ABSTRACT

“I’M NOT SO MASCULINE. I TRY TO USE MORE OF MY FEMININE SIDES.”
- Reproductive and subversive gender formations among male Swedish preschool teachers, hairdressers and nurses.

Marie Nordberg, Karlstad University and Göteborg University, Sweden

Presented at Gender and Power in the New Europe, the 5th European Feminist Research Conference
August 20-24, 2003 Lund University, Sweden

In Men’s Studies masculinity has been linked to men and femininity has often been constructed as the opposite pole to masculinity (for example Connell 1995; Ekenstam et al 1998; Kimmel 1997; Kuosmanen 2001; Nilsson 1999). The term masculinity has been used to describe men’s lives, experiences and discourses and concepts that constitute male subjects. The term has been criticised for classifying men like subcultures and thereby miss the hybridisation of discourses and cultural flows that both reproduce and change gender orders (Demetriou 2001; Nordberg 2000, 2002). By using the term masculinity it is possible to study masculinity norms as a concept both linked to and free from the male body. But, as the sociologist John MacInnes (1998) has point out, is the term masculinity also problematic and restricted because it is mainly associated to men. Jeff Hearn (2000) argues for abandon the term and focus on men’s practices.

In Women’s Studies is often femininity in the same way linked to women and masculinity looked upon as a problem. Due to this, in my opinion, unhappy dualism is the imagination that’s reproduce men and women as two totally different categories upheld. When femininity is constructed as an opposite pole to masculinity has femininity mainly in analyses been seen as something that men distance them selves from and defines one self as opposite to (e.g Kimmel 1997). The often unproblematised link between men and masculinity in Men’s Studies has contribute to that men’s materialisation of femininity, ”male femininity” and women’s materialisation of masculinity, ”male femininity”, has been mostly unnoticed in Critical Studies on Men (Gardiner 2002; Halberstam 1998, 2002). The sociologist Lisa Adkins (2002) argues that people in the labour market to day are expected to perform both masculinity- and femininity concepts and to daily move between both concepts. Adkins high light that new concepts of gender hierarchies are emerging in late modernity that are difficult to analyse with the gender theories that often is used today.

This paper, taking point of departure in Halberstams and Adkins discussion and Judith Butlers concept of gender as performative and produced by discourses, discusses how men working in non traditional occupations use the concepts of masculinity, femininity and how heterosexuality as a hegemonic norm is structuring there gender formations. The discussion is based on 31 interviews with men and women working as pre school teachers, hairdressers and nurses in Sweden and field observations at eleven workplaces collected between 1996-1999. The aim is to develop new analysis concept of men’s gender formations in late modernity and some suggestions are made.

The results from the empirical study shows that men in non-traditional occupations both use the concepts of masculinity and femininity to reproduce hegemonic gender formations and to subvert them. In the construction of an male identity some concepts of femininity be in great demand, while other concepts concerning dressing, soft movements and tasks that also is linked to the stereotype of homosexual men as effeminate are seen more problematic because of the heterosexual hegemonic norms.

Referenser

Author:

Ph.D student Marie Nordberg
Division for Social Sciences, Center for Gender Studies
SE-651 88 Karlstad, Sweden
Marie.Nordberg@kau.se