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The following article is about how and when ethnicity is of significance in elderly care. Below I analyze examples of how staff perceive each other and each other's work. These analyses describe how ethnicity is important in their work and in what ways the concept is given meaning. The importance of a phenomenon is primarily related to the linguistic expression of meaning. In this case the focus is on the meaning of ethnicity, which also includes the importance of actions, activities, behaviors and non-linguistic symbols, etc.

Keywords: ethnicity, elderly care, immigrant, social pedagogy, social work.



*Doing ethnicity
in elderly care*

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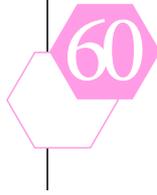
Social pedagogy is all about encounters between people and how these interactions can be understood. All encounters, in this sense, are about “*doing*” performances between actors (West & Zimmerman 1997). This means that through beliefs, ideas, norms and values we create each other and ourselves. Everyday life is made easier by using different kinds of categorizations to understand and act in relation to each other (Mark & Moya 2010). Notions of gender and ethnicity, for example, offer the female „immigrant” other associations than the male „immigrant”. Our conceptions of gender also mean that female and male physicians are seen and treated in different ways (Davies 2001; 2003). The way that the different categories relate to each other is consequently colored by gender, which in turn creates a situation where, for example, male nurses are regarded as abnormal in relation to the notions of profession and gender (Robertson 2003). It can therefore be said that the social positions regulate who we will encounter and how we are perceived as women, men, young, old, „immigrants” and „Swedes”.

The following article is about how and when ethnicity is of significance in elderly care. Below I analyze examples of how staff perceive each other and each other’s work. These analyses describe how ethnicity is important in their work and in what ways the concept is given meaning. The importance of a phenomenon is primarily related to the linguistic expression of meaning. In this case the focus is on the meaning of ethnicity, which also includes the importance of actions, activities, behaviors and non-linguistic symbols, etc. The topic of significance and meaning is difficult to distinguish from language as an abstract system to the concrete actions that maintain the linguistic regime. Meaning includes diverse kinds of human actions, which includes the outcomes of such activities, whether they are linguistic, value oriented or distinctive varieties of social practices (Foucault 1971; 1972).

How actions are performed is of great significance for preventive social work. This means, for example, that the understanding of the „immigrant” depends on how the “immigrant” is produced and represented for example in the elderly care context. If a whole society speaks of the „problematic immigrant”, then the perceived „immigrant” in a variety of situations will be comprehended as a problem. Potter (1996) argues that there are representations that become significant in the understanding of the statements, which also Hall (1997), Fairclough (1992; 1989), van Dijk (1997a, b) and Spencer (2006) see as essential to our identity and to our perception of the world around us. When it comes to health care, this practice is codified by different standard behaviors that convey required ideals that make them quasi-universal. These particular ways to behave and act are articulated in prescriptions concerning which actions should and should not be performed (Eliasson, 1987; Wearness, 1996; Lill, 2010). It is therefore important to find out how elderly care staff reasons about ethnicity. Because how they talk about problems influences how the concept of ethnicity becomes significant in the work.

Doing ethnicity

According to Norman Fairclough (2003), the communication between individuals are actions and interactions. He describes it as the discursive structure that is reinterpreted and reshaped after what a given situation demands. In the analysis of such actions and inter-



actions in elderly care work, I will argue that the concept of doing allows for an understanding of the social interactions that are fundamental in the elderly care context. Judith Butler (1990; 1993) argues that gender relations are performative, that they are a combination of representations and actions that are best understood as doing. She argues that we become our gender through this doing and that gender relations are to be regarded as a performative activities, processes in which gender is something we create in interaction with other people (Butler 1990). My argument also builds on the work of Karen Davies (2001) about how gender is done in the relationship between doctors and nurses .

Ethnic relations are described in similar terms as gender relations: they are constituted by a combination of representations, actions and interactions that condition subjects in relation to power and social privilege. The subordinate position of women can be compared to the status of ethnic groups in relation to the majority. These overlapping dimensions of gender and ethnicity challenge gender or ethnic only theories. The current challenge is to continue and advance multidisciplinary discussions of racial, ethnic and gender theory, that emphasize such comparisons (see the concept of intersectionality de los Reyes, Molina & Mulinari 2002). From a gender theoretical perspective, criticism has often been strong when it comes to the equation of vulnerability of those categories. The criticism has mainly been about how women and men's life conditions should be studied separately. This is regardless of the shared experiences of migration and/or ethnicity-based experiences, mainly because women and men's practices, abilities and knowledge, from a perspective of power relation, create different living conditions for men and women (Pettman 1996). However, within gender research there has been a lot of focus on women's different conditions and experiences depending on where, who and how a woman acts in a specific context (see hooks 1989; Frankenberg 1993; Skeggs, 1997; Sudbury, 1998; Hill Collins 2000; hooks 2000). It is therefore important that women's experiences of victimization describe and are based on the specific context in which they are inhabit. These accounts, I claim, must be done with consideration of the intersections of class, sexuality and ethnicity.

The meaning of ethnicity in elderly care in Sweden

Sweden is a multicultural society that in the recent decades has seen much immigration. This migration has predominately been by people of migration background. The migrants' experiences and how the established society deals with the encounter between different ethnic groups are central to the argument about how ethnicity is to be analyzed and how we become ethnic subjects. Since many migrants and people with Muslim backgrounds are working in elderly care, the exploration of ethnicity in the context of meetings in elderly care are essential to the study of care relationships. This article is concerned with the ways in which caregivers within elderly care reason and respond to questions concerning race and ethnicity.

- a. When do the persons' ethnicity carry meaning in elderly care work?
- b. When does the ethnicity of the caregiver or client begin to matter for the care giving relationship?

The empirical materials presented in the article are statements that emerged from two different group interviews (conducted in 2004 and 2012) with the staff that are working in elderly care in Sweden. Overall, 14 women participated in focus group interviews where I was the interviewer. The majority (10 persons) of the women were born abroad, four identified themselves as Muslims, but without headscarf (Lill 2005; 2007; 2015). The women (hereafter elderly care staff) are working in home help care (Swedish *hemtjänst*) or elderly care homes (Swedish *äldreboende*). They participated in the focus groups during their working hours.

Ethnicity is from the established society recognized as a difference from the „norm”. That is to say „immigrants” are ethnic because they are different than „Swedes”. The differences may consist of language, religion, cultural differences, but also a person’s appearance. The great dilemma of the concept of ethnicity is that it largely serves as a categorical variable. Categorizations further have a tendency to act stereotyping. A stereotypical categorization variable is furthermore often the basis for a kind of knowledge about „the other” (Torres 2015). Ethnicity is considered as interactions, which preferably are underpinned by notions of each other. Based on such a relationship, ethnicity is much more than individual expressions and expectations (Hylland Eriksen 1993).

Ethnicity is a cultural construction that is embodied in performances, for example in the novel *Ivanhoe* by Sir Walter Scott, where the characters Isaac and Rebecca will represent what the Jews are considered to be at a given time (the novel was published in 1819). Ethnicity may be viewed as a common social metaphor as age or sexuality (Soller 1989). Since ambiguous processes affect the approach to the concept, I argue that *ethnicity is our imagination of each other’s identities*.

Since the concept of ethnicity is dynamic and not really definable, it can be expected to bear a great deal of uncertainty. This uncertainty means that we have to rely on what we have read, heard and learned about in relation to “them” and that this becomes a basis of “our” knowledge of “them”. The problem arises when the knowledge of them is not consistent. All „immigrants” cannot be subsumed into the same category. Representations of the “ethnic” person therefore produces uncertain knowledge about ethnicity. This means that we depend on the representation of “them”. Ethnicity is therefore to be understood as representations and how these effect elderly care encounters.

It is not the fact of signification and representation that leads to a particular affirmation of ethnicity, but rather it is the representation of reality that governs these affirmations. The concept of ethnicity is thus an aspect of our beliefs. These beliefs are anchored in historical and social processes in different contexts and influenced notions of each other.

Imaginations becomes doing activities

“Men dominate in their (Muslim) culture. They (colleagues with headscarf) have to go home and ask.”

The quotation symbolizes a stereotypical perception of women who are wearing headscarves. It was in correlation with discussions involving dilemmas about ethnic relations



in the work place, when one of the participants in the focus group said that the teamwork with veiled women sometimes could be problematic. It was articulated, as colleagues with headscarf weren't considered to have the opportunities to make their own decisions about themselves and their lives. A staff member assumed for example that the women with headscarf at her work-place did not come to the Christmas party because they were not allowed to go there by their husbands. The elderly care staff assigned the veiled colleagues as a group distinct from themselves. The staff's attitude to the colleagues using headscarf can be understood as a simple and stereotypical notion of culture as something the individual carries with them and which is unchanging. When the staff related to each other through such categorizations they created space for a negotiating activity, which in turn is related to the discourse of the „oppressed Muslim women.” In this way, they construct each other's cultures through the observed and imagined differences between them.

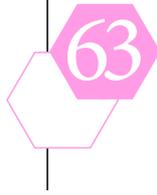
These imaginations of one another begin in the simple distinctions of our looks and how our bodies receive and assert symbolic value as women, men, old, young, black, and white. The bodily identification and categorization will be central in all interpersonal encounters. When we imagine each other's identities our bodies are always present as signifiers. This means that our bodies give signals that in turn relate to discursive understandings of what we should be or where we expect to find ourselves in relation to specific contexts (Joppke 2009). If a Muslim woman is not going to the Christmas party her absence is understood in relation to prevalent notions of veiled women's behavior. The symbolic assessment of bodies thus create meaning and can also be understood as a limit. The physical boundaries are perceived as „natural” and seem to the elderly care staff who do not wear the veil to exist at a basic structure of experience, as a physical condition of reality (Solheim 2001: 20). The symbolism of the body is thus crucial to how we read in each other's areas of action and which activities that are appropriate depending on who we are perceived to be as individuals.

Since the physical limits of the body are part of the perception of reality, notions about ethnicity are also perceived as a bodily dimension framing reality. The representations of bodily limitations came in particular to entangle the elderly care staff's reasoning about the colleagues who were wearing headscarves. The limitations were also presented by how their men were imagined as surveiling the women. An example of how the veiled women's bodies were produced as a limit experience was a discussion about whether colleagues with headscarves could ride bikes or not. Here are two staff members in a conversation:

- „They have never learned to ride a bike. They have never been taught because of their men. We've talked about it openly at work because we wanted to know if the husbands allowed it. So they had to go home to their men and ask. Some men accept it and said it's ok, so some we have taught to ride a bike. Those who do not get the bikes have to go by foot.

- Do you have time to walk?

- Yes, we have to, but it would have been much easier to have a bike especially if you have shopping bags and so. It is such small things that make the difference. It's not always the big things that's becomes the biggest deals and there are great differences, but it's the little everyday things that do.



- But what's wrong with bike riding?
- What will you have between your legs? You should have a saddle between the legs. For what I understand it is that one can feel sexual, or the men think that it could be a sexual feeling to sit on this saddle.

- Allow them to have that pleasure, by all means ...
- Yes, it could, we think, but for them it is a fact and the men are in control and it is they who are saying that the women can't go by bike, so it's those small things."

The conversation shows how some of the staff members define some of the colleagues, as "them". When she is saying „they” no one in the focus group oppose. It can be explained as the participants in the focus group are attentive to who „they” are. The individuals who become „the other” in this context are „real” because the language has the ability to give words the social and cultural meanings (Fairclough 2003).

The elderly care staff's experience enables values to be expressed that can be related to the staff's perceptions of „the other”. The imaginations of “them” is made clear in the statement that „we wanted to know if men allowed it.” It shows that there is a kind of knowing of that their husbands determine whether they have the opportunity to learn to ride or not. The conversation illustrates therefore the structural effects of the representation of the veiled woman as trapped and sexually controlled by the man when it is believed that the man considers that the saddle allows sexual stimulation and that this is the basis for the ban on cycling. The consequence of the expressions is that the Muslim man's authority is enhanced and the „truth” about the man as the governor. These kinds of imaginations are strengthened when the staff members ask the colleagues with veil to ask their husbands for permission to do specific things, as in this case, to ride a bike. These conversations show how social identities are articulated on the basis of the staff's experiences.

Summary and concluding remarks

In the Swedish elderly care has the focus on ethnicity predestined that the „ethnic” is a problem that must be solved and both the practice and the research has been absorbed on finding explanations for the so-called „immigrant problem”. In the following article I have exemplified and made reflections on dimensions that are strongly linked to social pedagogy and a theoretical framework on social work with the elderly. The examples have been about how we are to each other, the importance of ethnicity and an argumentation about how ethnicity is doing activities.

To do ethnicity in the context of care giving is to be assigned and to take discursively created subject positions through the constant interactions of the workplace. Through such an analysis it becomes possible to understand ethnicity and race relations as a continuous process revolving around the conceptions of each other's identities. By employing doing ethnicity as an analytical tool, it becomes possible to understand how caregivers, sometimes unwittingly, use ethnicity as a marker for their constructions of care.



The main ambition with this article was to present an alternative model for understanding how ethnicity becomes important in relation to care. A primary purpose has been to place elderly care within a new theoretical perspective, particularly by shifting the focus from ethnicity *per se* to the relational aspect of constructions of ethnicity. I have done that by showing how the ethnic dimension often is located in language use, in the relations created by various discourses and their institutional conditions. These conditions also create spaces of power in working life, pockets of mastery and subordination and the social hierarchies that go with them.

The results show how ethnicity becomes meaningful within elderly care through a detailed engagement with the concept of doing. Using gender theory as a starting point, I present an alternative perspective on ethnicity by analyzing ethnic relations as a doing array of interactions.

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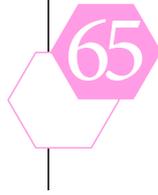
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