ABOUT
For decades, comics have been perceived as a mass phenomenon situated in popular culture, which manifests, establishes and perpetuates stereotypical (gender) representations. Hence, the image of a particularly helpless, passive, but all the more attractive female victim is at home in the repertoire of the medium no less than the representation of a radiant, muscular, white, heterosexual hero, whose first duty consists of protecting the world and its inhabitants from catastrophe. In this sense, comics might seem alike to other forms of mass media in the age of mechanical reproduction and their tendency towards generalisations and clichés. From a historical perspective, reactions to the worldwide anti-comics campaigns of the 1950s, including self-censorship among numerous comic book publishers, also exemplarily point to heteronormative andophobic tendencies within mass media comics culture, which was in turn long reflected in the demographics of its readership. However, as a popular and oftentimes marginalised medium, comics never completely became one with this role of a (reactionary) stabilising force. Rather, comics are imbued with a socio-political dimension that has always encouraged comics artists to use the spaces between in a creative way, and to question and subvert (social) norms.

The 13th annual conference of the German Society for Comics Studies will examine this productive potential of comics by uncovering and analysing different forms of the ‘spaces between’ within the art form itself, but also within its production and its audience. The internationally and interdisciplinarily assembled talks will focus on the question how gender, identity and diversity are represented and negotiated in sequential art. The conference topic ‘Spaces Between – Gender, Diversity and Identity in Comics’ will draw our attention to the nexus between the medium of comics and categories of difference and identity such as gender, disability, age, and ethnicity. In order to open and deepen an interdisciplinary conversation between comics studies and intersectional identity studies within the international comics studies community. In this respect, the 13th annual conference of the German Society for Comics Studies will not only contribute to the disclosure of exclusions, power structures and (hetero-)normative allocations in comics, but also critically analyse their socio-political and communicative forms of (re-)production.