Välja namn – välja kön? Hur förnamnsval bidrar till konstruktion av könsroller s. 5–17

Summary

Choosing names – choosing gender?

How first-name choices contribute to the construction of gender roles

By Emilia Aldrin

This paper analyses choices of first names in Sweden from a gender perspective and is a synthesis of two previous publications (Aldrin 2015a, b). Two sources of data are used: (1) a questionnaire survey of first names given to newborn children in Gothenburg in 2007, to which 621 responses were received, and (2) a list of 226 invented first names given to children all over Sweden in 2012. A combination of quantitative and qualitative methods is used to explore to what extent contemporary Swedish naming is helping to maintain or renegotiate traditional gender roles and gender boundaries. The study shows that the first names chosen, both established and invented ones, often have structures, phonemes and connotations that create a picture of girls' names as pleasant, soft, and linked more to the domestic context. Boys' names, on the other hand, convey a picture of roughness and of connection to family and a global context, i.e. offer wider scope for action, creating a situation of symbolic dominance. However, there are also many instances of resistance and of active, conscious attempts to renegotiate gender patterns through choices of first names. This is achieved both by choosing established Swedish first names that have certain attributes, and by choosing invented first names. In most cases, the gender negotiation involves adding new elements to, or expanding existing elements of, traditional gender identities, rather than trying to create completely new gender identities. Girls' names are mostly modified with regard to the structure of the beginning of the name, i.e. the vocalic ending that is gendered as a strong feminine marker in the Swedish name system is kept intact. Furthermore, invented girls' names have even more traditionally gendered structures than the established girls' names in contemporary use. Boys' names, on the other hand, are modified through new strategies both for name beginnings and endings and regarding the length of names. Invented boys' names, moreover, create new gender patterns to a greater extent than invented names for girls.