

Call for Papers

International Interdisciplinary Symposium on

“ Families, Rights and Disability ”

University of Innsbruck, Austria

23 – 24 June 2017

On the basis of a longstanding cooperation between the University of Innsbruck and the University of New Orleans we are organizing another conference on the topic of disability. In 2017, the Symposium “Families, Rights and Disability” will take place supported by the Center Austria and the Center New Orleans. During this international, interdisciplinary symposium, we will discuss family research and the social understanding of disability, following the paradigm shift that took place with the ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

The family is often considered an anthropological constant. However, empirical research shows that the traditional nuclear family (mother, father, children) within Western societies is but one of many possible forms. Also, its trajectories, its intergenerational relations and the experiences of its members vary greatly with the social, cultural, political, and technological situations in which families find themselves.

One of the relatively recent shifts in societies has been the pluralisation of familial forms, differentiating to include multi-ethnic families; foster or adoptive families; Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) families, and those individuals with whom the family determines to be a part of its nuclear circle.

This broadening of the definition of family has also led to an extension of the values and beliefs families cultivate and pass on to children. At the same time, many families have been forced to take over greater economic and psychological burdens due to the economic recessions and anti-welfare politics of past decades. Families of children with disabilities, in particular, are confronted with strained resources, complicated access to professional and community services, and emotional and physical demands. Children with disabilities grow up and may want to leave the family to gain independence which is not always easy or possible. Parents with disabilities may experience additional challenges in parenting, as do parents who are advocates and activists for inclusion of their disabled children. From the perspective of families’ socioeconomic status and emotional lives, disabilities pose certain challenges to family members. Conversely, those who are disabled or aged offer enrichment and positive benefits within the family unit and the community as they often require broader support networks.

Research on families, particularly those with a member who has a disability, needs to tackle a conundrum: on the one hand, families are entities where social, cultural, and legal rights secure their integration into society through the cultivation of a

communal life and the independence and socialisation of children. On the other hand, families and their members depend on social, cultural, legal, and human rights afforded them. This is a recursive phenomenon that requires deeper understandings of families who have a member with a disability.

These complex interrelations will be explored in the Symposium. Which aspects of social integration (in schools, programs, and communities) are families responsible for and which aspects is society responsible for? How is the inclusion of disability and/or old age into family life supported by civil society and the state, and who determines what those services and supports should be? How can families reciprocate and participate in public life? It is critical to understand which rights, services, and supports families rely on – especially in the field of education and health care – and how they are enabled to remain or become producers and representatives of rights and cultural values. Through discussion of these questions, the issues of today's families of diversity will be addressed as will research-based guidance for those professionals who provide services for families and represent their needs and rights vis-a-vis the community, the state, and the nation.

We are looking for research-based presentations or systematic literature reviews on the topic. To apply, please send a 200 word abstract by December 31, 2016 to lisa.pfahl@uibk.ac.at and lflynnwi@uno.edu. Please indicate whether the presentation is based on empirical research or a literature study.

Also, please let us know in advance should you need monetary or personal assistance to attend the symposium, as there are some limited funds to make the event more inclusive. The event will be held in an accessible venue, but please note any accommodations that may be necessary.

We look forward to stimulating discussions and will inform you about the possibility to present at the symposium by February 2017.

Keynotes will be delivered from Prof. Harriet Able (University of North Carolina Chapel Hill, USA) Prof. Janice McLaughlin (Newcastle University, UK), Prof. Swantje Köbsell (Alice-Salomon-Hochschule Berlin, Germany), Prof. Rannveig Traustadóttir (University of Iceland, Iceland), and Prof. Phillip Strain (University Colorado, Denver, USA).

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