

CARE AS A HIGH-TENSION ZONE: INVESTIGATING THE AMBIVALENCES OF CARE IN THE MIDST OF THE PANDEMIC

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Abstract:

Tensions are a crucial concept in STS studies on care (Gill et al. 2017; Mol et al. 2010; Lindén/Lydahl 2021; López-Gómez 2020). Care unfolds tensions that need handling: tensions “between individual and collective needs” (Thygesen/Moser 2010: 137); between different values inscribed in care (Lydahl 2021: 116); between subjective experiences and objectivation practices (Pols 2012: 71); “between feeling safe and annoyed” (Wiedemann 2021: 50); “between the scales of policy and situated care practices” (Gill et al. 2017: 14); or “between taking control and being erratic” (Mol/Law 2004: 57). Even if something has worked well for a while, it may unexpectedly come into tension with something else or slip again, thus good care depends “on the carers’ ability to experiment with what can be done and to respond to the ever emerging frictions” (Thygesen/ Moser 2010: 138). Hence, in reference to Susan Leigh Star (1990) it is worth to conceptualize and analyze care more widely as a high-tension zone (Wiedemann/Grün 2021). Noting moments of ambiguity, ambivalence, conflict or struggle steers the focus away from a “charmed” image of care and helps to find a “critical stance toward the politics of care” (Murphy 2015: 3).

However, tensions in care settings mostly become visible through a long-term examination of the daily and mundane enactments of care – through the exploration of specific situations and temporalities, with specific knowledge, bodies and tools (Pols 2019). But how do we get to the zones of specificity in times of pandemic contact restrictions, lockdowns, and increased vulnerability? More-over, since the rise of the pandemic care has become even more tensional. New ethnographic themes and contexts of conflicts, frictions and ambivalences engender that must be documented and understood in new ways which demands new research tools, methodological inventions and cooperative work.

The panel is intended to provide a space for sharing experiences: experiences on the conceptualization of care as a high tensions zone, on the access to tensions in times of infectious sociality and the increase of tensions in pandemic settings of care, calling for a focus on the specific more than ever. Today, at the threshold of an unknown (post-)pandemic scenario, there is not only an urgent need to produce knowledge about those whose visions of better futures dominate public narratives but to reflect the complexity, uncertainty, and tentativeness of our present research routines and scientific politics. In doing so, we invite contributors from all kinds of disciplines working on tensions in the field of care and who are currently dealing or have been dealing with the following questions:

- How to empirically investigate tensions in (post-)pandemic times?
- How to make sense of empirical data collected before the beginning of the pandemic?
- How to collect empirical data on sociomaterial care arrangements in the midst of a pandemic?
- Which (new) practices of ethnographic inquiry have been emerged?
- How to the grasps radically changing logics and practices of care and how to reveal the persistent ones?
- How to theorize pandemic dynamics and tensions?
- How is exploring the high-tension zone a way to “take better care of how we care” (Martin et al. 2015: 631)?

This panel is thought to exchange experiences as well as to encourage cooperative work.

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