

Institutionen för pedagogik, kommunikation och lärande

Kan Batman vara rosa?
Förhandlingar om pojkighet och normalitet på en förskola

av

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Abstract

Title: Have you Ever Seen a Pink Batman? Negotiating Boyishness and Normality at a Preschool.

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Gender research has long argued that gender is constructed through social processes. This study explores how this is done among children at pre-school. To achieve this objective the study focuses how norms related to boyishness was negotiated among children in their everyday activities. The theoretical framework rests on concepts from post structural feminist theory, queer theory and critical masculinity research. The material is produced through ethnographic method and two years of field work.

At preschool girls and boys acted in a wide variety of different ways not distinctly connected to their gendered identities. One main finding in the study is that out of this maze of practices certain acts are made visible and categorized as typical boyish or girlish. Included in these processes of categorization are assumptions about certain behavior as more correct and natural for different sexes, resulting in discursive positions such as “typical” boys, for example. However, this position is ascribed low status both among teachers and other children. The most attractive position is described as the “competent child”. When norms about gender differences are made relevant these are foremost manifested in negotiations about specific markers and signifiers, such as voices, movements, specific haircuts, colors and toys. The negotiations did usually not concern if a boy or girl could be part of a play but if the appropriate signifiers were used. The issue was not if a girl could take the position of Batman but whether he could wear pink or not. In that way one can say that construing gender preceded actual experiences of sexually defined bodies.

In the study it is concluded that the importance of belonging to a specific gender or sex is accentuated in specific spaces, but less relevant in other. The difference between the spaces lies in how they are opened or closed to a normative gaze. This gendered gaze is manifested not only by actually being seen by teachers and children but also in architecture. To evade this normative gaze children created “secret” spaces either by building small shelters or negotiating specific rooms of friendship. A further conclusion is that when age is emphasized norms about gender are equally stressed. The notion of “being a baby” consisted a very strong marker to police the border between being a sexual subject or not. The study brings out the crucial importance age have also for small children in processes of negotiating and naturalizing two different sexes and the importance of being gendered to be understood and normal.