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Men and Masculinities Research in the European Dimension : Guest Editors' Introduction

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MEN AND MASCULINITIES RESEARCH IN THE EUROPEAN DIMENSION: GUEST EDITORS' INTRODUCTION

In recent years in social and cultural studies voices about rapid changes in social relations, including the gender dimension, have increased. These changes have made Karl Marx's statement "all that is solid melts into air" highly topical, especially when it comes to the recent challenge of the social gender dualism (Connell 2002). As a result of the inversion of the traditional gender paradigm, contemporary academic discourse implies the existence of non-typical, ambiguous "femininities" and "masculinities" and thereby analyses and justifies the coexistence of diverse, complementary and/or contrasted types of gender identities (Connell 1995).

Contrary to common belief, the development of the scientific discussion on gender ambiguity has deepened the reflection not only on women's issues but also on the complexity of men and masculinities problems. The contemporary analysis extends beyond an essentialist perception of masculinity and focuses on the socio-cultural character of masculinities, also taking into account their multiplicity (Kimmel 1987) and the fact that they are created in social discourse. The majority of the analyses mentioned can be situated within critical studies on men and masculinities which arose from women's and gender studies at the turn of the 1960s and 70s and developed rapidly in the 90s.

However, the pioneers in this field have been based mostly in (North) American (Pleck 1974, 1981; Kimmel 1996; Brod 1987, 1995; Messner 1995, 1997; Clatterbaugh 1997 etc.) and Australian (Connell 1987, 1995) academia. European reflection on the issue started slightly later and for many years has been undertaken only in national contexts. The earliest analyses were conducted in the United Kingdom and Scandinavia (Hearn 1992, 1998, Pringle 1995, Seidler 1997), and over the years the issues of men and masculinities came to be explored in

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other European countries as well. The last region where such academic reflection appeared was Eastern Europe. Therefore, critical studies on men and masculinities in countries such as Poland, Czech Republic, and Estonia, in contrast to those in America, Australia and Western Europe, do not have a long history. In 1999 Iva Šmídová wrote: “In the Czech Republic men have not been studied yet, the theme of masculinities is often considered as unproblematic, or ‘the man’s role’ is only discussed under other branches of sociological inquiry – mainly research of family” (1999: 215). A similar situation regarding the development of men and masculinities reflection can also be observed in other Eastern European countries (Novikova and Kamburow 2004). For example, in 2006 Jeff Hearn and Keith Pringle, after conducting research on the state of European men and masculinities studies, sadly concluded that this type of reflection is still unpopular among Polish scholars (2006: 39).

A similar dynamic is a characteristic of multi-country, comparative (critical) research on men and masculinities in the European dimension. As mentioned above, for many years this type of reflection has been undertaken mostly on a national level. Therefore, comprehensive European studies did not really exist until the beginning of the 21st century. The situation has changed within the rise of the very first European research network focused on the exploration of men and masculinities issues in Europe. “CROME, an international research network for Critical Research on Men in Europe, was founded in 2002. The idea of this network was to provide data resources and other information about critical research on men and masculinities as well as to develop theoretical and empirical outcomes on men” (Bergmann, Scambor and Wojnicka 2014). The network’s members have been recruited from ten European countries and within the last 13 years have published a number of papers analysing the “the man’s question” in regards to four key themes: home and work, social inclusion, violence, and care (Pringle, Hearn, Ferguson, Kamburow et al. 2006; Hearn, Novikova, Pringle, Šmídová et al. 2013). Moreover, CROME was the first scientific initiative to undertake an attempt to analyse changes taking place in Central and Eastern Europe in the post-socialist period regarding men and masculinities issues.

Another important initiative aimed at conducting research on a wider, European level was initiated by a group of researchers associated with the German research centre, Dissens e.V. (today Dissens – Institut für Bildung und Forschung e.V.). Between 2005 and 2007 a team consisting of researchers from Germany, Iceland, Norway, Slovenia and Spain worked on the project *FOCUS – Fostering Caring Masculinities*. The main aims of the initiative were to analyse the issue of men’s possibilities for balancing professional and private life and to improve their opportunities regarding such balance (see Langvasbraten and Teigen 2006). One of the project’s outcomes was one of the first (European) introductions of the *caring masculinities* concept, which has become one of the most influential theoretical concepts in contemporary men and masculinities studies.

Dissens was also part of the research team that conducted the most extensive European project on the role of men in gender equality. The project *The Role of Men in Gender Equality*, funded by the European Union Programme for Employment and Social Solidarity (PROGRESS), was conducted between 2011 and 2012 and analysed the engagement of men in fostering gender equality in 31 European Union and EFTA (European Free Trade Association) countries across six key themes: education; work; care, household and family life; men’s

health; gender-based violence; and men's politics. Similarly to the FOCUS project, one of the main issues explored in the project's publication was the concept of *caring masculinity* and its influence in fostering gender equality in Europe (see Scambor, Bergmann, Wojnicka, Belghiti-Mahut et al. 2014; Scambor, Hrženjak, Bergmann and Holter in this volume; Wojnicka in this volume).

The role of men in fostering gender equality is also the main theme of the *European Institute for Gender Equality's* project on European pro-feminist social activism. The study was conducted in 2011 and presents pro-gender equality initiatives undertaken by men in 27 countries. The main aim of the study "was to map relevant stakeholders in all EU Member States whose activity could be considered as contributing to a more effective involvement of men in the promotion of gender equality" (Ruxton and van der Gaag 2012).

Last but not least, seven (research) institutions, members of *Work with Perpetrators – European Network*, have recently been engaged in conducting a project on European programmes for (male) perpetrators of domestic violence. The *IMPACT – Evaluation of European Perpetrator Programmes* project was funded by the European Commission Daphne III Programme. Between 2013 and 2014 the researchers not only analysed the character of contemporary work with perpetrators in all European Union countries but also developed tools and methodologies to harmonise and enhance the monitoring and evaluation of the results of work with perpetrators in Europe (see Scambor, Wojnicka and Scambor 2014; Gines, Geldschläger, Nax and Ponce in this volume).

The development of comparative, comprehensive European research on men and masculinities as well as scholarly reflection on the issue in Eastern European countries has coincided with the advancement of the theoretical discussion within critical studies. Since the mid-1990s Connell's *hegemonic masculinity* theory has been one of the most influential and explored analytical concepts (Connell 1995) and despite a number of critical voices (Beasley 1998, Hearn 2004, Johansson and Ottemo 2015) has remained highly popular in European academia. According to the Australian sociologist, *hegemonic masculinity* is a set of male traits that form a certain model of masculinity in any given culture or society. This masculinity model is highly valued and is linked to power, domination, strength, heterosexuality and work. Moreover, the existence of hegemonic masculinity is strongly connected to its relation to other forms of masculinities such as *complicit masculinities*, *subordinated masculinities* and *marginalised masculinities* (Connell 1995; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). Currently, however, along with Connell's theory, other conceptualisations of contemporary masculinities are gaining significant attention in European academia. One of them is the concept of *inclusive masculinity* introduced in 2009 by Eric Anderson. According to the author, the *hegemonic masculinity* concept is no longer accurate as contemporary societies are less hierarchical, homophobic and anti-feminist than they were in the 1990s. *Inclusive masculinity* (contrary to *orthodox masculinity*) is far from underlining the importance of heterosexuality and power and allows men to explore more diverse social practices (e.g. those traditionally linked to femininity) in a non-hierarchical and more equal way than previously (Anderson 2009, 2010, 2013). In this sense, Anderson's theory intersects with the abovementioned *caring masculinity* concept, which has become one of the most significant theoretical contributions to critical studies on men and masculinities in the last ten years. At the core of the *caring masculinity* concept lies

the assumption that traditional feminine practices, especially in relation to caring activities, are no longer unavailable to men as contemporary society legitimises and values male identities based on care (Hanlon 2012). In this context the masculinity of men who primarily define themselves as fathers, husbands or friends has become recognised as equal to other forms of masculinity, and here the male role becomes linked to caring activities. Therefore, according to Karla Elliott, at the core of *caring masculinity* lies “rejection of domination and the integration of values derived from the realm of care such as positive emotion, interdependence, and relationality” (2015: 13) and “caring masculinities are, furthermore, a critical form of men’s engagement in gender equality because doing care work requires men to resist hegemonic masculinity and to adopt values and characteristics of care that are antithetical to hegemonic masculinity” (2015: 15). Obviously, the presented concepts do not exhaust the list of critical studies on men and masculinities’ theoretical contributions and have been mentioned because of their popularity among the authors of this volume.

Hence, this Special Issue on men and masculinities in the European dimension is a timely contribution to ongoing efforts to understand discussions on men and masculinities and their place in contemporary European *gender studies*. It is an interdisciplinary collection of insights drawn from sociology, psychology, pedagogy, history, and literature studies and includes article written primarily by academics, but also by practitioners. The main aim of the special issue is to present and connect contemporary developments in research on men and masculinities on the comprehensive European level and in Eastern European academia with the most current theoretical debates within the critical studies on men and masculinities field.

The special issue begins with a paper from Katarzyna Wojnicka, who explores the intersections between men, masculinities and physical violence in Europe. The paper is based on the findings from the abovementioned project, *The Role of Men in Gender Equality*, and presents the role of men in physical violence perpetration, their position as victims of violence and men’s social initiatives aimed at combating male violence in 27 EU and 4 EFTA countries. Wojnicka’s analysis is framed within the discussion on the relationship between *hegemonic* and *subordinated masculinities* regarding diverse roles in violence practices and highlights the under-researched and under-discussed problem of men-to-men violence.

The issue of men’s violence, especially in the context of intimate partner violence (IPV) and family violence perpetration is explored further in the paper by Oriol Gines, Heinrich Geldschläger, David Nax and Alvaro Ponce. The authors present the results of the European project, *Evaluation of European Perpetrator Programmes*, in which data was analysed from 22 European countries where programmes for (male) perpetrators of domestic violence have been identified. The quantitative analysis aims to shed light primarily on the designs, methods and instruments used in European perpetrator programmes in their current day-to-day outcome monitoring practice as well as on the obstacles to and needs for improvements in this practice.

The last article to present comprehensive European analyses is an exploration of the engagement of men in care activities in the private sphere as well as their involvement in professional care. The authors, Elli Scambor, Majda Hrženjak, Nadja Bergmann and Øystein Gullvåg Holter, base their analysis on the findings from the *Role of Men in Gender Equality* project and, differently to Katarzyna Wojnicka, concentrate on the key themes of the project:

work and care, household and family life. The analysis of the current practices of men in regards to caring activities and factors associated with men's larger involvement in care for children and professional care, both on national and comparative levels, is strengthened by the implementation of the intersectional perspective and further exploration of the *caring masculinity* concept.

The notion of *caring masculinity* is also a leitmotiv in four other special issue papers. In the first one, Urszula Kluczyńska focuses on the ways of construction of masculinity and care by older men who are caring for their wives. Based on data collected during interviews with Polish caregivers, the author describes older men's motivations in providing care. The findings reveal four strategies on how older male care-givers talk about their masculinity, where *hegemonic masculinity* is a point of reference. The issue of caring husbands is further explored in a paper from Edyta Zierkiewicz and Emilia Mazurek who analyse the strategies of male partners facing the breast cancer diagnoses of their wives. Drawing on the results from qualitative interviews conducted in Poland with both male carers and their wives, Zierkiewicz and Mazurek present the main strategies undertaken by men while dealing with the (new) role of caregiver. Among these strategies, focusing on their wives' feelings and caring about them, taking part in the healing process, managing the household during the period of their wives' recovery, and bringing back "normalcy" into their lives can be singled out.

Two other papers focus on the comparative analysis of fatherhood practices performed in both Poland and Scandinavia. Paula Pustułka, Justyna Struzik and Magdalena Ślusarczyk present sub-findings from the Polish-Norwegian research project *TRANSFAM: Doing Family in a Transnational Context*. The analysis is based on qualitative interviews conducted with Polish couples living in Norway and two migrant fathers living alone and discusses the diversity of fatherhood practices among migrant men. The results of the investigation show that there is not a singular fathering or fatherhood type among the Polish men in Norway, and that a continuum of various men's styles of performing carer roles can be observed. This issue is explored further in the paper from Katarzyna Suwada, who presents the experience of fatherhood in Poland and Sweden. Based on qualitative interviews conducted with Polish and Swedish fathers, the author compares ways of experiencing and performing fatherhood in two different countries belonging to two different European gender regimes, taking into account the naturalised differences between fatherhood and motherhood and how these differences affect power relations.

The exploration of the *caring masculinity* concept is followed by two papers where the main analytical category is Connell's *hegemonic masculinity*. Iva Šmídová addresses the issue of power challenges for head doctors in maternity hospitals in the Czech Republic, who in their daily practice balance hegemonic and non-hegemonic ways of performing masculinities. The paper is based on data from interviews and public speeches of senior Czech obstetricians and head doctors of maternity wards and presents the strategies of reproducing or challenging existing gender regimes. The author highlights the clash of defence of the status quo in contrast to alternative approaches to childbirth performed by some doctors as well as the "living paradox of the hospital setting presented as being a formal institution par excellence, while at the same time being an environment for the very informal, individual authority of head doctors" (Šmídová in this volume). *Hegemonic masculinity* is an important analytical

category in Małgorzata Bienkowska's paper on transsexual men in Poland and their strategies regarding (re)construction of their masculinities. Drawing on data collected during qualitative interviews with transsexual men, the author argues that they tend to perform traditional, stereotypically understood male roles, which are expressed mostly in physical image, appropriate body-language and their behaviour towards the other genders.

The intersection between masculinities and queer (non)identities is also a theme of the final paper for the special issue, from Piotr Sobolczyk who presents a historical and literary essay on a non-heterosexual interpretation of the Warsaw Uprising. The author, drawing mostly on Miron Białoszewski's *Memoir of the Warsaw Uprising* explores warlike non-normative masculinities and sexualities and "offers a *paranoid* reading of traces, suggestions, allusions, and *illogical* fragments to build a working metaphor of queer acquaintances as an alternative *map* without the map" (Sobolczyk in this volume).

The diverse backgrounds and expertise of the contributors to the special issue reflect the importance of ongoing, interdisciplinary inquiry into men and masculinities research in (Eastern) Europe. We, the editors, would like to thank all the authors for their perseverance throughout the writing and editing process, which has produced a valuable resource that will be of keen interest to researchers, students and, hopefully, the general audience in Europe.

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