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Do older mothers, younger mothers and adolescents in Germany and Poland differ in their ideas about having children or not?

A closer look at the negative Value-of-Children and its further implications

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Introduction

- Value-of-Children approach is a fruitful theoretical framework for research aiming to explain differences in fertility behavior in different cultural contexts.
 - Value of Children (VOC) refers to the various needs that children fulfill for their parents
 - VOC as variable that mediates between context characteristics such as poverty and economic affluence of a society on the one hand and high or low fertility on the other hand

Hoffman, 1988

Positive VOC

- Three positive VOC dimensions have generally been distinguished:
 - economic-utilitarian VOC (e.g., contributing to family economy, help in the household; providing old-age security for parents)
 - social-normative VOC (e.g., continuing the family name; fulfilling expectations of older relatives)
 - psychological-emotional VOC (e.g., emotional relations to children; learning about self and life)

Arnold et al., 1975; Kagitcibasi, 1996; Trommsdorff & Nauck, 2010



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Positive VOC (cont.)

- ⇒ partial explication of differences in fertility behavior across and within different countries
- 1) number of children higher in contexts where economic-utilitarian VOC is more pronounced
 - 2) number of children lower in contexts where emotional VOC is more pronounced



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Explaining Differences in Fertility...

- The original Value of Children studies of the 1970s were motivated by the attempt to explain the high fertility rates and a resulting overpopulation in many parts of the world.
- Today the picture has been partially reversed: In many Western countries fertility rates lie often below replacement level.



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Socio-Demographic Changes in Europe

- Rising life expectancies
- Low fertility rates
 - ⇒ Growing disequilibrium between the economically active and retired population, as depicted by a steadily growing old-age dependency ratio
 - old-age dependency ratio for the European Union in 2010: 25.92
 - projected old-age dependency ratio in 2060: 52.55
 - ⇒ Changes will bring about pressures on the social security and public health systems in the next future

Eurostat, 2012



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Importance of Negative VOC

- Reasons for having children, i.e. positive VOC, have been a central focus within the framework of the Value-of-Children approach so far
- Reasons for not having children, namely negative VOC, have been given less attention

- => Perceived negative aspects of parenthood may be of particular importance for the individual decision of having children or not, and they may be related to the actual quality of intergenerational relationships.
 - => We assume that negative aspects of having children may be of special explicative value regarding the current extremely low fertility rates in many European countries.

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Aims of the Present Study

- The present study aims
 - to focus explicitly on negative VOC
 - to examine in how far negative aspects of having children are related to
 - a) further ideas about having children as well as
 - b) to variables characterizing individuals and their intergenerational relationships
- The study design includes
 - three different cohorts (mothers of adolescents, mothers of small children and adolescents) living in western and eastern Germany as well as in Poland.
- The design permits to compare
 - different cohorts/generations at different points in the life-span
 - different contexts characterized by high versus low socio-economic change


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West Germany versus East Germany

- Adaptation of fertility rates from the higher level in East Germany to the lower level in West Germany after reunification (Total fertility at around 1.39 for 2010)
- BUT: In spite of the current convergence in fertility rates, remarkable differences in the fertility behavior in both parts of Germany persist
 - East German mothers younger at the birth of their first child compared to West (27.5 vs. 28.7 in 2008)
 - Childlessness lower in the East compared to West
 - More large families in West compared to East Germany
 - More non-marital births in East compared to West Germany
 - More mothers full-time employed in East compared to West Germany

Eurostat, 2012; Kreyenfeld & Konietzka, 2004; Vatterrott, 2011



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Different ideal models of family planning in East compared to West Germany?

- In West Germany: **The sequence model**
 - Successful entrance in the job market and secured job position/economic security (in particular, of husband/male partner) as a precondition for having children
 - Having children as a potential threat to economic wealth and status in this (western) model
- In East Germany: **The parallel model**
 - Family formation and job security as parallel events
 - Particular importance of equilibrated work-life-balance
 - Job security is not as precondition for starting a family

Bernardi, Von der Lippe, & Klärner, 2006



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Poland

- Massive political and socio-economic changes in the past twenty years: Transition from communism to a market-based economy
- Fertility rate (2.06 in 1990) has fallen dramatically since the 1990s to 1.38 in 2010
- Age of mothers at first birth has risen (25.5 years in 2009)
- Unemployment rates and job insecurity have increased
- Changes toward higher flexibility and mobility in the labour-market
- Changes in the institutional settings
 - => reconciliation of work and family more difficult (especially for women)
- However, overall data indicate a rather low level of intended childlessness

Eurostat, 2012; Kotowska, Jozwiak, Matysiak, & Baranowska, 2008; Lubiewska, 2008



Research Questions

- 1) Do perceived costs of having children differ between cohorts/generations and contexts?
 - 2) Are perceived costs of having children related to further characteristics of individuals and their intergenerational relationships?
 - 3) Are perceived costs of having children related in the same way to desired, ideal or actual numbers of children in each subgroup?
- ⇒ A comparison between different age cohorts and contexts will allow for detecting convergence or divergence in ideas about costs of having children
- ⇒ The design will allow disentangling context effects from life course effects



Participants

	West Germany	East Germany	Poland
Young mothers	<i>n</i> = 200 Age: <i>M</i> = 33.86, <i>SD</i> = 4.27 (Range: 18-48) <u>Number of children:</u> <i>M</i> = 1.65, <i>SD</i> = 0.57 (Range: 1-3)	<i>n</i> = 100 Age: <i>M</i> = 30.68, <i>SD</i> = 4.41 (Range: 19-46) <u>Number of children:</u> <i>M</i> = 1.39, <i>SD</i> = 0.63 (Range: 1-4)	<i>n</i> = 100 Age: <i>M</i> = 30.12, <i>SD</i> = 4.67 (Range: 20-40) <u>Number of children:</u> <i>M</i> = 1.41, <i>SD</i> = 0.85 (Range: 1-6)
Older mothers	<i>n</i> = 209 Age: <i>M</i> = 44.53, <i>SD</i> = 4.63 (Range: 34-60) <u>Number of children:</u> <i>M</i> = 2.34, <i>SD</i> = 0.91 (Range: 1-6)	<i>n</i> = 104 Age: <i>M</i> = 41.50, <i>SD</i> = 4.80 (Range: 33-53) <u>Number of children:</u> <i>M</i> = 2.20, <i>SD</i> = 0.91 (Range: 1-5)	<i>n</i> = 301 Age: <i>M</i> = 43.86, <i>SD</i> = 5.18 (Range: 33-62) <u>Number of children:</u> <i>M</i> = 2.35, <i>SD</i> = 1.15 (Range: 1-9)
Adolescents	<i>n</i> = 207 Age: <i>M</i> = 15.66, <i>SD</i> = 1.02 (Range: 13-20)	<i>n</i> = 104 Age: <i>M</i> = 15.69, <i>SD</i> = 1.17 (Range: 13-18)	<i>n</i> = 301 Age: <i>M</i> = 15.6, <i>SD</i> = 1.32 (Range: 10-18)

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Measures

Negative VOC.

- For the present analyses we used only those *k* = 13 items that had been included both in the adolescent as well as the mothers questionnaire for reasons of comparability.
- Reliabilities were very satisfying in all subgroups (α = .92 for old mothers in Germany, α = .93 for Polish old mothers; α = .85 for German adolescents, α = .92 for Polish adolescents, α = .87 for German young mothers, α = .92 Polish young mothers).
- Example items are “Because it is harder to hold a job” or “Because large families are not well accepted in society”. Items had to be rated on a 5-point likert-scale from 1 = not important at all to 5 = very important.

Arnold et al., 1975; see also Schwarz, Chakkarath, Trommsdorff, Schwenk, & Nauck, 2001



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Measures (cont.)

Child Rearing Stress.

- A Child Rearing Stress Scale was applied with altogether $k = 3$ items (Gerris, Joutmans, Kwaiitaal-Roosen, de Schipper, Vermulst, & Janssens, 1998; Seginer & Vermulst, 2001).
- Reliabilities were all very satisfying (for German old mothers $\alpha = .91$, for Polish old mothers $\alpha = .88$, and also for both German and Polish young mothers $\alpha = .88$).
- An example item is "Raising my child has brought about more problems than I had expected." (rated from 1 = not true at all to 5 = very true).



Measures (cont.)

Satisfaction with Life and with Family

- assessed for mothers and adolescents by one item (rated from 1 = not satisfied at all to 5 = very satisfied) each.

Optimism.

- To assess a further personality characteristic of adolescents that is different from life-satisfaction, we applied the Life Orientation Test (LOT) (Scheier & Carver, 1985) that assesses dispositional optimism with $k = 8$ items (e.g., "In uncertain times, I always expect the best"). Reliabilities were $\alpha = .75$ for the German and $\alpha = .85$ for the Polish sample (items were rated from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree).



Descriptive Results: Rank Orders of Negative VOCs

Young Mothers	Most important	Least important
West Germany	Because it is harder to hold a job Financial burden for the whole family Not as free to do what you want Too concerned of future of children	Problems with neighbors/public Fear of pregnancy and childbirth Being mother not recognized by people
East Germany	Because it is harder to hold a job Not as free to do what you want Too concerned of future of children	Problems with neighbors/public Fear of pregnancy and childbirth Being mother not recognized by people
Poland	Because it is harder to hold a job Financial burden for the whole family Too concerned of future of children	Problems with neighbors/public Large families not accepted Being mother not recognized by people

Descriptive Results: Rank Orders of Negative VOCs (cont.)

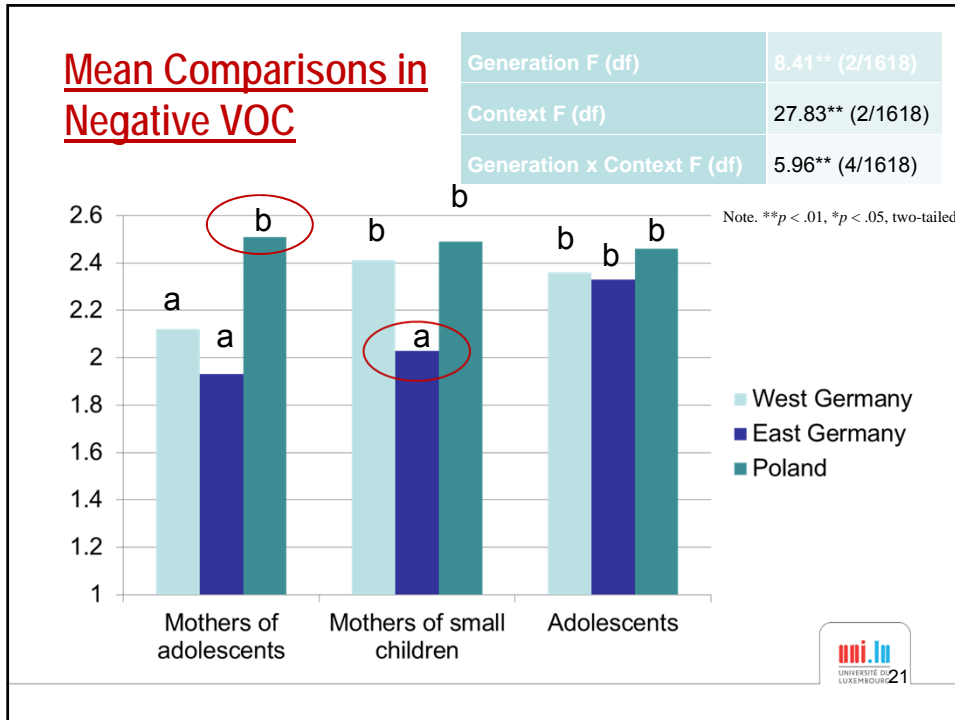
Old Mothers	Most important	Least important
West Germany	Because it is harder to hold a job Not as free to do what you want Too concerned of future of children	problems with neighbors/public fear of pregnancy and childbirth Being mother not recognized by people
East Germany	Because it is harder to hold a job Not as free to do what you want Too concerned of future of children	problems with neighbors/public fear of pregnancy and childbirth Being mother not recognized by people
Poland	Because it is harder to hold a job financial burden for the whole family Too concerned of future of children	problems with neighbors/public Large families not accepted Lose contact with your friends Being mother not recognized by people

Descriptive Results: Rank Orders of Negative VOCs (cont.)

Adolescents	Most important	Least important
West Germany	Because it is harder to hold a job Not as free to do what you want Too concerned of future of children	Problems with neighbors/public Large families not accepted Being mother not recognized by people
East Germany	Because it is harder to hold a job Not as free to do what you want Too concerned of future of children	Problems with neighbors/public Large families not accepted Being mother not recognized by people
Poland	Because it is harder to hold a job Not as free to do what you want Too concerned of future of children	Problems with neighbors/public Large families not accepted Being mother not recognized by people

Summary of Descriptive Results

- => Very similar rankings in all groups
 - Worries about job, financial situation and future of children more important than social acceptance of having children
 - Worries about losing freedom especially important in Germany and for adolescents in all three contexts



Correlates of Negative VOC with Further Relevant Variables Regarding Mothers

	Old Mothers			Young Mothers		
	West Germany	East Germany	Poland	West Germany	East Germany	Poland
Raising stress	.22**	.16	.31**	.01	.18	.30**
Family Satisfaction	-.12	-.34**	-.13*	-.14	-.25*	-.16
Life Satisfaction	-.15*	-.09	-.01	-.02	-.31**	-.18
Number of Children	-.03	-.20*	-.04	.17*	-.04	.05
Ideal Family Size	-.19**	-.12	-.02	-.07	-.04	-.09

Note. ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$, two-tailed.

Mean Comparisons in Negative VOC Between Young Mothers who want Further Children or do not

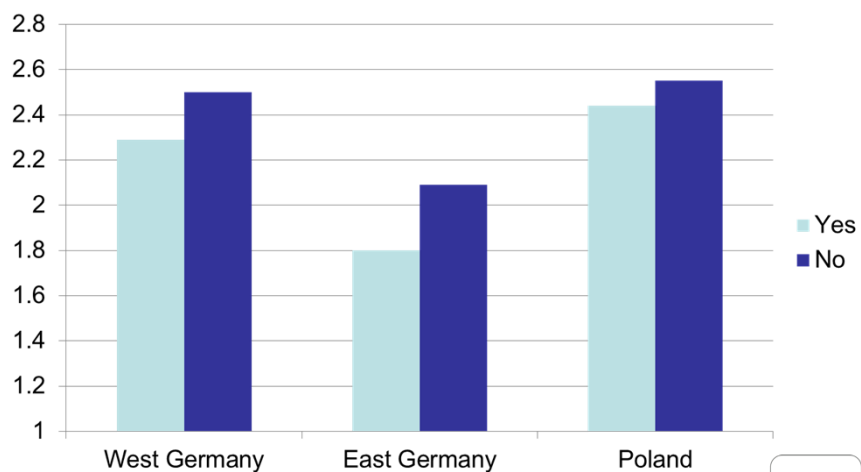
	Yes	No	
	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>t (df)</i>
West Germany	2.29 (0.72)	2.50 (0.69)	1.88+ (165)
East Germany	1.80 (0.61)	2.09 (0.47)	2.36* (79)
Poland	2.44 (0.84)	2.55 (0.83)	0.60 (94)

Note. ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$, + $p < .10$, two-tailed.

In West Germany, $n = 68$ young mothers wanted further children, $n = 99$ did not; in East Germany, $n = 31$ wanted further children, $n = 50$ did not, in Poland, $n = 67$ indicated to want a further child, $n = 29$ did not



Mean Comparisons in Negative VOC Between Young Mothers who want Further Children or do not



Correlates of Negative VOC with Relevant Variables Regarding Adolescents

	West Germany	East Germany	Poland
Optimism	-.08	-.18	-.09
Family Satisfaction	-.11	-.37**	-.12*
Life Satisfaction	.07	-.21*	-.10
Desired number of Children	.04	-.04	-.14*

Note. ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$, two-tailed.



Mean comparisons in negative VOC between adolescents who indicated to want children or not or being undecided

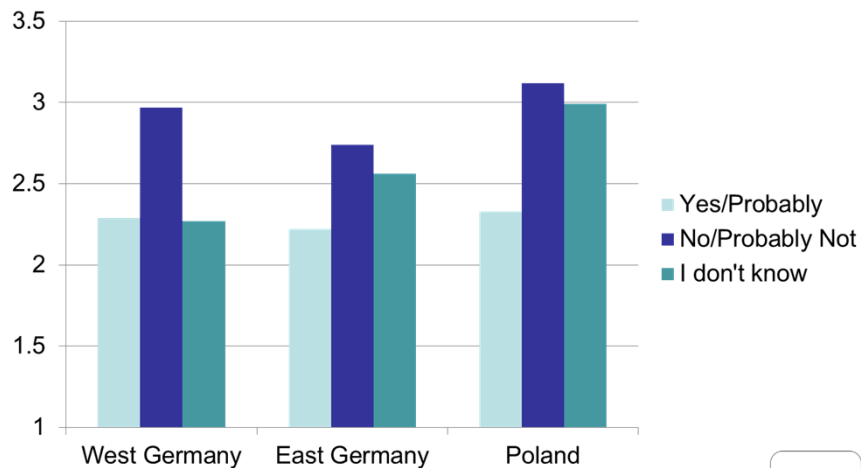
	Yes/probably	No/probably not	I don't know	
	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)	F (df)
West Germany	2.29 (0.54)	2.97 (0.53)	2.27 (0.62)	14.51** (2/205)
East Germany	2.22 (0.57)	2.74 (1.01)	2.56 (0.68)	4.22* (2/102)
Poland	2.33 (0.77)	3.12 (0.75)	2.99 (0.76)	19.21** (2/297)

Note. ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$, two-tailed.

In West Germany, $n = 149$ adolescents reported wanting children, $n = 21$ reported not wanting children, $n = 36$ were undecided. In East Germany, $n = 75$ adolescent reported wanting children, $n = 10$ reported not wanting children, $n = 18$ were undecided. In Poland, $n = 240$ reported wanting children, $n = 14$ did not want children, $n = 44$ were undecided.



Mean comparisons in negative VOC between adolescents who indicated to want children or not or being undecided



Discussion

- The negative VOC has proved useful in the study of ideas regarding fertility both of mothers in different stages of parenthood as well as of adolescents.
- Striking similarities in what is deemed as most worrying in all different subsamples: most important issues regarded job related worries and concerns about the future of the children.
- Whereas in the German sample also the loss of freedom was a prominent concern, in Poland financial worries seemed to be of higher importance.
- Contrary to claims in the public discourse regarding a presumed societal hostility against families, a negative image of families in society does not seem to be viewed as a problem by the participants of the study.

Discussion (cont.)

- In spite of similar rankings of negative aspects of having children, East German mothers and West German older mothers seem to be a less worried group.
 - => One might presume that the infrastructures for child care in the eastern part of Germany still help (young) mothers to reconcile work and family, resulting in a lower perception of difficulties, whereas in West Germany and in Poland mothers, in particular with small children, might encounter more difficulties.



Discussion (cont.)

- The perception of negative VOC was only loosely related to actual numbers of children or ideal numbers of children of mothers
- The perception of negative VOC was also related to aspects of satisfaction with the actual experience of having children and to actual child rearing stress.
 - => Mothers have already positively answered the question about having children (or not), thus their attitudes towards having children are also influenced by their actual experiences.
 - However, the perceived costs of having children seem to have an effect on the young mothers' planning of having another child



Discussion (cont.)

- Especially for adolescents, the negative VOC indicator seems to be of some predictive value for their future fertility behavior.
 - => Whereas Polish adolescents' desired number of children was related to costs they perceive of having children, for the German adolescents rather the decision of having or not having children was related to perceived costs.
- It seems that negative VOC is rather independent of dispositional optimism/pessimism, but it is rather related to actual experiences in the family and satisfaction with the actual living situation.
 - => These findings might provide a first indication that negative VOC reflects actual worries and concerns, and they underline the malleability of adolescents' attitudes towards children by experiences of adolescents in their own families of origin.



Conclusions

- Attitudes about costs of having children may be anchored in earlier experiences in adolescence, and these attitudes may be precursors for later decisions of having children or not.
- However, rather than a negative image of families in society, difficulties in managing job, financial issues and personal life might be most problematic for fertility decisions.
- Efforts of policy should thus tackle these issues in order to create a favorable context for future families – and this refers to more than just establishing a positive rhetoric and a positive image of families in society.



Thank you for your attention!

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