

Narratives of Masculinity: Commonalities and Differences in European Constructions of Masculinity

Die interdisziplinäre Tagung „20th and 21st Century Narratives of Masculinity: Commonalities and Differences in European Constructions of Masculinity“ hatte sich zum Ziel gesetzt Repräsentationen und Konstruktionen europäischer Männlichkeit zu untersuchen und aus vergleichender und vor allem literaturwissenschaftlicher Perspektive nach den Gemeinsamkeiten und Unterschieden zu fragen, die in den (Selbst-)Beschreibungen, den Bildern, Transformationen und Praktiken europäischer Männlichkeiten während der letzten 100 Jahre zu beobachten sind. Die aus Großbritannien, den USA, Spanien, Israel und Deutschland stammenden Konferenzteilnehmer, unter ihnen mit Jeff Hearn, Todd Reeser, Martin Dinges und Michael Meuser national und international führende Vertreter der Critical Masculinity Studies, nahmen nach 40 Jahren interdisziplinärer Männlichkeitsforschung eine kritische Bestandsaufnahme von theoretischen und historischen Zugangsweisen vor, die das heterogene Forschungsfeld der mit Männlichkeit befassten Wissenschaften bisher bestimmt haben. Durch die Kooperation von bislang nur sehr bedingt miteinander kommunizierenden Disziplinen (anglistische, germanistische, slawistische und romanistische Literatur- und Kulturwissenschaft, Soziologie, Geschichtswissenschaft, Psychoanalyse) gelang es, erfolgreich an einer Synthese des über Männlichkeit vorhandenen Wissens zu arbeiten. Zugleich wurde die in vielen mit Geschlechterforschung befassten Disziplinen bemerkbare Hinwendung zu einer ‚narrativen‘ Konzeption von Geschlecht aufgenommen und im Sinne einer komparatistischen Männlichkeitsforschung in Europa weitergedacht.

Conference Summary by Kitty Nichols, Elena Gaddes, Dawn Fletcher, Ruth Beresford and Stefan Horlacher

The field of masculinity studies is diversifying. Masculinities are increasingly understood as plural and are analysed in relation to other theories and politics. With the emergence of new concepts of masculinities, come new methods of analysis and investigation, such as the use of narrative to construct understandings of masculinities. This interdisciplinary shift towards narrative structures and ‘storytelling’ as a basis for masculinity research was a key focus of the conference on European masculinities that took place at the ZIF, Bielefeld, in January 2016. Convened by Stefan Horlacher (TU Dresden), Walter Erhart (Bielefeld University) and Victoria Robinson (University of Sheffield), this event sought to synthesise various contemporary international and interdisciplinary perspectives and theory on narratives of masculinity.

The four keynote speakers commenced the discussion. Stefan Horlacher outlined comparative masculinities and the importance of the arts and humanities. Jeff Hearn (Örebro University) articulated the contributions of the transnational to masculinity studies whilst Todd Reeser (University of Pittsburgh) discussed affect theory and masculinities. Victoria Robinson spoke about the embodiment of men’s narratives through empirical research, and Walter Erhart (Bielefeld University) talked about “Comparing Narratives of Masculinity: *True Grit*”; a presentation in which he utilised the Academy Award winning film *True Grit* as a catalyst for an analysis of the shifting notions of masculinity.

After the keynote speeches, other contributions were presented around a clearly structured range of themes. These included, among others, ‘Discourses of Fatherhood and Caring’, ‘Territorialities: Comparing Masculinities in Europe’, ‘Psychoanalysis and Medicine’ and ‘Media-Analysis: Literature, Videogames and Film’. Michael Meuser (TU Dortmund) presented a paper on “Involved Fatherhood: Discourses, Practices and Institutions”, proposing that despite the growing discourse surrounding involved

fatherhood, there is still a gap between this discourse and fathers' typical engagement in family work. Mechthild Bereswill (Kassel University) talked about "The Construction of Disadvantaged Boys and Caring Men", Ilka Quindeau (Frankfurt University of Applied Sciences) discussed concepts for understanding masculinity that have recently emerged from the perspective of inter-subjective, relational psychoanalysis, and Martin Dinges (IGM Stuttgart) analyzed the position of men within discourses of health. While Ofer Nordheimer Nur (Tel Aviv University) took the conference to the margins of Europe and right into the 'lifeworld' with his discussion of post-heroic masculinity in Israel, a significant number of papers had a strong focus on literature such as José Armengol's (University of Castilla-La Mancha) presentation on "Iberian Masculinities from the Margins", Alexander Wöll's (European University Viadrina, Frankfurt (Oder)) talk on "The Construction of 'Postcolonial' Emancipating Narrative Masculinities in Ukrainian Literature", Gregor Schuhen's paper (University of Siegen) on "The Sons of Lazarillo: Constructions of Masculinity in the 20th Century Picaresque Narratives", and Ralf Schneider's (Bielefeld University) analysis of "Narratives and Discourse of British Masculinities in Late 20th Century Prose Fiction"; a paper in which he mapped out the ways in which British masculinities are frequently portrayed within this genre, highlighting the positioning of men against both female protagonists, as well as other men within the narratives.

While Toni Tholen (University of Hildesheim) analyzed the narration of the concept of care – or 'Sorge' – within German cultural history, and the way that the relationship between masculinity and care is conceptualised in different disciplines, including literature, literary criticism and philosophy, the presentations by Elahe Haschemi Yekani (University of Flensburg), Jennifer Kapczynski (Washington University) and Wieland Schwanebeck (TU Dresden) took film and cinematic contexts into account, leading over to Jan Kucharzewski's (Hamburg University) paper on "Playing Men: Constructions of Hypermasculinity in European Video Games", which provided an in depth analysis of the depiction and construction of masculinity in European video games, contrasting this to the American and Japanese contexts.

It is safe to say that the conference provided a setting which enabled discussions on the work needing to be done in order to make the interdisciplinary connections between disciplines stronger. The contributions as well as the ensuing discussions – which took up a large part of the conference – did not only analyze the representations and constructions of European masculinities over more than a century but also presented new developments and theories relating to a) the narrative construction of male gender identity/masculinity; b) the link between narrative, affect and embodiment; c) the theoretical framework and analytical tools of comparison; and d) methodological differences and innovations in exploring men, masculinities and narratives across different disciplines and contexts.

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