

# The ronkedor phenomenon – constructions of masculinity, illness and health

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## ABSTRACT

This PhD dissertation is a phenomenological investigation into the life of men in relation to health and illness. The aim is to investigate the lifestyle connections of health and disease on the one hand and the perceptions of being a man – masculinity – on the other hand. The focus is to produce descriptions and an analysis to enlighten this connection. The research question is: How is health, illness and masculinity constructed in the life of men? It is a qualitative investigation into men's practice with illness and health, based on a philosophical-psychological-sociological analysis and lifeworld interviews with 13 Danish white men, 30+ and fathers.

The investigation's empirical part results in descriptions and the ronkedor model. Ronkedor is the Danish word for a male elephant living in apparent isolation from any herd. Distancing is about, in the interviewees' words, that, "one looks after one self" and "one would rather be alone" and "one wishes only to be treated as a healthy strong man". Primarily a concept of distancing and focussing is developed. By distancing is meant keeping illness, signals of illness, risks of illness and health at arm's length. Distancing and focussing is differentiated into three aspects: social, verbal and mental. These three forms can be interpreted both negatively as isolation/denial and positively as autonomy.

In the world of the interviewee, specific forms of distancing and focussing of illness and health appear in connection with specific forms of hegemonic masculinity.

Concepts of health and illness are developed through several steps discussing different theories. The connection between masculinity on the one hand, and health and illness on the other that is specific for this investigation is discussed in relation to other forms of literature and theories. Both the Danish and international perspective is included. The concept of masculinity is described and discussed on the basis of especially anthropologist David Gilmore and sociologist Will Courtenay.

Focus is on several themes in the interviewees' life such as: present or previous disease/illness, body, sex, work and love. The aim of the interview is to describe and analyze the experiential qualities of the interviewees' relation to health, illness and masculinity. The main goal has been to attempt to find an explanation of men's everyday life, their motivation, dreams, decisions etc. in relation to illness, health and masculinity.

The therapeutical perspectives are seen within the prophylactic work towards men and the existential/psychosocial aspects of the clinical work. Future research may quantify (e.g. a larger population), nuance and modify the models developed in relation to e.g.: age, class and culture.