

ABSTRACT

Title Catastrophes and Men. Explorative Studies of a Complex Relationship.
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Keywords Catastrophe, Srebrenica, Titanic, the discothèque fire in Gothenburg, men, sex, gender, patriarchy, gender segregation, gendercide, critical studies on men.
Distribution Gothenburg University, Department of Social Work, PO Box 720, SE 405 30 Gothenburg, www.perfolkesson.se, perfolkesson@telia.com
ISBN 91-86796-55-0
ISSN 1401-5781

The present work is a doctoral dissertation in the field of social work with a gender perspective. Three case studies with an explorative approach were conducted, with the following research questions as the point of departure: a) is there a catastrophe-related gender segregation regarding men, and b) if so, what does this segregation look like in terms of related forms and phenomena? The work has its methodological basis in grounded theory, which is designed to generate theory that is firmly grounded in empirical data. Through theoretical sampling, information regarding three catastrophes was collected – the ethnic cleansing in Srebrenica in 1995, the sinking of the Titanic in 1912, and the discothèque fire in Gothenburg 1998.

The central finding of the empirical studies suggests that there was a catastrophe-related gender segregation regarding men in all three cases. This was primarily evident in the fact that men collectively organized to defeat the causes and consequences of the catastrophic events that had taken place. Women were evacuated from the scene while men were left behind, or ordered there to help combat the catastrophe. Other phenomena that proved to be related to the main phenomenon, i.e. catastrophe-related gender segregation, were, for example, polarized normative patterns regarding men that pointed toward correctness, loyalty, and maximal performance on the one hand, or incorrectness, cowardice, and treachery on the other, and also altered psychological states as part of a process of mental mobilization in preparation of catastrophe-controlling tasks.

The catastrophes conditioned a redefinition of the relationship between men and women where the consistent structural priority given to men was temporarily suspended. To a great extent, men were collectively exposed to deadly risks, and in two of the three cases the actual mortality of men was very high. The findings have led to the conclusion that men are relatively expendable in the event of a catastrophe. This conclusion, which is part of a grounded theory of the relationship between catastrophes and men, is discussed in the final chapter of the dissertation in relation to existing theory regarding sex, gender, and patriarchy, and phenomena like dissociation, civilization, and safety.

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