"Money lets you sleep more peacefully, that's what I've experienced": Negotiations between motherhood and working-life from a class-sensitive perspective

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Abstract
Since the early 2000s, numerous family policy interventions have aimed at improving the reconciliation of work and family life in Germany. However, low-income women often face particular challenges in this regard, which the new measures hardly seem to take into account. This study therefore explores the question of what subjective and objective possibilities these women see for combining work and motherhood. It is based on biographical, guideline-supported interviews with six women from workers' milieus of different generations. The theoretical and methodological framework of the study is formed by critical psychology in Holzkamp's sense, and the interviews were evaluated with the developmental figure of critical psychology. The results show that the six women interviewed find ways and means to deal with the contradictory demands on them as mothers and class subjects, which can hardly be met in their entirety. The focus is on the negotiations along the following aspects, which proved to be central in the evaluation of the interviews: The relationship to (bourgeois) norms of the "good mother"; the mental relationship to the sociality of one's own problem situation; the awareness of the unstable preconditions of the (modernized) breadwinner model; and the care and maintenance of one's own social relationships (outside the partnership). These aspects are highlighted and discussed in relation to the current research situation.

Keywords
class, family policy, Germany, motherhood, women, work-life

1. Reconciliation or (in)reconciliation - a matter of class?

In the past thirty years, reconciliation of family- and work-life has become a societal goal and a "central policy field" (Auth, 2010, p.7) of German family

policy. This development is discussed in close connection with the increased labor force participation of women[1], which has almost doubled in Germany since 1970. Women have become an important, if not the most important, component of new labor market policies, not only wanting to work but also being expected to do so. Since women have also been considered "achievers" (McRobbie, 2010, p. 114) "who can make it in this society" (ibid.), measures to reconcile family- and work-life have increasingly become the focus of family and equality policies. Thus, since the early 1990s, numerous measures have been introduced to make it easier for mothers to be gainfully employed. The expansion of public childcare for under-threes and all-day care in kindergartens and schools, the right to work part-time while receiving parental benefits, and the introduction of parental allowance as an income-related wage replacement benefit are just a few examples of such measures. All of these are aimed at a modernized, heteronormative model of the family[2], according to which both parents can and should be gainfully employed (adult-worker model, see Lewis, 2004). Auth et al. (2010, p. 8) argue, with regard to equality policies since the 2000s, "that the family and equality policy reforms in Germany [...] have not meant equal opportunities and more freedom of choice for all women equally. Instead, selective emancipation has taken place, with more equality for socially better-off women." The goal of supporting female academics in particular in having children and taking parental leave through the introduction of parental allowance was also reaffirmed by the German Chancellor[3]. A turning point in family policy was the introduction of parental allowance in 2007 as an income-related wage replacement benefit, which replaces almost 70 percent of the previous salary. But if this measure was intended to better enable women to remain financially independent during parental leave, this step was also a novelty in that it no longer included any disadvantage compensation for low-earning women. In 2011, parental allowance was finally offset against unemployment benefit II (Arbeitslosengeld II, short: ALG II) to the detriment of mothers who are already on the edge of the subsistence level. While higher-earning women today have more opportunities to combine family and career than in the past (see e.g. Abele, 2003), the influence of changed conditions and a changed discourse on the life reality of proletarian women has not yet been investigated.

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[1] In many articles cited in this study, the category "women" is not further defined. I will refer to cis-women in the following when quoting statements about women. The active opening of the labor market to trans women and queer people occurred later and is to be discussed in a different context.

[2] The ideal of family is to be separated from the definition of family on which this work is based. The societal model of what family is and what almost everyone can agree on is the core family: mother, father and about two children. The more another form of life resembles this composition, the more likely it is to be perceived as a family. The extent to which a constellation can deviate from the ideal nuclear family in order to still be perceived as a family varies socially (Luck/Ruckdeschel, 2015, p. 74f).

[3] Until now, support for families has actually always been support for families in need. Now, for the first time, we have taken the initiative to say that no matter how much someone earns, the decision to have a child is, of course, a wonderful private decision, but it is also an important decision for society. That's why we don't want this decision to be associated with too much loss of standard of living. That's why we give a certain percentage of the last salary for one year." (Merkel, 2006)

2. State of research

While for many families[4] the hegemonic concepts are indeed the model and reality, alternative family practices and designs have always existed. When the norm of the male sole breadwinner was booming in the 1950s and 1960s, many women were simultaneously single parents in the aftermath of World War II (Notz, 2016, p. 102). Women from the working classes were often gainfully employed, as one salary was not enough to live on, and they additionally did the household and child-rearing work (Beer, 2010, p. 60). If today the *adult-worker model* or the ideal of the *working mom* prevails, according to which the mother is supposed to combine gainful employment, family life, financial independence, and self-care without any problems, reconciliation in the sense of having her own salary that is not far below the social average remains the preserve of very few women with children (Barišić/Consiglio, 2020, p. 4f; BMFSFJ, 2016, p. 4). Barišić and Consiglio highlight that mothers continue to earn significantly less income than fathers and then women without children. According to them, the average increase in women's earned income over the past 30 years is almost entirely due to the increased incomes of women *without* children. In particular, the expansion of the low-wage sector and part-time work in the form of mini-jobs is seen as a "risky form of employment" (Klenner/Schmidt, 2012). There is a clear gap between the social ideal and the reality of motherhood. For many women, reconciling family and work life is a problem when it comes to lasting, stable financial independence (OECD, 2017; BMFSFJ, 2016, p. 11). The notion that more and more women are employed as well as (quite relevant!) debates about double burden have displaced those about women's financial dependence. Sick and Schmidt (2015) point out:

> While more and more mothers are in the labor force, one might therefore assume that women's household incomes recover over time from the post-divorce trough. But in fact, only marginal employment and part-time work have increased. The volume of work itself has actually declined! (p. 129)

Since 2016, the labor force volume has been back at the 1991 level (Grünheid, 2018, p. 6).

The fact that most mothers are employed part-time is considered the cause of the low income of mothers in Germany. Women state family responsibilities and caring for dependents as the most common reason for part-time work (Wanger, 2015, p. 3). Full-time working women are nevertheless left with the bulk of the reproductive work (Berghammer/Verwiebe, 2015, p. 122). While women of the higher (wage) classes can finance household help and external childcare in this case, those from the working classes are often exposed to the

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[4] The term is based on the family definition of the microcensus: "In the microcensus, the family includes all parent-child relationships, i.e. married couples, non-marital (mixed-sex) and same-sex partnerships, as well as single parents with unmarried children in the household. Included are - in addition to biological children - also stepchildren, foster children and adopted children without age limit. Thus, a family always consists of two generations: Parents/parents and unmarried children living in the household." (Statistisches Bundesamt, Glossary: Family)

double burden of gainful employment and family work. If they opt for a part-time model, their income is barely sufficient to support themselves. Another problem is shift work, which often does not fall within the childcare hours of daycare centers.

Motherhood and the regulating power of norms

In 1921, the socialist women's rights activist Alexandra Kollontai asked, "How can women get rid of the eternal housework that only consumes unnecessary energies? Women could really use these energies more sensibly" (Kollontai, 1977, p. 163). What was meant was not how women could cede housework to other social groups, but how they could free themselves from the situation that they do housework because they are women (and are thus kept from other activities). It is not only social structures that lead to women not being able to get rid of 'the eternal housework', especially when they start a family. Dreßler (2018, p. 11) additionally understands motherhood as a cultural pattern of interpretation that "links female reproductive abilities with caring competencies and an emotionally strong bond between mother and child." Thus, from femininity is derived the natural-biological ability to care for children emotionally and to raise them competently out of an apparently innate maternal instinct. It is by no means to deny that this socially implemented female bonding and caring capacity allows mothers to form strong bonds with children that are sources of positive experiences happiness, joy, and social competence. Nevertheless, gendered norms of parenting undoubtedly have a regulating role. Speck (2016, p. 40) even sees the "primary function" of the ideal of the good mother in the "allocation of familial caring activities [...] to women," thus clearly highlighting its regulative character. In addition, there is the class bias of the symbolic representation of good motherhood, which various authors also point out (e.g., Speck, 2016; Dreßler, 2018). Mothers today are supposed to be financially independent, but *full-time* maternal employment is still considered incompatible with maternal responsibility toward the child (Dreßler, 2018, p. 33; Diabeté, 2015, p. 216). Financial independence on a part-time basis is difficult to achieve for many women, but for mothers from low-wage backgrounds it is sheer impossible. At the same time, women today are suggested that they can work and have careers as mothers, that they can seemingly become politicians and professors with ease – if only they manage their lives in the right way. Following McRobbie (2010), this imposes an interpretive framework with which the "effects of class discrimination, racism, and the sheer persistence of insurmountable obstacles for girls from poor backgrounds" (ibid., p. 110) completely disappear from public consciousness. If mothers fail to meet expectations of society, this can quickly become emblematic of merely individual failures to plan, she argues. Incompatibility is not a new phenomenon, but what role do class privileges and resources play in determining whether a woman manages to combine motherhood satisfactorily with a job and financial independence? If Flöther and Oberkrome (2017, p. 143) are followed, then in Germany "compatibility

problems are discussed especially for university careers, while empirical findings are largely lacking for other professional sectors." Against this background, this paper examines the reconciliation goals and practices of working-class women with a view to their subjective satisfaction with their implementation. Of particular interest is the question of whether desires for financial independence were present and how the possibilities to realize them were perceived. Against the theoretical background of Critical Psychology, the question of the extent to which women actively work to improve the conditions for reconciliation is always relevant.

3. Theoretical framework: Critical Psychology

Research that emerges within the paradigm of Critical Psychology always poses challenges to relatively short writings, such as a journal article. Critical psychology must be understood as a distinct research paradigm that operates with its own theoretical presuppositions, analytic terms, as well as a specifically developed methodological implementation of the paradigm. This sediment of Critical Psychology can only be presented here in a very abbreviated form and reference must be made to more comprehensive writings. In doing so, the study is oriented towards the theoretical-methodological explanations of Critical Psychology by Holzkamp (1985) as well as its further development by Markard (2009) and various feminist further developments (Kalkstein, 2016, Sieben & Kalkstein, 2015, Rommelspacher, 1991). The central lines will be traced.

How a subject behaves in a situation is considered by Critical Psychology as the interplay of individual needs, objective possibilities and constraints, their (normative) representation (e.g., in forms of thinking), and their accentuation and interpretation by the subject itself. In this context, Markard (2009) speaks of the "overall social mediatedness of individual existence" (p. 178). In the present study, the focus is specifically on the tension between the externally imposed conditions under which women must establish compatibility and the exploration of possibilities to overcome obstacles and to shape compatibility according to their own ideas and needs. For proletarian women, a situation exists that is referred to as *structural (in)compatibility* of family and gainful employment, following the explanations in chapter 2. Within the structural framework, the respective chosen forms of action – the *practices of (in)compatibility* – emerge. In critical-psychological terms, they are seen as an interplay of individual *reasons* (desires, needs, biographical experiences), structural possibilities and their subjective accentuation (*premises*). Forms of action can be analyzed as *premise-reason relations*. Actions are grounded in premises and usually aim at expanding the individual's agency. The agency can be expanded *restrictively* (within the structurally given framework) or by struggling to improve the initial situation (generalized agency). *Generalized agency* thereby represents a determination of the direction of practice in order "in the unfolding of the possibilities for cooperative self-determination of our own affairs [to] also arrive at a satisfying, anxiety-free, and fulfilled subjective existence." (Holzkamp,

1984, p. 10) It shows what would be possible and focuses on cooperative self-determination: the disposition of one's own living conditions in interaction with others. Against this background, the analytical notion of double possibility emphasizes that concrete people in principle always have the possibility to intervene in social conditions. As a category of analysis, it systematically incorporates into the inquiry that people have the possibility to engage in the expansion of the disposal of one's own living conditions (*generalized agency*). Analytically, it provides the framework for determining what restrictions on agency people experience in a situation.

In research practice, the focus is on the "subjective way of prerception" (ibid.) these very restrictions. The perceived immutability of existing power and inequality relations is identified as the intellectual premise of restrictive agency (Holzkamp, 1985, p. 370). With regard to the social contradictions between gainful employment and motherhood that the women in question encounter, it is important to understand the functionality of restrictive entanglements through the mental fading out of the *double possibility*. Actions do have reasons, but these reasons (interests, desires, needs) are by no means always conscious (cf. the self-critical discussion by Huck, 2006). Analyzing the conditions and functionality of individually realized forms of thinking thus opens up the possibility of looking at experience in a new way. In the critical-psychological developmental figure *(Entwicklungsfigur)*, it is an independent methodological step, which I will discuss in the next chapter.

The relation between subjectively experienced possibilities of action, objectively restricting conditions of life, and double possibility forms the core of a critical-psychological problem-analysis. The typical critical-psychological relation between subjectively experienced and socially given possibilities is brought into analytical focus.

4. Methodical Procedure

Data collection

The study reconstructs the subjective view of women of different generations on their own possibilities of reconciling family and gainful employment. Data basis are seven biographical interviews with six women[5]. These were recruited by means of notices in women's centers, sending mails via distribution lists and inquiries to trade unions. The interviews were transcribed and anonymized. The biographies of the sample were recorded by means of biographical guided interviews, which first asked (chronologically) about the biographical course and touched on certain areas of life (family, friendship, school, work, crises), and then asked about self-constructions, which were specifically intended to stimulate reflection ("Have you changed over time?").

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[5] One woman was interviewed twice, as the first interview was originally a trial interview. When the guide was subsequently adapted and the interview was evaluated after all, some questions had to be asked subsequently.

Sample

The sample (see Table 1) consists of six women between the ages of 28 and 66. Three women were between 29 and 35 years old at the time of the interview, three women between 58 and 66 years old. Accordingly, two generations were interviewed[6]. Four of the women were already mothers, and two were planning motherhood[7]. To determine the class position, the characteristics of educational attainment, professional qualification, and occupation, as well as inheritance and property situation were collected. Five participants have a secondary school diploma, another participant completed A levels, which was not recognized in Germany. As a housekeeping assistant in a large kitchen, she was undoubtedly part of the target group. At the time of the interviews, five women were living in rented accommodation; one participant had bought a small condominium in a working-class neighborhood in *city A* when she was a senior citizen. One of the women had already received an inheritance at the time of the interview, but it was so small that it did not result in a 'class change'. Another will receive an inheritance during her lifetime. These and similar blurbs are not uncommon in attempts to operationalize 'working-class' and must be decided on a case-by-case basis (see Braun et. al, 2008).

Table 1.

Name, Age	Education degree	Professional Qualification	Professional Occupations	Number of children	Family status
Julia, 66 years	secondary school diploma	Forwarding agent	Forwarding agent, unskilled labor	2 adult children	Married 2 times, divorced 1 time, Widowed
Nina 66 years	secondary school diploma	Industrial clerk, educator	Industrial clerk, Stenographer. Bürotätigkeiten, educator	2 adult children	Married, Divorced, Partnership, Single and Singleparent
Dunja, 58 years	A-levels (Iran)	Housekeeping Help	unskilled labor, Houskeepinh Help	1 adult child	Married, Divorced, Partnership, Singleparent

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[6] The question of whether so much has really changed for women from the working classes cannot be pursued further in this article, but can be read at the indicated place (Kalkstein, 2021).

[7] The starting point of the study (Kalkstein, 2021), of which this article is an abridged version, was not compatibility or motherhood, but the question of central areas of life in which women from working-class backgrounds struggle particularly hard for agency. Motherhood and issues around compatibility only emerged as a central theme in the analysis. Although only four of the six women were already mothers, all of them had a relationship to motherhood: Planning to start a family soon also took up significant space in the interviews.

Maria, 32 years	secondary school diploma	Nurse practitioner	Nurse practitioner	No children yet	Partnership
Vanessa, 31 years	secondary school diploma	Social Assistant	Waitress, Social Assistant Vocational baccalaureate (currently 12th grade)	2 Children of preschool and primary school age	Partnership, Singleparent
Marion 28 years	secondary school diploma	Hotel manageress	Hotel manageress	No children yet	Partnership

Data Analysis

Critical-psychological research practice pursues the goal of "analyzing how people move within the contradictions of capitalist society, how they expand or renounce their subjective possibilities of determination - and with which (psychological) problems this is associated in each case" (Markard, 2010, p. 170). The focus here is on the conceptual pair of *restrictive vs. generalized agency* (see above), and its reflection in thinking and in the form of social relations.

In the first step of the analysis, the interviews were sorted thematically and examined for common central themes. The procedure was based on the open coding of Grounded Theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). From this, it was possible to reconstruct the common problematic situation of the participants in the negotiations about gainful employment, family planning, and family work.

In the second step, the analysis of the thematic complex of *(in)compatibility* thus elaborated was oriented towards the first two steps of the critical-psychological development figure *(Entwicklungsfigur)* (see Markard, 2009, p. 279ff; also Geffers, 2008). These are:

(a) *the identification of the problem* (reconciling motherhood and work) and *reconstruction of the subjective view* of the person concerned.
(b) the analysis and working through of the problem and *reformulation in critical-psychological analysis categories* (cf. chapter 3, theoretical re-framing).

Depending on the data situation of the interview, either both concrete *reasons and premises* can be reconstructed from the narratives of the individuals, since these are disclosed. Or they have to be "speculated" about, since they remain unclear in the interviews. This means the "attempt [...] to make clear the premise-reasons-relations, subjective theories, life-condition references that come up in the evaluation in such a way that they are not only reproduced or thematized, but

reflected upon and questioned with regard to the respective (i.e., also one's own) location-boundness – and thus become comprehensible for others in a methodologically proven way" (Markard, 2020, p. 39). At the end of each individual case analysis, there is accordingly the practical or intellectual answer to the problem as a premise-reasons-relation against the background of restrictive vs. generalized agency. The individual responses *(practice of (in-)reconciliation)* to the structural framework *(structural (in-)reconciliation)* were cross-compared with each other in order to develop axes along which differences and similarities can be described. Four heuristic dimensions have emerged from the empirics to describe them. These will be presented in the following.

5. Presentation of the central results: Practices of (in) reconciliation[8]

As presented in the theoretical section, women faced a situation of structural (in-) reconciliation that made it practically impossible for them to fulfill the norms of good motherhood while remaining financially independent. For reasons of space, the detailed elaboration of the respective situation of each interviewee must be omitted. This can be found in Kalkstein (2021, p. 107ff). Although the initial situations showed structural parallels, the practical responses to them could be distinguished along the following four dimensions:
    (a) relationship to norms of good motherhood
    (b) presence or absence of structural categories in the thought patterns
    (c) subjective assessment of the risk of financial dependence
    (d) quantity of social involvement outside the partnership.
    These form the core of the findings of the study and are presented below as dimensions of practice and filled with content.

a) Relationship to norms of good motherhood

The normative relationship of the interview partners to motherhood, working life, and their compatibility was examined to see which subjective practices emerge from this relationship in response to a social structure that disadvantages women due to societal class relations. The evaluative pattern of the good mother can be reconstructed as particularly relevant, which to this day frames supposedly too much gainful employment of the mother (the extent varies historically) as a potential threat to the well-being of the child (Dreßler, 2018, p. 33).
    Questions about the temporality of career exit influenced all women's negotiations at a normative level. Nina (66 y.) exited the workforce when she became pregnant (1972), while her husband, three years younger, continued to work and provide financial security for the family. This form of division of labor was not only socially expected at the time, but was also legally mandated (Notz,

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[8] The comprehensive presentation of the results is beyond the scope of this paper; it can be read in detail in Kalkstein (2021, p. 318ff). At this point, it will be limited to the central results along the four heuristic categories.

2016, p.100). When Marion (28 y.) is asked in the interview about her desire to have children, she answers that her partner now has a new job, which is why the "external circumstances fit" (Ma, 12:10). Both Nina (66 y.) and Marion (28 y.) refer – despite considerable age differences – to socially legitimized forms of gender-specific division of labor as a practice of (in-)reconciliation, which in both cases leads to financial dependence on the partner. But as a family, societal expectations and social norms could be fulfilled (maternal care and paternal financial security of the family). The legitimacy of gender-specific division of labor remains self-referential (it is right because it is customary). It is not named as risky in the sense of giving up financial autonomy. Within the framework of the existing society, however, the breadwinner model also has an enabling character; despite its restrictive characteristics (economic dependence on the partner), as long as the relationship remains stable, a double burden is also spared.

Julia (66 y.) and Maria (35 y.) choose a different path. They put themselves in a problematic relationship to norms and social expectations as to when (how 'early' or 'late') and to what extent it is apparently good or right to re-enter the workforce. In the interview, Maria (35 y.) carefully weighs up the socially expected period of time against her own needs:

> Nowadays it's also possible that you give them up somewhere when you're only six months old. I mean, I think that's very early, but when they're a good year old, I think that's fine. (M_II, 5:33ff)

She expresses normative boundaries as well as possibility that her own needs (to return to work at an early age) do not meet social expectations. Maria evaluates it as possible in future to place her child in external care at the age of six months, but very early. But it remains an alternative, even if not the optimal one. Maternal primary responsibility is used as an orientation, even if it contradicts one's own needs. Subsequently, other alternatives are discussed, in which an external institution, rather than the mother herself, becomes responsible for the child's care at an early age. Comparable negotiations about the model of good motherhood with the main maternal responsibility can be found in the interview with Julia (66 y.). She tells about a biographical situation when she was a single parent looking for a daycare place in the mid-1970s and the district office told her there was none:

> Then I said, 'Good! Then I'll have to leave him [son] here so I can go to work on Monday!" (J, 14:14ff).

As a mother, the threat to leave her one-and-a-half-year-old son behind at the district office if she was not provided with a kindergarten place violated social norms. Julia thus signaled a willingness to prioritize her gainful employment rather than her maternal duties. In doing so, the interviewee referred to the double burden of being responsible for her children and being employed:

> From a health point of view, it would have been nicer to stay at home for three years. But how do you get back to work, that was hard enough as it was. (J, 31:16f)

The claims of good motherhood are experienced ambivalently, when parallel gainful employment had to be managed as a single parent. On the one hand, one had "not brought children into the world in order to have nothing at all from them" (J, 6:15), on the other hand, maternal main care was experienced as an external regulatory instance whose universal validity could be questioned depending on the situation. Maria (32 y.) also adds in the interview her plan to return to work early and to have the child cared for externally: "And I think that's good for a child, too." (M_II, 6:2) Since a supposedly too early entry into working life can be socially sanctioned, the decision to do so required one's own 'inner' or alternative system of norms and values that can be set against the sanctions. Although both interviewees were oriented toward the model of good motherhood, they still considered the possibility of violating it in exceptional cases in order to realize their own needs with regard to compatibility. Working is also weighted here as a factor in fulfilling one's own needs and desires. Agency is achieved here by setting oneself apart from expectations.

When Vanessa (31 y.) became pregnant unplanned at the age of 22, she found herself in precarious living and working conditions. Since her partner was studying and since she herself had neither vocational training nor a fixed employment contract, she received social benefits (ALG II) for several years. Poverty also contradicts the idea of good motherhood:

> Sure, there were months when I had no more money a week before the end and the refrigerator was empty and I had to go to my father and he then lectured me on how to manage. And me as a mother and anyway, yes (V, 22:21ff).

From the principle of society, she found it justifiable to receive state transfer payments: "And I also find it completely legitimate." (V, 22:11f) The concern about being measured against standards from the outside was countered by a lack of opportunities and the violation of one's own interests and needs that would result from adhering to appropriate standards. She talks openly about violations of the law in the interview. In addition, having an environment that shared sub- or counter-cultural norms reduced the potential threat of social exclusion from falling short or violating social expectations. Her "really strong social network" (V, 20:23) empowered Vanessa because her social participation was maintained even when she violated norms and rules. Vanessa referred to a system of values and norms that placed different evaluative standards on individual practices and allowed her normative space. This made it possible to question practices of (in-)reconciliation that are socially (tendentially) negatively valued (motherhood and receiving social benefits) and were avoided by other interview participants.

b) Presence or absence of structural categories in the explanatory patterns

Forms of thinking represent not only the mental relationship to norms and proximities, but also that to the material conditions within which attempts are made to reconcile motherhood and working life. They are a correlate of practice. The analytical perspective of critical psychology asks whether one's own situation is related to the social structure or appears as an immediate problem (to be solved privately). Julia (66 y.) tells several times about her problems as a young woman to decide between motherhood and professional realization:

> And the [boss, FK] also told me when I wanted to leave, the company is growing and I could then manage the shipping department and so. Unfortunately, these are things that I wasn't aware of, you know. When you're actually very, how should I say, girly and actually say, I want to get out of home, I want to have children. That was something very important to me! I know I would have believed it of myself, not just that others would believe it of me. But the female clock ticked so loudly and said: No! No! No! No! No! (J, 7:26ff)

It seemed to be her own responsibility to find a practical answer to the contradiction between the demands of motherhood and the need for occupational advancement. She formulates it in retrospect as always having to "manage her little family business and [keep] a lot in mind." (J, 8:24ff) This is in line with Speck's (2016, p. 38) statement that in the contemporary model of good motherhood, the mother is "responsible for a kind of small business." Structural double burden is reinterpreted as an individual ability to organize oneself 'well enough'. The practice of (in-)reconciliation results in an excessive amount of planning, organizing, and 'time management' – and "depression" (J, 15:43).

Motherhood lends itself to naturalizations in a special way, as it contains both societal and biological-nurturing components (Steins, 1994, p. 63ff). However, (intersectional) class boundaries and unsatisfactory working conditions are also seen as personal problems in the interviews. Maria (32 y.) talks about worsened working conditions as a nurse:

> You worked a lot of extra hours because jobs were cut. [...] Then the first step was that I thought, okay, you have to apply for something else, you have to do something else. (M, 20:7ff)

During this time (2010 - 2013), large-scale industrial dispute and nursing strikes took place, directed against staff shortages in hospitals (Wolf, 2013, p. 16). In the quote above, the need for change is experienced as a necessary change in the 'private' (you have to apply away) - an individual solution possibly seemed more sensible and promising than participating in protests. Marion also mentions several times that her income was "really lousy" (Ma, 23:6). If the 28-year-old could have made up her mind again at the time of the interview, she does not know if she would go back to hotel management training, "just because of the pay" (Ma, 23:6). The salary of hotel specialists is on the borderline of low pay (WSI, 2013, p.6) and Marion considers herself responsible for having chosen a

low-paid profession. Julia experienced discrimination in the labor market as a mother and as a wage-dependent employee:

> Yes, I had a very bad experience with a boss. [...] And then she called me in, because it was the probationary period, [...] and she was very satisfied with the work, but I should guarantee her that my child would not get sick, only then would she extend my contract. And then I said, despite all the hardship, give me the papers, I can't guarantee that. (J, 8:6ff)

In all cases, "particularly poor working conditions, particularly low pay [emerge], [...] without penetrating the appearance of possible 'wage justice,' without capturing the 'structural' nature of job insecurity and unemployment" (Holzkamp, 1985a, p. 366). The problem of low pay is not seen as a structurally bound class and gender relation. Working conditions were given, but they did not become the starting point of the double possibility: common representation of interests. However, it is also visible that women struggle in a restrictive way to expand their agency - and they succeed in doing so.

But what practices are realized when social aspects such as social inequality and gender relations are mapped in terms of their own situation? For the first time, Vanessa (31 y.) consciously perceived social inequality she switched to a gymnasium after elementary school. She experienced that she was "picked on" (V, 4:30) - because her parents were poorer. Structural inequality and unequal starting conditions were personally evident. Thus, Vanessa connected her immediate life situation as a mother with social structures of female double burden ("Of course I am doubly burdened" [V, 21:14f]). She defines her own experience of structural disadvantage as an injustice. From social references to social inequality and her own experience with it, a way of thinking was developed in which the societal-normative claim of having to secure one's own existence in an apparently private responsibility can be reinterpreted as a common task of the family and the circle of friends. Vanessa is currently dependent on social benefits when she tells us:

> When I hear, 'Its hard for you, single parent and so on! I don't have to do many purchases for the kids. That's actually always taken care of, my mother takes care of that. Or my father did, when he was still alive. And that is actually my fortune. I receive a lot of gifts from the outside. I do have friends who are good to me. And my boyfriend is good to me. That is, no, that holds the balance. So that's, everything goes. I can also go to the movies. I can also go on vacation and I do that. (V, 19:23ff)

Vanessa also lent money when she had financially 'better' periods:

> I: [...] So how do you assess your financial situation?
> V: Critical. Critical at the moment. But I have good friends who have also lent me a lot of money. And I have also lent a lot of money in the last few months. (V, 19:12f)

Against the background of social inequality, the need-oriented redistribution of money becomes a principle and a social practice, whereby one's own and others' life situations are understood within social inequality. The connection between social inequality, gender relations, and conditions of production and reproduction is not theoretically reconstructed, but nevertheless a conception of society as a social mediating instance existed.

Dunja, on the other hand, sees her working and living conditions as rooted in the "capitalist state and system" (D, 28:22), in the contradiction between ownership and non-ownership. She describes herself as a Marxist in the interview and it is evident that she reconstructs social problems and her life situation against the background of Marxian thought:

> I've always been a worker. I have always had a boss. I have lived with a low wage. Or with two jobs. And yes, I always think that work is exploitation. You get up in the morning, then you leave, and then you come home at 4 pm. And what do you have in your hand? And what do you earn? (D, 27:27ff)

Her situation appears to her to be rooted in the global conditions of production and reproduction, as well as gender relations, "especially for women, it's (working, FK) a double job." (D, 28:2f)

Although Dunja feels constrained to provide for her livelihood (and that of her daughter) in a private way ('two jobs'), she does not see herself as directly personally accountable for her situation, nor does she face an unchangeable social structure on which she has no influence. In her view, the condition for change is not individual effort, but social struggles for "equal rights for all people financially, in all things" (D, 28:30f)

> D: I always have hope and I live with my hope. I always think, one day all the workers will wake up, they will realize what is happening. Because, maybe then it will be completely different.
> I: Change of circumstances?
> D: That's coming, that's coming. (D, 28:16ff)

c) Subjective assessment of the risk of financial dependence

The interviewees often describe experiences of financial dependence. Before it appears and becomes noticeable as such, it usually manifests itself as a gender-specific, traditional division of labor. This is partly a satisfactory and desired practice. Nina (66 y.) had completed an apprenticeship as an industrial clerk. When she became pregnant (1972), she left the labor force altogether. She was involved in the family, met her mother for washing, maintained social contacts. "My parents, my mom, they supported me quite well there." (N, 14:27f) In the interview, she justifies her re-entry into the workforce with the fact that the possibility of traditional work and role division was no longer given after the divorce: "Because I had to work again." (N, 4:21f) In contrast, Julia (66 y.) and Vanessa (31 y.) found themselves in an unwanted practice of gender-specific-

traditional division of labor within the partnership after their first child. Julia did not find a part-time job in her original qualification level and started "working at home" (J, 6:26) far below her qualification. At the same time, she took care of the joint children. This work annoyed, isolated, and overworked her:

> Well, that's annoying, you know. [...] When I had a 120-page assignment, I wrote until ten in the evening. That was of course hard, because the kids were often sick or something, you could have them at home, but you couldn't concentrate very well, especially when you have such a hyperactive child like the big one. With Philipp I could say, play now, mummy comes to the side. And with the big one it was very, very difficult. (J, 6:26ff)

Subsequently, she worked "in the laundry [...], by the hour," then in a pipe cleaning business and in a chocolate factory. "The main thing was to earn a few marks." (J, 7:1) Her husband financed the family for the most part and "retreated completely" (J, 15:16).

Julia took care of the children, worked, and she had "the household under control" (J, 15:13). But she suffered emotionally from the situation: "I always had depression during that time, of course." (J, 15:26) Julia, well qualified and with a desire to remain gainfully employed, found only low-wage jobs as a mother of two. Her income was so low that she only "earned two-thirds of the rent" (J, 30:34f), the rest of the household income being acquired by her partner. The *practice of (in-)reconciliation* is similar to Nina's (J, 66), but satisfaction differs in advance.

Vanessa also stayed at home for a year and a half and then "[w]ith a bit of a job" (V, 13:30). She received ALG II for a total of four years. Vanessa's partner, the children's father, continued to qualify at university despite parenthood, while Vanessa dropped out of the workforce altogether. Like Julia, Vanessa found herself unhappily shouldering the quasi-sole responsibility of raising children. She "was just really alone a lot and also sad about it" (V, 14:3f). Both planned to take on somehow more responsibility for childcare, but then had the impression of being entirely responsible for the children on their own.

Traditional gender division of labor did not appear as financial dependency until the case of separation and divorce. This is because the practice is based on conditions of normality and stability that do not always materialize. The partnership must remain stable and both partners must share the income equally. Nina (66 years old) had been unemployed for five years when the marriage broke up:

> I didn't work then either, I was financially dependent on my husband. [...] Then I also lived for a short time from the social welfare office. But it was not so easy to go there. I had problems with that, I must say. (N, 15:19ff)

In her eyes, receiving social welfare came unexpectedly. Separations and divorces are usually not planned, while traditional divisions of labor are entered into. They are only statistically, but not subjectively predictable and thus belong to the subjective unplannability. Julia (66 y.) was also still on parental leave

during the divorce, which meant a considerable financial, logistical and organizational effort.

> But now first see, how do you manage? At that time there was a law that you could still get unemployment benefits up to two years after the birth. But you had to register as a job seeker and that meant looking for a place in kindergarten. That was difficult, of course. But then I registered, looked for work, and then found one [...]. Then I had four more months of unemployment benefit and then I separated. That is, it is not so easy to separate, not. (J, 14:3ff)

Vanessa (31 y.) was also separated at the time of the interview. The economic dependency (on the ex-partner or on social benefits), leads to economic precarity in case of separation and divorce. Furthermore, an additional educational effort followed:

> Of course, I am doubly burdened. And I am often also really tired. And also angry and desperate. (V, 21:17f)

Vanessa sums up though: "But in the end I feel better." (V, 21:18) But the stress of a separation combined with economic dependence on the partner and the perspective of being a single parent and not earning much afterwards, leads in other cases to the conclusion that a separation seemed unmanageable. Julia's second marriage did not work out well. When the therapist advised her to separate, this had brought her "close to such a 'suicide attempt'" (J, 25:1f). Julia did not see herself coping with a divorce, nor could she bear the idea of staying in the marriage:

> How am I supposed to manage all this! First of all, I fought for survival, actually, for years. And then my second husband started drinking even more. That's when you have the right touch! I just wanted to realize how I'm going to do it, how I'm going to manage it! With the apartment, with the children? Because one thing was clear, I would have dared to live with Philipp [2nd son]. But where should Steffen [1st son] go? To the first father, who drinks. With the stepfather, there's no right at all. (J, 25:2ff)

The fact that separations and divorces were a burden cannot be understood independently of the assignment of female caring responsibilities and the accompanying social assumption and high willingness of the interviewees themselves to forego financial autonomy in favor of motherhood. Julia had the impression of being trapped in the marriage situation, of not being able to change or end it on her own. But it is also the social conditions that drive women into this situation.

On the one hand, they are supposed to take on the main responsibility for child-rearing and caring activities; on the other hand, there was no social structure available to them that would provide relief in the case of separation and divorce. I understand this as an objective risk of traditional gender-specific division of labor. In the process, the minimal financial security one had through

one's own salary is abandoned. The collective repression of this circumstance can certainly be understood as an attempt to circumvent the powerlessness that this situation can trigger. But only the confrontation with it, can give insight into the necessity of its change and drive to generalized forms of agency.

d) Social inclusion: Paths to self-determination

It also turned out that social relationships and involvement outside of the partnership made a fundamental difference in the experienced opportunities for shaping life and the forms they took. Some women were more socially involved than others. Important social relationships included friendships, parents, and siblings. Nina (66 y.) was supported by her parents from the beginning when she became a mother at the age of 23. In the interview she tells:

> I was actually quite, how do you say, secure [after birth, FK]. My parents, my mom, they supported me quite well. I can't say anything else. [...] Everything was new for me. It wasn't wanted, let's put it that way. [...] But as I said, I had a lot of support from home. (N, 14:27ff)

Family support made the transition and coping with the demands as a mother easier. While at this point, she foregrounds the emotional support of parents (sheltered), in coping with the divorce and its financial consequences, economic help also became relevant:

> But my parents, my sister, they also supported me, again. As a family, we have always stuck together. (N, 15:30f)

She emphasizes cohesion with her parents and sister, who also supported her financially, because her husband refused to pay alimony ("I even had to sue him, it all went through a lawyer."). [N, 15:20f]). And although Nina was a single parent for the next six years, she completed two retraining programs and found a permanent job as a kindergarten teacher in her mid-30s.

The support in the supervision and education of the children was also decisive for Vanessa's (31 y.) further professional qualification. When asked about difficulties as a single parent, she replies:

> I get quite a lot of gifts from the outside. So that's, anything goes. I can also go to the movies. I can also go on vacation and I do that. (V, 19:24ff)

She also emphasizes at another point:

> I just also have a really strong social network. For example, [male friend] also looks after the children from time to time. They know him well and I have, well, I have male role model functions for them. My brother lives on the next street. My friend. (V, 20:22ff)

The function of the family of friends includes emotional and economic support, the willingness to (also) take on educational tasks, and the function of a solidarity community. Vanessa finds herself several times in the situation of not having enough money to live. There was no need for serious accountability. Vanessa's family and friends "stand up for each other. " (V, 22:25f) Within the social network, the circle of friends takes over family tasks through economic support[9]. The demands of reproductive work and financial security thus had to be carried only in part by her, opening up other spaces of opportunity despite her low income.

How important social relationships can be in breaking free from financial dependencies is shown by Julia (66 y.), whose early adult life was characterized by isolation and lack of social contacts. Julia's "first real friend" (J, 25:28f) was in her 20s, when she became a mother for the first time. When she moved with her husband to metropolitan-A, 600 kilometers away, she had "[missed] that, of course, after the move." (J, 25:33) The father committed suicide and the mother lived in a nursing home. Without parental support and further isolated, Julia filed for divorce. She justifies the second marriage with the fact that she expected relief:

> And that year I couldn't have done it without him [second husband]. He took all his vacation time because Steffen [first son] was sick a lot. [...] We somehow fit together well as a team. My second husband was a good craftsman and he always felt I might need him. (J, 14:21)

Julia saw remarriage as a way to cope with multiple stresses that she had previously faced not only being divorced and a single parent, but also without the support of a circle of friends or family. At the same point, she describes being underweight and a six-week stay in the hospital as consequences of the overload. Without the 'really strong social network', as Vanessa puts it, and the security of a family of origin that provided protection and support, as in Nina's case, the demands of motherhood and working life could not be managed without a partner. When the second marriage for Julia also went badly and Julia again considered separation in early 1990, she became desperate. A divorce with two children in the meantime seemed unmanageable to her:

> How am I supposed to manage all this! First of all, I fought to survive, actually, for years. And then my second husband started drinking even more. (J, 25:2ff)

Julia did not separate. The only friend with whom she had deeper contact saw her "about once a month" (J, 26:4). Opportunities for interpersonal cooperation, help, and solidarity hardly existed. Julia saw no way for herself to change and break free from the dependencies and burdens: "There is no way out. But, believe me,

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[9] The generative transmission of economic support is the social norm: Parents support their children financially and are legally obliged to do. They bequeath their wealth to their children. Although none of the women comes from a 'higher-earning' household, economic support plays a role in all six interviews. The special role of the extra-familial economic solidarity network, as found in Vanessa's case, should be emphasized at this point.

one has been depressed many times." (J, 26:20) She would have needed cooperation and support to cope with the separation and raising her sons alone. Private relationships such as friendships, peer groups, parents and siblings are particularly conducive when the interviewees are trying to break free from dependencies (in the case of divorce or separation as well as professional training). In the absence of such private relationships or if they are only rudimentary, an endeavor such as separations could appear in the subjective frame of the unfeasible.

Another relevant form of social involvement was activities in formal groups. Nina (66 y.) highlights several times that she was a member of the basketball club from adolescence "until she was a senior citizen" (N, 5:15). The club was a place of competition and success as well as exchange and meeting:

> We then also had success pretty quickly, because we then became second, there, in the [name] championship and then we always played tournaments and so. And then we also traveled around a lot within Germany and so on. [...] [And] when we had games on the weekend, [...] then my sister always picked me up and then we always drove around within the city of A. And that was fun, yeah. And that was fun, yes. [...] And my daughter, she came along a lot, on weekends we were out and about playing basketball. (N, 5:19ff)

Nina practiced regularly and participated in games on weekends during the season. Her sporting activity was a family spectacle: partner, children and sister came together regularly. She also says it was a teammate who recommended that she retrain as an educator after her divorce: "I heard from a sports teammate, they're looking for employees in an educator's job." (N, 3:30f) The formal group thus became a place for informal exchange. Social contacts were made, knowledge was exchanged, and paths and opportunities were illuminated that might have remained closed without membership in the association.

Another group biographically highlighted by Nina is a local group for single mothers:

> And only there [in the women's group, FK], only there I became somehow more self-confident, I think. And I was no longer isolated like I used to be. (N, 12:33ff)

In the case of the women's group, not only was social participation and exchange important, but also acceptance and understanding. By attending the group, Nina learned about different, tested ways of responding to the problems of single parents (e.g., increased problems of compatibility, problems with alimony payments, possible dependence on state social benefits, which are perceived as unpleasant) that had already proven to be workable or not.

Women's groups can make it understood that experiences are structured based on social inequality categories, contributing to the pervasiveness of immediacy. They can also be places of joint representation of interests.

One of the interviewees is an active trade union member and works council member at her workplace in order to represent and defend labor law interests as a wage-dependent employee. She negotiates with superiors, too.

> At the beginning of the unions, people worked 50 hours or had no holidays. They fought very, very hard. And they got rights. But unfortunately, the new generation, today's generation, loses the rights again very quickly. But they don't think about the fact that these people fought for these rights. Such rights, nobody comes and says 'Here you go.' People fought for them and got them. Now we're losing them again real fast. (D, 28:10ff)

Dunja understands formal groups as a place where interests and needs are thought of from a social position. They are communities of solidarity with strangers that are not entered into on the basis of sympathy or shared hobbies, but on the basis of shared positions and interests. In most interviews, social relationships and friendships are not seen as a possibility of collective interests(representation), with which generalized agency can also be won.

6. Discussion and Outlook

In the present paper, I have summarized the results of a comprehensive biographical study (Kalkstein, 2021) and significantly shortened them in many places. Nevertheless, it is to be hoped that the results are comprehensible and conclusive. At the beginning of the article, the state of research was used to show the situation of mothers in low-paid jobs and at the same time to highlight how many women still face considerable difficulties in standing on their own two feet financially. In addition to structural problems, the norms that are applied to mothers and the idea of a natural female competence advantage with regard to child rearing were addressed. This abstract description has replaced the concrete description of the situation of the individual interview partners at this point; it can be read in detail if interested (ibid.). Despite the initial situation described as *structural (in-)reconciliation*, it was shown that mothers consider different possibilities of acting for themselves depending on individual conditions and premises and open up or close off corresponding spaces for action.

In relation to norms, it was shown that this can be interpreted with varying degrees of rigidity and that some women also make use of this leeway. The relationship that emerges is relatively simple: the more one can distance oneself from norms, the newer spaces for action emerge. After all, with regard to motherhood and compatibility, women from working classes are evaluated on the basis of norms that are oriented toward the lifestyle of the middle classes (Speck, 2016, p. 60; Dreßler, 2018, p. 67f).

But those who turn away from social norms run the risk of social exclusion. The degree to which the threat of social exclusion was experienced through norm violation sometimes depends on the salience, quality, and norm and value structure of the immediate social environment. Thus, it was no coincidence that it was Vanessa, who had herself grown up in a sub- and counterculture, who saw the greatest scope for herself to turn away from norms - to the limits of legality.

Under b) the question of structural categories was discussed. There was a qualitative difference in how the women felt whether they perceived their

situation as an expression of individual failure or whether they could relate it to social inequality or societal conditions as a whole. Poverty and motherhood increasingly appear as the result of inverted (or completely lacking) individual planning[10] (McRobbie, 2010, p. 176f; Malich, 2014, p. 159). In the interviews, the financial situation as a mother is one of the key topics but is not always framed as a political-social problem. Motherhood represents the core of the material difference between men and women in Germany (Barišić/Consiglio, 2020, p. 4f). Again, the greatest emotional despair was shown where one's own situation is experienced in an individualized way. Julia's despair even drives her to attempt suicide (this can certainly not be explained monocausally as an individualizing form of thinking, but it does not remain completely irrelevant either). In the media, there are hardly any critical discourses about the financial situation of mothers: financial problems remain surprisingly quiet. Dominant forms of thinking are also subject to societal guiding and popular sciences (which currently include psychology), which influence everyday understanding. Critical psychology points out that the understanding of everyday life within the existing social structure is susceptible to the individualization of socio-structural problems, because individualizing forms of thinking start with what can be directly experienced: First of all, everyone is responsible for themselves and for the success of life tasks - such as compatibility. It also became apparent that it was precisely the recognition of a structural situation in one's own situation that opened up the possibility of solidarity and emotional comfort, as Nina experienced in the women's group for single parents.

Against this background, the results under c), the subjective assessment of the risk of financial dependence, can also be classified. They show a clear tendency to underestimate the risks of traditional, gendered family work. The functionality of this immediately strikes home: without the repression of the risks, neither the desire to actually take care of one's offspring can be pursued, nor can part-time work with a small number of hours be seen as a satisfactory compromise. It is precisely society's repression of this extremely uncertain initial situation that allows it to keep shifting the restriction on maternal agency, but not to lift it. With divorce rates ranging from 22% (1975) to 35% (2015) (Radenacker, 2018, p. 7), women seem to underestimate the risk of gendered division of labor to them. Often couples live relatively egalitarian relationship concepts until childbirth and then lapse into a traditionally gendered division of labor (Kortendiek, 2010). This happens even if it was previously planned differently by the couple (Flaake, 2014, p. 140f). Although studies indicate that the acceptance of equal partnership has increased, there is - in the words of Kerschgen (2010, p. 8) - a "gap between a verbal openness and a simultaneous behavioral rigidity, especially with regard to men and their participation in family work". The one-sided reference to the increased occupation of mothers can be understood in the language of critical psychology as leading to the "'repression,' denial, dissociation, mystification" (Holzkamp, 1985a, p. 379) of the risk of financial dependency, from which emerge the "participation in my

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[10] This refers to the dominant media representation. Other representations can also be found, but they are more marginal (see also McRobbie, 2010; Skeggs, 2005, 2001).

oppression" (ibid.), the restrictive entanglements of one's practices – an aspect Holzkamp identifies in domination-bearing social forms of thought (ibid.).

In this regard, the present study points to the importance of mothers' informal social involvement. In the narrated biographies it becomes clear that social support is essential in order to be able to attempt to realize independent life plans as a mother. The importance of the social integration of mothers from working classes for the possibilities of self-determined lifestyles with regard to compatibility has hardly been researched so far. The present study provides initial evidence that in times of financial hardship and periods of emotional overload, social relationships are an important resource for coping with the demands of work and family life without becoming psychologically or emotionally overwhelmed. If the children's partners and/or fathers are not integrated into family work to the extent needed, the social environment becomes an important factor in making reconciliation (more) self-determined.

There is a need for further research in this direction: On the one hand, the importance of social integration of mothers from the working classes in order to break free from restrictive and dependency-promoting arrangements would have to be investigated specifically and in depth. This remains to be investigated both from a subjective point of view (for one's own satisfaction, psychological well-being, etc.) and with a view to the material side, for example related to financial independence. The study by Braun et al. (2008) indicates that mothers from the working classes are more at risk of entering a period of isolation after childbirth than mothers from the middle classes. This is attributed to the fact that many typical ventures for mothers with their young children tend to be commercial (early music education, etc.) or focused on visiting each other's homes. Mothers from the working classes often do not have the appropriate spatial and financial resources. Together with the results from the present work, this points to the importance of low-threshold, free-of-charge offers of encounter.

The lack of thematization of financial dependency evident in the interviews calls for further research regarding the question of how women, if they want children, later 'think' about themselves financially (and what reasons they have for doing so in each case).

Here, further research remains desirable that not only reconstructs women's orientations and tacit knowledge around motherhood (e.g. the study by Dreßler, 2018), but also approaches that give space to discuss the ideal of the good mother and examine it for its restrictive parts. In any case, with regard to practices of motherhood and reconciliation, there remains a need for further research that defines class not merely as socioeconomic status, but likewise as a social relation of power and inequality from which opportunities and obstacles emanate.

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