



# Who Cares?

## Masculinity and gender equality

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*This reader offers an overview of the manifold connections between masculinity and gender equality. We start from the premise that gender equality is not exclusively the task of women, but that men must also be considered as target groups, as actors, and as hurdles on the path to equality. Our aim is to identify both the opportunities and the challenges that arise when we think of masculinity and equality.*

## In advance: the tug of war over the difference

What the difference between the sexes consists of and what it means has often changed in the course of history and is renegotiated again and again. Activities, emotions and social areas are divided and hierarchized into typically male or typically female. And the corresponding classification of occupations into male and female occupations is also often easy.

The question of whether we give high importance to gender difference or neglect it is much debated and extremely multifaceted. In 1995, Angelika Wetterer spoke of a „*Tauziehen zwischen Differenzmaximierung und Differenzminimierung*“ (Wetterer 2008) – a Tug of war between difference maximization and difference minimization - thereby illustrating the multiple conflicts of interest that arise when negotiating difference. The next section explores the various facets of difference and equality in more detail.

### Men in women's jobs, women in men's jobs

Men who take on traditional women's jobs emphasize their difference and maximize it. In cases where they are recruited for women's jobs, as is the case in nursing, they are addressed as men who are now finally introducing the necessary quality into the profession (Bohn 2020). As a man, I benefit from the fact that ability, rationality and competence in companies are attributed to men and denied to women. The emphasis on ones difference in this context thus has the effect of perpetuating the existing disadvantage.

Conversely, women who move into men's jobs exhibit behaviors aimed at minimizing difference. Similarly, entire industries try to increase their share of women by using measures such as 'girls day' to show that women are just as suitable for their field as men - difference is not supposed to play a role here (Bereswill and Liebsch 2019). At the same time - quasi on the backstage - this claim collides with verbal and physical discrimination, as well as with the much described 'leaky pipeline', the seeping away of women on the career path. The difference is now again clearly noticeable.

### Difference and equality

Difference can thus be minimized to avoid attribution or to break with disadvantage. It can be maximized in order to maintain existing disadvantages. Equally, it can be emphasized to draw attention to disadvantage. For example, a women's quota may be useful to allow women to enter well-paid male domains. In contrast, there is no reason for a male quota. Here it is important to point out the difference in order to reduce disadvantage.

But: many studies show that the less differentiated societies are between the sexes, the more men participate in childrearing and other caregiving tasks, the more women are seen as capable, rational, and competent in the public sphere, and the less common male violence is (Hearn 2021).

## Masculinity and equality

When it comes to gender equality, women are often named as needing to be put on an equal footing with men due to economic deficits. Less often, however, the focus is on male deficits, for example in connection with emotional and social competencies or the ability to assume ecological responsibility. It seems as if equality means bringing women into line with men's way of life, while men's way of life is the measure of all things and there is no task for them to create equality. Yet the role of men in gender equality in research and policy has become increasingly important within the EU over the past decade. There now seems to be a consensus among experts that the engagement of men *and* women is necessary to achieve gender-equal development (Hearn 2021).

It makes a difference (even if only symbolic) whether men are included in already existing gender equality structures or not, and it can be noted that the debate changes when men are invited as an active part and target group of gender equality policies (Scambor et al. 2013).

### Gender Equality

The Federal Government and the federal states undertake to promote equality between women and men in the research institutions and projects jointly financed by them (as defined in the GWK Agreement) in accordance with the principles expressed in the equality laws of the Federal Government and the federal states.

Its aim is to achieve equality between men and women, to eliminate existing disadvantages based on gender, in particular disadvantages faced by women, and to prevent future disadvantages, as well as to improve family-friendliness and the compatibility of family, care and work activities for women and men.

(Joint Science Conference GWK  
27.10.2008, own translation)

### Cost of being a man

On the one hand, the results of a Europe-wide study on masculinity show that men perform less unpaid care work and part-time work, are far more represented in management positions than women, and earn 16-17% more than women on average in the EU.

On the other hand, however, men work longer than they want to, tend to be absent from their families, die on average six years earlier than women, and fail to find male-specific help when they are victims of violence. (Scambor et al. 2013)

Men's strong focus on their jobs, public life and autonomy lead to stressful experiences, health risks, lack of friendships and limited family relationships. The high cost of male privilege makes other ways of 'being a man' increasingly important - not only for women and for society, but also for men themselves. (Ibid.)

This text offers an overview of the current state of research on the topic of masculinity and shows the need for action as well as the

## Care

Care means not only taking care of someone or something in a general sense, but also taking care of someone or something in a material and practical sense. Care is therefore usually associated with work, e.g. in the care work that parents do for their children.

Men are not always (or only) fathers and the concept of care goes far beyond caring for children. It also includes emotional support, empathy with others, attention to the needs of children, friends, the elderly, neighbors, work colleagues, and other family members. (Scambor et al. 2013)

possibilities for action. The question is: How can men become actors in gender equality policy and its target group?

### Starting points for change

When it comes to the question of how men can become actors and target groups of equality, the question also arises in which areas of life masculinity plays a role at all. That is, in which areas of life do men not merely appear as individuals, but act collectively, as it were, as representatives of the group of men? Where is it necessary to criticize the prevailing forms of masculinity?

In many areas of life, the structuring function of the social category of gender is obvious. In these areas, men and women are ascribed different predispositions and are given or denied different opportunities based on these presuppositions, which seem self-evident. These include, for example:

- **Work and division of labor**
- **Health**
- **Family relationships**
- **Sexuality**
- **Education**
- **Interpersonal violence**

Equal opportunities and chances for realization can also be implemented in daily interaction in these areas. This includes a culture in which

violence is not accepted and in which attention is paid to the problems of colleagues. Other areas require institutional intervention, for example, when it comes to reconciling gainful employment and care work and when it becomes necessary to negotiate working hours. The areas of work and division of labor, as well as interpersonal violence, will be discussed further below.

## Men and Care

A Europe-wide comparison from 2021 shows that men everywhere do less unpaid housework than women. (Irina Fernández-Lozano and Teresa Jurado-Guerrero 2021)

Differences in participation in housework lead to differences in career paths. Having to do much of the housework in addition to paid employment implies limitations in

participation in work and public life, as well as limitations in terms of economic independence. These limitations can arise both contemporaneously with the extra work, and delayed and cumulative later in life, (Niemistö et al. 2021) for example, in the form of poverty in old age or economic dependence on the state or partner.

The survey by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) shows that women in Germany do slightly more unpaid work than paid work, while the time share for men is about half of their paid working time. (Figure 1)

The goal is an equal division of domestic work between men and women in order to distribute and mitigate the associated restrictions. But also because care work means an important experience for the development of the personality and it means an indispensable ability for the functioning of a society to be able to care for others. Caring for others is a skill that must be learned and can only be learned in practice.

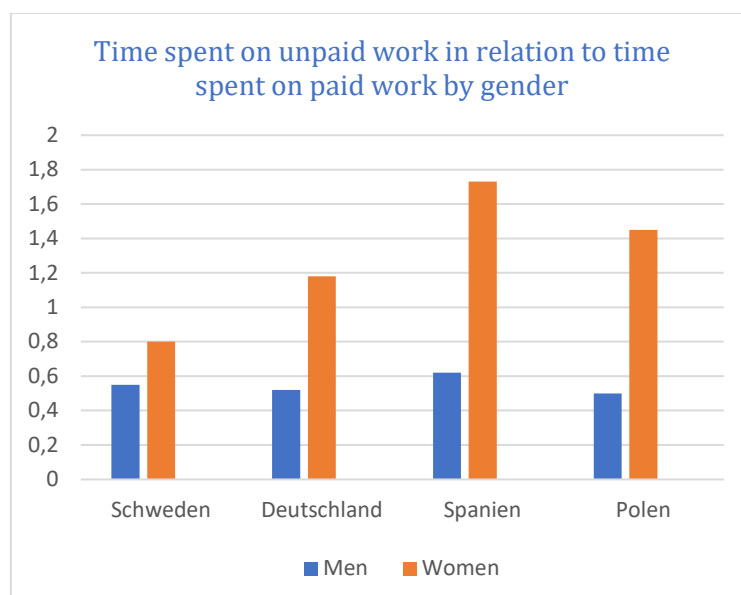


Figure 1: Time spent on unpaid work relative to time spent on paid work by gender (age: 15-64 years). (OECD 2020)

### Institutional measures

Working mothers in Germany are significantly more likely to work part-time than working fathers. In 1990, 93.6% of fathers were employed full-time, compared with just 33.8% of mothers. (Rudnicka 2022)

The reasons why men are much less likely to reduce their working hours in favor of care work are manifold and mostly socially constructed. The demands of care work and gainful employment usually collide. (Irina Fernández-Lozano and Teresa Jurado-Guerrero 2021)

### Individual measures

Both men and women face discrimination in the workplace if they do not fulfill their traditional gender roles in terms of the relationship between care work and gainful employment. Men experience more discrimination when they care for their children more than expected, but also when they do not have children. Women experience more

discrimination when they care for their children less than expected, but also when they do not become mothers in the first place. (Berdhal and Moon 2013) Employees can help reduce this form of discrimination by accepting and respecting the choices of their colleagues.

### Only men and women?

Often, measures for a more equal distribution of care work have been designed for binary, non-migrant, heterosexual family forms. If the focus of care is broadened, many everyday situations of e.g. LGBTIQ+ families become visible. This visibility, in turn, can lead to more appropriate and specific interventions and, ultimately, more equality in opportunities and development chances for employees. (Niemistö et al. 2021)

## Men and violence

The importance of men for equality is particularly evident when looking at interpersonal violence. The figures show that violence perpetrated by men against other men, but especially against children, women and LGBTIQ+ persons, must be considered as the most urgent problem on the way to gender equality. Interpersonal violence is considered one of the most serious causes of gender inequality, as the vast majority of violent acts (physical, psychological, and sexual) are committed by men (in public spaces, workplaces, and intimate relationships). (Scambor et al. 2013) Among the cases of intimate partner violence recorded in 2020, the perpetrators were male in 79% of all cases. One in 11 employed persons experienced sexual harassment at work in the past three years. Three quarters of those affected were female and in 82% of all cases the perpetrators were male. (Federal Anti-Discrimination Agency)

### Causes of violence

Certainly, male gender identity is not the only reason for violent behavior. However, it can be described as a risk factor. (Whitehead 2005) Whether men are more aggressive than women for biological reasons and therefore more prone to violence is conceivable, but cannot be tested because men do not exist outside of society. More productive questions might instead be: How do societies deal with violence? Is it condoned, approved of, or tolerated? Are there forms of violence that are integrated into societal institutions? (Kaufmann 1996)

### Institutional measures

Institutions prevent violence by not trivializing the problem. They can create functioning and transparent complaint channels and encourage their employees to use them.

Research on violence shows how effective it is when men in higher positions use their decision-making power to establish policies and programs to stop male violence (Ibid.)

The Federal Anti-Discrimination Agency assumes that sexual harassment in the workplace could be largely prevented and contained by:

- the role model function of managers
- binding guidelines
- consistent sanctions
- Regular internal public relations work
- Appropriate protection and support measures (in cooperation with company contact persons for counseling as well as complaints offices)

Managers would have to be trained accordingly. The Federal Anti-Discrimination Agency attaches great importance to the expansion of external, holistic complaints offices. (Schröttle et al. 2019)

### Individual measures

Men can play a productive role in preventing violence by helping to challenge the cultural basis of violence. Evidence shows that men who tolerate violence or who reject violence have the strongest influence on men who perpetrate violence. Addressing men's violence and structures that encourage and legitimize it requires courage as well as the ability to challenge other men, thus establishing a culture of safety and respect where norms apply that make all forms of violence unacceptable. (Pease 2008)

## Men and work

Against the backdrop of a steadily increasing number of outstandingly qualified women at all levels in the scientific landscape as a whole (GWK 2021) and a large number of equality policy measures, the persistent and stable phenomenon of the 'leaky pipeline' points to continuing structural disadvantages for women. This cannot be attributed exclusively to the challenge of reconciling gainful employment and care work. There must be other reasons.

### Causes of inequality in the world of work

Reconciling family and career - reconciling care work and gainful employment - has been the task of women in particular since the 1980s. (Becker-Schmidt) Career paths in science are fundamentally presuppositional and offer few opportunities to reconcile gainful employment and care work, which is very much to the disadvantage of those who, for example, care for children. (Research Consortium Federal Report on Young Scientists 2021).

Sexual harassment in the workplace has a negative impact on women's careers. Especially in cases where a person is structurally inferior, for example due to age, high levels of stress and considerable damage to the professional and personal situation of those affected are to be expected. (Schröttle et al. 2019 , McLaughlin et al. 2017)

However, the still low proportion of women in leadership positions can be attributed less and less to obvious forms of discrimination against women and more and more to

more subtle and unintentional forms such as microaggressions, which can nevertheless have serious effects on (mental) health. (Kim and Meister 2022) Microaggression can be spoken of, for example, when a colleague is denied competence and thus professional identity for no reason: "You're much too pretty to be a programmer." (Cf. Ibid.) It can be shown that sexism in the workplace is associated with a poorer sense of belonging in the industry, which in turn is related to a deterioration in mental health and job satisfaction. (Rubin et al. 2019) At the same time, it can be observed that mixed-gender teams perform better than same-gender teams, especially on complex tasks. The more balanced the gender ratio in a team, the better the team performs. (Yang et al. 2022) It would be in everyone's interest to increase women's sense of belonging to their company and encourage working in mixed-gender teams.

#### Individual measures

Individuals can be encouraged to proactively address microaggressions and help stem the tide of gender-based microaggressions, creating an inclusive work environment for women. They do this by highlighting examples of these aggressions, encouraging female colleagues to speak out, and illuminating the relief, gratitude, and resilience that allies can spark within the target group. (Kim and Master 2022)

#### Institutional measures

Measures against sexual harassment in the workplace have already been mentioned in the section "Men and violence". Furthermore, other forms of sexism in the workplace and their consequences for the entire company could be made visible so that targeted measures can be developed.



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