



7th St. Gallen Diversity & Inclusion Week

How privilege works

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Our Speakers



Jelena Tasic is Assistant Professor for Transcultural Studies at the University of St. Gallen. In her on-going research she develops an ethnographic / historical anthropological perspective on borderlands in Southeast Europe through the lens of (forced) migration. She is currently exploring patterns of moralizing and culturalizing inequality / (Un) deservingness (Tasic & Streinzer 2021, PI SNF Project "Europe's Un/Deserving: Moralizations of Inequality in Comparative Perspective") as well as the role of (teacher) education in the contemporary contexts of (forced) migration, populism and digital transformation.



Christa Binswanger is Professor, Senior Lecturer in Gender and Diversity Studies at the School of Humanities and Social Sciences (SHSS-HSG). She teaches courses on gender, diversity, intersectionality, care, affect, and masculinities and femininities. She is a member of the steering committee of Contextual Studies at the HSG, co-president of the Swiss think tank Gender and Diversity, and a member of the td-net of the Swiss Academies of Arts and Sciences. Recent publications include Transitioning to Gender Equality and Intersectionality and Diversity: Same or Different?

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How privilege works

A transdisciplinary dialogue between critical diversity studies and ethnographies of deservingness

CHRISTA BINSWANGER AND JELENA TOSIC

Outline

1. Introduction, Aims and Questions
2. Deservingness (discourse, practice and an analytical tool)
3. Understanding Privilege in the case of the „Ideal Worker“
4. Critical Diversity Studies, Intersectionality and Privilege
5. Conclusion – Transdisciplinary reflections

Introduction: Aims and questions

1. Paper background: a transdisciplinary engagement and exchange in terms of a „transgression, regrouping, reconfiguration of questions, theories, methods and solutions“ (Maihofer 2005: 200, translated) across disciplinary approaches
2. Synergy of Critical Diversity Studies (intersectional analysis) and anthropological assessments of Deservingness in terms of a new combined analytical heuristic for analysing Privilege
3. What can an intersectional assessment of Privilege learn from the analytic lens of Deservingness and vice versa?

Un/deservingness

1. On the most general level, un/deservingness is a prominent and ascending **moralization of inequality (and distribution)** in contemporary Europe

2. Examples:

- Forced migration and deserving status/welfare/social aid
- Families Un/deserving aid
- Deserving citizenship (belonging, productivism, wealth etc.)
- Deserving work status/promotion
- Etc.

Deservingness – epistemological coordinates

1. Deservingness is a **processual and relational notion** (who is seen as un/deserving **changes** depending on the socio-political, ideological constellations, events etc.) and is commonly claimed **”in relation/comparison to”** someone else (a category of individuals) (*Example Austria: “refugees do not deserve more than retired (national) citizens”*)
2. Deservingness helps “unpack” ideological **discourses** and the ways these “become **law/policy”**
3. Deservingness is often “articulated in a **vernacular moral register”** (Willen & Cook 2016); is “at hand” and can be easily “picked up” and employed without relying on accountable argumentation

Figures of Un/deservingness

1. Figures of Un/Deservingness as historical and contextual crystallizations of gendered ideological moralisations of inequality:
 - “social scrounger”/“welfare queen“ (undeserving of welfare)
 - “undeserving migrant” (undeserving of social aid and legal status) / „deserving refugee“
 - „capable entrepreneur“ (deserving tax-incentives)
 - „ideal (male, white) worker“ (deserving of respect, privilege etc.)



Comic novel representation of the figure of the social scrounger co-created by the artist Giulio Camagni and the students of the course „Figures of Deservingness“ (Jelena Tomic & Andreas Streinzer, HSG HS22)

The „ideal worker“: Gender, Privilege & meritocracy

1. The figure of the “ideal worker” (Acker 1990; 2006) can be critically analysed through an intersectional perspective
2. This gendered figure transforms depending on the particular socio-economic and cultural context and can vary from e.g.:
 - the (low-skilled) unprivileged exploitable (migrant) worker deserving of a work permit, but undeserving of wealth and social security
 - **The national white worker (high-skilled) deserving of certain privileges (social security, representing the company etc.)**

Acker: Inequality regimes

The ideal of the „abstract worker“ – „X₁, X₂, X₃, X₄...“: white, about 40 years old, heterosexual, middle class, male“ (Acker 1990; 1992)

But:

„The ideal worker for many jobs is a woman, particularly a woman who, employers believe, is compliant, who will accept orders and low wages [...]; immigrant women are sometimes even more desirable“ (Acker 2006: 450).

„**Inequality regime**“ (Acker 2006): strengthening hierarchies in companies based on inequality.

Inequalities among women* and awareness of privilege

- Currently, the 'ideal worker' in management is more and more applied to all genders.
- A study of **middle management female mothers** reveals that their ability to be the independent worker 'free' of care responsibilities is based on the outsourcing of care work to less privileged women (Hearn and Niemistö 2021).
- **Awareness and ambivalence regarding privilege:** Experiencing inner conflict when trying to be both: a good mother and a good manager (ebd.), while less privileged women do the care work.

Male managers – „ideal workers“ marked by invisible privilege

1. Qualitative study among **male managers: Privilege remains invisible**. The narratives lack references to social categories (gender, race, class, etc.) (Aavik 2020): The image of the „ideal worker“ normalizes privilege and makes it invisible.
2. Meritocracy serves to explain the ascent to managerial positions – even if higher positions not necessarily correspond with higher skills (Connell 2010) and even if an advantage is unearned. Still, privilege and advantage often involve a sense of entitlement and lack of awareness of being in possession of it (Aavik 2020).
3. Aavik uses the intersectional analysis to look not only at the marginalised, but also at privileged male managers, by showing how privilege is produced and upheld (Aavik 2020).

Ethnographic reflexions on the „ideal worker“

1. What is „behind“ the silence and invisibility of privilege in the case of the male „ideal worker“ can become more accessible through ethnographic focus on Deservingness, e.g.:
 - migrant biography => deserving of privilege since working oneself up the social ladder; pride-shame
 - Transgenerationally inherited wealth/status => implicit deservingness claim of „natural“ privilege
2. The figure of the „ideal worker“ is ambiguous and plays out as (un)privileged in radically different ways in different cases, e.g.:
 - the „East-European“ IT-specialist as the „ideal worker“, deserving due to competence and work, but unprivileged due to “origin“ (promotion, start-up capital)
 - the female migrant perceived (and exploited) as the „ideal care-worker“ undeserving of a (complete) social citizenship, since living transnationally; but seen as privileged by family and friends „at home“

Deservingness, Intersectionality & privilege transdisciplinary dialogue (1)

1. The analytical lens of Deservingness can **enrich intersectional analysis of privilege** (how is privilege legitimated, implied and moralised in which cases/situations)
2. It shows how privilege is legitimated from particular (also contradicting!) **ideological** standpoints (e.g. privileging non-migrant workers)
3. Deservingness as an analytical lens can grasp **how different – also privileged - actors are moralized**

Deservingness, Intersectionality & privilege transdisciplinary dialogue (II)

1. Understanding deservingness as moralisation of inequality needs to be based on analysis of **power relations** from an intersectional perspective
2. Thinking about the “invisibility of privilege“ helps us think more about **implicit claims of Deservingness beyond visible struggles**
3. The **dynamics of congruence and divergence of „Privilege“ and „Deservingness“** can analytically „sharpen“ both concepts (why are some privileges seen as arguments for undeservingness and others not)

Questions To our audience

1. Which “figures” best allow for, and which figures might complicate a transdisciplinary take on Privilege and Deservingness? (Male manager/ IT-migrant specialist; female migrant care-worker? Etc.)
2. Thoughts on comparability?
3. Navigating complexity: how can transdisciplinary reflections on deservingness and privilege contribute to inclusive working environments?

Upcoming events CCDI

- **«Successful through Diversity & Inclusion»**
Next edition: May 28, 2024, Language: DE, Registration [here](#)
- **«Aiming Higher – Karriereentwicklung für Assistenzärztinnen»**
Next edition: March 2024, Language: DE, more infos [here](#)
- **Male Allyship Training,**
More infos [here](#), Language: EN (contact us if you are interested)
- **St. Galler Diversity Benchmarking 2024 – NEW digital as dashboard**
Registration and more infos [here](#)

All our offers can also be found at www.ccdi-unisg.ch and updates on upcoming events on our [LinkedIn page](#).

SAVE THE DATE: D&I Week 2024



You will find the slides and further information on our website www.inclusion-tagung.ch in a few weeks.

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University of St.Gallen (HSG)
Dufourstrasse 50
9000 St.Gallen
Switzerland
+41 71 224 75 52
gudrun.sander@unisg.ch
www.inclusion-tagung.ch