

• Vol. 1, No. 1 • 2021 • (pp. 228-244) •
www.istp-irtp.com

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7146/irtp.v1i1.127090>

Queering Kritische Psychologie: Intersections between Queer Feminist Approaches and German Critical Psychology

Lisa Malich

Institute for the History of Medicine and Science Studies, University of Lübeck, Germany

Tanja Vogler

Department of Gender Medicine and Diversity, Medical University of Innsbruck, Austria

Abstract

This paper aims at connecting the Berlin school of Critical psychology with queer feminist theories by focusing on the concept of condition-meaning-reason (Bedingungs-Bedeutungs-Begründungsanalyse, BBBA). To this end, we will first discuss basic aspects of the BBBA concept, which forms an important analytical tool of German Critical psychology. Second, we will present possible connecting lines to queer feminist approaches. In so doing, we will argue that the concept of conditions offers links to feminist theories of New Materialism and (Neo)Marxist Critique. The concept of meaning contains parallels to the Foucauldian concept of discourse, which is central to Butler's theories of performativity and various subsequent queer feminist schools of thought. In turn, the concept of reason provides an opportunity to understand why subjects who live in similar material conditions and social constellations of meaning act differently. The fictional example of single mothers serves to illustrate the facets of the BBBA concept and the condition/meaning/reason analysis. In this way, we want to emphasise the potential of Critical psychology for queer feminist approaches and break new ground methodologically by integrating the previously divergent insights of Marxist, poststructuralist and psychosocial critiques.

Keywords: Critical Psychology, Queer-feminism, Subject-science, Marxism, New materialisms

Psychology produces powerful knowledge that defines norms and establishes practices of subjectivity. As such, psychology can have restrictive and discriminatory effects – but at the same time, it has emancipatory potential. This dual perspective unites many critical psychologies, which problematize mainstream psychological knowledge production to transform psychology into a social justice approach (Malich & Balz, 2020; Nissen, 2020; Teo, 2012). Many queer feminist approaches share similar goals, since they situate scientific knowledge in political contexts, articulate social epistemologies and aim to expose discrimination (e.g. Butler, 1990). In this paper, we want to concentrate more thoroughly on the links between queer feminist theories and one specific early approach of critical psychology.

This endeavour has its roots in our own academic and political socialization. We are both psychologists who studied mostly at German-speaking universities, where critical approaches are marginal. If such approaches appear in psychology departments at all, they often take the form of reading groups on *Kritische Psychologie* (German Critical psychology) organized by students. We both have become familiar with German Critical psychology in such groups but our main theoretical starting point came from outside the discipline. Seeking approaches that reflect the link between scientific knowledge and politics while simultaneously identifying as feminists, we found our way to queer feminist studies. In this way, we grappled with the wide array of theories in this field that take into account social forms of producing gender and sexuality and which are mostly linked to what is known as postmodern theories (e.g., Butler, 1990; Nagoshi et al., 2013). In the following pages, queer feminist approaches will be the primary angle from which we evaluate which parts of German Critical psychology are useful to create a multidimensional and intersectional perspective on gender.

With the term German *Critical psychology*, we refer to the work of Klaus Holzkamp (1983) and Ute Holzkamp-Osterkamp (1975), which was mainly developed in Berlin from the 1960s and 1970s onwards (Osterkamp & Schraube, 2013). This approach is based partly on Marxist principles, with the synonymous term *subject-science* also used (Aumann, 2003; Markard, 2009; Teo, 1998). As *Critical psychology with a capital C* (or, with the German initial letter, *K*), it is distinguished from heterogeneous critical psychologies *with a lower case c* (or *k*) that exist especially in English-speaking contexts (Teo, 2005). Recently, a special issue in the *Annual Review of Critical Psychology* was dedicated to *Kritische Psychologie* (Marvakis et al., 2019). In this issue, Thomas Teo (2019) suggested adapting Holzkamp's work as an important instrument for critical and theoretical psychology, while also warning against remaining true to only one standard interpretation. As we will argue, Critical psychology can provide important methodological and heuristic tools for queer feminist approaches insofar as Critical psychology combines different perspectives. In particular, Critical psychology's threefold focus on semiotics, economic inequality, and on psycho-social realities can be useful for a queer feminist analysis. Conversely, queer feminist theories can add a more complex understanding of power, intersectional oppression, and material activity to Critical psychology.

Nevertheless, there are many contradictions and differences between the two approaches. From a queer feminist perspective in particular, several substantial arguments against naturalizing gender can be raised (Sieben & Kalkstein, 2015). In view of these problems, we will follow Teo's (2019) diffractive approach to Holzkamp and select key elements of Critical psychology that are more aligned with queer feminist approaches while also containing useful aspects for research.

Our starting point is the condition-meaning-reason analysis (*Bedingungs-Bedeutungs-Begründungs-Analyse BBBA*), which is a central methodological element of Critical psychological research. Although Holzkamp (1983) did not use BBBA's concrete combination of terms in his central book *Grundlegung der Psychologie (Laying the Foundations of Psychology)*, it became increasingly important in the research practice in the later period of German Critical psychology (Aumann, 2003; Markard, 2010). In the following sections, we will introduce the three individual components of BBBA and show possible connections to, and expansions by, queer feminist approaches. In so doing, we refer to some results of our past theoretical work presented in the German text *Critical psychology written with a lower case q* (Malich & Vogler, 2018), which we refine, elaborate, and situate in English-language theoretical contexts.

Conditions (Bedingungen)

In Critical psychology, conditions are understood as the entirety of circumstances that influence or enable life. These include fundamental and material conditions that apply to all living creatures, as well as conditions that are specific to human beings and affect individuals and the course of their lives. Even more specific are economic conditions that define the framework for human life in capitalist societies (e.g., unequal distribution of the means of production). In his book *Grundlegung (Foundation)*, Holzkamp repeatedly writes about “conditions” (1983, p. 79), which he occasionally also calls “conditions of existence” (p. 354). Correspondingly, terms such as these appear in almost all other works of Critical psychology, especially “living conditions” and “conditions” (e.g., Markard, 2009, p. 147 & p. 170).

Given such a central role and consistent mention, it may be surprising that the concept of conditions within Critical psychology has not been systematically defined. Instead of a definite and comprehensive definition, many representatives of Critical psychology emphasise that conditions are always socially mediated and linked to meanings, the second category of BBBA. Therefore, whenever the focus throughout this article is primarily on conditions, their interconnectedness with meanings should always also be considered. Although no exhaustive definition of this Critical-psychological concept can be given, two key elements of the concept of conditions will now be highlighted. These two dimensions shall be linked to two approaches which are currently relevant for queer and feminist research, namely (a) New Materialisms and (b) feminist (neo)Marxist critiques.

Linking Conditions to Queer Feminist Positions

(a) New feminist materialisms.

The first connecting element concerns the understanding of conditions as material conditions of the real world. In this sense, the term includes physical and material phenomena that can act on and in organisms. Such phenomena form the material framework for certain ways of existence, enabling or impeding life. This understanding of conditions becomes particularly clear in Holzkamp's treatises on natural history, in which he deals with the development of organisms based on the theory of evolution. In this context, he refers to basal environmental factors such as temperature or the presence of food, and how they interact with factors related to the organism, such as mobility or irritability. Holzkamp repeatedly uses the term *conditions* for environmental or organism-related factors. He

speaks here of “external world conditions that are independent of the organism” (Holzkamp, 1983, p. 72) or “external and internal conditions” (p. 64) that are effective inside and outside a living being.

The definition of conditions as material, embodied phenomena shares some points of connection with the approaches of the so-called New (Feminist) Materialisms. This theoretical orientation in gender studies, represented for example by Stacy Alaimo’s and Susan Hekman’s influential anthology (2008b), aims to complement the *linguistic turn* with a *materialist turn*. Instead of dealing exclusively with language, symbolic representations, discourses, and epistemologies, as many previous approaches in gender studies have done, these new materialisms seek to include the influence of materiality, things, bodies, and ontologies, resulting in a turn towards the material aspects of environment and organism. As a result, even categories or concepts that were previously criticised as essentialising, such as reality (Barad, 2003), biology (Wilson, 2008), evolution (Grosz, 1999) or nature (Alaimo & Hekman, 2008b), have undergone a partial rehabilitation and redefinition.

The study of materiality reveals a great proximity to the understanding of conditions in Critical psychology described above. In view of these considerations, we propose to integrate the concept of material conditions in Critical psychology into the theoretical frameworks of New Feminist Materialisms and to expand the concept of conditions particularly regarding two aspects. First, this entails not assuming material conditions to be passive and given, but to conceive them as active (Alaimo & Hekman, 2008a). This is the reason why key theorists of New Feminist Materialisms speak of the activity of material entities. Donna Haraway (1995) for example, describes things and bodies as actors, and Karen Barad (2003) similarly emphasises the *agency* of material phenomena. According to these distinct material feminist approaches, things and bodies are not simply conditions that can be modified and interpreted as desired but are capable of their own activities and interventions. Accordingly, things and body parts – from stones and shells to weather phenomena, microbes, or hormones – have a dynamic effect and can modify other things and bodies. Such a perspective on the activity of material conditions fits in with Holzkamp’s theory to some extent because he does indeed include the activity of the material in the evolutionary analysis of his *Foundations of Psychology* (1983). For example, he describes a mutual relationship between organism and the environment or speaks of material entities as “agents” (p. 71). However, the Critical psychology based on Marxist historical materialism strictly separates between human and nonhuman ways of being, focusing solely on the human capacity for action or subjectivity, which is in contrast with how New Feminist Materialisms conceptualize the activity of things. Thus, we propose a theoretical extension of the concept of condition, which includes the activity of both human and nonhuman entities.

Secondly, the integration of the concept of conditions into New Feminist Materialisms aims to avoid a dichotomous separation of nature and culture, material and discursive, or organic and technical. Instead, within this theoretical framework, it can be emphasised that such categories are always interwoven and entangled. This means that a material phenomenon can have an effect (e.g., a certain substance can have a hormonal effect on certain body organs) but to be able to examine, describe and classify such a substance (in this case, as a specific “hormone”), language is always necessary. This also requires symbolic practices, cultural techniques, tools, and social cooperation, which ultimately lead to the isolation and chemical identification of a hormone such as “prolactin,” for instance. Thus, the hormone “prolactin” is not only natural matter, but also always produced by society, shaped by

culture and described by language. To emphasise such constant interactions between the natural and the cultural world, Haraway (1995) coined the term *material-semiotic actors*. Similarly, Barad speaks of “material-discursive forces” (2003, p. 811) and uses the term *intra-action* instead of *inter-action* to grasp the inherent interconnectedness of the social and biological spheres. The assumption of such interconnectedness has many commonalities with the theoretical positions of Critical psychology, which offers the postulate that “human nature is social” (Holzkamp, 2012, p. 393). Accordingly, the use of tools and the socialization of these tools led to qualitative leaps in human evolution, through which people created their own living conditions, which in turn made nature and culture inseparable in the course of human history. While this derivation in Critical psychology may be different from that found in some of the approaches of New Feminist Materialisms, the line of thought is quite similar with an inherent overlap of natural and cultural, of technological and material categories. Against this backdrop, we argue for an understanding of conditions that highlights socio-natural entanglements and is aligned with the concept of material-semiotic actors.

(b) Feminist (neo)marxist critique.

The second possible link between Critical psychology and feminist approaches pertains to another conceptual dimension of conditions, namely the understanding of conditions as operating within a capitalist system. Holzkamp repeatedly writes about “capitalist conditions” (1983, p. 309) and strives to analyse them from a historical perspective oriented towards dialectic materialism. He explains that “the living conditions of human beings are neither natural nor accidental but possess system- and class-specific characteristics that have evolved in the socio-historical process” (1983, p. 42). Similarly, Markard declares “capitalism/capitalisms” (2009, p. 152) to be a central analytical reference point. According to Critical psychology, the social nature of human beings results in a dual relationship to conditions. On the one hand, people are subject to their living conditions and on the other hand, people produce their living conditions themselves and can potentially change them accordingly. However, a possible change is often prevented by social relations of power within the capitalist system. At the same time, capitalist structures lead to a situation in which the living conditions of people are characterised by unequal distribution of resources, class division, oppression, production of surplus value, and the associated exploitation of labour. Such differences result in “situation- and position-specific living conditions” for individuals (Holzkamp, 1983, p. 357), which are characterised by unequal access to economic resources.

This understanding of living conditions in Critical psychology as being shaped by economic factors can be reconciled with another school of thought in gender studies, namely queer feminist (neo)Marxist critiques. Under this term we understand feminist approaches loosely influenced by Marxist theory, but whose critique of capitalist conditions is *not* based on the primacy of class. Unlike Critical psychology and other Marxist theories, queer feminist (neo)Marxist critique do not play off a central class oppression against a supposedly secondary gender oppression. A key contribution to this school of thought is Nancy Fraser’s (1990) critique of how feminist politics tend to focus mainly on representation and discourse while neglecting pressing social issues. Partly referring to Fraser’s socialist feminist critical theory, there has been an increasing number of initiatives to develop queer feminist (neo)Marxist critiques (e.g., Federici, 2012; Hanafi El Siofi, Moos, & Muth, 2010).

A recurring theme across these heterogeneous feminist approaches is that another essential component of capitalist systems, in addition to the separation of workers from the means of production, is the division of the spheres of production and reproduction (e.g., Federici, 2018). Production refers to the activities in which goods or values are produced. Reproduction aims at maintaining one's own labour power and that of other people, including activities such as caring for children and family members or doing housework. While production work is paid, publicly acknowledged in societies, and is considered to be a traditionally male sphere, reproductive work is often invisible, usually done by women, and not (or only poorly) paid. Thus, queer and feminist (neo)Marxist critiques have tended to strongly emphasize questions of reproduction and care.

In addition, there is a focus on intersectional approaches that, instead of relying exclusively on the categories of class and gender, consider the interconnectedness of various conditions of power, such as those perpetuated by heteronormativity, homophobia, racism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism, or ableism (Crenshaw 1991). These aspects of feminist (neo)Marxist critiques, in particular the investigation of reproductive labour and intersectional perspectives, can also prove beneficial for a Critical psychological concept of capitalist living conditions, and help to integrate it into a queer feminist social analysis.

An Example of Conditions

We therefore propose to integrate Critical psychology's concept of conditions into queer feminist approaches in two ways: as material-semiotic actors and as economic conditions. As an example to illustrate the possibilities of such an integration, we chose single mothers (including, of course, trans*, intersex, non-binary and queer mothers) in contemporary Western societies, who are affected by specific possible living conditions. The first understanding of conditions is concerned here with physical and material aspects affecting some but not all, mothers. This sphere of somatic phenomena includes, for instance, the fact that only some organisms are capable of becoming pregnant, so that different mothers* might have different (biological and/or social) relationships with their children. Similarly, not all bodies can produce hormones like "prolactin," for instance, and produce milk that a baby can drink.

The second form of conditions – their conception as living conditions in capitalist societies – refers to the material, economic situation that the single parent status can entail for women at a structural level. In neoliberal societies, this status often means that mothers must be able to carry out both productive and reproductive labour. The challenge is further complicated by gender-specific disadvantages, such as a lack of affordable daycare in countries like Germany. Moreover, women with children have a much lower chance of getting a well-paid job than men with children, a situation that is even more pronounced for single parents. As a result, around a third of single mothers in German-speaking countries live below the poverty line, regardless of their education (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2010). In addition, material and economic conditions can intertwine: For example, a woman* who cannot breastfeed is dependent on the purchase of milk substitutes – whether and which ones can be bought depends on her financial situation. Overall, such a double understanding of conditions can serve as a heuristic instrument for intersectional queer feminist analysis, which encompasses multiple aspects of gendered lives. With regard to concrete research practices, one could use knowledge from the life sciences or socio-economic data (e.g., statistics on income and single parent status) and analyse both from the perspective of New Feminist Materialisms and (Neo)Marxist Critiques.

Meanings (*Bedeutungen*)

According to Holzkamp (1983, p. 348), conditions do not have an immediate effect on individuals, but are rather mediated through specific social structures of meaning. Therefore, meaning and meanings function as a “mediation category,” since “conditions” and subjective “reasons” are not mutually exclusive. In contrast to the concept of living conditions, there are more detailed descriptions of what is understood by meanings in the *Foundations of Psychology* (Holzkamp, 1983). Holzkamp distinguishes three levels of meanings: meanings of sensual orientation, meanings of work, tools and equipment, and general socio-cultural meanings. In the BBBA, the third level, that of socio-cultural meanings, is central. This third level shows proximity to Marxist notions of ideology and it also offers possibilities of linking it to the notion of discourse, insofar as social meanings are represented in and produced by “forms of thought and language” (1983, p. 233; see also Billmann, 2019).

A necessary component of research in the field of subject-science is to identify social structures of meaning (Markard, 2010, 170). We argue that by defining meanings or “meaning structures” (Teo, 2019, p. 112) as discourses (symbolic and semantic structures as well as linguistic elements) that are the product of social interactions, numerous links to queer feminist positions emerge which will be discussed in the following sections.

Linking Meanings to Queer Feminist Theory

In our framework, the social structures of meaning represented in language and symbol systems come very close to what is called, in line with Foucault (1972), discourse. Holzkamp himself makes partial reference to Foucault in *Lernen (Learning)*, his last major work published in 1993, ten years following the publication of *Foundations of Psychology* (1983). In *Learning*, Holzkamp states that the way in which Foucault analyses the historical formation of “school discipline” does indeed comply with his own ideas of “educational meaning structures” (Holzkamp, 1993, p. 347). Thus, in the early 1990s, Holzkamp established a connection between his concept of meaning and Foucault’s discourse-oriented work. Similarly, German feminist Critical psychologists link Foucault’s concept of the “apparatus” (or *dispositif*) to the “orders of meaning of gender relations” (Schmalstieg, 2006, p. 26).

A concept of meaning that is oriented towards discursive approaches, offers many opportunities to tie in with the well-known linguistic turn in queer feminist theories, which came to the fore primarily from the 1990s onwards. Foucault’s concept of discourse is an indispensable component in many approaches, with Judith Butler’s foundational *Gender Trouble* (1990) first and foremost. In this theoretical framework, gender and sex can be understood not as natural givens, but as a performative social-discursive categories.

But as tempting as it is to equate meaning and discourse—are they really the same concepts? On the one hand, there are major overlaps. Most obvious, of course, is that both concepts refer to symbolic systems and linguistic structures. Another common denominator between the notion of discourse and meaning structures is that both are grappling with socially regulated and produced knowledge, which at the same time represents the scope of action for subjects. Both approaches assume that subjects are shaped through meanings or discourses, but with different nuances. In Foucault’s work, discourses constitute subjects that behave accordingly and have the capacity to creatively generate new possibilities of being at the boundaries of discourse (Meißner, 2010, p. 132). Butler’s (1990) concept of

performativity is based on similar premises. While Foucault's and Butler's focus is on the constitution of subjects, Holzkamp (1983) focuses on the participation of the individual in creating the general scope of action, or in his words, the "social possibilities of life" (p. 193). But he also speaks about how "individual existence" or the subject develops and maintains itself within the general "social life possibilities" (Holzkamp, 1983). This mutual relationship between the individual and the world is, as mentioned above, mediated by meaning structures.

On the other hand, there are also sources of tension between the discursive approach and the concept of meaning. In particular, two key differences between the two schools of thought stand out: First the question of power and second the relationship between materiality and linguistic/semiotic systems. These two differences are detailed below. With regard to the first difference, it may be stated that both Holzkamp and Foucault give power relations a central role in their concepts but their definitions of power divert massively from each other. One of Foucault's well-known formulations concerns "power-knowledge complexes" (Shiner, 1982, p. 387). In his work, Foucault (1998) analyses specific discourses - for example, the discourses of sexuality - as "power-knowledge complexes." Holzkamp (1983) speaks of "domination" rather than power. In his work domination also plays a role in regard to meaning structures: According to Critical psychology, meanings shape social order and are dependent on dominant, ruling structures; meanings also limit the subjects' agency. However, the specific way in which subjects act in and on the basis of meaning structures contributes to the stabilisation or destabilisation of power relations (Holzkamp, 1983, p. 232f.). But in regard to the theoretical model of power, Critical psychology and discourse theory diverge. Holzkamp formulates a dichotomous understanding of power that follows Marxist notions of the ruling class and the exploited proletariat. As a result, he speaks of "class antagonism" and distinguishes between those who clearly "rule" (1983., p. 331), and those who are clearly "exploited" or "oppressed" (1983, p. 364). Foucault, on the other hand, is opposed to an understanding of power in the sense of repression and speaks of power relations that are both limiting and enabling, which he in turn delimits from a more narrowly defined concept of domination (Foucault, 1998). Holzkamp, who himself draws on Foucault's genealogical works several years later, certainly notes in this context that Foucault's complex understanding of power has a high explanatory value, "in that not just a simple effect is assumed here from 'above' to 'below'" (1993, p. 128). This possible twist in Holzkamp's power concept, which appeared in *Learning* (1993) two years before his death, did not receive much notice in his reception. In this respect, it was probably above all his *Foundations* (1983) that influenced the further development of theory and the spread of Critical psychology, including the idea of a Marxist concept of dichotomous power.

Second, the two approaches differ in terms of whether the discursive or the material is the focus. In discourse theory, the relationship between the material and the discursive usually amounts to a materialization of the discursive. Judith Butler, for example, emphasizes in *Bodies that matter: on the discursive limits of sex* (1993, p. 2) that the discursively produced norms of sex are materialized in the body. In Critical psychology, conceptualizations in this respect vary. For Holzkamp (1983), the meanings represented in language are initially of a material origin or a result from the social division of labour. Nevertheless, he sometimes transcends this clear division to a more complex formulation. In some parts of his work, Holzkamp criticises the dichotomisation of material and ideal as an "ideological illusion within philosophical category formation" (1983, p. 227). According to a Critical

psychological understanding, language is coupled from the very beginning with the meaning of working materials or tools. Thus, language is intrinsically connected to matter and to the construction of human reality. In this specific understanding of Critical psychology, parallels to New Feminist Materialism and its reference to discourse analysis again become apparent. This is because, as we discussed before, approaches of New Feminist Materialism attempt to overcome a boundary between the discursive and the material by assigning things a performative and “co-constituting” role in the process of discursive production of reality (Langer, Macgilchrist, Wrana, Ziem & van Dyk, 2014, p. 355).

Thus, even if Critical psychology and discourse analysis are based on different schools of thought with regard to their understanding of power and the question of the relationship between the discursive and the material, there are commonalities to be explored. Therefore, we propose an understanding of meaning structures in the BBBA that is oriented towards the later phase of Holzkamp’s work, which connects the concept of meaning to discourse analysis and entails ideas of polyvalent power and performativity.

An Example of Meaning

To substantiate our point about a discursive understanding of meaning structures, we will return to the example of single mothers. In order to do a queer feminist study of their situation with the method of BBBA, it is not only important to examine their living conditions, but also to engage with a discourse analysis approach, not least because motherhood is linked to a multiplicity of social meanings and powerful discourses that have developed historically and are specific to Western cultures (e.g., Davis, 2012; Miller, 2007; Phoenix & Woollett, 1991). Discourses produce norms that link motherhood with traditional femininity and are often racialized: “good mothers” in dominant discourses are mainly heterosexual cis-women who are white and, ideally, married (Park, 2013). At the same time, discourses on motherhood are also connected to conditions, be they material or economic conditions. It is, for example, often set as the standard that mothers are middle-class, able-bodied and able to breastfeed. As a result, certain mothers are excluded from dominant discourses or problematized as, for instance, queer mothers, poor mothers or single mothers. Moreover, conditions and discursive meanings co-construct one another: Because discourses still assume the heterosexual couple with a male breadwinner to be the parent(s), institutional structures such as daycare centres or employment contracts are based on this assumption, at least in German-speaking countries (Rinken, 2010). This makes it all the more difficult for single mothers to find a suitable job, which often worsens their economic situation.

Nevertheless, the most widespread discourses of motherhood are not the only discourses concerning motherhood. Time and again, the ideals of motherhood and family are contested and challenged by feminist discourses, queer narratives and postcolonial critiques. In this way, discourses and meaning structures of motherhood are broadened, which also interact with modified conditions, so that single mothers may eventually be less marginalised and precarious. But discursive meanings are not only connected to conditions but also to subjective experience. It is the entirety of these current discourses that structure how a specific woman experiences what her individual single motherhood means for her. As a result, discourses also have an influence on individual possibilities for action. The Critical Psychological Concept of Reasons focuses on this individual experience and the possibilities for action that come with it.

Reasons (Begründungen)

Discourses enable processes of subject-formation (or subjectification) to take place, but actual subject positions that emerge in this way differ massively. Foucault's discourse analysis is often criticised because even though it can capture general frameworks of action or the production of subjects, it cannot explain why some people assume them and others do not, or do so in varying combinations (Butler, 1997; Hall, 2004, p. 178). After all, subjects are different despite similar discourses. It is precisely at this point that Holzkamp's concept of subjective "reasons" for action begins, the last of the three components of BBBA. According to him, we have to assume that all human actions are linked to characteristic conditions and meanings and that they are subjectively explainable and functional (Holzkamp, 1983, p. 352).

The reason analysis is at the heart of Critical psychology, which is derived "from the standpoint of the subject" (Osterkamp & Schraube, 2013). Methodologically, the approach mostly works with qualitative interviews that focus on psycho-social aspects. It is precisely from this central analysis of subjective reasons for action or "subjective functionality" – Thomas Teo speaks of "reason discourses" (2019, p. 112) –, which Critical psychology conceives as a conversation between two equal subjects, that the term "subject-science" is derived. This form of analysis is carried out to determine *why* a person acts the way they do, and which individual as well as social condition-meaning constellations can be identified that influence subjective perception and behaviour.

These differences result from the specific positions and current life situations of co-researching subjects in a study, as well as from their characteristic experiences, which can be traced to different personal backgrounds. Analysing these aspects helps to understand not only why they do certain things and to see which actions are subjectively functional or not, but also to find frameworks for individual agency and different possibilities for responding to social contexts.

At the same time, the "subjective reasons for action" do not represent anything that is merely located in the subject itself (Holzkamp, 1983, p. 348). The condition-meaning-structure still has primacy since it provides the context of subject formation and individual action (Markard, 2009, p. 159). Thus, the Critical psychology researcher can already acquire some knowledge about social contexts in advance, but deepens and discusses this knowledge in the qualitative interview. Within the dialogical conversation of the interview, general conditions and discursive meanings are jointly identified and studied in their effects.

An Example of Reason

To continue our example of possible research on single motherhood, we would now – after having grappled with general conditions and cultural meanings – conduct qualitative interviews with mothers about their background and specific situation (Eichinger, 2019). Following a Critical psychological approach, research on the subjective reasons for action of single mothers would, for instance, focus on the problem of the so-called "double burden" of paid labour and care work. A single mother can deal with the demands of the double burden in different ways, depending on what kind of job and financial resources they have, what other forms of discrimination she may face or what support she has from friends or relatives. In fictitious interviews, for example, there could be Ms. A, who is a single employed mother and dedicates every spare second to her children, because she likes to be with them and has the impression that they need her. Ms. B, on the other hand, is perhaps

involved in trade union activities in her free time because she is convinced of the need to work together with others for better work conditions, but suffers from being able to spend even less time with her child because of evening meetings. Mr. C, who is a male mother, works part-time because he has a relatively high income and wants to spend more time with his children. These examples should illustrate that there are various possibilities of behaviour, which are partly influenced by the specific subjective positioning in the condition-meaning structure. The concept of subjective reasons for action can therefore show why mothers have different reasons for their actions, and to what extent these derive from existing social inequalities.

Repercussions of Reasons on Conditions and Meanings

Importantly, Critical psychological analysis does not stop at the *why* but also asks *whether* problems could arise from certain behaviours, and to what extent they maintain or stabilize existing social systems with their inequalities. Above all, however, it asks what alternative possibilities for action may exist and how certain conditions and meanings can be changed. Therefore, the method is based on an ethical-political reflection aimed both at individual agency and social justice. Methodologically, Critical psychology almost always works with qualitative interviews. Therefore, such a political reflection usually takes place within an interview, for subject-science's primary goal is to expand the personal ability to act. However, Critical psychology is not simply about finding individual solutions, but ultimately about initiating social change and thus achieving a "generalised capacity to act" or a "generalised agency" (Holzkamp, 2012, p. 397; see also Dege, 2019). The goal of extended agency is also regarded by Sieben and Kalkstein as a central link to queer feminist psychologies (2015, p. 247ff.).

In our fictional example above (the reason analysis of single mothers in relation to work and childcare responsibilities), such an approach may also involve discussing different political interventions and developing possible social demands. There are various possibilities here. Using Ms. B as an example, the political proposal could be made that labour unions focus more on unpaid care work instead of focusing solely on waged labour rights, and that they should take care work into account in their organizational structure, so that, for instance, meetings can accommodate the schedules of more people. In a hypothetical interview concerning the discourses of single mothers' and their conditions, discussions could potentially lead to joint writing of queer pregnancy guides, policy proposals for tax legislation that no longer discriminates against single parents, and coalition-building for collectivising care work. These examples are intended to illustrate the extent to which Critical psychology and queer feminist theories share goals of social justice and social change. The combination of these approaches can thus expand the potential of emancipatory research.

Conclusion

Queer and feminist theories can be linked to Critical psychology. For this aim, the BBBA (condition-meaning-reason) concept of Critical psychology serves as a good starting point because it allows us to combine aspects from Marxism with postmodern ideas and psychosocial inquiry. In this article, we attempted to explore the connections as well as the tensions between the concepts of BBBA in Critical Psychology with queer feminist theories, as well as, the possibilities to expand the conceptual instruments of Critical psychology. We

have suggested to accommodate the three elements of BBBA in specific ways so that they address key queer feminist concerns.

The concept of conditions can be expanded in two ways. First, conditions can be understood within the approaches of New Feminist Materialisms to account for the relevance of material-discursive phenomena. As the condition-meaning concept in Critical psychology already suggests, the framework of New Feminist Materialisms makes it possible to overcome a strict demarcation between the material and the discursive, and to understand these areas as mutually constitutive. Second, the concept of conditions is already laid out as an economic category in Critical psychology. While queer feminist approaches are critiqued for having neglected the category of class with the advent of postmodernism (Roßhart, 2015, p. 19), the concept of economic conditions allows a closer look at economics and inequality in the distribution of resources. Therefore, the extended concept of conditions suggests an analysis of material-discursive aspects as well as socio-economic structures.

Critical psychology's concept of meaning structure shares already a pivotal point with discourse theories. This is because both meanings and discourses can be defined as socially produced knowledge that is linked to power relations and constitutes subjects capable of agency. However, the capitalist centred concept of power in Critical psychology that concentrates primarily on class needs to be expanded to include other power relations, such as those producing the categories of gender, race, nationality, sexual orientation, or disability.

While conditions and meanings can be used to grasp the material and discursive framework of agency, the category of reason focuses on the perspective of the subject. The analysis of subjective reason is central to Critical psychology and asks about the different ways of relating to general constellations of condition-meaning. But in its research, Critical psychology goes beyond the question of reason by also searching for alternative possibilities for action in order to increase both individual and general agency. The focus on agency is in accordance with its emancipatory goal, which understands psychological issues as taking place within specific political and economic contexts that can be evaluated in terms of their contribution to social justice. This demand for emancipation is a strong connecting line to queer feminist approaches that are usually closely linked to queer feminist activist practices, political demands, and utopian thought.

Despite all tensions, the BBBA provides categories of analysis that queer feminist research can benefit from, especially in the context of empirical case analyses and psychosocial studies. The extended version of BBBA provides a heuristic framework by integrating the previously divergent insights of Marxism, discourse analysis, queer and feminist studies, and New Materialisms. Regarding concrete research methods, it can combine statistical data and quantitative methods from economics, knowledge from biomedicine and the life sciences, discourse analysis, and critical tools from science and technology studies with qualitative interview methods. Being part of subject-science, BBBA focuses on the formation and agency of subjects and is driven by ethical and political concerns. Capitalization is an important distinguishing feature of Critical psychology – at least in German-speaking contexts. This approach is often referred to as “*Kritische Psychologie* written with a capital K” (or C) in contrast to the wide array of “*kritische Psychologien* with a lowercase k” (or c). With this article, we hope to have provided some impetus for a productive synthesis and crossover of theories towards an emancipatory Critical psychology with an explicit queer feminist approach. Against the background of the often-emphasized

capitalization of the term, we make a plea for a new spelling, at least in a theoretical sense: for a Critical psychology with a lowercase q.

References

- Alaimo, S. & Hekman, S. J. (2008a). Introduction: Emerging models of materiality in feminist theory. In S. Alaimo & S. J. Hekman (Eds.), *Material feminisms* (pp. 1–22). Indiana University Press.
- Alaimo, S. & Hekman, S. J. (Eds.) (2008b). *Material feminisms*. Indiana University Press.
- Aumann, G. (2003). *Kritische Psychologie und Psychoanalyse: Historisch-subjektwissenschaftliche Analyse zum Geschlechterverhältnis [Critical psychology and psychoanalysis: Historical-subject-scientific analysis on gender relations]*. Argument.
- Billmann, L. (2019). The constellation of meaning in the subject-scientific approach of Critical Psychology (Klaus Holzkamp) and ‘Discourse’ in Michel Foucault’s theory of governmentality: A synopsis. *Annual Review of Critical Psychology*, *16*, 220–244. <https://discourseunit.com/annual-review/arcp-16-kritische-psychologie-2019/>
- Barad, K. (2003). Posthumanist performativity: Toward an understanding of how matter comes to matter. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, *28*(3), 801–831. doi:10.1086/345321
- Butler, J. (1990). *Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity*. Routledge.
- Butler, J. (1993). *Bodies that matter: On the discursive limits of sex*. Taylor & Francis.
- Butler, J. (1997). *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection*. Stanford University Press.
- Crenshaw, K. (1991). Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color. *Stanford Law Review*, *43*(6), 1241–1299. doi: <https://doi.org/10.2307/1229039>
- Davis, A. (2012). *Modern motherhood: Women and family in England c. 1945–2000*. Manchester University Press.
- Dege, M. (2019). Natorp, Holzkamp and the role of subjectivity in psychology. *Annual Review of Critical Psychology*, *16*, 117–133. <https://discourseunit.com/annual-review/arcp-16-kritische-psychologie-2019/>
- Eichinger, U. (2019). What’s Up? The possibilities of subject-scientific practice research in social work: A methodological “explorative report”. *Annual Review of Critical Psychology*, *16*, 671–684. <https://discourseunit.com/annual-review/arcp-16-kritische-psychologie-2019/>
- Federici, S. (2012). *Revolution at point zero: Housework, reproduction, and feminist struggle*. Common Notions/PM Press.
- Federici, S. (2018). Marx and feminism. *TripleC: Communication, Capitalism & Critique. Open Access Journal for a Global Sustainable Information Society*, *16*(2), 468–475.

- Foucault, M. (1972). *The archeology of knowledge & the discourse on language*. Pantheon Books.
- Foucault, M. (1998). *The History of sexuality: The will to knowledge*. Penguin Books.
- Fraser, N. (1990). *Unruly practices: Power, discourse and gender in contemporary social theory*. Polity Press.
- Grosz, E. (1999). Darwin and feminism: Preliminary investigations for a possible alliance. *Australian Feminist Studies*, 14(29), 31–45. doi:10.1080/08164649993317
- Hall, S. (2004). *Ideologie, Identität, Repräsentation* [Ideology, identity, representation]. Argument.
- Hanafi El Siofi, M., Moos, J., & Muth, L. (2010). Feminismus revisited: Einleitung. *Freiburger Geschlechter Studien*, 16(24), 13–46. URL: <https://www.budrich-journals.de/index.php/fgs/article/view/4098>
- Haraway, D. J. (1995). *Die Neuerfindung der Natur: Primaten, Cyborgs und Frauen* [Simians, cyborgs and women: The reinvention of nature]. Campus.
- Holzkamp, K. (1993). *Lernen: Subjektwissenschaftliche Grundlegung* [Learning: Subject-scientific foundation]. Campus.
- Holzkamp, K. (2012). Gesellschaftliche Widersprüche und individuelle Handlungsfähigkeit am Beispiel der Sozialarbeit [Social contradictions and individual agency using the example of social work]. In U. Eichinger & K. Weber (Eds.), *Soziale Arbeit* [Social work]. (pp. 385–403). Argument.
- Holzkamp, K. (1983). *Grundlegung der Psychologie* [Foundations of psychology]. Campus.
- Holzkamp-Osterkamp, U. (1975). *Die Grundlagen der psychologischen Motivationsforschung: Band 1* [The foundations of research on psychological motivation Volume 1]. Campus.
- Langer, A., Macgilchrist, F., Wrana, D., Ziem, A., & van Dyk, S. (2014). Discourse and beyond? Zum Verhältnis von Sprache, Materialität und Praxis [Discourse and beyond? On the relationship between language, materiality and practice] In J. Angermüller, E. Herschinger, F. Macgilchrist, M. Nonhoff, M. Reisingl, J. Wedl, D. Wrana & A. Ziem (Eds.), *Diskursforschung. Ein interdisziplinäres Handbuch* [Discourse Research. An interdisciplinary handbook] (pp. 347–363). Transcript.
- Malich, L., & Balz, V. (2020). Psychology and critique - forms of psychologization after 1945: An introduction. In V. Balz & L. Malich (Eds.), *Psychologie und Kritik: Formen der Psychologisierung nach 1945* (pp. 23-39). Springer.
- Malich, L., & Vogler, T. (2018). „Kritische Psychologie mit kleinem q“: Anschlüsse zwischen subjektwissenschaftlicher Theorie und queer-feministischen Ansätzen [»Critical Psychology, written with a lower-case q. Intersections between subject-scientific theories and queer-feminist approaches«]. *Journal für Psychologie*, 26(2), 160–183. doi: <https://doi.org/10.30820/8248.09>

- Markard, M. (2009). *Einführung in die Kritische Psychologie [An introduction into critical psychology]*. Argument.
- Markard, M. (2010). Kritische Psychologie: Forschung vom Standpunkt des Subjekts [Critical psychology: research from the standpoint of the subject]. In G. Mey & K. Mruck (Eds.), *Handbuch Qualitative Forschung in der Psychologie [Handbook qualitative research in psychology]* (pp. 166–181). Springer. doi:10.1007/978-3-531-92052-8_11
- Mattes, P. (1994). Kritische Psychologie am Grabmal des Intellektuellen: »Handlungsfähigkeit« in postmoderner Sicht. [Critical Psychology at the tomb of the intellectual: "Agency" in a postmodern perspective]. *Journal für Psychologie*, 2(2), 29–36. <https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-20455>
- Marvakis, A., Batur, S., Kessi, S., Painter, D., Schraube, E., Bowler, E. S., & Triliva, S. (Eds.). (2019). Kritische Psychologie [Special Issue]. *Annual Review of Critical Psychology*, 16. <https://discourseunit.com/annual-review/arcp-16-kritische-psychologie-2019/>
- Meißner, H. (2010). *Jenseits des autonomen Subjekts: Zur gesellschaftlichen Konstitution von Handlungsfähigkeit im Anschluss an Butler, Foucault und Marx [Beyond the autonomous subject: On the social constitution of agency following Butler, Foucault and Marx]*. Transcript.
- Miller, T. (2007). "Is this what motherhood is all about?" Weaving experiences and discourse through transition to first-time motherhood. *Gender & Society*, 21(3), 337-358. doi: 10.1177/0891243207300561
- Nissen, M. (2020). Critical psychology: The most recent version (soon to be replaced), illustrated by the problem of motivation. In V. Balz & L. Malich (Eds.), *Psychologie und Kritik: Formen der Psychologisierung nach 1945* (pp. 59-86). Springer.
- Nagoshi, J., Nagoshi, C., & Brzuzy, S. (Eds.). (2013). *Gender and Sexual Identity: Transcending Feminist and Queer Theory*. Springer.
- Osterkamp, U., & Schraube, E. (2013). Introduction: Klaus Holzkamp and the development of psychology from the standpoint of the subject. In E. Schraube & U. Osterkamp (Eds.), *Psychology from the standpoint of the subject: Selected writings of Klaus Holzkamp* (pp. 1-15). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Park, S. M. (2013). *Mothering queerly, queering motherhood: Resisting monomaternality in adoptive, lesbian, blended, and polygamous families*. SUNY Press.
- Phoenix, A., & Woollett, A. (1991). Motherhood: social construction, politics and psychology. In A. Woollett & A. Phoenix (Eds.), *Motherhood: meanings, practices and ideologies* (pp. 14-27). Sage.
- Rinken, B. (2010). *Spielräume in der Konstruktion von Geschlecht und Familie: Alleinerziehende Mütter und Väter mit ost- und westdeutscher Herkunft [Ranges in the construction of gender and family: Single mothers and fathers of east and west german origin]*. Springer.

- Roßhart, J. (2015). *Klassenunterschiede im feministischen Bewegungsalltag [Class differences in the feminist movement reality]*. w_orten & meer.
- Schmalstieg, C. (2006). »Der große Graben« – Ideologietheorie, Geschlechterverhältnisse und Psychologie. [The huge gap - ideology theory, gender relations and psychology] *Forum Kritische Psychologie*, 49, 5–30. URL: <https://argument.de/produkt/fkp-49-geschlechterverhaeltnisse-sprache-und-symbolik-solidaritaet-und-schule/>
- Shiner, L. (1982). Reading Foucault: Anti-method and the genealogy of power-knowledge. *History and Theory*, 21(3), 382-398. doi: 10.2307/2505097
- Sieben, A. & Kalkstein, F. (2015). Kritische Psychologie und queer-feministische Perspektiven: Möglichkeiten und Grenzen einer Wiederaneignung der Arbeiten von Klaus Holzkamp und Ute Holzkamp-Osterkamp. [Critical Psychology and queer feminist perspectives: Potentials and limits of a re-appropriation of the works of Klaus Holzkamp and Ute Holzkamp-Osterkamp]. *Journal für Psychologie*, 23(2), 233–258. URL: <https://www.journal-fuer-psychologie.de/index.php/jfp/article/view/384/418>
- Statistisches Bundesamt (Ed.) (2010). *Alleinerziehende in Deutschland: Ergebnisse des Mikrozensus 2009 [Single Parents in Germany: Results of the Microcensus 2009]*. Statistisches Bundesamt.
- Teo, T. (1998). Klaus Holzkamp and the rise and decline of German Critical psychology. *History of Psychology*, 1(3), 235-253. doi:10.1037/1093-4510.1.3.235
- Teo, T. (2005). *The Critique of Psychology: From Kant to Postcolonial Theory. Library of the History of Psychology Theories*. Springer.
- Teo, T. (2012). Critical psychology. In R. Rieber (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of the history of psychological theories* (pp. 236-248). Springer.
- Teo, T. (2019). Diffraction when standing on the shoulders of giants: With and beyond Holzkamp. *Annual Review of Critical psychology*, 16, 102-116. URL: <https://discourseunit.com/annual-review/arcp-16-kritische-psychologie-2019>
- Wilson, E. A. (2008). Organic empathy: Feminism, psychopharmaceuticals, and the embodiment of depression. In S. Alaimo & S. J. Hekman (Eds.), *Material feminisms* (pp. 373–398). Indiana University Press.

About the authors

Lisa Malich, Dipl.-Psych., PhD, is an assistant professor for the History of Knowledge of Psychology at the Universität zu Lübeck. Her research focuses on gender studies, especially concepts of emotion and reproduction, and the history of psychotherapy in the 20th century.

Contact: Institute for the History of Medicine and Science Studies, University of Lübeck. E-Mail: lisa.malich@uni-luebeck.de

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9013-8681>

Tanja Vogler, MSc, is a doctoral candidate at the Institute of Education Science at the University of Innsbruck. Her focus is on discourse research, critical psychology, queer

theory, and social movement research. Recently she became a research assistant at the medical university of Innsbruck.

Contact: Department of Gender Medicine and Diversity. E-Mail: Tanja.Vogler@i-med.ac.at