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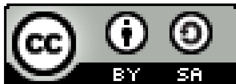

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Five Years after Unification: East German Women in Transition[1]

In the winter of 1990-1991, right after German unification on October 3, 1990, I spent a six-month sabbatical in East Berlin where I interviewed eighteen women from various backgrounds and ages about their lives before, during and after the opening of the Berlin Wall. After these initial interviews, I returned twice more to Berlin to talk with the same women, the last time during the summer of 1995, five years after unification. I wanted to find out what had changed in their attitudes and perceptions with regard to Germany and their new lives as united Germans since the period of upheaval following unification. The attitudes and perceptions expressed by the women in this third set of interviews contrasted in significant ways with those I found five years earlier.

During the first interviews, the women told me about the frustration and the excitement of the transition they were making from citizens of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) to citizens of the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG). They also discussed their experiences as women in a state that, in state policy and propaganda, promoted women as workers and mothers and declared women emancipated. Their responses to the opening of the border and unification were not—as was portrayed in the Western media—uniformly positive. Attitudes toward the new united Germany ranged from unequivocal joy to bitter resignation.

The first question I asked these eighteen women was whether they agreed with the widely published assertion that women were losers in the unification process. Dorothy Rosenberg (1991), among others, has argued that East German women have, along with children and the elderly, paid "the highest price for unification" (132). She points out that women "find themselves in the peculiar position of having gained a significant expansion of their civil rights at the expense of vital economic ones" (129). However, in contrast to Rosenberg's assertions, the women I interviewed demonstrate a wide variety of opinions, suggesting that it is impossible to generalize about women's experience. Some women answered emphatically in the affirmative: women had lost their jobs much more quickly than men with similar qualifications. They had also lost the state-supported services that encouraged women to have both a family and a career, including a full year of paid maternity leave, generous leave to take care of a sick child, inexpensive day care, and an average month's salary given to them by the state upon the birth of a child. However, while some women emphasized the losses, many saw the gains in other areas of their lives as equally or more important, for example the increased opportunities for work and travel and the ability to be out from under the control of the state. A number stated they had never worked so hard or had so much fun doing it. The interviews with these eighteen women, plus summaries of the second interviews which I performed during the summer of 1992, were published by the University of Massachusetts Press in my book, which I co-edited with Pam Allen-Thompson, entitled *The Wall in my Backyard: East German Women in Transition* (1994).

When I returned to Berlin during the summer of 1995, I spoke with these same women to find out what had changed in their lives since I had last talked with them. How did they view unification five years later? What had happened to the shock many felt so strongly in 1990 and 1991? Did they share the nostalgia for the GDR that was trumpeted by the *Spiegel* in its cover story of July 3, 1995 (40). Did they now find that women were the losers of unification?

The women came from a variety of backgrounds: housekeeper, filmmaker, writer, physical therapist, university student, lifeguard, physician, urban planner, editor for state-controlled Aufbau publishing and *Bundestag* representative. Ranging in age from 20 to 68, they were not randomly selected. I specifically sought out women actively involved with women's issues, but these contacts rapidly led to women in a variety of fields. Initial contacts were given to me by a West German friend.

Although all eighteen women were living in East Berlin, the nation's capital and showcase to the West, and for the most part were of an educated class rather than working class, their interviews demonstrate a surprising variety of attitudes toward the GDR state. Some women were members of the SED (Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands, or Socialist Unity Party, the communist party in East Germany), and others were convinced socialists who were not in the Party. Approximately 25% of GDR citizens were Party members (Winkler, 1990). A number of women rejected the GDR outright, while some had come to the GDR from other countries (the Soviet Union, Austria) in order to help build the socialist state. One woman had worked in the opposition, protesting actions of the state that she found untenable, and was imprisoned for her activities.

All the women in the group—regardless of whether they had ever married—had children, with the exception of the university student (20 years old), a woman who was in a lesbian relationship, and one woman who had devoted her life to taking care of an ailing mother. Through its various services for mothers, the state made it attractive for single women to raise at least one child, and many did. In 1989,

52% of firstborn children were born to single women (Kolinsky, 1993). Over 90% of all GDR women had children (Kolinsky, 1993).

About half of the women in the group were employed at the time of the interview, while some were expecting to lose their positions, as their employers, such as DEFA (the state-run film studio), DFF (the state-run radio and television) and the *Magistrat* (the governing body for East Berlin between May 1990 and the all-German elections on December 2, 1990) disappeared. Others were making moves to become independently employed.

Striking among the women this time, in stark contrast to 1990-91, was the sense that they had arrived in the new Germany. They understood what was expected of them in the new system, and the shock of being thrust into an unfamiliar culture, the real culture shock that was palpable in 1991, was gone. In five years they had had time to fully experience the Federal Republic of Germany, with its bureaucracy, its institutions, its free market economy and its unemployment. Chaos had given way to order, and they were now—in conrast to 1991—able to see realistically what it meant to be a Federal Republic German. "Life is quieter now. There's more order," 58-year-old Eva P., a former housekeeper, told me.

When I had talked with the women in late 1990 and early 1991, nearly all still held the notion that almost everything West German, from the school system to automobiles to democracy, was better than what they had had in the East, an impression widespread in the GDR that was gained from watching West German TV, from visits and packages from West German friends and relatives, and from the growing dissatisfaction with the GDR regime. The women thought West Germans knew more because they could travel and had greater access to knowledge: they were smarter, savvier, more sophisticated. Their schools were better as was their democratic form of government. After unification many in the East were intimidated by what they perceived to be the superiority of their West German countrymen.

Five years later, however, the women were able to see more clearly. They had experienced the West German form of government, and some had discovered that it did not work as they had imagined a democracy should work. Little people still had no voice. Decisions were still being made for them. In general, they had found that West Germans at work and at the university were not smarter; they just knew how to present themselves more aggressively. A number of the women discovered that they could perform as well or better than their colleagues from the West. Five years after unification they had gone over to West Berlin, had walked the busy shopping streets, had eaten in Chinese, Italian and Greek restaurants, and perhaps enrolled in workshops and classes. When they went home, they discovered that they could find in their part of the city the same things they had always idealized in the West, even if these things had different packaging. Many women told me about feeling at home in their own *Kiez*, the Berlin term for neighborhood, and had no need to go to West Berlin, which was still unfamiliar territory. Choosing to stay in their *Kiez* wasn't making a statement. It was simply doing what Berliners—East and West—had always done.

In the five years since unification, a number of the women had concluded that their experience of living in the GDR gave them an advantage over West Germans. 47-year-old Eva Kunz, who had a new job in the Ministry for Women in the state government of Brandenburg and who saw unification as very positive, said that her two children, both in their twenties, liked the fact that they had grown up in the GDR. They said their GDR perspective was "a stabilizing factor" in their lives. Although none of them felt nostalgic about the GDR, they told each other stories from the GDR in order to keep the past alive. "It's not because it was the GDR. It's because it's a bygone era," Kunz said. In contrast to West Germans, who had only experienced the capitalist West, East Germans could compare the GDR with the new FRG. A number of them felt this dual perspective allowed them to see the FRG with a critical eye and even gave them a certain superiority over West Germans.

Not one of the women I talked to wanted the old GDR back. All of them had positive things to say about their new lives as citizens of the FRG and were glad to be rid of the repression and the regimentation of the GDR. But this positive attitude was not unequivocal. All expressed varying degrees of ambivalence about the new Germany. All felt some gain and some loss. Whether they felt satisfied with their lives depended on whether the gain outweighed the loss. For some, the ability to express their opinions openly and publicly, the new freedom of speech, was the most prized gift of unification, and it outweighed the loss of whatever they valued in the GDR. For others, the loss of some treasured aspect of their lives in the GDR outweighed the positive gains of the united Germany.

Ingrid Brandenburg, a woman in her fifties who worked in the Ministry for Justice in the new federal state of Brandenburg, found much that had been good in the GDR, for example a secure pension, health care for all, what she called an open field for women, a liberal abortion law (abortion in the first trimester was legal in the GDR, in contrast to West Germany) and a secure job, even if the job was a kind of "hidden unemployment." But she was absolutely unequivocal in her belief that freedom from authority far outweighed any benefits she had experienced in the GDR. She likened the system of control of all aspects of society to fascism. For her, the newly found ability to express herself openly and freely restored her dignity as a human being.

Eva Stahl rejected her life in the GDR. 48 years old, she had had a good job in the office for foreigners in the district

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of Prenzlauer Berg at the time of our first interview. Now after having enrolled in two training programs in different fields, she was unemployed. She said she was "paralyzed," and faulted the GDR for her inability to make any firm decisions now: she had never been required to make important decisions in the GDR. When I asked her if experiences within her family had not been of value, she said that her parents had "delivered her over to the state." As a single mother, forced to work to support her two children, she felt she had also "delivered" her own children over to the state, to day care, schools, and military. "The state could do what it wanted with my kids. Kids belonged to the state, not to the family. Parents were powerless." The requirement of conformity stripped its citizens of their dignity and self-respect, she said.

While not as forceful in their rejection of the GDR, a number of women rejoiced at now being able to make decisions for themselves about the way they wanted to live their lives without the intrusion of the state. Ingrid Brandenburg said: "There is no such thing as a society that does not have influence over its citizens. All societies have strings tied to their citizens. In this society the strings are much longer and thinner than the ones I had in the GDR. I have much more room to move. I can start a chicken farm or travel, read or start a business." One woman said she felt as though blinders had been taken off her eyes. Eva Kunz, working in the Ministry for Women in Brandenburg, remarked that the lid had been removed from her creative imagination, and she was free to think new thoughts. She said, "I get excited by things that I never thought about before. For example, I think it would be fun to be a judge. This would never have occurred to me in the GDR because it simply wasn't possible." Other women talked about the immense new vistas that had opened up as a result of traveling to formerly forbidden places, reading formerly forbidden books and materials, and having access to new technology like the Internet. "The limits on what it is possible to know have disappeared, and we have now stepped out of the petite bourgeois experience of the GDR," said retired Humboldt University lecturer in English Hanna Behrend.

While these women emphasized the positive, others found more that was negative to say about their new lives in united Germany. The loss of financial security—the social net provided by the GDR welfare state—was the most profound of the losses for many of the women. The constitutionally guaranteed rights to a job and to an apartment disappeared after unification, and with them the sense of being taken care of by the state. The GDR state indeed took care of its citizens, from day care to retirement. It took many decisions out of the hands of its citizens, such as what health insurance policy to buy, and although some saw this treating adults like children as an unwelcome intrusion into their lives, a good many people came to depend on it. "The state took a lot off your shoulders, and that was very comfortable," said 53-year-old Maria Curter. Ingrid Brandenburg agreed. She said, "The shift from dependence on the state to dependence on yourself is making the transition particularly hard. The majority still want someone to take them by the hand and tell them what they can do and what they cannot do. They want someone to remove all the obstacles. To suddenly have to think for yourself is very difficult."

The loss of financial security was most evident in the high level of unemployment, which hit women particularly hard. In July of 1995, half of the women of working age were unemployed in the city of Potsdam, the capital of the new federal state of Brandenburg ("Jede," 1995). Young women were blatant objects of discrimination in a hiring process that allowed employers to ask women if they had children or intended to have children. In the GDR it had been illegal to discriminate against women with children. In response to this new situation, the birthrate in the East dropped precipitously. In 1989 the number of children born in East Germany was almost 200,000. By 1991 it was half that, about 107,000. Women were also having themselves sterilized in record numbers, a practice very much frowned upon in the GDR. In Rostock in 1991, the largest women's hospital registered 300 sterilizations where there had been none before 1989 (Behrend, 1995). Women between 40 and 55 faced discrimination of a different kind: many employers would not hire them at all because of their age.

The employment situation for women in eastern Germany appears at first glance similar to the situation in the postwar United States, when women were pushed out of wartime jobs back into the kitchen in order to make room for soldiers returning to civilian life. By the 1950s many American women who had worked as shipbuilders and welders had left the job market, and the image of the male breadwinner who worked outside the home and the womanly housewife whose purpose in life was to care for husband and children dominated the popular imagination.

In Germany after unification, political opinion predicted that large numbers of East German women would similarly choose to leave the job market. It was expected that the number of housewives in the East would soon approach the number in the old federal states. The Federal Minister for Women stated in 1991: "We have to assume that the level of employment among women in the East will decline. This is natural because the opportunity to be a housewife did not really exist in the GDR" (Schröter, 1995).

Nevertheless, five years after unification East German women had not voluntarily left the job market. In the GDR, in contrast to wartime America, working outside the home was a normal, integral part of women's lives, and by 1989 it had become an expectation and a duty. This double burden of work and caring for the family fell heavily on the shoulders of women: men were not expected to clean house

or wash diapers, and few did. Many women would have preferred to work part-time, especially when their children were small, and some women resented the expectation that they alone work what was in essence two jobs. One woman said, "Women were better off in the GDR, but problems were always solved within the context of the patriarchal system." Another pointed out that very few women worked at the State Security, the Stasi, except as secretaries. "This is typical of a dictatorship that deals with power," she remarked.

Nevertheless, virtually all women in the GDR were raised with the expectation that they would leave school and move into a training program or into the university and then into full-time work outside the home. Over the course of the forty years of the GDR, women had been working in increasingly large numbers, and by the time the Wall opened in 1989, over 90% of East German women worked. Work provided women an independent income, a sense of self-confidence and self-worth, and social and professional contacts. "Women want to work," said 73-year-old Hanna Behrend, retired Humboldt University lecturer, of the young women she knew. "They find it unbearable to stay home. It makes them feel useless and redundant."

In contrast to the ideology of the GDR, which clearly stated that men and women should both work, the ideology of the FRG, as perceived by a number of the women I interviewed, was that men should work and women stay home. In their attempts to push women back into the kitchen, said 53-year-old Katharina Stillisch, who had successfully set up her own consulting business, Western politicians were accusing GDR women of having neglected their children by giving them over to the state to raise. To this suggestion Stillisch retorted, "Women from the working class have always had to give their children to someone to raise, a grandmother or a neighbor. Upper-class women often gave their children to a nanny to raise. It's a tragic error to think that only mothers can raise their children." Stillisch and others were appalled at the matter-of-factness with which the message of the housewife-mother was "coming over" from the West. "In the West, children belong to mothers," she said. "Here women are banging on the door of the employment office, and they will keep banging until they find a job."

This attitude is clearly visible in the story of 50-year-old Maria Curter, single mother and a former academic at the GDR Academy of Sciences in environmental research. Wanting to become an environmental consultant, Curter enrolled in an extensive retraining program in Hamburg right after the opening of the Wall to learn about West German environmental law and policy. She then sent out over 150 applications but was invited to only one interview. She was now resigned to the fact that she would never find a job in her field. Her half-time government job, researching and lecturing about the scientific history of East Berlin, was set to run out in September. She intended to apply for grants and other soft money. "I can't imagine life without working," she said.

The women with whom I talked were outraged by the rampant unemployment, but few of them were personally affected by it. Almost all of them were educated and therefore had more resources for finding or creating work than did less educated women working in factories. But even the women in the group without higher education had managed to find work. All of the eighteen except "paralyzed" Eva Stahl had enrolled in retraining workshops, found jobs below their qualifications or outside their fields, worked at make-work jobs, started private businesses, or had retired. Some of them were experiencing the excitement of working for the first time in an environment where hard work was acknowledged and rewarded. Others found that they had never worked so hard and, in contrast to GDR times, they had almost no free time to read or visit with friends.

When I met this time with Gitta Nickel, a well-known DEFA documentary filmmaker at the time of the GDR and now almost 60, she had just finished a three-week marathon work session editing a documentary film about unification. The film was to be shown on one of the two main German TV stations, ARD, on the occasion of the fifth anniversary of unification on October 3, 1995. Hope was the main theme of the film, she said. "Real unification hasn't happened yet. Too many people are dissatisfied. To make it work, we all have to work. There are winners and losers, but you have to *do* something in order to be a winner." She was openly nostalgic about the GDR and missed the warmth of the DEFA studio and the security provided by the state. "You have to sell yourself now," she said. Free-lancing with a business partner, she had had periods of unemployment between projects and knew what it felt like to wake at night and wonder whether she would be able to pay her rent. She said she had never worked so hard.

Jutta Braband, 45, had been a respected fashion designer in the GDR before being elected to the *Bundestag*, the all-German Parliament, after unification. She had stepped down from her position as an elected official in 1992 after publishing an article in *Neues Deutschland* in which she admitted to working as an informant for the Stasi in her youth (Braband, 1991). She had extricated herself from the Stasi at age 26 (no easy thing to do) and joined the opposition in order to work toward the creation of the socialist state in which she believed. She had spent nine months in jail for her opposition activities. After unification she had discovered it was not possible to make it as a fashion designer. She explained that no one in East Berlin had any money for expensive clothes, and she could not afford to sell her things as cheaply as she had in the GDR. She now had a job as a fundraiser for a small arts program for East Berlin youth, and although she was still working in

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the arts, she had been forced out of the market in which she had worked all her life. She summarized her view of the situation for women in the new Germany by quoting her daughter, like herself a single mother: "I'm going to find a rich man to support me." Braband made it clear that her daughter had spoken in jest, but she added: "That sort of dependence on a man was unknown in the GDR."

52-year-old Ursula Sydow had lost her dream job with unification. Because her father had worked in West Berlin before the Wall was built and she refused to join the Party, the road to this job had not been easy. She had been forced to get her high school degree at night while working full time, a long and arduous road. But then, still without joining the Party, she had been allowed to earn a doctorate in literature at the university and had been hired at the state-owned Aufbau Verlag as editor of the literary journal, the *Weimarer Beiträge*. Because she had no family beside the elderly mother she cared for, and because she had never been allowed to travel, she told me, her work at the journal became her whole life. In our first interview she said, "Working with international literature opened up worlds to which I never had access in real life. Because I could always escape into these books, I never felt how narrow the GDR really was" (Dodds, 138). But after unification the staff at Aufbau Verlag was significantly reduced, and Ursula was let go. She had found another job, for which she was grateful, but she had only just recently been able to talk about her work in the GDR without fighting back tears. "I have taken so long to get over this break in my life, I've only just now begun to read books again."

Closely related in the minds of many women to the employment situation was the loss of equality they had experienced in the GDR. Many saw the widening gap between rich and poor, between the tennis club set and the homeless on the steps of the train station, as a great injustice and one of the worst consequences of unification. What was the role of the state if not to care for its least fortunate citizens? The average monthly salary in the GDR was around 1000 Marks, with some, for example secretaries or accountants, making between 400 and 600 Marks, and others, such as university professors, earning 2000 or 3000 Marks. Although the difference between 400 and 3000 Marks a month is significant, it is nothing compared to the discrepancies in wealth that exist in West Germany or in the U.S. Basic needs such as housing and food were heavily subsidized by the GDR state, so that an old roomy apartment in the middle of East Berlin cost around 90 Marks a month and a small flat in one of the outlying areas built after the war, such as Berlin Marzahn, cost about 50 Marks. The state ensured that people's standard of living was roughly uniform. Homeless people sleeping on the streets were rarely if ever seen in the GDR.

With the loss of equality had come a loss of physical safety for some women. Petra P., a woman in her early forties with endless ideas and energy who had made her way successfully into a middle-management position in the male-dominated construction business during the GDR and now had a good job at the Berlin Housing Office, had been positively exuberant about unification when I talked with her the first time. Still happy about unification, she said her unbridled enthusiasm had become tempered. She and her younger son were afraid to sleep with the windows open in their new ground-floor apartment, afraid someone would break in. "We used to leave the door unlocked," she said. A number of other women spoke about the increased criminality, robberies, thefts, personal attacks, all of which were new and made their lives seem less secure. "We never had this fear in the GDR," Petra P. said.

Other women said that the competitiveness of the new economic system had destroyed one very valued aspect of working in the GDR, the feeling of warmth, support and collegiality. Hanna Behrend told me that former colleagues in the social sciences at the Humboldt University had stopped discussing ideas with each other. They kept their projects secret out of fear that their ideas would appear in their colleagues' work. "People have learned not to share," she said. "They keep things to themselves because they are afraid their confidence will be abused. There is a shrinking feeling of cooperation."

Heike Prochazka, who was born in 1961, the year the Wall was built, also saw competition as negative. She lived within several kilometers of four border crossings, but as she said in our first interview, "I never had the feeling that I was locked in or a prisoner, as some people are saying now. I'm a different generation. I grew up with it. I was always able to defend it with a clear conscience, and I never pretended to myself that it was something that it wasn't" (Dodds, 115). She had been groomed to be an Olympic swimmer for three years before injuring her back at age 13, and had been proud to compete for the GDR. When the Wall opened in 1989, Heike was hit hard, and even now she said, "I reject unification." When it was rumored that the public swimming pools in Berlin, where Heike was employed as a lifeguard and swimming instructor, were to be privatized and half the employees let go, she watched her colleagues become aggressive in their attempts to elbow their way to the front. Personal relationships suffered tremendously, she said. Herself a lesbian, Heike said that many of the gay men she knew from her gay brother's café were ducking back into the closet, afraid now of losing their jobs in the new hard competitive world of the free market. Others said that the freedom of speech they had just been granted was limited by the inability to express their opinion at work for fear of losing their jobs.

Some women railed at the whole notion of competition. They called the market economy inhumane and the new society heartless. "How little is left of the old solidarity among colleagues," said one woman. Filmmaker Gitta

Nickel, who was facing eviction from her house by the West German owners, disdained the new society where, as she said, "You have to have a lawyer in order to live your life." She went on, "Capitalism exploits people. It's brutal. It runs over people. It comes like a ghost in the night and wakes you. My restful sleep is gone. What kind of a society is this?" she asked. At the same time she was aware that her nostalgia made things in the GDR seem unrealistically better.

Competition was, according to a number of women, creating distance between people. Physician and psychotherapist Haiderun Lindner remarked that while people in the GDR had had to fight for every little piece of individuality, now there were so many individuals that it was hard to create new meaningful relationships. People were feeling isolated. In her practice she said she noticed no difference now between patients from the East and patients from the West. Easterners had long since stopped talking about the shock of dealing with unification and now, like their Western counterparts, were interested only in their self-image.

DEFA filmmaker Gitta Nickel said she had felt truly human in the GDR: "I'm happy to have lived in the GDR. We did everything. It was our fatherland, and we loved it. I wanted to reform and improve it. I don't want to gloss over the bad, the Wall was absolutely medieval, but in the GDR I felt like a human being."

Gitta Nickel and a number of other women in the book felt the loss of the GDR intensely and rejected emphatically certain aspects of life in the FRG. Although none of them wanted the old GDR back, with the Wall, the Stasi and the regimentation, they rejected the capitalist market economy with its gross inequities. Filmmaker Gitta Nickel, swimmer Heike Prochazka and retired lecturer Hanna Behrend had shown their support for the socialist society in the GDR by joining the Party. Others, like fashion designer Jutta Braband, had shown support for a more egalitarian socialist society by working to oppose the Party and thus reform the state. But regardless of their political relationship to the GDR, all of these women valued the attempt to create what they viewed as the more humane society and bitterly regretted its loss.

Because of strongly held views like these, it is unlikely that real unification will occur in the next generation. Although the Berlin Wall is down, walls still exist inside people's heads. Ingrid Brandenburg said, "In the eyes of the West, East Germans were all communists. We East Germans, on the other hand, always heard how much West Germans loved us, and now we are disillusioned. The West Germans lied." Eva Stahl said that each side blames the other for the present ills. Two or three of the women said they were sick of being told by West German media what life was like in the GDR: dull, bourgeois, oppressed. When Charité Hospital physical therapist Karin Tittmann went to Bonn for a workshop, she said the West Germans in the group were surprised to find out she was East German: she was so intelligent, they said. The prejudiced view of East Germans as stupid and lazy still persists, as does the view of West Germans as arrogant and pushy.

If Germans are ever to get beyond these one-dimensional views of each other, they will probably have to look to young people whose adult lives have not been shaped by a divided Germany. Students at the Humboldt University talked in an article in *Der Tagesspiegel* from July 1995 about interactions between East and West in lectures and seminars ("Jenseits"). East German students were learning that they need not be afraid of West German students' tendency to dominate class discussion. Students from the West knew no more than they did. West German students, put off at first by the personal questions asked by East Germans, later appreciated their openness. They also found the East German students' custom of shaking hands more personal and less distanced than the West's simple "hallo." After two or three semesters studying together, students had "created a new culture together."

Finally, did the East German women see themselves as the losers of unification? Certainly many of the women I talked with had lost a great deal. But after my discussions with these women, I now think that the question itself is wrong. The continued emphasis on winners and losers perpetuates the perception of East Germans as victims of the unification process and the superiority of West Germans; such polarization postpones real discussion of unification. Retired lecturer in English Hanna Behrend, the oldest woman in the group and a convinced socialist who has published in leftist journals such as *New Politics*, told me, "All East Germans, not just women, are losers. All East Germans lost a good many things. But all had a valuable experience. The system that they thought would work didn't. This is not disastrous, rather a tremendous gift. Life is trial and error. To have experienced the failure of the GDR is a valuable experience."

The task for the future is to move beyond concepts of winning and losing and get on with living together as Germans. This is not an easy task, and I believe along with Gitta Nickel that her generation will not live to see it happen. Well-known GDR writer Helga Schütz, now 60, concluded the following: "We've reached a state of sobriety. We complain and know that this is the way it is. But in this recognition there is a piece of normalcy. The walls are still there, but normalcy includes acknowledging they're there. Now we know we are different, and that's all right."

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Notes

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