

Jan's Life-History: Changing Faces of Managerial Masculinities and Consequences for Health

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Abstract : Life-history research is an extraordinarily fruitful method to use for social analysis and gendered health analysis in particular. Its potential is illustrated through a case study drawn from a Swedish project. It reveals an old type of masculinity that faces difficulties when carrying out two sets of demands simultaneously, as a worker/manager and as a father/husband. The paper illuminates the historical transformation of masculinity and the consequences of this for health. We draw on the idea of the "changing faces of masculinity" to explore the dynamism and complexity of gendered health. An empirical case is used for its illustrative abilities. Jan, a middle-level manager and father employed in the energy sector in urban Sweden is the subject of this paper. Jan's story is one of 32 semi-structured interviews included in an extended study focusing on well-being at work. The results reveal a face of masculinity conceived of in middle-level management as tacitly linked to the neoliberal doctrine. Over a couple of decades, the idea of "flexibility" was turned into a valuable characteristic that everyone was supposed to strive for. This resulted in increased workloads. Quite a few employees, and managers, in particular, find themselves working both day and night. This may explain why not having enough time to spend with children and family members is a recurring theme in the data. Can this way of doing be linked to masculinity and health? The first author's research has revealed that the use of gender in health science is not sufficiently or critically questioned. This lack of critical questioning is a serious problem, especially since ways of doing gender affect health. We suggest that gender reproduction and gender transformation are interconnected, regardless of how they affect health. They are recognized as two sides of the same phenomenon, and minor movements in one direction or the other become crucial for understanding its relation to health. More or less, at the same time, as Jan's masculinity was reproduced in response to workplace practices, Jan's family position was transformed—not totally but by a degree or two, and these degrees became significant for the family's health and well-being. By moving back and forth between varied events in Jan's biographical history and his sociohistorical life span, it becomes possible to show that in a time of gender transformations, power relations can be renegotiated, leading to consequences for health.

Keywords : changing faces of masculinity, gendered health, life-history research method, subverter

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