

Workshop Critical Masculinity / kritische Männlichkeit with Rico Schüpach

Report on the virtual workshop from 10.08.2021

The workshop took place in the framework of the MenEngage project. The focus was to critically exchange about individual masculinity and masculinities. The participants developed an awareness of the current global injustice between the sexes. The biological and social development of gender was explained. The participants dealt with their own masculinity and how gender is constructed. It was shown how patriarchal global society is and how hegemonic masculinity is connected to gender inequality. After the critical examination of masculinity and its effects, approaches for action were presented that help the participants to implement the project goal of MenEngage. Namely, that the project participants contribute their share to gender equality through their participation in a social and individual transformation process. In the report I will summarise the workshop. The summary contains the statements of the participants.

A big thank goes to the workshop leader, Rico Schüpach, and to all participants.

Reflection on masculinity(ies)

It was discussed that role expectations depend on the cultural groups and they depend on the cultural context. Biologically, there is more than just the specific gender of woman and man.

In the role attributions of a man, more physical occupations were mentioned and that the man defines himself to a large extent through the physicality. Drinking beer was also described as masculine by one person. Such things currently define masculinity in Zimbabwe and Switzerland, among other countries. A man who drinks alcohol means to be tough and to be a really traditional man. This is of course contextual. The context defines what a man is. So in Zimbabwe, to be a man means to be tough and not to mess around, and it is associated with being a provider. It can also refer to someone who perseveres and does not give up easily, even if it is the only option. In rural Zimbabwe, masculinity is also associated with being a provider and a decision maker in the family. One participant writes that he experienced a different image of masculinity in his village, family and church. His father embodied authority, control and decision-making power at home. This image was challenged in the church. There he began to interact with girls and women who also had authority and decision-making power, which was tolerated. Similarities between people living in Switzerland and Zimbabwe became apparent. For example in the image of the man being the provider for the family. In Zimbabwe, age would not play such a big role. Depending on the age, the person is already considered male at 16 if he shows some masculine role characteristics.

The expectations for men after school are said to be high. The moment school is over, expectations and stereo-typing towards men are already provided. It becomes difficult for a man to ask for support if he does not work or is not given it.

The participants agree that there is a struggle with traditional and church values and that some of these are toxic for men and society.

Theories and important terms on gender and sex

Rico Schüpbach presented various theories on sex, which are briefly described below.

Adrienne Rich - obligatory heterosexuality:

In the Western tradition, at one level - the romantic - it is asserted that women are inevitably attracted to men, even if this is rash and tragic; That this attraction, even if suicidal, is still an organic imperative.

Heteronormativity - Michael Warner:

Michael Warner writes about hetero normativity and through his social theory makes visible structures that are influenced by gender, social and cultural aspects.

Judith Butler:

She describes social expectations. Male and female roles are not biologically determined, but socially constructed.

Cis

Cis is the abbreviation for cissexual. Or more generally for cisgender, which refers to a person's gender identity, assigned at birth.

Trans

Term describing people whose gender identity differs from the sex they were assigned at birth. A transgender person may identify as male or female, but may also identify outside of this binary gender.

Intersectionality by Kimberlé Crenshaw

Intersectionality is a lens through which to see where power emerges and collides, where it snaps and intersects. It is the recognition that everyone has their own experiences of discrimination and privilege.

Marginalised men

People of colour experienced change and the redefinition of masculinity at a faster pace. They struggled against racist stereotypes of violence and hypersexuality.

Media and Gender Inequality

Gender inequality exists in print, on TV and online across all media and news outlets. Women and non-binary genders are underrepresented in the channels mentioned. Voices of women and non-binary genders should be included.

For example, Disney films often portray how a real man should act and how a man or woman should think. In most films, gay people do not exist and if they do, their sexuality is the focus. The characters in films are often stereotyped. Like, for example, that the man has to find a partner.

The traditional media produces a language of how media should be organised. To this end, alternative outlets are offered. With this, the media compete with each other and try to generate as much attention

as possible through sexist and conspicuous contributions. Another important point raised was that a person from Zimbabwe focused on sports news when he was a little boy. He had never watched news about women's football or women in sport. Until the time Kirsty Coventry excelled at the Olympics. But since then she hardly heard anything about women in sport.

Another person describes being influenced by reading western novels and watching films. Lately, this person likes to watch documentaries about war and politics and somehow the plot is dominated by the male characters, the person notes. Thus, the dominance of male actors is explained by another person as oppression. It is further described that any woman who tries to run for political office is called a prostitute or irresponsible. This still happens in a small village in Zimbabwe.

It is perceived as important to operate under a different dynamic. For example, books should be read to children as young as 12 years old, where they are communicated in a gender-responsive way and encouraged to think. There is also a need to raise awareness in the media about gender equality. Oppressed people like drag queens need to be given a voice. It needs people to stand up and give a voice to the voiceless. There are examples of this on social media. It needs leading characters, like a woman who is brave and is the icebreaker for certain gender issues.

Construction of gender

Traditional gender identities exist. This means that extensive processes for non-binary genders are necessary because society has done a lot of damage. The "genderbread person" is a model divided into the categories of gender expression, gender identity, biological sex, romantic attraction and sexual attraction. Every person should be able to present themselves as they wish. It becomes problematic when people's gender is not respected and those affected (transgender, queer, gay, lesbian, bisexual, intersex and asexual) are punished. Every person should be able to live freely and not be pigeonholed and disadvantaged because of their gender. Perception and feeling for oneself is important to know that I am enough as a man, woman or non-binary person. Addressing gender has different views depending on the context. There are men who quickly feel feminised and criticised when it comes to such an argument.

Some men tend to doubt their masculine appropriateness when they get emotional. For example, African men are not expected to cry or give in to pain. Some men cannot even speak out against abuse that they suffer. They cannot speak up to authorities because they are afraid of being judged and labelled as less manly. It is difficult for men to report problems related to sexual harassment, considering how the authorities deal with it. Experiences are shared where close people have been involved in violent crimes just to prove that they are man enough. One finding on masculinity is that the discussion on masculinity gives a new perspective on the simplistic view of being a woman or a man.

Hegemonial Masculinity – patriarchal Society

Hegemonic masculinity creates power structures that lead to a patriarchal society. Hegemonic masculinity refers to a social pattern in which stereotypically masculine characteristics are seen as the masculine cultural ideal, which explains how and why men maintain their dominant social roles towards women and other groups considered feminine. Crime statistics demonstrate this violence and oppression of men towards women.

To counteract this hegemonic masculinity, gender-sensitive education must begin in childhood. The toxic patterns should be broken. These need to change not only on an individual level but also on a structural level.

Human Evolution is described as change that takes place unconsciously. The image of the monkey becoming a man shows how the monkey evolves into a man. This is very problematic because it excludes women and non-binary humans. Instead, the evolution picture should be adapted with the ape. One vision of a person from the workshop is an equal society with equal opportunities that do not depend on gender but on merit. From another person it is taken away that it is important to talk about "hegemonic masculinity" (together with patriarchy). So we empower ourselves to think outside this box.

Sexual orientation in law

The legal situation is different from what is lived in practice. Criminalised people work at the front. This does not solve the problems. An example is that in an Argentinian shopping centre a trans woman was expelled from the ladies' room by a security guard. The security guard was legally punished for this, but the problem is still not being addressed structurally. The mall was not punished for the action of their employee. Many voices are not respected and challenged by the hegemonic masculinities that are in positions of power. The case is not defined at the micro level. It should be thought about and also acted upon locally. There is a big gap between different countries as the sexual orientation map in the law shows.

http://www.viewsoftheworld.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/PI2019-02_GenderInequalityIndex.png

Possibilities for action for structural and individual changes (MenEngage-Clubs)

In intercultural exchanges there is great value and strength in bringing about change on a structural and individual level. The different knowledge of the people involved and the different contexts in which they live leads to a learning effect. The living spaces of the people involved should be included by connecting to them and addressing them. Specifically, it is about the following action instructions, thus making a contribution to oneself personally and to society:

- Educate yourself and share what you have learned.
- Confront your prejudices
- Make your spaces welcoming
- Be a supportive family member
- Be a good work colleague
- Be a role model
- Engage in activism
- Help change structural violence with your voice
- Speak out
- Ask how else you can help
- Language, are there inclusive options?
- Do you use them?