

Project number: 149194

Title: „We’re getting married“. An ethnography on the staging of intimate couple relationships in contemporary wedding ceremonies.

Lay summary

Marriage today is classified as unstable and short-lived because of its high divorce rate. At the same time one can observe an extensive increase in elaborate wedding ceremonies. How can these practices of publically displaying intimate relationships be understood and how is the desire for weddings related to love?

Content and goal of the project: While love is considered the natural prerequisite for the decision to get married, it is rarely its sole reason. What exactly is understood by the prerequisite of love? This question, as well as the ways in which the emotional dimension of weddings is linked to the instability of marriage as an institution remain largely unaddressed. The research project thus investigates the social and personal desire for public displays of love and intimacy between two people. What moves heterosexual and homosexual couples today to say in front of everybody, yet to no one of these others, but exclusively to one another “Yes, I do (want you)”? The goal of this examination is to gain insights into how emotions are expressed and manifested through wedding ceremonies and how, simultaneously, perceptions of gender and sexuality are normalised and transformed through these public stagings of intimate couple relationships.

Scientific and social context: By employing various qualitative methods, this micro-sociological study examines the individual experience of heterosexual and homosexual couples of their ‘happiest day’. Through the observation of actual wedding days in the German-speaking part of Switzerland, the project offers a contribution to the research of a “love praxis” and thus meets a broadly acknowledged research desiderata in sociology and gender studies.

Keywords: Wedding, Couple, Marriage, Intimacy, Love, Gender, Hetero-/Homosexuality, Normalisation

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