

What do we think we know about masculinities in Sweden, UK and India

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Introduction

This article takes its point of departure in the discussion about the concept of global business masculinities. In accordance with Elias & Beasley (2009), the basic assumption is that, while there are commonalities in both values and behavioural patterns between businessmen from different parts of the globalised world, also national and local masculinities have to be taken into account when studying business interactions with a gendered lens.

Studies into what could be called national masculinities are scarce. Such a thing as “national” masculinity hardly exists. Many different masculinities are performed even in such a small and relatively homogenous country as Sweden. However, nation/state is a categorising principle we often use, both in everyday thinking and in research. In relation to the business sphere, Tienari et al (2005) in their study of an international merger, come to a conclusion that imageries of national cultures – both one’s own and the other part’s culture - in such international affairs are accentuated as explanatory models when discussing gender issues.

This article is written from a Swedish perspective and sets out to examine masculinities in Sweden, Great Britain and India. British research literature on gender is widely used by Swedish researchers, often uncritically, as if the cultural contexts were the same. It is valuable to get a more in-depth knowledge of the masculinity constructions referred to in that literature, to be able to evaluate its usefulness in the Swedish context, for example when analysing Swedish business masculinities. India is a rapidly emerging economic power, playing an active role in the global business, and an increasingly important role for a number of Swedish companies. When analysing business relations between India and Sweden, knowledge of both Indian and Swedish masculinities is needed.

Material

The empirical material of the paper consists of research articles from Social Sciences Citation Index between years 2000 and 2011 with search terms swed* masculin*; India* masculin* and Brit* masculin*. From the body of articles some were removed: 1) those which in their titles had no mention of men, masculinity, gender or any area connected with men (such as sport, war, sperm, gay etc) 2) mentioned gender but obviously were about women rather than men 3) in case of Indian masculinity referred to American Indians and in case of British masculinity referred to studies in other Commonwealth countries than Great Britain. Articles mainly about women were omitted after closer examination, because men most often were quite marginal in them, and normally only aspects of male behaviours which were harmful to women were taken up – which might have led to a bias toward harmful masculinities in the body of articles.

The final body of articles included 41 articles about Swedish masculinity, 87 articles about British masculinity and 46 articles about Indian masculinity. Out of these, 20 articles for each country, the 10 latest and the 10 most cited, were chosen for closer examination. In the following these 3*20 are called the sample.

An inductive categorization of each sample separately was made, on the basis of titles and abstracts. This categorisation expresses what kind of images of masculinities in the three countries are transmitted to the international research community. These images can be highly relevant, but they can also reproduce stereotypes. To a certain extent such differences can also mirror the opinions of funding bodies, which in turn are affected by a general societal discourse on gender and masculinity.

In this short paper not all the material is elaborated on. The paper concentrates on the particular features of each national masculinity as they are presented in research, and only refers to some of those articles which are connected to these special features.

Masculinity

There are several understandings of masculinity in the literature reviewed. The simplest one is the implicit understanding that masculinity is what men do or are.

In particular in the medical and psychological texts, masculinity is seen as an essential characteristic, based on biology, but sometimes possibly influenced, “tainted”, during the life

course. Most of the literature, however, sees masculinity as socially constructed, stating that the doing of masculinity is a constantly evolving performance, conditioned by the societal, cultural and interactional contexts, and closely tied to identity. A third way of using the concept masculinity is to use or create masculinity indexes, which pertain to organisations and other units rather than individuals. Mentioning Hofstede's (1991; 1998) contested classification of nations along a masculinity-femininity continuum can hardly be avoided in this context, as many researchers in business and advertising refer to it, even in this body of articles.

Masculinities in Sweden

An overall picture that emerges from reading the articles about Swedish masculinity is that it is highly related to parenthood. Apart from health issues, masculinity is not linked to bodies or sexuality. Homosexuality is not taken up. Sport is invisible as a marker of masculinity. Most of the articles deal with adult, ethnically Swedish middle class urban men. Historical articles are almost absent and articles about education are only three out of the 41.

Most of the articles discuss masculinities or men in the gender equal Sweden. Some of them describe masculinities in a process of change, from traditional to gender equal, and others describe "new" masculinities, embodied in a gender equal ideology. However, while admitting that masculinities have changed, a number of the articles reflect on whether the dominant position of masculinities over femininities has changed to the same extent, and arrive at more negative answers.

Three of the articles compare Sweden and Denmark, which is interesting regarding the fact that the Scandinavian countries often are described as similar. Both Balkmar & Iovanni & Pringle and Tienari et al (2009) find that Sweden is a more gender equal country than Denmark. Balkmar & Iovanni & Pringle discuss how researchers and policymakers frame the question of men's violence, and find that in Sweden the power relations are much more prevalent in the discourse than in Denmark.

The gender equality discourse is present in a very distinct way in Egeberg Holmgren & Hearn's (2009) study. They interview a very special group of men who have adopted a radical form of feminist ideology and discuss the problems of "passing" as feminist men. Being a man, and thus regarded as a problem by this ideology, leads to identity problems. Being a feminist man is seemingly an impossible position. Egeberg Holmgren & Hearn (2009) conclude that this

form of problematic masculinity might be the product of the societal gender equality rhetoric. When, for example, male politicians rhetorically call themselves feminists, more radical positions are needed for those who are dissatisfied with the continuing gender inequalities in the society.

Even of only few of the 41 articles explicitly are about parenting, fatherhood as a central feature of Swedish masculinity is demonstrated in most of the articles in one way or another. Johansson & Klinth (2008) study men from four different backgrounds, who all ascribe to the Swedish equality policy and see active fathering and parental leave as a natural part of present-day Swedish masculinity. In their study, even men with immigrant backgrounds ascribe to this ideology, but they also see practical restrictions. Haas & Hwang (2007) study the father friendliness of companies. Backhans & Lundberg & Månsdotter (2007) include parental leave in their gendered division of work. Balkmar & Iovanni & Pringle (2009), in the study where violence towards women is interpreted differently in Sweden and Denmark, also find out that the Swedish society is less interested in men's violence towards their children than the Danish society – possibly because being a good father is such an unquestionable part of Swedish masculinity. Tienari et al (2005) refer to a study where active fatherhood is found to be an asset for a managerial career. The list can be continued by Bengts et al (2008), on how Swedish men and women present their stories of depression in newspaper texts, where children and one's own parents were more visible than wives and partners in the presentations by men– which was not true of women. Adrian (2010) compares the images of insemination clinics in Sweden and Denmark and finds that while the Danish clinic builds on an image of the potent Viking as a donor in its marketing, the Swedish clinic rather creates an image of a stand-in, mature and responsible father. And Alex et al (2008) found that the old men in their sample talked more and more warmly about their children than about their wives or partners. Thus, fathering young children is presented as an important marker of Swedish masculinity.

Several features which are prominent in research on masculinities in Great Britain are scarce in the Swedish material. Swedish masculinities as described in research are middle class, intellectual rather than embodied, urban, and adapted or adapting to a gender equal ideology.

Masculinities in Great Britain

Sport is a strikingly important area for studies of British present-day masculinities. Many of the articles also deal with young people. The studies most often deal with different kinds of subordinate masculinities, for example ethnic minorities or working class. Thus, the research shows a puzzle of a number of different masculinity constructions in the British society, but very few of them in British-born upper or middle class.

Of different subcultures, Muslim masculinities are the most researched, in particular young Muslim men and their positions and positionings in the British society. Both young Muslim men and young white British working class men are seen as enacting, though in different ways, masculinities that are not adapted to the modern society.

In the British discourse the concept “laddishness” is used to refer to problematic young men’s performances of masculinity. This concept has no exact equivalent in the Swedish discourse and does not, either, appear in the Indian research. Laddishness, as an important aspect of British masculinities, is described by Archer and Francis (2005): Popular notions of ‘laddishness’ (and being ‘a lad’ or ‘one of the lads’) are associated with young, male peer groups engaging in hedonistic practices such as ‘having a laugh’, objectifying women, alcohol consumption, disruptive behaviour, and pursuit or interest in subjects and past-times constructed as masculine (p 180).

Different masculinity constructions are problematic for the society, but they are also described as problematic for the men themselves. Coles et al (2010) describe how masculinity constructions prevent men from a socially deprived area from seeking health care. Darko (2009) describes how ideals of a masculine body cause elite rugby players to suppress their body anxieties. Adams et al (2010) show how the players’ masculinity is deliberately challenged and ridiculed in soccer teams. Duncanson (2009) analyses the difficulties of British military abroad in combining the expected doing of military masculinity with a peacekeeping approach. Meriläinen et al (2004), in one of the few articles analysing middle class professionals, conclude that in the firms in the British knowledge sector, a self-assertive and competitive masculinity is prevalent and makes it difficult to create a work-life balance. In a study of Pakistani men who have moved to Britain through an arranged marriage, Charsley (2005) analyses the problems caused by the clashes with traditional family arrangements in Pakistani families. Thus, the way masculinities are constructed are described as causing anxiety, worsening health problems and sustaining unsatisfying living conditions among all kinds of male subgroups.

The body is very much present in the British material. In studies of sport, masculinity is clearly tied to body. A prime example is Darko's (2009) study of rugby players, where many of her interviewees expressed anxiety for their bodies not being more "masculine" than their fellow players' bodies or not as masculine as rugby players are portrayed in the media. Even in the study of Adams et al (2010), about the language used by the coaches and members of a soccer team, referrals to a violent "warrior body" as an expression of desired player masculinity are common. Duncanson's (2009) study about real "warriors", peacekeeping corps of the military army, also finds that a physically fit body is important in the construction of masculinity. Bodies are also present in the study of McKeown et al (2010) about the experiences of black and South Asian gay men in relation to their white British sexual partners. The reluctance to talk about bodies which are not up to expectations, which Darko (2009) found among the rugby players, is also expressed by Coles et al (2010) in their article about middle aged and older men and their reluctance to utilize health services.

Among all the published 86 articles, 17 deal with history, both the 19th and the 20th century, mainly the military, sports and colonialism. Fatherhood is almost non-existent as a focus of a study among the published articles; only two of them deal explicitly with fatherhood. The articles in the sample indicate that, in contrast to the Swedish material, fatherhood is not, either, a common theme in the articles that do not directly deal with it.

Masculinities in India

A striking feature in the body of articles about Indian masculinities is that few (for example, only five of the twenty articles in the sample) are written by people whose current affiliation is in India. Many articles present thorough fieldwork in India, and a number of those researchers who are currently based somewhere else may have an Indian background, but yet, Indian masculinities are relatively often described with outside eyes in research.

When comparing research about Indian masculinities with research about Swedish and British masculinities, some issues which are particular for India emerge. The first is migration experiences. Partly this is due to a special issue of *Men and Masculinities* (vol 13 nr 4, 2010) about migration, but migration articles can also be found in earlier years. The second sphere of research interest is young men in the phase of life before building a family, and their possibilities

and difficulties in regard to entering married, ordinary adult life. There are also a number of articles about masculinity in particular contexts and subcultures.

Only in the Indian material provides studies which try to map popular constructions of masculinity by directly asking respondents to describe ideal men. For example, Pradhan & Ram (2010) as well as Verma et al (2006) have asked young people about what “a real man” is like and get answers such as he should be able to “earn and maintain family, to take decision, to physically satisfy spouse/partner and to procreate besides having a well-built body” (Pradhan & Ram, p. 546). The young men generally also see male aggressiveness, verbal and sexual and domination over women as a masculinity characteristic. However, being responsible and being able to take care of one’s family – including parents and siblings – was also an important aspect of true masculinity.

Educational attainment is also well in accordance with a desirable masculinity, when it is seen as a way to better fulfil the provider role. However, Jeffrey & Jeffery & Jeffery’s (2004) study shows how having good educational credentials, as the first member of a low caste family, but not finding appropriate work can result in either apathy or disruptive behaviour.

Globalisation has profound impacts on Indian masculinities both abroad and at home.

Osella & Osella (2000) analyse the men who make money in the Gulf states and need to find out how to change their cash money into a respectable position in their society after coming back from abroad. The situation of male domestic workers in Italy is analysed by Gallo (2006) and Bartolomei (2010) in the sample articles. They point at the contradiction in that these men can assert their (breadwinner) masculinity only by being feminised through doing domestic work, and even by being dependant of their wives for visas to Italy.

The problems following globalisation in India itself can be seen in the sample materials in particular in the articles by Cross (2009) and Soni-Singha (2009) who have studied work in the diamond industry. In particular, Cross’s study shows how the global diamond industry utilises the relatively well-educated workforce in a Special Economic Zone, locks them into precarious and temporary employment and thus makes it difficult for them to attain traditional adult masculinity.

The Indian studies are mainly about low caste or low income groups – masculinities in the wealthier middle class and among educated professionals are hardly described at all. Many of the analyses clearly situate masculinity in a dominant relation towards women, sometimes benevo-

lent, as a provider and head of the family, and more often violent, through harassment of different degrees from verbal assaults to enforced sex. Masculinities are also described as problematic to the men themselves. In the Indian material, many problems are very clearly tied to rapid changes in society, in particular to globalisation.

A distinguishing feature in the Indian material is the concentration on young people, and in particular the problems that young men face when trying to create, attain and maintain desirable masculinities in the rapid societal changes. Thus, the Indian material shows how societal, and in particular economic realities shape desirable and possible masculinities.

Conclusions

As can be seen, research indicates that there are local masculinities. Most of the studies describe local masculinities and only a few of them explicitly relate them to some kind of hegemonic masculinity in the national cultural context. However, when summarizing the studies it seems that parenthood and gender equality are important aspects of Swedish masculinity, that sports and bodies are important in British masculinity and that the breadwinner role and dominating over women are important in Indian masculinity. Some issues commonly dealt with in masculinity studies, such as violence, sexuality, work and change, are viewed from different perspectives in the different countries.

In research on Britain, violence, both as problematic and as sanctioned is a more prevalent feature than in Swedish research. The Swedish sample has some articles which problematize men's violence towards women, while the British material more often describes violence between men. The Indian sample does not specifically name issues of violence, even when describing violent behaviour.

Sexuality is almost absent in the Swedish research, while British researchers are interested in how sexuality is part of the discourses constructing masculinity, particularly in certain groups, and Indian research is more interested in actual sexual behavior, particularly in relation to sexual health.

Work is an issue that seldom appears in the Swedish research, and when it does, middle class professionals are researched. This is very different from the British material, where work-life studies are many, and often portrait working-class occupations. In India, many of the articles about work deal with migration and work abroad.

Masculinities are always in a process of change. In the Swedish sample, changes happen in attitudes and discourses, and seldom on a material level. The Indian sample gives numerous examples of how rapidly changing economic and political realities change the living conditions of men in different groups, enforcing the creation of new masculinity constructions. The British material is somewhere in between, and describes changes in masculinities caused by the changing economic realities, in particular in the job market for working class men and the changed demographic and political situation, where a number of different cultural patterns, with different ways of doing masculinities, have immigrated to the UK.

These differences in the research literature reflect the different cultural contexts where masculinities are done and the different ways they are done in these three countries, but they also reflect the different interests of the researchers. In addition, they reflect publication patterns (for example, the Swedish material has very few historical articles, because Swedish historians predominantly publish in Swedish), and funding preferences (for example, a number of the Indian articles are connected to issues of young people's patterns of sexual behaviour, and can be expected to benefit sexual health promotion). The different interests of the researchers regarding research questions, methods and interpretations, are not only a matter of personal tastes, but reflect colonialism (India is still described from the outside, as are the Muslims in the UK), general societal discourses (for example, fatherhood has been a central topic in Sweden for a number of years) and the inability or unwillingness to analyze one's own sphere of life (the lack of studies on middle class masculinities in the UK and India). Thus, what we really know about masculinities in these countries is highly dependent on a number of different circumstances. To a certain extent even the research literature reproduces and reinforces stereotypes – Swedish fatherhood, British men's interest in sports and Indian men's positions in patriarchal families. Even if these differences most probably do exist, they may be unduly accentuated in the image that research literature transmits to the international audience.

Even if these articles do not simply mirror actual differences between the societies, it still seems clear that the different national contexts, where the masculinities which are performed in the international business area have their roots, really do differ. Consequently, an interesting issue is to find out how regional, national or local masculinities feed into these business masculinities, how they form them and how they influence the power relations between them.

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