ABSTRACT

The father as the hero of the day

Clarissa Kugelberg, IBF, Uppsala Universitet

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"We have a new guy at the marketing department, a young man, around 28 years old. He has a rather high-pressure job in the company, being a marketing manager, but he has taken a lot of responsibility for his children. He started by saying that he doesn’t work longer than four o’clock, because he must fetch his daughter. This was indisputable and everybody was very surprised and assumed that he would not stay long - that was their attitude. He was much more challenging than I ever was”.

This story is about a young man in full career, who openly expressed his parental responsibility. The young father was manager at the marketing department at a multi national company, one of the departments under the hardest pressure. He left meetings, saying that he had to fetch his daughter at the daycare centre. Fathers a little older than he spoke about him with respect and almost a little awe. Women said that he was worth his weight in gold.

In this paper I shall explore how men and woman discuss and construct ideas about change towards gender equity in relation to parenting. In the above presented discourse fathers who openly showed fathering practices at the workplace were seen as a main figure in the change for gender equity. Fathers in couples who to a great extent shared care work were described by their spouses as clever, whereas women working equally hard were not spontaneously described as a “ever mothers”. In the stories about “clever fathers”, they appeared as clever in comparisons with other men they knew, with men in general and with older generations of men and they were not in comparison with women.

My discussion derives from two anthropological studies one about working mothers and fathers, the other about young adults and from some recent articles from the mass media. The paper explores how change is constructed in relation to structures and politics and to agency.