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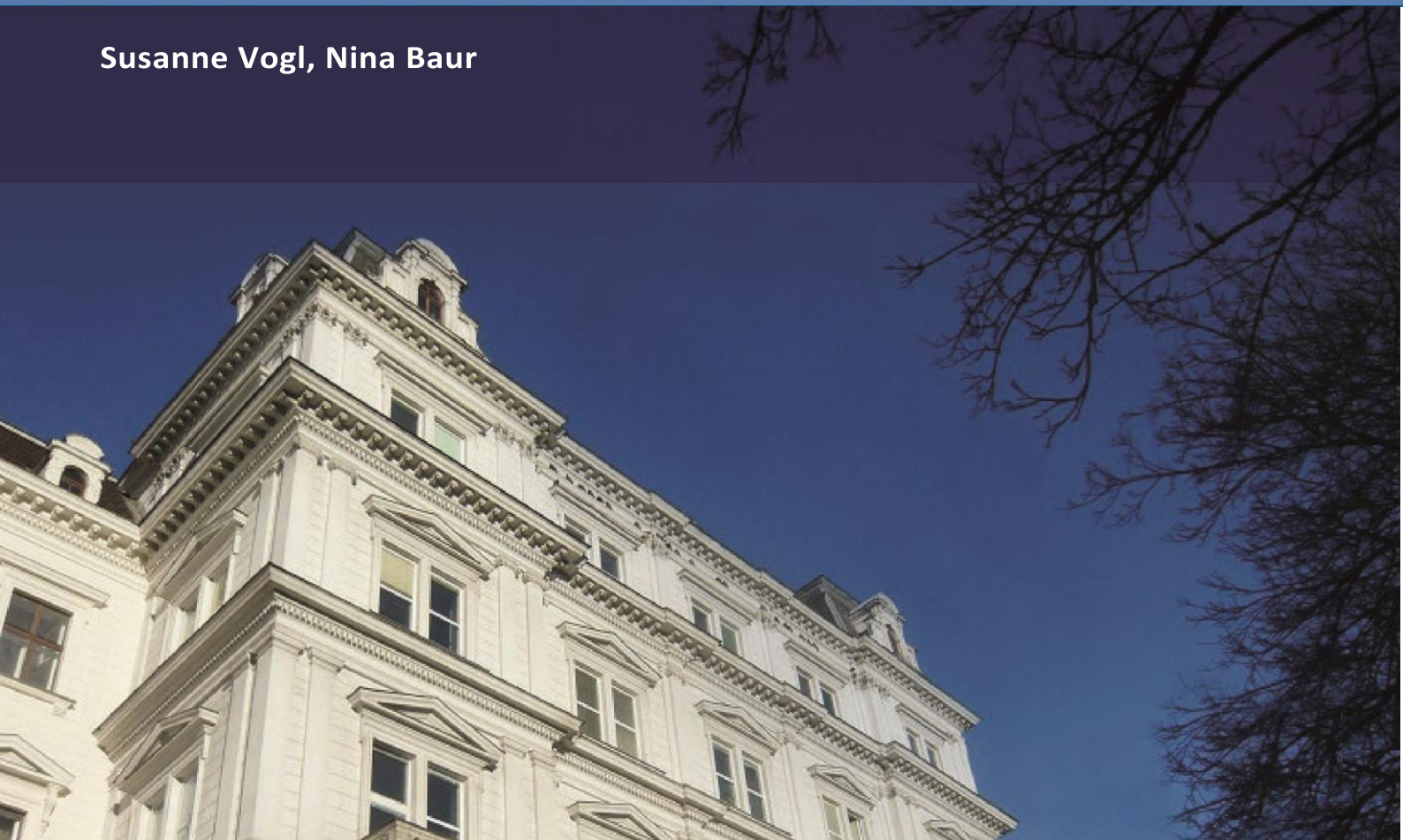


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Theoretical Concept for Gender and Social Inequality Research

Susanne Vogl, Nina Baur



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# **The Social Construction of Gender and Lifestyles**

## **Theoretical Concept for Gender and Social Inequality Research**

Susanne Vogl<sup>1</sup>, Nina Baur<sup>2</sup>

Dr. Susanne Vogl ist Universitätsassistentin am Institut für Soziologie die Universität Wien. Sie lehrt und forscht vor allem zu Methoden der empirischen Sozialforschung, insbesondere Interviews und besondere Zielgruppen, Familiensoziologie und Soziologie abweichenden Verhaltens.

Nina Baur ist Professorin für Methoden der Sozialforschung an der Technischen Universität Berlin. Ihre Arbeitsschwerpunkte sind Methoden der empirischen Sozialforschung, insbesondere prozessorientierte Methodologien, Methoden der Raumforschung und Mixed Methods, Raum -und Marktsoziologie.

<sup>1</sup> Universität Wien  
Institut für Soziologie  
Rooseveltplatz 2  
1090 Wien

<sup>2</sup> TU Berlin  
Institut für Soziologie  
Fraunhoferstraße 33-36  
10587 Berlin

## Zusammenfassung

In diesem Aufsatz schlagen wir einen konzeptuellen Zugang vor, mit Hilfe dessen das Zusammenspiel von Geschlecht und Lebensstil gefasst werden kann. Wir argumentieren, dass Geschlechtspraktiken und Lebensstil ineinander verwoben sind, je nach sozialer Milieuzugehörigkeit variieren und in Partnerschaften verhandelt werden. Um daher ein Verhalten verstehen zu können, muss die von den Akteuren zugeschriebene Bedeutung berücksichtigt werden. Auf Ebene des Individuums beeinflussen Normen, Werte und Geschlechtsrollenvorstellungen die Semantik. Im Hinblick auf die Pragmatik ist die tatsächliche Arbeitsteilung unter den Haushaltsmitgliedern zentral. Praktiken der Herstellung von Geschlecht sind spezifisch für soziale Milieus und für bestimmte Lebensbereiche. Wir gehen davon aus, dass Konstruktionen von bezahlter Arbeit, „Care“, Freizeitgestaltung und Konsum wichtige Sphären sind, um geschlechtsspezifische Lebensstile zu verstehen. Unser Ansatz bietet Kategorien, um „doing“ und „undoing gender“ in Beziehung mit sozialen Milieus und Lebensstilen zu setzen.

## Abstract

This article offers a conceptual framework for researching the interrelation of gender constructs and lifestyles and suggests categories for empirical research. We argue that gender practices and lifestyles are intertwined, vary according to social milieu, and are negotiated on a relationship level. Thus, researchers have to consider behaviour and ascribed meaning to explain underlying reasons for certain behaviours. On the individual level, normative orientations, values, and gender images influence semantics. Regarding pragmatics, the concrete task share among partners on a household level is central. Thus, gender practices are specific to social milieus and spheres of life. We argue that employment, care, and leisure time activities as well as consumption are important constructions for understanding gendered lifestyles. Our framework offers categories for better grasping differences of gender constructions, doing and undoing gender through lifestyles in social milieus simultaneously and systematically.

## Keywords

gender, lifestyle, milieu, social constructivism, sociology of knowledge

## 1. Introduction

The objective of this paper is to bring forward an important aspect in the context of lifestyle research by emphasizing the necessity to link gender and social milieu. We argue that in order to understand the practices and choices of people we have to consider the relationship level, gender, and social milieu. Especially promising seems the aspect of social distinction via gender practices between different milieus (classes) for which we identify need for further research.

We argue that the concepts of “lifestyles” and “social milieu” allow for a better understanding of the mechanisms of how (un)doing gender shapes lifestyle choices and the importance of others on a household or relationship level. Our key arguments are the following:

- (a) Doing gender and lifestyles are closely intertwined, the interdependence of gender and lifestyle is culture specific, and the variation of lifestyles within a given milieu depends on gender, which stresses the importance of social context (Choo and Ferree, 2010).
- (b) To explore the interdependence of doing gender and lifestyles, researchers have to extend their research from the individual to household and milieu as units of analysis and take account of their interdependence. The relationship level has been considered by researchers, for example, in the field of family studies (Dekovic and Buist, 2005; Ribbens McCarthy, Holland, and Gillies, 2003) but less frequently in gender studies (for an exception see Chesley, 2011) and very rarely in lifestyle research. Although lifestyles are perceived to be an individual characteristic, intimate partners (in stable relationships) jointly display lifestyle and social milieu affiliation. In the process, they also “do” and “undo” gender. However, the individually ascribed meaning and gender constructions are related to a certain milieu and are an integral part of lifestyles. Thus, intersectionality points to the impossibility of analysing gender independently from other axes of stratification (Roth and Dashper, 2016). When using this model of analysis, it becomes possible not only to show that genders differ in their everyday behaviours but to explain why they differ. Future empirical research should explore the negotiation between partners regarding the task share in the joint display of status and lifestyle and how these processes differ by context.
- (c) The interdependence of social constructions of gender and lifestyle on a household level makes it necessary to shift the focus from external pressures on people to people’s

choices. At the same time one needs to go beyond analysing behaviour (*pragmatics*) and consider the meaning (*semantics*) ascribed to behaviour—the social construction of lifestyles. On the individual level, normative orientations, values, and gender images influence semantics. Regarding pragmatics, the concrete task share among partners on a household level is central as well as the underlying negotiation process. It is, however, a result of people's interpretation; people express their social images and constructions of what it means to be "male" or "female" by their actions (i.e., by doing gender). This situation also implies that "doing social class" is a joint project of both partners in a relationship and might involve specific gender constructions; by doing gender, people might do social class (and vice versa).

- (d) Employment and occupation historically determined social class; however, they have lost their predictive power because people's choices have increased in terms of which occupation they take and how much time they want to invest in it. Therefore, other arenas of social life (such as leisure activities) become more important in constructing gender and social class. Lifestyles can thus express social inequality beyond social class as defined by the workplace (Michailow, 1996), and social class itself can be analysed as a social construct (Devine and Savage, 2000).
- (e) At the same time, employment remains important. There are strong indications that although gender practices vary according to social milieu and spheres of life, employment remains the linking factor, albeit in different ways than in the past. Building on such observations, the phenomenological approach towards lifestyles examines how everyday life and work are linked in doing gender and lifestyles. We argue that three arenas of everyday life seem well-suited for empirical analyses of the relation between gender and lifestyle. First, on the so-called vertical axis of lifestyles, people try to express distinction. On this axis, *employment and leisure activities and consumption* are linked because high income and occupational prestige are expressed by a highbrow culture. Second, in Western societies, this struggle for distinction was historically associated with a "traditional" household division of labour concerning *employment and family work*, resulting in men being assigned the role of the "breadwinner" responsible for providing income. Women were assigned the task of the "homemaker," responsible for demonstrative consumption and thus making social class visible (Baur and Akremi,

2012; Gerstel et al., 2002). However, many people want to handle this task share differently in a more “modern” way, resulting in a so-called horizontal axis of lifestyles. Third, employment and male honour cross-link both axes through hegemonic masculinity. On the horizontal, the modernity axis of lifestyles, and modern social milieus semantically oppose hegemonic masculinity, whereas traditional social milieus strongly support it. On the vertical, distinction axis, milieus with a high level of accoutrement affirm hegemonic masculinity via gender practices and in doing so marginalize these milieus with a low level of accoutrement.

In order to shape this argument, we first place our argument in a wider context, then we give an overview of the lifestyle debate and its key findings concerning gender and family relations. We then show how this debate can be theoretically linked to debates on gender and family relations. We conclude with suggestions for future research.

Social class and gender are socially constructed, and many indications suggest that the processes of construction are entwined. But where and how are they constructed and wound together? Many studies analysing the social construction and interrelation of gender and class focus on either the workplace or the family. One of the key findings of these studies is that employment and occupation are important indicators for defining social class. Not only does employment provide both economic capital and cultural, social, and symbolic capital associated with specific occupations (Bourdieu, 1984), but it also offers ways of expressing identity.

However, the situation is not as simple as it seems at first glance. Authors as early as Veblen (1899) and Bourdieu (1984) argued that because money cannot be seen, other spheres of social life are equally or even more important for defining social class, namely, consumption, everyday life, and leisure time, resulting in different lifestyles and tastes (Otte, 2008). Class differences correspond to a system of lifestyle differences (Bourdieu, 1984; Jarness, 2016). For example, one of the main means of expressing membership in a higher social class is having distinguished tastes in food. Numerous studies illustrate that there are many different ways of organizing everyday life within the same social class (Gerstel et al., 2002; Otte, 2008), but the reasons why people choose to organize their everyday lives in a specific way remain unclear.

Some approaches conceptualize occupation and the workplace as independent variables and lifestyles and tastes as dependent variables. Although this conceptualization seems plausible, the relation between work and lifestyles is not at all clear on closer inspection. So, do employment and occupation delineate people's everyday lives? Or, do lifestyles define what kind of occupation they choose? Are employment and everyday life completely decoupled? These questions cannot be answered yet and existing studies cannot be compared systematically. To address these research gaps, analyses of structure and of social interactions and social constructions have to be linked.

The situation becomes even more complicated when gender is taken into account. First of all, in analyses of gender relation, the distinction between "work" and "everyday life" is usually less clear-cut. While employment is often conceptualized as a basis for defining masculinity, the family and especially care work are typically conceptualized as the main arenas for defining femininity (Breen and Cooke, 2005; Gerstel et al., 2002). For many decades, social researchers measured a woman's social class by her father's or husband's earnings capabilities. However, social changes have rendered this conceptual model insufficient because both men and women might construct gender and class both at home *and* at work (Clawson and Gerstel, 2014; Grunow and Baur, 2014; Deutsch, 1999). In addition, merely analysing work and family relations does not seem sufficient for constructing gender; work and the family are important, but other spheres of life seem important as well. For example, in Western societies, many women express their femininity by dieting and preferring vegetables, while men tend to eat more meat and heavy food.

Moreover, constructions of gender and class seem linked, for example, gender constructions differ in various social classes but also seem to be important for the construction of social class. A multitude of studies reflect diverse ways of organizing everyday lives and the influence of social class and gender on everyday life (Gerstel et al., 2002; Perry-Jenkins et al., 2013). However, these studies often insufficiently combine empirical results and theoretical background (Otte, 2008) and seem decoupled from analyses of social inequality.

In this article, we therefore focus on how gender and social class are constructed and entwined via lifestyles. We offer a conceptual framework for researching the interrelation of

these constructs and suggest categories for empirical research. Our starting points are various approaches for analysing these constructions, for example, the “doing-gender” approach in gender research and the lifestyle approach in inequality research.

According to the doing-gender approach (West and Zimmermann, 1987), gender relations are not biologically determined but socially construed. Gender is actively constructed, perpetuated, reproduced, and displayed in daily activities and interactions and in family relations as well as other spheres of life. “Undoing” gender on the other hand reduces gender differences by not perpetuating gender stereotypes in interactions (Deutsch, 2007).

Doing (and undoing) gender can be considered one aspect of a person’s habitus (i.e., the sum of their behavioural patterns, routines and preferences, and social behaviour), which in turn means that (un)doing gender is linked to a person’s social milieu and lifestyle. The phenomenological approach to lifestyles (which we promote in this paper) aims at grasping meaning and shared knowledge (semantics) and showing how they influence people’s behaviour (pragmatics). In this vein, lifestyles are defined as collective orientations, norms, and values that manifest in dispositions for organizing everyday life as well as interpreting the symbolic meaning of events in a certain way (Schulze 1996). In lifestyle research, the relationship between gender and lifestyles is well known. For example, Bourdieu (1984) refers to the relation of gender and habitus as a structural category describing the division of labour between men and women, which basically structures societies. This structure implies a hierarchy that is unconsciously accepted and perpetuated through the predominant binary concept of gender in socialization and society by doing gender.

## **2. What are Lifestyles?**

### **2.1 Lifestyles as a Way of Horizontal Stratification**

The debate on lifestyles arose from the empirical observation that since World War II, Western societies have become increasingly diversified and individualized (Beck, 1992). These developments contributed to the creation of new mechanisms of social inequality (Jarness, 2016). Notwithstanding some remaining structural constraints, modern societies offer people increased choices for who they want to be and how they want to live. As different people make different choices, this results in what is called “horizontal disparities” (Zerger, 2000),



that is, very different patterns of everyday lives. This development in turn means that theoretical models of vertical stratification and class have decreased in predictive power (Beck, 1992; Giddens, 1984).

As a consequence, social scientists developed milieu and lifestyle concepts to account for these horizontal disparities. These concepts do not preclude the continued existence of structural constraints and vertical stratification, but they argue that theoretical concepts *additionally* need to consider individuals' values, preferences, and tastes as well as resulting patterns of consumption, leisure time activities, and aesthetics in order to fully understand social stratification (Jarness, 2016; Spellerberg 1996). In other words, lifestyle research shifted the focus from availability of (financial) resources to the use of resources. Unlike social stratification concepts, milieu and lifestyle concepts thus broaden the perspective to include subjective factors, people's choices, and their role in generating distinction.

The theoretical debate on lifestyles typically starts from Bourdieu (1984), who developed a theory combining class, social fields, and habitus with reference to the importance of social background, attitudes, and evaluative patterns. Lifestyles are typically defined as collective orientations, norms, and values that manifest in dispositions for organizing everyday life as well as interpreting the symbolic meaning of certain events in a specific way (Schulze, 1996). Lifestyles can be conceptualized as the sum of behavioural patterns in everyday aesthetical episodes in all spheres of social life (e.g., work, family, and leisure time) (Noller and Georg, 1994; Pokora, 1994; Schulze, 1996). This conceptualization means that lifestyles are a group-specific way of living and interpreting life, manifest in patterns and routines of organizing everyday life, and contribute to identity construction, meaning making, and self-presentation. So-called aesthetics in everyday life are used to indicate distinction from some groups and affiliation with others. In other words, social status is no longer ascribed but people express their belonging to a specific social group symbolically via everyday practices. Lifestyle is therefore a product of biographical interaction of an individual with their environment and contributes to one's identity alongside perceived social barriers and distinction (Spellerberg, 2014).

## **2.2 Decouplement of Lifestyle and Social Class, Formation of Social Milieus**

The lifestyle debate attracts many different theoretical approaches, but it basically encompasses two problems. The first point of debate is to what extent social class and lifestyles are decoupled (Schnierer, 1996). The second one is the distinction between phenomenological and action theoretical approaches which will be addressed later.

Some authors tend to reduce lifestyles to a form of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984; Peterson and Kern, 1996), thus not completely independent from economic capital. From this perspective, lifestyles and social class are considered to be only partially independent. Lifestyles are an essential mechanism in reproducing social inequality (Bennett et al., 2009; Chan and Goldthorpe, 2007). An example would be people eating raw oysters and drinking French wine, regardless of whether they particularly like them, in order to demonstrate that they can afford such items and thus signal their higher status.

In a more holistic concept of lifestyles, lifestyles are not reduced to a form of cultural capital but are rooted in a person's identity and manifest in behaviour. These approaches go beyond lifestyles as means of distinction in the social hierarchy. Instead, lifestyles are assumed to be partially independent from social stratification or class structure (e.g., Hörning and Michalilow, 1990; Otte and Rössel, 2012; Richter, 2006; Schulze, 1996). Then, a person's lifestyle is not determined by their social class and defined by others because of social pressure, but a person may choose their lifestyle themselves in order to express their identity without any power struggles or aims at establishing a position in the social pecking order (Lamont and Fournier, 1992; Schulze, 1996). As both external and internal orientation might result in the same behaviour (e.g., eating raw oysters), it is not enough to analyse people's actions; one also needs to take into account people's sense-making, that is, the reasons why they are doing what they are doing (Schulze, 1996).

One problem individuals face is complexity arising from increased choices: How do I choose? And how do I signal to others why I made this choice, and what it says about my identity? To simplify the complexity, people interact with particular others on a regular basis and thus create social circles. Within these social circles, people develop common concepts about what is important in life. People also develop codes what specific behaviour means. For example, does eating raw oysters mean that a person has distinguished tastes or likes novel food experience—or is it considered rather snobbish? After interactively having constructed

these codes of meaning, people orient their behaviour towards each other, and in doing so, form a social milieu (Schulze, 1996). People belonging to a milieu share certain values, develop a mutual understanding, and therefore interpret behaviour similarly (Schulze, 1996). Thus, although lifestyles and social milieus are not the same, but people within the same milieu will share similar lifestyles (Mochmann and El-Menouar, 2005) because they use them as codes for signalling meaning. Patterns of everyday behaviour become visible characteristics of individuals, signal belonging, and create symbolic boundaries (Jarness, 2016). However, this formation of social milieus is neither easy nor self-evident because the correspondence between values and action can be rather loose and highly context specific (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975). The same actions can express different meaning. Likewise, the same values can lead to different behaviour.

### **2.3 Behaviour and Meaning-Making**

Theoretical approaches to lifestyles can be distinguished in respect to the stance they take towards the relation between behaviour (pragmatics) and meaning-making (semantics).

*Action theoretical approaches* to lifestyles focus on the interaction of everyday activity patterns and social practices with social inequality. They argue that people's everyday lives are neither fully determined by social structure nor arbitrary. Notwithstanding some leeway, individuals tend to follow routes outlined by their resources and social stratification (Otte, 2008). These approaches to lifestyles illustrate *how* lifestyles differ between social groups. However, action theoretical approaches cannot sufficiently explain *why* these social groups differ in the way they do or why behaviour sometimes changes very fast and in a seemingly arbitrary way.

*Sociology of knowledge (or phenomenological) approaches to lifestyles* as proposed by German sociologists such as Schulze (1996) argue that not actions as such but rather collective meaning ascribed to these action determines lifestyles (Hitzler, 1994; Zifonun, 2014). On a semantic level, people have a certain idea of what constitutes a "good life," which is condensed in the so-called *aesthetic schemata of everyday life* ("Alltagsästhetische Schemata"), which in turn result in specific practices (Schulze 1996). In other words, values are the underlying structure that guides our behaviour (not vice versa). Daily routines and lifestyles as

behavioural patterns can be considered manifestations of these values (Spellerberg, 2014) — if one considers these values, seemingly arbitrary (changes of) actions become explainable patterns. We will focus on in this phenomenological approach in the following sections. We find it particularly useful for researching the interrelation of lifestyle and gender.

## **2.4 Distinction and Modernity as Major Dimensions of Lifestyle and Social Milieu**

Because of the context specificity of the shared knowledge, it is logical that both the aesthetic schemata of everyday life and the associated practices change over time (Flemmen et al., 2017) and vary spatially (Spellerberg, 2012). For example, eating a lot of meat was a modern practice in post-war Germany. Today it signals a traditional taste in food, whereas being vegetarian or vegan is considered modern. In contrast, being vegetarian indicates a traditional lifestyle in India and Southern Europe (Montanari and Ipsen, 1994). Thus, an empirical question is whether and how lifestyles and social milieus can be systematized—and classifications may vary historically and spatially. For example, in Germany, empirical evidence strongly suggests that social milieus can be classified along a vertical and a horizontal dimension (Schulze, 1996; Otte, 2008). These dimensions are still loosely linked to traditional concepts of social inequality (Spellerberg, 2014) because an actor's placement in the social structure enables and constrains their options for certain lifestyles (e.g., due to differing degrees of financial resources, time, and knowledge). Nevertheless, actors retain some freedom to invest their resources in different lifestyles.

*Vertically*, people's practices express social distinction. Thus, lifestyles are structured by the *level of accoutrement* ("*Ausstattungs niveau*") or "*distinction*" (Otte, 2008), which strongly correlates with *social class* and respective measurement indicators such as education, occupational prestige, and income (Müller-Schneider 1996). Examples for German highbrow culture are eating out, reading books and nationwide newspapers, and visiting museums and art galleries (Otte, 2008, Otte and Baur, 2008).

*Horizontally*, lifestyles seem to vary concerning *modernity* ("*Modernität*"). In Germany, for example, traditionally oriented people are generally more religious and hold on to family traditions, and their leisure activities are centred on the home. In contrast, going out a lot, travelling, and having a busy life are signs of a more modern lifestyle (Otte and Baur, 2008;

Otte, 2008). Evidence from international research suggests that lower socioeconomic status tends to be associated with more traditional gender ideologies<sup>1</sup> (Sullivan, 2006; Usdansky, 2011).

### 3. Gender and Lifestyle

We now illustrate how this concept of lifestyles and social milieus can help in analysing gender relations. As mentioned above, lifestyle research is mostly blind to gender differences. Furthermore, gender studies and lifestyle research are hardly related (Baur and Akremi, 2012), notwithstanding research on specific aspects understood as parts of lifestyle, such as health-related lifestyles, sports, leisure time use, commuting behaviour, residential preferences, consumption, and travel preferences from a gender perspective. A more holistic perspective on lifestyle not only focused on one sphere of life, hardly accounts for gender differences. Yet, gender is present in all social relationships. On the one hand, lifestyles can project a gender role and construct gender. Gender-specific lifestyles reproduce, develop gender identities, and represent the gendered self. Doing or undoing gender expresses not only gender identity but also lifestyle. On the other hand, gender specific experiences seem to structure lifestyles (Georg, 1996). Many areas of life have a clear “male” or “female” connotation, even in areas in which both sexes act. One gender might conduct specific activities more frequently or differently and maybe for different reasons. We notice these gender differences in almost any area of life—for example, choice of profession, consumption, health care, body care, childcare, housework, and leisure time activities like sports or reading.

#### 3.1 Gender Composition of the Social Milieus: Individuals and Households

Although it is an individual who lives a lifestyle, a lifestyle appears as a homogeneous behavioural pattern on the *couple level* (Klocke et al., 2002), and even if intimate partners stem from different social milieus, their lifestyles typically converge over time. Partners have to

<sup>1</sup> The term “traditional gender ideologies” is used for convenience, although the norm of distinct spheres for men and women is comparatively recent and more applicable for white middle-class families than for other groups (Barnes, 2008).

coordinate their daily routines and patterns of consumption, and thus men's lifestyles have implications in women's lives and vice versa (Chesley, 2011; Miller, 2011). Furthermore, different household constellations allow for different degrees of freedom in designing a lifestyle (Chesley, 2011; Shows and Gerstel, 2009). Hence, the relation of gender and lifestyle has to be analysed on a household rather than on an individual level. Perspectives and interpretations of partners should be triangulated for a better understanding of sense-making and dynamics within the relationship (Dekovic and Buist, 2005; Reczek, 2014; Zartler, 2010).

This assumption has conceptual implications: First, a person's lifestyle is not solely determined by their individual choices but is also a result of negotiation, compromise, and conflict between partners. "Micro politics" of intentions and practices within a relationships (Miller, 2011) and issues of conflict, power, and control in social relations transcends explanations of doing and undoing gender only at the level of individual practices of agency (Davis and Greenstein, 2013; Fox, 2009).

Second, developing a shared understanding of what it means to be male or female is an important factor for partnership stability. Keddi (2003) has shown that men and women in stable partnerships develop a common long-term life perspective that can be unconscious but serves as a kind of blueprint for organizing everyday life. For example, "family-orientated" couples emphasize founding a family, while both partners in "career-orientated" couples focus on their careers and children are secondary. These different life perspectives in turn result in different ways of doing (and undoing) gender. Although partners in stable relationships share the same values, tasks can be assigned differently. It can even be an integral part of a life theme that men and women take on different tasks. For example, family-orientated couples consider men and women equal but complementary. This outlook typically results in *both* partners agreeing that the man should be the breadwinner and the woman should take care of family and household. The career-orientated couples focus on their careers. They do not necessarily want children—but if they do have children, it is typically considered the woman's task to look after them (Keddi 2003).

This situation stresses the point made earlier. Lifestyle analyses have to consider symbolic meaning and practices because (a) different meanings may result in different social practices (e.g., family orientation vs. double-orientation); (b) the same social practices may be associated with different meaning (e.g., family orientation and career orientation), and (c)

we might find very small gender differences in some milieus (e.g., double-orientation) but large gender differences in other milieus (e.g., family orientation).

### **3.2 Doing Gender as Part of the Distinction between Social Milieus**

To summarize the discussion so far, although many actions are gendered, only a few everyday routines seem to be consistently ascribed to men or women across all social milieus. In other words, although gender differences *could* be similar across all milieus, empirical evidence shows that many gender differences occur in specific social milieus only. Baur and Akremi (2012) therefore suggest that—in addition to comparing male and female daily practices and the gender distribution of lifestyles—it is theoretically promising to view *gender* itself as an essential mechanism of *distinction between social milieus*:

A social milieu is (amongst other things also) defined by the value and position it ascribes to both genders (Bourdieu, 1984). Values and norms might differ regarding gender role expectation, or images of masculinity and femininity, as indicated by Keddi's (2003) analysis of life themes or Usdansky's Gender-Equality Paradox (2011). As a result, the organization of daily lives is more or less gender-specific depending on the milieu affiliation (Bourdieu 1984; Chesley 2011; Gerstel and Clawson 2014). Constructions of gender are an integral part of a lifestyle.

In contrast to the relation between lifestyles and social milieu, the relation between lifestyles and gender is only partially understood. Lifestyle research suggests that the two dimensions of lifestyles—modernity and distinction—might be related to gender and hegemonic masculinity. Gender studies also show differences in doing and undoing gender depending on social class, however, generally on specific behaviours like parenting (Gerstel and Clawson, 2014). Also, there are multiple masculinities that are created by class and occupation (Shows and Gerstel, 2009).

Baur and Akremi (2012) argue that on the *horizontal modernity axis of social milieus*, “modern” social milieus semantically oppose hegemonic masculinity, whereas “traditional” social milieus strongly support it. Thus, along the modernity axis, milieus vary in the orientation towards the breadwinner–housewife model. Milieus can be categorized as three types: tra-

ditional, familialistic, and individualized (Koppetsch and Maier, 2001). The *traditional milieus* replicate hegemonic masculinity to achieve distinction. In this endeavour both men and women collaborate, resulting in the milieu's dominant semantics being ritual patriarchy. In contrast, the *familialistic milieus'* semantics are familialism, and the line of conflict lies between the strictness of the distinction of separate spheres. Finally, the *individualized milieus* are oriented towards partnerships but struggles between their own modern semantics and traditional pragmatics (Koppetsch and Maier, 2001)<sup>2</sup>.

On the *vertical distinction axis*, milieus with a high level of accoutrement affirm hegemonic masculinity via gender practices, and thus marginalize the milieus with low levels of accoutrement. In the traditional milieus, men and women thus take complementary roles in the struggle for status. Men aim for high income and prestigious employment, while women demonstrate social status through consumption and participation in highbrow culture, resulting in a very "traditional" household division of labour.

#### **4. Analyzing the Relation between Gender and Lifestyle**

When applying this model of vertical and horizontal distinction of milieus and lifestyles in relation to hegemonic masculinity, it becomes clear that employment (paid work) still plays a crucial role in the construction of gender and lifestyles, but for different reasons than in the past. It does not externally define people's gender and class. Instead, in the course of meaning-making, it becomes a reference point for social construction. Consequently, employment can also have completely different meanings depending on context. On the modernity axis of milieus, gender practices relate employment to the household division of labour (care work, housework). On the vertical axis of social milieus, the gendered division of employment and consumption/leisure practices expresses social distinction. The relation of employment and male honour/violence seems to cross-link the two axes. What exactly do we mean by this?

<sup>2</sup> However, discursive practices in the individualized milieus could often just be semantics and practices can look completely different and thus not fundamentally different to traditional milieus when it comes to men's and women's practices.



#### 4.1 Employment and Household Division of Labour: Expressing Modernity

Many studies in gender and family research focus on how couples do gender by sharing employed and care work (Davis and Greenstein 2013), and the relation of employment and the household division of labour seems to be particularly well-suited to analysing how gender practices are linked to the horizontal dimension of milieus (modernity).

Since the 1970s, women have increasingly entered the labour market, and since the 1990s, men have taken on more care and housework (Blossfeld and Drobnic, 2001; Gershuny, 2000). However, not all social milieus were equally affected. For example, in conservative German social milieus, *both* genders typically view men's and women's roles as complementary and aim at a male breadwinner/female homemaker model. In modern social milieus, men and women are perceived as being equal, and partners aim at equal task sharing: Both partners should be employed and do housework and care work (Koppetsch and Maier, 2001; Keddi, 2003). Similar findings were obtained by Sullivan (2011) for the United States and Britain, where "men in dual-earner couples with lowest levels of educational attainment have disproportionately increased their contributions to housework over the past 20 years." At the same time, women with the highest educational attainment showed the steepest decline in performance of housework. However, regarding child care, women and men with high educational attainment had the greatest increase in time spent for child care. Thus, trends in housework and child care were opposing, and the intersection of gender and educational attainment documents different process of social change for housework and child care: "In the case of men's housework, we may be seeing evidence for a diffusion effect permeating through the socioeconomic strata, whereas in the case of child care for both women and men, there is evidence for a continuing widening of the socioeconomic gap" (Sullivan, 2013, 82). Even in modern households, specific tasks are connoted as male or female or at least contested terrain, despite a desire to share paid and unpaid work particularly in milieus with higher levels of distinction (Usdansky, 2011).

However, it is not necessarily that case that conservative orientations with a preference for traditional family roles are from lower strata while "modern" equal orientations can be found in higher social strata. Referring to the fact that same practices may be associated with different meanings (or vice versa), it could also be the case that lower income families practice a dual-breadwinner model – but not because of gender equality but rather out of

economic necessities. Likewise conservative approaches to family life and gender roles can be found in higher social strata but the meaning they ascribe to it and how they legitimize it varies. This underlines the need for analyzing semantics as well as pragmatics.

#### **4.2 Employment and Leisure Time/Consumption: Expressing Distinction**

Although a lot of research exists on the household division of labour and thus on the horizontal modernity axis of social milieus, research on the interrelation of paid work, consumption, and leisure practices is rare. Regardless, it seems essential when analysing gender and lifestyles because it refers to the vertical distinction axis of milieus. Authors as early as Veblen (1899) have stressed that social distinction is constituted through both consumption and production. A high status can only be achieved through employment with a high income and prestige and through demonstrations of this status via consumption. Consumption and production, leisure time, and care and work are not only important aspects of lifestyles, they are also interrelated, sometimes even blurred, when a specific activity could be leisure or work.

Although high income is necessary for *social distinction*, a person's social class, economic capital, and income cannot be directly observed. Instead, social distinction is achieved by displaying social status, for example, via eating behaviour, consumption of sophisticated goods, and participation in highbrow culture, social networks, and "appropriate" leisure activities (Bourdieu, 1984; Schulze, 1996; Veblen, 1899). As lower classes aspire to the consumption and leisure practices of higher classes, the latter constantly change theirs to maintain distinction between classes. Thus, consumption and leisure practices themselves change over time and vary spatially (Elias, 2000; Flemmen et al., 2017).

Although systematical empirical analyses of the interrelation of employment, care, leisure time, and consumption are scarce, abundant indirect empirical evidence shows that this relationship exists and is strongly gendered. There is vast empirical evidence for deeply *gendered consumption and leisure practices* (Bihagen and Katz-Gerro, 2000; Lizardo, 2005; Tomlinson, 2003). In fact, social practices are a major means of constantly re-asserting gender differences in daily interactions and—similar to the household division of labour—these practices are gendered in different ways. These social practices are obviously both linked to *gender and social class*.

Although gender and family research have often focused on the relationship between employment and homemaking, lifestyle research mostly deals with consumption and leisure time. A comparison of these debates reveals that they apparently both relate at least implicitly to employment, but employment has different meanings. When contrasted with homemaking, paid work is a specific (traditionally male) way of taking care of the family, stressing that “modern” men can also find other ways of taking care of their family without endangering their masculinity (e.g., by changing diapers). In contrast, in the context of consumption, employment is necessary for achieving the income necessary for buying consumer goods and also for producing these goods.

Employment explains why gender and social class are linked via consumption and leisure practices. During industrialization, men were assigned to the sphere of production—thus being responsible for expressing social status via income, occupational prestige, and a successful career. Women were assigned to the sphere of consumption—expressing social status via consumption of sophisticated goods, participation in highbrow culture, social networks, and “appropriate” leisure activities (Kocka, 1990; Kolbe, 2002; Schütze, 1991). These links between (a) employment and masculinity and (b) consumption and femininity were reaffirmed and strengthened after World War II. Even today, women’s employment is often still considered as contributing additional income rather than providing the main income (Baur and Luedtke, 2008).

Despite the importance of this link between gender, class, employment, and consumption, hardly any theoretical integration or systematic empirical research exists on this (Baur and Akremi, 2012). Current lifestyle research typically investigates consumption or leisure practices (without linking them to employed work or theoretically to gender research). Gender research focuses on the household division of labour (neglecting consumption and leisure practices). Both debates could benefit from a sociological approach towards lifestyles that integrates gender practices and class because the distinction between production and consumption is related to gender practices (Baur and Akremi, 2012; Behnke, 1997).

### **4.3 Employment and Male Honour: Expressing Hegemonic Masculinity**

So far, we have argued that the interrelation of employment and the household division of labour correlates with modernity (horizontal axis of milieus) and that the interdependence

of employment and consumption/leisure time practices refers to social distinction (vertical axis of milieus). Additionally, strong arguments exist that gender practices relating employment to male honour and violence link the horizontal and vertical axes with each other.

According to gender studies, men aim at hegemonic masculinity by achieving power and prestige. In doing so, they marginalize men with less power (Connell, 1995). This marginalization corresponds with the *vertical axis of social milieus*. Social prestige can be gained by male gender practices such as protecting the family and society against internal threats (e.g., through employment as a police officer or firefighter) and external threats (e.g., through military service); by representing the family to the outside world (e.g., through politics), and by being economically successful and thus financially providing for the family (Baur und Luedtke, 2008).

Referring to the *horizontal axis of social milieus*, not all men are equally oriented towards hegemonic masculinity. Research on sociology of deviance suggests that modern social milieus semantically oppose the concept of hegemonic masculinity, whereas traditional social milieus strongly support it; that is, especially traditional men strongly emphasize male honour (Kersten, 2003) and consider, for example, domestic violence legitimate. However, sociology of masculinity also points to alternative, noneconomic, and nonviolent means of gaining power and prestige, namely to excel in other social spheres such as sports and technological knowledge (Jösting, 2008). In particular, domestic violence seems to be independent from economic factors (Lamnek et al., 2012; Vogl and Krell, 2012). In addition, certain forms of violent behaviour (e.g., duelling, military service) are “respected” at least in some milieus or in some historical times and cultures, whereas other forms are deemed unacceptable (Garbarino and Bradshaw, 2002).

However, these links between lifestyle, gender practices, and violence/honour are a research void. Using the theoretical model of lifestyles, we expect gender practices to vary mainly according to the axis is modernity, resulting in three milieus: the traditional, the familialistic, and the individualized. These milieus differ in their orientation towards hegemonic masculinity. We also assume that only the *traditional milieu* fights for distinction—which in relation to gender practices means fighting for hegemonic masculinity. In this endeavour both men *and* women collaborate, resulting in the milieu’s dominant semantics being ritual patriarchy. In contrast, the *familialistic milieu’s* semantics are familialism, and

the line of conflict lies between the strictness of the distinction of separate spheres. Finally, the *individualized milieu* is oriented towards partnerships, but it struggles with its own modern semantics and traditional pragmatics.

## 5. Conclusion

It is a well-known problem that people are not utterly predetermined by social structure and the relation between gender and class is not as clear-cut as it first seems: “Almost two decades ago, Wright, Shire, Hwang, Dolan, and Baxter (1992) argued that popular images of the macho working-class man contrasted with the ‘egalitarian and enlightened yuppie who cooks elegant meals and pushes a stroller in the park’ were misleading because ‘location within the class structure is not a very powerful or systematic determinant of variations in the gender division of labour across households’ (p. 276). Today, it is still the case that the positive association between social class and gender-egalitarian behaviour is neither as strong nor as consistent as might be expected given marked social-class differences in attitudes” (Usdansky, 2011, 167).

The approach presented in this article offers new perspective on this problem by stressing that it is not (only) external pressures but people who define by their choices who and what they are. We therefore suggest a shift from merely analysing behaviour (pragmatics) to analysing how meaning-making (semantics) influences behaviour. Linking behaviour (pragmatics) with meaning ascribed to this behaviour (semantics) allows researchers to make sense of milieu-specific gendered lifestyles. Analyses have to go beyond merely analysing either the workplace or the family and take a more holistic approach to lifestyles that also accounts for other spheres of social life, such as leisure time and consumption, and systematically links the analysis of all these spheres of life. This approach could extend the explanatory power for social inequality and gender differences because it does not only focus on paid and unpaid work in families, on parenting, or on specific aspects of lifestyle (e.g., health, consumption, eating). Rather, it integrates family, gender, and lifestyle research.

These approaches also stress that meaning-making is highly context and culture specific and may change over time. This perspective offers a more open stance to intersectional analyses; who organizes their everyday life and how and why are empirical questions. Other empirical questions pertain to which dimensions of social inequality are relevant and/or

dominant in a specific context and if and how they are interwoven. For example, in some situations and contexts, gender might be the main issue, as our analysis of the household division of labour and how it connects work and family life illustrates. In other contexts, social class might be more important. For example, in the fields of consumption and leisure time, the main issue is often expressing one's distinction from other classes. Finally, in other contexts, gender and class might be interwoven, as our analysis of male honour and violence has shown.

This article also points to directions future research should take. Limitations of the model presented here are that it is based primarily on research studying Western cultures, White individuals, and heterosexual couples. Non-Whites or lesbian and gay people may hold different views, "reflecting racially and ethnically distinctive experiences of work and family" (Usdansky, 2011, 174). These limitations suggest several avenues for future research. In future research and theory construction, an integrative model should more systematically link analyses of work, family, and other spheres of life and focus on cross-cultural comparisons of similarities and dissimilarities in lifestyles and doing gender. Future research also needs to determine whether this model can be transferred to other cultural contexts.

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