

Work in progress

## **Men's agency and resistance in the gendered mining workers' collective**

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This paper focus on the gendered nature of the mining worker's collective in Sweden, also emphasis men's agency as individual and collective strategies, in opposition towards the notions of a homogenous worker and stereotyped masculine ideals. Ultimately, these acts of resistance suggest windows for change.

The mining industry is an important employer in the northern rural areas of Sweden. The industry is male dominated and men in blue collar work constitute the main body of employees, close to 85%. Also, the tradition of labor unions in mining is strong as well as the symbol of the male miner as a working class hero (Blomberg, 1995). An increasing number of women within the organizations are challenging the structures to some degree, but company and workplace cultures, are still characterized by men and masculine ideals.

To highlight industrial relations and the sociological processes in a blue collar collective, Lysgaard's (1961) seminal work on the workers' collective is revisited. According to him the demands of the techno-economic system of the company (e.g. productivity targets) are inexorable and one-sided, and for the workers to endure these demands, the collective system takes shape. One of the most salient features of this system is that workers develop collective strategies, including limiting output, keeping secret production rates and keeping down working-hours (Fältholm, 1998). This means that 'the workers' collective' is conceptually close to organizational or workplace culture in that it functions as a set of norms, controlling the workers' relations to each other. Materialized by this normative system, the workers' collective is based on a culture of joint resistance in order to gain informal control over the work situation. It can also function as a protector of practical and hard physical work (Willis, 1979), referred to as 'embodied competence' or 'body capital' (Connell, 1995; Monaghan, 2002). This culture of resistance is also gendered. In Swedish mining, an idealization of a certain type of 'macho-masculinity' rooted in the old manual, heavy and dangerous mining work prevails as an ideal (Andersson, 2012).

Further, as the strength of the collective system is manifested by conformity to "rules" of likeness, also regarding gender and certain masculinities as this paper argue, deviations from such norms are accordingly punished. Sanctions against those that break the rules are, though informal, very powerful and may for example result in exclusion from the fellowship of the workers. This means that the collective potentially can be in conflict with ideas of workplace democracy (Hasle & Sorensen, 2013) and gender equality (Andersson, 2012).

However, our previous research indicates that members of the workers' collective now are challenging the system from within, concerning its specific masculine connotations and homogenous worker ideal. Drawing on the notion that these individual and joint strategies can be seen as "cracks", in the mining collective, represent possibilities for structural change and could destabilize the prevailing relation between mining, men and masculine ideals.

The empirical base of this paper is semi-structured interviews with male miners active in the Swedish mining industry. Alongside these interviews our collaboration with the industry in several R&D projects made it possible to contextualize the narratives.