

Intimacies in History of Jewish Literature & Culture (Augsburg, 20–22 Jan 27)

University of Augsburg, Jan 20–22, 2027

Deadline: Sep 30, 2026

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The conference "Intimacies: Family and Sexuality in the History of Jewish Culture and Literature in Eastern and Central Europe (1900–1945)" explores perspectives on concepts of intimacy in regions shaped by European Jewish culture. The focus is on the question of how intimate relationships were historically regulated, religiously standardised, socially practised, negotiated in literary terms, and culturally interpreted. In this context, the family is not viewed as a self-evident, but as a dynamic structure and social category (cf. Bourdieu 1996) within which kinship, desire, care, obligation, conflict, belonging, social order, and norms are negotiated. Intimacy is therefore understood not merely as a sphere of the private, but as an analytical category through which transitions between domestic life, religion, law, the state, the economy, the public sphere and cultural representation can be examined (Wilson 2014; Gabb/Silva 2011; Roseneil/Budgeon 2004).

The focus on the period from 1900 to 1945 takes into account the political, social, and cultural upheavals of European modernity, during which Jewish ways of life were reshaped and radically transformed amidst the late empire, the formation of nation states, World War I, the interwar period, and Nazi persecution. It is precisely the concentration of experiences of transformation and crisis that makes intimacy a particularly illuminating analytical category, as processes of negotiation concerning belonging, norms, difference, and violence take on specific forms within familial, sexual, and affective relationships. The chosen time period thus offers the opportunity to highlight continuities and ruptures in the shaping of Jewish intimacies and to examine their intertwining with processes of modernisation, secularisation, migration, and persecution.

The focus on Eastern and Central Europe takes into account the historical and cultural constellations of this region, where Jewish communities were characterised by a particularly high degree of multilingualism, migration, and transnational interconnections. At the same time, this regional focus enables us to examine Jewish intimacies beyond the confines of the nation-state and highlights instead, how they were negotiated within social, cultural, and political spaces. Particularly in the Jewish context, family, love, and intimacy are frequently linked to issues of migration, multilingualism, religious difference, cultural translation, and the question of where one belongs – whether within one's own community or in relation to others. This opens up a perspective on the intertwining of local practices with supra-regional dynamics of modernisation, as well as processes of exclusion and belonging (Wittler 2019).

From a historical perspective, particular interest lies in those practices, norms, and institutions through which Jewish intimacies were created, restricted, controlled or negotiated. Contributions

may, for example, examine (everyday) practices relating to marriage, sexuality, and sexual morality, education, gender roles, religious law, state regulation, close social relationships or transnational family ties. Equally welcome are studies of various source materials, such as ego-documents, court records, press articles, and association publications in Yiddish, Polish, and German, which illustrate both the restrictions on and the exercise of scope for action (Garbarini 2006). Of particular interest is how Jewish individuals in Central and Eastern Europe shaped intimate ways of life amidst religious tradition, bourgeois family structures, secularisation, nationalisation, anti-semitism, and gender politics. Particular focus is placed on everyday practices and coping strategies, especially in situations and processes characterised by upheaval, uncertainty, and experiences of violence. In this context, forms of non-familial closeness – such as friendship, elective kinship, and intellectual networks – can also be examined as alternative or complementary social forms of Jewish belonging (Lenhard 2023).

The literary and cultural studies section of the conference explores how intimacy is narrated, staged, and aesthetically encoded in German-Jewish, Yiddish, Hebrew, Polish, and multilingual literature and culture. Literature, theatre, journalism, and the visual arts emerge as spaces in which love, sexuality, and family are not merely narrated or depicted, but are constructed as conflictual cultural orders. Of particular interest are representations of marriage, desire, sexuality, intergenerational relationships, and queer and non-normative forms of intimacy, as well as questions of assimilation, conversion, and intra-Jewish differences. At the same time, the focus is on how texts themselves generate intimacy and function as media of closeness (Holliday 2018), and how Jewish figures, bodies, and gender orders are negotiated as surfaces onto which otherness and difference are projected. This will also explore intersectional entanglements of religion, gender, class, sexuality, and origin, as well as the aesthetic strategies through which these can be narrated.

The visual representation of Jewish intimacy in paintings, prints, photographs, book illustrations, periodicals, and objects of material culture constitutes a distinct body of sources that also lends itself particularly well to art-historical perspectives. Images of family, the body, domestic spaces, and religious practice should not be read merely as illustrations of historical or literary contexts, but as media-specific productions of knowledge that generate their own norms regarding gender, desire, and belonging. It is precisely in (and through) the ephemeral nature of popular graphics, press illustrations, and photography that processes of rendering Jewish worlds visible and invisible can be examined – processes that often remain hidden in textual sources. We therefore welcome papers that analyse visual and material sources using methods from image and media studies, provenance and exhibition history, as well as gender and queer art history.

The conference is interdisciplinary in nature and is aimed at early-career researchers from the fields of Jewish Studies, History, Literary Studies, Cultural Studies, Gender Studies, and related disciplines. We welcome papers that examine family, intimacy, love, sex, and marriage as points of intersection in Jewish history and culture, bringing together perspectives from art history, literary studies, cultural studies, and the history of gender and sexuality.

Possible topics:

- (1) Close social relationships (family, friendship, and elective affinities)
- (2) Interreligious friendship, love, family, marriage, and encounters

- (3) Family spheres: spaces between social norms and intimacy
- (4) Marriage, law, and religious norms/standardisation
- (5) Love, desire, and sexuality
- (6) Queer and non-normative intimacies
- (7) Violence, vulnerability, and power in intimate relationships
- (8) Intimacy, the public sphere, and the media

Bibliography

Bourdieu, Pierre. „On the Family as a Realized Category“. *Theory, Culture & Society*, Nr. Vol. 13, Nr. 3 (1996): 19– 26.

Garbarini, Alexandra: *Numbered Days: Diaries and the Holocaust*, New Haven 2006.

Gabb, Jacqui / Silva, Elizabeth B.: Introduction to Critical Concepts: Families, Intimacies and Personal Relationships. In: *Sociological Research Online* 16/4 (2011), Article 23.

Holliday, John: Emotional Intimacy in Literature. In: *British Journal of Aesthetics* 58/1 (2018), S. 1–16.

Lenhard, Philipp: *Wahlverwandtschaften. Kulturgeschichte der Freundschaft im deutschen Judentum, 1888–1938*. Tübingen 2023.

Roseneil, Sasha / Budgeon, Shelley: Cultures of Intimacy and Care Beyond ‘the Family’: Personal Life and Social Change in the Early 21st Century. In: *Current Sociology* 52/2 (2004), S. 135–159.

Wilson, Ara: Intimität. Eine nützliche Kategorie transnationaler Analyse. In: *Feministische Studien* 32/1 (2014), S. 63–78.

Wittler, Kathrin: *Morgenländischer Glanz. Eine deutsche jüdische Literaturgeschichte (1750–1850)*. Tübingen 2019.

Application:

Please send your abstract (max. 400 words) for a paper of approximately 20 minutes, together with a short biographical note (max. 100 words), in one single document by 30 September 2026 to intimacies.conference.aux@gmail.com. Proposals may be submitted in German or English. Notifications of acceptance will be sent by 31 October 2026.

Kontakt

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Reference:

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