Serious Games. Competition and the Homosocial Construction of Masculinity

Doing gender is mostly scrutinized by focussing on heterosocial relations. But the social construction of gender also takes place within homosocial settings. The lecture asks how masculinity is accomplished in interactions among men. According to Pierre Bourdieu, masculinity is constructed within the serious games of competition that men play with each other. These games include battles of words as well as physical modes of competition (reaching from sports to acts of violence). Referring to empirical research on communication and interaction in all male groups I will argue that masculinity has a competitive structure that produces distinction and hierarchies not only in relation to women but also in relation to other men. Further I will argue that, with regard to masculine socialisation, the games of competition can be seen as „structural exercises“ in which men not only acquire the rules and the logic of competition, but also learn to like competition itself. Finally, I will explain that competing does not necessarily separate men from each other but ties them together. Male homosocial settings are characterized by a simultaneousness of competition and solidarity. This is the reason why men perceive those settings as an authentic masculine world where they can „be at themselves“.