In this paper I will present the results of my dissertation thesis (2003). I will give a short overview about the empirical data, the objective and about the methodological and analytical proceeding. Further I will present first readings on adolescent girls’ discussions about gender and the norm of heterosexuality as well as some reflections on practical pedagogical work with girls in schools.

1 Material and Objective
My empirical data are video recordings I took in a girls group I instructed. It was a mandatory elective class in a comprehensive middle school in Bremen/ Germany which met for two hours a week. The group consisted of seven girls (sixth grade, age eleven to twelve). During the term of 1997/98 the girls produced their own video film called „Girl Power“, based on a script they had collectively devised. The video recordings consist of the 35-minute-film as well as observation clips of the actual interactions between the girls during the making of the video. Those clips amount to about 20 hours of film.

My main thesis is, following the german sociologist Karin Flaake, that adolescence is a biographical phase, in which corporeality and sexuality become the central issues. At the same time social norms and social definitions of womanhood have an enormous impact on girls.

The objective of the study is to develop parameters for the analysis of adolescent girls’ interaction and communication within their female peer group, with special regard to the social ideas of gender, femininity, masculinity, and homo- and heterosexuality that the girls refer to, as well as the ideas and images which they develop during the process of their discussions and in the videofilm itself. The analysis focuses on the implications of gender and the connected norm of heterosexuality on individual processes of socialization and the development of a gendered self-image in adolescent girls. Both the interaction among the girls and the socializational influence of their interaction with the group’s instructor are of interest.

Theoretical referents of the study are current sociological discussions concerning the cultural/symbolic system of gender (lit. ‘Zweigeschlechtlichkeit’, two-genderedness) in which the norm of heterosexuality (heterocentrism) is explicitly included.

In an ethnomethodological view heterocentrism and commonplace theories about gender are instruments for the construction of reality and the rendering of social reality. They are understood as instruments of everyday action and interaction because they allow both an allocation of people to one or the other sex, and the construction of heterosexuality as an unquestionable and self-evident reality. To refer to the ethnomethodological view of doing gender doesn’t mean to neglect the authenticity of emotions and bodily experiences. It means that a sociological view on affection must take into account that expressions of authentic feelings make use of cultural codes. Those codes allow people to experience these feelings as reality.
2 Methodological and analytical proceeding

Empirical studies on youth rarely concentrate on what they are trying to analyse: the every-day-life of young people and the collective practices founding it. Instead, many well known german studies are methodologically based on reconstructing descriptions of every-day practices, using interviews, questionnaires or ethnographical notes. This means they do not analyse the every-day practices themselves. Most studies concentrate on contents and ignore the formal and functional organisation of young peoples' every-day practices, although it is well known that communication and interactive practices constitute and reproduce youth cultures. Goodwins study of 1990 has demonstrated, what can be gained for sociological perception by detailed linguistic research. Therefore it seems to be useful to use conversation analysis as a main tool for ethnography, and on the other hand to extend the classical conversation analysis with regard to aspects of content, as in Lorenzers' Tiefenhermeneutik, a method designed to analyse unconscious subtexts in conversations or other data.

The girls’ activities within the group have been documented on video tape, transcribed and then, in a first step, analysed using an ethnomethodological approach to the construction of social reality, the method of conversation analysis. Following this perspective, I analyse the regularities in the girls’ use of instruments for the construction of reality. My questions are, e.g.: what kinds of social relationship patterns do the girls establish, which topics do they choose, how are these embedded in the interaction, which styles of speech do they use, and what kind of interactive patterns are noticeable. Since it lies in the nature of commonplace phenomena and everyday self-evidences that they don’t have to be explicitly alluded to, the analysis will give special attention to the unspoken and the absence of action in social interaction.

Using conversation analysis, the question of how girls reproduce gender and the norm of heterosexuality within their interactions can be analysed very well. But in order to describe the social ideas girls refer to and the ideas, fantasies and wishes they develop, I decided to use a psychoanalytical proceeding to analyse the unconscious 'subtext' of expressions and interactions:

2.1 What is 'Tiefenhermeneutik'?

Tiefenhermeneutik refers to the critical rereading of Freuds Psychoanalysis, as done by Alfred Lorenzer (1986) in the german speaking context. Tiefenhermeneutik is based on concept of cultural systems of sense. Those systems provide frames for the perception and construction of subjective and social reality. Tiefenhermeneutik differentiates between the surface of experience and behaviour, which is intelligible to subjects, and such structures of sense which are not immediately open to everyday individual reflexion. As a method Tiefenhermeneutik follows certain regularities. The basis is the understanding of the text-reader-relation as an interaction. This means that we have no access to an 'original' text, only to its reception. The analysts' work is compared to the work of an archaeologist, who doesn't just concentrate on the surface but tries to find meaning beneath the first level of perception: the subtext of the text. The central category for the subtext of a text is the unconscious Lorenzer defines as the forbidden, wishes, which are in conflict with social norms and values of the current culture. The aim of the Tiefenhermeneutik is to reveal the hidden structures of sense. Of course there is not one subtext, but many. The analysis concentrates on the construction of probable, arguable readings on the basis of the text.

The analytical proceeding of Tiefenhermeneutik can be very briefly described in four steps:

1. Constant attentiveness and free association of ideas
   In the first step every kind of reading of the text is valid. Its aim is to put off the censorship of the every-day consciousness in order to uncover hidden phantasies, ideas and wishes.

2. Note confusions
   A first actual access to the subtext can be gained by looking at parts that seem illogical or irritating to the analyst. This approach uses the subjectivity and the feelings of the analyst, a proceeding that was adapted from the original psychoanalytic method of counter-transference in therapeutic relationships.

3. Scenic understanding
   Associations and confusions that appear in the discussion of the text can be described as tracks. Tracks themselves don't explain anything, they have to be linked with other tracks so that the analyst can develop an accountable scene or picture. There may be alternative pictures
or readings, which are acceptable as long as they can be verified on the basis of the text. To control the subjectivity of the analyst documented self-reflection and theoretical knowledge are used.

4. **Group-Validation**

The discussion of readings in a group of analysts is another way to control and correct the analysts' subjectivity and to make readings more probable.

It can be shown that there is a relation between what is said, what subtext is involved and how the intention is understood by the hearers. In my analysis I therefore switch between conversation analysis and the search for culturally determined subtexts.

As mentioned, in this context the analysts’ own constructions and re-constructions of social meaning must be taken into account.

Goffman's frame analysis has been very helpful for my research. In earlier studies I have been able to show how the conversational construction of the "elder brother" by adolescent girls can be analyzed as a means of establishing their understanding of gender and the norm of heterosexuality.

3  **Exemplary readings of the girls’ discussions**

The plot of the video film ‘Girlpower’ is about two quarreling girl-gangs: the "Black Outs" and the "Modern Girls". Especially in the first part of the film, the Black Outs represent what is commonly called ‘masculine’ behavior: they talk about ‘Gangsta Rap’ (a music style) and play Basketball, they wear cape sweat-shirts and trousers which are much too big. The "Modern Girls", reflect what is commonly called ‘female’ behavior: they use make-up, wear feminine clothes, they talk about boys they have a crush on and are enthusiastic about the Back Street Boys. One of the "Modern Girls" is being kidnapped and the "Black Outs" offer their help. Adults are not involved. The two gangs join efforts and successfully free the kidnapped girl from a mysterious black man. In the end they become friends and we can see all of them sitting together talking about boys and the Back Street Boys.

The video film has been discussed in several student groups. All of them agreed, that the way the two gangs free the kidnapped girl is not logical. The fact that in the end the Black Outs also take part in discussions about boys and Back Street Boys was recognized as a paradox. These are all indications of a subtext of the film. The kidnapping and the rescue of the girl is not the only story intended. The film documents the wide range of the girls’ phantasies about sexuality, including heterosexual as well as homoerotic phantasies.

The topic of heterosexuality is discussed on the basis of the cultural ideal of beauty. The Modern Girls are presented as objects of desire (here: objects of the kidnappers' desire). But the girls refer to the cultural icon of girlism that treats the ideal of beauty with irony and makes it possible to represent the Modern Girls as active and as subjects of their own desire. The topic of heterosexuality is extended to the aspect of romanticism, with the Modern Girls being fans of the Back Street Boys.

Referring to the module of Gangsta Rap the Black Outs can be seen as symbolizing the girls' construction of a connection between heterosexuality and violence. At the same time the Black Outs are associated with ideas of male-identified lesbianism.

All in all we can see that the girls, referring to different cultural meanings and readings of these meanings, develop their own system of meanings which symbolize different aspects of phantasies around the topic of sexuality. The girls switch between these meanings without letting themselves be fixed to one or the other position.

During the making of the video the girls only once discussed the gender of the kidnapper. One girl asked why the kidnapper had to be conceptualized as a man, when the real actor infact was a woman. I wrote a transcript of this sequence which was not longer than 45 seconds. With conversation analytical methods I analyzed that the introduction of the topic ‘gender’ through the question ‘why does the kidnapper have to be a man?’ was followed by co-operative non-establishment of the topic by the rest of the group. The fact that her question wasn’t answered, was in turn accepted by the asking girl. This would be the viewpoint of conversation analysis.

If we take the sexualized, or better: the hetero-sexualized subtext of the film into account, we understand that the girls refused to discuss this question. Since it lies in the nature of subtexts that they don’t have to be and sometimes can’t be explicitly alluded to, the subtext just wasn’t discussable. It
lies in the logic of the subtext, in which the black man symbolizes the girls' fantasies about heterosexuality as a threat, that there was no need to discuss the question: the kidnapper had to be a man and couldn't be a woman.

4 Reflections on practical pedagogical work with girls in schools

The foremost aim of pedagogical work with girls is to support them in finding ‘their own voice’ and to empower them to define themselves other than as subordinated and complementary (to males). In US-American feminist research on female adolescence, the term ‘desire’ is used to describe a girls' power to autonomously compose her relationships and her life and to create new patterns, thus refusing to adopt heterocentrism and the norm of heterosexuality.

In 1993 Elizabeth Debold and others wrote in their book ‘Mother-Daughter-Revolution’:

“Desire - wanting, lusting, craving, longing, needing in all and every way - is critical to women’s integrity and power. The power of desire is the root of woman’s power. Desire gives force to what she can and will do. It empowers her life and liveliness. Forbidding or compromising desire cuts off a girl’s life force.”

So far, my reflections on practical/pedagogical work with girls have shown that the instructor, when proceeding on the principle of giving space, has positive effects on the self-employed / self-empowering activities of girls. Girls use the space that is thus made available to them to construct and introduce their own ideas and concerns within the group. In the girls’ group, the idea for the videofilm, its story, contents and realization was essentially developed and determined by the girls themselves.

The realization of the film gave them the chance to discuss their fantasies in a face-saving way. And all that happened in an institution, in which the fantasies of adolescent girls normally are ‘tabu’. Therefore, I think it was an important experience for the girls, to be allowed to fill the space with their own fantasies, without being subjugated to official control by me, their instructor.

In action research the instructor/teacher is the researcher as well. In her pedagogical work with girls, her withdrawal from any decision-making-processes enables her to gain insights in the girls' ways of establishing meaning and understanding, which often substantially differ from the instructor’s expectations. This procedure demands a high degree of competence on the instructors part, especially at times when unplanned and unexpected situations arise.

In action research, self-reflective analyses must be taken into account, particularly because through her involvement with the group the instructor/researcher inevitably takes part in the process of constructing gender and the norm of heterosexuality. Ethnomethodology and conversation analysis as well as the psychoanalytical method of Tiefenhermeneutik are suitable to examine one’s own patterns of constructing and reconstructing social reality and may help in devising new perspectives.

References

Author
Dr. Kristina Hackmann
Carl von Ossietzky Universität Oldenburg
(Centre for interdisciplinary research on women and gender)
Fakultät 5, Institut für Mathematik
D-26111 Oldenburg
Germany
kristina.hackmann@uni-oldenburg.de