

## **Men in Feminised Workplaces**

A guide to overcoming stereotypes, challenging traditional perceptions of masculinity and creating new roles for men

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# ***MEN IN FEMINISED WORKPLACES***

- A GUIDE TO OVERCOMING STEREOTYPES, CHALLENGING TRADITIONAL PERCEPTIONS OF MASCULINITY AND CREATING NEW ROLES FOR MEN



CeLi – The Danish Research Centre on Gender Equality  
at Roskilde University



*Men in Feminised Workplaces*

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By *Kenn Warming*, December 2005

CeLi – The Danish Research Centre on Gender Equality ([www.CeLi.dk](http://www.CeLi.dk))  
at Roskilde University

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*»Male nurses – Is that really what It's called?«  
»Aren't all male hairdressers gay?« »All  
preschool educators do is to wipe children's  
bums, isn't it?« »Cleaning is a job for women,  
not for men.«*

Men working in women's professions often give rise to a lot of prejudices. But why? Are these men less masculine than other men? Or do they rather represent a new, more tolerant and less stereotypical male gender role? If less restricted by stereotypes, are men then eager to challenge traditional dichotomised perceptions of man/masculinity and woman/femininity?

By means of analyses of interviews with more than 160 Bulgarian, Danish, Italian and Polish men working in traditional women's occupations, this publication tries to answer some of these questions. Workshops were also held in each partner country.

The overall intention is to contribute to the debate about men and masculinity by arguing for the male gender role as neither fixed nor unchangeable. And that in complex societies, such as in Europe, there is room for the existence of multiple masculinities. Hopefully men (and women) will acknowledge that men have meaningful roles to play in feminised occupations – just like the last three decades have shown in the case of women in traditional male occupations.

# IS THIS A MAN?

*A man must and should be able to change a diaper and comfort a child, and embrace an upset child when it's left off in the morning.*

*Patients need somebody to hold hands with. Somebody they can talk to about life and death. Somebody who can comfort them when they feel depressed. [...] You're not less of a man If you hold the hand of a patient who is upset – or put an arm around their shoulder.*

4

*My wife and I agreed to share an incredible number of things. [...] Keep house, shop for groceries etc. I do whatever she does. [...] The only thing I can't do is to breastfeed.*

*At home it's my wife who assembles the IKEA furniture and uses the electric drill. [...] She is also very fascinated by VCRs and computers. [...] At present she takes home the largest pay cheque, so I'm the one who leave our child off at day care and fetches him later on... [...] I also chose to take five months' paternity leave.*

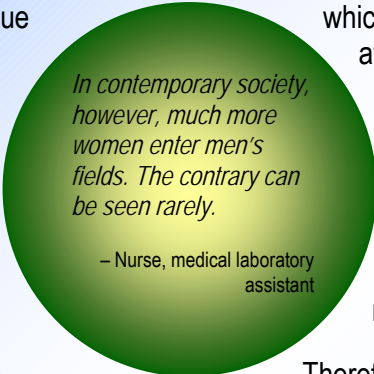


# SOCIETY HAS CHANGED

If we take an historical look at the European labour market, there has been a profound change within the last decades due to globalisation. Whereas European men used to work within the industrial sector, many of these jobs have now been outsourced to the Far East because of the lower costs. Furthermore, Europe has witnessed massive technological advancement throughout the last centuries and machines have replaced a large part of manual labour.

At the same time, Europeans' life expectancy has increased and the birth rate has fallen, which all together has resulted in ageing populations. As a result there is an increasing need for professionals to care for this group of people. This, moreover, means that there is a demand for people who find service and care

jobs appealing. However, these kinds of jobs are traditionally considered women's jobs, which means that few men find them attractive. If we look at traditional men's occupations, many women have "crossed over" and found employment within these occupations in recent decades. Men are loosing ground to women in regard to crossing over in the labour market.



*In contemporary society, however, much more women enter men's fields. The contrary can be seen rarely.*

– Nurse, medical laboratory assistant

Therefore the prejudiced attitudes towards women's professions need to change. We have to stop considering them as exclusively female, since there is nothing to be gained by using this outdated and stereotypical gender view.

We should rather rethink the way we view these traditional women's jobs and bring them up-to-date. It is time to change our views in accordance with the way society has evolved.

# HOW TO DEFINE "WOMEN'S JOBS"?

Although the gender division of labour ascribes some jobs to women and others to men, no jobs are per definition

*I think that nowadays there is no such division – male and female jobs. And yet it is acceptable for women to occupy male jobs, but the other way round is not acceptable.*

– Educator

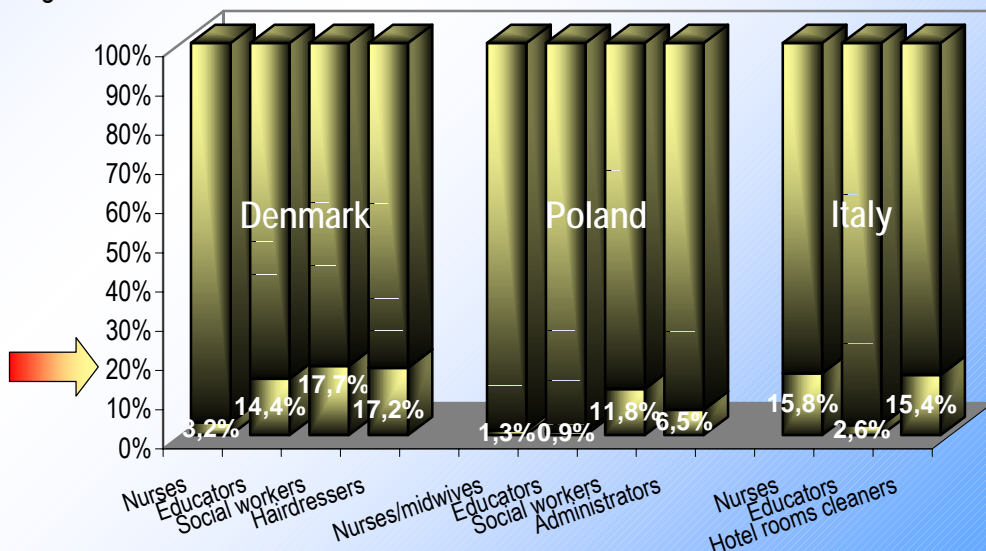
women's or men's jobs. The cultural understanding of female and male work is a cultural construction and can be altered. This is also why no clear definition exists

when it comes to labelling a profession as female (or male).

One way of defining whether or not a profession can be categorized as a traditional women's

field, hence a non-traditional men's profession, is to focus on the gender distribution. If the percentage of women by far outnumbers that of men in any given profession, then it can be labelled a women's profession from a statistical point of view. For different reasons, which will not be elaborated here, 20 percent is often used as point of intersection.

With respect to selection of professions to focus on, each partner country decided to study four. The diagram shows the gender distribution in some of the chosen professions. (Data for Bulgaria and the Italian beauticians are not available).







# "I WANTED A TEMPORARY JOB..."

It is very important to obtain knowledge of what motivates men to work in feminised professions, because this motivation illuminates possible barriers as well as presenting ways to motivate other men. Of course, the motivations to pursue different careers are manifold, but nevertheless there seem to be some very clear and distinct factors appearing in relation to men working in women's professions.

## Main motives for men to work in feminised workplaces

- Having a profound knowledge of the profession
- Uniting spare time interest and working life
- Perceiving the job as a good career move
- Preferring a practical oriented and not a theoretical line of study
- Having the role of breadwinner

women's fields after school to earn extra money while they were receiving their education; some were traditional for their gender. In multiple occasions these "short time" jobs ended up changing their career paths. Many men decided to leave their current training and instead get a formal education so they could become professionals and work within a feminised workplace.

Men also ascribe their non-

traditional career choices to the presence of a *role model*, who is a friend, family member or the like already working within a women's

profession or who otherwise has profound knowledge of the profession's tasks, career

## *Insight and experience*

Most men become aware of the possibility of making a career within a feminised profession by *chance*. They simply "fall into it" because of its availability or convenience. Some of the men had finished high school and needed time away from school to plan their next career step. For that reason they viewed the job as temporary. Others started working in

*A nurse is a big-busted woman with blond hair and a nice butt. And a uniform that's just a little too short.*

– Nurse, Nurses Organisation

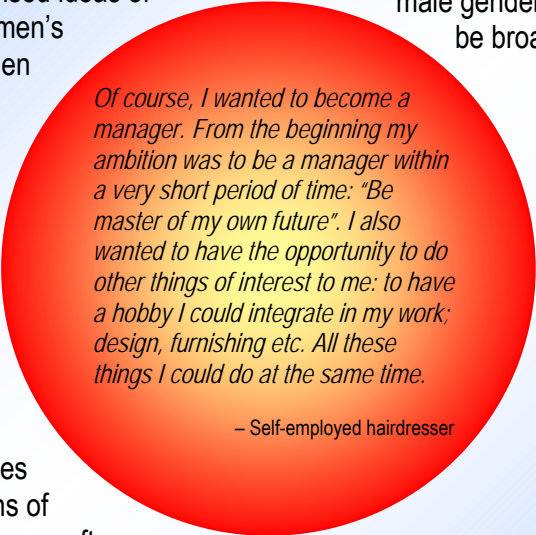
*I wanted a temporary job because I didn't know what direction my career should take. I needed a break from school. Just to have a nice time. After two weeks I felt that I had a special relationship with the children. Something unique.*

– After-school teacher

opportunities, social environment etc. By knowing a person who has experience in a women's profession, it becomes more legitimate to follow a non-traditional career path. Not so many questions are asked concerning one's choice.

The cultural and social barriers that keep men from working in feminised professions are very stereotypical and caricaturised ideas of how employees within women's fields look and act. But when men acquire knowledge about the professions, they confront these ideas and disprove them. They also find the professions more attractive and they are not deterred from switching to non-traditional work fields any longer. This clearly indicates that the cultural perceptions of these women's professions are often obsolete and draw unjust pictures of the professions.

If more men are to be persuaded to work in feminised workplaces, it is crucial to start *changing* the dominant – and outdated – perception of these professions. Without doubt, a fairer notion of these workplaces will show that women's professions not only contain traditional feminine, but also traditional masculine elements, and thus are culturally accessible to men. In this way, the scope of male gender roles on the labour market will be broadened.



*Of course, I wanted to become a manager. From the beginning my ambition was to be a manager within a very short period of time: "Be master of my own future". I also wanted to have the opportunity to do other things of interest to me: to have a hobby I could integrate in my work; design, furnishing etc. All these things I could do at the same time.*

– Self-employed hairdresser

## *"Money for running about..."*

When they work in women's fields, many men realise that they are able to *combine their* spare time interests and their

work tasks. Because of

this possibility, men

do not perceive

their work as non-

traditional or

feminised but

rather as something

they do in extension

of their spare time

activities. Consistency

between their private and professional identities

makes their career choice more legitimate –

both for themselves but also with regard to how

their circle of acquaintances view their choices.

*I was quite fascinated by how funny it really is to get money for running about and playing football all day [...] I could have used my spare time on that.*

– Educator, youth club

## *"It is very easy to advance..."*

Viewing their job as a *stepping-stone* towards another and more prestigious – more traditionally masculine – job is also common among men. From the point when they decide to enter a non-traditional profession, they are set on advancing and achieving a managerial position. They are thereby able to exercise authority and influence their daily working life. Thus good career opportunities and the prospects of advancement are a strong motivation. Because these aspects are valued in society, but also because they reflect a traditional way of perceiving men and masculinity. Holding a position that is associated with status legitimises men's presence.

*It is very easy to advance in this line of business, because it's a women's field, and most women don't have ambitions. Many of the women who do have ambitions and talent, prioritise children and family life instead. With no comparison, this line of business is the easiest to make a career within.*

– Self-employed hairdresser

## *Excluding other paths*

Another aspect is that some men do not regard their entry into women's professions as a result of a conscious choice. They rather perceive it as the result of *excluding* other career paths. They want to withdraw from theoretical studies and instead pursue careers within fields that are more practically oriented, preferably with more practical experience and traineeships.

*I started to work simply out of necessity. Earlier I had lost my job, and it was necessary to make a living somehow. And that's it.*

– Nurse

*As a child, I never liked studying. I liked artistic stuff, and therefore I chose to become a make-up artist and a hairdresser.*

– Hairdresser, apprentice

*It's a job! A job like many others! It's a job I've already got, and it's secure. It gives me the security many friends of mine don't have.*

– Hotel room cleaner

## *"It's a job... and it's secure"*

Due to the relatively high unemployment rate in Poland and Bulgaria, a significant number of Polish and Bulgarian men are motivated by the simple need to get a paid job, no matter whether it is feminised or not. These men do not have any alternatives when looking for a job, and therefore their choices can be interpreted as economic necessities. These men have a so-called "*breadwinner*" mentality, where what is mainly important is that they provide for the livelihood of their families. Job security is more important than stereotypes, traditions and gendered labels.



# REACTIONS CAN BE EXPECTED

Whenever culturally unexpected and non-traditional choices are made, the usual habits (social order) are challenged and some kind of social reaction can be expected to restore the status quo. This also applies to men who “cross over” to women’s professions.

Men who work in these feminised workplaces are well aware of the fact that their choices most likely will cause their family, friends and acquaintances to react. Not knowing what kind of reaction they are to face is what constitutes most worries for men.

At a general level the family’s reaction was positive. It was considered a career path with secure future prospects and the families knew that it was a choice that would make the person happy. In those cases where a family member (male or female) had the position of a role

model, men were explicitly encouraged and directed towards a non-traditional career path.

Men who choose to work in feminised occupations are met with a variety of questions, and they are expected to explain their choices. However, since they have based their decision by weighing pros and cons (often for years), they can quite easily convince their families that it is the (only) right career choice for them.

*I have met with very pleasant reactions. My acquaintances often laugh: "Look, here's the pre-school teacher!" or ask out of concern: "How do you cope with those kids?" But generally my female friends are fascinated. Those who have known me for a long time say that it's great and that I'm very suited for the job. I also discuss my work with my friends, and it interests them to know what it's like.*

– Pre-school teacher

*They ask if you are gay. You're at a college where 95 pct. of the students are women. That's a pretty weird line of thought. "You are a carpenter and there's 100 per cent men, so which of us is most gay?"*

– Nurse, surgical ward

## *To be or not to be – gay?*

Friends and acquaintances often react ambiguously. On the one hand they share their friends' joy about making a career choice and they are often fascinated by it, but on the other hand they cannot quite understand the reasons behind the choice. Often men in feminised workplaces are ridiculed and joked about in relation to sexual orientation. Even though these jokes are not meant harshly, they indeed question one of the fundamental characteristics of traditional masculinity, namely heterosexual orientation. As a result men become aware of the fact that they are working in fields that are non-traditional for their gender. While some men ignore these jokes, others put forward counter arguments to remove any doubt about their heterosexuality.

*Because the work is regarded as effeminate, many men are considered gay. They are exposed to ridicule and inappropriate questions or suspicions*

– Nursery-school teacher

Another interesting aspect exists when dealing with the prejudices about homosexuality:

Almost all heterosexual men stress that they themselves are not homosexuals, *but* that they did have homosexual fellow male students while they were training and now they have homosexual male colleagues. These men confirm that the concentration of homosexual men is large within feminised professions compared to other professions. Although, at the same time, they strongly point out that they themselves do not belong to this category. To underline this statement, many men experience themselves as successful heterosexuals with a lot of success among women.

*When they found out that I had a very beautiful girlfriend, then I was considered even more gorgeous because I was now unreachable. And they were like: "Oh, hallo Jimmy!" – and they all wanted to touch me."*

– Educator, youth club

*You can have as many women as you like. [...] When I started studying to be an educator, I remembered this, and I saw all those men who suddenly couldn't handle being in a place with a huge number of women – going to parties and to cafés.*

– Educator, after-school centre





# WOMEN'S JOBS – MEN'S TASKS

One of the most interesting conclusions that can be drawn from this study is based on the way men describe their work tasks and activities. They put a lot of effort into individualizing their job functions, thus underlining that they occupy a non-traditional – that is a traditional masculine – position within a feminised field. Men downplay the fact that they work in a women's profession. Instead they focus on those tasks in their work life that are associated with traditional

*I'm a trained social worker, but I have never ever functioned as a social worker.*

– Social worker, local authority

masculinity and are viewed as culturally legitimate for men. Even though they work in feminised professions, they strongly stress that they perform tasks that are traditional in relation to masculinity. But on the other hand, men

describe themselves as being non-traditional in relation to their professional positions and functions. They do not consider themselves as the

*I'm not the usual female teacher. I don't teach children to paint or to draw. I make them play, I have them running and I take them to the gym.*

– Teacher

average employee within feminised fields.

To anchor their statements and make them more convincing, men give several examples of what they work with on an average workday. Most of these examples are astonishingly similar to characteristics associated with traditional (hegemonic) masculinity (cf. later). Some men claim that women cannot carry out these specific work functions. Only men can. It is striking how men ascribe traditional masculine characteristics to professions that are traditionally associated with feminine characteristics.

*I'm a clinical counsellor as my primary position. [...] In this position I'm sort of responsible for the trainees and students learning what they have to during their stay. [...] I'm the resource person for the rest of the personnel. When patients with weird diseases come in, I try to discover what it could be. [...] But there is actually no time for patients in reality. [...] One works very independently.*

– Nurse, psychiatric department



## Men and high tech

Traditionally men and technology have been linked. In harmony with this link, men working in feminised workplaces

*We have respirators, screens and monitoring equipment of all sorts. We have every possible piece of equipment that we use to keep the patients alive. [...] This requires one to have a certain relation to technology; not to be afraid of technology.*

– Nurse, intensive care

often seem to be attracted by tasks, which include technology and require a certain kind of understanding of or interest in this. If

functions involve working with computers or some kind of other electronic equipment and gadgets, men are often drawn to them. Especially male nurses seem to specialize in technological working areas. By using computers or electronic devices as professional tools, the focus is shifted from the actual tasks to the way they are carried out. In other words, the focus is moved from traditional feminine to traditional masculine working contents. Male educators

*I have always wondered why one cannot work out professionally how to use computers with children. So it has been a dream.*

– Educator, after-school centre

also tend to perceive computers and other electronic devices as pedagogical instruments that are n their daily working life.

## Men in authority

Many men describe their work functions as strongly related to authority both in relation to clients and to (female) co-workers. Often they are assigned a central position at staff meetings, which they, at times, impute to a patriarchal role, much to their own surprise. Some men think it is because they are more to the point while, in their opinion, women tend to discuss matters until they reach a common agreement.

Clients often see men as authorities at the expense of women. Patients ascribe (and thus upgrade) the role of doctor to male nurses, while female doctors are viewed as (and thus degraded to) nurses. This is also the case with educators where authority is given to men at the expense of women. This kind of status levelling is based on

*When I'm at meetings, I can see [...] that I'm listened to a lot. Even if women say the same things as I do, they are not listened to in the same way.*

– Educator, day nursery

*There are some ethnic minority fathers who do not acknowledge female authority. They always speak with male educators even if they're standing beside a woman who may have a higher professional position, or simply know the child better.*

– Educator, integrated institution

gender and not on the achieved position. However, elderly people and ethnic minority men most commonly practise such traditional gender views.

*If I did the ward rounds with a female doctor, I was the one whom the patients talked to. [...] I tried to lead the conversation over to the doctor and sort of look at her instead, but that didn't bother the patients the least. It may have been the female doctor who spoke, but I was the one whom they addressed.*

– Nurse, residential home for elderly people

## ***Men as administrators***

Some men tend to withdraw from work on “the shop floor” and instead pursue administrative functions. For instance, hairdressers become independent businessmen, educators become heads of institutions and nurses seek the positions of department wards. Such functions are closely bound with professional success and hierarchical advancement, and thus make the positions more masculine in

relation to a traditional point of view.

## ***Non-traditional but still traditional work***

Men's descriptions contribute to a redefinition of the stereotypical perceptions of women's professions. In fact, they show that these professions cannot be viewed as strictly feminised. They are much more. In spite of the fact that men in feminised workplaces have made so-called non-traditional choices, they describe their work tasks as quite traditional according to the prevailing understanding of masculinity. Actually the descriptions might as well have been descriptions from a traditional men's profession. However, it should be stressed that the men *also* take care of more traditional feminine tasks, of course, even though these are diminished in their

*descriptions* (but not necessarily in their actual working life).

*About a third of my time on an ordinary working day is spent directly on administration, i.e. paying bills, wages, completing sickness forms, writing letters, applying for permits etc. Then, a third has to do with personnel management: How do we organise the days? How do we fit in holidays, days off and sickness? And the last third has to do with the children.*

– Educator, head of institution

# *"THERE ARE SOME EXPECTATIONS..."*

Men in feminised workplaces are often the only male employees and therefore become representatives of the male gender. Seen in this light, they are expected to fit the pre-existing generalizations about their gender, that is to act in a certain stereotypical "masculine" way.

Men take care of the above-mentioned tasks because they find them appealing but also because their colleagues and superiors have normative expectations as to which functions that are

appropriate for men.

However, most men feel at ease with these expectations because of the merging of these assumptions, men's own interest and the perceptions of traditional masculinity (as with

respect to computers, being handymen, playing wild games with children etc.).

Frankly, expectations like these create positions for men which make them feel needed and appreciated. They feel comfortable with their positions and roles as men. Vice versa, it should be mentioned that men

also have expectations regarding their female colleagues.

Through mutual expectations the traditional and stereotypical gender order known from the patriarchal nuclear family is reproduced and re-established. Men become culturally recognizable as men and therefore their presence in women's professions is legitimised. Their situational status is brought in line with the gender expectations.

*There are some expectations or other that as a man one understands computers. I help this along because I myself also do something to perform those tasks.*

– Nurse, surgical department

*You use your energy and resources on what is important, i.e. working with the children, and not so much on decoding other colleagues [...] There are some things that are best left alone.*

– Educator, deputy head

*It's parallel to what it's like in the family at home. What is it men are good at and what are women good at? I think that it is extremely important that we approach children differently.*

– Educator, head of institution







# "I INSIST THAT I'M A..."

Just like women's professions are associated with women, so are the titles within these professions. For instance, the Polish language has no word for male nurse, which means that they are often called doctors. Also in Danish the word "nurse" is a clearly feminine title. In order to cope with this dilemma men use alternative and more accurate titles to describe their work positions. Either they use a different word such as "consultant", "self-made businessman",

"clinical counsellor", "leader", "technical facilitator", "manager", and "bachelor of professions", or they attach some descriptive words to their titles, and refer to themselves as "surgical nurse", "sports

college trained educator", "social educator", "ward nurse with management function" etc. By using alternative and descriptive titles men show that they do not occupy ordinary positions but rather positions that are more masculine. Moreover, when using these titles they ascribe status to their work. In fact they often compare their functions and positions with those carried out by people who hold more prestigious positions.

Due to the fact that many of the titles are almost unambiguously associated with women, they simultaneously dissociate men. This happens even before men know the actual working tasks. For that reason using neutral and non-gendered titles would be a way in which men got a foothold and legitimised their presence. This would be a way to redefine the traditional gender marks, and hence make feminised workplaces more culturally legitimate for men.

*I insist that I'm a social educator because that's probably a word that sounds better in relation to a man. I can't hide that.*

– Educator, deputy head

*I'm a "leader", "leader of an institution", "managing director", or whatever you want to call it.*

– Educator, head of institution

*Before I could draw a breath I was working on an equal footing with the jurists and had precisely the same assignments.*

– Social worker

# CHANGING THE WORK ENVIRONMENT

Minorities are often marginalized and dominated by the majority. This is why it might be assumed that men who work in women's professions are forced to assimilate into the existing feminine cultural norms and values. However, this is not the case when men are minorities in women's occupations. Rather, the opposite seems to be the case since the presence of men initiates social and cultural changes in the work environment, and the tone becomes informal: humour, irony and flirting become part of the organization culture. Men are regarded as assets who contribute something very much needed. Often women explicitly say this to men. Therefore, men feel very welcome and valued. It does not take many men to change the culture. Just a few men will be able to create some

women-specific matters but as soon as men enter the conversation the topics change.

It is of importance that men (and women) understand the workplace humour; otherwise it is difficult to be socially included in the working group. Humour is applied as instruments for integration in the workplace culture.

Men also use humour and irony to distance themselves from embarrassing situations. In this respect, gender roles and codes are negotiated and boundaries are moved or cemented by means of humour, flirting and ironical distancing.

*Men contribute to a good atmosphere. We help to establish a different tone than if it had been a purely female department. [...] The colleagues at the department tease each other and we are good at helping each other up here. There's a good collegiate spirit as far as that's concerned.*

– Nurse, clinical counsellor

*It's not exciting to hear about inflammation in female organs, or about little Peter who is stammering for the third week in a row, or about how big their breasts get when they are pregnant. They sometimes discuss some weird things.*

– Nurse, orthopaedic department

*Some patients find it difficult to be bathed by a man. "Do you know how to do it?", many ask me. Then you have to jolly them along and say you've seen lots of bare female bottoms.*

– Nurse, orthopaedic department

# *"EVERYONE KNEW WHO WE WERE..."*

One of the most characteristic issues about working in an environment massively dominated by women is the fact that men stand out. They are highly visible, and everyone knows who they are. Even though their performances, both good and bad, are continuously scrutinized and judged, men do not seem to have a problem with this. Rather, they consider it an advantage. Since they are often asked for a "man's view", it is quite easy for them to have their opinions heard and thus influence decision-making.

*Everyone knew who we were at the nursing school. That's the way it is when there are only six men out of a total of 70-80 in a year. You really felt that.*

– Nurse, surgical department

Another aspect of being a visible minority is that men constant struggle to improve their skills and become better at their work. While some men leave feminised workplaces because of the constant scrutinizing and performance pressure, other men are motivated by it. They struggle to become better, and by doing so prove themselves as competent employees that are capable of occupying a position traditionally associated with women. They are very determined to dispel any doubts about their qualifications, and to have professional success.

*Male hairdressers are usually much, much more goal-directed than female. They haven't become hairdressers just for the fun of chatting with customers. They have a plan, right? They are very ambitious.*

– Hairdresser

*We were clearly a minority, but not a weak minority. [...] It was us who were deeply engaged in the social side of the school, and thus we also developed our social fellowship. But this was clearly a minority thing. It was because we stood out from the rest and therefore stuck together.*

– Nurse, working as project leader



# MASCULINE FELLOWSHIPS

As a result of being highly visible men often seek each other out and create male

*Well, we formed our own masculine subculture at the school and got together on Friday afternoons over a beer – and we went out and partied. We had that – well, masculine fellowship.*

– Nurse, working as project leader

groupings. This male sociality can be identified among peers and across positions, but also in both formal and informal settings.

During their training, many men spend time with other fellow male students and practise what can be interpreted as masculine rituals and symbols. Officially, these groupings are often founded on commonalities and mutual interest in sports, cars, computers etc., or just having

somebody similarly disposed to drink a beer with. But at a sociological level this homosociality enables men

*I found a male nurse and then we just talked about football and motorbikes, even though it wasn't really anything we were very interested in at that point, but we were going to show them. We played "real men".*

– Nurse, psychiatric department

to create a masculine professional identity. They are able to mirror themselves in each other in these inter-group cultures or subcultures. However, these groupings, where women are denied entry, are often considered a humorous alternative to the female dominance. They are not the result of men being socially excluded or isolated from female culture. They should rather be perceived as results of self-elected choices.

Men also form formal groupings where they create prestigious lodges or student clubs. Other men group professionally at work and in some sub-sectors where there are almost as many men as women. These sectors are closely related to tasks requiring technical skills, authoritative personalities, an interest in management and administration etc. (cf. above).

*At my workplace we have an almost equal number of male and female teachers in sports. This job can't be determined as either 'male' or 'female'.*

– Educator

## Male educators according to types of institution in Denmark

Clubs	40.6 %
After-school centres	23.7 %
Schools	21.7 %
Other*	16.2 %
Age-integrated institutions	8.0 %
Nursery schools	6.0 %
Day nurseries	1.7 %
Total	14.4 %

\* Remedial teachers, day-care centres, pool institutions and other.



# THE GLASS ESCALATOR

Women often encounter the so-called class ceiling in their professional lives, which means that they have difficulties scaling organizational and professional hierarchies. Some invisible and cultural barriers prevent women from reaching management-level positions.

One could imagine that this phenomenon is associated with

being a minority in general. Hence, it would also apply to men who work in cultures dominated by women. However, this is not the case. On the contrary, men seem to have better career options than women in feminised workplaces. In traditional female jobs ambitions in regard to advancement are often ascribed to men – to some even in spite of their intention.

When a managerial position opens up, men are often explicitly asked to apply for it – by their colleagues but also by their superiors. In this manner their female colleagues often have a

patriarchal attitude, which perceives men as natural leaders. And a male superior often looks for a partner who resembles

himself to work with. Therefore, men seem to practise their gender privileges when they enter women's professions.

By using a glass escalator-metaphor it might be said that men in feminised workplaces are pushed onto a moving escalator that helps them scale the hierarchies. Most men feel comfortable with this since it harmonises with their own ambitions and career plans. However, a few men view it as role encapsulation and as cultural pressure that is hard to resist. The fact that success on the labour market is closely related to traditional masculine characteristics also plays a part when men take advantage of their privileged positions.

*I could very well imagine that my superior had missed someone to spar with in the management team of the institution. Someone of the same gender.*

– Educator, just promoted to deputy head

*I have been encouraged to move on over the last few years, to get some more experience. Try something new. "Don't hang on here!" As if[...] I wanted something different and something better. I often hear that.*

– Nurse, orthopaedic department

*If I could choose – and had control over it – I wouldn't have ended where I am right now.*

– Educator, head of institution



# "I DO EVERYTHING MY WIFE DOES..."

*I would say that working with women has taught me to understand my wife's needs.*

– Nurse

Most men, who have broken down barriers in their professional life and undertaken traditional feminine tasks as part of their work life, are willing to do the same in their private lives. They do

their chores, e.g. wash dishes, prepare dinner, clean, make lunch boxes, mow the lawn etc. In fact some men have wives who work longer hours and have higher wages than they do, which is why it seems only fair to them to put in an extra effort at home. Men in women's professions seem to have no problem identifying with the role of care person.

Especially in connection with children: Many men play an active part in their children's upbringing and engage themselves in their spare time activities (e.g. drive their children to sports). Actually a significant number of the Danish men, who were interviewed, went on – or plan to go on – paternity leave. Working in a feminised workplace

makes it easier for men to prioritise family life over working life at times when this is needed. This favourable opportunity for reconciliation of their work and private lives seems important to men, and many of them put it forward as one of the most important (side) effects of working in a feminised field. Moreover, female colleagues take a liking to men who give highest priority to their family.

*When we adopted our children, I insisted on going on paternity leave. [...] I think that it was for the best. Without any doubt it is one of the most positive best experiences, I have ever had.*

– Educator, head of institution

A lot of women have difficulties competing with men on the labour market because women are often the parent with the main responsibility for caring for the family and children. But when men take on their chores, women's opportunities improve and they have a better chance of competing on equal terms.

*I'm not traditional. No way. [...] I do everything my wife does. I just don't dust. She's very particular about that, so she does it. [...] We have also broken with our social origin; my father was responsible for the finances at home and my mother cooked, cleaned and everything else while he had a beer. [...] In essence it's a question of breaking some of these patterns and doing things a little differently.*

– Nurse, intensive care



# *“IF THERE WERE MORE MEN...”*

But what would happen if more men were to cross over and pursue careers within traditional women's professions? When men redefine their positions and functions, this is done in order to remain culturally recognisable as traditional men. In other words, men describe their tasks in a way that can easily be related to a traditional masculinity. Taking into consideration that masculine characteristics traditionally and culturally have higher prestige than feminine ones, it can be said that men ascribe more status to women's professions, thus making feminised workplaces more attractive to men (and women).

*If more men are successfully recruited, the female dominated occupations will receive higher status, in the sense that I think that the female professions – educators and nurses etc. – are lagging behind in regard to salary, [...] because they are female professions. So in that way I think that [...] the professions would have more status if there were more men – and thereby higher salaries and better working conditions. So in this way I think it would be an advantage to have more men.*

– Nurse, Nurses Organisation

With regard to the gender-segregated labour market, the boundaries will be moved, and men's options will be improved. In this way they will regain some of the ground they have lost to women.

When it becomes socially and culturally legitimate for men to pursue careers within female dominated professions, stereotypes will have been overcome and new roles created. Then something new and positive will have been achieved in Europe.

*Men have perhaps fallen into a trap, which they have made for themselves; they have created such an ideal man that many social roles do not suit him, and if they don't reach this ideal, they start to get frustrated. [...] Guys have a problem because they don't know how to work in a job that's associated with women and how to preserve their masculinity.*

– Nurse

*People act with respect when they see a man in front of them. The prestige and authority of the profession suddenly rise when the job is occupied and performed by a man.*

– Workshop participant

# TRADITIONAL MASCULINITY

As stated at the beginning of this publication, women/femininity and men/masculinity are traditionally tied together as two inseparable pairs, and if they are split up and brought together crosswise it attracts attention – especially if one talks about “feminine men”. This should also be seen in relation to the fact that in the field of feminist psychoanalytical theory masculinity is often defined in contrast to femininity. But how is masculinity to be perceived?

## Constitution of masculinity

- Oppression of women
- Gendered division of labour
- Heterosexual orientation

First of all, masculinity is an ever changing and fluid concept that varies according to different periods of time, countries, cultures etc. Moreover, there exist multiple types of masculinities at the same time and in the same cultures. Each of these masculinities battle to become the dominant, that is the *hegemonic*, type. Nonetheless, there are three main normative characteristics that constitute European and western masculinity as a whole (cf. box).<sup>1</sup>

Other studies on men in women’s professions have identified the following qualities as being associated with traditional hegemonic masculinity: *Physical strength, bravado, stoicism, authority, independence, success, capability, reliability and control*. Apart from the parameter of “physical strength”, none of these qualities are influenced by the biological sex. Rather, they are practices and women are therefore also capable of possessing them, hence of being masculine. Because of the pairing of sex/gender, these qualities are often associated with men. The greater the harmony between these qualities and a man’s action, the more masculine he appears.

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<sup>1</sup> Robert W. Connell (1995): *Masculinities*. Cambridge: Policy Press.

# ABOUT THE PROJECT

This publication disseminates the results from the European research project, *When This is a Man*, which is a partnership between Poland (promoter), Denmark (research coordinator), Italy and Bulgaria.

The overall frame for the project is to promote change in gender roles and to overcome gender stereotypes. Within this frame we decided to focus on the horizontal part of the gender segregated labour market, namely *men working in traditional women's professions*.

The main objectives were to broaden the scope of gender roles for men and break down stereotype perceptions of men that narrow down men's possibilities in working life as well as in private life. Another objective was to initiate a change in the traditional perception of women's professions, thereby making these professions more appealing to men.

To fulfil these objectives we decided to provide empirical knowledge by *interviewing* a total of 160 men living in urban areas. The men were divided into the following professions: nurses, pre-school educators, social workers, administrative professionals, hotel room cleaners, hairdresser and beauticians. Of these professions, the two first-mentioned were included in each country. Furthermore, future-creating workshops were carried out in each partner country.

Never before have such extensive studies been carried out on men in women's professions.

The results were disseminated in four national reports, two comparative research reports and this present so-called "popular" publication, which aims at presenting the conclusions in a plain and accessible way. For an analytical approach, see Project Publications on the next page.



# PROJECT PUBLICATIONS

## Working papers

Warming, Kenn & Peter Ussing (2005): *Joint Base Analysis*. Denmark: The Danish Research Centre on Gender Equality.

## National research reports

Cori, Paola di (2005): *When This is a Man*. Italy: Fondazione Giacomo Brodolini.

Fuszara, Małgorzata (2005): *Men in Feminised Occupations*. Poland: The Chancellery of the Prime Minister.

Nachev, Ivan & Lilia Dimova (2005): *Men with Untraditional Jobs in Bulgaria*. Bulgaria: Ministry of Labour and Social Policy.

Warming, Kenn (2005): *Men Working in Women's Professions*. Denmark: The Danish Research Centre on Gender Equality.

## Transnational research reports

Sjørup, Karen (ed.) (2005): *European Men Working in Women's Professions*. Denmark: The Danish Research Centre on Gender Equality.

Denning, Betina, Lilia Abadjieva, Margarita Spasova, Francesca Molfino, Fabio Sgaragli & Małgorzata Fuszara (2005): *Report from the Future: Visions on How to Develop Men's Working Life in Non-Traditional Professions*. Denmark: The Danish Research Centre on Gender Equality.

## Popular Presentation

Warming, Kenn (2005): *Men in Feminised Workplaces*. Denmark: The Danish Research Centre on Gender Equality.

All publications can be downloaded from the official project website: [www.WhenThisisaMan.com](http://www.WhenThisisaMan.com)





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