

MASCULINITY: THEORIES AND PRACTICES AN INTERDISCIPLINARY CONFERENCE

Organized by: Faculty of Humanities at Nicolaus Copernicus University and the
Institute for Prevention of Exclusions

Conducted in: Polish and English

Took place on: 26-27 May 2022

Took place in: Toruń (online)

Report by: Katarzyna Stepak

The conference “Masculinity: Theories and Practices” took place on the 26th and 27th May 2022. It was conducted online, which enabled the participation of many scholars from different parts of Poland and abroad. The main themes of the conference included exploring different aspects of male identity and discovering the alternatives to the standardised and hegemonic conceptions of masculinity. Participants reflected on how masculinity is presented in different cultural practices and discourses. Both days of the event opened and closed with inspiring lectures elaborating on the topic. All sixteen presentations were divided into five panels, each of which was followed by a discussion.

The conference began with a lecture by Prof. Urszula Kluczyńska (Collegium Da Vinci, Poznań) – a sociologist and pedagogist specializing in critical studies on masculinities and men with a focus on social contexts of men's health, ageing, sport, the medicalisation of masculinity and male sexuality, and masculinity and care. She devoted her lecture to the notion of caring and hybrid masculinities, referring to the research conducted among male nurses. The first session of the conference was devoted to exploring the concept of “real men” as shaped by culture and media. The papers explored how the selected discourses

restrict performances of masculine identity and how men can escape the bonds of these limitations (Sylwia Wajs, a graduate of the Faculty of Psychology, University of Warsaw) and how media portray masculinity, traditionally associated with militarism, nationalism and patriotism, in the context of the war in Ukraine (Tomasz Tomasik, Słupsk). During the second session, the first two speakers analysed the portrayal of men in video games: the vision of tender and empathetic masculinity in *Life is Strange 2* (Grzegorz Zyzik, University of Opole) and the potential of computer games for the construction of positive masculinities (Sylwester Matkowski, Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań). The third speaker focused on the place of men in society, family, and politics in Croatian medieval city-state (Martyna Bąk-Ziółkowska, Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań). The third session was conducted entirely in English. It comprised papers that examined masculinity in selected cultural texts: the portrayal of immigrant fatherhood in Kerri Sakamoto's *The Electrical Field*, Sky Lee's *Disappearing Moon Café* and M. G. Vassanji's *No New Land* (Joanna Antoniak, Nicolaus Copernicus University), the spatial realms of masculine identity in Elizabeth Gaskell's *Cranford* (Edgar James Ælred Jephcote, Nicolaus Copernicus University) and a portrait of a caring man in *Scenes from a Marriage* (2021) as a departure from the patriarchal male archetype (Natalia Jaworańska, Nicolaus Copernicus University). Lastly, the participants had the opportunity to listen to Piotr Maroń's lecture on how male bodies are presented in the discourse on eating disorders. Maroń, a PhD student at the Centre for Social Health Research (University of New South Wales, Sydney), presented the results of his studies on male eating disorders performed in clinical practices.

The second day of the conference opened with a lecture by Dr Michał P. Garapich (University of Roehampton, London)—a social anthropologist specializing, among others, in the issues of migration, ethnicity, nationalism, and multiculturalism. He focused on the nationalism of the Polish diaspora in England understood as a symbolic reconstruction. The first paper of the

morning session was dedicated to the Polish manosphere (Bogna Kociołowicz-Wiśniewska, Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań). The speaker provided some crucial characteristics and described the political dimension of men's online spaces. The session continued with a detailed analysis of the representation of homosociality in Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* (Bartłomiej Brzozowski, Jagiellonian University in Kraków). The two last presentations explored the masculinization of sports: the manifestation of masculinity and reflection on the new roles of men in sport on the basis of research in a Warsaw-based Brazilian jiu-jitsu club (Karol Górski, University of Warsaw) and the analysis of Polish TV sports news as biased towards men's sports at the expense of women's sports (Sylwia Ryszawy, University of Silesia in Katowice). The last panel of the conference focused on masculinity as constructed in cultural and media discourses. The first presentation explored the rhetoric of the crisis of masculinity in *Pan* magazine (1987-1993) as a starting point for reflecting on the impact of the political transformation on domestic models of masculinity (Ludmiła Janion, University of Warsaw). The second speaker (Dominik Puchała, University of Warsaw) addressed male privilege and sense of entitlement in the context of the #MeToo movement and the socio-political situation of women in Poland. The session continued with a presentation on how the traditional images of masculinity have changed in various cultural practices, including film, computer games, advertising and theatre (Nina Putyńska, a graduate of the Faculty of Psychology, University of Warsaw). Finally, Joan Copjec's theory on male identity was presented on the basis of her essay "Sex and the Euthanasia of Reason" (Łukasz Silski, Jagiellonian University in Kraków). The conference ended with a lecture on the "Practices of tender masculinity" given by Kamil Błoch from Grupa Performatywna Chłopaki (the Boys Performative Group)—a collective of men exploring the idea of tender masculinity beyond socio-cultural roles and stereotypes controlling men.

The conference on the theories and practices of masculinity proved to be a successful event. It initiated many engaging discussions and inspired the exchange of ideas among its participants.¹

Endnotes

1. All details concerning the event can be found at <https://www.fundacjaipw.org/en/meskosc>.