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# Using Qualitative Content Analysis of Popular Literature for Uncovering Long-Term Social Processes: The Case of Gender Relations in Germany

*Stefanie Ernst* \*

**Abstract:** »Qualitative Inhaltsanalyse von Populärliteratur und die Rekonstruktion langfristiger Entwicklungen am Beispiel der Geschlechterbeziehungen in Deutschland«. Studies in long-term figurational approaches provide explanations for social problems and the development of society. A specific but often neglected kind of data in Social Science Research is the so-called popular literature being regarded as non-scientific. But it was and actually is still playing an enormous role in social life. The paper discusses how we can use this literature as a source for studying long-term processes. The presented case observes the work relations between the sexes and the contemporary behavioural ideals. Several research methods and theoretical models are adopted: the qualitative content analysis refers to 18th century books on etiquette and present-day career guides reconstructing the persistence of women's underrepresentation in leadership posts. It moreover refers to a model of gossip and gossip control from Elias/Scotson to explain social inequalities between groups. This demands to extrapolate within a very broad database of classification profiles, hypotheses, theoretical imbedding and to point structural peculiarities out of the selected texts. In this context I examine the example of the intellectual women and how the topic of women's and men's employment, knowledge ability and scientific activity is processed. The content analysis refers to n=86 as main unit of selected etiquette books and modern career guides. Some of the works are present in single, some in repeated edition. A minimum and maximum text component is the prologue, preface, chapter titles etc. covering the question of erudition, education and profession as well as the sex characteristics.

**Keywords:** Process-Generated Data, Long-term Social Processes, Popular Literature, Theory and Methods, Qualitative Content Analysis, Gender Relations, Figurational Sociology, The Established and the Outsiders.

## 1. On the Sociological Interpretation of Literary Texts

In social research, qualitative content analysis is mostly used in conjunction with narrative, biographical, or expert interviews, or also with participant ob-

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In the following all direct quotations are translations from German.

servation and document analysis. Various software solutions facilitate the preparation and systematic analysis of contemporary transcribed texts (cf. Gläser/Laudel 2006; Mayring 2008). Sociology, education, psychology, as well as media, cultural, and literature studies are all disciplines that use content analysis. Although the analysis of historical texts already presents the utmost challenge for a *process-oriented* social research, the analysis of *historical literary documents* at first poses problems for sociology. On the one hand, the texts to be analyzed are not a product of interaction between an interviewer and an interviewee. On the other hand, this particular genre is more likely to suggest the use of data analysis techniques employed in literary studies.

The methodological benefit of a sociological, historical content analysis of self-help literature lies in the opportunity of tracing the long-term evolution of discourses underlying Western academic culture and gender culture. Such an analysis adds a historical dimension of genesis to expert interviews, participant observation, statistical surveys, for instance, of men and women's study and career choices and the respective advisory services. Moreover, especially a look at texts of explicitly normative nature reveals the unreflected, subconscious, and contemporary knowledge about gender, everyone considers to be common everyday knowledge. Standards of desired behavior can hardly be determined by solely drawing on official statements and planned interviews; content analysis of such normative texts can deliver such insight without engaging in concrete interaction with interviewees.

*Sociological* content analysis serves to analyze complex data conserved in written form that cannot be collected through immediate interaction 'because it is either very difficult to approach the target persons or it is impossible to do so anymore' (Mayring 1995: 47). Twenty years after publishing the first edition of his book, Mayring notes that a systematic and comprehensive guide providing clear rules of interpretation for analyzing this kind of data has yet to be developed (cf. 2008: 10).

Frequency analysis is a basic method of content analysis designed to compare certain text elements. For instance, the frequency of certain topics, of manifest and latent contents, associations, contexts, and explanations found in the material may all be relevant to the analysis. For example, the criteria are determined according to which a topic is considered as having been mentioned or discussed (cf. Früh 1991: 153 ff.). A systematic basis allows identifying 'larger structural relationships' (ibid.), making trends visible and highlighting common sources via comparisons of formal features and contents. Analysis of stylistic devices and the level of reasoning are a means of inquiring into latent meaning or subtle patterns of interpretation and help guard against 'trivial and superficial' (Früh 1991: 211) descriptions of text contents. Whereas explicit arguments spell out the clear-cut pros and cons related to a certain topic and allow to easily identify tendencies, considering stylistic elements, such as irony, presupposition, connotations, euphemisms, suffixes, adverbs, compara-

tives, superlatives, repetitions, redundancies, claims to universal validity, and chains of association can draw attention to a text's implicit statements. The status of a source can provide information on tendencies and the standpoint of the text and the author (cf. *ibid.*: 222 ff.). Examining patterns of social interpretation also requires the critical analysis of sources: This involves considering the target group, the milieu of the author, the historical and social context of the text's creation, and the level of education in a society, group and gender specific approaches to the texts among other things.

## 2. The Case Study: Gender Relations as a Relationship between Established and Outsiders?

In the following case I want to demonstrate the methodological use of literary texts with examples referring to the discourse about men's and women's intellectual abilities since the 18th century. Here, typical phenomena of a so-called Established-Outsider-Relationship can be reconstructed in order to understand the long-term development of nowadays gender inequalities. This model was developed in order to understand social inequality in the 1960ies. It was based on the idea that the social techniques of superiority and subordination are interdependent: praise-gossip towards ones own and rejecting gossip towards the outsiders helps in creating a powerful self image. Also in a socially *equal* class formation the rejecting gossip and praise gossip are internalised by the group members in a long-term process. Women very often suffer from rejecting gossip and prejudices because they are newcomer's in particular social situations like leadership. The long-term dimension of traditional stereotypes and behaviour standards in popular readings with a normative spin can be analyzed with the methods of content analysis.

In the case of self-help literature, this means extrapolating classification criteria, issues addressed, hypotheses, the theoretical framing, etc. from a potentially vast pool of data and identifying structural peculiarities of the manually selected texts. In light of the vast wealth of historical and contemporary self-help literature<sup>1</sup>, failing to compare the structure of texts would virtually invite arbitrary interpretations and associations. In the following, gender relations are chosen as the area of social transformation to be addressed, and the question will be pursued how the topics of *employment, cognitive capacities, and academic activities of women* are treated in such literature. Considering the socio-economic context, the inquiry is concerned with the development of women's access to privileged and monopolized social positions and whether this process can be described in terms of a relationship between *Established and Outsiders*.

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<sup>1</sup> For the German-speaking world, for instance, Krumrey points out that about 700-800 books were published from the mid 19th to the mid 20th century (cf. 1984: 22).

The analysis of the literature is based on the premise of civilization theory that the normative statements in self-help literature reflect the social figuration of power in gender relations. Beyond the symbolic level, I am interested in the sociological function of gender stereotypes, the specific social life of their own that they take on in surges of social development. The persistently observable resort to stereotypes about men and women can be grasped as an attempt to simplify the complex social phenomenon of the distribution of power in gender relations and to make them fit in with everyday social life. Chapter 3 focuses on the characteristics of the data source, the sampling and data collecting. The example case of the intellectual women (chapter 4) then demonstrates how to interpret sequences of the texts and how to compare them firstly with other authors of the time and secondly in the long-term process over centuries. Moreover, these discourses are interpreted in view of the socio-economic changes in chapter 5.

## 2.1 The Example Case

In detail I will reconstruct the evolution and effectiveness of the repellent figure of the butch type in the debate about women's academic abilities. The questioning of male claims to superiority and female demands for participation upsetting the group charisma of *bourgeois* scholars give rise to a line of reasoning contending that *chaos* has taken hold of the order between the sexes. The perceived threat to a presupposed unambiguity of gender that ultimately looms behind this reasoning proves to be a historically constant phenomenon, yet evoking different views of women in response. In the 18th and 19th century, the paradigmatic figure of the female scholar is contrasted with the figure of the *housewife-mother-spouse* (Mixa 1994), which implicitly and explicitly serves as the yardstick for morally appropriate behaviour.

The *career woman* in modern self-help literature also evokes associations that disavow traditional gender roles and identities in historical comparison. The issue of women in leadership positions is treated in a much more reflected and subtle manner. Especially in view of modern women with career ambitions, there are different responses. The range of allusions and the attributions of supposedly gender-related qualities are remarkably similar to historical precursors and have been established as valid everyday knowledge via their status as scientifically founded knowledge. Those traditional interpretation patterns show women who want to advance from being *outsiders* to *becoming established* in leadership positions. The key questions guiding the sociological content analysis are focused on examining stereotyping, both on part of *Established* and *Outsiders*, and identifying implicit models of gender.

### 2.3 Methodological Problems to be Solved

Therefore two problems have to be solved: *first* the question of data collecting and *second* the question of re-embedding the results of the analysis in the theoretical framework. In this respect I analyse the example case as follows:

- 1) What lines of conflict are described and which action strategies are suggested? The gender-related assessment of leadership qualities, such as power, protection, determination, assertiveness, and perseverance, is taken into consideration just as well as issues relating to sexuality, professional objectivity, and conflict management in historical comparison.
- 2) What changes can be discerned in the various follow-up editions of the texts in question, and what conclusions can be drawn concerning the balance of power in gender relations and the theory about The Established and the Outsiders?
- 3) What topics are raised, how and when, and which interpretation patterns prevail in the respective periods of social transition in the 18th, 19th, and 20th centuries?

In detail I have chosen the paradigmatic chapter on the ‘*Umgang mit Frauenzimmern*’ (Association with Dames) and the figure of the intellectual woman (‘*Das Gelehrte Frauenzimmer*’) in particular. This chapter has undergone considerable changes in the course of extensive reception from the first edition 1788 to the 20th edition published in 1922. The book employs a politely instructing, episodic, and anecdotal style, which is personally appealing to the reader; the style invites identification and is frequently copied later on (cf. Pittrof 189: 44; Ernst 1999: 132). The readers of the time enthusiastically received ‘Über den Umgang mit Menschen’ (Döcker 1994: 34) so that the publisher felt compelled to publish the second edition in the same year. The third edition is published 1790 and the fourth 1792. Knigge is able to revise the fifth edition himself before his death in 1796. Numerous translations and other new editions of his work follow.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> In 1801, Gruber is the publisher, while Wilmsen publishes the tenth edition of the book on human relations. Wilmsen’s changes of the original text are noteworthy. They increasingly turn the book on human relations into a book on proper conduct by adding ‘detailed rules of conduct and details of conventions as they were considered appropriate at the time’ (Mitralexi 1984: 144). Gödeke issues the twelfth edition in 1844, the 13th in 1853, the 18th in 1908, and the 20th in 1922. Additional editions are published in 1878, 1890, 1911, 1919, 1922, 1926, and 1927 as well as in 1940, 1950, 1952, 1962, 1964, 1965, and 1967 (cf. Krumrey 1984: 688, GV).

### 3. The Characteristics of the Data Source, or: The function of self-help literature

The first important methodological step is to analyze the kind of data. In the case of guidance literature further information and collections of these books can be found in the literary, social anthropological and historical sciences (Krumrey 1984, Kiesel/ Münch 1977; Martens 1977; Radler 1978). As *normative* texts, the booming self-help literature has great social significance; this growing significance is reflected in continuously increasing publication numbers and growing differentiation within this genre. While it is per se worthwhile for research on reading to ask about topics and change in conduct literature as a specific kind of self-help literature, this specific genre grants insight into the diversity of possible responses and orientations related to demanded, desired, and sanctioned behaviour especially in periods of social transition and high levels of social and spatial mobility (cf. Elias 1997a/b, Krumrey 1984, Döcker 1994, Grawert-May 1992, Pittrof 1989, Mahlmann 1991, Mixa 1994). Historical analyses of literature, such as the work of Kuzcmics/Mozetic (2003) or Wild, show that literature can provide an ‘informative source giving testimony to civilizing change’. Literature is at the same time ‘– as an autonomous discourse geared toward enlightenment – a form of reflection on this life practice’ (Wild 1996: 196).

*Baron Adolph von Knigge*, who authored what is considered a prototype of the genre concerned with proper social conduct in the transitional period of the 18th and 19th century that sought to find middle ground between courtly dependence and emancipation inspired by the enlightenment, published his influential treatise *Über den Umgang mit Menschen* (Practical philosophy of social life: or the art of conversing with men) in 1788. By 1922, twenty new editions had been published. To date, a great variety of self-help literature has been named after Knigge even though they have little similarity with his original work. Knigge’s book on social conduct founded a genre that is distinct from previous *moral philosophies* in that it is written for a general public and ‘in a surge of popular and popular science books, (...) critically addresses political and ethical issues of the time’ (Döcker 1994: 32).

Besides *sociological* considerations on self-help literature, a *cultural studies* view on the ‘disciplinary mechanisms’ exemplified in doctrines of proper social conduct (Mixa 1994) as well as a *literature studies* perspective need to be mentioned. The latter point out that this specific genre ‘does not simply raise demands and present them to an audience in an authoritative fashion’ (Martens 1977: 205). They reflect prevailing norms and values and ‘mirror common practices in trend-setting circles’ (ibid.). They do not pursue a ‘set ideal but adapt to given circumstances’ (ibid.: 205), which is a sign for the growing diversity and differentiation of conduct literature. Instead of setting social standards and trends, ‘more recent social conduct books typically follow social

reality' (ibid.: 207). In the following, social conduct and self-help literature will be understood as offering specific social interpretations to find new answers to taken for granted knowledge that has been called into question. Patterns of interpretation are reluctant to change and are frequently only overcome when the connection between an understanding of the situation and successful action seems permanently disrupted (cf. Soeffner 1989: 17 f.). Gender differences are a key, widely debated topic, which evokes a variety of interpretations (cf. Döcker 1994: 219 ff.). The question as to successful and appropriate behaviour can be viewed as the principal point of reference of traditional as well as modern self-help literature. Even though self-help literature has changed over time in form as well as content, the persistent need for orientation, the lucrative market, as well as the promise of success remain characteristic elements of 18th century moral philosophies, 19th century conduct books and manners guides, as well as of modern self-help literature in the 20th and 21st centuries. The auctorial narrator, the experienced friend, the fictitious dialogue, embellished with supposedly true incidents, provide the reader with inviting identification points. Readers are given the impression of participating in social life and being in good hands with a typical question that is increasingly individualized.

The main features of this genre apart from its distinctive style are the tremendous publication and sales numbers, a clear-cut target group focus, and claims to providing expert knowledge and knowledge for life in general. Whereas 18th century *moral philosophies* still raise claims of explaining the world and providing guidance and seek to 'improve' and 'perfect' citizens, especially female citizens, 19th century conduct literature is considerably more pragmatic. Up until the end of World War II, *conduct literature* conserves traditions and displays nationally specific and nationalistic tendencies (cf. Döcker 1994: 57, 69, 222). The modern non-fiction book, which has been successful since around 1970, also claims to provide deeper insight into issues as well as a forum for popularizing well-founded knowledge beyond the confines of academic discourse.

### 3.1 Sampling and Data Collection

The content analysis is based on a universe (N=86) of partly difficult to find books on moral philosophy, social conduct, and modern (women's) self-help books. The following criteria have led my selection: time period from 18th century (century of Enlightenment) up to 20th century, i.e. the ups and downs of social crisis, the popularity and relevance of the author in his time and beyond the time, the topic of gender relations, number of editions of the texts, language and availability of the texts. A good source for the time after Germany's state formation is Krumreys excellent and systematic overview of etiquette books from 1870-1970. Some of the selected works have been published only once;



others have been published in multiple editions. Most of the original texts can be found in several German university and public libraries (for example Frankfurt, Hamburg, Marbach, Münster, Wuppertal and Zurich) with archives for ancient manuscripts and in form of so called microfiches. This often means that copies are not allowed. Meanwhile there should be more digitalized data available. Therefore it was not possible to determine the number of copies published in *all* cases. First the classification of a book as an etiquette book or as a guidance book has to be made. Then the minimally and maximally parts of the texts have to be defined. In the case study presented here the following parts of the texts were analyzed: preface, introduction, chapter headings, key passages, and the sections that implicitly or explicitly address issues of learning, education, and profession, as well as gender characteristics.

### 3.2 Identifying the Time Period Suitable for Observation

The second decision that has to be made is the identification of the time period that should be considered in view of the topic to be analyzed. Historical data and the literary since again helped besides the book of Krumrey and other detailed books about this specific genre. Here, the time periods under consideration are the *peak phases* when the topic of gender relations has attracted the most attention as reflected, for instance, in large publication numbers. The publication of the *Moralische Wochenschriften* (Moral Weekly – Gottsched 1725) in the early days of the Enlightenment up to the moral philosophies and pedagogical legacies of *Knigge*, *Rousseau*, *Campe*, *Gleim*, and others marked a period that lasted from 1788 until the German revolution of 1848 and is referred to as a time of struggle over a uniform image of the ideal woman (cf. Döcker 1994). At around 1870 another surge of publications of the restorative era set in, which resulted in a virtual ‘glut of etiquette books’ (Krumrey 1984: 25). Attention is also paid to the decades of the Weimar Republic and the post-war era, which evidence large publication numbers. In the period from 1960 until the late 1990s, a decline in traditional conduct literature and a rise in emancipatory women’s literature can be identified (cf. Wouters 1997: 128 ff.). Since the 1990s, self-help literature again has focused on ritual, courtesy, manners, confidence, and ‘a greater ability for adaption’ (Grawert-May 1992: 69) as a countermovement to previous tendencies of relaxing social standards of conduct (Wouters 1999, 2007). Women’s self-help literature represents a specific genre that, between waves of informalization and formalization, seeks to cast feminist thought into concrete forms of social conduct and thus provide information on proper behaviour.

## 4. The emergence of the intellectual woman

### 4.1 Identifying the Cultural and Historical Background

First of all the texts to be analyzed should be embedded in the social and historical background of gender constructions. Moreover one should identify the perceived audience of the books, i.e. the social class and the gender ideals and debates of the time. In the case presented here both *gender* and *class*-related attribution procedures act to mediate between the polar opposites represented by highly qualified, academic professions, on the one hand, and non-professional types of labour, on the other. After focusing on the anatomy of the female body and the construction of *female nature* as the *other*, the *alien other* that is, efforts are directed at popularizing this knowledge from the mid-19th century on. In the latter third of the 19th century, normative tendencies are becoming predominant, and the distinct practice of adopting universal traits, understatement, and knowledge of people gives way to the ‘as perfect as possible mastery of conduct modelled after the example set by elites’ (Krumrey 1984: 399).

Concerning female intellectuality, a remarkable change mediated through *gender* and *class*-related differentiation can be made out, involving the *disparagement* of the ‘erotic salonière’, formerly adored in enlightened bourgeois circles, as a ‘femme terrible’ (Döcker 1994: 220). Under the impression of rising criticism of educated women’s enthusiasm for reading and learning, Knigge in his treatise on relations with *intellectual dames* still shows marked ambivalence between fascination and disgust, which I will focus on in the following as an example employing historical comparison as well as comparison of different editions and their reception history.

### 4.2 The Perceived Audience

Examining the texts systematically on the basis of the questions developed before (see chapter 2.1) and coming next too, one realizes that especially, ‘the noble ladies’ come under attack for their ‘*preoccupation with aesthetics* and affectation’, ultimately accusing the ‘educated and cultivated female aristocrat’ of neglecting her duties (Döcker 1994: 41). Knigge is in agreement with his contemporaries in advocating that ‘the woman submit to male authority’ thus ‘enabling an orderly bourgeois life’ (ibid.: 223). Knigge addresses the audience of male readers and explicitly states that his work would have taken a different shape if it were ‘mainly for dames’. He would have had to ‘partly omit, partly modify, and partly rearrange a lot of the rules already laid down and still to follow’ (Knigge 1788: 85). Women, thus the reason given, are to a greater extent required to be concerned about their reputation and should not act as autonomously as men so that other rules of conduct apply, preferably related ‘to the realm of the home’ (Knigge 1788: 86).

### 4.3 Comparing the First Draft with the Following

Having analyzed the original text one should compare the selected chapters or scenes of the text with other editions over the time and with other authors of the time. Moreover, one should look for contradictions within the same text but also for similarities with other authors. In particular one has not the ideal possibilities like in the case of Knigge's book. But every text of the content analysis should be selected with respect to this criterion. In our case, the remark on lacking female autonomy is already missing in the second edition Knigge published in 1790 (cf. 1790: 113 f.). Wilmsen modified this section in 1822 by shifting the emphasis to the effect that women 'ought not to be so obliging in conversing with others'. They should make sure to exercise 'a kind of shy restraint', and, as opposed to men, they are led properly by 'a certain fine tactfulness without requiring rules' (1822: 73). In this edition, critical social remarks have been omitted and the power balance between the sexes shifted *to the disadvantage of* women by internalizing in advance the tightly restricted scope of action. Men profit from gender differences by the fact that associating with a certain type of woman, namely 'virtuous and well-mannered dames' (ibid.) is beneficial for their cultivation. An advantage mentioned is that 'milder and finer traits have a moderating influence on many a rough diamond' (1822: 175).

### 4.4 How are Gender Characteristics constructed as interdependent?

Since women are said to have 'a distinct stubbornness or self-will' (ibid.: 175), in the course of the text some of their positive traits are described, which are supposed to ultimately guarantee predictability and the capacity to act. In contrast to women's characteristics men are thought to *benefit* from a certain degree of 'female gentleness, which under no circumstances should be allowed to evolve into unmanly weakness' (ibid.: 176 f.). Women's job is to civilise the men.

### 4.5 Looking for Contradictions within the Same Text

The deep ambivalence toward powerful women and the courtly etiquette of the outsider from the ranks of the petty nobility, who at the time was but moderately successful as a writer, is *presumably* rooted in the episode described in the text involving vengeful and courtly women and men, as well as in his own life experience (cf. Döcker 1994: 37; Mitrallexi 1984: 5 f.). This ambivalence finds expression in pouring scorn not just on *intellectual dames*, who operate quite successfully in their parlours (cf. Döcker 1994: 38, 41, 50, Baxmann 1983: 118 ff.).

#### 4.6 Looking for Similarities and Contradictions between Authors of the Same Period

Knigge agrees with other authors of his genre, such as *Campe, Rousseau, and Ewald*, in his criticism of courtly life and the female intellect. A specific common feature in their work is that – in contrast to the *Moralische Wochenschriften* of the early thinker of the Enlightenment Gottsched – women do not act on their own, but ‘are mentioned only indirectly in context of issues concerning the conduct of men’ (Döcker 1994: 48). To be sure, *Gottsched* as well as *Knigge* view the education of woman as a sign of society’s moral advancement and not as an end in itself. Yet, whereas Gottsched is at least able to imagine women engaged in academic work, Knigge pours scorn and irony on educated women as ‘a sublime class of dames’, whose *unnatural* activity give him ‘the shivers’ (Knigge 1788: 194). *Gottsched* also criticizes women’s insufficient education. Yet, unlike a quarter of a century earlier, a condition once considered socially caused and hence changeable is now hypostatized by naturalizing women’s capacities. This line of reasoning is seen to be supported empirically by alleged experience of female inaptitude, which is not disproved by talented exceptions to the rule. Although Knigge does not ignore the ‘forty to fifty ladies that are now considered to be writers in Germany’, he states the belief that ‘only about half a dozen have not published nonsense’ (Knigge 1788: 197).

#### 4.7 Testing Findings Against Theoretical Assumptions

Going back to the theoretical background of the analysis should be the next step, i.e. defining the exclusive group within the established group. However, this ‘minority of the best’ (Elias/Scotson 1993) does not lead Knigge to give women recognition as a group, as the Eliasian model of the established group would suggest. Quite to the contrary, in a tirade against educated women, as it were, women’s academic accomplishments are declared exceptions, ultimately resulting from supernatural talent actually foreign to women. Such unnatural activity contradicting proper gender-related conduct has to be legitimized by meeting the requirements of the female role.

#### 4.8 Re-Embedding Findings in Socio-Economic Context

The significance of this reasoning becomes clearer when considering the socio-economic context of the courtly, absolutist society. Kiesel and Münch (1977: 78 ff., 167) point to a five-fold increase in the number of writers and the spread of extensive reading behaviour since 1766. It is possible that especially female writers of *noble descent* are viewed as competition for *bourgeois* authors, who already live under precarious economic conditions. Knigge voices the general concern expressed in the debate on education of the time of women’s cognitive

capacities supposedly being overextended. His description peaks in painting a drastic image of the *intellectual woman* that not only gives the author ‘the shivers’, but also evokes his disgust and, ultimately, pity:

I do not blame a woman who tries to perfect her writing and speech by her own studies and chaste literature. I do not blame her that she does not want to live completely without scientific knowledge. But she ought not to make a profession of it; she ought not to stray in all kinds of erudition. It causes not only disgust but compassion, if one realises the way in which these poor beings dare to discuss the most important things which during all the centuries have been a result of troublesome research by great men (...) (Knigge 1788: 196).

*Making an effort*, in Knigge’s view, barely keeps within the limits of acceptable female conduct; however, *to have the audacity of roaming around*, displaying determined behaviour, and even *daring to raise demands for power* would not only shake the order of gender relations. Rather, such *unwomanly* conduct of women is, if not presumptuous, at least on the verge of transgressing normality. In presenting this behaviour as pitiful, Knigge reveals the scope of group charisma he assigns men as *persons of the same gender*. Examples of pretentious behaviour of women serve to mark out the opposite side of the account and are employed as derogatory gossip. The accusation that intellectual women disrupting the social order in the home and in gender relations are a cause of social decline among the bourgeoisie is a widely voiced argument and triggers a sense of inferiority among men. Further examples demonstrate this gossip:

Then she views the most important concerns regarding the household, the upbringing of her children, and respect for fellow citizens without higher education as trifle matters, and believes to be justified in ridding herself of male dominance, despises all other women, makes enemies for herself and her husband, and constantly dreams of other worlds; her fantasy lives in obscene community with sound reason; everything goes wrong at home; meals are served cold or burnt; debt is accumulated; the poor husband has to walk about with holes in his socks (...). (Knigge 1788: 196)<sup>3</sup>

Men, in their everyday association with women, must distinguish between the honourable and depraved type of *women* and behave appropriately. The process also involves other imponderabilia, since women know better ‘to conceal their true intentions and feelings’ (ibid.). This typical courtly behaviour is again linked to female traits irrespective of any differences in social class.

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<sup>3</sup> This section is more ambivalent and partly more toned down in the Gödecke edition of 1853: The hypothesis that, so far, there have been no female academics has been maintained and efforts at wanting to compete with men are not even mentioned hypothetically anymore. However, the argument pertaining to neglect of the home is transformed in a peculiar way, which will be demonstrated below.

Spanned between the poles of *good* and *bad* female conduct, the author unfolds his interpretation of the *educated woman*. By way of derogatory gossip or bestowing praise, a nightmare-like image of a hypothetical minority of educated women is painted, which entails contempt and disparagement for women in general.

## 5. Tracing Changes over Time

In addition to the comparisons before it makes sense to find out which argumentations and constructions have changed or not have changed over the time in order to understand the long-term development. The following new editions of the *Umgang mit Menschen* first show remarkable changes in terms of style and content. The preface to the third edition of 1790 already contains additions that seek to draw attention to the large response the conduct book had already evoked.

The changes in the chapter entitled *Über den Umgang mit Frauenzimmern* (On Associating with Dames), especially with *educated dames*, raise questions concerning the possibility of the text having been enlarged, garbled, streamlined, or fundamentally altered, as Pittrof (1989: 64), Döcker (1994: 33) and Mitrallexi (1984: 131, 140 ff.) note with regard to the complete works. For instance, the changes in Gödeke's 13th Knigge edition omit the introductory remark stating that the book would have been written differently for women. In the same manner, the explanation for the limited range of female existence in civil society is also missing. These changes eliminated the striking contradictions in the original edition of 1788; to a greater degree than before, the conduct book can now claim universal validity and a greater reach.

The remark about *female gentleness* that does men good as long as it does not lead to 'unmanly weakness' (1788: 176 f., 1853: 180, 1922: 116) has been conserved over time, all the way up to the 20th edition. While the book testifies to the conviction that masculinity and femininity are supposedly gender-specifically determined, it still warns against divergence.

The changes Gödeke makes in the passage pertaining to educated women can be understood as, at the same time, toning down and reinforcing Knigge's assertions: The author is not immediately plagued by *the shivers* anymore. The first-person narrator, who disappears behind anonymous constructions such as *people*, knows of a general 'aversion towards so-called *educated women*' (1853: 190). In addition, the reference to the futility of the female endeavour to compete with men is completely omitted, which is to show that women are not granted a claim to an equivalent education anymore. There is also little effort to put the argument of the so-called *token academic* as a *minority of the worst* in a more favourable light – it remains at the level of misogyny. Although the Gödeke edition still scolds women who seek to make a mark by 'speaking out like a man' and 'have suppressed female modesty without being able to acquire

men's abilities' (1853: 199), it is now accepted that household duties may suffer if 'thousands and thousands (...) draw amusement, true pleasure, advice, consolation, warnings, and education from the writings of women' (Knigge 1853: 192).

Gödeke's edition disparages rejection of intellectuals as 'mockery from the mediocre and envious' (cf. 1853: 192). Gödeke takes up the argument of the female calling being violated in a polemical fashion; he is, however, convinced that it is given only to a select few to become true *geniuses*. Gödeke largely tones down Knigge's original text of 1788 by having him say in the 1853 edition that it is an act of 'irresponsible ridiculousness' to deny women's abilities to 'perform as capable as men in the field of literature' (1853: 191). Gödeke also makes concessions toward both Knigge and his contemporaries by exempting the 'dry sciences' (1853: 191). In 1788, Knigge bans women from participating in *all* areas of academic learning; now they are excluded only from the 'dry areas', that is to say, the *hard* natural sciences<sup>4</sup> (cf. 1788: 195).

It is remarkable that Gödeke severs the link between gender and talent: 'gender does not make the difference, rather individual talent irrespective of gender' (1853: 191). In an attenuating manner, Gödeke concedes that, while some of those women 'leave the female realm in the way they write' (*ibid.*), there are just as well men 'who in their lyrical entanglement with love lacking vigour and composure breach the limits drawn by nature' (Gödeke 1853: 192). Nevertheless, this edition recommends the same conduct toward ordinary dames as the original copy of 1788. The general assertion that the text is streamlined does not hold true, at least not for the chapter on *dames*.

On the whole, Gödeke's revision testifies to the fact that he shares the original author's ambivalent stance toward educated woman. Gödeke does, however, place a different emphasis and must be viewed as progressive in conceding that women command the capacity to engage in intellectual activity irrespective of gender. Yet, he is just as conservative as Knigge in acknowledging female competence only in the art of writing while denying their competence in the domain of science. The 20th edition of 1922 also fails to provide more clarity in this respect. As opposed to other parts of the text that Gödeke rearranged and abridged considerably in the 13th and 20th edition, the section on educated women evidences no changes. However, the dry sciences, where women are thought to hardly stand a chance of holding their ground, have now turned into the 'exact sciences' (1922: 119).

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<sup>4</sup> Already in 1748 women are excluded from 'serious' science based on a distinction made between the fine, higher, and philological sciences. While women have their proper place in the fine sciences of history, geography, and 'the art of rhetoric and poetry', the higher sciences, such as mathematics, theology, jurisprudence, philosophy, and medicine, are the appropriate field for men as the 'more sophisticated and serious thinkers' (Dülmen 1992: 247 f.).

## 5.1 Identifying Themes of Socio-economic Changes

As it should have become clear yet different themes can be identified in the long-term process of this specific gender debate. Briefly summing up the content analysis of gossip and gossip control expressed in popular literature over the time one realizes that since the 18th century several topics are a constant theme:

- 1) The first one is the constructed decline of family life having been caused by women's outside life and work. It has been allocated between the sexes and it was internalized in the self-descriptions of men and women and was also perpetuated by legislation in Germany.
- 2) The second topic is the diametric opposition of so called hard and soft sciences, i.e. natural and social sciences. It is connected with gender characteristics.

For the period ranging from 1870 to 1970, Krumrey perceives a gradual expansion of the female scope of action embedded in shifts in the power relations that define the web of interdependence between superiors and subordinates. Whereas in 1878 emphasis is on differences in emotional control that are linked to positions in the professional hierarchy, later on, especially in post-war Germany, groups in inferior social positions experience an enhancement of their status: Those having climbed the social ladder are less stigmatized and are much sought-after members of the workforce in a Germany that has yet to find a new economic and social order (cf. Krumrey 1984: 404-464). Further quotations illustrate these processes well:

Marianne Weber, wife of Max Weber and a historian and lawyer states 'equal not different intellectual capabilities' of men and women apart from 'the historical cultural science'. Women's 'special psychical capability' helps her to 'understand the feelings of others' and their motives (Weber 1906: 22-23).

After World War II working women in the factories and offices more and more came to exist in popular literature: especially the masculine woman, as a continuation of Knigge's intellectual woman is described as a 'monster' causing gender trouble too risking role models and the hierarchy of professions by talking and behaving 'like men in their posture and their movement' ignoring the 'feminine charm favouring the male carefreeness' and making 'men's jargon to their own' (Oheim 1955: 386).

To reduce social fears concerning especially lady bosses, a woman 'should make great use of the chance to be a pleasant and popular superior', Annemarie Weber suggests. Gender differences are interpreted as an advantage because 'the woman in business life is a marvellous stimulus for all to work better and with more interest'. (...) (Weber 1955: 189). But one should not go too far but respect 'natural' gender barriers cause even in 'leading positions one is confronted with women who are almost becoming masculine' (Weber 1955: 189).



Through these long term comparisons it is not difficult to realize parallels between behavioural codes of the 18th century and the popular belief of so-called specific women's skills in nowadays workplace reality and a specific 'fear of pollution' by trans-gendering traditional borderlines. Also modern career guides share these stereotypes and explicitly make use of the formerly stigmatised female (in)abilities. Moreover, they are overestimated as women's qualification to rescue the world demanding a global, economical and ecology awareness whereas 'the male domains of economic power sway' (Henes-Karnahl 1989: 139-140).

## 6. Conclusion

This long-term development in the popular literature shows explicitly the reciprocal dynamics between Established and Outsiders, by how women have adopted prevailing ideals of femininity which is constructed through difference by men, as something that seems to be common sense.

We have to take into account and can understand in how far long-term processes also led to very slow changes in the power balances between the sexes: re-embedding these results to traditional data types shows interesting parallels. For example we realize the context that until the 1950s female teachers who wanted to marry had to give up work in Germany. Only since 1977 have married women and mothers been allowed to work without their husband's permission. This inequality was legitimized with the argument that women's natural place is in the family and the household.

Until today this knowledge helps to understand the history of academia considering female and male students' preferences in research and education too. Moreover; the social dimension of inequalities becomes clear: the former contrast between bourgeoisie and aristocracy has been replaced by social and sex differences in general. Besides modern emancipation processes several strategies, i.e. diversity management or affirmative action programmes are needed to overcome these long-term developments.

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