

**Christmas parties and other social events in organizations:  
A hotbed for the (re)production of inequality regimes**

Renate Ortlieb, University of Graz (Austria); e-mail: renae.ortlieb@uni-graz.at  
Barbara Sieben, Freie Universität Berlin (Germany); e-mail: barbara.sieben@fu-berlin.de

April, 30 2010

Following Acker's pathbreaking analyses, organizational practices like reward or selection methods have often been shown to (re-)produce gender asymmetries. Compared to such practices, company parties appear to be less powerful or even unsuspecting. In this paper, we posit that especially such 'apparently more "innocent"' practices (Martin & Collinson, 2002: 258; Martin 2003) offer additional fruitful lines of inquiry into the gendered organization. Moreover, we extend the focus beyond gender to other diversity aspects, especially the body and religion. We analyze how related asymmetries are 'brought into being' (Connell, 2009: 73) by planning and celebrating company parties and other social events; i.e., how related practices (re-)produce inequality regimes in an organization.

Our theoretical framework grounds on Gherardi's (1995) and Acker's (1990; 2006) approaches to gender and organizational culture. Our empirical analysis is based on case studies of company Christmas parties, summer barbecues and incentive trips in German organizations. The case studies were generated by interviews, participant observations and document analysis.

In sum, the symbolism of company parties belies their 'apparent innocence'. The symbolic anchors we identify – e.g., the gendered character of the event as a whole and of its single components, bodily actions, intimacy and eroticism – contribute to the processual (re)production of (male, hetero-sexual, able-bodied, Christian ...) norms and deviations which are vital in German society. Also, they highlight the reciprocal relationship between inequality structures and practices.

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