

Abstract

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The Manly Company On the Construction of Gender in Corporations

There exist numerous studies of gender in organizations that document structural gender differences in contemporary workplaces. This study asks instead "How is it possible that these structural differences continue to exist?" and, "Why is gender difference still of vital importance in working life?" In an attempt to answer these questions, a study of newcomers' socialization into the organization was conducted.

The study focused on a trainee program. Five men and five women who took part in the trainee program were repeatedly interviewed during two years, with the aim of following their enculturation and the concomitant gender construction. Additionally, a picture of how the company enculturated the newcomers was constructed through observations of central events such as recruitment, trainee courses and trainee meetings.

The progress of the trainee program is described with help of the concept of rites of passage. This frame of reference enables a view of how the genders are constructed and reconstructed on a micro level. The study results, thus framed, help to explain how it is possible that women managers are welcome by the company but nothing happens on the practical level. Two groups of people are involved in the study - the management and the trainees, both of whom have the best possible intentions. The management encouraged women to follow a career, and the trainees assumed that gender did not matter for a person's ability to succeed in a career. Thus both groups wanted to dissolve the gender difference, but somehow did not succeed. Sometimes the intentions prevail and the gender difference vanishes, but in the taken-for-granted actions it is mostly re-constructed.

The theoretical discussion concerns organizational rites of passage and socialization interpreted as enculturation and acculturation. The rewriting of socialization as enculturation concerning gender, is the aspect that has not been elucidated earlier. In the silent processes of enculturation and acculturation, in what is taken for granted, the ideas of gender are re-constructed.

Key words: gender, gender construction, socialization, enculturation, acculturation, rites of passage, trainee program, recruitment, role modelling

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