

„Masculinity is what feminity is not“ – work with boys and lads in Austria

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The development of „work with boys and lads“, which began around 1990 in Austria, is taken as the starting point for outlining the legal basis of this essential work that is founded on the educational principle of gender mainstreaming embodied in the Austrian school curricula. Activities in the area of work with boys and lads are described with reference to different age groups. Reference is made to obvious failings in teacher training. Leisure-time activities that spill over into the public space of urban areas underline the importance of youth clubs and street work, in particular for migrants as well.

This study is divided into the following sections:

1. Development of work with boys and lads in Austria – the various challenges during the last 20 years
2. Aims and subject matter of gender-specific action in educational institutions: illustrated by the kindergarten – school – private work with children and youth group work
3. Gender-specific aspects in the training of primary school teachers
4. Leisure amenities for boys and lads: free play area – club sport versus freestylers – youth centres
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1. Development of work with boys and lads in Austria – the various challenges during the last 20 years

„Work with boys and lads“ first began to arouse interest in Austria around 1990 and individual institutions placed the emphasis of their work with children and adolescents on working with

boys or lads. Not every activity with boys is understood as „work with boys“ in the literal sense. According to Gnaiger (2001) it is feasible to refer to working with boys „when dichotomously understood gender roles that are learnt through socialisation are questioned, brought into the spotlight, and the opportunities for masculine role identification are broadened“ (Gnaiger 2001, p. 9).

In 1998, employees at the FBI Institute (Institute for Social Research, Education and Information at the University of Innsbruck) identified six areas in which work with boys was performed towards the end of the nineties in particular: youth centres; street work; the school; child protection centres; Catholic sector; and men’s advice centres (cf. Gnaiger 2001, p. 10). Other areas that may be mentioned in this regard are drugs advice centres as well as careers advice centres, crisis intervention organisations and organisations that provide community service training for conscientious objectors, provide assistance to Aids sufferers and so forth.

The six areas referred to above were inspired by the necessity of tackling the readiness on the part of men and boys to resort to aggression and violence.

Research on developmental psychology has shown that the development of gender-typical identity during puberty is increasingly characterised by gender role expectations; during these years, boys develop a subjective package of manliness that defines a masculine code of behaviour and is responsible for the development of gender-typified behaviour. According to Violi (2003), this includes negating inner values, building a hard outer shell, suppressing personal emotions, reflecting *coolness* and composure in the social sphere and cultivating a masculine appearance. As far as family structures are concerned, Violi (2003) points out that where the father of the family is absent as a male role model, boys define their masculine identity antithetically to the feminine - as:

„Masculinity is the absence of femininity“.

This deliberate elimination of feminine behaviour leads to the establishment of gender-stereotypical codes of conduct, to the adaptation of gender-typical ideals to the search for personal identity. Such ideals are evident in behavioural patterns as stereotyped male identities: courage, fearlessness, heroism and competitiveness. Gender-stereotyped socialisation peaks during adolescence, reinforced by the mass media which suggest to boys that masculinity is a byword for strength and courage whereas femininity symbolises weakness and timidity.

Migrants and migrant movements in Austria impart a particular aspect to the issue of identity development, especially with respect to lads, namely by constructing personal and social identity from the interplay of biographical experience and social context, that is to say, modifications,

erosion and consolidation of identities that are occasionally accompanied by dramatic upheavals and may lead to the collapse of identities and the disintegration of world views (cf. Seebauer 2007).

Haller (1996) summarises the following basic hypotheses of a theory of social identity: „Identity constitutes the totality of focal points and benchmarks of which an individual is a more or less clearly aware and that determine his orientation and actions as far as his surroundings are concerned ... “(Haller 1996, p. 49). Individual body image and mental and spiritual dispositions as well as relationships to other people constitute important aspects of identity. A distinction must, moreover, be made between the „self“ or „personal identity“ and „social identity“, the self-image that is conveyed through various social roles (cf. Haller 1996, p. 49). Self-identity – as a balance between accepting the expectations of others and clinging to personal identity – is not an intrinsic trait of the individual, but must be reformulated continuously (cf. Haller 1996, based on Krappmann 1995).

It is against the backdrop of this bundle of challenges that one trend in working with boys aims to eliminate „deficits“ (stereotypes, recognition that misogynous role stereotypes can be changed, learn forms of communication and conflict solving patterns of behaviour, ...); the other trend wishes to assist boys and lads and offer them support on the road to becoming a man (cf. Gnaiger 2001, p. 9).

Gender-specific work with children and adolescents in Austria is instigated by the „Ministry of Social Education“ on the one hand, and by the „Ministry of Education“ on the other hand. Some of the studies commissioned by the respective ministries were accordingly also produced towards the end of the 20th century. The „Platform against Domestic Violence“ provides a framework for organisations such as child protection centres, women’s refuges, youth institutions, men’s advice centres... to cooperate in the area of violence prevention and intervention. The „Platform against Domestic Violence“ was set up in 1993, at the instigation of the Family Minister at that time, as an instrument for preventing violence. In subsequent years, the platform was broadened to include, amongst other things, „gender-specific work with lads and men“.

Projects for boys by youth organisations, youth action groups and public-sector youth work may be subsidised by funds from the Federal Youth Sponsorship (cf. Minutes of Parliamentary Proceedings 2055/AB XXI.GP, received on 02.05.2001).

The results of the PISA Study 2003 undoubtedly provide other – current – impetuses. The social scientist from Linz, Bacher, who made a special study of the performance of boys, ascertains a „setback in all areas for boys“ – not only in reading; boys also obtained far worse results in mathematics and natural sciences than in the PISA Study 2000. For Bacher, the root cause of the deterioration in reading performance is a decision about education that is made at the age of ten. Bacher also sees an explanation for the deterioration in the reading performance of the boys surveyed in their leisure-time behaviour, with „ ... behavioural patterns that do not encourage success at school generally being rated highly among lads.“ (Local newspaper *Oberösterreichische Nachrichten* of 08.02.2005).

2. Aims and subject matter of gender-specific action in educational institutions: illustrated by the kindergarten – school – private work with children and youth group work

In Austria, work with boys/lads and girls is an integral part of the curricula of the majority of school types through the educational principle “teaching equality of women and men“. It is not possible to assign educational principles to a specific subject, but is – for the purposes of the Austrian curricula – only manageable in an interdisciplinary context. This accordingly complies with the principle of *gender mainstreaming* to which the European Union and the Austrian Federal Government have committed themselves.

The substance of the educational principle focuses on the following subsectors:

- Increasing awareness of gender-specific socialisation through family, school, media and the world of work as well as its implications ...
- Observation of causes and forms of gender-specific division of labour in the private sphere and in the world of work...
- Recognition of the possible contributions to handing down and reinforcing stereotypical roles in the school as an area of life (and other areas of life) through teaching content, teaching aids and the behavioural patterns of all school partners.
- Reflection on personal conduct, interaction during lessons, daily dealings with each other, individual ideas about gender roles
- Increasing awareness of everyday manifestations of violence and sexism at school, at work, in the media; providing opportunities for prevention and intervention and steps towards interpersonal relationships based on cooperation and mutual trust.
- Encouragement of a willingness to break down gender-specific prejudices and discrimination, encouragement or compensation of shortfalls with respect to social-

cooperative behavioural patterns and self-confidence as well as encouragement of cooperative behaviour by boys and girls.

Kindergartens are becoming increasingly involved in the implementation of gender-sensitive education. The starting point for this work which is for the individual to question his/her own role as a kindergarten teacher accordingly plays a major role in gender-sensitive education: the individual must have a clear perception of his/her socialisation, acknowledge his/her shortfalls and give himself/herself new room for manoeuvre. Self-observation and observation of girls and boys is a useful method for reflecting on the way the individual deals with girls and boys.

Children are able to see that women and men perform different activities and have different interests. Children should experience situations that show women and men performing activities that are not routine, e.g. women who build and repair, men who look after a baby and run a household, women in a position of leadership or political position, men who work at home or in a caring profession, women who decide, men who comfort... This broadens the powers of imagination and the room for manoeuvre of girls and boys. Gender-sensitive education at kindergarten also impacts on the interior design, the range of toys and games and project planning, e.g. invite or visit women and men with atypical occupations; let fathers and grandfathers help in the kindergarten, gender-homogeneous group projects (building project for girls – housework project for boys) ... (cf. Ennemoser 2004)

As far as the school sector is concerned, reference is made to a project that was developed by a group of teachers, parents and pupils' representatives from the federal grammar school, the *Bundesgymnasium* Rahlgasse in the 8th district of Vienna in school year 1994/95 in the course of the decisions on school autonomy. A syllabus for a subject called „Communication, Cooperation, Conflict Management“ (CO CO CO) was created. The core content includes: making acquaintances and team building, self-image-image of others, similarities and differences; communication – what is it? Forms of dialogue and manners; (active) listening, non-verbal communication, I and you messages, feedback exercises; communication disorders and conflicts. What kind of disorders are there? How are they handled? Teamwork: norms, rules, role models and objectives, involvement in the group as a „phenomenon“, responsiveness and external relationships, accepting differences and still doing things together; practical implementation in teamwork... The team of teachers sees the introduction of this subject as an opportunity to improve the social climate in the classroom and to prevent the readiness among adolescents to resort to violence. Pupils should also be given a set of tools to enable them to

recognise, analyse and remedy future communication problems and conflict situations. Individual members of the teaching staff act as special representatives for boys and girls at school.

The scouts in Austria and the *Rote Falken* (Red Hawks) are examples of (associational) teamwork with children and young people outside school. Although they are not involved in “working with boys” *per se*, their objectives show the same essential elements that are found in gender-sensitive work. The aim of the scout movement is to assist children and young people with the development of their personality. Hand, heart and brain should be addressed at one and the same time with holistic methods. Girls and boys are thus given the opportunity to discover their talents and skills and to grow up to be independent individuals. Teamwork, companionship, tolerance, critical thinking, experiencing and learning respect for nature and the environment are hence priority objectives. Typical methods used by the scout movement – familiar nowadays in the concept of „outdoor education“ – are camps, hikes and teamwork (cf. scouts in Austria).

The *Rote Falken* (Red Hawks) originated as part of the workers' movement to integrate young people into the *Kinderfreunde* Organisation¹. The idea of self-organisation – young people organise themselves, run the group themselves – has been maintained to this day. The aim of this social-democratic organisation for children and young people is the „mutual creation of a socially just and democratic and liveable world“. Top priority is given to personality development (learning how to accept responsibility, imparting and learning values, adventures and experience, fun, joy, relationships, companionship, reinforcement of individual responsibility and individual competence „strengthen children“, reflection on one's own personality); political education (imparting creativity, international exchange, imparting continuity, analysis of children's rights, imparting social democratic values, imparting political ideas); educational work (learning from each other, peer education, social learning, further education, acquisition of organisational skills, in addition to meaningful leisure-time activities, low-cost leisure-time activities and holiday trips (cf. The *Rote Falken* [Red Hawks])).

3. Gender-specific aspects in the training of primary school teachers

At the conference of 19 and 20 May 2006 in Graz, Hasenhüttel (2006) refers to the „massive deficits“ that exist in the teacher training sector with respect to *gender mainstreaming*. His criticism relates to – based on two evaluation studies – the level of awareness of the lecturers at the training colleges and the inclusion of gender topics in the curricula and lectures. Hasenhüttel

¹ Founded in 1908 with the aim of ensuring the welfare and wellbeing of children and respect for children's rights.

also criticises „the attitudes of lecturers towards issues of equality per se. Just under a third of them believe that equality has already been achieved and that appropriate measures are therefore not a priority; just under another third are of the view that equality based on biological differences is difficult to achieve....“ (Hasenhüttel 2006, p. 13f.).

Inclusion of gender-specific aspects in the training of primary school teachers is left to the commitment of the respective lecturers, even though the training area in human sciences and didactics offer good opportunities for this. It is assumed that gender-specific problems are still more likely to be addressed within the scope of „school placement studies“ and the „interdisciplinary didactic reflection“ that is led by experts in human sciences.

4. Leisure amenities for boys and lads: free play area – club sport versus freestylers – youth centres

Children in cities are increasingly suffering from limited opportunities for personal development through playing in areas that are close to nature and taking exercise outdoors. Lack of exercise is detrimental to health and also leads to emotional and cognitive development problems. A good example of opportunities for exercise and games that are suitable for children are so-called „free play areas“– public, adventure playgrounds supervised by teaching staff– that offer the opportunity for everyone to contribute their own ideas towards and actively design a self-contained empty space (adventure playgrounds). The „Green Playground Initiative“ in Vienna is calling for a gender-equitable design and points out that the danger of ignoring girls and their interests is particularly high. Given that the relationship to the other sex during childhood and adolescence fluctuates between marked disparagement and a pronounced interest, free, demarcated spaces are of particular importance. Girls and boys should have the opportunity to enjoy their interests together as well as with their peers of the same gender. Such an area may accordingly be divided up into various play areas (building and arts and crafts, play area for water games, areas for keeping and looking after animals, garden area ...) (cf. Smolik, Green Playground Campaign 2004).

The range of sports opportunities for children and young people organised by clubs was examined using WAT (Viennese Workers' Gymnastics and Sports Club) by way of illustration - as a benchmark for other gymnastics and sports clubs. The club offers a wide variety of activities ranging from baby swimming through „toddler swimming“ (3.5 to 5 years) to facilities for judo, table tennis, basketball, rope skipping, badminton, athletics ... The respective sports are offered at numerous locations in the city, often at appropriately equipped school sites in return for payment of an annual subscription (around EUR 85.-- on average). Up to the ages of 10./12, the

activities „for girls and boys“ take place together – for instance „Tai-chi-chuan Kung-fu“ for children from the age of 7 onwards to promote aesthetic and healthy physical fitness; a „ball school“ is run for „girls and boys“ aged from 7 to 8 and younger. There is „basketball“ for „girls and boys“ (aged 10 to 12); they are then grouped according to gender and age: „male pupils“ (aged 12 to 14 or 14 to 16 and 16 to 18); girls (aged 12 to 16).

„Competitive gymnastics“ is only offered to „boys from the age of 6 onwards“, and „rhythmical gymnastics“ for „girls (children and young people up to the age of 18)“ (cf. WAT Vienna).

Not only the expenses incurred by club sports, but the travelling time to and from the sports venues, the set training periods and a general trend – „away from the sports club“ (cf. Zellmann/Opaschowski 2004) – may be the reason for the emergence of so-called freestyle sports that differ enormously from club sport in many aspects – with respect to

- their flexibility in terms of space and time: freestylers desert the gyms and sports grounds; there are no set, compulsory training times; the sporting activity pervades daily life.
- Rules and order: freestylers derive part of their fascination from avoiding or breaking conventional rules, they derive their existence from the myth of their own (youth cultural) rules.
- Ideas about winning/competing: freestylers have their own personal ambition – to be better than they were yesterday; for them it's about body control and the difference between helplessness and control. The primary motivation is the flowing sensation which is the ultimate aim – a blissful sensation that is the result of total absorption in an activity.

The popular board sports, skateboarding and snowboarding, symbolise freedom, flexibility, dynamism, love of adventure, but also a willingness to take risks and being different. It is no longer simply a question of sport, it is now at least just as much a question of music, gear, cool equipment and the right attitude towards life. Fun maxims such as *do the right thing, but hang loose* or *no risk, no fun* as well are typical of the attitude that these sports cultures adopt towards life. Demonstration of total body control in a cool, relaxed manner, disregard for the rules of club sport, creation of personal rules and testing personal boundaries without shying away from risk. Another distinctive feature of freestyle sport is the relationship between the body, the piece of apparatus and the surroundings, and the surroundings are an integral part of the exercise experience. The boundaries between the body and the surroundings merge in the performance of the physical activity. As a street sport, skateboarders experience the hardness of the street – not only when they fall over; the genuine, cool skateboarder uncompromisingly takes over the public space and simply ignores anyone who is in the way.

For youth workers, the importance of addressing freestyle lies in prevention (risk management) as well as in gender-equitable youth cultural/leisure-time work. As youth culture research shows, lads as well as girls perceive skateboarding to have a cool image. The active skateboard sport is dominated by lads, however, and it is virtually only lads who benefit from skate parks and ramps as a leisure-time infrastructure. (cf. trend: freestyle sport 2004).

Public work with children and young people is gaining in importance in terms of leisure-time activities undertaken by children and young people, which is illustrated by the Viennese Youth Centre in Ottakring: „Different parks with football wire netting, basketball nets and children’s playgrounds, the underground stations Ottakring and Kendlerstrasse on the U3 line are the public areas which are appropriated by children and young people. Apart from the existing clubs and cafés ... betting offices in the district have gained a dominant position in the daily activities of young people during recent years. ...gambling addiction, debts and the criminality that often ensues“ are the frequent consequences. ... „The Youth Centre is visited by children and young people between the ages of six and nineteen in the second and third generation of migrant families, who mostly originate from Turkey and the territories of the former Yugoslavia. ... They frequently live with their parents and several brothers and sisters in small substandard apartments. As a result, children often go to the Youth Centre after school instead of home because of its cramped living conditions“(Ottakring Youth Centre in Vienna, Annual Report 2001, p. 95). Overall, fewer girls than boys attend the Youth Centre, which is attributable to the traditional rules and values of many parents; as the young people grow older, the gap in the numerical percentages widens: Children: 60% lads, 40% girls; Club 13: 70% lads, 30% girls; Young people: 80% lads, 20% girls. The Ottakring Youth Centre has been running a lads’ group that meets once a week for two hours since autumn 1996. The lads that participate in it come from the former Yugoslavia and Turkey and are supervised by two employees (cf. Ottakring Youth Centre in Vienna, Annual Report 2001, p. 96f.).

Girls and boys aged from 14 – 19 perceive deficits in leisure-time activities to predominantly lie in the music sector. Every fourth 14 to 19-year-old lad stated that he would like to attend concerts and music events, but has no opportunity to do so. Every fifth would like to use practice rooms free of charge for DJs, MCs or bands, but complains about a lack of opportunities. (4th Report on the Situation of Young People in Austria, p. 72).

5. Boys and lads with a migration background

Children and young people with a migration background speak or frequently learn two or more languages; they are confronted with the demands and expectations of different cultural contexts. In addition, children and young people find it difficult to come to terms with the „foreignness“ of their culture of origin, and of their parents' generation. Their parents' generation frequently underwent and completed its socialisation in their country of origin and consequently largely derive their ideas about the world and the future from their culture of origin. Children and young people from the second and third generation look for their socio-cultural empirical world in the Austrian youth centres, learn in Austrian schools and work in Austrian firms. According to a press report, the percentage of children in Vienna's state primary schools who do not have German as their mother tongue is 48%, and 24% in private primary schools (cf. the report in the daily national newspaper „Der Standard“ of 15 February 2005).

The socialisation of this group of children and young people is characterised by a clear divide between the private and public sphere and the world of the family and non-family. Foreign girls are particularly exposed to this culturally strained relationship, and girls from Turkey above all. Many boys, lads and young men learn ideas of manliness, associate manliness with strength, achievement, material power and superiority, in the family of origin as well as in the culture in which they live. As a member of the lower classes of society, it is difficult for them to live up to such ideals and to attain power, influence and material prosperity. This exacerbates the internal and external conflicts that have to do with manliness. The concepts of manliness interact and alter simultaneously. In addition, many people in Austria regard them as foreigners and distrust them; the attribution of „being a foreigner“ has an enormous impact on their life chances. Experience of violence, a lack of educational opportunities and chances to integrate (percentage of migrants in special schools for children with learning difficulties is as much as 75%), material poverty, social exclusion, daily degradation, poor teaching in some cases and cultural conflicts produce an explosive mix and are risk factors for mental stress, drug-taking, and the emergence of a readiness to resort to violence in boys. It is noticeable that the readiness to resort to violence increases with the duration of stay. An internal conflict is often held responsible for this. A readiness to resort to violence originates from the social degradation that materialises in cramped living conditions, high rents, discrimination in educational and job opportunities, lack of prospects, or in insulting treatment. When combined with the acquired role models that originate from different cultures, such circumstances make for violent individuals. Working with migrant boys and lads involves working with children and young people who are frequently discriminated against in terms of their educational and job opportunities, fear the future and look for male role models and reference points with which to shape their life (cf. Working with Boys and Lads in Austria 2006).

Many of these young people hang around in public spaces, are not included in other social work measures and are hence deemed to be particularly at risk. The mobile youth work „Back on Stage“ looks after around 600 young people in *Innerfavoriten* (10th municipal district of Vienna), and the percentage of young people with a migration background is approx. 60% to 65%. More than a half is of Turkish origin, the majority of the remainder comes from the former Yugoslavia, others from Syria, Chile, China ... After a procedure lasting one and a half years, the street workers from „Back on Stage“ came to the conclusion that it is important to bear gender-specific approaches in mind, but in the context of street work it is not feasible to offer special work with lads. The work by „Back on Stage“ is based on conventional methods of youth social work that – „takes a gender-sensitive view“ – and is described by the head of „Back in Stage 10“ as „totally adequate“ (cf. mobile youth work „Back on Stage“ 2002, p. 104).

6. Trends and development tendencies

The study that was conducted in Austria in 2006 – commissioned by the Federal Ministry for Social Security, the Generations and Consumer Protection – on working with boys and lads demonstrated that Austria needs to do more work with boys and lads that is oriented towards the needs of young people and that approaches their problems in a sophisticated manner (cf. *Working with Boys and Lads in Austria 2006*, p. 133f.).

The study also corroborated the following points:

Boys and lads increasingly have problems with general social conditions and challenges with which they are confronted in the social sphere and in education and supervision both in and out of school. Boys and lads are far more frequently perceived to be „abnormal“ than girls. They are more readily labelled „maladjusted“ than used to be the case (e.g. hyperactive syndrome, „fidget“ ...), which may lead to the wrong form of treatment. – Socialisation of boys and lads mainly takes place in an environment that is determined by women. Male role models would be necessary to develop the individual – male – identity of boys and lads, to experience male behaviour positively. – Experts call for more male educators who are able to act as role models and assist boys and lads with the development of a positive image of manliness. In the absence of male role models in the early phase of male identity development, ideals of manliness from the media or literature are a formative influence for boys and lads and are imparted through conventional stereotypical roles (Rambo, Terminator ...) (cf. *Work with Boys and Lads in Austria 2006*, p. 133f.).

Forster (2004), who published the book „Unmanly Manliness. Melancholy – Gender – Exhaustion“ in 1998, summarises the current status of work with boys and men as follows: „Despite initial opposition, working with boys and men has aroused interest, gained acceptance and is in the first stage of institutionalisation. ... A striking transformation has taken place during the last ten years, particularly in the work with boys. Anti-sexist work with boys that is critical of the patriarchy, and clearly positions itself as pro-feminist, is encountering increasing rejection on the grounds of its deficit perspective („men are worse than women“)" (Forster 2004). Forster also refers to approaches that assume that boys and men are in the throes of an identity crisis which they must be led out of through positive guidance. Gender projects at some schools brought about positive changes for boys and girls: increased self-confidence and self-assurance of boys that is not at the expense of other pupils by denigrating them. Boys become aware that violent conduct that oversteps their own boundaries is wrong and learn to stand up to confrontations and to take responsibility for their actions. Working to prevent violence and discrimination will only be sustainable, however, when the school as an institution adopts a clear position towards violence, when male teachers in particular reflect on their own experience in gender relations and act as living examples of other „masculine styles“ through their behaviour in the classroom. This also requires appropriate teacher training measures for all school classes and types of school, however! This is a challenge for teacher training colleges and universities!

Suggestions for further independent study of the topic

1. The text addressed gender-specific measures in the kindergarten and grammar school. Try to find examples of successful practical implementation for other types of school (primary school, junior high school)! Outline the respective model and the corresponding aims!
2. Visit some parks in your district! What amenities do they provide for children to play and to take exercise? Is it feasible to speak of a gender-equitable playground design? – Who plays there? – What do they play? – How do boys or girls behave...? Create an observation grid first. Write down the results of your observations. Give recommendations if possible!
3. Contact a youth centre in your residential area! Gather information on the focal points of their work. Are there any special amenities for working with boy and lads or for migrants?

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