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Pols 302: Research Method

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Final Research Paper

For my question, I will focus on feminism in Germany. As Western culture changes and feminism becomes more prominent, Germany has not chosen to use the word. In many ways, it seems like Germany is going against feminism. This questions is important on a large scale because it needs to be understood why Germany goes against the mold in feminism, whereas other countries in Northern Europe are making strides toward feminist policies and feminist beliefs. As well as, I believe this is a scholarly question. Feminism is being studied in Middle Eastern and Eastern countries.

My question: Is feminism seen positively in Germany?

My independent variables are historical (old/young, East/West) and social (low birth rate, women expected to give up occupation for children). Another variable is Chancellor Merkel, who has been the leader of Germany since 2005.

My hypothesis about my question is that feminism is becoming more popular in West Germany compared to East Germany because, historically, West Germany was populated by Western ideals and standards compared to East Germany’s socialist past. However, I do note as I reminder to myself about the word feminism because East Germany when it was its own country produced many female engineers and scientists.

When discussing feminism in the United States, there is a concise definition of feminism: equality for women and freedom for women. It goes more in depth with Rosalind Delmar’s definition from her article “What is Feminism?”: “Many would agree that at the very least a feminist is someone who holds that women suffer discrimination because of their sex, that they have specific needs which remain negated and unsatisfied, and that the satisfaction of these needs would require a radical chance (some would say a revolution even) in a social, economic and political order” (9). This American version of feminism did not apply easily to Germany’s definition of feminism. In several articles, it is discussed the divide of feminism in East Germany and West Germany. While today Germany has been reunified, some divides remain from the cultures that once stood, such as feminism and whether its effects are still felt in today’s Germany and if a female chancellor has done anything to help feminism, yet a hole still remains of what is feminism like today in Germany.

In East Germany, they had the “highest official female employment rate in the world, at 89%” (Kopf and Zabel 242). West Germany held the opposite effect during the time, where they followed the male breadwinner model (Kopf and Zabel 241). In Pamela Fisher’s “Post-Communism Feminism in Germany” article, she discusses the difference in feminism between the two former territories. In East Germany, women were expected to play “male” while at work but “mother” at home. This gained the idea in East Germany that feminism meant equality because of “a strong glorification of male labor and physical prowess, qualities that became associated with revolutionary ideals” (Fisher 88). Fisher argues that communism and feminism did not go hand in hand. As for West German feminism, much of it came from American feminism at the time, which held a strong focus on women being allowed to do what they liked. In West Germany, arguably, Reiner Klingholz’s article of “Europe’s Real Demographic Challenge” states that West German women found it hard to have children and go into the work force (70). This mixed with inflation and more higher education opportunities only made West German women more likely to choose freedom over what was seen as traditional gender roles. According to Kopf and Zabel, women in the former West Germany are less likely to participate in job activation programs after children compared to women in the former East Germany (240).

Much of this research is about the former East Germany and the former West Germany. When feminism is brought in to the former territories, there is a clear marking between the two definitions of feminism. However, there is not much research on feminism in modern day Germany. Since 2005, Angela Merkel has been chancellor of Germany; even before then, she was a key player in the political scene. With Chancellor Merkel for 13 years, there was a question if her role as chancellor might have an impact on gender and feminism in Germany. While the chancellor does not have feminist policies, the thought would be that her time in office has caused a rise in female empowerment. Though, Chancellor Merkel’s right-leaning policies have not brought women to her side, “a similar pattern can be observed among Western European countries in which women have supported parties or candidates from the left wing of the ideological spectrum significantly more frequently since the last quarter of the twentieth century” (Debus 37). In the article “An ‘Angel Merkel Effect’? The Impact of Gender on CDU/CSU Voting Intention between 1998 and 2013,” Debus responds that “professional activity” and “growing feminist awareness” in the 1970s caused a chasm on the view of women in Germany. In West Germany, especially, where freedom was valued over equality, traditional values decreased. In the case of Chancellor Merkel, it cannot be decided if she holds sway over feminism in Germany because she has not been able to bring in female voters of the CDU/CSU parties. There are questions on whether or not her time as chancellor has made feminism in Germany stronger too. Current research has a hole when it comes to feminism in Germany; while news articles and opinion pieces state the feminism is missing in Germany, there is lack of evidence in scholarly journals to prove for or against.

Because of this hole in scholarly articles about modern feminism in modern Germany, research is forced to be taken from the past and current policies in in place in Germany. With the two distinct definitions of feminism, there is overlap in current feminism, but whether there is that divide is still unknown. On the other hand, policies and current demographic changes, such as occupation activation programs and lower birth rate, change the feminist scene in Germany. Many hang their hats on Chancellor Merkel, yet nothing has been proven that she has done anything for feminist throughout her 13 years. With all of this laid out, more research will need to be conducted on current day feminism.

The question of “Is feminism seen positively in Germany?” is on current display media because of news articles stating that Germany lacks feminism. In academic literature, the variables of feminism definitions, stay-at-home mothers and Chancellor Angela Merkel are defining points of feminism in Germany. Because there is lack of scholarly articles about the missing modern day feminism, the survey hoped to fill this gap with special attention to how modern day Germans feel about feminism. Specifically, I will be looking at how the definitions of feminism and how variables affect feminism as a whole inside of Germany. I argue that feminism is seen positively in Germany than initially thought with some of the discussion based on age, region and stay-at-home mothers.

The procedure I used was doing a survey via Survey Monkey. I had ten questions; each question was both in English and in German for clarity. The questions varied on ways to answer, with seven questions being multiple choice and three questions being a scale from one to one hundred. There first three questions asked on gender, age and region. Five questions used the word feminism. The other two questions were about stay-at-home mothers and on whether the stay-at-home mothers gave up their university degrees to become stay-at-home mothers. The questions varied in variables and feminism. For the five questions about feminism, only one deals with an outside variable: Chancellor Angela Merkel. The other four questions ask about the participant feeling positively about the word “feminism,” the best definition of feminism, the belief in feminism and the positively about feminism within Germany.

The survey is as follows:

1. Are you female (A) or male (B)?

Sie sind eine Frau (A) oder ein Mann (B)?

A B

2. Are you older (A) or younger than 30 (B)?

Bist du älter (A) oder jünger als 30 (B)?

A B

3. In your life, where have you lived the longest: (A) east side of Germany (Brandenburg, Mecklenburg -Vorpommern, Saxony, Saxony-Anhalt, and Thuringia) or the (B) west side of Germany (Baden-Wurettemberg, Bavaria, Bremen, Hamburg, Hesse, Lower Saxony, North Rhine-Westphalia, Rhineland-Palatinate, Saarland and Schleswig-Holstein) or (C) Berlin? Wo lebten Sie in Ihrem Leben am längsten: (A) im Osten Deutschlands (Brandenburg, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, Sachsen, Sachsen-Anhalt und Thüringen) oder im(B) Westen Deutschlands (Baden-Württemberg, Bayern, Bremen, Hamburg, Hessen, Niedersachsen, Nordrhein-Westfalen, Rheinland-Pfalz, Saarland und Schleswig-Holstein) oder (C) Berlin?

A B C

4. Do you feel positively about the word “feminism”? (1 is strongly negative and 5 is strongly positive.) Haben Sie eine positive Einstellung gegenüber dem Wort “Feminismus"? (1 ist stark negativ und 100 ist stark positiv.)

1 100

5. Looking at these two definitions of feminism: (A) feminism is freedom of women or (B) feminism is being equal to men or (C) a mixture of both or (D) neither—which definition of feminism fits best with what you believe? Betrachten Sie diese beiden Definitionen des Feminismus: (A) Feminismus ist die Freiheit der Frau (B) Feminismus bedeutet, dem Mann gleichgestellt zu sein (C) Eine Mischung aus beiden (D) Kein-- Welche Definition von Feminismus past am besten zu dem, was Sie glauben?

A B C D

6. Do you believe in feminism? (1 is strongly disbelieve and 5 is strongly believe.) Glaubst du an Feminismus? (1 ist stark ungläubig und 100 glaubt fest daran.)

1 100

7. Did you grow up with a stay-at-home mother? War deine Mutter Hausfrau als du aufgewachsen bist?

Yes/Ja No/Nein

8. If you did grow up with a stay-at-home mother, does your mother have a degree from university? Wenn Ihre Mutter Hausfrau war, hat Ihre Mutter einen Hochschulabschluss?

Yes/Ja No/Nein NA/ nicht zutreffend

9. Do you believe that feminism is seen positively in Germany? (1 is strongly negative and 5 is strongly positive.) Glauben Sie, dass der Feminismus in Deutschland positiv gesehen wird? (1 ist stark negativ und 100 ist stark positiv.)

1 100

10. Do you believe that Chancellor Angela Merkel has affected feminism inside of Germany? Glauben Sie, dass Bundeskanzlerin Angela Merkel den Feminismus in Deutschland beeinflusst hat?

Yes/Ja No/Nein

The sample that was gained from this survey was small. Out of 24 participants, 19 of them were female, 21 were younger than 30 and 22 of them were from western side of Germany. Because of this, I did not have a large variety of participants. However, within their answers, there was a variety of answers, but the participants were not a variety. The strength of these participants is that it is a better understanding of what young female Germans are thinking about feminism, and some of their answers appear to be that participants who grew with a stay-at-home mothers saw feminism more positively than participants who did not grow up with a stay-at-home mother. Also, strength wise, it is a better understanding how female feels about feminism because overall—excluding one—feminism was generally more positive than their male counterparts. Negatives, however, include the small sample that mostly comes from the western side, even if the main definitions of feminism (feminism is freedom of women or feminism is equality with) were both used. It would have been more helpful to know how more men and people older than 30 thought.

As for the validity and reliability, there was no reason to lie on this survey because it was conducted anonymously. There were a few outliers, such as Respondent 19, who seemed not to understand the survey and had low ratings for feminism besides the fact that the participant gave the question of “Is feminism seen positively in Germany?” and the participant gave 100 percent. As for the rest of participants, they usually followed a path, if feminism was not positively seen in their lives, feminism was not seen positively in Germany. Also, for the reliability, something that was interesting was the fact that scholarly articles that Chancellor Merkel had no effect, positively or negatively, on feminism in Germany, yet 17 out of 24 participants said that Chancellor Merkel has effected feminism with Germany. That would go against the scholarly articles, and it should be studied more.

Ethically in the survey, there is nothing that could possibly hurt someone physically, mentally or emotionally. None of the information is known be person. It is all anonymous. With that being said, one of issues is that the sample size is all of my friends on Facebook. These are Germans that I have met before and talked with, even if we have not discussed feminism or any sort women’s issue. However, this does bring up an ethics question of only using people that I know. I did ask participants to share to have a larger sample size or people that I have never met, but it appears that most did not.

In the question, “Is feminism seen positively in Germany?” there are newspaper articles to say that feminism is not seen positively. Feminism is not strong in Germany, and this research was not about why but about how feminism is effected in Germany. Through definitions and historical contexts, it was easy to see what variables could play a part on feminism. Like stay-at-home mothers and Chancellor Merkel, the culture around the person can affected how the see feminism. Overall, feminism was seen more positively by the younger generation and then by females. Neither of those is surprising.

The amount of support for the hypothesis came via the survey. News articles and scholarly articles can only showcase so much of how regular Germans are feeling. News articles take a specific moment while journal articles take time to be published. By that time, it is possible feminism has changed. For this survey, it showcases how 24 Germans feel about feminism with controlled variables about what affects feminism.



While there are newspaper articles and academic journals that state feminism is having a hard time in Germany, mixed results come from the answers from the survey. There is a variety of answers. Taking the variables from research done in scholarly journals, there are some easy differences to spot, such as Chancellor Merkel having an effect. One of the scholarly journal articles stated that Chancellor Merkel has not affected feminism positively or negatively since taking office. When asking the survey takers, 17 out of 24 believed that she had affected feminism. Whether positively or negatively was not studied. The survey results also found that feminism nowadays in Germany is mostly a mixture of the two definitions of feminism between the East and West, even though there are a few participants who believed in one definition of feminism. Lastly, there is some strong correlation between people who have stay-at-home mothers and thinking of feminism more positively. While it is for every case, more often than not there is this correlation.

Overall, with these numbers, believing in feminism is at 68%, feminism being seen positively in Germany is at 61%, and if Chancellor Merkel had any affected on Germany is at 70%. The numbers can reflect the young female German population because it shows that Germans feel differently on feminism but overall they want feminism. Most young females feel that feminism is lacking, and they believe in feminism.

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