

Description of the planned dissertation project – Belinda Mahlkecht

(Cyber-)Bullying in the context of heteronormativity: A qualitative analysis of individual experiences of Tyrolean pupils

The planned dissertation project investigates individual (cyber-)bullying experiences and practices of Tyrolean pupils in the context of heteronormativity. The investigation mainly focusses on the subjective experiences, emotions and fears of victims, (co-)perpetrators, and third involved individuals, which can be traced back to heteronormative (cyber-) bullying. The project examines processes of attribution and construction of difference and supposed norm deviations from the heteronormative ideal through (cyber-)bullying and addresses the resulting inequalities. The empirical investigation uses a set of different methods: differentiated qualitative research methods contribute not only to a deeper but also to a broader understanding through different approaches and data. Two qualitative research methods are used: written narratives and guided interviews. The interviews are also extended by an elicitation approach: the digital smartphone interface method. The combination of these qualitative and digital methods promises further insights into the subjective perceptions and experiences of perpetrators, victims, and third involved individuals. The choice of methods follows an approach that does justice to the young research topics by letting them speak for themselves and integrating their personal experiences and perspectives. The survey will be conducted in the school context and is based on the following central research question:

What are the experiences of pupils in Austria whose lifestyles deviate from the construct of heteronormativity, with bullying in online and offline spaces?

The empirical study thus adds a qualitative perspective to the studies on cyberbullying, which so far have been primarily quantitative in nature, and thus aims to make visible individually experienced inequalities and exclusion processes in physical and digital spaces. The individual experience reports of the actors involved in bullying are intended to describe discrimination, constructions of difference and exclusion, as well as physical and psychological violence from different perspectives; moreover, they will also make visible how heterosexual norms and resulting deviations are constructed and shape social interaction in networked online and offline spaces. Thus, the planned dissertation project performs basic research and contributes to a deeper understanding of (cyber)bullying in the context of heteronormativity. In addition, the data collected will provide insights into changes in communication practices and negotiation processes between children in the age of globalization.

The dissertation project started in August 2019 and will be completed in 2022. The project is being conducted at the Department of Geography, under the supervision of Univ.-Prof. Dr. Tabea Bork-Hüffer and Dr. Katja Kaufmann.