

SEX EDUCATION

SUBJECTIVITIES | MATERIALITIES | DIFFERENCES

International & interdisciplinary conference

September 19–21, 2024

University of Mainz, Germany

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Call for Presentations

The collaborative research center *Studies in Human Differentiation* (<https://www.crc1482.de>) invites scholars from the social and cultural sciences to submit abstracts for the international conference “**Sex Education: Subjectivities, Materialities, Differences**”. The conference will be held from **September 19–21, 2024** at the **University of Mainz, Germany**. **Keynote-speakers** who have confirmed their participation in the conference include **Jack Halberstam** (Columbia University, USA), **Nick Fox** (University of Huddersfield, UK), and **Elisabeth Tuider** (University of Kassel, Germany).

The conference aims to provide a platform for interdisciplinary discourse and critical reflections on the various dimensions of Sex Education, including its subjectivities, materialities, and differences. Sex Education is subject to ongoing heated and often morally charged social and political debates and an arena of the “Sexual Antinomies in Late Modernity” (Jackson/Scott 2004): It is often perceived either as instrument for indoctrination or as necessary tool for sexual autonomy. Beyond such moralizing discourses, the forthcoming conference is interested in a perspective on sexuality as a cultural product of knowledge processes: We understand Sex Education (1) as a key cultural field in which knowledge *about* sexuality, and thus “sexuality” itself, is re-produced, and (2) in a broad sense: In addition to institutionalized educational programs (e. g. in schools or as offered by NGOs or sexual health programs), we include all phenomena that convey sexual knowledge in their self-understanding (including but not limited to areas such as tantra, sexual assistance, ...), or that can be analyzed as ‘educational’ in a wider sense (such as literature, art, porn, social media, ...).

Knowledge and sexuality have been variously described as closely intertwined: Michel Foucault (1976) has famously described sexuality as a *power-knowledge* nexus which produces “sexuality” as a cultural reality, *sexualities* as varieties/kinds of sexuality, and the subjects embodying them at the same time, driven by a “will to knowledge” (ibid.). From a different perspective, William Simon and John H. Gagnon (1973) locate the active negotiation and circulation of sexual meanings in the interweaving of intrapsychic and interpersonal “sexual scripts”, as well as shared “cultural scenarios”. The aim of the forthcoming conference is to analyze the production, distribution and application of different forms of knowledge as a central element of the cultural (re-)production of sexuality. Such forms of knowledge may include knowledge about and of the body, as well as social knowledge of how sexual relationships and interactions are formed and cultural knowledge of moral and legal aspects.

Against this backdrop, the conference seeks to discuss the following dimensions of Sex Education:

1. Subjectivities in/of Sex Education. Sexuality is central to the constitution of the modern subject; it has been increasingly significant and is still central to notions of individual and collective self-interpretation and subjectification. What (mediating) role plays Sex Education in this relation? Which modes of self-construction become available at different historical moments in specific social locations (Jackson/Scott 2010)? To what extent does Sex Education function as both enabling and disciplining (Thorogood 2000)? In how far are normative, hegemonic orders and their subject positions reproduced in Sex Education, but how are they also undermined, destabilized, and reinterpreted (Brodersen/Spies/Tuider 2021)?

2. Materialities of Sex Education. Beyond the linguistic-symbolic dimensions of Sex Education, the conference also focuses on its materialities: Sex Education takes place in situations of co-present (or mediated) bodies, in specific spaces and atmospheres, using a variety of materials and artefacts. Practices of Sex Education employ different forms of media and can even be based on bodily acts of feeling, touching, performing, experiencing etc., producing and negotiating affects like shame as elements of situational social order (von der Heyde 2022; Wolfe 2017), raising questions of pleasure and desire as controversial components of Sex Education (Allen/Rasmussen/Quinlivan 2013).

3. Differences in Sex Education. Sex Education draws on and addresses cultural differences: part of Sex Education policies, curricula, and practices are often distinctions between “normal”, “acceptable”, “desirable”, “healthy” sexuality and its manifold counterparts. Ways of sexual engagement are distinguished and hierarchized (Rubin 1984). Importantly, Sex Education draws on and disseminates knowledge about differences such as gender, *race*, dis/ability or sexual orientation working as a field of “human differentiation” (Hirschauer 2023; Dizdar et al. 2021): it (re-)produces and distinguishes different *versions* of sexuality (biological, moral, ...), *varieties* of sexualities (such as ‘hetero’- ‘homo’-/‘bi’-), and *kinds* of people in relation to these. Finally, Sex Education may claim to reinterpret, change or abolish such differences.

We invite submissions from scholars whose research theoretically and/or empirically addresses topics related to these dimensions of Sex Education. We welcome submissions from a variety of disciplines, including sociology, political science, education science, history, psychology, cultural/social anthropology, communication studies, as well as women’s, gender, queer, and disability studies among others. We encourage submissions from scholars at all stages of their career, including early career researchers and PhD candidates.

Please send a **title and an abstract of up to 250 words** to sexed24@uni-mainz.de by **February 15, 2024**. Please include your name, affiliation, and a brief biographical statement of 2-3 sentences. Accepted presenters will be notified by March 1, 2024. Conference language will be English.

References

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