

“Affirmative action is the most gender-unequal there is”

*Men forestry professionals’ meaning-making of gender equality interventions*

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Focusing on men—how male forestry professionals have made meaning of and positioned themselves in relation to gender equality intervention in forestry—this article adds to the literature involving critical masculinity studies in men-dominated industries. Two sets of descriptions were found: deconstructionist (recognizing and challenging the male norm of forestry) and protectionist (problematizing instead the gender equality interventions taking place—primarily the perceived use of affirmative action). The study shows how forestry professionals and forestry work are intertwined with specific forms of masculinity. However, being a man was also considered a disadvantage to a forestry worker’s prospects of being hired and promoted. The repeated association between the hiring of women and affirmative action are interpreted as acts of resistance to the changes in forestry.

**Keywords:** forestry; masculinity; gender equality intervention; men’s resistance; Swedish forestry

## **Introduction**

The forestry sector is Sweden’s largest export industry and an important component of regional momentum. It is a highly gender-segregated sector, dominated by men (almost 85 percent of forestry workers and professionals are male) and associated to specific forms of masculinities. Existing national employment surveys focusing on forestry graduates (Lidestav and Wästerlund, 1998; Lidestav et al., 2011) indicate that the increasing number of women has partly challenged previously all-male structures. Women’s reporting of sexual harassment has declined, as have gender-based differences in employment contracts. Nevertheless, existing gender segregation of positions and occupations suggests that rather than being altered, spaces of exception possible for women to break into have been created, enabling the general association with men and masculinity to prevail.

Today, Swedish forestry is under pressure to change in a more gender-equal direction, particularly by increasing the proportion of women personnel. In 2000, the Nordic Council of Ministers agricultural and forestry sector adopted its first gender equality plan, presented in a national report outlining how the Nordic plan could be implemented on the national level (DS, 2004:39). In 2011, the Swedish Ministry of Rural Affairs launched the strategy “Competiveness requires gender equality—a strategy of gender equality in forestry.” The strategy framed gender

equality as a means to achieve competitiveness, and competitiveness as conditioned by the ability to recruit the most competent staff across the whole working population (e.g., not just men). In tandem with the political interest in gender equality in forestry, most forestry organizations now include issues of gender equality in their rhetoric. If women have by tradition been excluded from representation in forestry work and among forestry professionals (Lidestav and Sjölander, 1997; Brandth and Haugen, 2000), women are now more often than not shown on websites and in advertisements as illustrations of contemporary forestry organizations' "modern" and "women-friendly" image. The gender equality intervention launched in the sector has focused mainly on the recruitment of (young) women to forestry education and to some extent to membership organizations and their boards.<sup>1</sup> In the event of two applicants of different genders who are considered equal in merit and qualifications, priority is often said to be given to the person of the underrepresented sex. Other forms of affirmative actions are not used in the sector.

While issues of gender equality have climbed the forestry agenda, little is known about how these initiatives are received and understood by those working in forestry. To fill this research gap, this paper empirically draws on men forestry professionals' responses to a national survey—part of the realization of the strategy of gender equality in the industry. When answering the survey, many male respondents expressed their views on the gender inequality interventions they perceived to be taking place in the sector. From our perspective, these narratives do more than just report neutral experiences of being a man or of gender equality interventions taking place in forestry; they are performativity struggles of meaning that produce the reality they describe by transforming conflicts and arbitrariness into perceived coherence. In the context of gender equality interventions, these struggles of meaning can be expected to be shaped by how the position of "man" tends to be articulated in opposition to the position of "woman" in a relation of dominance and subordination. Also implied in the context of gender equality intervention is that the relationship between "man" and "women" is problematic and in need of change.

The aim of this paper is to analyze and discuss the men's responses—their meaning-making of and positioning of themselves in relation to gender equality interventions in forestry. By focusing specifically on male forestry professionals, we added much-needed knowledge to the scarce research on men and masculinity in forestry. When forestry work has been addressed from a gender perspective the focus has primarily been on women (Follo 2002, Reed 2008), as illustrated by both existing reports (Thor 1994; S:son-Wigren 1996; Burrell 1991, Carlsson 2008) and gender equality actions such as networks for female forestry professionals (cf. Brandth et al., 2004 for a Norwegian discussion). The studies that do investigate norms of masculinity have focused on media representations and job ads (Lidestav and Sjölander, 1997; Brandth and Haugen, 2000, 2005). Apart from the historical ethnography of Johansson (1994) and the organizational communication work by Högvall Nordin (2006), investigations of gender relations, gendered processes and knowledge concerning the experience, meaning-making and subjectification of male

forestry professionals are missing. By analyzing the articulation and practice of strategies and conflicts in the dialectical struggle of defining and fixating the meaning of gender equality, we also add to studies on men and gender equality. In this context, the critical study of masculinities explores the ongoing tensions and contradictions that constitute the process of shaping workplace practices through gender equality actions. This enhances our understanding of gender and power relations in the intersection with other processes in both forestry and society in general.

### **Context: The changing masculinities of Swedish forestry**

Historically, forestry has primarily implied physically demanding, manual harvesting work, with practical and symbolic associations to men and to a particular form of rural, blue-collar, nature-mastering masculinity (Johansson, 1994; Ager, 2014). After the introduction of mechanized methods in logging operations, starting in the 1950s and almost fully implemented by the end of the century, the need for physical strength and endurance is no longer as obvious as it used to be. Owing to the development of purpose-built forest machines and adapted working methods, the productivity (cubic meters per day of labor) has increased tenfold in the same period, and the logger has become a machine operator—a controller of harvesters or forwarders. Operation is generally organized around two machines—a harvester and a forwarder—that are staffed with 4–5 specialized workers including the contractor (machine owner and employer) who are able to work independently based on few instructions (Häggström et al., 2013; Ager, 2014). Fairly autonomous teams have replaced the previous organizational structures, which entailed a rather high degree of control by supervisors. To maximize the output of the highly viable products of forestry in an environmental friendly and sustainable manner, states' interest in and emphasis on forestry planning and management has increased (SOU 2006:81; Swedish Government Bill 2007/08:108). These changes have led to the proliferation of professional forestry managers—experts and supervisors with an academic degree in forestry—who more or less perform their job from urban offices rather than the rural environments of traditional forestry.

The drastic transformation, in numbers and skills, of the workforce of Swedish forestry shapes gender structures and norms. In addition to more women having entered the sector as managers, academics and professionals (today, approx. 17% of forestry employees are women) (SKS, 2014:235), changes (and continuation) are also evident in the norms of masculinity. Based on a longitudinal study of the forestry press in the Norwegian context, Brandth and Haugen (2005) argues that the dominant representation of masculinity has been gradually repositioned in relation to changes in forestry work conditions. Their results show that constructions of masculinity have changed from the “logger,” who is a nature-mastering man with a body marked by hard work, to “the machine operator,” mastering chain saws and tractors, via the “organization man,” who has business

managerial skills, and the most recent notion of masculinity in forestry, the customer-focused “tourist guide.”

When analyzing the workforce that carries out mechanized forest operation (forest operator and contractors), Högvall Nordin (2006) identified four key symbols that in different ways build on notions and values of masculinity and reveal dominant mindsets, expressed as the “combat pilot” (machine operator linked to technology and performance), the “man of the forest” (manual laborer working close to nature and freedom), the “business executive” (organizational and management expertise) and the “contractor in crisis.” Lidestav and Sjölander (1997) have shown while gender has been constructed as a non-issue in forestry, the ideal forester has continued to be constructed as a hard-working, nature-mastering man, despite the increase of women forestry professionals

Aside from changes in the industry, the challenges of traditional forestry masculinities can be expected to be intensified by the more general “crisis of masculinity” and the criticism of traditional, patriarchal men. Of relevance to the changes affecting forestry professionals and gender norms are the ways in which hierarchies between men relate to the urban/rural relationship (Valentine, 2007; Little, 2002a; Campbell and Bell, 2000; Little, 1999). As manifested in media representations that Other “rural” men as the backward and outdated men against whom urban masculinities, perceived as modern and superior, are made to mean (Stenbacka, 2011; Eriksson, 2010). The nature-mastering, manual forestry worker is celebrated as the ideal within this context although this form of masculinity tends to be subordinated and marginalized in society at large. As the service-based economy and new technologies develop, other competences and skillsets are defined and required in forestry. The masculine connotation of forestry is somewhat persistent over time but forestry has faced and still faces many changes—from both within the sector, such as mechanization, differentiation, increased productivity and new managerial forms, and from society at large, such as changes in the prevailing construction of masculinity. Consequently, issues of gender equality are only one of many ways in which traditional notions of forestry work and forestry professionals are forced to change.

### **Theoretical framework: Male privileges and men’s resistance**

As the dominant norm of forestry, masculinity is often the invisible generic and an unmarked category of power that exists everywhere without being seen (Campbell and Bell, 2000). As an unmarked category of power, men are represented as forestry workers or professionals, an on-going production that is made obvious by the emphasis on women as “female forestry workers” or professionals. During times when dominant gender structures and norms are challenged, for example, through political intervention and gender-equality action, the invisibility of the masculine norm is potentially challenged (Squires, 2005). When the privileges of the masculine are challenged there tends to be resistance, defiance and/ or counterattacks. To defuse potential challenges to masculine privileges, the problem

(of gender inequality) tends to be placed on the group or individual women whose preferences and/or substandard performances give rise to gender-based hierarchies (cf. Squires, 2005). Defusing can also be a matter of assigning the addressed problem to a particular group of men rather than to men in general, thus making visible not only the plurality of masculinities but also the hierarchical relationships and power asymmetries between men (Connell, 2000). The ways in which hierarchies between men relate to spatial and class-based relationships in a restricting sector (Eriksson, 2010; Valentine, 2007; Fraser, 2000; McDowell, 2000), for example, are of relevance to forestry professions.

From the perspective of individual men, the potential challenges to the privileges of the masculine are also handled on the personal level as part of men's understanding of themselves. As such, Pleasants (2013) suggests that men's intentional or unintentional resistance to feminism not only serves the purpose of preserving male privilege but also the privilege of seeing themselves, and being seen by others as "good people," as opposed to perpetrators (Pleasants, 2013). According to Pleasants, this form of resistance has also, albeit implicitly and perhaps unintentionally, guided the men who have positioned themselves as feminist advocates.

One of the privileges men enjoy is that issues of oppression and inequality are not visible to the same extent as these issues are to more unprivileged groups. Part of this privilege is also a sense of entitlement—for example, to a certain job (Kimmel, 2007) or a certain wage (Hogue et al., 2007). If this fails to be translated into practice, this can foster explicit resistance and feelings of anger. Kimmel (2013) suggests that one signifier of "angry men" is that their anger is rooted in feelings of "aggrieved entitlement," of having been robbed of privileges and rights to which they perceived themselves as entitled.

Drawing on this theoretical framework, we analyze the empirical data in relation to a continuum of practice of resistance that moves between explicit/ implicit, intentional/ unintentional. As such resistance is "mutually implicative and co-productive" of control (Mumby, 2005:21). Less attention is placed on identifying the meaning of particular discourses and more on the interpretive struggle among discourses and practices, and on how these are constituted within the local context (Mumby, 2005; Prasad and Prasad, 2000).

### **Methods and material: National inquiry on gender equality among forestry professionals**

The empirical base of this paper is a national survey sent out in 2011 to all women graduates of Swedish forestry programs and a mirror group of men forestry professionals of corresponding educational backgrounds, ages and years of graduation. When a man of a corresponding age, educational background and graduation year did not constitute an option, the man closest in age was chosen. The programs included were all higher-education forestry programs, such as forest

engineering, B.Sc. in Forestry and M.Sc. in Forestry, during the period from 1969 (when the first women was enrolled in forestry education) to 2006.

Constructed as a mirror group, the men included in this study were not representatives of the population of forestry-educated men. Most importantly, as no students prior to 1969 were included in the study, and as the proportion of women slowly increased during the investigated period, the greater proportion of the investigated men had obtained their degree in the past few decades. Consequently, any man who was enrolled in forestry education prior to this point is less likely to have been included in the study. This is also reflected in the age composition of the group, as the men investigated were younger than the total population.

This survey was conducted as part of the national gender equality strategy in forestry, “Competiveness requires gender equality” (Landsbygdsdepartementet, 2011), to analyze the gendered structure of and the labor market in the Swedish forestry sector. To enable longitude analyses of the development of forestry since the late 1990s, the survey was designed in coherence with a previously conducted survey of men and women forestry graduates (Lidestav and Wästerlund, 1999). Aside from non-significant adjustments of the wording of some of the questions, one open-ended question pertaining to potential gender-equality actions (and placed in the focal point of this paper) was added to the existing query.

The survey was distributed by mail at the end of May 2011. After two additional reminders, the collection of data was completed at the end of September. Of the 1236 distributed surveys, 706 were returned, resulting in a response rate of 57 percent. Three hundred and ninety-three women and 313 men answered the survey. The responding men were between 24 and 60, with a mean age of 37 years. In total, 143 men provided answers to the open-ended questions in the survey. Three-quarters (108) still work in the forestry sector while the other quarter are in other sectors. Based on their educational backgrounds and occupations, the majority of the men in this study were forestry professionals rather than forestry workers. The majority of the men (105) had a Master’s degree in forest science, while the second-most common educational background was a Bachelor of forest science degree (18). Forest companies (25) and forest owner associations (13) were the two largest employers. About twenty of the men were self-employed, either full time or combined with other employment in the sector.

The compiled data proved rich. Depending on the angle from which it was analyzed, different observations regarding gender structures could be made and different forestry discourses could be constructed. The initial analyses, presented in a report (Lidestav et al., 2011), summarized and described the quantitative data in the survey on gender patterns in forestry. To elicit more qualitative data, the second phase of the analyses focused on the two open-ended questions posted at the end of the survey, which invited the responders to describe their experiences and perceptions of forestry more “freely.” Gender equality interventions tend to articulate “men” in opposition to “women,” which justified division of the study into two sub-studies, one analyzing the female respondents and one analyzing the male

respondents. Given the existing research gap, priority was given to male respondents, while a forthcoming paper will focus on female respondents.

Analyzing open-ended survey questions permits more qualitative analyses compared to questions based on a number of checkboxes. Nevertheless, unlike an interview, the survey format does not allow for any follow-up questions or further reflections in interaction with the researcher. While most of the answers given by the male respondents were short and to the point, they constituted performative “messages” of notions and assumptions that guided their understanding of their profession and their industry. The analyses were guided by an understanding of language as constitutive rather than descriptive, and explored how gender and gender equality were constructed by these men. The coding of the material was conducted inductively and was transformed into categorical themes based on patterns and commonalities.

## **Findings**

On an overarching level, the ways in which the male respondents made meaning and positioned themselves in relation to gender interventions in forestry seemed to be guided by two different approaches. One had a deconstructionist component that involved recognizing and challenging the male norm of forestry. The other had a more protectionist component that instead problematized the gender-equality intervention taking place in forestry. The two approaches did not constitute “opinions” or “voices” but rather positions between which the speakers can move as they attempt to make sense of themselves and the world.

### **“Being one of the lads”: Recognizing and challenging the male norm of forestry**

The deconstructionist approach was most noticeable in the descriptions of instances when being male was an advantage in forestry:

“Many forest owners expect you to be a man, especially the older ones.”

“I have never had to prove that I know things.”

“[Being a man is an advantage] when dealing with the mossy old fogies”

“My experience is that in forestry, it is an advantage to be a man at all times.”

“You are used to a ‘laddish’ atmosphere.”

What these quotations have in common is that they describe, from different perspectives, the masculine norm of forestry, and how masculinity is assumed among forestry professionals. Given that they embody the gendered notions of

forestry professionals, the men's choice of education or profession is not questioned or challenged. Also described is how male workers, as men, can assume respect, trust and authority as competent and knowledgeable forestry professionals. That so many of the respondents explicitly described experiences of male privilege indicates that the male norm of forestry can be both visible and mentionable. However, when it came to descriptions of the creation and reproduction of the male norms of forestry, it was figures outside their organizations who were targeted. The typical example was the "grumpy old forest owner" figure, who was assumed to be less egalitarian and more likely than a younger person to have issues with female forestry professionals. Also mentioned in these terms were customers, representatives of other corporate entities and entrepreneurs, who were conceived of as not taking women forestry professional seriously.

A deconstructionist approach was also noticeable in descriptions of instances when their male sex had been a disadvantage. In particular, some respondents referenced the negative effects that the masculine norm had on forestry workplaces.

"You have to participate in the boring discussions about hunting and machines because there so few women."

"The forestry sector needs more women in order to become more progressive and to shift its focus to issues within the industry that are now marginalized."

"I think that there would be a different atmosphere [at forestry workplaces]: more softness and balance—more like society at large. Maybe other issues would play a bigger part, and maybe the sector wouldn't be so stiff or conservative."

In the first quotation, the "you" who has to participate in "boring discussions" on topics associated with traditional forestry work is creating a distance and a hierarchical relationship between himself and the dominant norms of forestry. Assuming that this problem (a problem that belongs to others, not to himself) has to do with the limited number of women working in the sector, the speaker puts forward the idea that women would contribute something "different," and other conversation topics, to existing forestry. Similar notions also underlie the second and third quotations, which state that the industry "needs" women and that more women would bring something other than the already existing norms and cultures. Meanwhile, challenging the masculine norm of forestry, the claimed "need for women" in forestry is clearly guided by a dual and complementary view of gender.

In responses describing interventions that would improve gender equality in forestry, a deconstructionist approach could be found in those that described interventions that targeted the existing norms and cultures of forestry. From this



viewpoint, the problem was not so much that forestry did not attract women but rather that it only attracted particular types of men.

“Hire people who do not live for hunting and hounds and who have not been shaped by previous employment in the industry. This is the only way to disrupt the existing culture, which is organized around typical masculine norms”.

“Stimulate young women’s interest in the field. Do not use affirmative action!

“Provide scope for new students in traditionally feminine environments such as equestrian centers.”

Make sure that forestry educations are held in places other than Umeå. I reckon that more non-forestry-crazed guys would apply if it were held in Uppsala or Växjö. Locating a program in a hamlet like Gammelkroppa or Skinnskatteberg (Umeå) attracts one type of target group—that is, men like me with heads jam-packed with forestry and hunting.

Hunting (as well as hounds) is often used as a signifier in representations of typical forestry workers and professionals (Brandth and Haugen, 2005; Lidestav and Sjölander, 1997). As the quotation bear out, this hunter figure is strongly situated in a particular rural–urban duality through which the rural not only becomes associated with (a particular) masculinity but is also positioned in antagonism with femininity (Stenbacka, 2011; Brandth and Haugen, 2005; Morris and Evans, 2001; Campbell and Bell, 2000), and in relation to class-based positions (Eriksson, 2010; Morris, 2008; Little, 2002b). It is this logic that makes it possible to frame the relocation of higher-education in forestry in more urban contexts as a means to achieve a more heterogeneous recruitment base. Hence, while these quotations can be said to challenge the association between forestry and certain masculinities, while doing so they nevertheless reproduce other stereotypical notions of gender.

### **“Affirmative action is the most anti-gender-equality policy there is”: Resisting gender equality intervention in forestry**

The other approach had a protectionist component and was signified by a resistance to gender equality interventions in forestry. This was the approach that most clearly informed the respondents’ descriptions of times when being of male sex had been a disadvantage to them. Most of the descriptions of this sort were comments about forestry organizations’ efforts to hire and promote more women and how this adversely impacted male workers:

“The “We need more women here” mantra has disqualified me from at least one job. That I know for a fact”.

“Some employment ads make me wonder if it perhaps is a disadvantage to be a Swedish-born white man when the employer wants a greater gender balance and more ethnic diversity”.

In the quotations, it is assumed that male candidates, as men, are overlooked whereas female candidates, as women, get hired. This logic implies that women are, by definition, less qualified than men. Other respondents expressed the same logic more explicitly:

“Sometimes I feel that I’m not even being considered for the job even though the female applicants are less qualified”.

“For many years, the forestry sector has tried to increase the proportion of women. If she has the same qualifications, a woman is more likely to get the job than a man, and sometimes even if she is less qualified”.

“In order to even out the proportions of men and women in managerial positions, women have it easier ... The competition is based not on competence but on gender”.

As women were perceived to have an easier route to employment (and promotion), these respondents did express, in different ways, feelings of frustration and having been overlooked as men. Others had a somewhat more nuanced understanding of how men were affected by the industry’s bid to attract more women:

Forestry in general is male-dominated and needs more women. Because of that there is no advantage in being a man among many others. In some cases, when a woman has been allowed to jump the queue for a job, it has been a disadvantage to be a man. If the sector was more mixed, the use of affirmative action that negatively impact some people would be avoided. There is an obvious catch 22.

The statement above tries to rationalize the present situation in the sector, but still manifests an understanding that there are limits to how far gender equality can go. On one hand the respondent states that the industry needs more women, but claims on the other hand that action taken to attract and employ more women should not infringe on men’s access to available positions in the sector.

The protectionist approach was also noticeable in descriptions of potential interventions that would improve gender equality in forestry. Again, these descriptions were signified by repudiation of affirmative action, perceived to be used by forestry employers:

By threatening everybody equally regardless of gender. The affirmative action targeting women today in no way improves gender equality. It is simply unfair and is by definition discrimination against men. The changes in forestry students demographics that have taken place during the last 15 years will eventually be reflected in the market in a natural way.

“Educate more women. Is there any other way? Men (among whom too many are old fossils) outnumber women. Increasing women through affirmative action is idiotic—that only further irritates those who lack this way of thinking and does not make gender less of an issue”.

For me it is a matter of knowledge and social conduct—if the [proper] knowledge and ambition are there, gender becomes irrelevant. Affirmative action or other types of privilege only fuel more gender discussions. Everybody, regardless of gender, should have the same opportunities. If knowledge and experience are ignored, the gender gap will remain. We are in such a hurry to make everything gender-equal—of course the industry must be as gender-equal as possible, but that takes time. Many of the forestry owners are in fact women, and this will eventually be reflected among forestry professionals.

Although not identical, the quotes above are guided by similar overarching assumptions, namely that employers’ (as well as politicians’ and policy-makers’) express aim to increase the number of women in forestry has led to the use of affirmative action. Also assumed in this logic is that affirmative action is discordant to and a departure from the meritocratic principles that previously governed the hiring of forestry professionals (when they were almost all men). This association, seemingly taken for granted, between the hiring of women based on gender (affirmative action) and the hiring of men based on competence (meritocratic principles) indicates that forestry work and competence is still clearly associated with men and masculinity, despite the increase in the number of female professionals (cf. Lidestav and Sjölander 1997; Brandth and Haugen, 2000).

A number of men rejected, although for dissimilar reasons, the use not only of affirmative action but also of gender-equality action altogether. With some, this rejection had to do with the fact that forestry was not in fact gender-unequal.

“It [gender equality] does not need to change! I think the pace of change is fast: there are many women in forestry today compared to only 20–30 years ago. Today’s problem, I think, is that we are trying to create gender equality in too short a time. Gender takes precedence over competence and this has often not been very successful. Rome was not built in a day and neither will gender equality”.

“From my point of view, it is already good. Women might think differently”.

“Stop talking about it so much. Telling everybody that the field is gender-unequal becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. Let the best women/ men get the job—simple as that. Affirmative action is the most gender-unequal there is”.

Others stated that while forestry may not be gender-equal today, in time it will be—therefore, gender-equality action (particularly affirmative action) become unnecessary, artificial attempts to force something that will happen anyway.

“A quarter of my class were women, so when the “new generation” takes control, it will be so much more gender-equal. When all “old men” disappear. When they went to school, only men worked in forestry”.

“I think it already is well on its way. Furthermore, it is common knowledge that older men in forestry are often prejudiced against women, but that will also improve in the long run”.

As made evident by the above quotes, this “natural” development toward gender equality in forestry is rooted, on the hand in the increase in the number of women forestry students and on the other hand in the gradual disappearance of old men in professional forestry jobs and among forestry owners—something that could be described as an integrationist approach (Squires, 2005). Starting with the later, the tendency to target older men as the main preservers of sexist structures is based on a particular notion of gender as well as age. Another way of glossing over potential gender conflicts in forestry is to claim that any problem that might exist today will be automatically fixed as more women enter forestry education—two claims that follow the rational principle of gender equality as modern and consequently an inevitable development in the sector.

## **Concluding discussion**

This paper has focused on how male forestry professionals have made meaning of and positioned themselves in relation to gender-equality intervention in forestry. One set of descriptions had a deconstructionist component and recognized how forestry was shaped by a male norm that is perceived to primarily be upheld by older men outside the industry’s employee organizations. In order for forestry to become more gender equal, it was this male norm that must be changed. The second set of descriptions had a protectionist component, problematizing instead gender-equality interventions taking place in forestry, primarily the perceived use of affirmative action. Both sets of argument included, in different ways, practices of resistance. At times, the protectionist descriptions took the form of arguments

against the gender-inequality interventions, claiming that the problem at stake in forestry was not male privilege but rather that the use of affirmative action discriminated against men. Framing the hiring and promotion of women as an affirmative action assumes that women are not hired and promoted based on their merits. The deconstructionist descriptions did on the one hand agree that forestry was intertwined with a male norm. They also agreed that gender equality intervention was necessary. On the other hand, the deconstructionist descriptions included elements of resistance in so far as the problems relating to inequality were ascribed to a certain group of men, most often older male forestry owners.

Our study confirms how norms concerning forestry professionals and forestry work are intertwined with notions of a particular form of masculinity (Lidestav and Sjölander, 1997; Brandth and Haugen, 2000). The gendering of forestry professionals means that men are not only considered “normal”, but that being a man also functions as a gate-opener to a professional, homosocial community among men. The fact that forestry competences are intertwined with notions of masculinity is also made evident by the claim that men—unlike women—seldom had to “prove their knowledge” in relation to others, predominantly older forestry owners and professions, as their competence is often taken for granted.

Our study contributes new insight regarding the ways in which “being one of the lads” in forestry also are considered a disadvantage. Considering that most forestry employers have an express aim to increase the proportion of women in their organizations, this was perceived as making it difficult for men to compete with female applicants. Signifying the descriptions was that the hiring and promotion of women (but not men) is articulated as an affirmative action that departs from the meritocratic principles perceived as dominating the industry when men (but more seldom women) were hired and promoted. The men’s opposition to and rejection of affirmative action interventions visualizes the conflict between various discourses within the context. According to the meritocratic ideals that the respondents claim to subscribe to, the positions within the hierarchal division of labor should be distributed according to merit, by measuring individual competence. The idea of affirmative action programs challenges the principle of liberal quality and this type of action comes into conflict with the meritocratic ideals (Young, 1990).

The extended discursive space that affirmative action is given in the empirical data constitutes, we argue, a performative resistance strategy to gender-equality interventions that take advantage of the discursive conflicts combined with the visibility of women within the sector. This resistance also demonstrates that (some) men forestry professionals see themselves as entitled (cf. Kimmel, 2007; Hogue et al., 2007) to available positions and job openings. This entitlement demonstrates how forestry professionals are understood to be men. As such, this resistance works to reestablish the association between forestry competences and masculinity that is potentially challenged by the hiring/promotion of women.

An additional act of resistant found in the empirical data was, we argue, the *Othering* of the old male forestry workers and owners as representatives and

conservators of the traditional all-male gender structures and discourses of the industry. Positioned as the Other, the older men become the contrasting foil against which the men of the younger generation are constructed, perceived as being modern and egalitarian, pointing also to hierarchies between the men in the sector (cf. Connell, 2005)—in that “their” otherness contains “our” sameness (cf. Said, 1978). This tendency constitutes a break from the ways in which the problem of gender equality in forestry has tended to target women and women’s alleged incompetence and unwillingness to engage in forestry work. Placing the blame on a certain type of men illustrates that although “it may impress women with its united resistance to them, the brotherhood has difficulty in sustaining solidarity” (Cockburn, 1991:60). It is important to underline that the population of this study consists of middle-class men with higher education and often holding managerial positions. The class-based positioning of these men in time and space, through their articulation of gender equality and interventions, manual forest work, flexibility and modernity, etc., constitutes an important intersection that underlines the plurality and class coding of masculinities in the restructuring of the forestry sector (cf. Högvall Nordin, 2006).

Our study suggests that the meanings of being a man in forestry are partly changing. As shown in the material, various types of masculinities are constructed and defined through difference, and the construction of gender equality attempts to establish gendered, spatial and class-based relationships. Together with the economic restructuring of the sector and society, the articulation of gender equality and diversity, by the men in the study, challenges the hegemonic notion of masculinity and male superiority (cf. McDowell, 2000). The spatial articulation of gender equality, or rather the basis of gender inequality (types of masculinities), also reveals patterns of class-based inequalities (Fraser, 2000). In this context, it is important to further explore the relationship between discourses, resistance and the material world, examining how the structural, political and economic processes of the sector are products of performative struggles over meaning (Ashcraft and Mumby, 2004).

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