

Transformations of heteromasculine intimacies in Poland in the transition era (1987-1999)

This project will investigate media discourses on heterosexual masculinities in the transition era in Poland. 1987–1999 is a period of profound sociocultural changes – the westernization of culture, the introduction of liberal democracy and market economy, destabilization of the class structure – which led to new norms of what it meant to be a good citizen or worker, friend or parent. Neoliberalism shaped new social rules, in which an individual was responsible for their financial success, looks, sexual life, and ultimately, their happiness. One was supposed to take risks and invest. Self-interest became a new dogma, and features such as flexibility, entrepreneurship, independence, and competitiveness became new virtues. However, the impact of these changes on masculinities in Poland has not been researched yet.

This project will fill in this gap by analyzing changes in the understanding of heteromasculine intimacies. Although intimacy is often valorized positively as a domain of authenticity and privacy, in my project it is important that intimacy is publicly regulated: it is mediated and institutionalized in ways that privilege, for example, monogamy, reproduction, and able-bodiedness (marriage and heredity can serve as handy examples here) and thus lead to inequalities, discontent, and harm. So understood, intimacy is an attractive vantage point to critically approach sociocultural changes that relate to sexuality, close relationships, and the body.

To find out how masculine intimacies changed in the transition era, I will research Polish men's lifestyle magazines, as well as women's magazines and quality printed press. While now largely displaced by online content, in the studied period, lifestyle magazines constituted a crucial source of information on sexuality and relationships. From magazines such as "Pan," "Playboy," and "Gentleman," the readers could learn what behaviors and interests were manly, what one should look like to appear masculine, and how to attract women and have sex. My task will be not only to reconstruct these norms of intimate masculinity and compare them with norms presented in women's magazines, but also to explain these norms in relation to phenomena such as neoliberalisation, westernization, and commodification of intimacy. I will be also interested in the impact of, on the one hand, feminism and, on the other, neoconservative and religious voices, as well as in the ways in which resistances to the changes of the transition era were expressed.

The project's findings will contribute to Polish gender studies, and they will supplement important debates run in today's international academia in humanities in fields such as masculinities studies and critical heterosexuality studies.

The project will result in two English-language articles published in prestigious international scholarly journals and a comprehensive and accessible monograph in Polish.