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Male social workers experiences of gender bias

A study of gender biases within the social service in Gävle

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to investigate how men in the social service in Gävle experience gender biases within the social work profession. We conducted a qualitative research with five male social workers that we interviewed regarding gender biases. The main result ended up under three themes which are client influence and reinforcement; work culture; and lastly the unconscious experience. The conclusion is that male social workers experience gender biases accordingly through three themes.

Preamble

We want first of all start by saying thank you to all of social workers that participated in the interview. Without your willingness to participate and share your experiences, this study would not be complete.

We are very thankful to our supervisor Lars Westfelt for the guidance, help and effort!

"I would like to thank my mother for being there through everything in life including this program and this bachelor thesis. Thank you mama for the extra push." – Ismahan

"I would like to thank my brother Johan for being an inspiration to me. You have made me realize quitting is not an option." – Cecilia

Finally, we want to thank each other for the good collaboration.

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1. Introduction

Gender centered topics and issues are something we always have been interested in. When choosing the topic for our bachelor thesis the thought was to incorporate gender aspect to the study. We therefore discussed and came to the conclusion that there are probably a lot of research and studies on women experiencing gender biases at work places and the fact that women earn less salary than men. Our assumption is that social work practice is a profession dominated by women, so we then came up with what we wanted to investigate in our study. The necessity of having a direct social work link was of importance as well. The aim of our study is to conduct a study to gain a deeper understanding of if and how men experience gender biases within the social services in Gävle.

From a historical point of view the idea was that women and men naturally possessed different characteristics and this view was shared universally in the eighteen century. Men were viewed as dominant, stronger, intelligent, and aggressive and so on. Women were viewed as compassionate, kind, sensitive, and domestic and so on.
It is still visible that these gender expectations in the different professions today. In society today it is still noticeable that professions like nurse, teachers and shop assistants are female dominated professions, as well as doctors, managers and constrictions workers are male dominated professions (Bailey, 2013).

It is discussed in an article in The Guardian (2014) that women have dominated social work both in practice and in academic settings, even though social work values and principles transcend gender. It has underlying traditions of humanism, feminism and mostly advocating women rights and needs. Social work traditionally entailed working with broken and disadvantaged families often headed by single parents, mostly women.

Statistics Sweden (2015) has conducted statistics on how many social workers been graduated. In 2007, approximately 43 510 individuals between the ages 20-64 years, had an education in social work or had an employment within the social work profession. Number of educated or employed male social workers was 6 810

individuals, 15 percentage, and the trend appears to continue. The rate of male social workers in 2013 remained at 15 percentage (Statistics Sweden, 2010).

The social work profession advocates diversity, social inclusion and has a strong feminist tradition and influence. The persistent gender imbalance creates a rarely discussed irony within the profession. Social work profession has always transcended gender, though the noticeably imbalance between the male academics and female practitioners continues (Gunnarsson-Shlytter, 1999).

Except for managerial roles, men's suitability for social work has been questioned due to reasons such as lack in emotional capacity and if they are suitable to work with vulnerable children. In contrast to history's traditional male privileges, the male students of social work does sometimes experience stereotyping or discrimination throughout their education (ibid.). This lead to men being noticeably absent in the front line of service, though more prominent in managerial roles. In social work practice, males are a small minority of social work students. Outside of managerial roles some critics has questioned men's suitability to work with vulnerable children and one of the reasons being emotional non-suitable. Thus questions arise whether male social workers experience disadvantages and gender biases during the course of their career.

There are many consequences and long term effects of gender biases presence in a work environment, regardless of who is being subjected to it, it leads to an increase in employee turnover and results in a hostile work environment. Gender biases can lead to gender discrimination and eventually harassment and in worst case scenario work place violence (Scott, 2016). In many countries you have the right to file a lawsuit or a police report if you are subjected to gender discrimination in a work place and recover damages. Gender bias affects both male and females and the reason of gender biases being problematic in the social service office beyond the reasons stated above are the fact that we as social workers are should be aware of the our prejudice but it's not that simple given that gender biases occurs in social work environments. When you are more aware then you tend to act less on harmful prejudice and social workers should be more aware of this subject and also working against one gender receiving preferential treatment or responsibilities based on unfair stereotypes. Gender equality and equality treatment is part of the social work foundation and should be applied as such.

1.1 Aim and research questions

The aim of this study is to investigate how men in the social service in Gävle experience gender biases. This study has one research question.

- In what ways are male social workers at the social services in Gävle subjected to gender biases?

Oxford Dictionary explains the concept of gender bias as an unfair treatment or suggestion of a prejudice or expectation based on gender (Oxford Dictionaries, 2015).

1.2 Essay disposition

The first chapter of this study is an introduction to the subject chosen to investigate, and previous research related to the study is then presented. Then two theories have been chosen as a foundation to explain the phenomena through these theories. The methodology in chapter 4 clarifies how this study is conducted. Results and analysis are presented in the following chapter which consists of the findings and the re-occurring themes along with analyzing the findings. The discussion will complete the study with a concluding chapter.

2. Previous research

In this section, the research fields concerning gender balance and expectations within the social service will be presented. It is interesting to discover the contrasts in the perspectives of gender dominated professions, since the focus of the study is on male perspective of gender biases in social work.
One of the limitations we faced when searching for research, journals and articles about gender biases at the social service from the male perspective due to the fact of the restriction of the specific topic. However, we found researches regarding the imbalanced sex ratio at the social service and male gender expectations.

When finding journals, theses and articles related to the gender biases subject, we searched on words such as gender biases at the workplace, female dominated professions, and male expectations. We mostly used the portals Google and DiVA to search for previous research. We also used University of Gävles portal Discovery. The previous studies are presented and discussed in two themes; unequal gender balance within the social service and expectations based on gender.

2.1 Unequal gender balance within the social service

Studies and previous research regarding men within the social service addresses unequal gender balance within the social service. Högskoleverket conducted in 2009 an evaluation at Swedish universities on how the gender imbalance is represented. The proportion of male and female social work students is unequal and the trend continues (Brunn, 2013). The students are dominated by women with 85 per cent (Statistics Sweden, 2015). Still, women are falling behind when it comes to climbing higher up the hierarchy and the manager position is given faster to the male social worker. This phenomenon is referred to as *Leaky pipeline.*

Kullberg (2006) have come to another conclusion in her dissertation *Man hittar sin nisch* where she studies male social workers in Sweden. She argues there is a misconception that the manager position is being given to the male social worker. The research is presenting an alteration. Instead of male social workers climbing higher up the hierarchy, they are finding their own niche; they are specializing in a separate area where they can immerse the knowledge. Nonetheless, male social workers are more likely to get to a higher position or managerial positions than female social workers and because of this inherit an advantage.

Kullberg (2006) concludes by discussing whether more male social workers in the social service would lead to increased gender equality within the profession. She states that male social workers are necessary in larger proportion in order for female social workers to compete with the men on equal basis, for example the managerial positions. It would be easier for women to advance to higher positions and therefore increase gender equality.

2.2 Expectations based on gender

Previous research regarding expectations based on gender addresses how expectations and biases affect the profession and the worker. The National Board of Health and Welfare (2004) have conducted a report that addresses the gender differences between male and female within the social services in Sweden. The report is attempting to determine why there is gender disparity within the social service. The report also confirms how the social conditions in the society reflect of how the social service is working. The National Board of Health and Welfare states that different social problems vary depending on whether you are a man or a woman, and it reflects in the social services.

Hedtjärn-Swaling (2012) also arrived to a similar assumption, why the society should reflect gender balance of the social service in order to best meet the clients' needs. The outcome in Hedtjärn-Swalings research is that the male social workers would tackle cases effectively due to them being men. These cases usually involves situation when the male social worker should be a role model for the client. It is also discussed that the clients is more comfortable in meetings if the social worker is a man. Because social work is dominated by women, the social service cannot meet the expectations and the needs for the client. The research also displays how the male social workers would have received cases where the male client has a tendency to use violence. Same way of thinking is applicable when a client is threatening at the social service. It is more likeable for a man to interfere rather than a woman. The conclusion is that male workers have a quality to manage certain clients or cases based on their gender. Hedtjärn-Swaling (2012) states in their conclusion that their respondents experienced gender bias by being assigned male clients to better prevent or contain any type of aggression that could occur. The conclusion they came to was that male workers would be handed cases because of the assumptions that they would handle male clients with less difficulty than women simply for having male characteristics. The expectations were also connected to a power aspect where there is an assumption that male workers have a higher power/influence position in a meeting with hostile clients.

Wetterberg and Hallberg (2014) discuss in their bachelor thesis how the gender balance and equality is taking place within the social services in relation to the profession is

being dominated by women. The study is from female workers perspective and how they view uneven gender balance at the workplace. The study is presenting how there is a construction of both male and female social worker and the constructions is amplified when the profession is dominated by one sex. The construction of the gender is maintained because typical male qualities are compared in contrast to the profession.

Kullberg (2006) is using the term masculinity in her dissertation. Male social workers relates to traits within masculinity. Examples such as male workers are called upon when it comes to physical work, is brought up. It is also discussed how the un-traditional man breaches the traditional masculinity norm by their choice of profession. She also states male respondents chose family life instead of their career which is non-traditional in society's norm.

Kullberg (2006) concluded that male social workers unconciously carve out a masculine niche for themselves which avoids them being subjected to negative consequenses as a minority in their career. In the traditional image of male social workers they're encouraged into vertical career and work towards managerial and boss positions towards women that are by number dominating the profession. This is a common way for male workers to maintain their masculinity and results in more women to work in the forefront of social work.

An academic journal in Ireland explores gender related tensions that male social workers face in the Irish social work context where men are seen as offering other qualities to social work practice related to their hegemonic masculinity like leadership and rationality. The author discusses how feministic characteristics in social work practice results in masculinity and the profession to clash eventually leading to tensions between men and their masculinity (Myers, 2010).

This tension as fear of stigmatizations leads to male workers choosing a female dominating profession to re-establish a masculinity that has been overshadowed by their female occupation. Distancing strategies is a concept the author explains as male social workers already feel segregated in their profession and therefore seeking higher educational qualifications in order to obtain a more masculine role and dissolve these tensions. The journal also points out how statistics supports this in terms of the

disproportionate representation of men and women at professor level and managerial positions (ibid.).

A concept that has been a topic in social services is hiring mote male workers to balance out the gender proportions but also in some units for the male worker to function as a male role model. By male role models, the function is for young boys that do not have male figures in their lives, by good example influence the male youths in a positive manner. Bates and Thompson (2002) questions the concept that male figures can best influence a young boy leading a destructive life and a mother is incapable of filling that role.

3. Theoretical framework

In this chapter, the theoretical framework being used will be explained and discussed. The thesis will use two theories to analyze the data and those are gender schema theory and social construct theory. The findings will be analyzed through the chosen theories which contains both similarities and differences, in will further broaden the perspective of the study.

3.1 Gender schema theory

Gender schema theory was developed by Sandra Bem in 1981. The theory derives from a cognitive approach and describes how individuals in a culture, a society, are bound to a gender. Each gender has its traits and is being preserved between the individuals in the culture and is transferred through groups. According Bem's gender schema theory children who have established a basic gender identity later develop a gender schema. Children's observations and interactions combined also become gender schema.

Children's behavior and responses towards gender are a direct result of our society's gender expectations and norms. Gender schema starts at a very young age where children begin to be able to differentiate between the genders. This happen in the ages between two or three. After that age, children are taught what is suggested to be a woman or man in today's society and the expectations with that When this information

has been confirmed repeatedly throughout their life they fall into one gender role and figures out how they can appropriately symbolize that role. Bem also believes there are some differences in the amount of how much people use the gender schema and are shown by how much people are sex-typed.

3.1.1   Sex-typing

Stereotype is a known term within the gender schema theory. It is a concept named sex-typing refers to a gender being stereotyped. This is maintained by individuals in a culture that integrates information and interacts with each other to confirm and reinforce the gender stereotypes. Sex-typing is a phenomena that occurs when genders gets categorized based of qualities and traits that are typical for respective genders. These traits are mostly taught in society and an example of this can be how men are taught to be strong, ambitious and the "breadwinner" and most cultures agree with the same sex-types. This phenomenon is an ongoing process and is being transmitted by networks in the society.

This theory will be used as a guide to interpret our findings and explain this phenomena through a gender schema perspective that will provide another type of understanding to our study.

3.2 Social construction theory

The social construction theory is the human construction of reality. It criticizes an absolute objective truth to reality and argues instead that only our perception of reality is a subjective truth and the subjective truth is influenced by other people's perceptions (Payne, 2005).

The term social construction arrives from Berger and Luckmanns book The Social Construction of Reality (1966) where they analyze the reality of everyday life, meaning that the reality is a social construction based on individuals' and groups interactions over time. The authors also address the importance of social interactions between people and groups in everyday life together with language and knowledge. Experiences and

subjective knowledge is being exchanged under face-to-face situations and also through objects which can express objectivities of human subjectivity.

Payne (2005) states that information, facts and understandings are created not from individuals but in coordination with other people in the same culture. The basic assumption in this theory is that we as people rationalize our experiences with a structure of the social world and how it works with language, being a vital tool. This is how we construct our truth along with our reality. Language is essential in this theory; information that is received from your surroundings is processed by language to lastly then organized by the individual.

There are three processes that embody social constructionism: externalization, objectification and internalization. Externalization is the stage when people construct knowledge or a fact through our actions Objectification which is when subjective facts are results which are originated from someone speculations, ideas or theories. Lastly, internalization is when individuals' take certain facts about the world for granted (ibid.).

3.2.1   Role theory

This part of social construction theory is how interactions with people lead to expectations and reactions which lead us to act in a characteristic way, in this case characteristic of the gender. Perlman (1968) argues there is a connection between people's expectations and interpretations of your personality and human interaction. She states the role theory assumes people occupy roles or positions in our social world of structures which people assume based on interactions, assumptions and expectations. Perlman emphasizes three vital roles which affects others interpretations; the work; the marriage; and the parenthood role. Munson and Pallassana (1978) continue to argue how individuals holds positions in different structures and social patterns. Each structure and social pattern is associated with a role which is shaping our personalities in the eyes of others. The traditional roles of parenthood and gender is for a mother, a female, to a stay at home with the child while a father, a male, fulfill the role of being the breadwinner. If the role is incompatible with another role, it is causing conflicts for the surroundings and is known as inter-role conflict. For the father to be at home with the child and the mother to be the breadwinner is causing an inter-role conflict due to

the untraditional gender roles. Even though role theory helps to explain how social patterns influence people it may lead to the assumptions that roles simply exist as a part of the social structure in which we might fail to criticize if those pattern are appropriate.

We are using this theory to explain the phenomena of men experiencing gender bias in social services. The social constructions theory is used because it will explain how we construct roles and information through experience and common understandings of the genders. The common perception is how men and women are and should be throughout our constructions. This will further go into men's perceptions of what is expected of them based on their gender role.

Gender schema theory will be used to try to explain from a different perspective where it will give an insight on why men experience gender biases through gender schema.

4. Methodology

In this chapter the methods used in this study will be explained and discussed.

4.1 Research design

The objective in this thesis is to enhance the understandings about gender biases within the social service from a male workers' perspective. We used a phenomenology approach to comprehend and interpret the individuals' experience. According to Patton (2002) phenomenology has various approaches and meanings but the basis are how people or individual's perceive a phenomena through their senses; how they reflect, speaks, remember etc. a phenomena. To gain a directly understandings about their experiences, to truly learn about the selected topic, we preferred to let phenomenology be the foundation of this thesis and the essence of the experience will be presented.

The chosen method is a qualitative method to ensure the optimal results. The thesis concerns the issue about the male social worker's own experience. In order to describe the context in detail, in-depth interviews were being used (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009). The interview question (see appendix 1) were designed in a certain sense so the

respondents could answer them freely and not feel limited but at the same time were at confined within the subject.

4.2 Sampling

The sampling method used in this research is targeted sampling. Targeted sampling is when there is already a target group to randomly select from (Watters and Biernacki, 1989). This type of sampling is appropriate when conducting a study similar to this research meaning on a smaller scale. This sampling method is suitable because the authors want to find out why a group of male social workers in Gävle experience gender biases.

Firstly we contacted the human resource manager at social service in Gävle, she then sent a list of all the male workers which is our preexisting indicator data. Then we randomly selected from the target group and contacted them from different departments for the research group to be as varied as possible.

The different areas are departments within the social service in Gävle, such as unit of children, youths and family (*barn-, ungdom- och familjeärenden*); maintenance support (*försörjningsstöd*); and abuse and dependence (*missbruk och beroende*) (socialtjänsten, NN). To interview social workers from different departments will provide us a broader perspective and show us if gender biases occur in various units within the social service.

4.3 Data collection

To be able to gain answers to our aim the authors conduct interviews with male workers within the social service. The participants are five men working at the social service in Gävle. Two were working with income support; two were working with youths and unaccompanied children, and one with investigation of parental ability in an "investigation home". The objective is whether men in social work experience gender biases and how it appears. The interviews have been conducted in the social service in Gävle and the participants are five men in different departments of social service in Gävle.

The Social Service in Gävle is divided into different departments and the departments have one manager (gavle, 2014). To reduce the many contact within the Social Service the authors contacted the human resources manager. The manager gave the authors contact information to all men within the Social Service. The authors contacted each on the list through email before meeting them with information of topic, presentation together with contact niceties. The respondents who were interested answered the email. Together with the respondent the authors decided time for the interview. The respondents chose the location of the interview.

The interviews took place at their workplace or at the respondent's home. Before the interview, the authors informed about the four ethical considerations (see in chapter Ethical considerations). The interview was divided into two parts; first the semi-structured questions and secondly scope for a discussing of the topic; if the respondent had something to add. The interview lasted approximately 45 minutes to 90 minutes each and was recorded through voice control with our phones. One researcher conducted the interview and the other took notes. Face-to-face interviews were conducted and it allows the authors to see the respondent's expression and body language.

After the interview, we code the interviews in private and listed main arguments and possibly future themes. Hence, the authors went through the material together to discuss their interpretation of the interviews. This approach ensures that the interpretation is close to the reality of the respondents. The interviews were deleted after the transcribing was done.

4.4 Limitations

We chose to interview men within the social service. It was decided before the interviews that the participants would be composed of men with a bachelor degree in social work but that was not possible since some men at the social service did not have a bachelor degree. The selection was then to include all men who are working within the Social Service to reflect all of the elements and aspects of the chosen issue.

4.5 Ethical standpoints

In order to conduct the interviews, we followed "Ethical Guidelines" for researchers (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009). These are informed consent, confidentiality, consequences, and the role of the researcher. In this chapter it is discussed how these ethical guidelines are implemented in the present study.

Informed consent addresses informing the respondents about the purpose of the research, the respondents can withdraw at any time and the participation is voluntarily. The respondent was informed and accepted the conditions. At the end of the interview the respondents was informed about the process henceforth. We conducted the interviews in Swedish but will write this thesis in English.

Confidentiality refers to the anonymity and privacy of the interviewee (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009). To protect their anonymity the authors uses numbers in the research. Since age is not relevant in this research, the ages of the interviewees will not be described. It was further explained that our recordings would be deleted after the transcription and the recording solely replayed for the authors whilst they were being informed that other social workers will be reading the thesis. Confidentiality was addressed at the beginning of the interview if they wished to withdraw before the actual interview.

Consequences addresses potential mistreatment directed towards the respondent (ibid.) To diminish harm towards the respondent, the authors discussed about their own prejudice concerning gender biases in advanced and reflect the possible consequences of our immediate responses in a negative manner regarding the respondent's answers. Due to the utilization a qualitative research with in-depth question, the relationship between the researchers and respondents becomes intimately as well as the answers is about their personal experience. The importance here is to establish a respectable relationship between the interviewers and the interviewees. The authors further discuss the importance to listen openly and not to engage in a discussion about differences in opinions. Therefore, one author only listened to what was being said.

The last consideration is the role of the researcher and it refers to the researcher as an individual with emotions, integrity and principles. These should be put aside from the interview and not be focused on.

4.6 Validity and reliability

Validity means that the investigator are measuring what is intended to be measured and using appropriate measurements (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009).We are going to focus on the interview questions in connection to aim and ensure validity, to understand also what the interviewees are saying.

Reliability describes the repeatability and consistency of a test. After the analysis, the outcome will be the same (ibid.). To ensure reliability we will, as mention in the method, conduct the interviews together and later listen to the records individually and together discuss our findings and understandings.

The concept of reliability is that any noteworthy data must be consistent and naturally repeatable; basically saying that other researchers should be able to carry out the same investigation under the same conditions and circumstances and produce the same results. This in turn will enhance the data and make sure that the academic community will acknowledge the study. In order to have a reliable study, the research must fulfill all demands of testability. When it comes to using a qualitative method with interviews it is important to ensure reliability. The authors have listened to the findings separately and discussed our understandings to make sure we share the same understandings. This way we will not be affected by each other when interpreting what the interviewee said and make it biased.

This type of research related problems can occur which makes it even more important to know what it is you intend to measure and also the importance of consistency (ibid.).

5. Results and analysis

In this chapter we are going to present our results from the interviews. The quotations from the interviewees will end with a clarification which worker said what, for example

W2 (worker number 2). The initial result will be presented in themes and the empirical data will thereafter be analyzed through selected theories. The findings from the interviews are divided into three re-occurring themes which are identified as client reflects the society; culture at work; and unconscious.

5.1 Client influence and reinforcement

One theme that kept re-occurring was that some respondents experiencing gender bias from the clients; a few female clients could sometimes request a female social worker. The social workers then had to adapt to the clients request because of previous traumas caused by men in their lives. The social workers did not want their clients uncomfortable or feel mistrust towards the social service and was the motivation behind the adjustment. Sometimes the clients would also want a social worker with the same gender, for example a single mother wants a social worker who also is a mother in order to fully understand motherhood and the needs and wants of children and how overwhelming it can be.

Interviewee number 5 described how he noticed some clients had a hard time opening up towards him in their counseling session. He especially explained how some male clients had a hard time talking about their feelings when discussing certain sensitive topics.

> A good example of how one of my male clients avoided discussing emotions is when one of my clients brought up a traumatizing experience. He went on to explain the event however made the decision to avoid talking about his feelings towards it which is when I drew the conclusion that he did not want to talk about it with me as a male worker. (W5)

Here interviewee is sensing that he is being subjected to gender prejudice which basically states that males are not supposed to talk about their emotions amongst each other. The client did not say this directly. Thereby, our male social worker picked up on the indications and signals that implied it. This ultimately led the male social workers had to work harder to earn the male clients' trust and feel at ease. Kerstin Wetterberg and Cornelia Hallberg (2014) concluded similarly to that scenario, that research presented how there is a construction of both male and female social worker and the

constructions are amplified when the profession is dominated by one sex. The construction of the gender is maintained because typical male qualities are compared in contrast to the profession characteristics such as empathic, nurturing and caring.

Another male interviewee described a similar dilemma were he meets some female clients' who have been subjected to physical and mental abuse caused by men. He later claims that he also has to work harder to earn their trust simply because many of them are mistrusting towards men. The male social worker also stated that many of these presumptions can both be unconscious and conscious.

The male social worker who had been subjected to gender prejudice by a few male clients not wanting to open up to him can be explained by Bem's Gender schema and more specifically sex-typing. Here the client subconsciously sex-typed the male worker and himself into a category that they both fit into. The man is viewed as strong and masculine which is the opposite of sensitive and feminine which are typically traits for women. Bems' theory suggests that some people sex-type people more than others and the client had to in this case be part of a culture where this form of gender schema is the norm. Therefore it is only natural for the client to act upon the norms and culture he takes part of which many times happens subconsciously.

Gender schema theory states that people sex-type in different extension. Here we got a display on how the client sex-typed the male worker along with himself because of the traditional belief that men are not supposed to be sensitive and talk about their feelings. The client might not have known that he sex-typed the social worker yet interviewee number 5 is more aware of this type of categorization of gender since social workers are more aware and educated about the subject.

When taking the example where clients would want social workers with the same gender for them to be able to relate to them is another example of sex-typing. As stated above where a single mother would want a female social worker that has children, the assumption here is that another mother would be able to relate more and understand the difficulties of motherhood. As opposed to a male social worker who would not be able to relate to the difficulties single mothers face and might not give the client the same assessment as they would want.

These types of events can also be explained through social construction theory where assumption is that information, facts and understandings are created from a large group of people in coordination with other people in the same culture. This theory believes gender biases and gender expectations are socially constructed by everyone in a culture. This theory would describe these gender biases by saying that we have constructed our gender expectations through interactions. Here the client is part of a culture were social norms and expectations have been created almost as a structure to follow and act upon. The case where the client did not want to open up to the male social worker you can see how he is acting upon his role that he adapted within the socially constructed norms. The role plays a big part in this theory because you can see how the client is displaying the role he has received in his culture and his actions confirm it. He displays the role he assumed as the "masculine tough guy" towards the male social worker and is an example on how the male worker experience biases from a client.

The case where a single mother client wanted an older female social worker, assuming she is a mother and can relate to motherhood. The client wanted more specifically the qualities of a typical mother in her social worker, such as caring and understanding, assuming she would get helped with her family easier in contrast to a male social worker that the client assumes cannot relate.

The cases above is two examples how male social workers are subjected to inter-role conflicts. The client's expectations and behavior towards the male workers is that men should not be caring or cannot relate to parenthood. The male role is incompatible with the social work profession role together with the male role is incompatible with both family and parent model.

5.2 Work culture

Several of the gender prejudice and gender biases that men experienced where coming from norms at the work place. By trying to adapt to the workplace, as people normally do, sometimes people inhabit the "bad" norms as well. Gender biases were normalized at Gävles social service and much of it is because of the environment at the workplace and the work culture around. All of the five interviewees stated that they all have

experienced gender biases from their co-workers at one point or another. Interviewee number 1 describes day to day situations, for example being a helping hand when moving heavy objects, the male workers were asked more frequently. He then continues to elaborate on how some of his co-workers have assumptions that he gets work related benefits for being a male worker and states the following:

> There is this imagination that I receive stuff for free at work simply for being a man as well as work benefits and higher salary. It is almost as if I should be accountable for the uneven gender opportunity that exist in society. It is mentioned jokingly around the workplace in different contexts but there is probably a serious tone behind it. (W1)

The male social worker means there is an attitude towards gender biases in the workplace. He is also stating that people have the notions that as a male social worker he receives work related benefits which are not the case. Lastly he discusses how the topic of gender prejudice is addressed in the workplace in a non-serious manner but he implies it must have some truths to it.

Interviewee number 4 discusses how gender biases manifest itself in their workplace and states:

> Social work is not a physically strained job rather a mentally challenging job, so in that way both genders are hired with the same competency requirements. However the workers wants to move something or a physically straining task like moving heavy boxes or desks it is a male worker who gets called on automatically. (W4)

Interviewee number 4 discusses how both female and male workers have the same demands on both genders when the social services are recruiting. He proceeds to explain even though they have the same requirements; there are natural differences in their traits which are typical for men and women. One example being men are considered more physically strong than women and if there is a task at hand that requests "strength" which is one example of help is expected by the male workers.

Interviewee number 5 had an experience where the managers of the social services would act upon their gender when it comes to gender bias. He stated that when a client was abrasive or showed signs of aggression, the managers would appoint them with a male social worker.

> Whenever a client shows or acts aggressive towards a worker, I am called upon to defuse the situation. (W5)

Interviewee number 5 explains they had to receive clients as the other workers felt they could be able to better manage the client's behavior. This originates back to the traditional idea that men are better suited to deal with this issue due to the assumption that males are better "suited" to deal with emotions, for example aggression and hostility, particularly when it also is coming from another man.

Hedtjärn-Swaling (2012) also arrived to a similar assumption. The outcome in Hedtjärn-Swaling (2012) research is that the male social workers would tackle cases due to them being men. These cases usually involves situation when the male social worker should be a role model for the client. The research also displays how the male social workers would have received cases where the male client has a tendency to use violence. Same way of thinking is applicable when a client is threatening at the social service. It is more likeable for a man to interfere rather than a woman. The conclusion is that male workers has a quality to manage certain clients or cases based on their gender

Social construction theory would explain this by referring to stereotyping. Stereotyping is present in social settings such as where men are looked upon as strong and possesses traits as physical strength. The assumption in society is men can better manage other people's aggressions rather than women which are the case here.

He continues describing an example on how his co-workers' expectations is reflected due to his gender.

> I sometimes get the feeling that some of my co-workers think I am, or maybe should be, a role model to my male youth client's, and it is nothing really wrong with it but sometimes I have reflected on it. (W5)

Interviewee number 5 states that because of his gender one of his assignments include being a role model because of his gender. His female colleagues did not get the same assignment for the role he is assumed to take as a male worker. Bates & Thompson addresses the term role models usage in social service context and questions the necessity.

The second example of what interviewee number 5 has experienced can be explained by roles. The male worker describes that his co-workers assumes he has to be a good male role model to his male clients'.

Interviewee number 1 states his female co-workers believed he was getting work benefits because of his gender. The assumption and expectations is men get a higher salary than female workers and this is also a general fact. The male worker has been sex-typed by his female co-worker by the idea that men automatically get higher salary no matter the experience or skills previously. This is female co-workers trying to categorize and assume that men have it easier everywhere in society and even in the same work place for being men which is sex-typing. Their gender schemas are reflecting that even though it might be a profession of mostly women, a male worker is valued more than the average female social worker. The interviewee number 4's perspective is about all the workers being hired with the same competence requirements which also can be explained through gender schemas and sex-typing.

The worker claimed even though the workers are employed with the same requirements, they naturally fall back into the categorizations of genders where males are asked often to help out with heavy lifting or moving furniture's around the office. It also displays how the male social worker has been sex-typed by his colleagues, where the managers are equal as possible in the hiring process. The natural gender roles take over and are why gender schemas are deep rooted. In conclusion, interviewee number 5 addresses how he had to assist a session where a client had previously been aggressive towards a female social worker. This social worker was also sex-typed and assumed into a male that could manage situations with aggression better than a female worker since those typical characteristics is more in line with the male gender then the female.

Social constructionism would explain the first interviewee's experiences of his co-workers assuming he gets a higher salary as people constructing that information. Role theory would explain the man is given the role of having more benefits than female workers in the work place for being a male. Interviewee number 5 who had to assist for a male client and a female social worker because the client had become aggressive, had the role of the rational one who can solve tense arguments, which are more of "male" qualities. Interviewee number 1 stated his female co-workers alleged he was getting work benefits because of his gender. The assumption and expectations is that men get a higher salary than female workers in any profession they choose and these are compatible with the role of a male and a male worker.

Construction of knowledge and role delegation is maintained within a culture where people assume information of each other and occasionally confirm the stereotype of the genders continues. When society sex-type and role delegation occurs in society it is easy to blame ignorance and people do not know better than to categorize the genders. This theme is about when gender biases occur from the workplace which is from the co-workers, managers and bosses. Even though social workers are supposed to be more aware of their biases and how it affects people around them, it may not always be accurate which is demonstrated from the examples above. Reasons for this may be social workers are only aware of the biases that are known and conscious to them which they can change and prevent from acting upon. Yet, the unconscious prejudices and biases are the ones who become problematic since they are so deep-rooted.

5.3 The unconscious experience

Several of our social workers we interviewed stated many biases occur were very subtle and something they never gave much thought. The deeper into the interview, the more the interviewees described scenarios of how they have at one occasion at least been subjected to gender biases at the social services by both clients and colleagues. Several of their experiences were unconscious and not something they discussed at the workplace regularly.

The third interview we carried out the interviewee specifically explained his experience of gender biases and how he had expectations on himself. An example he said was that they had a female safety guard in the building but did not feel the need to call her because he relied on himself to be able to be there for his female co-workers.

> I have personally so far never needed to call for the security that works at the reception, even though some of my co-workers have done so. I on the other hand expect myself to be there for my female-workers if they need me to. (W3)

The interviewee number 3 described he is the one with the expectation on himself to be there for his female-coworkers, whatever unpredictable situation that may arise.

The second interview at the social services was a male social worker who stated that gender differences is rarely talked about except when discussing recruiting new social workers and the disproportionate gender division.

> When we talk about new job recruitments is also mostly when we talk about the gender differences and how we need more male workers to even out the gender gap. (W2)

Interviewee number 2 was implying that gender discussion only occurs during the recruitment process, subconsciously giving the message to the employees that the only times gender is being discussed at the social services is when there are lack of male workers.

The third interviewee was expressing how he needed to be there for his female co-worker. By "be there" he meant to serve as protection if they ever would need it in case of a situation that would need him to act and secure the female co-workers towards their safety. The interviewee had, due to external factors, internalized the expectation he evidently had on himself. Role theory explains that he occupies the role of a "protector" as perceived by his colleagues. This is based on previous interactions and reactions that protectors generally are a typical male trait.

Gender schema, more specifically sex-typing would explain this with him sex-typing himself as a protector and the women he works with as needing protection. This expectation and biases towards himself and his co-workers derives from information he learned and constructed from the culture he belongs to. We observed that our interviewee did not reflect on the fact that the expectations he had on himself was subconscious.

The second interviewee was explaining that the only time they discuss gender topics seriously at his workplace, is when there is discussions about new social workers to recruit. Since it was mostly brought up in that context they have only seen a problem in how uneven the genders were at the social service office. Therefore the problem that some of the workers had experienced gender biases was not discussed and addressed. This creates difficulties for an institution such as social services, since a problem cannot be addressed that is discussed in one context.

6. Concluding discussion

The five male candidates who participated in an interview had all at least once experienced gender biases, some experiences were similar and other experiences were diverse according to the interviewees. They all have experienced gender biases in the social service in Gävle. The result had three themes that kept re-occurring. The first theme was client influence and reinforcements of gender biases; the second theme was the work culture and how the co-workers and managers would display their gender biases. Finally, the third theme was how gender biases were so deep-rooted in the culture it was not noticeable; the subconscious experiences.

The answer to our research question is explained in the three themes are mentioned above. In the first theme the male social workers experience this by situations in which clients being mothers wanted a mother as a social worker. This is one of the reasons being the assumption that a man is not empathic and sensitive enough to give an assessment in accordance with the clients' wants and needs.

Second theme of work culture had many examples of how the male workers experienced gender biases. A specific example is at the work environment, gender biases become disguised and the gender expectations are not as clear as when the clients act upon them. One respondent claimed that both genders are recruited with the same competence requirements but when it comes to other tasks, such as lifting heavy boxes or moving tables, the natural gender expectations fall into place.

The last theme was not about how people would subject the respondents to gender biases as in the previous themes but more about how this particular type of gender bias displays in a deep-rooted and subconscious manner. One example of this was when one of the respondents had a gender expectation on him and not being aware of it which indicates how deep rooted and subconscious the experience of gender expectations can be.

The theories chosen for this study is gender schema theory and social construction theory which overlap each other as well as complement each other. Gender schema theory addresses how the child forms opinions and gender expectations in the childhood and how we afterward develop a gender schema to rationalize our experiences. The gender schema theory does not elaborate how this world views on masculinity and femininity originated, it only states we have this worldview. When analyzing the data, the researchers aim is to find out where the history of a phenomena or social norms originates from to fully understand the concept.

Both social construction theory and gender schema theory overlap since the theories explains the childhood and how the individual is forming an opinion at an early age and being heavily influenced by the surroundings. The theories complement each other due to the fact that gender schema is only applicable to gender related issues whereas social construction theory takes factors such as environment and surroundings, in consideration.

Both of these theories consider gender being a social construction and when analyzing the data we had these two theories in mind as a foundation. It would be interesting to find out how the analyze would appear with two very contrasting theories.

The difficulties when conducting a qualitative study is the findings will not be objective or none biased, the reason being is interviewing respondents is in a subjective context due to the fact that it includes their personal experiences which varies from individual to

individual. The interpretations where limited due to the fact that interpretations are subjective. What one researcher might understand in one way, a different researcher might understand in a different way. Also our own biases might have been displayed throughout the research by us assuming that male social workers had experienced gender biases. Therefore you become narrow minded when trying to find the issue before hand however this risk occurs often when doing a qualitative research study.

The different studies in previous research all came to the same conclusion that the respondents had experienced gender biases in one way or another which also is in line with our conclusion. These studies had different methods, participants and theories but get the same conclusion that men do experience gender biases within the social work profession. It would be interesting to take the conclusion further and to make a new study on a larger scale why biases against men occur in the social work profession, when social work is a profession that teaches awareness about gender issues. Could it be because we simply have our gender expectations to make sense of our social world?

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Appendix

Interview questions in English

1. What are you working with within the social services?
2. What does gender biases mean to you?
3. Have you been treated differently by clients because of your gender?
4. Have you been treated differently by colleagues because of your gender?
5. Has it affected your work sometime because of your gender?
6. Do you believe that this is a problem?
7. What causes the gender prejudices / expectations of the profession according to you?
8. Is there something you discuss at your workplace?
9. What do you believe can counter so that these problems do not occur in your workplace?

Interview questions in Swedish

1. Vad jobbar du med inom socialtjänsten?
2. Vad betyder könsfördomar för dig?
3. Har du blivit behandlad annorlunda av kunder på grund av ditt kön?
4. Har du behandlats annorlunda av kollegor på grund av ditt kön?
5. Har ditt arbete påverkats någon gång på grund av ditt kön?
6. Tror du att detta är ett problem?
7. Vad orsakar könsfördomar/förväntningar inom yrket enligt dig?
8. Är detta något som diskuteras på din arbetsplats?
9. Vad tror du kan göras så att dessa problem inte uppstår på din arbetsplats?