

Panel Proposal for the Conference of the Swiss Association for Gender Studies

Axis 1: Gender(ed) Labor

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Chaired by

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Ambivalence, suffering and beyond: Men engaging with gender equality

An increasing number of men is getting engaged with gender equality and feminism. However, becoming a change agent often comes with ambivalent feelings and struggles. While many men want to see women and men treated fairly and equally, they are at the same time struggling with hegemonic masculinity. How do men experience these ambivalent positionings? Are they using their privileged positions to turn into “male allies” or become “feminist coalition partners”? In what way are they entangled in processes of “re-sovereignization” and how do they challenge male supremacy? Engaging with several sites and contexts of men engaging with gender equality, the panel aims at exploring these questions further both empirically and conceptually.

Julia Nentwich, University of St. Gallen

Ambivalent alternatives: Male managers struggling with their support for gender equality

In this talk I am aiming at furthering our understanding of men’s roles, but also the struggles, challenges and ambivalences involved when becoming change agents in equality initiatives. Analysing how men talk about gender equality in ten group discussions with male managers in five companies in Switzerland, I show that they are both invested in gender equality and as well critical about hegemonic masculinity. However, being critical of face time, full-time work, and the ideal of the heroic leader does not result in disengaging from hegemonic masculinity or an actual positioning as alternative men. Rather, the discussions end in silence and a general feeling of helplessness.

Anika Thym, University of Basel

Pains of change: Challenging hegemonic masculinity from equality-oriented and patriarchal men

In my presentation I seek to investigate men who incorporate a bourgeois hegemonic masculinity – including a successful career, good salary, status symbols, wife and family – and how they suffer from and reflect on recent changes toward more gender equality. The presentation is based on my PhD project in which I conducted 23 interviews with men from leadership positions in the Swiss financial sector to learn more about their critical self-reflections on aspects of gender and class. I want to compare the narratives by two interview partners, who are both around 60 and whose relationships and families broke apart, because of their patriarchal values, including prioritizing work and ignoring needs voiced by the family. While one affirms patriarchal views and questions equality, the other affirms gender equality and questions patriarchy. Both, however, regret their socialization, which did not prepare them for the changing social values and set them up for those kinds of suffering. The focus of the presentation lies on the complexities of emancipatory change toward gender equality and the corresponding challenges to bourgeois male subjectivity.

Matthias Luterbach, University of Basel

Masculinity & Care. Involved paternity as a starting point for a new perspective on men and the transformation of male dominated gender relations.

In my presentation I develop a critical perspective on masculinity from a care perspective. I take these reflections as a starting point for a new perspective on the transformation of gender relations in regard to men and their specific experiences.

The presentation includes historical and contemporary empirical reflections. Historically, I reconstruct how central aspects of bourgeois masculinity are part of a male dominated culture of care. I examine ideas of paternity in parenting guides of the early modern period. From this perspective, not an erasure of care from the construction of masculinity but a hegemonic masculine logic of care is constitutive of bourgeois patriarchal society.

On the basis of my empirical material from interviews with involved fathers, I then examine which fields of conflict are currently encountered by men who are involved in the process of caring for their children. Starting from a consideration of the connection between caring of the self and of others, I delve into how central aspects of male subjectivation are renegotiated in involved paternity. Disputes such as the question of the father's relationship to his child and to his partner are combined with problematizations of habitualized, conventional masculine ways of thinking or the relationship to one's own emotions. I illustrate this with interview passages from my research project. Thus, in my presentation I show how current transformations in gender relations involve a relearning of ways of thinking, acting and feeling in care relationships.

Megan Kelly, University of Basel

“Spitting out the Pills”: Leaving Male Supremacism and the limits and possibilities of emancipatory transformation.

In my presentation, I explore how men narrate beginning to leave or disassociating themselves from male supremacist groups and ideology, which they often narrate as “spitting out the pills”. This presentation is based on my PhD project, where I draw from digital ethnographic data collected from two online forums aimed at helping men leave male supremacist spaces and ideology. In this presentation, I explore how claims of a collective male victimhood (a key component of male supremacist ideology) are negotiated in these narratives of “spitting out the pills”. In my preliminary analysis, I find that this process is often narrated as gradual and non-linear. Many of these narratives are still focused on feelings of victimization, particularly in regards to forming and maintaining intimate relationships with women. The possibility of “leaving” is often attributed to finding the “love of a good woman”, but with little to no recognition of what it means to have participated in and contributed to these misogynist spaces. Relatedly, men in these forums are regularly advised to talk to and get to know more women, so as to challenge their objectifying and limited perspectives of them informed by male supremacist ideology. Therefore, this possibility of “leaving” male supremacist groups becomes dependent upon the gendered emotional labor of women to transform these men. While there is often a renouncement of some aspects of male supremacist ideology, “leaving” is then more about returning to an “acceptable” level of misogyny, or cultivating a masculinity to find a “good woman” rather than a transformative understanding of misogyny, masculinities, or norms. This presentation then focuses on the complexities of leaving bigoted groups and the limits and possibilities of emancipatory transformation therein.