



The Current Discussion on Men and Masculinities

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Abstract

In the past gender specific problems were mainly discussed in a female perspective. In the meantime there is a rising attentiveness in the living conditions of men and their coping strategies within critical life events. In this paper an appropriate frame of reference is outlined which can be used in those areas of social work where men are already discovered as a target group with special difficulties and needs.

In the past gender specific problems were mainly discussed in a female perspective. In the meantime there is a rising attentiveness in the living conditions of men and their coping strategies within critical life events. In the following treatise I will outline an appropriate frame of reference which can be used in those areas of social work where men are already discovered as a target group with special difficulties and needs.

For quite a while now, social research and studies on men and masculinities are at the crossroads. Masculinity and men's studies used to be imbedded in the research of women's issues when it came to research policy and methodology. Nowadays it is faced with the challenge of finding its own ways. The "second wave" of the research into women's issues in the 1990s has evoked a variety of discourses about masculinity which tried to define the subject in its own way (see overview of Messner 1997; Döge 1999; Wedgwood and Connell 2004). Especially the position of complementary, whereas the questions pertaining women's issues is rather a question pertaining men's issues, and therefore primarily discuss masculinity in this relation, has reached its limits. Made on this background, typologies of male attitudes and behavioral patterns, which deal with men having been made more or less insecure by women's emancipation have been discussed to death. They are faced with an invisible wall as was pointed out e.g. by the authors of a German wide survey on men in the middle of the 1990s in the deep structure of male mental states: "The results of the survey display with a systematical persistence that changes in men are the less the further one gets to the core of the person. Some parts of the survey even point to a loss of depth [...]. Changes of cultural arrangements of the surface is only one part of the solution" (Zulehner and Volz 1998, p. 27). This reflexive admission identifies two dimensions of understanding which have been nearly ignored or were not tangible in the perspective of interaction in gender studies. One is a psychodynamic drive which releases masculinity – especially in critical constellations of living – in a way which can not be explained by the everyday gender culture. The other are contradictions and ambivalences in society in which men are entangled. Men have to find their own ways to deal with these contradictions and from the respective coping dynamics it is possible to derive male conduct more complex than by the interactional view on men. In this sense, Susan Faludi (2001) came to the conclusion that the feministic point of view of men and the interactional model inevitable have to come back to the culture of male dominance

and are therefore always caught in the “adversary model.” This does not take the inner reality of men into account, who are constantly fighting to “see themselves as master although they so clearly live in a world where they are under control and being suppressed.” (p. 631f.)

In a similar way, Armin Zeman (1997) identifies a theoretical embarrassment of gender research when it comes to men. He is of the opinion, and here we can take up with Zulehner and Volz, that this is especially due to the phenomenon that male identities are more resistant to changes in society than other identities. Men develop conditions of dominance but at the same time are dominated by these conditions. Maleness in industrial societies is characterized by a structural *dialectic of male hegemony and availability of men*. To find a theory for this phenomenon is one of the main tasks of research in social science in view of masculinity. Another task derives from the analysis of psychodynamic men who are affected in view of economical availability and their ways of expressing themselves, which are visible in interaction but most often are hidden and ambivalent.

This is not only a problem of research methods but also a problem of research policy. Michael Kimmel (2000) pointed this out when he comments that women research was always able to connect itself with an ethical imperative which is not possible for masculinity research. And Susan Faludi puts it more dramatically when she remarks that the discourse of gender emancipation has so far been defined anti-patriarchal. This has taken away from men the explicit or implicit possibility to claim the term of emancipation for themselves: “The male paradigm is not especially suitable for declaration of war against the miserable position in which men are. Men do not have a clearly defined enemy who oppresses them. How can men be oppressed when society has already identified them as the oppressors and they themselves see themselves in this role?” (2001, p. 630/ 631).

Therefore the following argumentation starts from the thesis that masculinity research in social science will have to consider economic, societal as well as psychodynamic dimensions if research in this area aims on raising above social reproductive dimensions of doing gender, in zones of historic-structural disaggregation of masculinity and their depth. The international comparative research of masculinity as presented in the “Handbook of Studies on Men and Masculinities” (2005) points out that what is urgently needed is to unclothe these two dimensions of masculinity research. The editors Robert W. Connell, Jeff Hearn and Michael S. Kimmel see the key area of current and future research of masculinity in the growing influence of the global capitalistic economy on the forming and detachment of masculinity.

They also point to the fact that it is necessary to find new theoretic impetus because current socialization research, in view of gender questions, has not got beyond the interactive level of role specific behaviour (2005, p. 9) The socialization perspective refers to the level of the subject and demands therefore – in this methodological perspective of ambivalence - an analysis of psychodynamic related coping structures which can be assumed behind certain behaviour patterns of young boys and men. In this context, Connell has pointed out the necessity of integrating psychoanalytical approaches in social science masculinity research. Yet, he has made these approaches subordinate to the social constructivist perspective. (Connell 1994) The social constructivist perspective, however, starts out from the fact that psychoanalytical impulses, even when socially caused, follow their own logic which is not visible in interaction.

International comparative masculinity research agrees that there is a necessity to turn away from a unilateral direct hierarchical model of male dominance. The question that has to be

asked is why masculinity is so strongly bound to power. This approach does not deny male connotative gender hierarchy since it has not vanished but appears in a “different light” (Holter 2005, p. 23 ff.). And to allude to the “paradox” of the structural concurrence of male dominance and male availability Holter also pleads for a methodological approach as already described before: „Yet we need a term that pinpoints the structural character of inequality and a recognition that structural gender inequality has survived even if patriarchy in the literal sense (father-power) has not” (Holter, p. 20).

This perspective forces us to search for an access to structural correspondents between the economical-societal, the interactive and the psychodynamic dimension of masculinity. These correspondents can not be identified in empirical reality. They are hidden, which leads to an ambivalence of male behaviour patterns.

Concealments and contexts of covery

There is a more or less differentiated tendency model in literature on gender-specific socialization: boys and men tend to behave extroversive, split off emotions, to project their helplessness on weaker persons and to close their inner being especially in critical life situations (see Faulstich-Wieland 2000; Böhnisch 2004). Girls and women, on the other hand, are considered to have an introversive behaviour. In psychoanalysis, this masculine tendency of externality, splitting off one’s emotions, is not only seen as the consequence of the centrifugal dynamic of infantile pressure of separation of boys from their mother (see Chodorov 1984) but also as the pressure of economic availability which weights heavily on men. Hereby a correspondent of economical-societal structuring and a psychodynamic activation of masculinity is postulated. From this point of analysis it is possible to construct a complex model of the construction of masculinity as a differentiated and variable coping context. In view of the psychoanalytical approach I especially follow Arno Gruen (1991) who assumes that in our industrial societies men, because of their habitual fitting for industrial processes, are therefore more “exposed” to it than women and that it is consequently necessary for them to suppress their own needs and to deny their helplessness in regard of this exposure. He continues to argue that this psycho- and socio-genetic emotional disadvantage of men compared to women leads to a repeated pressure of using violence. Above all, helplessness is for Gruen a general human phenomenon which men and women have to equally cope with in modern societies. However, men are stronger exposed to economical-societal availability and fitting and they also have no own alternatives to untie from economical-societal bonds and to find own ways to build a societal recognized protected zone. Women are able to do just this because society legitimizes, of old, an own exceptional zone for women, namely maternity. By this women are able to build up their own emotionality and are equipped to deal with helplessness much better than men. According to Gruen this fear of helplessness and weakness and especially the fear of not being able to cope with it, governs male behaviour and brings forward a pressure of splitting off and to project it on weaker persons.

The principle of movement and competition of the economy is build according to this structural logic of externality and splitting off. Because men are traditionally seen as being the gender the most intensive available for industrial production, it can be assumed – in the sense of an adaptation of Bourdieu’s theory of habitus (see Meuser 1998) - that it will come to a stable and refined incorporation of principles of externalization and splitting off and to their respective psychodynamic forming and interactive placement. However, this concurrence is hidden because these principles are dysfunctional in the course of social modernization and gender emancipation in everyday life of human relationships and are therefore experienced by

boys and men as going in the opposite direction. This inconsistency dealt with in the psychodynamic-interactive magnetic field of coping, whereby maleness is set free in ambivalent attitudes and behaviour patterns (see Böhnisch 2004). One of these central attitudes which can only be explained by analyzing those hidden conditions, is the male *neediness*, which can be found in different forms of male behaviour patterns. The term neediness means a physical-mental state of pressure in which one longs for something which at the same time is refused. This neediness creates helplessness which – when the issue is not broached – has to be split off. Carol Hagemann-White has identified the usefulness of this approach of concealments for gender research in commenting our work (see Böhnisch 2001): “The breakdown of a number of ‘concealments’ which work under the surface of everyday actions should point out that maleness can not be seen as a societal construction but also as a ‘culture anthropological entanglement’. In this sense, this neediness full of tensions which develops as a consequence of an obstruction to one’s core being, a concealed ground structure of maleness which – among other things - can be covered up by violence. [...] Networks of men conceal the flight aspect in the outward drive of man, his defence of feminacy and the taboo of homosexuality. By describing these concealments we can point out connecting lines from the patriarchy of Fordism, the industrial-capitalistic society to post modernism, as well as between social circumstances and physical-mental sexuality.” (Hagemann-White 2002, p. 145)

How these concealments “work” can only be partially understood, at the most indicatory, by the cognitive instrument of empirical social research – see statement of Zulehner and Volz (1998). Consequentially this leads to learning from experiences of therapeutic and social pedagogic counseling practice (see Brandes 2001). In the theoretic transformation of this empiricism the above mentioned coping paradigm (see Böhnisch 2005) was developed where a connection of hypothesis between psychodynamic, interactive and socio-structural factors can be made. In the center of this paradigm the thesis that human beings in critical life situations, in which previously available social and mental resources are not available anymore, strive for subjective patterns of a capacity to act, in the components self-esteem and acceptance. These patterns can differ from previously displayed patterns of behaviour and action. In therapeutic practice it shows that men in critical life constellation – e.g. separation, unemployment, pressure of competition – fall back on decided coping patterns – rationalization, defence of emotions, strategies of control and devaluation – even if one had not expected this because of their previous everyday attitudes (see e.g. Neumann and Suefke 2004). Masculinity therefore functions as a “redundant” means of coping in critical life constellations.

In the following, this connection of the hypothesis of release of covered up masculinity in critical life constellations will be transformed socio-structural. In doing so, the socio-structural induced disaggregation of maleness is understood as a critical background constellation.

Disaggregation and dislimitation of masculinity

In the 1980s and 1990s it was almost agreed upon that the modernization of the welfare state and the democratization, as it had started in the 1960s, would lead to gender equality and democratization of the gender ratio in western European countries. Especially northern and western European welfare states were able to accomplish a transformation and contextualization of gender hierarchical division of labour of the postmodern economic system, with its division of the production and reproduction sphere, in a way that the problem of reconciling family and job, which was manly a problem for women, could be eased.

Families were relieved by creating public child care facilities and by a social safeguard of paternity leaves, re-entry programs for women. Many women lived the three-phase-model: good education and start on the labour market, family time with children, re-entry in the job market. This model of reconciling job and family worked especially because capitalistic modernization in the second third of the 20th century was still in need of exhausting qualified human capital and needed especially female “reserves.” The women’s movement, at the same time, created a political climate where welfare strategies of modernism met female interest of emancipation. The questions pertaining women’s issues which were transformed by the welfare state hardly concerned men in the 1970s or 1980s. As long as male culture of hegemony, which still relied on the fact that the reproduction sector would still be a female dominated sector regardless of rising female gainful employment and the production sector was still characterized by male normal labour contracts, stayed relatively stable, the majority of men, although forced to come to terms with women, could still trust on the security of a “male dividend” (Connell). This male dividend continued to exist because besides all transformations the gender hierarchical basic model of division of labour and demarcation between production and reproduction sectors continued to exist. Especially those middle-class men with jobs in the social or cultural sector were confronted with the “new women” of the women’s movement in their jobs and partnerships. Cultural and social areas of society were (and are) touched most by feminist influences. In and from these areas an anti-sexist pressure on men built up and men were forced to mentally bid farewell to the naturalness of the hierarchical gender ratio in order to find a “purified” definition of maleness. The effect of these inner commotion of men was limited to middle class men working in social and cultural areas. Publications, however, led to a trend in the welfare state to develop a gender democracy which now no longer was only claimed and carried on by women but was also accepted by men. Male hegemony culture was further de-structured, the naturalness of male dominance was gone from many areas in society, women’s emancipation became more and more visible and men were no longer able to ignore this fact. In the welfare state there grew a tendency of gender balance. Since then this development was altered by the economic-technologic dominance of digital capitalism. Now two worlds exist next to each other: the world of the social and gender compromise regulated by the welfare state and the economic world of rationalization and globalization. The logic of latter more and more develops into dominant principles of socialization pushing back the values of the welfare state. The more the new digital - socially deracinated capitalism – looks for its own social forms in order to reproduce socially, regulation efforts by the welfare state are counteracted, washed down or suspended (see Altvater and Mahnkopf 1996). Whereas the welfare state keeps striving towards a democratization of the gender ratio (“gender mainstreaming”), digital capitalism leads to a disaggregation of the social and the gender ratio which undermine these regulations.

The digital capitalism with its main characteristics of economic and technologic rationalization and a global substitution of human capital is characterized by a social *uprooting and abstraction*. Social components and conditions of the way the society develops are being made more and more informal, are privatized, are not discussed in society and become part of the private sphere (see Altvater and Mahnkopf 2002). In the same way as the economy gets rid of its dependency on national society and its human capital by internationalization, forces their rhythm on people and pushes through a mentality of externalism and material constraint, it does not care about social balancing and the relationship of genders.

This development, however, is ambivalent. To the extent that gender hierarchy and gender conflict are not a central theme in economic-societal development, in the same way as this is still the case with regulations by the welfare state, the economy does not take into account gender ratios anymore, this opens the path for women into the production sphere (see Astrachan 1992). Through this the social division of production and reproduction, which was and is characteristic for the society of Fordism, is more or less suspended. Families are disaggregated – there are many new different forms of family nowadays. At the same time, rationalization and flexibility of reproduction of digital capitalism have led to the situation that normal working conditions are not granted anymore. These normal working conditions – one lifelong job, full-time employment full social security – account for the economic societal core of the definition of masculinity in a capitalism regulated by the welfare state. (see Döge 1999, p. 24f.; Hoffmann and Walwei 2002). Digital capitalism undermines the picture of masculinity in society, but on the other hand spurs on “male principles” of *externalization*. Masculinity is – at the same time – contested and newly demanded. On the other side, women are freed from the bondage of the reproduction sphere, but then they get trapped in the drift of economic externalization when they want to realize the classic three-phase-model and with it the desire of founding a family. (‘revolving door’, see Wimbauer 2000).

The agreement between the generations about how to accomplish building a family and raising children has become a private matter. At the same time, families do not have a total freedom for this negotiation: The intensifying of work and the usually higher industrial availability of men tends to work towards a classic role allocation of gender which is quite resistant or needs to be negotiated over and over again. This happens more restitutive as the development of gender equality in the sphere of regulations by the welfare state would make one assume. (see Reich 2002). Many men would like to realize taking responsibilities for their families and to get involved in raising their children (claims which are backed by the welfare state) but are hindered to do so because there are so intensely bound to the economy.

The ‘abstract worker’, the new working figure of digital capitalism is characterized as a flexible figure without gender (Baumann 2000; Klein 2002). In other words: people have to leave behind social ties and gender affiliations in their private lives. In the view of the new economy, gender hierarchies and gender conflicts are not contexts of progress. They are left to the welfare state and its efforts of social regulation. The welfare state itself, however, does not stay unaffected by this economic point of view: Meanwhile, in the strategies of “gender-mainstreaming” there shows up this economic governance perspective by which gender conflicts and gender hierarchy are “made objective” and therefore drawn away from public and privatspheres.

The disaggregation and de-standardization of maleness in digital capitalism does not only influence men differently from women. They also hit them quite “sudden.” Because of a transformation of questions pertaining women’s issues in the welfare state and especially because of the problem of reconciling job and family, women have learned long ago to change between production and reproduction spheres, most men are hardly prepared to do so. Men are rejected the family role because of different reasons. They lack the respective experiences and the public acceptance of such a second role. Although men also have access to family because of the lowering of boundaries between production and reproduction, many men are still blocked by domestic power claims of women and from the outside by the intensifying of working hours (see Appelt and Sauer 2001, p. 132).

The fragmentation of the standard work biography does not only loosen the hold of unemployed men but also of those who find themselves in precarious and underpaid employment. Feminist discussion speaks of a “feminization” of employment. This does not only mean that the quota of women in gainful employment has increased disproportionate in western European countries over the last quarter of the century but that more and more women find themselves in precarious job, gainful employment is less formal and there is a rise in discontinuous and insecure jobs. For men this means that many of them find themselves in situations where it is not possible anymore to keep their male role of dominance and as breadwinner. Such men, when looking for a way to compensate a fragile male role, tend to fall back on naturalistic concepts of masculinity and the “male dividend” – in the sense of the coping concept – to keep up their capacity to act. (see Dietz et al. 1997; Kreher 2005)

It can thus be stated that behind the disintegration of the normal work biography of Fordism there can be found a development of segmentation of the labour market and the gender society. Men with precarious jobs– especially in social fringe groups of society – develop different pictures of what it means to be male than those more centered in society, even with fragile job perspectives, because they are still provided with social and cultural capital and are not depended on devaluation of women. The man who is integrated in the new economy as a ‘abstract worker’, on the other hand, is able to incorporate his narcissistic masculinity, which he needs in order to become visible and tangible for himself, into the esthetic of the culture of success. (see also respective typologies of male behaviour patterns as they have been found in different surveys. Summarized by Brandes 2002).

The segmentation of male society, however, is only one dimension of these fragmentation tendencies which the digital capitalism provokes with its dynamic of rationalization and globalization. On the one hand, these enormous fragmentations result from the dichotomy of the economy – national markets regulated by the welfare state and international and national independent economic circuits on the other hand. The latest reports on wealth and poverty of the German government. have pointed out that the gap between wealth and poverty has increased due to globalization. This is even more true when inspecting the international development. The policy of spreaded wages in companies introduces globalization into every day life. The logic of dislimitation and fragmentation brings it about that these disparate structures can now unfold and stabilize without restraint. This also means that the underlying gender hierarchy does not need to hide any longer. Hale peers (“Männerbünde”) in the management circles of the old and new industries (see Döge 1999, p. 34f.) –added by an assertive type of women – can now act dominantly in public because they are independent of national and international gender discourses, but because the forces of digital capitalism - with the tendency of abstraction, social de-structuring and externalism – also destructure and neutralize male networks, depoliticize them and lift them up in the perspective of material logic and constraint. Whereas medium and lower gender hierarchies are leveled, men and women are requested to create their work relations rather flexible and to negotiate gender conflicts in private, upper hierarchy levels, which are traditionally male, are maintained and are now economic-technological legitimated in their new patrimony. The hierarchical dimension is covered with a technologic *language of hegemony* and an esthetic *culture of success*, which influence everyday life of the general public and develops into models and symbols of what is worth striving for. Although they hide gender hierarchy and do not make them a subject of discussion, men and women are made sensitive in their respective state of well-being. Men feel reaffirmed in their conviction of the male dividend, women are very

attracted by the combination of the culture of success and a gender open accessibility so that the male “aftertaste” seems to be negligible and or bearable. Today, boys are brought up in this ambiguous and ambivalent society in regards to maleness and gender ratio.

The male habitus

The modernization of capitalistic societies also influenced the development of gender ratios and had a mayor impact on changes of masculinity from a rigid system of patriarchal force to an elastic-indirect concept of dominance of hegemonic manliness: “Hegemonic masculinity is [...] the form of masculinity which is assuming a key role in a given structure of gender ratios. A position, however, which can be put into question at any time.” (Connell 1999, p. 97) We deal here therefore with a historic-flexible relation, which though bound to a respective group of dominant and influential men, which incorporate this hegemonic type of masculinity, nonetheless serves the majority of men as a identity creating cluster for orientation, although they do not acquire of this dominance in reality. Connell refers to this male option, which can appear with all men as conscious or unconscious tendencies of attitudes, as a *patriarchal (or male) dividend*. It works when men feel inferior (e.g. by women). Hegemonic masculinity always point to structures of social inequality, whereby hegemonic manliness is linked to a system of gender-hierarchical division of labour. In addition, Connell’s system also makes the subject of the dominance structure not just being linked to power and violent relations towards women but also to power and violent relations among men. Here the cultural artifact of the male dividend offers even the most inferior the possibility to play these out against women and by this to generate subaltern male power relations. However, Connell’s concept does not approach systematically the problem of the particular *availability* of men which symbolizes in the male connotation to economic externalism and competition. He also does not bring this into relation to the dimension of male hegemony. Connell does take into account that this principle provides the structures of externalism and splitting-off as can be found – interactively and psycho-dynamical conveyed and broken – in male everyday actions. Therefore one has to speak of a dialectic tension between male hegemony and male availability which manifests in the *ambivalences* of male neediness, male behaviour and also in the nationalization of manliness and in their economic-political frame.

These *dialectic of male hegemony and male availability* has to manifest – if hegemony theory and habitus concept are connected with each other – that a male habitus is not that easy to identify. Bourdieu understands habitus as “a societal imperative which has become a second nature and has been developed into motor schemata and physical automatism” (1993, p. 239). Thus, habitus is the result of social experiences which one, by all means, can characterize as “conditioning”. This deduction has brought upon Bourdieu the reproach of determinism but he has “always pointed to the fact that by the efficacy of habitus, practice is not determined in the strict sense. By the exterior material, cultural and social condition of existence – i.e. through societal structures – and their internalized transformation in habitual structures of thought, expectations and actions – only the boundaries of more possible and less possible practices are set but not the practices themselves.” (Schwingel 2000, p. 67) In this context, Holger Brandes (2002) points out that “habitus makes it possible to intuitively act in infinite varied fields of practice in the same way because habitus merely sets the fundamental base principles of this action, e.g. the way of approaching problems” (p. 67). Brandes also tries to disclose a psychodynamic of habitus. The habitus does not simply function as a “social carrier of meaning” (ibid. p. 66) but is also fed from the “deep layer of the personality, which develops even *before* acquiring language” (ibid. p. 74). It is therefore this “pre-linguistic

constituted relation of immediate physicalness and social symbolism which is responsible that a certain social interpretation is so fundamentally connected with one's image of being male or female that every challenge is seen as a personal attack" (ibid. p. 74). Brandes complex habitus adoption – when connected with the hegemony concept of Connell - does not aim that much at the social structure of male hegemony but at the male dividend which is also psychogenical activated. But the problem lies in the fact that – at least implicitly - an equivalence of psycho-dynamic and socio-dynamic of the habitus is implied. Already when introducing the term neediness I pointed out that the "interior" and the "exterior" of corporeality of habitus affect as well as harmonize or disharmonize with each other quite differently. In this context we can therefore again talk of a diametrically opposed relationship which creates those ambivalences as they were discussed in the context of *concealments*. The male shaped habitus of the latent and as well the open strive for dominance which incorporates societal background structure of hegemonic manliness as an outward department, has its fragile inner side. While the male habitus appears outward directed and feelings (about oneself) are split-off, it conceals the weak and helpless sides of men as well as his economic exposure in society and availability in an externalized, e.g. growingly socially fragmented, economy. Social-pedagogic experiences and therapeutic results especially call to attention this ambivalence of male habitus.

The male habitus seems to break up at different times and constellations. Therefore one could formulate, that it is not as much the strive for male habitual safety which drives the action of boys and men but the strive for general psycho-social ability to act, in critical life situations by activating and accentuating of *masculine coping elements*.

The coping concept can disclose how this masculine drive is set free in respective coping patterns and is activated in different social settings. (see Böhnisch 2004) In the therapeutic practice of men this concept has proven its usefulness and empirical plausibility. (see Neumann and Suefke 2004) The pattern of *externalism* can be found in masculine coping patterns. The pattern of externalism is not only revived as a structural principle of the neo-capitalistic society but has also led to the disaggregation of hegemonic masculinity. Nowadays, women, too, have access to this sphere of hegemony. Nonetheless, the hegemonic structural principle of masculinity still keeps to exist. This emphasizes the earlier theory in the discourse of masculinity whereas masculinity constructed by society as a type of structure is not equivalent to the feeling and the needs of men. (see Hearn and Collinson 1994) Hegemonic masculinity driven by global economy has become structural independent, is often addressed against men themselves.

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