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**Mini-Lecture - Next GenDerations (Monday June 21, 10.20h)**

# >'Modern Girls' + 'Black Outs' = 'Girl Power'<:
# Readings on adolescent girls' discussions about gender and the norm of heterosexuality

## 1. Introduction

My name is Kristina Hackmann. I work at the Institute for Sociology and Social Sciences at the University of Oldenburg in Germany. In this Mini-Lecture I'd like to present my dissertation project. My field is interdisciplinary empirical feminist research on adolescence.

I will give you a short overview about the empirical data, the objective and about the methodological and analytical proceeding. Further I will present first readings on adolescent girls' discussions about gender and the norm of heterosexuality as well as some reflections on practical pedagogical work with girls in schools.

## 2. Material and Objective

My empirical data are video recordings I took in a girls group I instructed. It was a mandatory elective class in a comprehensive middle school in Bremen/ Germany which met for two hours a week. The group consisted of seven girls (sixth grade, age eleven to twelve). During the term of 1997/98 the girls produced their own video film called „Girl Power", based on a script they had collectively devised. The video recordings consist of the 35-minute-film as well as observation clips of the actual interaction and discussions between the girls during the video making process. The latter part of the recordings encompasses about 20 hours of film.

My main thesis is, following the sociologist Karin Flaake, that adolescence is a biographical phase, in which corporeality and sexuality become the central issues. At the same time social norms and social definitions of womanhood have an enourmous impact on girls.

The objective of the dissertation is to develop parameters for the analysis of adolescent girls´ interaction and communication within their female peer group, with special regard to the social ideas of gender, femininity, masculinity, and homo- and heterosexuality that the girls refer to, as well as the ideas and images which they develop during the process of their discussions and in the videofilm itself. The analysis focuses on the implications of gender and the connected norm of heterosexuality on individual processes of socialization and the development of a gendered self-image in adolescent girls. Both the interaction among the girls and the socializational influence of their interaction with the group`s instructor are of interest.

Theoretical referents of the study are current sociological discussions concerning the cultural/symbolic system of gender (lit. `Zweigeschlechtlichkeit´, two-genderedness) in which the norm of heterosexuality (heterocentrism) is explicitly included.

In an ethnomethodological view heterocentrism and commonplace theories about gender are instruments for the construction of reality and the rendering of social reality. They are understood as instruments of everyday action and interaction because they allow both an allocation of people to one or the other sex, and the construction of heterosexuality as an unquestionable and self-evident reality.

Referring to the ethnomethodological view of doing gender doesn’t mean to neglect the authenticity of emotions and bodily experiences, as Stefan Hirschauer said in 1993. It means that a sociological view on affection must take into account that expressions of authentic feelings also make use of cultural codes, which allow persons to experience these feelings as reality.

My understanding of gender, combines aspects both of psychoanalysis and of constructivism.

### 3. Methodological and analytical proceeding

The girls' activities within the group have been documented on video tape, transkribed and then analysed using an ethnomethodological view of the construction of social reality and on the method of conversation analysis.

I analyze the regularities in the girls´ use of these instruments. My questions are, e.g.: what kinds of social relationship patterns do the girls establish, which topics do they choose, how are these embedded in the interaction, which styles of speech do they use, and what kind of interactive patterns are noticeable. Since it lies in the nature of commonplace phenomena and everyday self-evidences that they don´t have to be explicitly alluded to, the analysis will give special attention to unspoken and undone social activities.

Referring to the videofilm 'Girlpower', I'm interested in the 'subtext' of the film story the girls devised. With interdisciplinary approaches I want to analyze what the real spoken text documents, what the spoken text stands for.
Goffman's frame analysis for example has been a helpful tool for my research. In earlier studies I have been able to show how the conversational construction of the "elder brother" by adolescent girls can be analyzed as a means of establishing their understanding of gender and the norm of heterosexuality.

There is a relation between what is said, what subtext is involved and how the intention is, understood by the hearers. In my analysis I therefore switch between conversational analysis and the search for cuturally determined subtexts.

In this context the analysts´ own constructions and re-constructions of social meaning must be taken into account.
In the following I would like to present

## 4. First readings on the girls' discussions

The story of the video film 'Girlpower' is about two quarreling girl-gangs: the "Black Outs" and the '„Modern Girls". Especially in the first part of the film, the Black Outs represent what is commonly called `masculine´ behavior: they talk about 'Gangsta Rap' (a music style) and play Basketball, they wear cape sweat-shirts and trousers which are much too big. The "Modern Girls", reflect what is commonly called 'female' behavior: they use make-up, wear feminine clothes, they talk about boys they have a crush on and are enthusiastic about the Back Street Boys. One of the "Modern Girls" is being kidnapped and the "Back Outs" offer their help. Adults are not involved. The two gangs join efforts and successfully free the kidnapped girl from a mysterious black man. In the end they become friends and we can see all of them sitting together talking about boys and the Back Street Boys.

The video film has been discussed in several student groups. They all agreed, that the way the two gangs free the kidnapped girl is not logical. The fact that in the end the Black Outs also take part in discussions about boys and Back Street Boys was recognized as a paradox. These are all indications of a subtext of the film. The kidnapping and the rescue of the girl is not the only story intended. What the film story documents is the girls' phantasies about sexuality, especially sexuality with men. The question is: which girl falls first?

On the one hand the girls desires and phantasies are threatened; this is symbolized by the black man. One measure to deal with that is to cut off their own desire and to stay passive: the man is the active one.

On the other hand they also have positive, romantic phantasies, symbolized by the Back Street Boys. But in this phantasy, the girls also stay passive: they have no chance to get in real contact with the stars but share the dream that one of them (probably the most beautiful) might be invited on stage by one of the Boys.

During the video making process the girls only once discussed the gender of the kidnapper. One girl asked why the kidnapper had to be conceptualized as a man, when the real actor infact was a woman. I wrote a transcript of this sequence which was all in all not longer than 45 seconds. With conversation analytical methods I analyzed that the

introduction of the topic ‘gender’ through the question ‘why does the kidnapper have to be a man?’ was followed by co-operative non-establishment of the topic by the rest of the group. The fact that her question wasn’t answered, was in turn accepted by the asking girl. This would be the viewpoint of conversational analysis.

If we take the sexualized, or better: the hetero-sexualized subtext of the film into account, we understand that the girls refused to discuss this question. Since it lies in the nature of subtexts that they don’t have to be and sometimes can’t be explicitly alluded to, the subtext just wasn’t disscussable. It lies in the logic of the subtext, in which the black man symbolizes the girls phantasies about heterosexuality as a threat, that there was no need to discuss the question: the kidnapper had to be a man and couldn’t be a woman.

These are only first readings, presented in a very compressed way. But I hope that you got a general idea of the project and that I was able to show the potential which lies in the material and in the interdisciplinary approach to the data.

Last but not least I want to present some

**5. Reflections on practical pedagogical work with girls in schools**

The foremost aim of pedagogical work with girls is to support them in finding ‘their own voice’ and to empower them to define themselves other than as subordinated and complementary (to males). In US-american feminist research on female adolescence, the term ‘desire’ is used to describe a girls power to autonomously compose her relationships and her life and to create new patterns, thus refusing to adopt heterocentrism and the norm of heterosexuality.

In 1993 Elizabeth Debold and others wrote in their book ‘Mother-Daughter-Revolution’: „Desire - wanting, lusting, craving, longing, needing in all and every way - is critical to women’s integrity and power. The power of desire is the root of woman’s power. Desire gives force to what she can and will do. It empowers her life and liveliness. Forbidding or compromising desire cuts off a girl’s life force.“

So far, my reflections on practical/pedagogical work with girls have shown that the instructor, when proceeding on the principle of giving space, has positive effects on the self-employed / self-empowering activities of girls. Girls use the space that is thus made available to them to construct and introduce their own ideas and concerns within the group. In the girls' group, the idea for the videofilm, its story, contents and realization was essentially developed and determined by the girls themselves.

The realization of the film gave them the chance to discuss their phantasies in a face-saving way. And all that happened in an institution, in which phantasies of adolescent girls normally are 'tabu'. Therefore, I think it was an important experience for the girls, that they were allowed to fill the space with their own phantasies, without being subjugated to official control by me, their instructor.

In action research the instructor/teacher is the researcher as well. In her pedagogical work with girls, her withdrawal from any decision-making-processes enables her to gain insights in the girls' ways of establishing meaning and understanding, which often substantially differ from the instructor's expectations. This procedure demands a high degree of competence on the instructors part, especially at times when unplanned and unexpected situations arise.

In action research, self-reflective analyses must be taken into account, particularly because through her involvement with the group the instructor/researcher inevitably takes part in the process of constructing gender and the norm of heterosexuality. Ethnomethodology and conversation analysis are suitable methods to examine one's own patterns of constructing and reconstructing social reality and may help in devising new perspectives.

Thank you very much for your attention and thank you very much to all the women who organized this wonderful congress.