

## **From macho to modern? Exploring changing masculinities in forestry**

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This paper presents the first preliminary results of an on-going research project investigating performances and negotiations of gender in Swedish forestry workplaces. Forestry has historically primarily implied physically demanding, manual harvesting work, with practical and symbolical associations to men and certain masculinities. In contrast, modern forestry implies new advanced technology, new organisational forms and new skill requirements which – together with more women entering the sector as managers, academics, professionals – might change gendered practices and discourses in this area. Forestry workplaces thereby provide empirical examples of possibly subversive negotiations about the links between gender identity, work and profession. The research project examines tensions between old and new gender constructions in relation to organisational and technical changes.

The paper highlights the ways in which employees (both men and women) describe and interpret the increase of women managers in one of the major forestry companies in Sweden. It also focuses men forestry workers meaning making of gender and gender (in) equality in relation to work. The study thereby contributes to the literature on critical masculinity studies in men dominated industries.

The empirical data consist of 1) qualitative interviews with 17 employees in one of the major forestry companies in Sweden, 2) the result of an employee survey sent out to all employees and managers in the same organization, 3) a comprehensive survey sent out 2011 to all women graduates from Swedish forestry educations and a mirror group of men forestry workers.

Forestry has historically primarily implied physically demanding, manual harvesting work, with practical and symbolical associations to men and a specific form of rural, blue-colour, nature-mastering masculinity. Symbolizing these notions are often the remote huts, perceived as a male “escape zone”, allowing traditional masculine behaviour to be preserved despite the challenges posed by emerging, modern masculinity norms (Johansson 1997; Petterson 2000). In contrast, modern forestry implies new advanced technology, new organizational forms and new skill requirement. Together with more women entering the sector (today, approx. 10% of forestry workers are women) as managers, academics, professionals these changes seem to have the potential to challenge traditional gendered practices and discourses in the industry. Existing national employment surveys focusing on forestry graduates (Lidestav & Västerlund 1998; Lidestav et al 2011) indicate that the increasing number of women partly has challenged previous all-male structures. Women reports of sexual harassment have declined, as have gender-based differences in employment contracts. Nevertheless, existing gender segregation of positions and occupation suggest that rather than being altered, spaces of exception possible for women to break into, have been created, enabling the general association with male and masculinity to prevail.

Today, most forestry organization have an outspoken need for increased gender

equality and a self-critical sense of pace change being too slow among forestry companies, forestry higher education and public authorities on national and regional level (DS 1991:31; DS 2004:39). Needed is knowledge concerning gendered processes in forestry. However, when forestry work has been addressed from a gender perspective the focus have foremost been placed on women (Follo 2002), as illustrated both by existing reports (Thor 1994; S:son-Wigren 1996; Burrell 1991, Eriksson et al 2011, Carlsson 2008 and gender equality actions such as different networks for women forestry professionals (cf. Brandth et al. 2004 for a Norwegian discussion). The studies that do investigate norms of masculinity have focused on media representations and job-ads (Lidestav & Sjölander 1997; Brandth & Haugen 2001, 2005). Existing studies provide important insights of the experiences and meaning makings of women forestry workers as well as nuanced discourse analyses of the ways in which representation of forestry work is based on masculine embodied experience of physical forestry work. Missing in the literature are however ethnographic investigations of gender relations, gendered processes and knowledge concerning the experiences, meaning makings and subjectification of men forestry workers.

The preliminary findings indicate both stability and change of gendered practices and discourses in the forestry company being studied. On the one hand, many of the men employees see the increase in women manager as a positive change in the hitherto heavily men-dominated organization, thus welcoming a negotiation of gendered practices and discourses in forestry. On the other hand, some men employees perceive the increase of women managers as a consequence of gender equality quotas, favouring unqualified women at the expense of qualified men. Some men even stated that they saw no point in applying for manager positions, as these were pre-folded for women. Skills and competences associated to forestry professions thereby remain associated to men and certain masculinities, even as more women become managers in the company. The sceptical men thus contested the on-going negotiation of gendered practices and discourses in forestry.

One particularly interesting theme found in the material was narratives of men's meaning making of what they perceived as the gender equality actions taking place in the industry. The aim of this paper is to further investigate these narratives and the ways in which they construct norms and notions of 'gender', 'forestry work' and 'forestry workers' as well as 'gender equality' and 'gender equality actions'.