

COFFEE, COOKIES AND CARDS: THE USE OF VISUALS AND MATERIALITY TO REPRODUCE AND TRANSFORM MASCULINITY IN DUTCH SOCIAL WORK INTERVENTIONS /

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Abstract: In what way do gender-specific interventions aimed at marginalised men reproduce and transform masculinities, and what kind of masculinity do social professionals, who carry out these projects, work with? This paper analyses how visual materials, spaces and artefacts enable professionals to deal with masculinity and gender-equality issues when working with men whom they assume hold traditional views on masculinity and gender roles. A three-year study of semi-public interventions that worked on individual empowerment, participation and gender equality with marginalised men in the Netherlands revealed that the professionals found it difficult to raise gender-equality issues. In contrast to the other project goals of individual empowerment and participation, gender-equality issues created a discomfort. The authors also discovered that gender equality in most cases was dealt with in more subtle ways than the issues of individual empowerment and participation. In this context, professionals worked with an ideal version of what the 'new' masculinity of the participants would look like, which we labelled 'pacified masculinity'. The paper empirically shows how social professionals benefit from the use of space, images and artefacts to break down rigid gender roles and potentially enable men to construct other versions of masculine identity. Moreover, we argue that visuals and materiality create room for a reflection on the role of men in women's emancipation.

Keywords: masculinities, interventions, gender equality

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In this paper we study how social professionals make use of visual materials, spaces and artefacts to deal with masculinity and gender-equality issues when working with men whom they assume hold traditional views on masculinity and gender roles. We looked at interventions carried out by male and female social professionals working in the field of social work and civil society between 2011 and 2013 in a programme funded by a Dutch NGO. The aim of the NGO programme was to enable 'low skilled and socially isolated men' (ages 15–65) 'participate' more in society, and to reflect both on their role 'as men' in the family and on themselves as men.

The prevailing assumption behind the NGO programme, largely shared by the social professionals carrying out the projects, was that these marginalised men – most of them working-class, unemployed and migrant men – hold traditional views on masculinity and gender roles. That is to say, they worked from the idea that with regard to masculinity these men value being strong, tough, and potentially aggressive. With regard to views on gender roles, the social professionals often said that they thought these men aspired to be the breadwinner, the head of the family, and would (potentially) hold back their wives and daughters from holding equal positions in the family and society. The interventions, therefore, needed to make them reflect on these roles so that they would be better able to fit into current Dutch society, in which gender equality is thought to be the norm (Duyvendak et al. 2010: 235; Mepschen et al. 2010; van den Berg,

Duyvendak 2012; Roggeband, Verloo 2007). However, our evaluation of the projects showed that, in contrast to the other project goals of individual empowerment and participation, many social professionals found it difficult to raise gender-equality issues (van der Haar, van Huis, Verloo 2014; van Huis, van der Haar 2013). In interviews, many professionals said they did not explicitly talk about gender-equality issues with the participants, because they thought it would 'scare away the men. Here, we found that professionals appeared to benefit from the use of visuals and materiality. In this paper, we explore how professionals make use of space, images and artefacts to work on gender equality: to break down (assumedly) rigid gender roles, to potentially enable men to construct other versions of masculine identity, and to create room for reflection on the role of men in women's emancipation. We, moreover, assess what kind of 'ideal masculinity' is constructed in these visual and material aids used by social professionals in the interventions.

From observations of project practices and in interviews with social professionals we learned that in the interventions the social professionals constructed an ideal version of how masculinity could be transformed. We found that this desired 'ideal masculinity' was a pacified masculinity, in which men's practices, which are assumed to have been aggressive or violent in the past, are transformed into peaceful behaviour, whereby men become, for example, more suitable for the labour market, but also discipline their children

in non-violent ways (van Huis, van der Haar 2013). In this paper we show how these professionals materialise an ideal masculinity in the spaces, visuals and artefacts they use in interventions for men.

Our conceptualisation of the desired ideal masculinity is inspired by the concept of 'hegemonic masculinity' (Connell 2010; Connell, Messerschmidt 2005), to the extent that it also refers to normatively aspired configurations of practice that structure what a man should be like and that it has historically been constructed on the basis of gendered power relations (Connell, Messerschmidt 2005: 832; Connell 2010: 44, 77). However, whereas hegemonic masculinity is the pattern of practice that allows men's dominance over women to continue (Connell, Messerschmidt 2005: 832; Connell 2010: 77; for a more critical discussion: Hearn 2012), ideal masculinity, as constructed by social professionals, does not necessarily imply this particular dominance. Ideal masculinity can have subordinating effects in those situations where men do not adapt to an ideal that is represented by more powerful others – for example, when it is a (white) middle-class ideal that men are pushed to adapt to. A second contrast is that hegemonic masculinity structures men's practices across many domains of social life, starting in the early stages of socialisation, for example, in education (Connell, Messerschmidt 2005: 833), whereas ideal masculinity is formed by what are seen as masculine virtues in a specific institutional context. Although the masculine practices that are aspired to and that are a part of this ideal can be influenced by dominant ideas about masculine behaviour and by dominant practices, the ideal itself relates to what is constructed and desired in a specific context, and in our study the context is interventions performed by social professionals. Although an ideal masculinity is being formed in the interventions, hegemonic masculinity (which however is also continually changing) may continue to be present (van Huis, van der Haar 2013).¹

Scholars in masculinity studies have argued that it is difficult to engage men in gender-equality issues because many men are unaware of their own privileged gender position (Kimmel 1993; Messner 2000: 4) and are unaware of the possibilities or the need for change (Connell 2005: 1818), many men feel this as a threat to their privileged position and to their identity (Connell 2005: 1810–1811; Connell 2010: 236), and many of them feel no solidarity with women's issues (Connell 2010: 236). However, there is also support among men for gender equality (Messner 2000: 49–62; Connell 2005: 1809; Kimmel and Mosmiller 1992), and there are many reasons for men to support gender equality and changing hegemonic masculinity, including improving the lives of women they are close to and their relationships with them, doing something about the 'costs' (Messner 2000) or 'toxic effects' masculinities have for men themselves, improving the 'wellbeing of the community they live in', and simply to support 'ethical and political principles' (Connell 2005: 1812–1814). In this paper, we seek to offer a better understanding of how professionals try to engage men

in gender-equality issues by reproducing and transforming masculinity and to show how this adaptation forms a specific kind of ideal masculinity. The Dutch case is especially relevant because there is little research on these kinds of projects that aim at gender equality by focusing on men (the MenEngage projects are an example), especially in a European context.

In the following section we present the data and elaborate on our theoretical understanding of visuals and materiality. We then present an analysis of how social professionals make use of images, spaces, and artefacts in interventions with men to discuss masculinity and gender-equality issues. In the conclusion, we reflect on the ideal masculinity that the social professionals construct via the use of images, spaces and artefacts and how this ideal masculinity relates to gender-equality goals.

Data and theoretical perspective on visuals and materiality

In this study we combined ethnographic research with a textual analysis of project plans (and other project documents) based on Critical Frame Analysis (Verloo, Lombardo 2007; van der Haar 2013; van Huis, van der Haar 2013). The ethnographic data consist of 103 participant observations of interventions, interviews with 35 participants and 41 social professionals, and two focus groups with social professionals.

We collected images by describing them in our field notes, photographs and films made by us or by the people we studied. Some of the images and artefacts the social professionals show participants are of unknown origin (are 'found'), others were made by the social professionals and shown to the participants, or made by the participants themselves ('found'), and some were made at the initiative of the researcher ('generated') (Yanow 2014). There were also images we did not see ourselves, but learned of their existence in the interviews: for example, pink yoga mats, or a pair of trousers drying on a heater. We will refer to this latter group of images as 'evoked'.

We selected the images from the dataset in a theoretically informed way. The images in this paper, therefore, are part of a process of building theory through a constant comparison of theory and verbal and visual data (Glaser, Strauss 1967; Charmaz 2006).

In our research and emerging analysis, we noticed that images and objects were used by social professionals to work on gender-equality issues. Images and materiality were part of the field we were studying, the questions we were trying to answer and the theory we were building. Therefore, we decided to specifically analyse the images and artefacts they used and the organisation of these images and artefacts in space. To study images and artefacts we drew on visual studies perspectives, in which images (and artefacts) are seen as different kinds of symbolic communication than spoken words or a written text. Images and artefacts impose (reproduce or change) meanings on their observants in different ways than words. This applies to both the researcher and the

researched. Not only are the senses affected differently than by spoken or written words, but the meaning-making process also occurs differently. We refer here to the relationship between the signifier (sign-vehicle), the signified (object) and the interpretant of visual objects (Atkin 2013).² The interpretant is the interpretation of the artefact/image by the one who observes. The interpretant can be related to, but is not necessarily the same as what is signified. With photography or film, for example, the relation between signified, signifier and interpretant can seem quite direct, which has consequences for how we perceive the images and the associations we make. In other visuals the meaning can be more implicit, a visual may even only have meaning through social agreement, or may seem to have hardly any meaning outside of itself at all (like a cup of coffee). However, because they are a part of social life and influence how people interact, it is important to take images and artefacts into account.

Artefacts can also work as symbolic images that have certain meanings, but have physical possibilities and constraints as well. When it comes to spaces, and the organisation of things and bodies in space, there is a combined symbolic and material structuring of possible behaviour, in which persons still have agency, but are faced with material and symbolic constraints. Important to our research is the idea that images and artefacts get gendered meanings in social interaction. Spaces can be symbolically gendered by historical configurations of practice in which (through reproduction and transformation of cultural norms) certain areas became the domains of men and others are those of women. However, spaces, artefacts and images do not necessarily have to be gendered, and the symbolic meaning can change. A process of 'degendering' (Connell 2010: 234) can, for example, take place, when practices, or even an image, an artefact or a space, become less connected to a certain gender: they can lose their masculinity or femininity depending on the way they are used. Moreover, masculinity and femininity can change in this process, as they are not fixed practices, but are historically and socially constructed.

Preferring a reflexive way of analysing images over a realist one (in which the analysis of the image and what it reveals would not be problematised), Pink argues that we need to take into account both the context of the image and what the researcher reveals with an image (Pink 2001; Bryman 2004: 313). Owing to the seemingly authentic character of images, especially photography and film, and their powerful ability to impose meaning, we reflected on how images are constructed in a specific setting and on what kinds of images to present as a researcher.

'Found' images: talking and doing spaces

In the interviews, the social professionals who carried out the interventions said they had difficulty recruiting men for their projects. In order to invite men to take part in their projects, they argued that they needed to connect with the participating men; they tried to understand what the

men were interested in and organised activities that they thought would benefit men's lives and would appeal to men (van Huis 2014). This idea of connecting with men and masculinities can also be recognised in the specific *spaces* and *locations* where the interventions take place, which often had gendered characteristics.

Most projects are carried out in the neighbourhoods where the participants live. The locations are usually community centres. These are public spaces and common areas where professionals interact with visitors in both informal and more formal ways. The 'built spaces' (Yanow 2014) in this way enabled the participating men to exercise a form of agency. The hierarchical characteristics of the spaces within buildings were disguised in order to connect with the men, and accentuated in order to distinguish between the social professional and the participant. The kind of space that we observed in most projects were meeting rooms in neighbourhood centres, with tables arranged in a square or a square circle, with chairs around them, and with men on those chairs. It reminded one of a classroom, a work canteen, or an office meeting room, moreover because there was always coffee, often served with cookies. The round setting forced the men to face each other and the social professional, or sometimes two professionals.³

The social professionals were male or female, and when there were two professionals, one was often male and the other female. It was often the decision of the professionals to have at least one man involved as a professional in the project, in order to connect with the men: to have someone present they could identify with. The same applied to the ethnic backgrounds of the social professionals, which sometimes, but not always, was the same as the participants'.

The professionals sat in the same circle or they stood 'in front' of the group or walked around while talking. The professionals appeared strong and self-assured, in contrast to most of the participants. When there were two professionals present, the one who was not actively leading the group would sit among the other men, as if sending out the message that he or she was one of them. While speaking, the professional would stand or sit in a spot where it was clear that this was the person who was leading the group: by the white board hanging on the wall, or by a standing flip chart, or at the head of the (group of) table(s).

From the way in which the space and the objects and bodies in it were organised it was clear that there was going to be talking: by the professional educating the men, or by the participants among themselves. Therefore, we called these spaces: *talking spaces*. According to the social professionals, some of the men felt potentially threatened by talking, as they were not used to talking in public about personal issues. However, with a cup of coffee, the men could also lean back and become comfortable. If they wanted, participants could also just listen. Image 1 shows such a setting, including the thermoses with coffee. In that room the conversation with the (male) professional started informally. He stirred the cof-

Image 1. Meeting room in a father centre.



Image 2. Central hall in a youth centre.



fee in his cup and talked about something he had read in the paper: in fact, he had brought the article with him. He told the men that a new computer game had come out and that had made him realise that he doesn't know any women who play computer games. A conversation about the differences between men and women started: about violence, about raising children, and about the men's own childhood.

The other settings were variations of this talking space. Image 2, for example, shows a youth centre in a rural area of the Netherlands. The youth centre is located in an old, small school building in a residential area of a village. In an attempt to make young people feel at home and identify with the space, the central space is decorated with graffiti on the wall and there is a pool table in the back and a ping pong table (folded away on the left). At the spot from which the photograph is taken there is a small bar with bar stools, where thermoses with coffee and coffee cups were stored. At this youth centre young people usually walked in and out. A small group often sat smoking cigarettes and talking at the entrance. The two social workers who organised activities had their office at the back of the building. This centre was also the kind of place where young people would walk in and out to socialise or to ask for all kinds of help. There were also two small offices at the back where it was possible to talk more privately. The smaller talking spaces made it possible to discuss more personal things in a way that was less visible and audible to others. This shows that not only what is visible is important, but also what is made invisible (and inaudible) by the organisation of space. The more private spaces gave participants the possibility to seek help for more private problems and gave the professionals access to the men's private lives, including their problems with intimate relationships, problems like domestic violence, for which the professionals helped to find solutions.

The black couch (image 2) is where the project participants would sit, holding their cups of coffee, while a professional talked to them, standing or seated on a bar stool. The programme taught the participants how to be

activity leaders at recreational events. The participants learned how to present themselves in a group: they practised standing up straight, and were advised on how to dress and how to be a role model to (other) youth, by behaving correctly (no swearing, not putting other people down) and by looking clean and confident. Upon completing the project successfully, they received a certificate allowing them to lead a group. The professionals' intention in this project was to empower the men and to give them more opportunities to participate in unpaid as well as paid work.

Besides working on this 'participation goal', the professionals organised a parallel programme to meet the gender-equality goal. There was a cooking class and educational trainings on how to communicate with children and how to handle conflict. In the case of the cooking class, the social professionals not only created easily accessible *talking spaces* that made it safe and comfortable to talk and listen to professional educators, but also created *doing spaces*.

The *doing spaces* that we visited ranged from repair workshops, fitness rooms, a gym, a sports and playing field, a bowling alley, a vegetable garden and many kitchens. In the interviews, the social professionals (female as well as male) said they deliberately give the spaces a gendered masculine character in order to make them easily accessible to and welcoming for men, to make the men feel at home and to activate them in a way that presumably suits them. By creating masculine spaces, the social professionals reproduced masculine practices that they did not find harmful to others. However, they may in effect have excluded men who are not attracted to these kinds of stereotypical masculine spaces.

The kitchens had a gendered side as well, but in this case in a more transformative way. A cooking class was an important part of some of the projects. The idea was that it would be emancipating (in this context meaning improving gender-equality) for men (and women) to let men have a bigger role in the household and to teach them how to cook. Cooking, according to these social professionals, is something that is more associated with being a female activity. To make it an

activity that is also attractive to men, the social professionals made references to famous male chefs, presenting it as a high status activity. In one project in which cooking was a central activity, the men were told that after finishing the project they could become 'health ambassadors' within their family and community, accentuating their expertise, and providing them with a new status. (Re)producing male status in families and communities, in a domain that is seen as feminine, could appeal to men (and perhaps also to women). It could, however, also be counter-productive when improving women's lives is considered one of the goals. Whether this is harmful or helpful to women, of course, depends on how this new status is performed.

In some instances, activities that were associated with femininity provoked protests. One young man (white Dutch), for example, initially refused to pour coffee for the others because in his view that was something women do. Later in the project, according to a female social professional, he would pour coffee without being asked. Another young man, in the same project, when asked to set the table refused, saying: 'I am not a kitchen princess!' He did help with the more physical work of arranging the tables. A few weeks later, without being asked and after having seen other young men do it, he did set the table.

During the observations it became clear that many spaces were deliberately gendered, in order to make it easier to attract men, assuming the spaces now resembled places the targeted men like to be in. Some spaces were, however, also gendered in order to motivate them to reflect on their masculinity: to make them more active in what is presumed to be a masculine way, or to make them change their masculinity, by doing activities that they perhaps would previously have seen as feminine. These observations correspond to earlier findings based on interviews and observations (van Huis 2014). In the projects the social professionals use masculinity as something they need to connect to, something they want to use and enhance, or something they want to

transform. Which of these strategies social professionals choose depends on whether or not they perceive specific masculine practices as hampering the participants, hampering others, or as non-conforming, and whether the social professionals see possibilities for change in discursive and materialist ways of working within the projects.

'Found' images: directing or prompting cards

As part of the talking sessions, professionals often used question cards or cards with images to prompt the men to talk about themselves. The cards with images range from cards already used widely in social work for men as well as women to reflect on their feelings or their goals in the future (see image 4) to specially designed cards for men from particular ethnic backgrounds that let the men reflect on the upbringing of their children. We will here discuss some examples of this latter category of cards to show how masculinity is being reproduced and transformed and how an ideal masculinity is being formed.

Image 5 shows a black man who is raising his finger towards a child. The image in the setting of the project is meant to get men to talk. Again, sitting in a circle around tables, one of the men is asked to react to the card. A female professional (Afro-Caribbean background) asks: 'What do you see?' At first, the men give an almost literal description of what is seen on the card (signifier): 'I see a father correcting his son' (interpretant). His observation is actually already an interpretation because he does not know if the people in the photograph (signified) are father and son or that a raised finger combined with a certain facial expression means 'correcting'. After they are prompted with questions from the social professionals, but sometimes without prompting, the men compare what they see on the cards to their own memories of similar situations. To the men in the group it seems clear that they are being asked to make associations and to reflect on their own daily lives: on their behaviour and attitudes. The men in the group seem to share a definition of the situation.

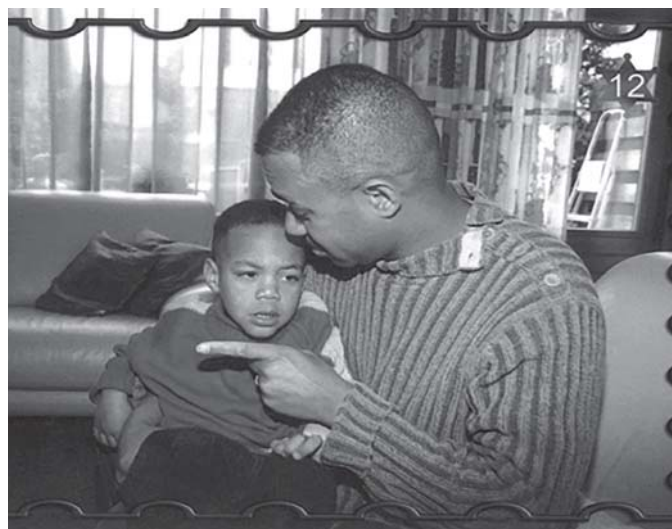
Image 3. Repair workshop.



Image 4: Cards that were used by the men to reflect on their life goals.



Image 5. One of the cards used in a conversation about childraising.



on and the purpose of the cards, maybe because it is not the first time they have come to a meeting like this, but perhaps also because photographs provoke responses on a more emotional or bodily level, as well as in more rational ways in the mind (Sontag 1977; Barthes 1981). As Sontag (1977: 4) puts it: 'Photographed images do not seem to be statements about the world so much as pieces of it, miniatures of reality that anyone can make or acquire.' This emotional and seemingly real aspect of photography could also help the men to express associations with their own memories.

One of the men randomly picks another card. He shows the card to the rest of the group. On the card there is a man bathing a baby. The man who is holding the card reacts to the image on it: 'I see me and my eldest son. I used to do everything for him, from morning till night'; 'That brings back good memories', he adds, with a smile on his face, clearly with joyful images in mind of his own experiences with his son. The social professional moves the conversation to the rest of the group by turning her glance from the man with the card to the whole group: 'Can a father bathe a little girl?' This question does not stand on its own, nor does the image of the father bathing the child. It refers to the problems that the social professionals expect these men have and that she thinks are important issues to discuss.

In the group, the men continue to talk about what is permissible or appropriate. They say that it depends on whether it is his own daughter, on the age of the child, and what the child itself wants. They give examples from their daily lives: a child who at a certain point wants to go to the toilet on her own; a man who bathes his wife's children, who are not his biological children.

Other cards also seem to have specific messages in them: a man/father playing football with his son; a boy playing with toys; and a father reading a book to his son. Thinking about all of these images, it occurred to us that they are all positive examples. The man on the card is an ideal model against which the men have to mirror themselves.

One card in itself would not be that remarkable, and would perhaps be something one would expect when thinking about images of childraising. However, taking all the cards together, a certain kind of fatherhood seems to be taken as an ideal. All of the images are men in situations that seem peaceful and appropriate childraising situations: a father reading a book to his child; a father bathing his baby; a father on a stroll holding his son's hand; a father playing with his child and with toys. The professionals clearly use images that present involved fatherhood as the norm. Care for children is, however, not completely 'degendered'.

It is worth noting that the child in the pictures is in most cases a son, except in the case of the potential issue of bathing a girl. The assumption seems to be that fathers are especially necessary in the upbringing of their sons, to guide them, discipline them, and teach them, and to be around for them as a role model.

The social professionals used the cards to focus the participants on reflecting on themselves as men in their families. The relationship with a partner is less a topic of discussion, which is remarkable because one of the initial arguments for organising these projects was the assumption that men were hampering the progress of wives and daughters. Another card shows a woman serving a man and a boy breakfast or lunch. This image (to us) represents the (mostly) unquestioned division of work and care in the practice of the projects.

The social professional showed black men and women on the cards the professional in an effort to connect to men from an Afro-Caribbean background in this specific project. The man in the photograph is a friend of hers. In an interview she explained that it is easier for the men to identify with pictures of black men. She learnt this when she was teaching black men about sexually transmitted diseases and made use of pictures of the genitalia of white men, which the black men did not identify with.

In earlier work (van Huis, van der Haar 2013) we have used the term *pacified masculinity* to identify the ideal masculinity that was being created in these projects: an ideal man who disciplines his children in a non-violent manner, who negotiates with his wife (there is a hetero-normative assumption in the projects) about childraising, and does not react impulsively when angry. We recognise this pacified masculinity in the use of images like question cards. Pacified masculinity, however, does not only refer to relationships with family members, but also to relationships with others in society. A pacified man discusses societal problems and he expresses frustration about issues like discrimination or unemployment in a group of men or by being active in sports (in *talking* and *doing spaces*), in order to repair relationships with institutions and future employers that the men formally were frustrated about, and in order to let men live active, conformist lives again.

Confronting men with this ideal masculinity is normalising and pacifying in nature and seems to leave little room

for men's agency. However, the images the social professionals use are to prompt men to reflect. Although vehicles of norms, they provide room for an open discussion, and for raising other ideas of involved fatherhood.

'Evoked' images: pink yoga mats, a pair of pants, the participation ladder

We also heard stories from the project professionals that were so vivid that they evoked strong images in our minds. Even though the researchers themselves did not see the actual objects, the stories evoked an image that symbolises a particular way of working. In this paragraph we discuss three of those 'evoked images'.

The first 'evoked image' is one of pink yoga mats. A male professional from a project called 'Real Men' explained how he and his female colleague decided to provide pink yoga mats for their yoga lesson. He told of this moment in the context of putting the topic of gender equality on the agenda. More specifically, we understand this as a way of addressing the topic of masculinity. The pink yoga mats are used to provoke a discussion about the use of 'gay' as a slur, which some of the participating men, described by the social professional as 'macho' and 'tough', do. He explained this during a focus group interview (19-9-2013) with other social professionals organised by the researchers. The social professional expects these men to associate the colour pink with homosexuality and therefore react to it.

The second 'evoked image' is part of a short story told by a female professional in the context of how she relates to the targeted men in her project by showing 'your own vulnerability' (interview 11-05-2012). She said that she shares a part of her personal life with them:

I tell the men, I look good now, I can afford to buy expensive or not so expensive clothes, but there was a time when I had only two pairs of jeans. One pair would be drying on the heater and I'd be wearing the others.

She used this image of a pair of pants drying on the heater to tell those men: I know your life world, I have been there too. After making this link, she used the connection to tell the men to behave responsibly and to take an active role in changing their own position. This can be seen as an empowering, but at the same time a pacifying direction for change: the direction for change seems to be empowerment but within conformist limits.

A third evoked image is the 'participation ladder'. The participation ladder is an instrument for social professionals to classify the participation level of persons. We argue that this ladder symbolises the Dutch political discourse of 'active citizenship'. The current neoliberal discourse implies that citizens should be able to take care of themselves; they need to be responsible for their wellbeing and social cohesion. For those citizens who are not succeeding, those referred to as 'vulnerable' (*kwetsbaren*), it is the task of social work to

fix this. This line of thinking can be traced back in the projects to where those issues that are considered problematic are intended to be solved at the individual level. The 'ladder' consists of six rungs numbering from 1 to 6; the lowest rung on the ladder labels a person as socially isolated (no social contacts outside of the family), and the highest rung means a person who has paid work and no assistance (van Gent et al. 2008: 10). For that matter, the participation ladder is a metaphor for upward mobility, achieved step by step, on an individual track. The tool is supposed to enable social professionals to identify and evaluate changes in the situation of the participating men in the projects. We found that in one-third of the 23 project plans there is a reference to the instrument. Even though a search on the internet shows that there are many images of the participation ladder, the project plans rarely included an actual figure of 'the ladder' and usually only referred to it in writing. In most cases the social professionals used this instrument in the diagnostic part of the project plan; they explained that their target group is made up of men who are situated at the bottom rungs of the ladder. In the prognostic part of some plans it is stated that the interventions aim to help men move men up the rungs. The ladder is usually used as a backstage tool and not in direct interaction with the participants. This particular usage suggests that social professionals draw on it to legitimate their actions in the context of the current political discourse. Moreover, some social professionals argued that there are specifically masculine consequences of social isolation, including 'low self-worth' and 'frustration', because the men do not adapt to the male breadwinner norm. 'Low self-worth and frustration', according to some of the project plans, results in 'pressure' within the family, implicitly referring to violence. The rungs on the ladder, therefore, also lead to the development of a pacified masculinity.

'Generated' images: the making of a short film

Several projects made use of film, either as promotional material or to send a message to a larger audience about 'their' group of men. Additionally, the social professionals argued that making a film and having the men record their story is in itself an act of empowerment. In the first case, as promotional material, a film can be used for future funding, or to convince other men to participate in the project; in the second, the message is a political one, to oppose stereotypical images of, for example, young fathers with migrant backgrounds, or unemployed men. The third aim is to strive for empowerment by presenting a positive image of the men and making sure the men can look back at themselves in a way that builds their self-esteem, or by making the film an instrument of self-reflection that should lead to changes in their values. The narratives and images chosen in the filming and editing contribute to these goals. We will illustrate this point in an analysis of a film that was made by one of the researchers in interaction with the participants: visual material that we will call 'generated images'.

We will reflect on the kind of masculinity that is produced in the film. First, we will reflect on how the film came about, provide an idea of the content of the film, and give an impression of the relation between what was going on in the project (signified) and what was shown in the film (signifier).

During one of the research visits to the project a social professional mentioned that he was planning to make a short film about the project, which he wanted to present at the end of the trajectory. Iris van Huis, experienced in filming and editing short films, offered to make this film. It would give her a reason to visit the project more frequently, and she could use the material to write a case study for her PhD research. Several meetings followed to discuss the content and the form of the film. Iris wanted to make sure the film was not merely promotional in character, which might cause a conflict with her role as a researcher on the other projects. Exclusively positive images resembling a commercial would render implausible any critical view in the research.

A small hand-held digital camera was used in order to not draw too much attention. Filming occurred while sitting among the participating men, and interviews were carried out one on one in a small meeting room in the building where the project was organised. From many hours of film material, Iris edited a seven-minute film, combining the audio of the interview material with images from the project: the men talking and listening, being active in excursions and a few street images of Amsterdam. The film, after the edit, was structured along three questions: 'Why do you participate in the project?', 'What do you do at [the organisation]?', and 'What does the project do to you?'

After the first question ('why do you participate in the project?'), the film shows the viewer one man explaining that he hardly ever came out of the house before participating in the project, and how he is now more active, for example, using the computer, when he visits the organisation. Simultaneously, images of men getting computer lessons are shown. A second man explains how, after becoming unemployed, he gradually stopped looking for work and how he lost contact with other people. He explains he enjoys the contact with other people, which he had lost. At the same time film shows images of him smiling and interacting with other men. A third man says he was asked to participate by someone from the organisation who visited a local community building. Simultaneously the viewer sees images of a neatly dressed speaker standing next to a flip chart and talking in front of an audience of men, who are seated and listening.

The question 'what do you do at [the organisation]?' is followed by summaries of activities by the men, combined with images of these activities: health education, conversation and discussions about migration and discrimination, talking about personal problems, a visit to the Anne Frank House, education and conversations about raising children. When the subject of raising children comes up, two men explain why they think this topic is important. One of the men says you should not try to take children back to your own

time, 'we have had our time', and that you should raise your children according to 'this time'. The viewer sees a sketch on a television screen of a family fighting over something.

The last question, 'what does the project do to you?', is answered with narratives about the changes the men have undergone on an emotional level: that it is nice to learn something you never knew, even though you are already older; that it is good to be able to express yourself; that it simply feels good to move, to get out of the house, and to belong to a group of people who are nice to each other. The film finishes with a man who says that he likes the fact that in the Netherlands people take care of each other, and that he does not take this for granted, because it costs money and effort. The final shots are pictures of the men performing different types of activities, but always smiling, patting someone on the shoulder, and standing proudly in a group at the *Binnenhof*, the centre of Dutch politics in The Hague.

Looking back at the intention of the film, and what it has become, the question arises of whether the film really represents 'the way it is' and whether this is even possible. In a way, the film is a representation of what actually happened. There is a relation between what happened in the project (signified) and the film images (signifier). Of course, the hours of material have been edited back to seven minutes, and there is a storyline in the film that is created purely by editing. The clearest and sometimes the most remarkable stories of the men are chosen and edited into the film. The voice of the interviewer is left out, as are the pauses when the men are thinking and searching for words. This edit makes the men seem verbally stronger than they are when you meet them face to face and are in direct conversation with them. Their vulnerability, on the other hand, is emphasised by starting off with a selection of sentences that express the men's problems. They also appear to be more open than they perhaps 'really' are because they seem to be disclosing their self-reflections in public, while in reality they are speaking intimately with an interviewer (for more than an hour).

The general meaning the film generates is a positive one: the participation of the men in the project helps to solve the issues of men who have problematic, isolated lives and helps them to learn things, to share their thoughts with each other, to do activities together and to make them feel better. This general message is consistent with conclusions from previous analyses (van Huis, van der Haar 2013). However, the film misses the more critical findings of gender-equality topics given that the projects give little explicit attention to these topics, and there is also the idea that these men are being pushed to adhere to a certain norm of masculinity: of having to act as pacified men.

The film communicates that the participating men are in need of attention and that the project helps them to gain self-worth and feel better and that the project educates them. In a way, the film counters stereotypical images of immigrant men as embodying stern, oppressive masculinities. The men in the film seem accessible, reflexive and

willing to change and to learn in order to improve their lives and those of their families. The film therefore constructs and shows a positive transformative masculinity, as it presents the men in an appealing way, while at the same time it shows their vulnerable and reflexive sides.

Conclusion

In this paper we have shown how social professionals make use of visuals and materiality to be able to work on gender identity and gender roles in semi-public interventions for marginalised men in the Netherlands. Visual materials, spaces and artefacts contribute to the reproduction and transformation of masculinity. Moreover, working with their target group, the social professionals created an ideal kind of masculinity to which they let these men relate.

The social professionals placed the men in *talking* spaces and *doing* spaces and confronted them with images and artefacts and thereby asserted a notion of gender difference while 'degendering' (Connell 2010: 233) practices and spaces that they see as feminine. The spaces, images and artefacts they used were often deliberately masculine (repair shops), or feminine (pink yoga mats; kitchens) and/or were presented as gender-neutral (pictures of men in childraising situations).

Asserting difference can be seen as a strategy that is used by the social professionals to overcome the (theoretical) lack of solidarity men feel with gender-equality issues (Connell 2010: 234), and it is intended as a way of connecting with the men and bringing them together and/or starting up a conversation about gender roles.

Another solution to this lack of solidarity, one proposed also by Connell, is: 'grounding masculinity politics outside pure gender politics, at the intersections of gender with other structures' (Connell 2010: 237). In accordance with this idea, we have seen that the goals of individual empowerment and participation offer an easier basis for the social professionals to connect with men than gender equality does. However, these other goals also create a distraction from the goal of gender equality and generate a 'front stage' – 'back stage' tension: the social professionals less openly framed their actions as gender-equality interventions when communicating with participants. In contrast to, for example, unemployment and discrimination, gender issues were often discussed amongst the social professionals but were only rarely discussed with the participants. We have shown that masculinity and gender-equality issues are primarily addressed with images and through the organisation of artefacts in (de)gendered spaces. The use of images, artefacts and spatial organisation made it possible for the social professionals to work on gender issues without giving them much explicit (verbal) attention.

In the process of trying to subtly address gender equality, visually and materially, as well as in verbal discourse, and in the combination of degendering with the assertion of gender difference, we can see that a pacified masculinity is being created. The creation of pacified masculinity takes place on the level of ideal masculinity: it concerns what pro-

fessionals present as ideal masculine practices, based on their interactions with participants and on the directions of change they are seeking.⁴

Finally, we can see that pacified masculinity is negatively as well as positively connected to the goal of gender equality. On the negative side, the pacified masculinity the participants measured themselves against entails a reproduction of stereotypical male spaces and practices. Although this might be an effective way to connect with some men, it can also serve to exclude those men who are not attracted to these kinds of spaces and practices. Moreover, these stereotypical practices assert the difference between men and women, which could, though does not necessarily, produce inequality. That would depend on the ideals that women in these kinds of projects are presented with, and how the differences between projects for men and projects for women create different possibilities and constraints between sexes. Furthermore, in the projects, there is hardly any assessment of participants' attitudes and behaviour that show that the men do not already have a wider view of masculinity and that they do not adhere to gender equality. Therefore, confronting these men with this pacified masculinity could possibly have no effect or could create patronising situations.

On the other hand, pacified masculinity is positively connected to gender equality goals because it potentially creates less violent men, active and involved fathers, and men with less rigid ideas about what it means to be a man, which can be seen as a way of broadening gender roles and as beneficial for both sexes. The visuals, artefacts and spaces, furthermore, stimulate men to become more aware of their situation and to improve it. For that matter, the way in which these social professionals create a pacified masculinity could be interpreted not only as normalising pacifying efforts, but also as producing material-discursive environments that enable men to be active agents with regard to their masculinity.

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Notes

- 1 Our concept of pacified masculinity is similar to Foucault's concept of docile bodies (Foucault 1977). However, the concept of docile bodies strongly emphasises the structures in which these bodies are formed. We see pacified masculinity (and ideal masculinity) as being created in interactions between professionals and participants, in unequal power relations, but in which participants are active agents. Moreover, in our analysis, there is less focus on the body, and more on identities and practices.
- 2 Peirce uses several different terms for signifier: sign, sign-vehicle, signifying element, representation, representamen. For the signified he uses the term object (Atkin 2013).
- 3 The female observer/researcher in these *talking spaces* was sitting where the participants sat, in the circle, writing in a small paper notebook or on a piece of paper, therefore facing down and listening, or facing the men and observing.
- 4 We have not focused here on changes to the participants' masculinities or on changes in hegemonic masculinity, as that would require a different type of analysis.

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