

**Social Change in a Feminist Perspective:
Situating Gender Research in Times of Political Contention
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Life courses and generations in a feminist and intersectional perspective

Panel title: Normativities of Life Courses: Feminist Perspectives on Intersectional Identities shaped by Discourses and Narrations of Coming Out, Comedy and Correction.

Keywords: intersectional identities (gender, class, sexuality); normativities of life courses; narration of subjectivities;

Panelists:

Tanja Vogler

Daniela Hörler

Verena Sperk

Flavia Guerrini und Kevin Heiniger

Chair: Nadine Schmidt

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Subjectivities and individual life courses are shaped by both macro-level forces of history (Elder 1994) and the position of individuals in relation to various dimensions of social inequality (i.e. gender, race, class dis-/ability, sexuality, age etc.), framing therefore the individual's agency, decision-making and biography building. Culturally prescribed norms produce gendered, racialized, and classed subjectivities and the related expectations of what it means for these subjects to live a successful life - or even "the good life" (Butler 2015). In recent decades, society and culture have modernized significantly, and the success of various social movements in particular has created new ways of life and new opportunities to express themselves for the concerned groups (e.g., feminist movements, LGBT movements, civil rights movements, disability rights movements, "Heimkampagne", etc.). On the one hand, social change therefore creates new normativities and expectations for a successful life course, such as the pursuit of modernity and an "authentic" way of living (Reckwitz 2017). On the other hand, despite the seeming processes of modernization, traditional normativities and expectations associated with different stages of life (i.e. family formations) are still very much in place. Thus, individuals are left in charge of coping with these ambivalent appellations regarding their identity building and giving meaning to their social worlds.

The papers in our panel aim to analyze intersectional social identities (gender, class, sexuality) and their relation to normativities of "successful" life courses. Therefore, we want to examine the role of deviation from a normative unfolding of certain stages of life and how this "failing" is narrated by/for the concerned individuals. Each paper presents a different case study: All being carried out within a qualitative methodological frame they each draw on different empirical data (audio-visual material, magazines, case files, pictures) and employ different research methods (Critical Discourse Analysis, Grounded Theory, Close Reading). We want to explore how these different methodological approaches and empirical data allow for a specific view on the production of intersectional identities that deviate from the "normal" life course. To what extent are the different approaches able to reveal the power relations that work as "mode[s] of directionality" (Ahmed 2017) in life courses? Does it make a difference whether deviations from the "well-trodden paths" are narrated by the self, by a political community, that is arranged around these shared experiences, or are narrated by others?

Literature:

Ahmed, Sara. *Living a Feminist Life*. Durham/London: Duke University Press, 2017.

Butler, Judith. *Notes toward a performative theory of assembly*. London: Harvard University Press, 2015.

Elder, Glen H. Time, human agency, and social change: Perspectives on the life course. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 1994, 57 (1), 4-15.

Reckwitz, Andreas. *Die Gesellschaft der Singularitäten. Zum Strukturwandel der Moderne. [The Society of Singularities. On the structural change of modernity]* Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2017.

Papers:

Coming out in queer activist youth magazines. A discourse-analytic approach.

Tanja Vogler (Medical University of Innsbruck)

In a world where a heterosexual life course is normality, coming out still plays an important role for homosexual trans and nonbinary people (Ahmed 2017). Since queer youth mostly do not share the experience of deviation from the norm with their family and most of their peer group (Samules 2003), self-organized queer activist youth groups are important places of mutual support. By encouraging and supporting each other to take an alternative life course, queer youth groups participate in the struggles at the macro level forces of history and cultures that mold the opportunities of subject formation (Elder 1994). Discourse analysis (Jäger 2015) of two youth magazines from Germany and Switzerland (2010-2016) showed that coming out to the family is a central theme in these queer-activist discourses. Using the example of the results of the fine analysis of two representative discourse fragments from the material corpus, the paper asks how coming-out is problematized. The analysis focuses on the question of the extent to which coming-out discourses are able to question normatively produced notions of identity. The paper elaborates how coming-out discourses open up the possibility of becoming a proud and empowered subject for some, but remain closed to others (often multiply marginalised young people). However, the paper also works out the extent to which coming-out discourses unintentionally affirm normative life-courses.

Literature:

Ahmed, Sara. *Living a Feminist Life*. Durham/London: Duke University Press, 2017.

Elder, Glen H. Time, human agency, and social change: Perspectives on the life course. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 1994, 57 (1), 4-15.

Jäger, Siegfried. *Kritische Diskursanalyse. Eine Einführung*. Münster: Unrast, 2015.

Samules, Ellen. My Body, My Closet. Invisible Disability and the Limits of Coming-Out Discourse. In: *GLQ: A journal of lesbian and gay studies* 9 (2003), 233–255.

Gendered educational spaces in residential childcare 1970-1990

Daniela Hörler (University of Applied Sciences and Arts Northwestern Switzerland)

This paper explores how gendered educational spaces in the city of Zurich (Switzerland) transformed in the period between 1970 - 1990. Normative expectations concerning gender as well as other categories (i.e. class, sexuality) changed along with the transformation of society. It is to be investigated on how they changed.

Current research about residential childcare in Switzerland focusses mostly on earlier periods of the 20th century and shows how educational spaces and practices were shaped by gender norms. Boys and girls, for example, were housed in separate rooms or houses and had gender specific chores (Bombach et al., 2017). With the modernization of society and culture through social movements in the 1960s and 70s the traditional normativity of gender changed. However, the expected “successful” life courses of girls and young women, mainly fixated on their sexuality, stayed a focal point of local agencies (Businger/Ramsauer, 2019). Instead of educating or punishing “fallen girls”, “safehouses” and institutions with new protection and prevention concepts were opened. Considering these concepts, the author asks about the emergence of new gendered norms and how adolescents produced their own space within these constellations of normative expectations (e.g., Elder, 1994).

Employing the methodology of Grounded Theory this study examines photographs and textual primary sources from childcare homes of Zurich in the late 1980s with the perspective of spatial theories. The model of space by Henri Lefebvre (1991) with its three dimensions – Spatial Practice, Spatial Representations and Representational Spaces – is guiding the analysis of gendered educational spaces.

The paper is part of a DACH research project, which investigates the changing educational spaces in three welfare regions: Tyrol/Vorarlberg (Austria), Hesse (Germany) and Zurich (Switzerland).

Literature:

Bombach, Clara et al.. *Zusammen alleine. Alltag in Winterthurer Kinder- und Jugendheimen 1950-1990*. Zürich: Chronos Verlag, 2017.

Businger, Susanne and Ramsauer, Nadja. *“Genügend goldene Freiheit gehabt”. Heimplatzierungen von Kindern und Jugendlichen im Kanton Zürich, 1950-1990*. Zürich: Chronos Verlag, 2019.

Elder, Glen H. Time, human agency, and social change: Perspectives on the life course. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 1994, 57 (1), 4-15

Lefebvre, Henri. *The production of Space*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 1991.

Hannah Gadsby's "Nanette" and the politics of laughter, affect and the personal.

Verena Sperk (University of Innsbruck)

As social phenomena, comedy, humor, and laughter are an everyday part of our interpersonal, as well as our cultural, social, and political life. However, they function in vastly different ways and can create communities and generate exclusion (Kotthoff 2010, Critchley 2004). Hannah Gadsby's acclaimed stand-up comedy special "Nanette" addresses these ambivalences of comedy by making visible its entanglements and complicity with power relations within the framework of a meta-reflexive comedy performance. In the show Gadsby reflects on her own life course, how it was affected by social persistences and which strategies helped her to give meaning to her social world and identity. She tells her personal coming-out story in times of a homophobic social climate, describes surviving sexual and physical abuse, and experiencing associated shame and fear. To do so, she mobilizes not only the laughter expected from punchline-oriented storytelling in a stand-up comedy show but also feelings such as anger, frustration and sadness. Through "Nanette," Gadsby thus creates an affective disharmony that positions her as a "feminist killjoy" or "affect alien" (Ahmed 2014). The produced discomfort reflects on Gadsby's own discomfort in regard to expectations about a normal life—a happy life. Therefore, in my paper I will argue that by addressing the embeddedness of individual life courses in power relations Gadsby's storytelling could be read as a politicization of the personal. To do so, I will do close readings of crucial scenes from "Nanette" based on insights from feminist comedy studies and feminist affect theory. What is the role of laughter and affect in Gadsby's politics of the personal?

Literature:

Ahmed, Sara. *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. 2nd Edition. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014.

Critchley, Simon. *Über Humor*. Wien: Turia + Kant, 2004.

Kotthoff, Helga. "Humor mit Biss zwischen sozialer Konjunktion und Disjunktion". *Gewalt in der Sprache. Rhetoriken verletzenden Sprechens*, Ed. Sybille Krämer/Elke Koch. München: Wilhelm Fink, 2010, 61-95.

The regulation of sexuality in correctional (care) institutions: discourses on gender, class and sexualities

Flavia Guerrini (University of Innsbruck) & Kevin Heiniger (University of Applied Sciences and Arts Northwestern Switzerland)

Throughout the 20th centuries a large number of adolescents mainly from poor or working-class families were referred to different institutions that aimed at their correction and reform. Having to spend a smaller or larger part of one's youth in such an institution had a significant impact on one's life course (i.e. Seglias 2019). In many cases it causes a considerable limitation of opportunities often leading to the accumulation of further constraints throughout the life course, for example due to the assignment of devalued subject positions, the lack of professional training, or the stigma of having been placed in such an institution (Jansen 2010, Färber 2019).

Correctional institutions are heterotopias in the Foucaultian (Foucault 1993) sense: they reflect the society's dominant values in an intensified way and their practices follow a normative logic. For a long time, the sexuality of inmates had no place in these highly hierarchized and regimented institutions and represented a disruptive element. Their deprivation was considered part of the punishment and an educational element. Nevertheless, it always broke through.

The paper focuses on three institutions in Switzerland and Austria situated at the intersection of the residential care and the prison system. In a first step the analysis of case files will show how these institutional discourses on sexuality were shaped by notions of gender and class. In a second step we will address the question how these discourses influenced the social identities and subject positions of the institutionalized adolescents.

Literature:

Färber, Corina. *Subjektivierung in der Pädagogik. Das Subjekt zwischen Ent- und Ermächtigung*. In: Ricken Norbert, Casale Rita u. Thompson Christiane (eds.). *Subjektivierung. Erziehungswissenschaftliche Theorieperspektiven*. Weinheim/Basel: Beltz Juventa, 2019, 75-92

Foucault, Michel. *Andere Räume* (1967), in: Barck, Karlheinz (ed.): *Aisthesis: Wahrnehmung heute oder Perspektiven einer anderen Ästhetik. Essais*. Leipzig: Reclam, 1993.

Jansen, Anne. *Victim or troublemaker? Young people in residential care*. In: *Journal of Youth Studies*, 2010, 13 (4): 423–437

Seglias, Loretta et al. *Alltag unter Zwang. Zwischen Anstaltsinternierung und Entlassung*. Zürich: Chronos, 2019.

Participants of the panel

Chair:

Nadine Schmidt, MA

Affiliation and contact: University of Kassel, Faculty of Human Sciences, uk085031@uni-kassel.de

Nadine Schmidt works as a research assistant at the University of Kassel in the DACH research project "Negotiating Educational Spaces in Residential Childcare 1970-1990. An Interdisciplinary Comparison of Transformation Processes in Austria, Germany and Switzerland", in affiliation with the University of Innsbruck and University of Applied Sciences and Arts Northwestern Switzerland.

Panelists:

Flavia Guerrini, Mag.a PhD

Affiliation and contact: University of Innsbruck, Faculty of Educational Sciences and Center Interdisciplinary Gender Studies Innsbruck, flavia.guerrini@uibk.ac.at

Flavia Guerrini works as an assistant professor at the Faculty of Educational Sciences and the Center Interdisciplinary Gender Studies of the University of Innsbruck. Her research focuses on the history of education and gender history, as well as intersectional perspectives on social inequalities and social care.

Dr. Kevin Heiniger

Affiliation and contact: University of Applied Sciences and Arts Northwestern Switzerland, School of Social Work, kevin.heiniger@fhnw.ch

Kevin Heiniger is a historian and works as a postdoctoral research assistant at the School of Social Work as part of the University of Applied Sciences and Arts Northwestern Switzerland. His research focuses on the execution of measures and welfare education in Switzerland.

Daniela Hörler, MA

Affiliation and contact: University of Applied Sciences and Arts Northwestern Switzerland, School of Social Work, daniela.hoerler@fhnw.ch

Daniela Hörler is a doctoral student at the Institute of Integration and Participation of the School of Social Work at the University of Applied Sciences and Arts Northwestern Switzerland. Her doctoral thesis is part of the DACH research project "Negotiating Educational Spaces in Residential Childcare 1970-1990. An Interdisciplinary Comparison of Transformation Processes in Austria, Germany and Switzerland".

Verena Sperk, Mag.a Mag.a

Affiliation and contact: University of Innsbruck, Faculty of Educational Sciences, verena.sperk@uibk.ac.at

Verena Sperk is a university assistant in the area of Critical Gender Studies at the Institute of Educational Science at the University of Innsbruck. As a fellow of the doctoral program "Gender and Gender Relations in Transformation," she is working on her doctoral thesis on comedy as a possibility for feminist intervention.

Tanja Vogler, MSc PhD

Affiliation and contact: Medical University of Innsbruck, Gender and Diversity Unit, Tanja.Vogler@i-med.ac.at

Tanja Vogler is a postdoctoral university assistant at the medical university of Innsbruck in the field of gender and diversity. She completed her doctoral thesis on the relationship between identity and politics in queer activist discourses and actor constellations. Her current research is on queer health discourses.