Ageing men as changing men? Caring Masculinities in Later Life

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1. Age and gender(relations)
2. Caring masculinities
3. ALMA: Older men living alone – pilot study in Frankfurt/Main
4. Summary and outlook
5. Food for thought ...
Age and gender are both social categories that are continuously produced and reproduced with variations depending on time and place.

Doing gender (West & Zimmermann 1987), doing age (Schroeter 2007)

To understand age and ageing it is necessary to consider intersections with other social categories (e.g. gender, ethnicity, race, (dis)ability) (Calasanti & Slevin 2001)

Power relations among men and between men and women in relation to other social categories have been conceptualised as hegemonic masculinities (Connell & Messerschmidt 2005)

In later life men experience privileges by gender but marginalisation due to age (Hearn 2010)

The emergence of the the “third age” for post WWII cohorts (Laslett 1989) and radically changed later life (Gilleard & Higgs 2000) underscore the role of agency in the lives of older people.
2. Caring masculinities

Roots and development

- Roots in critical studies on men and masculinities and feminist care theory
- Absence of care in traditional constructions of masculinities (Hanlon 2012):
  - Care is defined as feminine
  - Doing care means enacting a feminized identity
  - Care is seen as something men are bad at
  - Care means relinquishing the power associated with traditional masculinity
- Elliott (2016) defines CM as “the rejection of domination and their integration of values of care such as positive emotion, interdependence, and relationality, into masculine identities” (p. 241) and in doing so recast traditional masculine values like protection and providing.
- Ungerson (2006) draws a distinction between caring for (practical task of care) and caring about (affective relations of care)
- Scholz & Laufenberg (2019) call for CM as a concept to investigate the power relationships in the care work of men.
3. ALMA – Older men living alone

- **Aim:** To map the experiences of men living alone in later life as well as the services available to this group in an urban setting such as Frankfurt/Main.

- **Methods:**
  - Scoping review of social, educational and cultural services in Frankfurt/Main
  - Five qualitative stake holder interviews with service providers
  - Four qualitative narrative interviews with older men living alone

- **Question:** How does care work as a form of agency feature in the lives of older men living alone?

### 3. ALMA – Older men living alone

#### The sample (maximum variation)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Herr Rost</th>
<th>Herr Ün</th>
<th>Herr Färber</th>
<th>Herr Willershäuser</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
<td>76, born 1941</td>
<td>69, born 1947</td>
<td>86, born 1931</td>
<td>88, born 1930</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Family status</strong></td>
<td>Unmarried, LAT for 12 years</td>
<td>Divorced, instable LAT</td>
<td>Widowed, LAT for 10 years</td>
<td>Unmarried, single since 1980</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Relatives</strong></td>
<td>No children, one brother with</td>
<td>2 children, 1 grandchild, extended family in</td>
<td>4 children, 8 grandchildren, 2</td>
<td>No children, one sister, nephew</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>family</td>
<td>TUR &amp; D</td>
<td>great-grant children</td>
<td>and niece</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Education</strong></td>
<td>Degree-level</td>
<td>Left school at 18, teacher training</td>
<td>Apprenticeship</td>
<td>Apprenticeship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Financial situation</strong></td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Previous debt problems (gambling)</td>
<td>Precarious income, now good</td>
<td>Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Social Network</strong></td>
<td>Friends for different activities</td>
<td>Many acquaintances, feels lonely</td>
<td>Large circle of friends and acquaintances</td>
<td>Acquaintances</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(church, political party)</td>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Care</strong></td>
<td>• Post-operative care for this LAT partner between interview 1 and 2 (6 weeks)</td>
<td>• Cared for his mother who lived in his flat for 8 years</td>
<td>• Cared for his terminally ill wife</td>
<td>• Visits and looks after friend in care home every weekend</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Visits friend in care home</td>
<td>• Looks after his LAT partner (dementia)</td>
<td>• Runs errands for sister, cousin, neighbours, land-lady, local book shop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Meaning</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>• &quot;Krankenschwester&quot; (female nurse)</td>
<td>• Contradiction to traditional construction of masculinity</td>
<td>• Unrequited love</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Promise of reciprocal care</td>
<td>• Meaningful bond</td>
<td>• Daily structure and continuity</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Curiosity: caring and living together</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Influence</strong></td>
<td>• Professional work and experiences with psychotherapy</td>
<td>• Political work on gender equality</td>
<td>• Christian ethics</td>
<td>• Gay identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Work in logistics</td>
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</table>
Although they live alone the men were in meaningful relationships with others. Caring for others involved push as well as pull factors. Caring for/about others had multiple meanings for the interviewed men and helped them in the process of ageing (finding meaningful activities) and living alone (maintaining independence). Men’s biographies (and the social and cultural contexts that shape them) are important in understanding their care work. Caring masculinities allows an examination of how the men oscillate between their gendered privilege of seeing care as ‘women’s work’ and care as agency in a life-stage of shrinking possibilities.
5. Food for thought

• **Equality**: Older men living alone and caring for others contribute to gender equality in small ways.

• **Awareness**: The care work of older men needs to be recognised but should not distract from the care work of women.

• **Life-long learning**: Older men should be supported in reflexive work that helps them recognise their life-long dependency on care work by others.