



Elias Fromm & Sophia Weißer

Conference Report

FFK #39 in Halle an der Saale 2026

ABSTRACT

From Mar. 11-13, 2026, the “Film and Media Studies Colloquium #39” (FFK) at Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg offered early-career researchers a non-institutional space to debut their findings, gather feedback of peers, and build academic networks. Characterized by a strong sense of community and shared enthusiasm, the event highlights how scholarly practice can resemble fan culture, as participants actively engage with media, exchange ideas, and explore new perspectives beyond solitary research work. The conference featured presentations in both English and German and included presentations primarily by students and early-career researchers and was organized by the Department of Media and Communication Studies at the Institute for Music, Media, and Speech Sciences. The colloquium demonstrates the diversity of current research while underscoring how media representations both reproduce and challenge normative structures.

KEYWORDS

film studies, media studies, queerness, gender, participatory cultures

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The “Film and Media Studies Colloquium” (FFK) is a non-institutional conference held annually since 1988. The 39th edition was organized by the Department of Media and Communication Studies at the Institute for Music, Media, and Speech Sciences of Martin-Luther-University Halle-Wittenberg and took place from Mar. 11-13, 2026. The conference offers early-career scholars an independent forum to gain experience in academic conferences, discussions, and presentations.

Many participants use this opportunity to present ongoing or planned doctoral projects. Beyond academic exchange, the FFK functions as a community of enthusiasts where scholarly practice mirrors fan culture. Therefore, the colloquium provides a participatory space that transforms solitary research into collective engagement. By actively discussing media and networking practices, scholars do not merely observe their objects of study but perform a form of “aca-fandom” (Jenkins 2006, 4), characterized by shared intellectual passion and constructive feedback. This communal atmosphere effectively breaks up the isolation of individual qualification projects and fosters new perspectives through collaborative reflection. The sometimes rather solitary work on one’s own writing and qualification projects was thus lightened, broken up, and filled with new ideas. Since the variety of different ideas and projects is vast, only three of the panels will be presented here as examples.



Queer Representation and Subversion

Elsa-Margareta Venzmer (Friedrich-Alexander University of Erlangen-Nuremberg) opened the panel by examining British celebrity Noel Fielding in her talk “The Confuser: Noel Fielding and the Subversive Power of Nonbinary Identity in Television and Culture.” Venzmer analyzed Fielding’s various appearances on British television in the early 2000s, tracing how Fielding’s play with costumes and makeup destabilized heteronormative media logics. By drawing on the emerging field of nonbinary studies (cf. Quinan/Kempfen 2026), Venzmer illustrated how nonbinarity serves as a methodological approach for film and media studies and demonstrated that the inspiring effects of Fielding’s androgyny remain significant to this day.

The emergence of a new queer filmic archetype the ‘Bitch Lesbian Lead’ was the central focus of the contribution “Darstellungen queerer antagonistischer Frauen in englischsprachigen Serien” by Lina

Heimann (University of Potsdam), who examined these characters as morally ambivalent antiheroines. Drawing on contemporary serialized storytelling—such as the protagonist Carol of the TV series *Pluribus* (2025–) or the character Aggie Wiggs from *The Beast in Me* (2025)—Heimann questioned the supposed ‘moral ambivalence’ of these protagonists through the lenses of queer negativity and visibility. They addressed the transgressive potential of lesbian antiheroism in demarcation to masculinist figurations of the ‘antihero’ and showed how reactionary backlashes in online forums, referring to these characters, often serve in the reproduction and reification of heteronormative gender ideals. In reference to Kate McNicholas Smith’s (2020) discussion of lesbians on television, Heimann related this representational style to the ‘lesbian normal,’ which cannot be directly linked to actual queer-feminist politics and history. This field of tension between depoliticized representations and transgression is, Heimann argued, a central axis through which these ‘new’ lesbian leads relate to their progenitors.

Maximilian Zhang (Eberhard Karls University of Tübingen) analyzed the Boys Love (BL) genre by mapping out the diverse subcultures and facets that have emerged alongside its recent rise. His talk, “Affekt, Fankultur und Soft Power: Das Boys-Love-Genre im ostasiatischen Kino,” examined how this popular media genre intersects with fan cultures, platform strategies, and gender discourses. By analyzing its affective impact, the emergence and dissolution of fandom spaces in Japan, Korea, and China, as well as its role as a form of soft power, Zhang introduced the audience to a culturally vibrant area of research. While some BL content remains structured through heteronormativity and as such should not necessarily be read as queer, the way its ‘softness’ inspires and affects fans (even in defiance of censorship laws) strengthens the discussion of globalized fandom practices and their relation to queer visibility. Practices that inscribe heteronormative structures into gay relationships can defy anti-queer censorship. Likewise, marketing strategies that associates same-sex desire exclusively with ‘femininity’ may nevertheless increase queer visibility for broader audiences, potentially allowing for relations that defy gendered normativities.

Synthesizing these three presentations underscores the importance of discussing queerness not only as a question of personal identities and how they can be represented in different forms of media but as a complex network of media relations produced through their very relationality. Noel Fielding’s androgyny, for instance, can only be read within the wider context of nonbinary subcultures, and ‘Bitch Lesbian Leads’ gain their moral ambivalence through their relation to (a)normative surroundings, while the global interconnectedness of BL shows how queer genres can inspire fan practices of connecting and relating. Through this lens, ‘relation’ in participatory cultures becomes a fertile ground for active practices of queering. A potential follow-up question here could be how ‘doing queer relationalities’ forms continuities and discontinuities within participatory cultures.

The Procrastination Economy: Media Use in the In-Between

In this panel, three different student projects involving self-experiments were presented; these projects examined mobile apps within the framework of a seminar based on Ethan Tussey’s (2018) concept of the Procrastination Economy. All project groups focused on the connection between short breaks, moments of waiting, or brief bouts of boredom (in-between moments) and the use of apps during these moments. While all three concepts effectively draw users to the screen, each employs a distinct strategy to capture that attention.



The research group “Between Mood Board and Marketing: Monetizing Mobile ‘In-Between’ Moments on Pinterest” (Luisa Giebler, Ulrike Kühnold, Josephine Mai, and Maria Wiebke) highlight-ed that Pinterest’s endless scrolling and algorithmic focus on users’ specific interests lead to in-tensive usage, which is also strongly correlated with the display of advertisements. In this pro-cess, the ads visually blend into the feed and become part of the images consumed, to the point where it is sometimes nearly impossible to directly distinguish between an image and an ad with a direct link to a purchase.

The project “Pay to Procrastinate: When Waiting Becomes a Business Model” (Louise Günther, Anna Langkabel, Josephine Ruhlandt, and Jamie Schröder) focused on casual games that were played and used repeatedly during brief downtime. The project revealed that these spare mo-ments can be significantly extended by the games: for example, regular push notifications and additional boosters or extra abilities expanded a planned ten-minute session to nearly an hour. Furthermore, casual games are evolving into elements that structure the day: by repeatedly prompting users to play and, in some cases, enabling extended play through bonus promotions, they not only prolong breaks but also potentially shift users’ daily routines. For example, it was reported that users’ bedtimes were pushed back due to extended playtime and short planned breaks were significantly lengthened.

The group “Swipe Culture in ‘In-Between-Moments’” (Pia Jendretzki, Juliane Koch, and Lea Schneider) focused on the study of dating apps. A comparison of three apps revealed that while all of them initially focus on the potential for meeting partners, a strong element of gamification emerges over time. Through cryptic push notifications and the option to pay to see more match-es, the urge to keep returning to the app and receive new matches increases. Thus, usage shifts from dating to swiping and success in the app are primarily achieved by getting as many matches as possible.

All three projects demonstrated how mobile apps utilize waiting periods to, on the one hand, re-tain users and, on the other hand, encourage them to make payments to bridge waiting times or unlock additional features. The community created through shared practices of procrastination is also monetized: competitive as well as collaborative elements serve a larger incentive structure that aims to motivate players to spend money to better their standing as an individual in the community at large. Within the games, players are further encouraged by rankings and leader-boards to, for example, defend their top position, obtain boosters or maintain a streak through special offers. This embeds the individual player within the game’s entire community. A similar function is pursued in dating apps: individuals can actively boost their own status through func-tions such as ‘Super Likes,’ increased reach, or prioritization in the algorithm, thereby becoming more visible within the community. This demonstrates that for those with the financial means, the consumption of casual games, social media, and dating apps demands a dual investment of both time and capital.

Mediatized Negotiations of Normative Orders

Anna Sacher (University of Vienna) addressed the affective reach of awkwardness in her talk, “Awkward, Feminist Killjoys,” discussing its potential to disrupt patriarchal and heterosexual normativities. The ephemeral affective regime of the ‘awkward’ appears as a form of social misdirection that breaks with expected feminine gender performativities. By relating this dynamic to Sara Ahmed’s concept of the ‘feminist killjoy’ and the discussion of happiness as a normative registry (cf. Ahmed 2010; 2023), Sacher analyzed representations of feminine awkwardness as a form of social critique. Using examples such as the sitcom *Broad City* (2009-2014) and the web series *Awkward Black Girl* (2011-2013), she posited

the awkward as a powerful counter-position that challenges the regulatory connection between social norms and social goods.

Katerina Papadopoulou (European University Viadrina Frankfurt/Oder) drew on theories of multimodality to examine ‘Court TV’ and the impact of its medial affordances in her talk, “Depp v. Heard – Mediatisierte Gerichtsverfahren.” Papadopoulou’s research analyzed how the affordances of livestreamed court trials and their reception impact the American justice system itself. By synthesizing approaches from film studies and linguistics through the concept of the ‘cinematic metaphor’ (cf. Müller/Kappelhoff 2018), Papadopoulou demonstrated how the reversal of perpetrator and victim in the case of *Depp v. Heard* (2022) was produced by its cinematic staging. She also gave a glimpse into the evaluation of her collected data, and through her research process showed how the organization of communities around events and media formats can also act as a discursive mechanism that aids in the reproduction of patriarchal violence.

The panel addressed normativity primarily in relation to gender and the representation of gendered identities. While one talk focused on fictional representations of awkward female characters, the other posited how the current landscape of digital media can also result in the fictionalization and metaphorization of actual events. In both cases, representation becomes a venue for the production of normativity as well as for the rejection of normative logics. The impact of the different ways through which representations are produced, then, is greatly influenced by cultural practices of reception: TV series like *Broad City* become cultural signifiers of everyday a(b)normativities, while the ‘Court TV’-trial of *Depp v. Heard* becomes fictionalized through the ways it is related to by the community it brings forth. Investigating how these practices of reception relate to the groups that form and are formed through the recipients could be an interesting way to expand on these ideas, especially through considering ‘femininity’ as a community that is repeatedly stabilized, challenged or rejected. Negotiating normative orders, then, becomes about questions of (not) participating in their repeated production.

Conclusion

This report can only provide a small glimpse into the many talks and panels held at FFK #39. Visiting the conference and getting to see the many facets of current and emerging positions in media and film studies brought up the question whether or not scientific research itself could also be seen as a type of fan practice, one that’s not necessarily defined by allegiance but by curiosity. The joy and community of the FFK’s many participants sharing their enthusiasm for film and media studies research certainly resembled participation in an especially active online forum with its own rituals, language, and temporality. And within this context, all participants discussed and shared the hope for more financial security and less institutional precarity.

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