Adolescent Masculinities in Sociology and Photography (Bochum, Jan/Mar/Jun 25)

Ruhr-Universität Bochum, Germany
Deadline: May 31, 2025

Christian Wandhoff, Ruhr-Universität Bochum

Adolescent Masculinities in Sociology and Photography: Visual Youth Cultures in the Global North since 1960.

Dates: January 15-16, March 19-20, June 11-12, 2026.
Organizers: Prof. Dr. Katja Sabisch, Prof. Dr. Änne Söll, Jule Fischer, M.A., Christian Wandhoff, M.A.

Since the 1960s, emancipated, pluralistic and independent youth cultures are on the rise. Even though they are mostly male-dominated, questions of masculinity have rarely been explored until now. Our aim is to close this gap by connecting sociological knowledge with visual culture which seem to be closely and ambivalently related. Therefore, we would like to examine how, when young men are concerned, sociology and visual culture interact.
We are interested in the sociological and photographic discourses of adolescent masculinities, their function in creating knowledge about male adolescence and its visual representation. How do scientific knowledge and artistic/visual knowledge on male adolescents relate to one another? How do they differ? To examine the visual and discursive conditions that make young men visible since the 1960s, we are planning three workshops in 2026.

January 15-16, 2026 - Adolescent Masculinities I: Sexuality, Vulnerability and the Body

This workshop will focus on the male adolescent body and the vulnerabilities associated with it. Physical transformations and the discovery of one’s own sexuality do not only play a crucial role in adolescence but are extremely precarious. The act of being photographed engenders a sense of vulnerability, irrespective of whether it is performed by another person or the subjects themselves. In this workshop, we would like to discuss how photography and sociology deal with young masculine bodies and the topic of sexuality and vulnerability. Significantly, the visibility of frequently marginalized male youths has increased in both the media and the public sphere in recent years. Meanwhile, violence against these groups has intensified, resulting in a "crisis" of male youth representation, particularly concerning marginalized identities. Therefore, we are particularly interested in the intersections of photography and sociology, and the representations of masculine adolescence addressing gender identity, sexuality, race, class, and disability, and the vulnerabilities therein.

Contributions are invited to address but are not limited to the following questions:

 How does photography change or determine the sociological discourse of male adolescent vulnerabilities?
 What methodologies can social and cultural research employ to analyze the ambivalences of male youth' vulnerabilities? In what ways do these methodologies interact with photography and art historical approaches?
 What are the differences between normative (white/heterosexual) young masculinities and marginalized masculinities concerning their vulnerabilities in photographic or sociological research and what language is used to describe or document them?
 What are the ways in which vulnerabilities of female adolescence are reflected in photography, and how do these differ from those of males? How are these vulnerabilities discussed in the social sciences?
 Social media has been referred to as the medium of self-empowerment and control. In what ways are these ambivalences of social media discussed in the fields of photography and sociology, specifically regarding the vulnerabilities of the adolescent masculine body?
 What visual languages/aesthetics are used on social media and how do they compare to artistic photography?
 How are idealized male bodies present in social media and artistic photography?
 The depiction of sexuality, particularly the sexualization of the youthful male body is a crucial aspect of photography. How are the associated vulnerabilities and power dynamics reflected in social and photographic discourses?
 If we are experiencing a crisis of male youth representation in the media, it is necessary to consider alternative photographic strategies. If such strategies are indeed required, what form could they take?

March 19-20, 2026 - Adolescent Masculinities II: Homosociality and Hierarchization

Although gender norms have been changing in the Global North since the 1960s, the traditional image of masculinity continues to dominate. During adolescence, this traditional image is reinforced through rites of passage in homosocial groups which are significantly reflected and documented in photography. Homosociality emerges through the school system and sports or fraternities that hierarchize masculinities through privileges, exclusion, and competition. Such male associations are essential for the stabilization, formation and strengthening of hegemonic-patriarchal masculinities. The associated homosocial practices are not only characterized by self-optimization and violence that come with physical risk-taking behavior. They also draw fragile lines between (supposed) homosexuality and homosociality. Therefore, we are particularly interested in contributions that address the ambivalences of homosociality in photography and sociology while reflecting gender identity, sexuality, race, and the hierarchization and privileges attached to them.

Contributions are invited to address but are not limited to the following questions:

 In what ways are the rules, rites and constraints of homosocial groups reflected in photography and sociology?
 What insights can photography and sociological research on homosocial groups offer about marginalized young masculinities?
 What are the ways in which sociology and artistic photography engage with the demarcation of

homosexuality within homosocial and supposedly heterosexual groups of young men? How do they negotiate the ambivalence between homosexuality and heterosexuality within these groups?
 The promotion and visualization of (hyper)masculinity is particularly prevalent on social media, where it is propagated through regimes of bodily optimization within homosocial groups. How are concepts of re-masculinization and optimization reflected in artistic photography and social discourses?
 How can photography and sociology research provide insights into the dynamics between effeminate, caring friendships and love on the one hand, and hypermasculine competition and violence within homosociality, on the other?
 In what ways are the effects of homosociality, such as its association with privilege and the resulting hierarchization of young men, discussed within the fields of visual sociology and photography?
 Homosociality is also a significant aspect of female adolescence. How does female homosociality differ from male homosociality? In what ways is female homosociality discussed in photography and social sciences?
 How does the relationship to women and girls change during male adolescence and how is this reflected in photography?

June 11-12, 2026 - Adolescent Masculinities III: Knowledge, Empowerment and Institutions

This workshop deals with the politics of sociological knowledge and visual discourses on adolescent masculinities. We are especially interested in (sociological, political, pedagocical and/or grass root) strategies of empowerment that use photographic techniques. Until the 1990's research on the Sociology of Youth in the Global North lacked a sufficient analysis of masculinity and male youth. Intersectional research perspectives have garnered strength since the 1990s, but the narrative of "youth in crisis" persists. How are queer and black masculinities constructed within this narrative? How have photographers tried to counteract the image of male youth in crisis? Additionally, we are interested in aesthetic and research strategies that empower marginalized young men through photography. How have they shaped the (visual) discourses on young men?

Contributions are invited to address but are not limited to the following questions:

 How can sociological and photographic discourses on youth and their politics of knowledge be described?
 What can interdisciplinary sociological and visual approaches of analysis look like?
 How does visual youth work shape visual discourses on emancipatory masculinities and which aesthetics are used to empower (marginalized) young men?
 How do photographic images unfold their emancipatory powers? Which techniques and motives help to counteract marginalization and foster empowerment?
 What role do institutions such as schools and sports clubs but also archives and museums play in the discourses on male youth?
 In what ways can institutions contribute to the empowering of male youth and how does this interact with visual culture?
 How does the sociology of youth shape our knowledge of male youth and where are the blind spots?

Early career researchers and established researchers from various disciplines (e.g. (visual) sociology, cultural anthropology, art history and history of photography, cultural studies, media studies and gender studies, etc.) are invited to apply with an English abstract of max. 400 words by e-mail and a short CV of half a page. Presentations of 20-25 minutes plus discussion are planned.
A publication will follow the workshops. All participants will be asked to hand in their paper two weeks prior to the workshop. The workshops will be held in English.

Travelling and accommodation expenses will be covered.

Please send your application to viskurse@ruhr-uni-bochum.de by 31 May 2025.

Reference:
CFP: Adolescent Masculinities in Sociology and Photography (Bochum, Jan/Mar/Jun 25). In: ArtHist.net, Mar 31, 2025 (accessed Nov 22, 2026), <https://arthist.net/archive/44950>.