Jigsaw Piece on Definitional Power and sexual Violence

for the pro-feminist academy in Eisenberg 2017

Date 12/09/17

Agenda

Definitional power[1] has two meanings. On the one hand it's about who has the power to define the meaning of things. On the other hand it's a pragmatic approach to handle some of the questions and problems that arise after a sexual assault.

In this jigsaw piece we'd like to start to talk about definitional power in general, because we think understanding definitional power leads to the conclusion to follow an approach that focuses on the wishes and needs of the people who have been harassed.

After the general talk we'd like to talk about practical dealings with definitional power, either through the example of an argument about naked chests on concerts and parties or through an imaginary example of sexual harassment in an autonomous space.

That's our proposal for an agenda:

<table>
<tr><td colspan="4">Part One</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3">read the text about definitional power (Antje Schrupp)</td><td>15 min</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3">check understanding</td><td>15 min</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3">discussion (Questions on definition power)</td><td>60 min</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="4">Part Two</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Variant a)</td><td colspan="2">Variant b)</td></tr>
<tr><td>read both texts about Feine-Sahne-Fischfilet</td><td>15 min</td><td rowspan="3">After a sexual assault in an autonomous space people argue about the question who is obliged to define what happened. Your task is to check various possible steps of action (listed below) and reflect their meaning for the offender, the one who was harassed and the space. You can also discuss own ideas for good steps of action.</td><td rowspan="3">90 min</td></tr>
<tr><td>check understanding</td><td>15 min</td></tr>
<tr><td>discussion (Questions about dealing with naked chests)</td><td>60 min</td></tr>
</table>

There is no time pressure, follow the agenda as far as you like. The questions mentioned below are only proposals to start a discussion, there's no need to follow them like an exam.

Try to be considerate and consider that you might be talking with people who have been sexual harassed. State your own limitations, accept those of others and take breaks when necessary.

1 There's a little problem here: While one translating person translated the german term „Definitionsmacht“ as „Definitional Power“, the other chose „Normative Power“. Keep in mind that both concepts refer to the same object.

Questions on definitional power:

- What does definitional power generally mean? What does it mean when dealing with sexual harassment?
- When did you first hear about definitonal power?
- What are privileges and why are they often invisible?
- The black author Pat Parker said: „The first thing you do is to *forget* that I'm black. Second, you must *never forget* that I'm black“. What does that mean? What is the emancipation-trap Antje Schrupp is talking about?
- Why do you think the text only talks about men and women?
- What is your stance towards definitional power?

Questions about dealing with naked chests

- What‘s so disturbing for the people that don‘t want cis-men with naked chests dance or make music?
- What‘s so disturbing for the people who are told to keep their shirt on?
- How do you act on concerts? Do you show your chest? Would you like to? What surroundings would you need to be able to show your chest?
- Check for privileges: Reconsider which rules or norms concerning clothes apply to you. Distinguish between social norms and individual rules. In a second step reconsider what are the potential consequences if you don‘t comply. In a third step compare the potential consequences for different groups of people.
- The TAZ wrote about the events discussed: „Excess, infiniy and physicalness are acts of emancipation“. Discuss what this means from your individual perspective. Then consider what it means for different groups of people. Think about differences like male/female/transsexual/intersexual, old/young, established/outsider, confident/unsure, good-looking/not good-looking, ill/healthy. At the end, discuss, what it means if the sences is generalized.

Normative Power[2]

by Antje Schrupp, via https://antjeschrupp.com/2012/11/14/definitionsmacht/

German news website heise.de reported about a case of not blocking internet access to a 55 year-old convicted criminal. He was sentenced for photographing a 14 year-old girl in the shower with a mobile phone camera hidden in a shampoo bottle. Unfortunately the shampoo-cam's flash was activated what caught the girl's attention. She then sewed the man.

The phrase “unfortunately” illustrates the author's positioning nicely: throughout the whole story he identifies with the photographing voyeur and not with the harmed girl, her parents and friends.

Taking the narrative perspective of a healthy adult white man at social stories is a relict of our patriarchal culture. That culture declares THIS type of human breed the standard every other kind of human being has to be measured by.
Usually this positioning is “invisible”: times of patriarchy are over and the standard of “old white males” is no longer offensively present nowadays.

E. g. if the mentioned heise.de article's editors would have researched more properly the word “unfortunately” would have been deleted and the article's narrative perspective would be completely neutral. Of course it would still be the same author and still the same positioned viewpoints although this would not be provable then.

In the course of 20th century's emancipation movement (the proletariat, the females, the colonized and “non-whites”) the idea of an “equal” society has developed – a society in which contrasts of gender, colour and social standing are not of importance because “we are all equal”.

The *claim* of this equality does not change anything about the fact that the standard this equality determines itself on is still the one of the adult white male. The “others” were always “equated”, they were allowed to become just the same as that standard. It was ignored that a world population only of “adult white males” would not work out in reality – the “others” (right because they were defined to be “different”) are essential for the functioning of the old structures, e. g. for child care.

Those cultural patterns of differentiation between “them” (adult white males) and “the others” (females, poor people, “non-whites”) are not a question of laws. The patterns cover all aspects of politics, science, cultural production and daily life to the basics. Simone de Beauvoir pointed it out

2 There's a little problem here: While one translating person translated the original „Definitionsmacht“ as „Definitional Power“, the other chose „Normative Power“. Keep in mind that both concepts refer to the same object.

in detail in her work “The Second Sex” relating to the gender difference.

Now what can be practically done to get out of this “emancipation trap”?

The most important thing is of course to recognize and realize these patterns. It is easier for those who do not belong to the “normals” (even if it is not an automatism) because they are constantly confronted with the mismatch between themselves and the “standard”. In a world that permanently uses the generic form of masculine (i. e. sometimes only males and sometimes all humans are meant by that) I as a female have made the experience of being drilled since my childhood to question if I am also “included” or not. Males lack of that type of drill because they are automatically “included” unless a specific female version is clearly indicated – males immediately typically conclude it is “not their problem” then.

This mechanism does not only concern the pronunciation, the cultural patterns go further into detail. It is not easy to understand which position is dominating and setting the standard in a particular situation.

The call for “objectivity” presently does not help solving the mentioned problem because it simply confirms the “normativity”. External “objectivity” (i. e. sticking to legal requirements, not using judgemental phrases) mostly even can help concealing the obvious positioning of those who comply with the standard and claim to act e. g. “objectively” and “rationally”. It is impossible to “prove” the opposite to them but it is possible to convince them (but only if they are seriously interested in the topic).

This mechanism is responded by political practices whose presently suggested keywords are “normative power” or “go check on your privileges”. They are a try to answer the fact that it is logically impossible to break a dictated standard by submitting to that standards rules. Audre Lorde summed it up: “The master's tools will never dismantle the master's house.”

“Checking on one's privileges” is not a moral opinion true to the motto: “You as an adult white male are loaded with guilt and sin and should not express your opinion on the subject xyz”. It is rather a political recognition and practice which means as much as: “Whether you as an adult white male realize or understand anything is not the standard which we logically can orient our debate on.”

This is one great symbolical change, because our whole culture is based on the idea of executing social changes by convincing adult white males of something. In this case it means the ancient patriarchal days in which adult white males clearly expressed their normative power (“I am the master of this house.”) as well as present equated times in which the above mentioned males play

their game safely and claim to be the epitome for universal rationality (“prove it to me, explain it to me”).

If “the others” claim normative power for themselves it means: “We do not need to convince you of anything.” There is no “economic evidence” of what e. g. rape or sexual harassment means, it is rather a question of taking decisions and setting values. The practical feminist movement simply set a new definition (rape is when limits of sexual autonomy and personal freedom are crossed) against the patriarchal definition (rape is when “another bad man” puts his penis into one of “our women's” body and applies physical violence).

“Normative power” means that the “others” define for themselves which significance they give to certain activities and phenomena. It means they refuse to follow a discourse that already set itself to standard.

It does *not* mean that *all* the “others” (all females, all people of colour, all handicapped people etc.) would share the same opinion. Let us stay with rape as the subject: among the females there is a wide range of different and even contrary opinions about how to value and deal with rape.
“Normative power” does not mean countering the “standard opinion” with a coherent “different opinion”. It means that in controversial discussions, e. g. females debating about rape, only *their own wishes, their own desires and their own opinions* are the standard, the thoughts males have already shared on the subject are not. This can similarly be transferred to the other discourses.

That does *not* mean males cannot join discussions about feminism or whites cannot debate about racism. Whoever should prohibit them from voicing their opinions and arguments on the subject? Every woman might be dumb to ignore or forbid a man's interesting, original and helpful suggestions and contributions on a subject like rape.

It also does *not* mean that discourses which have been led this way should directly be mediated into mainstream discussions then. Factually there is no option to pass on mediation work at all because “the others” might eventually get into unavoidable situations (mostly pretty fast) where they have no other choice due to the existing power structures.

No, it is about the exclusive fact that males and whites *can no longer automatically expect* interest or attention on their contributions. They cannot raise a claim on “the others” just to use their developed standards and organize their personal actions in daily life when they succeed in convincing the “normals” to do the same.

It is quite understanding, by the way, that so many males and whites do not know the difference and cannot separate one from the other.

AJZ Bielefeld vs. Feine Sahne Fischfilet

via Indymedia linksunten

The alternative youth centre “AJZ Bielefeld's” staff more or less successfully executed what the state of Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania's constitutional protectors have tried in vain for several years: stage ban for the Rostock Punkrock band Feine Sahne Fischfilet (abbr. FSF).

On 20 September FSF just finished playing two songs in Bielefeld when a drunk female suddenly stumbled across the stage yelling and pushing the lead singer off the microphone. She screamed at the audience that the show was “over right now” because one band member was “naked”.
Several persons, amongst them “AJZ” security staff, entered the stage and went towards the band's members while the audience pretended everything to be a joke until it was stated that the interruption was meant seriously. The reason was FSF's drummer appeared on stage with naked torso what is prohibited at the “AJZ”. FSF then left the stage when the audience started getting pretty nervous and on the other hand 10 to 15 people meanwhile threatened the band. Another security guard stated towards everyone that the show was “done”.

An immediate discussion turned out that the still rioting drunk female is indeed one of the “AJZ's” persons in charge and that there really is an existent plenary decision which prohibits musicians to take off their clothes. It is not known if the band was informed about that. It “does not matter” anyhow because it might be “obvious” that the “AJZ” is “anti-sexist” after all. Frequent concert goers confirmed that such things happened “here several times”.

We went on our way home (at least 120 km) reflecting about so much stupidity and speculating about the “AJZ” staff's continuously extremely aggressive behaviour. Little later we found out that FSF continued playing for a few remaining people after being interrupted for more than one hour. We could not find out if the musicians should have put on burquas therefore...

We do not know what is going on in the city of Bielefeld but even after several brainstorms we completely fail to see a relation between anti-sexist policy and prohibition of removing one's upper body clothing.

After all it is still hard to believe that the “AJZ” in Bielefeld ever reflected about sexism, machismo and patriarchal attitude. The aggressive and partially violent behaviour of the “AJZ's” obviously responsible persons (“I am the janitor, so you better shut up”), mainly being young males dressed in 80s-style antifascist clothes, sends a different message. The guards and their local supporters left the (not only optical) impression of a group of lost neo-Nazis even before the assaults on the

band and visitors happened.

If all of the “AJZ Bielefeld's” statements should indeed be well thought out and meant to be serious as “anti-sexist practice” at least 300 delinquent's protectors got off pretty lightly at FSF's show... The “AJZ” can be considered as a real alternative for those who would also have a beer at a Catholic school camp. Those who rather like autonomous policy and culture as well as social interaction in some degree should rather avoid this place.

We would still like to know about the daily life in this house anyhow.

That's why sometimes solidarity means not to put off the t-shirt

From Viruletta, Mädchenmannschaft

Probably some of you have also received a link in their timeline in the last days, which containes a very horrible text about an termination of a concert of the punkband Feine Sahne Fischfilet in the AJZ Bielefeld. Maybe the link to this text were add by several resentful comments about that the poor poor bandmembers had become victims of a for example senseless, prudish or even repressive event policy. Because: The concert was temporary terminated of one of the organisers, after the drummer of the band doff his T-shirt on the stage.

Anyhow, it happened to me, I was even confronted with this link and these comments several times. What got my attention immediately: non of these dudes – and it was really all dudes – who found it awful unfair and unreasonable that the drummer had to keep on his T-shirt on the stage nevertheless he did hard work and was swetting there, ever complained about the fact that this is a rule four everybody effected by sexism – in fact allways and everywhere.

The authors of the text emphasize that they can not see a connection between antisexist politics and prohibition of naked upper body even after “thinking about it long time”. And because we women's libber can be nice now and than if we are not just busy with building up an feminist terror regime, I will explain the connection here.

We live in a society, in which dudes com with privileges. One of them is to divest themselfe mostly, almost where- and whenever they like to. For feminized persons the law already gives restrictions which say at least there nipples have to be covered.

But even in locations where probably nobody would refere to the state laws, for women or trans*persons it is for example not so easy just to doff their T-shirt. Their body is mostly seen as the property of the general public. Almost everywhere, that means the same if they go shopping in a supermarket, visit a lecture, take part in a works meeting or a party, completely strange people presume to comment and evaluate their body. Women or trans* persons who off their T-shirt, perpetrate not only eventually a written law but also a societal taboo. The rebuke usually follows very fast by looks, cooments or physical boundary crossing, which differs from to what extent the body correspond the norms of beauty and perceptions of gender. That means, if you are affected by sexism you miss the privilege to divest youselfe for any reasons – even if a goup of people decides „to allow also women“ to doff their T-shirts in their rooms. And that is the reason why it is an ostentation of sexist privileges if dudes doff their T-shirts in the public where – and whyever they like to. And yes, to deny yourselfe privileges as long as they are not given to everybody, is an solidary – and in this case antisexist – act. For similar reasons it is alsy solidary to deny yourselfe performances of heteronormativity.

Because the debate about the naked-upper-body is not at all new, it is a little bit astonishing, that neigther the band Feine Sahne Fischfilet, who understand themselfes as socio-critical, nor the

authors of the text, who play the experts of sexist behavior, ever heared of it. An especially interesting sentence is here, that the authors can hardly believe “that in the AJZ of Bielefeld there were any reflexion about sexism and patriarchal behaviour at all”. You see, they are real experts there.

Instead of writing a resentful text, the authors could in the end just have asked, if they would have been really interested in understanding, why it is antisexist to keep your T-shirt on. Different places inside the text imply instead that it was written to vent the authors anger and to bash the AJZ Bielefeld. Without understanding the demands at all, it was already tried to deligimate the people who claime it – and so also the concern itself. Thats why the authors put forward relatively fast a classic argument: the tone-argument. The person, who established the apparent consense in the AJZ that evening, has been drunken at was shouting, so it is written in the text. They call the person “mackerig” (no translation possible – the translator), “vulgar” (hello classism!) and “stupid” (hello ableism!). Also they use a strange – and meanwhile really stale – nazi comparison. But this is not enough yet, no, they have to to trot out a hackneyed sexist and racist cliche: a Burka – comparison! Because, of course, anybody who request anybody to dress anything, has to be prudish, and there is nothing more prudish than a Burka, and hey, weren't we just talking about repression, opression and so on? So, if you did not read this so called text, maybe you should just save your nerves and pass on. In the commentaries – but this is (not only on indymedia) somewhow usual - it becomes even worth. The band has meanwhile published a statement on facebook, where they diagree with the way of presentation of the text on indymedia – but unfortunately you will not find any self criticism there. Alternatively you should better read this analyse of the shitstorm against the event-policy of the AJZ Bielefeld which is meanwhile published on a blog.

In the end I like to ask the authors of the text a question, because they say that they like to think a lot: did you ever think of the possibility that the person, who intervene that evening first, was drunken because she did not plan to work that evening? But that she was maybe the first / only person who felt responsible to enforce the antisexist AJZ consens, because there is no free time for affected people, no quitting time from sexist normality?

There is a word, I already mentioned it; it is called privileges.

step of action	meaning for the one harrassed
The sexual assault is ignored, everything stays the same.	
A meeting without the people involved is held and decides what has happened and what are the consequences	
A meeting with the people involved is held and decides what has happened and what are the consequences	
A meeting is held and the one harrassed can tell what happened, then the meeting decides	
In single talks the people involved tell the others what happened. Then a meeting decides.	
People call the police, a judge decides what happened.	
A community-support-group talks to the one harrassed. A meeting is held and decides based on the needs and demands of the one harrassed about the next steps.	

meaning for the offender	meaning for the space the offense happened