

## **Normative Processes of Masculinity in Medicine and Technics**

Chair: Jeff Hearn (Helsinki/Linköping), Moderation: Stephanie Hering  
Participants: Fank Luck, Inge Beckel

During industrialisation the engineer established himself as one of the main symbols of the bourgeois man. He embodied rationality, logic, and efficiency. It was the machine facing the engineer. Man was positioned within the newly created field of technology and specifically the bourgeois man was set to represent 'man'. The engineer was conceived as a rational object, who constantly had to be in full control of himself just like a machine.

Until today the concept of masculinity in bourgeois society is based on a model of masculinity that is characterized by notions of strength, rationality, and discipline. Embodying this model, men's health practices do not appear to be chosen, but rather seem to be a result of a predetermined self-conception of the male body – again as a machine.

**Frank Luck (Basel), Lecturer, nurse**

### **Men, Masculinity and Health**

Gender and Health is nowadays more and more an issue in the health sciences. So far, gender and health research has focused predominantly on women. In the past years increasingly more authors were engaged in research with men (Meuser, 2007; Niederöst, 2007; BAG, 2006, Hearn & Kolga, 2006; White & Holmes, 2006; Courtenay, 2003; Kolip & Hurrelmann, 2002; Schofield, Conell, Walker, Wood & Butland, 2000). Maihofer (2007) explains, that despite of the richness of knowledge which was produced by men during the centuries the body of knowledge about the life, thinking, feeling and action of men is very low.

Men have a lower life expectancy than women (BAG, 2006; Hearn & Kolga, 2006; White & Holmes, 2006; Kirby, Kirby & Farah, 2002; Lee & Owens, 2002). Men die earlier than women: life expectancy for men is 79.1 years and for women 84.0 years (Bundesamt für Statistik, 2007). Men, up to the age of 65 years, die five times more often of heart attacks than women, three times more often of fatal traffic accidents, Aids, lung cancer and suicid (Arbeitsgruppe Mann und Gesundheit, 1999). Men care little about their health: They do perceive symptoms like abdominal pain, chest pain, persistent sadness or fears. But less than women, men take this as a reason to consult a physician (Dinges, 2005; Gasser, Battegay & Elke, 2004; Courtenay, 2000), as Faltermaier (2007, p. 282) states:

Despite of the high risk of dying and serious chronic health problems, men assess their health status as excellent or very good. They evaluate their health status better than

women do it (DHHS, 1998b; Ross & Bird, 1994, quoted from Courtenay, 2003). Over and over again men's diseases are explained with biological factors (Courtenay, 2003). Authors like White (2006) consider this kind of argumentation as insufficient. They point at the men's living conditions, which influence decisively their state of health.

(Hegemonic) masculinity

Masculinity respectively masculinities represent a frame of identification of the man-being, which is constructed in an interrelation between individual and society (i.e. King & Bosse, 2000). Up to nowadays concepts of masculinity in the civil society are based on the assumption of an ideal of masculinity (i.e. Maihofer, 2005; i.e. Beier, 2007). The ideal is characterised by norms and values like discipline, strength, readiness to fight and power of self-assertion. The trained male body is the exhibited embodiment of these norms and values. Like a machine the male body has to function - otherwise the machine has to be repaired (i.e. Meuser, 2007).

### **Inge Beckel (Basel/Zürich), Publicist of Architecture, architect**

#### **The engineer as a symbol of the bourgeois man**

In late 19th century engineers were decisively involved in pressing ahead with industrialisation and also in guaranteeing fast new mobility by building trains and their infrastructure. In spite of this technical knowledge the reputation in society of engineers and technicians in general was low; they were called upstarts or even necessary evil – in particular in contrast to noblemen, lawyers or doctors. But their industriousness, discipline and in the end good results more and more assured their societal recognition. Still they were badly integrated in political life.

What counted for an engineer was written in cold print or could be scientifically derived. He only relied on figures and numerals – and hated the unprecise and spongy. His arguments were numbers more than words. So one was measuring, comparing, optimizing, and measuring again, to maximize in terms of a reasonable, efficient, and time saving production – production of goods as well as services. In this era of a continuously better organized capitalistic way of life the engineer thus advanced to a symbol of a righteous man of the upcoming bourgeoisie.

Efficiently being economical at the same time meant demanding of categorical standardization – as in a period of assembly line work only big numbers guaranteed an asset, deviants or individual wishes were time-consuming and thus expensive. After World War II yet among engineers critical voices augmented. These men, as SBZ-editor Adolf Ostertag for example, argued that one had been blinded to believe only in 'pure' rationality as court of last instance and that in this 'chilly male believe' all 'maternal warm' and bearing had been expelled out of one's nurturing moral sense as well as one's sense of responsibility.