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Biographical Work in Queer Volunteering. Findings from a Case Study on German Young Adults

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Abstract. While research has revealed subjective, biographical and identity-related meanings of volunteering, gendered perspectives have not yet been given a central focus. Little is known about the impact that volunteering has on construction of (gendered) biographies. The present study aims to address this research gap by undertaking a biography-analytical study of young adults involved in queer volunteering, exploring the influence of queer volunteering on the (gendered) construction of their biography. By using the documentary method of interpretation, relations between queer volunteering and the biographies of the volunteers were reconstructed. In this article, the central ways in which the biographies of queer activists are presented in their biographical interviews are firstly presented and reflected upon. All the cases in the underlying sample use theorising and argumentative modes to construct their biographical self-representations. Then, the manner in which young adults engage in biographical work is reconstructed. To conclude these aspects, queer volunteering contexts are discussed as spaces for biographical work. In queer volunteering contexts, volunteers are able to identify themselves, develop the necessary competences to deal with everyday challenges, regain their agency, find visible role models and thus opportunities and anchors for biographisation.

Keywords: queer, volunteering, biography, meaning, biographical work

1. BIOGRAPHICAL MEANINGS OF VOLUNTEERING

The selection of volunteering contexts is based on biographical experiences. The attribution of specific meanings to volunteering is contingent on biographical relations, contextual influences and situational considerations. «Participation emerges from young people's biographical experiences, experiences of self-efficacy (or their lack) [...], their search for recognition and belonging, their coping with their personal lives and their attempts to make an impact and to change things in their lives and life-worlds» (von Schwanenflügel *et al.* 2019: 442). Contexts of voluntary work are chosen to enable experiences of belonging, community and recognition, autonomy, independence and self-direction, security, emotional support, visibility, self-efficacy, emancipation and identity work (von Schwanenflügel 2015; McMa-

hon *et al.* 2020: 164). Volunteering can therefore lead to an experience and expansion of agency. This impacts identity formation, enabling people to perceive themselves as autonomous, self-determined and capable of independent action. Volunteering can therefore serve as a coping mechanism for biographical challenges (von Schwanenflügel *et al.* 2019: 438). Volunteering is «part of the young people's identity-work where they pursue identity-offers and positions which reflect their experiences in the past, their needs and motivations in the present, and their desires for their imagined futures» (McMahon *et al.* 2020: 171).

Findings have been obtained on the subjective, biographical and identity-related meanings of volunteering. However, gendered perspectives have not yet been given a central focus. Some perspectives emphasis on gender inequality – e.g. androcracy (Biester *et al.* 1994; Sauer 1999), reproduction of social inequalities in volunteering (Munsch 2011; Grasso and Smith 2022), public/private spheres and gender segregation (Siltanen and Stanworth 1984; Vromen 2003). Nevertheless, little is known about the impact of the topic of volunteering on constructions of (gendered) biographies. The present study aims to address this research gap by undertaking a biography-analytical study of young adults involved in queer volunteering, exploring the influence of queer volunteering and the associated issues and topics on the (gendered) construction of a biography.

In the underlying study (Leinhos 2024), biographical-narrative interviews (Schütze 2016) were conducted with young adults who voluntarily campaign for the recognition of gender and sexual diversity and against hetero- and cis-normative discrimination in political and trade union interest groups, queer associations and educational projects. As the interviewees are predominantly in their early to mid-20s, the term «young adults» is employed to encompass the simultaneity of autonomy (e.g. the coming of age, marked by expanded opportunities for engagement) and dependencies (social expectations of entering the labour market, familial obligations, and occasionally financial constraints). This term also acknowledges the interplay between social structures and the practices of young adults. By using the documentary method of interpretation (Bohnsack *et al.* 2010; Bohnsack 2014), relations between queer volunteering and the biographies of the volunteers were reconstructed. This way the focus is on the thematic dimension of volunteering as queer. This does not mean that the people involved are or have to be queer themselves. The sample also includes interviews with hetero-cis-people who campaign for the recognition of diversity and against discrimination based on ascribed gender and

sexuality. Assuming that only queer people are queer activists would reify marginalisation and make diversity an issue solely for marginalised people.

In this article, the central ways in which the biographies of activists in queer volunteering are constructed are firstly presented and reflected upon (1). Then, the manner in which young adults engage in biographical work is reconstructed (2). To conclude these aspects, queer volunteering contexts are discussed as spaces for biographical work (3).

2. BIOGRAPHICAL CONSTRUCTIONS OF YOUNG ADULTS IN QUEER VOLUNTEERING

The interviews with young adults in queer volunteering are characterised by the presentation of an implicit construction of agency, the processing of biographical uncertainty and a mode of self-realisation in volunteering. The analysis of the interviews reveals that self-reflection, theorising and argumentations are essential modes of biographisation in all the cases studied. In consideration of the methodological reflection that these modes of biographisation «deal with disorderly chunks of biographical experiences» and are indicative of the interviewee's biographical work (Schütze 2006: 110), this section provides a reflection on the background of theorising and argumentative modes in biographical interviews. Firstly, the focus is on field-related discourses and theoretical implications of queer volunteering. The second focus is on biography theoretical backgrounds. Theorising and argumentations thus come into play as forms of biographisation and biographical competence in dealing with experiences of crisis. Finally, theorising and argumentative biographisation is considered a moment of community building and solidarity.

At first glance, an explanation for this theorising self-view seems obvious: The perceived necessity of coming out evokes introspection and the capacity for differentiation, recognition and endurance of heterogeneity (Göth and Kohn 2014: 33). Those engaged in the field of queer activism are well-versed in social science concepts relating to gender, sexuality, identities, heterogeneity, diversity, marginalisation, discrimination, etc. Volunteers engage with the subject, work with it, communicate its content to others, and incorporate these aspects into their political work. Individuals volunteering in gender and sexuality-related fields are inextricably linked to the theoretical contributions of gender and queer studies. In the context of queer volunteering, the practical application of these theoretical concepts is elevated to a norm of volunteering. Engaging with these discourses fosters

introspection and reflection on individuals' personal experiences and their social interactions. As Oldemeier and Timmermanns (2023: 187) conclude, a queer affiliation can evoke the critical consideration of social norms.

Furthermore, volunteers involved in queer issues are within a domain of institutionalised and discursive «overdetermination» (Schmidt 2023: 65), both with respect to individual positioning within the context of a heteronormative matrix and, in the case of formalised volunteering, in terms of (legal) operating options, ideas and requirements of volunteering itself. This overdetermination renders conventional formats of self-description more probable.

Theorisations, scientific concepts or common-sense knowledge that are invoked in argumentation also become explanatory patterns or «keys to biographisation» (Bartmann and Kunze 2008: 183). This is not surprising against the background of a conception of «biography» at the intersection of individual agency in reciprocal tension with the orientation schemes of different spaces and social, collective structures (Fischer-Rosenthal 2000: 117; Mažeikienė 2012). The presentation of a biography is never a solitary endeavour; it always has to be considered in the context of the prevailing social, interactive and situational framework conditions, and be informed by the collective knowledge. The awareness of one's own position outside of these matrices, and the associated experiences of foreignness in heteronormative fields, evoke challenges to one's own self-presentation. Argumentations emerge in order to make oneself socially understandable, to position oneself in the social world and to identify oneself. «The individual realisation of belonging to a minority that deviates from the common ideas of binary gender norms and/or heteronormative desire suggests a self-reflective examination of how one perceives oneself and one's environment» (Oldemeier and Timmermanns 2023: 187). Argumentation can be used to connect to collective knowledge, to embed one's own experiences in collective situations or to invoke generalisable, stereotypical concepts to frame one's own experiences and actions.

Furthermore, normalising or distancing depictions of varying intensity can be interpreted as references to experiences of crisis. The emotional impact and perceived significance of potential norm violations can be mitigated through rationalisation and theorisation of personal experiences as being in accordance with established norms. Retrospective reinterpretations, self-observations and explanations based on generalised knowledge can be interpreted in a number of ways. They can be understood as a «protective wall» (Schütze 1983: 286). However, they can also be biographically learned

ways of dealing with problems and possible crises. Argumentative passages serve as indications of biographical competences of addressing problematic situations and a document of the adoption of collective structures. In the context of challenging biographies, theoretical considerations can offer a cathartic effect. In interviews, interviewees are able to discuss emotional relationships or biographical difficulties in a scientific context, thereby engaging in self-reflection in a distanced manner. The exclusion of negative aspects in self-reflection results in a distancing of one's own experiences from social reality. This process enables the maintenance of an image of a self-determined individual, at least on a narrative level. The result is a depiction of an individual who effectively copes with and shapes everyday life, unencumbered by societal constraints (Bröckling 2015). This retrospective reinterpretation of experiences and the explanation of situations, actions and contexts can be described as «self-therapy» (Oevermann 1988). In this process, the application of scientific knowledge enables self-discovery and self-representation in accordance with social norms.

Oevermann (*Ibidem*) proposes an alternative theorisation concerning scientific theorising, reflexive self-constructions. These modes of representation frequently emerge in the context of endeavours to establish a sense of community and solidarity, wherein individuals have the opportunity to experience and embed their sense of self. In this context, the concept of communitisation is closely intertwined with the collective knowledge of how to live together. Theorising and argumentation facilitate the establishment of a connection to collective knowledge, thereby offering protection from social demands and moral support to its members.

On the one hand, theorisations and argumentations can therefore be an expression of painful, repressed experiences from which people distance themselves, which they cannot express, which they have not processed. They can be an expression of the impossibility of coherent biographical representation, alienation from practice or a lack of autonomy and agency. The aforementioned aspects can be found in the analyses of the cases in the underlying sample, as does the perspective of biographical competence. Theorisations and argumentations point to the existence of reflexive processing skills, learned ways of dealing with conflictual experiences, relief through theorisations or connections to collectivity. In the field of volunteering, solidarity is established on the basis of shared attitudes. The shared experience of deviating from society's hegemonic stereotypes can be processed biographically in the protection of the collective, in mutual exchange and with moral support. Volunteering also makes it possible to experience the

de-individualisation of experiences of difference, which can awaken their potential for change. The de-individualisation of biographical problems, particularly the identification of experiences of difference as a structural problem caused by gender and sexual norms, enables (political) association to achieve common goals. These opportunities for communitisation act as a driving force for the reproduction of this immanent scientific imprint in the field. As a result, the volunteers successively theorise their (volunteering) actions, their own selves also increasingly coming into focus. Concomitantly, the established norm of academic style and self-reflexivity is upheld. These theorisations engender introspection and reflective interpretations of one's own life. Consequently, they facilitate the construction of a consistent biography, biographical stability and (biographical) agency. Furthermore, the adoption of theoretical discourses functions as the 'entry ticket' into the domain of queer volunteering, which is reflexive in nature. Theorising and argumentation thus enable a connection to the collective structures of queer volunteering.

3. BIOGRAPHICAL WORK IN QUEER VOLUNTEERING

This study explores the significance and relevance of volunteering contexts for biographies. Biographical relevancies of hegemonic discourses and counter-discourses in the context of queer volunteering can be analysed using subjectivisation theory approaches in biographical research (Spies and Tuidier 2017; Spies 2018). However, the question posed here is concerned with the biographical constructions of the volunteers. Therefore, the following discussion is based on the concept of "(biographical) work on the self", because «creating oneself as a 'person' seems to be possible only by telling how one became what and who one is now» through biographisation (Fischer-Rosenthal 2000: 116). A biography and a biographical self-presentation are the results of biographical work, with the person who has engaged in this work being the biographer (Schütze 2014). The term biographical work refers to the recognition of one's own biography, i.e. the «attention to one's own biographical identity in its development and changeability» (Schütze 2014: 124) with the aim of a formative attitude. The concept of biography has been defined as a «self-reflection and self-description» that structures the life-time (Fischer-Rosenthal 2000: 115) or as a «self-observation and interpretation of own life» (Mažeikienė 2012: 131). The focus of biographical work is therefore on recognising and processing the conditional and formative dimensions of one's own life story (Schütze 2014: 130).

The work of orienting the temporal process of the individual's life and of social change can be termed 'biographical work'. Biographical work is a practice that has been developed in modern societies in order to solve some of the main issues of integration and order. Biographical work is a way to orient the individual and make him or her reliable for institutions in a historical social situation (Fischer-Rosenthal 2000: 115).

The logic of constructing biography developed in biographical work guides the formation of identity and frames the processing of external demands and stimuli (Schütze 2014: 124). The potential for biographical work to engender empowerment lies in its capacity to facilitate change and autonomy by enhancing reflective abilities (Mažeikienė 2012: 134). In moments of introspection or interaction with significant others, the characteristics, connections, processes and mechanisms of one's own life story can be discerned (Schütze 2014: 125). Consequently, a biographer can reflect subjective sources of meaning, personal positioning (of action), biographical resources, individual moments and recuperations of potential for distraction or injury, personal and framework conditions of social relationships, as well as personal orientations, interests and abilities. The necessity for biographical work is evident in situations where routine is disrupted by changes, where a context conducive to well-being (e.g. a home) must be established and created, where social relationships involving mutual adoption of perspectives are to be initiated, where obstacles to one's own ability to act are to be identified and where an authentic self is to be presented that is both self-critical and flexible (Schütze 2014).

In this context, it is crucial to develop an understanding of how to adequately deal with attributions and collective perceptions as well as the demands of different areas of life. A biography is defined as the «interplay of objective structures and consciousness» thereby underscoring the dynamic interplay between individual agency and the broader societal structures (Mažeikienė 2012: 130). On the one hand collective and social contexts represent the framework conditions for all actions as well as (biographical) work on the self. On the other hand, a narration of a life story can function as a means to cope with modern world contingencies (Fischer-Rosenthal 2000: 115). Collective identities have been demonstrated to exert a pivotal influence on biographical actions and agency, as well as the representational shaping of biographical narratives (Schütze 2014: 130f.). This concept pertains to various social entities, including families, groups, (religious) communities, nations or states, society, culture, regions, and overarching entities such as the concept of a global community or, in a theoretical sense,

generalised or significant others, social worlds or arenas and social categorisations. These include typifications of selves and others, ideas of centre and periphery, historicity, universalised or institutionalised mechanisms, postulates or ideas of action, being or interaction (*Ibidem*). These collectivities are in an interdependent constitutive relation with biography, biographical identity and biographical work and biographical work is at the same time the search for 'suitable' environments and contexts (Ivi: 123). Biographical work can establish a socially appropriate connection between the individual and society, produces «a network of events and options», and processes time, situations and the becoming of the self in a dialogical and interactive way (Fischer-Rosenthal 2000: 117f.). This exploration is enabled by a person's understanding of their own life and the structures surrounding them (Mažeikienė 2012: 134). From the perspective of a praxeological sociology of knowledge (Bohnsack 2014), biographical work can be understood as the processing and negotiation of the notorious discrepancy and interdependence of the logic of practice or *modus operandi* of action and contextual requirements. The focus is therefore on dealing with, appropriating, demarcating, incorporating, borrowing or adapting, confronting, etc. expectations, social requirements and ideas of biographisation, life courses and identity.

In order to systematise the presentation, the following section employs the reconstructed typology of the significance of queer volunteering in biography (Leinhos 2024) to present how biographical work can be carried out in queer volunteering and how queer volunteering influences biography and the recognition of the self. This is illustrated by quotations¹ from interview transcripts.

3.1 Volunteering as a reinforcement of agency and emancipation from biographical heteronomy

In the biographical presentations typified as 'volunteering as a reinforcement of agency and emancipation from biographical heteronomy', a tendency towards an emphasis on crisis and a perceived lack of agency is observed in the retrospective, i.e. in life periods preceding the volunteering.

In a present-day perspective and in the most positively connoted future sights, the cases aspire to self-determination and emancipation. In this type, the medium and context in which these endeavours take place is queer volunteering. In this context, there is a self-realisation of one's own ability to act, as well as the possibility of demarcation, (re)interpretation, negotiation and pro-

cessing of perceived biographical deficits. An example of this is Jasmin, who meets with political decision-makers to implement queer content in legislative procedures.

And then we actually met once. I think I've flipped a switch from okay. I can somehow seem to be quite good with people who you usually perceive as such authorities... as such obvious authorities that you know from TV. Apparently I can also talk to them quite well and you can just talk to them and you can somehow have a coffee with them um: [...] so my experience, so you can somehow meet on a human level let's say so [...] and I think that somehow a switch has been flipped I think that was actually another very strong somehow politicising moment (transcript Jasmin).

Here in this self-theorising description, Jasmin accentuates her own ability to converse with individuals from diverse spheres of influence as a resource. Nevertheless, this is not an exposition of herself, but rather a presentation of her experienced agency, which she supports argumentatively with learnt skills of communication. The switch metaphor refers to an implicit before and after: previous knowledge excludes political action, it is not within the horizon of possibilities. In the present, the possibilities, competences and knowledge are available so that the goals can be pursued. Jasmin characterises this as a moment of realisation that not only reveals the possibility of political agency, but has also "activated" it. The knowledge reconstructed in the description of her self-described politicising moment is closely linked to her first contact with the political sphere. Jasmin demonstrates the manner in which individuals can obtain or discover resources, knowledge, skills and abilities in volunteering activities. Queer volunteering facilitates the realisation and maintenance of agency and self-determination. This way, volunteer contexts function as a medium of (self-)empowerment. Life stories and experiences of heteronomy that have been connoted deficiently encounter volunteer contexts that, due to their thematic focus, become a medium and possibility for the enactment of biographical orientations. In the process of «exploring issues, formulating plans, experimenting with them, revisiting the problem, creating new plans, taking action, encountering difficulties and finding ways to resolve these» (Percy-Smith *et al.* 2020: 184), the objective is to empower oneself and enable autonomy. The process of attaining agency within the heteronormative system is achieved through the medium of queer volunteering. «Participation is a learning process in which individuals gradually develop their capabilities to participate through practice» (Ivi: 196).

¹ The quotes were translated into English.

McMahon *et al.* (2020: 170) also observe a similar figure of volunteering as a search for recognition and belonging that people did not have in the past. Accordingly, people seek contexts of volunteering that enable them to counteract or deal with marginalised and damaged identities and experiences of exclusion or difference from the past, and to realise a desired positionality. Within a volunteer context, individuals empower themselves, experience self-efficacy, and «become the people they want to be» (*Ibidem*). These changes are observed as biographical turning points (Ivi: 172f.; with reference to Rosenthal 2004), in which volunteer contexts and positions are attributed a decisive role in promoting (self-)empowerment and overcoming challenges in terms of agency and self-efficacy.

3.2 Volunteering as the creation of opportunities for biographisation

The biographical presentations typified as ‘volunteering as the creation of opportunities for biographisation’ are more about biographical uncertainties caused by experiences of difference and the difficulties of positioning oneself in the world with its norms and demands.

of course you're then confronted with the fact that somehow, uh, in puberty you suddenly don't uh fall in love with a girl but with a boy and that's just the first time that I think you're confronted with the fact that you don't act according to expectations even if you don't want to so falling in love isn't something you consciously decide so I think that was the first time that you or that I was affected by something like that and I think it was the only time or it wasn't necessarily a topic otherwise so as I said it wasn't really talked about at school and yes that was I think the first time that I was confronted with something like that. even if I don't think you realise at that moment that what you're feeling now is somehow different from others, um and it's just a kind of label and that people are being persecuted and discriminated against for it um I don't think that's so clear yet but I think you realise that it's somehow different than others (Transcript Lukas).

As demonstrated by Lukas, cases of this type are characterised by a realisation of their position at the periphery of social norms. Against this backdrop, criticism is levelled at the perceived deficiencies in education concerning diverse lifestyles and forms of intimacy, both within society and within the context of educational institutions. In light of their experiences, individuals tend to seek social acknowledgement, a sense of belonging to a community, social support, and positive role models – «I didn't really identify as gay back then

because it wasn't tangible for me» (transcript Lukas). An implicit connection has been established between this and their volunteering activities. This connection is evident not only in the fact that they wish to address this criticised circumstance for themselves and their own biographical positioning through volunteering, but also in their endeavours to address it for others. The objective of the present volunteering is to render plural lifestyles, love and life models visible, to educate about them and about structures and modes of differentiation and categorisation, to provide processing and support instances and to maintain offers of possible identification foils. The overarching aim is to ensure that the interviewees themselves or other people do not have to present their own biographies as non-conformist.

This pattern is similar to a mode McMahon *et al.* (2020: 172) have discovered, in which individuals seek or create a context in which they can fully express their identities and feel a sense of belonging. The pivotal difference is that it encompasses not solely the creation of contexts and opportunities for themselves to biographise (as gay, bi, trans, inter, etc.), but also the facilitation of these same opportunities for others. This process facilitates the realisation that one can assist others, pass on one's personal history and experiences, and thereby become a role model for others. «Where one's own story can be elevated to a role model and orientation for others, it experiences a revaluation and a higher meaning as a good or right path. Behind this is the need for a specific form of recognition» (von Schwanenflügel 2015: 233). This way of volunteering can be conceptualised on two levels: firstly, on the social level, involving the representation of others and the contribution to collective decision-making processes (e.g. in political parties or committees); and secondly, on the individual level, encompassing the maintenance of personal visibility and the representation of one's own experiences and perspectives (Pais 2008; Pitti *et al.* 2021).

3.3 Volunteering as a continuation of family attitudes

In the biographical presentations typified as ‘volunteering as a continuation of family attitudes’, the family is the central framework for biographisation. This is the case with Mira, for example. Her first statement in the interview refers to the fact that her entire family lives in the region where she grew up. The family references also form a consistent background for the description and legitimisation of political interests.

we had two stays abroad as a family [...] and uh yes; that means I'm a convinced European. I became interested in

politics very much very early on, certainly at the age of 11 with somehow no idea. My parents watched the news in the evenings at 8pm and [...] found that very depressing but I was still interested in it (transcript Mira).

Cases of this type reflect family attitudes towards social issues, the exercise of political practice and skills acquired in the family household (e.g. through political «lunch table discussions») as a legitimising basis for their volunteering activities. Skills and knowledge acquired in the family are negotiated as a continuation of the family's attitudes towards political involvement. The volunteer context is therefore implicitly constructed as a suitable environment for the individual's own biographical orientations.

Other studies also identify exposure to political issues within the family as the starting point for the development of their political interest (Hillebrand *et al.* 2015). Nohl (2022: 59) describes that political role orientations also develop in interactions in family contexts. It is here that we can learn how collective decisions are (or can be) negotiated, what can become the subject of dispute, and how power-shaping positionings are carried out. In the type I have reconstructed, volunteering is formulated as a continuation of the family's (political) attitudes. This is linked to the implicit recognition of the central importance of the family for one's own biography. Voluntary work is then directed towards the continuation of competences, skills and attitudes acquired in the family.

3.4 Volunteering as an extension of community experiences

The biographical presentations typified as 'volunteering as an extension of community experiences' is based on a biographical orientation towards social integration as an emotional connection, support and anchorage, as an instance of both demarcation and community, of stability and appreciation, and as an instance for moments of self-reflection. The latter is particularly evident in Malina's statement:

and the person I was with [...] then um came out to me as trans, which at first questioned a lot of things for me [...] and I totally questioned my own labels so um what does that mean for me what does that mean for my sexual orientation and um we came to the club 14 in city 12 about it [...] is such a contact point just a counselling centre also with a youth group (transcript Malina).

The first contact with queer volunteering is negotiated both in the context of a peer relationship and in moments of biographical work. Social interactions and

social inclusion as a central biographical orientation of Malina form the context of biographical work. Cases of this type find social integration within the context of volunteering. However, this is not achieved in a functional manner with the objective of establishing friendships and peer relationships through volunteering. Instead, volunteer contexts are negotiated as possibilities of community building and as opportunities for collective action, due to their inherent social structure.

um and that was kind of a really matter of heart project from the very beginning simply because I also really loved the people behind it um it was really cool to be able to put the group together myself and see how it grows together. We've only just got together so we're supra-regional that's about 25 people and in different places um we met last month in city 2 that's always like that: it's just so nice to have such an empowering group somehow (transcript Malina).

To Malina, friends are people with whom she is «on the same wavelength feministically» and «my favourite people are also all volunteers somehow» or with whom she «shares feminist point of views» (transcript Malina). Sociality is always implicitly considered and present; other people are therefore always present and their influence is always reflected – also and above all in her volunteering.

Cases of this type combine sociality and volunteering. Other research findings also discuss social integration and the development of community and social relationships as functions and consequences of volunteering (Hirschle and Kleiner 2016; Kleiner 2021). A sense of belonging and a sense of community are therefore central elements of participatory practices (Frankel and Mountford 2021). Behrens (2023: 204) differentiates between community-building processes according to geographical (local and global), intergenerational and identity (e.g. queer movements) dimensions. As Shabel and Montenegro (2023: 219) observe, «to participate politically is to do and to be with others and thus, inevitably, is to act within the framework of certain human relations».

The connection between biographical work and sociality in the context of queer volunteering transforms the context of queer volunteering into a place of biographical work. In this sense, biographical work can be realised in the social contexts of queer volunteering, social structures and community. Consequently, social others become a possibility for volunteering, and, conversely, volunteering can become both the result and the possibility of realising biographical aspirations.

4. CONTEXTS OF QUEER VOLUNTEERING AS PLACES OF BIOGRAPHICAL WORK

In order to cope with life as a queer person, it is beneficial to be aware of queer lifestyles, communities, backgrounds, and explanations for one's own life situation and the reactions of others (Krell and Oldemeier 2018). Queer spaces facilitate comprehension, designation and articulation of one's own sexuality and gender (Hiestand and Levitt 2005; Beemyn and Rankin 2011). Additionally, they encourage interaction with others. As Göth and Kohn (2014: 34) observe, this enables concrete forms of support, which are constituted by a sense of belonging, social support and the experience of spaces without marginalisation. From the perspective of "biographical work", such biographical (self-)realisation or reflection of one's own (biographical) orientations, resources and (im)possibilities in volunteering are used as the basis for seeking or finding a specifically suitable context for the enactment of biographical orientations, or for shaping volunteering contexts in accordance with biographical orientations. Firstly, orientations of emancipation from heteronomy can be cultivated by identifying, developing and actualising one's own agency within contexts of volunteering. Secondly, in the context of experiences of difference, the necessity of role models and social anchor points can be addressed through volunteering, thereby educating about pluralistic ways of life, making them visible and creating biographical identification opportunities for oneself and others. Thirdly, the competences acquired in the family can be applied in volunteering in accordance with family attitudes. Finally, the opportunity for the enactment of biographical aspirations for social integration and community is presented as a chance for community experiences and community action. In the context of (queer) volunteering with its framework conditions, contexts and structures, it is possible for those involved to become aware of themselves, to recognise their agency, to live out and realise their biographical orientations, to develop, acquire and reflect on the (biographical) skills and abilities necessary for this and to be recognised for this. Depending on the focus, reflecting on experiences in volunteering contexts and situations can lead to an interpretation and reinterpretation of one's own biography. This may also result in the appropriation or incorporation of structures of volunteering, or the specific organisation and interpretation of volunteering according to biographical priorities. Volunteering can therefore be regarded as a context of biographical work on the self, in which one's own biography can be constructed in a consistent and stable way.

The community also provides possible answers for dealing with prejudice, discrimination and experienced or expected violence and offers opportunities to position oneself beyond the heteronormative standards of mainstream society (Göth and Kohn 2014: 34). Queer affiliations and alliances have been shown to offer support and safe space, as well as acceptance and security (Oldemeier and Timmermanns 2023: 191). In light of the unavoidable nature of social norms pertaining to gender and sexuality, queer spaces provide a valuable opportunity for individuals to identify and address chosen aspects of their personal experiences. Queer contexts offer means to avoid the self-construction as deviant and to a certain extent to become an empowered subject (Vogler 2022: 314). Moreover, queer spaces offer a platform for challenging and resisting these inequalities. Queer volunteering incorporates an inherent moment of sociality and therefore can contribute to the development of a positive attitude towards one's own queerness. It can establish a sense of community and facilitate coping with minority stress (Goldbach and Gibbs 2015: 300f.). The social relationships, opportunities for exchange, affiliations and potential for self-development that result from volunteering can promote positive self-esteem and positive references to gender identity.

This provides support for individuals in their coming out and helps them to experience recognition and acceptance. Biographical crises can be addressed through volunteering. Many volunteers involved in queer movements perceive their participation as a means of augmenting their self-efficacy and agency (Krell and Oldemeier 2018). Moreover, the analysis in this paper supports the findings of a favourable impact of queer movements on the coping mechanisms employed by children and adolescents in dealing with discrimination, violence and uncertainties concerning their gender and sexuality. Contexts involving queer volunteering have been shown to create spaces of opportunity, provide resources and impart knowledge for the formation of alternative and positive concepts of identity (Klapeer 2020: 11). The typology presented and the reflections on biographical work in volunteering based on it were reconstructed on the basis of queer volunteering, but could also be transferred to other volunteering topics that are based on marginalisation. However, these considerations are not arbitrary, but a more abstract and generalised typology that can serve as a starting point for analysing and contrasting the significance of other areas of volunteering for the biographies of those involved. After all, hetero-cis-people also use contexts of queer volunteering for their biographical work. The distinctive aspect of queer engage-

ment is that the self-reflexivity within the horizon of (gender) norms triggered by queer volunteer spaces, the acquisition of knowledge and the exchange with others are strategies for dealing with the speechlessness about one's own position and situation, for making diverse identities socially visible and imaginable, and for reconstructing and deconstructing these norms as such. Queer volunteering contexts have been found to offer significant coping mechanisms, resilience, and support strategies (Ivi: 27).

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