Abstract

Title: Finnkampen – A Study on Finnish Men’s Lives and Social Careers in Sweden

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Key Words: Masculinity, manliness, men, Finnish men, sex, gender, gender relations, homosociality, class, class relations, working class, middle class, urbanization, modernisation, migration, emigration, immigration, ethnicity, ethnic relations, Sweden-Finns, Finland, Sweden, marginalization, integration, social care, social services, alcohol, drugs.

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The aim of this study is to describe and analyse experiences, living conditions and processes that have influenced Finnish immigrant men in Sweden and the resources and strategies they have used to handle and control their lives as immigrants. An important issue has been whether it is possible to connect the separate social careers, marginalization and integration to the different living conditions and circumstances that have influenced the men in Finland and Sweden respectively.

Thirteen “marginalized” and 15 “integrated” men have been interviewed about their journey from early childhood in Finland to a life as immigrants in Sweden. The interviewees were born between 1920–1960 and their average age at the time of the interviews was 53 years. A majority had moved to Sweden in the 1960s and the 1970s.

The autobiographies of 50 Finnish men living in Finland have also been used as background material. This multifaceted problem area has been analysed through gender, class and ethnic perspectives and on individual, group and structural levels.

To summarize, the results show that emigrating from one cultural environment to another and the effects of the modernisation process have put these men to the test and that they have had different abilities to control and handle the new and quickly changing circumstances. During the years when there existed a large supply of unqualified work, with demands of neither formal professional qualifications nor language qualifications, those who were less well-educated also had good opportunities to find work on the labour market. From here on the development has favoured those who have been able to keep up with progress, i.e. men who have been socialised in emotionally positive and career-friendly environments, men who also as adults have kept this attitude toward future and evolution. These men have had more favourable conditions to keep up with the competition against others. This type of attitude has been particularly important in an immigration context, which has further reinforced the competition between and within the social groups, but also between Finnish and Swedish masculinity.

The data shows that a flexible masculinity is a vital resource. This means not being bound by tradition but being prepared to pass both class and gender barriers. This open attitude has been valuable on a labour market where manual and traditionally male work opportunities are less numerous than before.

Inside the relation sphere, this flexibility has been just as valuable. It has been important that present conditions and circumstances directed emotions, actions and negotiations, instead of traditions and other patterns that no longer are of current use in a new life situation.

As for the use of alcohol and drugs, this has mainly been connected with men from dysfunctional families, traditional and poor countryside, lower working class milieu and certain pronounced homosocial environments such as professional travelling and collective housing. Family men and men from stable future-oriented environments, the modern countryside, upper working class and middle class environments have not developed these types of difficulties to the same extent.

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