

Alexander Bentheim

»Listening, both ways, and not trying to convert other people.«

The MännerWege Questionnaire – answered by Jeff Hearn.

I am Jeff Hearn, born 1947 in London, and lived in Charlton, near the football ground, also near to the famous Greenwich Meridian with its Mean Time line. Perhaps that is what got me interested in Geography ... and then colonialism and imperialism.

My family background was respectable, aspiring working class, building on both my parents' strong sense of missing out on their education, even if my father ended up, on retirement, in a senior position. My interest around feminism, gender, and then men and masculinities comes from many directions. For example, I see clear family influences, sister, mother, grandmothers, and especially great-grandmother; and I could also mention my interest arose unconsciously when at seven years old I was suddenly moved from all my girl best friends to single-sex schooling, as was totally normal then – I didn't realize the meaning of this till many years later. Then, again, that educational pattern remained even to single-sex college at university, this was 1965, not 1865. There, »the Sixties« were going on; I did my undergraduate finals in May '68, with student rebellion, social movements (including sexual politics, Irish republicanism, peace, community, green alternatives) and (re)new(ed) forms of organising and education. It was in that space I studied Africa and South Africa; in many ways, class-race politics preceded gender politics.

Later, I started buying the feminist magazine, *Spare Rib*, and then got publicly involved in anti-sexist men's groups (what was then sometimes called 'men's politics') and feminist childcare politics from 1978. I've been involved in various

CR (consciousness raising) groups, anti-sexist activism, policy and practice development, and research and teaching. My personal-biographical approach to boys, men and/or fathers is profeminist, pro-queer, and decolonial. I've been publicly involved in issues around feminism, men and masculinities since 1978.

My academic studies have shifted from Geography to Urban Planning, Sociology, Organization Studies, Social Policy and Women's and Gender Studies, including studies on patriarchy theory and critical studies on men and masculinities. It also took a few years to realize that the personal and political concerns were very close to my academic and theoretical concerns – which have thus been at the centre of my political and academic orientation and work since the early 1980s – even if they tended to use different languages. Over the years, my focus has shifted somewhat. I've worked in universities since 1974, and done a lot of research, teaching and writing around critical studies on men and masculinities, and also on gender, sexuality, violence, age, work, care, organisations, ICTs, cultural studies, social theory, and transnational issues.

Many, if not all of my work environments, have been feminist or influenced by feminism. In 1978 a friend or mine Pete Bluckert and I set a men's group that was (after some hiccups in the first two meetings) broadly anti-sexist and based on consciousness-raising, and also in December that year I become part of a new campaign group for under-fives and their carers, mainly mothers and women. This group followed on from the domestic labour debate and the feminist politics of

care. So, in the late 1970s and early 1980s I was most interested in childcare politics, reproduction, and the critique of fatherhood. I was particularly concerned about most men's lack of interest and involvement in care and work for children: what I called 'childwork', a term that hasn't caught on.



From the mid-1980s I started teaching masters courses on 'men and masculinities' to both Women's Studies students and Social and Community Work students. I also became much more interested in violence, that is, working against men's violences, and this was a major preoccupation, in research, teaching and activism in the 1990s, especially with long-term and focused research on men who have used violence against women and children. Once you get involved in that area, it never goes away, so it is a major theme and interest now.

In the late 1990s I moved to Finland which meant starting again in many ways, both politically and academically. On the first, I was involved in the inauguration of the White Ribbon Campaign and then in founding, initially with three friends, »profeministimiehet« (profeminist men), which ran for quite a long time, carrying out various demonstrations and actions, in favour of feminism and against men's violences. On the second count, my work base changed, and I also had to rethink what might be useful in a new country context. This move also fed directly and indirectly into many international collaborations in the Nordic region, in Europe, especially through EU projects, and beyond, especially with South Africa.

Two driving forces for me are, first, politics, and the political construction of knowledge, and, se-

cond, the need for very thorough and very critical academic work. I now see the urgent need to name men and masculinities, but also simultaneously to deconstruct them and us; to work materially-discursively, transnationally, and against colonialisms, the hegemony of men, and the current gender order. I think it is important to respond to the range of feminisms – for example, radical, decolonial, queer, and much more – and the intersections between them. This is an important theme in the book series, *Routledge Advances in Feminist Studies and Intersectionality* for which I'm co-managing editor with Nina Lykke, and that has now produced over 40 books. I've especially valued international and transnational connections around research, writing, policy change, and activism on (pro)feminism, gender, men and masculinities. An important experience, among many, was being involved in the Swedish part of the European project 'Transrights'.

Now. I'll try and respond to just a few of the questions that the organisers posed.

What is the most lasting social/historical event for you – also in the context of your work?

Personally, there are many things, but I would highlight sitting down, probably in early 1989, with the late feminist academic and activist, Jalna



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Hanner, and agreeing to work together against men's violence to women and children. More broadly, and less directly personally, again there are many possibilities, but how about the **inauguration of Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela** as President of the Republic of South Africa on 10th May 1994.

Three qualities that make you stand out in your work and/or relationships with others?

I suggest, with great modesty – :) – just two (why always the Freudian three!): passion and persistence.

What gives you personal meaning and fulfilment in your professional and private relationships?

Listening, both ways, and not trying to convert other people.

With which institutions and persons did you like to be connected professionally or privately, or still are?

I have been connected with BUG: Bradford Under Fives Group; the Finnish organization of profeminist men (»profeministimieh«); CROME: Critical Research on Men in Europe; Tema Genus, Linköping University. I am still connected with:

International Sociological Association RC32; »NORMA: International Journal for Masculinity Studies«. I'll also mention the Routledge book series, and the international organization, RINGS: the International Research Association of Institutions of Advanced Gender Studies, that I've been strongly involved, with many others, in building up – and now with over 70 centres as institutional members.

Do you have a philosophy of life, or a motto?

Rely on intuition, and do what you can ... in your own context.

What keeps you going in your work – despite sometimes adverse circumstances?

Commitment and rest.

A question that was not asked, but which you would still like to answer?

How about, »What is most important for the future?«: on one hand, connecting critical profeminist work on men and masculinities to the big issues of the planet, ecology, food, water, energy, climate, and also remembering we do not know many things.

