Abstract

Title: Men’s Parenting. On Men’s Perceptions and Experiences of Fatherhood

Author: Lars Plantin

Language: Swedish

Key words: Fatherhood, Family, Gender relations, Men, Masculinities

SE 405 30 Göteborg


ISSN: 1401 - 5781

The objective with this thesis is to examine men’s perceptions and experiences of their fatherhood and how this influences the male self-image. The study is based on qualitative interviews with 30 couples with children in different ages: infants, children between the ages of 5-7 and teenagers. The theoretical point of departure for the study is a social constructivist perspective where fatherhood is considered to be a process that changes over time and that is shaped by different relations and structures in men’s lives. Particular attention has been paid to the life historical experiences, the interaction in everyday life and the structural conditions; all three important aspects of the fatherhood process that influence the men’s way of thinking and behaving as parents.

The study shows that, within the framework of the patriarchal power structures in society, a number of different expressions for and experiences of fatherhood develop. Previous experiences, individual goals in life, the relationship between the parents, which phase you are in in parenthood, the relation to the labour-market or the family’s financial situation are some examples of the factors that contributed in creating variations in the construction of fatherhood. Some distinguishing patterns emerged in the descriptions of fatherhood that show how both traditional and new forms of expressing gender are constructed in everyday practice. Besides economic provision, most men took a considerable responsibility for the technical and heavy maintenance of the family’s material assets. Slightly less than half of the couples had also a relatively traditional domestic work distribution.

At the same time all the men expressed a strong emotional attachment to the children and to family life. Fatherhood was described as a “maturity process” towards a wider behavioural repertoire and a more balanced male self-image. In a majority of the couples the fathers participated also in most of the everyday life domestic tasks. As opposed to the couples with a more traditional responsibility distribution, the “modern” couples constructed gender and parenthood on the basis of how and not if you participate in different domestic tasks. In total, the study shows thus that many of the men have begun to change in the direction of an increased involvement in family life. A comparison with an English parallel survey emphasises however how strongly this process is dependent on support in form of structural changes and constructive socio-political initiatives.