

Kubandt, Melanie (2019). **The role of the gender of pedagogical professionals in dealing with children close to the body.** Paper presented on the 29th EECERA Annual Conference, 22.8.2019, Thessaloniki, Greece.

Abstract

The ethnographic study "Doing gender in the day-care centre" focused on doing gender in everyday life in a German day-care centre. The connection between female gender affiliation and a general presumption of innocence is contrasted with the general suspicion in the context of more men in day-care centres. Aigner and Rohrmann (2012) conclude that the suspicion of paedophilia, which is also discussed under the buzzword general suspicion, leads to a restriction of male educators and forces them to act particularly cautiously. According to a socio-constructivist-ethnomethodological research perspective (Garfinkel 1967, Reckwitz 2003) the educators own gender perspectives come into sight. The data are based on a weekly observation over 14 months and was coded with the aim of categorization based on the Grounded Theory (Strauss/Corbin 1996). Sensitive to reification, the study avoided reconstructing gender patterns on the basis of observations in which the actors in the field did not make gender a theme themselves. Ethical principles were used with regard to consent, data storage and confidentiality of personal data of children, parents and professionals. The gender affiliation of pedagogical specialists functions as a determinant in child day-care when it comes to dealing with children close to the body and how such logics have an effect on everyday pedagogical life. Blind spots on the part of early childhood educators for their own (stereotypical) assumptions in dealing with educators are reconstructed. The results make it possible to point out pitfalls in everyday pedagogical life and to take up perspectives on gender that go beyond stereotypes.


Keywords

doing gender, male educators, ethnographic study, gender stereotypes, early childhood institutions

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THE ROLE OF THE GENDER OF PEDAGOGICAL PROFESSIONALS IN DEALING WITH CHILDREN CLOSE TO THE BODY

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OUTLINE

- The gender of early childhood educators - a determinant in child day care facilities?!
- General suspicion versus general presumption of innocence?!
- Summary and Conclusion

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The gender of early childhood educators - a determinant in child day care facilities?!

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- Profession of the early childhood educator is still regarded as a typical female occupation in Germany (Hoffmann 2012, Metzinger 2013, Karsten 2017).
- Heite (2009) and Ehrenspeck (2009): *spiritual motherhood* → high importance of gender for professionalization in early childhood education in Germany
- Early childhood institutions: „gendered institutions“ (Acker 1992) and professionals belong to a „gendered occupation“ (Murray 1996)

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- Buschmeyer (2013): *masculinity* tends to be challenged by the choice of a profession with a feminine connotation
- Breitenbach et al. (2015): Constructions of masculinity are regarded as a specific challenge for educators in ECEC
- Kubandt (2016): female gender = blind spot for the educators themselves in everyday pedagogical life

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**general suspicion versus general
presumption of innocence?**


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- Aigner/Rohrmann (2012): suspicion of paedophilia leads to a restriction of the educators in their professional actions
- Cremers und Krabel (2012): "it is virtually impossible to deal with the topic of men in day-care centres without being confronted with the general suspicion of men" (p. 265, transl. MK).
- Murray (1996): „Specifically, in many centers, men are more restricted in their freedom to touch, cuddle, nap, and change diapers for children“ (p. 378).

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Study „Doing Gender in a Kindergarten“

(vgl. Kubandt 2016)

- **Research Question:**
„How is gender constructed by children, parents and professionals in everyday educational life in the day care centre?“
- Ethnological perspective on *doing gender* (cf. Garfinkel 1967; Kessler/McKenna 1978; West/Zimmerman 1987) of professionals, parents and children.
- Analyses based on Grounded Theory (cf. Strauss/Corbin 1996) and sequence-analytical methods (cf. Kruse 2014)

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Study „Doing Gender in a Kindergarten“

- The female gender of the professionals was a complete blind spot, as it represented the standard (vgl. Kubandt 2016: 202ff.).
- *"Don't film me, Melanie, film the children instead! I am completely uninteresting for your gender subject!"*

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Study „Doing Gender in a Kindergarten“


- The female gender of the professionals was a complete blind spot, as it represented the standard (vgl. Kubandt 2016: 202ff.).
- *"Don't film me, Melanie, film the children instead! I am completely uninteresting for your gender subject!"*
- *Natascha says to me laughing, pointing to Tom: "Oh, interesting topic for you with Tom! It couldn't be better for your study!"*

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Study „Doing Gender in a Kindergarten“

 With Tom's presence did a deviation from the standard case occur due to the combination of male gender and educator, whereby the relevance of female gender indirectly became visible as the *invisible gender* in the day care centre.


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"I am interrupted by the kindergarten child Isabell filming in the mat room because she says there is no one there to wipe Maximilian's ass, a boy from the crèche. Isabell can't find anyone, so I look for an educator, too, because I assume that I'm not authorized to help the children with the diapers, as this might be too intimate. I also tell that to the educator Anna, who I find shortly afterwards. But she answers with a laugh: "But why shouldn't you be allowed?"


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Since Melina is the only child who does not sleep in the afternoon, the head of the kindergarten Sabine suggests that I can stay with Melina in the group room while she takes the other children to bed. Melina and I both lie down on the mats in the room. Melina lies down next to me and cuddles up. We lie down for a while, Melina cuddles up to me more or less. Sabine comes in, I ask: "Can I actually cuddle up with Melina like this?" Sabine nods and says, "Yes, why not?" At that moment Melina unintentionally strokes my chest for a moment. Sabine sees that and says "Well, you can and must say if something is unpleasant. That's completely ok then." I tell her that I ask, since I experienced in a discussion with a male research colleague, who also researched ethnographically in a child day care centre, that he was treated very carefully with regard to physical contact with the children and that the subject was treated rather sensitively. Sabine listens attentively, but is then called away by other educators."


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Tom and several children romp wildly around outside and chase a ball. Jannis stumbles briefly and falls to his knees, crying loudly. Tom, who ran next to him, takes Jannis in his arms and tries to comfort him. Katrin and Anne, who have played with other children in the sandbox, hurry up and try to comfort and caress Jannis as well. I'm a little irritated that the two educators also come running, because it doesn't seem to be a big deal and Tom is already taking care. Jannis gets up shortly afterwards and runs off again.

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“generalized presumption of innocence“?

(Kubandt 2016: 205).

- My female gender can be an explanation for the trust placed in me, since I correspond to the same invisible gender or the standard of the institution
- The possibility of a general suspicion with regard to male persons is thus countered by a "blanket presumption of innocence" (Kubandt 2016: 205).

 the female gender of the educators not only the *invisible*, but the *innocent gender* in the day care centre

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SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

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- While the male gender shape the focus of early educational debates on pedagogical professionals in ECEC in Germany, the female gender of professionals in day care centres is a blind spot.
- Both the *generalized presumption of innocence* towards females and the *general suspicion* towards males refer to the effectiveness of stereotype gender attributions in child day care facilities.

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- Effectiveness of collectivizing gender attributions in the everyday life of child day care facilities
- Comparisons of male and female gender, usually following a heteronormative notion
- Necessity: to raise awareness of (unconscious) stereotypes at the level of the professionals *themselves*

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