

Care, care work and the struggle for a careful world from the perspective of the sociology of masculinities

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Abstract Feminist research often links the issues of care and care work to women, both theoretically and empirically. In this article we discuss the fact that, in contrast to such feminist approaches, theories of masculinity barely theorize care and care work. Fatherhood for instance is not included in Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity. Here, we investigate the ways in which men and the construction of masculinities are affected by ongoing restructuring processes that mark the move from Fordism to post-Fordism. Within the politics of masculinity in Europe, Caring Masculinities denote a key route towards the development of non-dominant masculinities. We discuss to what extent this can be a useful theoretical concept for research in this area.

Keywords Care · Hegemonic masculinity · Caring masculinities · Generativity · Gender

Fürsorge, Fürsorgearbeit und das Ringen um eine ‚fürsorglichere‘ Welt aus der Perspektive der Männlichkeitssoziologie

Zusammenfassung Das Thema Fürsorge und Fürsorgearbeit wird in der feministischen Forschung sowohl theoretisch als auch empirisch oftmals mit dem weiblichen Geschlecht verbunden. In unserem Beitrag beschäftigen wir uns mit dem Aspekt, dass im Gegensatz zur feministischen Theorie in der Männlichkeitstheorie Care und Carework noch stark untertheoretisiert sind. So stellt zum Beispiel Vaterschaft und

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Care im Konzept der hegemonialen Männlichkeit weitgehend eine Leerstelle dar. Herausgearbeitet werden soll, in welcher Hinsicht Männer und die Konstruktion von Männlichkeiten von den aktuellen Umstrukturierungsprozessen vom Fordismus zum Postfordismus betroffen sind. Caring Masculinities gelten in der europäischen Männlichkeitspolitik als zentraler Weg zur Entwicklung nicht-dominanter Männlichkeiten. Erörtert wird, inwieweit es ein brauchbares theoretisches Konstrukt für die Forschung in diesem Feld sein kann.

Schlüsselwörter Fürsorge · Hegemoniale Männlichkeit · Caring Masculinities · Generativität · Gender

1 Introduction

In the new millennium, a widespread debate about care and care work has been taking place in gender studies. This debate picks up on discussions that have been going on in Women's Studies since the 1970s, which thematised the unseen, unpaid work of women in social and generative reproduction. There was a lively debate about whether wages for housework could be a potential solution to the problem. There was however also discussion about the fact that a capitalist society organized around the principle of economic growth was also dependent on both the exploitation of female reproductive labor in western societies as well as on the appropriation and destruction of subsistence labor in the Global South (cf. v. Werlhof 1988). This situation has become more acute through the transformation of industrial capitalism into a post-Fordist, neoliberal finance capitalism (cf. Federici 2012). Gabriele Winker (2015), as well as many others in this field, point to a crisis in social reproduction and the need for a care revolution.

In contemporary discussions, a very heterogeneous concept of care work has been applied, frequently relating to the debate around commodified care work (Aulenbacher et al. 2014). Following Klinger (2014) we argue for a broad concept of care, which includes all forms of care for oneself and others, relating to child-rearing, education, nurturing, care of one's own body etc. This broad conception of care appears to be extremely helpful because it means that as few preconceptions as possible frame the way in which care is to be understood in relation to the subjects of the research. Such a concept should however contain within it sufficient possibilities for differentiation so that it does not become rather arbitrary and thereby mask traditional forms of division of labor between the sexes. For example, providing financially for the family is not to be equated with care work within the family.

The inclusion of women in the labor market has brought with it a commodification of reproductive work. Domestic labor, child rearing, care of the elderly and so on have become contract goods and thus a labor market for women has developed. Logically, such work must be converted into wages, but the value of care work cannot be measured with a production-line mentality (cf. Madörin 2010). A careful world will not be built on the conveyor belt. Many studies (cf. Geissler 2008; Lutz 2008; Winker 2015) analyze the situation of female care workers and criticize

the redistribution of care work to female compatriots or under-privileged female migrants.

Recent feminist researchers have criticized the association of care work with women and point to the necessity of research into and theorization of the topics of care, care work and masculinities (cf. Aulenbacher et al. 2015). We would like to contribute to this research, particularly from the perspective of the sociology of masculinities. From this perspective, we will first look into the challenges masculinities face in post-Fordist societies. Second, we will examine the failure to thematise care and carework in research into masculinities and, third, we will present current debates about the development of new masculinities which are subsumed under the concept of Caring Masculinities. We discuss the advantages and disadvantages of this concept and in conclusion suggest it be expanded to include the perspective of masculine generativity, in order to foster research into care, care work and the struggle for a careful world from the perspective of the sociology of masculinities.

2 The challenges for masculinities in Post-Fordism

In Fordist industrial societies men and masculinity are closely connected with paid employment: men spend a large part of their everyday life in paid employment and it also is central to the constitution of male identities (cf. Scholz 2012). At the same time, the position of breadwinner both cements the masculine position of power in society, as well as defining private gender arrangements. This ideal-typical constellation has been described as “the construction of masculinity in industrial societies” (Meuser and Scholz 2012, p. 28)¹. In Fordism a specific form of employment, the ‘normal’ masculine relationship to labor, became institutionalized. Masculinity was therefore associated with pride about being the sole earner in the household; families may have been *de facto* dependent on a female contribution to the household income, but this was denigrated as mere ‘additional income’. Regardless of their participation in paid labor, women remained however responsible for childcare and the household. In the 1970s a gradual change in these Fordist gender arrangements was already beginning to take place, something which has become more pronounced since the 1990s. The causes of this change are complex and are to be found in transformations in the labor market and the welfare state, but also in changes in private family arrangements and the gendered division of labor. In what follows, central aspects of these shifts will be briefly discussed; on the basis of the available data, intersectional dimensions can only be indicated, and not systematically represented.

The transition from an industrial to a postindustrial, knowledge-based service economy brings with it the gradual alignment of the participation of women and men in the labor market. This results from a rise in the number of women in paid work, and a fall in the number of men in paid employment. In addition, rates of

¹ There is no space in this article to go into greater detail regarding the differences between West European countries and Eastern European, post-socialist states (including East Germany). In socialist countries, masculinity was also associated with paid employment, but, thanks to the almost complete integration of women into the workforce, it was less connected to the position of breadwinner (cf. Scholz 2016a, b).

unemployment converge. Female labor patterns are still strongly determined by part-time work. In the male group it is largely working-class men, untrained men from the manufacturing industries, men with experience of migration, and young men who have been affected by structural changes in the labor market. Across the EU there is a close connection between low levels of education and poorer opportunities in the labor market. Fewer men than women are employed in the public sector, which in previous decades had become an area of relatively secure employment, frequently, as in the case of care work, with low wage levels. Men have not tended to become part of the developing service sector, which is often connoted as feminine, while highly-qualified women, in particular, have come to occupy areas of the labor market previously dominated by men (cf. Scambor et al. 2013).

Globalization and the neoliberal radicalization of the market are also leading to the dismantling of social security systems. The “Fordist triad of stable (masculine) terms of employment, the nuclear family and the welfare state” (Meuser 2010, p. 329) is coming under increasing pressure. This pressure has been intensified by the new gender-political model of the adult worker that has gained legitimacy throughout the EU. “The centrality of employment is becoming a norm in forms of life that transcend questions of gender” (Meuser 2016, p. 165). This model does not “seem to recognize any responsibility to care for others” (Walgensbach 2015, p. 35). For men, this can lead to ‘reproduction problems’ (cf. Heilmann 2015)—particularly the regeneration of the workforce and generative reproduction—the responsibility for which lay with female partners under Fordist gender arrangements.

At the same time, this structural transformation in employment has been accompanied by a transformation in family structures and gender arrangements. As normal masculine patterns of labor erode, there is a decline in the dominance of the image of the nuclear family, and the traditional division of labor between men and women can be ever less taken for granted. This is also a result of processes of individualization and emancipation particularly with regard to women. The nuclear family, understood as one comprising married parents with children, is still “the most common form of family unit in Germany” (Kuhnt and Steinbach 2014, p. 54). In the meantime, however, there is broad recognition in society that people live single lives, and bring up children on their own or in alternative forms of living arrangements. Yet, regardless of forms of life, women no longer unquestioningly take on all care work single-handedly and aspire to share parenthood with active and involved fathers. The majority of men has this ambition too, even if it is realized to very differing extents. A structural “gap in care provision” (Trinka and Völker 2015, p. 178) arises in the areas of childcare, the care for old and needy persons, as well as in terms of self-care. With the restructuring of the welfare state towards activation (Lessenich 2009), and the “re-familialization and privatization of care” (Trinka and Völker 2015, p. 179) associated with this, the ‘gap in care provision’ has widened.

Our position is that this development has not led immediately to a ‘male crisis’, or a ‘crisis of masculinity’, as is often asserted in public discourse (cf. Meuser and Scholz 2011). We rather argue that it has brought about a “challenge to traditional constructions of masculinity and possibly also to hegemonic masculinity” (Meuser 2010, p. 329), which had been associated with the identity and position

of the worker and family breadwinner in Fordist industrial societies. Opinion-based research reveals that paid labor remains highly significant for men, although work is diminishing in importance in relation to the private world of family and friends (cf. Volz and Zulehner 2009). Masculinity remains coupled to paid labor and is dissociated from caring activities and so-called feminine jobs. What might non-hegemonic forms of masculinity look like if they included care work? What can be done to encourage masculine actors to become engaged for a Careful World? These questions must be addressed from the perspective of the theory of masculinity.

3 Care and carework relating to masculinity and fatherhood, and the absence of a theoretical frame

In contrast to feminist theory, theories of masculinity barely reflect on care and care work. Over the past 30 years, R. W. Connell's concept of "hegemonic masculinity" has established itself as central to research into the social construction of masculinity and masculine dominance². Raewyn Connell (1987; 2005) may start from the premise that gender relations are produced and maintained within the 're-productive arena', but in the concept of hegemonic masculinity that she develops, this aspect plays a markedly minor role. The core of her theory is that hierarchically-ordered, different constructions of masculinity are in competition in society. Only one historically concrete form of masculinity is hegemonically dominant at any one time, and all others exist in a specific relationship to this form. Connell assumes that hegemonic masculinity is shaped in society's centers of power: the state, the military, and the economy. Within these institutions, the respective elites shape hegemonic masculinity. Fatherhood and fatherliness have no systematic value within this concept of hegemonic masculinity. At the same time, Connell is aware that the exclusion of care work is a central feature of hegemonic masculinity (cf. Connell 2005). Any alternative construction of masculinity would have to integrate care work, and the praxis of fathering contains, for Connell, the potential to trigger such a transformation. She has however not pursued this line of discussion in her more recent studies relating to transnational business masculinity (cf., for example, Connell 2010; 2013).

While theories of masculinity barely touch upon fatherhood, research into fathers, which is more widely developed, albeit usually in a psychological direction, does not take into account the topic of masculinity. To begin with, its focus was on the importance of the father for the development of the child. Since the end of the 1990s, 'father-centered father research' (cf. Matzner 2004) has emerged. The focus of attention is now the father, and, in particular, his self-image and the circumstances that favor or hinder active fatherly involvement. Only in very recent times have sociological studies emerged that consider the father from a point of view that is explicitly grounded in theories of masculinity (cf. Scholz 2012). These studies reveal the tensions in the relationship between masculinity, fatherhood and care work. While

² A broad debate has arisen around this concept, a discussion which has led to numerous critiques and conceptual refinements which there is no room to discuss in this context of this article (cf. Scholz 2017).

fatherhood only plays a subordinate role in hegemonic constructions of masculinity, motherhood and motherliness are dominant in modern constructions of femininity. Caring for children is thus coded as feminine. Patrick Ehnis (2008), referring back to Connell's conceptual framework, speaks of '*hegemonic motherliness*'. In this context, it is difficult for mothers to involve the father in the relationship with the baby and the small child, and to trust him to care 'properly' for the child. Although most mothers champion the idea of an 'involved fatherhood' (cf. Behnke and Meuser 2012), empirical investigations show that the father "becomes the junior partner, the 'everlasting trainee' or the 'guilty student'" (Behnke and Meuser 2012, p. 131). This masculine subordination can lead to a destabilization of masculine habitus. The study *Männer leben (How men live)* has shown that it is especially family planning and childbirth which men experience as an 'alien territory' or a 'foreign experience' (cf. Helfferich et al. 2005). For them, having children, when all is said and done, is 'women's business' (cf. Helfferich et al. 2005), and the world of reproduction is femininely coded. How can this feminine coding be interrogated, both empirically and theoretically?

4 Caring Masculinities—a new umbrella concept for the move towards a careful world

Since the late 2000s, studies related to the theme of care have increasingly turned to the umbrella concept of 'Caring Masculinities' (cf. Gärtner et al. 2007; Hanlon 2012; Scambor et al. 2013, 2014; Elliott 2016) and clearly move beyond the focus on fatherhood. These questions emerge at the intersection between academic research into masculinity and policies relating to masculinity. For example, the 3rd *International Conference on Men and Equal Opportunities* in Luxembourg in October 2016 discussed Caring Masculinities in terms of its status as an "academic concept, strategic perspective and political model" (Theunert 2016, p. 2). The 'Luxembourg Declaration' formulated the goal of a "fair, that is an equal division of paid and unpaid labor between the sexes" (Icmeo 2016, paragraph 4). Its recommendations related to the support of masculine contributions to care within the areas of fatherhood, self-care, the caring professions, volunteer work, care for relatives and housework (cf. Icmeo 2016; as well as Theunert 2016).

Karla Elliott (2016) argues for a more profound theorization of the concept of Caring Masculinities. Bringing together critical masculinity studies and feminist care-theory, she sums up Caring Masculinities as "masculine identities that reject domination and its associated traits and embrace values of care such as positive emotion, interdependence, and relationality" (Elliott 2016, p. 240). Elliott distinguishes between practices of *caring for* and *caring about*, the latter describing attitudes that embody solicitude and emotional attention. Quite often, attitudes towards care which are integrated into one's self-image only develop in the exercising of care itself. Elliott draws out above all the positive aspects of Caring Masculinities, seeing it as a path to gender equality, and indeed, with reference back to Hanlon, as a "gender equality intervention" (Elliott 2016, p. 243). We share this view that Caring Masculinities *can* be a path towards a careful world, but think that it is equally important

to be aware that they do not *have* to be, and that these aspects must first and foremost be researched in greater empirical detail.

In the meantime, the model of the ‘involved father’ has found its way into patterns of hegemonic masculinity (cf. Behnke and Meuser 2012). This means that the integration of aspects of care work into masculinity has been possible without there being an undermining of the primacy of the dominant model. Baumgarten et al. (2012) note in their study that all the men interviewed dissociate themselves from their own fathers, whom they experienced as distant, and understand themselves as oriented towards their families. What this does not mean, however, is a decoupling of masculinity and paid employment. This was not simply a result of the close relationship between masculinity and paid work, but was also a consequence of the new relevance of the adult-worker model. In Miller’s study (2011), the interviewed men observed that paternal engagement gained less social recognition than the securing of a good family income. The model of the ‘involved father’ only gains legitimacy through the ongoing significance of paid work for masculine identity. And even in this model, care work remains the domain of the woman. Miller (2011) also ascertains that men have more leeway in how they balance demands, both in how much they are involved in everyday care work and how much they focus on paid work. Meuser points out that carework within the family can also take on a gendered dimension; bringing up children is associated with a “semantics of masculine strength and autonomy” (Meuser 2016, p. 175). Whenever there is a specifically masculine mode of exercising child rearing and child care, this creates negative distinctions for women. In this way, new “gender-connoted power struggles can arise in the private sphere” (Meuser 2016, p. 175). Similarly, male activity in commodified care work need not necessarily go hand-in-hand with a transformation in gender relations towards greater gender equality (cf. Gallo and Scrinzi 2016).

All these studies point in one way or another to a tension between modern constructions of masculinity and the exercise of care work, a tension that the individual men have to negotiate in different ways. These tensions are worth closer examination. While Elliott (2016) directs her attention towards adult men and their praxis, we propose to look for the causes of these tensions in an earlier phase of life. In this respect, we follow Connell’s call to conduct more precise research into masculine processes of socialization, and to make renewed use of the potential of psychoanalysis (cf. Connell 2005). Although Connell’s concept of hegemonic masculinity dominates research into masculinity, this dimension of her thinking has not been picked up on (cf. Bereswill 2014). Particularly instructive for our work is the theory of intergenerational generativity, which Vera King (2002, 2016) has developed in recent years. Adolescence turns out to be a crucial period in the development of the capacity to care for one’s self and others. From our perspective, research on gender and care can benefit from the introduction of a concept of masculine generativity.

“The concept of generativity [...] denotes the socio-historically changing forms within which the upbringing of the next generation is made possible; the conditions produced by the caring generation so that, through attention, attitudes and actions, the next generation might thrive” (King 2016, p. 103, cf. King 2002). This theory refers back to Erik H. Erikson’s development-psychological socialization and identity model. Erikson understands the desire for generativity as a central component

of the psycho-social development of the individual. Generativity is not conceived in relation to fatherhood, but is rather an “attitude which promotes welfare and empowerment towards younger generations” (Günther and Kerschgens 2016, p. 14). From such a standpoint, research can widen its own perspective, and theory can explain more clearly that generativity is central not only for women, but rather for all genders.

This aspect seems to be particularly productive to us, but the next step must be to investigate what can be done to facilitate masculine generativity. Generative perspectives are, with reference to the work of Vera King (2002), mainly constructed in adolescence. It has to be noted that, in contrast to female adolescence, the emergence of generative perspectives for boys has been subject to little research. One central question for such research would be: What could promote the development of a generative attitude in boys? Flaake (2015) has shown that shared parenting not only leads to men being able to shape and experience more actively their desire to have children, but it also brings with it further emancipatory possibilities. Familial constellations which seek to provide shared parenting can indeed support boys in constructing alternate models of masculinity. Within their peer group, friendships among boys, as relationships of mutual care, represent a further possibility for the development of a caring perspective. Niobe Way (2013) demonstrates that, in their early adolescence, boys have very intimate friendships, which however become much looser in later adolescence. The boys interviewed for the study explain that they are now mature and do not need friends any more to talk about problems or emotions. Way connects this explanation to patterns of adult masculinity. Research is needed into how adolescent processes of individuation would have to be shaped so that this separation of caring perspectives did not result. The following questions could also be instructive: How do boys themselves see this, and what processes are visible? Can further resources be identified, and if so, which ones? In combination with the perspective of Caring Masculinities, it could be instructive to look at the caring practices or the generative perspective of boys within their own generation—for example, caring for other children.

5 Conclusion

Numerous studies demonstrate that the majority of carework is still being performed by women. Female emancipation and individualization have not led to a redistribution of care work between the genders, and instead new global care chains have formed amongst women. At the same time, men do participate in various areas of care work, but this participation needs to be made visible and to be taken into consideration in debates about the transformation of gender relation. The care revolution that is required is not just a matter for women, but also for men, who, even if it is at a lower level, are bound into the “international division of reproductive labor” (Gallo and Scrinzi 2016, p. 112). This aspect has barely been remarked upon up to now in conceptions of hegemonic masculinity (cf. Connell 1987, 2005), which function as the model concept for research into masculinities. The concept of Caring Masculinities has enabled the development in recent years of an alternative perspective, which

connects masculinity with care and care work outside claims to dominance. Yet while there is much discussion of this perspective within the framework of policies aimed towards gender equality, it has up to now been insufficiently theorized and barely been investigated empirically. Linking it to feminist care theory and the perspective offered by Caring Masculinities would be instructive in investigating the constraints which face the emergence of gender equality in this area, and also in looking at how to get there and thus to a Careful World—with a focus on the contributions to be made by the politics of masculinity and the sociology of masculinities.

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