

Part 2: Theoretical Background and Further Information

Social parameters

For an understanding of violence and aggressiveness, prevention and social skills, it is important to bring to mind the current cultural-based image of masculinity from a gender-related point of view. For this reason, this section outlines the essential traits, characteristics and judgments, attributed by society, which are directly correlated and in that way justify the generally accepted understanding of "masculinity –and its relation to violence."

Boys and men acquire masculinity mainly by taking on qualities and behaviours which are regarded as masculine according to the prevailing value system in society. Adolescent boys are shaped by an interaction between their cultural environment and their biological and genetic dispositions. Innate basic characteristics are for example the capacity to learn and to develop instinct mechanisms and grow physically. The acquisition and internalization of masculine features is a long-term social learning process. In interaction with biological dispositions (i.e. puberty phase), the learning process for adolescent boys takes place in active and passive phases. In our European cultural area, a young boy acquires masculinity through differentiation (especially from females), role models, projection, testing limits, confrontations, identification as well as media image of masculinity. This is how a social model of what it means to be a man or a boy is developed.

'Being a boy': in the delicate balance of masculinity and "being a man".

Prevention-oriented youth work is mainly focused on what it means to be a boy. Being a boy is understood as an early stage of manhood. Manhood as well encompasses all of the different and diverse alternative lifestyles available to men.

However, a series of stereotypes are running awry such as about how maleness should be expressed, what behaviours are appropriate and how a man has to behave, which are obvious in expressions such as: "I can do it on my own, I don't need any help, "Hey, don't be such a softy!", "What a real scaredy-cat?". These sentences reveal values regarded as essential for males like being independent, strong, assertive, fearless, etc. and as a rule they must be individually coped with by boys at one stage or another of their lives.. Masculinity is therefore understood as a culturally shaped distorted image. Nevertheless, men and even boys orientate themselves on the basis of this image. This is because on the one hand, they do not have any tangible "alternate models" of men as fathers, male teachers in kindergartens, etc. and on the other hand, because they are forced to come to grips with this image. In other words, every boy must compare society's image of masculinity with his own image. Masculinity is the sum of the prevailing ideas and images about being a man and therefore these expectations are carried over to boys as future men. As a result, a lot of boys have to face this task and to take a stand while trying to find their male identity.

Therefore, masculinity is a construct and the outcome of the social confrontation between prevailing ideals or ideologies (i.e. cultural norm and attributions, traditional influences) and the boy's individually developed conception (self-socialization). To be more precise, there is not one form of "masculinity", but many different kinds of masculinity which are attached to each other, subordinated or in competition with each other. (cf. the term of "hegemonial masculinity" by Connell, *Der gemachte Mann (The Made Man: Construction and Crisis of Maleness)*)

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