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Masculinity and Kinship: Intersections of Care, Social Justice, and Privilege

The frictions and the overlap between constructions of masculinity and kinship constitute important points of cultural negotiation and exchange in the United States. Given long histories of American individualist discourses and ideologies, constellations that build communal masculine identities are particularly noteworthy—though they may not always lie beyond normativity. In a purely binary framing of the latter, hegemonic masculinity is constructed around the power and the personal agency of the individual *against* others, including other masculinities (Connell), whereas kinship suggests a collective identity or community based on interconnection. However, normative constructions of masculine identities may rely on collective identities in similar ways as subversive or counterhegemonic iterations of masculinity, for instance in Michael Kimmel's studies of how anger and rage can create "a community out of people's individual frustrations, giving them a sense of 'we-ness.'" Indeed, kinship may generally be understood as structuring and as being structured by relations of power, though its meanings are hardly fixed (McKinnon). In trying to unravel the productive ambiguities and contradictions that contemporary scholarship on masculinities and kinship has grappled with, this panel proposes to investigate their relationship via the intersections of care, social justice, and privilege across contemporary American culture as well as cultural history, literature, and politics.

The panel proceeds from the assumption that masculine kinship may be characterized by (mutual) care and simultaneously be implicated in contradictory, emotionally charged evocations of privilege, hence raising questions of social justice and in/equity. It thus operates intersectionally across particular configurations of social difference (Crenshaw) and within affective economies (Ahmed). Care finds its expression not only in concrete reproductive work but generally in (emotional) modes of relationality that are signified by reciprocity and interdependence, which may also manifest among men (Elliott). Of course, such contemporary notions of care as being conducive to building community, even to enabling resistance to domination, have historically also emerged from Black feminist thought (Lorde; hooks). Privilege, in turn, has also been theorized as an inherently relational concept, though ultimately giving one group power over another (McIntosh; Johnson)—and yet it allows for a group that others may decry as benefiting from 'male privilege' to nevertheless understand itself as victimized or oppressed (Kimmel). Privilege thus upends normative standards of social justice in democratic settings (Rawls) as it influences the equal distribution of resources and affective economies of attention and care. As such, particularly the gendered intersection of care, privilege, and justice is riddled with ambivalences. In the US, political ideas and cultural representations of, for instance, masculine 'bonding' beyond the heteronormative family thus seem to complicate binary understandings of kinship as either an emancipatory practice or a mechanism of (biopolitical) power and control because they imply contradictory regimes of mutual sustenance, notions of (affective) hierarchy, and conflicting appeals to justice.

Accordingly, the panel wants to explore how US culture negotiates the potentials, limits, or dangers of thinking about masculine kinship along these intersections, interrogating questions such as: How does masculine kinship relate to issues of power, oppression, resistance, and participation? Which individual and communal identity constructions does it enable or prevent? Is kinship among (white, straight, etc.) men always politically regressive, or does affectively caring for men inherently subvert hegemonic and/or patriarchal understandings of masculinity? What subversive and/or regressive role(s) may class play in the cultural negotiation of masculine kinship in the US? Which liberatory ways towards subverting power structures do queer, non-white, embodied and disabled

forms of masculine kinship in American (political) culture afford? Which concrete affects and emotions does masculine kinship work with? How have specific aesthetic forms been used to grapple with, conceal, or reveal particular ambiguities related to masculine kinship?

Presentations may focus on historical or contemporary examples from literature, (popular) culture, or politics. We welcome case studies analyzing individual aspects or more theoretically driven presentations, which could tackle topics including but not limited to:

- Specific forms, genres, media, etc. in which masculine kinship is explored, from the Western or ‘male melodrama’ to ‘buddy films’ or (multiplayer) video games, etc.
- Representations and complications of fatherhood and other quasi-familial constellations: brotherhood, fraternities, etc.
- Evocations of masculine solidarity in right-wing politics, e.g. in contemporary digital culture (‘manosphere,’ ‘brologarchy,’ etc.)
- Intersections of class, masculinity, and kinship (e.g., in reality television and sitcoms: *Duck Dynasty*, *The Ranch*, etc.)
- Analyses of the roles of ‘race’ and ethnicity in texts that negotiate the interstices and ambiguities of masculinity, care(work), justice, and privilege (e.g., slave narratives)
- Analyses of specific affects and emotions that foster or denounce kinship among men (e.g., anger, rage, pity, fear, or feelings of empathy or nostalgia)
- The relationship between dis/ability, power, and masculine kinship (e.g., veteran narratives)
- Forms, functions, or complications of queerness or nonbinariness in representations of masculine kinship
- Cultural representations and political discourses of ‘female’ and ‘feminist masculinities’ in their relation to kinship
- The transnational politics of masculinity and kinship in American culture (e.g., evocations of global brotherhood)

Please send your paper proposal (300 words) and a short bio to nathalie.aghoro@lmu.de, peter.hintz@uni-leipzig.de, and stefan.schubert@uni-leipzig.de.

Confirmed speaker: Jan D. Kucharzewski (Mannheim), “Killing for Kinship: Hunting, Violence, and Fraternal Care in Cooper and Melville”