

The role of intergenerational transmission for out-group rejection with female adolescents

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Good morning ladies and gentlemen.

This contribution investigates the effects of personal and familial variables on negative attitudes of adolescent girls toward strangers.

The rejection of minorities is widespread in all social strata and generations, embodied in negative opinions, stereotypes and hostile attitudes toward others' differentness. The different aspects of negative attitudes and rejecting behaviour towards foreigners are comprised in the concept of "xenophobia".

Development of out-group rejection

There are two main influences on the development of out-group rejection: significant others and own experiences.

Traditional research indicates that parents and families are the primary social influences that model and communicate values to children (Benson, Donahue & Erickson, 1989; Steinberg, 2001). This belief is also explicit in many theories concerning the development of prejudice (e.g., Allport, 1954; Marger, 1991), intolerance (O'Bryan, Fishbein & Ritchey, 2004) and also xenophobia (Aboud, 1988).

In the literature this phenomenon is usually referred to as intergenerational transmission. A number of studies provide evidence for the influence of intergenerational transmission on the development of negative attitudes towards foreigners (e.g. Gniewosz, 2001; Gniewosz & Noack, 2006; Grob., 2006; Hadjar, 2005; Rippl, 2004; Sinclair, Dunn & Lowery, 2005).

While younger children usually adopt parents' and significant others' opinions about other people, forming one's own opinions are an integral and characteristic part of adolescence: Teenagers analyze more critically and want to make autonomous decisions. In the literature this phenomenon is understood as "self-socialization". Several studies account for the decreasing parental influence in the process of transmission by including the age of the adolescents (Urban & Singelmann; 1998; Cavalli-Sforza et al., 1982; Gniewosz, 2005; Gniewosz & Noack, 2006).

The aim of this study is to identify influencing variables of personality and identity formation on xenophobia in its relation to the effect of intergenerational transmission.

Intergenerational transmission

Even though intergenerational transmission has to be understood as an active and reciprocal process, limitations of the statistical procedures usually necessitate the assumption that the primary direction of influence is from parents to children, and not the inverse. Moreover, there is evidence that the effects are different for mothers and fathers as well as girls and boys respectively (Urban & Singelmann, 1998; Putallaz et al., 1998; O'Bryan, Fishbein & Ritchey, 2004; Baier & Hadjar, 2004). Empirical studies suggest that transmission effects are strongest in same-sex-dyads (Bartle-Haring, 1997; Flor & Knapp, 2001; Nieuwbeerta & Wittebrod, 1995; Boehnke et al., 2007).

“Tolerance“ as a preliminary condition for experiences

Throughout a number of studies a person's own experiences with strangers have been found to mediate the process of developing opinions about and negative attitudes towards foreigners (e.g. Allport, 1954, 1971; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2000; Reinders, 2004; Böltgen, 2000; Hoofmeyer-Zlotnik, 2000). In a broader sense of the term, “tolerance” describes the granting of religious faith and practice, way of life etc. by a ruling or prevailing group or society. It is not equivalent to agreement, but represents a possible preliminary stage to acceptance. Moreover, a more or less tolerant position towards the foreign leads to a general behavioral attitude of either approaching it or avoiding it. According to this meaning of “tolerance”, this concept can be understood as a preliminary condition for own experiences with strangers.

Forming opinions about strangers in adolescence

The main aspect of developmental growth is forming identity. To find the cultural identity is one part of this process and comes along with forming attitudes towards strangers. Information seeking and processing is certainly a variable of great importance in this process. Several studies demonstrated this for the development of religiosity (Duriez & Soenens, 2006; Duriez, Soenens & Beyers, 2004).

In the tradition of Tajfel (1978), we assume that self-esteem is an influencing variable in the forming of attitudes towards minorities. Several studies support these theses for the case of national identity (see Barrett, Lyons & del-Valle, 2004; Blank, 2003).

In the context of national identity, not only personality variables but also the economic situation was identified as an influencing variable (1978). For adolescents, the economic situation is especially apparent in the form of fear of the future (Bornewasser, 1994; Sturzbecher, 1997; Sturzbecher & Freytag, 2000; Kleinert, 2004).

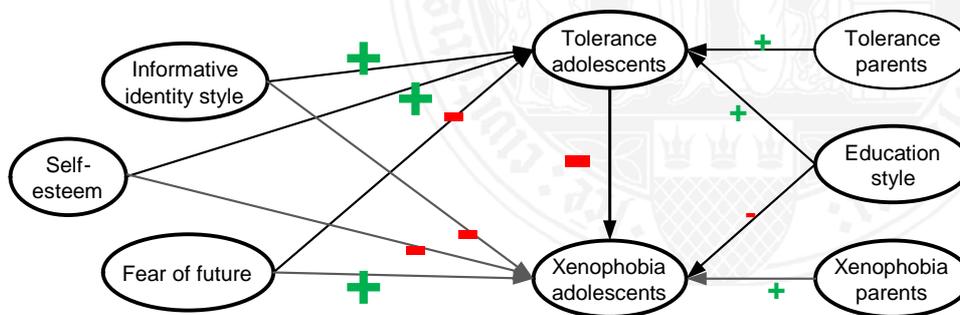
Furthermore, in the case of forming opinions about strangers, education style is of particular interest. Several authors postulate a supportive influence of certain educational styles on the development of xenophobia (e.g. Schönpflug, 2001; Rippl, 2004).

Research question and hypotheses

The research question focuses on the relative influence of family variables in forming negative opinions about minorities in adolescence. We assume that in adolescence the process of self-socialization is of greater influence on forming (negative) opinions about foreigners than family influence (here: intergenerational transmission and educational style). We secondly assume, that “tolerance” as a preliminary condition for own experiences mediates this process. We finally expect that the influence of family and education also plays a subordinate role in the process of developing a tolerant behavior attitude.

Research Question

- Which role play familial variables on the forming of negative attitudes towards minorities in adolescence?



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Method

We used the method of structural equation modeling to test the hypothesized relations. To reduce variance, we initially used a German mother-daughter sample. To allow for generalization of the results we secondly compared the results with data from a German mother-son sample and finally with mother daughter-samples from other European countries. Because of the smaller sample sizes in the other samples this consideration had to be limited to correlative relations. The relations of the theoretical model were as follows:

Research instrument

Items expressing negative attitudes towards foreigners and Jews were used as indicators of “Xenophobia”. Six items were included, for instance “It isn’t good to have too many different ethnic groups in a country”.

The scale “tolerance” comprises five items asking for participants’ tendencies to approach or avoid persons with different orientations in terms of politics, culture or religions.

As indicators of intergenerational transmission we included the parents’ answers to the same items used to measure the adolescents’ “xenophobia” and “tolerance”.

Education style was operationally defined as education to agreeableness and openness. We asked for it in terms of agreement to educational four goals, for instance „Being respectful and tolerant of those, who are different”.

Identity style is a concept that refers to the methods of how people use information in the construction of their identities and decision making (Matheis & Adams, 2004). An informative identity-style reflects the tendency to consider various sources of information. We included six items, for instance “I’ve spent a lot of time reading and/or talking to others about ideological ideas”.

“Self-esteem” covers a person’s self-acceptance and the positive attitude towards oneself in the light of personal moral concepts. We included six items for instance “I believe that I have some very good characteristics”.

“Fear of the future” included four items which broaches the issue of a person’s abilities in relation to future problems, for instance “My future looks pretty dark”.

Indicators of Constructs

Xenophobia: 6 Items alpha= .704/ .847

Negative attitudes against foreigners and Jews

Tolerance: 5 Items alpha= .809/.855

How do you feel about people who are very different from you?

I prefer to avoid them... I’d like to know them better

Transmission: same scales Xenophobia and Tolerance answered by the parents

Education to agreeableness and openness: 4 Items alpha= .794

What goals do you want to achieve in raising your children?

Informative identity style: 6 Items alpha= .495

Tendency to consider various sources of information

Self-esteem: 6 Items alpha= .773

A person’s self-acceptance and the positive attitude towards oneself

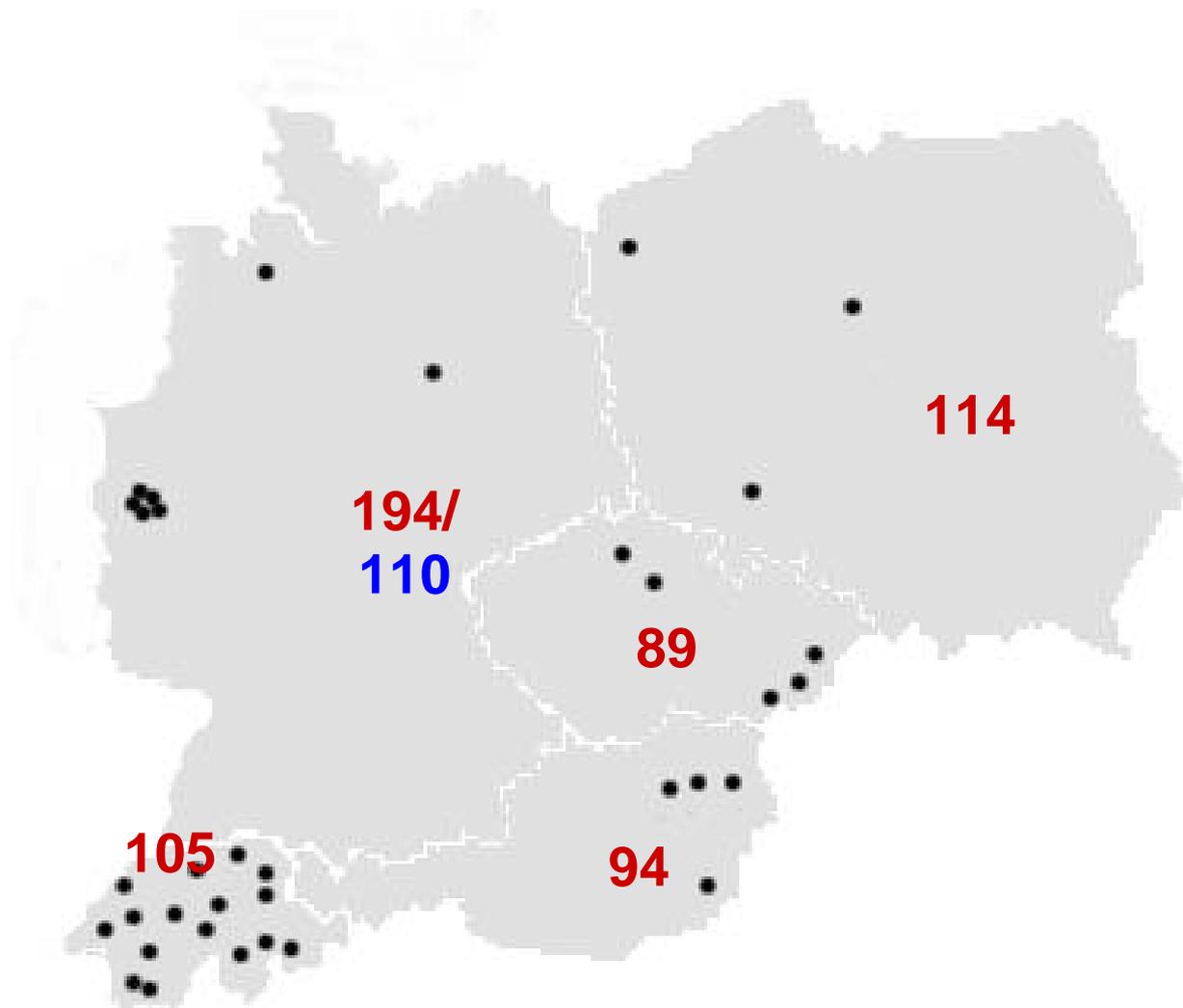
Fear of future: 4 Items alpha= .789

Abilities in relation to future problems



Sample

The data comes from the large research project of personal and social identity described in the previous contribution. For the present calculations it was possible to include data from Germany (boys and girls), Switzerland, Austria, the Czech Republic, and Poland. Sample sizes and places of data collection are shown below.

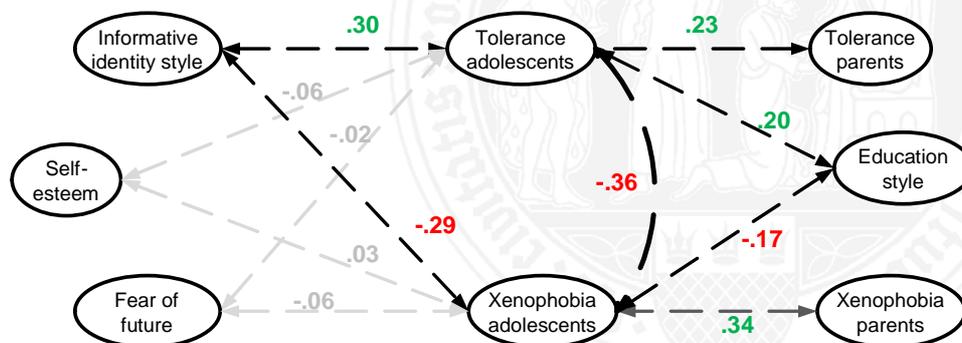


Measurement Quality

The reliability of the scales was good with the exception of (the scale) informative identity scale where the respective alpha was merely satisfying. Confirmatory factor analyses hold for good construct validity.

Before reporting the results of the structural equation modelling, we arranged the explored bivariate correlations in the theoretical model. This is unconventional, but makes it easier to evaluate the results.

Bivariate Correlations (Pearson)

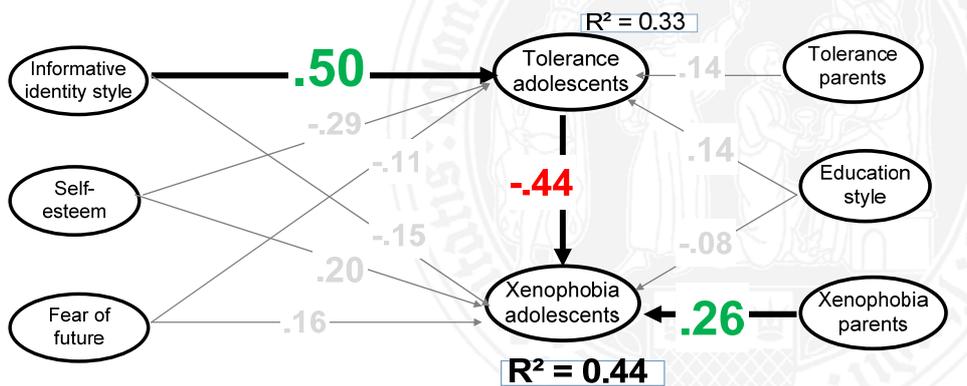


In contrast to our assumptions about the influence of personality variables, only information seeking is related to tolerance and xenophobia. The directions of the correlations are as expected.

Results

In contrast to exploring bivariate correlations, structural equation modelling accounts for error variance and calculates the respective relations while holding the influences of the concurring variables constant. We used the asymptotic correlation matrix (Jöreskog, 2004) and the Satorra-Bentler-Chi-Square was interpreted. The model fit was good.

Results Structural Equation (girls D)



Chi²/df	GFI	NNFI	RMSEA
969.1/784	0.708	0.967	0.035

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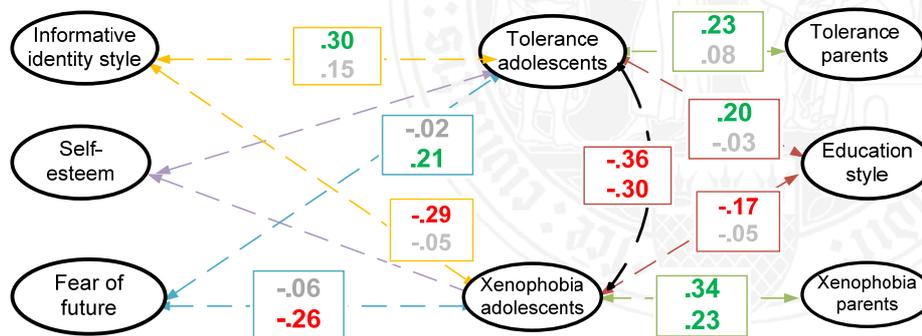
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In line with our hypotheses, the influence of transmission and educational influence is lower than the influence of personal variables and the influence of personal variable in turn now is completely mediated by tolerance. The direction of the relation between self-esteem and tolerance as well as self-esteem and xenophobia is unexpected and surprising: The greater the self-esteem, the lower is a person's tolerance and the higher the degree of xenophobia.

In order to test for the generalizability of the results we additionally considered the German boys-sample and the girls-samples from the other European countries. We could not calculate structural equations, because in all cases the total sample size was smaller than the number of parameters in the model which would lead to unreliable parameter estimates. The picture below compiles the bivariate relations that were computed in all samples instead.

Bivariate Correlations (girls/boys D)

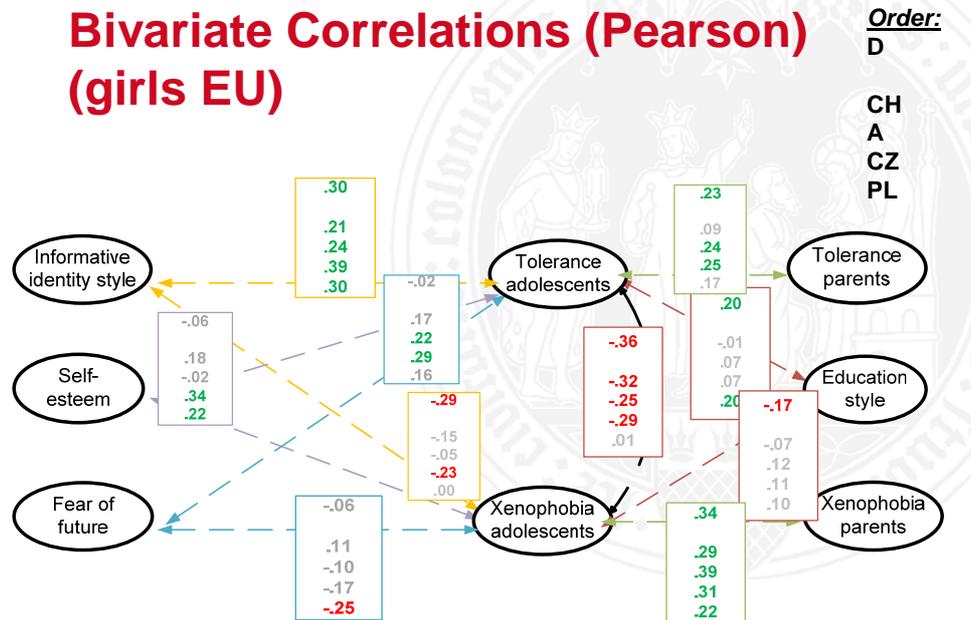
Order:
D (f)
D (m)



Concerning the influence of parents the coefficients vary substantially between boys and girls: Influence of transmission or education is usually stronger in mother-daughter dyads than in mother-boys dyads. Moreover, informative identity style is related with tolerance and xenophobia only with girls, however fear of future is related to xenophobia and tolerance only with boys.

The coefficients as well vary substantially between the countries. This is of particular evidence for the influence of education and fear of future. But there are also commonalities:

Bivariate Correlations (Pearson) (girls EU)



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With the exception of Poland there is always a strong relation between (potential) experiences and xenophobia. Similarly, substantial influences of the parents' degree of xenophobia on adolescents' xenophobia are found in all cases. Moreover a substantial influence of informative identity style on tolerance is found in all countries, whereas the influence of transmission on tolerance is different between the countries.

The current results do not support the theses derived from Tajfel's model. The question of the relative importance of personal and familial variables can not be answered on the basis of these bivariate correlations.

Discussion

Main results

In sum, the results indicate that the influence of transmission on the development of xenophobia differs as a function of the type of dyad and the culture considered. To make experiences with the foreign (resp. a positive attitude toward potential experiences) is of substantial influence but itself largely independent of family influence. Instead, informative identity style plays a substantial role. In the case of adolescent girls, the influence of intergenerational transmission is of limited importance for the development of negative attitudes towards foreigners.

Conclusion

It can be concluded, that information seeking and the adoption of tolerant positions play a prominent role in reducing negative attitudes toward foreigners and Jews. Accordingly, teaching young adolescents to respect diversity, to enhance their knowledge and to revise their attitudes is necessary for positive social interactions.

Thank You for Your Attention!

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