

# **Anne Mielke: Women in Couleur. Academic sororities and the ideals of female community building within a male domain.**

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## **Abstract**

The milieu of student associations („Studierendenverbindungen“) in Germany is male-dominated, with male-dominated traditions and rituals that focus on masculinity. This is also reflected in their members: the majority of student associations in Germany are fraternities, and the vast majority of all corporate members are men. Student association members navigate a milieu in which women exist primarily as partners of male members but not as members in their own right.

Nevertheless, female associations (sororities) have proliferated since the 2000s. While the female percentage across all associations is still very low at around 5 percent, many university towns now have their own student associations that only accept women. In media and research, very little is known about these female communities. The few publications that exist deal with women's associations at the beginning of the 20th century, and therefore the historical predecessors of today's sororities. In this dissertation I focus on the strategies of female community building within the male-dominated („männerbündisch“) milieu of German student associations. I examine the phenomenon of German sororities and their members with the help of data triangulation based on association magazines of (male) umbrella associations, interviews with members of sororities, and a group discussion. In doing so, this dissertation sheds light on German sororities and their practices. It thereby contributes to the larger research field on the history and current practices of male-dominated student associations („Männerbund“), by adding a gender perspective that focuses on women.

In my dissertation, I argue that today sororities as homosocial gender-exclusive communities may be individually empowering for their members via their functions as communities of socialisation and protection. Nevertheless, those communities and their members exist in a gendered *double bind* in which they are guided by conflicting standards of appropriate behavior.