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Chapter 17
How to Incorporate Gender in Lutheran Pietism Research: Narratives and Counternarratives
Ulrike Gleixner

This article draws attention to the gender gap in the field of Lutheran Pietism research. I would like to discuss three "issues": first, how to incorporate gender in Pietism research; second, women's participation and the expansion of their agency through the piety of Pietism and third, the challenges of the gender order by pietistic practices, which I call "gender trouble". My observations about Pietism and Pietism research derives from my view on Lutheran middle class Pietism in Württemberg/Germany.¹

Narrative and Counter-narrative

The undertaking of incorporating a gender perspective into Pietism research needs to overcome a double barrier: first, the tradition in church history which has focused research primarily on leading male figures; and second, the tendency of social history to ignore the gender aspect.² Many experts on Pietism have criticized this practice and we have seen an increase in gender studies in the field of Lutheran Pietism. Interestingly, however, this work has faced obstacles in being integrated into mainstream Pietism research.³ One parameter for the barrier of

¹ See Ulrike Gleixner and Erika Hebeisen, (eds), Gendering Tradition. Erinnerungskultur und Geschlecht im Pietismus (Korb, 2007).
reception and out of this resulting gender gap is the new four-volume German
handbook Geschichte des Pietismus. Only in the last volume do we find some
articles where the contribution of women to Pietism are seen as central.4 This
modern trend differs even from the self perception of early modern male Pietists.
For example Johann Henrich Reitz (1655–1720) has in his biography collection

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England (Baltimore, 1989); Christel Köhle-Hezinger, 'Frauen im Pietismus', Blätter
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218–31; Cornelia Niekus Moore, 'Göttsges Bezeugen und frommer Lebenswandel.
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29; Ulrike Witt, Bekehrung, Bildung und Biographie. Frauen im Umkreis des Halleischen
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Das Beispiel von Frankfurt am Main 1670–1700', in Leonore Siegle-Wenschewitz et al.
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and the Family Future: The Journal of Beate Hahn-Paulus (1788–1842) of Württemberg',
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Pietismus und Bürgertum. Eine historische Anthropologie der Frömmigkeit. Württemberg
17–19. Jahrhundert (Göttingen, 2005); Gisela Mettele, 'Der Entwurf des pietistischen
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Echo Halles. Kulturelle Wirkungen des Pietismus (Tübingen, 2001), pp. 291–14; Erika
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Jacobi, 'Pietismus und Pädagogik', Zeitschrift für pädagogische Historiographie, 8 (2002):
49–53; Fred van Lieburg, Living for God. Eighteenth Century Dutch Pietist Autobiography
(Maryland, 2004); Ruth Albrecht, 'Johanna Eleonora Petersen (1644–1724). Eine
gangierte und stiefharte Schriftstellerin', in Peter Zimmerling (ed.), Evangelische Seelsorgerinnen.
Biographische Skizzen, Texte und Programme (Göttingen, 2005): 82–102; Ruth Albrecht,
Johanna Eleonora Petersen: theologische Schriftstellerin des frühen Pietismus (Göttingen,
2005).

5 Johann Henrich Reitz, Historie Der Wiedergebohrnen/Oder Exempel gottseliger/
so bekandt = und benam = als unbekandt = und unbekanner Christen/Männlicher
und Weiblichen Geschlechts/In Allerley Staenden/Wie Dieselbe erst von Gott gezogen und
bekehert/und nach vie/en Kämpfen und Aengsten/Durch Gottes Geist und Wort/zum Glauben
Schrader (ed.) (Tübingen, 1982).

6 See Ulrike Gleixner, and Marion Gray (eds), Gender in Transition. Discourse
and Practice in German-Speaking Europe, 1750–1830 (Ann Arbor, 2006), especially the
introduction, pp. 1–22.
Participation and Expansion

In overviews on women and Pietism we can read that Pietism attracted women in particular, and that in the first time of change women took an influential role, but with the consolidation of the movement they were pushed back into their more traditional roles. This result requires a closer examination. We should ask: How was this postponement put into practice, which arguments were used, and how women perceived their driving out.

But nevertheless Pietism enabled women to expand their personal and public realms. In Lutheran Pietism women gained opportunities for spiritual experience. Women began prophesying and they insisted on the validity of their religious experiences. They demanded individual time to read the bible and devotional literature and to reflect on their spiritual lives. In mainstream Pietism middle-class women received for the first time in history the right to write: diaries, spiritual life stories, death-bed-accounts and thousands of letters. Some Pietist women of high status and higher education even wrote devotional literature and theological interpretations, which in Early Modern Europe was not unusual for noble and learned women.

Pietism gave women new opportunities to say "I", new methods to develop a subject position and therefore new ways to gain self-confidence. For women and for men Pietism supported the process of individuation.

The new Pietist mode of communication even gave women the opportunity to act in public – in a village or town circle and as noble women in court. Although we do not have a detailed examination of women's roles in small groups of religious devotion, we do have many references of their participation. As the jurist and politician Johann Jakob Moser tells in his spiritual biography of his deceased wife Friederike Rosine Moser. The couple met in Stuttgart in the 1730s with Moser's mother, his siblings and their partners and other friends to prepare for the Communion. He called the circle “Geistes-Gemeinschaft”.

And there are more references to Pietist circles of high civil servants in Stuttgart in the 18th Century which were socially closed and in which we find couples, wives and husbands, and also widows. Besides charismatic individual leaders of conventicles family, kinship, spiritual friendship and similar social statuses could be the basis for women's participation in small groups of religious devotion. We even find women who lead conventicles for women. The pastor Philipp Matthäus Hahn (1739–1790) finally divided his overflowing conventicles for his parish by sex and social status. Every other time his so-called “Weiberstunde” (Women's hour) met, it was run by two women of the parish. Decades later his daughter was head of a small conventicle with other village women.

Pietist Women, married and unmarried, visited Pietist pastors to discuss religious affairs. As an unmarried woman Helena Flattich (1748–1811), daughter of the pastor Johann Friedrich Flattich, visited Friedrich Christoph Oetinger several times in the second half of the 1770s to discuss questions of faith with him. Noble women or women of the upper middle class could even have independent correspondence with Pietist theologians and pastors. After the death of her husband in 1759, the upper-middle-class poet Magdalena Sibylla Rieger, born Weissensee, (1707–1786) started a correspondence with the Pietist Pastor Philipp David Burk (1714–1770), which lasted for years. Again a woman with a high social status had a spiritual correspondence with a pastor with a lower social status and lower position. It seems that the unequal social status (middle class – nobility/ or high middle class) could be balanced by the inequality of sex (male – female). The usual border of the gender difference is invalidated by the social status difference. The neutralization of the gender-status difference enables equality which is essential for a spiritual pen-friendship. A great deal of correspondence where Pietist women were involved is based on family, kinship and spiritual friendship.

When we ask if women participated in theological discourse, the analysis of autobiographical writing provides some information. The participation of daughters and wives in the theological discussions and plans of their educated fathers and husbands was no exception. Women in the educated middle class possessed a basic knowledge of Latin which they were taught in the paternal home, together with their brothers, by their fathers, teachers or curates. Their lessons ended when their brothers left home for higher education. In the autobiographies of learned Pietists, references are frequently made to the involvement of their wives and daughters in their work. Friedrich Christoph Oetinger (1702–1782) writes of the highly educated daughter of Johann Jakob Schütz, who drew his attention to Rosenroth's Kabbala denudata. After their marriage, Johann Albrecht Bengel (1687–1752) taught her, Johanna Regina Seeger, Greek. The reason for this instruction was the Pietistic idea of "Gefährtin" (helpmate) which emphasized the spiritual partnership of marriage and had very practical uses. Wives copied out the theological manuscripts of their husbands so that they could be sent to intimate colleagues for evaluation. Beate Regina Hahn, second wife of Philipp Matthäus Hahn – was trained by her father Johann Friedrich Flattich, a pioneer for women's

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8 See Gleixner, Pietismus und Bürgerturn.
9 Johann Jacob Moser, Etwas von dem inneren Leben der seeligen Frauen Frideriken Rosinen Moserin (Stuttgart, 1775), pp. 9ff.
higher education. She wrote down from memory the theological reflection of her pastor husband in his devotional hours, which he then corrected for the printer.\(^{13}\)

The importance of mothers and grandmothers in producing learned sons and grandsons was not limited to Württemberg. Spener’s daughter Susanna Katharina (1665–1726) was described as an exceptionally learned woman who educated her son Karl Otto with care. Zinzendorf’s grandmother, Henriette Catharina Gersdorf, had an important role in his religious education. In mainstream Pietism women’s contribution was embedded in family, kinship and small groups and occasionally extended to a wider audience. That women expanded their sphere of influence in Pietism is also verified through the opponents of Pietism who always pointed out the – in their view – indecent public role of women in this movement. All female Pietist authors needed to insist in their printed works that in spite of writing they didn’t neglect their most important duties as housewives, wives and mothers, because they wrote only in their leisure time.

In the transition to the 19th Century there was a major change. Whereas in the 18th century in the betrothal correspondence the brides portrayed themselves as self-confident spiritual personalities, the female rhetoric of this genre in the 19th Century was that of their female inferiority. But we should be cautious about blaming the Pietist movement for the devaluation of women in the 19th Century – the devaluation of women’s legal position, women’s work and women’s intellectual capacities was part of modernity in the first half of the nineteenth Century.\(^{14}\) Whereas the Napoleonic Code protected the male individual from state intervention, women were again denied the same protection. The modern concept of citizenship as a male concept brought a new public–private split and women were now seen as belonging to the private realm. Even the understanding of historical knowledge changed fundamentally. With the emergence of the new academic history in the course of the 19th century, women’s contribution to this history was denied.\(^{15}\) Therefore it is not a surprise that the Pietistic tradition was also reorganized without women’s contributions.

But parallel to these changes the Pietist emphasis on education and social work developed new areas of work for women in the 19th Century, including Pietistic schools, the social work in the Rettungshausbewegung, and the deaconess and the female missionary. The “Domestic” and “Foreign Mission” enabled women to work outside the family realm. In my view the Pietist emphasis on social work, education and mission was a kind of catalyst for women’s demands for occupying roles in the broader society.

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\(^{13}\) Gleixner, ‘Pietism, Millenarianism and the Family Future’.


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**Gender trouble**

Renunciation of matrimony was an option in Pietism but didn’t determine mainstream pietism. Most educated middle class Pietists married. Philipp Jakob Spener (1635–1705) and other Pietist theologians emphasized the spiritual partnership of marriage, but the subordination of the wife was mandatory at the same time. If we look on pietistic marriage sermons it is evident that the pietistic marriage order doesn’t differ from the Lutheran concept. In his catechism sermons Spener stated that the couple should live in mutual love and in mutual responsibility for the soul of the partner. The wife shall be the helpmate of her husband who has to support her. Parallel to his symmetrical perspective the wife has to be obedient to her husband and has to subordinate herself under his will.\(^{16}\) The reciprocal responsibilities are in indissoluble tension to the asymmetrical subordination of the wife.\(^{17}\) In this tension “gender trouble” was grounded.

The journal of Beate Paulus (1778–1842) offers insight into these tensions. She was born in 1778 as the oldest daughter of Philipp Matthäus Hahn. Ten years after the death of her father she entered into an arranged marriage with the pastor Karl Friedrich Paulus (1763–1828), who came from a wealthy family of Stuttgart civil servants. Paulus, however, was not a Pietist and the spouses’ differing conceptions of piety led them into considerable conflict. Beate Paulus began her journal in 1817 and ended it eleven years later after the death of her husband in 1828.\(^{18}\) Her writings document the couple’s primary conflict over the financing of their sons’ formal education. In contrast to her husband Beate Paulus was convinced that only with a university education would her sons be able to serve the kingdom of God in a proper way. Like her father she lived under the conviction of being chosen. Her millenarian notion of status must be understood against the background of the Württembergian Pietistic notion of the educated elite, in which the learned constitute an especially elect group in working towards the kingdom of God. In her journal she needs all her religious rhetorical capacities to argue why she is allowed to transgress the worldly gender order and to be disobedient towards her husband. She didn’t follow his life plan, managed a lot of financial transactions behind his back and expressed her criticism of him as a husband, father and pastor.\(^{19}\)

Pietistic husbands could also use their spirituality to empower their household position. The diary of Philipp Matthäus Hahn, written in the last quarter of the


\(^{18}\) The journal is stored in the manuscript section of the Württembergisch-Landesbibliothek, Stuttgart under Wochenschriften Beate Hahn Paulus (1817 to 1828) Cod. Hist. 109, 4; 109, 5; 109, 6; 109, 7; 109, 9; 109, 10; quarr 370, 8; 370, 11; see Beate Hahn Paulus, *Die Talheimers Wochenbücher 1817–1829*, Ulrike Gleixner (ed.), (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2007).

\(^{19}\) Gleixner, *Pietismus und Bürgertum*, pp. 249–70.
18th Century, from 1772 to 1790, shows how hard he worked to assure his self-construction as a patriarch. His position as a pietistic patriarch was unstable and therefore he demanded permanent signs of subordination of his wife and other household members.20

In the Pietist movement the “priesthood of all believers” expanded women’s activities, and the concept of spiritual equality before God strengthened women’s consciousness of their own value. But the concept of “spiritual equality” never transgressed or changed the actual gender order in society. Spiritual equality never led to a Pietistic demand for civil equality. Looking at radical, separatist Pietist groups we will possibly find a stronger challenge of the established gender roles, but these attempts don’t reach over to affect the larger society.

Pietism in Germany and North America 1680–1820

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Contents

Acknowledgements vii
List of Contributors ix

Introduction: Pietism in Two Worlds
Jonathan Strom 1

PART I: DEFINING PIETISM IN THE WORLD OF TRANSATLANTIC RELIGIOUS REVIVALS

1 Pietism in the World of Transatlantic Religious Revivals
   Hartmut Lehmann 13
2 Some Thoughts on Pietism in American Religious History
   Stephen J. Stein 23
3 Communication Networks as One Aspect of Pietist Definition:
   The Example of Radical Pietist Connections between Colonial
   North America and Europe
   D.F. Durnbaugh 33
4 Religion in the Atlantic World: The Ebenezer Communication
   Network, 1732–1828
   Alexander Pyrges 51

PART II: DISSENT AND MIGRATION: OLD WORLD HERITAGE

5 Johanna Eleonora Petersen in the Context of Women’s and Gender
   Studies
   Ruth Albrecht 71
6 Homeless Minds: The Migration of Radical Pietists, their
   Writings, and Ideas in Early Modern Europe
   Douglas H. Shantz 85
7 From Jakob Böhme via Jane Leade to Eva von Buttlar –
   Transmigrations and Transformations of Religious Ideas
   Willi Temme 101
8 Traveling Prophets: Inspirationists Wandering Through Europe
   and to the New World – Mission, Transmission of Divine
   Word, Poetry
   Hans-Jürgen Schrader 107
PART III: DISSENT AND MIGRATION: NEW WORLD CONFRONTATIONS

9 Heinrich Melchior Mühlauerg and the Pietisms in Colonial America
Hermann Wellenreuther

10 “Only Brothers should be accepted into this proposed council:”
Restricting Women’s Leadership in Moravian Bethlehem
Beverly Prior Smaby

11 The Evolution of the Bethlehem Pilgergemeine
Katherine Carté Engel

12 “Don’t Teach My Negroes to Be Pietists:” Pietism and the Roots
of the Black Protestant Church
Jon Sensbach

13 “If you want to be the Lord’s servant, Resign yourself to
Confrontation:” The Pietist Challenge in Early Georgia
Helene M. Kastinger Riley

PART IV: NEW DIRECTIONS IN RESEARCH

14 Halle Pietism and the Prussian State: Infiltration, Dissent,
and Subversion
Benjamin Marschke

15 Pietism, Print Culture, and Salzburg Protestantism on the Eve of
Expulsion
James Van Horn Melton

16 “The Hope of Better Times:” Pietism and the Jews
Christopher Clark

17 How to Incorporate Gender in Lutheran Pietism Research:
Narratives and Counternarratives
Ulrike Gleixner

Index

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