

Negotiating leave in the workplace

leave practices and masculinity constructions among Danish fathers

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Negotiating leave in the workplace: leave practices and masculinity constructions among Danish fathers

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Fatherhood in a Danish context

- The time Danish fathers spend with their youngest children has increased (2000s→) → fatherhood practices
- However, the extend to which Danish fathers convert these fatherhood practices into leave use is limited compared to the other Nordic countries:

Maternity and paternity day benefits in the Nordic countries (statistics from 2010)

	Denmark	Iceland	Sverige	Norge	Finland
Total number of days (1.000)	22 913	1 236	51 451	12 755	16 668
Percentage taken by men	7,7	31,7	23,9	14,7	7,1

Source: Nordic Statistical Yearbook 2012

- Danish fathers have the weakest legislative rights to parental leave in Norden – no fathers' quota

Leave entitlement in Denmark

The Danish legislative leave rights (from 2002):

<u>4 weeks pregnancy leave</u> - for the mother	B I R T H	<u>2 weeks maternity leave</u> - for the mother (mandatory) <u>2 weeks paternity leave</u> - for the father (optional)	<u>12 weeks maternity leave</u> - reserved for the mother	<u>32 weeks parental leave</u> - to share between the mother and the father (32 weeks for each parent but only 32 are compensated with social security benefit) <div style="border: 1px solid red; padding: 5px;"> Fathers' share : 7,7 % (2010-2011, Statistics Denmark 2012) </div>

- In Denmark leave is not only decided in the legislation but also:
 - in **various collective agreements**
 - at **work place level** - as a part of company policies
- This means that **Danish fathers have different leave entitlement dependent on the sector, trade and work place they are employed in – and thereby very different opportunities to take leave....**

Fathers' negotiations of leave in the work place



Focus is on leave use among fathers within three specific work places:

- How do these fathers construct leave practices – and individual male identities – in the work place?
- And how are these constructions influenced by the fact that fathers must negotiate leave individually with their superior in the work place?

Theoretical framework

‘Fatherhood practices’

- Concept developed by Brandth & Kvande (2002, 2003)
- Applying a ‘practice’ perspective on fatherhood, focusing on what fathers *do* becomes central; **how they construct fatherhood in their daily interactions with others**
- Men and women can construct different gender identities among several possible – cf. ‘multiple masculinities’ (Connell 1995; 2000)
- Still, gender is not ‘done’ freely: Fatherhood practices must be seen as ***the outcome of the various negotiation processes within different structures***:
 - Ideals of fatherhood
 - Ideals of work and masculinity
 - Existing leave entitlement

Methods and data

Three private, Danish workplaces – characterized by a varying degree of ‘family friendliness/leave entitlement:

- **IKEA** (an international furniture and interior concern)
 - **Telia** (a Nordic telecommunications company)
 - **‘The Shop’** (pseudonym) (a national chain of retail shops)
-
- Field work, participant observation, interviews, documents, statistics on leave take-up
 - ‘Following specific & ongoing negotiations to a result’
 - 12 fathers’ negotiations

Variations in leave take-up

IKEA

Entitlement:

6 weeks paid fathers' leave
10 weeks paid parental leave

Leave use:

All men have taken fathers' leave
Nobody takes parental leave

Telia

Entitlement:

2 weeks paid fathers' leave
10 weeks paid parental leave

Leave use:

57% have taken all 10 weeks (parental leave)
83% have taken some parental leave

Adam: *I have applied for 10 weeks of parental leave – that's what it said on the IntraNet and therefore I thought : 'Well, then it's 10 weeks...'. (...) I have heard of an man, who took 30 weeks [but] that's not normal....*

Int.: *So it is between two and 10 weeks...?*

Adam: *For fathers yes. If you take 30 weeks then you're a bit odd!!"*

(Male employee, Telia)

Fathers' negotiations of leave in the work place – the case of Janus (Telia)

- Janus, Telia employee
- Telia: only full time employees
- Has successfully negotiated a flexible leave agreement with reduced hours – with the support from a HR manager

“Kim, my superior’s superior, said ‘No!’ ... But then our HR manager said that I should send him up to talk to her. She got angry about his ‘we’re-not-even-going-to-talk-about-this’ attitude”. (Janus, Telia)

Fathers' negotiations of leave in the work place – the case of Ulrik ('the Shop')

- Ulrik – middle manager, 'the Shop'
- Begins negotiations about two month parental leave

'Even if there would be fire and brimstone [at the workplace], I would take leave – I already decided that when my wife got pregnant. It was so important to me. 'Cause I will *not* be the kind of father about whom people say 'that guy – he's always working'. Damn it, I want to be there! It might sound like an old romantic speech or an ideal that will not turn out – but hell, I mean it! '

(2. interview, one month after the birth of his daughter)

Ulrik ends up with not taking any parental leave – because of a new position and 'personal reasons' (3. interview, Ulrik's daughter is one year old)

Competing masculinity ideals

- work and care

“The ideal connecting masculinity and work has varying strength, depending on the competing ideals at play within a certain context. For example, how Scandinavian fathers construct work/career and fatherhood will be more conflicting as a result of the development of a strong discourse of ‘the present father’ and leave entitlement for fathers in the Scandinavian countries” (Morgan 2002: 281)

Ideals combining masculinity and work are strong in Danish work places

Lotte: *"Would it be okay here, as a man, to take leave? Do you think that your manager Mark will take leave, when he becomes a father?"*

Henrik: *"Well yes, **those two weeks** (paternity leave), yes yes."*

Lotte: *"What about longer time – 4 month for example?"*

Henrik: *"No, I definitely don't think that he would do so! (laughing) Mark is **a very serious man**! He's very involved and.... No, really, I don't think he'd be the type, who would leave his job for so long..."*

(Male employee, 'The Shop')

Conclusion

- Paid leave entitlement for parents (or fathers specifically) given in collective agreements and at the workplace level can contribute to making longer leave a possibility for fathers – in some workplaces. However, the existence of such an entitlement is no guarantee that fathers actually use it....
- Instead, workplace norms, including masculinity ideals, and ‘what other fathers do’ in relation to leave in the workplace seems to be significant for masculinity constructions and leave use among fathers.
- As fathers individually must negotiate their leave with their immediate superior, the question of taking leave or not can depend on the superiors and their goodwill and individual attitude towards ‘fathers and leave taking’.
- The fact that fathers must negotiate leave individually in the workplace, where the ideal connecting masculinity and work is strong – without the support that a legislative father’s quota may provide – must be seen as an important explanation for the limited leave use among Danish fathers