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# Risk and the School-to-Work Transition in East Germany and the United States.

Antje Barabasch

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## ACCEPTANCE

This dissertation, RISK AND THE SCHOOL-TO-WORK TRANSITION IN EAST GERMANY AND THE UNITED STATES, by ANTJE BARABASCH, was prepared under the direction of the candidate's Dissertation Advisory Committee. It is accepted by the committee members in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy in the College of Education, Georgia State University.

The Dissertation Advisory Committee and the student's Department Chair, as representatives of the faculty, certify that this dissertation has met all standards of excellence and scholarship as determined by the faculty. The Dean of the College of Education concurs.

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## ABSTRACT

### RISK AND THE SCHOOL-TO-WORK TRANSITION IN EAST GERMANY AND THE UNITED STATES

by  
Antje Barabasch

This study investigates how young adults in vocational education perceive risk in regard to their professional futures in East Germany and the United States. It analyzes students' career aspirations and life plans in both countries and how they cope with uncertainties at the labor market. It further outlines underlying values, beliefs, and attitudes that guide young Americans and East Germans in their planning.

Several theoretical frameworks ground this study and comprise the majority of the relevant literature. This cross-cultural comparative case study takes a mixed method approach using a concurrent triangulation design. The inquiry is framed by theories in the field of risk and cultural risk perception, school-to-work transition, vocational education and training, and welfare studies. In both countries, 129 students filled out a questionnaire. Additionally, narratives from nine focus groups and 29 biographical interviews were conducted.

A three level analysis of the data was compiled that outlines the themes and categorizes them according to an individual, institutional, and macro-structural level of influence on risk perception in each country. Emerging premises on an individual level were choice, family and career planning



concerns, geographical and occupational flexibility, further education and training, and agency. On the institutional level the influence of public career advisement institutions, teachers, parents, peers and friends was outlined. On the macro-structural level unemployment, political welfare reforms, the vocational education and training system were themes that have been of concern among the East German population. The dissertation also offers a comparative analysis of the data.

This study reveals that young adults in East Germany are highly concerned about their occupational futures and tend to be pessimistic about current welfare reforms. They hold on to the idea of a standard biography and try to make strategic career plans. Their counterparts in the United States are highly optimistic about their futures, expressed little concern about labor market policies, but also appeared to be short term oriented in their life planning in order to remain flexible and mobile.

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THE UNITED STATES

by  
Antje Barabasch

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in  
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in  
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in  
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Atlanta, Georgia  
2006

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CHAPTER 1  
INTRODUCTION  
Background

My dissertation focuses on the cultural differences in risk perception within the school-to-work-transition. Mary Douglas (1985, 1992) was the first who argued that risk has a social nature. Cultural differences exist among different social groups in one country but also depending on the national culture between countries (Adam & van Loon, 2000) such as the United States and Germany. This is particularly the case in regard to labor markets and welfare supply that shape peoples' risk perception about their personal socio-economic futures. The theory of the "risk society" from Ulrich Beck (1992), a German sociologist, who defined risk as a systematic way of dealing with hazards and insecurities induced by modernization, has dominated the debate in sociology over the last decade.

The concept of risk has been used in a wide variety of disciplines and was of particular interest in economics for the insurance industry (Abraham, 1986; Chikan, 1991; Daykin, 1994; Farnham, 1994; Jaeger, Renn, Rosa, & Webler, 2001) and international monetary entities (Jaque, 1978; Levich & Wihlborg, 1980). Other perspectives focused on environmental hazards (Böhm, Nerb, McDaniels, & Spada, 2001; Glendon, 1987; Lash, Szerszynski, & Wynne, 1996; O'Riordan, 1995), moral issues (Furedi, 1997; Thomson, 1986), sociological issues (Clark & Short, 1993; Heimer, 1988; Luhmann, 1993), technical risk



analysis (Fischhoff, Lichtenstein, Slovic, Derby, & Keeney, 1981; Stern & Fineberg, 1996), or health risk and disease-prevention (Morrison, Gillmore, & Baker, 1995; Roe, 1987). Different risk theories were labeled as risk-aversion theory (Arrow, 1971), decision theory (Bacharach & Hurley, 1991; French, 1986), prospect theory (Weyland, 1996), and theory of choice under uncertainty (Arrow, 1971; McCall, 1982).

This dissertation is particularly concerned with the risk of the school-to-work transition where decisions have to be made that can have a major impact on the life course of young adults. Mayer and Tuma (1990) outlined that the life course is shaped by cultural beliefs about the individual biography, institutionalized sequences of roles and positions, legal age restrictions, and decisions of individual actors. Life course research intends to provide better descriptions and explanations of the processes shaping the life course and tries to link them together. Life course researchers attempt to explain individual life course events and social patterns of life trajectories within a common conceptual and empirical framework and look at the social processes that create these events and trajectories.

I am interested in the cultural difference of perceptions regarding risk among youth in Germany and the United States. Risk perception determines career decisions and is therefore influenced by individual, structural, and societal circumstances. Parents, peers, political satisfaction, uncertainty related to job-market opportunities, and social policy play major roles in the decision making process and are therefore analyzed in this study.

The reflexivity and incalculability of societal developments requires youth in their transition from school-to-work to be reflexive and self-navigated in planning a life-course. Under the circumstance of changing labor market requirements it is difficult to predict which training will lead to long term employment. Young adults need to negotiate the risk that might be involved in the decision for a particular apprenticeship or training program. Personal beliefs about values, social institutions, and moral behavior are guiding them in their decision process. Risks, therefore, are emphasized or avoided according to the cultural, moral, and social acceptability of the underlying activities (such as delaying post-school employment) upon which a particular risk is predicated. Risk-taking behavior and risk perception is often historically embedded and a reflection of the extent to which external control and manipulation through the state takes place. No longer a linear process in biographical planning, the school-to-work transition is both synchronous and reversible.

In this study, I investigated how young adults perceive risk in regard to their professional futures and what strategies they have in mind to cope with these risks. In personal interviews and focus groups I explored to what extent young adults are aware of different influences on their choices for certain careers and how they perceive limitations to their biographical futures. I elaborated on significant cultural differences between the United States and East Germany. This included an analysis of patterns of attitude, belief, and behavior shaped by institutional circumstances that helped the young adults in my study to cope with perceived risks and insecurity.

While during Fordist<sup>1</sup> times, school-to-work transitions were rather short and linear and led to standardized homogeneous experiences, in the post-Fordist<sup>2</sup> society transitions are characterized by fragmentation and less predictability. Especially over the last 20 years life courses have changed in both countries and became less predictable and linear. The increasing range of possibilities in conjunction with growing unemployment is associated among youth with augmented life-course risks (Lehmann, 2003). The 2000 Trend Report about European youth emphasized the increasing risk young adults' face today and on the vulnerability to unemployment or underemployment (Furlong, Stalder, & Azzopardi, 2000).

Those risks are perceived differently in comparing Germany with the United States. Heinz (2003b) outlined that life-course research focuses upon the relationship between institutions and individuals, and illuminates the impact of modernization on the shaping of biographies. He argued,

in the continental European context, life-course institutions still define the timing and sequencing of transitions across the life course. In less regulated societies, like the United States and Great Britain, biographies and living arrangements are shaped more by the interaction of markets, social networks, and individual decisions. In active welfare states, institutional resources and rules continue to mediate the effects of social change on the life course. In the age of globalization, it is likely that individual biographies will become more flexible and have to be shaped with less institutional guidance and support. (p. xi)

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<sup>1</sup> Fordism refers to a political order that was based on industrial production and a high level of technological innovation. The system relied on consensus, but also a gender order founded in a male breadwinner and female career division of labor as well as on an international situation of U.S. domination and hegemony (Chandler, 1977).

<sup>2</sup> Post-Fordism is characterized by global competition, a flexible production system that requires flexible specialization among the workers, and cooperation between government, employers and trade unions and industrial relations based on high trust, high discretion, and collective participation (Brown & Lauder, 1999).

Heinz emphasized that the institutionalization of life-course events provides a certain level of security and predictability for individuals as well as for society. At the same time policies that regulate the life-course also tend to reproduce the existent social inequality in society regarding gender relations, occupational opportunities, labor-market segmentation, the division of labor in the family, and the eligibility for social security<sup>3</sup> benefits. Heinz (1997) further outlined that the life-course is increasingly dependent on the changes in the labor market which lead to new conflicts and risks. As a consequence, the individual has to be creative and innovative in order to compensate irregularities, and would often combine traditional norms, self-centered values, and extended options.

Beck (1986, 1992) and Giddens (1990) wrote that the individual has become an active negotiator that takes or avoids risks under the condition of uncertainty as to what the future might bring. According to Beck (1992),

In the individualized society the individual must therefore learn, on pain of permanent disadvantage, to conceive of himself or herself as the center of action, as the planning office with respect to his/her own biography, abilities, orientations, relationships and so on. (p. 135)

Transferring the concept about risk to the school-to-work transition implies that the individual has to make career choices in life without being able to predict if the future labor market will require the skills and knowledge that the individual gets through certain trainings. As a consequence, young adults need to

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<sup>3</sup> Social security can be defined as a minimum protection offered by the state to individuals whose personal security is threatened by sudden changes in their life situations. Those threats can be economic depression, sickness, or natural disasters. Social security is also meant to secure people in case of changes that influence their employability such as a lack of physical and mental resources among old people (Vail, 1999).

constantly reflect on their choices and their self-development and evaluate their opportunities in regard to the actual needs of the labor market.

Not all young adults are affected to the same extent by those developments. DuBois-Reymond (1998), who studied youth transitions in the Netherlands, argued that there are choice and normal biographies. She outlined that some of the students still follow traditional patterns of a pre-determined transition into the world of work while others face increased options and need to negotiate their prospects. Not every opportunity that is provided leads to success. It is up to the young adults to evaluate their own abilities to be successful in certain occupations, and to decide which opportunities can actually lead to qualifications that are needed in the chosen sector of the labor market.

Evans and Heinz (1995) referred to the influence of institutional and market agencies on choices, activities, and identity formation among young adults. While Beck (1992) argued that class, race, and gender play a decreasing role in the process of individualization and risk applies to everybody, Evans and Heinz (1995) opposed this statement and argued that under the circumstance of a lack of material and social resources, passive individualization may result in “wait and see” patterns. According to them risk is unequally distributed and affects young adults in disadvantaged positions more than others.

Furlong and Cartmel (1997) analyzed young adults and social change and came to the conclusion that individual human agency has only a minimal input, but that the notion of greater social risk and uncertainty facing young adults is a social construction. They stated that subjective feelings of risk play a role in

young adults' lives more so than 20 years ago. While both authors argued that all young people regardless of social background, gender, or race face increasingly uncertainty and risk, they acknowledged that the poorer part of society has to carry the biggest burden.

A major concern among many researchers is that existing inequalities in society are reproduced. Nevertheless, I agree with Beck that in the German society individual lifestyles and individual behavior cannot necessarily be predicted based on social class, race, and gender. Individualization leads to a variety of different lifestyles as well as different risk taking behavior.

Today, people are forced to put themselves at the center of their planning and construct their own biographies. In that sense everybody chooses the people one wants to be surrounded by and forms alliances that might temporarily support one's own agenda. Within the process of modernization individuals have to be self-reflexive and need to react to frequent changes in society as well as an increased array of choices. The ultimate source of judgment comes from the individual (Abbott & Jones 2005; Beck, 1992, 1997, 1998, 1999, 2000a, 2000b; Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002; Beck, Giddens & Lash, 1994; Beck & Willms, 2000).

In the English speaking world the concept of risk in social science is often applied to the situation of losing or lacking socio-economic as well as socio-psychological stability and therefore being "at risk" (Furlong & Cartmel, 1997). Lehmann (2004) argued that the application of Beck's risk theory to the school-to-work transition indicates that as a result of the dissolution of traditional

structural elements of industrial society, such as class, race, or ethnicity the process has become more uncertain, fragmented and individualized. This implies that every individual might be differently confronted with risk. Nevertheless, even Beck (1992) wrote that disadvantaged people face more risks because they are less able to protect themselves against certain hazards.

Overall, it can be assumed that structural, institutional, and individual conditions influence the life course as well as risk behavior and risk perception. In regard to structural conditions I refer to a macro-societal level involving the structure of the school system, regulations regarding further education and training, the provision of social security, and the labor market. Social institutions such as family, peers, teachers, and career advisors provide reference points for the validation of perceptions. On an individual level values, beliefs, and attitudes that constitute a culture as well as planfulness and agency<sup>4</sup> are the main items of inquiry. The overall culture of a society, especially in regard to the value of work and the value of social status related to work, plays an important role as well.

In Germany the transition from school to work is highly standardized and any career step requires certain qualifications that have to be approved on a national level. Although apprenticeships provide an entrance key to the labor market, employers are increasingly reluctant and unwilling to provide full-time positions to their charges. Mortimer and Krüger (2000) note that one's life course

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<sup>4</sup> Elder (2003) wrote about the principle of agency and defined it as the construction of individuals' life course through choices and actions. Those are made within the opportunities and constraints of history and social circumstance. He further argued that peoples' choices and compromises are based on alternatives that they perceive before them.

is severely impacted by the perceptions of success in a first job, resulting in a series of failed career satisfactions later on.

The German institutionalization of the school-to-work transition is characterized by high regulation, a curb on wage labor, and inequality structured by status and gender. Normative principles such as security, stability, and continuity characterize the German society. The welfare state protects the individual against social risks in regard to the regulation of the labor market. The German flexible coordinated corporate system (Hall & Soskice, 2001) is in contrast to the deregulated, open system in the United States. Germany is considered to be a high-trust-society, based on shared solidarity to attend collectively to individual risk, compared with the low-trust-society of the United States (Fukuyama, 1996). Both models refer to the social relationship between corporate actors and the society at large.

Many Americans believe strongly in individual choice (Furstenberg, 2003) and that everyone has equal opportunity and is free to rise above the social class one was born into (Hochschild, 1981). Institutional stratification is delayed and individuals get second and third chances should motivation or other problems occur earlier in life. At the same time knowledge and networks are unequally distributed and the opportunities might therefore not be practically accessible for every American (Cook & Furstenberg, 2002). The transition into adulthood has become more individualized (Buchmann, 1989) and disorderly (Rindfuss, Swicegood, & Rosenfeld, 1987).



Youth have an extended moratorium (Arnett, 2000) that enables them to explore several life options. That might lead to a greater maturity which increases the likelihood of making informed occupational choices and achieving fulfillment with adult work and family roles. At the same time those extended periods of floundering also involve financial investments without ensuring a reimbursement through a future job. For those young adults who do not achieve a college degree it might end with a unsatisfactory job and intermittent residence in the parental home (Staff & Mortimer, 2003).

Furstenberg (2003) said that affluent families are supported by institutions, while working-class and poor families are prone to fend for themselves. Families play a much bigger role in the United States, and it is their responsibility to provide their children with opportunities to master the transition from school to work successfully. Although, all states have equalization formulas for their schools, at a local level it does not happen. In Europe, the welfare state takes care of many responsibilities, such as financing education or providing schools with equal resources independent of their location.

In many cases the German vocational education and training system still provides institutional ties that give employers a stake in training students and reducing their risk. Every student in Germany is by federal law required to attend school at least until the age of 18. Those students who do not get a training place in the dual system are channeled into some kind of full-time vocational school depending on their performance in school. The system therefore ensures that

students receive professional training, but it cannot ensure that they find employment afterwards. The risk of becoming unemployed is delayed.

Müller (1996) criticized these structures and argued that young adults end up in a sociopolitical vacuum. If they do not have employment prospects they end up in container projects (Mørch, 1996). The orientation of policies and institutions towards a linear transition does not ensure that young adults are secured, because the chances for employment are low even after attending additional school and training programs. Success and failure are considered to be of individual concern (Stauber & Walther, 2002). Biggart, Furlong, Cuconato, Lenzi, Morgani, Bolay, Stauber, Stein, and Walther (2002) argued that the systemic risk based on the institutional facilitation of the school-to-work transition is relatively low in Germany although it is higher in East Germany. They further pointed out that the rigid structure of the educational system and the lack of flexibility, however, lead to a high subjective risk among young adults regarding their professional future.

In the United States, institutional structures that channel young adults in some form of postsecondary education after finishing high school are absent. As a consequence students take college courses that might sometimes be of little value for their later employment. The initial labor market experience of young adults is rather unstable and leads to a high job-turnover in non-unionized employment situations (Arum & Hout, 1998).

## Approach of the Study

The dissertation aimed to investigate the complex relationship between macro-structure, micro-structure determined by several institutions, and the individual's planfulness and agency during the school-to-work transition among young adults in vocational education and training. The dissertation is compiled as an exploratory case study comparing a particular group of young adults in vocational education and training in the Eastern part of Germany with a relatively similar group in the United States. Both countries are highly developed economically, but differ strikingly in the school-to-work transition as well as in their welfare policies related to employability and job training.

According to Creswell (1998) a case study is an exploration of a bounded system, also called the case. Bounded means that the case is bounded to a particular time and place involving detailed in-depth data collection. It is common to use multiple sources of information rich in context. This case study is a collective case study (Stake, 1995) that involves two vocational schools in East Germany and one technical college with two campuses in the United States.

Methodologically, the study draws on narratives about the individual's construction of a life plan. Besides a questionnaire, I used focus groups and biographical interviews to elicit information from students who pursue different apprenticeships in Germany, and technical programs in the United States. Lehmann (2003) used this method to investigate how structure (e.g., class, race, and gender) and agency influence decisions regarding the life course among students in vocational education and training in Germany and Canada.

Evans, Behrens, and Kaluza (2000) explored the subjectivities of young adults associated with choice and determination under differing structural and cultural conditions. The authors outlined that there has been an increasing emphasis on area studies and that the research field has become internationalized. In their study, they chose to examine in particular the East German labor situation and used focus groups as a method of inquiry. Evans et al. emphasized that more research needs to be done to deconstruct individualized aspects of young adults' transitions.

Thomson, Bell, Holland, Henderson, McGrellis, and Sharpe (2002) also used the story approach to understand key moments of biographical change in young adult's lives. They followed Bruner's (1987) approach and suggested

that the ability of young adults to tell a story in a certain way, to identify and describe critical moments or turning points, may be a reflection of their ability to perceive the world in this way, a skill which has practical consequences. (Thomson et al., 2002, p. 3)

The research on critical moments focused on the relationship between young adult's agency and their imaginations and explored how young adults were able to realize opportunities, imagine chances, and control their destinies, a form of agency. Recent transition studies have put much emphasis on agency and choice (Evan, Behrens, & Kaluza, 2000; Lehmann, 2004; Wyn & Dwyer, 1999) because the future has become unpredictable for many young people.

My study provides an in-depth analysis of young adults' own narratives and understanding of their school-to-work transition. It highlights the cultural differences between Germany and the United States and helps to further understanding about how structural, institutional, and individual conditions

interact among young adults in both countries. The study followed the life-course approach from Bremen, Germany (Marshall & Mueller, 2003), which is concerned with the construction of meaning and making sense of one's life course. The life cycle is defined as a sequence of status configurations. The Bremen model focuses on agency using personal narratives about individual action and social contexts. Additionally, the interplay of institutions and policy and how they regulate timing and sequencing of the life course of the individual were analyzed. This approach took individual agency into account. Evans (2002) suggested that young adults can actively respond to structural influences and make their own decisions. They are reflexive and can vigorously shape important dimensions of their experiences. Therefore, the Bremen approach requires mainly qualitative research.

Marshall and Mueller (2003) outlined the differences in life-course research that exist between European and North American researchers. On a macro-societal level European researchers have paid more attention to the role of the state. North Americans examined orderliness and disorderliness in the life-course and conducted large-scale empirical studies of patterns and sequences of life events. European researchers were more deductive in discussing macro-level changes leading to the "risk society" and provided more qualitative data to describe the meaning of life-events under conditions of societal change.

In my study, I asked students between the ages of 18 and 25 about their perceptions toward occupational futures and employment prospects. I constructed interviews from the research literature on risk perception in cultural

anthropology, social psychology, family sociology, and policy studies. Based on my data and the literature I have developed a theoretical model about the relationship between risk perception and educational policy regarding the school-to-work transition for the field of comparative education.

Chapter 2 examines the literature within the given area in order to develop new theoretical assumptions. Sociologists develop models as a representation of some system with the goal to relate it to existing sociological concepts and theories or to develop new ones. Fararo (2000) outlined that for sociologists the term theory covers frameworks and more specific formulations addressing particular problems. A scientific theory consists of a framework level and a model level; both are linked by theoretical problems that are addressed by constructing a model within the framework. According to Berger, Cohen, Snell, and Zelditch (1962) there is a linkage between theoretical goals and model building. They outline three basic goals for the construction of a model: to explicate the concept of a theory, to represent a recurrent process, or to formalize a theory in terms of some theoretical construct.

The findings of my research will help to understand the underlying perceptions as well as preferences, values, and visions that influence young adult's decisions concerning the transition from school-to-work and how they relate to unique cultural realities within each nation. The study will provide information that can help to identify what drives young adults to make decisions regarding their professional futures. This knowledge might help to develop more effective or appropriate strategies for career advice, but also to inform teachers

about concerns and fears that should be addressed. In terms of further research, cross-cultural comparisons provide new contexts for the extension and evaluation of research.

### Statement of the Problem

The reflexivity and incalculability of societal developments requires young adults in their transition from school-to-work to be reflexive and self-navigated in planning a life-course. With the changing economy, it is more and more difficult for young adults to make the right decisions about their training in order to secure long-term employment. The less the future is predictable and possible to plan, the greater the risk that is involved in every career decision, because those decisions have long term effects on one's future. According to Nagel and Wallace (1997),

whereas in the social planning model there were long term future perspectives, protection for the citizen from cradle to grave, and social support through different life stages (at least as a sustaining ideology), in the market model there is only short term planning. Markets are inherently unstable and introduce increased risk. In the market society, young people are left to fend for themselves, to worry about procuring their own training, improving their own human capital and even securing their own pension on an individual basis. (p. 52)

Risk theory has been applied to school-to-work transition in various studies (Behrens, Brown, & Hurrelmann, 1992; Evans, Behrens & Kaluza, 1999; Evans et al., 2000; Lehmann, 2003, 2004; McGinnity, Mertens, & Gundert, 2005; Miller Idriss, 2002; Thomson, 2002). Many researchers have looked at the transition process from school to work and its institutional facilitation in Germany

(Müller, Steinmann, & Eil, 1998; Schömann, Blossfeld, & Hannan, 1995; Witte & Kalleberg, 1995) and the United States (Arum & Hout, 1998; Arum & Shavit, 1995; Hughes, 1998; National Center on Education and the Economy, 1990; Shavit & Müller, 2000; Stern, Finkelstein, Stone III, Latting, & Dornsife, 1995; Stull & Sanders, 2003). Some authors did direct comparisons of educational systems and the transition processes (Hamilton & Hurrelmann, 1993, Harhoff & Kane, 1996; Kerckhoff, 2000; Mortimer & Krüger, 2000; Rosenbaum & Jones, 2000; Shavit & Müller, 1998, 2000). Other researchers have paid particular attention to the effects of changing labor markets and a decline of welfare supply (Burchardt & Hills, 1997; Skinner & Ford, 2000; Tulloch & Lupton, 2003).

Qualitative research is still underrepresented in risk research and there are many questions regarding individual context that can only be researched using narrative inquiry. Ulrich Beck's (1992) theory of the risk society includes the assumption that the occupational future is less and less predictable and the individual has to deal with uncertain and fragmented transitions. Some of the studies have already examined individual perceptions and strategies to cope with risk. Nevertheless, there is still a need for more qualitative inquiries on individual life-course stories and the influence of life events on risk perception in the school-to-work-transition because those factors influence decisions about further training and the transition to the world of work. They have not been analyzed among different groups of young adults related to their life course pathways.

Comparative studies that examine cultural patterns in the school-to-work transition and compare perceptions of vocational students in the United States



and Germany have not been found to date. Wolfgang Lehmann (2003) investigated issues of social inequality, structure, and agency. The structural components that he analyzed in his dissertation were race, class, and gender with the intent to explain the persistence of social inequality in school-to-work transitions without forgoing agency. I consciously decided not to pay primary attention to the social reproduction of class inequities because the concept of class as it applies to the United States can not be simply transferred to Germany and in particular to East Germany. Although there are social inequities, the situation in the two countries is not similar. Definitions of poverty, quality of life, or living standards do not uniformly apply to the social situation in each country.

Crysdale, King, and Mandell's (1999) study in Canada on the school-to-work transition of working-class youth developed policy recommendations to widen opportunities for young adults and motivate them to pursue higher qualifications. This study was also concerned with different structural backgrounds such as social class, ethnicity, gender, parents, and teachers aspirations as well as employers and students' early work experiences. The authors compared the situation with the United Kingdom and Sweden. The group of students chosen for the study attended high schools that offered co-op education. While this study is very helpful to understand the interaction between structures of transition to work and the values and experiences of individual youth, it failed to examine intercultural differences in risk perceptions, and did not consider the influence of social welfare systems.

A major critique by Renn (1998) was that technical risk analysis rests on conventions such as the equal weighting of probability and magnitude and the selection of rules for identifying undesirable effects. Through qualitative research, social scientists can get a grasp of the nuances in individual as well as societal experiences of risk. Risk perceptions reflect the real concerns of people based on personal experiences and risk awareness.

The structural economic change in Germany and particularly in East Germany that caused a problem with unemployment and a social change in society require from the individual a new understanding of agency. Evans, Behrens, and Kaluza (1999) argued that risk and uncertainty are under these circumstances much greater than in stable situations. Since formerly predictable institutional pathways are subject to change, employment status is at risk of loss, but there might also be a higher chance of advancement. Agency plays a greater part under the circumstances of less predictability, and the individual has to balance out risk that is dependent on a combination of social and material resources available to the individual.

In the past, the German vocational education system, also called the dual system, functioned as a safety net and prevented young adults from early unemployment. With the economical and social changes in society this safety net is declining. The trend towards individualization in Germany is characterized by the dissolution of traditional parameters of industrial society, such as class culture and consciousness, gender, and family roles (Evans, Behrens, Kaluza, 2000).

According to Chisholm and Hurrelmann (1995), there are three key points that can be made about the youth situation today: (a) difficulties with negotiating the transition in the educational system; (b) risk of failure in a highly competitive society; and (c) the striving for an increasing amount of additional credentials in order to achieve employability while the investment in education shows a declining return. Young adults might have difficulties in making the right decisions about vocational education and training, due to a lack of information about changing demands of the labor market. They also need strategies to cope with disappointments and be prepared to constantly reorient themselves. This study might be able to illustrate that strategies can only help to a certain extent since the building of a family often prevents flexibility. A high level of uncertainty might actually lead to discouragement and less commitment to quality work. Finally, young adults need to make informed and rationalized decisions about schooling or further education and training. They also need to get realistic feedback on their performance and to develop a sense of realistically evaluating their abilities.

The following questions guided this research:

1. How do young Americans and East Germans perceive risk and opportunity regarding their future life planning?
2. How do risk perceptions in both countries differ regarding the school-to-work transition.
3. To what extent are young adults aware of personal, institutional, and macro-structural limitations?
4. How do Americans and East Germans cope with uncertainty regarding the continuously changing requirements of the labor market?
5. How are underlying values guiding Americans and East Germans in their planning?
6. Is there a difference between East German young adults and American young adults regarding their self consciousness, agency, and optimism about the future?

7. What recommendations can be given to policy makers in both countries to adjust career guidance and education to the conditions of uncertainty?

The risk perception of young adults in their transition might be affected by the experience of unemployment within the family and influenced by information provided by the school, external career agencies, and the media. Career guidance is often more concerned with grade point averages, skills, and competencies, but not with emotions one might have about the current situation in school and in the family and perceptions of future positions. Like a good salesperson, a career counselor has to be aware of people's values, beliefs, and attitudes in order to understand their needs. Teachers, additionally, need to address concerns and develop a pedagogy that prepares young adults for a world where they need to be active agents of their life course (Heinz, Kelle, Witzel, Zinn, 1998). This study can help researchers, teachers, and career educators understand when and why students perceive something as risky and why they choose certain life course strategies. The problems young adults have in Germany and the United States in planning their life course as well as risk perceptions regarding their future might differ significantly.

### Rationale

School-to-work transition has been a persistent topic in educational research (Gallie & Paugam, 2000; Müller & Shavit, 1998). However, most of the studies are based on empirical data. There was little research found on cultural and societal factors since they are hard to define as variables for person-

centered data sets. Contextual effects are mostly excluded and individual characteristics are often not taken into consideration. Nevertheless, culture-based preferences and biases are important components in risk perception (Renn & Rohrman, 2000). This research study investigates qualitative aspects of students' risk perception and career aspirations and provides insights into cross-cultural contexts that have not been explored to date. The qualitative data are of particular importance because they are the best way to get an understanding about the "subjects' own frame of reference" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998, p. 2).

In European life-course research, the biography has been more of a focus than in the United States, where complex concepts were developed to describe timing, duration, and spacing of events (Marshall & Mueller, 2003). Heinz (1996) outlined that

studies about biographies in social contexts are needed to discover the micro processes or status passages that are particular to various transitions and the way they influence other concurrent or subsequent transitions like school-to-work or labor market entry.  
(p. 3)

The special value of qualitative research is that emotions can be analyzed as well. According to Renn and Rohrman (2000), understanding about emotions is better gained with inquiry methods which have seldom been applied. In opposition to the simple, logical sequence of steps used to identify and manage risk which has been used in many areas of technology (Carter, 1995) as well as economics, a more critical approach addressing the socially constructed and culturally specific character of the conceptualization of risk needs to be examined

(Fox, 1999). Additionally, American scholars have not emphasized the role of governmental institutions (e.g., the state) in shaping the life course. There is no parallel in North American research in life-course analysis to German research in regard to the influence of the welfare state (Marshall & Mueller, 2003).

This case study contributes knowledge about cultural differences in risk-perception in order to help filling the gap existing in qualitative life-course research. The results might be used to support or oppose existing risk theories. Since Germany is undergoing some significant changes in the educational system, as well as in the provision of welfare, the country, as well as the United States, faces an increasing destabilization of traditional jobs. The replacement of humans with technology and the outsourcing of jobs to third world countries is a globalization effect (Miles, 2002). This case study also looked at strategies young adults had in mind to cope with aspects of structural change.

The findings of my research help to explain how the various transitions from school-to-work take place, how they are interrelated, and how they reflect unique cultural realities within each nation. My research shows how external control and manipulation through the state institutions influences the transition. It explains how young adults in Germany and the United States perceive their future and their constructed life-plans.

Renn (1998) outlined that from a psychological perspective it is important to look at inter-individual differences and commonalities among populations, nations, and cultural groups. More knowledge is needed about the links between risk perceptions, attitudes towards risk objects, and actual behavior. A deeper

understanding of those connections will lead to how young adults construct their ideas about the future and to what extent their decision for a particular apprenticeship impacts future employment chances.

From a sociological perspective, the study indicates that there is a need to base risk policies on the experience of inequities, unfairness and perceived organizational incompetence (Dietz, Frey, & Rosa, 1996; Perrow, 1984; Short, 1984; Stallings, 1987). Issues of fairness and competence are addressed. I will also draw some conclusions for legitimizing risk policies (Wynne, 1984). The study indicates that the public institutional facilitation of the transition process from school to work in Germany has weaknesses and lacks societal trust. My findings correspond with a study by Freudenberg (1993) who pointed out that public institutions such as schools and career guidance centers are increasingly less able to carry out their responsibilities to ensure a smooth transition to employment.

My findings support Beck's thesis that the individual is more prone to a variety of risk in modern society, but also indicate that family background is of particular importance in both countries. The new knowledge about perceived risks will broaden the understanding of the social and cultural meaning of risk for young adults in their transition process that might differ in the two national cultures. Based on my findings I compiled some policy considerations and recommendations about how to prepare young adults appropriately for risks.

## Significance

Risk, risk taking behavior, and risk perception have been of great interest among researchers in different disciplines. Cross-cultural studies regarding the social nature of risk are rare. Nevertheless, various researchers have examined different aspects regarding the school-to-work transition in Germany and the United States and referred to the difficulties in the decision process because of many uncertainties implied by changing labor market requirements. According to Renn (1998) sociological and cultural analysis of risk will be of vital importance for the next decades. Since Beck's (1992) argument that there are increasingly pluralistic values, lifestyle, and knowledge in society, communication between different groups as well as between cultures has become even more difficult. Beck (1992) argued further that the experience of risk spans the boundaries of confined social groups. Therefore, a deeper understanding of how people feel about their situation is required. If the concept of risk within and between cultures is better understood, tools of communication as a precondition for intercultural or international cooperation can be developed that manage to bridge these differences. Clarke and Short (1993) argued that organizational structures, networks, and broad institutional factors such as political economies and cultural expectations need to be analyzed in further comparative work.

According to Renn and Rohrman (2000) studies on risk perception are of great value for management decisions and policy making. They can help to enhance the capability of society and its institutions to cope with risks in accordance with the preferences, values, and visions of their citizens. Under the



circumstances of globalization, cross-cultural comparisons are an essential tool for the facilitation of understanding between nations and cultures (Rosa, Matsuda, & Kleinhesselink, 2000). To study risk perception may ensure that the risks people fear in different social and cultural environments are met with the institutional means to manage and control them appropriately. Social science has the task to inform policy makers about public concerns and develop better methods of mutual communication (Fischhoff, 1995; Morgan, 1995). Renn (1998) argued: "Public values and social concerns may act as the driving agents for identifying those topics for which risk assessments are judged necessary or desirable" (p. 66). In terms of further research this cross-cultural comparison can provide new contexts for the extension and evaluation of research protocols (Rosa, Matsuda, & Kleinhesselink, 2000).

This case study explored aspects of risk perception in a cross-cultural setting. The research questions are new because no study has been found that examined cultural differences in risk perception regarding the biographical planning among youth in apprenticeships or technical colleges in the United States and Germany. As a case study my research is also unique because data have been collected in a particular time bounded by specific political circumstances. In Germany policies regarding public unemployment benefits have been changed which resulted in increasing fear among young adults to be pushed to the socioeconomic margins of society. The narratives of young adults in East Germany reflected young adults worries and concerns.

There is currently a paucity of comparative data available about beliefs, values, and attitudes among young adults regarding their professional futures in Germany and the United States. This comparison was also of interest because two very different welfare approaches are taken in the two countries that influence how students in vocational training perceive their occupational future. In order to facilitate appropriate preparation for the changing requirements at the labor market and teach coping strategies that help young adults to navigate under conditions of uncertainty, it is necessary to learn more about their risk perceptions and life plans. So far most studies have looked at the individual contexts, structural conditions (e.g., race, class, and gender) as well as different educational systems and labor market situations. The interrelationship of individual, institutional, and macro-structural conditions has not been studied. Additionally, research about cultural differences in risk perception in regard to life and career plans from a comparative perspective has not been undertaken.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Introduction

Many researchers have compared the school-to-work-transition as well as the vocational education and training systems in Germany and the United States. The institutional facilitation and structural and political conditions have been researched. Besides the historical development of vocational education and training, its underlying philosophies, and facilitation in each country, recent studies have taken a critical look at the benefits vocational education provides for different groups of students. Labor market outcomes and persistence in school determine whether the system works in an effective way or not. In both countries labor market policies have aimed at increasing educational attainment in order to promote employability.

Chapter 2 comprises several themes that need to be elaborated. The first part of the chapter is an extension of Chapter 1. It outlines my theoretical framework that is based on socio-cultural risk theory. Risk has been a persistent topic in different disciplines and applies also to the school-to-work-transition. I explain how young adults' views about their future occupational chances at the labor market are influenced by risk perceptions. The school-to-work-transition in Germany and the United States will be compared. Particular attention is drawn to cultural differences between the two countries. The macro-societal level with the

impact of welfare as well as the structure of the school and vocational education and training systems is described in detail. Youth unemployment is also addressed in comparative perspective.

### Theoretical Framework

According to Douglas and Wildawsky (1982), risk has a social nature. How risk is conceptualized and acted upon by youth of different social and cultural backgrounds in Germany and the United States varies. In both countries youth have risk perceptions that lead to decision making regarding their school-to-work transition. The study investigated the risk perception of students in both countries because their life-courses are structured in a different way.

Ulrich Beck (1992) and Mary Douglas (1985, 1992) have contributed the most comprehensive literature to form the contemporary understanding of risk as a social phenomenon. Both developed theoretical explanations for the social development of a new culture and politics of risk. Iain Wilkinson (2001) contrasted their views and outlined that Beck favors the idea of a rising risk consciousness that might lead to a new critical rationality for the political reform of industrialized societies. Mary Douglas proposed from a structural-functionalist perspective that what we conceive as the “reality” of risk is a perception determined by our prior commitments towards different types of social solidarity. Beck puts great emphasis on the role of the individual in coping with risk while he ignores “complex cultural processes that affect both perceptions and responses of groups of people within society” (Abbott, Jones & Quilgars, 2005). Douglas

(1985, 1992) argued that various groups of people within the same culture may frame and understand risk differently. People's view on risk depends on symbolic and shared assumptions according to the nature of the social group, "as well as distinctions of the self and Other between social groups" (Abbott, Jones & Quilgars, 2005).

Americans are considered to be risk takers because there are only a few restrictions through institutions that influence their planning of a life-course (Cook & Furstenberg, 2002). They tend to be more short-term planners. The model of deferment: Living in the present—keeping the future at bay (Brannen & Nilsen, 2002), might apply. American youth tend to flounder for a period of time until they make a commitment for a particular career. This tendency seems to occur because of the lack of welfare supply, standardization, and governmental regulation of training as well as a labor market that provides many low-skilled jobs. Kappelhoff and Teckenberg (1987) emphasized that chances for both upward and downward mobility are higher in the United States.

Germans are risk avoiders because of the regulated life-course that was always planned through institutions such as schools, the Labor Exchange Office (*Arbeitsamt*), or the Chamber of Industry and Commerce. As a result of the highly structured school-to-work transition (King & Peart, 1996) and a labor market that rarely provides jobs for unskilled workers, youth are forced to plan their lives at an early age. The reason is that the system offers less flexibility to gain higher degrees at later stages in life or to switch jobs to different fields (Hinz, 1997). Regulations imposed by several institutions force young Germans to strive for

long-term security and to predict future outcomes of their investment in schooling at an early age (Heinz, 1992).

Young adults in Germany are highly oriented towards the normal biography and usually try to avoid claiming any social assistance. They are highly committed to work and try to avoid unemployment at all costs. Even those young adults that do not enter the dual system and end up in youth assistance programs usually try to upgrade the level of education and gain additional certificates (Biggart et al., 2002; Straus & Höfer, 1998). Hinz (1997) stated that the combination of school degree and vocational degree that is expected for entry level jobs leads people to expect stability over the work life and hardly any changes in class positions or occupations. The model of predictability: Striving in the long term for security might apply (Brannen & Nilsen, 2002).

Risk taking is a conscious process that is influenced by parents, peers, political satisfaction, uncertainty related to job-market opportunities, and social policy. Risk perceptions are embedded within cultural meanings and exhibit a wide variability. Culture functions as a template that structures the individual psyche and filters perceptions among its members (Douglas & Wildawsky, 1982).

The theoretical framework for this research project relies on Beck's (1992) and Giddens' (1990) writings about the risk society. Their theories are based on the notion that there is a strong trend towards individualization and a parallel loss of tradition and social bonds that influence how one shapes one's life-course. Giddens (1991) defined the risk society where living means to have

a calculative attitude to the open possibilities of action, positive and negative, with which, as individuals and globally, we are confronted in a continuous way in our contemporary social existence. (p. 28)

Edwards and Glover (2001) underscored that the risk society is determined by a “pervasive and inescapable sense of concern” (p. 1) based on past experiences and focusing on future events. Debates about risk resulted out of this notion and centered on social welfare policy interventions that could reduce or modify the impact of risk events.

School-to-work transition is a historically persistent topic of educational policymaking and reform that affects national systems of vocational education and training (Bailey, 1995). The transition process refers to a period between completion of general education and the beginning of vocational education or the beginning of gainful employment as well as to training systems, institutions, and programs that prepare young people for employment after completion of general education (Rauner, 1999). The status passage of youth from school-to-work has changed structurally and young people are forced to adapt to changing demands of their environment, especially the labor market. While some young people have developed successful strategies to cope with these requirements and can be considered as trendsetters (or risktakers) whose concept involves choice biographies, students at risk or disadvantaged students often face problems when trying to develop new concepts for their life-courses (DuBois-Reymond, 1998). Longer transitions lead to a greater vulnerability to risk (Furlong & Cartmel, 1997) which is particularly affecting disadvantaged youth.

Sennet (1998) talked about a shift away from a linear concept of time implying that people no longer try to predict the future. There is an emphasis on randomness, where people seem to have lost control over events in time. A meaningful connection between the past, the present, and the future is missing. Consequently, the planning of a life-course loses its meaning when the future becomes unpredictable (Nilsen, 1999). Chisholm and Hurrelmann (1995) labeled those discontinuities in the process of transition structural contradictions and emphasized that those are a fundamental risk factor for young adults. Wyn and Dwyer (1999) wrote that young people in Western societies become increasingly pro-active in the face of risk and uncertainty, and make pragmatic choices in order to maintain their occupational aspirations and continue to pursue a career. According to Beck (1992), the individual is not so much an actor in the choice biography as compelled by deinstitutionalizing structures to make choices. Youth in the top trajectories, who are typically high achievers with strong social support, tend to be proactive while poor achievers with weak social networks tend to be more reactive in their behavioral patterns regarding the planning of a life-course (Evan, Behrens, & Kaluza, 2000).

The status passage is no longer a linear process, but instead synchronic and reversible. The life-course of young people today does not necessarily follow the traditional model of finishing school, completing professional training, getting a job, and building a family (DuBois-Reymond, 1998; Thomson et al., 2002; Wyn & Dwyer, 1999). Griffin (1986) distinguished between staged transitions that follow the traditional model, and broken transitions, which indicate that people



are floundering between different stages. Young people often perceive the transition as a process external to them. They are forced to live by the rules which transition imposes (Miles, 2002). The traditional focus in youth research is now on exploration of the relationships between a range of transitional strands: education, employment, training, housing, family, income, consumption, and relationships (Thomson et al., 2002).

The school-to-work-transition is often the crucial point in one's life-course, where decisions have to be made that involve risk or that are perceived as risky since they have long lasting effects on labor market entry, life style, and upward mobility (Heinz, 1996). In this dissertation, I take a cross-cultural approach comparing Germany with the United States. The German life-course group based at the University of Bremen, Germany, uses the term status passage for the transition from youth to adulthood, which includes the transition from school-to-apprenticeship (or college)-to-work. In North America the formulation, transitions and trajectories, is more popular (Marshall & Mueller, 2003). Transitions can be seen as turning points in the life-course and include leaving the parental home, entering the labor market, becoming a parent, or retiring, but can also be changes in state or role (Elder, 2003). Transitions modify life trajectories. Some events might initiate important turning points in life or redirect pathways.

Trajectories often refer to a sequence of life events and transitions (Elder, 1985).

Research on risk has been of increasing interest in the last three decades. According to Renn (1998) there is no common definition about risk and the understanding of the term differs widely. Several authors argued that risk cannot

exist as an objective phenomenon (Adams, 1990, 1995; Dean, 1999; Ewald, 1991; Luhmann, 1993). Risk is not just out there, but can be seen as a means to calculate and control the uncertainties of the future through rational action in the present (Reith, 2004). Mathieu-Rosay (1985) defined risk in his *Dictionnaire Etymologique* in the following way:

RISK: 15 century: from Italian *risco*, *rischio* (danger, risk), derived from *rischiare*, *risicare*. The origin of the word is surprising. It must be traced to Greek *rhiza* (root). The word *rhiza* came to designate, in Greek, all which is extended from a trunk in the manner of a root, and later, in Crete, the beach cliffs, formed by the protruding rocks at the foot of the mountain, rather similar to the roots protruding from the foot of a tree. Thus, from *rhiza* came *rhizikon* (something with a similarity to a cliff and hence presents a danger, a "risk").

The understanding of risk differs widely across different disciplines. According to Rohrman and Renn (2000), "risk can be understood as the possibility that human actions, situations or events might lead to consequences that affect aspects of what human's value" (p. 14). What all concepts about risk have in common is the distinction between reality and possibility (Markowitz, 1991). The analysis of risk is not seen as a value-free scientific activity (Fischhoff, 1995). How risks are characterized, measured, and interpreted reflects on values (Renn, 1998).

In the social sciences as well as in psychology, people's view on risk is labeled risk perception. Drottz-Sjöberg (1991) argued that

the phenomenon of risk requires subjective apprehension and evaluation. It may certainly be real, but it cannot exist without an apprehending subject and it cannot be observed in the same sense as material objects. However, it can be estimated, and it can be subjectively perceived or construed. Perceived risk lies in the eyes of the beholder. There may exist general agreement about what is

appropriate to consider as a risk, but different times show considerable change of preferences. Perception of risk is content dependent. (p. 37)

She further stated that personal decision making relies on perceptions of risk as a heuristic tool that functions as a guideline to identify danger and harm. In this sense risk perceptions are real even if they are misguided. They are real, because they are recognized and acted upon.

Psychologists argue that personal preferences for probabilities are the base for risk judgments and not values (Lopes, 1983; Luce & Weber, 1986). There are consistent patterns of probabilistic reasoning that are well suited for everyday situations, such as the assessment of becoming unemployed depending on the kind of degree someone has acquired. Kahneman and Tversky (1979) wrote that people are risk averse if the potential losses are high and risk prone if the potential gains are high. The decision to leave home, family and friends is made when the chances of getting a well paid job somewhere else are high. At the same time the risk of losing a relationship, not getting settled somewhere else, or of having a job that is not satisfactory can deter young adults from taking the risk of moving to another place.

Social scientists put more emphasis on social and cultural groups and how they perceive risk differently. Sociologists focus on the roots of the belief-forming process. Intervening factors such as general value commitments and perceptions of the society (overall belief system) determine the definition of gains and losses and structure the argument to legitimize self interest (Renn & Swaton, 1984). Some of the issues that social scientist have looked at were the social

distribution of risk (by social class, sex, race, ethnicity, and location in the world economy) (Bryant & Mohai, 1992; Bullard, 1990). Those studies support the thesis that poor or disadvantaged people are disproportionately bearing the consequences of risk-decisions in regard to environmental risks.

A lot of research on transition has been done in the last 10 years about social exclusion (Coles, 1995; MacDonald, 1998; MacDonald, Mason, Shildrick, Webster, Johnston, & Ridley, 2001; Ridge, 2002). The authors emphasize that marginalization in society often results from unemployment and poverty. Unfairness, inequities, and perceived organizational incompetence are illuminated by sociological studies (Dietz, Frey, Rosa, 1996; Perrow, 1984; Short, 1984; Stallings, 1987).

People recognize certain signals and information about possible outcomes of (future) human actions and form opinions and attitudes towards risk sources and impacts (Rohrmann & Renn, 2000). Risk perception depends on individual experiences as well as social networks and their relationship to knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs (Royal Society, 1992). They are different among social and cultural groups. What all have in common is that risk is a multi-dimensional phenomenon influenced by beliefs with respect to the nature of the risk, the cause of the risk, the associated benefits, and the circumstances of risk-taking.

Studies about the social construction of risk stress the cultural foundations of risk assessment, often incorporating a rational choice perspective, to determine the relationship between risk interpretation and risk taking or risk avoiding behavior. Social scientists have developed different theories about risk

perception. Most widely held is the knowledge theory with the notion that people perceive something to be dangerous, because they know that it is dangerous such as certain technologies, and they perceive it as a threat to their life.

According to this theory the perception of unemployment as a threatening risk would become stronger the more it is recognized in the media and in the public.

The perception to see unemployment as a threat also depends on the cultural perception of it.

Risk is socially constructed and historically conceptualized (Lupton, 1999) and might not only differ between two countries but also between youth with different social background or schooling. However, according to Renn (1998) it seems to be common in all countries that risk is perceived as a multidimensional phenomenon that involves beliefs with respect to nature of the risk, the cause of the risk, the associated benefits, and the circumstances of risk-taking. In opposition to some psychologists, Renn (1998) argues that it is irrelevant whether the cause-effect relationships reflect real dangers or gains. "Individuals respond according to their perception of risk and not according to an objective risk level or the scientific assessment of risk" (p. 60). Risk perceptions reflect the real concerns of people and might be an indicator for undesirable effects that can not be measured by technical risk analysts (Royal Society, 1992).

During the last two decades anthropologists and cultural sociologists have taken a different approach to risk research. They suggest that social responses to risk are determined by prototypes of cultural belief patterns (Douglas & Wildavsky, 1982; Rayner, 1992; Schwarz & Thompson, 1990; Thompson, Ellis, &

Wildavsky, 1990). Renn (1998) outlines that sociologists are more concerned with social judgments about risks and how they are linked to individual or social interests and values. Cultural studies look at cultural patterns that structure the mindset of individuals and social organizations to adopt certain values and reject others.

Kasperson, Renn, Slovic, Brown, Emel, Goble, Kasperson, and Ratick (1988) draw attention to the social amplification of risk that depends on the experience of risk, both the primary but also the secondary experience (through information). The social amplification might be influenced by the intensity of the experience. Social groups such as family, peers, or coworkers provide reference points for the validation of perceptions. Peers become more important with the separation from the family (Chisholm & Hurrelmann, 1995). They provide emotional stability and also influence how one perceives the world. Peers also influence one's view or bias in regard to potential hazards or threats. The interpretation of risks might be integrated in a larger framework of values and leads to resistance towards new conflicting information.

According to Douglas and Wildavsky (1982), a leading question in the analysis of cultural differences in risk perceptions is: Why do people emphasize some risk while ignoring others? In the German and U.S. society people selectively choose certain risks from the vast array of risks that exists. Their choice is based on beliefs about values, social institutions, and moral behavior: Risks are, therefore, emphasized or avoided, according to the cultural, moral, and social acceptability of the underlying activities (such as delaying the school-

to-work transition in Germany) upon which a particular risk is predicated. The authors see risk not as an objective reality based only upon scientific inquiry, but as the perception of risk as a social process. They further outlined that human perceptions are embedded in cultural meanings. Culture is like an organized structure that sits on the individual's psyche. This template is similar among members of a culture and filters environmental inputs including risk perceptions in systematic ways. Cultural theory predicts that variances in culture imply that there is a parallel variability in risk perceptions.

According to Wildavsky and Drake (1990) individuals are active organizers of their own perceptions and choose what to fear in order to support their way of life. Both authors refer to individuals' agency that is very differently developed among young adults in one cohort. Within this perspective the selective attention to certain risks corresponds to cultural biases – that is worldviews or ideologies that entail deeply held values and beliefs (Douglas, 1978; Douglas & Wildavsky, 1982).

Brenot, Bonnefous, and Marris (1998) conclude that

risk perceptions are held to reflect the way in which society itself is perceived, and alternative views about risks (and about the world in general) are expected to flow from patterns of social relations. (p. 730)

This approach is very different from other cultural studies, but has been applied in a number of cross-cultural comparisons (Marris, Langford, O'Riordan, 1996; Seifert & Tongersen, 1995; Sjöberg, 1995). One criticism is that those studies were measuring the individual level, but not behavior that might be typical among certain nationalities or in cultural groups.

Englander, Farago, Slovic, and Fischhoff (1986) argue that exposure to risk varies from country to country, depending upon the economic situation, but also on media reports, public discussion, cultural norms that are viewed as important and on the opportunities to control risk. There are major institutional differences between German and U.S. institutions that provide pathways from school to work and impinge upon the experiences of young adults in different labor markets. The labor market systems between the two countries are very different (Cartmel, 2003). Germany shows a rather rigid dual system in contrast to a very flexible labor market in the United States (Kappelhoff & Teckenberg, 1987).

Relatively stable normative patterns of individual behavior are summarized by sociologists with the term institutions. These are agencies in each country that regulate behavior and function as background expectations for normality (Leisering & Schumann, 2003). For young people the major institutions that regulate the life-course are the school system, family, welfare institutions, and finally the labor market. The last two offer social assistance if family support is not available. In this study the influence of institutions including family, peers, and teachers along with the organization of the school system, welfare supply, and labor market conditions are combined as the macro-structural conditions.

Leisering and Schumann (2003) call the German institutionalization the life-course regime, which is characterized by high regulation, a curb on wage labor, and inequality structured by status and gender. According to Krüger (2003) Germany is still at the forefront among the post-industrialized countries with a



strong life-course regime. “Structural linkages between social background and educational attainment, between educational credentials and labor-market entry placements, and between employment careers and retirement benefits” (p. 33) frame individualization in Germany.

According to Beck (1992) and Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002) individualization can not be equalized with emancipation. It rather refers to the contradiction of the individualization process which leads to a decline of individual independence. Although the individual is liberated from traditional bounds, such as parents, communities or colleagues, one is now even more dependent on societal institutions. This new dependence includes the subjugation under societal constraints which can hardly be influenced. Those constraints can be labor market, educational system, or social security that impacts the individual life-course (Heitmeyer & Olk, 1990). As a consequence, young people perceive their life as being threatened by unemployment (Allerbeck & Hoag, 1985) and try to minimize risk and maximize their prospects for survival under the new structural conditions (Evans, Behrens, & Kaluza, 2000).

In the United States, with its more open institutional framework, the individualization paradigm plays a different role. According to Dee (1999) the doctrine of equality of condition never made sense to many U.S. Americans. Historically, most of them believed that a society can be built by individuals and as a result of the collectivity of individuals. Most people were opposed to the idea that a government would take over the role of distributing and redistributing resources. Dee further outlines that “equal freedom in American culture is equal

opportunity, not equal result” (p. 222). He based his arguments on the results of several opinion polls. Americans across four generations agreed on the importance of hard work that would lead to success and a higher social status and that opportunities are more important than ensuring equality of income. A big government was perceived as the greatest threat to America’s future. Deere further emphasized the importance of choices in American society. “It is a freedom to do something, not a freedom from something—particularly not from the responsibility of making choices beneficial to oneself and one’s society” (p. 222).

According to Beck (1992) individualization in Germany has to be attained as a practical capacity of self-assertion. In the United States, the individual is individualized not by choice but as a consequence of the lack of social security and protection. Nevertheless, in both countries coping with socially produced risk is individualized (Bauman, 2001).

### Welfare Systems in Germany and the United States

In order to analyze the macro-societal conditions for young adults in both countries it was necessary to look at welfare supply. With welfare I refer to a system of public regulation that is concerned with the protection of individuals through both legal measures and the distribution of resources (Gallie & Paugam, 2000). Social security supplies that are of particular importance for young people in Germany are health insurance, social insurance, long-term care insurance, as well as features of welfare like free education, job security, healthy work environments, and payments for holidays in order to gain new strength for work.

The term welfare by itself has a different meaning in Germany and the United States. Edwards and Glover (2001) argued that the word needs to be reclaimed from its increasingly narrow (Americanized) association with social security benefit systems and budgets alone. They suggest restoring its meaning in regard to “a broad gamut of risks, resources and their social distribution” (p. 2). The authors argued further that the traditional model of the welfare state is an institutional nation-state response to coping with unforeseen although often broadly predictable consequences. Welfare supply is often based on actuarial principles and collectively shared rights and responsibilities. The state is based on a solidarity response to risk that comes within a typical life-course. The welfare state provides a broad social obligation as well as the creation of mutual security among its citizens (Edwards & Glover, 2001). With the current economic as well as critical demographic development in Germany, the welfare state is challenged. Edwards and Glover (2001) argued that the effect of globalization could be a change in perceptions and experiences of the nature of risk. Those changes might be interlinked with “a decline in citizen’s confidence in, and reliance on, those who administer and provide welfare service” (p. 4).

Mayer (1991) suggested why it is important to look at the nation state as a welfare state and outlined how it is interlinked with the individual life-course.

Since there is no “state domain” in life and not really a “life stage” controlled by the state (with the exception of military service and—some would argue—education), an assessment of the role of the state in shaping individual lives is primarily an analytical and theoretical task linking institutional arrangements and processes on the macro level of societies and the dynamics of life histories on the individual level. (p.177)

The purpose of social security systems is to cover major life risks or to decrease the dependency of the individual on others. The individual should be able to make life plans based on the expectation of stabilized income and need provision. It should also enable the individual to flexibly change places and jobs.

Germany and the United States have two very different welfare systems. In Germany there is a corporatist approach with trade unions included in the management of the economy. In the United States the system is called liberal laissez-faire and interventions by the state are sometimes seen as illegitimate activities by the public (Esping-Anderson, 1990; Crouch, 2001; Mishra, 1990).

According to Leisering and Schuhmann (2003) German society can be characterized by the normative principle of security, stability, and continuity. The welfare state protects the individual against social risks in regard to the regulation of the labor market. The welfare state represented by different formal and governmental institutions shapes the individual life and protects it especially in transition processes. Assistance is provided to deal with work related risks like accidents, disability, and unemployment, as well as illness, parenthood, and divorce. The authors list four regulative mechanisms and related provisions.

1. Resources: transfer payments during illness, child benefit, social assistance payments, etc.;
2. credits like tax exemptions for married persons or earned income tax credits;
3. personal social services, e.g., in social assistance, health services or psychiatric care; and
4. protective rights and privileges like guarantees of jobs for women on maternity leave, job security for handicapped persons. (p. 194)

The individual depends on the agreement of gatekeepers for the realization of personal goals and is bounded by their criteria for eligibility to receive certain welfare provisions. Welfare provisions are meant to help a person bridge a situation of risk until self-support is possible again. That includes for example further education and training with the prospect of employment.

Young people in Germany have access to a number of social support options when they are unemployed. Unemployment is defined by the Social Legislation Code (Nipperdey, 1998) as a situation where young people

- only have short-term or minor part-time jobs (less than 15 hours);
- are looking for work and are willing to take any reasonable work (including part-time employment);
- have registered at the employment office;
- comply with their tri-monthly duty to register.

In order to be eligible for social support young adults have to be available for the arrangement of employment and show that they are actively searching for work. When young adults search for an apprenticeship after finishing school they are not considered to be unemployed. Unemployment benefits apply when a young adult has worked for 12 months. For those who have worked as part of their apprenticeship in the dual system, unemployment benefits are calculated as 50% of the expected income from their future job. Individuals are eligible for social security benefits after one year, or under certain circumstances before that. This minimum income is provided when no other payments are available, for example through to a job or a person obliged by maintenance. The minimum subsistence

level includes the costs of diet, accommodation, clothing, hygiene, household contents, heat, and personal needs for daily living such as to sustain social relationships and participate in cultural life. Larger investments, such as a washing machine or television can be financed by single payments, which require a separate application (Kieselbach, Beelmann, Erdwien, Stitzel, and Traiser, 2000). According to Nipperdey (1998), young adults when unemployed are also eligible to participate in further qualification schemes. The European Social Fund (ESF) supports young long-term unemployed adults with payment of additional training, including financial support for becoming self-employed, language courses, or internships in other European countries (Kieselbach et al., 2000).

Traditionally, the welfare state in Germany responds to unforeseen hazards such as unemployment, sickness, or the need for another qualification. However, in the last few years the government has increasingly curtailed the level of, and eligibility for, many forms of state provision. Financial support as described above is provided as social insurance and social assistance.

Today, young adults are expected to make provision for many of their welfare needs such as retirement or occupational disablement insurance. At the same time young adults get less social assistance particular after they attended full-time vocational schools. Social benefits in case of unemployment are sometimes so low that they have to rely on family support (Green, 1988). Young adults have to be at least 18 years old to be eligible for social assistance, but in terms of welfare benefits young people are not normally recognized as

autonomous adults until the age of 27 (Biggart et al., 2002). At the same time higher unemployment rates and the constantly changing demands for skills in the labor market as well as the fewer chances for finding low paid jobs to make ends meet has meant that Germany has become an increasingly risky society, with more people at risk of unemployment and insecure employment since the second world war.

Leisering and Schumann (2003) stated that Germany can be described as a flexible coordinated corporate system in contrast to the deregulated, open system as it exists in the United States. Germany is considered to be a high-trust-society, based on shared solidarity to attend collectively to individual risk, compared with the low-trust-society in the United States. Both models refer to the social relationship between corporate actors and the society at large. Many Americans strongly believe in individual choice (Furstenberg, 2003) and that everyone has equal opportunity and is free to rise above the social class one was born into (Hochschild, 1981). Institutional stratification is delayed and individuals get second and third chances should motivation problems occur earlier in life. At the same time knowledge and networks are unequally distributed and the opportunities might therefore not be practically accessible for every American (Cook & Furstenberg, 2002).

The inequalities in the United States are much higher than in most other countries with developed economies (Cook & Furstenberg, 2002; Vleminckx & Smeeding, 2001). The United States is characterized by a diverse population and a high premium on individual choice. The responsibility for a good education and

social support is up to the parents (Hinz, 1997). The role of the public sphere in family life is shrinking which limits life choices of those who do not have the financial resources to purchase daycare, early education, after-school care, and high-quality schooling (Garfinkel, Hochschild, & McLanahan, 1996). Assistance from the government is only expected to a small extent since many parents believe that the federal and state administration is undermining parental authority (Leisering & Schumann, 2003).

In the class society families are attempting to preserve the social status of their children and choose private education or move to suburbs with high property taxes since the schools are mainly funded out of these resources (Cooper, Fusarelli, & Randall, 2004). Families with a low-income background, often living under the poverty line, are not able to provide their children with the opportunity of a good education.<sup>5</sup> Poor families are more prone to move between different neighborhoods which results in family instability as well as an unstable school situation. Schools in these neighborhoods offer lower quality education so that the students there lag far behind students at schools in better neighborhoods and private schools (Furstenberg, 2003).

### Comparing the School-to-Work-Transition

Various school and training schemes have a great impact on the school-to-work-transition. I point out some of the significant differences between Germany and the United States and show that transitional patterns in Germany

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<sup>5</sup> According to Dalaker & Proctor (2000) in 2000, poverty levels were officially defined for a family of four at \$ 17,463. In 1999, more than 30 percent of Americans were in households with incomes below 200 percent of the official poverty level for their family size.



are changing. The results of the study might show to what extent transitional patterns among young adults are similar or different.

The German school leavers who pursue vocational education and training have to attend vocational and educational training institutions that guide and, to a certain degree, control entry, duration, and exit of status passages to employment (Heinz, 1996). While Germans have to plan their life-course at an early age and age-graded transitions are more institutionalized particularly in regard to education and work, age norms appear to be more elusive in North America (Heinz, 1992). Americans do often not make strong professional commitments until their early twenties or even early thirties. Structures that promote motivation among non-college youth to continue education and improve their human capital are generally deficient in the United States (Mortimer, 1996). Youth of high income families are given a lot of freedom to form their identities. According to Leisering and Schumann (2003), "youth are generally encouraged to experiment in employment, personal relationships, living situations, and the like as part of the quest for finding meaningful work and satisfying emotional relationships" (p. 218).

One of the major fears for young adults in Germany is to choose the wrong apprenticeship and end up being unemployed and socially excluded. The anxiety of not getting a job in the training company is high and a lot of trainings that are offered today do not necessarily lead to a stable employment situation. Parents, teachers, and the media are continuously causing awareness about the

highly competitive apprenticeship and labor market and the importance of a good placement.

Apprenticeships can have a major impact on future income and social status (Engel & Hurrelmann, 1989; Olk & Strikker, 1990). This causes enormous psychological pressure among some of the youth (Allerbeck & Hoag, 1985). Even if the youth unemployment rate in Germany is low compared with other European countries (Crouch, Finegold, & Sako, 1999), youth with few qualifications are particularly at risk.

In the United States, the situation is not much different. Less educated students experience more periods of unemployment, change jobs more often, or work part time and receive stagnant or declining wages (Bauman, 2001; Cook & Furstenberg, 2002). Additionally, they are (particularly in the United States) less protected against several hazards through a comprehensive social security system.

For a long time there has been the assumption that the transition from school to work is a linear process. While this still holds true regarding the situation in Germany (Allmendinger, 1989a, 1989b), several studies have outlined that it is not necessarily the case in the United States (Coleman, 1984). In the United States there is a common functionalist assumption that markets work smoothly on their own and should not be further regulated (Rosenbaum & Jones, 2000).

The problem in the United States is that vocational education is not well recognized, and students and parents are trying to keep students from being in

work-bound classes in high school. More and more students are going to college while fewer students planning to get a full-time job after graduating from high school. Nevertheless, approximately half of the 12th grade students lack basic 9th grade math and verbal skills (Murnane & Levy, 1996). And only 40% to 60% of the students who enter college get a degree. Those young adults who do not graduate from college with another degree enter the labor market with the same educational credentials as students who took work-bound classes in high school (Rosenbaum & Jones, 2000). The latter might even be better prepared. The United States does also not have a high degree of standardization regarding the credentials youth can achieve at many different institutions. Employment decisions are therefore less likely based on education, because credentials are not a very viable indicator for employee qualifications (Rosenbaum & Jones, 2000).

Schneider and Stevenson (1999) wrote about the importance of aligned ambitions that impact the timeframe for finishing a degree and getting a self supporting job. The authors pointed out that approximately 24% of young adults in the United States complete a bachelor degree by five years after high school. Youth without a bachelor degree (42% of those starting at 4-year institution; approximately 85% of those starting at 2-year schools) often end up in considerable debt and only a few achieve credentials beyond the high school diploma. There are no reliable statistics about those students who attend technical colleges at some point in their lives in order to ensure their employability and increase their income.

Gray and Herr (2000) wrote about the widely spread desire of getting a college degree. They argued that this excessive desire for college is not based on academic ability, maturity, or even well thought out. While the majority of high school students enter college, a shortage of skilled technicians has evolved particularly in areas such as information technology, precision manufacturing, electronics production, and building construction. While most students strive for a college degree, prognosis showed that only 24% of all work in the future actually requires postsecondary education.

Gray and Herr (2000) argued that almost half of all work requires less than two weeks of on the job training. From a German perspective that seems to be very critical and indicates that there are many low-skilled jobs available that do not exist in Germany. It also implies that jobs are given to people that can only be poorly qualified.

The notion that quality in education and training plays a very different role in the United States than in Germany is supported by Fussell (1983) who argued that the state of Ohio has more institutions that call themselves universities than there are in all of unified Germany. Gray and Herr (2000) outlined in detail how the value of degrees in the United States has declined while the value of technical training is underestimated. The authors showed that many high skill/high wage occupations were actually in the areas of craft/precision, metal/repair, and technical support and do not require a bachelor degree. Workers trained in those fields earned more than most people with a college degree apart from the ones who worked in the managerial/professional ranks. In

the above mentioned professional areas only 133,000 workers are trained yearly while there are jobs for 455,000 of them. Those opportunities are often overlooked, because the size of these groups is small and getting smaller. Jobs that require technical skills become more demanding, but higher skill levels are paid with higher wages.

Evans, Behrens, and Kaluza (2000) identified four strategic transition behaviors among young people in Germany and Great Britain: strategic transition behavior, step-by-step transition behavior, taking chances transition, and wait-and-see transition behavior. Strategic transition behavior involves a high degree of planfulness. Young adults make a clear occupational choice and define career goals. Step-by-step transition behavior indicates medium and short term oriented plans.

The choice is not necessarily tied to a clear occupational goal and the person is still searching for a profession. Taking chances transition refers to young adults who have no clear occupational goals and would confront themselves with different situations that are not necessarily planned in order to come across an occupation that might fit one's interests and skills. Wait-and-see patterns are typical for young adults who show an attitude of learned helplessness. They are satisfied as long as their situation doesn't get worse and hope to have a lucky moment in the future. While Evans, Behrens, and Kaluza (2000) assigned those patterns to young adults in different kinds of educational levels I argue that all of them can be found among young adults in vocational education and training in Germany and the United States.

## Vocational Education and Training (VET) in Germany and the United States

### *Introduction*

This section of Chapter 2 provides an overview of the contemporary structure of the German and U.S. American vocational education and training system and the manner in which they are underpinned by the general educational system. (A comparative description can also be found in Appendix A.) Structural differences between the two influence how young adults think about their future and the way they take agency to move into adulthood, and “constitute the social contexts for the formation of occupational preferences, attitudes about work and schooling, career planning, and other psychological and behavioral reactions” (Mortimer & Krüger, 2000, p. 477). Historical roots will briefly be outlined and the vocational institutions described in more detail. After a description of the advantages of the German model, I will identify a number of current issues and concerns within the German and U.S. system.

Germany’s vocational education and training system is still a “source of pride at home and emulation abroad” (Pritchard, 1992, p. 131). It was often used as a model (Cockrill & Scott, 1997) even if no country did actually transfer the system completely (Gill & Dar, 2000). The high investment in vocational education and training in Germany that involves cooperation between different stakeholders also ensures a more human intercourse with the employees. In comparison with the United States young adults are protected against several social hazards while they are trained.

Instead of a politics of short term labor contracts and job insecurity due to termination and lay offs as it exists in the United States, German workers face more employment security. More emphasis is placed on an inner-company job-market, stable employment, work organization which is based on high qualifications, workers participation, and a strategy of diversified quality products (Heidenreich, 1998). A trustful relationship at work as well as qualifications based on a concept of occupation was called by Americans the “Eurosklerose” (Olson, 1996), but international comparisons have actually contributed to the general opinion that the German production model has its strengths (Lane, 1994). At the same time it can not be underestimated that the system has its weaknesses and needs reformation.

“America has the worst approach to the school-to-work-transition of any industrialized nation” argued Orfield (1997, p. 8). There has been a discussion about the limited opportunities available for African Americans and the role of schooling in terms of social mobility for a long time and was of particular concern during the famous Washington-Dubois debate (Crowson, Wong, & Aypay, 2000; Parnell, 1985). DuBois favored traditional academic education while Washington believed that Blacks can build economic self-reliance with industrial education that would help to better integrate in society. DuBois argued that vocational education for Blacks would hold them in alleged substandard living conditions.

Urban and Wagoner (2000) pointed out:

Whereas Washington wanted to persuade prospective teachers, editors, ministers, and businessmen to guide the race’s social development along the self-help and accomodationist lines he favored, DuBois advocated leadership by a more assertive and

articulate class of college-educated men and women like himself.  
(p. 156)

The Washington-DuBois debate goes on today and signifies the philosophical distinction between vocational and academic education (Gordon, 1999).

Orfield (1997) discovered in Indiana that vocational training is taken by only one-seventh of that state's students. Many of them were pessimistic about getting a job in their field of training or building up a foundation for further training. The Center for Education Statistics (1998) stated that institutions which are specifically designated to vocational education enrolled less than 0.5% of America's public students. Lewis (2000) argued that vocational education has always been seen in the United States as being "second choice" education "for those who cannot meet the requirements of the college preparatory curriculum" (p. 578).

As a result of the disparity between vocational education in American high schools and the expectations of businessmen, the German vocational system drew America's attention, in 1905, when Massachusetts Governor Douglas appointed a commission to set up several public hearings in the state about vocational education and training. It indicated a lack of skilled workers in industries, and that public schools were doing little to meet the needs of industry and society at the time (Crowson et al., 2000).

While Germany offers a transition from school-to-work which is based on a framework of vocational qualifications, the United States relies on a model of on the job training (Heinz, 2000). It seems that both models are not adequate anymore for the requirements of our societies today and both need to be



transformed. The German system is not flexible enough to react to the changing requirements at the labor market while the approach in the United States does not ensure high quality work.

The German system faces increasing pressure to differentiate and to offer more flexibility. The U.S. system needs to be standardized and promoted in a manner to increase the number of participants in order to establish a well qualified workforce. I will explain current reforms, particularly the School-to-Work Opportunities Act (STWOA) in the United States and highlight the major differences in the school-to-work-transition between Germany and the United States.

### *Vocational Education and Training (VET) in Germany*

The school-system in the German-speaking countries generally follows the European model of free public education and a variety of secondary schools for academic and vocational education. General schooling and vocational training are inextricably linked in Germany, because the choice for one of the secondary schools has a substantial influence on the later career of the student (Cockrill & Scott, 1997). Therefore, the school system will be described here in more detail.

School starts at the age of six or seven with primary school. After four years, parents and teachers decide about the next school type for the child. Based on the assessment of their intellectual capacities children are streamed into *Hauptschule*, *Realschule* and *Gymnasium* (Mortimer & Krüger, 2000). The extended elementary school (*Hauptschule*) goes until grade nine or in some

states until grade ten, the intermediate or secondary school (*Realschule*) ends with grade ten, and the grammar school includes junior and senior high school (*Gymnasium*). Students graduate at age 18 or 19 (see Appendix A).

Today, there are more students attending junior and senior high schools than the other types of school, because the high school degree not only offers the possibility to study at a university, but also better chances of getting an apprenticeship for certain professions (Cockrill & Scott, 1997). The *Realschule* caters to vocationally inclined students and focuses more on the preparation for work. Therefore, the subjects that are taught there are more practical oriented such as teaching for electricians, cosmetologists, nurses, or sales people. The student has the chance after graduation to continue with an apprenticeship, a full-time vocational school, or change to the *Gymnasium* which is the equivalent to gain university entry qualifications. The last is often difficult, because of the differences in the curriculum, and it sometimes requires an additional year in school.

The *Hauptschule* used to be the school which prepared students for vocational education and training. But the school has changed in student body and caters mainly to students with very low ability and/or social/behavioral problems (Cantor, 1989, p. 97). Most of the states in Germany offer extended elementary school until the 9th grade, but some states like North Rhine Westfalia, Berlin and Bremen also offer the 10th grade. *Hauptschulen* focus on career and technical education, because the students often have more practical skills. One can gain an apprenticeship with the basic leaving certificate, but it

depends on the school and of course on the situation in the apprenticeship labor market. Therefore, the ministries for education in various states have developed different ways to obtain higher degrees.

Additionally, there is the choice of going to a comprehensive school (*Gesamtschule*) in some states. In these schools students are taught together until the end of compulsory schooling, at the ages of 15 or 16, or sometimes all three types of school are encompassed under one roof. The introduction of this type of school was the result of SPD (social democratic) state governments.

According to Brachel (1994) the choice of secondary school has a considerable impact on later career choices. Moves between types of schools are possible, but they are not straightforward, because of differences in the curriculum, and can only be achieved by people who realize too late that they made an inappropriate choice and who are determined to make the best of their potential. The general opportunity to change from one type of school to another is anchored school law, but, nevertheless, it is often difficult due to different curricula and teachers as well as the socialization within a new environment.

There are a lot of elements of uncertainty which prevent students from upward mobility in the educational system. In order to start vocational training it is not necessary to change the school, even if the chance to get a certain apprenticeship does increase with certificates from *Realschule* or *Gymnasium*. It is required by law that students are in some kind of school until the age of 18.

Regardless of what type of school the student attended, everybody can enter vocational training at 15 or 16 (depending on the state), but they are legally obliged to continue with some form of school based education until they are 18 years old. This requirement is the

origin of the term “dual system”—vocational training in Germany can either be in full-time vocational schools, or, if it is in the form of an apprenticeship, it also always includes a school-based element. (Cockrill & Scott, 1997, p. 339)

However, the extended elementary school offers the most practical preparation for certain kinds of apprenticeships. Besides a variety of general knowledge, one foreign language is taught there and starting in the 7th grade the subject of labor theory (*Arbeitslehre*). In this subject the pupils can choose a special direction such as

1. engineering, economic science (*Wirtschaftslehre*), vocational training, computer science;
2. housekeeping, economic science (*Wirtschaftslehre*), vocational training, computer science;
3. economic science and administration, computer science

In ninth and tenth grade students are required to do an internship of about 3 to 6 weeks in a company of their choice. The subject, labor theory, and the internship should prepare students for an apprenticeship. It is also meant to provide job-orientation, personal interests, and skills. If the students have passed grade 9 successfully they get a certificate of the extended elementary school and can move on to grade ten to reach the so called qualified certificate of the extended elementary school. This possibility is very important for the pupils since it is increasingly more difficult to get an apprenticeship with a basic leaving certificate (Büchel, 2002).

Problems with discipline, learning difficulties, violence, and school absence at the *Hauptschule* often occur, because the perspectives for those

students of getting an apprenticeship and later permanent employment are rather poor. These problems contribute even more to the unfavorable reputation of this type of school (Brand, 1998). The initial work experiences of the students often change their perspective on certain professions and convince them not to pursue an apprenticeship in this field (Mortimer & Krüger, 2000). Schober (1996) stated that student judged their first trial as either too demanding, the earnings were not high enough, or the working conditions were too difficult.

Vocational education and training has a long tradition in Germany and has brought about many different institutions, processes and procedures. The system is very important in Germany because almost 80% of an age-cohort pass through it (Brand, 1998). The roots of this system go back to the training of apprentices during the Middle Ages where young men joined a master-craftsman and learned a trade.

The guilds<sup>6</sup> controlled vocational training (Greinert, 1994). In the second half of the nineteenth century industrialization and accompanying political, social, and economic developments led to important changes in vocational training. Subsequently, the legislature set up a framework for vocational training by establishing Chambers of Crafts as intermediary powers in the political system. They were responsible for the development and control of vocational training (Soskice, 1994).

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<sup>6</sup>guilds = Gilden. During the middle ages in Europe, working men of particular trades usually joined associations called craft guilds. These Guilds were forerunners of the modern Unions and served to regulate occupations and preserved a monopoly of crafts. Weavers were probably the first to organize. Quickly the goldsmiths, saddlers, fishmongers, bakers, dyers, glove makers, and other craftsmen saw the benefits of organization and formed their own separate fraternities. (Retrieved March 11, 2005, from <http://renaissance-faire.com/Renfaires/Entertainment/History-of-Guilds.htm>)

These changes culminated in the establishment of the dual system in VET one hundred years ago. Since then the training in the companies had to be supplemented by VET in special vocational schools (*Berufsschulen*) mostly financed by communes or the states of Germany. The teachers there had a specialized training in theory and practice of a craft. A consequence for the guilds was that decisions had to be made in consensus with the state administration. At the end of the apprenticeship or training period the trainee had to take an examination which was overseen by the guild or the Chamber of Industry and Commerce. The first framework of VET came out in 1969 in the form of the Vocational Training Act or *Berufsbildungsgesetz* (Brand 1998; Ertl, 2002).

The Vocational Education and Training Act is the main foundation for the exercise of VET in Germany. It regulates the organization of vocational training in 360 occupations as well as the certifications, obligations of the training, appropriate salary for trainees, regulations of notice, personal and technical suitability of employer, and trainee and final examination (Heinz, 2000). Training ordinances guide the apprentices' learning process and specify minimum training and examination standards. For professional training the training regulations are important. They determine which content knowledge in the individual occupation has to be possessed. Normally, a vocational education lasts 2 to 3.5 years with approximately three quarters spent in a firm under the supervision of a certified trainer or master craftsman (Heinz, 2000). Regulations about the examinations can be found in the test orders of the Chambers of Industry and Commerce. The remaining time of the apprenticeship is spent in vocational schools where the

apprentice gets a general education and learns theoretical aspects of the specific occupation.

The vocational education system is administered on a national level by the Federal Institute of Vocational Education and Training (BBIB) which is a public agency with representatives of 16 German states, unions, and employers. On a regional or local level there are Chambers of Industry, Commerce, and Crafts which are in charge. The costs of VET are shared between state and employers. Apprentices get only a small salary and do contribute to the financing of the training with their labor (Heinz, 2000).

For those who do not get an apprenticeship in the system a variety of vocational colleges offer full-time training which also leads to a recognized certification in a vocation (Franz & Soskice, 1995). For the full-time vocational schools the most important law is the school ordinance. In this law there are basically the same aspects specified as in the training ordinance. The law outlines regulations about different types of schools such as admission, duties of the students, time of classes, and examinations.

Vocational schools are divided by branch or trade, and students are grouped by year of apprenticeship. They can receive instruction for either a single occupation or for related occupations. For the small percentage of students who did not achieve the intermediate level of the secondary school, the *Berufsaufbauschule* offers the possibility to achieve an equivalent qualification. The *Berufliches Gymnasium* which provides the equivalent of the last 3 years of the *Gymnasium* education on a technical/vocational basis offers, besides the

usual subjects, career-oriented subjects such as business studies or engineering. Students can achieve the *Abitur* which enables one to attend institutions of higher education and subsequently a vocational degree.

There are two other types of programs for students who did not successfully graduate from *Hauptschule* or *Realschule*, the *Berufsvorbereitungsjahr* and the *Berufsgrundbildungsjahr*. Both are school-based full-time courses which prepare students for the world of work and give insights into a range of occupations. These courses are not taken into account if one starts an apprenticeship afterwards (Cockrill & Scott, 1997). Students who attend this type of school often lack discipline and often take up unskilled work after completion (Her Majesty Inspectorate, 1993). Streeck, Hilbert, van Kevelaer, Maier, and Weber (1987) further argued that in many cases these two types of courses function as “waiting areas of the dual system for those who have been unable to obtain an apprenticeship or other work” (p. 98).

The advantage of the German VET system is that the vocational schools have to comply with the respective curriculum worked out at federal level with regard to the training-ordinance. Training activities in businesses and in vocational schools are coordinated which resulted in vocational qualifications that have nationwide recognition. Since 1974 it is possible to recognize new vocational training if it can fulfill the following criteria (BBIG 1993):

- sufficient long-term demand, not just based on the demand of individual (big) businesses;
- geared to continuous vocational activity irrespective of age;
- providing training with a broad-based vocational foundation;
- duration of training between two and three years;



- securing a basis for continuing training and occupational advancement;
- development of the ability to take personal-responsibility in applying knowledge and skills appropriately. (p. 17)

The key steering-instrument for the actual training is the training-ordinance. Each of the training-ordinances defines

- the name of the training-vocation
- the normal duration of the training
- qualifications awarded on completion of the training (vocational profile)
- a schedule of the training program within the business setting
- an outline of the requirements of the examination at the end of the training (Brand, 1998)

The companies are compelled by the Vocational Training Act to set up their individual training schedule according to the ordinance. It becomes an obligatory part of the training contract between the firm and the trainee. Negotiation about training-ordinances are organized and facilitated by the Federal Institute for VET (*Bundesinstitut für Berufsbildung*) which is an organization of the federal government. Its policies are decided by a governing board in which four “benches” of stakeholders are represented in equal numbers. The “benches” consist of employers, trade unions, federal government, and governments of the sixteen states.

Sometimes similar in content, but entirely under the jurisdiction of the educational authorities and operating on a full-time basis, the vocational college offers qualifications in areas in which apprenticeship schemes do not exist or where there are insufficient numbers of openings for apprentices. A general school leaving certificate serves as an entry requirement and, as is the case of

the dual system, the final diploma can often be used to enter more ambitious programs within the system (Lehmann, 1995).

The vocational education system as a whole is governed by a host of regulations which cover the entry requirements, transition, and exit qualifications. The responsibility within the federal states rests with the Ministry of Culture (*Kultusministerium*). Since the Federal Constitution established a states jurisdiction over formal education, several states have provisions in their own constitutions governing educational matters. All of them have passed special legislation establishing the goals, structures, instructional content, and procedures in their respective system (Lehmann, 1995).

The German VET system is based on a corporatist approach which binds enterprises, vocational schools, and labor unions together in a legislative framework. Apprentices spent approximately half of their training period in a company and the other half in a school. In classroom instructions they are taught theoretical knowledge related to their occupational specialization as well as general skills that cut across occupations (Shavit & Müller, 2000). Universal standards concerning the contents and duration of training are set by this framework. It also defines the responsibility of firms, vocational schools, public agencies, and trainees (Alex & Stooss, 1996). Qualifications in Germany are highly standardized due to the institutional structure which ensures a high level of transparency for both employers and employees. The system is labeled qualification space by Maurice, Sellier, and Silvestre (1986), because it is segmented by vocational qualifications. The system ensures that workers have a

clearly defined occupational identity. Mobility between different occupations is therefore not very common, but it is relatively easy for workers to move between firms.

For a long time the German production model (Kern & Sabel, 1994) was very successful. It combined a high-skill production system with a high-wages reward structure. The school-to-work-transition is qualification centered and standardized. Curricula, credentials, and job descriptions are applicable on a nation-wide basis (Heinz, 2000; Kelle & Zinn, 1998). Objectives, standards, and regulations are set at the national level by the VET Act, but the supply of training places depends on human resource policies of a firm (Heinz, 2000). For several years the amount of apprenticeships offered by companies has been declining, especially in East Germany (Furlong, Stalder, & Azzopardi, 2000; Mortimer & Krüger, 2000). Additionally, not all apprenticeships provide the same level of security. Particularly in the construction industry there is a declining need for highly qualified workers.

The state therefore intervenes by providing incentives (wage subsidies) for employers and training schemes for young people in full-time vocational schools (Heinz, 2000). The Federal Government under the leadership of the Social Democratic Party came up with a new proposal which is called Alliance for Work. It attempts to renew the employers' social responsibility and brings employers, unions, and government at round tables on a federal, state, and regional level (Heinz, 2000).

Fewer construction jobs, but also a high supply of cheap labor from mainly Eastern European countries and a high amount of illegal labor, make it increasingly difficult for young adults to enter long term employment. Miller-Idriss (2002) pointed out that many foreign firms bring workers from their own country which intensifies the unemployment situation in Germany. With high unemployment there is also a growing illegal labor market not only fed by illegal immigrants but also by unemployed Germans. Taylor-Gooby, Dean, Munro and Parker (1999) wrote,

one way in which people without legitimate employment can “get by” in an increasingly flexible labor market is to supplement social security entitlement illegally by taking undeclared employment in the informal economy. In so doing, they expose themselves to another kind of risk: that of detection and prosecution. (p. 188)

Approximately 80% of young people who learn an occupation go through the system of part-time work in a company and part-time schooling in a vocational school and obtain either an occupational certificate or an undergraduate degree (a number which is significantly higher than in the United States, where only 50% reach the same standards) (Cook & Furstenberg, 2002). The remaining 20% go to a full-time school-based training. Apprentices are usually between 16 and 25 years old, and they learn their profession in 3 to 3.5 years, a period which can be shortened if one has graduated from high school (Miller Idriss, 2002). According to Evans and Furlong (1997), the German institutional system of preparation from school-to-work is based on participatory socialization in extended full-time education or apprenticeships. Young Germans must complete their qualifications and training programs successfully before they

can practice most occupations (Roberts, 1997a, 1997b). Weyman (1999) said that the highly institutionalized training system ensures high qualification levels of skilled work and craftsmanship in Germany. It also protects the individual skilled worker against dismissal or downward mobility.

The dual system has an advantage in that it integrates real work experience and organizational settings with theoretical instruction in vocational schools. (A detailed description of the system can be found in Appendix A.) The German vocational education and training system has been successful because it contributes to a well-trained labor force and, compared to other European countries, a relatively low youth-unemployment rate (Blossfeld & Stockmann, 1999). Looking at the high degree of institutionalization and standardization of vocational education and training in Germany it can be argued that the system functions as a safety net, one that provides work and training for three to four years, and prepares young adults for the world of work (Shavit & Müller, 2000).

But the system also has its weaknesses. Since the German unification in 1990 it is obvious that it cannot serve everyone, which is particularly the case in the East.

From 1993 onward there has been a growing shortage of training places, which has primarily been a result of the steadily and substantially increasing number of young people looking for a training place. Despite their high motivation, many young people do not manage to get a place for their training occupation of choice; instead, they have to continue school or decide to take on a training contract in the western Länder. (Ertl, 2000, p. 59)

The system does also not prepare everybody appropriately for the labor market (Miller-Idriss, 2002). Some of the jobs young adults are trained for have already

disappeared, others have changed their focus. For students who attended *Hauptschule* or *Realschule* it is also very difficult to enter apprenticeships in fields such as banking, insurance, or travel industry because many students who achieved the highest school degree, *Abitur*, enter those apprenticeships. Pollmann-Schult & Mayer (2004) pointed out that “due to an oversupply of *Gymnasium* and university graduates from higher education, vocationally trained workers got crowded out of the jobs they traditionally occupied” (p. 2).

In Germany, the Department of Labor keeps track of the amount of youth who are currently enrolled in some kind of vocational education and training. There is a law of the Federal Constitutional Court from October 12, 1980, that the provision of apprenticeships has to exceed the actual demand by 12.5%. According to information from the *Bundesanstalt für Arbeit* from October 10, 2003, there was a lack of 286,400 training posts. According to Cortina, Baumert, Leschinsky, Mayer, & Trommer (2003) the lack of training places varied between 1997 and 2000 between ten and six percent. In September 2003, there were 515,700 youth under the age of 25, and 93,000 under the age of 20 unemployed. In total there were approximately one million youth not involved in the primary labor market, unemployed or parked in different supporting measures. Of 2,145,600 companies, 1,167,700 have permission to train apprentices and 637,700 do actually train young people. That means that more than 45% of those companies who have the permission to train are not getting involved. Further, of 1,237,106 school graduates in 2003, 89,685 were without a degree from the extended elementary school (*Hauptschule*). There were 47.5% of the

unemployed youth who had not completed an apprenticeship. Of those, 21.6% had not graduated from the extended elementary school. These figures imply that students who did not graduate from school are particularly at risk (Deutscher Bundestag, Ausschuss für Wirtschaft und Arbeit, Ausschussdrucksache vom 11/03/2003).

The vocational education and training system is also in decline, because it does not prepare everybody appropriately for market conditions. Heinz (2000) argued that the training is too job-specific and the range of skills and knowledge one can gain is dependent on the size of the firm. Forty percent of those who complete an apprenticeship in the dual system cannot find a job in the occupation they were trained (Cook & Furstenberg, 2002). Leaving the training firm enhances shifts at the labor market and negatively affects the chances to enter skilled positions (Konietzka, 2003). Miller Idriss (2002) outlined that while there are thousands of apprentices trained for fields where employment prospects are dismal, there is a lack of trained people for the information technology sector.

Under the technological change and the circumstances of globalization, some of the traditional occupations which were developed according to the guild model are now becoming obsolete (Miller Idriss, 2002) and new occupations are continually emerging. According to Heinz (2000, p. 167), "Because of its hierarchical and horizontal regulations and cooperative patterns the dual system is slow to adapt to changes in technologies and work organizations which require more cross-occupational competencies." Schools and companies often cannot accommodate the new requirements because the teachers are not trained for

them. Miller Idriss (2002) claimed: "Students complain that teachers are ill-informed about the field and that the theoretical instruction is not relevant enough to their future occupations" (p. 477). Currently, the dual system is perceived as too slow in adjusting to changes (Cockrill & Scott, 1997).

The question of how the German system could gain more flexibility is widely discussed there. According to Ertl (2002) two models are of interest. The consecutive model where modules would lead to an extra qualification is characterized by an institutional separation. Various modules could be obtained at different schools and build a portfolio of skills. The integrative model combines initial and further training in a newly structured qualification. A big advantage of modules would be that they can be shared among related occupational trainings. It would also enable the trainees to continue with their training at a later time which one can decide according to the needs.

Social scientists argue that it has become much more important in these days how one learns and that a more general education should be central in the future (Cook & Furstenberg, 2002). Therefore, it is vital to take a critical look at the current structure of the vocational education and training system in Germany and examine if it prepares students for the changing requirements at the labor market in the risk-society (Beck, 1992). This includes the critical analysis of the structure, especially regarding its permeability.

Another critique comes from Lehmann (1995), who argued that the training only provides an entrance qualification for a lifelong qualification process. Therefore, the training should be shortened and become more flexible. The



current training-ordinances leave little room for adaptation to the special needs of businesses, interests of apprentices, or new developments in the industry.

Training ordinances, curricula of vocational colleges (*Berufsfachschulen*), and controlling bodies form a network that restricts flexibility, in contradiction to the constant rhetorical demands of politicians. Willi Brandt, Party chairman of the SPD from 1964 to 1987 said,

it has to be seen whether the forces of social consensus will be strong and creative enough to keep the essentials of this system alive under deteriorating economic conditions, new business policies, and globalized economic, cultural and social relations. (Brandt, 1998, p. 22)

Young people today are confronted with the dilemma that they should have as much education as possible, but also gain work experience as early and as long as possible (Heinz, 2000). According to Livingstone (1998) there is a growing mismatch between qualifications and employment opportunities in Germany. As a result of the growing demand for further education and training in the firms in order to meet the requirements of the knowledge industry, the chances for young people to obtain employment right after finishing an apprenticeship decreases. The growing risk is characterized through a more deregulated labor market, company downsizing, part-time, temporary, and insecure jobs (Heinz, 2000). This development contradicts the human labor theory which assumes that with a growing level of education the chances on the job market will increase (Heinz, 2000). Another drawback of the system is that it restricts mobility between types of schools and between labor market segments. Hamilton (1994) outlined the following example:

A 3rd year auto mechanic in Munich explained to me that he had decided to switch to auto body repair because it was a more creative occupation. He added that this would entail a second 3-year apprenticeship, including 3 additional years of part-time schooling. [He further describes that] German adults who wish to change occupations, or whose occupations have been made redundant by new technology or economic change are best advised to seek training in fields that do not have apprenticeship programs. If they are unable to retrain, they face serious downward mobility because the social and economic gap between skilled and unskilled jobs is vast. (p. 269)

Not everybody is managing the transformation process from school to work successfully. Especially those young people who do not complete an apprenticeship between 20 and 29 (11.6%) are in danger of social exclusion (BMBW, 1999). Considering the major goal of the dual system which is full-time employment in a trained occupation (Herget, 1986, p. 9), there is a major concern about the future of those 10% to 14% young people in each age cohort who do not continue in any kind of education or training after school leaving age (Cockrill & Scott, 1997).

One possibility to help these young people could be a shortened apprenticeship that would accommodate low motivation and/or ability levels. In contrast to this proposal from employers' organizations, unions argue that these young people need more training and suggest an extension of the apprenticeship and additional training. So far, both did not come to a consensus because employers fear the growing costs and

conversely, unions worry that shortened apprenticeships would create a set of low status occupations outside of the tariff structure, and that entry into one of these occupations would pigeon-hole a young person permanently. (Cockrill & Scott, 1997, p. 344)

Another problem which was partly solved already is to shorten the apprenticeships for apprentices with *Abitur*. While some employers suggest separating classes at the vocational school or additional classes such as languages or business administration, trade unions call these proposals unegalitarian and some employers oppose them because of the costs. Cockrill and Scott (1997) argued,

a solution will have to be found soon, since about 40% of the apprentices with *Abitur* continue into higher education and usually do not return to the firm who trained them. This negates one of the main advantages which employers perceive in the dual system: the provision of in-house trained employees well acquainted with the working procedures of a particular firm. (p. 344)

In order to find out what kind of reform would be the most effective for the German VET system, a number of pilot projects have been initiated. Miller Idriss (2002) outlined that improvements could be made,

especially in the flow of information between the learning sites, the avoidance of “double-training” or repeating information between the sites, and improving the degree to which the theoretical education in the schools is praxis-oriented. (p. 482)

A pilot project called MDQM (*Modulare Duale Qualifizierungsmaßnahme*) offers young people the chance to gain modular-style qualifications. So far, the program aims at students who did not finish a school leaving certificate or have acquired the *Hauptschul* degree (Miller Idriss, 2002).

Cook and Furstenberg (2002) argued that the greatest threat to the apprenticeship system comes from structural changes. In an increasingly global and service-oriented economy many young people find only part-time or temporary jobs. Traditional occupations are now becoming obsolete, others have

changed their content, and new occupations emerge. This change includes new requirements for the training of young people.

While soft skills were never neglected in the apprenticeship system, they may now be even more important than job-specific skills. How one learns has become as important as what one knows. (Cook & Furstenberg, 2002, p. 260)

There is also a changing attitude among businesses. The number of firms who prefer to hire people on a short-term basis is increasing.

The future of the vocational education and training system in Germany is uncertain. While it still provides the labor market with well qualified employees and offers social security it has to change towards more flexibility. One of the questions for the future is who benefits from a more general education instead of a highly specialized education that trains only for one or two production oriented skills.

### *Vocational Education and Training (VET) in the United States*

The approach to vocational education is very different in the United States. While some authors argue that attending vocational education reduces a student's chance of attending college (Vanfossen, Jones, & Spade, 1987) as well as limiting entry to higher prestige occupations (Grasso & Shea, 1979), Arum and Shavit (1995) demonstrated with their study that vocational secondary education serves as a safety net for those high school graduates who are not likely to go to college. Although vocational programs do exist in the United States, they are often considered too narrow (Rieble-Aubourg, 2001) and lack professional quality

and flexibility (Berg, 1994; Brint & Karabel, 1988; Lynch, 1994) as well as coordination.

In comparison with the German vocational education and training system, programs in the United States also do not form a national training system (Deluca & White, 1998). There are over 800 recognized occupational titles in the United States, but the training dominates in 20 trades that are mainly related to construction (Bureau of Apprenticeships and Training, 2005). Apprenticeships account for less than one percent of the labor workforce (Rieble-Aubourg, 2001) and can only be considered as seeds in the system of school-to-work transition (Hamilton, 1990).

Education and also vocational education is distinct in several ways. The country has many private schools that mainly admit students who can afford them which leads to stratification in society. Furthermore, students who struggle in school are often channeled into vocational tracks (Cook & Furstenberg, 2002). There, they can acquire skills in subjects such as cosmetology, car repair, or drafting which enables them to enter jobs in these fields after graduation. The percentage of eighteen-year-olds still in high-school is low in comparison to other industrialized nations, because of high dropout rates. "Americans seek to delay institutional stratification so as to provide individuals with second and third chances should their motivation to get ahead come late or should they stumble at earlier points" (Cook & Furstenberg, 2002, p. 279).

For the transition process that means that young adults flounder from one job to another, often with occasional spells of unemployment in between

(Klerman & Karoly, 1995; Stern et al. 1995). They may not have stable employment until they are 40 and often also change between schools and work until this age or even longer (Stern et al. 1995). Such inconsistent employment periods involve low wage jobs and low status positions and can on a long term discourage young adults from finding meaningful employment. It can even lead to more vulnerability in regard to destructive or even self-destructive behavior (William T. Grant Foundation Commission on Work, Family and Citizenship, 1998). In the report of the Grant Foundation it is further spelled out that greater mobility, changing family forms, and increased concentrations of unemployment and below-poverty wage employment results in less contact with family members. There are fewer successful role models available as well as less well-developed job-finding networks.

Another difference is that the United States has a high teenage birth rate and a lot of young people work in part-time and temporary jobs after age sixteen. Büchtemann, Schupp, and Solof (1994a) pointed out that one year after leaving school the unemployment rate in the United States is about 10%, whereas it is 4% in Germany. Cook and Furstenberg (2002) wrote,

for those who do not attend university, the United States has relatively high levels of unemployment before age twenty-five and the highest levels of churning around different jobs. Most businesses are reluctant to collaborate with unions and government, and so vocational training is not well established. Firms prefer to do their own training and want maximal flexibility in hiring, training, and firing. So finding jobs is more a matter of individual initiative and social networks than of third-party placement. (p. 280)

According to Marshall (1997) the problem of youth unemployment is especially serious for inner-city and minority youth and those in isolated rural areas who lack access to transportation to available employment or training opportunities.

The U.S. society is oriented on a democratic-egalitarian ideal. Education became one of the most important institutions of nation building and resulted in the concept of mass education in the 1840s. Reese (1995) argued that this development was forced by the upper class because of the idea that education of the lower class would prevent them from being disruptive. "Mass education became a political weapon against dangerous ideas" (Reese, 1995, p. 38). Vinovskis (1995) wrote further, "The value of education, according to many commentators, was to improve the moral character of the poor rather than to enhance their occupational skills or to foster individual social mobility" (p. 78). It was a form of early social politics where every citizen should have equal opportunities (Heideking, 1992).

In the process of industrialization the function of public education had to be extended beyond the idea of citizenship education. Debates about economic efficiency and requirements of the industry regarding the labor force were increasingly important. In the industrial town an urban workforce was growing which had the central virtue of punctuality. Therefore, one of the major tasks of the schools became education towards punctuality and conscientiousness.

The first intention of the American high school was to prepare the students of mainly middle-class families for their future jobs. At the end of the 19th century public high schools were starting to offer courses which prepared students for

college (Herbst, 1996). Vocational education in the country was developed in two steps. First, German and British immigrants brought the apprenticeship system to the colonies. It had emerged from the guild system which means that a master craftsman restricted access to a craft by only allowing men who were properly trained to enter their field (Urban & Wagoner, 2000). The second step followed after an industrial international exhibition that included a collection of tools to train students at the Moscow Technical Institute, one that encouraged John D. Runkle, president of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and the educator Calvin Woodward at Washington University in St. Louis to open manual training schools. In Woodward's school a three year program combined academic and technical training. Woodward (1974) pointed out that

vocational education will indirectly but positively affect the aims and methods of general education: (1) By developing a better teaching process through which the children who do not respond to book instruction alone may be reached and educated through learning by doing; (2) by introducing into our educational system the aim of utility, to take its place in dignity by the side of culture and to connect education with life by making it purposeful and useful. (p. 177)

Since the beginning of the 19th century social reformers viewed manual labor training "as a vehicle for the social and moral reformation of wayward youth" (Urban & Wagoner, 2000, p. 189). Vocational education was increasingly promoted and high schools began to differentiate their curriculum into academic, vocational, and commercial courses. This development contributed to a differentiation in the student body because upper and middle-class students attended academic courses while middle-class girls went into the commercial track, and lower-class students attended vocational courses. Since this



separation occurred a vast array of tests has been established to determine which students belong in which track. The measures are subject to criticism because they are sorting students on the basis of class or race as much as on their abilities and talents (Urban & Wagoner, 2000, p. 213).

The Smith-Hughes Act of 1917 established the structure for vocational education and training as it persists today. With new technical developments in the industry more and more young people faced unemployment and needed to get appropriate education to find new jobs. “Traditional practices declined not only prior to industrialization but also before the creation of any network of institutions to contain and manage young people” (Katz, 1988, p. 106).

Thomas Jefferson saw education as a way to protect freedom in a democracy (Meyer, 1997). Education has been instrumentalized to achieve national goals such as ensuring democracy, integration of immigrants, and fight against poverty (Hadden, 1992). Public rhetoric promoted the idea of equality as well as liberty.

The National Center for Education Statistics (2000) pointed out that the purpose of vocational education historically has been the preparation of students for entry-level jobs in occupations that require less than a baccalaureate degree. Since 1985 the purpose has “shifted towards broader preparation that develops the academic, vocational, and technical skills of students in vocational education programs” (p. 1). The new purpose was first passed into law at the federal level in the 1990 Perkins Act, and confirmed in the 1998 Perkins Act. The Act emphasized the application of academic and vocational skills and was directed

towards all segments of society (Gordon, 1999). In 1994, the School-to-Work Opportunity Act (STWO Act) was conceded. The Act reinforced the call for integration of academic and vocational education with the goal to provide students with more options to choose or invent their careers.

### *Vocational Education at the High School Level*

Traditionally, high schools offered courses in specific labor market preparation (such as agriculture and renewable resources, business, health care, and trade and industry); family and consumer sciences education; and general labor market preparation (which included courses such as basic keyboarding and typewriting, industrial arts, newer technology education, and career preparation). Students who were channeled into those classes were tracked and had fewer chances to pursue a college degree after high school. In American society parents and educators are highly averse to tracks and similar arrangements that might curtail a child's educational chances (Mortimer & Krüger, 2000).

In order to get away from the negative image of tracking, schools began to organize occupational education around broader occupational clusters or industries. Sometimes an entire school such as magnet school or theme school is organized around a broad occupational or industrial theme. It is also possible to create one or more schools-within-a-school that offer occupational or career-oriented themes (such as health science, business and finance, natural resources, graphic arts, communications, or technology). The courses can be of interest for either at-risk or academically talented students. Other practices

involve grouping occupational programs into clusters, majors, or pathways (NCES, 2000).

There are three main high school settings where occupational clusters could be implemented: comprehensive high schools, which offer a full range of academic and vocational education; area vocational schools, which offer a wider range of occupational programs, that students attend for part of the day to take their occupational coursework, and in a few states there are full-time vocational high schools. The last provides students with all their academic preparation and offer a variety of occupational programs. In traditionally full-time vocational high schools students are usually required to complete a vocational program of study. In comprehensive high schools students are free to take as many courses as they want. Those students who drop out at college and have mainly attended academic or college prep classes in high school are not well prepared for the labor market (Staff & Mortimer, 2003).

The NCES (2000) reported that a majority of public high school graduates take more than 1.0 Carnegie unit<sup>7</sup> of vocational education, and more than half take the equivalent of three or more year-long courses. Many public high schools have implemented some vocation-related reforms. NCES (2000) stated that half of the comprehensive high schools have integrated academic and vocational education and a similar proportion offers tech prep courses. Nevertheless, there

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<sup>7</sup> The unit was developed in 1906 as a measure of the amount of time a student has studied a subject. For example, a total of 120 hours in one subject -- meeting 4 or 5 times a week for 40 to 60 minutes, for 36 to 40 weeks each year -- earns the student one "unit" of high school credit. Fourteen units were deemed to constitute the minimum amount of preparation that may be interpreted as "four years of academic or high school preparation". (Retrieved September 19, 2005, from <http://www.carnegiefoundation.org/aboutus/carnegie-unit.htm>)

are only a few schools that offer block scheduling, career majors, school-based enterprises, skill standards, or skill or occupational certificates.

Students often gain early work experience outside of school. Additionally, schools offer work-based learning, followed by job shadowing, internships, and mentoring. “Although participation in occupational education decreased between 1982 and 1994, the percentage of public high school graduates earning cooperative education credits increased somewhat over the same time period” (NCES, 2000, p. 87). NCES (2000) further pointed out that 71% of the high school graduates in 1992 worked during their senior year, most of them fewer than 20 hours.

### *Vocational Education at the Postsecondary Level*

Vocational education at the postsecondary level covers associate degrees and sub-baccalaureate certificate programs which are offered at 4-year and less-than-4-year postsecondary institutions. There are six main types of postsecondary institutions which offer vocational education programs: public 4-year institutions, public 2-year institutions (sometimes referred to as “community colleges”), public less-than-2-year institutions (sometimes referred to as “vocational-technical institutes”), private, not-for-profit 4-year institutions, private, not-for-profit 2-year institutions (which includes all private, not-for-profit less-than-4-year institutions), and private, for profit institutions. Four-year institutions award bachelor’s or graduate degrees as the highest degree; 2-year institutions award associate degrees or sub-baccalaureate certificates.

There are approximately 1,600 community colleges in the country and they are the most important schools in the vocational education system. In 1999, 40% of the high school graduates in the U.S. were visiting these institutions. The courses offered at community colleges vary from general education to highly specialized and occupational oriented courses. Two-thirds of the participants are older than 21, one-third older than 30 years. The main goal of these colleges is to improve the chances of getting a job in the labor market. Most participants need three years to finish a degree because they work part time (Heidemann, 1999).

According to Jacobs (2001) fewer than 30% of all college students obtain a 4-year degree; at a community college, the proportion of students who complete a baccalaureate is even less. Adelman (1998) pointed out that as many as 40% of the students completed fewer than ten-credit hours. A relatively new trend is that companies send their employees to community colleges to get a further degree. Grubb (1996) wrote that over 90% of all community colleges engage in customized training.

Many high school graduates try to find some career directions for their lives and, therefore, attend programs at postsecondary institutions. They test if they could meet the requirement there which is often not the case, but community colleges admit students with poor academic records (Grubb, 1989). If students fail in a course, they are required to take remedial courses, a process which has been labeled the cooling out of marginal students who enroll with the intention to transfer to 4-year colleges (Clark, 1960). Krabel (1972) outlined,

community colleges, which are located at the very point in the structure of education and social stratification where cultural

aspirations clash head on with the realities of the class system, developed cooling out as a means not only of allocating people to slots in the occupational structure, but also of legitimating the process by which people are sorted. One of the main features is that it caused people to blame themselves rather than the system for their “failure”. This process was an organic rather than a conscious one; cooling out was not designed by anyone but rather grew out of the conflict between cultural aspirations and economic reality. (p. 539)

There is little done to advise students about vocational careers. Rosenbaum and Jones (1995) and Lerman (1994) underlined that vocational teachers who are responsible for preparing young adults for work do not see it as their duty to organize job placements for their students.

### *On-the-Job-Training*

Approximately half of the students in one age group gain occupational skills on the job; the others pursue programs in higher education. One of the reasons for the less developed vocational education and training system in the United States is that many qualified workers from Europe arrived in the 1850s and worked as qualified craftsmen and women. For a long time there was no need to accommodate a lot of apprentices in a vocational education system. The European craftsmen used to take apprentices in their companies and trained them which had been common practice in Europe over centuries. Today, training on the job is often short and might sometimes only last one hour. It is very specific which is typical for industrial Taylorism (Streeck, 1991). According to Hinz (1997) 70% of a school leaving cohort work at jobs without formal skill requirements even five years after graduation.

The principle of hire and fire contributes to the fact that particularly young people change their jobs very often and have many periods of unemployment in-between which are also called the floundering periods. For most of the jobs at the secondary market, salaries and requirements are low and there are only a few promotion prospects (Münch, 1992). Young adults shift jobs until they find a good match. The gap between each job is usually very short, but frequent (Blanchflower & Freeman, 2000). Mortimer (2003) pointed out that teenage employment engenders planfulness. Those young adults who have had meaningful work experiences during high school may be less likely to flounder after finishing school.

If one stays in the same job for a couple of years a worker can have developed an occupational profile, comparable to the training of a *Facharbeiter* (skilled craftsmen) in Germany. After some years of working in the same company workers may be sponsored by their company to go back to school and get a degree. Big enterprises also offer a wide net of internal training opportunities (Lauterbach, 1995).

Apprenticeships according to the German model are rare in the United States. Those that exist also have a dual structure and combine in-classroom instructions and on the job training. The certificate is transferable, but there are usually no further career opportunities (Rieble-Aubourg, 2001). Sometimes there is a so-called “2 + 2 apprenticeship” offered which begins in high school and combines vocational courses with academic courses and a work-based apprenticeship. After graduation students continue with the same combination

through two more years at a technical college (Parnell, 1985). Those programs are evaluated by means of a collaborative agreement that involves the schools, colleges, and local business and industry (Hamilton, 1990). Some of the labor unions offer vocational education and training, but only for their members which is partly paid for by participants and companies or unions. While apprentices are working in their companies they earn a full salary and take theoretical courses in the evenings.

Various companies offer apprenticeships where people work in the firm but earn only 40% to 50% of the regular salary while taking theory courses in a skill center during the evenings. Many apprentices are between 25 and 30 years old. Approximately 50% of them do not finish the apprenticeship because they receive job offers from other companies. This indicates that formal vocational education is generally not as highly valued in the United States as it is in Germany. In order to provide more flexibility, workers can often attend courses in modules and decide when to take them. After they have acquired a certain amount they are recognized as qualified for their job (Lauterbach, 1995). Cook and Furstenberg (2002) stated that

no national system is as fluid as the American one with respect to the number of opportunities that individuals have to get back on track. And no nation leaves so late the fundamental choices that have to be made about the quality of educational institutions to attend. (p. 281)

Students who did not finish high school in the United States are at risk at the job market. Orfield (1997) pointed out that students who do not go to college “need the most help, experience the most risk in the job market, have the worst



information, and tend to receive the least assistance” (p. 28). Nearly two thirds of America’s young adults do not complete a postsecondary education. Real earning for those who have not more than a high school education decline and employment options worsen (Lerman, 1994). Race and ethnicity play an important role in the discrimination of some portions of the society. “Striking is the high percentage of less-educated African Americans and Puerto Ricans who experience unemployment, incarceration, homelessness, poverty, childbearing before twenty, and single parenthood” (Cook & Furstenberg, 2002, p. 280). Schnaiberg (1998) argued that the school dropout rate nationwide remains “stubbornly high” (p. 7).

While the United States offers its citizens always a new chance in life, it seems that the system is also very restrictive. Cook and Fürstenberg (2002) wrote that the country is prone “to incarcerate young repeat offenders and to do so in ways that do not seriously aim at rehabilitation” (p. 281). This lock them up and throw away the key policy particularly affects the life of many young African American males and makes it even more difficult to find employment and get back on track in the society. Young single mothers also have more difficulties to get a school certificate and find employment, because it is harder than in Germany to get child support services.

Another critical aspect is that, in the United States, it is generally believed that individuals should get ahead by themselves by virtue of their own willpower and initiative which also includes that people build up their own supportive networks. Cook and Furstenberg (2002) argued that such “networks may be

more unequally distributed in the United States than elsewhere and second-chance opportunities may therefore not as universally available or as practical accessible as many Americans would like to think” (p. 283). The high unemployment rates among African Americans and Hispanics support this argument (Leisering & Leibfried, 1999).

A further problem of the American model is that the title of a profession is not nationally recognized in the United States which can lead to confusion, because education and training can be very different depending on the company, school and the state (Lauterbach, 1995, p. 40). Without standardization it is difficult to measure the quality of education which adds another component to the insecurity the system provides for the employees and a reason for the low value of formal vocational education and training.

Bishop (1988) emphasized that many vocational students get higher wages than those who did not go through on-the-job-training, but if they do not get a job related to their qualifications they get few benefits. Less than one-half of vocational graduates get a job in a field that matches their training. As a result of the low degree of standardization employers can not rely on credentials to evaluate the skills of the applicant, because it does not necessarily reflect their qualifications.

### *Reforms in VET in the United States*

Vocational education and training lost most of its attractiveness in the 1980s, because of the decrease in financial support and the general disdain

about manual labor. The Job Training and Partnership Act (JTPA) which was enacted in 1982 had the goal to support programs that would help youth and adults with no or low incomes to find better jobs through increasing their employability (Deissinger, 1994). The act focused on drop outs, the difficult school-to-work transition, and the different curricula in every school, and caused awareness about downward mobility.

The programs were designed in order to help disadvantaged groups to learn how to help themselves. Local employers have been involved in the program as well as local schools, particularly community colleges. In 1989 a sum of \$4.5 billion was channeled into the qualification of economically disadvantaged people (Lauterbach, 1995). According to Deissinger (1994) critics claimed that the high proportion of attendees who found a job after the program was due to the fact that only very motivated and talented students were chosen or that subsidies were used to help local firms.

Major reforms in vocational education and training in the United States started with the Carl Perkins Act in 1990 and, later, the provision of the School-to-Work Opportunities Act of 1994. There has also been the Marshall Plan for Urban Schools which aimed to dissolve the historical dualism between vocational and academic learning in secondary education. While the Plan does not mention the term vocational education it still emphasizes work education, but attempts to change attitudes. The goal was to change the perception about vocational tracking towards high academic standards for all students, school-to-work

learning, and a new sense of connections to business and employment environments (Arum & Shavit, 1995).

For President Clinton the quality of the American educational system was an important topic in his electoral battle in 1992. Therefore, he enforced the School-to-Work Opportunity Act. This law was supposed to promote initiatives in the states in the areas of research, development, education and training of teachers, and to support its organization financially (Büchtemann, Schupp, & Soloff, 1993, 1994b; Schmidt, 1996).

#### *The School-to-Work Opportunity Act*

The United States as many other countries were very interested in the German model and tried to implement it, but for different reasons the dual system never succeeded outside of the German speaking countries. Many politicians, Republicans as well as Democrats, were already complaining about the lack of a well structured national vocational education system. Some advocates saw the international competitiveness of the United States decreasing, others criticized the college-focus of the American school system, which leaves a lot of students behind. Clinton wanted to create a vocational education system “like those in Europe, to encourage non-college-bound students to stay in school” (Clinton, 1993, p. 7). As a result of his effort the School-to-Work Opportunities Act (STWOA) was enacted in 1994.

The main goal of this law was to create a framework which would enable every state to construct its own educational system. Students who would

participate in these programs should get an academic as well as a vocational education, so that they would also be prepared for college. The option of going to college would still be available for all students, and at the same time the connection between school and college was meant to be strengthened through tech-prep programs (National School-to-Work Office, 1996; Office of Technology Assessment, 1995).

The law enabled the states to build their school-to-work system upon existing programs. "STWOA does not seek to establish programs but rather to develop comprehensive statewide and local systems for facilitating school-to-work transitions" (Office of Technology Assessment, 1995, p. 15). But the states had to consider three elements: school-based learning, work-based learning and connecting activities. The component school-based learning included the development of curricula which combine academic and vocational contexts equally to the so called applied academics curricula.

Additionally, curricula had to be extended towards career majors, which would adjust the last two years in high school towards the first two years in college. The states as well as the school communities could fall back on existing tech-prep programs. For effective work-based learning it was thought that employers could get involved in the program through the provision of apprenticeships in their companies. Mentors in the firms should look after the students and advise them. Students should get a certificate for their work experience which would be recognized in certain branches and offer as much

mobility as possible. The most important element of the school-to-work system is the connection of school-based and work-based learning (Wills, 1997).

Only if schools and companies cooperate in the field of vocational education, can useful and coherent programs be developed and students could have a smoother start in their professional lives, especially if they want to do higher qualified work. Certain teachers in the schools should function as coordinators of the career majors. The law implied that there would be local partnerships between schools, employers, labor unions, local authorities, and other stakeholders (Gitter & Scheuer, 1997; Rist & Joyce, 1994; U.S. Department of Labor, 1997). "Such partnerships foster the broad-based community support necessary to establish STW systems as an integrated approach to help all students better prepare for further education and employment" (National School-to-Work Office, 1996, p. 9).

Grants were provided for those states who applied for funding. In the first phase beginning in 1994, eight states qualified for an implementation grant. Among them was Wisconsin, where since the turn of the 19th century, a vocational training system was in place which equals the German dual model. But the amount of apprentices did steadily decline in the last decades (Parker, 1996). In 1995, another 19 states and in 1996, an additional 10 states qualified for the implementation grant (National School-to-Work Office, 1996, p. 9). In 1998, the last 13 states qualified for the grant (National School-to-Work Office 1998).

In addition to the federal funding opportunities for single states, there was also the possibility of single program funds, especially when the state had not yet qualified for the implementation grant (School-to-Work Opportunities Act, 1994, Title III, pp. 301-105). The idea behind it was that successful local partnerships could function as role models. In 1997, there were 29 communities that obtained a local partnership grant (National School-to-Work Office 1997). If the community was particularly poor, it received further support from the urban/rural opportunities grant. Until 1997 there were 109 communities that were funded by the urban/rural opportunities grant (National School-to-Work Office, 1997, 1998).

In the first year of the STWOA congress agreed to spend \$100 million in states and communities. In the following years the maximum amount spent was \$300 million (Grubb, 1996). The financial support could have been substituted by money from the Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Applied Technology Act and the Job Training Partnership Act (Riley & Reich, 1993). Every state had to apply separately for each program in order to get permission to use the money for their school-to-work system (Kassebaum, 1995). The governors association criticized this procedure: "New waiver authority is helpful to a certain extent, but as a nation, we will move very slowly toward the goal of integrated workforce development systems if each state must apply separately to each different federal department for permission to integrate programs" (Kassebaum, 1995, p. 157). In comparison to the financial support which the federal government spent on vocational education and different apprenticeship programs, the STWOA

support was very low. Grubb (1996) called the law an example of “piddle politics” (p. 537).

All parties agreed to the STWOA after some critical aspects were taken out (Kinni, 1994). A major disagreement was caused by the definition of “paid work experience” in the first version of the law. A lot of representatives criticized this rule and argued that it would hinder companies to participate. Senator Nancy Kassebaum noticed “that the paid work requirement would limit the ability of businesses to participate in the program” (Kassebaum, 1995, p. 156). Advocates of this rule saw it as an incentive for companies to take education and training serious.

The financial burden would force the companies to use their recourses in the most efficient way, which is the investment in future workers. Richard Kazis, vice-president of “Jobs for the Future,” a non-profit organization that promotes pilot-projects in the field of vocational education and training commented: “Most students work anyway. If their experimental learning is unpaid, students may end up juggling two jobs and their school schedule” (U.S. House of Representatives 1993, p. 338). In the final version of the STWOA the “paid work experience” is not required, but desirable (Office of Technology Assessment, 1995).

After the law was released, there was a fundamental debate if the law had created a new program in the form of a “youth apprenticeship” system or if it was just based on existing programs. The American Vocational Association was very much in favor of the second variant. “Once the Clinton Administration decided not to create a new, separate apprenticeship program but to build on the current



programs, most potential opposition to the bill faded away” (Jennings 1995, p. 198). That all parties finally agreed to the law still leaves much space for interpretation in the states.

The states are following different strategies in the contextual organization of the school-to-work programs. There are basically two major strategies: school-to-work is seen as a chance for a reform of the educational system and an option for a reorganization of the workforce development. Depending on the strategy the states chose their administration structure. In most of the states the school-to-work office is placed in the department of education. Only two of the states that have implemented grants in 1998 were decided by the Department of Labor or the Department of Commerce. Eleven states established regional boards or local partnerships (Erlichson & Van Horn, 1999). The creation of a consistent administration hierarchy did not mean that the states followed a uniform program strategy. The main responsibility for the programs lies mainly in the communities and local partnerships, which developed their own school-to-work programs according to needs and capacities.

Kreysing (2003) said the School-to-Work Opportunities Act (STWOA) helped to support disadvantaged communities and to offer non-college bound students a perspective to achieve a higher qualified job in the labor market. The local administration of the programs was actually manifested by the STWOA instead of centralized as it was once attempted in the 1950s. After 2001 there was no funding anymore for the projects. Richard Kazis (2001) summarized the chances for continuation:

When federal funds run out, as they have already done in some states, only a few states will try to sustain school-to-work as such – and they will not do so with resources anywhere near the level that federal funding provided at its height [...] But in most states, school-to-work as a discrete effort will go the way of other, time-limited federal initiatives.

## Comparison of the VET Systems in Germany and the United States

Appendix A provides a comparative analysis of the skill formation mechanisms in Germany and the United States. The different approaches in the two countries towards vocational education and training are outlined. The education level of workers in 1990 was higher in the United States than in Germany, with almost 37% of the population pursuing more than a secondary education. While labor unions in Germany help to ensure that the turnover of workers was low, the labor market in the United States is characterized by lower average tenure on the job, which is about 30% shorter than in Germany (Gill & Dar, 2000; OECD, 1993).

Both countries take different approaches to matching the skills of labor force entrants to jobs. In the United States informal on-the-job training is the major source of occupational education while in Germany it is a formal training process mainly through firm-sponsored apprenticeships in conjunction with vocational education provided by the state (Gill & Dar, 2000). Comparing the youth unemployment rate of non-students of both countries in 1999 it amounted to 3.2% in the United States and 4.7% in Germany (OECD, 2001).

In comparison with the United States where

management is characterized more by short-term decision making to implement high-tech and organizational innovations, German

firms still tend to put more emphasis on long-term labor-force planning which includes apprenticeship and further training. (Heinz, 2000, p. 169)

In Germany there is no youth labor market with decent wages that would ask young people to drop out of school. Therefore, the VET system in Germany is oriented towards long term job security.

### Conclusion

After introducing the vocational education and training systems of Germany and the United States the question arises: Which system works better? As far as Germany is concerned, no attempts were undertaken to change the system towards the United States model. Modularization of vocational education and training in Germany is often discussed but has not been put into practice (Steinmann, 2000). Under the circumstances of globalization and changing needs for a successful transition from school-to-work, there seems to be a change necessary in the United States as well as in Germany. Heinz (2000) demands school-to-work transitional arrangements that “foster flexible skill profiles that are knowledge-oriented and based on a college education” (p. 162).

Psacharopoulos (1997) argued that the best model “might be general education and training” (p. 388) and explains that a person with general education would be more easily trainable than one with a narrow set of skills. His argument makes sense if one considers the high illiteracy rate in the United States as well as the lack of basic mathematical skills. General Motor’s president

Robert Stempel lamented, in 1990, about the fact that the company had to offer classes to teach its employees basic skills.

A surprising proportion of the adult American work force is functionally illiterate or operating with reading and math skills at the elementary level .... And the lack of education and lack of skills don't just hurt the unemployed. They hurt American business, making us less competitive in the global market .... But if we knew that the people coming into our plants had the right basic skills, the training burden and cost for GM would lessen considerably. (Psacharopoulos, 1997, p. 388)

According to the Educational Testing Service (1993) half of adults cannot read or handle arithmetic. "Business estimate they lose between \$25 billion to \$30 billion a year nation-wide in lost productivity, errors and accidents attributable to poor literacy" (New York Times, September 9, 1993).

Lewis (2000) also demanded a more general education and argued that the focus of vocational courses should be on reinventing basic skills that are needed in all occupations. Zuboff (1988) pointed out that learning becomes a top priority in the knowledge society and workers need the freedom to play with ideas, to experiment, and to enter into dialogue. Wirth (1994) offered different proposals how to accommodate the requirements of the new age. One of the proposals is to replace standardized testing assessment with a system of performance standards that students could explicitly prepare for. The general idea is to create certification programs beginning in Tech-Prep and continuing throughout work careers that would improve lifetime employment opportunities for all.

As a result of mainly informal on-the-job-training, education in the United States is valued more as an indicator of employability, achievement, motivation,

and social competence. The opposite is the case in societies where an organizational transition is regulated and strictly organized like in Germany. Here, academic education tends to be overrated and vocational education and training undervalued (Heinz, 2000).

The German system is highly standardized and stratified which makes it easy for employers to screen for those highly trained. Van der Velden and Wolbers (2003) outlined that “high standardization makes the qualities of school leavers simple to interpret and compare. High stratification leads to detailed differentiation in the outflow of education” (p. 193). Overall it can be argued that the German three-tier structure of the school system which prepares students for different careers is relatively successful in preventing dropouts. “Only 9% leave the school system without at least a lower secondary school certificate” (Heinz, 2000, p. 168). This is an indicator that the system still fulfills one of its main functions. Joshi and Paci (1997) pointed out that “learning on the job” seems to be a viable model in the context of a buoyant economy.

Franz, Inkmann, Pohlmeier, and Zimmermann (2000) argued German youth have great trouble in finding a job after their apprenticeship and the overall situation in getting access to well paid jobs is rather difficult. Nevertheless, less educated young adults have lower unemployment rates and higher relative earnings in comparison with their American peers. Hamilton (1987) came to different assumptions. He warned Germany about the social exclusion of those young adults resulting of an institutional failure and referred to America as a negative example. “If the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) responds to these

challenges with nothing better than an “Americanization” of their system—prolonged secondary schooling followed by delayed career entry—then their rates of youth problem behavior may take an American direction as well” (pp. 201-202).

Evans, Behrens and Kaluza (2000) supported this notion. They wrote: “Young people in Germany are increasingly caught in a double bind: a hostile labor market which effectively excludes unqualified young people but which can no longer sustain the training routes and social support previously provided for the large majority” (p. 146). The unemployment rate is significantly higher for those who haven’t finished any kind of higher education degree. Stauber and Walther (2002) stated that in Germany there is a high risk constellation in terms of exclusion of unemployed young adults based on labor market situation, economic exclusion plus social isolation.

In the United States vocational education is not well developed, and has a rather low reputation. As a consequence young adults strive for more and more education in order to stay ahead in the competition for jobs. This leads to the effect that qualifications lose their value in the labor market. In opposition, in Germany, a diploma does not derive its value from its position in the hierarchy of credentials, but also from the specific skills one has acquired (Shavit & Müller, 2000). The organizational space in the United States creates the ground for an excessive supply of secondary and postsecondary credentials while at the same time it lowers the value of them in the labor market. The wide variety of credentials from many different institutions of higher education does not provide

reliable information for employers to judge the students qualification. Young adults in the United States also do not develop strong occupational identities and usually apply for many different types of jobs (Kerckhoff, 2000).

The U.S. labor market shows lower unemployment rates than most European countries, but job insecurity is on the rise. Burchell (2002) emphasized that by the end of the 1990s the United States showed higher levels of job insecurity than the European average. He also argued that there was a significant redistribution of job insecurity away from traditionally disadvantaged blue-collar workers, ethnic minority groups, and non-graduates towards a wide variety of people with different backgrounds. Vocational education would be an interesting choice for many of them considering that financial incomes for high qualified skilled workers are often higher than those for people without any degree. Nevertheless, high incomes are only available to those students who end up in jobs for which they were trained. Bishop (1987) found that in the United States 17% to 52% of vocational graduates find training related placements, while in Germany two-thirds of the apprentices obtain a job related to their training. Graduates of vocational education and training programs at colleges also make significantly higher earnings than their counterparts who haven't any specialized training (Stern et al., 1995).

Typical for the transition from school-to-work in the United States is that many young adults go through several transitions. The different levels of standardization and stratification do impact the likelihood of going back to school and getting higher degrees (Coleman, 1984). In the United States young adults

are more prone to go back to school than they are in Germany where further educational levels are often gained through internal training in the company. According to Almendinger (1989) approximately one-half of the men in her sample had had more than five jobs during their first 5 years in the labor force. Those patterns are rare in Germany. Only 13.6% in the same study showed such patterns. Overall it can be argued that the organization of vocational education and training in Germany provides a safety net for young adults while it does not in the United States.

Youth unemployment is particularly an issue in inner cities in the United States and all over East Germany. This has a major impact on the way young adults plan their life. Often they stay until their early thirties with their parents. Marriage and parenthood are delayed (Booth, Crouter, & Shanahan, 1999). In regard to different cultural perceptions about the school-to-work-transition in both countries it is important to notice that the combination of school and work as preparation for future jobs is highly valued in Germany but receives a lot of criticism in the United States, where work causes worries about distraction from school (Mortimer & Krüger, 2000). The concern in Germany is mainly if there will be enough apprenticeships for everybody.

Kreysing's (2000) comparison of the two training systems in Germany and the United States offers a comprehensive summary:

The German "dual system" is based on a set of unique features: centralized employer association and unions, mandate of the federal government to regulate vocational education, existence of mandatory training standards, and a consensus on the need of a high-quality training system among all stakeholders. The U.S. lacks all of these features, except the last one, although the consensus is



more about the need for a skilled labor force rather than the way to achieve it. (p. 31)

This chapter outlined the macro-structural conditions in regards to school and training organization and welfare provision in the United States and Germany and illustrated major differences. The structure of vocational education systems as well as the approach to it illustrates that young adults can plan their professional life in different ways in each country. The overall situation of the labor market also influences risk perception among youth and their planning. Chapter 4 will provide an overview of individual and institutional conditions that impact career planning and risk perception, but also outline how students feel about macro-structural conditions in their country.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODS AND METHODOLOGY

#### Introduction

This chapter outlines the theoretical traditions and concepts in comparative research, case study research, life-course and transition research, as well as socio-cultural risk research. It further describes the methods that I applied in this study, such as questionnaires, focus groups, and individual interviews and how reliability and validity was ensured. According to Giele and Elder (1998), I used a social system approach which means that I combined both groups and individuals as research units.

The best defense for choosing to do a comparative study comes from Heinz (2003b) who argued,

when individuals' decisions and outcomes can no longer be explained by reference to the standard variables like age, gender, social class, or cultural milieu, it becomes mandatory to analyze the consequences of changing social contexts for the timing and duration of biographical transitions and life-course sequences on the level of populations as well as on the level of cases. (p. 74)

Comparisons can be made between contrasting countries in order to develop new theories (Cartmel, 2003). The data of such comparisons are cross-societal (Ragin, 1987). I researched the cultural aspects that drive young adults' risk perceptions regarding their futures. In order to do that on a national level it was necessary for me to distance myself from my inherited German culture and find

out how members of the U.S. culture perceive their chances of being able to achieve their occupational goals. This method leads to relativity in the evaluation of a current situation as well as future prospects.

### Cross-Cultural Comparison

Germany and the United States are two countries that are both highly developed economically, but differ strikingly in the school-to-work transition and in the way young adults negotiate their individual school, work, and family lives. They also differ in cultural approaches to the provision of equal opportunities and welfare. In Germany welfare provision is declining, while the United States does not provide a lot of welfare. Unemployment rates are higher in Germany than in the United States, while both countries are struggling with the effect of globalization that causes a relocation of jobs toward Eastern Europe and Asia. Consequently, conditions of uncertainty related to the labor market apply to both countries, which makes a good case for comparison.

The purpose of this comparison was to find out to what extent one group differs from the other. An evaluation of the current situation of young adults in the two countries is provided. The investigation of cultural differences is most appropriately done in a direct comparison when both cultures understand the chosen labels. Under the label of individual impact on risk perception I am looking at self-determination, planfulness, and agency. Besides the influence of perceptions about their own future roles on the individual planning process,

young adults are influenced by aspirations others hold for them (Crysdale, King, & Mandell, 1999).

Young adults can further be differentiated according to their levels of education, socio-economic background, and personality factors. The institutional label compares parental expectations or aspirations, and parental warnings, peer group influence, and teacher or school counselor advice. The structural label includes the school structure and the institutional organization of the school-to-work transition, unemployment rates, and social benefits. Crossley and Keith (2003) pointed out that in order to prepare a comparison it is important to understand the cultural context of each school and societal system. That involves knowing the language of the other culture as well as understanding forces, national character, and cultural philosophy of each country.

Cross-cultural comparisons or comparative studies aim to increase our understanding of the universals and particulars of a research area or topic and should sharpen our awareness of our own perspectives as essentially limited and culture bound (Harkness, Mohler, & Van de Vijver, 2003). It is important to note in comparative research that the meaning of a concept like risk might differ not only between the two cultures, but also between social and cultural groups within those cultures. Therefore, the instruments (questionnaire, interview guidelines) used in this study need to be adjusted to each culture since it cannot be assumed that respondents would come to the same interpretations of questions or that the responses actually have a similar meaning (Harkness, Mohler, & Van de Vijver, 2003).

What makes comparative studies more difficult is the fact that alternative explanations multiply as well as the sources of error based on personal and cultural bias. For the researcher the challenge is to look beyond one's own cultural frame of reference. Lots of aspects that are taken for a common ground in one's own culture might be understood differently in another (Harkness, Mohler, & Van de Vijver, 2003). Bynner and Chisholm (1998) argued that cross-national comparisons pose a distinctive set of methodological challenges and pitfalls. They refer to Sztompka (1990) who argued there is always traditional ethnocentrism involved which makes it difficult to relativize findings and permits to make generalizations across national and cultural boundaries

The following questions guided my research:

1. How do young Americans and East Germans perceive risk and opportunity regarding their future life planning?
2. How do risk perceptions in both countries differ regarding the school-to-work transition?
3. To what extent are young adults aware of personal, institutional, and macro-structural limitations?
4. How do Americans and East Germans cope with uncertainty regarding the continuously changing requirements of the labor market?
5. How are underlying values guiding Americans and East Germans in their planning?
6. Is there a difference between East German young adults and American young adults regarding their self consciousness, agency, and optimism about the future?
7. What recommendations can be given to policy makers in both countries to adjust career guidance and education to the conditions of uncertainty?

#### Methods in Risk Research

There are many studies on risk and risk perception that rely on technical analysis. Renn (1998) pointed out that social scientists have criticized

quantitative research because they are convinced that people's perceptions depend on values and preferences which are not adequately measured in those studies. Interactions between human activities and consequences are very complex and have not been captured. Organizations that are managing risks may fail and increase the actual risk. The Federal Labor Exchange Office (*Arbeitsamt*) in Germany, school counselors, and the media might not consult young adults effectively, because they are not spending the effort to find out what young adults really drives to make certain decisions regarding their future. While the influence of family, peers and teachers has been analyzed in several studies (Du Bois-Reymond, 1995; Emler, 2000; Engel & Hurrelmann, 1989; Knothe, 2002; Marx Ferree, 1991), risk perception played a minor role.

According to Fischhoff (1995), values are reflected in the characterization of risk as well as its measurement and interpretation. Individuals face different degrees of risk depending on the variance of the probability distribution (Hattis & Kennedy, 1990; Novotny & Eisikovic, 1990). Lifestyle factors and anecdotal knowledge also influence a person's risk perception. A major critique by Renn (1998) is that technical risk analysis rests on conventions such as the equal weighting of probability and magnitude and the selection of rules for identifying undesirable effects. Through qualitative research social scientists can nuance the individual as well as societal experiences of risk. Risk perceptions reflect the real concerns of people including the undesirable effects that technical analysis of risk often misses.

Therefore, this study is concerned with the social meaning of risk and how risk perception is shaped by individual, institutional, and structural contexts. On the individual level the focus is on how young adults construct life plans and how they think and feel about their own interests and abilities, as well as about their fears (Kracke, 1997). Clarke and Short (1993) referred to the need of further comparative work about the importance of organizational structures, networks, and broad institutional factors such as political economies and cultural expectations. I intend to combine the various aspects in my analysis when I talk about the institutional and structural contexts.

This study is following the Bremen tradition of life course research. It centers on the construction of meanings in regard to risk and how young adults make sense of their life courses. It is less concerned with the question of how choices will influence one's life. Marshall and Mueller (2003) pointed out that the Bremen research puts more emphasis on biographical self-organization and institutional regulation than American researchers, and the question how young adults negotiate risk is of particular interest.

In the context of this study which provides a cross-cultural comparison I refer to Marshall and Mueller's (2003) analysis of the differences between North American and European approaches to life course research. It might already signal some cultural differences in not only the analysis, but also the interpretation of trajectories and transitions. They indicate that different experiences in one's culture might lead to different presumptions that guide the research. Marshall and Mueller (2003) wrote,

North Americans have contributed in a detailed or fine-grained way to the discussion of orderliness and disorderliness in the life course, whereas European scholarship in this area has painted a portrait of life-course complexity with a broader brush. North Americans have been more inductive in developing an appreciation of disorder, inferring its existence from large-scale empirical studies of patterns and sequences of life events. Europeans, on the other hand, appear to be more deductive in their approach, discussing macro-level changes leading to the “risk society”. North American scholars have developed complex concepts to describe orderliness, such as timing, duration, and spacing of events, and have modeled trajectories in these terms. On the other hand, European scholars have provided a greater wealth of qualitative data to describe the meaning of biography, transitions, and trajectories under conditions of societal change. (p. 23)

Qualitative research is often more appropriate for life-course research than quantitative measurements which have been applied by Gallie and Paugam (2000) and Müller and Shavit (1989). George (1993) stated that most life course studies were descriptive cohort studies and showed differences in the timing and duration of life events among different generations. Those quantitative research studies described changes in transition patterns, but failed to explain them.

In Europe my qualitative approach is of particular importance in the field because research is centered more on individual biographies and interviews (Heinz & Krüger, 2001). Marshall and Mueller (2003) argued further that North American researchers rarely analyze the influence of welfare on life course decisions. That might mainly be the case because welfare provisions in the United States are very limited and in many fields not even existent in comparison with Germany. The analysis of welfare provision as it applies to the school-to-work transition is part of the analysis of macro-structural conditions.



Giele and Elder (1998) talked about a new paradigm in life course research. They state that studies about the life course have to comprise

location in time and place (history, social structure, and culture), linked lives (institutions and groups), human agency (individual goals and sense of self), and timing (chronologically ordered events that simultaneously encode individual, group, and historical markers). (p. 26)

According to Heinz (1996),

the life course framework suggests that transitions are shaped by cultural norms and societal opportunity structures, and that they are constructed by individuals who use various pathways to accomplish a continuous and meaningful biography. (p. 3)

Institutional factors in this study are understood as personal networks of peer and reference groups as well as public agencies. Kasperson et al. (1988) argued that people base their risk perception on other social issues or on views of their peers. Friends and family members provide reference points for young adults and influence one's perception of risk.

Renn (1998) pointed out that future research should focus on inter-individual differences and commonalities among populations, nations and cultural groups. McDaniels and Gregory (1991) brought to the attention that cross-national comparisons have to be associated with in-depth analysis of the cultural context within each country. In this qualitative study it is possible to look at all those aspects according to their impact on the individual. The different layers or aspects that influence how a young adult perceives his or her future are interconnected and can not be observed separately from each other.

There is also a need for knowledge about the links between risk perception, attitudes towards risk objects, and actual behavior. Kasperson et al.

(1988) talked about the comprehensive conception of risk that included aspects like voluntariness, personal ability to influence the risk, familiarity with the hazard and the catastrophic potential that shape public response. For a young adult who has experiences with unemployment in the family risk perception might be different in comparison with someone who grows up in a very stable socio-economic environment. Voluntariness or agency depends on personality factors as well as styles of upbringing in the family. Grotevant (1987) stated that personality factors such as self-esteem, ego-strength, openness, and reflexivity are qualities that strengthen the individual to cope with uncertainty and promote the desire to explore options. Of particular importance is the influence on the development of agency. Baumrind (1989) wrote about parental awareness of children's needs and that they should be loving, responsive, and involved. Equally important are parental expectations such as that the children act in a responsible and mature manner. The financial status of the parents also has a significant influence on risk awareness and risk taking behavior among youth. Without financial support from their parents young adults face a very difficult time during their education periods (Kruse & Paul-Kohlhoff, 1987).

### Methodological Strategies

The study is a cross cultural comparative case study. Heimer (2001) argued that cases can help to understand variations in routinized practices of institutions and "how people react differently to cases and biographies in bureaucracies, legal settings, and markets" (p. 48). According to Ragin (1992)

cases are comparable instances of some general phenomenon. They take the center stage in comparative research because they do not disembody and obscure the data as it is the case with variable-oriented research. The case researcher teases out local, foreshadowed, and readers' consequential meanings and reflects on them (Stake, 1998).

The case study can illustrate the complexities of a situation, the fact that not one, but many factors contributed to it. This approach has the advantage of hindsight yet can be relevant in the present. A case study seems to be an appropriate methodology to investigate risk perception because it can spell out differences of opinions about risk and the school-to-work transition and suggest how these differences have influenced the individual life course.

The case study can also present information in a wide variety of ways and from the viewpoints of different groups. Further, it can explain the reasons for a problem, the background of a situation, what happened, and why (Merriam, 1988). According to Yin (2002): "The case study method allows investigators to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events such as the individual life cycles" (p.2).

The Bremen school uses case studies that are located in social time and institutional space, and "they are constructed at the intersection of biography, institutional regulations, and opportunity structures" (Heinz, 2003b, p. 78). Heinz outlined, that

the life course is constructed by active and self-reflexive actors in constraining and enabling social contexts, by actors who do not necessarily react rationally to opportunities and risks, but assess life events and transitions in terms of their biographical past and

future plans. We regard respondents as agents-in-contexts, who construct and reflect about transitions and events, and not just as sources of answers coded as variables. (p. 79)

The mixed method research approach seems to be appropriate for life course studies because it elucidates divergent aspects of a phenomenon (Johnson & Turner, 2003). Results of questionnaires, focus groups, and individual interviews can differ or even be contradictory which indicates that perceptions and opinions shift depending on the method of inquiry. The challenge for the researcher is to explain emerging contradictions. To a certain extent the literature serves as a source of information that helps to explain contrasting findings. Mixed method research offers the advantage that the two worldviews of positivism and post-positivism can be blended while representing the best of both. It further enables the researcher to confirm, cross-validate, and collaborate findings in a single study. The weaknesses one method might have can be compensated with the other methods. Although my study was guided by theories about risk and cultural risk perception, the purpose of the study was to explore young adults' perceptions in two countries. Therefore, both methods needed to be combined. In this study that the results of the questionnaire only signify tendencies and indicate first spontaneous responses while the narratives show a higher reflexivity and also point out a great variety of views and opinions.

I used the triangulation design, where the investigator collects both quantitative and qualitative data at the same time and merges them in the analysis while consulting the literature through the whole process (Creswell, 2002). This methodology helps to “offset weaknesses inherent within one method

with the strengths of the other method” (Maxwell & Loomis, 2003, p. 229). Two or more different methods are used to confirm, cross-validate, or corroborate findings within one study. In my study the data collection was concurrent which means that I collected all data during one phase of the research study. My first priority was the collection of qualitative data, because I was mainly interested in the interpretation of narratives as well as the analysis of subjectivity and meaning (Seale, 1999). My goal was to learn more about the social and cultural construction of the meaning of risk and how this depends on personal circumstances.

#### Selection of Research Sites

I found two vocational schools in a medium sized town in East Germany and one technical college in a major city of the southeastern region in the United States that were willing to participate in my study. The process of receiving permission to the schools was very different in the two countries. In Germany I contacted four vocational schools and talked with the principals about my study. All of them agreed to participate upon arrival of permission from the school board. The school board reviewed my materials and had me sign an agreement that outlined how I would protect participants. The Institutional Review Board approval from Georgia State University has not been recognized in Germany. The school board then contacted all vocational schools asking for their participation in my study and required them to respond in one week. After this week, seven of eight vocational schools had formally agreed to participate. I

scheduled appointments with the two schools that offered apprenticeships that matched technical programs in the United States. The principals set up appointments with me for my visits and I started my study. The process of receiving permission and setting up appointments took two weeks.

In the United States I anticipated it to be even faster because a school board permit was not required. My expectation proved to be wrong. I contacted six vocational schools, of them three turned out to be unreliable because they promised to get back with me, but never did even with me asking a few times. One school finally invited students to participate in my study without any prescheduled appointment with me. The few students who came were in their forties and fifties and in various training programs. Other schools agreed to participate but finally told me that either due to time constraints or a lack of students in the intended programs they had to cancel appointments with me.

After three frustrating months of trying to receive access to schools and students I was grateful to find a technical college with a vice president of instruction that had been very reliable and helpful, supportive teachers, and interested students. The population I had intended to study turned out to be in a wider age range than their German counterparts and has also been very diverse thus representing the ethnic diversity in U.S. society. As it turned out the German system was highly hierarchical and schools' participation depended on the permission of a higher administrative office, while in the United States, there seemed to be no official way to enter a school and permission depended on the goodwill of gatekeepers (vice president of instruction) or semi-private

relationships, such as a person from an official educational administration board who knows the key figures in the technical colleges. The process of getting access relied heavily on subjective evaluations of my personality and the desire to help. There was no official way to approach or enter a school for research.

I chose to use a convenience sample since participation in my study was voluntary. Among the volunteers for focus groups and individual interviews in the United States I asked for students who were between 18 and 30 years old. All students in each class that I approached filled out a questionnaire. The disadvantage of my sampling method was that the results were not generalizable, not even to the population researched with the survey. Students who volunteered to participate might have been a specific selection. Therefore, I cannot be certain that I covered the variety of perceptions and views that existed in the classes I approached.

Nevertheless, the results of this case study can be generalized to the theories of Beck (1992) and Giddens (1990) about the risk society and individualization as well as Douglas and Wildawski's (1982) and Lupton's (1999) theory about the cultural construction of risk perception and risk taking behavior. Conclusions about national cultures cannot be drawn from the data, but the results can be used as indicators for tendencies in each country (Arnove, 2003) because case studies are only "generalizable to theoretical propositions and not to populations or universes" (Yin, 2003, p. 10).

The relatively large number of 129 participants helps to create a strong case and can be used to support or oppose existing theories about risk

perception and school-to-work transition. According to Seale (1999) it is not so much that the selected cases (i.e., the empirical data) have to be statistically representative, but that the theoretically derived conclusions are generalizable. The basis of theoretical generalization lies in logic rather than statistical probability (Mitchell, 1983). That means that my findings either support existing literature or can be explained by looking at current macro-societal developments.

The purpose of this study was to investigate the contemporary phenomenon of an increasing risk perception in Germany regarding the unpredictable future, the decline of the welfare state, and the instability of the labor market, and contrast this view with risk perceptions among young adults in the United States. The interviewees were asked about their life contexts and perceptions regarding plans for the life course.

There are two potential turning points in family trajectories that might influence risk perceptions. One turning point would be the occurrence of unemployment among a family member, the other divorce. Both can be seen as ruptures in a family. Sackmann and Wingers (2003) pointed out that divorce as well as remarriage rates are high in the United States and East Germany. Besides those turning points there might be other influences in a family that I did not pay particular attention to.

#### Data Collection

Lehmann's (2003) comparison of young adults in West Germany and Canada functioned as a guideline for the design of my research study. He



collected his data among 105 youth apprentices and academic high school students in the cities of Edmonton (Alberta) and Bremen (Germany). Like Lehmann I decided to take a mixed method approach and triangulate the quantitative data from questionnaires with the qualitative data from questionnaires, focus groups, and open-ended individual interviews (see Appendix B for copies of the interview guidelines and questionnaires). Giele and Elder (1998) and Ragin (1991) argued that an ideal study should combine both qualitative (subjective, including the meaning of experience and emotional feelings) and quantitative (objective) data. Comparative research should be balanced between cases and variables in order to justify the reliability of the data, because often conclusions will be drawn to the overall culture or society being studied.

Between June 2005 and February 2006, I visited two vocational schools in Germany and two campuses of a technical college in Atlanta. Students of four vocational programs in Germany (Drafting, Office Clerk, Assistant Tax Accountant, Plumber for Heating, Gas, and Sanitary) and four technical programs in the United States (Drafting, Office Clerk, Accounting, and Plumbing for Heating and Air Conditioning) participated in this study. The programs were chosen, because they lead to relatively similar professions. In total, 129 students (65 in Germany and 64 in the United States) filled out the questionnaire anonymously. The students in East Germany were all in their second half of the training program. In the United States programs of study were highly individualized so that students were not necessarily with the same peers in each

of their classes. Students were also at different stages in their program of study. In East Germany I recruited a focus group from each vocational program (four), in the United States I recruited students for five focus groups, because I went to two Accounting classes, one based at the city campus, the other at the rural campus.

It was easier in the United States to find volunteers for focus groups than for individual interviews due to the fact that most of the students worked part time or full time and had little spare time available to meet with me again. Nevertheless, I was able to collect a lot of personal information from the students, particularly at the rural campus. For the focus groups and individual interviews I used a flexible interview guide which led me chose in which order I posed the questions. The open structure was meant to provide student with more control over the interview process. The guidelines served mainly as a tool to ensure that all students would be asked the same questions or that all major themes would be addressed by me. The questions allowed participants to construct narratives of agency and independence, if they chose to do so.

Focus group discussions lasted between one and two hours. Personal interviews took 30 to 90 minutes. I only met once with each student for an interview. In East Germany I interviewed 16 students, in the U.S. 13 students. Students for the focus groups were recruited among the students who filled out the questionnaire. Afterwards I recruited students for individual interviews out of the focus groups. In each class in both countries I had 10 to 25 students. All students in the classes that I approached filled out the questionnaire.

The purpose of the focus groups and biographical interviews was to learn more about the risk perception among students and the interrelationship with the different institutions (family, school, apprenticeship, welfare state). The narratives helped to find cultural patterns in each country such as shared beliefs, attitudes, norms, roles, and values. The focus groups were a useful method to explore young adults' experiences of their social world. In the groups students inspired each other to talk about common themes. The focus groups were useful to generate new questions, frames, and concepts. In later focus group discussions I also raised new issues that I did not discuss in the first groups, such as asking students to explain what their understanding was of welfare, being unemployed, and quality of life in order to find out if information given in the first groups were of importance to other students as well. The young adults pursued their own priorities and spoke with their own vocabulary. In contrast to quantitative surveys, the focus groups were appropriate to explore how points of view are constructed and expressed (Kitzinger & Barbour, 1999).

The personal interviews offered the chance to learn more about individual concerns that were not spoken about in the focus group. I was able to pay more attention to the influence of family and friends and also find out if a student agreed or disagreed with what was said in the focus group. Some students felt more confident and were more outspoken in individual interviews.

The voluntariness of the participation in the focus group brought students together who felt comfortable talking with each other. The individual interviews allowed me to inquire more about revealed feelings and collect personal

information because they often do not come up in a focus group (Kitzinger & Barbour, 1999). They seem to be the best method to investigate social factors in individual decision making (Rokeach, 1968). According to Michell (1999), focus groups mainly reveal public issues, while the interview can facilitate the private ones.

*Survey.* The survey was administered before the focus groups and individual interviews. One reason for distributing the questionnaire first was to catch students' interest in my study and also to gain a broader overview of the class or course population. The facilitation of student recruitment was much easier in a classroom where everybody had already participated in filling out a questionnaire. There are a variety of themes that are difficult to inquire in a personal interview, such as socio-economic data and maybe even family background. For ethical reasons, some of these data were difficult to obtain in focus groups. Additionally, the questionnaire might offer more spontaneous answers.

The questionnaire had been slightly modified for the students in each country. All participants were asked the same questions regarding age, gender, family socio-economic status, schooling background of the students and their family members as well as their employment status. I also included a range of items intended to assess notions of risk and agency. Not all students responded to each question, but the data from focus groups and individual interviews provided additional information and enhanced the available information.

## Research Ethics

The research design has been approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Georgia State University in Atlanta. In Erfurt, I received approval from the local school authority (*Schulamt*) and the school principals, in Atlanta from the school principals. Research procedures in both countries followed the same ethical guidelines, which guaranteed voluntary participation, anonymity, and confidentiality. In the focus groups anonymity and confidentiality could not be guaranteed because I can not be hold responsible for group members talking about the context of the focus group. I talked about it with the students and asked them to keep the information of the focus group confidential. All students received a letter outlining the conditions of their participation, the nature of the research, my own and my supervisor's contact information. Before the start of the interview or focus group, participants were asked to sign a consent form that signified their agreement with the conditions of participation. They had been informed about the voluntary participation and the option to refuse to answer questions or withdraw from the interview/focus group at any time. Participants' identities were kept confidential, and names of schools, employers, and participants have been coded. I assigned fictional names to each participant (see Appendix A for names and details).

The transcripts of the individual interviews were sent back to the interviewees for a member check. The purpose of the member check was to solicit informants' views of the credibility of the findings (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993; Merriam, 1988; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Member

checks ensure that the researcher understood not only the words but also the intention of the words in the interview. Participants took an active role in directing the research after the data had been collected. They were asked to judge the accuracy and credibility of the account (Creswell, 1998). I did not provide interpretations of the findings to the students.

### Data Analysis

The precondition for the data analysis was the transcription of the audiotaped narratives as well as the coverage of my quantitative data in an Excel table. I started with the analysis of the quantitative data using SPSS to create crosstabs for the description of the student population. The verbal answers provided to open ended questions in the questionnaire were collected separately and descriptively reported

For the analysis of the transcripts I used a top down approach (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999). My codes were mainly derived from my research questions. Some codes had to be newly developed, because certain themes (e.g. quality of education, money matters) emerged from the data. During the process of my data collection and transcription I noted emerging themes and developed a coding scheme (Appendix C). It consists of three levels and presents a coding hierarchy representing the key theoretical and empirical categories. The first level is determined by the structural analysis (macro-structural, institutional, and personal influences on risk perception), the second level indicates the themes that I raised in my questions and that the students additionally brought up in the

interviews and focus groups. The third level comprises subthemes or subcategories. The coding scheme helped to reduce the amount of data and categorize them for the display in the dissertation. I used the coding scheme to categorize data from both countries. I kept the data of both countries separate because some codes only applied to one country.

In the first coding phase I broke down the data into discrete parts and looked for categories which I organized hierarchically. Afterwards I analyzed each category more closely and looked for sub-themes and patterns. At this stage I also looked for contradictions and breaks in individual narratives. In the description and final analysis I compared and contrasted the findings between the East German and U.S. young adults. In chapter four I consolidated or combined results of the descriptive statistical analysis with the qualitative analysis and reported data together while pointing out contradictions and relations.

The most important results of the questionnaire are also reported in tables and can be found in Appendix C. In the data analysis priority is given to those data that provide information that are most relevant to my dissertation. Data that were not informative or datasets with a lot of missing data were left out of the analysis and discussion.

#### Validity, Reliability, and Generalizability

Research questions in interviews and focus groups have been open ended and allowed for different interpretations. Interviewees freely talked about

their life and career plans. The use of semi-structured interview guides assured that all interviews and focus groups cover the same topics. I personally transcribed the interviews and member checked to ensure that no misunderstandings were written down. The verification of the respondents served to ensure validity.

Validity can also be assured through the rigorous analysis of data, including comparison between cases, categories and concepts, tabulations of confirming and deviant cases, and the inclusion of quantitative measures to support findings generated from the interview and focus group data. In chapter 4 I interconnected my findings; drew comparisons between students in one country, and outlined nonconforming stories. Some of my findings reflect the results of similar studies in the United States and Germany (Arum & Hout, 1998; Asbrand, 2005; Booth, Crouter, & Shanahan, 1999; Büchtemann, Schupp, & Solof, 1994a; Cook & Furstenberg, 2002). However, the broader scope of this comparison (within and between the two countries), the relatively large number of participants, the inclusion of a wide range of variables, and the theoretical reasoning move this study beyond the existing research literature.

#### Limitations to the Study

Cross-cultural studies often assume nationally homogenous transition regimes and outcomes, which cannot be found in the United States where “little is known about the achievement orientations of minority groups other than Afro-Americans” (Mortimer, 1996, p. 37). However, Heinz (1996) argued that case



studies can shed “light on the interaction between regional employment opportunities and the efforts of parents, educators, and business to provide education, training, and work experiences at community level” (p. 5). Cross-cultural comparisons are ideally pursued by a researcher who is familiar with both cultures, since an extended exposure to another culture supports the understanding of the spoken and non-spoken language. Interaction with people and the exposure to different media support the familiarization with the different culture and the development of inside knowledge.

Cartmel (2003) emphasized that cross-cultural research has to cope with the problem of making meaning and the interpretation of sociological research. He draws on Weber and explains that meaning being arrived at “when the overt action and the motives have both been correctly apprehended and at the same time their relation has become meaningfully comprehensible” (p. 97). Societal background influences how the researcher attaches meaning to different questions and categories in comparative research. I am German, have grown up in Germany and lived in the United States since August 2003. Although I can not consider myself to be an expert in American culture, I have acquired a deeper grasp of and a higher sensitivity about the culture including ways of thinking and native customs.

Problematic in the data analysis might be my cultural bias based on my socialization as an East German, and my life experiences in different parts of the world. It limits the interpretation of the American as well as the German data to my personal understanding that is influenced by my cultural background. Gonon

(1998) emphasized that the use of external references in order to evoke or modify problems at home is dangerous since it is of necessity based on a selective apprehension. The view on the other side is usually connected to a personal interest which explains the tendency to neglect contradictions. Bynner and Chisholm (1998) made a very important point in their article about methods and meanings in comparative youth transition research. They argued that

traditionally, comparative research meant constructing accounts of other societies or cultures from the outside, and then attempting to convey the essentials to the researchers' "home" scientific community, either in their own right or in relation to the "home" context. These accounts use conceptual and normative languages with which their home audience is familiar rather than those familiar in the "foreign" context studied. (p.138)

Although, I am using English as my mode of communication I tried to translate German narratives without a change of the meaning and avoided typical American expressions for similar kind of feelings. In order to solve the problem of cultural blindness I talked about my research with professors and friends in Germany and the United States. That I am East German was one more reason to choose East Germany as the region of interest for my study. My identity helped me to gain access to respondents who felt comfortable talking to me.

According to Van de Vijver (2003) bias can be understood as the presence of nuisance factors that challenge the comparability of concepts. In this study other forms of bias such as the different understanding of concepts such as welfare, retirement, unemployment, quality of life, poverty, or living standard had to be explained or discussed first in order to establish a common understanding of others cultural context. In the United States, I often explained the situation in

Germany and my understanding of these terms before I asked students about their perspectives. Risk itself is a concept that is constructed differently in U.S. and German culture and was therefore also perceived differently. Narratives were a very good instrument for the exploration of new dimensions.

Additionally, a method bias might have occurred such as the interviewer effect. It might have been the case that East German students were more able to identify with me and felt more comfortable. In opposition students in Georgia might have felt more uncomfortable being interviewed by a stranger.

Another critical aspect is the administration bias in regard to communication problems. Van de Vijver (2003) outlined that communication problems might occur even if the interviewer knows the language. There might be tensions that get lost, since the translation alone does not necessarily lead to understanding. The use of a certain tone in language might be due to the fact that it is not the native language of the interviewer, and can also lead to a bias among the subjects. Bynner and Chisholm (1998) stated that the use of English as the major lingua franca for international research communication is critical, because English terms can take on different meanings depending on who is using them and where they are employed. They outlined that, for example, the term "youth" can have different meanings. While the word is used as a general reference to a phase in life it can be attached to a set of social positions, personal development tasks, and processes of maturation.

Van de Vijver (2003) suggested various strategies to cope with those biases. One way of avoiding the misunderstanding of the concept of risk is the

use of informants with expertise in local culture and language. I discussed my interpretations with various U.S. citizens. Additionally, the connotation of key phrases is important in order to find out to what extent often used terms and expressions differ. I analyzed response styles after every interview in order to reflect about the bias that might have influenced the conversation. Vijver (2003) wrote further,

from a methodological vantage point, cultural specifics need to be handled with care as by definition, they are difficult or even impossible to compare across cultures. So, the focus on bias in comparative research is not meant to eliminate culture-specifics but to tell these apart from more universal aspects and to ascertain which aspects are universal and which are culture specific. (p. 15)

In my study it was important to recognize cultural specifics which involve permanent reflexivity about my own standpoint and the standpoint of the beholder. I needed to distinguish between my personal bias and a cultural perspective on the various issues that came out in the interviews. Since personal bias and one's own culture is strongly interconnected, it might not be possible to separate the two. Additionally, it is important to note that cultural identities are shifting and cannot be seen anymore as fixed to a specific time and place (Gray, 2003).

That meant for me that the first interviews and focus group sessions were more informative, while I developed a deeper understanding of young adults perspectives and was later more able to address specific concerns. In the U.S. I would ask students about their daily life schedules and their work history. In East Germany I paid particular attention to individual experiences with unemployment.

My own identity might also have shifted during my stay in the U.S. where I was confronted with many different life styles and points of view. Therefore, my way of posing questions included a certain familiarization with the culture. Without the three years of living experience in the country I might have posed questions differently and paid more attention to details that were not so special to me anymore.

Another limitation of the study was that the analysis of cultural contexts and the deconstruction of meanings across cultures is always incomplete. Giele and Elder (1998) argued that most contextual analysis does not provide full information about the broader structural conditions that interact with changes in individual lives. Nevertheless, I outlined the situation at the labor market and the structural conditions of the two educational systems and will show how those different conditions play a role in peoples risk perceptions.

There are some flaws that have to be taken into consideration while reading the analysis. Although I tried to match the students in Germany and the U.S. as much as possible, they were different in terms of their age range, social background, race, amount of work experience, and education. What all students had in common was that they pursued certain vocational/technical programs.

The students that volunteered for my study showed a similar background in terms of socio-demographics and their class. It is important to recognize that students in the United States went to a highly individualized technical program and did not attend each of their classes with the same peer group. Their programs were of shorter duration than the programs in Germany. Students in

the United States also often worked in jobs not related to their programs of study while attending classes. Due to the high level of individualization in the United States it was always possible to interview students who were in the second half of their training program which meant that some of them might not complete their current field of training.

## CHAPTER 4

### RESULTS

#### Introduction

In this chapter I will describe the results of my research. The themes that emerged during the focus groups and individual interviews are assigned to the three levels of influences on risk perception (individual, institutional, macro-structural). Results of the questionnaires in the form of descriptive statistics and qualitative answers to open-ended questions are triangulated with the narratives of focus groups and individual interviews and to some extent with the literature. I will begin with a description of the student population in regards to age, gender, race, living situation, educational and socio-economic background.

The following section provides a thematic analysis of all the collected data. In each section I will first outline results of the questionnaire before I describe the information provided in the narratives. First is the data collected from East Germany followed by the data from the United States. Although the various themes that emerged in the focus groups and individual interviews have been assigned to the individual, institutional, and macro-structural level, they are strongly interconnected. For example the individuals approach to family and career planning depended on personality factors, but might also have been influenced by institutions such as parents and friends and macro-societal circumstances such as unemployment or age restrictions.

My data show that East German young adults differ considerably from their U.S. counterparts in regard to career decision, life planning, perceived chances in the labor market, and the transition from school to work. The data collected in East Germany support the notion of increasing risk awareness, consciousness, and perception that reflect the current critical labor market situation in the country. Strong evidence is found that supports the notion that there is little risk perception in the United States.

#### Description of the Student Population

The students who filled out the questionnaire in East Germany had an average age of 20, and in the United States the average age was 28. Males and females were distributed fairly equal among the two groups of participants. In Germany 33 males and 32 females (total 65) completed the questionnaire, in the United States 34 males and 30 females (total 64).

In terms of race, all students in East Germany were Whites and East Germans; in the United States I surveyed 11 Whites, 47 African Americans, three Hispanics, one Asian, and three Africans (Eritrea, Ethiopia). The majority of the U.S. American students were people of color, which reflected the racial composition of the school neighborhood. Another reason might be that fewer African American students pursue a four year baccalaureate education, and might therefore be overrepresented in post secondary vocational-technical colleges (Cochrane, Mattai, Huddleston-Mattai, 1994; Giddens & Diamond, 2005).



The typical living situation differed in the two countries due to the diverse age of the participants in the study. In Germany, 34 students lived with both parents, three with their mother, seven with their father, nine with siblings, 12 with unrelated others (specified by seven students with boy or girlfriend, one parent in-law, one roommate, one spouse, and two lived with their grandparents). Of the U.S. population, 12 students lived with their parents, two with their mothers, 12 with their fathers, nine with siblings, and 29 with others (specified by 17 students in the United States as spouse, husband or wife which can be explained with the older average age of the students).

In the German sample there were 34 students who graduated from *Realschule* (secondary school), 19 from *Gymnasium* (grammar school), and 8 from *Hauptschule* (extended primary school). The data support the current trend of *Gymnasium* graduates that enter the apprenticeship market. In the United States, there were 43 students who graduated from senior high school, 14 had a college degree, and two students dropped out of high school in 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade.

The socioeconomic background of the students in both countries appeared to be relatively similar. There were 19 (14.7%) students who did not comment on that so that I can only present an overview about the available results. In East Germany the monthly average income is €2,700 (ca. \$3,240) (Ulrike Türk, Statistisches Landesamt Thüringen, Personal Communication, March 3, 2006). Among the population, 31 families had a salary below this amount, 20 had averaged this amount, and 11 had more money available.

The monthly average income in the United States is \$3,600 (Retrieved May 9, 2006, from <http://www.city-data.com/states/Georgia-Income.html>). There were 18 students who stated that their family income was below this amount, 15 had around this amount, and 15 had more than that. (There is more data missing for the U.S. population.) A slightly higher number of German students came from economically disadvantaged families (31 versus 18 in the United States), which could be explained with the higher unemployment rate among East German parents.

When asked about parents initial vocational training and their current occupations, out of the 65 questionnaires that I received in East Germany, ten students did not indicate the initial training of their mother and 11 students did not indicate the initial training of their father. The mothers of 48 students went to some kind of formal vocational education and training; five mothers have studied at an institution of higher education and two could not be categorized.

The analysis of the current job situation among the mothers indicated that 12 were unemployed and three were stay-at-home-mothers. Students might have pointed out either of those options depending on the mother's decision. If she wanted to work, but did not find employment, she was viewed as being unemployed, while a mother who consciously chose to stay home, was considered a stay at-home-mother. Two mothers were retired. Two are found in the category "others." The students explained to me afterwards that their mothers were on maternity leave and in a retraining program. Forty-four of the mothers had employment, four of them worked in unskilled occupations even though they

had finished an apprenticeship. One student indicated that his mother was working for a gas company leaving uncertain exactly what type of occupation, and so did another student who wrote that his mother is working in the field of alternative medicine. Another 19 mothers remained in the occupation in which they had been trained.

The notion of being a housewife/househusband versus being unemployed was marked according to the individual perception of the situation and might have led to very different interpretations. In East Germany more mothers were employed while in the United States more mothers were unemployed. Also, more mothers were categorized as housewives in East Germany.

Most of the fathers were employed full-time. In East Germany, there were five fathers unemployed, in the United States four. It can generally be said that the majority of the parents were in full-time employment. According to the descriptions in the questionnaire, it can be assumed that the majority of the students had a working-class background. There is no strong indication that students chose the occupation of their parents since it occurred only in two cases.

The data about parental background that I received from U.S. students were very diffuse because many did not fill in anything; others misunderstood the categories or could not report about their parents training and current occupations. It seems that many parents might have some kind of high school credential and worked in several jobs that do not require additional formal training. Some students mentioned names of companies or wrote the title of a

position such as supervisor or assistant manager. The majority of the students had parents with a working-class background which is typical for students who pursue vocational qualifications (Shavit & Müller, 2000). Rohland (2003) pointed out that in the nineties black young workers shifted to a lower educational level compared with white students.

A comparison of the two populations in Germany and the United States is very limited. Nevertheless, a couple of conclusions can be drawn. The population in both countries is relatively similar in terms of gender and socio-economic background. Most parents work in blue-color jobs and can be considered working class. The students in both countries differ in terms of age, race, and schooling. In East Germany students are younger in average, are all white, and have achieved different school degrees. In the United States the age range varied between 17 and 50. There were also people with different races represented. Most of the students in the United States had graduated from high school. It is not possible to examine the level of success in school and compare that to the schooling levels in Germany.

The next part of this chapter provides a description of students' narratives and will help to understand some of the differences between them in the two countries, but also of variations in one country. Additional descriptive data are outlined as well. A comparative analysis drawn from the research questions of this study follows in Chapter 5.

## Emerging Risk and Career Planning Themes in East Germany and the United States

The dissertation topic and interest in young adults' career choices and perceived options in the labor market provoked great curiosity among all the East German students in the study. In the focus groups no student indicated being bored or wanted to finish the discussion because the topic seemed to be important for them. After breaks the students told me that they were continuing their discussion outside and some said that to find a job after the apprenticeship is their biggest concern at the moment.

In the United States curiosity about the topic was rather restrained. Career choices as well as unemployment seemed much less to be a burning issue and participation was more driven by a general curiosity about me being from Germany and the comparative aspect of my study. It was also much harder to recruit students for the focus groups as well as the individual interviews. The reason for the restrained interest seemed to be that most students worked either part- or full-time and had only limited time available to spend at school and work on their projects.

In the following section, I will describe statistical data as well as qualitative data concurrently as far as they relate to an overall theme. Various themes that emerged were assigned to the structural levels of influence (individual, institutional, macro-structural) on risk perception. Those levels as well as the various themes interrelate to each other and together offer a more comprehensive picture about the topic. The data from both countries will be

reported separately. I always begin with East Germany followed by data from the United States. If a theme only occurred in one country the section is not further subdivided.

### *Individual Level*

#### *Program Choice*

In order to answer my research questions, I first needed to learn more about young adults' choices and how they relate to their perceptions. I start my analysis with the themes that relate to the individual level by asking if the program they were currently in was their choice. There were 36 students in East Germany who said "yes", and 29 said "no". In the United States, 59 students said "yes" versus four who said "no". Those figures clearly show that many East Germans were involuntarily in a program, while most of the American students consciously chose to enter theirs. Many East German students would have tried to find an apprenticeship in another field without success and, therefore, had to take what was available. The students in the United States consciously decided which program they want to enter, sometimes had to fulfill additional requirements, but were able to pursue studies in their desired field.

*East Germany.* One of my first questions in the focus groups and individual interviews was: Why did you decide to start this apprenticeship? It turned out that many students in all four programs have not been placed according to their primary choice but decided due to a lack of other options to start this apprenticeship. Hilke (20, Drafting Focus Group, June 16, 2005) is one

of the students who said: "I had originally decided for another job, but didn't get anything. So I took that one." Her first choice was to get trained as a real estate sales agent, but she faced a lack of provision of apprenticeships in the desired field and the need to reorient herself.

The Labor Exchange Office notified her that there were still training places available in the Drafting program and due to a lack of alternative options she chose that one. The quasi-voluntary choice was necessary in order to fulfill the societal expectation of pursuing further education and training straight after finishing school. This forceful situation influenced Hilke's rather negative view at the apprenticeship and her future options. She was pessimistic about her occupational future and earnings in this profession, but expressed that she would go anywhere if the pay check would be high enough. Other students in her class realized that they either did not have the appropriate school degree for their desired apprenticeship or that their grades were not good enough.

Theresa (Drafting Focus Group, June 16, 2005) referred to that:

Theresa (18): I more or less slid into that. I was too lazy at senior high school and dropped out. So, I only got the secondary school degree and had no idea what I should do next... I have no idea what it will bring me in the future.

Denise was one of the students who went to an institution of higher education, but dropped out because she disliked the program and decided to attend an apprenticeship. The degree she hoped would be valuable in the labor market, ensure employment, and probably enable her to earn money earlier than those who attend institutions of higher education (Drafting Focus Group, June 16, 2005):

Denise (23): I also don't know what I really want. I had studied and dropped out. Then, I had applied for a couple of occupations and had a few acceptances.

Several students expressed that a degree at an institution of higher education would not necessarily ensure employment afterwards and, therefore, they preferred to finish an apprenticeship. It was considered to be a safer way than to pursue a program at the university since there are fewer positions available for people with higher degrees. Theresa considered pursuing her *Abitur* after finishing the apprenticeship which would enable her to enter a university or a *Fachhochschule* (University of Applied Science), but critically evaluated the time she would need to devote towards it without receiving any income and with little hope for more job security afterwards (Drafting Focus Group, June 16, 2005):

Theresa (18): I just think if I would do my *Abitur* afterwards and then go to the university and study it would take me another 6 years. And who knows if I would be able to find a job afterwards? If not, the 6 years would be up in smoke.

For Marc future employment prospects with a university degree were also questionable. He was mainly concerned about being overqualified that would prevent employers from hiring him and also delay the time of generating an income (Heating, Gas, and Sanitary Focus Group, June 15, 2005):

Marc (19): Who knows what else you could do? Engineer, yes, but come on, how many engineers are needed in these days? Then, you have studied and you are overqualified and they can't pay you anymore. No, we [referring to other students in his situation] don't want that. We don't have any desire for that.



Overeducation or overqualification positively correlated with unemployment in a study undertaken by Velling and Pfeiffer (1997), but Büchel, deGrip, Mertens, (2002) argued that it depends on the academic field. Social science majors and women in general are more in danger of becoming unemployed or inadequately employed than graduates from other programs and men.

Ilka and Conny had originally decided to join the Armed Forces, but could not enter because of their health. Both regretted the impossibility of being employed there. They pointed out (Office Clerk Individual Interview, June 10, 2005):

Ilka (21): Originally, I had applied with the Armed Forces for the Frontier Protection. That would have been something that would have suited me. But, because of my knees, I couldn't do it. I had an injury, and therefore I am not suitable. That was tough luck.

Conny (21): I would like to work in a storehouse as a material mover because I can do more physical work. And then what I originally wanted was working with the Armed Forces as a sergeant. That would have been nice, but unfortunately it didn't work out because of my lungs. I had an operation on my lung.

A job with the Armed Forces was considered as secure, stable, and a way to pursue further training or qualifications. Particularly the male students who were in the Gas, Heating and Sanitary Program often mentioned the option of going to the Armed Forces after they are done with the apprenticeship. Service in the Armed Forces or alternatively one year of civil service is compulsory in Germany for males. Some manage to completely opt out if they show proof of physical inability to attend.

Marco viewed his vocational training as a preparation for further studies at the university. In order to make sure that he has “something in his hands” before he would go to the university, referring to the certificate that would theoretically enable him to get a job according to his qualification, he decided to start this apprenticeship. Hillmert and Jacob (2003) pointed out that this “insurance strategy” (p. 320) is used by low-achieving and risk-averse school leavers (Drafting Individual Interview, June 16, 2005):

Marco (22): I did my *Abitur* and I viewed a study program in structural engineering or something related to it as a further option. And so I thought that this apprenticeship would be a good foundation for that. Possibly further studies could be built on top of that.

In the Assistant Tax Accountant program three students had plans to build on their primary education in this profession and decided to become a tax advisor and possibly self-employed. In opposition to the other three apprenticeships where possibilities of further qualification are very limited, this profession requires another degree from the *Berufsfachschule* (University of Cooperative Education) and at least three years of permanent employment as a tax advising assistant before one can attend the exam for the tax advisor. A typical way to get there or at least to improve chances of employment in the labor market is to study at the *Berufsakademie* (University of Cooperative Education, which is a college that offers higher education in combination with on-the-job training in a company that the student needs to find upfront). Three students expressed in the focus group that this was their pathway of choice.

Some of the students who were not in the program of their choice were channeled into their apprenticeship by the Labor Exchange Office. The institution provided addresses of potential employers and had an interest in filling classes at the vocational school. Rüdiger was in the apprenticeship (wood technician), but couldn't finish his degree because his training company declared insolvency. He didn't find any apprenticeships in his area and was finally advised to start the Drafting apprenticeship with the possibility of getting one out of three past training years recognized towards his new degree. Rüdiger felt insecure about his career options and therefore also very unsure about his decision to start this apprenticeship (Drafting Individual Interview, June 16, 2005):

Rüdiger (22): I started my first apprenticeship at 18, which is actually pretty late. Now, I am here and I am 22 and still don't know if this is the right occupation. That's the thing, if they don't employ me afterwards, then I stand there again and waste all my time. And at the workplace they demand a lot. You have to work a lot and if you imagine for what kind of money. If they don't employ me after those three years, then that would be completely lost time. Therefore, I am really concerned what I should do in the best case.

Rüdiger expressed the risk he is taking in starting an apprenticeship that will take another 2.5 years. He has been in an apprenticeship for 3 years already and would have been trained for 5.5 years in total until he can finally be hired for a certified job. Considering the future employment prospects of the students, which I will describe later, Rüdiger was very concerned about the consequences of his decision. He was still not sure if the occupational training he is in right now would lead to stable employment and was concerned about his personal fulfillment through the jobs he might be hired for in the future.

The Labor Exchange Office plays a major role in directing students towards certain apprenticeship and therefore in regulating public provision and needs at the apprenticeship market. Tobias explained how he and some of his fellow apprentices ended up in their apprenticeship (Heating, Gas, and Sanitary Focus Group, June 15, 2005):

Tobias (18): For some of us as we sit here the Labor Exchange Office has organized this apprenticeship. It is in fact a non-company based training which means from the Chamber of Crafts here in *Erfurt*. 6 weeks we are here in the school in the Chamber of Crafts, and after two years we have to find a company for one and a half years. Some have found a company already; the others have to stay at the Chamber of Crafts. The plan is to help them finish their apprenticeship. They will be trained by the custodian of the building. Sometimes, they will be able to attend a special workshop. Half of us are affected by that. They are put off.

Tobias described the provision of non-company based training through the Chamber of Crafts, an institution that audits training programs and facilitates training phases in workshops. Besides a large number of students who did not participate in a vocational program of their first choice there are some counter stories of students who consciously chose to be there. Some of those students missed out on the opportunity to get first-hand practical experience in a company. Everybody was aware that most companies prefer to hire people who had some prior work experience and that those students who did not find a company for the second half of their apprenticeship might have fewer chances in the labor market.

Students who made a conscious choice about their apprenticeship showed higher satisfaction with the context of their apprenticeship and also more

optimism about the future than their peers. Gunnar (23, Assistant Tax Accountant) is an example who made a well informed choice regarding his apprenticeship. He dropped out of college, but worked parallel to his studies for a tax advisor. His boss encouraged him to start this apprenticeship. By the time of the interview it was arranged that he would stay another year in his company and afterwards switch to a software house for tax advisors. In comparison with everybody else his situation is unusual. He knew exactly where he would be in the next two to three years after finishing his apprenticeship. The support of his boss who was a friend of the family provided security and satisfaction.

The students had various reasons to choose their apprenticeship. Some didn't get the apprenticeship of their choice and followed the advice of the Labor Exchange Office, family and friends. Others had no idea at all about what they wanted to do and were channeled into it. A few students viewed the apprenticeship as a foundation for further studies at an institution of higher education or wanted to work in this profession. And one student was in the desperate situation in that he wanted to finish his original apprenticeship and was left with the choice of getting one year accreditation towards another degree if he would start the Drafting program.

While the individual had to make a conscious choice about which program to start, societal regulations prohibited many from pursuing a choice career. Apprenticeship places in companies and schools are limited. There are rarely any low-skilled jobs available for students who would prefer to wait a year and try a year later again to access one of the scarce apprenticeships. Instead many

young adults were forced to take the apprenticeship that was available. They knew that they needed to finish the program in order to have a chance to access skilled employment, a salary and various social benefits. The general expectation in society to finish an apprenticeship (or a program of study) as the next step after school imposes a lot of pressure and leaves young adults with no other acceptable choices. Nevertheless, there are students who drop out of programs and some who never finish a degree, but it is not rewarded in society. Those who do not receive a degree from an apprenticeship struggle to find employment.

*United States.* In the United States, students consciously chose the technical program that was of interest to them. Supply of training places is not an issue at all since technical colleges cater to a demand that is communicated via job advertisements. The students in this study were in the program of their choice and had the desire to work in the profession afterwards. They explained that certain abilities draw them to their program, such as being good in math, drawing, and working with their hands.

I will outline a number of different reasons that motivated students to enter their technical program. The main motivation for most of them was job security, independence, and a higher paycheck (Heating and Air Conditioning Focus Group, November 8, 2005):

Luis (22): After I have this degree the job market is open. If I lose my job somewhere I can easily get another job.

Terrence (23): I chose that field because it is interesting. And on the job itself you don't need to depend on somebody else in finding you a job. You can go out, show your degree and do it.

Marcus (25): I chose it because of the future and stability. I don't have to worry about that they close my company and I would be out of work. There is always be work available in this field. You can also work for yourself. You don't have to worry about money. You can be independent.

Lucius (29): I chose this job because I got tired of people who take over your job or something. With this job you got a degree and that protects you more. In many jobs they can just hire anybody from the street. I used to work in a job where I needed to read barcodes and so. Everybody can do that.

Arum and Shavit (1995) underlined technical education in the U.S. serves as a safety net for those who are unlikely to pursue 4-year college degrees. It enhances chances for employment in higher-quality jobs.

Independence was understood as the freedom to work for different companies because skills in Heating and Air Conditioning were supposedly in high demand. The degree was also viewed as the foundation for establishing one's own business. The students argued that they would be protected from unemployment with a technical degree because it is well recognized in the industry and also among individual customers. It would enable them to choose an employer instead of being chosen among many other unskilled workers. These students did not have the problem of not finding employment, but needed to cope with the risk of being fired on an every day basis since most low-skilled jobs in the U.S. offer little or no social benefits and no job security. In comparison with their German counterparts American young adults could find employment without having a technical diploma. Nevertheless, most of the jobs they were working in before entering the program or were currently pursuing can not be considered a profession as will be outlined later in this chapter.

Michael and Alex viewed the field they were approaching as a way to professional self fulfillment as well as a good technical base for many other vocations. Both students were Whites and came from an academic family background. It can be assumed that those students never faced a scarcity at home because their parents both worked in well paying jobs. Therefore, those students were less concerned about generating an income and put more emphasis on self-fulfillment. Additionally, both students had artistic skills and pointed out how important it was for them to use their abilities in a profession (Drafting Individual Interview, November 10, 2005).

Michael (26): I was in computers and I was just in there because of the money and I like working with my hands and Drafting and that was the closest program where I could actually build that stuff. And where what I design gets actually built.

Alex pointed out that he wants to develop his skills to the best of his abilities. He knew he needed to be in an artistic profession and although he was not sure if drafting is the right one, after he had tried welding first, he believed that he was getting close to it. Alex thought even further. Like the other two he enjoyed working with his hands, but also emphasized the idea of developing “troubleshooting skills.” Heating and Air Conditioning is not just a job he said, it is a multitask profession that can be applied in many different areas. Alex lives in a neighborhood that has formed a spiritual community, where members take over roles that are relevant for the members. Alex’ skills were needed in the community and he knew that he can be useful there. His approach was to learn as much as possible to be able to cope with many different technical situations (Heating and Air Conditioning, November 8, 2005):



Alex (27): It is also essential in trouble shooting where you learn how each component works with the other components. That assists you in trouble shooting and how something works. So, that is also a field where one learns how to think in that manner. Once you have learned it you can name and address problems in the other fields to.

When Matthew was not playing the guitar he worked in construction like most of his friends. After having lived in New York as a musician on his own since he was 17, Matthew finally decided to enter another professional field. The reason for this change was that the incident of September 11th, 2001, caused a lot of unemployment among musicians because New Yorkers did not go out much anymore. He also explained that the life style “sex, drugs, and rock’n roll” became too much for him and affected his health. Therefore, he needed a degree in a profession that would provide stability and an acceptable pay check (Drafting Individual Interview, November 10, 2005):

Matthew (27): I was trying to get the Heating and Air Conditioning thing because I can’t do the same job that I did for years. I was a musician before. I was sick for a while and couldn’t keep up the lifestyle. I rather do the drafting. I can turn it into better money in the long run.

Lucius, an African-American student, described how he lived in a neighborhood where a lot of people were unemployed and involved in crime. He had three children by three different women and kept in contact with all of them. His children were the main reason for starting this technical program because he wanted to earn more money to support all of them. Lucius had moved out of a crime driven neighborhood and planned to move again once he was employed. By the time of the interview he stayed at home and took care of the household while his wife was working full time. They were expecting a child.

Lucius (29, Heating and Air Conditioning, November 8, 2005): It keeps you off the street. In my neighborhood there are many who don't work, taking drugs and getting involved in all kinds of criminal activities. I didn't want to end up there. That's why I chose to get more education.

The choice for a technical program was for U.S. students mainly grounded in the desire to gain higher paychecks and job security. It was not perceived as a decision that will determine one's life. Some students viewed it as the foundation for a variety of other professions.

### *Floundering*

Floundering was only an issue in the United States. Most students surveyed were switching between jobs and school and it was rare to go straight into technical college after graduation from high school. The average age of students at the institution was 29 years. Their reasons for not going to a technical college straight away were manifold. Students wanted to earn money first. They did not like school and needed a break. Some were not sure which kind of training to start and did not want to waste time and money. Others needed to save up in order to be able to afford schooling. Caring for household and children, a difficult family situation, or a spouse that discouraged from going to school were other reasons.

The majority of the students worked in low-skilled jobs for some time before entering the program and was employed while being in school. Kevin was from the "country" referring to a rural area where he grew up. He described why he did not go to a technical training earlier (Drafting Individual Interview, November 10, 2005):

Kevin (24): As I was done with high school I went to work. By the time that was the thing to do. I had a brand new vehicle that I paid for and hey I wanted to go to work. And now a couple of years down the road I look back now and I mean it's hard to make it up the steps without more school. I want to be a lot higher up on the latter where as I just kind of wake up and the schooling is been helping.

Some students realized later than others that a career in a field usually requires a higher educational degree. Kevin knew that he will be able to earn more money than he did helping out at a farm owned by his father in law. His wife had just graduated and was working as a teacher. They were expecting a child which also encouraged Kevin to pursue another degree.

Adrian is a representative for the situation of many of his fellow students. He wanted to be independent and to be able to afford a lifestyle which includes a car, nice clothes, and going out in the evenings. By 19, he had been employed in various positions that can all be considered low-skilled jobs. He viewed his work as a backup in case he would not be able to finish schooling, but could still maintain an income. He planned to move up in the delivering company where he currently worked which required a technical college degree (Heating and Air Conditioning Individual Interview, November 8, 2005):

Adrian (19): I managed a restaurant and had a couple of side jobs. Towed cars, a family member of mine has a towing company, so I did that, working on cars, putting together cars, DC. Going back to school was always one of the things to do, it was on my to do list. You just need another back up if anything is not going right. You never know what's going to happen. How are you paying for school? You don't have no scholarship, no nothing. So, I had to make some money so that I would have some to pay for everything.

Almost all students have had some work experience. Two students helped out in the company of their parents, others had to find jobs on their own and sometimes changed positions a couple of times. German students did not mention low-skilled jobs that they would usually pursue during school breaks because it was not considered to be serious employment. German students usually pursue an apprenticeship straight after school and gain little experience with short term low-skilled employment. The situation of being employed in low-skilled jobs for a while before starting technical training seemed to be generally accepted among American young adults. In Germany this would lead to the assumption that a student is not persistent, maybe even lazy, and might not be a desired worker under those circumstances. What would be the exception in Germany is general acceptance in the United States, but viewed differently by each society. The U.S. students themselves would argue, that they “have not been ready earlier” to go back to school and that they wanted to make the right decision for which program to attend.

Only a few students worked part-time in a field that was related to their technical program, while the majority was employed in a wide variety of jobs. Some young adults had two to three jobs at the same time and worked up to 70 hours a week. They explained how they managed their life under those circumstances. Michael additionally had a family to take care of and maintained some friendships (Drafting Individual Interview, November 10, 2005):

Michael (26): I am the storage media operator, basically a librarian in a big library. Get tapes, I mean get the books and put them back where they belong again. Check books out and check them in again. That’s basically what I do, except there

are no books it's A-Tapes. Then Max Living, you know it's a home improvement company. I am a cashier there. I am starting my career. The other two are just jobs. So, I pick my career over jobs.... Right now I am doing 70 hours a week, I go to school and I am a father.

Michael pointed out that he is currently applying for a job as a drafter since he is almost done with his program. If he finds a job in this field, he would quit the other jobs. The drafting teacher encouraged his students to go out and find jobs in their profession which seemed to be possible even if they had not finished their degrees.

Many young adults struggled to organize work and school at the same time. Some students could only take one or two classes per semester which delayed their graduation. Others worked early in the morning or late in the evening and had long distances to drive. Kevin was one of the students who described difficulties in juggling school, work, and family life (Drafting Individual Interview, November 10, 2005):

Kevin (24): I work almost full time right now. I work 35 hours a week. When I get home after school and will probably work until 6 or 7 o'clock this evening. I work for my wife's family. And they do the development of lots of land sales. We develop a lot of subdivisions. Her dad is a farmer and has probably thousands of head of cattle. There are different things every day. But mostly he is in construction. But, I am not going to stay there. They gave me a job to help me out while I am in school in terms of the times that I had to come up here. That was kind of hard. When I first started school I had to find a job where I can work early in the morning for a couple of hours and make good money, which is usually back breaking labor before I go to school. But then I was blessed to find work with them and it works really good with my schedule.

In comparison with their German counterparts many of the U.S. young adults were not only older, but also had taken over more responsibilities in terms of living alone or with a spouse, being full-time employed that sometimes involved having the responsibility to watch over other employees and even being responsible for sustaining one's own family. Although the conditions for some of those U.S. students seemed to be much harder they expressed little concern about neither their current situation nor their future prospects. The effort was viewed as something that would pay off at the end. Employment also provided them with the confidence of being able to support oneself and being strong enough to achieve higher life goals.

Floundering was a typical phenomenon among the students who generally took their time before making a final decision about another degree or until they graduated from college. The trial phase between finishing school and another graduation had been extended by some of the students in this study for more than ten years. The life experiences in this floundering phase were highly individualized. The students in the focus group talked about it themselves but could not relate to experiences of their fellow students. There had been little interest in what fellow students in the program had experienced and also a small common base that would connect them with each other. I will outline a few individual stories here that are exemplary for the wide variety of experiences students carry with them.

Alex moved between places and programs back and forward. He originally would have like to do something in this field of interest which is fine arts, but

discovered that he did not feel confident to teach it. For some years Alex was unsure what to do, then moved into a community in Atlanta where mentors helped him to find a direction (Heating and Air Conditioning Individual Interview, November 8, 2005):

Alex (27): I finished high school and went to college out in Wyoming and graduated and didn't know what to do. My mother was living in Wyoming by that time, so I just went there. I come from a very artistic family. I was a Fine Arts major. After a year I decided that I didn't like it anymore and I moved to Atlanta and went to a fine art school here. After a year I decided that I didn't like Atlanta anymore and I went back to Wyoming. It is difficult to make a good living with fine art. The whole idea of the suffering artist, you know. So I was going into education to teach art, but that didn't really fit, so I quit it. I didn't finish this program at college because there was no direction in relation to which way to go. It didn't make sense to waste the money if I wasn't completely sure about it. And so I thought it doesn't make sense to do it. If I don't agree with it 100% then I don't do it. That is kind of a general idea that I apply with anything in my life.

Jennifer explained that her parents expected her to go straight to college, but she was not mature enough to finish a program there. The following years were spent with different jobs until she finally decided that she would like to have her own business and work as a drafter from home. A friend helped her making this decision (Drafting Focus Group, November 10, 2005):

Jennifer (30): I went straight to college after high school, but didn't stay there very long; worked as a waitress for a while. Then I got a job at an insurance company as an insurance agent, worked that for a while. Moved, worked as an insurance agent a little more. Then I worked as a secretary in a law firm. And then I decided to go back to school. So, then work became part-time and school became full time. Now, I have a part-time job in drafting and work from home.

Deborah used to live in another state, but moved because of lower tuition rates. She had to juggle taking care of her child, working, being in a difficult relationship with her boyfriend, and school. For a while Deborah moved back and forth between places and states, switched programs of study, and finally made a decision to attend an Accounting program anticipating that she would be able to generate a decent income with the degree (Keyboarding class Focus Group, January 23, 2006):

Deborah (23): I graduated in 2001. Originally, I wanted to go to Boston, but I have a son and my mother talked me out of it. So, I started to have a family. I started at XXU for fashion design, but my living arrangement didn't work out so I went back home. Then I came back in 2003 and started back school, got my own place and switched my major to interior design after talking to some people in the field who told me, that I don't really need a degree in fashion to work in the field. Why getting a degree in it? Loans were becoming too much so I decided to come to school in Accounting so that I can pay my way through interior design and then go to a four year college to get a degree in architecture.

June explained to me that she was a foster child and did not get along with her adoptive mother which led to the situation that she was finally forced to move out at home. During this time she did not attend classes at the technical college anymore and lost her financial aid. After explaining her social situation at school she received another chance and was taking two classes by the time I interviewed her, hoping that she would maintain a grade point average that was sufficient to be eligible for further financial aid. Although the situation seemed to be risky for her, June appeared motivated, emphasized that one always has to think positively and was convinced that she would be able to maintain her grades at a high level (Keyboarding Class Focus Group I, January 23, 2006):



June (20): I didn't graduate from high school. I had a job. By the time I graduated I was 15 and then had a job. I started here when I was 17 or 18. I was a management and supervisor for development. I did that for about a year. And due to my living situation I didn't go to school and just started to go back this quarter and started graphic design. I got a general education diploma. This is supposed to be the equivalent to a high school degree. I have been here for about two years. When I am done with this I want to go to another two year college to get an associate or a BA. I haven't decided which one yet. I work part-time at a food store.

Floundering was not viewed as a deficiency among the U.S. students. Many young adults took advantage of the possibility to try out different things and also often believed that working first after high school and generating one's own income should be the primary priority.

### *Life Planning*

*East Germany.* I asked the students about their life plans. Many young adults seem to think a lot about their private lives and professional futures. Some students expressed that it was not possible anymore to make a long-term life plan since everything around them in society is changing rapidly. Theresa and Kathrin pointed out (Drafting Focus Group, June 16, 2005):

Theresa (18): I think you should only plan for two or three years. Because, you never know what will happen in the future and what will come to their mind up there in terms of reforms. We are still young.

Kathrin (18): In these days, you are all the time busy to learn new things in order to make money for one or two years, and then you have to start all over again. That's nerve wracking. You can't do that to anybody. It basically means that you just sit there with your fear about the future. Who knows how things will be in one or two years.

Kathrin expressed resignation about the possibility of making a life plan. She felt insecure about her future.

Kathrin (18): My little sister asked me: "Give me advice. What jobs will last into the future? Which occupation should I learn to have a job later?" I can't do that in these days. That can change from today to tomorrow. Really!

Many of her friends were unemployed, her parents could not provide helpful advice on how to cope with the current situation, and she did not like her apprenticeship. At the time of the interview she had no idea how to get out of this situation and felt helpless in advising her sister which apprenticeship to choose.

From general life planning the discussion moved to family planning, an issue that played a role in each focus group and was raised by female and male participants. Many young adults were imagining starting a family in their mid-twenties. It did not make a difference if the students were already in a relationship. Having children and building a family was of concern to all of them and a perceived risk to employment. Various constraints were raised that might delay the start of a family. Some students brought up the issue of employment difficulties for women with children. For all of the students it seemed clear that they first needed to get work experience and find long-term employment before they would consider starting a family. In Germany, it is not permitted by law to employ somebody on a termed contract for more than two years. After that the employee has an unlimited contract (lifetime job security). Theresa described how she discussed the issue with her boyfriend (Drafting Individual Interview, June 16, 2005):

Theresa (18): My boyfriend and I, we have thought about it earlier. And he basically said as we got to know each other and he was still unemployed: "Before not both of us have a stable job we don't even have to think about it." Now he has a job, but he thinks that we should not think about it. We just make ends meet. Both of us have a car. That costs gasoline, tax, and insurance. Then we want an apartment sometimes. We are together since two years, so we could also take an apartment together now. He just turned 25 and doesn't like to live with his parents anymore and wants to move away from there. He was away already for two years, but because he was unemployed, he had to move back. He has this standpoint that at 25 he does not want to live at home anymore.... We could afford an apartment together, but don't need to think about kids in the next three or four years.

Theresa pointed out how important material standards are as a foundation for building a family. Her boyfriend who was seven years older than her had already experienced unemployment and downward mobility.

Sabine had a very secure home environment where she could count on the support of her family and boyfriend. She was the only student in this study who was convinced that she would not leave her home region, but rather take any job she could get to be able to stay with her parents. Since childcare facilities are in high demand and many people are under the pressure of losing their jobs if they stay away for too long, family support is essential. At the same time the increasing demand for geographic flexibility of young workers, who are expected to move anywhere for a job, contradicts the need to stay close to family members and makes it more difficult to actually start a family (Office Clerk Individual Interview, June 10, 2005):

Sabine (22): When a child comes, then it comes. It wouldn't be the perfect time, but whatever, when is the perfect time? I would have the support of my parents and of course of my boyfriend. So, when it would happen now besides studying –

I wouldn't call that a problem. But, I think it would be negative in the labor market. A child plays a role in life planning, but work comes first. You want to offer the child something.... The perfect situation would be to first work a little bit and secure a workplace. Work comes first, that's important.

The female students in the Office Clerk class got into a lively discussion about the chances of finding a job for women with children. The German society is perceived by many of its inhabitants as a non-children-friendly environment and discriminative against women with children. Various problems that young mothers have to deal with were discussed. Ilka pointed out (Office Clerk Focus Group, June 10, 2005):

Ilka (21): That's such a case. With children you have fewer chances. I see that with our neighbor. She had a great job at Bau Um, she had a lot to say there, and then she got a child and stayed at home for two years. Now she has to see, they didn't want her back because she has a child now, and the child can get sick and maybe she could also get another child. And all such games. They have tried to fire her.

It is not only difficult to keep a job while having a small child, the difficulty is also to find childcare. In the former GDR childcare was available for everyone and most children went to childcare facilities at an age between one and three years. The students also compare the situation in East Germany with the situation in West Germany, pointing out that it is even more difficult in the western part of the country. The Western states are considered to be more conservative which means that people there hold on to the idea of a stay-at-home mother once a woman has children (Office Clerk Focus Group, June 10, 2005):

Ramona (22): And then you have to see if you can get childcare. Here in Thüringen that's still possible, but in the West you have to fight to even find day care that would take your child and then you pay accordingly.... Between noon and 2 p.m. you have to pick them up.

Caroline (21): It's disgusting, the child is not in this world yet and you need to look for a childcare place already. That's idiotism.

Sabine (22): It's unbelievable, as a woman they deny you the possibility to work.

The young women in East Germany were brought up by their parents with the mindset that every woman has the right and the duty to work. That was part of the constitution of the former East. Full-time employment was set as the norm. Only about 27% of the women worked part-time in 1988 compared with 41% in the West (Leisering & Leibfried, 1999). Therefore, childcare was provided by public institutions for everybody who was in need of it. The inexpensive service was meant to relieve women of family burdens, ease their way into the world of work and motivate them to bear more children (Frerich & Frey 1993; Mädje & Neusüß, 1996).

The obstacles young women are facing today in combining work and motherhood are perceived as an injustice. Gender discrimination outside of this discussion played a minor role but was emphasized by one student who described how she tried to get an apprenticeship at a bank and experienced male biases at the assessment center (Assistant Tax Accountant Individual Interview, June 14, 2005):

Kristin (22): My parents wanted me to become a bank clerk and I wanted that too. I applied everywhere. I was also there for the employment tests and for interviews. At the Yellow Bank

for example the tables were placed in a U form, the boys were sitting in the front and the girls in the back. As they started talking about soccer, I knew that this male bonding was going on and figured that I didn't have much of a chance anymore.

Securing the financial resources as a basis for having a child was another concern that was expressed by a young woman. Age played a role in the planning and thought process and is part of risk considerations (Office Clerk Focus Group, June 10, 2005):

Conny (21): At the moment it is very difficult to build up savings. Money is scarce anyway. And when you think about having a child at some point, then you think: How should I pay for it? How long do I have to save up until I can have a child? Then I need to be 40 in order to have a baby. That's a bit risky too. That is somehow a vicious circle in Germany. If you should have a child first, and then you don't get access to jobs anymore because every employer says if you have a child then you stay at home because they get sick all the time anyway. And when you get it later you also risk your job. It's strange.

Kristin expressed a lot of constraints that she takes into consideration when making plans about her life. Her ideas about life reflected common East German perceptions about combining work and family as well as having a life course without unemployment spells. In East Germany in 2000 the average age of having children was slightly below the West German average of 28.4 compared with 29 (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2004) and although it has almost leveled out, the parent generation in the East still imposes the old East German model of starting a family in one's 20s.

Kristin also talked about the perception of a disconnection between older parents and their children. She further explained that her life plan involves having

a house, but her grandparents caused awareness about the risk that is involved in such a purchase by indicating that the labor market demands flexibility and houses are not easily sold in Germany. The financial burden of acquiring a house might be too high for somebody who has no job security (Assistant Tax Accountant Individual Interview, June 14, 2005):

Kristin (22): My future life very much depends on my occupation and where I find a job. You need an apprenticeship first, so that you have something in your hand. Then maybe a child and settle with a family. But at the moment it is better to get a college degree. On the other hand it is pretty stupid to have a child in your 30s or 40s. Then you are in school and your parents are in the age of grand parents. Maybe there would be less of a strong connection. I have a girl friend. As I saw her parents, I thought, where are you going with your grandparents? If she is alone one day she doesn't know how to sort out everything. She gets so much here and there from her parents and is getting spoiled; and I always think, that is very bad. I think you work towards having a family. And later you need to be able to support yourself and the family. Therefore you need to have a certain salary. I also don't want to become unemployed later on. I also need some kind of promotion. You want to have a house at some point, although in these days that is not really advisable. I would love to have a house, but my grandparents are against it. They say, think about all the costs and the effort and then you loose your job and need to go somewhere else and still have the house.

Among the male students in the Heating, Gas, and Sanitary program having children was mainly discussed in connection with the need for financial stability. The students know that the country needs children since it is expressed by politicians, broadcasted on TV, and written about in newspapers and magazines, but at the same time the perceived risk of unemployment and the low salary that many of them will earn in their first employment is realistically viewed by these young adults as a major obstacle in the realization of ones own family.

One student pointed out (Heating, Gas, and Sanitary Focus Group, June 15, 2005):

Lars (18): People are surprised that we don't have enough children anymore and so on. They don't have to be surprised, that 25 year olds fear to put a baby in this world if they can't feed it. You want to be able to offer the child something. You want to offer perspectives and don't want to say, the child is here now and then the story is over.

The students in the Assistant Tax Accountant program discussed their concerns about having a family and children, but they did not think of any solution that would reduce the risk. The lack of financial resources, the insecurity of their jobs, and the biological clock play a part in their risk considerations. In the focus group building a family was discussed in relation to work hours. Vincent was used to a family where the members spent a lot of time together. Ellinor comes from a family where her father has his own business and works overtime. Although in both families there seems to be a strong emotional relationship between parents and children, the young adults viewed having a family strikingly different (Assistant Tax Accountant Focus Group, June 14, 2005):

Vincent (20): Well, and you also want to have a family. That is also such a point, also for a man.

Ellinor (25): But, you are still young.

Vincent (20): Well, now, but...

Denise (22): Well, I have already my private retirement plan where I certainly will get some good payments.

Ellinor (25): I have two.

Vincent (20): You also need better working hours. You need time for yourself and for the child. There is also work at home to do. My boss for example is in the office 14 to 16 hours per



day and then she goes home, into bed, and the next morning she is at work again. She has no family for herself, nothing.

Ellinor (25): Well, but then she made a mistake in her planning.

Two important planning themes cross each other here. The students were aware about the difficult pension situation in Germany that might affect their generation. The aging society is already struggling to pay the pension that was once ensured through public mutual support. The payoffs from the social pension fund will be cut and more responsibility transferred to the individual. Politicians and economist have raised awareness about the low fertility rate and the incapability of society to work and pay for the pensions.

Vincent was trying to get the point across that a family needs time and is not easily combined with long work hours. His superior provided a negative scenario for him. Ellinor was very satisfied with her family situation at home although her father had little time for them. Therefore, she was convinced that everything can work well if it is planned accordingly. The risk that Vincent perceived was that one can easily get trapped in too much work and miss out on other aspects of life.

Another planning theme concerned one's future career. While the students in the Assistant Tax Accountant, Drafting, and Office Clerk program were partially thinking about further education or starting another apprenticeship, for some of the Heating, Gas, and Sanitary students joining the Armed Forces seemed to be a path that offered security over the next couple of years. It was viewed as an alternative to unemployment, as a provider of further training and as a foundation

for other jobs that were out of reach at initial application. The students also argued that the salary at the Armed Forces is lucrative, and for Bernd the goal was to save enough money to be finally able to leave the country and build a life somewhere else (Heating, Gas, and Sanitary Focus Group, June 15, 2005):

Lars (18): I have made some plans already. If they don't take me over, then I will go to the Armed Forces. That's what I have decided to do and think that will work. Well, and then I can continue to apply for jobs during this time and if I don't get anything I will stay with the Armed Forces, if I like it. They also offer good training programs.

Bernd (19): After the apprenticeship I wanted to go to the Armed Forces and do the basic military service. Then I wanted to sign up for another eight years and change to the police. There I could be a master sergeant. But that is still standing in the stars (meaning it's uncertain). It is also possible that I have collected enough money and can leave the country. My big aim is Australia. That is a continent that is just overwhelming.

Marc (19): If I don't find something after the apprenticeship I would go to the Armed Forces before I end up being unemployed.

One student in the Heating, Gas, and Sanitary group was very driven to get a higher school degree and attend the university. He realized too late that he should have focused more on school in order to pursue the *Abitur*. This school degree would have enabled him to go straight to a university and achieve his career goals earlier. The German school system still offers pathways to graduate with an *Abitur* later in life, but for Tobias that means he would have to spend additional time in school which he could have avoided otherwise (Heating, Gas, and Sanitary Focus Group, June 15, 2005):

Tobias (18): You have actually two choices. You either finish your apprenticeship with grade 1 or 2 [A or B] in order to have a chance of employment. Or as a student from the extended

elementary school you get the final degree from secondary school or as a next step the *Abitur* in order to get higher and higher and eventually study. I don't want to earn my life long just €1,000. That is certain. This understanding came pretty late for me, just after I have snooped into the profession and understood what it is all about. It started after 10th grade. While in school it didn't matter to me. My parents brought food on the table. Now, I have a car and have to pay for it. Now I realized where I will end up. Somehow you realize what really matters in life. Some realize that in 5th grade, I realized it in 10th grade.

The prospect of being able to have a higher job position in life and a higher paycheck motivates him to get more schooling and also work hard in his apprenticeship. His family and girlfriend provided social support and encouraged him in his life goals. Tobias had a high sense of his own performance abilities and was realistic about his weaknesses, such as having concentration problems in school (Heating, Gas, and Sanitary Individual Interview, June 17, 2005):

Tobias (18): I was here in Erfurt at a sport high school and was very good in athletics. I very much concentrated on the sport. I was very good on the country level, but also international. In the morning two hours of training, after school two hours of training, so I was at home at seven in the evening. I neglected school. After eighth grade I had to quit and change to the secondary school. The interest in school turned to the background. It was a pity because I lost some of my friends. I didn't live in the boarding school anymore. They weren't gone, but I was not there anymore. Then I lost the sport. I still play soccer, but no competitive sport anymore. I don't train every day. I miss that. It has shown me that I have to work on myself. It also has shown me that I should not just concentrate on one thing in my life. It has to be more versatile. I woke up in this regard. Now, I definitely want to get my *Abitur*. And then I want to study. If that will be possible I don't know. I also don't know in which direction I want to go, if I want to stay in the field I am in right now or do something else. I have to get canny about that. My dad has studied chemistry and works as a referent for pharmaceuticals. My mother, since 11 years she isn't there anymore, but we still have contact. She was trained as a

retail trade woman and leads a chain store from Schmecktje. My mom was happy that I got something. My dad was not very satisfied. He had wished a bit more for me. He had invested a relative high amount of money, meaning he paid for the school, the sport, the boarding school, and that I had a roof over my head and food. I had done that for 6 years and he had hoped for more.

Like his fellow students Tobias planed to establish a middle class lifestyle and realized that he needs to provide the financial resources for that. His life plan was laid out very clearly already. He was highly motivated and had little risk perception regarding his future. He saw the options that are available and was willing to work hard to achieve his goals (Heating, Gas, and Sanitary Individual Interview, June 17, 2005):

Tobias (18): My girlfriend is a great support. We have been together three years. I also have a very good relationship with her parents and she has with mine. Well, it's almost like a marital relationship. She is over the week with me, but I also sleep over at her place. We also have planned already that we want to establish our own family when we are 25 or 30. But the money has to come from somewhere. And somebody has to bring in the money. Therefore, I thought something has to change because with what I am doing now I am not making enough money in order to provide something for my family like to go on a vacation, a nice car, or a nice house. She supports me with my plans. At the moment she is also doing an apprenticeship and will become an office clerk. But, she is not stupid and her mom and I thought already about her also getting the *Abitur*.

Steffen agreed with Tobias in regard to the importance of the *Abitur* and emphasized that employers would often prefer students with the highest school degree because the students are expected to learn faster and they are older and might be more mature (Heating, Gas, and Sanitary Focus Group, June 15, 2005):

Steffen (19): If you don't necessarily study, then this is O.K. Then they say to themselves, well, he is not overqualified, but he

is better than the average. Then they say, he is not completely stupid and we can still pay him because he is not overqualified.

Steffen also knew of an example where a student with *Abitur* got a job at a company where Steffen had applied for an apprenticeship. After four weeks the company fired the other apprentice because he was not capable in the work. Steffen was convinced that often students with the *Abitur* are better in intellectual than in practical work. Although he found reasons for employers decisions to hire students with *Abitur*, he also questioned this judgment and thought that students with another school degree are often more practical oriented and would also stay in the field or even in the company; while students with *Abitur* are likely to use the apprenticeship as a safety net for themselves and consider it as a foundation for future studies.

Ellinor pointed out how the entrance requirements have shifted as a consequence of the downgrading of the *Abitur*. Today more students receive the school degree than before unification. In the state Thüringen 28% of the 2003/2004 cohort graduated with an *Abitur*, 22.5% with a secondary school degree, 18.7% with a degree of the extended elementary school, and 8.9% without a school degree (Ulrike Türk, Statistisches Landesamt Thüringen, Personal Communication, March 3, 2006). Although the percentage of students who pursue an *Abitur* has not changed much over the last five years it used to be much lower during GDR times.

Ellinor was also conscious about age restrictions and age perceptions in Germany, but did not experience any discrimination although she was already 25

years old. She had first tried to get an apprenticeship in a civil service sector that leads to a tenure track position, but could not enter a program because of her obesity. She then lost the required amount of weight, but failed the test that was a requirement for the desired apprenticeship. For the following two years she did an apprenticeship as a retail sales person at a car dealership. In her current position she received lots of positive feedback, was the best student in her class and had an offer to stay with the company, but she decided to attend the University of Cooperative Education to get a higher degree in her field and finally become a self employed tax advisor (Assistant Tax Accountant Individual Interview, June 14, 2005):

Ellinor (25): Well, originally, assistant tax accountant was a profession for those who graduated from the extended elementary school. That has shifted now and the bosses prefer somebody with *Abitur*. First of all, I guess because of more education and second because the people are 18 or older. Then there is more sense of responsibility for the occupation and also the attitude towards learning. That crystallizes more and more and so mainly students with *Abitur* are taken. I am 25 now and when I had the job interview I had no problems. It didn't matter to my boss. He said: "Age doesn't play a role; a bit more life experience doesn't hurt."

The students in this study either made life plans while being an apprentice or thought that it is necessary to plan ahead. They hold on to traditional life course patterns based on a linear model of finishing schooling, working, settling down, securing a middle-class lifestyle, and building a family. Some of the students were aware about the risk that society imposes on them and might delay their life goals or be forced to accept changes that they could not anticipate. Those students who were not satisfied with their apprenticeship or did

not know exactly what or where they would like to work perceived more insecurity regarding their future life than those students who had a clear idea about their future. The financial burden that comes with the establishment of ones own family was a major constrain among the young adults because their expected salaries after finishing the apprenticeship are low and will be less than €1,000 after deductions per month.

Among the female students discrimination against women with or without children was a major concern. They would like to make an informed decision about when it is best to start having children, but perceived a younger as well as an older age for childbirth as a risk to stable employment. Generally, most of the women were in favor of having a child in their twenties while the average age for the first birth in society is now 29 years. Age was also addressed in regard to societal expectations as to when to finish an education and enter the labor market.

For students who pursue an apprenticeship the age range varies according to the primary school degree between 18 and 23. Students who are already older than that are aware about being divergent from the societal norm. All students included in their life planning the wish to establish a typical middle class lifestyle and for many that involved having a house, a car, and being able to go on vacations. Since many people in Germany live in apartments the desire for having a house can be considered as a high expectation. One student expressed the risk that comes with such a purchase since it is not common in the German

society to buy a house without having a stable job in the region or the security of finding a new job in ones occupation without the need to move.

Job stability is highly desired among the students but rarely promised by training companies. Therefore, many male apprentices already considered joining the Armed Forces, which offers job security, a good salary, and additional training. Two female students were originally interested in a military career as well, but could not enter training due to health issues.

Another important issue was the type of school degree that decides which kind of apprenticeship one can pursue and subsequently stratifies the society. Students either had the *Abitur* which enabled them to enter an apprenticeship like Assistant Tax Accountant, others knew that they would not be able to pass this school degree and expressed little interest in schooling. A few students planned to pursue their *Abitur* after the apprenticeship because they had realized their limited career options and wanted to pursue a higher education. The early tracking of students in school after fourth grade was criticized because it casts them to a particular profession at an early age.

The third planning theme was retirement. All students in the Assistant Tax Accountant group expressed that they wanted to retire as soon as possible. The age range varied from 55 to 65, but nobody wanted to work all his or her life. Even those who were imagining having their own company thought that they could plan their retirement independently and might be able to retire even earlier. Vincent was not in favor of a higher statutory retirement age (Assistant Tax Accountant, Focus Group, June 14, 2005):



Vincent (20): Well, until we are at that stage that we can retire - they say now at 67 or 70. Why should I retire at 70, then I can go straight into the grave. I mean that is a stressful job. If I imagine that, there is no way.

The expected retirement age reflects a general trend in society. Current political messages contrast this view because the government discusses an increase in the statutory retirement age. Many students already had a retirement plan and saved money regularly. A few students wanted to work as much as they could in order to accumulate enough money and retire as early as possible while others opposed this mentality and put more emphasis on time for family and friends.

*United States.* The life plan of American young adults was generally less structured and thought out in comparison with their German counterparts. Nevertheless, themes like founding a family, securing a steady income, and having a retirement plan were discussed as well. Again, age played a minor role in the discussion. Most of the students wanted to buy a house, which is more common in the United States. It is mostly financed with a monthly payment to the bank and often sold before it is paid off. Since this is general practice it is easier to sell a house again. Owning a house is clearly seen as an investment while in Germany it is more perceived as a luxury living style and thought to be the final home for most families.

First I will outline family plans among the U.S. students. Many young adults in this study had a family or were planning to have one in the near future. Two female students were single mothers. The young men in the Drafting as well as in the Heating and Air Conditioning focus group did not discuss the issue of

having a family, but in the other three focus groups the young women talked about it. Having children was consciously postponed by some students because earning money had first priority enabling them to be a provider for their children. Some young women were thinking about three children and planning to start in their mid twenties after having settled in a career (Keyboarding Class Individual Interview, January 27, 2006):

June (20): I want to have a family and want to work in something that I like. I don't want to worry about money, so that my kids can have a college education. I would maybe like to have three kids, two on my own and a foster child because I am a foster child.

Kevin and his wife were expecting a child that was not planned. He explained that it might be difficult, since both are still in the phase of building a career. Overall he is optimistic that they will be able to cope with the new situation (Drafting Individual Interview, November 10, 2005):

Kevin (24): My wife just started her first year of teaching first grade. She went to a four year college. We have one child due in April. It was a kind of shock to both of us. We didn't plan that. We are both in our careers, you know I will be starting my job, she is in hers. There is never really a time when you can say we are ready I guess. But, I am excited about it.

In one focus group having children became a major theme. All the girls consciously had decided not to take over this responsibility early in life. Their parents often had children early and many of their former friends had also started a family already. It was perceived as a barrier to their career. Finishing school and establishing one's own life independently had priority (Keyboarding Class Focus Group I, January 23, 2006):

Maria (21): Yes, my parents told me not to have kids so early because I want to be able to support myself. I first want to go to school. Right now, I also want to have some fun. I have a friend and all she has is a husband and kids. And I don't want that right now.

The percentage of single mothers among African Americans is higher than among any other race in the United States (Dickerson, 1995). Shenique pointed out that she did not want to get involved with somebody who would just be a "babies daddy" referring to men who leave women with children. The others in the group agreed (Keyboarding Class Focus Group I, January 23, 2006):

Shenique (19): And the men, they don't take care of the kid, they just ran around. I don't want to have a babies daddy.

Maria described that most Mexican women around her get married and have children early. Among this ethnic group it is also common to have more children than in other groups (Saenz, 2006). Maria's parents supported her finishing school and being independent. They had married early and her mother never finished school. Maria therefore emphasized the importance of education for her future life and self-fulfillment and underlined that she wanted to be able to be self supportive (Keyboarding Class Focus Group I, January 23, 2006):

Maria (21): Often women have one kid and then they don't stop there. They get another one and another one. I don't want that. I want to enjoy my life. If you get kids, you have to be 100% there for your kids. When you get married, you should be there 100% too. You have to be ready to dedicate yourself to husband and kids. You cannot say, I need some time off and do other things. That's why you have to enjoy yourself first so that you are ready for it. Of course sometimes you might want to go away with your husband, sometimes.

The women in this study indicated that they broke out of current trends because they did not want to become a cliché and end up being uneducated and dependent on a spouse, parents, or social welfare. Having children early was considered as a risk in regard to their future careers. German and U.S. perceptions seem to be similar in this regard although the U.S. young women have to have the strengths to resist common patterns while in Germany there is a general trend of postponing motherhood in society that applies to people with many different career pathways.

The second planning theme was career planning. A major life plan for at least half of the students that I interviewed in the United States was to open up their own business and be financially independent. This freedom is understood as the ability to decide over one's own salary, days to take off, work hours, work place, and to secure retirement. The reality of the financial burden that comes with the establishment of one's own business was rarely discussed because the students did not know much about it.

Jeniffer was planning to have her own business and had already drawn a map as to when she wants to employ more people, by what time her business should be self sustaining and when she wants to retire. She could imagine selling her business if it runs well. Further she intended to invest money in properties as another retirement plan (Drafting Focus Group, November 10, 2005):

Jeniffer (30): After I am done I plan to have my own business, that's what I am doing right now from home, it's technically my own business, so I have to make that bigger. You know, instead of it being just part-time and a little bit right now, I end up with more clients and more to take care off.... My future plans are when I finish my associate degree I want my home

business to become enough work that it is full-time work. And at least in five years there should be potentially enough work that I can hire one or two employees. And at that point that is as far as I have really gotten with that kind of goal.... If you are willing to do a whole of a lot of work then ya, you can make a whole of a lot of money, but if you are willing to put in 80 hours a week. Well I am not willing to put in 80 hours a week, so I want an employee or two or something, eventually.... Who is willing to put in 40 hours? I am sorry; I am not an overtime person. I am just not.

Jeniffer wanted to be independent from an employer and preferred to work from home in order to combine family and work. The amounts of hours that need to be invested in one's own business seemed to be rather unrealistic, but the issue was not further discussed in the group. Other students in her focus group also planned to become self employed one day. They were convinced that success can only be achieved if one owns his or her own business since otherwise the salary would not be enough. Their bosses or people they knew otherwise functioned as role models (Drafting Focus Group, November 10, 2005):

Kevin (24): Having your own business is the way to make it. That is pretty much it. If you work for a man you never gonna make it. You gotta be the man.

Michel (26): That's my thing. I tell people that I go to school now and get a degree and then get a company and owe it. I mean I don't mind working differently now, but I see myself in the future at least buying a company. That's one thing that I want to do. If you work for somebody you loose money.

Philip (20): My mom has this friend of her. Way back when my dad and my mom and this friend were working for the same company and they were computer engineers. And he decided you know he was a really good person in what he did, and he decided to become a wood worker. And he went from being this company guy traveling all over and sell computers and now he is a self employed wood worker and

he makes good money. He has designed half the things in our house. And people who come over ask who did this and we refer them to him. And he is making good money. Plus he gets good power tools.

Lawrence also wanted to be self employed one day, but first plans to accumulate several degrees and skills in order to be equipped for becoming an entrepreneur (Keyboarding Class Focus Group I, January 23, 2006):

Lawrence (19): I want to work on myself and need these skills. Business education helps me to manage my own business. I might get another degree, possibly. Maybe I want to get a masters degree.

Philip, a student who did not want to think very far ahead, was living with his parents and did not have a job besides school. In comparison with his fellow students he was still free from many fiscal responsibilities the others had already to bear. Administering his money was still a major task to learn, and he was not ready to live on his own (Drafting Individual Interview, November 19, 2005):

Philip (20): I mean at some point I would like to be financially independent, but I don't think I am ready for that yet. I can barely keep track of money as it is. I don't know how to save and anything like that. But I mean I think until I really got a hang how to handle money and pay bills and stuff like that. As I was in high school I took a class where you know they teach you how to pay bills and write checks. They teach you like how to deal with money you know stuff like that and I really I wrote it all down, but I kind of forgot about that, but I think you really need to get a handle on that before you trust yourself to handle huge amounts of money. I have a check book and I get a bank statement every month. So, my parents help me with that. I am slowly relearning how to balance check books and stuff like that.

Apart from this one example many of the U.S. American students were more independent and in a different transition stage than their German counterparts. Nevertheless, their views on a life plan seemed to be overly

optimistic and less realistic in regard to working hours, retirement age, and future earnings. Self employment was either the ultimate goal or an alternative plan for at least half of the students I interviewed individually. Many students expressed the desire to become financially independent from an employer.

Making more money was the main motivation for students to enter an apprenticeship. In opposition to the German students it seemed to be easier for their American counterparts to find low-skilled employment and generate an income that would enable them to live independently. Nevertheless, this option does usually either secure a stable life style nor a sufficient paycheck. With a minimum wage of \$5.15 per hour (Georgia Department of Labor, 2006) and the risk of getting fired any day which happens often and causes unemployment spells until one finds another job, it is almost impossible to pay for health insurance or to save money at that income level. It is also difficult to support a family.

Therefore, there is a need to acquire another credential in order to achieve higher salaries. In many jobs people get paid for their degrees and not just for the type of work they are doing. It is generally understood that investing in an education pays off once someone starts working. Rohland (2003) pointed out that students with a college degree had the greatest wage gains in the 90s although that differed between degrees.

Wage differences between jobs are much bigger than in Germany. A salary increase can therefore be high depending on the degree. The students believed that graduating from a technical college can be more lucrative than

obtaining a bachelor degree. This idea was supported by the teachers who had multiple contacts to the industry and told students about possible future incomes. In the Drafting program, for example, the teacher had told the students that former graduates were hired for a yearly income of \$52,000. Despite high income expectations the students were aware of their limitations (Drafting Individual Interview, November 10, 2005):

Kevin (24): There is a difference between just getting a degree out of college and getting a professional certificate. Financially, I will on a long-term not be able to make as much money as an architect, but we start out on the same level. That's the biggest thing for me to make more money.

Lawrence explained how he was driven by the idea of making a lot of money in his life, and therefore, wanted to become a lawyer until he realized that his performance in school would not be sufficient for admission to college and that he does not really like schooling. Nevertheless, he was fascinated by the idea because the income of a lawyer is so much higher than what he could earn with many other degrees, and it seemed to him that lawyers are free to charge whatever they want. Two other students also emphasized that this profession was their first idea (Keyboarding Class Focus Group I, January 23, 2006):

Lawrence (19): As I was in school I always wanted to be a lawyer because a lawyer was always needed among the people I knew. And if they told me, \$1,000 or \$2,000 for a visit, so, there is always money. Sometimes, people just need a lawyer for advice and they get paid by the hour. Right now, by this time it's very loose.

Alex did not believe in the idea of schooling leading to a higher salary because he knew people who became financially successful without having another degree (Heating and Air Conditioning Focus Group, November 8, 2005):



Alex (27): I think many people can make it without a college education, my mom and dad. It can be done. I can make good money without a college education, and you need to pay for a car.

Alex was short-term oriented in his plans, thinking mainly about current costs that he has to cover such a car. He believed that the life path of his parents can still function as a role model for him. Other students agreed that a lot of money can be made without further education.

The third planning theme was retirement. Some students wanted to retire early in their lives. The anticipated retirement age varied between 35 and 45. I wondered about the early age that they had in mind as to what time they wanted to stop working, and found out, that retirement was more understood as a breaking point in life. The students plan to work hard in a job until a certain age and then be either self-employed or live partly from investments and have several other jobs or income opportunities next to it. The statutory retirement age that defines when one can receive Social Security is 66 in the United States. A few students realized that they might need to work longer than expected. For June young TV stars that became successful and rich in a short time were role models for her life plan (Keyboarding Class Focus Group I, January 23, 2006):

June (20): I want to be retired at least by the time I am 40. But, a lot of us would say we want to have our own business and that would increase the chances of retiring earlier. If I can retire before 40, if I become successful in what I do that would be great. I want to see lots of things. I want to be able to do whatever. I think there are no limitations. I don't see myself past 40 still working in the company where I am right now. Then I will have my own business. There are people who have their own business and become extremely successful in less than three years you know. They sometimes have only an education like us or even less.

Shenique is highly influenced by clamoring media shows and has a rather unrealistic view of reality. Her surroundings support the idea of entitlement to success based on the fact that she is still young. She does not believe in working hard to achieve something but instead dreams about “making quick money” (Keyboarding Class Focus Group I, January 23, 2006):

Shenique (19): I want to start very young, probably 35 if I can; if I can. I mean I don't want to work all of my life. I mean, both of my grandparents have their own business and they are both staying home. They have people working for them. That's what I want to have. I want to have my own business and stay at home and still make money. Not being at the job. That's how I want to be. I am trying to be how I deserve it. See that I get a degree and see how far we want to go from there. Make quick money, so that my family can be straight. And my boyfriend kind of motivates me now. He says, you are young, you can be rich. And you see the people on TV and see how young he is I think if they can make it, I can do it to. I will retire very young.

Shenique talked about wanting her family “to be straight” which refers to growing up in a social, emotional, and economically stable and secure environment without being involved in any crime. Some African American students in this study viewed education as a pathway out of a poor lifestyle. Often they lived among other African Americans who did not work, got involved in crime, and the social situation either in the students' family itself or in their environment was described as very difficult.

Maria was a Mexican American student and glad that she had the opportunity to live and work in the United States. Being the child of an immigrant family she explained that in her upbringing, schooling and independence were always emphasized. She outlined that she did not mind working long and hard,

but that amount of work and retirement depended on her marital status

(Keyboarding Class Focus Group I, January 23, 2006):

Maria (21): I work to whatever age I want. It depends on my situation in life. If I am single I would work. If I have a family, then I would work less and watch the kids. I also see myself single and traveling.

Another student pointed out that he could not imagine retiring because he liked working and always would like to be active. Other students in his focus group agreed and underscored that they did not know of any alternatives to a life of full-time work. A student in the Drafting group demanded that one should be realistic about retirement and that for most of the students it might be likely to work at last until reaching the official retirement age (Heating and Air Conditioning Focus Group, November 8, 2005):

Jason (19): If you work on commission you work as much as you can. For commission you work 200%. I cannot imagine retiring. I will always do something. If I would retire I would do something else.

Timothy (34): Americans are money driven. There is plenty of stuff people want to buy, SUVs [Sports Utility Vehicle], nice houses. Everybody wants to have it comfortable; so people work more to have more money.

Lucius (29): More money more problems.

Alex (27): I lived in Wyoming for a while. There was a lady who worked 120 hours or something and she had like two kids. She has worked and worked. She had a nice car and a nice house and everything, but she was running herself ragged. She looked awful. So it's a balance in your quality of living. You know you can have a whole of a lot of money working in a typical job, but your health might not be ready for this.

Jeremy (22): I think most people want to work as long as they can. And when they are in their fifties and seventies they figure they don't have enough money that they need and they work

the whole time to make it through to their seventies. Some work very hard in their twenties and thirties to have more money later. My parents worked hard until they were in their sixties because they didn't have the money to retire.

There was a shift in the discussion after one student pointed out that generating a higher income involves taking over more responsibility and involves more risk. His fellow students agreed that there should be other priorities in life apart from "making a lot of money." The students in this group were also more realistic about the possibilities of retiring early, pointing out that they might have to work much longer than they wished. It is not uncommon in U.S. society to see people at retirement age working while it is rather rare in Germany.

Optimism clearly dominated the debate about the life plan which is characteristic for young people in general. Nevertheless, U.S. American young adults were clearly more optimistic than their German counterparts and did not perceive any limitations that would prevent them from achieving their goals. Although the awareness about realistic chances in this regard differed widely the belief in ones own abilities and the opportunities the society seems to offer were very strong. Adrian (19, Heating and Air Conditioning Individual Interview, November 8, 2005) pointed out: "There are no limitations in life and I want to do a lot of things," and Kevin (24, Drafting Focus Group, November 10, 2005): "The sky is the limit."

### *Geographical Flexibility*

The results of the questionnaire indicate that there was more inclination to geographic flexibility among the East Germans than the U.S. Americans.

Fourteen East Germans and 36 U.S. students stated that they would definitely stay in their region referring to Thüringen in East Germany and the greater Atlanta area in the U.S. Seventeen East German students were willing to go to another country versus 11 in the United States and 14 versus four would apply for jobs all over the country. The data clearly express that the risk of becoming unemployed forces young adults in East Germany to be flexible, although moving a lot between jobs and places was originally not a typical pattern in Germany. Given the general high geographic mobility of the U.S. population, most students in this study were less inclined to move outside of their city or state which can be explained with Atlanta being a flourishing city in the U.S. that offers lots of job opportunities.

*East Germany.* I asked the students during the focus group discussion if they would consider leaving Thüringen in order to take on a job somewhere else. Many students expressed that they would go to other parts of Germany if there was a job for them. Three students planned to go abroad. Leaving the country was for others no option because of the language barrier. Generally, most students would have preferred to stay in their home region and only plan to leave because of the difficult employment situation. Two students would like to experience a different state or country for a while keeping the long-term goal in mind to finally return to their home region (Drafting Individual Interview, June 16, 2005):

Theresa (18): It doesn't matter to me. I would stay in the region, but I would also like go away for five years. I live in a very small hicksville. Of course, I would also go away. I would also go in another country. It doesn't matter to me. I would also go

for five years who knows where as long if I have a job there.... I would go anywhere, but not in the *Ruhrpott* region [refers to a former mining region in the state Nordrhein Westphalia], there I won't necessarily go.

Theresa was considering the Netherlands as her next destination because she had heard that drafters are in demand there. She considered herself to be a spontaneous person and was not predetermined on a life plan.

Another student described how everybody she knew had already left, mainly to West Germany, and therefore she was convinced to leave as well. Her decision was supported by a counselor at the Labor Exchange Office who left little hope to find employment in Thüringen (Office Clerk Individual Interview, June 10, 2005):

Ramona (22): What I realize around me is that they all go away, to the West or abroad. I will do it as well.... The women at the Labor Exchange Office also said: "Don't wait to get any addresses here from Thüringen, there is nothing in it." And others view it the same way and go away.

Bernd had similar plans. He pointed out that self marketing is very important today. East Germans are generally skeptical towards overly positive self representation and consider it to be unreal and dishonest. High self confidence paired with a winning presentation is considered to be typical West German behavior and suspiciously questioned. Bernd expressed resignation about the current situation which in his opinion causes dishonesty among people and creates an aggressive atmosphere. Going away to the West is equaled among some East Germans with subjugating yourself to the capitalistic world which involves the self transformation into a shallow personality, someone that is committed to dishonesty in order to achieve monetary goals. His remarks also

symbolize the widely disseminated opinion that German craftsmen are very well qualified and therefore welcomed all over the world. His assumption is based on current media reports about German workers, many of them are from East Germany, who are employed in various European countries (Heating, Gas, and Sanitary Focus Group, June 16, 2005):

Bernd (19): I would go everywhere outside of Germany. Now it is already so that everybody goes away. In former times everybody said no, I don't sell myself, but now they do. If you are good, you can go everywhere. That's the good thing that the German is everywhere welcomed as a craftsman.

Monika could imagine moving to another place somewhere in Germany although she would miss her family. She resigned to the fact that there might not be a job available for her in Thüringen and admitted that moving to the West might be the only way to find employment (Assistant Tax Accountant Individual Interview, June 14, 2005):

Monika (23): I could imagine going farther away. Although I am kind of attached to my family, but if the developments don't change until I graduate.... The most important thing is to find a well paying job. That is the most important thing for me.

For other students the language barrier denies the step of leaving the country. Some students in the Heating, Gas, and Sanitary program pointed out that they are not proficient in languages and do not see themselves acquiring the necessary skills. Others were more inclined to put effort into studying another language or imagined that the language skills would be learned once they are in another country (Drafting Focus Group, June 16, 2005):

Maik (18): I am not a language genius I would say and so I would have big problems abroad and therefore I would not even try it.

Although skeptical about the necessary costs to bridge the time abroad until the language skills were appropriate for the workplace, he carefully considered the pros and cons to such a career step (Heating, Gas, and Sanitary Focus Group, June 15, 2005):

Steffen (19): Well, I have to honestly say that my school English is not enough. Too much is missing in the sentences and besides the sentences. On vacation it works somehow, but if you really go somewhere I have to sit down on my ass and study for half a year. And I need money for this time to support myself. You must think about the costs here as well.

Tobias took a more optimistic standpoint and supposed that with a higher school degree and a lot of determination one can achieve almost everything. At the same time he acknowledged that not everybody has so much drive and those people also need to be accommodated in the labor market. Leaving the region was an option Tobias would only consider after he had tried to find different positions in *Thüringen*. He believed in strategic career planning according to the needs in the labor market, so that job search and finding employment would be easier (Heating, Gas, and Sanitary Individual Interview, June 17, 2005):

Tobias (18): For me that would be the last option to go abroad. I would first try everything here. I would also try to get a retraining or go to senior high school. It isn't the case that there are no jobs at all in Germany. It might be the case that someone with a secondary school degree with a normal apprenticeship encounters difficulties. But I think, if you really keep on trying and think about the labor market and find out what is in need and what not and you move towards this direction, I think you have a chance. But you have to fight it out. And many can't do that. They don't have the energy and the persistence to go through that.



Other students did not agree with the general tendency of giving up and relying on inevitability. They wanted to stay in the region by all means and were willing to carry on with another career if that would be the only way to stay. Rüdigers' girlfriend lived in Thüringen, had a stable job and did not want to move away. He admitted that as a single the situation would have been different for him and he might have been more flexible, but under the current circumstances the relationship had first priority (Drafter Individual Interview, June 16, 2005):

Rüdiger (22): I don't go away. Why should I go away? If I would be alone, the situation would be different. Then I would also go away for a job.

For Susanne the situation was similar. She also relied on her boyfriend in terms of her flexibility. He struggled to find stable employment because his occupation was not in demand in the region. Nevertheless, he did not want to leave (Office Clerk Individual Interview, June 10, 2005):

Susanne (21): We would like to stay here in Thüringen because my boyfriend also doesn't really want to leave. For me it wouldn't be a problem, but because we are together it becomes a bigger problem. He is trained as a joiner and the prospects are very bad.

Ingolf came originally from a smaller town in Thüringen, a deprived area with a high unemployment rate. He was gay and had a partner who lived close to Erfurt so that they could easily visit each other. Therefore he wanted to stay. It was also important for him to remain in Erfurt because he did not feel comfortable in his home town, perceived the West as discriminating against East Germans, and was glad to be in a town that is big and tolerant enough to feel

comfortable as a gay man (Assistant Tax Accountant Individual Interview, June 14, 2005):

Ingolf (25): Important for me is that I can stay here in Erfurt independently of my occupation. Even if I don't find something in this field I would be flexible and do something else before I go somewhere else. I don't want to go away from Thüringen. I am not flexible in this regard. I don't want to leave.

Sabine was even more persistent than the others in her decision to stay in the region. She did not accept the fact that there are rarely any jobs available for young people. Her strong connection to her parents, the fact that she felt committed to her family and to helping them with taking care of a big house, the garden and the property, and that her boyfriend was currently studying in a town nearby built the foundation for her strong commitment to stay under all circumstances (Office Clerk Individual Interview, June 10, 2005):

Sabine (22): I definitely want to stay here. It cannot be that all young people below 30 go away. I don't see why I should go before I haven't tried everything to get something here. Yes, I will stay here. I also have my boyfriend here. He studies and will also stay in Thüringen. My brother also wants to stay here. We have a big property and a very big house where there is lot's to do... I get something here and even if I have to do something completely different. I will continue to write applications to whatever companies. I fail to see that young people with a good training won't get a job. I get something here, even if I have to work in manufacturing somewhere. I don't care. I am not picky in the sense that I would say I wouldn't work there. I will definitely stay here in the region.

Most students were flexible in terms of their next destination and could imagine working in other parts of Germany, particularly the West as well as abroad. The approach to and the reasons for such a step differ. Some students

would go because there are more jobs available in some of the other states, salaries might be higher as well as the chances of finding stable employment. Some students had relatives or friends in West Germany and considered going there first in order to have a place to stay and social support. Leaving the country to work abroad was discussed as well. While three students were convinced that this is the only way out of the extensive challenge, some students did not want to leave Germany, and others feared that their language skills were not sufficient.

Most apprentices are interested in a continuous job career without interruptions. One student was an exception because she could imagine living and working somewhere else for a while just to experience it and might come back afterwards. The Netherlands, Norway, Switzerland, Austria, and Australia were mentioned as possible next destinations.

Four students underscored that they did not want to leave the region because of their significant others. The relationship had first priority and the students were willing to make career commitments to be close to their partners. Thüringen is one of the states where people usually prefer to remain which results in a high amount of commuters who come home every weekend. The mobility patterns in the East are “partly a legacy of the largely dismantled government institutions in the East and partly a consequence of the disruptions created by unification” (DiPrete, 2002, p. 279).

The Heating, Gas, and Sanitary group reflected on the realization of leaving the region under different circumstances. Many of their friends did either commute or had left the region. In Thüringen, 123,750 people commuted in 2003

between Thüringen and other states; 38,000 to 40,000 commuters enter the state to work there each year (Ministerium für Wirtschaft, Technologie und Arbeit, 2004, p. 61). Commuting separates many families over the week and also impacts the divorce rate (Heating, Gas, and Sanitary Focus Group, June 15, 2005):

Marc (19): Well, the problem is that you have to move all the furniture. It depends on the distance and if you have a family already. That's the biggest catch 22 – a family. Let's say I am 25 and have the offer to move to Munich. I got married one year before and have a three year old *skittle pin* [child], I wouldn't go there. Maybe you wanna be there for the wife and the child. She has work in Erfurt.

Steffen (19): Maybe she wouldn't find something there and you would maybe also not find childcare. That's the problem.

Lars (18): You have to commute.

Tobias (18): You need to pay for a second apartment.

Andreas (19): At the end you just work for the apartment and the child. On balance you don't have more than before. Then you might as well stay where you are.

Steffen (19): Well, you have to count again.

Andreas (19): But, you can't spend your life on the *Rechenbank* [meaning calculating everything].

Marc (19): In any case there should be more willingness.

Tobias (18): You could also go to the Armed Forces.

Steffen (19): But then you are in a barrack.

The young men negotiated risk under uncertainty and tried to find a solution that offered the safest pathway. Money, job security, separation from the family, life alone or in a barrack, long hours on the road, employment for wife and

husband, childcare, and the burden of moving to a new place played a role in their considerations. While some were convinced that the individual has to make commitments, others were skeptical if it would pay off in the end and hesitated in their speculations about leaving the region.

Occupational flexibility and geographical flexibility are strongly interconnected. Apart from two students no one else wanted to move somewhere for the purpose of experiencing another place. Employment was the main force for thinking about it. The risk consideration is based on the “win-win” approach meaning that the effort for moving has to result in stable employment, a higher salary, employment for both partners and the provision and affordability of childcare. According to Kalinski (2002) before unification there were approximately 25 per 1000 inhabitants who moved away in a year, after unification it was almost double.

*United States.* In the United States most students generally agreed that they would move somewhere else, but their willingness to stay in the region was much stronger. The reason for the difference seems clearly to be economic stability in the United States versus economic strains in Germany. Matthew moved to Georgia because many people in New York lost their jobs after September 11, 2001, but he expected to stay now and find employment in the region. He described a phase of moving back and forth between places (Drafting Individual Interview, November 10, 2005):

Matthew (27): I tried to move up here once and then I had to go back. I have been up here for about a year. I went back over for a job. I was supposed to take over somebody's company but it turned out that he hadn't really enough work to have

somebody taking over the company so I got kind of stuck over there. And I was having trouble finding work here back at that time. I wasn't totally recovered and couldn't really do the work in construction... I was battling for about 6 month and finally I decided to move here.

Other students expressed that they would like to experience another region and escape from the routine they are used to in their state. In the questionnaire students mentioned the following places as possible destinations: Florida, South Carolina, Phoenix, Washington, Philadelphia, Chicago, and New York. The female students generally expressed more willingness to leave for the purpose of a change in their life and out of curiosity (Keyboarding Focus Group, January 23, 2006):

June (20): I want to see things. I don't want to be in Georgia for the rest of my life. I want to get to know something else. I would like to be able to stay out on my own with or without family. I would like to go to another state and build my own foundation. Anybody that lived here long enough knows they want to get away from here and see other places.

A Mexican American student explained that she never felt comfortable in Georgia and wants to go to California as soon as possible. This state has the highest population of Mexican Americans and many industries cater particularly to this ethnic group. She also expected to have better opportunities for employment there (Keyboarding Class Focus Group II, February 8, 2006):

Belen (17): I want to go to California. I was born in California and I can't wait to get back there. I don't like it here. Here and California are just way different. I just want to get out of here and go back to California. Because me being Mexican American there are a lot more chances for me finding a good job, better life. If I do want to get a higher education, there is more help available, also if you want to open your own business. It's because there is more Mexicans over there. Or

I just go to Mexico because I have never been there. My parents came first. I am first generation Mexican American.

Most American students and also the immigrants I interviewed from countries such as Eritrea, Ethiopia, and San Salvador were willing to move anywhere in the United States if a good paying job would require it, but nobody expressed an urgent need to move somewhere else. With an unemployment rate of 4.7% (Georgia Department of Labor, 2006) the economic situation in Georgia and particularly in Atlanta is stable according to the teachers and students I spoke with. Nobody had to worry about finding employment in the region.

### *Occupational Flexibility*

*East Germany.* Insecure future prospects as they are outlined in the next chapter caused speculations about protective strategies among the young adults. Each focus group discussed alternative options of finding employment and the students pointed out what they were willing to commute. One student in the Drafting group said that she would not mind working in a low qualified, blue-collar job, but the payment has to be sufficient. Some of her fellow apprentices argued that working in a supermarket one might earn more money than regular workers and that under circumstances such as a tax reduction or tax treaty, a job in a supermarket could be lucrative (Drafting Focus Group, June 16, 2005):

Theresa (18): If I would get enough money I would also work in any supermarket and pack and unpack stuff there. If I would get good money for it, I would do a lot of different things. I don't know. If the money is alright, I know that I can work.

In the Office Clerk focus group occupational flexibility was seen as a risky approach because employers might perceive the applicant as erratic, disoriented, unstable, or even not reliable. One student underscored that people who were trained in an occupation that seemed to correspond with their skills and interests, but were retrained in a very different field might have little success in finding a job. Discontinuities in the life course caused by unemployment spells could be difficult to explain in an application. A resume or curriculum vitae in Germany needs to be written in a linear way and should not indicate floundering periods. Every gap between jobs or educational phases needs to be carefully explained. The student who described the situation of another applicant indicated how difficult it is to find a job if someone only has to offer a short (one year) retraining in the profession one is trying to enter (Office Clerk Focus Group, June 10, 2005):

Lioba (24): As a restaurant newly opened a lot of people applied. One of them has studied Graphics and Design for 10 years, then he got retrained as a cook and now he applies for positions as a cook. Who wants to take this guy, who writes in his curriculum vitae as a hobby drawing comics and nothing that has to do with cooking, just one year of training? Who would take him?

Sabine responded to Lioba with the remark that a grand proportion of the population does not stay in the profession they were already trained in and that she anticipates the majority of her cohort might also leave the profession (Office Clerk Focus Group, June 10, 2005):

Sabine (22): I don't believe that all of us stay in this office job. We will guaranteed go in another direction in these days. In these days you have to be flexible.



According to the information of the *Institut für Arbeitsmarkt- und Berufsforschung* (2001) approximately 47% of the people who went through vocational training change their profession in a lifetime. Therefore, the risk of switching careers and jobs over the life course is not perceived as a risk, while switching jobs more often than every two or three years after finishing a degree is not well looked upon in society.

Ellinor in the Assistant Tax Accountant group favored the opportunistic approach of having two occupational degrees and being a little older once she enters the labor market. She did not encounter any form of discrimination or disadvantage. Her philosophy was to stay open for career opportunities and to be courageous in trying out unusual career pathways. Nevertheless, her life course can still be considered linear, because she did not lose time due to waiting periods or unemployment. The positive feedback she received motivated her to acquire more education (Assistant Tax Accountant Individual Interview, June 14, 2005):

Ellinor (25): Everything I have done so far will help me. I had no disadvantages because I broke up something and had done another apprenticeship beforehand. The contrary is the case. Also regarding the old states I say, you also have to look next to the highway [meaning you have to broaden your mind]. It is also good to have experiences in different fields.

While some students would prefer to stay in their job and did not anticipate getting additional training, others would like to have a change some day and could imagine working in another field. They also pointed out that they know many people who changed careers and were therefore open to it, but cannot anticipate yet in which direction they might want to go.

*United States.* In the United States group various students pointed out that they could imagine going back to school and starting a new career. Being in the same job for a long time might become boring and some students saw themselves in different careers during their life course. The students knew that they can go back to school at any time in their life, if they have the resources to pay for it and there was little age discrimination perceived as to when someone has to start a career. Adrian pointed out (Heating and Air Conditioning Individual Interview, November 8, 2005):

Adrian (19): I don't want to do the same each and every day. This is just a start. After this I want to go back to school and do automotive. Later on down the road I want to go to university to get some kind of degree in science where I can become a pharmacist. I want to become a pharmacist. I want to do a lot of things, but you wanna start with a trade. You wanna work with your hands. There are things that go no right. And if you stay five years at a university and pay a lot of money, you wanna be sure about what you study.

Another student wanted to be an accountant first and later maybe attend college and become a psychologist. The American educational system allows for a lot of occupational flexibility because there is always a chance to upgrade a school degree or graduate with another one. The willingness among students to go back to school was high and will be outlined later in this chapter.

### *Future Prospects*

The results of the questionnaire support the notion of pessimism among East German students and high optimism on the side of the U.S. students. I asked: "How sure are you that you will find a job with your training program?"

Thirty-three students in the United States were very sure that they would find employment after their graduation, 21 were sure about that, seven indifferent, and only three students were not sure at all. Those three students were immigrant students who expressed in the focus group that they were rejected at many places because their language skills were not sufficient, although it might just be their pronunciation. They did not consider racism as a cause for their difficulties.

In Germany, the situation is completely the opposite. Only three students marked that they were very sure to find a job after their apprenticeship, six were sure about it and the majority was either indifferent or unsure. Those results are a clear indication of the high risk perception regarding career options prevalent among East German students, while their U.S. counterparts showed no indication of that.

The strong pessimism among German students also is reflected in the answer to my question in the questionnaire: Do you think that you will always find a job with your occupation? Only 15 students marked yes and 48 no, while in the United States the opposite was the case. Sixty students affirmed the statement, and only three denied it.

I further asked the students: "Do you think you can work in your occupation all your life?" Although this question sounds very similar compared with the former one, I wanted to see if students would consider aspects like unforeseen illnesses or a change in the economic situation and reflect it in their answers. However, the results differ only slightly from the former question. Only

18 German students anticipated that it might be possible, while in the United States 51 students seemed to be convinced that there would be always jobs available in this field. The difference can not just be explained with the different risk perception regarding employment options, but is also a result of the fewer possibilities Germans have to go back to school and receive additional training. It is not necessarily easy to convince employers that an older newly trained worker is a good investment.

*East Germany.* With the current unemployment rate of 19% in East Germany almost everybody has been confronted on a personal level with people who are affected. Most of the students were highly concerned about their professional futures. They were skeptical about their opportunities and chances of finding a job, particularly long-term appointments. The risk perception was additionally fed by everyday news reports about the difficult situation in the labor market. Future options were an important issue in the Office Clerk focus group (Office Clerk Focus Group, June 10, 2005):

Susanne (21): At the Labor Exchange Office they also told me that they have the highest unemployment rate among office clerks because there is nothing available. No jobs are there. That's my biggest concern, that I won't find anything.

Sabine (22): I have an offer – to work illegally, but that is such a case. It's very risky. Well, I don't want to do that.

Sabine has been confronted with the alternative of working “under the table” or how it is expressed in Germany “doing black labor,” but the risk that is involved appears to be too high. After the issue was raised the students started an engaging discussion about their options of going into black labor. For some,

that seemed to be the best current option for securing one's livelihood (Office Clerk Focus Group, June 10, 2005):

Caroline (21): My boyfriend is also unemployed. He works illegally, because otherwise he would not get to real money. He is a carpenter, and when there are no other options, I would also do it that way.

Ramona (22): I was on the phone with a friend some time ago. He works away on a construction job near Frankfurt. Well, and opposite of the construction side, as he put it, people stand in line like in a knocking shop [brothel]. And then they stay there looking for work, today black [illegal work], like that. And then take it for a day, get the money in their hands and the next day they stand there again. They never could make money in a simpler way.

While Sabine hesitated to agree on illegal employment and still perceived a moral barrier, Caroline realized that there are not many other options for some people and admitted that she also would work under those circumstances. Most of the students would rather avoid this kind of commitment by all means. Illegal work was morally equalized with prostitution and had in the eyes of some girls a very low reputation. At the same time they recognized the ease of making money this way. Kathrin, who had a lot of unemployed friends, knew that people commit crimes like drug dealing or breaking into houses in order to generate income. She demarcated herself morally from them in pointing out that she did not agree with their activities and considered them to be just associates (Drafting Individual Interview, June 16, 2005):

Kathrin (18): Well, a big portion of the people I hang out with, they are not necessarily my friends, but people I know. They make their money in other ways. Here we come to the illegal stuff. I don't want to condone it. I don't think it is O.K. Therefore, they are not my friends, just people I know. But they don't have another choice and then they do that....

Many don't see another way out regarding the financials. I mean there are rarely parents who can come to the aid of their kids so that it would be sufficient at the end of the month.

Kathrin pointed out that she does not support any criminal activity, but understands the reasons for it and explained that those young adults do not lack financial resources and parental support. Her explanation is that they start to steal and to deal drugs in order to make ends meet.

In each focus group students talked about their possibilities of being employed by their current companies or other companies in the region. The majority knew already that they would not be taken over by their companies and needed to think about alternatives. Sabine was one of them. She insisted on staying in the region and would have taken any job available. At the Federal Labor Office the counselor explained to her that she would be listed as a market customer when she gets registered as being unemployed. That means that she theoretically has to accept every employment all over Germany that would be offered to her since it is automatically assumed that she is young, not bounded to anybody and therefore flexible (Office Clerk Individual Interview, June 10, 2005):

Sabine (22): The joke is, the guy from the Labor Exchange Office told me, I am listed as a market customer. That's on the top of the list at the Labor Exchange Office. Market customer means young and freshly finished the apprenticeship, still good to be placed. So that you principally after your apprenticeship would get a job straight away and not even become unemployed. And then he said: "The problem is most likely that you don't have work experience." That's the thing; they want young people that are just done with their apprenticeship. But then you don't get something because you don't have work experience and also don't get a chance to get some, if you don't get anything. That's the problem. They really look for people who are something like 25 so that

they can see they must have collected some work experience already.

Sabine referred to the contradictory situation that young adults are well qualified workers after finishing their apprenticeship, but that employers prefer people who had some work experience already. Therefore, the second trajectory which is the transition from apprenticeship to work is delayed and young adults might find themselves in several short term employments interrupted by unemployment spells. The importance of a first employment also was emphasized by Conny who had the option of staying in the company for another five months until the end of 2005, but did not know what would happen afterwards. She negotiated about accepting this offer or trying to find a job in another town where she preferred to live, risking that she might only find short term employment (Office Clerk Individual Interview, June 10, 2005):

Conny (21): My boss would take me over until December, 31st depending on how it goes with the restaurant. I am busy thinking if I should risk losing that or if I first build up my own existence for later. Or if I risk signing on a limited employment contract and afterwards I stand there again and have to look for something. And when someone is said to be job hunting, that doesn't look good. When people come to us and apply for jobs and it says job hunting, then worked again for a year, then job hunting again. That doesn't look good. It's especially the case among cooks. They are sometimes every quarter of a year somewhere else, very volatile, doesn't look good.

Conny also described the preconditions for a successful job application. It is generally advisable in Germany to apply for another job out of a current employment. To go into unemployment first and then apply for another position is supposed to be risky because employers might be suspicious as to what reasons

caused the unemployment. If somebody had only short term employment phases it might imply that the person was not wanted at those workplaces and therefore would not be a desired employee. The risk of downward mobility and long-term unemployment increases with the duration of short term employments interrupted by unemployment spells or additional trainings or retraining programs. Young adults are aware of that and fear the consequences.

The Heating, Gas, and Sanitary apprentices were for the most part very pessimistic about their occupational futures and expressed that it is their biggest fear at the moment to be unemployed once they come out of the program. In their opinion too many young adults are trained in their profession and only the very best ones have a chance to find a job. One student described how his employer made false promises and he felt disappointed and unprepared (Heating, Gas, and Sanitary Focus Group, June 15, 2005):

Marc (19): My last internship company had promised me that they would take me over. And now I asked them the last time I was there as an intern how it is with the takeover and they started to stammer and told me that it would not be possible. The situation is so shitty. Well there I was, I had totally trusted them and did not apply anywhere else.

Lars (18): We are too many. We have 25 people in our class. Then there is another class. And the training takes 3.5 years. Those are alone 100 pupils in Erfurt, who apply only here in Thüringen. That is going to be very difficult.

Steffen (19): Even bigger firms where you would think they take apprentices over. Forget it. I am in a big company. They haven't taken over any of their apprentices.

Marc (19): Look around at the boys in our class. There are many who want to get somewhere, who have plans; but for how many is there the possibility looking at their grades and options and so on? There are maybe five boys who have



good grades, but we are not the only five. And in other classes there are also some. And further training options are limited too.

The students in the Office Clerk class discussed marginalization and social exclusion as a consequence of long-term unemployment and concluded that people who have reached this social status might never be able to move upwards in society or at least that this is supposed to be very difficult. The participants are convinced that they will try to avoid the disgrace that comes with long-term unemployment by all means (Office Clerk Focus Group, June 10, 2005):

Ramona (22): Because you have finished school, your apprenticeship, and then you are so down below in the social order that you need to work extremely hard. You would need to work so hard in your life in order to make it up higher. You won't manage that because if you fall so deep, I would also say good bye.

Elizabeth (19): Before I end up getting social assistance I would go away. I don't want to end up getting social assistance because you never have earned something.

Both students viewed going away from their home regions as the least alternative to unemployment. West Germany was mentioned mostly as the next destination and for a few students it was another country. The issue of leaving was discussed in all focus groups. Among the office clerks a few students seemed to be in favor of leaving East Germany and argued that the West (referring to West Germany) offers higher salaries, better living conditions, and more stable employment than the East.

Ramona (22, Office Clerk) planned to follow her boyfriend to the West once she has finished her driving license. Getting this license is a big deal in

Germany because everybody has to take at least 23 driving lessons, 8 theoretical lessons, two exams and pay various fees. A license today costs approximately €1,600 (approximately \$1,920) and can be acquired only at 18 years. Her boyfriend had already a job in a major town in the north of Germany and she was hopeful to find a job there too.

Another student from the Office Clerk class also planned to follow her boyfriend. They wanted to go abroad, but nothing seemed to be finalized. Nevertheless, she was convinced that this is the only way to choose in these days – leaving the country and making ends meet somewhere else, possibly in Norway. Germans who have worked at least 12 months and paid unemployment insurance are eligible for three months of financial support from the Labor Exchange Office to look for employment in another country of the European Union. The prospect of being unemployed in Germany after finishing the apprenticeship was also not an acceptable option for Lioba (Office Clerk Focus Group, June 10, 2005):

Lioba (24): To go abroad would be the very last option. I also thought that way in former times. I thought I will try it first in Thüringen, so that I would be anchored here a bit more. But my boy friend said, well I would go there and there; do you want to come with me? Well, and I wouldn't say no. And this is now the foundation for going abroad, because the precondition should be there. I would go if he keeps his offer. Well, nothing is sure yet, but he said, here you won't find anything. And I have to admit that he is right. How I found out now at the Labor Exchange Office where I asked the guy, how does it look? I will be unemployed in two months. And he said: "Well you will get 60% of your current salary if that regulation will be put in place...." But even in our third year we don't get much. That will be enough for the rent and energy, if so. Then you are immediately at the low social ground. Then you can try whatever you want. The

difficulty is to find something, especially if you slipped so low. And you don't have the possibility to drive here and there, or to move somewhere because there is no money. The capacity is not there. It's just not possible. I don't have any savings.

Students in the Office Clerk program receive approximately €400 per month. This is hardly enough to live on. The idea to make a living is based on the assumption that apprentices would start working after they are done with the apprenticeship and their salary would increase over the years. The students know of friends who graduated from a training program or an institution of higher education and are unemployed. Knowing this encouraged the young adults in this study to think about possible alternatives and to become risk takers in order to avoid unemployment and social exclusion.

The Assistant Tax Accountant students also discussed possible alternatives to unemployment and expressed their willingness to work in low-skilled jobs or in jobs that are not related to their degree as long as they can avoid being jobless. All students demonstrated the willingness to be flexible and were aware that flexibility is the major requirement in these days for being successful (Assistant Tax Accountant Focus Group, June 14, 2005):

Vincent (20): I would work at Lagu and place groceries on the shelves. At home I would become insane.

Florian (23): At Lagu you might make more money as during your apprenticeship and maybe even as the regular employees.

Vincent (20): Well, if you become unemployed, then you should try everything that you can in order to find another job as soon as possible. As nice as it is to just be at home for a while, oh I don't fancy work today. I just need a quiet time. If you continue to stay at home you will rot.

Monika (23): Just the idea to be unemployed. To say, I am unemployed now. Even if I know that there will be something afterwards. It's a strange feeling. For me it is so, that I start again in October and will be unemployed for three month.

The idea of becoming unemployed was frightening for the students; it was so frightening that they felt already guilty being at home for the time between finishing their apprenticeship and starting their next training or job. The focus group nodded in approval to Monika's remarks. Therefore, some of these young adults, as a result of missing alternatives, were willing to take on any job in order to be employed. Unemployment imposes the risk of exclusion and marginalization and therefore young adults try to avoid it if they can.

*United States.* The situation for the students in the United States was different. Nobody expressed serious concern about unemployment, but instead they were very optimistic about their future employment options. The students in the Drafting group described how their teacher was helping them to find employment while still being trained, but also afterwards (Drafting Individual Interviews, November 10, 2005):

Michael (26): Our teacher likes to take care of his top students. That's what I like about it. He will stay behind you. Having been in the real world and having been an architect he has a lot of contacts and people contact him for workers that help and everything. This is a plus for us.

Matthew (27): But they get you a job here. They don't have any unemployed graduate student that has already graduated. They said there is not one student that came through and studied with him who is unemployed. They are all working in drafting. It's a really good opportunity.

The students knew that they have to be good in school in order to get support from their teacher, but pointed out that the less encouraged students

usually drop out of the program along the way. They believed that those who graduate will find a job in the drafting field. In the accounting program students also were explaining how the teacher helped to establish contacts between students and the industry. They outlined that there are many different fields and industries where they can work, such as banking or the insurance industry. For those students who might encounter serious employment difficulties, the school offered retraining for free. The situation in the Heating and Air Conditioning program was similar. Students believed that there are a lot of jobs available and they would definitely find something in the field. Availability is evaluated by the amount of announcements in newspapers and on Internet links.

Kevin was convinced that he would either find employment with his new degree or a position in a related area. He argued that business opportunities are growing in town and lots of property developments are under way (Drafting Individual Interview, November 10, 2005):

Kevin (24): I am not worried, I am just ready to get out and start working. There is always gonna be the need to design. And the surveying field, you know the land surveying that's what I have done in high school. There is always gonna be the spy over land and there is always gonna be a big piece of land and making it into a small piece you know. So, I don't have the worry that it is going to be obsolete. There is a lot; in my region it is growing. There is gonna be more work in my area down the road in the future. And that's where I want to stay.

In the Heating and Air Conditioning group students were not concerned about job opportunities, but rather convinced that their skills would always be in demand. Leaving the region to find a job was not an issue for them at all. Some of the students also expressed that they did not see a need for further training

once they have graduated with the degree (Heating and Air Conditioning Focus Group, November 8, 2005):

Timothy (34): You can always find a job in that kind of field where you need the stuff we learn here. Even if they don't have air conditioning like today anymore there will always be something electronic that we could do.

The results of the interviews clearly indicate that there is a strong optimism about future employment opportunities and life chances. The students expressed no concerns about their future at all.

### *Going Back to School*

In the questionnaire I asked the students: "Would you like to go in another program after this one?" The results showed that 20 German students pointed out that they were not planning to go back to school once they are done with their apprenticeship, but 14 wanted to do another training straight after their program, 12 in three to five years, and 11 sometime in their life. While students have the possibilities in their 20ies to pursue another apprenticeship, later they can only attend retraining workshops.

In the United States 23 students were planning to start another program directly afterwards, 13 in three to five years, and twelve sometime in life. Ten U.S. students pointed out that they were not interested in going back to school. The data generally support the notion that many students in both countries had realized the importance of further schooling. Nevertheless, more German young adults were still holding on to the idea that one professional training should be

enough for a lifetime, while their U.S. counterparts were convinced that some kind of further education might be necessary.

Another question was: Do you think it will not be possible to go back to school later in life? The question seemed to cause some confusion and, therefore, I will only point out some of the comments. In Germany students mostly referred to earlier mentioned arguments of being flexible in the labor market, and building a foundation for the future: "You are never done with learning and you always have to stay flexible," and "No occupation is secure." In the United States students pointed out: "If you have the money it is never too late," and "Because you are never too old to learn."

Those students in both countries who marked "no" as an answer outlined that there might not be enough money and time available for it. The Germans further referred to age, for example: "Too old, I am not a bit keen on that," and also pointed out that further training is often facilitated by companies and another school visit would therefore not be necessary.

*East Germany.* Asked about their willingness to acquire another degree the majority of the students in Germany responded that they could imagine obtaining further training and were aware about the need for it in order to secure employment. Some students also viewed it as a necessary step in their life to avoid being trapped in a routine. There were students who expressed that studying is not their favorite activity and that they are glad to finish one apprenticeship. A perceived lack of ability or energy kept them away from the

idea of starting another program and going back to school (Office Clerk Focus Group, June 10, 2005):

Susanne (21): I mean, if you work, what is left in life? When I come from work so around quarter past five, not much happens for the rest of the day, I eat a little, watch a little TV and that's it. If you also have a family to support and a study or something with evening classes that is total... you are completely exhausted.

Aging was viewed as a process where one loses the ability to invest the same energy into learning than young adults do. Another student pointed towards his laziness (Heating, Gas, and Sanitary Focus Group, June 15, 2005):

Tobias (18): And in old age you are not so able to learn anymore.

Andreas (19): No, I don't think so. I am too lazy. I don't do anything for school.

Claudia did not have any desire to attend another apprenticeship program, but understood it as relying on inevitability (*Fügung in eine Notwendigkeit*). In her opinion many people do not have the possibility to make choices, but rather need to follow current trends as to what kind of training is in need and required in the labor market which includes the adjustment of skills to current requirements. Other students in her class felt that they already were too old to start another training.

Rüdiger wanted to take over responsibilities and also contribute his share to the household that he was running with his girl friend. Theresa was considering the financial support (*Bafög*) she might be able to get for studying at an institution of higher education. Employment and time constraints were considered (Drafting Focus Group, June 16, 2005):



Claudia (18): If there is no other choice you have to take what you can get.

Rüdiger (22): I don't know I am 22 now and I don't know if it makes sense to start another apprenticeship. Sometime soon I want to earn money. I live together with my girlfriend. That all does cost money.

Theresa (18): I want to do a technician training. That only takes two years and I would get something like *Bafög*. And, I also don't know there if I would get a job afterwards, but it takes only two years, that I would possibly have given away.

I also asked the students if they would be willing to pay for additional training. The response was that there might not be enough money available to pay for further education, but if there would be no chances for employment otherwise, then the students would even pay for another training. Going back to school was for most of the students not part of their life plan (Office Clerk Individual Interview, June 10, 2005):

Conny (21): O.K. when I earn money at the end and when I can do it during my regular work hours. When it would go parallel I don't see a problem. But extra, if it is not really necessary, when my job is not in danger, if I don't do it, then no.

Lars also considered money as a barrier to further training. Nevertheless, he could imagine going back to school at 30, but he viewed it as the last step to avoid unemployment. The idea of staying at home was not at all attractive for him. He could imagine going back to school as a pensioner and study something that interests him. In Germany it is not very common to see pensioners at a university, but the evening schools which are considered the main facility for the provision of general education to the people (*Volksbildung*) have a large number of senior citizens enrolled in their classes. The schools are subsidized by the

government and the prices for the classes are so low that everybody can afford them (Heating, Gas, and Sanitary Individual Interview, June 15, 2005):

Lars (18): Paying is always such a thing. If you have no choice but to get additional training because otherwise you would be unemployed, and then you really don't have the money for it, but, principally, I would say with 30. If this is the only possibility I have in order to avoid crouching at home and rot away, except if I would be a pensioner, then I would know what I have to do.

Nevertheless, there are some students who were open to further training and studies. I will outline some counterstories. Marc, for example, was generally open for more schooling and convinced that there are a variety of courses he would enjoy and that would enable him to be flexible in terms of job choices. The training should be started at an age where he would still be able to switch careers and use his new skills (Heating, Gas, and Sanitary Individual Interview, June 17, 2005):

Marc (19): Versatility in life, not just doing the same thing but to check out everything a little bit. I could imagine doing something different later if there is enough money and if it is not too late like with 40 or 50. Otherwise it is too late. Then you are almost under the earth.

Ilka combined the idea of another training program with the thought of leaving the region or moving to another country in order to gain employment. Flexibility again is viewed as being hindered by a relationship or family. Going away was not a desired choice for her but a last resort to avoid unemployment (Office Clerk Individual Interview, June 10, 2005):

Ilka (21): Later, if it brings me forward and there is no alternative, I would do it. I would not just try to stay here in Thüringen, but also try to get something nationwide or if necessary abroad.

I think as long as you don't have a family or someone to whom you are bounded, you should be flexible.

Kristin (22) calculated further training already in her life plan because she thought that upgrading skills was a necessity in these days in order to maintain employment (Assistant Tax Accountant Individual Interview, June 14, 2005):

“You have to further qualify yourself. As a normal office clerk you won't have many chances here.”

Ingolf was open to going back to school later in life because he had a positive example in his family. The idea of switching the career to something very different was not absurd to him although it is generally not well looked upon in society. The reason is that salaries increase with years of work experience. If a person starts a completely different career he or she loses this benefit and might even need to accept a lower starting salary than in the first profession. The risk of not even finding employment in the new field is high as well, because many employers prefer to employ young people with a few years of work experience in their field. The affirmation and support from friends and family that his aunt received reduced his concerns towards such a step (Assistant Tax Accountant Individual Interview, June 14, 2005):

Ingolf (25): I would also do another apprenticeship, something completely different because I also have some other interests, but only one. You don't get younger. You want to make money at some point and build up something. That is only possible if you generate a regular income. But, in general I could image it. I know people who have done that, even twice. My aunt did it twice. In former times everything was very craft oriented. She had learned during GDR [German Democratic Republic] times to be a lathe operator and after the *Wende* [referring to the political change in East Germany] she didn't find anything. She couldn't gain a

foothold anywhere as a woman. They only took men. She did an apprenticeship as a bank clerk and was laid off at 40. And then she did something different again and became a nurse. I found that very extreme from the bank to the hospital. And she got a lot of support from others. Everyone found it great. She managed everything very well. Therefore, it wouldn't put me off to do something completely different.

Tobias went in his considerations a step further and included aspects of quality of life which involved satisfaction and fulfillment at the workplace that reflect back on family life. He argued that dissatisfaction with the work one is doing would negatively affect the wellbeing of a family while taking a new direction in the life course and being optimistic about the future might also rejuvenate one's private life (Heating, Gas, and Sanitary Individual Interview, June 17, 2005):

Tobias (18): I can very well imagine doing something different because at some point if you have been in a field for 15 to 20 years it is not exciting anymore. I think you should never lose the pall on something because otherwise it also won't work out in your marriage anymore because they depend on each other. I mean regarding your well being. You won't be attempted to anything anymore when you come home. And when you are in your mid thirties or forties and you do a retraining or another program of study, why not, that would be a change. That brings new spirit to your life.

Sabine took a similar optimistic stance on that and could imagine getting another qualification. She also thought that there will be a return on investment and that she would be more satisfied with a higher education. For her lifelong learning was a life enriching approach (Office Clerk Individual Interview, June 10, 2005):

Sabine (22): If I would know what I want to do and that it would be usable and help me, yes. If there are better chances afterwards in the labor market or I could make a career.

Then you would surely make more money too. You are in any case better qualified. I would say you can never know enough. It doesn't hurt, so, why not. Nothing speaks against it.

Nobody questioned the step of obtaining a job after the apprenticeship instead of going back to school. The reason is that becoming a qualified worker is completely acceptable in Germany and is well perceived. Therefore, even some of the students who acquired an *Abitur* pursued an apprenticeship before going to the university for further studies.

Students' views on their future perspective were driven by the awareness about poor job opportunities in Thüringen and the possible need to reorient themselves in terms of their profession or move away. Those who wanted to stay in the region were willing to change careers and jobs as often as necessary and showed a high degree of occupational flexibility. Students who wanted to stay in their professional field had a higher sense of geographical mobility.

Risk considerations and risk negotiations were bounded to expectations of employability. If students faced unemployment among their family members and had little hope to succeed at the highly competitive labor market, they were inclined to negotiate about pursuing alternative pathways that might involve taking on illegal labor. Very few students perceived their future as a safe pathway. Others indicated that they did not have the capability of getting further training and were to a certain extent in a waiting position. They did not make strategic plans about possible career alternatives and showed little willingness to become active planners of their future.

Further training was more attractive for the students in the Assistant Tax Accountant program who mostly had their *Abitur* and, therefore, the foundation for a lot of different programs in higher education. In their professional field a clear career pathway into self employment or a higher paying job was institutionalized so that the planning for a future involved less risk considerations. For the students in the other programs, pathways were less known or not at all structured. The young adults needed to be more creative and active in designing their life plan which caused a higher sensibility for risk.

*United States.* In the United States students can go back to school any time as long as they have the financial resources for it. The students therefore could well imagine pursuing another degree sometime in their life, but were not specific about as to when and at what institution (Drafting Focus Group, November 10, 2005):

Jeniffer (30): But, potentially I could go back to school for a bachelor degree. The idea is never out of my mind. I mean it could take me a while to go back for that sort of thing. It might take me another 5 years until I actually go back for a degree. But, it is not something that is never to late... Some companies require a higher degree for a higher position with better money. It doesn't really matter how long you have been with them.

Jermaine (21): I gotta get the money to go back to school. And I get better trained.

Lifelong learning is a generally accepted concept among the U.S. American students. For them further education seemed necessary in order to upgrade one's skills, maintain competitiveness, and secure employability in the future. They also realized that they might have to change their career over the life

course depending on developments in the economy (Heating and Air Conditioning Focus Group, November 8, 2005):

Adrian (19): You wanna know as much as you can about yourself. You wanna be ahead of everybody. You wanna keep up with what is new in your field. You wanna stay on top of the game and beat everybody else.

Alex (27): For every individual it is not possible to think anymore that they are gonna continue in one field for their whole life. Because things change and even if we don't need air conditioning anymore then we need to be flexible and possibly change into something else. The economy can also put pressure on you and you have to find something else.

Angelo (20) I am always open to expanding my horizon. I don't want to limit myself to just one thing.

For the students in the Keyboarding class everything was more uncertain. They were in different degree programs, but none of them was sure if that would be the profession for life. Everything from pursuing another degree to going back to school if it would be absolutely necessary to secure employability was discussed in the group (Keyboarding Class Focus Group I, January 23, 2006):

Lawrence (19): I always thought about it a couple of years from now. I was thinking about getting a degree in business administration. Or, I would also go back to school for a trade.

Nathalie (21): I could imagine going back to school at 40 or 50 to finally making up with my business or a refresher course so that I can integrate the skills.

Maria (21): If I have to go back, I just go back. And, also if I have the opportunity to go, I would go. You don't know, right now, I am thinking about going back to school, but it depends how my life goes. I have no plan for that.

U.S. students were generally open to returning to school and flexible in terms of further educational programs. Students who were

interested in self-employment pointed out that additional business skills needed to be acquired. The decision for further schooling mainly depended on the individual willingness to invest more time and money.

### *The Next Career Step*

*East Germany.* I also asked the students if they already knew where they would be next. The majority of the German students could not stay in their companies after finishing the apprenticeship. Two students received an offer to remain, but were planning to move to other towns to attend programs at the University of Cooperative Education. A few students had the offer to stay for a couple of months or up to one year. Others did not want to stay in their field and planned to either begin another apprenticeship or a program of study. Theresa pointed out that she was pessimistic about the role of schooling and grades in finding employment, while Mike referred to the fact that employment positions sometimes get funded by the Labor Exchange Office in order to provide people with a chance to reenter the labor market (Drafting Focus Group, June 16, 2005):

Theresa (18): My parents always told me, get your *Realschulabschluss* [secondary school degree] as good as possible, finish your apprenticeship with the best grades possible. But, I think that has nothing to say anymore. I had somebody in my class at secondary school, who never got a school degree, but he got an apprenticeship and makes more money there than me. What do grades tell in these days? Nothing.

Maik (18): It depends if they get federal support for the job.

In the Assistant Tax Accountant group students were more optimistic than in the other groups. The reason might be that they have possibilities of upgrading



their degree and earning more money and also better labor market opportunities. Many students in the East were influenced by their parents and were still holding on to familiar institutional structures such as 10 years of general schooling which equals the *Realschule*. They were particularly interested in a smooth transition from school to apprenticeship to work without any waiting or orientation periods in between. There was little advice or preparations for the insecurities young adults have to deal with. Students whose parents struggled to achieve employment stability did not have positive role models at home and expressed a higher risk perception regarding their future career.

*United States.* The U.S. students did not know where they would work after their training program, but were all convinced to find a job after finishing their degrees. Their assumption relied on the promises of the school teachers, advertisements in newspaper and online as well as their personal experiences in the labor market. Although the situation for many of them could have been more risky because of the unknown future outcome, the low unemployment rate and a highly flexible labor market provide a security bolster that the students in East Germany missed.

### *Agency*

In terms of taking agency over one's life U.S. and East German young adults appear to be very similar. Determination, persistence, self motivation, and perseverance were qualities both had emphasized. Nevertheless playful competence as defined by Clausen (1991) appeared to be different. U.S.

students seemed to be less inclined to make strategic plans regarding their career and lived and planned more on a short term perspective. Most of the students believed that they needed to get ahead by their own means. The questionnaire results support this notion. I asked: "Do you feel that you can direct your life by yourself?" Forty-two German and 40 U.S. students agreed to it, 21 Germans and 22 U.S. students disagreed with the question. Although the East German students appeared to be very pessimistic in the focus group discussions and individual interviews, many reacted rather optimistic to this question in the questionnaire. The reason might be that a first initial response might always have a strong tendency to positive answers while a deeper consideration about its meaning leads to a more realistic or pessimistic evaluation of the situation.

German students supported their denial in pointing to macro-level societal conditions, such as the situation in the labor market. One student wrote: "You don't participate in a dream concert today and therefore you have to take what you can get, otherwise you take the risk to be unemployed. Although, if you really want something, everything is possible." Another wrote: "Everybody tells you how you have to live your life. But there are always restrictions." Students mainly were concerned about the situation in the labor market, further outlining that an income needs to be generated and therefore choice and fulfillment of personal interest is not their first priority. Another student wrote: "You have to take what you can get, which might be far away from what you really want."

The question occurred to have more of a religious meaning for some U.S. American students. They answered: "There is a Higher Being greater than I, and

he is Lord God Almighty,” or “You need the help of God to direct you in the right path.” To be honest, I first thought that students had made a joke because this answer would cause irritation among Germans, but found out during the focus groups and individual interviews, that spirituality is a serious concern for some of the young adults. Others wrote about institutional support they needed from family, friends or others.

*East Germany.* The transition from school to work is a process that requires agency and the conscious planning of a life course. There is a strong relationship between agency, young adult’s imaginations and their ability to realize opportunities and control their destiny (Thomson et al. 2002). Vondracek, Reitzle, and Silbereisen (1999) suggested the success of dealing with career transitions depends upon personality factors, such as values, attitudes, coping styles, and degrees of planning as well as family background—all variables that create inter-individual differences in the timing and patterning of adulthood transitions.

Creating one’s own life plan without or with little guidance from parents, teachers or public institutions involves personal strength. I wondered how these young adults viewed themselves in terms of their ability to cope with their situation. I asked them about coping strategies, personal qualities that helped them to get ahead, and what it takes to be successful in life.

Sabine was a good example for a student that was very persistent and had a strong will. I will outline her individual story here because it differs from the other students. She definitely wanted to stay in Thüringen and had to go through

a couple of struggles during the process of finding the right employer. She switched companies twice during her apprenticeship, and had arguments with the Labor Exchange Office because they would give her false advice, denied financial support although she was eligible for it, and treated her in a demeaning way.

The first company she worked for did not offer the kind of practical training that was required for her occupation, at the second company she was treated inappropriately including physical and verbal abuse. She managed to get out of those unsupportive situations and was successful in finding a third employer for her apprenticeship as well as finally receiving the needed advice from the Labor Exchange Office and the financial support. In opposition to most of her fellow students her self evaluation was based on her own experiences in managing to find successful coping strategies. She pointed out (Office Clerk Individual Interview, June 10, 2005):

Sabine (22): I think you have to be able to stand your ground. Diligence is important. Investing time. You should not give up, don't lose courage. You have to be able to prevail against things. I am stubborn not in a bad sense, but if I want something, then I want it. Therefore, I think I will find something here. I am not a Blinse [pancake, meaning she is not stupid].

Other students in her class pointed out personal qualities that might help finding a job or keeping a workplace (Office Clerk Individual Interview, June 10, 2005):

Conny (21, Office Clerk Individual Interview, June 10, 2005): I am spontaneous. I know where I can say what and how to deal with different people.

Ilka (21): I think I am very diligent. I hear that very often. If I have to make big decisions, that will impact my life, then I ask my parents and sometimes my friends. Overall I am very independent and make decisions according to what I think is right. Sometimes they are wrong, but that's part of it. I think, I know very well, what I would like to have, and what I want. And this is for me within reach like I imagine it.

Susanne (21): I am reliable and independent. I also think that discipline from school should be mentioned. As our school class got together for an anniversary we told our class teacher that we think it is very good that we were forced... and that he did a good job and so. Discipline and control in school have helped me. I can rely on myself that I do a good job and so.

What encouraged Kristin is that she thought she was not just successful for herself, but also became a role model for others showing them how to focus on a career instead of being resigned and fearful. Her classmate Ingolf realized that he felt better after he decided everything by himself and realized his plans before informing others. His risk strategy protected him from the feelings of disappointment his family or boyfriend might have projected if a plan was not realizable (Assistant Tax Accountant Individual Interview, June 14, 2005):

Kristin (22): You need to get ahead. You need to get through. It will be alright. You need to be a model in general. The feeling you managed something.

Ingolf (25): I try to decide everything by myself because I know how others react. I always try to have something in my hands such as the contract for the apprenticeship. And then I told my parents about it. That's the way I do it generally. I try to be on the safe side and then I inform others. But beforehand I try to organize everything by myself. If it doesn't work out I don't have to inform anybody about negative news. I find that easier.

In the Heating, Gas, and Sanitary group aspects like personal appearance, perseverance, and solidarity were emphasized (Heating, Gas, and Sanitary Focus Group, June 15, 2005):

Steffen (19): If you are really ambitious and if you fight to the last, then you will get there.

Lars (19): Many people tell me that I am very helpful... I like to do something for others and then even less for myself. I like that to do something for others.

Tobias (18): Very important is for me to have a well-groomed appearance and that you are articulate. People perceive that very well. Therefore, you also should always further educate yourself. I think that is important. Otherwise, never give up; never lose hope even if it looks very bad. That's what I have decided to do.

Some students also honestly admitted that they are not energetic enough, sometimes lazy, or do not work hard enough for school. All students were critical about themselves and often hesitated to talk about their strengths first.

The students viewed full-time work after leaving school through the lens of job accomplishment, promotional opportunities, interesting work, and the like as basic or foundational to their career goals. The belief that performance and initiative lead to success was very common although dependent on social background and the general economic situation in the family. The majority was convinced that to be successful one had to perform well and show initiative.

*United States.* Among the students in the United States qualities such as persistence, stubbornness, getting along with people, determination, open-mindedness, perseverance, and curiosity were emphasized. Those qualities are important since the students are mostly left alone with their career decisions.

Some of them were surrounded by people who never pursued another degree after finishing high school, and they did not have a role model that would motivate them. Since there is no institutional career placement agency that channels people into further training programs, students have to make a conscious decision themselves about finishing school. There seemed to be alternatives that appeared more attractive to some of their peers, such as working to make an income that can be used to consume or just enjoying life with a variety of leisure activities. Matthew is an example of a student who has learned through trial and error what is important at the workplace. He stated (Drafting Individual Interview, November 10, 2005):

Matthew (27): I had to learn like I said basically with the music go and get up and practice even if I am tired. So, I have a good work ethic. Most of the time, unless you really bother me in the wrong way, I get along with everybody. If I can help you I help you. I never cause problems in the workplace. It's gonna be interesting. I never worked in an office before. So, that's something. I read a lot of books on how to deal with people and this and that because that wasn't always one of my strong points. I have done a lot of studying on that. I get along with people and people would come to ask me questions if they needed it and I would go to people and ask them questions if I needed. So, I get along with people, had to do that for the music thing. You gotta keep a good work ethic and then you do well.

Work ethic was understood as being on time at the workplace, showing that one wants to work, and being diplomatic in communicating with other workers. A couple of students emphasized work ethic and I assume that the above mentioned characteristics are not necessarily common sense everywhere in the United States. Therefore, if a young adult has those qualities it might increase his or her chances of finding gainful employment.

Michael emphasized that he likes to make jokes, and gets along with people. He described himself as a reliable and hard worker, having been at the workplace for up to 70 hours a week. He thought that future employers will value this quality. His desire to provide a better life for his son and his family encouraged him to work hard and also to pursue this degree (Drafting Individual Interview, November 10, 2005):

Michael (26) I am silly not to the point where I would be class clown, but to the point where people say, he is funny, just little stuff. You know, I am a hard worker. People see me as a guy who wants to get the job done. If they need something to be done they come to me. I am a people's person. Determination. Whenever I am here, when I work with AutoCAD I loose time, especially if I work on something that I like. I work and then suddenly it is 2 o'clock. I wanna succeed. I want my kids I want them to look at me, if I bring them to school one day, this is my dad, when I bring them to school, he does this. That's what I guess motivates me. I want to be happy and successful.

Self-motivation was the quality that most students referred to, which might be due to the fact that there is not a lot of external motivation available. Adrian described that it is possible to own a lot of things in the United States if the parents provide it for their children, but in the long-term it would be necessary to be able to take care of oneself. He also emphasized that one should be able to pay for the things one acquires (Heating and Air Conditioning Individual Interview, November 8, 2005):

Adrian (19) For me it was self-motivation. That's just the key right there. I know somebody their parents they live in a nice house, nice car, got a good job. They went to school, they want to go to parties; they want to have babies and stuff. I mean it all bounds down to yourself and what you want to do. If you do something because somebody else wants you to do it, it doesn't work. Every penny for school comes out of



my own pocket. What I did is what I want. If somebody else says it and its not what you want to do, then the time is wasted.... I keep positive people by my side. Otherwise I wouldn't be able to achieve anything. You have to push yourself and go out and get it. Nobody gonna get you nothing.... College doesn't make you a rich or poor person. I mean the things that you do in life decide whether you will be able to survive or not. If you want to go out and spent a couple of hundreds of dollars on clothes and CD's and stuff and you only make 500 dollars a month I mean it might not be a very wise decision. I mean you gotta look at the situation for what it is. You gotta know how to play the cards. You gotta take one thing at a time.

The United States is highly diverse in its population and people are sensitized about different cultures and races. Diversity is emphasized in many firm philosophies and can be a selection criterion for human resources. Although racism was not a major topic for the young adults in this study we talked about it and the narratives will be outlined later in this chapter. Racism is still prevalent in society and can be encountered during interactions in public spaces, but discrimination laws have contributed to more justice in hiring practices and to the creation of multicultural environments. Angelo emphasized that he was able to work with people of different ethnic backgrounds (races) and that he has a positive charisma. In how far this statement would help him towards employment can not be forecasted, but the ability is important for any customer interaction (Heating and Air Conditioning Individual Interview, November 8, 2005):

Angelo (20): I am a people person. I don't mind working with people of different races. I am in a good mood all the time. I have many bad days, but nobody would notice it. I am a good listener. I am a good person to get along with. I can bring a good atmosphere to a place. I help motivate other people. Somebody you have never seen is standing in your area, I would talk to them. I am an interactor. I am smart, I got good ideas. I am creative. That's about it.

Another student pointed out that race, class, or gender should not be aspects that hold somebody away from achieving his or her goals. He emphasized that when a person has a clear goal he or she will also be able to achieve it by working hard and being determined. Other peoples' opinions should be ignored to a certain extent and not prevent somebody from following a chosen pathway (Drafting Focus Group, November 10, 2005):

Philipp (20): I think reality simply seems to fail to reach my standards. I can't fly. But, seriously, if you really want something and if you are willing to work on it you can achieve it. I mean, there is always talking like this person can't get a job because of race, ethnicity, or gender, whatever. But, if you want it bad enough and you work hard enough at it you can push those people aside. You can do whatever you want to. Except fly, you know.

Alex emphasized that self development and self motivation are very important for success. In his opinion others can not be changed actively, but by working on himself he could become a role model and encourage others to change too. The student viewed himself as an agent of change and outlined how the knowledge about technical relations helped him to understand peoples' personal problems as well (Heating and Air Conditioning Individual Interview, November 8, 2005):

Alex (27): So, as far as the work that I do is concerned you have to focus on the individual level and as you make sure that yourself is set you can stay stable. Look at things with a clear thought process, look at how things work and how they need to change. And you can assist other people in the same manner and those people change other people.

The idea of "everybody can get ahead by lifting oneself up by the bootstraps" was prevalent among the students. Some underscored that nobody

can hold them back from finishing their education. This attitude might be based on the fact that many students drop out of college and never acquire a degree. Especially the older students in the groups were determined to finish their degrees soon (Drafting Focus Group, November 10, 2005):

Matthew (27) It's usually your own fault if you don't achieve what you want. Usually it is. Sometimes it's not. But, most of the time it's your own fault.

Jeniffer (30): And the ones who don't achieve what they want, they didn't really want it. And it was someone else's fault. Usually they pick themselves up and they try it again and they usually end up succeeding. Somewhere I read something about people who were successful weren't really successful, they just failed more than anybody else. And they just tried it more than anybody else. They just tried it that many more times. I mean you could probably achieve anything here in America when you set your mind towards it.

The United States is viewed as a place where everybody can achieve anything. It just depends on the individual. Another student listed a couple of other qualities that he thought were important in the workplace. His view reflects his open mindedness towards life. He had no clear opinion about his career and took a step-by-step approach (Drafting Individual Interview, November 10, 2005):

Philip (20): Perseverance and determination are really good qualities. It's good to be open minded. Curiosity is another good thing. Everyone says curiosity killed the cat and the unofficial phrase is, but satisfaction brought him back. So, you know there is times when you should just not be curious and not put your nose in certain business. I think to a certain degree you should be following orders, but there is always a point where, you know, blindly following orders is a bad thing. There should also be a point where you say, this isn't right, I shouldn't be doing this. Willingness to learn. I think most everybody has something to teach you, even if they are not aware of it, everybody has different experiences, everybody has got their personal lessons that they have learned and you may not have learned.

In one of the Keyboarding focus group young women, who lived in a rural area emphasized the role of religion in their life and pointed out (Keyboarding Class Focus Group II, February 8, 2006):

Stephanie (21): No, I know God will show me where I need to be.

Heather (18): He will show us where we should be in life. If it happens that I end up in police force, that's good. If I end up behind a desk its O.K. to. Or if I get hit by a horse or what and I have to not be able to do the police thing, that's fine. God will show us where we need to be.

Stephanie (21): You can't do it on your own, really. God has his ways to show us where we need to be. We have to look to him for help.

The results indicate that despite a high level of self motivation and sense of agency, a large amount of students were rather skeptical about the idea that success mainly depends on oneself. While German students consider macro-level societal conditions such as the labor market and regulations to be responsible for limited opportunities, U.S. young adults were more inclined to rely on institutions such as family, friends, and religion. Other guidance was specified in personal interviews as teachers, counselors, and superiors at the workplace. Nevertheless, apart from the young women who believed in a higher intelligence that would guide their life, U.S. students seemed to belief more in themselves as the only agent of their life course than their German counterparts. The East Germans were under pressure to live according to expected lines in society and perceived more limitations that prevented them from being independent in life planning.

### *Solidarity*

*East Germany.* The East German students in this study were sensitive about solidarity which had been emphasized in the former GDR as the foundation of living and working together in a socialist country. Students and workers were taught to help each other. Solidarity, as with other socialist countries, was a major topic in public communication. The students were conscious about the issue of helping and caring for others, but saw themselves confronted with a society that is based on competition. Some of the students emphasized how they help friends and former classmates to succeed. They felt fortunate having found an apprenticeship and that they or their family members had not been affected by unemployment (Office Clerk Individual Interview, June 10, 2005):

Ilka (21): (after talking about her unemployed friends) Yes, we sometimes look together for jobs. Most of them can't afford a car and then I say, come I take you there. I think I am there for my people and they take it very positively. I was lucky. I know how it is. I had also written quite some applications and got mainly rejections. I can imagine how it is.

Lars (18): Two of my friends were at home for two years because they didn't have an apprenticeship. For one of them I got a job in our company and that works well.

Steffen was critical about capitalism. He thought that this societal system creates egoism and an addiction to material objects, that people only care about themselves and are less committed to helping others (Heating, Gas, and Sanitary Focus Group, June 15, 2005):

Steffen (19): Well, that's the thing with the capitalists. They watch out that they can lean their ass against the wall [meaning to secure themselves]. The main thing is that everything is O.K.

for them. That doesn't happen that they would think differently. I have my stuff and that's it. Why should I be interested in others? They would not look left and right on the side and say, come I help you so that you also get there, that doesn't happen.

Another student pointed out that her workplace treats apprentices fairly and equally and that, fortunately, she did not have to deal with jealousy among colleagues. Teachers had spoken in the class about the consequences of labor market competition on classroom behavior among students who are in non-company based vocational programs. The chances of finding gainful employment are smaller for those apprentices because they cannot obtain primary work experience in a company (Office Clerk Individual Interview, June 10, 2005):

Ilka (21): In our class it's O.K., but I know it from friends so in my surrounding. It's really extreme there. One doesn't grudge something to the other. At my work place there are also two *Azubis* [apprentices]. And it is actually timed that we change every half year. And after half a year they recognize what everybody likes and can do and ask us if we want to stay there. I think that's O.K. Therefore, we didn't see each other as competitors. But, I also heard how it goes in other sectors. The teachers also tell us about it. For example, one teacher told as about the non-company based apprenticeship. There is one part of the class on one side of the classroom close to the windows and the other part on the other side. If one student solves an exercise, the others laugh at him and vice versa. That goes back and forward and the teachers struggle to get order and teach them something because they are just busy with putting each other down. They are not busy learning something there. The reason I think is the competition in the labor market.

Kristin experienced avoidance, restrained help, and jealousy at the workplace since her colleagues had been informed about her next career step, which is getting a degree from the University of Cooperative Education that will better qualify her. She interpreted the behavior of her colleagues as resulting

from a fear of losing a valued co-worker, not being able to find an appropriate substitution for her, and of being displaced due to better qualified young workers that might be available in the near future. The scarcity of jobs seemed to create passive aggressive behavior at the workplace. While there are lots of workers available in the labor market who need to find employment, Kristin outlined that there is doubt about their qualifications which might make it very difficult to find a replacement for her (Assistant Tax Accountant Individual Interview, June 14, 2005):

Kristin (22): Since my colleagues know that I want to do the BA *[Berufsakademie]* program, there is some jealousy involved. Now, I realize that they won't inform me that much anymore. That was different at the beginning. Now, they always send me to the boss. Well, they also think their job is in danger. One of them also wants to get pregnant. They thought they could employ me and there would be somebody, but now I go to the BA.

Bernd was very critical about the optimism that some of his fellow apprentices expressed. His parents had both been long-term unemployed. He was involved in a network of 300 young adults who had organized themselves to fight against crime in town. Due to his connections and his voluntary work in this underground youth organization, he was in contact with people who were marginalized in society. His parents taught him their view about solidarity between workers in East Germany and had caused awareness about inequity and injustice, but also feelings of pessimism and disappointment. Nevertheless, he was an activist driven by idealistic social or socialist values, and took an active role in creating a just society (Heating, Gas, and Sanitary Individual Interview, June 15, 2005):

Bernd (19): My parents have experienced the time before the *Wende* and today's times. They did the comparison. It is true before the wall came down there was a *Mangelwirtschaft* [economy of scarcity]. But it was taken care of everybody. Everybody had his job and there were no fights like now in the wage negotiations. Today everybody takes the air to breathe away for himself. I don't agree with this other guy in my class who said that if you really work hard you can achieve anything. I think that is nonsense in our times. Normally, he would be right I have to admit that. But it doesn't work anymore. Its like swimming against the current and the two times you come up to get air this is like a drop in the bucket. You just drift away if you don't rescue yourself to the shore.

Evans, Behrens and Kaluza (2000) wrote that the fundamental transformation East Germany had to undergo led to changes in the structural foundations of inequality in the country. Inequalities in the East were based on different circumstances than they are now in unified Germany. Personal relationships that helped develop access to rare products were sustained. Scarcity created a high solidarity while the social system in the country provided everybody with employment, health insurance, and social security. Inequality in this sense was produced through human interdependence. Since the unification risk and uncertainty are objectively much greater than they had been in the more stable social situation before 1989. Roles and positions are changing and the potential for a high inequality in the distribution of risk increases dramatically.

According to Witte (2001) East German employees justified their performance as strongly collectivistic and emphasized utilitarianism and deontology. Socialistic goals, a strong sense of justice and equality, and ideas about direct participation in democracy are strongly internalized by East Germans. The societal changes have left many of them with a resigned and hopeless



disposition – a situation that created high risk awareness among the young adults in this study.

*United States.* Solidarity among people was not addressed by the U.S. students. Even friendships seemed to play a much smaller role, which will be outlined later. The comparison showed that East Germans still hold on to collectivistic values while U.S. Americans are highly individualistic.

### *Worries*

*East Germany.* I asked the students if they had any concerns or worries regarding their future, particularly their professional future. Those East German students who received strong support from their parents, and already knew where they would go next did not have anything to say. The majority of the students expressed several worries that were mostly related to financial constraints, pregnancy, and job security. Kristin worried about not being able to finish her apprenticeship because the company was struggling financially due to the overall difficult economic situation in Thüringen and East Germany. Denise pointed out that companies mostly lay off young people first because it is assumed that they will find another job more easily and are not necessary bound to the region (Accounting Individual Interview, June 14, 2005):

Kristin (22): That's because of the overall economic situation. The company has to save money. Everywhere they are saving, so that I can't finish my apprenticeship. I think about it a lot what I should do when that happens. Everyone seems to be affected, the small entrepreneur but also trade and industry and therefore also the assistant tax accountant.

Denise (22): Even if they take you over now, you are still the one who has not yet a family and when they need to lay off, then they will first release those who don't have a family and those who haven't been in the company for long, and we are those ones. We are the first who need to go. So, you have to establish yourself first. That you can stay in a company and everything is alright and the company is economically viable somehow.

*United States.* The U.S. American young adults reacted very differently to my question about concerns and worries. It was not an issue they seemed to be willing to discuss. Worries in relation to employment were not expressed. They rather made some speculations as to what might cause them to worry and outlined issues like war, terrorism, and the state of the economy. Terrorism seemed to be the major theme because once the issue was raised many students became involved in the discussion and made speculations as to what city or place in the United States might be attacked next. Nevertheless, two students pointed out that they considered their country to be the safest in the world at the moment, except New York. Another student pointed out that talking about risk seems not to be appropriate for a male (Heating and Air Conditioning Focus Group, November 8, 2005):

Timothy (34): Can you go away from the idea that something can happen. Something is gonna happen. Come on. [Everybody laughs.] It seems not really the right thing to do for a man to talk about worries, concerns, and security.

Another student emphasized that she rather lives in the present than being concerned about her future. Enjoying life to the fullest was the leading drive for Deborah. She also took a passive stance towards career planning and complained that service provider such as counselors were not actively

approaching her. She described how she had been in a difficult living situation with her former boyfriend and admitted that she made wrong choices in her life. During the focus group she was called outside by the security officers of the school and never returned to the discussion (Office Clerk Focus Group, January 23, 2006):

Deborah (23): You know most children are not concerned with their futures anyway. They think nothing can harm them. Teenagers think that nothing can touch them. I think it goes back to, what is it... sex and drugs, everything that you experience in high school. That's why we are not worried about the future. You are not worried about later, you are only worried about right now. [Others join in.] We are having fun now.

Many students emphasized that they do not want to look at negative aspects because it would demotivate them. The difficult living circumstances of some of the students contributed to their emphasis on the importance of motivation. Self motivation and the hope to achieve more stability and wealth in life kept many young adults on their track to pursue a technical degree. June had to leave the house of her adoptive parents and was in an unbearable living situation with a female friend. She pointed out (Keyboarding Class Focus Group I, January 23, 2006):

June (20): Well, I guess you should always look at the positive side instead of the negative things. Anything from now on can happen and can make it difficult to make it happen where you want to be, or delay that plan. But what you can do is put your best into what you want to achieve to get this picture. I try not to look at the negative in the situation. Like I said, we all realize that anything can happen to prevent you from where you want to be, but man if you look at it that way, you won't be as motivated. You would put less effort into something that you would like to become.

Lisa was the only student who referred to her occupational career and pointed out that she was a bit worried about finding a job, but even more so about her being able to handle the new life situation and the work conditions. She was aware that her first job might not be what she would like to do, but she first needed to get a foot in the door (Accounting Individual Interview, February 1, 2006):

Lisa (21): Yes, I do, I think when I get out of school will I be able to find a job. I think I will, but will I be able to handle it? And will it be something that I like. I also wonder if I will be able to handle the hours.

Worries and concerns among American students were highly individualized resulting in students refusing to talk about them in the focus groups. Unemployment did not play a role for most of the students except the immigrants. At the same time, some students pointed out that they used the strategy of avoidance referring to the short-term orientation in their planning that leaves little room for worries about the future.

### *Money Matters*

*East Germany.* Having enough money for their imagined lifestyle was a major issue in all focus groups in Germany. The devaluation of the Euro in comparison with the German Mark, as well as the small salary young adults receive during their apprenticeship and expected low salaries during their first employment were emphasized. Their major desire was to be independent from their parents and be able to sustain a lifestyle that would soon enable them to start a family (Office Clerk Individual Interview, June 10, 2005):

Susanne (21): I would do another apprenticeship. My parents would support me. They would also support me with the money, but it's relatively tied. I would prefer to make my own money and not to be dependent on anybody. I think if you study, then you are always a little dependent with the money.

The Euro was introduced in 2000 with an exchange rate of 1.95583 German Mark for one Euro. Although most markets claimed they would not increase their prices, the reality proved to be different.

Theresa (18, Drafting Individual Interview, June 16, 2005): Well, if I want to get ahead sometimes, family, with Euro 800 I won't get far.

Theresa (18, Drafting Individual Interview, June 16, 2005): Four hundred Euro I get while doing the apprenticeship. If I would have told somebody in former times, you get 800 German Mark while being trained, that was real money by that time, but with 400 Euro, you don't get far.

Lioba (24, Office Clerk Individual Interview, June 10, 2005): I also think the problem is that everything gets more expensive, but the salary doesn't keep up with it. Everywhere you need to pay more, gasoline, groceries, everything is getting more expensive, but you don't get more money.

Steffen was concerned with his inability to support a family according to his imaginations because it seemed too expensive to him (Heating, Gas, and Sanitary Focus Group, June 15, 2005):

Steffen (19): Well, to stay behind...the financials. That you have to say to your child, you can't get the ice cream now, it's too expensive and all that. Generally, to afford a child in this society you have to have a good standing. Everything is so expensive. In general, establishing a living - that all depends on money. To go out for dinner with your girlfriend, or to make a little trip somewhere, and fly somewhere; that all depends on money. If you want to enjoy your life, you need money.

Another problem that was analyzed in the Office Clerk focus group was the small elbowroom for negotiations about the salary. Competition of foreign workers, particularly from Eastern Europe raised awareness, but also resignation among the young adults (Office Clerk Focus Group, June 10, 2005):

Susanne (21) Today you can't negotiate anymore about your salary because there is always somebody who would work below that. You make an offer and there is always somebody who would work below that.

Students further pointed out that they felt themselves underpaid in the new states, which refers to the fact that East Germans today still earn 85% to 93% relative to their West German counterparts. Although some students could imagine studying, it was their desire to be independent from their parents, and they thought about the financial constraints concerning three to five years of additional schooling.

*United States.* Money was also a concern, but not to the same extent as in Germany. The young adults there discussed potential salaries in their future jobs, orienting themselves on the highest possible income. The opinion that one needs to work more if more money is needed was the prevalent opinion. It is possible to have three jobs at the same time because many companies work 24 hours a day, which allows for much more flexibility. There are no regulations in place in the United States that would forbid an individual to work up to 70 hours a week; and people take advantage of that. The value of the dollar was not discussed. The only concern brought up was paying for further schooling. Apart from tuition which often varies between institutions, students have to purchase books for

each class and be able to pay for their living expenses. Nevertheless, students believed that it would be an investment that would pay off in the long run.

### *Institutional Level*

One of the questions in the questionnaire referred to the person who had the biggest influence on the decision to pursue the technical program. Multiple answers were possible. The majority in both countries (28 students in Germany, and 31 in the United States) marked “others” and partly explained to me later that they had either found information on the internet or made the decision themselves. The individual’s mother and father had a higher influence in Germany than in the United States, while siblings were more influential in the United States. Friends played a slightly bigger role than parents in career decisions. Most influential were the career advisors, particularly in Germany, while teachers played almost no role in both countries.

### *Ways into the Apprenticeship/Training Program*

*East Germany.* In this section I will examine institutional influences on the individual career plans as well as describe perceptions of risk. One of my questions was: How did you get your apprenticeship? A lot of the East German students responded that personal connections were the most important reason. Without personal connections it was often very difficult to even find an apprenticeship. A few students were referred to their apprenticeships through the Labor Exchange Office. Some of those students believed that they had been

misguided or channeled into an apprenticeship that would not lead to employment because the training offered is either outdated or, particularly the case with the Drafting program, is not in demand anymore.

Andreas (19, Heating, Gas, and Sanitary Individual Interview, June 15, 2005) I got an internship and later my apprenticeship through connections.

Claudia (18, Drafting Individual Interview): Today, you only profit from contacts, that's what I think.

In the Office Clerk focus group apprentices discussed the struggle to find an apprenticeship, and argued that students are exploited because of the tied situation at the apprenticeship market. Potential employers would sometimes invite candidates to a probation period to test their work abilities. There is very limited time to participate in such test training periods for young adults since they have to find an apprenticeship before the next school year starts (Office Clerk Focus Group, June 10, 2005):

Conny (21): A friend of mine has written 200 applications and did not get an apprenticeship. Among most of them it is the case that they are invited to internships, then they work there for four weeks without getting paid. They use the labor and two weeks later you get a rejection that they won't take you because another applicant was better.

Susanne (21): Or because they know somebody.

Ilka (21): They pull a fast one on us. Some of the people I know have been lucky, but just because they have connections. They only wrote one application, went to the interview and got the apprenticeship, and the money is right too. They were lucky. Most of them went into trades. Fitness and sports tradesman, travel agent or something like that. And for most of them it looks like they will stay in the company. There was also a great amount of competitors.



Ellinor also had to be very persistent in submitting applications, but was finally successful. She talked about her determination and her expectations regarding a job placement that she needed in order to be eligible for attending a further qualifying program of study at the University of Cooperative Education (Assistant Tax Accountant Individual Interview, June 14, 2005):

Ellinor (25): I am very happy at the moment. I really fought very hard for it. I really wanted that. I moved heaven and earth for it and have sent out 125 applications. I wanted that. So, I was even happier as I got it. Just with grade 1 and 2 [A and B]. I had a 1.8 in my Abitur, a 2.0 in my apprenticeship as an automobile sales person, have only grades 1 and 2 here and have to write more than 120 applications. The first one I wrote in July 2004 and the last one in March 2005 and this one was successful. That has cost me a lot of time and nerves.

Tobias is an apprentice who was directed into his apprenticeship via the Labor Exchange Office. At first most of the apprentices were glad to be able to enter a program. It is expected of young adults to learn an occupation if they do not decide to attend an institution of higher education. Students who stay at home because they could not find an apprenticeship are viewed in society as being lazy or low achievers (Heating, Gas, and Sanitary Individual Interview, June 17, 2005):

Tobias (18): I got it over the Labor Exchange Office because I was registered there as seeking an apprenticeship. It wasn't my dream, but I took it to have some kind of a goal in my life so that I won't go down completely.

There were 35,000 applicants who did not find an apprenticeship in September 2003. More than 4,600 decided to go to school again or chose to work in low-skilled temporary jobs due to a lack of options. More than 32% of the

students in one cohort end up in non-company based training programs. There is a tendency for the best students often to choose to go to West Germany, and start an apprenticeship there. Some of the other good students follow. Low achieving students often stay behind, which might lead to a future lack of well educated workers in East Germany (Polke-Majewski, 2004).

*United States.* Getting access to a technical program was not a question of institutional restrictions or limitations and therefore in most cases not difficult for the students in the United States. The programs are modularized, and students who do not fulfill the entry requirements can take remedial courses first to upgrade their Math and English skills. A student can furthermore determine his or her individual pace, and take courses according to time available and ability. The school assists students in finding a job afterwards. Additionally, students can apply for financial aid which can cover schooling costs as well as associated costs of living. Eligibility depends on the socio-economic background of the student and school performance. Students often learned over the internet or a brochure about the school and then applied there. Since most of the time the job the student might pursue part or full time in addition to their studies is not related to their technical program, there is little concern about finding employment. Low-skilled jobs are usually recruited via local newspapers, the internet, or via walk-ins.

### *Satisfaction with the Apprenticeship/Technical Program*

I asked the students in my questionnaire: "Do you think that you are well prepared with your courses for professional life?" The results indicate that in both countries the majority felt well prepared, greatly contrasting the tendency in the German focus groups. Forty-three German students and 56 U.S. American students said "yes", 22 German and 7 U.S. students "no." Most of the German comments again refer to the involuntary nature of their respective programs.

The students who responded "no" also added, "Poor imparting of context. Partially they just tell us that everything gets worse," "I don't think that this occupation has a future because of computer technology developments," or "I should learn more in the company. I didn't learn enough there." In the United States students commented more on the need to learn more because they had not finished the program yet. One student could not continue to work for the Army and wrote that he needed to get used to civilian life again. One student was not interested in his program. The data shows that more U.S. students are satisfied with their technical program than East German students.

*East Germany.* Feelings of insecurity among the young adults in Germany were stronger among those who did not consciously choose their apprenticeship, as well as those who were skeptical about the learning outcomes of schooling and work in the company. These students were under the impression that their employers did not make sure that they familiarized themselves with all aspects of the profession and that what they learned in school was not connected to what they needed to know in the workplace. Approximately half of the apprentices in

the Heating, Gas, and Sanitary class had not had formal company-conducted training company by the time of the interview, and were trained in the Chamber of Crafts. Some of those students did not have the opportunity to attend workshops where necessary skills for the profession are taught because they cost additional money, and were not compulsory. Sometimes employers would also not allow their apprentices to participate in a workshop, due to demands in the office (work place) (Office Clerk Individual Interview, June 10, 2005):

Ilka (21): In our class, there are many who learn the occupation Office Clerk but what they do in the company has nothing to do with the occupation. Most of the ones in my class have never done a booking or written an admonition or a bill or something. And I don't understand how the Chamber of Industry and Commerce allows that. The occupational name office clerk is not appropriate. It should be called office communication or something like that.

Ilka expressed doubts about the quality of her education and the institutions who are supposed to ensure it. Ellinor was more skeptical about the benefits of her theoretical education for her practical work and suggested having more case-oriented learning in the classroom (Assistant Tax Accountant Individual Interview, June 14, 2005):

Ellinor (25): Well, theory and praxis are sometimes so divided, that is not nice anymore. The training is relatively superficial. You gain a wide general knowledge, everything a little bit. At the *Berufsakademie* we will probably learn more about specific cases. That is missing here. If you don't have that in the praxis, then you are missing that.

The majority of the students in the focus groups expressed that they were not satisfied with their apprenticeship, and were concerned with the value of their training. The critique that there is not a strong relationship between classroom

learning and practical application at the workplace needs to be reviewed. The role of the teacher as the mediator of technical knowledge had been questioned.

*United States.* In the United States, students spoke very positively about both their school, and their program, and seemed to be satisfied. These students' highly valued the business knowledge of the teachers, as well as their connection to the industry. Students further pointed out that they had consciously chosen to pursue their technical program, which increased the level of satisfaction.

### *Parental Support*

*East Germany.* The decision to enroll in a particular apprenticeship program was generally made by the student. Nevertheless, parental advice and parental expectations impact career decisions. If parents signal that they expect their children to be financially independent as soon as possible, young adults tend to decide against further studies, and attend an apprenticeship. Since parents in East Germany grew up under completely different circumstances, they sometimes struggle to understand the situation of their children in unified Germany. In the former GDR young people were often channeled into a particular program of study or an apprenticeship according to the economic need of the country. The individuals never had to worry about finding employment afterwards because employment was also regimented.

Until the re-unification, the sequential patterns of steps into adulthood were constant: "Ten years of schooling at the Polytechnikum—vocational training (alternatively, extending to a high school degree and studying)—order a car—

starting a job—forming a family (at age 23 on average)” (Bertram, 1994, p. 280). Students options to move around between career paths were limited, and the transition process into work was clearly formulated, so that a person could become fully employed and financially independent by age 18 or 19. Several students expressed that they received little understanding and help from their parents. Therefore, they had to rely on themselves or other sources of advice such as teachers, counselors and friends.

Kathrin (18, Drafting Individual Interview, June 16, 2005): They can't give advice. For them everything was different. They have done their apprenticeship during GDR times. They had to do that. They can't evaluate it. They always say: I don't understand it.

Rüdiger (22, Drafting Individual Interview, June 16, 2005): But they also don't know how it is when I am done with my apprenticeship and don't find anything and wasted my time.

Susanne (21, Office Clerk Individual Interview, June 10, 2005): There is little influence. They all knew that I like to write and that I therefore like Office Clerk, but none of them had a clear idea, also not regarding the situation in the labor market.

Conny and Ilka came from a parental home where the parents preferred their children to start an apprenticeship in order to have them financially independent sooner than if their children attended the university. In the former GDR, students received non-refundable scholarships already during their last two years of school and also during the time they studied. Therefore, it was common for young adults to be financially independent regardless of career path, although they often chose to live with their parents until they had found their own apartment which had been difficult in East Germany for singles or non-married

couples. Nevertheless, the rent for an apartment was so low that staying with parents was no financial burden. If young adults today choose to attend university they are either eligible for governmental support (*Bafög*) or their parents are expected to bear the costs of living on behalf of their children. Parents are required by law to pay for the first degree after primary schooling.

The two office clerk students did cohabit early with a partner, but kept a loose relationship to their parental home. A caring relationship was either not existent anymore, or had been interrupted and could be reestablished once the young adults had built families of their own (Office Clerk Individual Interview, June 10, 2005):

Conny (21): My parents wanted me to drop out of senior high school and make my own money, but now during the apprenticeship not because I don't live at home anymore. I moved out. It's my life.

Ilka (21): My parents also had this opinion, no better start working.

Ilka described further that her parents argued that highly qualified people are not necessarily in demand, but with an apprenticeship as an office clerk there will always be work somewhere. Other students viewed their parents as a role model for a change in careers, and outlined that the occupation they were now trained for was not likely to be pursued their entire working life (Heating, Gas, and Sanitary Individual Interview, June 15, 2005):

Bernd (19): You need a certificate in order to get ahead later. Therefore, I first finish that one and then I can still learn something else later. But, first I will work a little. After the apprenticeship everybody does something different anyway. That was in fact the case with my parents. There, nobody did what he had originally learned.

Most students told me that they get either emotional support from their parents, advice, or even practical help. Some parents had contacts to potential employers, or to other business representatives who knew potential employers. They actively helped their children find an apprenticeship. Parental advice was a topic of interest among the Heating, Gas, and Sanitary apprentices, while in the other focus groups it was not discussed in great detail.

Sabine (22, Office Clerk Individual Interview, June 10, 2005): My parents are also trying to help; they look around and ask people. Also, all my relatives, they have some good connections now, like in shops, car dealerships, insurance agencies, and whatever. Some are tenured and work for the government. They are lucky. You keep the hope to get something somewhere via those connections. That's the point.

Tobias (18, Heating, Gas, and Sanitary Individual Interview, June 17, 2005): I think if you got both of your parents and they have an interest in you and not just ignore you, this is also a great support and important for your future way.

Marc (19, Heating, Gas, and Sanitary Individual Interview, June 17, 2005): My parents definitely stay behind me. They are happy that I found an apprenticeship.

Steffen (19, Heating, Gas, and Sanitary Individual Interview, June 15, 2005): Parents can help you with their life experiences because, if you do it differently then it won't work out. Because, if you have fallen on your mug then you say to yourself, think about it, they have told you so, than I should go this way.

I asked the students: "What kind of advice do you get from your parents and what do you think about it?" If the students talked about advice from their parents, they agreed with it and said that they tried to follow them. Parents emphasized open mindedness towards opportunities, thinking about alternatives, and being flexible in terms of future occupations and jobs.



Tobias (19, Heating, Gas, and Sanitary Individual Interview, June 17, 2005): My dad always says: Keep your eyes open and be open to opportunities. If you run around with your eyes shut, you won't see what is really going on in the world.

Marc (19, Heating, Gas, and Sanitary Focus Group, June 15, 2005): My father says: First think about it and then have something up one's sleeve in case it doesn't work out, so that you always have an alternative.

Lars (19, Heating, Gas, and Sanitary Focus Group, June 15, 2005): You should not insist on one direction.

Steffen (19, Heating, Gas, and Sanitary Focus Group, June 15, 2005): You should do your shit and bring your ass against the wall. That you do everything in a decent way and that you go straight without further help. If you do anything decent right from the beginning you don't have to do that much at the end because then you have a direction already that brings you forward. If you don't do anything you have to start from the scratch again.

The main message from many parents is security. Students are encouraged to develop back-up plans. The importance of stable employment was emphasized by many parents who perceived their children at risk for becoming unemployed.

Steffen described himself as a student who did not like school. He had concentration problems, and struggled with the theoretical knowledge in a couple of subjects. His parents told him to be persistent, work diligently, and remain disciplined. He valued the parental advice, but admitted that he struggled to follow it. Other students in the focus group pointed out that their parents also functioned as friends, supported the ideas and the goals of their children, such as leaving the country or furthering their studies, and challenged their children as an

encouragement to better performance (Heating, Gas, and Sanitary Focus Group, June 15, 2005):

Bernd (19): My parents are informed about everything. I can talk with them about everything. My mother is my friend. My parents say, I should finish the apprenticeship then I should care about the future. Then I should go to the Armed Forces, save up some money and then away from that country. Salvage what you can salvage.

Tobias (18): My parents support me. My dad would always support me. My mom actually says yes to everything. My dad is always the critic. He always says that won't work out in order to awaken the little devil in me. That is a little incentive; he wants to show me that I can do it.

*United States.* Parental influence in the United States differed widely, often depending on social and socio-economic background. Many parents seemed to be very interested in further education for their children. Nevertheless, this can have many meanings. "Going back to school" might refer to a technical or two-year college, but can also mean a four-year college or research university. Therefore, it was not clear as to what kind of career this expectation refers to.

One student pointed out how contradictory this expectation can be. She explained that a bachelor's degree in political science might actually be much less helpful in finding a job than a degree from a technical college. Status considerations might have played a role in some parents' recommendations, while others only expected some kind of additional degree. As mentioned before, it is possible to find employment with only a high school degree, but wages for those jobs are very low and often employment might be unstable. Many students pointed out that their parents had been supportive and were glad that their

children were in school. Jeniffer commented on her parents' desire for her to attend college (Drafting Focus Group, November 10, 2005):

Jeniffer (30): Well, my parents always expected me to go to school once I finish high school. They kind of expected me to go to college. Even if it wasn't sure how we gonna pay for it. They expected me to go. Even as I stopped going and worked inbetween I always had this idea, yes, I would be going back to school.

Some students went through a trial phase to see how they adjusted to college. They often felt that they were not in the right program, and dropped out. Alex described his pathway (Heating and air condition Focus Group, November 8, 2005):

Alex (27): I tried college first. My dad told me since I was born that I should go to college, but he said: "Don't study with no income."

While Alex' parents demanded high self-responsibility including the expectation that he would be able to support himself, Philip's parents were financially supporting their son completely so that he did not need to work (Drafting Focus Group, November 10, 2005):

Philip (20): My parents are really supportive. They think what I am doing is very interesting. Every day I come home I got something to show them. They think I do really great.

Michael had a very close relationship with his mother. She expected him to go to school for the time he was living with her. So he attended technical college for seven years where he pursued two separate degrees. Half a year ago he moved in with his wife and son. Michael's mother helped him find a part-time job. She supported her son financially and emotionally. Michael described the bond between himself and his mother as very strong, and viewed his doing well

in life as a result of her encouragement (Drafting Focus Group, November 10, 2005):

Michael (26): I have some good friends who support me and my mother is one who supports me. You know how moms are. She is very encouraging. She thinks for me. If I need to make a decision I am talking with my mother. I want to make her happy. That's what I want to see.

Other parents did not graduate from college, and encouraged their children to do so because they had realized how difficult a career could be without another school degree. In June's case both parents highly supported this step. Knowing that her parents would stay behind her in this regard helped June apply for the program. At the same time she did not feel the urge to pursue another college education at the moment (Keyboarding Class Focus Group I, January 23, 2006):

June (20): My dad always said: "I don't want you to do anything but graduate from college." My dad never got a college degree. He started it, dropped out and never really went back. My mom got a master degree and she really pushes it. She wants everybody to go to school. But when you are a teenager you think whatever, eventually I will get there. Well, you got your peers around you all the time and when your peers are not motivated, than you wouldn't be either.

Another student was an example for those who did not receive emotional support in going back to school, and had to be a self agent, resisting the social pressure in her surroundings. Those students outlined that many of their peers and family members never pursued another degree and showed little understanding for them. Shenique had a father and grandparents who did support her when they had contact. She emphasized how she was resistant

against the urging of her mother and peers towards not going to school

(Keyboarding Class Focus Group I, January 23, 2006):

Shenique (19): My mom, well I stay with her, but its like, my mom was never forceful about school or about the future. She was like well I have my boyfriends, and my children, whatever. I always had my dad. I was like my mom, I was never motivated to finish school, never motivated to go to college. He said: "Well you can stay in this environment but you don't have to be a part of it." With my dad, so I know I gonna finish school, I gonna make it without my mom motivating me I gonna finish. And I always had my grandma. She is a pastor. She stands on me. You gonna go to college, you are not like the family, you gonna move out of town and make your own.

School often competes with financial independence, and the freedom to spend leisure time with different activities instead of doing school work. The female students in the second Keyboarding focus group pointed out that some young African American and Mexican adults wanted to live in the present, enjoy the moment, and not have to think about their future. They explained to me that life circumstances are hard for them, and there was little encouragement to leave this social environment.

Many African American children who grow up in single mother households receive little guidance or attention because their mothers are working a lot and sometimes might spend time with other men. The children are left alone looking for alternative role models. Peers often have to fill more than one social role while living in similar predicaments. For the young adults it becomes, therefore, very difficult to leave the only institutional support they know, to pursue a different life outside of their surroundings. It requires a lot of personal strength and

sometimes another adult who supports their steps towards independence in order to be successful (Keyboarding Class Focus Group I, January 23, 2006):

Nathalie (21) Yes, right now. I don't worry about one day you know, or next week. When you are young, you don't really think like that. That's why the counselor does not understand that, and also the parents. It's a difficult situation right now in many families, you know. There are a lot of single mothers and it's not easy. Parents are an important foundation and so we don't have a lot of that. So, we live a lot into now.

The other young women in the focus group agreed and supported her comments. It seemed that they were convinced that this was the right way to live, and told me that planning ahead made no sense to them because of the unpredictability of life events. Sometimes siblings instead of parents functioned as positive role models, but in the case of Lisa she had to be the positive role model in her family since no other family member had pursued another degree.

Nathalie (21, Keyboarding Class Individual Interview, January 27, 2006): Yes, my sister does. It might not be something we speak about, but she is in school and so it encouraged me to be in school because I thought if she can make it I can make it too. She has a child already and can manage it. I am a little bit difficult because I think I am always right and so my mother often would not say anything.

Lisa (21, Accounting Focus Group, February 1, 2006): My dad I don't know, I never met my father. My mother left him as I was three years old. I have an older brother. He dropped out of school and I have a younger brother who is 19. My younger brother is not doing anything. He has hidden down the wrong path; he is in and out of jail. My older brother is also not doing anything. Sometimes he works on cars. He does not have a license or anything; he just does it at his house.

Some of the students in the United States seemed to be disconnected from their families, and felt an even greater desire to be independent. Parents were

consulted less about career decisions. Nevertheless, the idea of getting a college education was prevalent in many families.

### *Friends*

In the questionnaire I asked the students: “Who had the strongest influence on the choice of your apprenticeship?” Nine students in the United States remarked that friends had influenced their decisions to go into the technical program, while in Germany that was only noted by one student. While Germans never said that they did not have any friends, and only one woman demarcated herself from some of her associates, U.S. students more often emphasized their lonely career and life pathways. Many students emphasized that they did not have any real friends. Pursuing another school degree was for them a conscious decision that required more courage than among their German counterparts.

*East Germany.* The impact of friends on career decisions seemed to be very small in Germany. The occupational situation of friends sometimes had an impact on young adults risk perceptions, as I will outline later in the unemployment paragraph. Young adults’ feelings about their own situation are influenced by their friends’ situations, since they do make comparisons. Most of the time the students had friends who were either also pursuing an apprenticeship, or had already completed one. Those students who received their *Abitur* had more friends who went on to attend a university and were

therefore also more familiar to other life situations as well as career perspectives. I will outline two opposing examples here.

Conny who was already very independent and had little contact with her parents, relied a great deal on her boyfriend and his friends. She did not know many people who pursued a higher education. Sabine had a strong connection with her parents, lived with them in the same house, and planned to stay there. She also had a boyfriend who studied and lots of other friends who were at the university as well (Office Clerk Individual Interview, June 10, 2005):

Conny (21): The guys around my boyfriend are sales representatives for copy machines, bricklayer, so simple occupations, rarely anybody who studied. Two or three study, but not many. Most went after school straight to the apprenticeship. Most of them are older, so 25 or 26. They have all found an apprenticeship straight away. In those days that was possible. From my last class most people left. And those I still know mostly have jobs. Well, and some are pregnant or mums and dads already.

Sabine (22): All my friends study apart from one who became a nurse. They have extended her contract for the second time and afterwards they have to decide if they want to give her an unlimited contract or lay her off. The students have to think about their internship. Apart from that, students seem to be very relaxed. They don't have fears about the future yet, no fear not to find a job one day. Although I have to say that a Diplom [Master degree] in your pocket is no guarantee for a job. If I see how many people study micro-economics, those are many. And there are many of them who don't have a job. But, I must say, those who study, those who have their program of study, and they know it will take a few more years; they don't rack their brains what happens afterwards. They study and with the lecture, they go there or not. Everything is easy and cool and party here and party there. And ourselves thinks about where to send the next application. There are new addresses from the Labor Exchange Office, indicating Frankfurt and... I have to apply there otherwise they cut unemployment benefits, or take it



away from you, but you haven't tried everything here to get something. We rack our brain and have more worries.

Sabine perceived the life of a university student as much easier, more carefree, and relaxed. She was skeptical about them having much better options in the labor market, and was surprised that they were not worried about their future compared with herself. While she was facing labor market realities, and needed to find successful coping strategies to find employment, her peers at the same time only had to negotiate internships. Nevertheless, Sabine did not regret the decision to pursue an apprenticeship because she liked her profession, and did not know what to study.

As outlined earlier, students talked a lot about friends, and thought about how to help them. There was a strong collective sense expressed through the thorough comparison students made between their life and the lives of their friends. Nevertheless, the actual career decision had little to do with peer relations.

*United States.* In the United States, friendship seemed to have a different meaning. There were a few students who told me that they have close friends who influence them in their life decisions. The majority of the students either pointed out that they do not have real friends, or they demarcated themselves from them because their influence was not considered to be positive. I will outline here a couple of individual stories that reflect students' experiences with, as well as opinions about friendships and friends. I will start with examples in which friends were described as being a positive impact on an individuals' career. Alex was an exception in this regard among the others, which might be due to the fact

that he was living in a community where people were committed to helping each other (Heating and Air Conditioning Individual Interview, November 8, 2005):

Alex (27): I have a very large and wide range of friends from 11 years old to a person that I see regularly, who is 74 years old. I have some friends that work in the health field in naturopathic [homeopathic] field; I have a couple of people who work in this field. One friend is a writer. Another one is a multi-business owner. He oversees 15 different companies. He is a very interesting man. On my block there is a boy who is 11 years old and his parents split up. At the weekends he comes to his mom and I spent a lot of time with him, mentoring him and teaching him different things that I know. I have another friend who works in sales and she also does marketing. I have another friend who works in computers. Another one is a pharmacist. Another one works for a cell phone company. It's a wide range....The man that I am closest to, he is an older man, he is in his forties and is a writer. He was the one who actually brought me to Air Conditioning. He saw my abilities and my capacities and how I work. And he thought that my company is always hiring out subcontractors for the air conditioning work. And he said: "What do you think about going to school for the air conditioning work?" and I said: "Sure." I am always open to expanding my horizon. I don't want to limit myself to just one thing.

Another student also had a variety of different friends. The most influential were those who shared the common life goal of becoming a business man in life. He had started to study at the university but dropped out because his performance in the general education subjects was not sufficient. Nevertheless, he was still holding on to his plan of business ownership, and negotiated acquiring further degrees. His father expected him to take over his business one day so that Angelo's pathway was already traced out (Heating and Air Conditioning Individual Interview, November 8, 2005):

Angelo (20): Some of my friends are in the Army. Most of my friends take business administration like I did, some got their

education at the army, some of them go to school and one is taking computer science. Some of them took a semester off. My parents work too. They all work. I don't really know anyone who was unemployed.... We all kind of know what we wanted to do. We all decided that we wanted to wear suits so we decided to go into business management. We also wanted to make money. We always thought that the jobs would be there. We didn't really think about anything else. Eventually, I want to have my own business, which will be the business of my dad, after I have gained some more work experience.

Many of the African American men had friends or associates who were working in the Army. They perceived it as a risk to work there because of injuries and death in war times. They further pointed out that soldiers often come back from a war with mental problems, and might encounter difficulties pursuing a civilian career. The students argued that it would not be a good decision to join the army since there are other employment opportunities available, but admitted that the job and educational opportunities within the civilian sector can be lucrative (Heating and Air Conditioning Focus Group, November 8, 2005):

Marcus (25): We have job fairs where they bring in different companies. The army comes in. They are there all the time.

Adrian (19): I don't want to have anything to do with the army. People get really messed up there.

Luis (22): But they offer you schooling and pay for it.

Timothy (34): If you go to the army you get sent to Iraq first.

Alex (27): My brother was a scout and went to the army. He was in Iraq.

Timothy (34): You might get an education there, but you pay a price for that.

Alex chose friends who were role models for him, and he became a role model for others. He was the only student who emphasized solidarity among people and described how he practiced it. The wide range of friends was untypical. Alex was less interested in self development but instead wanted to fulfill a useful role in his community.

Matthew had a highly individualized lifestyle as a musician, and described that his family and old friends had not been happy about it. Since he started school and attempts to establish a middle class lifestyle he received more emotional support (Drafting Individual Interview, November 10, 2005):

Matthew (27) People are generally supportive because finally I am getting kind of more focused because I lived in a truck for a while and have done lots of things like that. Now that I am going for a career that seems like I could do that for the rest of my life. They are pretty supportive. When the musician stuff was going good I didn't have to do stuff like that but that was as I was 19 or 20 years old. I graduated as I was 17 and I moved to New York as I was 17. I came from a little town in South Georgia. It was interesting. I mean I was going to school, but I had lots of fun; maybe too much fun. I mean I was on Long Island. So it was a little more, sort of, it was not like living in Manhattan, a little quieter. Manhattan would probably have killed me by that time with all the fun. Actually, when I lived in Manhattan I barely slept. I didn't have time to. I would be working. I worked until five or six in the morning, slept a few hours and then got up and practiced for eight hours and went back where the "gig" is. And do that every day.

Besides his physical inability to continue with his former lifestyle, Matthew also told me that his colleagues in the music industry often became a negative role model for him, and he realized that he did not like to follow their examples as lonely alcoholics and drug addicts. Since he had little contact with his parents, siblings, and former friends, the career change was externally motivated due to

health problems that prevented him in staying in the music industry, and also due to self realization as to what kind of lifestyle he wanted to live on a long-term perspective. After 10 years of living day-to-day, he had started to think on a long-term basis, and established a strategic plan for his career. Another reason for his change of heart was also the desire to have more financial stability in life.

Adrian described how he preferred to stay by himself instead of spending spare time with former friends or associates. He considered them to have a negative impact on him and therefore avoided any interaction. He was also skeptical about the meaning of friendship, indicating that people might abuse each other because they needed help with something, but it could not be considered a real friendship because his peers would not really care about each other. That seemed to him a waste of time and energy that he preferred to invest in achieving his own career goals, such as getting out of his current living situation, the neighborhood, and the people who surrounded him (Heating and Air Conditioning Individual Interview, November 8, 2005):

Adrian (19): A lot of my friends, a lot of people gotten married, starten to have babies. Everybody has too much on their own thing. I never was the friend type of person. It's not me hanging out and doing stuff like that, getting in criminal activities. I never wanted to get caught up in trouble or anything with drugs. And they are saying you are young and let's do this and that. If I would do that I wouldn't be my own person. So they left me alone and I was by myself. That was cool with me.

Adrian was a strategic planner. Being focused on his long-term plan motivated him to demarcate himself from his peers. He did not want to get involved in any crime, and preferred to be an outsider. Other students told similar

stories, all pointing out that they needed to distinguish themselves from their peers because the influence was negative and perceived as a downer. Often they said that they did not have any friends, and were orienting themselves with colleagues, parents, or other people they got to know (Keyboarding Class Focus Group I, January 23, 2006):

Lawrence (19): I don't have a friend, just some people from high school. I don't pay attention to what my so called high school friends say. Or what they do. I know what I know and what is good for me. With other friends it's always the same. They don't understand that I go to school and they do nothing.

Nathalie (21): I was always more motivated. I have always been a leader. What they do does not affect me. I do what I want to do. What I noticed is that a lot of them don't do much, they humble around, they don't know what to do, and finally I surrounded myself with more positive people, people who I can learn from. I still associate with the people I hang out in high school, but not like I used to. A lot of them are not positive. I need people who motivate me. I have been in my job since two years and there I found a friend, who graduated from college and got her master. She motivates me.... (Individual Interview): My friends are not doing anything. And as I was hanging out with them I also didn't do much. Now, that I am more focused and do something with my life and better my life. I like the people I work with. The majority of them are in colleges. Some of them realized that they have to go back to school. Most of them are in school for nursing. One of my friends I hang out with is a nurse. She does not know if she wants to works in the field right now. She is actually looking for different options like owning her own business. We were thinking of starting one together with another person, a collection agency and see how it goes.

Shenique (19): I don't really have friends or I don't hang around my friends at all. My best friend is the only one I would talk to. Some of them stand their mom, but they are not doing it. They are not going to school anymore. They are not paying their rent. They are doing nothing. I don't stay with them, I stay on myself. I don't hang around with them because if I would I would do nothing with my life.

June (20): I don't have real friends. The one that I have has three children and is soon getting another child. But it is kind of a downer because she is my roommate. It is kind of a downer sometimes because you are there and I try to study at home, and you are trying to do your home work, but also need to help. There are little kids running around and you know kids get into stuff. There is a ten month old, a three years old, and a 10 years old, and she is about to have another baby. So, I am leaving in March because I know if I stay there, I would not be motivated enough to do what I want to do. Now I have associates I hang out with. We are all moving in the same kind of direction and for a while I was OK with this, I got caught up in that. It was this little comfort bubble. I know that now, since I am moving away from that and can't be with her and you know think, I should get pregnant, you know what I mean and for the rest of my life I become a stereotype.

All of the students in this focus group expressed a strong will towards pursuing their own goals, regardless of the opinion of their peers. There was little sense of connection to classmates, peers, or friends expressed, but instead the desire to demarcate oneself from others. Most students did not have friends who could be considered as positive role models.

### *Teachers*

In the questionnaire only one U.S. student indicated that high school teachers had influenced his career decision. U.S. teachers do not talk about career options and are also not prepared for career counseling. In the United States counselors at each school take over this responsibility, Germany a regular teacher is usually assigned to advise students and hand out information materials. Since there are many other assignments and duties to take care of,

the German teachers usually just organize job fairs and distribute information brochures about training institutions and career options.

*East Germany.* The influence of teachers on student's career decisions in Germany is low. What teachers did was to prepare students mentally for the struggle in the labor market and teaching the students what society expects from them regarding their life course. Kathrin pointed out (Drafting Focus Group, June 16, 2005):

Kathrin (18): Regarding work they were drumming into our heads since fifth grade, pass the exams in 10<sup>th</sup> grade and then you have to see how you manage everything else.

Teachers seemed to be not sufficiently prepared to provide meaningful job preparation for the students. They often lacked recent work experience and had little insights into the job placement process in the labor market. Nevertheless, one student mentioned that her school principal had mediated between her sister and an employer (Office Clerk Individual Interview, June 10, 2004):

Susanne (21): Well, our principal at the secondary school. My father was a parent representative there. And my sister got her apprenticeship in a technical drafting office because of our principal. And therefore we thought maybe we will also get something for me with the help of our principal. Well, then we had the counselors and our class teacher was also always very supportive, but less so in regard to occupational choice. They asked, what do you want to become and that was it.

*United States.* In the United States, some students described teachers they had in school, who were generally supportive in the sense that they motivated their students and encouraged them to perform well, but also to pursue a career afterwards. In the Drafting program, as earlier mentioned, the teacher



personally arranged contacts between his students and the industry and made sure that they would find a placement. Other teachers advised students where and how to look for employment and what aspects to pay attention to. Ensuring employment for their students instead of just providing technical education was part of their job (Focus Group Interview, November 10, 2005):

Jennifer (30): I have gotten assistance through the teacher here. He is generally really helpful and makes sure that his students have jobs afterwards. But, no other school has ever been helpful. The other schools either had job placement services, but it was like pulling a pig trying to get them to help you. They had the office and they were supposed to help you, but when you went in the people acted like they didn't want to. But here is the only place where somebody says, let me help you. It has just been our teacher here.

Jennifer's' experiences with former teachers and counselors support what other students had mentioned. They received little support in high school and felt mainly left alone in making their career decision. At this technical college, teachers developed a very comprehensive view of student development and training that involved not only providing students with the necessary technical and personal skills for their jobs but also assisting them in finding a job. The students valued this support and felt fortunate that they had chosen this school. One student outlined that the teacher as well as one of her managers became her friend. She was glad to have found those new role models since she received little support from her family and peers (Accounting Individual Interview, February 1, 2006):

Lisa (21): One of the teachers here at the college is my advisor. She is my friend. She is a nice lady. My manager is also my friend and my advisor. One of our plans was to open up a business together. He is soon going to be retired.

Another student pointed out that he expects the teachers not just to be a motivator and supporter, but also wants to be challenged in order to be prepared for demanding situations in “real life.” His comment might refer to the fact that many teachers tend to motivate the students a lot in order to help them become proud of themselves. For students who receive little attention and support at home, this is important to build up self confidence and motivation. At the same time, preparation for the work-life should, according to Philip, also include learning how to cope with failure (Drafting Individual Interview, November 10, 2005):

Philip (20): There have been teachers who supported me, they understood me more than other people did and so they were supportive. There have been teachers who said: “You gonna be someone really special some day.” So, it helps to be supported. I guess in some ways its good to be supported, but it’s also good to be challenged some day. Because if you have nothing but support because the first time when you fail, you gonna be like ohh what happened. If you fail its good to have support so that you can get up again but it is also good to have challenges that make you better yourself.

High school teachers seemed to play a small role in career decision of the young adults. Students, particularly in the Drafting and Accounting program, expressed high satisfaction with the effort their teachers put into career advisement and also in direct support for finding a job. A teacher who was well connected to the industry matched students with potential employers which increased the value to the program.

### *Experiences with the Labor Exchange Office/Career Counseling*

I asked in the questionnaire: "If you received advice from counselors about your apprenticeship/technical program, do you think they advised you well?" The results show that those students who spoke up in the focus group were not representative for all the students I surveyed. In Germany, 26 students marked that they were well advised and 29 students noted that they were not satisfied. In the United States, 30 students felt that their counselors advised them well, 17 disagreed. Twenty-seven students did not mark anything which might be due to no contact to counselors.

The German students outlined in the questionnaire that they would prefer to get more precise information about the context of the apprenticeship and future options in the labor market. They wanted to receive more personal attention and more addresses of potential employers. Some comments that the U.S. students made about their counseling were: "I wished I would have known about dual enrollment, then I would have been finished with my degree by now," "take out more time to discuss careers one on one with students," and "more information about expenses."

*East Germany.* Although the Labor Exchange Office is organized as a country wide public institution, the advice students receive from there depends on individual counselors. Therefore, I consider it to be an institutional influence and will outline here how the students perceived the service of career counselors. The public institution that functions as an information center, advisory board, and a placement agency was judged as providing a non

satisfactory service because students felt not appropriately informed about professions and some young adults pointed out that they had received little attention. Career centers, usually located in the Federal Labor Exchange Office, provide information about the 498 occupations for which access can be gained through the apprenticeship. They are supposed to offer personal guidance and a range of informational material about each occupation.

Almost all students who I talked to were dissatisfied with the advice they received from there and perceived the institution as being not at all helpful. I outline a number of statements that refer to students experiences with the agency and represent the general views towards the institution. Ilka thought that employees at the Labor Exchange Office were not advising her well and explained that they have little incentive to fulfill their jobs better because they are tenured. The young women in the Office Clerk program talked intensely about their experiences with the institution. Another student pointed out that counselors at the Labor Exchange Office were careless and did not fulfill their job description (Office Clerk Individual Interview, June 10, 2005):

Ilka (21): They didn't help much. I think most of the people who are not directly affected by unemployment don't know how things are out there. If I hear what kind of stories Sabine has to tell what happened to her at the Labor Exchange Office or to her brother. Those are intolerable conditions, things that shouldn't happen at all. The brother for example was registered in a completely different group. He works in construction and was registered as a baker. Something like that must not happen. And he was wondering why he never got anything mailed.... Nobody really thinks about that. At least it seems like it, they don't give a shit as to what happens to us. When you really take it in your own hands, then... you can only trust yourself and family and friends or your closed surrounding. Apart from that you are alone.

Ilka referred to stories she had heard from her friend and classmate Sabine. I will briefly outline what happened to her. Sabine had been at the Labor Exchange Office a couple of times, asking for social assistance for her traveling costs to the employer, advice to find another employer as she needed to switch her training places, and for her job search. The personal advisor who had been assigned to her said that she was not eligible for travel aid. Sabine did not receive any help in finding another training place and was forced to apply all over Germany although she insisted on staying in the region. She was told that if she would not apply all over Germany her eligibility for unemployment benefits would be lost. Another student said that the office did not keep up with the records of the students (Office Clerk Focus Group, June 10, 2005):

Conny (21): Well, I had to go there before I started my apprenticeship. A guy talked with me, but that was it. I never heard from him again or that he took care of my case. And now where I am in my apprenticeship for two years already I got this letter that I would be done with school soon and start an apprenticeship and that they will cut out my child benefits [Federal money for the support of children that every family with children is entitled to]. I told them that I have been in an apprenticeship for two years and asked where they are with their updates. They are not keeping up [laughs ironically].

Susanne (21): They didn't help much to find a job. They weren't very supportive. The addresses they've sent were outdated. I applied and only got rejections. I am not very impressed with them. They couldn't help much.

In the Drafting group, students also expressed disappointment and resignation. Rüdiger who would really have needed help from the Labor Exchange Office after his training company declared bankruptcy, and he was released and unable to finish his apprenticeship. He expected assistance in

finding another appropriate training company in order to finish his first apprenticeship (Drafting Individual Interview, June 16, 2004):

Rüdiger (22): No they didn't help me. I have organized everything by myself. As I was already in this current program for more than half a year, they wrote me that they have a job for me where I can apply. Half a year later! That is really poor. I don't think very highly of the Labor Exchange Office.

Kathrin refers to training measurements organized by the Labor Exchange Office for those young adults who did not get an apprenticeship in the dual system and further training or retraining for the unemployed indicating that the degrees are not in demand in the labor market and most people have only small chances of employment afterwards (Drafting Individual Interview, June 16, 2005):

Kathrin (18): They offer this kind of further training that nobody wants. I was twice at the Federal Labor Office. He told me, well with those grades you don't get anything. There was not a tiny little bit of advice, nothing. He didn't care. That's the thing with tarring everything with the same brush.

According to my data the young adults expected assistance in their career choices from the Labor Exchange Office and were disappointed. Career decisions are partially institutionalized. Students have to make existential choices and there is limited room for experimentation. The institution fails many young people who would need more assistance.

Lioba expressed doubts about the regulation in the labor market and the attempt to retrain workers so that they could be qualified for new jobs. She thought that people should work in an occupation that they are skilled in and interested. A change in labor market needs and an adequate retraining might not qualify the individual for new jobs (Office Clerk Focus Group, June 10, 2005):

Lioba (24): I know a woman who looks after people who have been long-term unemployed. She tries to give them new motivation and to encourage them to look in the future. She retrains people to become office workers, but some of them have worked as joiners for 20 years and now they should be in an office just because they can't work as joiners anymore. That is nonsense.

Elizabeth suggested that students are not taken care of for statistical reasons. She pointed out that many apprentices do not get employed by their training companies and are channeled into non-company based training. They only appear in the unemployment statistic once they have graduated and did not find a job (Office Clerk Focus Group, June 10, 2005):

Elizabeth (19): The awful thing is. They want to have their figures about people in apprenticeships. Then they need to have a couple of *Azubis* [apprentices] available, who don't have an apprenticeship yet. Then they can send them in certain training companies so that the statistic is right, but employment afterwards? This is.... Interconnected takes 20 apprentices every year, but most of them have to go afterwards....

According to Mayer (1996) the reduction of applicants for apprenticeships and a reduction of firms offering apprenticeship slots is causing a crisis of the German dual system and leads to a lack of long-term perspectives.

Sabine described the German way of managing ambition. She and her girlfriend were told at the Labor Exchange Office that they would only be able to study something in social science based on the evaluation of their *Abitur*. At the university professors told students straight away that a major in sociology would not lead to stable employment (Office Clerk Individual Interview, June 10, 2005):

Sabine (22): The Labor Exchange Office didn't really help. I didn't take serious what they have told me there. The women looked at my school certificate and said to me: "But you

don't want to study, do you?" Something like that they tell you there. And my girlfriend who studies dental medicine was told, more than *Anglistik* [Anglo-American language and literature] is not possible for you if you want to study... And at the university somebody said something that I never forgot. The lecture hall was full with 400 people in a Sociology lecture. The professor said, that he is wondering what all of us are looking for here; why we want to study this, you don't get a job afterwards anyway all of you as you are here. That was so the point where I said, wow, great motivation here.

Everybody in Germany has the right to study and had for a long time access to free education. Although tuition was invented in most German states in order to generate more income for universities, the amount students have to pay per semester falls around Euro 500 and makes studying in Germany still affordable. In most programs of study, there are no admission tests required so that everybody who wants to enter a program and has the *Abitur* can start to study.

The great amount of students who start every year at the university are a burden for the professors so that many have invented strategies to separate those students who have the ability to finish their program from those who might be better placed in either another program of study or an apprenticeship. Part of the strategy is to talk negatively about future job options, another is to set up a high level of performance expectation (high standards) that only a few students can pass. Especially in social science, the dropout rate of students is very high in the first couple of semesters (40%). Only students who are very persistent, independent, responsible, and able to ignore the rather discouraging comments of professors have the ability to finish their program. Where state regulation does



not take place as it is the case at many universities semi-institutionalized or informal ways of regulation are put in place.

*United States.* Many students in this study expressed dissatisfaction with counselor advisement, but some also pointed out that they received help from them. One student said that his counselor had encouraged him to continue schooling although by that time he had set other priorities and was also without a concrete direction (Drafting Individual Interview, November 10, 2005):

Kevin (24): Yes, my high school counselor didn't really lead me to Drafting, but she led me going back to school. She just generally encouraged me to go back to school and get a degree. I knew in my mind that I needed to do that, but by that moment I was just working and enjoying my life and enjoying my new vehicle.

Another student described how he filled out a questionnaire that directed him after the analysis to two professions and he chose the one he liked more. Joshua emphasized that he trusted the test because he would not have known what else to pursue and was satisfied with his decision (Drafting Focus Group, November 10, 2005):

Joshua (22): For me it was either Accounting or Drafting. My counselor gave me a list of courses I could take and it was either Accounting or Drafting and so I decided to take the Drafting.

Deborah had a demanding attitude and was passive in terms of making a decision about her career. She expected the counselors to come to each student and follow up with them on career decisions. Her expectation seemed unrealistic since there are only a very few counselors in each school and career advisement is just one of their tasks (Office Clerk Focus Group, January 23, 2006):

Deborah (23): I mean it's like you have to hunt them down, instead of them. They are your counselors and should call us down and ask us about our future plans. Deborah, what are you planning with your life, instead of us coming up and to them. I just figured out everything on my own.

Alex favored the approach of discovering on his own what direction in life to go. He argued that people need to know one another well in order to be able to give helpful advice. Good guidance is needed in real life situations instead of having a talk in a counseling office. Most students in his focus group agreed that the conversations with counselors had not been very helpful for them (Heating and Air Conditioning Individual Interview, November 8, 2005):

Alex (27): That is the drive to see how people change for the better, not a better way of life but to look at their life in a different way. Talking only goes so far. So if you say a bunch of words, after a while people shot you out. What's good about counselors? They are no good.

Counseling at high school seemed to have little impact on students' career decision. Many young adults expressed that they felt little prepared to make an informed decision. The reputation of counselors seemed to be negative and students expressed that they would not even go there, because no help was expected.

### *Macro-Societal Level*

Most of themes that are outlined in the following section mainly emerged in East Germany and I specifically asked for them in the United States in order to find out if there are any similar experiences. The students in the United States did not express any concern about unemployment, politics, or systemic changes, and offered no critique about their schooling. U.S. students indicated no

consciousness about disparities or injustices in society and emphasized optimism and opportunities throughout the focus group and individual interviews.

Therefore, the following section is mainly concerned with East Germany.

*Satisfaction with the Apprenticeship/Training System*

*East Germany.* Many students expressed dissatisfaction with the apprenticeship system and felt exploited. The reasons were manifold ranging from being in a program for too long while earning only a small salary, being used as cheap labor in their companies, being channeled into an occupational career that is not in demand in the labor market, and being treated badly. Monika additionally mentioned that even for her higher program of education at the University of Cooperative Education where it is required to work half of the time, she would still only get paid as an apprentice although she would be already fully qualified. Several students expressed their dissatisfaction with the system:

Hilke (20, Drafting Individual Interview, June 16, 2005): What I actually also find very stupid is, that they always say, we need to train, we need to train and at the end, at the end they don't employ you. For example with retail sales people; they employ apprentices, but at the end they employ students, who want to make a little money. And the trained people are on the street.

Susanne (21, Office Clerk Individual Interview, June 10, 2005): Another friend of mine did an apprenticeship at Fashion One in Erfurt and they also just exploited her because they only employed apprentices. She left them and has now her own shop here in Hinterlingen.

Monika (23, Assistant Tax Accountant Individual Interview, June 14, 2005): Well, that's actually a joke. You have been trained for three years and are completely qualified to get employment in your field. You could be a regular employee and you work for nothing. But, you have to take it as it is because you want

to study, because you want to get further training and there is little incentive for that. That is disgusting.

Dissatisfaction with the apprenticeship and the impression of exploitation by the employers caused some doubt about the effectiveness of the German vocational education and training system. Too many students had been channeled into training that they did not originally want to pursue. Additionally, they received pessimistic messages about their future job opportunities from teachers and colleagues. Opportunities in Germany were viewed as being limited.

*United States.* Students in the United States seemed little concerned with the overall organization of vocational or technical training or the reputation that comes with it. The students were rather optimistic regarding the many opportunities that are available. They perceived that as a major reason for foreigners to enter the country. What students outlined about the unlimited opportunities in their country intertwined with students' optimism about future prospects (Keyboarding Individual Interview, January 27, 2006):

Nathalie (21): I love America. I think everything is possible. A lot of Americans take things for granted. A lot of foreigners come and work hard because they don't have opportunities in their own countries. And then Americans get upset because they are not willing to work so hard like the foreigners who take advantage of what we have. Here there is more opportunity to make money. I try to take advantage of the things we have and make the best out of my life.

Sahidi was one of the immigrants I interviewed. He supported Nathalie's notion about the opportunities in the country. All immigrants and also the Mexican Americans who had grown up in the United States were convinced

about the opportunities the country offers and pointed out that they are taking advantage of it. Despite their struggle to find appropriate employment, they were optimistic and pointed out that they might have to work harder, but their goals would finally be achieved (Heating and Air Conditioning Individual Interview, November 8, 2005):

Sahidi (29): In Eritrea, you can't find a job like in the United States. The United States is a land of opportunities. If you come here and you work hard you get what you want.... With this certificate I can work in many companies. Over here people try to work for themselves. With air conditioning and heating you can work anywhere. That's why I came here too.

June was a bit more skeptical about the many opportunities the country has to offer, but was not able to explain her skepticism precisely. It seemed that she referred to the social background of people that might hold some back to achieve what they could (Keyboarding Class Focus Group I, January 27, 2006):

June (20): I say yes and no about it. I am not really sure, but I would say there are lots of opportunities out there. There are lots of grants if you want to start your own business, you can go to school, there is a lot of anything. It just depends on how you get about doing it. It depends on where you are going.

U.S. students did not criticize the training system or the fact that they have to pay for their training. They strongly believed in future opportunities and viewed their training as a valuable investment.

### *Experiences with Unemployment*

*East Germany.* None of the German students in this study had been unemployed, but many had either family members or friends who were affected. Additionally, the topic is presented in the media almost every day and receives

particular attention during elections where each political party is evaluated by its planned efforts to reduce unemployment. Having unemployed friends had a major impact on young adults risk perception regarding their professional future and influenced their career planning as well as their view of society. Kathrin, a student who dressed loudly in black colors, expressed a very pessimistic view about society, where nobody seemed to care about the younger generation. She had little connection to her parents and no contact to her sister. In the focus group discussion Kathrin often took a lead role. Many of her fellow students had similar contacts or experiences (Drafting Focus Group, June 16, 2005):

Kathrin (18): I can say that two thirds of my friends are unemployed or in the civil service. They won't get something and they have not been worse than me in school. Many of them are in debt already. Not so nice. A friend of mine has the extended elementary school degree, started an apprenticeship, but was fired during the trial period because they hired 20 and fired 15 in order to find out who fits best. Since then she had been at home and finally decided to get her secondary school degree. She did that too, but didn't get good grades. Since then she is sitting at home again.

Marco (22): Similar, I guess one third of my buddies or friends are unemployed.

Denise (23): In our region most people went away. The boys learn something here most of the time and then they are away on a construction job.

Theresa (18): Among my friends and people I know all have learned an occupation, but didn't get anything afterwards. Those who got something went further away or to the West or Switzerland. Those who stayed did learn everything indeed, and got employed somewhere, but afterwards....? Always short term employments or something for half a year where they work away on a construction job. And then they come back and are unemployed again, from one short term employment to the next.

Marco (22): Some of my friends are definitely unemployed. O.K., they found something, but when I think about it what they found, that is not the right thing for the future. Actually, they work from early in the morning until late in the night for a few cents. And really happy.... you know that they are not really happy.... One is working in an industrial bakery after being unemployed for a very long time.... Another one is a roofer, well O.K. Roofer! The problem is that he has lots to do in the summer, but in the winter when there is snow, if the weather isn't cooperative, then he is unemployed. Well, I believe they are not really satisfied.

The life situation that those young adults are confronted with reflects their expectations about future prospects. Those students who were not high achievers in school and have grades lower than 3 (C) on their certificates have almost no chances to find employment since low-skilled jobs are rare in Germany and often taken by immigrants or university students who use part-time jobs to earn some pocket money. Therefore, the only alternative many young adults have is to leave the region and go to places in Germany with a lower unemployment rate or even leave the country.

Nevertheless, the jobs they find somewhere else are often only seasonal or temporary jobs that do not offer long-term stability. Males might find jobs in construction and commute between home and workplace. Others finally might get employed in less attractive blue color jobs and find no fulfillment in them.

In order to encourage people to put more effort into finding employment and avoid long-term unemployment, the government has introduced a new regulation called "One Euro Jobs." Those jobs are supposed to help people who are long-term unemployed to re-enter the labor market. If a person works more than 15 hours a week he or she would still receive unemployment benefits

(*Arbeitslosengeld II*), but is not recognized anymore in the unemployment statistics (Heiny & Rudzio, 2004). Particularly for older people who have worked in high skill jobs over a long time and are facing unemployment now, it is demeaning to force them into this kind of employment.

In East Germany, many people argue that they have no other choice than being unemployed because there are no jobs available at all, not even low-skilled jobs. The newly introduced One Euro Jobs paid by the government have lead to a shift of jobs. Companies specialized in gardening, cleaning, basic construction, and others loose contracts, because local governments employ unemployed workers and pay for their work one Euro per hour. Nevertheless, for some people working in a One Euro Job seems to be an alternative to being alone at home all day and feeling useless (Office Clerk Individual Interview, June 10, 2005):

Ilka (21): You know what, my boyfriend is unemployed and now he would also say, I rather take one of those One Euro Jobs and get out of here and don't need to hang around at home and can make some additional money. He also has cabin fever.

Another student outlined how she benefited from her fathers job loss because it made her eligible for financial aid. She described how she realized at home that money became scarce (Office Clerk Individual Interview, June 10, 2005):

Conny (21): As my father was unemployed it had a positive effect on me because I got *BAB* [*Bundesausbildungsbeihilfe* = financial support during the time of training]. But, you had realized that the refrigerator was empty. Well, you could tell when it was Friday. Although, I was 14 or 15 by that time, but when I asked: Mum why didn't you buy anything? No money. What can you say?



Ilka described friends who were going through an orientation period trying out different programs and apprenticeships but ended up being unemployed. She also pointed out that some students had to write a large amount of applications (Office Clerk Individual Interview, June 10, 2005):

Ilka (21): Most of them didn't find anything. They wrote more than 200 applications and only got rejections. Some of them started to study, but dropped out after half a year. Well, now they sit at home and think about their prospects. They think about going abroad or if they should go into another direction. They tell me that I have been very lucky, that I was able to..., but they are not envious. They fear that it will become more and more difficult for them the longer they are not in a school. Many are still looking for an apprenticeship.

Susanne (21) [talked about the friends of her boyfriend first]: In his village, half of the people are unemployed. That gets close to me. I am really sorry about it. You have to ask, who really has a job? It is frightening. Yes, and among my other friends. There is almost nobody who has had a real apprenticeship. I was there the only one. The others have either done a social year or one of those full time trainings. Anything. Or, those who had only the degree of the extended elementary school made their secondary school degree so that they had something, but, a real apprenticeship, nobody.

Susanne expressed empathy for those who did not find an apprenticeship and who are unemployed or in non-company based training measures. She described that she feels sorry for them and tries to help, but there is little she can do about it. Since she knew how difficult it can be to find an apprenticeship, Susanne was very thankful for having found one and was concerned about finding stable employment next. Sabine outlined how angry she was that even people who want to work did not find any employment. She described the situation of her sister as an example and expressed her disgust about people

who became freeloaders, abusing the welfare system without an interest in finding employment (Office Clerk Individual Interview, June 10, 2005):

Sabine (22): If I look at my sister that makes me angry too. Well, it is not easy for her. She is 24 and O.K. she is a little behind and sometimes has the level of a 14 or 15 year old. It has been really difficult for her. There are reasons for that, but well... That makes me angry too. Not even she gets a job although she finished the apprenticeship as an office clerk. That she doesn't find a job in her field, O.K., but not even somewhere on an assembly line? No chance, not even for those who really want to work.

In the Heating, Gas, and Sanitary group students also described situations of their friends (Heating, Gas, and Sanitary Focus Group, June 15, 2005):

Lars (18): I have a buddy who has been at home for two years. He writes applications non stop, has his degree from the secondary school, a good one, but doesn't get anything. It's stinky boring for him. He has no money and nothing. Now he signed up for Armed Forces for 23 months. He doesn't really want that, but he has no other choice.

Marc (19): I see that as well with a buddy of mine. He is a cook and doesn't find anything in Germany. He was in Austria, but the working climate was very bad and money wasn't great either. Now, he is unemployed again and also wants to go to the Armed Forces for 9 months just to have something.

Steffen (19): I have a buddy who was unemployed for a long time. Now he found something by accident. He had applied and applied. He also finished secondary school and everything fine, also this occupation as a plumber. But everybody has a new bathroom now. The bathrooms are all done. There is nothing to do anymore.

Andreas (19): Well, the people hold their money back because they see that everything is shit. Very soon there will be nothing to do anymore in Germany.

The discussion often slipped into politics and economic issues. In the citations above, students refer to the phenomenon that Germans are holding

their money back because they perceive the economic development in Germany as being insecure. Current risk considerations lead to a higher saving and lower spending rates. Bernd was critical about the shift from traditional labor to modern machines and the declining supply of quality products for affordable prices that also resulted in the abolishment of manual labor jobs. His parents further experienced that their salary was withheld for a couple of months which happened often in East Germany (Heating, Gas, and Sanitary Individual Interview, June 17, 2005):

Bernd (19): My mother has learned the profession of a cosmetologist but for health reasons she couldn't work in this profession anymore. She was also trained as a shoemaker, but this is a throwaway society today, nobody needs that anymore. My stepfather was trained as a bricklayer and worked for the Holzworm AG. They filed bankruptcy. He always got along with the boss, but was one of the first who had to leave. Then he worked for a temporary employment agency and they organized him a job with a company that didn't pay for three months. And because we missed out on this salary for three months, we got very seriously into debt, it wasn't easy anymore, it was very hard. We were so worn down that my mother once said: "If you wake up in the morning one day and I don't then just do the same. That is better." [Bernd needed some minutes to get his countenance back. Tears were collecting in his eyes and he couldn't speak for a few minutes.]

The citations above signal a high degree of despair among those who face unemployment. In Bernd's case, his mother mentioned suicide considerations that resulted out of a desperate situation, one that seemed unsolvable. His parents are considered the "losers of the unification" because they are unemployed, live in poverty, and suffer from economic disadvantages.

School grades played an important role in the evaluation of future chances in the labor market. They indicated how the student performs and are the main guideline for employers in their choice of apprentices. Students had to cope with the pressure of getting good grades between ages 15 and 18 depending on their school degree because that was the time when they applied for apprenticeships. Nevertheless, in a tight labor market other aspects such as personal relationships with future employers played a more important role than grades. Knowing that discouraged some students from performing well in school.

I also asked the students: "How do you perceive reports about the situation in the labor market?" Almost everybody had something to say about it. It was frightening for some; others were annoyed and wanted to keep a positive attitude which became difficult if one listened to negative news every day. Media reports seemed to play a major role in young adults risk perceptions and contributed to the overall pessimistic attitude. In the following citations, young adults expressed how those reports affected their mood and their approach towards an apprenticeship (Drafting Individual Interview, June 16, 2005):

Kathrin (18): It's a shitty situation, but I wouldn't make a drama out of it and spread more fear and fright. I mean, we all know how shitty it is. That it is difficult to get something, especially if you want something, then most of the time you won't get it really, even if you don't have bad grades. That's the thing always. We have always been told; you have to fight for it, for good grades and everything. And then you were actually one of the best and nevertheless it was a washout, anyway. I had a grade point average of 2.1 [on a scale from 1 best grade to 5] and that was the only apprenticeship I have got.

Kathrin (18): Surely it is not nice that things are not going forward, but you should not make people more afraid. There needs to

be a little more pep. People need to be able to say, O.K. I look forward, towards the future.

Rüdiger (22): It's really frightening. Almost every third person has no job now. This is frightening. You sit down on your ass [meaning you exert yourself] and were just exploited in the company and now it's for nothing. And then you can simply go. I don't need an apprenticeship for something like that if nobody employs me.

The Office Clerk and Assistant Tax Accountant students emphasized the issue of over-qualification and argued that employers would use this argument however they wanted to. They concluded that this is not a very strong reason, but rather an excuse for employers if they do not want to employ a person. They further emphasized the frightening character of unemployment the closer they moved towards their graduation (Office Clerk Individual Interview, June 10, 2004):

Susanne (21): Yes, if I see the unemployed quote and the unemployed numbers, this is frightening and now so two, three minutes before the final exams that creates fear in me. At the beginning I wasn't that interested in it, but now you realize, hmm, real life starts now. It was important to have an apprenticeship and then a job somewhere so you won't be dependent on anybody anymore. But now, every week another company if you put it that way because you are unemployed or the company is bankrupt or whatever, it's frightening.

Sabine (22): You get annoyed. It also causes anger. Sometimes, I switch to another channel because I can't bear it anymore. It doesn't help me if I see it. It just brings you down and you might lose your courage. You have to present yourself. If you show up and look like shit, they won't take me anyway. There are too many unemployed in the labor market. Why should they take me? You cannot start with a negative attitude.

Ingolf (25, Assistant Tax Accountant Individual Interview, June 14, 2005): Very negative. You just hear bad news. If you follow

that there are more and more unemployed. You learn and learn and learn and can be very qualified but it gets more and more difficult. And the more you are qualified the more difficult it gets is my impression. My parents also say, don't qualify yourself too much, then nobody wants you anymore. My dad has a leading position in a building center. There people apply for a sales job who are highly qualified. They would be a good fit, but need to get higher payment. That's the worry. They prefer less qualified people at the end because they are cheaper. I also know that from my buddies. Stupidly, people who are a little better than others struggle to get their feet on the ground because they are too high qualified. They are also told because you are overqualified. Students I know say that to. Those are the biggest fears we talk about. We learn and learn and learn, but for what? Is it any good for something? Before I would start another apprenticeship I would check if it is worth something and how it looks if I can get my feet on the ground with it.

All students expressed major concerns regarding their employability. Fear and the perceived insecurity about employment options create a high risk perception among them. Skepticism about the usefulness of their degree, as well as any further qualification arose and anger about many negative media reports that increased fear and worries. Among all the topics we talked about unemployment was the one where each student got engaged in the discussion. They also told me that they were continuing to talk about it during our breaks and after the focus groups. Unemployment created a collective fear that brought those young adults closer together but also seemed to increase the feeling of desperateness among some.

*United States.* Unemployment seemed to be much less of an issue in the United States than in East Germany. The first reaction of the students often was rejection pointing out that this is not something they consider for themselves.

One obvious reason seemed to be the high amount of low-skilled jobs that are available everywhere. People get hired and fired on an every day basis and work for minimum wages. Therefore, the main argument of the young adults was that nobody in the United States really needs to be unemployed. Nevertheless, some students pointed out that they know people who had been affected and described their situation (Drafting Focus Group, November 10, 2005):

Joshua (22): I had a friend, her brother lost a job. He was making good money. His wife was a stay at home mother. He got laid off at his job and couldn't find another job that paid him enough. He finally found a job, but they were struggling.

Stephanie (21, Keyboarding Class Focus Group II, February 8, 2006): My dad was unemployed for 6 month and couldn't find something in his field because of what he does. It can get difficult when you have been in an area for so long. He did maintenance. His old department was moved to Mexico. He took a couple of jobs, but didn't stay there very long because it wasn't what he wanted. It took my dad forever to find a job.

Lucius pointed out that many people in his former neighborhood were unemployed and involved in criminal activities. He explained that they were consciously choosing to live that way and he did not want to get involved with them. He finally managed to move somewhere else and was glad about it

(Heating and Air Conditioning Individual Interview, November 8, 2005):

Lucius (29): I moved out of my neighborhood sometimes. There is too much crime and drugs and everything. It's just too much. Many people don't have jobs and don't get out of this situation. It's bad.

Another student pointed out that unemployment can be a problem for people who are trying to find a job according to their degree. If people want to have a choice or are not willing to work in a low-skilled blue collar job, they might

be affected by unemployment. The students did not judge this situation although they indicated that this would not be a concern for themselves because they were willing to work in another field. At the same time, everybody was very optimistic to find employment. In the Drafting as well as in the Heating and Air Conditioning focus group, people did not approach the issue seriously. One student pointed out (Drafting Focus Group, November 10, 2005):

Joshua (22): Some are unemployed because they choose to be unemployed.

Everybody laughed about it. Others pointed out what kind of job opportunities are available and emphasized that unemployment is not really a big issue for people in the country.

Kevin (24, Drafting Focus Group, November 10, 2005): There are lots of jobs, even if you work at McDonalds, but there are jobs there. Whether you choose the job or take the job, that's it.

Jeniffer (30, Drafting Focus Group, November 10, 2005): Most of the people that I know if they choose to remain unemployed, they refuse to take what a lot of people call crap jobs. They are not very good. In other words, you can go out and find a job in food service any day of the week, like wiping tables, working in a kitchen somewhere any day of the week. But those jobs don't pay very good. They don't have benefits. And, there are a lots of people who would refuse to take those kind of jobs because technically they deserve more money, but if you are really hungry they'll go and take some of those jobs.

Matthew (27, Drafting Individual Interview, November 10, 2005): We say here, you can always find a job, but at a time you can't be picky. I once lost a job when I was young busing tables. I lost the job and I was more qualified than a busboy. Two days later I had a job in a car wash. I wasn't picky. I needed a job, whatever. I got a job, so.



Although Matthew was willing for a long time to take any job he would find, he admitted that he might be more selective once he has acquired his degree in Drafting. He speculated that he would not be interested anymore in taking on low-skilled blue collar jobs. Alex also emphasized that there is no reason for people to be unemployed, but people need to make conscious choices as to where somebody wants to work (Heating and Air Conditioning Individual Interview, November 8, 2005):

Alex (27): I don't think it is a big issue. I don't watch the news as much as I should, but I don't think it has been addressed a lot. Like if you look at any newspaper or any resource to find a job, there are jobs announced always. That's not an issue in America. The issue is what the person is willing to take on. If a person wants to work they find a job. The cause of the problem is blaming. People want to blame the government for their problems like everybody does. Everybody wants to blame something, someone, but, ultimately it falls on that person and on what you want to do. If you don't like the situation you are in change it. And most people are not willing to take the steps to make that change. On an individual basis, on a smaller level, people change their situation no matter what.

The immigrants showed little sympathy with the idea and discussion about unemployment and outlined that they would always adjust to the situation and were willing to work anywhere, if necessary. Sahidi (29, Heating and Air Conditioning Individual Interview, November 8, 2005) pointed out:

“Unemployment means nothing to me. I can work anything!”

After talking about cases of unemployment and possible options of finding a job, the discussion in the Heating and Air Conditioning focus group turned around. Some students pointed out that unemployment is a conscious decision among people who prefer not to work but rely instead on social benefits. Many

students indicated that they had little sympathy for that. One student pointed out that going to the Department of Labor in order to receive financial aid would not be appropriate behavior for a man (Heating and Air Conditioning Focus Group, November 8, 2005):

Alex (27): It's a mind set. People who are more self driven and more motivated will go out and just find a job. The unemployment service can be a crouch. It can be a way of free loading.

Timothy (34): I am not a fan of the whole give-me-program. It puts everybody down. Other people, families may have to.... Like we have people who are illegal aliens and they come here and have medical needs and everything. Who covers that? We are. We have to do this. You need to try to make a way for yourself. America is full of opportunity. There are so many programs you can go in. Look at us. I find the pilgrimage.... Go back to school and in five, six years I could turn this into a big company. You just have to think big. That's why I am not a fan of the whole giving program.

Luis (22): If you don't have a clue where to go next, or where to go, they need some help. That's how people end up receiving unemployment.

Luis argued that people might need assistance to find a new direction in life and is less judgmental about their situation than Alex and Timothy. The most disseminated opinion among U.S. students was that unemployment is dependent on the individual's willingness to take on low qualified jobs, and that finding gainful employment depends on agency and courage. The role of politics and change had not been addressed. The students seemed not to have a vision about different work conditions or work organization, but rather appeared to be satisfied with the high flexibilization in the labor market that permits unlimited

working hours, a politics of hire and fire, employment for minimum wages, and few social benefits. Issues of risk had also not been addressed.

### *Images of the West among East German Students*

Students often expressed that the West, referring to the Western part of Germany or the so called old states, where unemployment rates are significantly lower and productivity rates and salaries are higher, was a possible destination after finishing their apprenticeship. I was interested in the perception about the West among young adults, their hopes, and the experiences they collected either while having been there or in interactions with West Germans. Some students expected to have better chances in West Germany in regard to finding a job than in the East. Others underscored that people in West Germany make more money. Sabine in the Office Clerk focus groups asked her classmates to pay more attention to the higher living costs in the West which might almost level out the difference in earnings.

The students discussed the issue of self-marketing and the necessity to appear with a high self-confidence which East Germans sometimes lack in comparison with their West German counterparts. Further issues were the need of having two working parents in the East while many women in West Germany either do not work or work part-time. According to the opinion of the young women it was not a question of choice but of necessity (Office Clerk Focus Group, June 10, 2005):

Caroline (21): They make more money in the West.

Sabine (22): No, if you go to the West as a Tippse [nickname for office clerk] you may make 100 or 200 Euro more. That is not so much more.

Ramona (22): Well, maybe, if you as the little Ossi [nickname for East German] go to the West.

Lioba (24): You need to have a lot of self-confidence.

Elizabeth (19): In the West you can even make money with cleaning.

Doreen (21): In the West the man is making good money. But, here in the East it is actually the case that both have to work in order to make ends meet. That's not like that in the West. There, the women can say, I only work part-time and they still make ends meet. That's a particular problem in East Germany.

Another student described how he felt treated in a condescending way while attending job interviews and job assessments. He did not feel comfortable among the West Germans and preferred to stay in East Germany (Assistant Tax Accountant Individual Interview, June 14, 2005):

Ingolf (25): I will first try to stay in Thüringen because as I applied for the bank clerk apprenticeship not just here but also in the old states I made the experience that to a certain extent they treat you differently. Well, I would say it was blatant, but they appeared so condescending in the interviews. Well, I applied at a bank and in the assessment centre they have put Osis and Wessis [nickname for East and West Germans] in one group and we had to speak up to certain issues. And the Osis, they were immediately [He ducks his head]... and somehow I experienced that also at other places, and so I thought, if an apprenticeship in this field, then in Thüringen and concentrated my applications in this region.

He further described the selection process in the West that he perceived as intimidating.

Ingolf (25): At the tests everything was so anonymous. Nobody talked to you. You just had to take a number, sit down on a

table and fill out the test for a whole day. The whole day nobody talked to you. And then they invited you again after the test showed a positive result. And then they had built these small groups which were mixed. Some were from the East, some from the West. And then you realized already how they treated you. I experienced that they hear how you talk. I don't realize that, but they said; you are from Südingen, but in such a way, just an Ossi. Of course, I thought; what's the matter with it. But with the organizers it was the same. They have immediately assigned you. I perceived that very negatively. You feel somehow inferior as a human. As I applied here everything was very open, they looked at you, talked. The other experience was rather bad.

Two other students confirmed Ingolfs' experience and told me that people they knew had similar encounters. A greater number of students had either heard about positive experiences or were convinced that there are more opportunities for them in the West and that life would be more comfortable and economically secure there. Two students in the Assistant Tax Accountant group knew already that they would work in West Germany next and looked forward to it (Assistant Tax Accountant Focus Group, June 14, 2005):

Ellinor (25): I have a girl friend which I know since we went together to school. She went during her apprenticeship in the old states to Kassel and she says she would never come back. Work there is a complete different story. People are friendlier. They don't walk around with such a falling face [meaning unhappy face].

The young men in the Heating, Gas, and Sanitary group appeared to be the most flexible students. They had heard of better opportunities in the West and that their qualification was welcomed there and could well imagine moving to the West or commute to work (Heating, Gas, and Sanitary Focus Group, June 15, 2005):

Marc (19): I have heard that they look for skilled workmen.  
Therefore, it is very likely that some from our class will go to the West.

Lars (18): It is so that they don't have a plumber over there. Well, they do have some kind of plumber, but more unspecific. They have somebody for heating, somebody for water and gas. In the East, we can do more than they can. If you go over there they usually have to employ two instead of one.

Andreas (19): If I would get a good offer, I would do it immediately. Pack the little packet and let's go.

Images of West Germany differed widely. Some students expected better opportunities and referred to higher income levels, better work conditions, and more job stability. Other students felt that they did not conform to the different mentality or had strong feelings for their home region and were convinced to rather make a lot of concessions than to move to West Germany.

### *Politics and Change*

*East Germany.* The last theme that I want to outline here is political change in Germany. Particularly the Heating, Gas, and Sanitary students raised a variety of political issues, and expressed their concern and anger about current political developments but also their thoughts about possible changes (Heating, Gas, and Sanitary Focus Group, June 15, 2005):

Bernd (19): All the shit they fabricate up there and we have to carry the can. Well, and then they say that's not our business. But, no this is our business. We slog and work on the building side not really squeamish. And just yesterday we heard that they up there get a salary raise again and that they move up to another salary bracket.

Andreas (19): Well, and negotiations with the unions are also not successful. The unions say; we need more money. Then there is more money, but in the countermove everything gets more expensive.

Marc (19): Well, we have learned that you can establish a party if you got 500 people together. That is not a problem. If you go there and say, we change something now, so that the people get a little bit more money, have better working hours, just in general to do something for the people, so that they see that something happens.

With “they” Marc referred to the politicians. The discussion reflects often expressed public opinions about politics and politicians. The young adults in this focus group discussed issues such as immigration politics, *Harz IV* reform (a reform about unemployment benefits), tax reform and the introduction of a medical fee, and outlined that those reforms do not seem to work, and that they are perceived as being absurd. Cynical remarks indicated that these young adults did not believe in any social improvement occurring as a result of various reforms that have been put in place over the last few years.

*United States.* In the United States, I asked students explicitly if the government and politics in the country play any role in their life planning, but most students denied that. One outlined that funding for somebody who wants to establish a business might be an issue. Three students got into a discussion about standardized testing and one of them pointed out (Heating and Air Conditioning Individual Interview, November 8, 2005):

Terrence (23): That’s how our government has set it up. Then they are looking at the individual if that person has learned anything. So they have all these tests on different levels. So government funding is based on this numbers and on standardized tests. The government is looking if this school has the number alright and if they are passing a certain

level. They are not interested if a person has learned anything because government funding is based on how many people passed this test.... Well, if you want to be a mathematician or a philosopher or something like that, yes, you know, is the best way to have some kind of standardized test, but if you want to be something like an artist or comedian or something out of the ordinary how do you measure that on the test? How do you put this on the test?

I further wanted to know if students had any desire to change politics in the country. Only Alex commented on that (Heating and Air Conditioning Individual Interview, November 8, 2005):

Alex (27): There is nothing you can do about the government in a direct and immediate sense. They're gonna do what they wanna do and it is gonna be as corrupt as it is until something major happens. Because as the system is set up the way it is now, it's very hard to change anything and people with good intentions who go in the government and want to change things, they get kicked out or buried by people who want to keep things the way they are. And because there is nothing that I can do in a direct way about it, what good would it do to worry about it? It only impairs my ability to function. It would make me unable to see the solution that is there. Einstein or somebody was saying you should not focus on the problem, you have to focus on the solution if you gonna see it. If that's what I am focused on in making myself a part of the problem by being frustrated about it I never gonna see what needs to happen to make the change. It would limit my ability to function.... There is a principle that you can not address a problem head on or that it is most difficult to address a problem head on. If you work at something, especially a government in any country you work on it piece by piece.

These remarks indicated that there was no broader collectivistic sense of belonging or of being oppressed. The students felt free and perceived their country as a place where opportunities were offered and dreams could be fulfilled. The role of the government was mostly ignored and the individual perceived him or herself as the navigator of ones own life path without being



concerned about anybody else or the overall wellbeing of society. Alex outlined that change can only be created by taking little steps on a personal and community level and did not perceive the people as a collective power or agent of change.

### Summary

The data clearly indicate that risk perception and career planning in both countries are influenced by factors on an individual and institutional level. The macro-societal level mainly played a role for the East German students. They were very concerned about unemployment in the country and also talked about social policies and the apprenticeship system.

The fear of becoming unemployed after finishing the apprenticeship influenced their views about the future. Feelings of pessimism, discouragement, and despair were as prevalent as the Hope that there might be a chance to find something in West Germany or another country. Finding stable employment was the major concern for most of the East German students who indicated that everything else in life is dependent on the achievement of this goal.

Starting a family was viewed as an obstacle to employment. Additionally, many East German students were involuntary in an apprenticeship program and felt that they were not sufficiently prepared for their occupations. Time and age was another major concern. The students underscored that they were trapped too long in the apprenticeship system, especially if they were unhappy with the current training program and planned to start another one.

Age consideration played a major part in students life planning. Most students believed that they should have finished their education at an age of 30. Having children was planned for the mid twenties and retirement for the late fifties to sixties.

In the United States many of those aspects were viewed very differently. The young adults there had little or no contact with unemployment and were not at all concerned about it. The impact of the government or public policies was only discussed in terms of standardized testing and funding opportunities.

The main theme was that everybody needs to “lift himself up by one’s bootstraps,” being a self agent of one’s life course and always motivated. Some students seemed to emerge from a rather desperate childhood and had the desire to change their life styles in order to live different than their family members and surroundings. They had little stability in their life and were open to different possibilities. Life plans were highly individualized, short term oriented and did not follow linear patterns.

U.S. young adults seemed much less connected to each other than their German counterparts. Friendships played a smaller role and relationships to peers in the training program were loose because students studied on their own pace. There was also a higher variability in terms of age, race, and socio-cultural background among the students. Many students were not able to name the occupation of their parents and seemed to have little sense of its meaning.

Technical programs were viewed as a step towards stable employment and higher salaries. Many students could imagine returning to school at any time

in their life and pursue a degree in another field. Age considerations played a much smaller role in life planning. Long term plans seemed not to be well thought through which was indicated by an imaginative retirement age of around 40.

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

#### Discussion

After outlining my research results for each country individually, this chapter provides a comparative perspective and answers to my guiding research questions for this study.

*1. How do young Americans and young Germans perceive risk and opportunity regarding their future life planning?*

The East German young adults indicated high risk perception and anxiousness regarding their future employment while the U.S. students were not anxious about their future employment prospects. High unemployment rates along with the impression that future career opportunities were limited caused fear and insecurity among the East Germans. Pessimistic approaches towards the transition from school to work were affected by difficulties in finding apprenticeships, unemployed family and friends, and poor prospects described by teachers and peers.

Young adults in Thüringen expected to struggle finding employment as office clerks, assistant tax accountants, and in drafting. Some students strategically planned their next career steps, particularly those who considered pursuing a higher education degree. Employment was a priority for students

remaining in the Erfurt region. Students were willing to seek employment not related to their occupational degree.

The perceived insecurity lead to a desire for employment stability. Berg and Möller (1996) reported that many young people whose parents were unemployed had the desire to find a “secure job” and a “secure salary” after their apprenticeship. Working with the Armed Forces was viewed as a wise choice to secure a job and salary. Almost half of the young people who were interviewed were willing to move to West Germany in order to start a second apprenticeship or find employment. According to Zapf, Breuer, Hampel, Krause, Mohr, and Wiegand (1987) the increasing pressure to individualize one’s biography corresponds with increased striving for security.

The students in the United States expressed little concern about their future, presuming that there would always be job opportunities in their related fields. Employment in low-skilled jobs was considered a back up plan. Most of the students planed to stay in their home towns, and those who planned to relocate had personal reasons, such as the desire to live somewhere else for a change. Two Mexican-American students had the impression that there were better job opportunities in California, simply because they thought more businesses were owned by Mexicans.

The young adults did not express any concerns about their future financial situations. They argued that financial security would just depend on how much work one was willing to take on and assumed that low-skilled jobs were readily available. This low risk perception regarding employment options might be based

on a much lower national unemployment rate, and flexible labor market policies, which enable employers to hire and fire at will. This common practice was not perceived as disturbing. It also suggests that these young adults were flexible and willing to accept low-skilled jobs, if necessary.

Looking at the conditions under which young U.S. adults in this study lived, it seems surprising that they expressed so much satisfaction with their employment, as well as their general life situations. Furedi (1997) wrote about the situation in the United States: “The inflation of problems which is a characteristic of today’s risk calculations follows logically from the decline of support for the perspective of social change” (p. 61). Furedi focused on the failures of human endeavor to discover solutions to serious social problems in the past and to use them as warrants for changes in American society. He referred to social stability and security. Instead, a culture of uncertainty was created in order to protect the status quo, but this uncertainty was not prevalent in young adults’ minds in this study. Their perceived security might have been based on the conviction that there was no better alternative to their situation. Therefore, due to sheer ignorance young adults in the United States remain optimistic regarding positive changes in their lives as well as the idea that success only depends on individual agency.

Family planning was approached differently in East Germany and the U.S. East German young adults were worried about the ability to secure a middle class lifestyle with children. Reasons for their insecurities again included unemployment. The young adults wanted to stay geographically flexible in order

to be more employable. This becomes more difficult with a family. In addition, there exists the notion that women face greater risk of losing their jobs and not finding other employment, and the fear that the expected salary would not sufficiently sustain a family, particularly when only one parent is working. Nevertheless, many students wished to start a family in their mid-twenties.

While most of the students in Germany had similar beliefs about the establishment of a family, U.S. family structures varied including single parent homes, male students having children with different women, or grandparents rearing children. Three African American and two Mexican American females pointed out that they consciously postponed having children in contrast to the trend among their peers. They first wanted to finish their training and establish a career instead of becoming “another stereotype.” The data support the trend that many African American students do not continue with higher education and often start to have children early.

Continuing education as a future life plan was also approached differently. Those East German students who wanted to pursue another degree either as an apprentice or as a college student planned to start immediately after finishing the apprenticeship and continue along the lines of a linear career or “normal biography.” Some of the students could imagine returning to school at some point. Overall, they had no plans for that and hoped it would not be necessary. The affordability of continuing their education was cause for further concern. Nevertheless, a career change later in life was a possible alternative to

unemployment or downward mobility. Examples of relatives or friends strengthened views about possible new pathways that could not be foreseen.

For the students in the United States the pursuit of another degree sometime in the future was part of the life plan. Ideas about programs of study varied widely, although the students were generally ill informed about degree requirements in pharmacy or law, for example. Knowing that returning to school was always possible kept the students convinced that there was no need to have a timeline and that opportunity would always stay open for them. Additionally, the belief was expressed that further education would not necessarily enable them to earn more money. For most students the salary seemed to be the ultimate measure for the effort that had to be put into either education or work.

The students also showed different levels of awareness about the opportunities in the labor market, labor policies, and social policies. In both countries I asked students if they thought about retirement. In East Germany students knew that the official retirement age is 65, but showed dissatisfaction with the government's attempts to raise the statutory retirement age. Some students intended upon retiring in their fifties.

Among the U.S. students some of the participants believed that they would never be able to retire, while others imagined retiring in their forties which seemed to be rather unrealistic because the assumption was based on the idea of generating "quick money" with one's own business. The statutory retirement age played little role in their life plans, especially among the students who considered self-employment. While talking about their future plans, no concerns



were expressed as to the achievability of their goals. Reasons for those plans could be an underlying desire to escape from reality. Long working hours, the pressure of combining school, work, and family, as well as the social pressure of high parental expectations, or the resistance to common social patterns was not directly expressed as a burden, but might be the underlying reason for their “dream plans.”

Overall, East German students tried to make long term plans for their lives, but acknowledged that this becomes increasingly difficult due to societal limitations. The need to plan on a shorter perspective was recognized, but not desired. Students in the United States pointed out that long term plans have no meaning for them, because personal circumstances can change very quickly. Their optimism was also based on the assumption that they would be able to pursue a next step in the life course, while a broader goal in life might have been overwhelming for the individual.

The 13th Shell Study (Deutsche Shell, 2000) supports my results and mirrors the high level of perceived insecurity among youth in Germany which appeared to be higher in the East than in the West and particularly high among the girls. Only 15% of the girls surveyed in the Shell Study said that they felt well prepared to cope with insecurities in the future. Eckerle (2000) called this phenomenon the “resigned mentality,” which is characterized by low self confidence, low levels of agency, and pessimism regarding their personal future.

East German students were more inclined to talk about their worries and concerns than their U.S. counterparts. One possible reason could be that the

insecurity of an unstable labor market provides a collective experience, while the struggle that U.S. young adults might have to go through is a highly individualized experience. They preferred to emphasize optimism and kept comments about concerns rather short. In the U.S., a message of freedom or liberty is consistent with educational choice. That is, young people believe in mobility, that they can return to educational institutions at any time and are free to decide and pursue whatever career path desired.

The young adults in the United States seemed less inclined to make active life plans and kept themselves open to opportunities that might come along. They preferred to be in a “waiting position.” Compared with their German counterparts they seemed to be passive life planners, but indicated that they would become active life agents on the short term if a goal seemed to be in reach. The strategy among the U.S. students has been to suppress concern and take a simplified approach towards life plans. The reason thus might be that concerns would have been overwhelming and would have left them with the feeling of resignation. The short term planning and enjoyment towards the present approach creates a more optimistic feeling and success and acknowledgement in the short term might help encourage them to pursue another career step.

*2. How do risk perceptions in both countries differ regarding the school-to-work-transition?*

Vondracek and Reitzle (1998) argued that a successful transformation from school to work depends on the vocational maturity of young people. If the

transition is no longer linear, it becomes more difficult for young people to reach a certain stage of maturity. This notion resonates for the East German students who did not have the chance to receive company-based training during their apprenticeship as well as for students who needed to wait one or two years until they found an apprenticeship. If young adults due to circumstances were forced to pursue training in a field that was not their first choice, this may have led to dissatisfaction with the occupation and a feeling of unpreparedness and insecurity regarding their professional life. In the United States students might acquire more professional maturity during their interim period if they are able to find employment with increasing levels of responsibility. On the other hand, if they continue to work in low-skilled jobs over an extended period of time there is no foundation for the development of occupational maturity either.

Baltes (1987, 1990) claimed that career development is today one of conscious gains and losses. His claim holds true for a part of the East German population in this study. Some of them had to start all over again after finishing their first apprenticeship and might begin either another apprenticeship or end up in a retraining program offered by the Labor Exchange Office.

East German students perceived time as being lost if the training they pursued would not lead to stable employment. U.S. students emphasized that time spent in college might be a loss if it would not lead to employment with adequate payment. The investment in attending their technical college was viewed as gainful, because students expected to generate a higher income with their degree.

In comparison, German young adults perceived a higher risk regarding the school-to-work transition than their U.S. counterparts. In the transition from school to apprenticeship where in East Germany one might not be admitted to the desired training program and later in the transition from apprenticeship to work with the risk of not finding employment. Among the students in the United States risk perception was low. Students showed little concern with time frames and unemployment. Almost all U.S. students pursued the training of their choice. The only risk that some students outlined was the social pressure of their peers who were not pursuing another school degree and were distracting them from school work. Some U.S. students had to consciously separate themselves from peers and even family members in order to keep the confidence about their chosen career path.

*3. To what extent are young adults aware of personal, institutional and macro-structural limitations?*

*Personal Limitations*

Students outlined that certain character traits prevented them from being successful, such as laziness, hesitation, being less outspoken, or less self confident than their peers. In the United States, students emphasized self motivation as the major factor to success. Some of the East German students were concerned with self marketing which was not promoted in schools and in the former East German society.

### *Institutional Limitations*

On the institutional level parents, peers, teachers, and career counselors function as career advisors and influence young adults decisions. Parents played a role in those families where they owned a business and expected their children to become the owner in the future. In some cases the students felt emotionally supported by their parents. Nevertheless, the majority of the students received little specific parental advice in regard to career decisions and their life plans. Families in East Germany were described as being less able to prepare their offspring for the challenges of the risk society as well as new cultural demands and could not ensure that their children would remain in their social status (Weymann, 1996).

Students in East Germany seemed to rely more on relationships with peers than their U.S. counterparts. They talked a lot about the employment situation of their friends and drew conclusions about their own further options of finding employment. In some cases students expressed that they felt lucky to be in an apprenticeship and were helping others to find one. Most East Germans had peers who also pursued a vocational career or were attempting to do so.

In the United States, students often expressed that they did not spend much time with their peers. They consciously demarcated themselves from former classmates and high school friends because their influence on ones own life course was perceived as negative. Peers were partially described as young adults who did not finish high school or did not work, were involved in crime, took

drugs, and did not take over any responsibilities. Some of the young women described their peers as young single mothers without positive future prospects.

The influence of teachers was viewed differently in the two countries. It seemed that students in the United States more often felt that the teachers took serious interest in them and their career, while in Germany the relationship between teachers and students was more limited to teaching the context of the program. Career advisement in Germany is externalized to institutions like the Labor Exchange Office or presumed to be given from parents, and peers.

Career counseling played a small role in both countries in the career decision process. It seemed that those students who were responsible self agents did not need much help from a counselor and were satisfied with the service; while students who were unsure about their career or in East Germany needed assistance with finding another training company received insufficient support from the institution.

### *Macro-Structural Limitations*

On this level limitations were mainly experienced among East Germans. Students in the United States were generally very satisfied with their technical training, had little and mostly no experience with unemployment, and were not critical about work conditions or the role of the government in the organization of the labor market.

In East Germany all those aspects played a major role in the focus group discussions and individual interviews. The apprenticeship system does not permit

much individual choice, because of limited availability of company based workplaces. The channeling of young adults into certain trainings is aimed at achieving a balance of supply and demand in the labor market, but leads to dissatisfaction and a lack of motivation among the young adults. The supply of work training places, as well as the curricula in vocational schools is not necessarily related to actual needs at the labor market. Therefore, students in East Germany had been skeptical about the value of their training and their future employment prospects with their professional degrees. Nevertheless, some East German students perceived the apprenticeship as a safer trajectory than studying at an institution of higher education, because they anticipated finding a job in their profession or a related field.

For the U.S. students technical college education was highly individualized. Students could study on their own pace and take modules that would bring them together with different classmates in different courses. Although all students did pursue the same training, they often worked part or even full time outside of college. Early work experience was an unstructured non-institutionalized process, because young adults usually worked in many different jobs that were not related to their training.

The German technical programs were highly structured and provided a collective experience. All students went through their courses together, but worked part time in different companies to learn the practical skills for their future profession. The individual experiences at the workplace were evaluated and discussed in school so that students learned from each other.

Unemployment was the major force towards a high risk perception among the students in East Germany. The figures of the Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend (2004) about youth unemployment in 2003 in Germany reflect that. The report outlined that 41% of the young women and 39% of young men in East Germany were unemployed after finishing their apprenticeships. However, one year later young women were less often in employment that was related to their apprenticeship (61%) than young men (65%). Approximately 25% of the graduates were unemployed one year after their apprenticeship. Among those who were employed, 40% of the men and 38% of the women had only temporary employment contracts. Most of the students who were taken over by their companies were still employed one year after the apprenticeship. Another 92% of young women who received a non-temporary contract in their training companies were in jobs related to their apprenticeship and only 2% were unemployed one year later while 3% of men were unemployed.

Low-skilled jobs or what Esping-Andersen (1990, p. 214) called “junk-jobs” are rare in Germany and their creation is not supported. Therefore, young adults who do not find employment in their profession are left with little chances to find a job at all. The best case scenario for the students is to be employed by their training companies because it usually ensures stable employment and at least provides further professional work experience.

The phenomenon of youth unemployment was practically non-existent in the former GDR and the East German workers highly identified themselves with



the work they performed. Therefore, the high unemployment rate that occurred since the unification causes not only the greatest difficulties in the transformation, but also a high risk perception among the population concerned.

Although unemployment was not addressed by the U.S. young adults in this study, it is a threat to people in this country as well. Furedi (1997) outlined that the risk of becoming unemployed in the United States equals “the risk of smoking ten packs of cigarettes per day” (p. 58) pointing out that the unemployed in the United States face social exclusion and as a result higher health risks as well as life risks. Furedi might also have found an explanation for the resistance to talk about this potential life or career risk. He pointed out that perceptions of risk are influenced by previous experiences of change and he wrote:

The failure of numerous social experiments – from the Soviet Union to the European-type welfare state – has strengthened conservative suspicions about the consequences of change. Today terms like planning, social engineering and reform often have a negative connotation. Even the attempt to formulate a state interventionist strategy is dismissed as utopian. (p. 60)

While in the past state interventions seemed to be in the interest of the public, today they are viewed as the cause of societal problems and so is change. This explains the resistance of U.S. young adults to talk about unemployment concerns and their worries regarding their future life course.

The argument that the risk of youth unemployment is smaller in Germany than in the United States (Büchtemann, Schupp, & Solof, 1993) cannot be supported with this study. Although American young adults go through a floundering period and highly rely on on-the-job training, they usually have some kind of employment. American young adults appear to be much more flexible and

be willing to work in any kind of job if necessary. A reason for the higher risk perception among East German young adults is most likely the high unemployment rate in the East. In addition, the perception might also be related to a higher consciousness about the potential loss of an occupational identity and as a consequence decreasing employment opportunities.

Consciousness about the concept of a profession and the privileges that could come with it were less developed among the U.S. students. Most of them viewed their degree as the foundation for generating a higher income and secure employment, and anticipated that in the future another degree might be necessary. Germans are usually much more fixed to certain professional positions as well as social positions in a status hierarchy than their U.S. counterparts.

Unemployment benefits were discussed among German students who were concerned about not being able to generate an income once they are done with their apprenticeship. In the United States, some male students indicated that it would be inappropriate for a young male to ask for financial support. Rieger and Leibfried (2003) have stated that the financing of unemployment insurance in the United States is incumbent upon the employer alone. Therefore, many people have to rely on themselves if they need to bridge a phase between employments.

The students in the United States were little concerned with politics in their country, particularly labor politics, while the German students discussed current welfare policies and reforms that have been put in place regarding health care

and unemployment benefits. One explanation for this difference was provided by Rieger and Leibfried (2003) who pointed out that in Germany federal state wages and income are strongly subject to political manipulation. In the United States, by contrast, the price for labor power, which is determined by market competition, is viewed normatively as the “correct” price and as a “just wage.” As a consequence both individual and collective distributional labor outcomes are considered far less to be the responsibility of the political sphere.

The individual is expected to take sole responsibility for all consequences of his or her actions. This orientation is also reflected in the greater scope of inequality as well as in a greater tolerance for increases in inequality in the population. I would further argue that the students in the United States were little aware about possible better working conditions and workers rights in general (Rifkin, 1995). Therefore they were less critical about their own situation.

#### *4. How do Americans/Germans cope with uncertainty regarding the continuously changing requirements of the labor market?*

In both countries the students had different positions on the development and application of coping strategies. Due to the highly structured school-to-work transition in Germany, students had to cope with different uncertainties than their U.S. counterparts. The major concern of the East Germans was to find an apprenticeship followed by the added pressure of finding employment, preferably stable employment. General strategies were to rely on recommendations by

family members or friends, sending out numerous applications, and remain flexible and open to changing career anticipations or geographic locations.

In the United States young adults took a highly flexible and individualized approach towards seeking employment. Keeping options open and not making strong professional commitments were two strategies/themes used. The technical training was perceived as a stepping stone for their next trajectory – a stable employment situation to last for several years. The students avoided making long term plans, but developed future dreams as an encouragement for themselves. Another emphasized strategy in the United States was to stay away from negative influences as provided by family members or peers who are not interested in pursuing a career.

While the German students shared a collective experience of being in certain life trajectories and expressed concern for others as well as the society, American students tried to be highly independent and individualized. East Germans talked openly about their worries and concern and exchanged ideas about how to cope with uncertainties in the transition from school to work. This process strengthened their capability to realistically evaluate their own abilities as well as their chances at the labor market. In the United States, the individual seemed to negotiate these aspects alone through success and failure.

Nevertheless, one student, Andrew, represents a trend in the United States towards the building of new communities which contrasts the increasing individualization in society. He described his neighborhood community as a union of people who were willing to cooperate. They had created a collective bond

based on shared values, solidarity, and their submission of individual interest to those of a larger group. The focus was not on self-interest but self development in accordance with individual needs and the needs of the neighborhood were the driving forces.

*5. How are underlying values guiding Americans/Germans in their planning?*

Young adults in both countries seemed to have a number of similar values. Work or to have stable employment was often emphasized. In both countries work played a major role in one's self identification. In the former East Germany, the meaning of life was strongly defined by the work one did. East Germans place an even greater emphasis on work than West Germans, but they are also more interested in relatively equal outcomes for those who participate in the labor market (Kaina, 2002). In the former GDR a duty and the right to work was manifested in the constitution. One of the leading ideologies was to provide security for everybody (Leisering & Leibfried, 1999).

Many young adults in the United States were inclined to work hard while others did not share this sentiment. Some students anticipated that retirement might not be possible for them, because they would not have sufficient financial resources for that. Others seemed to have delusions about early retirement and generating an income. For most young adults work was viewed as a means to make money and not as a meaningful way to promote self development or participate in the development of their society. The drafting students were the only ones who showed some identification with their chosen occupation.

The East German young adults valued a linear career path and expected to finish their education at least by the age of 30 with their first apprenticeship completed by the age of 25 or earlier. They were holding on to traditional career patterns and tried to fulfill societal expectations although they realized that it might not be possible. Also, the students in East Germany seek an apprenticeship in a specific field. Their expectation is that after completing the apprenticeship they will work in their field for an extended period of time.

For the East Germans, their career is determined early on while students in the United States allow themselves an exploratory period where they switch jobs as often as they want and try out different fields. The early career path of East Germans is a result of societal regulations and expectations. In contrast, in the United States the career path is directed by exploration, but also limited due to a lack of monetary resources. Nevertheless, the U.S. career path can also be viewed as having a trial and error phase that leads to professional maturity where one develops traits and social skills such as reliability, confidentiality, loyalty, or punctuality.

Students in the United States further explained that one has to stay open for other opportunities and the need to be flexible. German students emphasized the desire for stability in their lives. Nevertheless, due to the difficult labor market situation many of them were willing to be geographically flexible to find employment outside of their state. Flexibility was emphasized as a necessary trait, but also viewed as a barrier to establish a family and sustain a healthy social life.

Another difference between the two populations was the sense of individuality. Students in the United States emphasized their independence and need to get ahead by their own means. Some of them had extended their exploration phase to more than 20 years. The life experiences in this period were highly individualized. There was little sense of connectedness and no conversation with each other about their life path. It seemed that the students did not have much in common to talk about apart from the few courses they were attending together.

In one group religion became a common theme (Accounting Focus Group II). Religion plays a much bigger role in the United States compared with any other industrialized nation (Markovits, 2004). According to Dee (1999) almost four-fifths of Americans have either a quite firm belief in God or a confident belief in God's existence. Since Tocqueville visited the U.S. in 1830 and had the impression that religion played a major role in Americans daily lives not much seemed to have changed in this regard (De Tocqueville, 1835/2003). Rifkin (2004) pointed out, that

over half of all Americans are devoutly religious-more so than any other industrialized people-and they just don't buy the idea of a relativist world. Religious Americans still believe in a grand scheme of things and live their beliefs intimately each day. (p. 5)

He further outlined that Europeans "left a personal God behind" (p. 19).

Less than 10% of the population in Germany attend religious services once a month and even less in the East.

In East Germany, students followed a common pathway and were for the most part in the same life trajectory. Their social life appeared to be relatively

similar and they had lively discussions about each other's experience. There seemed to be a true interest in each other and empathy was expressed.

Also, the East German students appeared to be very independent, but would also consider opinions expressed by parents, friends, teachers, or counselors. Although they were individualized in the sense that many young adults make their decisions alone, nevertheless, they were influenced by experiences of their peers and had developed a risk sensibility in their lives that united them. Notions of individuality differ in East and West Germany. Münchmeier (2003) pointed out that youth in the West are more concerned about individuality (47%) than youth in the East (39%).

Education in the East supported equality of gender and might have contributed to the high level of emancipation among East Germans. According to Münchmeier (2003) youth in the East seemed to be more emancipated because it was more important for them to defend their own interests in a group – something that girls in particular were not willing to give up. I did not discover any major differences between the views and expectations of males and females in the focus group discussions. Both genders were equally concerned with starting a family, pathways of their fellow students and peers, as well as politics and change.

As opposed to the collectivist approach in East Germany, the U.S. students were highly individualized based on the ideology of “the American Dream” which involves the idea that every individual can get ahead by his or her own means. Self motivation was highly emphasized while there seemed to be



little empathy for others. Furedi (1997) explained the consequences of this traditional American value and underscored that the U.S. lacks sociability. A “culture of greed which ignored the destructive consequences of unrestrained egoism, is held responsible for the breakdown of elementary forms of social solidarity and weakening of trust” (140). His conviction that the process of individuation has resulted in a higher consciousness of risk was difficult to determine because students did not talk about worries and concerns.

Nevertheless, a fear of terrorism and wars as well as the state of the economy was emphasized. There might have been a collective fear to talk about individual concerns because it could have been interpreted as a personal weakness or distrust in American society.

Furedi (1997) used the term individuation and argued that individualization in the United States needs to be rephrased. He pointed out that

individuation without a parallel process of reintegration into some new social network can contribute to the creation of an atmosphere of mistrust. In particular it has the effect of altering the interactions between people. Where once neighbors and colleagues might have been seen as friends and allies, today they are more likely to be perceived as competitors and as potential threats. (p. 141)

*6. Is there a difference between East German young adults and American young adults regarding their self consciousness, agency, and optimism about the future?*

It is difficult to draw conclusions about self consciousness from the observations and discussions in the focus groups. All students appeared self confident and were willing to answer my questions. U.S. students seemed more

self-conscious than their East German counterparts. This might be due to the fact that I am a foreigner and also to the notion mentioned above that there is less trust among people in the United States. Another reason could be that I am a white woman coming from the University and that some students, particularly African American students, felt little connection to me. On the other hand, all immigrants were glad to share their thoughts and experiences because we could relate to each other since we were non-natives.

Once I had identified myself as an East German and told the students in Germany that I am studying in the United States they felt very confident in talking with me about their concerns. The reason is that we all share similar experiences and there was little fear that one could be misunderstood or misinterpreted. The difference is that East Germans were more inclined to talk about their weaknesses, concerns and worries than their U.S. counterparts.

Waterkamp (1990) found that accurate self-evaluation was promoted in East German schools and teachers told me that they were still emphasizing that. Students in the former East had to evaluate themselves continually in front of the class and were publicly evaluated by teachers. Optimistic or unrealistic self-appraisals and individualistic assertions of personality were discouraged. The author argued that this practice has not only contributed to a lower self-esteem among East Germans but also to their performance orientation since rewards and incentives were more group oriented. This practice could still be prevalent in schools today.

Sturzbecher and Hess (2003) found that East German youths tend to evaluate their abilities more realistically, which might be due to the fact that they are less self-confident. Sturzbecher and Hess (2003) did a study among youth in Saxony and Nordrhein Westfalia. They found out that the students in Saxony, East Germany had significantly lower self confidence. A contributing reason for the view that their country – the German Democratic Republic – has been declared inferior and in need of restructuring and change. Additionally, the East German states were in a state of economic need regarding aid for carrying out the transformation. According to a study by Weiss and Brauer (1998), apart from the climate in the family, self-evaluation of future employment options has a significant impact on youthful self confidence.

Young adults in the United States receive a lot of praise in schools, because their family situations sometimes do not provide the foundation for being self confident. Students are encouraged by teachers to feel good about themselves and also about their country. As far as this study is concerned I was not able to determine the level of self confidence among the individuals in the United States. To some extent it seemed that various students thought very highly of themselves and were not able to reflectively evaluate their abilities, but I did not get to know them well enough to draw further conclusions.

In regards to agency, students in both countries showed various levels. While some students relied on family members to find employment or followed directions from career counselors, the majority of the students made the decision about their training themselves. Nevertheless, the students in East Germany

relied more on the institutional framework that was guiding them into their next life trajectory. Therefore, they were more concerned with restrictions that resulted from societal expectations and guidance and felt that their life path was externally directed. They also criticized the lack of choice in regard to their career.

The biggest difference was found in risk perception about future career options. Where U.S. students indicated a strong optimism, the East Germans displayed pessimism. The students in the United States believed that everything would still be possible and attainable in their lives emphasizing that one always has to stay positive. Considering that some of the students came from a difficult or disadvantaged family situation the students' convictions gave the impression that they were rescuing themselves through optimism, because hope might have been the only factor that kept them on path.

The German counterparts for the most part came from more stable family backgrounds and grew up in a country where various welfare policies provide social security. Their risk perception was high because the students were fearful they may lose the security they were used to and were therefore rather pessimistic about their near future. The females in particular were concerned about their options to participate in the labor market, because they perceived women to be discriminated against in society. Most parents in the East had been in stable employment until the unification and might have caused awareness about gender inequalities existent in unified Germany.

Those findings correspond with the result of Sturzbecher and Freytag's (2000) research. They found out that hopelessness and agency correspond with

age and future educational perspectives. Youth in schools who prepared for vocational education and training or who were already in the dual system were more fatalistic about their perspectives. Optimism was particularly low among girls who felt that they had very little control over their employment options.

*7. What recommendations can be given to policy makers in both countries to adjust career guidance and education to the conditions of uncertainty?*

Based on Gonon's (1998) notion that the international argument has to be used carefully and cannot be the major base for policy decisions, I will not provide concrete policy recommendations. Instead, I would prefer to call them "considerations" since my findings are based on one exclusive case study and cannot be generalized to an overall population. Nevertheless, this comparison can enrich the educational and socio-political discourse in Germany and possibly in the United States as well. The intent of these considerations for policy making are to ease the transformation process of young adults and ensure their successful management of the trajectories in an apprenticeship or technical training and early employment. Some of these considerations apply to both countries; others are mainly concerned with Germany and in particular with East Germany. I will start out with them.

Many young adults in my study have pointed out that there is a lack of appropriate role models that could show them how to adapt successfully to economic and social change. As Bynner (1999) outlined already, the successful transition from school to work relies more on individual factors such as formal

education, skills, planning competencies, coping strategies, and flexibility – in sum “employability.” Curricula in vocational schools need to involve the development of those factors and constantly evaluate if students improve competencies such as creativity, flexibility, sociability, team work, enthusiasm, willingness to take risks, to change, and to take over responsibility.

The students in East Germany also claimed that to stress traditional values such as high discipline, punctuality, politeness, and orderliness in primary and secondary school had helped them to be successful at the workplace. They criticized teachers who did not pay enough attention to those traits at the vocational school. Trommsdorff (1994) pointed out that those values were strongly emphasized in East Germany and could help young adults cope successfully with new developmental tasks. For instance, high performance at workplaces, expected employee adaptability, reliability, and teamwork were values that ranked very high in former East Germany.

Despite this emphasis on values, students need to be self confident and optimistic about the chances that the market economy offers (Beyer, 1996) which could be accomplished if teachers would talk more about success than about poor future prospects. Teachers further need to become convinced that students could achieve their goals, which according to Berg and Möller (1996) was the case a few years after the unification. East Germans have experienced another societal system and, therefore, they are very critical about the market economy. Nevertheless, a pessimistic attitude does not lead to a change. Teachers should caution students about the downsides of capitalism and encourage ideological

discussions. Cynicism and being negative does not help the students and might instead lead to resignation.

What these young adults also need is the ability to reflexively negotiate or renegotiate their opportunities and their commitment. Misinformation or a lack of information about the partnership between employers, unions, and the state that is the foundation for the establishment of the apprenticeship system in Germany have led to a certain ignorance about the opportunities provided for young adults in comparison with their counterparts in other countries such as the United States. The pessimistic, even cynical, and sometimes angry feelings that were expressed by many students may be based on a risk perception regarding their future career, and the fact that some students were not able to enter the apprenticeship of their choice leaving them stuck with their current training.

In order to provide more security, students need to have a clearer idea about the reality in the world of work and a training that would ease navigations within the labor market that may lie ahead of them. A precondition to accomplish this would be that teachers need to establish a closer relationship to workplaces. Although internships for vocational teachers have been introduced in Germany, not many have made use of them so far.

Another recommendation is to update the curricula of vocational schools. The efficiency debate prevalent in the United States might also be considered in Germany (Gonon, 2004). Particularly in the drafting program, students outlined that their training is not in demand in the labor market anymore because the requirements for technical drafting have shifted. Often engineers would draft

themselves or they need a person who is firm with different computer drafting programs and can be hired as a contractor. Especially in the field of technological education a constant update of the learning context is needed. In the United States, students acquired different drafting skills more related to graphic design, which is in greater demand in the workplace.

Another model that might provide young people in Germany with more satisfaction about their training could be to let them earn more money during their apprenticeship, but pay for their education. This might increase students' sense of self responsibility and self control. Many students had expressed dissatisfaction with the low salary they received during their apprenticeship and were particularly dissatisfied when it was not the apprenticeship of their choice.

The apprenticeship system in Germany tracks young adults early into specific careers which hinders employment flexibilities (Büchtemann, Schupp, & Soloff, 1993). Therefore, it would increase student employability if employers would acknowledge skills and competences acquired during the training that are useful for other work fields as well. Additionally, some of the vocational trainings in Germany seem to be too long. It is recommended that programs be renegotiable in lengths or shortened to permit young adults to go back to school to pursue another degree.

My study also indicates that more U.S. students were willing to become entrepreneurs in comparison with their East German counterparts. Entrepreneurship in Germany is much smaller than in the United States, although often members of the lower class in the U.S. would be lodged in their class even



if they become self employed. Nevertheless, this tendency leads me to suggest that more emphasis should be put on teaching entrepreneurial skills in German vocational schools to give students another employment option. According to the information of the Institut für Arbeitsmarkt- und Berufsforschung (2001), an average of 10% of the in-company trained apprentices in Germany become self-employed sometime in their lives.

Further, I agree with Locker (1996) who argued that career counseling in schools or at the Labor Exchange Office in Germany has to be more pro-active at least to reach those students who do not have the courage and agency to take action themselves. Particularly in the United States, some students seemed to have received very little career counseling which might have contributed to their long floundering periods. In both countries, students outlined that they did not receive sufficient information about different occupations and felt unprepared to make an informed decision. Lerman (1990) pointed out that there is a growing need for adult mentors, especially for those young adults who lack ties to their parents.

Although the issue was not addressed in the United States, affordable, flexible, quality child care is a necessary foundation for many women to work or to pursue technical training. Particularly the female students in East Germany felt that they were discriminated in the labor market and viewed that as a reason for the low birth rate in the country. In the United States, having children and probably being a single mother was addressed as a potential barrier to attending a technical college, finding stable employment, and receiving a higher paycheck.

Work, training, and private life are highly flexible in the United States. In order to afford quality training and make ends meet students need to work part-time or full-time. Often they would work in fields that are not related to their program of study which leads to the assumption that students might not be sufficiently trained over all, especially considering the short training periods for a degree.

Teaching values seems to be important for the students in both countries, not just to contribute to occupational success, but also to educate citizens who would work on improving their society. Reitzle and Silbereisen (2000b) found that Eastern adolescents and young adults put a great emphasis on collectivist values such as family security, politeness, and respect for tradition and I would argue that those values should be sustained. According to Schwarzer and Leppin (1990), having healthy relationships with peers, family, and teachers provides the necessary social support as well as emotional, instrumental, and informational aid that helps young adults cope successfully with uncertainty and unpleasant conditions. Scheller (2002) pointed out that solidarity, a trustful working relationship, and a high responsibility are important values among all group members for a society.

In the United States, it seems to me that there is a great need to teach those values. To share them might also connect people and unify their goals. Living and working conditions could surely be improved if the majority of the members of society would recognize the need for a change. With U.S. citizens working up to 70 hours a week while going to school and having a family seems

to suggest that quality of life as well as quality of work in the United States need to be newly defined.

Another recommendation is that students in the U.S. need to be better informed about their rights as citizens to change life and work conditions. The high emphasis on individuality prevents not only the development of a collective sense, but also the readiness to stand up for social change, activism that would lead to more equality in the country. The challenge is to get students to recognize that the assumption that individual action leads to success does not work for many individuals. One possibility to create higher awareness about the possibilities of collective action is to reform teacher education in the U.S. I recognize how tremendously difficult it will be to create awareness about the structural and cultural characteristics of success in the U.S. Although various communities can provide resources for success, they can also be the reason for failure.

The young adults in this study often showed a low level of reflexivity about their own life conditions as well as about politics and were not able to recognize a connection. Reflexive individuals would become more skeptical about persistent power structures in society, have a strong desire to stay informed about policy and social issues and become inclined to take over a more active role in changing current conditions. There are various social groups in the United States that need more help than others. As Shanahan (2000) pointed out, racial and ethnic minorities in particular are likely to experience transitions that will have negative effects on their life course including diminished prospects for socio-

economic achievement and a fulfilling family life. Therefore they are more likely to need assistance and guidance.

Beck (1991, p. 11) talked about a “political self-reflection about risk” which needs to be raised in Germany, but seems also necessary in the United States although the risk that has to be addressed differs in both countries. Life trajectories need to be newly defined as well as the concept of a normal biography. It seems important to reconsider the age structuration of the lifespan as it is defined by social norms and institutions, particularly in Germany.

*8. What can policymakers in both countries learn from each other?*

The intent behind this question is to offer some benchmarking ideas as to what might be changed in one country based on the observation of another country. Although the cultural as well as the socio-economic backgrounds in Germany and the United States are very different and the results of this comparison allow no generalization, a few aspects might raise awareness and could be taken into consideration. Based on the literature as well as my own experiences with service in the United States, I was skeptical about the quality of technical education in this country. The school that finally permitted my data collection surprised me in many regards. I was most impressed with the career service offered to the students as well as the strong connection that teachers had to the industry. I suggest that the following aspects should be considered in Germany:

- 1) Technical programs should provide skills and knowledge that are currently in need in the labor market. This requires a constant update of existing curricula.
- 2) Teachers should be more involved with the industry in order to further educate themselves about recent developments.
- 3) Teachers should also be more involved in the job placement of their students.
- 4) Vocational programs should have their length adjusted to actual training needs and not be overextended.
- 5) Vocational programs in Germany need to be modernized and admission to them needs to be flexibilized so that students at different career stages can enter them.
- 6) Vocational schools should receive more autonomy in order to provide them with the opportunity to compete with other schools and improve their services.

The overregulation in Germany not only leads to fear and increased risk perception, it also encourages defensive strategies in life planning meant to secure the status quo of employment. Esping-Andersen (1990) called the German system a conservative welfare state because it has been slow to react to societal changes such as increasing unemployment and now increasing poverty as well. Nevertheless, Leisering and Leibfried (1999, p. 4) pointed out: "While the German welfare state may appear like a dinosaur to some observers, this strong

tradition of state welfare can still offer ample stimulations for the international debate on restructuring welfare states.”

Although I have been in the United States for only three years and the focus of this study is very limited I suggest that the following aspects could be considered in the United States:

- 1) Quality training needs to be ensured throughout vocational education.

When students are viewed as customers, and there is heightened competition with other schools for enrollments, a market principle drives educational programming and delivery which may compromise academic standards and training excellence.

- 2) The schools should create more collective experiences among the students and strengthen their sense of solidarity. That can only be achieved if students spend more time together, preferably at school and at the work place.
- 3) Students need to become aware of workers' rights as well as appropriate human workplace conditions. Instead of just teaching skills and basic knowledge a broader consciousness about the value of work in society, environmental issues, as well as social issues need to be created as well.
- 4) The concept of the profession should be communicated in order to strengthen students' identification with their occupations. This could lead to the willingness among the students to offer better quality work and a sense of pride in their skills.

- 5) Minimum vocational training standards should be introduced for new employment hires. Vocational graduates should meet trade certifications and industry standards in order to ensure a higher quality work.
- 6) A technical degree should become more uniformly recognized all over the country. Employers would have a better indication of training in skills and competencies held by a vocational school graduate.

### Conclusion

The most striking finding of this research is that, although the welfare support and the regulation of the labor market in Germany are set in place to protect the individual from certain risks, the actual risk perception among young adults about potential losses of job, social status, and financial security are much higher than in the United States where less social protection is provided by the government. In the United States, eligibility criteria for social assistance are more restrictive, the benefit levels are much lower and paid for a much shorter period of time.

It seems that risk protection, risk consciousness, and risk perception are strongly interrelated. In the United States, little risk protection is provided and little risk perception has been found in this study. Although those findings cannot be used to draw conclusions about the need of welfare supply, they can encourage or influence the debate about the meaning and purpose of risk protection and the social consequences of it.

The results of the research also indicate young East Germans were better informed about social policies than their American counterparts and, therefore, displayed more consciousness about current political reforms. The sense of community and mutual trust among them might have contributed to a broader collective sense of insecurity. In the United States, students were highly individualized and showed little interest in the life of their fellow students as well as in politics.

According to Leisering and Leibfried (1999) European welfare states in general have an impact on individual lives and contribute to distinct life-course regimes. The authors argued, "They produce and sustain specific temporal structures of life by institutional definitions of events, phases, episodes and transitions that are linked to individual expectations and life plans" (p. 6). They further pointed out that the United States places a strong emphasis on education, less emphasis on social security and little emphasis on risk management, mainly welfare.

The German model attempts to balance those three components more equally. In East Germany, the situation is a bit different because during GDR times life courses were pre-planned and actively controlled. The norm for everybody was a full employment biography but the individual had less occupational choice since careers could be imposed by the state. The reorientation to more flexibility requires assistance so that students find successful coping strategies for planning their life course.



The German society seems to provide higher levels of trust so that the young adults spoke more freely about their concerns regarding job search, unemployment, starting a family, and establishing a middle class lifestyle. Fukuyama (1995) underlined, "Trust is the expectation that arises within a community of regular, honest, and cooperative behavior, based on commonly shared norms, on the part of other members of that community" (p. 26). The importance of this notion needs to be considered in U.S. schools where the ideology of the "American Dream" seems to be too dominant.

The strong notion of pessimism among the East German students needs to be taken seriously. As Bailey (1988) pointed out, pessimism paralyzes and is a celebration of passiveness which cannot lead to positive outcomes. Schools need to establish optimistic approaches and concepts about ways to cope with uncertainty in the life course (Asbrand, 2005). To make decisions and carry them through is always a risk and young adults need to learn how to evaluate it. Schools need to reconsider teaching methods in order to prepare young adults for the new requirements of the labor market and provide them with the confidence to meet job search and work place challenges.

Young adults in the United States seem to have very different needs. Some of them know little security in their lives and need to experience stability, community, and trust. The negative impact of extreme individualization was emphasized by Emile Durkheim (1893/1964). He argued that a society composed of isolated individuals pursuing their own narrow objectives could not survive for long. It would undermine social solidarity. In order to overcome this

trend a morality of people based on cooperation is needed as well as a network of secondary institutions such as cooperative societies or professional associations that help to create collective bonds.

With this study, I have only started to scratch the surface of the phenomenon of cultural risk perception, but it might encourage others to look deeper into these issues. I am convinced that the rational analysis of risk and welfare provision cannot sufficiently explain if and how much the individual is, or even more importantly, feels protected. It would be interesting to learn more about how members of various societies perceive risk in different life situations. Further studies could also be done about people at different life stages and how they perceive risk regarding their life course.

I am deeply concerned about societal ignorance regarding a lack of risk consciousness in the United States due to low levels of risk protection for the disadvantaged part of society that might lead to a further downgrading of work and life conditions, trust, welfare, and solidarity. In East Germany my concern is that the high risk perception regarding the future will lead to further stagnation and prevent a turnaround in society. Although the optimism among young adults in the United States was impressive, I do not have the impression that it is based on better life prospects nor better life situations. While life and working standards as well as quality of life and work need to be newly defined in the United States, East Germans need to pull up themselves, reconsider gains and losses after the unification, and gain confidence in themselves and their society. The current unemployment rate in Germany and the poor employment prospects of young

adults imply that the once achieved welfare cannot longer be expected as a given privilege, but could be newly achieved.

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APPENDIXES

APPENDIX A

Table 1: The School System in Germany

	<b>Die Hochschule oder die Universität (Higher Education)</b>				<b>Tertiärer Bereich</b>
<b>13</b>	<b>Advanced Training</b>	<b>Specialist College</b>	<b>Das Gymnasium (grades 11 – 13)</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>Sekundar- bereich II</b>
<b>12</b>	<b>Vocational Training</b>			<b>17</b>	
<b>11</b>		<b>Technical Training</b>		<b>16</b>	
<b>Die Gesamtschule (or combined into a comprehensive school)</b>					<b>Sekundar- bereich I</b>
<b>10</b>	<b>Die Hauptschule (grades 5-10)</b>	<b>Die Realschule (grades 5- 10)</b>	<b>Das Gymnasium (grades 5-10)</b>	<b>15</b>	
<b>9</b>				<b>14</b>	
<b>8</b>				<b>13</b>	
<b>7</b>				<b>12</b>	
<b>6</b>	<b>Die Orientierungsstufe (grades 5-6, only in some states)</b>			<b>11</b>	
<b>5</b>				<b>10</b>	
<b>4</b>	<b>Grundschule (elementary school – grades 1-4)</b>			<b>9</b>	<b>Primärbereich</b>
<b>3</b>				<b>8</b>	
<b>2</b>				<b>7</b>	
<b>1</b>				<b>6</b>	
<b>-</b>	<b>Kindergarten oder die Vorschule (optional Kindergarten or preschool)</b>			<b>5</b>	<b>Elementar- bereich</b>
<b>-</b>				<b>4</b>	
<b>-</b>				<b>3</b>	
<b>grade</b>				<b>age</b>	

(Retrieved May 4. 2005 from

<http://www.dl.ket.org/german2/Seupplemental/schoolsystem/schoolsystem.htm>;

Table 2: The basic structure of the dual system

<b>Vocational education and training in business establishments</b>	<b>Vocational education and training in Berufsschulen (vocational schools)</b>
<p>The process of training is regulated by federal law. The student has to find a business which is willing to enter into a formal training contract with him. They can choose a vocation from a list of about 370 different accredited training vocations. The contract has to be approved by the relevant chamber of commerce or an equivalent body. For each of these 'training-vocations' special training regulations have been set up by the federal government in cooperation with representatives of industry and labor. These regulations comprise obligatory elements of every training contract. They state:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ the name of the training-vocation</li> <li>▪ the 'normal' duration of the training-vocation</li> <li>▪ qualifications which have to be gained</li> <li>▪ a schedule for when these qualifications have to be imparted within the company</li> </ul>	<p>Part-time school education is obligatory. It is regulated by the laws of the state. Each state sets up its own syllabi, but these should be in compliance with the frame curriculum agreed upon by the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education from the sixteen States.</p> <p>The main aims of the vocational school are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ improve the general education of students</li> <li>▪ supplement company training with a theory-background</li> <li>▪ take up and reflect work-experiences from companies</li> <li>▪ provide knowledge and experience which goes beyond the sometimes too specialized training in the business</li> <li>▪ prepare the students for their final examination.</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ an outline of the demands in the final examination</li> </ul> <p>About 70 % of the training time is spent in the company or in training centers.</p> <p>Training within the company must be organized by a certified trainer, who is responsible for keeping the contract. He will be supported by employees who do most of the 'on the job' training. Only some of them will be certified trainers.</p> <p>Training is controlled and the examination is organized and supervised by the individual chamber of commerce (or its equivalent).</p> <p>Representatives from industry and from labor conduct the examination in cooperation with vocational school teachers.</p> <p>Companies spend about €15,000 to 25,000 on the training of an apprentice during the three years training time (including an allowance).</p>	<p>Students spent about 30% of their training time either in a day-release or in a block-release system in the vocational school.</p> <p>Teachers with university education are supported by a (decreasing) number of 'practice-teachers' in workshops and labs.</p> <p>Vocational schools are supervised and fully financed by the government of the states (mainly teachers' salaries) and municipalities (mainly buildings and equipment).</p>
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Source: Brandt, 1998

Table 3: Skill Formation Mechanisms, Germany and USA of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (percent)

<i>Characteristic</i>	<i>Germany</i>	<i>United States</i>
<i>Education level in 1990</i>		
Percentage of population with more than a secondary school education	7.2	36.9
<i>Enrollment ratio in 1990</i>		
Upper Secondary School	88.6	90.2
Tertiary-level school	28.7	65.9
<i>Labor force growth</i>		
Annual average (1965-95)	0.52	1.70
<i>Unemployment</i>		
Average rate (1982-94)	7.9	7.0
Youth rate divided by average rate (1973-89)	1.25	2.75
<i>Vocational education</i>		
What level? Where?	Secondary School (theoretical education); firm (practical education)	Postsecondary Community colleges
Who pays?	Government and firm	Government and worker
<i>On-the-job training</i>		
Structure	Formal	Informal
Formal for new hires	71.5	10.2
Who pays?	Firm	Worker and firm
<i>Training institutes</i>		
Technical/commercial	Commercial	Both
Public/private	Both	Private
<i>Skill certification</i>		
Central body	Tripartite	None
Local bodies	Employers and unions	None
<i>Labor contracts</i>		
Union influence	Strong	Weak
Turnover	Low	High
Average tenure (years)	10.4	6.7

Source: Gill & Dar (2000); OECD (1993).



## Overview about the Population Studied

Table 4: East German Population

<p><u>Drafting / West School</u> Focus Group (1:45) Claudia, 18 (06/16/2005) Denise, 23 (06/16/2005) Hilke, 20 (06/16/2005) Mathias, 19 (06/16/2005) Maik, 18 (06/16/2005) Sybille, 18 (06/16/2005)</p>	<p>Individual interviews: Kathrin, 18 (06/16/2005; 0:48) Marco, 22 (06/16/2005, 0:45) Rüdiger, 22 (06/16/2005; 1:15) Theresa, 18 (06/16/2005; 0:33)</p>
<p><u>Office Clerks / North School</u> Focus Group (1:36): Caroline, 21 (06/10/2005) Elizabeth, 19 (06/10/2005) Lioba, 24 (06/10/2005) Ramona, 22 (06/10/2005)</p>	<p>Individual interviews: Conny, 21 (06/10/2005; 0:29) Ilka, 21 (06/10/2005; 0:41) Sabine, 22 (06/10/2005; 1:27) Susanne, 21 (06/10/2005; 0:50)</p>
<p><u>Assistant Tax Accountant / North School</u> Focus Group (1:52): Denise, 22 (06/14/2005) Florian, 23 (06/14/2005) Monika, 23 (06/14/2005) Vincent, 20 (06/14/2005)</p>	<p>Individual Interviews: Ellinor, 25 (06/14/2005; 0:42) Ingolf, 25 (06/14/2005; 0:26) Kristin, 22 (06/14/2005; 0:37)</p>
<p><u>Plumber for Heating, Gas, and Sanitary / West School</u> Focus Group (2:46): Steffen, 19 (06/16/2005)</p>	<p>Individual interviews: Andreas, 19 (06/15/2005; 0:51) Bernd, 19 (06/15/2005; 1:26) Lars, 18 (06/15/2005; 0:32) Marc, 19 (06/17/2005; 0:46) Tobias, 18 (06/17/2005; 1:16)</p>

*Note.* For each area of study, all individuals participated in focus groups, but only some (those listed on the right) participated in individual interviews.

Table 5: U.S. Population

<p><u>Drafting / Orange City School</u> Focus Group (2:10): Jennifer, 30 (11/10/2005) Jermaine, 21 (11/10/2005) Joshua, 22 (11/10/2005)</p>	<p>Individual interviews: Kevin, 24 (11/10/2005; 0:29) Matthew, 27 (11/10/2005; 0:50) Michael, 26 (11/10/2005; 0:35) Philip, 20 (11/10/2005; 0:39)</p>
<p><u>Office Clerks / Orange City School</u> Focus Group (1:31): Deborah, 23 (01/23/2006) Lawrence, 19 (01/23/2006) Shenique, 19 (01/23/2006)</p>	<p>Individual interviews: June, 20 (01/27/2006; 0:34) Maria, 21 (01/23/2006; 0:49) Nathalie, 21 (01/27/2006; 0:30)</p>
<p><u>Accounting / Orange City School</u> Focus Group I (1:38): Hasan, 37 (01/25/2006) Magdalena, 21 (01/25/2006) Sorayel, 29 (01/25/2006)</p> <p><u>Accounting / Orange Country School</u> Focus Group II (1:24): Belen, 17 (02/08/2006) Heather, 18 (02/08/2006) Joline, 23 (02/08/2006) Stephanie, 21 (02/08/2006)</p>	<p>Individual Interviews: Lisa, 21 (02/01/2006; 1:10)</p>
<p><u>Plumber for Heating and Air Conditioning / Orange City School</u> Focus Group (1:51) Dushawn, 21 (11/08/2005) James, 47 (11/08/2005) Jason, 19 (11/08/2005) Jeremy, 24 (11/08/2005) Luis, 22 (11/08/2005) Marcus, 25 (11/08/2005) Terrence, 23 (11/08/2005) Timothy, 34 (11/08/2005)</p>	<p>Individual interviews: Adrian, 19 (11/08/2005; 1:01) Alex, 27 (11/08/2005; 1:21) Angelo, 20 (11/08/2005; 0:37) Lucius, 29 (11/08/2005; 1:11) Sahidi, 29 (11/08/2005, 0:44)</p>

*Note.* For each area of study, all individuals participated in focus groups, but only some (those listed on the right) participated in individual interviews.

## APPENDIX B

Focus Group guiding questions:

With the technical program you have made a decision for an occupation.

- Why did you choose this occupation?
- What factors do you think may affect your chances of keeping a job for a long time?
- How would you deal with the situation of becoming unemployed?
- How long/How much do you want to work?
- How do you think you will be able to achieve what you want in your life?
- What hinders you to achieve some of your goals in life?
- Is there something that worries you about your future?
- What do people warn you about?
- Do you think you are well prepared with your apprenticeship for your future work?
- How do you think about moving a couple of times in your life in order to get a job?
- How do you feel about going back to school at 40 or 50 years of age to learn a new occupation?

## Individual Interview semi-structured questions

### 1. Warm up/Introduction

- Can you tell me a little bit about your technical program?
- What kind of school degree did you have before?
- When did you start your program?
- When are you done with it?
- What do you like about it?
- What kind of practical training do you get or did you get?
- Would you have liked to get another school degree? If so, why?
- Which other programs of study were of interest to you?
- What is important for you in your job?

### 2. Structural level

#### *Parents/Siblings*

- In what ways do your parents support you?
- Is there anything your parents worry about regarding your professional future?
- Is there anything your parents warn you about regarding your professional future?

#### Friends

- What are your friends doing? (Vocational training, jobs,...)
- How did they influence you in your choice for this apprenticeship?
- How do they support you?

#### *Teachers*

- How did your teachers inform you about future career options?
- How do teachers talk in school about unemployment?

#### *Career advice*

- How did the career counselor inform you about this program?
  
- Who else influenced your choice?

### 3. Individual level

- Why did you decide to go into this program?
- What did you do to get into this program?
- What do you like about the profession?
- How do you make decisions about your life?
- How do you think about directing your life?
- What factors may influence your life choices?
- What factors might influence the achievement of your goals?

### 4. Institutional level

- How do you feel about unemployment?
- How is your school degree helping you to achieve your goals?
- How do you feel about doing another training/program of study later in life?
- What would hinder you to do that?

**Consent Form**

Interviewer: Antje Barabasch  
Department of Educational Policy Studies  
Georgia State University

Principal Investigator: Dr. Richard D. Lakes

Interviewee: Antje Barabasch

Title of the study: Risk and the school-to-work transition in East Germany  
and the United States

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Dear \_\_\_\_\_

I am a doctoral student at Georgia State University in Atlanta, USA. As part of my dissertation, I am conducting a research study about how people choose a technical training program and how they perceive their professional futures in Germany and the United States. I am interested in who and what influenced your decision about this apprenticeship. Some of the questions will ask about who encouraged or discouraged your decision (e.g., the influence of parents, siblings, teachers, friends, etc.), and how external factors influenced your choice (e.g., your school, previous employment, media, etc.).

I appreciate your agreement to participate in this study and would like to inform you of what that participation implies.

I will be asking you to participate in a focus group discussion. All focus groups will be audio taped and last 45 minutes to one hour. I might additionally ask you to have an interview with me which lasts 1 to 2 hours and which will also be audio taped. The audiotapes will be destroyed after transcription.

I would like you to know that participation is voluntary and that you may chose not to answer any questions or withdraw entirely from the interview (focus group) at any time. You may skip questions or discontinue participation at any time. There is no particular risk involved in answering these questions. The benefit is that you will contribute to the acquisition of new knowledge about how students feel in their current situation as apprentices. Your participation will help to get a deeper understanding of the different aspects that play a role for you in your current situation.

I can assure you that all your answers in the individual interview as well as the focus groups will be kept strictly confidential. Nobody (except for myself and my supervisor, Dr. Richard Lakes) will know your individual responses. We will keep your records private to the extent allowed by law. We will use pseudonyms rather than your name on study records where we can. Your name and other facts that

might point to you will not appear when we present this study or publish its results. The findings will be summarized and reported in group form. You will not be identified personally.

Contact Dr. Richard Lakes or myself if your have questions about this study:

Principal investigator: Richard Lakes, Ph.D.  
Associate Professor  
Department of Educational Policy Studies  
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P.O.Box 3977  
Atlanta, GA, 30302-3977  
Tel: 001-404-651-3124  
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Research Assistant: Antje Barabasch  
Graduate Student  
Department of Educational Policy Studies  
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P.O.Box 3977  
Atlanta, GA, 30302-3977  
Tel: 001-404-651-2582  
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Email: [abarabasch1@student.gsu.edu](mailto:abarabasch1@student.gsu.edu)

If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a participant in this research study, you may contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) which oversees the protection of human research participants. Susen Vogtner, in the Office of Research Integrity, can be reached at 001-404-463-0674.

I will give you a copy of this consent form to keep.

If you are willing to volunteer for this research, please sign below.

Signatures:      Subject: \_\_\_\_\_  
Interviewer: \_\_\_\_\_  
Principal Investigator: \_\_\_\_\_

### Vereinbarung

Interviewer: Antje Barabasch  
 Department of Educational Policy Studies  
 Georgia State University

Hauptgutachter: Dr. Richard D. Lakes

Doktorant: Antje Barabasch

Titel der Studie: Risk and the school-to-work transition in East Germany and the United States

Datum: \_\_\_\_\_

Liebe/r \_\_\_\_\_

Ich bin Doktorantin an der Georgia State University in Atlanta, USA. Im Rahmen meiner Doktorarbeit möchte ich untersuchen wie Schüler in der Berufsausbildung über ihre berufliche Zukunft denken. Es interessiert mich wie du deine Berufsausbildung ausgewählt hast und was du später damit vor hast. In meiner Arbeit werde ich Jugendliche in der Ausbildung in Deutschland und den USA vergleichen. Von besonderem Interesse dabei ist für mich was dich bei deiner Wahl der Ausbildung beeinflusst hat. Einige der Fragen beziehen sich darauf wer dich ermutigt oder entmutigt hat bei deiner Entscheidung z.B. Eltern, Geschwister, Lehrer, Freunde) und wie andere Faktoren deine Wahl beeinflusst haben (z.B. deine Schule, Jobs, Medien usw.)

Ich freue mich sehr darüber, dass du zugestimmt hast an dieser Studie teilzunehmen und habe hier im folgenden mal aufgelistet was du dazu wissen solltest.

Ich bitte dich an einer Gruppenbefragung teilzunehmen. Diese wird elektronisch aufgezeichnet und dauert ungefähr 45 bis 60 Minuten. Ich werde dich möglicherweise zusätzlich bitten mit mir ein Einzelinterview zu führen, das etwa 1 bis 2 Stunden dauern und ebenfalls elektronisch aufgezeichnet wird. Nachdem ich Transkripte angefertigt habe, werden die elektronischen Gesprächsaufzeichnungen vernichtet.

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Hauptgutachter: Richard Lakes, Ph.D.  
 Professor  
 Department of Educational Policy Studies  
 College of Education  
 P.O.Box 3977  
 Atlanta, GA, 30302-3977  
 Tel: 001-404-651-3124  
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Doktorantin: Antje Barabasch  
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Unterschriften: Schüler: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Interviewer: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Hauptgutachter: \_\_\_\_\_

**Consent Form Focus Groups**

Interviewer: Antje Barabasch  
Department of Educational Policy Studies  
Georgia State University

Principal Investigator: Dr. Richard D. Lakes

Interviewee: Antje Barabasch

Title of the Study: Risk and the school-to-work transition in East Germany  
and the United States

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Dear \_\_\_\_\_

I am a doctoral student at Georgia State University in Atlanta, USA. As part of my dissertation, I am conducting a research study about how people choose an apprenticeship and how they perceive their professional futures in Germany and the United States. I am interested in how you perceive your chances of pursuing a career of your choice and how you think you can achieve the goals of your life.

I appreciate your agreement to participate in this study and would like to inform you of what that participation implies.

I will be asking you to participate in a focus group discussion. All focus groups will be audio taped and last 45 minutes to one hour. I might additionally ask you to have an interview with me which lasts 1 to 2 hours and which will also be audio taped. The audiotapes will be destroyed after transcription.

I would like you to know that participation is voluntary and that you may chose not to answer any questions or withdraw entirely from the interview (focus group) at any time. You may skip questions or discontinue participation at any time. There is no particular risk involved in answering these questions. The benefit is that you will contribute to the acquisition of new knowledge about how students feel in their current situation as apprentices. Your participation will help to get a deeper understanding of the different aspects that play a role for you in your current situation.

I can assure you that all your answers in the focus group will be kept strictly confidential. I will ask all participants to keep the answers of the focus group confidential. I will keep your records private to the extent allowed by law. I will use pseudonyms rather than your name on study records where we can. Your name and other facts that might point to you will not appear when we present this study or publish its results. The findings will be summarized and reported in group form. You will not be identified personally.

Contact Dr. Richard Lakes or myself if your have questions about this study:

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Associate Professor  
Department of Educational Policy Studies  
College of Education  
P.O.Box 3977  
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Signatures:      Subject: \_\_\_\_\_  
                         Interviewer: \_\_\_\_\_  
                         Principal Investigator: \_\_\_\_\_

**Vereinbarung Focus Group**

Interviewer: Antje Barabasch  
 Department of Educational Policy Studies  
 Georgia State University

Hauptgutachter: Dr. Richard D. Lakes

Doktorant: Antje Barabasch

Titel der Studie: Risk and the school-to-work transition in East Germany and the United States

Datum: \_\_\_\_\_

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nicht mit anderen Personen darüber zu sprechen. Die Aufzeichnungen werden aufbewahrt so wie das vom Gesetz in den USA vorgeschrieben ist. Das heißt, dass statt deines Namens ein Pseudonym verwendet wird. Neben dem Namen werden auch andere Merkmale, die auf dich schließen lassen könnten verschlüsselt. Dein Name oder andere typische Merkmale, die dich identifizieren könnten werden auch nicht in den Veröffentlichungen auftauchen, die wir möglicherweise schreiben werden. Die Ergebnisse werden als die Ergebnisse einer Gruppe und nicht einer einzelnen Person dargestellt.

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Unterschriften: Schüler: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Interviewer: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Hauptgutachter: \_\_\_\_\_

### Questionnaire

Thank you very much for taking the time to fill out this form. Your answers will be confidential. Please **DON'T** write your name on the forms!

1. Age: \_\_\_\_\_
2. Sex:  Male  Female
3. Who had the strongest influence on your choice of this technical program?

- Both parents  Friends  
 Mother  Teachers  
 Father  Career advisor  
 Siblings  Others

4. With whom do you currently live?

- With both parents  By myself  
 With my father only  With others (specify: \_\_\_\_\_)  
 With my mother only (e.g., boyfriend/girlfriend, spouse, roommates)

5. Which occupation did your parents/siblings learn?/Which occupation do they hold right now? (Or alternatively: What is their highest degree?)

Mother: \_\_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_\_

Father: \_\_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_\_

Siblings: \_\_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_\_

6. In which occupational situation are your parents and siblings right now?

	Mother	Father	_____	_____	_____
Work full time	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Work part time	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Work in different part time jobs	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
unemployed	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
housewife/houseman	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Retired	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Student	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Retraining	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Others _____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

7. A family in Georgia has a monthly average income of \$ 3,600. Does the income of your parents lie:

- Below this amount
- Around this amount
- Above this amount

8. Which school degree do you have?

- College (please specify: \_\_\_\_\_)
- Senior High School
- Middle School
- Dropped out at \_\_\_ grade
- Others, \_\_\_\_\_

9. In which training program are you in right now?

\_\_\_\_\_

10. Is this the program of your choice?

- Yes (continue with question 11)
- No (skip to question 12)

11. If yes, why did you decide to go into this program? You can check more than one answer!

- Offers long term job security
- Offers lucrative career options
- Offers useful general skills that are valid for many different jobs
- Offers a good salary
- Offers the opportunity to work in a field that I like
- Others: \_\_\_\_\_

12. If no, which program did you want to start originally?

\_\_\_\_\_

a.) Why did it not work out?

\_\_\_\_\_

b.) Who decided that you should go into this program?

\_\_\_\_\_





21. Where would you go to find a job? You can check more than one answer!

- I will definitely stay in Georgia.  
 I would only move to places in the United States where I have relatives or friends.  
 I would only move to places in the United States that I like, (such as \_\_\_\_\_)  
 I will apply for a job all over the United States and would go anywhere.  
 I would also go in another country.  
 I don't need to think about that, because I already have a job after my training program.

22. Do you think you can work in your occupation all your life?

- Yes  No

23. Do you think that you will always find a job with your occupation?

- Yes  No

24. Do you feel that you can direct your life by yourself?

- Yes  
 No, because

---



---

25. Do you feel that you can still achieve anything in your life that you want?

- Yes  
 No, because

---



---

Again, thank you very much, particularly for your comments. They are very helpful. I wish you success with your apprenticeship and in your career.

## Fragebogen

Vielen Dank, dass du dir die Zeit nimmst und diesen Fragebogen ausfüllst. Alle Angaben werden vertraulich behandelt. Bitte schreibe deinen Namen **NICHT** auf dieses Blatt!

12. Alter: \_\_\_\_\_

13. Geschlecht:  Männlich  Weiblich

14. Wer hat Dich bei Deiner Berufswahl am meisten beeinflusst?

- |                                       |                                        |
|---------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Beide Eltern | <input type="checkbox"/> Freunde       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Mutter       | <input type="checkbox"/> Lehrer        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Vater        | <input type="checkbox"/> Berufsberater |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Geschwister  | <input type="checkbox"/> Sonstige      |

15. Mit wem wohnst du zur Zeit zusammen?

- |                                                |                                                 |
|------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Mit beiden Eltern     | <input type="checkbox"/> Allein                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Nur mit meinem Vater  | <input type="checkbox"/> Mit anderen (_____)    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Nur mit meiner Mutter | (z.B., Freund/Freundin, Verwandte, Mitbewohner) |

16. Welchen Beruf haben deine Eltern und Geschwister gelernt/Welchen Beruf haben sie zuletzt ausgeübt?

Mutter: \_\_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_\_

Vater: \_\_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_\_

Geschwister: \_\_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_\_

17. In welcher beruflichen Situation befinden sich deine Eltern und Geschwister zur Zeit?

	Mutter	Vater	—	—
arbeitet Vollzeit	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
arbeitet Teilzeit	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Teilzeitjobs	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
arbeitslos	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Hausfrau/Hausmann	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Rentner/In	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Weiterbildung	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Umschulung	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Andere _____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

18. Eine Familie in Thüringen verdient durchschnittlich € 2700,-. Liegt der Verdienst deiner Eltern:

- Unter diesem Betrag
- Etwa um diesen Betrag
- Über diesem Betrag

19. Welchen Schulabschluss hast du?

- Hauptschulabschluss (nicht qualifiziert)
- Hauptschulabschluss (qualifiziert)
- Realschulabschluss
- Gymnasium
- Sonstige: \_\_\_\_\_

20. In welcher Berufsausbildung befindest du dich zur Zeit?

\_\_\_\_\_

21. War dies die Berufsausbildung deiner Wahl?

- Ja (weiter mit Frage 11)
- Nein (weiter mit Frage 12)

22. Wenn ja, warum hast du dich für diese Ausbildung entschieden? Du kannst hier mehrere Antworten ankreuzen!

- Bietet langfristig Jobsicherheit
- Bietet gute Aufstiegsmöglichkeiten
- Bietet Grundlagenkenntnisse, die ich in vielen Jobs gebrauchen kann
- Werde anschließend in meinem Job ein gutes Gehalt bekommen
- Ich kann damit in einem Bereich arbeiten, der mir Spaß macht
- Sonstige: \_\_\_\_\_

12. Wenn nein, was wolltest du eigentlich lernen?

\_\_\_\_\_

a.) Warum hat es nicht geklappt?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

b.) Wer hat entschieden, dass du diese Ausbildung machen sollst?

---

13. Denkst du, dass du mit deiner Ausbildung gut auf das Berufsleben vorbereitet bist?

Ja

Nein, weil \_\_\_\_\_

14. Falls du vom Arbeitsamt über diese Ausbildung beraten worden bist, findest du, dass du von dort hilfreiche Informationen bekommen hast?

Ja (weiter mit Frage 16)

Nein (weiter mit Frage 15)

15. Wenn nein, welche Informationen hättest du dir noch gewünscht?

---

16. Möchtest du noch eine andere Ausbildung absolvieren?

Ja, direkt im Anschluss

Nein

Ja, vielleicht in 3 bis 5 Jahren

Ja, irgendwann in meinem Leben

17. Möchtest du gern noch studieren?

Ja, ich möchte gern \_\_\_\_\_ studieren  
an der  Universität /  Fachhochschule.

Nein

18. Denkst Du, dass Du später im Leben noch mal eine Ausbildung machen würdest?

Ja, weil \_\_\_\_\_

Nein, weil \_\_\_\_\_

19. Wie sicher bist du dir, dass du mit deiner Berufsausbildung einen Job findest?

Ganz sicher

Sicher

Halbe/halbe

Weniger  
sicher

Sehr  
unsicher

20. Wenn du weniger sicher oder sehr unsicher geantwortet hast, warum ist das so?

---



---



---

21. Wo würdest du hingehen um eine Arbeitsstelle zu bekommen? Du kannst hier mehrere Antworten ankreuzen!

- Ich will auf alle Fälle in Thüringen bleiben.
- Ich würde nur in bestimmte Orte in Deutschland ziehen, weil ich da Freunde oder Verwandte habe.
- Ich würde nur in bestimmte Orte in Deutschland gehen, weil es mir da gut gefallen würde. (z.B. \_\_\_\_\_)
- Ich werde mich deutschlandweit bewerben und würde überall hingehen.
- Ich würde auch ins Ausland gehen.
- Ich brauche darüber nicht mehr nachzudenken, weil ich schon eine Stelle sicher habe.

22. Denkst du, dass du in deinem erlernten Beruf ein Leben lang arbeiten kannst?

- Ja  Nein

23. Denkst du, dass du mit deinem erlernten Beruf immer eine Stelle findest?

- Ja  Nein

24. Hast du das Gefühl, dass du deinen Lebensweg selbst bestimmen kannst?

- Ja  
 Nein, weil

---

---

25. Hast du das Gefühl, dass du in deinem Leben noch alles erreichen kannst was du willst?

- Ja  
 Nein, weil

---

---

Nochmals vielen Dank, vor allem auch für deine Kommentare, die besonders hilfreich sind. Ich wünsche Dir viel Erfolg bei deiner Ausbildung und für deine weitere berufliche Laufbahn!



495 North Indian Creek Drive • Clarkston, Georgia 30021 • (404) 297-9522

12 October, 2005

DeKalb Technical College  
495 North Indian Creek Drive  
Clarkston, GA 30021-2397

Institutional Review Board (IRB)  
Office of Research Integrity  
Georgia State University  
Attn: Ms. Susen Vogtner  
Fax: 001-404-654-5838

Dear Ms. Vogtner and Dr. Lakes

Antje Barabasch is approved to pursue her study on Risk and the School to Work Transition at DeKalb Technical College. Ms. Barabasch will conduct a survey, focus groups and individual interviews with students as well as individual interviews with College faculty during the months of October and November, 2005.

The research will take place during hours that will not impact instruction. Program faculty will assist Ms. Barabasch with finding students who volunteer to participate. If you have further questions please don't hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

Tanya Gorman, Vice President of Instruction  
404-297-9522 x-1142  
[gormanf@dekalbtech.edu](mailto:gormanf@dekalbtech.edu)

Office of the Vice President of Instruction and Campus Operations

DEKALB TECHNICAL COLLEGE

# Staatliches Schulamt Erfurt



Staatliches Schulamt Erfurt, Jurk-Gagarin-Ring 152, 99084 Erfurt

Antje Barabasch  
Die Bahnhofstraße 9  
**99310 HAARHAUSEN**

Ihr Zeichen, Ihre Nachricht vom  
10.05. 2005

Mein Zeichen, meine Nachricht vom  
08 / 51200-0

(03 81) 37 88 - 130

Erfurt, den  
30.05. 2005

Permission to collect data, questionnaires and scientific research according to § 57 Abs. 5 school law of Thuringia (ThürSchulG) of 8<sup>th</sup> of August 1993 (GVBl. p. 445), modified through article 10 of the law from 16<sup>th</sup> December 1996 (GVBl. p. 325)

Survey about occupational future in comparison Germany/United States

Dear Ms. Barabasch,

Your request to pursue a survey at vocational schools in Erfurt has been approved for the following schools:

1. **Staatlichen Berufsbildende Schule 1 Erfurt**  
Am Fließchen 10, 99081 Erfurt,
2. **Rudolf-Diesel-Schule**  
Staatliche Berufsbildende Schule 2 Erfurt  
Eugen-Richter-Straße 22, 99085 Erfurt
3. **Ludwig-Erhard-Schule**  
Staatliche Berufsbildende Schule 3 Erfurt  
Talstraße 24, 99089 Erfurt,
4. **Andreas-Gordon-Schule**  
Staatliche Berufsbildende Schule 4 Erfurt  
Weldengasse 8, 99084 Erfurt,
5. **Staatlichen Berufsbildende Schule 5 Erfurt**  
Langer Graben 82, 99092 Erfurt,
6. **Walter-Gropius-Schule**  
Staatliche Berufsbildende Schule 7 Erfurt  
Heckenrosenweg 2, 99097 Erfurt,

and can be pursued according to § 57 Abs. 5 ThürSchulG under the following preconditions:

Sprechzeiten:  
Dienstage 9.00-12.00 u. 13.00-18.00 Uhr  
oder nach Terminabsprache

Staatliches Schulamt Erfurt,  
Jurk-Gagarin-Ring 152,  
99084 Erfurt

Telefon (Zentrale): (0 36 1) 37 85 - 1 00  
Telefax: (0 36 1) 37 85 - 1 10  
E-Mail: [Poststelle@esscf.thueringen.de](mailto:Poststelle@esscf.thueringen.de)  
Homepage: <http://www.schulamt-erfurt.de>

- 2 -

1. Participation of students/teachers is voluntary; a withdrawal from participation has no negative consequences. The students have to be informed about that before filling out the questionnaire or in a consent form which informs about the voluntary participation and that there are no negative consequences in case of withdrawal from participation.
2. Students and teachers who participate have to be informed about the content and the goal of the survey.
3. Parents of students under the age of 18 have to be informed about the content and the goal of the survey.
4. Students under the age of 18 are only allowed to participate if parents have given their written permission to the school. Parents are allowed to look at the filled out questionnaire of their children. The parents have to be informed about those rights in advance.
5. The survey has to take place outside of regular classroom lessons.
6. The name of the student should not appear on the questionnaire.
7. The researcher has to ensure anonymity of the informants as well as third parties who are involved in the study.

We expect from the researcher, that she summarizes her results and sends them to the Staatliches Schulamt Erfurt. The schools get a copy of this permission for their information. Dates and times for the planning of the research project have to be negotiated between the researcher and the school principals.

Kind regards



Uta Glatz

Referentin für Grundschulen

Staatliches Schulamt  
Erfurt  
Jud-Gagarin-Ring 152  
99084 Erfurt  
Telefon (0361) 3 78 51 00  
Telefax (0361) 3 78 51 10



Walter-Gropius-Schule, 99092 Erfurt, Binderslebener Landstraße 162

Berufsschule  
Berufsvorbereitungsjahr  
Berufliches Gymnasium  
Fachoberschule

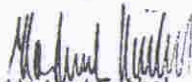
Institutional Review Board (IRB)  
Office of Research Integrity  
Georgia State University  
Susen Vogtner  
Fax: 001-404-654-5838

2005-06-01

Dear Ms. Vogtner,

Antje Barabasch has my permission to pursue her study on risk and the school to work transition in Walter-Gropius-Schule Erfurt. Ms. Barabasch will conduct a survey, focus groups and individual interviews with our students as well as individual interviews with teachers in our school in June 2005. The research will take place after regular school hours. We will assist Ms. Barabasch with finding students who volunteer to participate. If you have further questions please don't hesitate to contact me under 0049-361-22120.

Kind regards,



Hartmut Friebel  
School principal

Walter-Gropius-Schule Erfurt  
Staatliche Berufsbildende Schule 7  
Binderslebener Landstraße 162  
99092 Erfurt  
Tel. (0361) 22 12-0 · Fax 22 12-100

Staatliche Berufsbildende Schule 7  
der Stadt Erfurt  
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e-mail: [info@walter-gropius-schule.de](mailto:info@walter-gropius-schule.de)

## APPENDIX C

**Table 1: Age**

Country	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
Germany	20.14	65	2.200
USA	28.03	63	8.656
Total	24.02	128	7.397

**Table 2: Gender**

		Country		Total
		Germany	USA	
Sex	male	33	34	67
	female	32	30	62
Total		65	64	129

**Table 3: Race**

		Country		Total
		Germany	USA	
Race	White	65	11	76
	Black	0	47	47
	Hispanic	0	3	3
	Asian	0	1	1
	African	0	2	2
Total		65	64	129

**Table 4: Living situation**

		Country		Total
		Germany	U.S.	
Living situation	with both parents	34	12	46
	with my father only	3	2	5
	with my mother only	7	12	19
	by myself	9	9	18
	with others	12	29	41
Total		65	64	129

**Table 5: School degrees among the German students**

	Germany
Hauptschulabschluss (nicht qualifiziert)	6
Hauptschulabschluss (qualifiziert)	2
Realschulabschluss	34
Gymnasium	19
Others	4
	65

**Table 6: School degrees among the U.S. students**

	U.S.
College	14
Senior High School	43
Dropped Out	2
Others	1
Total	60

**Table 7: Socio-economic background**

			Country		Total
			Germany	USA	
Income	below this amount	Count	31	18	49
		% within Income	63.3%	36.7%	100.0%
	around this amount	Count	20	15	35
		% within Income	57.1%	42.9%	100.0%
	above this amount	Count	11	15	26
		% within Income	42.3%	57.7%	100.0%
Total		Count	62	48	110
		% within Income	56.4%	43.6%	100.0%

**Case Processing Summary**

	Cases					
	Valid		Missing		Total	
	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent
Income * Country	110	85.3%	19	14.7%	129	100.0%

**Table 8: Occupational situation mother**

		Country		Total
		Germany	USA	
	work full time	37	32	69
	work part time	7	6	13
	work in different part time jobs	0	1	1
	unemployed	10	2	12
	housewife/houseman	4	8	12
	retired	3	7	10
	others	4	2	6
Total		65	58	123

**Table 9: Occupational situation father**

		Country		Total
		Germany	USA	
	work full time	39	30	69
	work part time	3	1	4
	work in different part time jobs	0	2	2
	unemployed	5	4	9
	housewife/houseman	0	1	1
	retired	3	8	11
	student	1	0	1
	others	5	3	8
Total		56	49	105

**Table 10: Is this the program of your choice?**

			Country		Total
			Germany	USA	
Choice	Yes	Count	36	59	95
		% within Choice	37.9%	62.1%	100.0%
	No	Count	29	4	33
		% within Choice	87.9%	12.1%	100.0%
Total	Count		65	63	128
	% within Choice		50.8%	49.2%	100.0%

**Table 11: How sure are you that you will find a job with your training program?**

		Country		Total
		Germany	USA	
very sure	Count	3	33	36
	%	8.3%	91.7%	100.0%
sure	Count	6	21	27
	%	22.2%	77.8%	100.0%
half/half	Count	24	7	31
	%	77.4%	22.6%	100.0%
less sure	Count	17	0	17
	%	100.0%	.0%	100.0%
not sure at all	Count	14	3	17
	%	82.4%	17.6%	100.0%
Total	Count	64	64	128
	%	50.0%	50.0%	100.0%

**Table 12: Do you think you can work in your occupation all your life?**

		Country		Total
		Germany	USA	
Yes	Count	18	51	69
	%	26.1%	73.9%	100.0%
No	Count	45	10	55
	%	81.8%	18.2%	100.0%
Maybe	Count	2	0	2
	%	100.0%	.0%	100.0%
Total	Count	65	61	126
	%	51.6%	48.4%	100.0%

**Table 13: Do you think that you will always find a job with your education?**

		Country		Total
		Germany	U.S.	
Always job	yes	15	60	75
	no	48	3	51
	yes and no	1	0	1
Total		64	63	127

**Table 14: Would you like to go in another program after this one?**

		Country		Total
		Germany	USA	
Yes, directly afterwards	Count	14	23	37
	%	37.8%	62.2%	100.0%
Yes, probably in 3 to 5 years	Count	12	13	25
	%	48.0%	52.0%	100.0%
Yes, sometime in my life	Count	11	12	23
	%	47.8%	52.2%	100.0%
No	Count	20	10	30
	%	66.7%	33.3%	100.0%
Total	Count	57	58	115
	%	49.6%	50.4%	100.0%

**Table 15: Do you think that you are well prepared with your courses for professional life?**

			Country		Total
			Germany	USA	
Preparation Yes	Count	43	56	99	
	% within Preparation	43.4%	56.6%	100.0%	
No	Count	22	7	29	
	% within Preparation	75.9%	24.1%	100.0%	
Total	Count	65	63	128	
	% within Preparation	50.8%	49.2%	100.0%	

**Table 16: Do you feel that you can direct your life by yourself?**

			Country		Total
			Germany	USA	
Yes	Count	42	40	82	
	%	51.2%	48.8%	100.0%	
No	Count	21	22	43	
	%	48.8%	51.2%	100.0%	
Yes and No	Count	2	0	2	
	%	100.0%	.0%	100.0%	
Total	Count	65	62	127	
	%	51.2%	48.8%	100.0%	

**Table 17: Do you feel that you can still achieve anything in your life that you want?**

	Germany	U.S.	Total
yes	43	58	101
no	21	5	26
yes and no	1	0	1
Total	65	63	128

**Table 18: If you got advice from the counselor at your high school about your training program, do you think they advised you well?**

		Country		Total
		Germany	USA	
Yes	Count	26	30	56
	%	46.4%	53.6%	100.0%
No	Count	29	17	46
	%	63.0%	37.0%	100.0%
Total	Count	55	47	102
	%	53.9%	46.1%	100.0%

## APPENDIX D

## Coding Scheme for Qualitative Data Analysis

I Personal Level			
IA	Program choice	IA1	Conscious choice
		IA2	Parental expectation
		IA3	Money
		IA4	Labor Exchange Office
		IA5	Jobsecurity
		IA6	Alternatives
		IA7	Career foundation
		IA8	Self-fulfillment
IB	Floundering	IB1	Money first/Material standards
		IB2	Self-fulfillment
		IB3	Family first
		IB4	Work-life-balance
		IB5	Unqualified jobs
		IB6	Legitimizing floundering periods
		IB7	No concerns
		IB8	Trials
		IB9	Realization of importance of degree
IC	Life planning	IC1	Impossible
		IC2	Unstable labor market
		IC3	Short term employment
		IC4	Middle class lifestyle
		IC5	Making money
ICa	Family planning	ICa6	Being prepared
		ICa7	Not being prepared
		ICa8	Conscious postponement
		ICa9	Concerns
		ICa10	Discrimination towards women
		ICa11	Contrast East and West Germany
		ICa12	Financial stability
		ICa13	Babies dady
		ICa14	Marriage versus single life
ICa15	Being straight		



ICb	Future Career	ICb16	Armed Forces
		ICb17	University or college studies
		ICb18	Importance of school degrees
		ICb19	Age considerations
ICc	Retirement	ICc20	Early retirement
		ICc21	Late or no retirement
		ICc22	Unrealistic retirement considerations
		ICc23	Self employment
ID	Geographic flexibility	ID1	Need for leaving to the West
		ID2	Leaving for another country
		ID3	Staying in the region however
		ID4	Wanting to leave for the experience
		ID5	Strategic career planning depending on regional requirements
		ID6	Commuting
		ID7	Wanting to leave because of perceived discrimination
IE	Occupational flexibility	IE1	Determined careers
		IE2	Level down
		IE3	Discontinuities
		IE4	Staying flexible
		IE5	Flexibility for a change
IF	Future prospects	IF1	Unemployment
		IF2	Pessimism
		IF3	Illegal employment
		IF4	Employment within training company
		IF5	Leaving the country for jobs
		IF6	Going to the West
		IF7	Unemployment and social benefits
		IF8	Low-skilled employment
		IF9	Teacher support
IG	Going back to school	IG1	Need for further training
		IG2	Another training program
		IG3	Adult education
		IG4	Difficulties
		IG5	Aging
		IG6	Paying for education
		IG7	Occupational flexibility
IH	The next career step	IH1	University
		IH2	University of cooperative education
		IH3	No worries
		IH4	Higher school degrees

II	Agency	II1	God determines life
		II2	Personal experiences that created strength
		II3	Personal traits
		II4	Being a model for others
		II5	Learning by doing
		II6	Self directedness to get out of unpleasant living circumstances
		II7	Work ethics
		II8	Being social
IJ	Solidarity	IJ1	Helping others
		IJ2	Capitalism critique
IK	Worries	IK1	No worries
		IK2	Worries due to unemployment
		IK3	Living in the present
		IK4	Concerns about terrorism
		IK5	Personal qualification for a job
IL	Money matters	IL1	Financial resources for schooling
		IL2	Transformation of German Mark into Euro
		IL3	Living standard
		IL4	Competition of foreign workers
		IL5	Independence
II Institutional Level			
IIM	Ways into the apprenticeship or training program	IIM1	Connections
		IIM2	Unavailability of apprenticeships
		IIM3	Placement through Labor Exchange Office
		IIM4	Many applications
IIN	Satisfaction with apprenticeship or technical program	IIN1	Gap between theory and praxis
		IIN2	No or few job opportunities afterwards
		IIN3	Training does not meet industry requirements
IIO	Parental support	IIO1	Can't give advice
		IIO2	Expectation of early independence of their children
		IIO3	Model for career change
		IIO4	Parents as connectors
		IIO5	Parental advice
		IIO6	Parental expectations
		IIO7	No parental support

IIP	Friends	IIP1	Boyfriend and his friends as role models
		IIP2	Student life
		IIP3	Friends as role models
		IIP4	Making plans together
		IIP5	Support
		IIP6	No friends
		IIP7	Stay away from former friends
		IIP8	Being a role model for friends
IIQ	Teachers	IIQ1	Support
		IIQ2	Role model
		IIQ3	Pessimism
		IIQ4	No support
IIR	Experience with the Labor Exchange Office or Career Counseling	IIR1	Carelessness
		IIR2	Dissatisfaction with advice
		IIR3	Further training
		IIR4	Unprofessional approach
		IIR5	Spreading pessimism
		IIR6	Encouragement
		IIR7	Taking care of less performing students / students with less agency
III Macro-societal Level			
IIIS	Satisfaction with apprenticeship program	IIIS1	Exploitation
		IIIS2	Pessimistic messages
		IIIS3	Not their choice
		IIIS4	Great opportunity
IIIT	Experiences with unemployment	IIIT1	Unemployed friends
		IIIT2	One-Euro-Jobs
		IIIT3	Poverty
		IIIT4	Not finding an apprenticeship
		IIIT5	Armed Forces as an alternative
		IIIT6	Always job alternatives
		IIIT7	Reactions to TV reports
		IIIT8	Chosen unemployment
		IIIT9	Bad influences
		IIIT10	It's a mindset
IIIU	Images of the West among East German students	IIIU1	More money
		IIIU2	Better work conditions
		IIIU3	Less affordable child care
		IIIU4	Discrimination
		IIIU5	Trade off

IIIV	Politics and change	IIIV1	Disgust about politicians and their actions
		IIIV2	Reforms
		IIIV3	No belief in politics
		IIIV4	No belief in change
		IIIV5	Blame on people