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Gender, bodies, corporeality

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Abstract

Postmodern and post-structuralist theories of gender put into question the use of “men” and “women” as categories. However, perspectives on gender should take account the bodies of individuals involved in interactions. Phenomenological philosophy attempts to overcome simplifying ideas of a body and mind dualism with the idea of the “felt body” or corporeality. The relevance of these approaches for research on gender-mixed teams will be discussed.

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First, second and third wave feminism

- **First and second wave feminism** - subordination of women/the female. Men in ECEC is seen as important to break perceived destructive, masculine sex roles.
- **Third wave feminism** - critical masculine-, postmodern, and poststructural theories. Show a variety of masculine positions among different men and their personal, different experiences.

Fourth wave feminism

- **Neo-materialist theories (e.g. posthumanism)** - continuing the question of the Cartesian concept of dualism, where body and mind are analyzed as two different things.
 - Rethinking of the concept of mind, body, discourses and materiality.
 - Stop giving humans a self-evident higher position, above other matter in reality.
 - Non-human forces are equally at play in the constituting of the doing of gender.

Fourth wave feminism

- Challenge the binaries humans/nonhumans and discourse/matter.
- Matter as mutually argentic in transforming discourses, discursive practice and human subjectivity.
- *Non*-human matter and humans in the *becoming*.
- A rethinking, “bodies” (human and *non*-human) is “flatternd” and analysed horizontal.
- The reality cannot be thought upon as socially constructed, involving humans only.

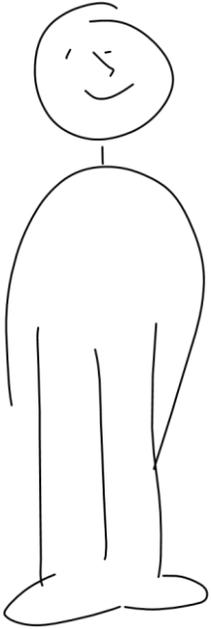
Fourth wave feminism

- Agency is understood in relation to a materialistic approach, emerged *in-between* different “bodies”.
- A man in ECEC is in a state of *becoming with* the preschool, the matter, discourses, and so on.
- The matter is understood as a force, evoking difference and transformations.
- The man is not understood as autonomous, unitary and coherent. The man, as we know him, as a human subject, becomes *undone*. The man as a separable entity is no longer easily located. He co-exists with the world.

The “felt body” as microsocial approach

- A microsocial perspective should take account of the bodies of individuals involved in interactions.
- The social omnipresence of the body lets it appear analytically irrelevant.
- In contrast, the body is not only relevant as anatomical object, but also as the place of a sensual experience, which becomes part of the interpersonal exchange and therefore must not be neglected in its analytical description.
- This aspect finds its theoretical equivalent in the category of the “felt body”.

Terminology



- Mind
- (Physical) Body [in German: *Körper*]
- Felt Body or Corporeality [in German: *Leib*]

The “felt body” - A definition

...the felt body is a feeling body - its mode of existence cannot be separated from its becoming manifest to the conscious subject in specific kinds of corporeal feelings. These corporeal feelings are crucially distinct from what usually gets described under the term ‘bodily sensations’ (in psychology or the analytical philosophy of mind): the feeling body becomes manifest in holistic corporeal stirrings such as vigour and languidness, in one’s being corporeally gripped by emotions and room-filling atmospheres, and equally in one’s corporeal orientation in the world in contexts of perception, action and spatial navigation.

(Schmitz, Owen Müllan & Slaby 2011: 244)

Neo-phenomenological Sociology

- Following the philosophical anthropology of Helmut Plessner (1975) and the New Phenomenology of Helmut Schmitz (2015), the German sociologist Robert Gugutzer develops a Neo-phenomenological Sociology around the central concept of “embodiment”, with which he refers to the intertwined duality of the two dimensions of the physical and the felt body.
- Human being as a dialectic between culture and nature: On the one hand, the physical body becomes the first cultural object for every individual, since he or she first has to learn its mastery. On the other hand, the felt-bodily or corporeal experience of the phenomena of human nature, such as hunger or thirst, remains with him or her.
- This supposed naturalness is culturally over-shaped, since the felt body can communicate only through the physical one. The individual experiences his or her so-called “corporeality” in the culturally influenced and socially interpreted form of her or his body knowledge: “There is no pre-social experience of one’s own felt body”.

(Gugutzer 2012: 41-47, translation MA).

A corporeal understanding of social action

- Neo-phenomenological sociology focuses on social action and seeks to grasp its meaning in accordance with the interpretive paradigm.
- At the centre of attention is not a rational change of perspectives, but a reciprocal sensing based on an overarching felt-bodily structure that includes equally all of the individuals involved in an interaction.
- The meaning of the action of a counterpart can be grasped without reflection by means of a corporeal understanding [in German: “Spürsinn”].
- Any Action, in turn, follows a felt-bodily “stubbornness” that, as affective attitude, becomes perceptible “ex negativo” when the situational experience contradicts a person’s own self-perception.
- Thus, less symbolic, verbal and rationally mediated interactions are considered, but above all non-verbal, corporeal interactions, which are described by terms such as “intercorporeal dialogue” and “suggestion of motion”.

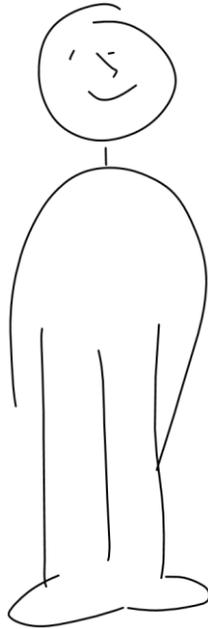
(Schmitz 1992, 2005, as quoted in Gugutzer 2012: 58-67).

An embodied philosophy

- In terms of gender identity, this dynamic of the body is of particular importance.
- With regard to the biographical relevance of this category, it can be assumed that in particular the gender-related socialisation experiences leave a "practical sense" in the body, which is felt-bodily perceptible to the individual.
- This integrates the individual into relations and conditions of gender. Thus, gender identity becomes an *embodied philosophy*.

(Schmitt 2017: 220, referring to Gugutzer 2002)

The “felt body” - Frozen body postures



The “felt body” - Frozen body postures



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