

## Abstract

Title: The Suburb in the Head. Young Men's Thoughts on Gender and Sexuality in the New Sweden.

Author: Nils Hammarén

Key words: Identity, Gender, Masculinity, Sexuality, Heteronormativity, Ethnicity, Place, Class, Suburb, Youth, Post-structuralism, Racism, Multicultural

Distribution: Atlas Publishing House, The Arena Group, Drottninggatan 83, SE-111 60 Stockholm

ISBN: 978-91-85677-61-0

ISSN: 1401-5781

This thesis is a study of how gender and sexuality is constructed among young men in 'multicultural' suburbs in Gothenburg, Sweden. Through group- and individual interviews with 39 young men age 17-20, the thesis explores the manner in which masculinities and sexualities are constructed in relation to a variety of intersected meanings such as class, race/ethnicity, gender, sexuality and locality.

A central point of departure is that identities are processes of 'doing'. The theoretical perspective is grounded in post-structuralist theories focusing on gender and performativity. The American philosopher Judith Butler argues that gender identities are an effect of how we talk and act, rather than being a fixed 'natural essence' grounded in biology. In addition to Butler, the study also builds on so-called critical men studies. Men do not constitute a single category; they are instead differentiated along axes of class, sexuality and ethnicity. The theoretical chapter also discuss post-colonial theories in relation to the impact of stereotypes, such as the problematic 'immigrant young man'/'multicultural suburb', on young men. Furthermore, the post-colonial perspective problematizes questions about ethnicity and cultural identity in a 'multicultural' racialized hybrid society. Discourse analysis is used as methodological tool. Discourses shape and influence how we act, our identities and narratives about ourselves. Accordingly, the study tries to relate the young men's narratives to discourses in order to understand their meanings, why they express themselves as they do and how their conceptions are constituted.

Gothenburg is an ethnically and socially divided city and some areas, especially those defined as 'multicultural', are often conceptualized in media and the public debate as problematic and uncivilized. The empirical findings show that the young men are well aware of the problematic representations that are attached to the suburb and its citizens, especially 'immigrants'. These representations can be burdensome for the young men, but also function as a starting-point for different types of gendered and sexual resistance strategies. One is to criticize 'rich' or 'Swedish' individuals living in 'snobby' and wealthier neighbourhoods and depict men in these areas as ridiculous, "loose" or feminine. These strategies and the staging of a respectable 'immigrant/suburb masculinity' can be interpreted as compensation for subordination. Another way is to criticize 'traditional immigrants' or 'immigrant men', who become 'the Other', and stage a gender discourse. This seems to be a way to 'disidentify' subordination and aspiration to 'do' 'Swedishness'. The young men's narratives also show how they identify themselves with a kind of 'both and' or 'neither nor' position, and consequently challenge the rigidity of dualism. The different positions can be occupied by the same informant in different or in the same interview settings.

The empirical findings also shows that the young men often state that they want a girl who is not 'loose', i.e. one who has not slept with many boys. However, the picture is far from unambiguous. The young men also express an ambivalent, hybrid and/or oppositional masculinity, claiming that gender-equality and women's rights are important and criticizing structures of hegemonic masculinity. It would seem that the construction of a gender-equal masculinity be a way to question dominant and problematic representations of 'young men in suburbs' or 'immigrant young men'. However, this does not mean that boys have complete sexual freedom. A 'loose' boy may be stigmatized as an unmoral and unreliable 'player', which decreased his chances of a serious relation with a girl.

Furthermore, the thesis shows that the boy group often functions as an important arena for young men's socialisation and identity formation. The power relations that develop in the group, for example practices of excluding individuals who do not fit the norm of masculinity, strengthen the group and the boys' kinship. Thus, heteronormativity plays an important role in the boys' practises and influence and restrict their gender- and sexual identities and possibilities to act outside the norm. However, the heterosexual norm is not clear-cut; many boys express ambivalence about their feeling towards homosexuals, other times they are more tolerant, and on still other occasions they express gender overarching attitudes and positions.

The thesis also shows how assigned racialized representations are used and rejected by the young men in different ways in the narratives. The boys' conceptions of gender and sexuality uphold as well as undermine ethnic boundaries and hierarchies, not the least in relation to the choice of future partners or wife's/husbands and in the discussion about 'honour related violence'. What the young men say shows that it is problematic to conceptualize categories as absolute and fixed and that those positions are relational, contextual, hybrid and mobile.