

## **Men Working in Women's Profession**

A sociological interview study focusing on redefinitions of work functions and masculinisation strategies in four gender labelled professions in Denmark

Warming, Kenn

*Publication date:*  
2006

*Document Version*  
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

*Citation for published version (APA):*  
Warming, K. (2006). *Men Working in Women's Profession: A sociological interview study focusing on redefinitions of work functions and masculinisation strategies in four gender labelled professions in Denmark.* Roskilde Universitet.

### **General rights**

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the public portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

- Users may download and print one copy of any publication from the public portal for the purpose of private study or research.
- You may not further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain.
- You may freely distribute the URL identifying the publication in the public portal.

### **Take down policy**

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact [rucforsk@ruc.dk](mailto:rucforsk@ruc.dk) providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

# Men Working in Women's Professions

– a sociological interview study focusing on redefinitions of work functions and masculinisation strategies in four gender labelled professions in Denmark.



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

**MEN WORKING IN WOMEN'S PROFESSIONS**

By *Kenn Warming*, June 2005

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

The report forms part of a project, *When This is a Man*, supported  
by the Fifth Community Action Programme on Equal Opportunities

ISBN-no.: 87-7349-636-7



## **FOREWORD**

I would like to thank the many male nurses, educators, social workers and hairdressers who took part in this study. The study would not have been possible without their participation. Thanks are also due to research assistant Peter Ussing for having interviewed social workers and to Bo Wagner Sørensen, lecturer, for interviewing hairdressers and analysing the interviews. A final word of thanks goes to Karen Sjørup, director of the centre, for her comments and professional sparring.

June 2005

**Kenn Warming**

# LIST OF CONTENTS

<b>PROJECT FRAME .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>The objective of the study.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Social topicality.....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>A THEORETICAL LOOK AT THE CONCEPT OF MASCULINITY .....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Hegemonic masculinity.....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>NATIONAL PROFESSION-SPECIFIC HISTORY.....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>The nursing profession; formal access – cultural barrier.....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Pedagogical work is professionalised.....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>From hospital assistant to social worker.....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>From barber to hairdresser: When a profession changes gender .....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>RESEARCH DESIGN .....</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Interview context; locality and the researcher's gender .....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>The nature of the empirical material.....</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>ANALYSIS: MASCULINISATION, REDEFINITION AND MALE ROLES.....</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>Motivation for career choice .....</b>	<b>18</b>
Targeted by accident.....	18
Role model and professional insight.....	19
Uniting spare time interests and working life .....	20
A choice – but simultaneously a rejection .....	21
<b>Reactions to – and legitimising – career choice.....</b>	<b>22</b>
Family support .....	22
Friends' surprise.....	23
Career opportunities articulated; temporary stop.....	24
Job descriptions and work functions clarified.....	25
<b>The significance of gender during training.....</b>	<b>27</b>
Visibility; when one is always 'on' .....	28
MUMS; when men group .....	29
Relations to women fellow students .....	30
A privileged teacher/pupil relationship.....	32

<b>Gendered experiences and tales from working life .....</b>	<b>34</b>
Masculinisation of work tasks.....	35
Technologising focus and articulation .....	36
Physical strength, mutual expectations and social role stability.....	38
Authority and mistaken categorisation – gender versus position .....	40
The man's gender role; untraditional but simultaneously traditional.....	41
<b>Working environment: Social relations with colleagues and clientele .....</b>	<b>43</b>
The informal way of talking; humour, irony and flirting .....	44
The conversations; participation and self-chosen exclusion.....	45
<b>SUMMARISING AND CONCLUDING CONSIDERATIONS .....</b>	<b>48</b>
<b>The potential of the study and its application possibilities .....</b>	<b>50</b>
<b>REFERENCES .....</b>	<b>53</b>

## PROJECT FRAME

This report was composed on the basis of a number of qualitative interviews with men; the interviews were mainly carried out between November 2004 and April 2005. The report is published as part of the transnational EU project, *When This is a Man*. The project represents cooperation between partners in Poland (overall coordinator), Denmark (research coordinator), Bulgaria and Italy. The project is under the EU's fifth action plan for equality between men and women, and the project period runs over 15 months, from 1 October 2004 to 31 December 2005.

It should be mentioned here that the report is based on a number of methodological, theoretical and analytical assumption/considerations explicated in the report entitled *Joint Base Analysis* (Warming & Ussing 2005). This is a working report that ensures a common point of departure for data collection and analysis, making the Polish, Danish, Bulgarian and Italian findings comparable.<sup>1</sup>

### The objective of the study

The objective of the study is to focus on men employed within areas that are culturally, traditionally and/or statistically regarded as feminine.

The subject area is what is popularly known as '*men in women's jobs*'. The reasoning behind studying men in this gender equality perspective is that in recent decades a great number of women have crossed vocational gender boundaries that traditionally have been a feature of the gender divided labour market, so that today it is no longer unusual to see women in 'prestige professions' such as doctors, dentists, lawyers and executives (Rambøll 2004). In other words, it has become more legitimate for women to work within traditional 'male professions', which can, among other things, be seen from the fact that the concept of career *women* has emerged and is a category associated with positive values. The opposite is not the case. Because even though a concept exists for the men who cross over (*caring men*), such a position often gives rise to questions from the men's social surroundings and a consequent need for legitimising explanations. There is no corresponding one-sided attribution of positive values, and the career choice is often

---

<sup>1</sup> At the beginning of July 2005 a comparative research report will be published comparing these different national findings and drawing a European picture of male roles and what it means to be a man in an occupation dominated by women.

regarded as a devaluation of status.<sup>2</sup> This is also due to the fact that masculine qualifications have higher prestige than feminine ones and thus achieve greater justification (cf. Williams 1995:65-80). In other words, men are far from equally willing to enter into work contexts that have traditionally been the preserve of men as *vice versa*. So even though it can be argued that the man's gender role options have developed, this is a development that relationally loses ground in relation to women.

The intention of the study is by focusing *positively* on the small number of men who have broken these gender limits – and thus challenged the traditional gendered structures according to which all individuals (consciously or unconsciously) navigate – a contribution can be made to clearing the way for other men. Hopefully, greater knowledge about men in women-dominated professions (including the way in which masculinity is included, negotiated and construed) will lead to more men being motivated and equipped to challenge the culturally and traditionally embedded gender role patterns that characterise the gender segregated labour market.

Quite concretely, the objective description from the project application is a three-point formulation: 1) To broaden the scope of the gender roles of men – and thereby their op-

tions for action. 2) To break down some of the most widespread stereotype perceptions of men. 3) To redefine the gender-marks attached to certain professions.<sup>3</sup>

There are, however, three intervening sub-objectives all of which are pursued by taking a starting point in point 3, as the assumption is that men who have 'crossed over' in their work have, through this action, initiated a break with the stereotype view of what is culturally 'permissible' – and the frames have therefore been moved. More precisely formulated, what is aimed at is an illustration of what *action strategies* the men initiate when they break the boundaries and act in 'the other gender's labour market'. On the basis of this focus, new action and gender role options are analysed that challenge the role capturing stereotypes.

## Social topicality

But why this interest in men in woman dominated occupations? Will women not just loose out if they now have to compete with men – an unequal competition– as women more frequently than men choose a strategy for their working lives that can be combined with home and children? No, this is not the case!

---

<sup>2</sup> That the men's presence in 'feminine jobs' is regarded as a benefit by society and colleagues is another side of the matter that will be elaborated in the analysis.

---

<sup>3</sup> By the concept of 'gender labels' is meant "the feminine or masculine connotations the job [...] has or the feminine or masculine characteristics associated with the job or profession." (Nielsen & Sørensen 2004:6). In the present study it is, of course, the feminine connotations that should be redefined.



Various societal scenarios predict that development trends will lead to an increase in the number of service and caring occupations, job areas traditionally labelled female. For example, this was one of the conclusions of a report published by Rambøll Management at the end of 2004, where it is also predicted that the number of unskilled jobs within the industrial sector will be radically reduced because of the outsourcing of jobs to the Far East along with swift technological and *innovative* progress. At the same time the population is *aging* as there will be more older and fewer younger people in Denmark, giving rise to a larger number of service and care personnel, both in number and relationally.

On the political front also, last year a need to channel more men over into caring jobs was formulated. This appears from the following extract:

*"The care sector, i.e. child-care institutions, rest homes, homes for the ill and socially excluded, hospitals and the like have far more women than men employed. As the genders often have different needs and as the needs of both genders must be catered for in connection with the work in such institutions, it would be appropriate to have more men employed in the sector."* (Department of Gender Equality 2004:12) <sup>4</sup>

On the level of specific number, the deputy chairman of the Danish Nurses Organisation

(DSR), Aase Holdgaard, says that *"at present there is a lack of about 1,000 nurses on the national level, and in 10 years this figure will have risen to 10,000"* (Christensen 2005), which is a clear call for studies such as the present one.

The final argument for conducting this study is scientific, as there is no qualitative analysis of men as gender minorities on the labour market with such a broad empirical basis as this. There are interesting and well-founded studies of the field of gender minorities such as Bloksgaard and Faber's (2005) study of male nurses and female police officers, and various other studies that focus on a single occupation (cf. e.g. Hjort & Nielsen 2003 and Pedersen 2005). This Danish study focuses on four occupational groups, but the project as such includes eight different professions in four European countries.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> For further discussion of men as unequal cf. Sjørup (1999:9-10), and Messner (1998).

<sup>5</sup> All four partner countries focus on nurses and educators/teachers of small children. In addition social workers, hairdressers, secretaries, assistant midwives, beauty experts and hotel cleaners are included..

## A THEORETICAL LOOK AT THE CONCEPT OF MASCULINITY

Since it is an important part of the objective to challenge stereotype and role reducing notions about men, masculinity will be a key theme in the study, for which reason it is necessary to be more precise.

The study employs a plural conception of masculinity, meaning that there is a plurality of masculinities. This is to emphasise that masculinity (like femininity) is not something static and inflexible, but is instead a dynamic category with a multiplicity of meanings, the content of which is constantly challenged, altered and renegotiated. At the same time also there exists an internal inconsistency between these different competing perceptions.<sup>6</sup> The utilisation of such a floating and multifaceted understanding of the masculinity concept makes it possible to expand men's gender roles as potentially the category can include aspects *above and beyond* the tradition-embedded stereotypes which the present study seeks to challenge. In other words, the possibility exists for actions and values historically and culture-traditionally regarded as feminine to be integrated in such a complex and wide-ranging view of masculinity.

---

<sup>6</sup> Due to this constant renegotiation and ongoing (re-) construction, hegemonic masculinity varies both culturally and historically.

### Hegemonic masculinity

As the aim of the study is to expand the frames for men's gender roles, this presupposes a relationship where one has an understanding of the perception of masculinity (already established state) in which the expansion takes its starting point. The concept of *hegemonic masculinity* formulated by masculinity researcher Bob W. Connell (2000; 1995) can be used here.<sup>7</sup> This type of masculinity should be understood as the dominant form of masculinity which the other types of masculinity define themselves in relation to.<sup>8</sup> There is a continuous battle for this hegemonic position, for which reason its borders undergo constant movement and development, but there are, however, some components – core characteristics – that are 'tougher' than others. It is most frequently in the border areas around these components

---

<sup>7</sup> In spite of many years' criticism of the concept, it is still widespread in masculinity research. This is due to the fact that there is no alternative theoretical frame of reference (concept) med with the same application possibilities. For a critical and challenging approach to the concept cf. Folkesson, Nordberg & Smirthwaite (1999).

<sup>8</sup> Connell (1995:78-81) also uses subordinate, contributory and marginalised forms of masculinity. These four types of masculinity are interrelated in a system where the hegemonic (a priori) is the dominant one and therefore has the defining power. (For further discussion of Connell' forms of masculinity cf. e.g. Slottemo (2000:42-45)). In this context it should be made explicit that in the present study the focus will be the hegemonic masculinity type as what is interesting is the negotiation of masculinity in opposition to femininity.

that the real discursive battle – and thus also change – take place. It should be pointed out that hegemonic masculinity is not necessarily the most widespread form, but it is nonetheless the form on the basis of which most men establish and perceive their gender.

According to Connell (1995:74-75), hegemonic masculinity is primarily defined in relation to three parameters: 1) Men's oppression of women. 2) A gender divided labour market (with respect to work tasks, status, salary, control, power etc.). 3) A heterosexual orientation. If a man does not manage to stage himself in relation to one of these parameters, he can choose to focus more on one of the others instead. American sociology professor Christina L. Williams (1995), who has conducted year-long studies of men in 'non-traditional occupations', presents as one among many examples of this the fact that male nurses often to choose to specialise in areas with work tasks that are regarded as feminine in the hegemonic perspective.

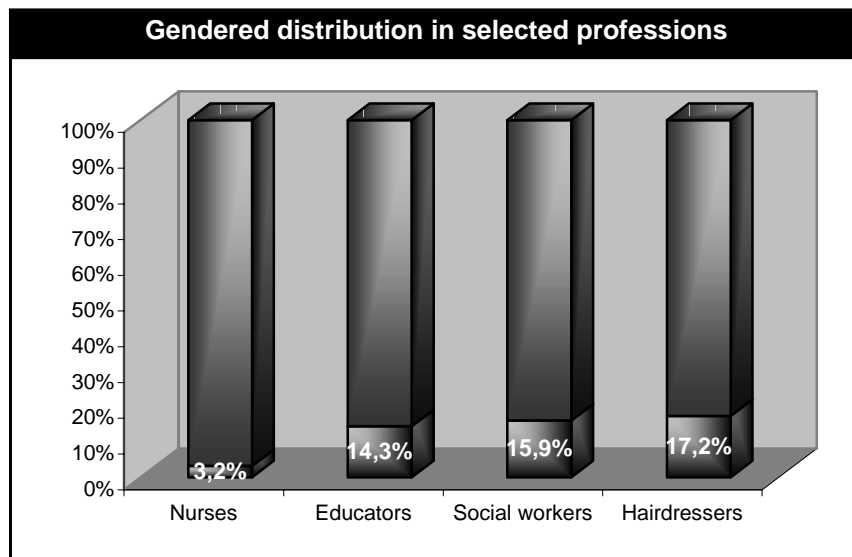
Professor Williams (ibid.:118) has based parts of her interview analysis on 'hegemonic mas-

culinity', and in accordance with this she identifies various concrete characteristics: *Physical strength, fearless behaviour, strong heterosexual orientation, stoicism, authority and independence*. Another well-established male researcher, sociologist Michael S. Kimmel (1994:125), states similar features: *Strength, success, skill, dependability, reliability and control*.

In relation to the object area of the report, it is interesting to examine the way in which the men include – and exclude – these qualities that are associated with hegemonic masculinity, but also the extent to which they wish – and manage – to detach themselves from works tasks and contexts whose traditional connotation is feminine. To the degree to which the men utilize strategies prescribing articulations of work functions in relation to the above-mentioned characteristics, this is a redefinition (expansion) of the traditional gender labels associated with the profession in question, but simultaneously also a cementing of the gender stereotypes.

## NATIONAL PROFESSION-SPECIFIC HISTORY

In order to form an impression of the professions that the present study focuses on, a brief history of these professions follows. As can be seen in the diagram, the empirical object area is limited to nurses, educators, hairdressers and social workers.<sup>9</sup> The reason for selecting precisely these occupations is primarily the relatively limited share of men, which means that the men as a group can be regarded as a *gender minority* (cf. more about this later). This also indicates that we have to do with a profession with female connotations and feminine gender labels; women's professions. In order to understand why these occupations are culturally regarded as gendered, it is first of all necessary to place them



The percentages reflect the share of men. (Sources: BUPL, DSR, DS og DF, cf. note 9)

in historically – although radically simplified and delimited – development perspectives.<sup>10</sup>

### The nursing profession; formal access – cultural barrier

Until the 1950s, there were no male nurses on the basis of the excluding formality that one of the formal entrance requirements was that the applicant should be a *woman*.<sup>11</sup> This requirement disappeared in the post-war pe-

<sup>9</sup> The diagram is based on information from the different professional unions: The Danish Federation of Early Childhood Teachers and Youth Educators, BUPL (May, 2005), the Danish Nurses Organization, DSR (July, 2004), the Danish Association of Social Workers, DS (May, 2005) and the Danish Union of Master Hairdressers [Dansk Frisørmesterforening], DF (October, 2004). The percentages thus indicated the gender distribution of the *members*. With respect to the hairdressers, it is pointed out that the share represents master hairdressers, i.e. hairdressers under this rank are excluded. This is because the journeymen hairdressers are organised in the Danish Union of Hairdressers and Cosmetologists, DFKF, and that it was not possible to separate out the hairdressers (DFKF has about 5 percent men in all (October, 2004).

<sup>10</sup> It should be mentioned that the nursing, educator and social worker training programmes are professional bachelor programmes, which allows for further studies to MA level at institutions of higher education.

<sup>11</sup> This section is based on the dissertation entitled *En kvindelig verden* [A female world] by Steen Hundborg Martensen (2000). For a brief but interesting examination of the first experiences from the male nurse training programme reference is also made to (2001).

riod because of the lack of nurses, and the first seven male student nurses commenced their training after thorough admission interviews (which female applicants did not have to undergo) at the Nurses Training School of Copenhagen City Hospital. This was an experimental scheme and experience from their education and their subsequent working lives was to form the basis for men's future access to the profession. In 1954 the seven men had completed their training, and in spite of the fact that they were not granted state authorisation until five months later, they were all employed immediately. The evaluations of the men's engagement and ability were positive, and even though men now had access to the education the flow of men into it was (and is) extremely limited. So, despite this formal acceptance of men, the occupation was still regarded as a decidedly female profession as the attitude was that the potential for care belonged naturally to women. Thus the entry of men into the profession has been modest, and between 1967 and 2004 the increase was a mere 2.8 percentage points (from 0.4 % to 3.2%), although in absolute numbers the increase went from about 20,000 to about 74,000 (DSR membership statistics). This sluggishness is to a high degree due to an entrenched cultural view of the occupation as female (gender labelled). Despite the fact that the following quotation from consultant Holger Nielsen dates from the middle of the 20th century, it illustrates a gendered view of the nursing profession that can still be traced in the present day stereotyped perception of the profession.

*"Like the attitude generally is in this country, as far as I can judge, nursing must be described as decidedly women's work. [...] Within nursing, the presence of special womanly characteristics is especially valuable. These are genuine empathy with and almost motherly care for their fellow human beings and a feeling for the homely touch and cleanliness, and it is also worth pointing out that the indescribable but genuinely special spirit and tone that only women can create and with which they influence their surroundings can play a special role. It should also be emphasized in this connection that when a child is ill, it is looked after by its mother and not its father."* (Ministry of the Interior 1949, quoted in Martensen 2000:4)

As mentioned, however, this argument lost in the face of the lack of nurses. Nevertheless it reflects the contours of a socio-cultural picture that to this day (although not to such an extreme degree) are associated with the profession (Martensen 2000).

## Pedagogical work is professionalised

The breakthrough of industrialisation gave birth to the need for childcare institutions. Many women of the lower class were forced out onto the labour market and the necessity arose of having the children looked after during the morning and afternoon. It was, in other words, to help the woman as looking after children was regarded as her task, which emerges clearly from a statement made by Borgberg, a foreign minister, in the middle of the last century:

*"Kindergartens are for the children whose parents or mothers have to leave the home to earn their living"* (quoted in Enoksen 1996:26)<sup>12</sup>

The institutions were regarded as supportive of society as women were given the opportunity to participate in the labour market and thereby relieve the lack of labour experienced by the business sector.

The first Danish educator training school (the Fröbel College) was founded in 1885, thus *professionalising* childcare. At that time the training consisted in two courses of ten months each, but already from 1915 students had to train for two years before they could obtain the title of kindergarten teacher (with the feminine Danish ending *'inde*). From 1953 it was a requirement to have completed primary school and to have been in pre-practice, i.e. to have practical experience from the type of institution one wished to be educated for before being admitted to a training college in Denmark.<sup>13</sup> In 1976 educators came under the collective agreements and thus achieved the same conditions as 'real' workers, which is also how they regarded themselves. Historically there have been different lines in the education programme (e.g. kin-

dergarten, recreation centre and social pedagogics), but in 1992 a *common educator training programme* was introduced and this internal distinction disappeared. The length of the programme was now fixed at 3½ years (ibid.:37-55).

The educator training programme has to a high degree been dominated by women, but the first male kindergarten teacher, Chr. Engelstoft, graduated as far back as 1899. While this pioneer was a practitioner, the men who followed him undertook more atypical educational work tasks as they were travelling agitators for Fröbel gifts rather than traditional practitioners of the educator profession. Back in 1945 Engelstoft said concerning his view of male educators:

*"There can be no doubt that men regard children in a different way from women. [...] [I] don't consider them [read: Women] better than men, but because they are different from men I like them."* (Engelstoft, quoted in Enoksen 1996:17)

## From hospital assistant to social worker

The social reform of 1933 laid the foundation of the social worker profession, and four years later the Copenhagen College of Social Work was established at Copenhagen Municipal Hospital. It was a course of 1½ years for *"the education of social hospital assistants and other social workers"* (Nielsen 1974:116). The participants should be younger

<sup>12</sup> It is implicit here that even though the father stays at home, the children have to be looked after at an institution, which support the state of affairs where the man is not responsible – and should not be made responsible – for childcare. Something else that appears from this statement is that men are not associated with childcare, which also shines through on the level of work by virtue of a general absence of male educators/babysitters?.

<sup>13</sup> The pre-practice requirement was abolished in 1973 (Enoksen 1996:49).

women (this requirement was abolished later) with an upper secondary school leaving examination or corresponding school skills. They were trained to undertake personal and legal counselling at hospitals and at Mødrehjælpen (The National Council for the Unmarried Mother and her Child) (ibid.:116). Mødrehjælpen was also established in the 1930s, and in 1940 its director – together with others – founded the Danish Association of Social Workers, and the 70 members of the time manifested themselves with the slogan: "We didn't become social assistants for the wages" (Worning 2001:137). The term 'social assistant' was only replaced by the present 'social worker' in the 1940s. The origin of the social worker education programme in the National Council for the Unmarried Woman and her Child caused the Council to form the frame for the programme, and the 'great ladies' of the time achieved considerable influence on the methodology development and self-perception of the profession. This is still reflected in the socio-cultural – gendered – view of the occupation. In 1955 the social worker education programme was extended to its present length of 3½ years (Worning 2001; Nielsen 1974).

## From barber to hairdresser: When a profession changes gender

Jytte Larsen, historian and research librarian at KVINFO, The Danish Centre for Information on Women and Gender, has previously studied the hairdressing profession in an his-

torical perspective. She says that the profession has gone through a development in which it has changed gender.<sup>14</sup> It was originally a purely male profession and hair was not actually cut at the salons; the work consisted in shaving and trimming beards. Up to the 1920s, when fashion dictated that women should have short hair, hair was cut in the kitchen at home. With the new fashion, the need arose for women to have their hair cut by professional hairdressers. The salons thereby changed their function as women's hair also had to be cut – by other women, of course, because it was unheard of for men to cut women's hair and *vice versa*. At the beginning, therefore, the salons were divided in two; a *men's department* and a *women's department*, in which worked male barbers with male customers, and female hairdressers with female customers, respectively. In other words, there was a sharp division between ladies hairdressers and men's hairdressers (barbers). This division lasted until the 1960s when *unisex* salons appeared – primarily as result of the male barbers not wishing to cut the hair of the fashionable longhaired men. The gender-divided departments were abolished in these salons and it became common to cut the hair of both genders. At the same time men began to shave at home, undermining the barbers' *raison d'être*. All of this greatly reduced the barbers' clientele, and the female hairdressers advanced at the expense

---

<sup>14</sup> This section is based on a taped interview with Jytte Larsen as her information has not been written down.

of the male barbers. The female share expanded from a fourth in 1951 to comprising two-thirds in 1966, and this development has

continued, so today the occupation of hair-dressing is categorized as a 'female profession'.



## RESEARCH DESIGN

As the objective of the study is to establish a platform for expanding the legitimisation basis for men's behaviour in both the labour market and the private sphere, it is important to achieve profound knowledge of how the men *themselves understand and interpret* their choice and activities; that is which strategies the men utilise in their daily lives and how these are subsequently articulated. The *qualitative research interview* is ideal for obtaining such information as this methodological approach/technique makes it possible to collect profound and realistic data about the men's subjective life worlds; the self-experienced and articulated meaning of being a male gender minority. The reason that the guide is semi-structured is a desire for greater openness and the possibility of gathering spontaneous, living and unexpected answers. By constantly relating natively and— with a starting point in a *semi-structured interview guide* — openly asking about the matters in question, a deep insight into the men's self-perceptions is obtained that no other social science research method can achieve. There is also the possibility of collecting spontaneous and unexpected answers.<sup>15</sup> It is pointed out that the

<sup>15</sup> Condensation of meaning has been applied as a transcription technique, while the analytical approach is

intention is to study the way in which the men subjectively *articulate* their actions and not to obtain an objective description of this, for example, the way in which their work tasks differ from those of their female colleagues (Kvale 1997).<sup>16</sup> By focusing on the men's subjective self-perceptions, knowledge is established concerning which strategies

they employ to renegotiate the stereotypes and redefine the gender labels socio-culturally linked with the occupation within they act professionally.<sup>17</sup>

At the concrete empirical level, *41 men* from four different occupational groups were interviewed. This relatively large number of informants has been chosen to ensure that the empirical material is solid and

Number of men interviewed	
OCCUPATION	NO. OF MEN
Hairdressers	10
Educators	11
Social workers	6
Nurses	14
<b>Total</b>	<b>41</b>

inspired mainly by the interpretation of meaning approach (Kvale 1997:188-201).

<sup>16</sup> Cf. The Thomas theorem: "If a person defines a situation as real, then it becomes real in its consequences." (Ekegren 1998:234). If the men define their work functions in agreement with a hegemonic perception of masculinity, it is in fact unimportant if this is truly the case. What is important is that in their subjective self-perception the men carry out 'masculine' activities and occupy 'masculine' positions.

<sup>17</sup> The empirical material provides no basis for concluding whether the women employ similar strategies (cf. Later) to describe their work functions. To the extent that they do so, this is merely a sign that they are enrolling themselves in a more masculine (and often prestigious) context, but this does not change the fact that the men also wish to enrol themselves in this context (and distance themselves from being connoted feminine).

informative enough for the analysis to be founded on it. Some few criteria had to be fulfilled for the occupations to be regarded as 'suitable'. It is a precondition that the male workers occupy a position as a gender minority, and the limit for this was set at *20 percent* on the basis of a theoretically anchored expectation that different gender mechanisms can most easily be identified in such work contexts.<sup>18</sup> In addition, the men must also have completed a lengthy course of education, as this would mean that their work area could be regarded as more permanent than if it were a case of a transitional job.<sup>19</sup> The criteria were deliberately selected as very loosely defined, thus giving the partner countries great freedom to select the professions they found most appropriate and interesting. Each country must, however, focus on *nurses* and *educators* (or teachers of small children). In addition, as mentioned, *hairdressers* and *social workers* were selected. Since these occupations all have a training period of 3½ years and simultaneously contain several practice periods, it seems plausible that the men have thought long and hard about their

---

<sup>18</sup> The decision about precisely this percentage is based on other studies of gender minorities (cf. e.g. Kanter 1977 and Williams 1995).

<sup>19</sup> If instead of interviewing educators, we had, for example, interviewed *assistant* educators, this would not necessarily have thought about gender as an issue?? As many male assistant educators are men who either have the job as a sideline while they study, or do it to earn money before they continue their studies. In other words it is not (to the same extent) important for them whether the job is connoted feminine or masculine as they dissociate themselves from the job and anchor a hegemonic masculinity in the studies they are pursuing or are about to pursue..

gender in a work context. Finally, it appears from the diagram (cf. earlier) that the professions live up to the requirement concerning a maximum of 20 percent men.

## Interview context; locality and the researcher's gender

With respect to the *interview localities*, the majority of the interviews took place at the informants' *workplaces* and most often during working hours, at the request of the informants themselves. This can have influenced their answers, as there is a potential risk that their female colleagues could overhear the interview. This is expressed in the following quote from an e-mail sent to the interviewer on the day after the interview:

*"I wasn't too keen on saying anything about my role in relation to my superior because, as I said, I wasn't sure if she could hear what we were speaking about."* (Christian, educator, 34)<sup>20</sup>

This does not, however, seem to be the case with the other interviews. The informants do not appear to have held back from discussing even very personal subjects with the interviewer, not have they remarked on this in subsequent informal conversations and e-mail correspondence

---

<sup>20</sup> All the informants have been made anonymous in relation to the various matters that could reveal their true identity.

Several researchers (e.g. Cross & Bagilhole 2002, Williams 1995, Nordberg 1999) have pointed out that the *interviewer's gender* has an influence on the interview situation and thus on the empirical material that is collected.<sup>21</sup> For example, Professor Williams (1995:191-92) has experienced that when both the interviewer and the informant are men, an 'us vs. them' feeling arises as the men talk themselves into a common *masculine space*.<sup>22</sup> This is important as the present study, as mentioned, is about men working in female-dominated occupations, for which reason a large part of the interviews are precisely about men's interpersonal and collegiate relations with women. With this reasoning *in mente* – and an explicit ambition to establish a 'masculine' interview context – *exclusively* male interviewers have been used

## The nature of the empirical material

As previously mentioned, the empirical material consists of qualitative interviews with 41 male hairdressers, educators, social workers and nurses. The original intention was to interview about half of the men in focus groups, partly to benefit from group dynamics and partly to minimize costs in time and money of

---

<sup>21</sup> When the interviews were finished and the tape recorder was turned off, several of the informants said that they would not have spoken about their female colleagues/superiors in the same way if the interviewer had been a woman.

<sup>22</sup> There are empirical examples in the analysis chapter that confirm the assumption about such a space.

conducting such a large number of interviews. However, because of coordination problems only three small group interviews could be held with two, two and three informants, respectively.<sup>23</sup> The rest of the men were interviewed *individually*.

The informants were recruited using the so-called *snowball selection* method (Neergaard 2001:30; Neuman 1997:205-06), i.e. we contacted single men within each occupational category who then passed the contact on to other potential informants. The difference in the number of informants within each occupational group (cf. The diagram) is due to the above-mentioned project decision that the main focus should be on nurses and educators, and the fact that the lower the share of men is, the more prominent are the gender mechanisms.<sup>24</sup> It should also be mentioned that the men come mainly from *Greater Copenhagen*, which is also due to a joint project decision based on economy and time.<sup>25</sup>

There are great differences in the length of the interviews because some men had difficulty in sparing the time but the informants'

---

<sup>23</sup> In addition, it was also significant that the men were interviewed at their places of work, for which reason it was difficult to assemble the men at the same time and place, which is a precondition for being able to interview them in groups.

<sup>24</sup> The need for greater focus on the nurses is further stressed by the fact that this occupational group has the lowest percentage share of men, and that in ten years there will be a lack of about 10,000 nurses (cf. earlier).

<sup>25</sup> In our partner countries especially – Poland, Bulgaria and Italy – it would be very costly to find informants who were evenly distributed geographically.

openness and talkativeness also played a part. As a result, the interviews have a *duration* of between 30 minutes and two hours and 45 minutes. With respect to age distribution, the

youngest man is 25 and the oldest is 58, while seniority ranges from one to 26 years.

## ANALYSIS: MASCULINISATION, REDEFINITION AND MALE ROLES

Due to the nature of the empirical material as qualitative interviews, the focus of the following analyses is the men's *articulations*. This means that it is their *subjective experiences* that form the basis of the assumptions and conclusions made.<sup>26</sup>

### Motivation for career choice

The interviews reflect several motivating factors influencing the men's choice of profession. However, despite this multiplicity of meaning, three general trends that are directly articulated by the men can be identified; an accidental aspect, the significance of a role model, and de-stereotyping of the professions and the possibility of uniting personal interests and working life.

### Targeted by accident

It is characteristic of a great many of the men that did not have any previously defined idea of the career path they wanted to pursue

---

<sup>26</sup> The reason that certain men are quoted relatively often – and that there are no explicit references to all 41 men interviewed – is because the quotes are used to exemplify and concretise general trends that can be identified in the material. The grounds on which the quotes are chosen is thus their clarity and the men's ability to formulate themselves rather than attempting to achieve quantitative representation in the statements.

when they finished their youth education.<sup>27</sup> In the majority of cases the choice of profession was based neither on targeted search nor inspiring (present) school counselling, but on the contrary on *accident*, as before making a choice very many of the men had had experience of the work within their respective professions. For example Andreas (45 years of age), the educator, says that he needed "*time to think, just to have a nice time*", while another educator says that his choice of career was due to:

*"Pure chance. I don't think I would ever have become an educator if I hadn't begun working as an assistant quite by chance."* (Esben, educator, 37)

The men's experience often comes from assistant positions, substitute jobs, student jobs, spare-time work etc., that is jobs that they had originally envisaged as temporary. It is emphasized that even though there is an accidental aspect in relation to choice of profession for many of the men, the narratives reflect more deeply lying and genuine interest in working as nurses, hairdressers, educators and social workers, as it has been a case of a step-by-step approach to a career involving

---

<sup>27</sup> This does not apply to the hairdressers, as it can be gathered that they were clear about their choice of career already when they finished primary school, and that the choice can almost be regarded as the result of a family tradition (cf. later).

human and soft values. In other words, the accidental aspect is linked to the motivation and not to the men's present occupations in the respective professions. The insight that the men had gained into the professions led to them getting a more varied view of them, and to them becoming conscious of matters that appealed to them as persons – and not least as men.

### Role model and professional insight

While a (partly) accidental choice of profession is articulated by the educators, the nurses and to a lesser extent the social workers, this is not the case for the hairdressers. The great majority of these have close family members who made their living as hairdressers at the point in time when the career path was to be chosen. The hairdressers stated, for instance, that they had been in their father's or mother's hairdresser's salon as children, and that this had given them an insight into – and interest in – their profession:

*"I was in and out of here [the salon] throughout my childhood, of course. My grandmother and grandfather worked here, and my whole family. [...] I have to admit that sometimes I really wonder why some of the guys I meet who are in the business have chosen it. I mean, how you ever can get that idea. I did it because I knew about the business, knew what it was about, and I found it fascinating and a good place to develop oneself. But if I hadn't known so much about it, I would never have chosen it. I have to admit that."* (Frederik, hairdresser, 34)

Where the knowledge and experience of the professions of several of the educators and nurses are due to chance and, to a lesser extent, family relations – *role models* – the hairdressers' insight typically comes from here. As stated by Frederik above, it is essential for choice of profession to have an *insight* that is deeper than the stereotype picture culturally and traditionally associated with the job. All the men – not just the hairdressers but also the nurses, social workers and educators – point to the importance of knowing a 'role model' (the gender does not matter), so they can obtain a factual – realistic and practice-related – professional insight into the work involved and the culture. In this way various prejudices are often weakened and barriers/doubts – that were the source of their uncertainty about their professional choice – broken down and removed. The men eliminate the discrepancy that immediately occurs in connection with having to unite a professional identity associated with the profession in question with the culturally determined hegemonic idea of masculinity. That this is the case is clearly stated by Andreas, who compares his greater knowledge of the educator profession with his earlier more traditional understanding of it:

*"If anyone had asked me if I was going to become an educator, I would have roared with laughter. It was only when I started to work in the universe of children myself that I actu-*

*ally found out that was a meaning in it.” (Andreas, educator, 45)<sup>28</sup>*

The importance of having a role model is, moreover, empirically confirmed, as several of the men relate that their choice of profession has led to many of their male friends also being inspired, and now undergoing – or have completed – a gender untraditional education. After the men’s ‘pioneering work’, atypical career choices have become more acceptable in their social circle. This appears from Jørgen’s story:

*“It has sort of made it acceptable – that it doesn’t have to be a traditional man’s job.” (Jørgen, educator, 52)*

## Uniting spare time interests and working life

A final common element of motivation is that the men pursued the possibility of having a career with the future prospects of *uniting their spare time interests and their working lives*. There are several examples of this pos-

sibility having been the main motive force and decisive factor for the choice. The career path was chosen, for example, to fit in with an interest in music, nature, IT or sport as part of work. As an example of pursuance of interests, Jimmy, whose great passion is role play, has this to say:

*“I can use that, of course, it’s an advantage. It makes it all much easier that in principle my private and professional lives are mixed to a certain extent. It’s a big advantage. [...] [I] have also managed in the places I’ve worked to sneak it [read: Role play] in, so that now my main job is a role play assistant. [...] I [was also] quite fascinated by how funny it really is to get money for running around and playing football all day [...] I could have used my spare time on that.” (Jimmy, educator, 31)*

Jimmy mentions an interesting aspect here. This agreement between spare time and work means an overlap between his private and professional self-perception (self and professional identity), by which he avoids the potential conflict of identity involved when a masculine identity is confronted with a ‘feminine’ professional identity. Instead of being an educator, Jimmy is a ‘football playing role play assistant’, which is a description with more masculine connotations than ‘educator’ (cf. later for job descriptions). A characteristic of the educator group can be observed here; they mention activities that presuppose that the children have reached a certain age. A clear trend can be identified of the men preferring to work at institutions with *young*

<sup>28</sup> The fact that the circumstances for entering the profession are linked to having a varied, multifaceted insight into the profession can be interpreted as an expression of the men – by virtue of their socialisation as men – having been ‘limited to career options that are traditional for their gender, and a professional life within a job area with another gender label such as hairdressing, nursing, social worker and educator not having been reflected as a potential option. For a thorough analysis of the importance of school counsellors for educational choice, cf. Sine Lehn (2003) *Gender-blind counselling?*, and Steen Baagøe Nielsen and Aase Rieck Sørensen (2004) *Young people’s routes to the gender-divided labour market*.

people or older children.<sup>29</sup> Mogens, a nurse, also talks about cultivating his spare time interests on the work level:

*"I have four different mobile phones, a computer and other things I find interesting. [...] I also have all these gadgets here; I have pace-makers, pumps – everything. You name it, we got it here."* (Mogens, nurse, 35)

## A choice – but simultaneously a rejection

Several of the men have previously worked in traditional male occupations, and in this context they tell about conscious rejection of more hierarchically structured, business like and result-oriented professions/education programmes in favour of careers in softer, more caring fields. In this context Jarl says:

*"[I] then came to a kindergarten and I thought it was fantastic, and the values that exist in*

*the area of care /children – rather than the rather hard world with results – impressed me a lot."* (Jarl, educator, 43)

Jørgen also tells about how he regretted a career change from educator to advertising man, as a professional existence within the latter came into conflict with his family life. A personal friend offered him the job in advertising:

*"He was the director of an advertising agency and we played music together. And when we were driving home from some gig or other late at night we often talked about jobs. We overdid it a bit. He really provoked me and I provoked him. I said 'rich pig' to him, and he could deduct the whole lot. Finally he made me such a concrete [job] offer that I was actually so provoked that I had to say 'yes'. [...] He wanted to save me so I tried it for a couple of years."* (Jørgen, educator, 52)

Jørgen remained employed in advertising for a few years during which period he had a great deal of *success* and managed to prove to his friends – as well as to himself and his social surroundings – that he had the qualifications that made it possible to hold down an *"ice cold and really tough"* job, as he termed it. He managed to act in a satisfactory way in relation to the criteria of the trade and his friend, and thus eliminate the cause of the provocations – as well as earning professional respect. The reason for Jørgen ending with rejecting the advertising world was a stepped up stress level and a longing for more freedom/less routine in working life as the same time as feeling personally inadequate on the

<sup>29</sup> It should be pointed out that two of the educators interviewed work in crèches. When asked about his choice of institution, Esben says that his job in a crèche is the result of a personal compromise where the possibility of working with management took priority over the age of the children: *"It's not really because I specifically chose a crèche. I chose a collectively managed institution."* (Esben, educator, 37). With this statement, the work function is *redefined* by the explicit removal of the focus from the children and to the work. Marvin also works in a crèche. He has just finished his training and he was appointed because during his studies he had his internship in the institution in question. He says about his job: *"I'm really employed by the Municipality of Hillerød and not by Vuggestuen Regnbuen, which is here [where we are now]. I'm employed by the Municipality of Hillerød and I work at Vuggestuen Regnbuen."* (Marvin, educator, 27). It is also clear that articulates himself as a municipal employee and not as an educator in a crèche.



home front in connection with the family getting bigger:

*"I noticed that it had a bad effect on my family life and my relationship with my children, because I was never there when something happened."* (Jørgen, educator, 52)

He got this opportunity again when he returned to his job as educator. Jørgen describes his experience from the trade as important for his present working life, as it has confirmed his feeling that being an educator is the correct decision for him. His has also shown that being an educator is not a necessary choice caused by a lack of qualifications, but that instead it is an *active choice*, just as he was successful in filling out a more gender traditional 'man's job' and thus proved that he is a 'real man'.<sup>30</sup> Jørgen's story reflects a general phenomenon; when men have proved that they can achieve success in relation to the criteria and values prescribed by hegemonic masculinity, it is more legitimate to take a job that is usually categorised as feminine.

## Reactions to – and legitimising – career choice

It is characteristic of the choices that most of the men have taken a long time to make them

– often several years – and that they thought about them a lot before coming to a final decision and telling their family/friends about them. This means that the choice was based on *conscious assessments* and that the men were prepared for one or other type of reaction when they told their primary socialisation environments. It is interesting that in their descriptions the men do *not* stress the concrete work tasks as being the reason for their doubts, but rather assumptions about the reaction they expected from family, friends and people in general. By having very carefully considered the consequences of their choice, the men could present credible and well thought out arguments, thus creating greater understanding.

## Family support

The men describe their families' reactions to their career choice as mainly *positive*. They were not confronted with unwillingness or prejudice, but on the contrary with a high degree of backing and understanding – and direct encouragement in some cases. Before making the choice, several of the men had either had unskilled jobs for some years or had dropped out of study programmes – primarily third level – which meant that the family interpreted the choice as an expression of focus with good, stable perspectives for a working future.<sup>31</sup> In the case of many hair-

<sup>30</sup> 'Real man' here refers to the stereotype way in which Mads uses the category, and not Marco's broader definition (cf. later).

<sup>31</sup> The third level study programmes the men had dropped were psychology and pedagogics in the case of

dressers, the choice even seems obvious and expected because of the families' occupation in the profession for very many years. Commenting on this, Poul says:

*"It was natural for me [...] with my great-grandfather and grandfather who won several [hairdressing] championships and Danish championships. With both national and international judges."* (Poul, hairdresser, 57)<sup>32</sup>

The fact that other persons in the men's social circles – both family and persons from the group of friends – have made similar career choices to a high degree legitimises the men's choice, which can (partly) be explained on the basis of greater knowledge of the profession and its working conditions.

## Friends' surprise

The reactions of the group of friends may be described as ambiguous as the men tell about a pattern of reaction that corresponds to the

---

the educators. Some of the male nurses had been studying medicine, sport and theology. The social workers had been studying at the social science basic studies programme at Roskilde University, which was also the case for some educators and nurses. None of the hairdressers had been enrolled at a university. While one could ask whether the men's masculinisation strategies also contain compensatory elements, this aspect will not be pursued in the present report.

<sup>32</sup> Thomas's family, who are graduates and farmers, did not understand his career choice but changes their minds, *"because you can earn a lot of money moonlighting."* (Thomas, hairdresser, 34). This is grounded in an association between money and og masculinity, while the significance of the cultural status of the hairdressing profession as a 'female profession' loses its meaning.

family's, but on the other hand the friends are *surprised* at the choice of a caring – and culturally female labelled – profession with soft values. For example, Mads met with various prejudiced comments from his football mates:

*"They thought it was very strange that I should suddenly, as they said, 'go and wipe other people's bums', and I was also asked, of course, if I was homosexual. [...] 'Well, if that's what interests him, then it's fair enough that he doesn't want to be a carpenter or painter or electrician like the rest of us. Like we real men do'."* (Mads, nurse, 25)<sup>33</sup>

Mads's masculinity is being challenged here on two fronts, partly that in their statements, founded in a stereotype perception of the nursing profession, his friends make a caricature of his work tasks with the metaphor of 'wiping bums', and partly that his heterosexual orientation is doubted, which are key parameters of hegemonic masculinity.

Like Mads, Andreas tells about derogatory reactions by former colleagues and friends from the defence forces, who expressed astonishment and *"had a great laugh"* at his career change to educator.<sup>34</sup> Andreas's

---

<sup>33</sup> In all fairness it should be mentioned that this was said with a twinkle in the eye, and that Mads and his football mates had been friends for many years since their childhood.

<sup>34</sup> It is interesting that Andreas formerly read psychology at university – which is also a subject dominated by women – and when colleagues/friends got to know this, they reacted with understanding and interest. With a point of departure in a hegemonic perception of masculinity, this can be explained on the basis of a university education giving a higher degree of status, financial

counter reaction was to *invite* them to come to the day-care institution when he was working at that time to let them see the work areas and tasks (more about this later): "*It was important for me that they gained insight into the universe I was now working in*", Andreas says, explaining his action which lived up to the intention and got rid of the prejudices, thus eliminating any tendencies to amusement.

It is very characteristic of the educators and nurses that in different ways they have felt a *need to explain* – and thus legitimise – their choice by de-stereotyping the work tasks associated with their profession. Klaus describes how this is a problem based on the professions' cultural association as feminine rather than masculine, as he shows a certain reluctance to tell that his future career will be that of a nurse:

*"I think it would have been easier if I were to work in a bank or as a navy."* (Klaus, nurse, 49)

To legitimise their career choice, the men use different strategic articulations that can often be related to certain work tasks (cf. later), favourable career prospects, and/or alterna-

---

benefit and the like than is the case with educator training. Jonathan also tells about a loss of prestige when he switched from studying psychology to the training college: "*People couldn't understand it: 'What's going on?'. It's untraditional and it also has something to do with status. When I said that I was reading psychology, people were very enthusiastic: 'I've always dreamt about studying that'.*" (Jonathan, educator, 32).

tive/clarifying entitlements of their professional positions.

### Career opportunities articulated; temporary stop

When telling his friends about his career choice as a nurse, Mogens presented his deliberations so his friends could get an understanding of the assessments and reflections that led to his choice. The reaction was that;

*"[the friends] also were convinced of the career opportunities in the choice. There were potentially interesting possibilities of getting on."* (Mogens, nurse, 35)

The nursing profession is not presented here as the career target, but on the contrary as a *temporary stop* and a means of getting a;

*"middle manager position – before I go on to something like a business studies degree. I think that things will be like that within the next two years."* (Mogens, nurse, 35)

There are narratives with similar chains of argumentation within all four professions when it comes to legitimising career choice, but it should be added that a considerable number of the men had abandoned these articulated ambitions at the time of the interview and instead arrived at an acknowledgment of the fact that "*it's more fun to be on the shop floor, so to speak*" (Jimmy, educator, 31) than to pursue an ambition about a management position. This can be inter-

preted as an indication that the men – when they had to choose a career path – were subject to a notion about men and a hierarchical career, but it can also reflect the fact that due to greater insight into the nature of the professions the men had found other parameters in which they could anchor a masculine identity. Or it could simply be a result of the men getting older and therefore more confident about their masculinity. The empirical material does not allow a clear conclusion to be drawn here, but nevertheless it does not affect the fact the men use favourable career opportunities to legitimise their choices.

## Job descriptions and work functions clarified

As previously pointed out in the case of Jimmy, the 'role play assistant', several of the men use alternative and/or more precise *job descriptions* to legitimise their choice, thus changing the profession's stereotype associations. This strategy is implemented both when they enter the profession and in their subsequent working lives. For example, the educators use the titles of 'leaders', 'deputy leaders', 'bachelors by profession', educators in natural science subjects' or 'sports college trained educator', and only two men use the bald title of 'educator'. Andreas says straight out:

*"I insist that I am a social educator [...] because that is probably a word that sounds bet-*

*ter in relation to a man. I can't hide that'."*  
(Andreas, educator, 45)

This is said in spite of the fact that the distinction between different types of educator training (formally speaking) no longer exists (cf. earlier).

In the case of the nurses, a polarised view can be identified of whether or not the title's feminine form is suitable when talking about male nurses. Jess (nurse, 52), who describes himself as 'a night nurse at an old people's home, says:

*"I get offended when anyone says something else or tries to make it into something masculine."* (Jess, nurse, 52 år)

Kristoffer, who calls himself 'ward nurse with a management function' articulates the opposite opinion:

*"When today one gets one's authorisation from the Danish Health Authority, it says that I have the right to practise the profession with the right to call myself 'nurse'. I don't think that's OK. I never have. It's also a question that many male patients ask me– and then I change it to 'sygeplejer [Danish] '-ske' [the feminine Danish ending] is an expression of something female. So it surprises me that a public institution like the Health Authority has never changed it. It's strange."* (Kristoffer, nurse, 44)

Most of the nurses have a *strong professional identity* associated with the title 'nurse' (based on the authorisation as well as professional pride), and many of them feel pro-

voked if one *directly* asks about the utility of the title in relation to male nurses because of the feminine form of the Danish word [sygeplejerske]. With respect to an alternative, neutral term such as 'sygeplejer', Jeppe says:

*"Everyone knows what a 'sygeplejerske' is. But what exactly is a 'sygeplejer' – is it someone with half training?"* (Jeppe, nurse, 42)

In addition, many men relate the term with World War I and associate it with a profession with a lower educational level. In spite of this professional pride, almost all of the men use titles that make precise their section and function such as 'anaesthetist nurse', 'clinical counsellor', 'consultant', 'section leader' and the like when talking about themselves in contexts that do not have to do with their occupational title. There is no question of re-titling when it comes to the hairdressers, as a distinction is no longer made between barbers and women's hairdressers; the title 'hairdresser' is simply used. A neutral term is also used for the social workers. Nonetheless the social workers use more precise titles such as "technical facilitator" (Erik, 59) and "rules man" (Dennis, 58). In his description Dennis equates himself with the more prestigious jurist group, thus drawing attention to the fact that, at any rate in his work, he is more a jurist than a social worker:

*"Before I could draw a breath I was working on an equal footing with the jurists and had precisely the same assignments."* (Dennis, social worker, 58)

The final aim of the hairdressers is often to become the manager or owner of a salon – or a 'business', as they call it themselves. The hairdressers (and one of the social workers) mention the possibility of becoming *self-employed* in connection with their career choice, and also stress the prospect of a professional life in glamorous surroundings:

*"If you are ambitious, then you at least play with the idea of having your own business. And there are a whole lot who of course also have ambitions about doing stylist work, i.e. working for big fashion magazines, at fashion shows, and one thing and another – and then [also with] shows and teaching."* (Frederik, hairdresser, 34)

However, the longer they have worked in the trade, the less importance men tend to attach to the title and they become more distanced and ironical about it. Prejudices disappear with time and the men tell about more acceptance and respect concerning their profession – although they do still meet with humorous (but well-meaning) comments. Henning, the leader of an institution, provides an example of this ironical distance when, with stoical calm and a twinkle in his eye, he says that he is "a 'leader', 'leader of an institution', 'managing director', or whatever you want to call it", (Henning, educator, 48). The objective of alternative job descriptions is to *change* and *redefine* the gendered associations that are culturally associated with the respective pro-

fessions, making them appear legitimate and masculine (cf. later).<sup>35</sup>

## The significance of gender during training

Their student days – and in general the period while they were enrolled at the various educational institutions – are evaluated as *extremely positive* by the men. This is clearly expressed in Max's assessment, among others:

*"It was the best time of my life when I was at the training college."* (Max, educator, 30)

This enthusiastic attitude can be clearly identified among the great majority of the men in all the professions.<sup>36</sup>

There is a great deal of consistency between the social and cultural conditions the men are

---

<sup>35</sup> It cannot be concluded on the basis of the material whether the women likewise use clarifying job descriptions, but it is a plausible assumption as, for example, the term 'nurse' covers a large group of individuals and there can be a desire for internal differentiation in relation to each other. Several of the men say that clarification also relates to status. This appears from Niklas's statement: *"I am an anaesthetist nurse. [...] You can't become much more in nursing unless you take the management route."* (Niklas, nurse, 41). As a representative for the educators, Esben also points out that *"there is obviously much more status involved in saying that one is working in a specialist area"* (Esben, educator, 37).

<sup>36</sup> It should be emphasised that it is the success stories whom we have interviewed, i.e. the men who completed their studies and now work in female dominated professions. It is therefore to be expected that they in general are positive vis-à-vis the environment (including the form and culture of the study programme, social working environment etc.).

confronted with at the different educational institutions, just as the study-contextualised experiences can also be identified later on the labour market. This also means that if, for instance, visibility and male groupings are described in this section, these are phenomena that cannot be limited to the period of education as they are likewise very much present – and constantly actualised – in working life. The same applies to the men's position as gender minorities. This is, however, more obvious while they are studying as the men frequently only have five or six male co-students per year who complete the education, while later in their working life, apart from their fellow professionals, they will also meet men from other professional groups as well as clients.<sup>37</sup> This interdisciplinary male fellowship is described by Mogens, who is a nurse:

*"The colleagues and partners I have – doctors, orderlies, other nurses and physiotherapists who are also men – we have quite a good understanding of one another's function level. There are quite a few men here."* (Mogens, nurse, 35)

The men's position as a gender minority is, in other words, more sharply defined while they are studying than later on the labour market.

---

<sup>37</sup> In this context it should be noted that there are some lines of study where the proportion of men is much greater – as many as half. In our material this applies to the sports training college and training colleges that still maintain they are social educational (cf. earlier section on the history of the educator profession).

## Visibility; when one is always 'on'

One of the most characteristic consequences of being one of a gender minority - both while studying and on the labour market - is *visibility*, a cultural component that is always present and actualised. Max comments on this:

*"Everyone knew who we were. 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."* (Max, educator, 30)

The men do not, however, present being in the limelight as inhibiting or repressive. It is almost the opposite as this attention is felt to be *advantageous* because it means that it is easier for them to get their opinion heard and thus to have influence:

*"At the large assemblies, the men were more 'on stage' than the women. Even though there were few of us [men], we were more visible. There were many - also among the women teachers - who liked a bit of male opposition."* (Jonathan, educator, 32)

The visibility does not only apply at plenary sessions, at morning assembly or during the teaching, as the men are also very engaged in different social activities at the educational institutions:

*"We were clearly a minority, but not a weak minority, because it was us who got elected as class representatives in the study councils and staff-student bodies, us who belonged to the IT groups - and us who ran the social café at the school. 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."* (Alex, nurse, 28)

While Alex puts forward his minority position as the reason for the male fellowship that is established in connection with great academic and social engagement, there is, however, another factor involved. As previously mentioned, the majority of the men - with the exception of the hairdressers - have been working for a number of years - or been studying something else - which means that in general they are older than their female fellow students. In addition, the men have based their career choice on lengthy and deep thought, which has targeted their professional life. This (professional/educational) experience, reflection and focus meant that the nurses and educators in particular - but also men from the other professions to a certain extent - consciously prioritised a high degree of academic and social engagement in their education.<sup>38</sup>

Having been visible at an educational institution has had a *positive effect* on some of the men's later careers as former study mates and teachers can remember them several years after they have completed their education. For example, Kenneth tells about a hospital

---

<sup>38</sup> Several of the men also speak about this under the cliché 'men act - women talk'. According to the men the same is the case when the men talk about working life (cf. later where nurse Mogens talks about 'chattering' women).

where he had been in training practice and had recently revisited:

*"I haven't been there for 25 years, and there's a lot of people that still remember me. It's not very likely they would have if I had been 'Lise'." (Kenneth, nurse, 49)*

While the increased attention is very largely associated with something positive, it is however, described as negative in certain contexts. This aspect appears from Frederik's description:

*"Typically you are noticed more, that is by the teachers and one thing and the other. You don't melt so easily into the crowd and you don't get away with things." (Frederik, hairdresser, 34)*

This also illustrates an implicit *performance pressure* to which the men must constantly relate in their actions, and which therefore impacts on daily life, because they 'don't get away with anything so easily'. Mogens clearly speaks from experience:

*"Mistakes are remembered and never forgotten." (Mogens, nurse, 35)*

Visibility cannot be clearly said to be either an advantage or a disadvantage, but an ambivalent circumstance to which all the men had to relate when they commenced their education and that also characterises their presence on the labour market now.

## MUMS; when men group

In the quote above, Alex touches on an interesting aspect when he says that the men 'stuck together'. Stories about how the men group themselves are found across the professional boundaries and in almost all the narratives. These *social groupings* arise primarily because the men want to be together with male students in the same position at their respective educational institutions:

*"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." (Alex, nurse, 28)*

This male socialisation – where girls are a priori denied entry despite their desire to join in – is often established as a humorous *alternative* to the female dominance that characterises the environment at the educational institutions. But at the same time an underlying and unarticulated intention is present; to create a common, professional – *masculine* – identity. For example several nurses tell about more formalized and named groups:

*"We started a society called MUMS [Danish abbreviation]: The Minority Group of Indecent Male Nurses. We had to start it because it could really get to be too much for some, and it was also to support some of the others [men] who maybe found it difficult and thought that it sometimes was too much. So we went bowling or out to drink a few beers. [...] [The group was set up] across the lines of class and study years. That was OK. It functions very well. The society was bit like a*



*lodge where we tried to bring people [read: Men] together a bit.*" (Mogens, nurse, 35)

The prestigious Marcel Club, a lodge-like club for hairdressers, is a similar formal male fellowship.<sup>39</sup> The educators and social workers are more informal in their grouping strategy, but despite this they use terms such as "*comradeship*", "*brotherhood*", and "*allies*" (Jørgen, educator, 52) to characterize the time they spend together with other men. As far as studies are concerned, the men often use each other as sparring partners as they often cooperated on written papers, group work and studying for exams.<sup>40</sup>

It is also interesting that several of the men say that the male friendships that started while they were studying were very strong and are kept going with frequent phone calls or e-mail correspondence – even between men who received their training back in the 1970s.<sup>41</sup>

---

<sup>39</sup> Up to ten years ago the club was only open to men, but there are now a few female members: "*We are 80-90 members, about 75 of whom are men – and of the 75 men, at the moment we have one [man] who is homosexual*" (Frederik, hairdresser, 34). As appears from the aside, Frederik says that with a single exception, the male members are masculine on the basis of the hegemonic line of thought regarding sexual orientation.

<sup>40</sup> The descriptions refer to the possibility of establishing a social masculine space with insider language: "*By using smiles, looks, glances and hand signals you can make it very easy for another [man] to understand what one means. [...] It's another form of communication. I agree with the book called: Men are from Mars and Women are from Venus. That's what they [read: Women] are.*" (Jimmy, educator, 31).

<sup>41</sup> The men also depict a high presence of male socialisation in working life.

In general it can be said that segregation/male fellowship is used as a *social valve or line of retreat*; when conversation become too 'chicken-run like, the women 'cackle' too much, or there is too much 'nonsense', then the men seek communities of interest and cultivate 'maleness'.<sup>42</sup>

## Relations to women fellow students

In spite of the above-mentioned male socialisation being described as something the men 'had to do', it should not be regarded as an indicator of a forced, necessary or excluding relationship. On the contrary! The men describe their relations with their female fellow students as *extremely positive*. In fact all the men describe their presence at the educational institutions as being fully *accepted* – academically, socially and culturally – and they do not feel the need to explain their choice. There are many interesting narratives around this theme, but one particularly interesting matter comes to light in several of the narratives; the men tell of a popularity among the women fellow students anchored in a *gender game* on the more *intimate and interpersonal level*. Followed by loud laughter – but still very sincere – Jimmy says:

---

<sup>42</sup> The vocabulary used is that of the men, and it can be said that there is an extreme tendency to use chicken run analogies when speaking about the women's conversations.

*"I had even more women who thought I was gorgeous. When they also found out that I had a very beautiful girlfriend, then I was even more gorgeous – even more 'divine' – because I was unreachable. And people [read: Women] were like: 'Oh, hallo Jimmy!' – and they all wanted to touch."* (Jimmy, educator, 31)

In agreement with this, Kenneth says that he was also very aware of this, and that the prospect of being a gender minority with such privileges influenced his choice of career. After having listed various factors motivating his career choice, he says:

*"It was more a matter of there being a lot of good women I could be together with, to be honest."* (Kenneth, nurse, 49)<sup>43</sup>

Here are exemplified clear references to parameters about heterosexuality that are contained in hegemonic masculinity, just as there is an implicit distancing to the prejudice mentioned by Mads about being 'gay' (cf. earlier).<sup>44</sup> In other words, the men's stressing

this can be interpreted as a masculinisation strategy.

Even though the possibility of coming into close contact with women was regarded as a welcome and valued side effect of being a gender minority, it is reported that exploiting this potential to an extreme degree could backfire. Max, who formerly studied nursing but then switched to the training college and is now an educator, has this to say:

*"You can have as many women as you like, but that is a really, really bad idea. I could see the repercussion of this with my male fellow students [from the nursing school] after a year. 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. I could see where it would go after a year. They actually became quite unpopular and the more 'reticent' men were really popular."* (Max, educator, 30)

However, this does not seem to be a widespread attitude as it is only Max who directly articulates the matter while the other men do not as much as mention similar experiences, not even the men who according to themselves have diligently exploited the 'opportunity'.<sup>45</sup>

<sup>43</sup> In this perspective it is also interesting that more than a third of the educators and nurses interviewed have spouses with the same education.

<sup>44</sup> When (heterosexual) men distance themselves so emphatically from prejudices about homosexuality, one could be led to conclude that that the homosexual men working in the professions are *doubly stigmatised*, partly in relation to the women by virtue of their gender as male, and partly in relation to heterosexual men by virtue of their homosexual orientation. It should be added here that the few homosexual men who were interviewed for the study do not tell of such double stigmatisation. It is Alex's experience that *"in nursing there is greater tolerance of male homosexuals"* (Alex, 28, nurse). Niklas is the only one to tell about a socialisation with other homosexual men: *"[In] the Testosterone Club probably over half were gay."* (Niklas, nurse, 41). The homosexual men do not describe their sexual orientation as causing a problem, and the heterosexual men do not describe it as a problem to be around homo-

sexual men (and women). It is only to the extent that heterosexual men are 'accused' of being homosexual themselves that this is manifested as a problem.

<sup>45</sup> These statements were made by heterosexual informants, but the homosexual men also tell about good social relations while they were studying.

A great number of the men maintained that they did not exploit their 'popularity' in this way, while in the same breath telling colourful tales about male fellow students who 'were surrounded by women'. Mads puts forward what René terms *"the cock of the walk"* (nurse, 28) as evidence of his heterosexuality:

*"They ask if you are gay. You're at a college where 95% of the students are women. That's a pretty weird line of thought. 'You are a carpenter and there are 100% men, [so] which of us is most gay?'"* (Mads, nurse, 25)

This illustrates an archetypical example of the way in which men (try to) masculinise their professions by means of an untraditional emphasis: The fact that the majority of the students at the educational institutions are women (thus the label 'women's profession') is used by Mads as an argument for his sexual orientation, by which his presence at the nursing school is legitimised on the basis of a traditional masculinity discourse.

### A privileged teacher/pupil relationship

With respect to the *teaching staff*, the men also speak of good social relations most often based on a formal teacher/pupil relationship, but in some cases the men depict an increased and person related interest in them on the part of the teachers. The men describe this as originating in their relatively greater academic engagement and increased visibility

at the educational institutions (cf. previously), and only a few of them connect it with anything gender-related. Jørgen is one of the men who has experienced a more formal relationship – almost an alliance – with the *male teachers*, as the men supported one another across the lines of their positions:

*"They [the male teachers] said: 'That's fine. Move on. Do more about this. It's right. This is the way you should go.' On the other hand, we also supported them when we had communal singing [or when we were voting about,] who should come and hold a lecture. We had to make some suggestions. It shouldn't only be what the women thought was interesting [that the lecture should be about]. 'Some of the other values should also enter into it. [...] It was really more on the level of comradeship.'"* (Jørgen, educator, 52)

Jørgen presents here a woman/man polarisation which, however, is not characteristic of the men who were interviewed as a whole, and it should rather be related to a generational relationship.<sup>46</sup> Moreover, it appears from the interview context that male teachers and students came together in a 'masculine community' (cf. earlier). Peter had also experience of occupying a privileged position among the male teachers from his studies at the National School of Social Work:

*"Especially in relation to the male teachers at the school, we got some respect – or profit –*

<sup>46</sup> The argument is justified by this polarised perception of gender being identified among the older group of informants to a far higher degree.

*or got something out of it. We were sort of looked after [...] one could say that there was mutual understanding to some degree or other.*" (Peter, social worker, 48)

Some of the other men speak about the way in which they made use of their gender vis-à-vis *women teachers*:

*"If you knew that the lesson was to be about something [specific], and you perhaps had not done your homework, you could go over and flirt a little with her".* (Jimmy, educator, 31)

It is difficult to judge whether this is the result of personality rather than a gendered relationships as such, but a common feature of the men who articulate such stories is that they are extravert, quick and charismatic.

More generally, several of the informants speak about being relatively more *privileged* than the women students. Kenneth describes it unambiguously:

*"I could get away with ten times as much as the others [read: The girls] could."* (Kenneth, nurse, 49)

While the majority of the stories tell about the men's privileged positions, this picture is blurred by narratives about men who feel a need to *prove* their academic qualifications:

*"There were probably a few nursing teachers who felt that the men should make an extra effort. [...] then you only got good marks, because 'it is so easy to be a man in a female environment!'. I felt that that was the opinion at the school. Both of the teachers and one's fel-*

*low students. But I thought – on the contrary – that sometimes unreasonable demands were made one just because one was a man."* (Niklas, nurse, 41)

Other men describe similar situations where they have to prove that they master the core qualifications of the profession, which have to do with care and therefore are not traditionally associated with men. The trend in these depictions – also to be found in working life – is that gender becomes an obstacle/disadvantage for the man in that he has to prove that he has caring competencies *in spite of* his gender. This does not seem to be widespread or to have any serious impact on the men, but it must nevertheless be presented because it plays a part in dispelling the prejudice that men's presence in female professions should only be regarded as advantageous to them.<sup>47</sup>

---

<sup>47</sup> *Excursus on gender as a barrier*: While the man's gender is often regarded as a clear asset and good in a female dominated occupation, the intention of this excursus is to further refine this view. This will be done by taking a point of departure in Max's story as he has experience of gender undermining qualifications. In other words, there are several more examples of this but these will not be made explicit as the objective of this excursus is only to *nuance* the matter and not to provide an exhaustive description of it. Max says that four months before the interview was held, he was made acting head of department even though he was only in his early 30s and had been at the institution for a relatively short time. This was a welcome opportunity as he had wanted promotion for quite a long time, but all the same he had not been prepared for the opportunity to present itself *already now*. The reason that it was precisely he who was appointed was: *"The fact that I was an educator who was proud of my profession [...] but I could [also] very well imagine that he [read: The leader of the institution] had missed someone to spar with in the leader team of the institution. [One] of the same gender."* Max is here referring to what is termed the 'Huey, Dewey and Louie' effect where an individual chooses a partner to work with who resembles

It should also be stressed that the education programmes for all four occupations are so designed as to contain several *practical training periods* of longer or shorter duration where the men enter the labour market to try out the academic skills they have learned and simultaneously acquire experience based knowledge of practice and the working environment. Narratives from this will be integrated in the context of other experience and experiences from working life in the following chapter, but it should be briefly pointed out here that in the practical training periods being a man is assessed as being a greater advantage than was the case at the educational institutions. Jarl presents this attitude when he says that;

*"in the practical training periods – which after all are part of the education programme – it's true enough that men are very warmly*

---

him/herself (cf. e.g. Reinicke 2002:98). By becoming a temporarily appointed leader, Max does not have to go through procedures that formally test his qualifications – and firmly anchor the justification of him as leader: *"I felt myself that I had the necessary qualifications for such a job – but I was not allowed to show it. I couldn't prove it to an appointment committee or my colleagues, and it ended with my worst nightmare."* (Max, educator, 30). The nightmare scenario became a reality and Max ran into problems with the staff group, which developed to such a scale that he contacted the leader who had appointed him and asked him to re-advertise the position. He simply handed in his resignation. Subsequently Max applied for the position 'on an equal footing with all other' applicants and went through the formal application procedures vis-à-vis the administration - and was (re)appointed. The result was that Max's position as department leader was accepted by his colleagues. It could be said that in the first instance gender was an asset in connection with the temporary appointment, but that it later became a social and cultural *barrier* that undermined/made impossible genuine leadership until a formal administrative appointment procedure was initiated and Max's appointment was thereby justified.

*welcomed and are enormously popular."* (Jarl, educator, 43)

## Gendered experiences and tales from working life

One of the most interesting matters that can be identified in the men's stories is the way in which working tasks, chores and activities are subjectivised through articulations. As will emerge from the following, to a high degree the men construe their narratives in agreement with the hegemonic perception of masculinity that was introduced at the beginning of the report.<sup>48</sup>

It may on the surface seem ambitious to have the objective of localising common working features at the concrete, practical level in professions as diverse as those within which the educators, hairdressers, nurses and social workers function. But, as will be seen from the narratives, several interdisciplinary embedded masculinisation strategies and social and cultural conditions emerged during the investigation process.

---

<sup>48</sup> It is emphasised that masculinity is understood as a phenomenon that cannot be clearly related to biological gender (men and women, respectively), but that it is something practised in social contexts, i.e. in interaction between individuals. It is pointed out that women to a certain extent also describe themselves in relation to a hegemonic masculinity (cf. Warming & Ussing 2005:9-10).

## Masculinisation of work tasks

The four professions contain a wealth of different job functions which are partly specific to the occupations but which can also be related to the respective professions. Nonetheless a great number of general characteristics can be identified at the professions' external (between the occupations) and internal levels (e.g. at different departments or type of institution). It would be too extensive – and involve an inappropriate number of repetitions – to present concrete exemplification from every single occupational group in relation to all themes, for which reason there will be exemplary and concise statements describing the interdisciplinary trends (cf. note 26).

Klaus provides an example of subjective accentuation. He enumerates the tasks that fill his working day, and in the following quote he describes his work on the basis of different qualities and characteristics, but it should first be emphasized that he is a *nurse*:

*"I am a clinical counsellor as my primary position. [...] In this position I am sort of responsible for them [trainees and students] learning what they have to during their stay. [...] I am the resource person for the rest of the personnel: When patients with weird diseases come in, I try to discover what it could be. [...] One works very independently. [...] There is absolutely no time for patients in reality."* (Klaus, nurse, 49)

The job requires qualifications such as *responsibility* and *independence*, and also having *strong resources* and a *great deal of*

*knowledge*, and since Klaus is in the job, it is implicitly expressed that he has these competencies. It also appears that he uses the terms 'clinical counsellor' rather than nurse, which can be related to the matters mentioned concerning job descriptions. Finally, he draws attention to the fact that he actually does not have time for the patients, which must otherwise be regarded as the main point of nursing. Other men mention similar matters, and by accenting certain qualities, atypical and subjectivised positions are emphasized, just as they articulate that precisely *their* jobs require skills that exceed the professions' traditional core qualifications. It should be noted that these are features that converge with (and confirm) hegemonic masculinity. Erik is a pure example of this dissociation:

*"I am a trained social worker but I have never ever functioned as a social worker. No, I don't think I have."* (Erik, social worker, 59)

Jørgen dissects his working day to produce a picture of the way in which his working tasks are distributed. It should be noted that similar thematic points are presented by almost all the educators and a great many of the nurses, but to a lesser extent by the social workers and hairdressers:

*"About a third of my time on an ordinary working day is spent directly on administration, i.e. cash drafts, paying bills, wages, sickness forms, writing letters to the administration, applying for permits – all those things that have to be in order. Then there is a third that has to do with personnel management: How do we organise the days? How do we fit*

*in holidays, days off and sickness? And then there is the last third that has to do with the children.” (Jørgen, educator, 52)*

It can be seen from Jørgen’s description that two-thirds of the work is centred on *administrative* and *managerial* tasks, which are not usually considered core educational qualifications, while the traditional tasks – being together with the children – are reduced to a third. What is characteristic here is that by virtue of their descriptions the men stage an individualisation of their positions/areas of work.<sup>49</sup>

The men present a subjectivising gender division of work by stressing that their work functions are not traditional, thereby avoiding being categorised as ‘ordinary’ nurses, educators, hairdressers and social workers, respectively. Somewhat provocatively but justified through Klaus’s og Jørgen’s choice of words,

---

<sup>49</sup> It could easily be suspected that this answer is a response to a provocative question by the interviewer, causing Jørgen to consciously choose to use concepts that present the job – and thus himself – in agreement with a hegemonic idea of masculinity. This is, however, not the case, as Jørgen’s intention with this statement is to point out that he longs for pedagogical activity with *the children*, and that his position as leader of the institution is a result of him more following social and collegiate expectations than taking his own interests and wishes into account. He acknowledges reflectively: “*If I could choose – and had control over it – I wouldn’t have ended where I am right now.*” (Jørgen, educator, 52). This can be depicted with Williams’ (1995:87) glass escalator -metaphor, as without definitely wanting it Jørgen has, ‘automatically’ (passively) been wheeled into position as leader of the institution. Other men tell about how they have to argue (take action) to remain ‘on the shop floor’ – not to be promoted. Jesper expresses this: “[I have] *been encouraged to move on over the last few years, to get something else [experience]. Try something new. Don’t hang on here, that is as if [...] that I wanted something different and something better. I often hear that.*” (Jesper, nurse, 28).

it could be said that several men regard themselves as people who are independent and responsible with strong resources and a great deal of knowledge who mainly perform managerial and administrative work tasks. This is a *redefinition*– masculinisation – of the culturally determined and gender stereotype perception of the professions as being ‘female professions’, as the descriptions have connotations that, relatively undisputed, relate to the previously mentioned perception of hegemonic masculinity, for which reason the occupations appear to be legitimate. The consequences at the individual level are greater social and cultural legitimacy and the maintenance of a traditional, masculine identity.

In order to further concretise this presentation, in the following the focus is on some of the various practical work tasks and activities that the men describe in their narratives.

### *Technologising focus and articulation*

Among the educators and nurses, practically all the men articulate great interest in technology and especially in computer and IT equipment. For the great majority of the men, the prospect of being able to integrate this interest in their working life has had a strongly motivating effect on their choice of career (cf. earlier). Max tells about how this ‘dream’ has been realised and that the computer has become his primary pedagogical working tool:

"[I have set up] a computer room which – before I started – was very sporadic and not organised, and since my study time I have always wondered why one cannot work out professionally how to use computers with children. So it has been a dream. [...] We have set up different rules about how one plays on the computer, and how to behave, how to talk to one another, and how to use the [Inter]net. [...] I built that up in here." (Max, educator, 30)

It also appears from other interviews that this interest is symptomatic of a great number of the men and that it thus can be attributed to a gendered relationship. For example, the educators clearly speak of the computer rooms as their area of responsibility and these have also been established on the men's own initiative. It should be pointed out that some of the men are dissatisfied that they – almost as a matter of course – have to look after all the technical tasks and thereby work up competencies within the area. This duality is described by Morten, who does not regard it as a problem, however, as he – like most of the other informants – almost encourages this gender division of labour:

"There is some expectation or other that as a man one understands computers. I help this along because I myself also do something to perform those tasks." (Morten, nurse, 39)

By accepting and performing technological type work a certain form of social, gendered *stability* is created for the men *and* the women, but at the same time the association between *men and technology* contributes to

an inappropriate stereotype cementing of gender roles; one could even speak of role fixation.

With respect to the nurses' narratives, the men/technology association is also presented in connection with the description of work tasks, and there exists likewise an (implicit) reference to the assumption of hegemonic masculinity. For example a clear *technologisation* of the employment relationship appears from Mogens's very precise depiction of his present job:

"I work at what is called the Thorax Anaesthesiological Intensive Department. It's a heart centre. It's here we do bypass operations, heart valve operations – we transplant hearts and lungs – and we have ... a mechanical heart where we bypass a bad heart function with a mechanical pump that is battery driven. [...] 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. The patients here have bad circulation – their circulation is disturbed – and it is necessary to keep them going. This also requires that one has a certain relation to technology; that one is not afraid or does not fear technology. We have a lot of pumps, respirators, screens, equipment – we have the lot." (Mogens, nurse, 35)

Far from all the informants technologise – masculinise – their description of their work tasks as distinctly as Mogens, but the quote clearly exemplifies this redefining strategy, as the description creates connotations to the stereotype perception of the nurse portrayed by Kenneth:



*"A big-busted thing with blond hair and a nice ass. And a uniform that's just a little too short."* (Kenneth, nurse, 49)<sup>50</sup>

The fact that the men use a *rhetoric* that stages their work as an untraditionally traditional choice of occupation (cf. later) is a trend that frequently recurs in the men's stories.

### *Physical strength, mutual expectations and social role stability*

Just as in the case of men and technology, an essentialist association between *men and physical strength* is also articulated. On the quite concrete level, several of the men speak of episodes where they had to *pacify* patients, clients or children/youngsters who were reacting in a violent way – or just be present to prevent an escalation of potentially risky situations. Michael, who is a nurse at an emergency ward which receives out-patients speaks of his 'control creating' and 'fearless appearance':

*"At the weekend there are sometimes people who want to get in who have, for example, taken too many drugs or have got too drunk. They are often very violent and shout and want to fight and beat people up. Then as a man I sometimes have to come down and say: 'Get out of here!'. [...] It's something different*

*when a man of one meter ninety comes and says: 'You have to go now otherwise the police will come and get you!'; than if one of my small [female] colleagues of 60 kg says it."* (Michael, nurse, 31)

Also with respect to more practical tasks, Michael says that he is regularly asked for help by his female colleagues:

*"It could be to pull on a broken leg or give heart massage. Men can pull harder than small women."* (Michael, nurse, 31)

From a positive perspective, the men speak of satisfaction and personal pleasure in being able to help their colleagues, just as the value of their presence is explicitly articulated and they become invaluable. By virtue of their relatively greater physical strength, the men – by their colleagues but also by themselves – are often positioned in a role where they have to *protect* their colleagues, control an uncontrolled situation, or solve different practical problems/tasks, i.e. a role that can be regarded as consistent with the picture of hegemonic masculinity.

It should be noted that to lesser extent there are opposite perceptions of this as some men find it *repressive* and *undermining* for their professional integrity to be reduced to a 'strong man'. René says that women colleagues approach him if there is;

*"a patient who has to be moved from a bed and doesn't have the strength to move over into the bed, or if a patient has fallen on the floor. [...] that's discrimination [...] I get irri-*

<sup>50</sup> Out of respect for the women nurses, it should be mentioned that this is a stereotype many of them explicitly try to dissociate themselves from (cf. Sjørup 1997, for example).

*tated and ask them to call for an orderly. I don't think it's reasonable for us to strain our backs. [...] They have begun to stop but it still occurs.*" (René, nurse, 28)

At the end of the quotation René brings up an interesting aspect when he points out that his colleagues still approach him even though he has asked them not to. This is a general tendency that many men speak of because they find it difficult to renegotiate physical strength – and other stereotype characteristics – as *not* being a part of their qualifications. It should also be said that some men speak of having competencies attributed to them that they themselves do not think they have.<sup>51</sup> The majority of the men, however, contribute to construing these stereotype, gender embedded roles by willingly taking on tasks that confirm these roles. This is clear from Esben's narrative when he says:

*"I [live] more or less up to people's expectations about what a man does; I'm the one on the slide and it's me crawling round on the floor with the kids."* (Esben, educator, 37)

On the other hand the men describe corresponding expectations of the tasks taken on by their female colleagues. This appears from

---

<sup>51</sup> A few men also say that their presence has had a directly counterproductive effect on situations as clients who react violently have felt directly provoked by the men's presence, thus exacerbating the problems. Bent tells about precisely such a situation; *"I [rushed] out, and when I got there the troublemaker said that he wanted to fight with me when I came. Because I was more threatening, because I came rushing out [...] but that doesn't happen very often."* (Bent, social worker, 39).

Esben's further description: *"[The] women have to work in the 'clearing up' and 'washing up' department"* while Jørgen says that the expectations can be regarded as being *"parallel with what it's like in the family at home"* (Jørgen, educator, 52). As mentioned previously, these expectations and role adjustments can be because the men – and their female colleagues – are assigned a desire for social stability that is ensured by having a traditional gender order as a common point of reference. Put sharply, Andreas says that the advantage of maintaining the traditional gender role patterns is;

*"that one uses energy and resources on what is important, i.e. work with the children, and not so much on decoding one another as colleagues and where one stands in connection with one's point of departure – professionally and humanly. There are some things that are best left alone."* (Andreas, educator, 45)

Both sluggishness and inertia exist in the gender game, and through the presence – and not least acceptance – of the gendered expectations, the men and women reproduce the gender order by which the stereotype perception of the male educator is legitimised.

With respect to 'handling' work tasks associated with women, Andreas articulates an interesting strategy in that he *makes the children part of* such job-related activities. For example he turns all work tasks into;

*"a 'pedagogical activity' [...] If I sometimes do the afternoon snack – for example some light dish like pasta or lasagne – I get some chil-*

*dren to help me [...] [and] we stand on each other's toes in the kitchen.*" (Andreas, educator, 45)

This moves the focus from cooking – which historically and culture-traditionally is associated with the female work sphere – to the children who thereby become the focal point. This is a masculinisation of work tasks traditionally associated with women.

#### *Authority and mistaken categorisation – gender versus position*

*Relations of authority* have been touched on several times in the above without having been directly named, but the men say that to a high degree they have had authority ascribed to them in several respects. In relation to his colleagues, Mogens experiences this in connection with staff meetings at the hospital:

*"When we have a staff meeting – there are also other men working here– and when we get up and say something or other, they keep quiet, but if it is a women who gets up, twenty other women chatter. I've often wondered why they do it."* (Mogens, nurse, 35)<sup>52</sup>

Jess, also a nurse, tells how he has experience being *wrongly interpreted* on several occasions – revaluated – by the patients in relation to his professional position:

*"If I did the ward rounds with a women doctor, it was me they [read: The patients] referred to. [...] I tried to lead it [reads: The conversation] over to her and sort of look at the doctor instead – to get her to answer, – but that didn't bother the patients in the least. It may have been she who spoke, but it was me they spoke to."* (Jess, nurse, 52)

The nurses have experienced being mistaken for: "Orderlies, kitchen assistants, doctors, everything." (Mogens, nurse, 35). Through these mistaken categorisations/status switches – almost exclusively carried out by the older generation of patients – the nurses are indirectly made aware that they do not occupy traditional male positions in the hospital system. This does not seem to have any particular effect on the men, however. They usually reply to and correct the patients by using humour, which appears from Jesper's way of handling such situations:

*"I'm a doctor, and you're discharged'. [...] I use it [read: Humour] a lot, sort of disarmingly."* (Jesper, nurse, 28)

In the quotation above, it is not only Jess whose status is wrongly categorised, but also the woman doctor, whose position (on the basis of education) is devalued from doctor to nurse. Gender is decisive for ascribing authority/power, while the real position/function is ignored. In other words the anchorage is based on a structural stereotype association between *gender and position*,

<sup>52</sup> The resemblance between Mogens's experience and Esben's description is striking: "When I'm at meetings, I can see [...] that I'm listened to a lot, but when I look and listen to others [read: Women] who say the same [as me], they are not listened to in the same way." (Esben, educator, 37).

where anticipated category affiliation is decisive. Educators also tell about similar authority attribution:

*"There are some ethnic fathers who do not acknowledge that women can have authority. They always speak with a man even if they are standing beside a woman who may have a higher position – or knows the child better."* (Andreas, educator, 45)<sup>53</sup>

Only a very few men speak of such episodes subsequently giving rise to conflicts with colleagues, which is because the men – as exemplified in Jess's statement - are quick to correct wrong categorisations rather than allowing them to continue, and thus deflect tensions.

The previously mentioned wish to preserve a traditional gender role pattern can also be localised in the quotation with Jess, as it appears that even when the patients have been informed about the correct gender division, still see him – exclusively on the basis of his gender – as the person with the greatest authority. A *status levelling out* is taking place, founded on gender and not on position.

Thereby the social gender order that associates between gender and hospital personnel is maintained.

---

<sup>53</sup> Regarding ethnicity, Jimmy remarks that *"respect means a lot, an awful lot. [...] There is a great deal of respect for me from all other immigrants in the area – all the big ones. All those who are dangerous, they think I'm cool."* (Jimmy, educator, 31). It should be mentioned that both Jimmy and Andreas are ethnic Danes.

The man's gender role; untraditional but simultaneously traditional

Even though the men to a high degree present the masculinise aspects mentioned above, it is, however, important to stress that they unanimously and strongly insist that the content of their work is also more traditional *caring elements* that culturally are characterised as female. Jonathan underlines, for example:

*"A man must and should be able to change and comfort a child, and receive a child who is upset when it is left off in the morning"* (Jonathan, educator, 32)

While Michael points out that;

*"one should also be capable of the other. One is not less of a man if one holds the hand of a patient who is upset – or put an arm around his or her shoulder."* (Michael, nurse, 31)

The men make every effort to stress that such matters must *not* be neglected as these are unavoidable and integrated parts of their professions.

Referring to concrete work tasks, Marco articulates a definition of a 'real man' (cf. also the earlier quotation with nurse Mads), which on a general level illustrates this *multiplicity* that can be identified in the men's narratives:

*"In my world a real man is someone who doesn't mind doing anything, is not afraid to cook, dares to sit at a sewing machine, but is also someone who can hammer a nail in. It's a*

*round person who dares to show it.*" (Marco, educator, 39)

In other words, a 'real man' is regarded as someone who *breaks with* the traditional gender division of labour but simultaneously *holds on to it*.

This attitude is also illustrated when the focus shifts to the home front, as the majority of the men take an equal part in home chores, which are thereby not left up to their partners in the traditional way.<sup>54</sup> This is expressed, for example, in connection with daily chores but also in relation to maternity/paternity leave, an option several of the men have made use of – not only the two weeks reserved for the father, but for several months:

*"I chose to take five months' paternity leave. That's untraditional, statistically at any rate. On the home front it's my wife who assembles the IKEA furniture and uses the electric drill. She's ecstatic when she sees a user's guide to something. So I let her get on with it."* (Jonathan, educator, 32)<sup>55</sup>

<sup>54</sup> This may not be peculiar to 'the modern man' (cf. Mogens later), but it is nevertheless important to stress from an gender equality perspective.

<sup>55</sup> As previously mentioned, a relatively great number of the men have partners who have a training within the same profession as themselves, for which reason it is unimportant which of them takes leave from a financial point of view. In these cases the men speak about an equal division of the period of leave. In the cases where the partners have different income levels, the choice is made on the basis of *cost/benefit*-reasoning. This was, for example, the case in Jonathan's description, as his wife is a graduate and therefore has a significantly higher income than he. When the men take part of the parental leave, not only do they achieve a closer relationship with the child, but their female partners obtain a better opportunity to participate in the labour market

It is characteristic of the men that the culturally female associated work they do in a job context and in the private sphere do not make them feel less manly (rather the contrary), and with respect to the private sphere the attitude is that the division of labour must be based on areas of interest and competencies. Mogens exemplifies this:

*"She good at financial matters so she controls that."* (Mogens, nurse, 35)

Generally in the men's self-depictions, they present themselves as 'modern men' who challenge a rigid, traditional and stereotype idea of gender. This emerges sporadically from a few of the men's narratives, while the majority are directly explicit in this regard. One of the men who spends some time articulating this understanding is Mogens, who characterises himself as:

*"a modern man [...] So I'm not traditional. No way. [...] I do everything she does. I just don't dust. She's very particular about that, so she does it. [...] We have agreed to share an incredible number of things. The only thing I can't do is breastfeed. [...] We have also broken with the social origin; my father was responsible for the finances at home and my mother cooked, cleaned and everything else while he had a beer. My in-laws are also stereotypes; my father-in-law can't cook a*

on the same terms as men. (At the time of writing at the Danish Research Centre on Gender Equality we are working on another EU-supported research project, *Modern Men in Enlarged Europe*, which deals with the topic, and reports concerning this will be published during 2005).

*sausage without something going wrong. In essence it's a question of breaking some of these patterns and doing things a little differently. That they can't understand us is quite another matter.*" (Mogens, nurse, 35)

Like Mogens, a significant number of the men say that they participate actively in the chores at home and that they thus also challenge the stereotypes. In spite of this redefinition of the male gender role – and the challenge to the stereotype gender ideas of earlier generations – the men are not, however, advocates of a complete deconstruction of the genders. This is exemplified by Jarl, who expresses the importance of holding on to some of the values from the traditional gender role pattern and not letting the differences disappear, so that everything becomes the same rather than gender equality taking place:

*"I have to be careful that my soft side does not dominate too much in our relationship so that it is she who is the man of the house and I am the woman. [...] It's absolutely not on the Arnold Schwarzenegger level, but all the same."* (Jarl, educator, 43)

By holding on to some aspects of the gender ideas embedded in tradition, the genders' mutual difference is stabilised – and thereby their dependency – which is described as essential in relation to the attraction that brought the men and their partners together in the first place. In other words, the men's actions in both their professional and their private lives contribute to expanding the scope of what is regarded as working and be-

haviourally legitimate on the basis of a traditional and hegemonic masculine perspective.

## Working environment: Social relations with colleagues and clientele

The men describe the working environment and relations to their colleagues in extremely *positive* terms, and the general impression is: *"I was made really, really welcome"*, as Max (educator, 30) formulates it, referring to the management team, colleagues and the clientele. The same is the case in the narratives of the nurses, hairdressers and social workers. The overriding reaction that the men describe is to be regarded as a colleague who can *add* something desirable – and often needed – to the female organisational culture on both the social and the professional levels. To continue Max's exemplary depiction, he remembered having been made extremely welcome and regarded as an asset to the institution where he works:

*"Now we have got someone we have to look after because it's someone we'd like to keep."* (Max, educator, 30)

According to Max, the difference between having one or two genders represented at a place of work is that in the latter case;

*"really good interaction [arises] in the personnel group. We have talked with the female employees about that, of course, and they also really think that this is great; that there are some male nurses at work."* (Mads, nurse, 25)

When the men speak about their relations to the women they all go to a lot of trouble to make explicit that this is not merely their personal understanding, but that women colleagues have said that their attitude is similar. While all the men agree that gender mixed workplaces produce the best *working climate*, there is disagreement concerning the desirable man/woman ratio. Nurse, educators and social workers, all of whom have close collegial cooperation within their respective occupations, find that a more or less *equal distribution* of men and women is the most enriching for the working culture, while the hairdressers – who often work more individually with their clients (customers) – argue on the basis of a financial/rational perspective, as they wish to maintain the status quo:

*"For me personally it is an advantage [to have few men]. No, I see it as a big, big advantage for me. [...] If there were more men in our trade, there would more ambitious people that I'd have to compete with."* (Frederik, hairdresser, 34)

This statement is characteristic of the hairdressers, but is not articulated by men from the other occupations.

### The informal way of talking; humour, irony and flirting

With respect to working environment, the men speak more concretely about an altered

social way of talking among colleagues, which has become more informal, humoristic and ironically distanced. The presence of the men leads to a change in the tone used and a social dynamics is created, which can be seen from René's statement:

*"We contribute to a good atmosphere. We help to establish another tone than if it had been a purely female department. [...] We [read: The colleagues at the department] have an open relationship to one another where one can say things like they are. We 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."* (René, nurse, 28)

The men relate that their woman colleagues tell stories about how a single gender working environment is very dominated by 'chicken run', 'pettiness' and 'gossip', which at times can create counterproductive tensions among the colleagues. But the presence of the men changes the *way of talking to each other* because different gender mechanisms are activated. It also appear from this that the men do not let themselves be subjected to an assimilation line of thought where they have to adjust to the social rules of the majority, because they actually take part in changing these. Andreas, who as well as being an educator also has a BA in psychology, terms this 'constructive flirting', which he defines as:

*"It's not flirting in the usual sense, but it's more that one maintains an ironical distance to woman/man things, and we can push one another around a bit and snigger a bit – in a good way. [...] It's what I would call a dy-*

*namically collegiate form of being together.*"  
(Andreas, educator, 45)

Flirting, humour and ironic distance are elements that, according to the men, make the working climate more relaxed and informal, and Andreas goes on to say that in practice he *"actually likes using irony as a working tool"*. It appears from this that irony is used as a strategic instrument to put at a distance embarrassing (and gender role challenging) situations or work tasks that are regarded as conflicting with the hegemonic idea of masculinity. Mads gives a practical example of this, as he has experience of older patients showing reluctance for him to wash them in bed:

*"So you have to jolly them along and say I've seen lots of bare female bottoms."* (Mads, nurse, 25)

This takes the sting out of the situation, and the situation is eased (cf. also the previous quotation by nurse Jesper)

The men stress the importance of understanding the workplace's *humour*, as it is regarded as an important element – or even a fundamental element – of a pleasant working climate. In fact, several of the men present this as a precondition for managing, as humour is a fundamental part of the working culture and on the collegiate level is used as an instrument for being integrated – and thereby surviving - in a social and professional respect. Nurse Mogens characterises the humour between the colleagues as *"everything from below the belt and upwards"*

(Mogens, nurse, 35). However, – like the other men – he is very conscious of having a good feeling for the situation and of maintaining the very fine line between the complimentary and the harassing; professional etiquette.<sup>56</sup>

It can be gathered from the men's narratives that gender roles and codes are negotiated and boundaries are moved or cemented by means of humour, flirting and ironical distancing (more about this later).

### The conversations; participation and self-chosen exclusion

Even though the men have positive experience in relation to social inclusion, they say that in conversations they often run into gender and content related barriers. This should not be understood as meaning that an attempt is not made to include the men in the conversations, but more because they often find the topics of conversation uninteresting (unless these have more professional aspects). René for example often experiences:

---

<sup>56</sup> In addition, humour has a non-gendered – and in human terms extremely important – function, which is expressed by nurse Mogens: *"In reality it is also a question of this survival mechanism we have as people. It's a profession where there are a lot of terrible things – or unpleasant things – sometimes."* (Mogens, nurse, 35). This survival mechanism can only be found in the nurses – and not men from the other professions – because of the different nature of the occupations.



*"If they [read: Women colleagues] are discussing something and you come in, they usually ask what you think about it." (René, nurse, 28)*

This makes clear an example of attempts being made to involve the men, by virtue of their gender, in the conversations, as the women think that that the men can contribute some useful perspectives. This is not, therefore, a question of contrasting, where the women demonstrate a polarised us/you attitude, just as the men's presence is not regarded as a contribution that threatens and undermines the established order. One could almost say that the men's social presence is legitimised because of – and not in spite of – their gender.

Speaking of the reason why the men sometimes choose not to take part in the conversations, Mads says:

*"It's not exciting to hear about inflammation in female organs, and that little Peter is stammering for the third week in a row, and how big their breasts get when they are pregnant. They sometimes discuss some weird things." (Mads, nurse, 25)*

Per says the same:

*"The problem is that when you sit in a back room, which we also do, then a lot of this menstruation stuff comes into the conversation." (Per, hairdresser, 45)*

The men sometimes choose to take a break from the women and to consort with other men at the workplace:

*"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 at being real men." (Klaus, nurse, 49)*

Like when they were studying, the men seek each other out to practise what could theoretically be termed 'masculine rituals and symbols, but also the fact that they speak – and understand each other – on the basis of their gender situated positions. Jimmy comments on this:

*"What I get by being together with other men in the conversation, it's [the] inside things you can say. [...] Men need to be together with other men and talk about men's things." (Jimmy, educator, 31)*

What is essential is not that there are a lot of men, but merely that there exists a possibility of establishing 'masculine togetherness (cf. previously). The men find this possibility important, which is illustrated by Andreas:

*"The way I see it is that if there is one more man, then it's fine. [...] But I don't like to be alone." (Andreas, educator, 45)<sup>57</sup>*

If there are several men present in the institution/at the workplace, their presence also

---

<sup>57</sup> Several of the men similarly tell about a *social distancing* based on their position as leader, as they wish to maintain a professional distance to the employees (who a priori are most frequently women), so the leader/employee relationship is maintained. They speak of a balancing act between showing an interest but not becoming too involved.

seems/becomes more legitimate, which can be regarded as a gender segregation strategy by which areas are masculinised by virtue of a large concentration of men. Speaking about the decisive reason for his choice, Marco says:

*"To be honest, it was probably to be somewhere where there were more men."* (Marco, educator, 39)

With respect to participation in the conversations, it should be emphasised that – like during their education – it is a matter of *self-*

*chosen exclusion*, and experience with social isolation or forced exclusion is not articulated. This is to say that gender is active, favourable possibilities for social interaction with the colleagues are created, but at the same time it functions as a precondition for the establishment of an alternative (male) grouping.

## SUMMARISING AND CONCLUDING CONSIDERATIONS

The objective of the study has been to focus positively on men who break with traditional social cultural and gender stereotyping gender roles patterns, in order to expand the frames of what is legitimate from a masculinity perspective. It has been particularly interesting to observe the way in which gender influences the men's working lives when they constantly construe and (re)negotiate their masculinity – perform gender work – in frames with a female connotation. In order to approach this issue in a manner that was as concrete and realistic as possible, qualitative interviews were conducted with men who had completed their training within the nursing, educator, hairdressing and social worker profession. It is these men's *subjective* articulations that have formed the crucial point of the study. Women in the respective occupations may have similar tales - or the men's subjective emphases may not quite correspond to reality – but this does not alter the study's quality and the correctness of the finding, as the central issue is the deep insight into the men's self-projected world pictures and life narratives.

It should also be said that the empirical basis of the study is interviews with 41 individual men, each with his unique narrative, a presentation of which can of necessity only appear simplified on the basis of the perspective of the single individual. Nonetheless there have been remarkably great overlaps and agree-

ments – both within the respective occupational groups and between these – in the men's depictions of being gender minorities.

One of the most interesting findings of the study is the way in which the men socially initiate and utilise different masculinisation strategies, which leads to (secure) congruence between what American masculinity researcher Bob W. Connell terms 'hegemonic masculinity', and the men's working lives/existence. The strategies contribute to challenging and redefining the gender labelled characteristics traditionally connoted with the professions. This also has the effect that the men establish a masculinity point of anchorage that makes possible new potential for action and thus breaks with the traditional role entrapping stereotypes.

The different patterns of action that the men actualise in – and outside of – their professional lives when their gender is made into an issue/ challenged can be condensed to the following general *masculinisation strategies*:

➤ *Re-titling of functional area.* Even though it is only the nurses' professional title that in the wording in Danish has a feminine association, all the men use terms to make the function precise and/or alternative terms when speaking about their work. In so doing the men present precisely their function as special and atypical, and a distancing is launched

to the professions' feminine connotations. Some examples of clarifications are project/anaesthetist nurse and role play/social educator, while examples of a completely alternative title are 'self-employed' (hairdresser), 'technical facilitator' (social worker), 'clinical counsellor (nurse) and 'deputy leader' (educator). By virtue of these re-titlings, prestige is often attributed to the atypical positions, and the men's presence seems to be legitimised – vis-à-vis them and their social surroundings.

➤ *Redefinition of work function and competence requirements.* A very widespread strategy is for the men in their articulations to present work tasks and competence requirements that create masculine – rather than the traditionally feminine – connotations. An example of this is when the men associate their work tasks with a need for technological skills, an authoritative and control creating personality, physical strength, management competence, administrative overview, professional skill, independence and the like. At the practice-oriented level, the men tell, for example, about how they administer the budget and the work sheets (educator), keep patients alive with advanced technology (nurse), are self-employed professionals (hairdresser) or have an intimidating effect on troublemakers (social worker). Several of the men also explicitly distance themselves from their core working area, like the nurse who does not have time for patients, and the social worker who has never worked as such. This strategy is very widespread and is articulated to vary-

ing degrees by all the men all through the interviews.

➤ *Potential career opening for hierarchical promotion.* When the men decide on a non-traditional career and have to legitimise this, several of them present favourable career opportunities and hierarchical promotion as their future career scenarios. This makes the position a temporary stop – a jumping off point – on the way towards a more prestigious and (thus) masculine position.

➤ *Homosocial grouping.* A clear wish for male colleagues is identified in the men's narratives. At the educational institutions – like later in working life – the men socialise with each other in a more or less formal manner. The intention is to establish an alternative to the female dominance created by the greater number of women and thus obtain a social space where they can practise masculine rituals and symbols. By virtue of a greater concentration of men, the need to initiate the other strategies is reduced, as a masculinisation process has been set in motion, just as their position as a minority becomes less visible.

➤ *Unambiguous signalling of heterosexual orientation.* Almost all the men report having run into assumptions about homosexuality. Several of them tell explicitly about how they 'were rolling in women' during their studies, and about their present female partners. In doing so they partly signal their heterosexual orientation, and partly stage themselves as

popular men who are successful with women, with whom they can 'be together'.

To a very great extent, the men manage to describe – stress – their respective professions on the basis of a wide range of matters that culture traditionally are associated as masculine. But what is particularly interesting is that the men are able to capture these traditionally masculine characteristics and components in professions that are gender labelled as feminine. The men draw a different – not alternative but complementary – and less stereotype picture of the professions. They are able to build bridges between the professions' feminine connotations/characteristics and the hegemonic idea of masculinity. Because of the focus of the report on action strategies in relation to masculinity construction/(re)negotiation, it might on the surface seem to be an alternative – and not a complementary – picture, but this is exclusively due to the somewhat one-sided focus. The men strongly emphasise that they *also* change nappies, comfort children etc., everything traditionally associated with the professions

What the present study reveals is that the occupations also include work tasks/areas that do not conflict with the idea of hegemonic masculinity in which most of the men reflect themselves. The men individualise their positions, and describe their presence and functions as being *different* from the women's (cf. the presentation of the very same matter given by kindergarten educator

Chr. Engelstoft in the introduction). They are different because, for example, they have different fields of interests than their women colleagues. It should be added that by 'different' the men are not referring to a hierarchical evaluation as 'better' – which includes the opposite of something 'worse' – but on the other hand to a non-value loaded 'different', by which they articulate elements of a self-chosen division of labour between the genders, based on mutually respecting and complementary personal characteristics/interests. There is no stringent division, but rather a division that has consideration for the expectations of both genders and simultaneously ensures a role stability where everything does not always have to be negotiated, thus enabling an informal and constructive working environment. The creation of niches is a risk involved in such division of labour, where potential rigidity leads to men (and women for that matter) only performing certain work tasks. This is inappropriate and undesirable. In the case of the men who were interviewed, however, this does not appear to be a problem, as several of them describe the more service and caring tasks as attractive parts of their working lives that they would not be without.

## The potential of the study and its application possibilities

The masculine aspects put forward by the men in the connection with the 'redefinition of work functions' strategy can be used as

inspiration for modifying the social cultural—and gender labelled pictures of the professions that contribute to maintaining their position in the category termed 'female professions'. The first barrier to be overcome – if the proportion of men is to be increased – exists already at entry to the profession. The men say that they had had no intentions of a career within the professions before by accident – or through a role model – they got some *professional insight* that went beyond the traditionally determined and prejudiced picture. This motivating insight includes knowledge that there are other work tasks that are not traditionally associated with the profession. It is therefore important to initiate social measures and initiatives that have the potential to change/redefine the present stereotype and one dimensional perception of these female dominated occupations, and show that within these – from the man's perspective – gender untraditional frames, there exist traditional 'masculine' work tasks. If this is done successfully, it will not merely attract more men, but will also lead to less need for social legitimisation, as many of the prejudices have been dispelled on the social cultural level, and it will also lead to a better social environment on the workplace level.

With respect to the *titles*, there is also a barrier, and it seems advisable to use/introduce specifying and clarifying terms for, e.g. educators and nurses, as these are job descriptions that cover great variations. Recently, however, it has become possible for social workers, nurses and educators to call them-

selves *profession bachelors*, which, if these titles become more accepted, could possibly (partly) ease the situation. The fact that the education programmes are now categorised as bachelor degrees also means that the doors have been opened to a wider range of supplementary education at university level, and that academic careers have been made possible.

The fact that the men articulate a need – and a desire – to socialise with other men can be used at the educational institutions where there could be an advantage in *avoiding* placing the men individually in different classes or at institutions, and instead striving at a minimum to ensure that they have a couple of other men around them.

With respect to expanding the frames for the men's gender role and action options, the study shows that the men are more inclined to renegotiate their masculinity – and thereby extend the range of what socially and culturally is regarded as legitimate – when they hold on to some of the values from the traditional gender role pattern, and thus maintain a certain level of gender role stability (stabilise the gender order). At one and the same time, men who are socially positioned as gender minorities reproduce and renegotiate their gender roles. In other words, it is decisive for the informants to remain culturally recognisable as traditional men.

No final and complete proposals for a solution can be formulated on the basis of a study like the present one, and absolutely not for

issues as complex as expanding men's gender roles and redefining traditionally embedded occupationally connoting gender labels. On the other hand, the analyses are expected to provide inspiration and be utilised in connection with practical and attitudinal measures. There are also aspects in the area of research that could be carried further and developed. In other words, the report can be regarded as a much-needed contribution to the (at the time of writing) limited scholarly illustration of the field of research termed 'men in female professions'.

The primary perspective in the study was men's positions, but in conclusion it should be emphasised that the men's redefining masculinisation strategies rub off on the professions *per se*, just as increased involvement on the home front leads to women's labour market opportunities being improved by virtue of a higher degree of gender equality. As pointed out in the introduction, masculine

qualifications rank as more prestigious than feminine ones, so that when the men emphasise masculine components in their working lives, it may reasonably be assumed that the professions as whole – including the women employees – *are given more status* (revaluated). In relation to this, Kenneth, who has functioned as a consultant at the Danish Nurses Organisation for many years, says that 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. – lag behind as regards salary, [...] because they are female professions. So in that way I think that [...] the professions could get some more status if there were more men – and thereby higher salary and better working conditions. So in this way I think it would be an advantage [to have more men]." (Kenneth, nurse, 49)*

## REFERENCES

- Bloksgaard, Lotte & Stine Brock Faber (2004) ***Køn på arbejde. En kvalitativ undersøgelse af mandlige sygeplejerskers og kvindelige politibetjentes arbejdsliv.*** [Gender at work. A qualitative study of male nurses' and female police officers' working lives] Denmark: Aalborg Universitetsforlag.
- Christensen, Mads Krøll (2005) "Sygeplejerskemangel forstærkes af for få studiepladser". [The lack of nurses is strengthened by too few study places] In ***Synergi***. Nr. 15.
- Connell, Bob W. (1995) ***Masculinities***. Cambridge: Policy Press.
- Connell, Bob W. (2000) ***The Men and the Boys***. USA: University of California Press.
- Cross, Simon & Barbara Bagilhole (2002) "Girl's Jobs for the Boys? Men, Masculinity and Non-traditional Occupations". In ***Gender, Work and Organization*** (2002), Vol. 9, No. 2.
- Ekegren, Peter (1998): "Social konstruktion/konstruktivisme". [Social construction/constructivism] In Andersen, Heine. et al. (red.) (1998): ***Leksikon i sociologi*** [Sociological lexicon]. Denmark: Akademisk Forlag.
- Enoksen, Ivan (1996) ***Folk&Fag – træk af pædagogfagets historie.*** [People and profession – features of the history of the educator profession] Denmark: Børn & Unge.
- Folkesson, Per, Marie Nordberg & Goldina Smirthwaite (1999) ***Hegemoni och Mansforskning.*** Rapport från Nordiska Mansforskningsworkshopen i Karlstad. [Hegemony and research on men. Report from the Nordic man's research working group] 19-21/3 1999. Karlstad universitet.
- Hjort, Katrin & Nielsen, Steen Baagøe (red.) (2003) ***Mænd og omsorg.*** [Men and care] Denmark: Hans Reitzels Forlag.
- Jensen, Anders Chr. (2001) "Vi var pionerer". [We were pioneers] In ***Sygeplejersken***. Nr. 9.
- Kanter, Rosabeth Moss (1977a): ***Men and Women of the Corporation.*** New York: BasicBooks.
- Kimmel, Michael S. (1994): "Masculinity as Homophobia. Fear, Shame, and Silence in the Construction of Gender Identity". In Brod, H. & Kaufman, M. (1994): ***Theorizing Masculinities.*** USA: Sage Publications.
- Kvale, Steinar (1997) ***InterView – En introduktion til det kvalitative forskningsinterview.*** [InterViews - An Introduction to Qualitative Research Interviewing] Denmark: Hans Reitzels Forlag.
- Lehn, Sine (2003): ***Kønsblind vejledning? – en rapport om ligestillingsperspektivet i grundskolens uddannelses- og erhvervsskoling.*** [Gender-blind counselling? – Report on the gender-equality perspective in educational and occupational counselling in Danish primary and lower secondary schools] Denmark: The Danish Research Centre on Gender Equality, RUC.



Ligestillingsafdelingen [Department of Gender Equality] (2004): **Vejledning om bekendtgørelse om initiativer til fremme af ligestilling**. [Guidelines on the executive order concerning initiatives to promote gender equality] Denmark: Ligestillingsafdelingen.

Martensen, S. H. (2000) **En kvindelig verden. En kvalitativ undersøgelse af fem mandlige sygeplejerskers erfaringer som mænd i sygeplejefaget**. [A female world. A qualitative study of five male nurses' experience as men in the nursing profession] Denmark: Danmarks Sygeplejehøjskole.

Messner, Michael A. (1998): "The limits of 'The Male Sex Role': An Analysis of the Men's Liberation and Men's Rights Movements Discourse". **Gender and Society**. Volume 12, Number 3.

Neergaard, H. (2001) **Udvælgelse af cases i kvalitative undersøgelser**. [Selection of cases in qualitative studies] Denmark: Samfundslitteratur.

Neuman, W.L. (1997) **Social Research Method. Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches**. USA: Allyn and Bacon.

Nielsen, Keld (1974) "Socialrådgiveruddannelsens udvikling i Danmark". [The development of social worker education in Denmark] In **Socialrådgiveren**. Nr. 5.

Nielsen, Steen Baagøe & Aase Rieck Sørensen (2004) **Unges valg af uddannelse og job – udfordringer og veje til det kønsopdelte arbejdsmarked**. [Young people's routes to the gender-divided labour market] Denmark: The Danish Research Centre on Gender Equality, RUC.

Nordberg, Marie (1999) "Synd att du inte kan hänge med in i duschen... – om könstillhörighetens betydelse vid intervjuer och fältstudier". [It's a pity you can't be with us in the shower – on the significance of gender affiliation in interviews and field studies] I **Nord Nytt**. Nr. 75/76.

Pedersen, Peter Møller (2005) **Fordelinger og fordoblinger – et studie i kønskonstruktioner og social læring i pædagoguddannelsen**. [Divisions and doubling up – a study in gender constructions and social learning in the educator training programme] Denmark: PUC.

Rambøll Management (2004) "Fremtidens arbejdsmarked – set fra et kønsperspektiv". Bilag til **Fremtidens arbejdsmarked**. [The Future Labour Market – viewed from a gender perspective. Supplement to The Future Labour Market]

Reinicke, Kenneth (2002): **Den hele mand – manderoller i forandring**. [The whole man – male roles undergoing change] Denmark: Schönberg.

Sjørup, Karen (1997): "Kønnet, seksualiteten og sygeplejen". [Gender, sexuality and nursing] In Karin Müller, Ulla Kusk & Marianne Toxboe (1997) **Fokus på sygeplejen**. [Focus on nursing] Denmark: Munksgaard.

Sjørup, Karen (1999): "Ligestillingsdiskursen i krise". [Crisis in the gender equality discourse] In Ligestillingsrådet (1999) **Mænd på vej**. [Men on the way] Denmark: Ligestillingsrådet.

Slottemo, Hilde Gunn (2000): "Menn og maskulinitet – en oversikt over et forskningsfelt". [Men and masculinity – overview of a research field] In **Kvinneforskning**. Nr. 2.

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

Worning, Anne (2001) "Dansk socialpolitik set fra socialrådgiversiden". [Danish social policy viewed from the social worker side] In Jørn Henrik Petersen, Palle Simonsen, Bo Antonsen, Jesper Fisker, Anne Worning, Jon Andersen & Jørgen Goul Andersen (2001) ***Festskrift i anledning af Socialministeriets 75 års jubilæum 2001***. Denmark: Socialministeriet.