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(ANTI)DEMOCRATIC MASCULINITIES THEORY IN ACTION: TRANSDISCIPLINARY REFLECTIONS AND CO-CREATION

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ABOUT MEN4DEM

MEN4DEM (2025-2027) is an innovative co-creation project that involves six partner universities, a theatre group and a gender justice organization. The consortium studies various manifestations of masculinities in politics. Based on mixture of academic, activist and artistic knowledge MEN4DEM will develop concrete tools to support democratic masculinities in Europe. The project was funded by the European Union under Horizon Europe research and innovation programme (grant number 101177356). The project website is: www.men4dem.eu

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviation	Definition
LARP	Live Action Role Play
MEN4DEM	Masculinities for the Future of European Democracy
MSC	Masculinity Contingency Scale
RAN	Radicalisation Awareness Network
Y&E	Youth and Education

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Masculinity is a focal point in contemporary political discourse. Particularly right-wing and conservative actors fear that traditional masculinity is threatened by demands for gender, racial, and sexual equality. MEN4DEM will examine how anti-democratic masculinities are socialized, spill-over and justified in politics and how this influences democracy. The project aims to transform anti-democratic masculine norms into democratic masculinities that promote equitable participation, representation, and leadership across the European Union. This paper outlines the first iteration of a theoretical framework and serves as an initial compass for MEN4DEM's research and interventions. MEN4DEM will develop adapted versions as the projects progresses.

The framework serves as a conceptual discussion piece for project participants. Drawing on co-creation by a transdisciplinary team of academics, artists and activists the framework maps how participants use and understand the relation between masculinity and democracy. Project participants do not always agree and they do not have to. But they do need a shared terminology The co-creation process includes a literature review, panel discussions, internal self-study, and participatory methods during a three-day workshop. Data was gathered through mini-surveys, diary entries, interviews, participant observation, and collaborative exercises.

Three pillars support a theoretical framework to understand and foster the transformation of political masculinities in a democratic direction.

First, a clear conceptualization of both non-democratic and democratic masculinities is essential. How can we theorize the normalization of violence, dominance, aggression, oppression, and power within certain masculinist discourses and how does this relate to democracy? How do inclusion, diversity, and empathy connect to realistic masculinity alternatives and democratic values?

Second, participants identify the need for a theory of transformation to examine effective change. A theoretical foundation of transformation will enable MEN4DEM to understand

shifts over time, pinpoint key catalysts and reveal mechanisms that resist or obstruct change.

Third, the framework must balance negative and positive associations with masculinities, avoiding reductive portrayals while recognizing the harm linked to hegemonic norms. This means acknowledgement of the complexity and plurality of masculinities and to make space for affirming, constructive, and plural models that align with democratic values.

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1.   INTRODUCTION

Masculinity is a hot political topic. Right-wing leaning and conservative influencers, tycoons and politicians explicitly embrace 'masculinity' as part of their agenda. In this version masculinity is seen as something that is threatened by a variety of social justice movements advocating for equality based on, for instance, gender, race/ethnicity or sexuality. So-called 'anti-woke' policies and actions need to protect masculinity from these influences (cf. Paternotte and Deleixhe 2024; Segers 2024).

The immense traction and popularity of masculinity framed as a way to liberate men from the oppression of 'woke' and 'gender ideology' asks for a thorough analysis of the relation between masculinities and democracy. MEN4DEM aims to systematically understand how masculinity is constructed and mobilized by the extreme right in Europe. In co-creation with a European network of gender justice organizations, it will develop interventions to promote models of democratic masculinity that can guide equitable political participation, representation and leadership in the European Union. These are models of masculinity that underscore key democratic values of the European Union: pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity, and gender equality.

This paper presents a first iteration of a practical theoretical framework that serves as a joint starting point for the study and understanding contemporary political masculinities. The framework is a theoretical discussion piece for the MEN4DEM community, consisting of consortium members (junior and senior academics, activists and artists), affiliated activist expert organizations (Men Engage member organizations) and the International Advisory Board (senior academics and policy makers).

MEN4DEM aims to develop theory that has academic *and* practical relevance. To achieve this goal we draw on transdisciplinary co-creation of academics, artists and activists. Co-creation of a theoretical framework is a process of various moments of reflection and deliberation. This paper is a building block that informs next versions and spin-offs. Bit by bit MEN4DEM will consolidate a common understanding of anti-democratic masculinities and develop a joint vision for democratic masculinities. As MEN4DEM progresses, we will

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merge scientific evidence-based hypotheses with experience-based best practices and artistic immersion.

The emerging framework will feed MEN4DEM's empirical work and its transformative interventions. It constitutes a common starting-point for the definitions and operationalizations of central concepts that make sense to academics, activists and artists. Theorizing activist knowledge and integrating it into an academic framework is a transdisciplinary project. While the primary purpose of this first iteration of the framework is to be able to move ahead academically, future iterations will be specifically designed to serve activists in their practical work.

The paper reviews the combined knowledge that we as MEN4DEM have generated in the proposal writing phase, during a self-study, the project kick-off event and a co-creation weekend that took place in January 2025. During three immersive days MEN4DEM on Terschelling, a Dutch island known for its theatre festival Oerol. Prior, during and after the weekend we collected several types of data based on mini-surveys, diary-entries, interviews, participant observation and workshop exercises.

Next, we outline the general aim of MEN4DEM and present the initial framework based on existing academic literature. We then explain the methods, data and context used for theory in action. Subsequently we present the outcomes of co-creation process and summarize the framework as it stands now. We conclude with an agenda for next steps.

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2.   POINT OF DEPARTURE

MEN4DEM investigates how people are socialized into anti-democratic masculinities, how ideas spill over from extreme right pockets into mainstream politics, and how understandings of masculinity are used to justify political behaviour. Comprehensively mapping these dynamics will allow us to better understand how these gendered identities develop and spread in society. This will also furnish starting points for subsequent evidence-based interventions that offer alternative ways to masculine identities that do not have detrimental consequences for liberal democracy.

How can we empirically study, interpret, understand and explain the relation between political masculinities, the extreme right and democracy? To answer this question, we draw on a combination of existing scholarship and co-creation. The rationale for this approach is twofold. First, MEN4DEM is a project funded by the EU to provide solutions and recommendations for real-world problems. We thus need to include insights from actors who are literally close to these real-world problems in our thinking from the very beginning. Second, academic knowledge is often tailored to speak to disciplinary audiences. Real-world problems do not follow the boundaries and conventions of disciplines but are messy. An interdisciplinary, transdisciplinary and mixed-method approach are best suited to capture such problems. MEN4DEM constitutes political science, media studies, sociology, psychology and anthropology, as well as activists and a theatre collective. The methodological approach is mixed method and applies a wide range of qualitative and quantitative approaches.

Academic work on masculinities has worked with masculinities plural, highlighting that there are many different templates for how to be a man. To pinpoint the practices and behaviours that go with these templates, masculinities research has also worked with adjectives. Research on masculinities has been preoccupied with identifying and critiquing different forms of masculinities – hegemonic masculinities, caring masculinities, militarized masculinities, toxic masculinities, political masculinities, protective masculinities, to mention a few examples. This focus on "masculinities with adjectives" has been welcomed as a way

of structuring research and pinpointing societal ideals that are often taken for granted. But there is also critique that masculinities based on fluid, contextual and intersectional experiences are reduced to essentialist, stable categories (Pease 1999; Hearn 2004; Kimmel and Aronson 2003). We know that masculinity ideals can and do change, but we know less about what spurs such change in a democratic direction.

Masculinities scholarship has been influential in many social science fields, but less so in political science (e.g. Murray and Bjarnegård 2024). A strong focus on masculinities in politics is long overdue, particularly as present political currents seem to merge anti-democratic and anti-gender ideologies (Krizsan and Roggeband 2019; Corredor 2019; Unal 2024). Research on political masculinities is a useful starting-point. However, politics is a contested concept; there is no consensus of what is 'political' (Bjarnegård and Starck 2024). The concept of 'democracy' carries with it a similar luggage as 'political': it can be defined and understood in different ways. There is a more narrow definition of democracy, focusing mainly on the institutions and processes by which people freely and fairly elect their representatives, or a broader conceptualization, focusing on democratic values and principles, such as equality and inclusion. In line the values of the European Union MEN4DEM will rely on both understandings of democracy.

Among the core values or the European Union is a procedural emphasis on representative democracy in which every European citizen enjoys political rights, and can stand as a candidate and vote in elections to the European Parliament. Other values listed by the European Union are preconditions for democratic rule. It states that human dignity "must be respected and protected", that "the principle of equality between women and men underpins all European policies" and that human rights are protected by the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, covering "the right to be free from discrimination on the basis of sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation" (Aims and Values | European Union).

MEN4DEM will look at the broader aspects of democracy to see how values and ideas about gender equality and its intersections align with different idealized forms of

masculinity. But we will also study the more narrowly defined political arenas to see how authoritarian masculinity ideals seeps into more mainstream political leadership, political party youth wings, and attitudes in the broader public.

Critical perspectives on men and masculinities are needed to understand how men in politics access, exercise, maintain and reproduce political power (Murray and Bjarnegård 2024). In today's political context, it seems clear that authoritarian ideals of masculinity influence political discourses, mobilization and attitudes. Right-wing parties are sometimes called *Männerparteien* as they are disproportionately made up by men, and supported by men (Mudde 2007). Young men are increasingly considering voting for the far right in Europe (Abou-Chadi 2024). While the youth gender gap seems to be issue dependent, it is particularly prominent in sexist attitudes, where young men are the most likely to think that discrimination against women is no longer a problem (Off, Alexander, and Charron 2025).

Figure 1. Overarching framework

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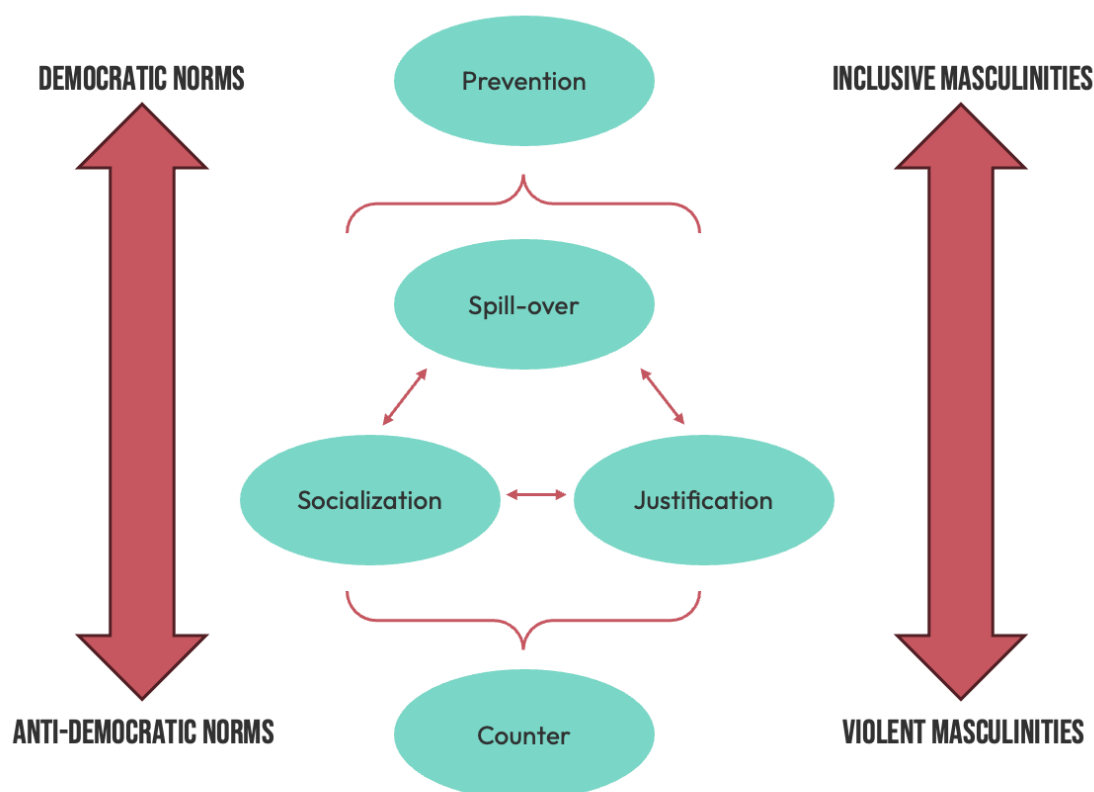
Based on existing academic work on masculinities, justification, spill-over and socialization we develop a preliminary model (

Figure 1. Overarching framework). We expect a relation between norms about democracy and norms about what it means to be a man. Inclusive masculinity ideals underpin and enhance democratic norms and vice versa, while violent masculinities enhance anti-democratic norms and vice versa. MEN4DEM will develop interventions to prevent and counter spill-over, socialization and justification of anti-democratic norms and violent masculinities. *Spill-over*, *socialization* and *justification*, the inner triangle of

Figure 1. Overarching framework, are related.

Political socialization is central to understanding the conditions under which (anti)democratic masculinities develop in grassroots spaces. Socialization processes build on conformity to social expectations and related social control mechanisms. When individuals are exposed to social norms through education and socialization in primary and peer groups, they tend to internalize these norms in their own value systems (Bjarnegård, Brounéus, and Melander 2021). Gender norms refer to standards and expectations to which women and men generally conform. Micro-level interactions in the groups where political socialization takes place are therefore key elements in the development of (anti)democratic masculinities. These interactions increasingly take place online, as well as offline (e.g. Lomazzi 2023; Holm 2024).

In studying how extremist ideas *spills over* from small communities to wider society, MEN4DEM considers how online platforms amplify the communication of alternative and counter-factual claims. Multiple accounts of truth and reality compete for legitimacy and attention on social media (Hameleers and and Schmuck 2017; Waisbord 2018). Online communities can host anti-democratic speech and extremist content more freely than traditional media due to the lack of gatekeeping. The threshold is lower due to (perceived) anonymity and low time investment (e.g. Mølmen and and Ravndal 2023). Extremist actors, in particular, are known to exploit the affordances of unfiltered digital

communication to spread falsehoods related to (gendered) out-groups, with incendiary content amplified by AI-driven algorithms (Hameleers, Brosius, and de Vreese 2022).

A structural feature of extreme-right movements and parties is their domination by anti-democratic masculinities and men—as leaders, core members, and followers (de Lange and and Mügge 2015; Linders, Dudink, and Spierings 2023; Spierings et al. 2015; Coffé 2018). 'Traditional' gender roles are central within extreme-right beliefs, while political masculinities—'masculinity that is constructed around, ascribed to and/or claimed by political players' (Starck and Sauer 2014, 6) are mobilized to trivialize authoritarianism and *justify* anti-democratic behaviour (Holm 2024; Messerschmidt 2024). The political players range from influencers such as Andrew Tate, who openly advocates the submission of women, to elected leaders who reverse gender equality policies such as Hungarian prime-minister Viktor Orbán. All mobilize gender-based stereotypes to normalize and celebrate gender inequality, while women with extreme-right beliefs reproduce these ideas in daily life and contribute to their justification (McRae 2018).

The exercise of developing this model provides a solid foundation to study the relation between socialization, justification and spill-over. Yet, academic work provides few pointers to capture how this triangle relates to inclusive masculinities and democratic norms versus violent masculinities and anti-democratic norms. It says even less about how a movement from one to the other might be made possible. To find ways of investigating this we turn to co-creation.

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3. METHODS, DATA AND CONTEXT

In research projects, co-creation refers to collaborative processes where researchers work together with non-academic actors – such as civil society organizations, policy makers and affected communities –to jointly identify problems, generate knowledge, and develop solutions. Co-creation moves beyond simply consulting external stakeholders; instead, it values their expertise and lived experiences as essential contributions to the research process itself (Madsen and and O'Mullan 2018; Lang et al. 2012). This deep form of collaboration – when it works well - redefines the role of academics and creates relationships where different types of knowledges are both recognized and valued.

Traditional epistemic norms tend to build on the perspectives of those with power, while excluding vulnerabilities based on gender, ethnicity, class and other lived experiences. Knowledge is situated. This requires us as consortium to be reflexive and, where relevant, to discuss positionality and how it may impact knowledge production, results (Haraway 2013; Harding 1991) and our writing (e.g. Bjarnegård 2024). Yet, in this day and age in which scholars are increasingly targets of online hate and violence, researchers may not always feel comfortable or safe to position themselves in the traditional way of sharing their identities. Ethical and privacy guidelines protect research participants, we may have to rethink our protection as researchers as well. Moreover, positionality statements may reinforce unequal power relations in academia (see Gani and Khan 2024).

Co-creation enhances societal relevance, impact and legitimacy of research outcomes. Research is more likely to effect change if it is recognized as relevant and owned by people who have a capacity to effect change (Horvath and Carpenter 2020). By ensuring that those affected by the issues being studied are involved from the outset, can help bridge the gap between research and practice. In MEN4DEM, co-creation is a guiding principle and practical method that shapes how we work together, but it also reflects the change we want to see and the community we want to be. We are a group of socially engaged researchers, a theatre collective and gender justice organizations trying to develop tools for social change. This collaborative approach brings us into dialogue around shared

concerns — in this case, how to rethink masculinities in ways that promote democracy and gender equality. Rather than treating knowledge as something produced only by experts, we try to see that everyone is the expert of their own life, and those insights are essential to understanding how masculinities are shaped, challenged, and reimagined in different contexts.

Co-creation processes are not straightforward. They may not immediately generate consensus around well-articulated ideas, but they may give rise to hopes, uncertainties, frustration, and emerging thoughts that have not yet found clear expression. These unfinished insights are crucial, especially when exploring how masculinities intersect with power, rights, and democracy. At the same time, there is a need to move forward, to formulate preliminary conclusions and to work in a coordinated fashion. This is a balance that MEN4DEM will need to deal with throughout the project. For instance, this first iteration of a joint framework will seek to capture this explorative phase that we are in, but it also needs to be a guiding tool for participants in the project about what the next, careful steps should be, and in what direction they should go. These ideas are going to be revisited, we are going to test and refine them together, in an iterative process.

Co-creating the theoretical framework starts by taking stock of who we are and what we know. To do this we have collected different types of data and information to bridge different conceptualizations of (anti)democratic masculinities and to gauge how they develop and change in co-creation. Three types of actors participate in the MEN4DEM co-creation process:

1. Academics at different stages of their careers, from full professor to research master student, from different disciplines, with different methodological backgrounds and employed at one of the partner institutions.
2. Activists affiliated with Men Engage member organizations from Germany, Greece, Italy, Poland, Sweden, the Netherlands, and a representative from Men Engage Europe.
3. Theatre-group members – producers, actors, directors.

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To understand how these actors view the relation between masculinity and democracy, the type of knowledge they rely on, and the questions they have we used a combination of methods including mini-surveys, reflection diaries, notes from group work and participant observation. The data collection provided insight about the co-creation process as such – to better understand how shared knowledge is formed, where the frustration and hurdles lie, and what participants see as enabling factors for transforming masculinity ideals in a democratic direction.

The survey revealed information about conceptions of political masculinities, and how they are challenged and changed over the weekend (Appendix I)In total we sent out four surveys: one pre-arrival, two on-site and one post-departure. The first survey included some personal questions about gender identification and their primary role. The aim of the survey was not to create a database for quantitative analysis, but rather to quickly collect systematic information and feedback from participants. One part of the survey collected recommended readings from the participants. These readings portray a variety of material, such as theoretical books, academic articles, reports, novels and YouTube videos. Together, they constitute a MEN4DEM reading list (Appendix II) that is a living document, continuously updated as new reading recommendations come in.

The survey was complemented by an entirely open diary entry, where participants entered their reflections during the workshop. They did not see other people's entries. The entries were open, people could write what they wanted. We did include some questions to get people started, like "What happened today, and what did you think about it?", "What are new and unexpected insights about political masculinities?"

Participants did several group exercises and games for team building and to generate ideas about the task at hand: what are antidemocratic masculinities? What does a joint vision of a more democratic masculinity look like? And how can we use the co-creation process to understand how change may come about? Some sessions were designed to get to know each other and what drives us to be involved in this project. Why are we here? What are experiences that influenced how we got interested in masculinities and

extremism? In other sessions we used theatre to perform associations with different types of masculinities, developed characters for a Life Action Role Play (LARP) and discussed the core values of MEN4DEM. Elin Bjarnegård and Liza Mügge collected the notes that groups made on the flipcharts and took fieldnotes during the weekend.

Figure 2. Team Canvas
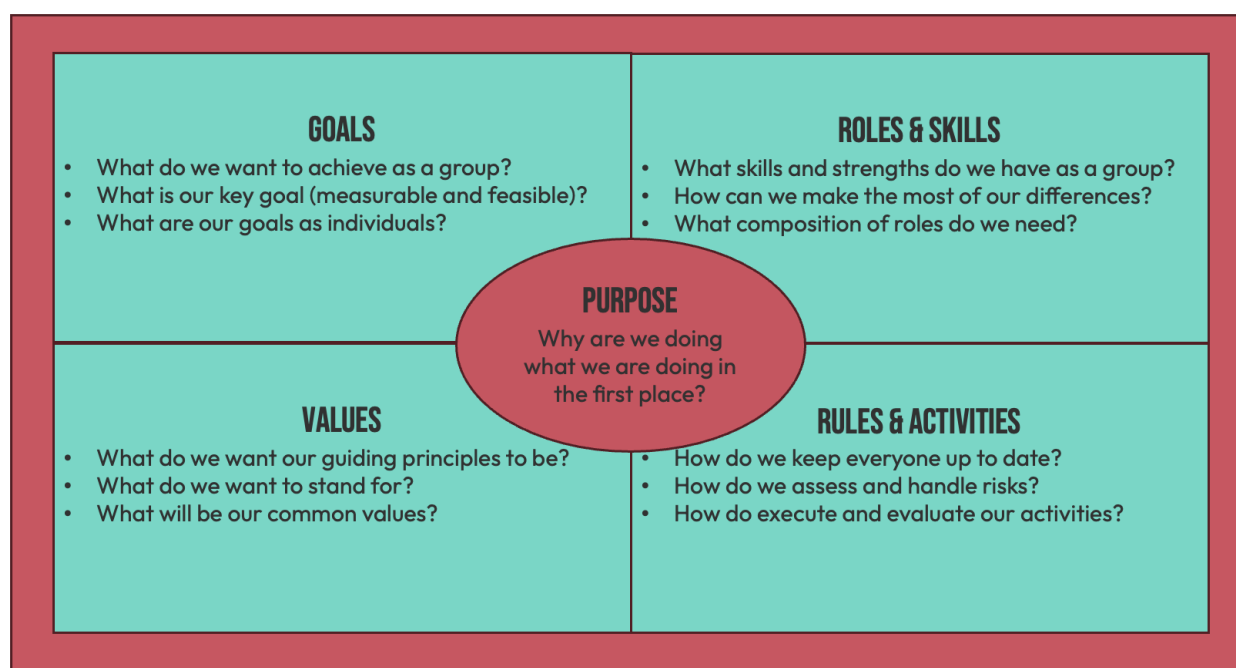
We made use of a team canvas, to keep the focus of the workshop throughout the variety of activities and sessions (see Figure 2. Team Canvas). This canvas centres the core purpose of the activity, and encourages participants to consider goals, roles and skills, values and rules and activities, and how they relate to the core purpose. This was presented early in the workshop, in a session about co-creation as an activity, and we asked survey questions to follow up on the progress.

The co-creation event at Terschelling was attended by about 40 people. Some people came in for just one night, but a core group of 30 people stayed for the full weekend. Among these, there was an even distribution between academics and non-academics. About 15 participants represented universities, while the other half mostly represented gender justice organizations. The theatre group, Via Berlin, organized the logistics of the

event, but they did not have as many participants who were present throughout the process. Whenever we want to make distinctions between participants in the co-creation process, we will focus on academics and non-academics, keeping in mind that non-academics are from gender justice organizations as well as, to a lesser degree, from the theatre.

Thirty-three people answered the survey at some point. The table below shows some descriptive statistics about the respondents according to sex and primary role (as an academic, non-academic, i.e. activist, member of theatre group).

Table 1. Participants

	Men	Women	Other	Total
Academics	4	12	0	16
Non-Academics	8	6	2	16
Others	1	0	0	1
Total	13	18	2	33

Table 1. Participants shows that our co-creation team has an even distribution between academics and non-academics and a fairly even gender distribution, albeit with a slight overrepresentation of women, not least among the academics. Concerning our positionality, we are relatively diverse along gender and professional background. At the same time, the group included participants from all European regions – North, South, West and East – well as the US and the UK. Yet, there was greater homogeneity when it comes to race/ethnicity (not visible in table).

Each day at the weekend started in a circle with a check-in, each day closed in a circle with a check-out. A red thread throughout the weekend was a shared concern about global politics, the rise of the extreme right, how the right hijacks masculinity and the impact that this has on our academic, activist and artistic work. While the activists and theatre participants are more familiar and comfortable with bringing in their personal fears and worries into their work, in general there is less space for academics to do this in their daily work and institutional environments. However, such reflection is central to feminist and

intersectional methodologies. Despite different backgrounds and professional practices participants were committed and open.

The data collected has been analysed through close readings. The survey has been used to systematize replies so that they can be compared across time and type of participants. The idea is to discern differences and similarities between participants, as well as to trace change over the weekend (and, ultimately, the project). We have drawn the recommended readings from the survey replies to construct a first view of a combination of different types of knowledge. The diary entries have been thematically coded using software for qualitative text analysis (Atlas.ti).

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4. FOUNDATIONAL TEXTS ON MASCULINITIES

What theoretical knowledge does the MEN4DEM community have about masculinities? To answer this question we asked participants to suggest one favourite text on masculinities that they thought other participants should read of any genre, in any language. We also asked them why they recommended this text. Twenty-two participants suggested a text, eleven participants mentioned no text (see Appendix II). Eighteen participants suggested an academic book or article published in a refereed journal; five participants suggested another text, like a novel, blogpost or a report. Raewyn Connell's seminal book *Masculinities* (1995) is mentioned three times, bell hooks *The Will to Change: Men, Masculinity and Love* (hooks 2004) twice. Other texts are mentioned only once, illustrating the diversity of the group as well as the breath of the topic.

Based on participants elaborative comments and our own reading we distil three key broad themes: 1) conceptual, 2) effects, 3) transformation. While these themes are sometimes overlapping and readings often have multiple meanings – e.g. texts on transformation also analyse effects on men – participants' takers are the key guiding principle. Readings that focus on concepts are all academic, while the works on effects and transformation are both academic and non-academic. Academic participants have more professional experience to conceptualize and measure effects of masculinities, while the activists are seasoned in thinking about change and actually do transformative work with boys and men. The target groups that participants work with vary enormously, ranging from policy makers to high school kids, imprisoned perpetrators and fathers. This diversity clearly comes to the fore in the readings they recommend.

4.1 CONCEPTUAL

Connell's text can safely be considered as the basis of the study of masculinity. The main argument is that there is not one masculinity, but that there are many. She draws on a wide range of disciplines to analyse how masculinities are constructed in society, science and our thinking. One of the key concepts that emerges from the analysis is 'hegemonic masculinity', defined as the dominant and idealized way of being a man in a given context,

constituting a pattern or configuration of practices that allows men's subordination of women and of subordinate masculinities to continue (Connell 1995; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). Numerous authors have built on – and critiqued - this idea. There is still a vibrant debate around the concept, structuring discussion in the field. As one of the participants writes:

> This text reflects back on the foundational text and concept development of hegemonic masculinities by R.W. Connell--a significantly important text--and works to consider the limitations of the book and the concept at that time. It argues for a more multi-dimensional approach to the concept of hegemonic masculinity. Thus, I think that this is an important text for us to consider as we think through the concept of political masculinities, our approach, especially when considering the various geographies of masculinities, as well as how masculinities are embodied and portrayed in positions of privilege and power.

Another participants says:

> It allowed me to understand better the dynamic power relations between men and women and among men themselves. It is a classical text, which means it has received a fair share of critique, but it can serve as a solid foundation to build and expand further theorizing about masculinities.

Three other recommended books take a more historical approach: *Sapiens: A brief history of Humankind* (Harari 2014), *Is Masculinity Toxic? A primer for the 21st Century* (Smiler and Taylor 2019) and *The Image of Man* (Mosse 1998). According to the participants each of these books demonstrate how ideas of masculinity have changed over time along with societal values and power structures. This show that masculinity is not biologically fixed, but socially constructed. Mosse seems to be particularly relevant to understand the link between masculinities and political ideology, as a participant writes:

> The book emphasizes how this masculine image played a crucial role in the formation of national identity, serving as a foundation for the promotion of fascist and Nazi movements. Mosse also explores how the ideal of masculinity permeated the regimes of "real socialism," where the image of the strong and determined man was used to promote a political ideology and a social structure centered around

authoritative figures. Mosse's analysis highlights the connections between the image of the "real man".

Finally, the article by Murray and Bjarnegård (2024) demonstrate that masculinity is essential to the understanding of politics, but that it is largely absent from political science analyses. Yet, as one participant notes: 'This project can change this!'

4.2 EFFECTS OF MASCULINITIES

A number of readings disentangle how masculinities influence society, men and gender roles. The common denominator is that many masculinities have a negative impact on themselves and on their environment. For instance, two articles highlight how masculinity hurts men. Vandello and Bosson (2013) demonstrate how

> *[…] manhood must be earned and maintained through publicly verifiable actions. Because of this, men experience more anxiety over their gender status than women do, particularly when gender status is uncertain or challenged. This can motivate a variety of risky and maladaptive behaviors.*

James Baldwin's text *Here be Dragons* (1985) makes a similar point. A participant explains:

> *[…] critiques how the American ideal of manhood, rooted in power and dominance, limits emotional expression and creates a façade of invulnerability. This often isolates men and fosters a culture of fear and aggression.*

Zij is van mij [She is mine] (2025) by Saskia Belleman analyzes the relation between masculinity and violence. It helps a participant to 'understand more what is happening in our society when men are murdering women.' Drawing on the Netherlands, Belleman analyses why femicide takes place so often and why some men cannot accept women end their relation. Finally, *Hate in the Homeland: The New Global Far Right* (Miller-Idriss 2020) shows how the extreme right integrates toxic masculinity, based on hate and anger against women, in its messages and narratives.

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4.3 TRANSFORMATION

Negative and problematic effects of masculinities are widely documented across disciplines and fields, but what can we do about this? A substantive number of the readings is about various aspects of transformation processes in all spheres of society.

For instance, a paper presented at the International Conference on Men and Equal Opportunities in Luxemburg (Scambor, Holter, and Theunert 2016) advocate for more attention to men in gender equality policies to stimulate 'caring masculinities' and how to organize this. As the participant recommending the text explains 'It contains a lot of transformative arguments that can resonate with a lot of men (fathers, employees, employers etc.).'

A more intimate perspective comes from hooks (2004) who disentangles how patriarchal structures are damaging men. She argues that we need to listen to their pain and their experiences of abuse. Men need blueprints for feminist change to reconnect and recover. This cannot not be done alone:

> *In a world where men and boys are daily losing their way we must create guides, signposts, new paths. A culture of healing that empowers males to change is in the making. Healing does not take place in isolation. […] We need to stand by them, with open hearts and opened arms (page 188).*

One of the participants who suggested this book, explains why this text is important:

> *That we need a personal approach to masculinity theory, but also to change this. We have to bring in ourselves to make theory and scholarship relatable. And that men, even if they have hurt the women in their lives, are also victims of oppressive patriarchy. hooks is forgiving, and I found that brave and inspiring.*

An article by psychologists Van Laar and colleagues (2024) equally underline the importance of allyship. As one participants describes the argument: 'The paper argues that achieving gender equality requires engaging men as allies, as men's privileged status and restrictive gender roles negatively impact both women and men.'

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A research report by Via Berlin summarizes the findings from a survey and discussions on gender based violence around a theatre play. The report shows why bystanders often do not interfere and how they can activate. It also showcases that theatre is an effective tool in a transformation process (Via Berlin).

Two readings demonstrate how transformation is obstructed. The report *Man Enough? Measuring Masculine Norms to Promote Women's Empowerment (*OECD 2021) identifies ten norms of 'restrictive masculinities' that are most hindering to gender equality. These are: breadwinner, financial dominance, manly jobs, ideal worker, manly leadership, head of the household, controlling household assets, protecting and guardian women and girls, sexual and reproductive dominance, and not engaging in unpaid women's work (e.g. care and domestic work) (OECD 2021, 10-11).

An article by Dana Berkowitz and colleagues (2021) reveals how modern technology obstructs transformation, as one participant elaborates:

> *The study shows that Tinder's design, which encourages quick, appearance-based judgments, leads users to follow outdated norms instead of challenging them. The app's game-like design makes interactions feel like "just a game," which reduces the seriousness of these issues and normalizes sexist, racist, and classist behaviour.*

Going back to the initial conceptual model (

Figure 1. Overarching framework) this first rough analysis of foundational works for the MEN4DEM community, shows that there is a particular need to think through transformation of anti-democratic masculinities.

Three observations emerge from the readings as well as from the in-person discussions. First, we have a common, albeit basic understanding of masculinities as dynamic, historically embedded, and are manifold. Conceptually we lack a fine-grained theory of the relation between democracy and political masculinities. Second, the negative associations between authoritarianism and masculinities are well documented, the positive associations less so. This also emerges during a discussion at the public MEN4DEM kick-off event at the University of Amsterdam prior to the weekend. The event attracted around

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70 people, consisting of the participants of the weekend and interested students, activists, academics and policy makers. Dagmar Slagmolen, leader of partner organization Via Berlin, led an exercise in which she asked the room to list words that one associated with the smell, taste and sound of masculinity. People mentioned words like umami, Saturday stubble, sweat, violence, beer, loudness, sour, caring and chocolate. Third, while there is some work on transformation, insights are scattered and not yet integrated and adapted to current political challenges to establish effective prevention and counters strategies to foster targeted transformation.

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5. CO-CREATING THEORY

To co-create theory, we rely on the surveys, participant reflection diaries, notes on discussions during the kick-off and the weekend and outcomes of dedicated workshops on Terschelling. The project launch in Amsterdam had impact on the ensuing discussions on Terschelling. The concept of 'protective masculinities' that was named during a panel discussion resonated with many people, as did critique of the negative concept of 'toxic masculinities'. In the pre-departure survey, we asked participants to associate words with a) a non-democratic, non-inclusive masculinity and b) with a democratic, inclusive masculinity.

The workshops included a 'character' creation session in which we developed characters for the theatre plays and live action role plays (LARP) that MEN4DEM will produce as part of its interventions. Theoretically, these interventions will feed back to the theory-building and inform our knowledge about how transformation takes place (and not). It is thus important that our knowledges are translated into theory in action already from the start so that we know what it is that we are testing in the interventions we co-create and develop. Theoretical concerns like the usefulness of strict categories, the relationship of masculinity characters to politics and democracy etc. are of direct practical relevance here. Characters must be evident enough for participants and audiences to pick up their main message. As researchers, we must know that the play and LARP (our interventions) are affecting (treating) participants in the way we intended. Too stereotypical a character will not be realistic and will not give rise to empathy, which is essential for artistic immersion to affect the way we think about others. The characters we co-create for artistic performances are manifestations of theoretical-practical constructs that will be defined and operationalized in our research. It was this co-creation part that participants most enjoyed and where academics, artists and activists most easily created a common language.

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5.1   ASSOCIATIONS WITH MASCULINITY AND DEMOCRACY

The word clouds in Figure 3 and 4 constitute illustrations of project participants' associations before we had even started to interact and co-create: a sort of baseline for our collective work. Standing out in the non-democratic, non-inclusive word cloud is the word violence. Related visible words include dominance, aggressive, oppression, and power. Because participants were prompted to think about anti-democratic masculinities, it is perhaps not surprising to see words such as authoritarian and radicalization as part of the cloud. In the second cloud words associated with openness and care. In a second order we see the words inclusion, diversity and empathy. Again, inclusion is perhaps not surprising as they were asked to associate with democracy, and inclusion is a central principle of most definitions of democracy.

Figure 3. Associative word cloud: nondemocratic/non-inclusive masculinities

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Figure 4. Associative word cloud – democratic/inclusive masculinities

The word clouds map future theoretical work and discussions for MEN4DEM. The next step is to concretize what associations like violence, dominance, aggression, oppression, and power (non-democratic masculinities) as well as inclusion, diversity and empathy (democratic masculinities) imply in practice. This will be an ongoing task in the project, which will involve revisiting literature as well as carrying out the different studies.

3.2 Character Creation

Several workshop sessions included exercises to feed scripts for the theatre plays and the LARP. The character creation sessions on Terschelling focused on the development of a set of characters that had to fit together, be clear but not stereotypical, and that would create different tensions and conflicts. A follow-up session focused on the role of the moderator, and how to design live action role plays so that they become safe spaces to explore different perspectives and ways of thinking. In planning sessions, it was emphasized how we need a living vocabulary of different characters and types of masculinity, so that we mean the same thing in different parts of the project. A more physical exercise used the concepts in the word clouds (Figures 3 and 4) as inspiration for a series of artistic movements. Groups of participants performed the concepts, moving from manifestations of anti-democratic masculinity words to manifestations of words associated with democratic masculinities. All participants repeated the movements of the

group, embodying the concepts but also creating a first vision for the transition from anti-democratic masculinities to democratic masculinities.

5.2 CONCERNS AND CONSIDERATIONS ABOUT THE CO-CREATION PROCESS

It is clear from both the survey and the diary entries that the immersive nature of the workshop at Terschelling was important for thinking and inspiration. People were reflecting on lessons learnt during formal sessions. But as fundamental were the informal discussions over meals, or reflections during walks to the beach and in the forest.

Reflecting on the types of concepts we want to use in the project, many diary entries reflected on the negativity bias in our view of anti-democratic masculinities. This is also clearly demonstrated in the word cloud: many of the spontaneous associations are derogatory. The project has a challenge here that many participants are aware of as they write their diaries: we are clearly normative in that we see and elaborate on the dangers in contemporary forms of masculinities and in how they challenge and threaten democracy. At the same time, we have to dare to "dive deep" if we really want to understand the attractiveness of these forms of masculinities. If we demonize masculinities, in distancing ourselves too much from them, we are not likely to understand them. Many note that if we cannot understand why these masculinities are attractive and idealized, we are not likely to understand what it takes to create a new vision for a more democratically engaged, but still desirable and attractive, masculinity.

The discussion of whether or not we should use the word toxic masculinity was central and continued in group work as well as informal discussions (de Boise 2019; Harrington 2021). Toxic masculinity, many argue, do not describe any specific traits or practices - it is only a normative assessment of the consequences. Most people would probably not subscribe to being "toxic", which puts a distance between ourselves and the people we want to affect (Norocel 2022). Some participants saw that it can sometimes be helpful to talk to young men about toxic masculinity. Toxic masculinity highlights and focuses on the consequences of individual behaviour for others: both as a way of influencing other young men to move in the same direction, and as a way of hurting those who are not part of the in-group.

Some diary entries reflected that the joy of being together with likeminded people in a safe environment, sharing the same goals, had a sour aftertaste. In a way, these gatherings also create an increased sense of "us" and "them". Thinking about positionality in relation to our research subjects is clearly important to many.

> *We transform when we ourselves feel so far away and sometimes contempt, fear, or anger towards others and the negative practice that this might introduce. How do we reflect on our biases and positions and approaches and how this is even shaping the questions we ask, the concepts we think are important, etc. and, significantly, how do we TRANSFORM our own associations with masculinity and uses or embodiments of masculinity?*

Other diary entries, however, saw this feeling of belonging as empowering, and as setting an example. They commented that it is far too easy to focus only on the negative aspects of the political changes we see today, on what is wrong and what we worry about – so that there is no positive vision left. If we want to bring about a transformation of masculinities, we have to be visionary. The alternative visions for masculinity need to be attractive and accessible.

> *I had some really engaging discussions today […] The discussion was about how having fun and performing happiness, togetherness and community really is demonstrating an attractive alternative. If we are brooding about risk, doomsday and enemies, we are not going to attract any followers. An alternative masculinity has to be an attractive masculinity. I guess I inadvertently thought that having fun is closing my eyes to what is going on, pretending it doesn't happen - but it is actually a counteraction, a freedom performance and an invitation to join us. I will try to remember that.*

> *I want us to be the change we want to see in the world. Our ways of being need to reflect the new perspectives and narratives and positive masculinities that we are working on. […] I wish us to let our work be fun, full of liveliness, a celebration of our humanness, of sensing and sensitivity, of connecting, sharing, healing, creating, loving, feeling, dancing, walking, celebrating, meditating, and so on.[…] Let us experiment with and develop new ways of being and doing.*

The co-creation of characters and the collective thinking about different forms of masculinities was where it was easiest to merge the different types of knowledge from the

different types of participants. When discussing masculine ideals of different kinds, it seems evident to everyone that the combination of different types of knowledge from academia, arts and activists is fundamental. Some other parts of the co-creation process raised frustration, as it seemed unclear to many how the different types of knowledges would be brought into some of the more academic exercises around socialization, spill-over, and justification, as well as into the review of what types of interventions that have spurred change. Several diary entries commented on the need to translate and explain academic thinking, as they reflected on an "encounter between science and practitioner/activists".

> *Two different worlds, two different perspectives, two different languages - or actually, two different 'bodies' of all that, because within science and within practitioners/activists, the differences are also huge. So we should beware of assuming common ground or shared principles if we don't take time to check these and when and where necessary jointly develop these.*

Some commented that they had thought that the co-creation process would have much more of these translation issues than it did. A preliminary conclusion is that the co-creation process works most smoothly in character development, where it is relatively easy to bring in and respect different types of knowledge and experiences to create characters that are scientifical constructs that we can use for measurements at the same time as they need to be realistic and interesting. There are greater challenges associated with co-creation in the more traditional academic exercises that are going to describe and establish socialization, spill-over, and justification, as well as the rigorous systematic review that is going to be conducted. Importantly, co-creation does not mean that everyone does everything. We do not expect activists to carry out scientific investigations and we do not expect scholars to produce a play. Rather, we respect our different roles and draw on our different experiences. As the framework develops, it should increasingly guide different groups to their tasks and translate the results from research tasks to that it can be adapted to practice.

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The final part of this framework will summarise views from the mini survey on what causes positive change in masculinities, and it will be structured according to our three mechanisms of socialization, spillover and justification. We will trace differences between the group of academics and non-academics, as well as potential developments over time. It should be noted that only half of the participants replied to the survey that was sent out after the workshop, so we have less information for capturing any change in considerations.

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6.   THE LIVING FRAMEWORK

The living framework at this point consists of two parts: mechanisms to change masculinities and a dictionary. First, the survey answers questions about hurdles and enablers for change in masculinities in a democratic direction have been sorted according to the three theoretical mechanisms (see Table 2). Second, based on some heated discussions about the meaning of some of the core concepts participants raised the idea of a joint dictionary.

6.1   FRAMEWORK FOR CHANGE

Survey questions about both hurdles and opportunities provide us with a first basic idea about what would be needed for change. The table also divides the replies of academics and non-academics, and traces survey answers pre- and post the co-creation experience.

Most survey replies can be sorted under the three categories socialization, spill-over or justification, even though we did not specifically ask people to relate to them. This strengthens the status of our initial framework as a reasonable point of departure. There are no evident differences between academics and non-academics, nor is there an evident learning-process pre- and post Terschelling. Let us remember, however, that much fewer participants replied to the post-survey.

Political socialization centres on gender norms and social expectations and is considered by both academic and non-academic participants. Insecurities about what it means to be a man are mentioned as hurdles by both. Social media algorithms and influencers are also considered important. Low levels of contact and engagement with men and boys in society is also considered a hurdle. To foster more democratic and inclusive masculinities, work with role models, spaces for open dialogues and support networks providing genuine contact are suggested. There are no clear differences between the views of academics and non-academics when it comes to socialization.

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Table 2. Framework for change

		Socialization		Spill-over		Justification	
		Academics	*Non-academics*	*Academics*	*Non-academics*	*Academics*	*Non-academics*
Hurdles	Pre-*** Post	Insecurities Influencers Fear of rejection Cultural norms Social media algorithms *** Online islands Deeply rooted beliefs about being a man Failure to identify critical points of change Lack of support from other men Failure to reach radicalized groups	Insecurities about what being a man implies Gender norms – the "man box" Gender binary Little contact with feelings Unattractive alternative models of masculinity *** Social media algorithms Low level of engagement with young boys	Current political leaders Current political climate Antagonizing ideologies *** Polarization Loud voices Rhetoric Black and white narratives	Poly-crisis Extremist groups *** External insecurities – war, economic crisis Individualist ideologies Lack of cohesive progressive movement Low social budgets	Rise of the radical right Contradictory expectations Need for validation Not seeing the needs of others Feelings of deprivation *** Lack of understanding other perspectives No convincing alternative narratives	Capitalist standards Propensity to look back to something well-known Psychological resistance to change Fear of losing Feeling of complacency regarding women's emancipation Views of a competitive zero-sum game *** Lack of clear alternative narratives Communicational efficiency of anti-democratic narratives

Enablers	Pre *** Post	Early education programmes Changing family norms Support networks for men Small step transformations Change is accomplished through experience-based learning (not rational arguments) *** Mentorship Spaces for open dialogues Support and collaboration networks	Role models Positive narratives Safe spaces for reflection and change Identify crises in men's lives Embrace vulnerabilities Build communities of trust for people *** Genuine contact with boys and men	Role-models in positions of power Social media regulation Education and workplace policies A sense of security *** Role models Education	Role models Social pressure and campaigns for change *** Systemic change prioritizing people Creative collective action Community-based support systems	Facilitate active engagement and non-judgmental discussions Creation of deliberative spaces Point out that patriarchy is detrimental for everyone *** Shape masculine justifications for empathy and connection	Pointing to personal benefits of change Connecting on a personal level, meeting people's concerns *** Positive alternative narratives Promote curiosity and sincere self-reflection

Spill-over effects concern the interaction between small communities and mainstream politics. Extremist ideas are picked up and gradually articulated by mainstream politicians which, in turn, legitimizes them. In the survey, many pick up on how the current political climate and crises are giving rise to a discourse that spreads from extreme groups to the mainstream. A simplified and binary black and white narrative takes over and further spurs polarization. Political role models, a progressive political campaign and social media regulation are suggested factors that may mitigate the development.

Participants bring in the justification by focusing on psychological mechanisms make us more likely to support what we are familiar with, and less likely to advocate for insecurity and change. Change can be particularly frightening when coupled with an ego-centric worldview, a feeling of relative deprivation and a fear of losing. Suggestions for moving forward include shaping inclusive spaces for sharing and promoting positive visions for change.

6.2   MEN4DEM DICTIONARY

Academics have asked for shared definitions of a set of concepts. In Table 3 we provide a list of concepts that people mentioned with a textbook definition as an academic starting-point. After this, MEN4DEM members can decide how it should be operationalized and measured in different studies. It may not mean that everyone studies it in the same way, but we will have a joint definition to rely on and speak to. The definition of political masculinities in the context of the project is of course of particular relevance, as are questions about the criteria of toxicity, and whether we should refrain from using the concept.

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Table 3. MEN4DEM dictionary

Term	Definition	Source
Democracy	A regime that is ruled by the many and based on freedom and equality. Everyone has equal political rights, regardless of ability, and leaders are chosen. "A government of the people, by the people, for the people" Democracy is not about the people ruling directly or pursuing a common good, instead it's about a system where leaders compete for power through elections.	Plato. *The Republic*. (1992) Lincoln, A.(1863) Schumpeter, J. (1942) Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy.
Extremist Groups	Any organization or movement that advocates or engages or radical extreme, or violent actions to pursue their goals and aims.	Builta, J.A. (1996). *Extremist Groups: An International complication if Terrorist Organizations, Violent Political Groups, and Issue-Oriented Militant Movement.*
Far right continuum	A conceptual framework used by scholars to describe the range or spectrum of far-right ideologies, movements and behaviors.	Mudde, C. (2019). *The Far Right Today.* Miller-Idriss, C (2020). *Hate in the Homeland.*
Feminism	"A belief in the social, political and economic equality of the sexes." A movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression.	Adichie, C. N. (2014). *We should all be feminists* hooks, b. (2000). *Feminist theory: From margin to center* (2nd ed.)
Gender essentialism		

	A belief that men and women biologically have inherent, natural and unchangeable qualities that define their gender.	Skewes, Fine, & Haslam (2018). *Beyond Mars and Venus: The Role of Gender Essentialism in Support for Gender Inequality and Backlash.* Bell (2016). *Gender Essentialism and American Law: Why and How to sever the connection*
Gender based violence	Gender Based Violence refers to any harmful act directed to someone based on their gender. Any type of violence that is based on someone's gender, from physical to emotional, to financial to reproductive violence.	European Institute for gender Equality (2025). *Gender Based Violence.*
	Often used to describe violence that is directed at a woman because she is a woman.	Watts, C., & Zimmerman, C. (2002). Violence against women: Global scope and magnitude.
Hegemonic masculinity	Hegemonic masculinity refers to the dominant form of masculinity in a given society, which is culturally and socially accepted as ideal. It subordinates other masculinities and femininities. Although it is not necessarily the most common form of masculinity it is highly valued as it reinforces male power in relation to women and other marginalized masculinities.	Connell, R (1995). *Masculinities.*
Incel	An incel (short for) "involuntary celibate". An incel is typically defined as a self-identified member of	Aiolfi, I., Palena, N., Ó Ciardha, C., et al. (2024). "The incel phenomenon: A systematic scoping review."

	an online subculture of men who describe themselves as unable to attract romantic or sexual partners despite desiring them. They often express feelings of frustration, hopelessness, and resentment, particularly toward women, attractive men (sometimes called "Chads"), and societal norms that they believe exclude them	
Intersectionality	How overlapping social identities – such as race, gender and class – interact to create unique combinations of discrimination and, or privilege. As an example it is not about being a woman or being black, it is how being a black woman creates a specific experience of discrimination (or privilege).	Crenshaw, K. (1991). *Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color*
Masculinity	Refers to a set of roles, behaviors, attributes and social expectations which are associated with being male or identifying as a male.	Connell, R (1995). *Masculinities*.
Masculinity Contingency Scale	Tool understand to which a man's self-worth is linked his sense of masculinity.	Burkley, M., Wong, Y., & Bell, A. C. (2015). *The Masculinity Contingency Scale (MCS): Scale development and psychometric properties*
Paternalistic	"The interference with a person's liberty of action justified by reasons referring	Dworkin, G. (1972). *Paternalism.*

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	exclusively to the welfare, good, happiness, needs, interests or values of the person being coerced."	
Polarization	Polarization is the process by which opinions, attitudes, or positions on an issue become more extreme and opposed, often leading to a division into strong contrasting groups.	Commonly used in political science, psychology and sociology, see Lowi, T. (1964).
Precarious manhood	Is a theory that manhood is something that is socially earned and is something that is hard to achieve as well as easy to lose.	Bosson, J., & Vandello, J. A (2009). *Precarious manhood.*
Protective masculinity	Refers to a model of masculinity centered around the ole that men are protectors, traditionally seen as guardians of family, community or nation.	Pollack, W.S. (1998). Real boys: Rescuing our sons form the myths of boyhood. Connell, R.W (1995). Masculinities.
Radicalization	A process where an individual adopts an extreme political, social or religious idea, often moving towards actions that challenge the status quo, or even rejects it. A process where people adopt extremist ideologies that can lead to terrorism.	Neumann, P. R (2013). *The trouble with radicalization.*
Sexism, benevolent	A form of sexism the seams positive or protective, but the true motive is to reinforce traditional gender roles which keeps women in subordinate positions.	Glick, P., & Fiske, S. T. (1996). *The Ambivalent Sexism Inventory: Differentiating hostile and benevolent sexism.*

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Sexism, hostile	A form of sexism that is openly negative, hostile attitude towards women who are seen to be challenging male power by stepping outside of traditional gender roles.	Glick, P., & Fiske, S. T. (1996). *The Ambivalent Sexism Inventory: Differentiating hostile and benevolent sexism*
Toxic Masculinity	Cultural norms and behaviors that are harmful to men themselves or to others, such as emotional suppression, aggression and dominance, viewing sex as a conquest, very hostile towards anything seen as feminine	Kupers, T. A. (2005). Toxic masculinity as a barrier to mental health treatment in prison.
Trad wife	"Traditional wife", a wife who follows the traditional idea of a woman. A woman that cook, cleans and takes care of the household.	

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7. MOVING FORWARD

This first iteration of a MEN4DEM framework should be seen as a discussion document. It provides an overview of how the concept and idea of masculinities is used by academics, artists and activists. We mapped the knowledges that we had at the start of the project and used this as a basis for co-creation. The outcome is not a fixed theory, but a conceptual compass to guide future research and co-creation. The framework will be discussed and revised throughout the MEN4DEM project.

Based on this framework we will organize three co-creation activities. First, we will organize an online seminar with the MEN4DEM community to discuss the first iteration of the framework. We will ask the participants to share their thoughts on gaps that we have found:

- Theorize and define violence, dominance, aggression, oppression, and power (non-democratic masculinities) and inclusion, diversity and empathy (democratic masculinities) based on existing literature;
- Theorize and define transformation and change as well as its obstruction;
- Balance negative and positive associations with masculinities.

Second, we will continue to collect terms for the MEN4DEM dictionary and update the dictionary on a regular basis.

Third, we will organize an online reading club for the MEN4DEM community to discuss and reflect on foundational and other readings. The reading lists will be shared via our website.

A final challenge is to incorporate intersectionality within the framework. While intersectionality as a theory and political praxis has inspired the project in so many ways, it has been little discussed. Yet, some of readings that the MEN4DEM community is inspired by (e.g. hooks, Baldwin) are explicitly intersectional. The next step is to integrate intersectionality into the next version of the framework and the MEN4DEM community to take this on board in their research questions, hypotheses, operationalizations and interventions.

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Messerschmidt, James W. 2024. "Interrogating 'Political Masculinities.'" *European Journal of Politics and Gender* 7 (3): 345–60. https://doi.org/10.1332/251510821X16897800306124.

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Mudde, Cas. 2007. *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511492037.

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Rydgren, Jens. 2018. *The Oxford Handbook of the Radical Right*. Oxford University Press.

Scambor, Elli, Øystein Gullvåg Holter, and Markus Theunert. 2016. "Caring Masculinities - Men as Actors and Beneficiaries of Gender Equality." In *Conference Paper*.

Segers, Iris B. 2024. "'The Anti-Woke Academy': Dutch Far-Right Politics of Knowledge About Gender." *Politics & Gender*, December, 1–25. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1743923X24000448.

Smiler, Andrew, and Matthew Taylor. 2019. *Is Masculinity Toxic?: A Primer for the 21st Century*. Thames and Hudson Limited.

Spierings, Niels, Andrej Zaslove, Liza M. Mügge, and Sarah L. de Lange. 2015. "Gender and Populist Radical-Right Politics: An Introduction." *Patterns of Prejudice*, March. https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/0031322X.2015.1023642.

Starck, Kathleen, and Birgit Sauer. 2014. "Political Masculinities: Introduction." In *A Man's World? Political Masculinities in Literature and Culture*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

Unal, Didem. 2024. "The Variety of Anti-Gender Alliances and Democratic Backsliding in Turkey: Fault Lines around Opposition to 'Gender Ideology' and Their Political Implications." *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 26 (1): 6–30. https://doi.org/10.1080/14616742.2023.2299701.

Van Laar, Colette, Aster Van Rossum, Natasza Kosakowska-Berezecka, Renata Bongiorno, and Katharina Block. 2024. "MANdatory - Why Men Need (and Are Needed for) Gender Equality Progress." *Frontiers in Psychology* 15 (March). https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2024.1263313.

Vandello, Joseph A., and Jennifer K. Bosson. 2013. "Hard Won and Easily Lost: A Review and Synthesis of Theory and Research on Precarious Manhood." *Psychology of Men & Masculinity* 14 (2): 101–13. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0029826.

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APPENDIX I. QUESTIONNAIRES FOR MINI-SURVEYS

1.1 Survey questions – pre-workshop

<u>Personal questions:</u>

Sex: Identifies as female/male/neither/other

Primary role: Academic/Artist/Activist

<u>Associations:</u>

Five words that you associate with a non-democratic, non-inclusive masculinity:

Five words that you associate with a democratic, inclusive masculinity:

<u>Perceptions:</u>

Spontaneously and based on your experiences, what do you see as the biggest hurdles to transformative change in masculinities?

Spontaneously and based on your experiences, what you think enables transformative change in masculinities?

Expectations:

What do you expect from the workshop at Terschelling?

What do you look forward to in the workshop on Terschelling?

Are there any activities in the schedule that you do not look forward to? Which and why?

Knowledge:

Suggest one text (any kind) about masculinities that you would like other project participants to read at some point:

Describe what you learned from this text and why you recommend it:

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1.2. Survey questions – during-workshop 1

Knowledge:

Mention one thing that you learned today.

Mention one thing you taught others today.

Expectations:

What has been most enjoyable today?

What have you found most frustrating today?

Activities:

What are your thoughts about the co-creation sessions?

Fun/Interesting/Frightening/Embarrasing/Boring/Pointless/Challenging/Inspiring/Other

1.3. Survey questions – during workshop 2

Knowledge:

Mention one thing that you learned today.

Expectations:

What is your biggest take-away from the Terschelling workshop?

What has been hardest during the Terschelling workshop?

Activities:

What are your thoughts about the risk assessment session?

Fun/Interesting/Frightening/Embarrasing/Boring/Pointless/Challenging/Inspiring/Other

What did you learn from the risk assessment session?

Associations:

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Five words that you associate with a non-democratic, non-inclusive masculinity:

Five words that you associate with a democratic, inclusive masculinity:

Perceptions:

Based on your interactions here at Terschelling, what do you see as the biggest hurdles to transformative change in masculinities?

Based on your interactions here at Terschelling, what you think enables transformative change in masculinities?

1.4. Survey questions –after workshop

Now that you have had some time to digest and reflect on the co-creation process that was started on Terschelling, we would like you to answer a few questions. These questions focus a lot on concepts and theories, and will help us move forward as we shape the first iteration of a joint MEN4DEM framework.

Looking back

What is your biggest take-away from the Terschelling workshop?

What are some questions or points of confusion that you have after the Terschelling workshop?

Looking forward

What type of activities would you like MEN4DEM to organize in the near future?

What are some concepts or theories that you think we need to develop in the MEN4DEM project?

What are some concepts that work for you, in your daily work?

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Were there any concepts used that you think are difficult to understand, either because they are difficult to translate from English or because they are too academic? Which are they?

Are there any concepts that you use in your language or context that you would like to see translated and discussed? Which ones?

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APPENDIX II.   MEN4DEM READING LIST

Academic / Articles / Reports

Barker, G. (2025). What is a masculine workplace, anyway? Equimundo.

> https://www.equimundo.org/masculine-workplace-zuckerberg-rogan/

> Description: Gary Barker's What Is a Masculine Workplace, anyway? explores how traditional masculinity shapes workplace culture, using Mark Zuckerberg's Joe Rogan interview as a lens. He critiques the glorification of toughness and endurance in professional settings and advocates for more inclusive, emotionally intelligent leadership

Berkowitz, Dana, Tinkler, Justine, Peck, Alana, & Coto, Lynette. (2021). Tinder: A game with gendered rules and consequences. Social Currents, 8(5), 491–509.

> DOI: 10.1177/23294965211019486

> Description: This paper is worth reading because it explores how new technologies, particularly mobile dating apps like Tinder, reinforce traditional stereotypes and cultural norms. The study shows that Tinder's design, which encourages quick, appearance-based judgments, leads users to follow outdated norms instead of challenging them. The app's game-like design makes interactions feel like "just a game," which reduces the seriousness of these issues and normalizes sexist, racist, and classist behavior. As a media psychologist I think it is important to mention the role of media in maintaining traditional stereotypes, recognizing that, to some extent, this is a profitable practice and part of the strategy of large corporations.

Bosson, Jennifer K., & Vandello, Joseph A. (2013). Hard Won and Easily Lost: A Review and Synthesis of Theory and Research on Precarious Manhood. Psychology of Men and Masculinities.

Description: Review research on the implications of men's precarious gender status across the domains of risk-taking, aggression, stress and mental health, and work-life balance.

Bosson, J. K., Jurek, P., Zukauskiene, R., et al. (2021). Psychometric properties and correlates of precarious manhood beliefs in 62 nations. Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology, 52(3), 231–258.

https://doi.org/10.1177/0022022121997997

Description: To understand precarious Manhood Theory. Belief in the precariousness of manhood is linked to behaviors aimed at restoring one's masculinity after perceived threats. Many of these behaviors—such as violence, derogation of women, and endorsement of war and radicalism—have direct implications for anti-democratic attitudes. Our team has explored the cross-cultural universality and differences in precarious manhood beliefs. Research on incel communities highlights two predominant "traits": the use of hateful and aggressive language and a strong perception of exclusion or failure in social hierarchies. These elements may be relevant to understanding online radicalization.

Burkley, M., Wong, J. Y., & Bell, A. C. (2016). The Masculinity Contingency Scale (MCS): Scale development and psychometric properties. Psychology of Men & Masculinity, 17(2), 113–123.

https://doi.org/10.1037/a0039211

Description: To understand Masculinity Contingency Scale (MSC). This measure assesses the extent to which a man's self-worth is derived from his sense of masculinity. Research indicates that high masculinity contingency scores are generally associated with negative social and personal outcomes.

Connell, R.W. (2005). Masculinities. Polity press. ISBN: 978-0745634272

Description: A very comprehensive analysis that explores the multiple ways in which masculinity is constructed, performed, and maintained within society. How gender is an onto-formative practice; it creates the world we live in. How to distinguish between hegemonic, complicit, subordinate and marginalized masculinities. How achieving and maintaining masculinity can be seen as a project in men's lives. How the end goal of our effort can be the transformation of the whole system, and in the process towards that historical change we need all initiatives that build up pressure that will lead to that change. It allowed me to understand better the dynamic power relations between men and women and among men themselves. It is a classical text, which means it has received a fair share of critique, but it can serve as a solid foundation to build and expand further theorizing about masculinities.

Connell, R.W., & Messerschmidt, James W. (2005). Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept. Gender & Society, 19(6).

Description: This text reflects back on the foundational text and concept development of hegemonic masculinities by R.W. Connell--a significantly important text--and works to consider the limitations of the book and the concept at that time. It argues for a more multi-dimensional approach to the concept of hegemonic masculinity. Thus, I think that this is an important text for us to consider as we think through the concept of political masculinities, our approach, especially when considering the various geographies of masculinities, as well as how masculinities are embodied and portrayed in positions of privilege and power.

Decker, O., Kiess, J., Heller, A., & Brähler, E. (2024). Vereint im Ressentiment: Autoritäre Dynamiken und rechtsextreme Einstellungen / Leipziger Autoritarismus Studie 2024. Psychosozial-Verlag.

Leipzig Authoritarianism Study 2024 | Heinrich Böll Foundation

Description: Since 2002, researchers at Leipzig University have been analysing the development of authoritarian and right-wing extremist attitudes in Germany, first as a Mitte study and since 2018 as an authoritarianism study. The Authoritarianism Study 2024 analyzes in particular anti-Semitism, sexism and anti-feminism, disenchantment with democracy and the social conditions of resentment.

European Commission. (2023). Gender, preventing and countering violent extremism. RAN Practitioners, European Commission. Spotlight Magazine.

https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2023-12/spotlight_on_gender_112023_en.pdf

European Commission. (2023). RAN Y&E meeting: How can youth practitioners deal with the current polarisation around masculinity? Berlin, 12–13 June 2023. Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs.

https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/whats-new/publications/ran-ye-meeting-how-can-youth-practitioners-deal-current-polarisation-around-masculinity-berlin-12-13_en

Description: RAN working group meeting in Berlin for practitioners in youth work.

Filc, D. (2020). Is resistance always counter-hegemonic? Journal of Political Ideologies, 26(1), 23–38.

https://doi.org/10.1080/13569317.2020.1825281

Fried, A., Lauro, G., & Barker, G. (2020). Masculinities and preventing violent extremism: Making the connections. Equimundo.

https://www.equimundo.org/resources/masculinities-and-preventing-violent-extremism-making-the-connections/

Description: Here's an interesting report from Equimundo, probably the biggest NGO working worldwide to transform masculinities, about preventing violent extremism.

Haugstvedt, Håvard. Google Scholar profile. Google Scholar.

https://scholar.google.com/citations?user=QzJGZlcAAAAJ&hl=en

Description: Haugstvedt has done research on mental health, extremism, terrorism, prevention and youths.

Hegarty, Stephanie. (2024). The real reason for the rise in childlessness. BBC.

Description: Talking about important social matters without involving half of the population shows that we still think in stereotypical ways, assuming that having a baby is solely a woman's responsibility. This mindset will lead us nowhere.

Howson, R. (2005). Challenging hegemonic masculinity. Routledge.

Description: Introduction and chapter 2 as a suggestion.

Kahn, J. S., Goddard, L, & Coy, J. M. (2013). Gay men and drag: Dialogical resistance to hegemonic masculinity. Culture & Psychology, 19(1), 139–162.

https://doi.org/10.1177/1354067X12464984

Description: Constructions of hegemonic-resistant masculinities.

Kahn, J. S., Holmes, J. R., & Brett, B. L. (2013). Dialogical masculinities: Diverse youth resisting dominant masculinity. Culture & Psychology, 19(1), 23–38.

https://doi.org/10.1177/1354067X13494865

Description: Dialogical-self approach to studying masculinity, useful for the ethnographic work with youth wing members. A constructivist model that assumes that meaning making is fluid. Has also been referred to as storied self, constantly shifting in socio-cultural contexts to adapt to situations and

nuances in human interaction. Consists of various dialogues that represent different ways of understanding, experiencing, and negotiating with self and other.

Küpper, B., & Zick, A. (2015). Was ist gruppenbezogene Menschenfeindlichkeit? Ein Online-Dossier. Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung.

Gruppenbezogene Menschenfeindlichkeit | Rechtsextremismus | bpb.de

Description: The homeless, the Jews, the gays – whenever people are divided into groups on the basis of an often single common characteristic and these are devalued and excluded, one speaks of group-related enmity. Researchers Beate Küpper and Andreas Zick explain how this works and what the consequences of GMF – as it is abbreviated – are.

Miller-Idriss, Cynthia. (2020). Hate in the Homeland: The New Global Far Right. Princeton University Press.

https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv10tq6km

Description: How the extreme right combines toxic masculinity narratives with far-right messages

Mosse, George. (1999). The Image of Man. Oxford University Press. ISBN: 9780061129735

Description: "The Image of Man" by George Mosse explores how the concept of the "real man" has evolved throughout history, examining its connections with political, social, and cultural ideologies. Mosse traces the formation of a masculine stereotype that, beginning in the late 18th century, establishes the ideal of the "real man": a courageous, bold individual who does not let emotions overwhelm him, physically strong, yet also honest and courteous. This model becomes a common notion in the 19th century and continues to persist without significant changes to the present day.

The book emphasizes how this masculine image played a crucial role in the formation of national identity, serving as a foundation for the promotion of fascist and Nazi movements. Mosse also explores how the ideal of masculinity permeated the regimes of "real socialism," where the image of the strong and determined man was used to promote a political ideology and a social structure centered around authoritative figures. Mosse's analysis highlights the connections between the image of the "real man" and power structures that define politics, culture, and collective identities.

Mogensen, C., & Rand, S. H. (2020). The angry internet: A threat to gender equality, democracy & well-being. Centre for Digital Youth Care.

CFDP_the_angry_internet_ISSUE.pdf

Murray, R., & Bjarnegård, E. (2024). Bringing men and masculinities into political science. European Journal of Politics and Gender, 7(3), 308–325.

https://doi.org/10.1332/251510823X16920325768482

Description: It explains how masculinity is crucial for, yet curiously absent from, political science analyses. This project can change this!

OECD. (2021). Man Enough? Measuring Norms to promote Women's Empowerment. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. Social Institutions and Gender Index, OECD Publishing, Paris

Description: It is not about political masculinities but it provides a framework to measure 10 common norms of restrictive masculinities. I think it would interesting to engage with the OECD framework, e.g., for the development of the questionnaire as they are doing research on this in other countries, links can be beneficial.

Park, M. (2022). Understanding the incel experience online. Insights, in Global Network on Extremism and Technology.

https://gnet-research.org/2022/08/15/understanding-the-incel-experience-online/

Description: A good source for WP3.

Sauer, B. (2024). Autoritär-rechte Männlichkeiten. Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung.

Autoritär-rechte Männlichkeiten | Rechtsextremismus | bpb.de

Description: She draws on Klaus Theweleit.

Scambor, Elli, Holter, Øystein G., & Theunert, Markus. (2016). Caring Masculinities: Men as Actors and Beneficiaries of Gender Equality. International Conference on Men and Equal Opportunities. ISBN: 978-99959-889-3-7

Description: It contains a lot of transformative arguments that can resonate with a lot of men (fathers, employees, employers etc.).

Sieckelinck, S. (2016). Ga met jongeren het gesprek over hun idealen aan (Reradicalization). Kennisplatform Integratie & Samenleving.

https://www.kis.nl/artikel/stijn-sieckelinck-ga-met-jongeren-het-gesprek-over-hun-idealen-aan

Sparks, B., Zidenberg, A. M., & Olver, M. E. (2022). Involuntary celibacy: A review of incel ideology and experiences with dating, rejection, and associated mental health and emotional sequelae. Frontiers in Psychology, 13, 9780135.

https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.9780135

Description: To understand precarious Manhood Theory. Belief in the precariousness of manhood is linked to behaviors aimed at restoring one's masculinity after perceived threats. Many of these behaviors—such as violence, derogation of women, and endorsement of war and radicalism—have direct implications for anti-democratic attitudes. Our team has explored the cross-cultural universality and differences in precarious manhood beliefs.

Theweleit, K. (1987). Male fantasies (Vol. 1): Women, floods, bodies, history. University of Minnesota Press. Male Fantasies, Vol. 1: Women Floods Bodies History,

Theweleit, K. (1989). Male fantasies (Vol. 2): Psychoanalyzing the white terror. University of Minnesota Press. Male Fantasies, Vol. 2: Male Bodies: Psychoanalyzing the White Terror

> Description: "Male Fantasies" (original: 1977) is the classic on men and fascism. It is huge and methodologically a little... erratic; but anyway, inspiring for many, also for myself

Theunert, M. (2024). Faktor M – Männlichkeit und Radikalisierung. männer.ch

> Description: I think it makes a difference in how to look at the right wing, based on a masculinity analysis.

Van Laar, C., Van Rossum, A., Kosakowska-Berezecka, N., Bongiorno, R., & Block, K. (2024). Mandatory – why men need (and are needed for) Gender Equality. Frontiers in Psychology, 15, 1–19.

> https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2024.1263313

> Description: I recommend it because it changes the perspective from giving girls opportunities in a patriarchal world to changing the world to benefit all. The paper argues that achieving gender equality requires engaging men as allies, as men's privileged status and restrictive gender roles negatively impact both women and men.

Zawisza, M., Kosakowska-Berezecka, N., Glick, P., Olech, M., Besta, T., Jurek, P., et al. (2025). Worse for women, bad for all: A 62-nation study confirms and extends ambivalent sexism principles to reveal greater social dysfunction in sexist nations. Social Psychological and Personality Science.

> https://doi.org/10.1177/19485506241302882

> Description: To understand endorsement of sexism. Both benevolent and hostile. These forms of sexism contribute to rigid gender hierarchies and

exclusionary ideologies. Our team's recent work on sexism across cultures and its negative consequences may be useful here.

Non-academic, fiction, commentaries

Baldwin, J (1985). Here be Dragons.

> Description: Baldwin critiques how the American ideal of manhood, rooted in power and dominance, limits emotional expression and creates a façade of invulnerability. This often isolates men and fosters a culture of fear and aggression.

Belleman, Saskia (2025). Zij is van mij (She is mine). Ambo/Anthos. ISBN: 9789026370229

> Description: To understand more what is happening in our society when men are murdering women.

Fromm, Erich. (2019). The Art of Loving. Harper Perennial. ISBN: 9780061129735.

> Description: While some aspects of the book, especially on gender and sexuality, are toxic and/or outdated, other aspects of the book helped form my core understanding & lived experience of what it means to be human, your true vulnerable self in connection with others and how to relate to others. As such it continues to forms part of the fundaments of my interaction with gender in my own life, my own (toxic) masculinity, but also very much my conversations and teachings about what it is to be truly fully freely human and how masculinity limits this for everyone.

Harari, Yuval Noah. (2018). Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind. Harper Perennial. ISBN: 9780062316110

> Description: "Men often try to prove how manly they are, even at the risk of their own lives." This book takes a unique look at masculinity, showing it's not biologically fixed but shaped by history and culture. It explores how men often

feel pressured to "prove" their masculinity, sometimes in risky or harmful ways. It also explains that patriarchy didn't happen naturally—it developed through specific historical and economic changes.

The book also tracks how ideas of masculinity have evolved over time, shifting with societal values and power structures. Today, traditional ideas about masculinity are being questioned more than ever, thanks to gender equality and modern views on human behavior.

It's a not hard to read and at the same time insightful read that challenges stereotypes and gets people thinking about how masculinity impacts us all.

hooks, bell. (2004). The Will to Change: Men, Masculinity and Love. Washington Square Press Inc., NY: Atria Books. ISBN: 978-0743456081

Description: That we need a personal approach to masculinity theory, but also to change this. We have to bring in ourselves to make theory and scholarship relatable. And that men, even if they have hurt the women in their lives, are also victims of oppressive patriarchy. hooks is forgiving, and I found that brave and inspiring. What patriarchy does to men and that men also need to break out of the same shackles

La Cecla, F. (2009). Modi Bruschi. Per un'antroplogia del maschio. Eleuthera. ISBN: 9788842498094

Description: A book that expresses a theory that can be a link between machismo and the vision of a different masculine.

Smiler, Andrew P. (2019). Is Masculinity Toxic? A primer for the 21st Century. Thames and Hudson Ltd, ISBN: 978-0500295021

Description: It shows with clear historical references how the concept of masculinity has changed often and quite dramatically over time, and thus that the concept of masculinity is a societal fiction, based on the shared beliefs of

what is acceptable and desirable masculine behavior, not on any universal truth or biological facts.

Podcasts / Videos / Websites / Social Media Profiles

MenEngage Alliance. (2021). Youtube Playlist: Misogyny and anti-feminist backlash.

Youtube: https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLZEc8nrtg9eUt4KP-15we4nl2vP5E47K0

Description: Researchers are quoting an angry young man saying before the interview, 'Now I'm going to tell you for an hour why I am so angry', but then in fact telling for an hour why he was so sad.

Park, Maeve. LinkedIn Profile.

LinkedIn: https://www.linkedin.com/in/meadhbh-maeve-park-aa7b01212/

Via Berlin. Show: Huis G. Website to Via Berlin.

https://viaberlin.nl/

Description: It is about domestic violence and the role of bystanders. We learned why people do not interfere and what we can do to get more people interfering.