

Diewald, Irmgard (2016).

Men in childcare: the discursive construction of masculinity between heroism and general suspicion.

Presentation on the 26th EECERA Annual Conference, 1.9.2016, Dublin, Ireland.

Abstract

This research analyses how gendered identities are constructed in the political and scientific debate on men in childcare. The focus of analysis is the availability of gendered subject positions for men who work in this field.

This paper builds up on previous research on how men position themselves as preschool teachers (Buschmeyer 2013, Heikkilä 2015). In my contribution I will consider the question from a discourse analytical point of view. My special interest is the gender discourse in the debate about men in childcare and the construction of gendered subject positions (Foucault 1998; Butler 1991). The discourse analytical corpus consists of texts and interviews from Sweden and Germany. From the methodological point of view it was analyzed using interpretative analysis (Dreyfus/Rabinow 1994). All interviewed persons have signed an informed consent before the interviews. Afterwards the interviews were anonymized.

There is a struggle between different gendered subject positions. Masculinity is seen as the special located in a naturalized ambiguity. It is constructed between two poles; either men are glamorized as the so called 'modern men' who are important for children as paternal role models or they are problematized as potential abusers. Furthermore gender boundaries are shifted. A so-called new masculinity is constructed in delimitation to the constructed femininity of the vocational field and an old no longer appropriate masculinity.

It is discussed how masculinity respectively men can be constructed as something 'normal' in childcare. How can social gender patterns be challenged not only on practical, but also on political and scientific level?

Keywords

men in childcare, gender, masculinities, discourse analysis, subject positions

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Men in childcare: the discursive construction of masculinity between heroism and general suspicion

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INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES ON GENDER
BALANCE AND DIVERSITY IN ECEC – EECERA 2016
01.09.2016

Content

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- Theoretical perspective and methodology
- Comparison between Germany and Sweden
- Results
- Conclusion

Aim and research focus

Special interest:

the gender discourse in the debate about men in childcare and the construction of gendered subject positions

Which gendered identities are constructed in the political and scientific debate 'Männer in Kitas/fler män I förskolan'?

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Theoretical perspective/ methodology

Foucauldian discourse analysis

Definition subject (Foucault 1982, S. 212)

- subject to someone else by control and dependence
- tied to his own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge

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Corpus of data (Germany and Sweden):

10 interviews (with people involved in the scientific/political debate)

20 political and scientific papers

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Comparison between Germany and Sweden

- No difference in the percentages (4%)
- Difference in the importance of the debate

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‚fler män i förskolan‘

- Debate in the 1970s
- Agenda Setting 2013
- Ministry of Education
- Labour shortage



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‚(MEHR) Männer in Kitas‘

- Agenda Setting 2010
- Ministry of Family Affairs
- Koordinationsstelle 2011-2014
- Equality



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Results

Continuum between men in childcare as heroes and general suspicion .

Range from a new/caring masculinity to a violent/abusive masculinity.

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New/caring masculinity

“And I think the situation is much better in Sweden so that the fathers take care, **very natural part** of taking care of the children today. So it's very much more common you see male, you see male persons taking care of small children, going to cafes, take a part of the period where you are parental leave and so. So that for the situation is more changed. The young men say this is quite normal for **updated masculinity**, this is normal. **Being a man and taking care of children, its normal, its normality**” (Sweden VI).

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New/caring masculinity

- Naturalization with a positive implication
- Normalization of mal gender construction in the life course
- New/caring masculinity in delimitation to an old, traditional masculinity
- Modern heteronormative masculinity

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Violent/abusive masculinity

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„And one of them talked about one experience that they have been within, he had this **little girl** who really **liked him** and she **wanted to sit on his knees** and they were **alone in the room** and she was just **sitting very very close** and then one of the other teachers came in and stopped like this and he had the feeling that she was thinking something about it. But than the other day, and he thought a lot about it, but they never talked about it, but then the other day one of the other persons working there, a woman she was changing the diapers of a boy and she was kissing his belly you know they were laughing and she was kissing his feet and so on.

And then he said in this interview, if I have done that it had been very difficult for me, I would never have done it. So of course it's a little bit problematic for them, because they are always with these suspicions. That maybe they are not a good man“ (Sweden II).

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Violent/abusive masculinity

- Problematization from two perspectives
- Produced in contrast to the caring female preschool teacher
- Focus on the biological gender (sex)
- Problematization of gendered physicality

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Conclusion

- Subject positions are always produced as something special
- Conflict between different subject positions
- Interaction between processes of construction and naturalization

Masculinity as the special located in a naturalized ambiguity

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Thank you for your attention!

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