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“A life of violence”: Reflections on activism, policy, and research around men, masculinities and violences

The urgent social problem of violence, especially men’s violences, has been a long-running thread in Jeff Hearn’s life.

In his presentation, he will reflect on some meeting points. A first and very obvious issue is the simple importance of not forgetting violence in researching gender relations and sexual relations. Violence is also a challenging research focus in diverse ways, simultaneously in respect of several different spheres of activity: it hails being, working, politics, and theorizing, and differences within and between them. This is even though it brings some dangers, such as academic heroism, ends justifying means, working violation. Violence provides a useful test of how theories operate, and their implications. Focusing on violence can not only suggest that epistemology, ontology, methodology and ‘the subject’ are not gender-neutral, but also not violence-neutral. Moreover, violence is not fixed, but historically and culturally constructed, defined and contested. How violence is named, seen, referred to – what is included and excluded – whether by lay actors, professionals or experts, is part of how it is (re)produced. This is one route to the ‘materialist-discursive’. Yet how to research all this is less clear. There is a tension between narrowing measurement of violence and the undecidable complexity and scope of violence. This parallels a paradox between the need to focus on men’s violence and the danger of separately, even isolating, this from the rest of social life, especially sexuality. Violence frequently invokes sexuality, and vice versa – yet it is more usual to speak of sexual violence than violent sexuality.

In discussing these meeting points, the presentation will draw on several forms and sites of violence: men’s violence to known women (Hearn 1998, 2012, 2013); organisation violations (Hearn and Parkin 2001); the erotics of wounding (Burr and Hearn 2008); and ICTs (Hearn, 1996, 2014).