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## Historical Masculinities as Intersectional Problem

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## About

*Gender forum* is an online, peer reviewed academic journal dedicated to the discussion of gender issues. As an electronic journal, *gender forum* offers a free-of-charge platform for the discussion of gender-related topics in the fields of literary and cultural production, media and the arts as well as politics, the natural sciences, medicine, the law, religion and philosophy. Inaugurated by Prof. Dr. Beate Neumeier in 2002, the quarterly issues of the journal have focused on a multitude of questions from different theoretical perspectives of feminist criticism, queer theory, and masculinity studies. *gender forum* also includes reviews and occasionally interviews, fictional pieces and poetry with a gender studies angle.

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Target articles should conform to current MLA Style (8th edition) and should be between 5,000 and 8,000 words in length. Please make sure to number your paragraphs and include a bio-blurb and an abstract of roughly 300 words. Files should be sent as email attachments in Word format. Please send your manuscripts to [gender-forum@uni-koeln.de](mailto:gender-forum@uni-koeln.de).

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## **Editorial: Historical Masculinities as an Intersectional Problem**

By Norbert Finzsch, University of Cologne

1        Gender, race and class used to be seen as separate categories for members of the dominant and repressed groups, until scholars started to understand that the intersection of these issues, in combination with age, sexuality, abilities and others, are integral to the position a member of society may hold. These intersections are referred to as the “race-class-gender matrix, the intersectional paradigm, interlocking systems of oppression, multiple axes of inequality, the intersection and intersectionality.”(Berger and Guidroz, 2009, 1) Because of its “[...] critical stance toward knowledge in the traditional disciplines, its interdisciplinary approach, and its orientation toward social change and social betterment, women’s studies has been most open to self-critique for its exclusion of multiply oppressed groups such as women of color, working-class women, and lesbians.” (Weber 2004, 121)

2        Intersectional work on masculinities in general is actually rare, a fact that may have its cause in the history of the concept intersectionality itself. It originated in the context of discussions between white middle class liberal feminists and African American women who reproached the white liberals color blindness and their lack of concern for questions of class. Kimberlé Crenshaw, founder of Critical Race Studies (Crenshaw 1995), was interested in the relationship of race and law. She not only coined the term “intersectionality”, but wrote two ground-breaking articles that investigated the law’s inability to make visible black women’s experience of discrimination, which was a problem of intersectionality. (Crenshaw 1988, 1991) Nira Yuval-Davis and others started to investigate the interrelationship of ethnic and gender divisions in the early 1980s. (Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1983). Intersectionality became a concept that allowed for the understanding of gender differences as mediated and transformed by other categories of repression such as class and race. So far, the intersectional approach has not yet been applied on masculinities in historical studies. If gender is a relational category, it is only logical to assume, that this lacuna has to be filled. Intersectionality as an approach that attempts engage with historically specific forms of power and domination does not lend itself easily to the analysis of masculinities, because men have been perceived as being the Other in possession of power and privilege. It may be argued however that masculinity is no fixed and uniform concept. If one applies the concept of hegemonic respective non-hegemonic masculinities in accordance with Connell (Connell 1995, 2005), it may be scholarly useful and politically functional to apply the intersectional approach to the study of masculinities as well, especially since masculinities can be found outside of traditional male roles and bodies (Stoller

1997, Halberstam 1998). If masculinity is a contested terrain that produces exclusions, hierarchies and stratifications within itself, if there is indeed something like hegemonic and non-hegemonic masculinity, if in other word one has to speak about the striations within the masculine space, it may be justified to speak of the application of intersectionality within the history of masculinities, even if this seems to contradict older feminist contentions and initial usages of the concept.

3 Multiple masculinities, among them hegemonic masculinity, a concept founded by Raewyn Connell (Connell 1995, 2000, 2005, 2006) has been criticized by various authors since the time of its inception (Petersen 1998, Demetriou 2001) but is still upheld as valid, albeit in a modified form. The concept of hegemony was derived from Antonio Gramsci's analysis of class relations and "[...] refers to the cultural dynamic by which a group claims and sustains a leading position in social life." (Connell 2005, 77) "Hegemonic masculinity can be defined as the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees [...] the dominant position of men and the subordination of women." (77) It has to be mentioned that hegemonic masculinity "[...] embodies a 'currently accepted' strategy. When conditions for the defence of patriarchy change, the bases for the dominance of a particular masculinity are eroded. New groups may challenge old solutions and construct a new hegemony." (77) It follows that if not all men participate in hegemonic masculinity simultaneously that there has to be some kind of relation between the hegemonic men and those that are seen as non-hegemonic. These relations can have the form of subordination, complicity and marginalization. It also follows that the concept of hegemonic masculinity is inherently intersectional, since the "interplay of gender with other structures such as class and race creates further relationships between masculinities." (80) The common tie that binds all men in one camp, despite their different masculinities, is the dividend that they receive from maintaining women in subordinated position, independent of their individual motives and inclinations. The term dividend refers to a material gain, but not exclusively. Next to the differences in income and wealth distribution, access to positions of power and influence are only one part of the dividend that is paid to men. Patriarchy is also sustained by violence and indeed it is obvious that men receive a masculinist dividend for upholding the unequal distribution of wealth, income and power through violence both directed against women but also directed against other men in order to draw boundaries and to make exclusions, but also in the struggle for an assertion of a hitherto non-hegemonic form of masculinity. (83).

4 Despite the existence of a considerable body of research on the history of masculinities it is evident that masculinity has hitherto not been discussed as an intersectional problem. It

was Pierre Bourdieu who pointed at the fact that masculinities are constructed in a series of competitions that men play with each other (Bourdieu 2001). The goal of these games is the accumulation of symbolic capital in the forms of “[...] fertility strategies, matrimonial strategies, educational strategies, economic strategies, inheritance strategies, all oriented towards the transmission of inherited powers and privileges”. (48) It was also Pierre Bourdieu who pointed at the fact that constructions of masculinity can be „postural“ since they presuppose not only speech acts but also poses, positions within space, body postures and gestures. (74) Bourdieu also warned to equate the existence of hegemonic masculinities with harmony within the group of hegemonic men, since the idea of masculinity is one of the last resorts of the dominated classes (Adkins and Skeggs 2004, 131). Masculinity has also been studied in the relation with the production of knowledge and truth in the sense of technologies of power. I would like to restrict my following remarks therefore to three subjects: Studies on the history of masculinities, masculinities in the context of race and class (intersectionality) and “doing gender” as everyday practice.

4 Historical research pertaining to masculinities has been a field that has yielded relatively rich results in the last 20 years, especially in the United States. Here, in contrast to Germany, we find comprehensive histories of masculinities (Kimmel 2005, Kimmel 2006, Kimmel, Hearn and Connell 2005). In German speaking countries historians tend to shy away from a field that is perceived as being closely linked to gender history. The American advances in the field of masculinity history can partly be explained by the overwhelming success of feminist discourses since the late 1960s which have made visible masculinist counter discourse, resulting in male organizations like the Promise Keepers (Heath 2003, Newton 2005) and events like the Million Men March (Hagan 1992, Boyd 1995, Bartkowski 2004). Since masculinity is always already a contested field, which must be constantly defined, redefined, patrolled and defended against intruders and imposters, in order to maintain the illusion of a fixed and biologically permanent masculinity, masculinity seems to be in the state of crisis. The masculinist discourse attempts to push back the cultural and institutional gains of feminism since the foundation of NOW. This could be perceived as a “back-lash”, but it is more likely part of the constant necessity to define masculinity, which evades precise definitions and suffers from relentless historical erosion by the forces of social and cultural change. Since the 1990s there exist a number of groundbreaking studies on historical masculinities, even if one disregards the numerous media studies, especially on film and masculinities. What I discuss here is situated in the field of “history proper” and disregards both the medial representations of masculinities and masculinities as part of literary criticism.

5        Given the lag and the lack of research on masculinities by historians in Germany (Schissler 1992), it may seem ironic that the first impulse of a historical study of masculinities came from a German cultural historian. Klaus Theweleit submitted a two-volume study on the members of the right-wing militias (Freikorps) in 1977, expounding the genesis of the Nazi system within a male cult of misogyny. This massive study was translated into English rather late, and failed to contribute to the emerging field in the US and Great Britain also because of its heavy reliance on Freudian theory (Theweleit 1977, Theweleit 1987). Since then, German historians have been busy claiming the field for themselves, but their number is confined to a few historians who are firmly grounded in the post-structuralist cohort. (Finzsch and Hampf 2001, Finzsch 2003, Martschukat and Stieglitz 2005, Martschukat and Stieglitz 2007, Martschukat and Stieglitz 2008). Among the ground-breaking studies one could also count Elizabeth Pleck's book, since she discusses the emergence of social politics in the context of domestic violence from the 18th century to the present (Pleck 1987). Dating from the late 1980s, Critical Men's Studies developed as a sub-discipline of sociology, but has been able to influence historiography to some extent. Cynthia Cockburn was among the scholars who has widened traditional women's history to intersectional gender studies by including men in her research (Cockburn 1983, Cockburn 1985, Cockburn 1998). With the development of gay and lesbian studies *Critical Masculinity Studies* emerged in the attempt to study alternative conceptions of masculinity. These have to be seen in stark contrast to *Masculinist Studies*, which are based on a biologist gender essentialism thus refusing the necessity of historization (Dawkins 1976, Bly 1990, Greenstein 1994).

6        David Pugh was one of the pioneers of the history of masculinities, since as early as 1983 he published a study on the revolutionary „Sons of Liberty“ and the emergence of a male consciousness in the 19th century (Pugh 1983). Mangan and Walvin followed soon with an analysis of the connection of morality and masculinity in Great Britain and the US between 1800 and 1940. Both authors concentrated their inquiry deliberately on men of the middle class (Mangan and Walvin 1987). Mark Carnes and Clyde Griffen moved on similar paths when they studied the constructions of masculinity in Victorian America (Carnes and Griffen 1990). Thomas E. Mosmiller and Michael Kimmel documented the writing and thinking of “pro-feminist” men between 1776 and 1990, an approach that despite of its apparent lack of definitorial precision nevertheless presents us with a useful collection of primary sources (Kimmel and Mosmiller 1992). Anthony Rotundo focused on the idea of the transformation of masculinities in the periods between the American Revolution and the present (Rotundo 1993). Gail Bederman succeeded in presenting a complex analysis of selected aspects of masculinity

in the years between 1880 and 1917. She was also one of the first historians to expressly include the category of race in her path-breaking book (Bederman 1995). Angus McLaren studied one of the many crises of masculinity between 1870 and 1930 in what was an analysis of petit bourgeois masculinity, informed by Queer Studies (McLaren 1997). Writing about the life and work of the scandalous painter Thomas Eakins, Martin Berger succeeded in presenting a surprisingly dense description of non-hegemonic masculinities in Gilded Age America (Berger 2000). Bryce Traister underlines the necessity to steer away from heteronormativity in masculinity studies (including literary criticism), but he certainly has a point in the sense that queer theory and the history of masculinity still have to find a way to speak to each other (Traister 2000). What is missing are works that center on masculinities in the context of violence. Although there are studies on domestic violence, the historical dimension in these studies is usually lacking. William Pinar and Pieter Spierenburg were the authors of general works on the topic of race and violence, but Spierenburg's study encompass the US only partially and Pinar's book is informed by the problematic and ahistorical notion of a "crisis" of masculinity. (Spierenburg 1998, Pinar 2001). Suzanne Clark pursued the configurations of masculinity during the Cold War era, a plausible and obvious question since communist fellow-travelers and homosexuals were often portrayed as belonging in the same pathologized field (Clark 2000). Tom Pendergast approaches a similar problematic since he correlates masculinity and consumer behavior during the first half of the 20th century (Pendergast 2000). Situated in the borderlands between cultural history and literary criticism is James Catanos' book on the character of Ragged Dick, similar to John Kasson, who wrote the history of the male body focusing on fictional and actual characters such as Tarzan and Houdini (Catano 2001, Kasson 2001). Thomas Winter's study of the history of the YMCA is intersectional in its scope, since he combines the analysis of class and masculinity (Winter 2002). Athena Devlin studies the period between 1880 and 1917, an era that yields rich results for an understanding of the transformations and transfers in the contested history of male identities (Devlin 2005). Amy Greenberg examines the expansionist tendencies in the context of male subjectivity before 1861 (Greenberg 2005). David Anthony has recently presented an inquiry of economic male identities in the context of paper money, a legal tender that was censured as unmanly until after the Civil War (Anthony 2009). Nicholas Syrett has published an overdue history of white college fraternities in the US, orienting himself along the concepts of Connell's hegemonic masculinity (Syrett 2009, 3).

7        If masculinities in the sense of Connell are the result of practices one should at least risk a glimpse into the historiography of gendered every day practices. The practices can be based



on language performances but can be also postural (see above). Cultural practices that are repeated over and over again may form sediments that prefigure and structure social behavior. *Doing Gender* relates to a methodology in Gender research that understands gender as the product of performative practices that are directed by social rules. (West and Zimmerman 1987, McDowell 1992, Pyke and Johnson 2003, Sharp, Briggs, Yacoub and Hamed 2003, Trautner 2005, Simpson 2009) As put in 1987, doing gender is defined as “[...] an ethnomethodologically informed, and therefore distinctively sociological, understanding of gender as a routine, methodical, and recurring accomplishment. We contend that the “doing” of gender is undertaken by women and men whose competence as members of society is hostage to its production. Doing gender involves a complex of socially guided perceptual, interactional, and micropolitical activities that cast particular pursuits as expressions of masculine and feminine ‘natures.’” (West and Zimmerman 1987, 126) „We argue that gender is not a set of traits, nor a variable, nor a role, but the product of social doings of some sort. What then is the social doing of gender?“ (129) The connections to Connell’s theory of hegemony as practice are obvious and have not escaped the attention of theoreticians of *Doing Gender*. (141, 147; Pyke and Johnson 2003, 35)

8        The scholars assembled in this issue of gender-forum come from different disciplinary backgrounds but see their work as a contribution to the widening field of historiography. The range of the articles in this issue testifies to the advancements made in masculinity studies in general, albeit an intersectional approach has hitherto been applied rather sporadically. It was my intention therefore to encourage a discussion of an intersectional methodology beyond its original scope of a critique of white middle class feminism. Even if the authors gathering in this issue owe a lot to Crenshaw's concept, it is our contention that it has to be broadened to include other axes of discrimination. Anti-Semitism for instance was not a notion that figured largely in the development of intersectional approaches, but "Being-Jewish" is definitely an item on the long list of "interlocking systems of oppression". Whether talking about "black masculinity" in the face of an economic and political crisis during the 1990s or about "white masculinity" in the context of the role of fathers vs. explorers in the 1950s, it can be amply demonstrated that concepts of masculinity sustain a longevity that overlaps the narrow rims of decades. The discourse about the alleged loss of masculinity in the wake of feminisms or the tension between the father and the explorer predates the 1990s and the 1950s respectively. Two contributions in this volume focus on media history in connection with masculinity studies. They both try to put masculinity studies within a wider context of media theory, thus stepping away from the one-sided approach that looks at masculinity in film as an isolated matter without connection to

other regimes of oppression. One cannot talk about gender if one is silent about the body. Therefore the two film articles in this volume examine specific filmic bodies which oscillate "between hypervirility and effeminacy" (Karremann) or generate a "posthuman male fantasy" (König).

