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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Protectors and Modern Princesses: A Qualitative Investigation of Gender Ideals Among Young Migrants in Berlin

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Abstract

The debates at the nexus of migration and gender often focus on the supposedly diverging ideals Muslims and Christians have about gender. Migrant femininities and masculinities are framed in contrast to liberal, Western values and they undermine the efforts for more gender equality in Western societies. Only a few studies have addressed non-Muslim migrants' construction of, and their perceptions of, the femininities and masculinities of others. To fill this gap, we present the findings of a qualitative social research project where 43 young people aged 16 to 29 shared with us their perceptions regarding gender ideals. In our analysis, we utilize theories developed within women's studies and critical men and masculinities scholarship and adopt an intersectional lens to investigate how young first- and second-generation migrants in Berlin with roots in different world regions imagine their own and others' ideals of masculinity and femininity. Like non-migrant youth, our research participants want their life partnerships to be based on gender equality. Contrary to this, their ideals of femininity and masculinity embrace traditional gender roles, and they mirror the racialized relations in German society. We do not argue that the migrant youth's gender ideals are significantly shaped by their ethnic or religious belonging, and thus they do differ from those of non-migrant youth. However, racial othering is relevant for these migrants' images of their life partners and should be taken under consideration while designing specific policies aimed at increasing levels of gender equality in multi-diverse societies.

Keywords Masculinity · Femininity · Gender ideals · Migrant youth · Racial othering

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Introduction

Migrant and refugee youth in Germany, as elsewhere in Western Europe (Wojnicka & Pustułka, 2019), is framed by popular, and at times also scientific, discourses surrounding religious extremism, social and economic deprivation, educational deficits, and patriarchal attitudes towards gender equality. Frequently, these debates refer to stereotypical opinions or general surveys on gender equality attitudes in the countries of origin of migrants, presuming that migrants' attitudes continue to be largely shaped by socialization in these countries. Sara Farris (2017) and more recently Janine Dahinden and Stefan Marser-Egli (2022) addressed the entanglements of concerns about gender equality with nationalism and xenophobia that stigmatize Muslim men and women in Western Europe. While acculturation might be a long-term process, indeed (Salikutluk & Heyne, 2014), such studies, in particular, if they rely on people's declarations of values, neglect the complexity of gender attitudes among migrants. This is related to, among other factors, the selectivity of migration, gender, and age of migrants (Demircioglu, 2017) and the context of their destination. For example, Nowicka and Krzyżowski (2017) demonstrated that local contexts of integration affect migrants' attitudes. In turn, unifying visions of migrants and a host society need to be avoided if we want to understand and enhance support for gender equality.

Studies among youth in Germany demonstrate that the overwhelming majority declare their commitment to gender equality (Wike et al., 2019), regardless of the religious belonging of the respondents (Becher & El-Menouar, 2014). Also, studies among migrant and non-migrant youth confirm that young men and women in Germany support equal division of care work between parents (Albert et al., 2019). We believe that declarations of commitment to gender equality do not offer a satisfactory picture of gender relations, and they can even be misleading. We know, for example, that Germany is only in eleventh place in the ranking of gender equality in the European Union (EIGE 2023), which might not change soon, given that half of the young respondents of a Shell Youth Study consider the man to be the main breadwinner in the family (Albert et al., 2019). Instead, we consider the ideals of femininity and masculinity at the root of gender relations. In our paper, we focus on first- and second-generation migrant and refugee youth and their ideas around their gender, and their ideal family and partnership. We attend to these young people's gender, ethnic, and religious self-identifications to shed light on how these matter for their perceptions of femininity and masculinity. The material we analyze and discuss in this article, collected in 2019 in Berlin, comprises transcripts of individual and focus group interviews and drawings produced by the research participants.

We believe our results make a valuable contribution to the literature on gender equality, migration, and youth. First, we add insights into the young migrants' and refugees' ideals of femininity and masculinity, which are complementary to German literature engaging primarily with media and public discourses on foreign masculinity. By addressing migrants with diverse ethnic and religious self-identifications we go beyond both German and international studies which tend to

consider Muslim youth or focus on a single ethnicity. While the interest in "foreign masculinity" (Scheibelhofer, 2017; Wojnicka, 2023) has led to more studies on men, we see a gap in research on femininity, in particular migrant women's perceptions of their own and others' femininity. Finally, while it is common to investigate femininities by interviewing women and masculinities by talking to men, we consider how young migrant men and women perceive the femininities and masculinities of themselves and others.

To unpack our arguments, the text is structured as follows: first, we navigate through the complex landscape of migrants' attitudes towards gender roles and gender equality, with an emphasis on the German context. Our exploration begins with a comprehensive review of previous studies, scrutinizing the existing literature to extract valuable insights. We highlight studies that specifically address the attitudes of young migrants, thus providing a foundation for our focused inquiry. We then construct our theoretical framework, drawing inspiration from critical men and masculinities studies and feminist scholarship. This theoretical lens serves as a solid foundation for our study. We then delve into the methodological intricacies, explaining our qualitative research design, sample selection process, recruitment strategy, and analytical approach. Following the methodology, we present our findings, unraveling understandings of masculinities and femininities among the studied population. Finally, we engage in a nuanced discussion that weaves our original findings into a rich tapestry with previous research, offering theoretical and practical contributions that advance our understanding of migrant attitudes towards gender roles and equality.

Gender-Related Attitudes and Migrant (Youth) in Empirical Studies

Migrants' attitudes toward gender equality in Western Europe have been a growing field of scholarly debate over the last 15 years. Various studies based on survey methodologies have investigated attitudes among migrants in general (Spierings, 2015; van Klingeren & Spierings, 2020) or they have compared migrants and non-migrants (Diehl et al., 2009; Röder, 2014). Presuming Islam to impede commitments to gender equality (Maliepaard & Alba, 2016), many studies focused on Muslim migrants. In Germany and other Western European countries, these surveys frequently targeted specifically migrants from Turkey (Idema & Phatel, 2007; Diehl et al., 2009; van Klingeren & Spierings, 2020; Spierings, 2015). Levels of religiosity (Diehl et al., 2009; Röder, 2014; Röder & Muhlau, 2014; Norris & Inglehart, 2012) and gender (Idema & Phatel, 2007; van Klingeren & Spierings, 2020) were thereby considered as factors relevant to the support of gender equality.

Few of these studies focus on migrant youth. *The Children of Immigrants Longitudinal Survey in Four European Countries* (Kretschmer, 2017) encompassed migrant adolescents from Turkey, the former Yugoslavia, and northern, western, eastern, and southern Europe. These, as well as a study among Turkish youth in Germany (Idema & Phatel, 2007; Maliepaard & Alba, 2016 for the Netherlands), demonstrate an inter-generational shift towards egalitarian values, which is stronger among young women than among young men. Similarly, the *Shell Study* surveying

youth in Germany (Albert et al., 2019) concludes that women, regardless of their ethnic backgrounds, are more likely than men to support progressive gender roles.

It is important to note that these studies considered gender equality to be a cultural and declarative, rather than a structural and performative issue, one linked the question of attitudes towards gender equality with a concern for the degree of acculturation of migrants at their destination (Idema & Phatel, 2007; Röder & Muhlau, 2014). It is more common for explorative, qualitative studies to rely on theories developed within gender studies. Given their focused character, however, few studies thematize gender roles and the masculinities and femininities of young people with diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds. One such study encompassed 120 male and female migrants in the UK from different countries (Batnitzky et al., 2009), and shed light on the dynamic negotiations of their masculinities and a shift towards flexible and strategic forms of masculinities. This study and others pay attention to the social contexts in which masculinities are negotiated by migrants (Pustułka & Bell, 2017; Wojnicka & Nowicka, 2022), in particular, vis-à-vis the public discourses embracing Islamophobia (Hoque, 2019; Mac en Ghaill & Haywood, 2014, 2022), which produce the figure of "dangerous, Muslim men" (Razack, 2008).

The German scholarly discussions on migrant masculinities also pick up the question of how young Muslim men are depicted in the media (Lunenborg, 2014) and how these images impact their masculinity performances (El Mafaalani & Toprak, 2017; Gärtner, 2017). Individual studies also present analyses on non-Muslim masculinities, such as Russian (Zdun, 2007). Analyses of perceptions and negotiations of migrant femininities are less prominent in German literature. Those studies which address the intersections of sexism and racism (Palenberg, 2020; Sing, 2007) often focus on the care-work sector and address how women from Eastern Europe or Asia are constructed as empathetic and domestic in contrast to emancipated Western European women (Goel, 2019; Lutz, 2011; Rohde-Abuba, 2016; see Morrice, 2016 for the UK). Others address how young migrant Muslim women cope with tensions between traditional roles imposed on them by their families, and expectations from the majority society, for example in the context of sports (Burrmann et al., 2017). Similar research in the UK shed light on how young Asian women's identities embrace racialized experiences and how their femininities are increasingly hybrid and fluid (Ratna, 2011).

While this research highlights the racialization of migrant masculinities and femininities, another body of work demonstrates how the question of gender equality as such becomes a moral imperative upon which boundary-making is legitimated. Honkasalo (2013), for example, showed how gender equality becomes a marker of Finnishness in various youth contexts. Studying interactions in a classroom in Switzerland, Duemmler et al. (2010) analyze how male minority pupils subscribe to non-equality models of gender relations to subvert their subordinate status within an ethnic hierarchy. This research is an important reminder that gender equality is never neutral, and it cannot be seen separately from the social contexts in which femininities and masculinities are negotiated vis-à-vis racial and ethnic hierarchies.

Masculinities and Femininities in Theories

Women's studies and critical men and masculinities studies offer useful concepts and approaches to the study of young migrants' perceptions of femininities and masculinities. Connell's hegemonic masculinity theory (2000a; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005) is a good point of departure in the analysis of the most desired forms of masculinity. This theoretical approach is, despite the criticism of it (Beasley, 2008), still highly relevant for identifying hierarchies and power dynamics among different groups of men, men and women, and men and other genders that may represent and perform hegemonic, complicit, and marginalized masculinities that resonate in sexually and ethnically diverse societies. Connell's theory is supplemented by the concept of protective masculinity, a particular form of hegemonic masculinity understood as'men's patriarchal dominance over women' (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005), children, and other individuals. Protective masculinity relies on physical and/or economic dominance and financial and/or physical protection of women and children. In exchange, "(…) protected individuals need to recognize and accept the authority of the protector and their own subordination. Otherwise, the dissenting person or a group can be denied protection" (Wojnicka, 2021:3). Protective masculinity can be triggered by the perceived need for defending women (and children) from other men, which indicates the hierarchies between men (Wojnicka, 2022). This often happens at the intersection of racialized perceptions of other men, and it can draw on the 'foreign dangerous masculinity' frame (Scheibelhofer, 2017). In our data, we can identify narratives pointing to various forms of protective masculinity, as well as to the awareness of racialized foreign masculinity related to Muslim refugee men.

Likewise, femme theory, which can be seen as women's studies' response to (over)theorized discussions about masculinities, is useful for our analysis. In this approach "(…) femme refers to the deviations from patriarchal norms of femininity—whether by race, ability, sexuality, class, gender/sex, or the value afforded to femininity" (Hoskin, 2019: 10). As femininity is "a process through which women are gendered and become specific sorts of women" (Skeggs, 2001: 297), femme can be seen as an attempt to navigate femininity in a way where an individual embraces selected elements of heteronormative and cis-normative femininities, and simultaneously overcomes and ignores constraints linked to femininity in the patriarchal structure.

Finally, intersectionality is an immanent constitutive element in all the evoked concepts, yet it often remains implicit (Christensen & Jensen, 2014; Wojnicka & Nowicka, 2022). Intersectional sensitivity requires us to analyze how specific masculinities and femininities are produced in particular times and places, and how they intersect with racial, ethnic, and religious self-identifications and ascriptions. Thus, ideals of femininity, masculinity, racism, Islamophobia, and xenophobia must be seen as interlocking, and people experience their gender and other social statuses simultaneously (Collins, 2019).

Research Methodology

The paper is based on the results of a qualitative study conducted among young migrants, refugees, and children of migrants who live in Germany. The study, entitled *Friendship, partnership, and family. Normative ideas of young men and women with migration experience* was conducted between 2018 and 2020.

Research Participants and Sampling Strategy

The research participants were recruited in youth clubs and Sprach Cafes in the three Berlin districts of Pankow, Wedding, and Kreuzberg, and via snowball strategy. In our sampling, we aimed at the maximum variation of countries of origin, ethnicity, religion, gender, and length of stay. Ultimately, we included forty-three young people aged 16 to 29 in the study. Twenty-nine of them self-identified as men and fourteen as women. Most of our research participants were born in Germany (23), while the rest are either refugees (8) or migrants who recently arrived in Berlin (12). Some of the research participants are EU citizens, and some have German citizenship or are dual citizens. Others identified as refugees or refused to inform the researcher about their residence status. Moreover, some referred to their elective ethnicity, thereby relating to the heritage of one of their parents. Most of the research participants were students in institutions or schools of tertiary or higher education. Some had already held internships or jobs such as sales clerk or hairdresser. Most of our research participants were unmarried and childless, although we spoke to two married men (one the father of a daughter) and five married women (two of them mothers). All except one, who declared being bisexual, identified as heterosexual cis-gender men and women. Nineteen research participants were self-declared Muslims, four identified as Christians, and the remaining claimed to be atheists or agnostics.

Research Instruments and Data Collection Process

In our project, we used various research instruments: semi-structured individual interviews, and focus group interviews with visual elicitation; we also conducted an art-based workshop, followed by an exhibition and video-captured interviews. This article is based solely on the interview material with individuals and groups. The script for the individual in-depth interviews (IDI) included open questions on friendship; their current, future, and ideal families; fatherhood, motherhood, parenting, and partnership; religion and its role in their lives; gender and sexual diversity; and general plans and aspirations for the future. We conducted 28 individual interviews, which were audio-recorded and transcribed. All except four were conducted by one of the authors; the remaining interviews were conducted by a female researcher native to Germany. The gender, age, and social status positioned the main researcher as an outsider to the research group, but her migration experience and foreign accent

helped her to create a rapport with the participants. The age of the junior researcher positively impacted the interviews. We believe that both researchers were read as white.

The same two researchers implemented four focus-group interviews in three different youth clubs, whose staff provided significant technical and organizational support and showed commitment to the study's aims. We constructed the groups to include those who migrated to Germany themselves and those born to immigrant parents in Germany. Each session began with a screening of the first 20 min of the first episode of *Mad Men*, an American television series. The plot of the show tracks people's personal and professional lives in the early 1960s in New York, thereby illuminating gender performances and relations typical for a time and place that can be characterized as hyper-traditional and sexist. The reason for choosing this form of visual elicitation was to trigger the research participants' narratives on gender relations in general, as well as to draw their attention to traditional role models, masculinities, and gender-equality ideals and their transformations. The participants commented eagerly on the excerpt and linked it to their own current situations and observations. The researcher facilitated the discussion, asking questions about the participant's perceptions of contemporary gender relations in Germany and other countries, gender-based discrimination experiences, and challenges to gender equality. Following this discussion, the participants were invited to engage in thematic drawing (Kuhn, 2003), in which they drew how they envision an ideal man or woman. They were instructed to think of either how they would like to look, a person they would like to date or marry, or a person they admire. A few participants wrote down the characteristics of their ideal man/woman, while most expressed themselves through images. Afterward, the participants presented their drawings to the group, explaining what they represented and why; others could then ask questions, comment on, and discuss the drawings. The discussions were audio recorded and transcribed, and the drawings were scanned and archived in a way that linked each drawing to its author during the analysis phase.

Analytical Strategy

Our analysis of the transcripts was guided by the principles of the interpretative approach in the tradition of Alfred Schuetz (1962) and Thomas Luckman (Berger & Luckman, 1990 [1966]), which emphasizes the life worlds experienced by people as given. This analytical framework puts into focus how individuals interpret some situations, as they direct their attention to some aspects, thereby neglecting others, according to the stock of knowledge they have. In our engagement with the empirical data, we applied an abductive analysis (Svennevig, 2001) which is rooted in the epistemological tradition of Schuetz's phenomenology. It means our analysis did not aim to verify a pre-existing assumption, nor did it aim at a causal explanation derived from the empirical observation. The aim thus of our analysis was to probe different interpretations to suggest theory developments, which requires a continuous reflective dialogue among researchers, data, and theory. According to a three-stage process suggested by Svennevig (2001), we adopted a hypothesis derived from

our prior theoretical knowledge matching our research observations in the field in the first dialogical step, used deduction in the second step to spell out its necessary and probable consequences, and proceeded inductively in the third step to assess the plausibility of the hypothesis based on the empirical data, to contribute to theory (cf. Lipscomb, 2012).

Research Quality and Trustworthiness

To attain a high level of quality and reliability, we took measures to ensure the meticulous selection of our sample, emphasizing its heterogeneity and ensuring a sample size that surpasses the commonly accepted standards in qualitative research (Guest et al., 2020; Hennink & Kaiser, 2022). This approach aligns with the credibility criterion concerning data collection. We additionally used theoretical triangulation to enhance the credibility of our findings (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). To enhance transferability, we applied and refined established theories and concepts in gender and migration research, such as hegemonic masculinity theory, protective masculinity, and femme concepts. The dependability of our study was ensured by subjecting the research findings and initial drafts to scrutiny by peers—experts in gender studies, sociology, and migration studies during thematic conferences and seminars that we organized or attended. Their feedback was incorporated into the final version of the paper. Lastly, confirmability was guaranteed through joint analyses and an in-depth reflection on our positionality and its influence on the research process, as discussed above and additionally detailed in our methodological publication published in 2023, which is based on field notes and offers a comprehensive understanding of our research approach (Wojnicka & Nowicka, 2023).

Findings

Protector or Boxer: Ideal Masculinities in a Racialized Context

During both individual and focus group interviews, our research participants discussed masculinities much more intensely than femininities and other expressions of gender. Young men and women seemed to be more inclined to describe an ideal or typical man, rather than an ideal or typical woman. The prioritizing of masculinity in narrations mirrors the societal engagements with masculinity, and how it is steadily questioned and negotiated. Men in contemporary Western societies need to prove their masculinity (Duckforth & Trauter, 2019). In our interviews, both female and male research participants described an ideal man, a man they admire or would like to be, thereby referring to hegemonic (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005) and protective (Wojnicka, 2023) notions of masculinities, which focus on the man's role as (family) protector and his physical strength and courage, but also engagement in sports as an indicator of the desired masculine performance.

The hegemonic and protective masculinities were particularly strong in narrations about the participants' future family, a family they would like to start one day. Our

interview partners defined the male gender by contrasting masculinity and femininity (Connell, 2000b). In particular, male participants often stressed the differences between these two (cis)genders, which they presented as essential, and which are (or should be) reflected in the person's character, activities, and social roles. For example, Jon,[1] a 17-year-old Muslim man born in the Middle East, when asked about his preferences for his future family, told us that he would like to have a son and a daughter because:

> (…) having two guys sucks. You have to wait (for them) all night. But one [child] can dance ballet and one [the other child] can be a soccer [player] or a boxer. Yes, girls should do ballet. Something quiet and simple. And the boy should do the extreme. So boxing and then soccer.

Jon added then "(…) my father told me this, too" (Kretschmer, 2017). For him, the differences between the genders are undeniable, and this impacts people's roles, tasks, and activities. Therefore, boys should do sports that make them "dangerous", as Jon put it.

Similarly, Alex, an 18-year-old atheist born in a post-Soviet republic, fantasized about having a son and a daughter, for whom he envisioned very different but complementary roles:

> And this ideal image would be an older son who then looks after the future daughter or her younger sister, so to speak, as a protector. That would be nice.

Our female participants share this image of family and the female and male roles in it. They also positioned boys and men as protectors of more vulnerable family members, in particular their younger sisters. Paula, a 16-year-old non-religious girl born in Berlin to German and Eastern European parents, said: "(…) a girl and a boy: If it's a big brother, he's protecting the little sister. But I find it sweet." And Anna, aged twenty-five, an atheist born in a post-Soviet republic, indicated how this is a widespread, quasi-natural family model:

> If my daughter has problems, then her older brother can help her. And I have many friends with children different in this way, an older brother and a younger daughter.

The figure of the male protector appeared in most of the collected narrations on family and was produced both by female and male research participants, regardless of their ethnic or religious self-identification.

The core of the protector's role is the men's physical strength, which is best illustrated by a drawing created by Max, an 18-year-old male participant, born in Berlin from immigrant parents, who self-identified as Muslim. During one of our group discussions, he portrayed Muhammad Ali (Fig. 1). To Max Muhammad Ali symbolizes the ideal man: physically strong, famous, and admired by millions, which situates him on the top of masculine hierarchies (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Also, Muhammad Ali represents a person focused on his goals,

[1] All names are fictitious; the names of the countries are also changed, but regions remain unchanged.

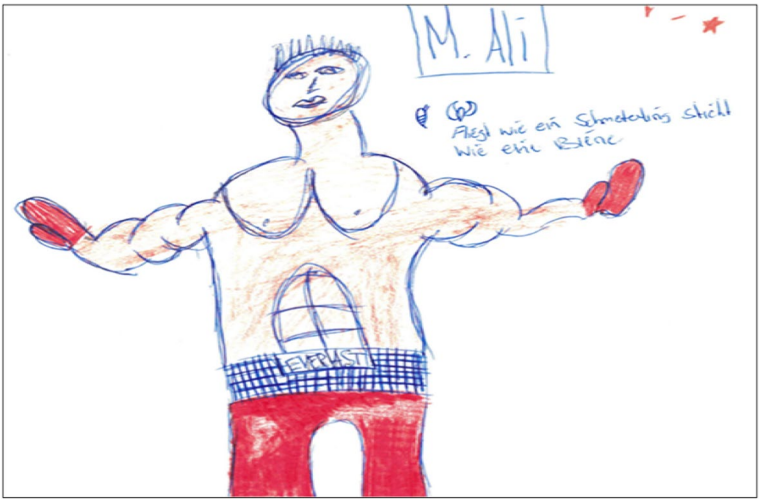

Fig. 1 Portrait of Muhammad Ali, followed by one of his phrases "Float like a butterfly, sting like a bee". (The color version is available online)

working hard and consequently towards success, and hence he "incorporates not only physical fitness, muscle, skill, and good looks, but also a whole set of physical experiences through which this version of masculinity is forged" (Woodward, 2007:64). Max explained to us why he drew Muhammad Ali:

> I drew my idol because he started weightlifting because someone stole his bike and he really wanted to know who stole his bike and then he wanted revenge. Really wanted to know who stole the bike.

Max included in his drawing Ali's famous boast about his boxing style, "float like a butterfly, sting like a bee", which was popularized and interpreted as a life motto of the boxer, inspiring people to turn words into deeds. Max's drawing and quotation indicate how this particular type of masculinity engages a man's abilities, and the willingness to (physically) confront other men which also involves a certain degree of (physical) violence in the "masculine games of competition" (Bourdieu, 2006: 52).

The figure of Muhammad Ali thus resonates with the Western cultural script of "dangerous foreign masculinity", a popular script often utilized in the context of Western European discourses on young Muslim men and male Muslim migrants (Hoque, 2019; Scheibelhofer, 2017; Wojnicka & Nowicka, 2022). These are depicted as confrontational and violent. This discourse is mirrored in the narrations produced in our interviews by the young migrant men which embrace racial othering in relation to ideal masculinity (Mac an Ghaill & Haywood, 2014). Interestingly, such racialized ideals of dangerous masculinity were absent from the narrations produced by our female research participants, who instead stressed the protective aspects.

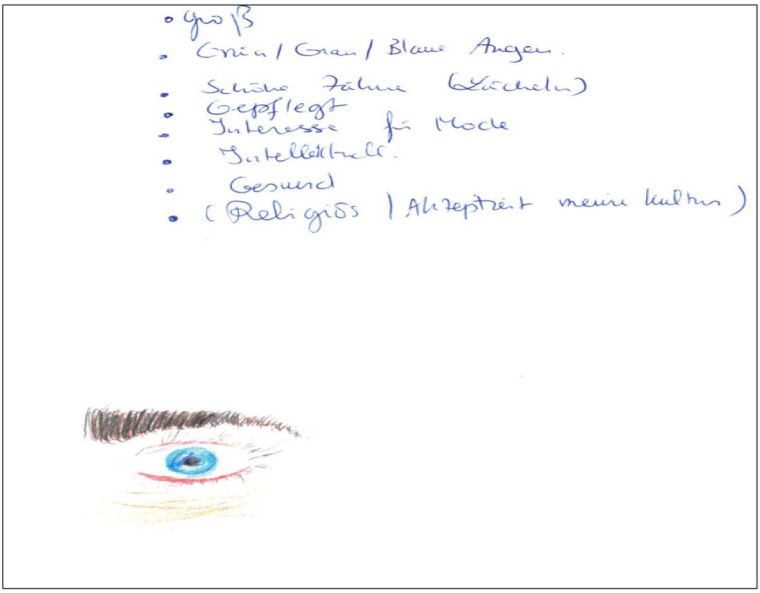

Fig. 2 A picture of a singular blue eye with dark eyebrows flowed by the description (in German) of the most desired traits of a future male partner (tall, green/grey/blue eyes, nice teeth/smile, well-groomed, interested in fashion, intelligent, healthy, religious/accepting my religion). (The color version is available online)

When narrating about their ideal life partners or husbands, female research participants even explicitly distanced themselves from foreign, non-white, and dangerous masculinity. These narrations depicted a white and economically privileged man who could be located in any Western European metropolis. During the focus group interviews, our research participants were asked to visually represent such ideal partners. These drawings, sometimes texts, situate the ideal male partner in a heteronormative context (Fig. 2).

The list of features in Fig. 2, provided by a 29-year-old Muslim woman born in Berlin, is about the ideal partner's appearance (tall; green, grey or brown eyes; nice teeth; groomed), physical condition (healthy), and modern outlook (interested in fashion, religious but tolerant, intelligent). These features suggest both the whiteness of the partner and his class belonging, as well as belonging to the majority as contrasted to the research participant's background ("religious/accepting my culture"—authors' emphasis). The drawing of a blue eye emphasizes the desired whiteness of the ideal partner.

Little Princess or Femme: Ideal Femininities in Narrations of Boys and Girls

The desire to be in a relationship with a white person was common among male research participants as well. Their drawings suggest that the Westernized, yet stereotypical imagination of female (physical) attractiveness is widespread among

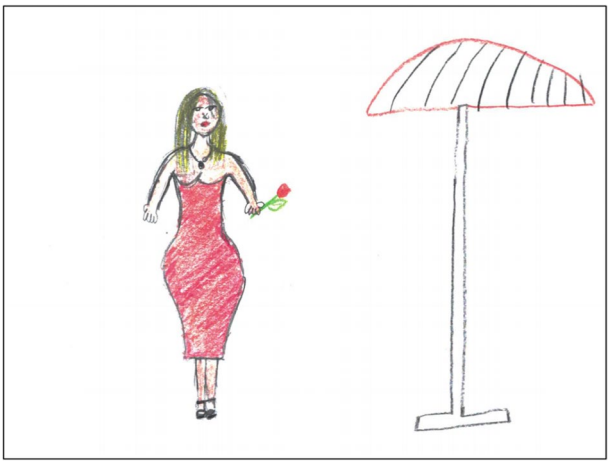

Fig. 3 A portrait of an ideal female partner (white, blond in a red dress) in the company of a beach umbrella. (The color version is available online)

this group. The ideal woman, according to, for example, a 17-year-old Muslim boy born in the Middle East, has blond hair and blue eyes and wears clothes accentuating her figure, especially in the areas of the hips and breasts; the red rose in her hand suggests a romantic character (Fig. 3).

Strikingly, none of the drawings portrays a woman in a headscarf or a black woman, even though we provided the participants with a wide range of pencil colors. The male migrants' visual representations of the ideal partner's femininity seem to embrace a racialized white ideal of a woman, and they correspond to female participants' visualizations of an ideal male partner (Fig. 2). Yet the males' oral accounts reveal a more complex notion of femininity, one in which an ideal woman is subordinated to a man. For example, Daniel, a 16-year-old Muslim boy born in a post-Yugoslavian republic, said his ideal romantic partner should be "just normal", and when the researcher asked him to explain what he means by a "normal woman", he explained:

> Respect. [she] Has respect. Doesn't smoke pot, doesn't smoke. Doesn't drink alcohol. Doesn't go out with other guys. At night. What's it called? Go to parties. I don't want that.

His ideal partner is a woman who stays at home, pays respect to him, and is self-controlled. It is the femininity subordinated to protective masculinity, and as such it is necessary for its construction.

In the individual and focus-group interviews, the research participants discussed the transformations in the positioning of women and men in society. They often stressed that women (in Germany and Western Europe) are free to choose their lifestyles, or whether they work or stay at home. Yet their acceptance of female liberties often remained tight to the German context, and thus localized

and culturalized. Adam, a 19-year-old second-generation migrant born in Berlin who described himself as Christian (but did not specify his parents' origin) said:

> It depends on the country of culture. In Germany, for example, one can say that this is often how men help their wives. I often hear that they also take their children to school.

However, he also adds that perhaps it was better when men went to work and women stayed at home, by which he suggested that the trend toward female emancipation might not be altogether for the better. Several participants added that while they are generally tolerant and accepting of different lifestyles and family types, they would rather prefer to be the only breadwinner and would appreciate a partner who is willing to stay at home. Sami, a 22-year-old man from Iraq, said "I don't care if they work or not, but my wife doesn't. She must stay at home, and just cook".

Such traditional perceptions of femininity were also revealed in narrations about future family composition: the fantasy of an older protecting son, was supplemented by the fantasy of a "little princess, the little daughter", to use Alex's description. But the figure of a sensitive, family-oriented, supportive, and empathetic woman is present also in the narrations produced by those male research participants who declared to be clearly in favor of the emancipation of women, like Tom (a 24-year-old non-religious student, born in Jordan and raised in the UAE) who said:

> I love girls. I love children. I don't have any preference, but I would prefer girls because girls are so smart, they are lovely. And if they want something they come to you, I saw my sisters when they were children. They came to my father, they brought him some tea, you know. Daddy, my father. Even if they get married, they still care about you.

Our female participants tended to share the ideal of a "little princess" daughter when narrating about their own future families. Yet these are not necessarily the roles they want for themselves. When speaking about their desires and aspirations, these young women describe an emancipated or progressive ideal of femininity, one often influenced by the images (re)produced by social media. One of them is the image of "global girls", a "femme type": ambitious, assertive, self-confident young women. Such femininity embraces selected elements of heteronormative and cis-normative femininities, and simultaneously overcomes and ignores constraints linked to femininity in the patriarchal structure (Hoskin, 2019). Jana, a 20-year-old Muslim female born in Berlin into a migrant family, explained to us how she apprehends the role of social media in promoting images of women and their role in contemporary Germany:

> Women have become a lot more self-confident today, especially because of social media and such. Because there are so many influencers who try to make women feel special, no matter how they look, no matter what your religion, what nationality, or where you come from. So who you are, almost anything is accepted. And I think that's a big difference. In the past, you didn't say anything. So, most of them didn't say anything if something happened to them or something. But these days it's all about really getting your point across.

Fig. 4 A portrait of male and female skaters. (The color version is available online)

Narrations produced by women asserting that "boys and the girls, they can do everything. And they can, they are same" (Ana, a 20-year-old Muslim refugee from Somalia, a young mother) commonly referred to socially constructed roles for men and women. Yet the same research participants emphasized the biological differences between the genders, thereby reproducing a binary understanding of gendered differences. Figure 4, a drawing by Elvira, a 22-year-old female of Eastern European background born in Berlin, is illustrative of such understandings. Here, both figures are dressed similarly, and both are presented as skateboarders. But one has long hair and wider hips than the other. And Maria, an 18-year-old born in Germany into a migrant family from southern Europe, said, with her future child in mind:

> Yes, yes, everyone is different. Well, there are also quite a few guys who have a bit of feminine traits or are just a bit shyer. Or more sensitive or something. Then there are some who are totally distracted. And want to play football and everything. And then, the other way around, there are also the others who also like to play soccer and are very wild, and then there are other girls who are also sensitive and calm. Well, I don't think that's bad. My child is then just the way it is. And then I think that's nice too (laughs).

Maria's narration emphasizes gender binarism while stressing a diversity of gender performances.

Maria's narration and Elviras's drawing of skateboarders (Fig. 4) are typical of all the narratives we collected. These demonstrate great similarities of a binary understanding of gender, regardless of the research participants' gender self-identification, ethnic or religious background, age, or citizenship, and length of stay in Germany. None of them questioned gender binarism. Moreover, this radical cis-normativity was accompanied by strictly heteronormative visions of intimate relationships.[2]

[2] During the individual and group interviews, the researchers prompted discussion about sexual diversity. The analysis of these narrations is included in our other publication (Nowicka & Wojnicka, 2021).

Discussion

The narrations we studied reveal that young migrants and refugees consider the ideal of a man as a protector of his family. This protective masculinity (Wojnicka, 2023) is present in accounts given by both men and women, irrespective of their age and ethnic or religious self-identification. Yet when asked to think about their aspirations, young migrant men envision an ethicized form of hegemonic masculinity (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005), that is embodied as both protective and dangerous performances of their gender identity. Concerning an ideal life partner, young migrant women partly distance themselves from such masculinity and wish only for a male protector, preferably coming from the Western cultural context, hence without a "dangerous" component. Interestingly, we find no accounts of more egalitarian caring masculinity (Wojnicka & Kubisa, 2023).

Thereby, when picturing an ideal life partner, our female research participants depicted a white man, while the male interviewees referred to foreign masculinity. We think this indicates how these young people embrace racialized masculinities and femininities in Germany. Young men seem to oscillate between racialized discourses on "dangerous masculinity" and their desire to be like Muhammad Ali, a strong and proud Black man who still fulfills the Western ideal of success in how he controls his strength. Also, this result points to how women striving for a more equal position within their own family see this as more likely to be realized with a white, European man by their side, who simultaneously has a higher social status than their migrant friends and family members. This reveals the gendered ethnic hierarchies of masculinities, in which whiteness is associated with emancipation, tolerance, and respect for gender equality and the process of constructing gender ideals has a significant intersectional dimension.

The collected narratives uncover also how femininity is subordinated to protective masculinity and projected by our research participants on their visions of their future family, in particular the relations to their daughters and wives (in narrations produced by men), and on daughters (in narrations of women). That said, when narrating about themselves, or their future selves, the women we interviewed are more likely to depict femme femininity or relate to the ideal of global girls (Hoskin, 2019). Women are also more likely than men to accept and enjoy a diversity of gender performances, which aligns with the results of German and international surveys (Albert et al., 2019). They are more eager to bridge the traditional, religiously underpinned views of family and femininities and the more progressive models associated with Western, European, or German society. They are, however, also more likely to reflect on the tensions this role brings to them. They wish for themselves more freedom and declare to actively demand it (McRobbie, 2010; Hoskin, 2019). Having this said, like the men, the women we interviewed also insist on biological differences between binary genders, and physical traits of (traditional) femininity and masculinity. Here, physical appearance is pivotal, as we saw in the drawings of the visible musculature of men, and the round hips and long hair of women. Narratives that go beyond gender binarism were not captured.

Theoretical Implications

This scientific paper has made a significant theoretical contribution to the field of critical men and masculinities studies, enriching the discourse on established theories such as hegemonic masculinity and foreign masculinity. By introducing the concept of protective masculinity, the paper not only expands the theoretical landscape but also underscores its relevance in the context of migration studies. Furthermore, the inclusion of the less explored femme theory in the discussion adds a novel dimension to the research, demonstrating its applicability in migration and integration studies for the first time. The paper not only broadens the scope of existing theories but also paves the way for more inclusive and comprehensive examinations of masculinity and femininity within the complex dynamics of migration.

Practice Implications

Despite the study suggests that the gender ideals characteristic for young migrants and refugees that live in Berlin are, at first glance, rather traditional, we believe our findings bear implications not only for theory but also for social practice. Firstly, the results show that protective forms of masculinity are still popular among young generations and the link between masculinity and physical protection/breadwinning is strong. This means that the interventions and policies aimed at increasing gender equality among young people should pay attention to challenging traditional forms of masculinity and promote alternative ways of performing them, such as caring masculinity (Wojnicka & Kubisa, 2023). Secondly, the economic independence of women should be encouraged, and young girls should be given more tools that will empower them. Moreover, given the racialized dimension of our findings, social initiatives aimed at migrant communities should acknowledge and embrace their ethical and religious diversity, simultaneously challenging their patriarchal elements and searching for progressive ways of doing gender in their reach cultures and traditions, that go beyond Westernized understandings of gender equality.

Conclusions

Young people's ideals of femininity and masculinity embrace traditional gender roles and mirror the racialized social relations in Germany. Depending on their ethnic and religious self-identifications, young migrants' and refugees' ideals of femininity and masculinity in various ways embrace the racial othering with which they are confronted in Germany. As well, young men and women differently conceive of an ideal life partner, and these ideals often differ from their imaginaries of an ideal man or woman. We thus suggest that future research should better account for differences in values related to abstract or concrete situations involving gender equality. Further, a strictly binary biological understanding of genders stands in contrast to young women's appreciation of the flexibility of gender social roles. In this respect, we see the potential for future investigations.

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Data Availability In order to protect the anonymity of study participants, data ate not available openly but can be shared upon request.

Declarations

Conflict of interest The authors of this paper have no conflicts of interest to report.

Ethical Approval This study was approved by the German Centre for Integration and Migration Research's review board, where both authors were employed during the project's execution.

Consent to Participate All participants consented according to the procedures outlined in the application that was approved by the board and signed a consent form where they agreed to participate in the research project.

Consent for Publication All research participants agreed to use their data in the publication.

Human and Animal Rights This article does not contain any studies with animals performed by any of the authors.

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