New Perceptions of Gender and Reproduction
On July 25, 1978, Louise Brown became living proof that conception could take place in a test tube. Many thousands of babies later, In Vitro Fertilisation (IVF) is almost a routine and all the IVF “miracle stories” have created the impression that childlessness is a thing of the past as biotechnology provides the answer to all fertility problems.

At the same time new biotechnologies provide alternative images of the body and its functions as well as alternative ways of modifying dysfunctional bodily processes. The Norwegian research project “Perceptions of gender, genes and reproduction” focuses on how people’s perceptions of reproduction and parenthood are changing in relation to assisted reproductive technologies, how this new knowledge of biological functions has influenced contemporary perceptions of reproduction. The very term for these technologies has gradually shifted from “artificial reproductive technologies”, that is to say de-naturalisation, to “assisted reproductive technologies”, indicating that the intervention of medical technology is meant to restore the body so that it functions the way it naturally should, as project leader and professor Merete Lie at NTNU says in her article. She also points out that cultural perceptions of nature, culture and reproduction are implicitly also stories of gender related to biological bodies. The new ways to conception also make us rethink what we previously might have considered as pure nature.

In a new project, leading Swedish gender researchers give their view on how nature, biology and other gendered matters can be theorised and how feminist biology can contribute in this process. Sociologist Tora Holmberg discusses in her article the tensions between the biological research field and gender studies. Sometimes these tensions have been so intense that they could be described as outbreaks of “science wars” over the causes of gender differences, represented respectively by “biologism” and extreme “feminism”. The controversies sometimes arise from the confusion that often surrounds post-structuralist theory of the biological body, which states that the body is “socially constructed.”

The third article on gender and biology in this issue takes us into the animal world of hyenas and peacocks, walruses and pipefish. The Swedish evolutionary biologist Måns Andersson outlines how androcentrism and schematic thinking on sex within biology research has been challenged by modern behavioural ecology and gender research. In particular the study and transgression of the boundary between theories of gender and sexual selection might produce surprising counter knowledge. Studying the world of animals we have come to realize that two sexes, separated in two main types of bodies, what we normally call sexes, is not a biological rule, Andersson says. Instead most species lack sex totally, many have more than one sex in each body and the capacity for flexible sex expression is widespread. The association between behaviour and sex does not follow rules set by sex.

So, looking at animals – as well as human beings – with a schematic understanding of sex differences certainly opens up for “gender trouble”.
GENDER, GENES AND REPRODUCTION

Cultural perceptions of nature, culture and reproduction are implicitly also stories of gender as it relates to biological bodies. How has this new knowledge of biological functions influenced contemporary perceptions of gender, nature and culture? PAGE 4

GENDER EQUALITY AND FERTILITY

In the Nordic countries, women enjoy a high degree of participation in working life while at the same time giving birth to a relatively large number of children. This is often interpreted as indicating that the Nordic family policy model has high sustainability with respect to equal opportunities policy. More detailed analyses of the development of fertility patterns provide only conditional support for this assumption. PAGE 16

NORDIC WELFARE STATES – A VIEW FROM THE OUTSIDE

To what extent have the Nordic welfare states been successful in promoting a women-friendly, gender-inclusive model of citizenship? Ruth Lister, professor of Social Policy at Loughborough University in England, looks at the challenges for the Nordic model. PAGE 28

Biology in feminist theory

Biological research and gender studies have produced new understandings of sex and gender that in many ways have led to increased tensions between these scientific fields. PAGE 8

Gendering Animals

A female spotted hyena has a penis and a male pipefish carries the young in his belly. How to define biological sex and gender in the world of animals? PAGE 12

Russian Women in Grey Zones

While the Nordic states are celebrated for the inclusiveness both in social and gender terms, many immigrant women find their agency being restricted. PAGE 20

Towards a Family Equality Policy?

How have welfare policies in the Nordic countries been influenced by developments in the European Union? A team of researchers has analysed trends and changes in employment and family issues in eight northern European countries. PAGE 24

Generation XXX

Pornography is a familiar phenomenon in the daily life of Nordic adolescents. The vast majority have seen porn and many use it actively. These are the main findings in a study carried out among youth in Denmark, Norway and Finland. The study is part of the Nordic research project Youth, Gender and Pornography. PAGE 34

Different porn careers?

Some clear differences between boys and girls emerge regarding behaviour patterns with respect to pornography. This also goes for attitudes towards the phenomenon. This study is based on conversations with Swedish young people about their experience and perception of porn. PAGE 37
New Perceptions of Gender and Reproduction

New biotechnologies provide ways of modifying dysfunctional bodily processes but they also present alternative images of the body and its functions. New stories about nature and culture are connected to the new technologies. Cultural perceptions of nature, culture and reproduction are implicitly also stories of gender as it relates to biological bodies. How has this new knowledge of biological functions influenced contemporary perceptions of gender, nature and culture?

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THE FOLLOWING ARE SOME reflections on nature, culture and gender in the context of the ongoing research in the project “Perceptions of gender, genes and reproduction”, which is financed by the Norwegian Research Council’s programme on bioethics.1 A main research question is how people’s perceptions of reproduction and parenthood are changing in our times in relation to assisted reproductive technologies.

Modifying the biological body
A contemporary story of nature and culture is taken from the Norwegian newspaper Aftenposten’s weekend magazine. The headline on the front page tells us that in ten years every third couple will have problems in conceiving a baby. And the reason for this? The article provides the answer: it is because they wait too long before trying to conceive. Indiscernibly, the focus shifts from couple to women. The physician who is a lead person in the story, and who is working with infertility treatment at a private clinic, says that he cannot give women advice about what they are doing now. Firstly, getting an education and then getting a good foothold in working life before thinking of getting pregnant. He has, however, the answer to the problem, which is assisted reproductive technologies.

This is a story of nature and culture within a contemporary context. It is about new life careers among women and the place they have gained within the public field versus their biological bodies that have different requirements. Thereby, the body is presented as a stable construct in contrast to altered life patterns and in accordance with a familiar storyline of the body as unequivocally “given” with reference to “the biological clock”. The original twist is that whereas culture traditionally has been depicted as changeable in opposition to a stable nature, it is now the biological body that may be modified and not women’s new life careers. In addition, we may be witnessing what Charis Thompson (2005) speaks of as a biomedicallization of American society in the sense that there is an increasing tendency to turn social problems into biomedical questions.

De-naturalisation and re-naturalisation
Within feminist theory, the story is different. Within feminist research the body is theorised as a particular form of nature produced by culture, but this version seems to reach a limit when it comes to reproduction. The cultural body tends to collapse into a biological body that has a lot of culture “attached to it”. To understand the gendered body, contemporary theory works towards conceptualisations that avoid the additive and are integrative, moving towards an understanding of bodies as bio-socio-cultural bodies. Book titles from studies of new reproductive technologies, such as After nature, Beyond the natural body, Making parents² state that we are beyond what is understood by a purely natural body and a natural birth. Feminist researchers like Donna Haraway and the authors of the titles above have basically questioned “how natural nature is”. Moreover, the distinction between nature and culture is confused by the point that nature has a strong symbolic dimension and thus is also part of the cultural. The symbolic function of nature is most visible in the way new steps in the technologies of reproduction tend to be associated with natural processes.

The new reproductive technologies provide a good basis for the study of changing perceptions of nature because the field consists to a large degree of stories of de-naturalisation and re-naturalisation. A very simple illustration is the very term for these technologies that over time has gradually shifted from, artificial reproductive technologies that is to say de-naturalisation, to assisted reproductive technologies, indicating a re-naturalisation. The latter term indicates that the intervention of medical technology is meant to restore the body so that it functions in the way it naturally should (Lie 2002).

The trend seems to be that terms tend to change gradually and often after a new technology has become legal. Normalisation and social acceptance is linked to concepts that relate to nature and natural processes. This does not mean that assisted reproductive technologies can be presented as “pure nature” but there is a
trend towards linking nature and culture in terms that present them as connected and not in opposition to each other.

**Egg donation and surrogate motherhood**

In Norway, IVF treatment (in vitro fertility, red) has been through such a re-naturalisation process whereas egg donation is now under debate. Generally, the term donation is a very acceptable term culturally, associating it to the positive action of gift-giving. Surrogate motherhood has negative connotations and a surrogate has never been as good as the real thing. It may also be associated with the evil stepmother that replaces the real and good one. Many of the voices currently in favour of egg donation are at the same time against surrogate motherhood. Thus it is a term signifying the socially unacceptable. If surrogate motherhood becomes legal in Norway, there is every likelihood that there will be a new term for it.

However, the “most natural” process does not always correspond to what is most socially acceptable. Referring to the practice of sperm donation, Stine Adrian (2006) finds in her doctoral study that insemination by donor is experienced as being slightly socially unacceptable. It is actually described in terms of feeling like one has been unfaithful. So to give and receive the gift is probably socially acceptable, but the practice of insemination which to a large extent is mimicking a process of nature, goes against what is socially acceptable.

**Redefinition of human conception**

A most interesting aspect of these de- and re-naturalising processes is how we at the same time reconfigure the understanding of that we had before. An enlightening case by Sarah Franklin (1995) of how assisted reproductive technologies are introduced to a broad public shows that when presenting the new reproductive techniques, the point of reference is natural reproduction. This means that natural reproduction is simultaneously reinterpreted and presented in new ways. The storyline of the first of two docu-dramas that were produced for the BBC, is that to produce a baby the natural way is actually a miracle, considering all that can go wrong. The public is told that most egg- and sperm cells will never achieve fertilisation and that there are several points of extreme risk during the process of conception, pregnancy and birth. In the follow-up on assisted conception, the two ways of conceiving babies are depicted as basically similar: that is, both involve risks and uncertainties. The point is that the way to make assisted reproduction normal and acceptable is through a process of redefinition of ordinary human conception.

**Domestication**

The stories of de- and re-naturalisation may be analysed as a process of domestication. The term domestication is used in studies of new technologies to analyse how users are active in shaping them during processes of cultural interpretation and social adaptations (e.g. Lie and Sørensen 1996). During these processes the technologies may change functions and meaning to fit into peoples’ lives, values and modes of understanding. As exemplified above, we choose terms that make these new technologies acceptable and familiar – they must literally be integrated into the family.

The concept of domestication assembles all the social and cultural processes that are taking place to make new technologies understandable, acceptable and usable. These processes are taking place on many levels. They take place on the political level...
When laws are issued and later renegotiated, the producers of medical technologies disseminate information and advertisements telling us what they are, what they are good for, and why they are important. Media relate popular science information and stories of ordinary people who are pioneers in new scientific advancements.

The everyday life processes when new technologies are being talked about in casual and familiar terms should not be forgotten. These are of vital importance in transforming technologies from something strange and unknown into something useful and familiar. Our project focusses on how such negotiations of assisted reproductive technologies are taking place at different levels in society.

New images of egg and sperm

Today, the most effectual stories of the biological body and the process of reproduction are mediated by new visualisation techniques. We have been provided with new terms to talk about bodies and reproduction in new ways and we have also been given new images allowing us to perceive what happens inside the body. New technologies for looking into the body and studying the tiniest parts of it through electron-microscopes have been developed in parallel with assisted reproductive technologies – the latter would not have been possible without the former. Simultaneously, this has given the public access to new images of the body and what it is made of and, not least, what babies are made of.

Pictures of the egg and sperm, preferably at the moment of conception, have become new icons of the conception of life. Whereas the moment of conception used to be symbolised by a love story, that is a picture of she and he, it is today depicted as a story about the egg and sperm.

We may ask to what extent these pictures are depicting the interior of the body and what is taking place there, or to what extent they reflect common perceptions of the egg and sperm and the romantic story of their fusion (Martin 1991). The story that we expect to be told is strengthened by conventions for images and illustrations. Currently, the egg and sperm are generally used to illustrate stories about new reproductive technologies. However, they have already been taken up by commercial advertising to illustrate the race towards a certain goal with one heroic winner. Evidently, we knew the story even before we had the photos. To produce an eye-catching effect, the pictures are brightly coloured, and anything which could distract from the point in focus has been removed. Most interestingly, the bunch of competitors have been deleted as well as the shield around the egg cell. The effect is the undisturbed image of a monogamous, heterosexual union of he and she.

These images and the new stories of reproduction are simultaneously stories about gender related to biological bodies. As previously mentioned, the studies of reproductive technologies have brought the body’s reproductive functions into focus at the same time as the social and cultural interference into the process is made evident. The new ways to conception also makes us rethink what we previously might have considered as purely natural. What the new biotechnologies make clearer is that where we draw the line between nature and culture is a product of culture and that this is a moving target. ■

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Due to the division of labour in science, “nature” is in general overlooked by gender researchers who mainly come from the cultural sciences. In a new project, leading Swedish gender researchers give their view on how nature, biology and other gendered matters can be theorised and how feminist biology can contribute in this process.

Ghost hunt?
Understanding ”Biology” in Gender Research

PHOTO: STEVE BENSON / GETTY IMAGES
WHAT IS “BIOLOGY” in feminist theory and gender studies? That is a question asked by Linda Birke in a book called Debating Biology (2003), and a question I have been asking myself for some time. The background for that query is complex: The division between nature and culture, the biological and the social, matter and form, and sex and gender represents a gap in scientific theory and practice (Butler 1990, Moi 1998). Depending on the direction from which a researcher approaches this boundary, one of the two terms seems primary while the second category can be reduced to the first (Holmberg 2005a).

For sociology, for example, the discipline’s inside is called culture and the outside consists of nature, while the reverse is true in biology, for example. Sociologists consider that this outside, nature, is of subordinate significance in explaining the social phenomena in question. However, for biologists nature becomes the essential and ultimate significance in explaining the social phenomena. From this, nature is in general overlooked by gender researchers who mainly come from the cultural sciences.

In the last decade, biological research and gender studies have produced new understandings of sex and gender that in many ways have led to increased tensions between these scientific fields. Sometimes these tensions have been so intense that they could be described as outbreaks of “science wars” over the causes of gender differences, represented respectively by “biologism” and “crazy feminism”, which in later debates was labelled “extreme feminism”. The controversies sometimes arise from the confusion that often surrounds post-structuralist theory of the biological body, which states that the body is “socially constructed”. The critical question is what the ontological and epistemological status of this construction is. It could mean, and sometimes does, that we can never know of the biological body per se, only of our conceptions of this body. But it can also mean that the biological body becomes, that is it materialises out of cultural practice and discourse (Butler 1993). The standard objection to the constructionist perspective is that it neglects reality and that gender researchers therefore deny the biological body. Now, following Bruno Latour (1999), we could say that the more effort invested in these constructions – and one can without doubt say that the discourse on sex-differences is a rather rehearsed one – the more “real” and firm does it become. In this example from post-structuralism, nature becomes incorporated into culture. In biological research, the reverse movement can be observed. In genetics, for example, “gender” as well as “behaviour” sometimes become incorporated into nature: they become natural types (Holmberg 2005a).

Discussing biology

Much of the lack of understanding that sometimes, but far from always, prevails between biologists interested in human and animal behaviour, and social and cultural gender researchers has to do with different ways of grasping the categories of and boundaries between nature/culture in general. However, this boundary work is a heated topic that gives rise to tensions within the field of gender research as well. Gender studies is a relatively new and heterogeneous field where the divisions between different fields are increasing (Smithewaithe 2005). To understand how gender researchers relate to the nature/culture divide and to analyse the possibility of transgressions on different levels, is therefore of importance for the future development of gender studies and feminist theory. With this in mind, I have turned to Swedish gender studies in order to investigate how gender researchers from different disciplines relate to the nature/culture divide in research and for example sexuality, violence and the body. The questions I pose are as follows:

- How do gender researchers relate to biological research and knowledge?
- Which different ways of understanding the biological body are represented?
- What are the existing theoretical frameworks?
- What conceptual and methodological problems and openings become articulated within the frameworks?

The aim of the current project is to highlight the premises of the nature/culture divide with Swedish gender studies as the point of departure. Within the project, I investigate understandings of the biological and the social through concrete gender research projects in the humanities, the social sciences and in medicine. I have interviewed 12 prominent gender researchers interested in the divide, and analysed some of their scientific production (Holmberg forthcoming). From this project, I will present some themes concerning the idea of dialogues between cultural and natural sciences on the one hand, and the theoretical space or the conditions inherent in feminist epistemic culture for these transgressions on the other. I will conclude with a discussion of the conceptual limitations of in feminist theory: the effects and the possible ways out.

Dialogues over the line

As mentioned earlier, there has been quite a lot of boundary work going on between feminist scholars and biologists. In general, I believe that “biologism” as a defined enemy, has done quite a lot for the unification of the rather divided research field of gender research. I also believe that this boundary work towards biological accounts of gender-related issues has given rise to a rather disturbing problem of credibility, both theoretically and politically. Having said that, let us not forget that there are some very good reasons for feminists’ assumed reluctance to deal with biology. Firstly, biological facts have historically been used in order to prove the validity of women’s subordination. Secondly, biologists speak with the voice of power, from within traditional and...
patriarchal science, while feminists come from outside, or from an oppositional position. They therefore cannot speak on equal terms. Now the table has turned at least to some degree. Feminists and gender scholars are starting to become accepted by the academic collective, and even within biology, feminist perspectives have gained acceptance and at least to some extent, become part of normal science (see, for example Hrdy 1981, Gowaty 1996).

Prior to starting the project, I had heard all sorts of critical accounts of feminist researchers and their relation to biology. It was claimed that they deny the biological body (as represented in the “biologism”-debate), that they are “bio-phobic” or ignorant of biological theory (Wandermassen 2005). Now, even though this might be true in some aspects, it is not quite the impression that I got from my interviews. For example, researchers mentioned areas where biological research has been essential on emancipatory grounds. But more than being good examples of sound and feminist science, biological research is also framed as a possible source of inspiration for theoretical development. The new genetics could for example tell us more of differences between people, which in turn could inspire conceptual and theoretical development. Most interestingly, knowledge in natural science is portrayed as an epistemological advantage; the more you know, the more you realise the limitations of that knowledge. This knowledge also becomes an advantage when communicating with “the other side”. Some of the interviewees embody that knowledge by education, such as the two medical gender researchers. Others have engaged in inter-disciplinary projects where broad competence becomes essential for the knowledge production in question. Now, even though this is not claimed to be a representative picture of how gender scholars in general relate to biological research, it’s interesting to consider this rather positive account. On a level of praxis, there seems to be several possible openings here for further dialogues with biology and feminist biologists. But what about the conceptual, epistemic level? Is there theoretical (and cultural) space for understanding, challenging or refiguring “the biological” within feminist/gender studies?

**Feminist epistemic culture**

In order to narrow down the prevailing norms of the feminist epistemic culture I would like to present how informants narrate their understandings of good versus bad gender research. This will have the effect of narrowing down the prevailing norms of the feminist epistemic culture. I want to get at the centre and the periphery; what is considered to be good and not so good when it comes to theory? So the main questions are:

- **Norms** – what is good versus not so good gender/feminist research? Who is the researcher?
- **Boundaries** – mapping the field of gender/feminist research; what is main stream and what becomes marginalised?
- **Rhetoric analysis** – how is the story told, what are the effects?

To make a long story a great deal shorter, good gender research in essence purports to challenge existing knowledge, to be a piece of good craftsmanship, politically relevant, honest and reflexive. It’s preferably empirically solid, but should not be overly empirical. Gender scholars in medicine and psychology appear as somewhat marginalised; their work is understood as empiricist and therefore, not good feminist science. Masculinity studies also get some critique. Some masculinity studies are said to be “banal”, e.g. stating the obvious.

If the overly-empirical constitutes one of the margins, there is also a reverse tendency of criticism towards the overly abstract, post-modern/post-structuralist kind of gender research which is framed as unusable when trying to understand real people. But even though most of my senior gender researchers, who nearly all entered the field of women’s studies in the late 70’s or early 80’s, are eager to position themselves against a “butlerist position” – but not necessarily against Butler – there is an even greater enemy lurking around the corner: essentialism. The researchers in my study work with issues like mothering, menstruation, menopause, violence and medicine. They collectively run the risk of emphasising bodily matters – or simply women – too much and to consequently be labelled essentialists. The anthropologist Lena Gemzöe has formerly been critical about the phenomena and she wrote along with some colleagues in the late 80’s about an existing “taboo” within the gender research community surrounding even
goal for such passionate discussions is not set at the outset, which is why they can take unexpected turns and produce unexpected results. I think that the actual meeting between researchers, empirical issues, problems and theories is essential if we seriously want to transgress existing boundaries. Gender is a promising boundary object for facilitating transgressions, and the timing for such transgressions is right (Fausto-Sterling 2003:123).

As I have seen in my study based on interviews, there is certainly some interest among leading gender researchers for such encounters. But what about the conceptual and theoretical conditions for such discussions?

I have argued that interviewees in general talk about two poles in understanding the biological – butlerism and essentialism – and that they somehow look for a third way, a way in between. What happens is that we collectively try to grasp the “biological”, but it eludes us, and this is exactly what happens in publications on the matter. Butler has been criticized for not paying enough attention to the material body in her thorough study Bodies that matter (1993), and this is the fate of many other prominent theorists as well. The “biological” slips away, and still, it appears to be haunting gender perspectives of the body like a ghost. So, maybe the ghost is a useful figure for analysis in this case (Törnqvist, 2006). A ghost is a scary creature because it challenges the boundaries between life and death, material and spiritual, reality and fiction. Maybe the ghostly existence is a promising entrance to understanding, not only how one can draw and in whose interest, but also to consider what the “social” is. What is the social? What is “gender”? And what are the limitations of the nature/culture division of labour in science?

The challenge then is to find concepts to describe and to understand gender matters in creative ways. For that purpose, it may be useful to follow the ghost back to biology and make use of the insights of feminist biologists, medical gender researchers, feminist science studies scholars or other cross-border characters.
NO ONE WOULD DENY that general societal structures influence the way we think about and represent animals. We appear to use animals as artifacts in the iterative identity producing processes, in the same way medicine has used the body, history has used the past and anthropology has used the related other. Looking at bird books, it can be easily demonstrated that the size of males generally is exaggerated and this does not just depend on the fact that they are often depicted disproportionately in front of the female. Considering that male birds generally are more colorful it makes the books prettier, but it also causes problems, since females generally are harder to identify and really need to be bigger and in the foreground (Greenwood & Adams 1984, Andersson & Eliasson 2006).

The evolution of the animal world provides dream artifacts for the gender hierarchy producing process. It is about body, it is about history and it is about related other. Male lions, deers, and walruses are ready to be used as prefabricated gender stereotypes. However, the core theories regarding animal sexuality, for example, contain elements of counter knowledge and have the potential of revolutionizing the thinking regarding the linking of certain characteristics to certain sexes (Zuk, 2002). To dismantle and rebuild the sex concepts has been necessary, in particular for those of us working with theories on sexual selection. However, the fact that we work with sex linking of behavior also, of course, opens up for gender trouble.

Several of Darwin’s ideas about evolution have taken time to permeate into mainstream biology. One of them was the idea of the sexually active female. During the last thirty years androcentrism and schematic thinking on sex have been challenged by gender perspectives and modern behavioral ecology, but a great deal remains to be done. There is much suggesting that, in particular, the study and transgression of the boundary between theories on gender and sexual selection might produce surprising counter knowledge.

**Natural and sexual selection**

Charles Darwin produced two main theories on evolution; one about natural selection and one about sexual selection. Natural selection is about the survival of the fittest, while sexual selection is about reproductive competition and about choosing the right partner. The theories on natural selection fitted the white upper class male scientists of the 19th and 20th century like a glove. Natural selection theories also produced a far more understandable world and are today the theoretical fundament of biology. As opposed to this it took almost one century before the theories on sexual selection became thoroughly explored. In 1972, Robert Trivers reinterpreted and developed Darwin’s theories in the following groundbreaking way: “Where one sex invests considerably more than the other, members of the latter will compete among themselves to mate with members of the former” (Trivers, 2002). Trivers excluded the words “female” and “male” and said that behavior was basically regulated by the division of labour between sexes. This sounds very much like the feminist theories of the time.

How do we define sex? We know that it cannot be defined by penises, chromosomes, x or y, steroids, genetic composition, etc, as all of these vary between sexes and species. In crocodiles, temperature, not the genes, decides if an individual will develop into one sex or another. Like shrimps crocodiles are not born female, they become it. A female spotted hyena has a penis, but she is still a female and a male broad-nosed pipefish carries the young in his belly, but he’s still a male.

Biological sex is not determined by the structure of the body, but by the size of the main sex-cell that is produced. If individuals in a species produce two main sizes we call...
ANIMALS and the demise of simplicity
those who produce more of the small type, males, and those who produce more of the bigger, females. In other words sex is a strategy and sexual selection studies have come to be the science that investigates how traits such as competitiveness move back and forth between sexes.

Therefore, most organisms do not fit into such simple dichotomous sex classes. However, it seems like pet owners, Disney’s film script writers, wildlife filmmakers and scientists focus on those animals that fit and if they do not, we often force them to or omit them from the picture. The interpretations of animals seem to be firmly based in conceptions about similarity, conceptions that too often are characterized by gender stereotypes and androcentrism. One cannot help suspecting that we as human beings identify heavily with animals, and in particular with animals that we perceive as belonging to our own gender, genders where biological sex is an important marker. Furthermore, the gender order in society seems to affect the sex order we see in animals. Considering this it would be a challenge to investigate the role of gender in animal representation in general. The factors causing gender trouble are all interconnected. They range from question about definitions of good science, for instance, the relationship between the low status of primate studies and the high impact of women scientists within this field. This is interconnected to role models, department organization and university policies. Finally, studies involving animals have a totally unique feature. Since there is one animal species for each human identity and for each aspect of human life, the choice of model organism is of pivotal importance.

Highly sexually active females

The field of sexual selection produces counter-knowledge. Today we know, for example, that the previously heteronormative, monogamous female birds seem to be highly sexually active. DNA technique has shown that they can store and sort sperm from multiple males and thereby take control over when they want to fertilize their eggs, who they want to be the father and what sex they want their young to have. In other words, the female birds decide which kind of sperm fits their agenda. The sperm and egg story is crumbling; the power relationships are changing. In the two-spotted goby behavior varies over the breeding season. Early in the season males compete over opportunities to mate with females. Late in the season the females compete for the males (Forsgren et al. 2004). In the mormon cricket the mating strategies differ between different populations. In some populations females compete for males while in others males compete for females. This seems to be dependent on food quality (Gwynne 1993).

However, animal research sometimes encounters problems. It can for instance be demonstrated that when it is hard to get information about the females of a species, scientists’ schematic precognition tends to fill the knowledge gaps with stereotypes or play down the importance of the second sex (Zuk 2002).

The mathematical ecologists Hanna Kokko and Michael Jennions have, in an analysis of polygamy research, demonstrated that sexual stereotypes are so heavily interwoven into the fabric of evolutionary theory that logical paradoxes have been reproduced over and over again for over a century (Kokko & Jennions 2003).

Since the 1980s, some scientists tried (passively or with an active gender perspective, such as Patricia Adair Gowaty) cleaning up the concept apparatus by choosing to study the eastern bluebird, where females have death fights over nesting grounds.

This isn’t an exception, female reproductive aggression is found in many animal groups, from bees to wolves. In great reed warblers the females in a group share one male and fly around tossing the eggs out of each other’s nests.

Conflict or choice

Stepping back in time one cannot help noticing other comparable peculiarities about the development of the sexual selection theories.

According to Darwin, there are two main ways in which one sex competes among themselves to mate with the other. The first is direct conflict which traditionally has been studied on males fighting for females. In many cases, this has led to weaponry such as horns and violent competition, such as for the walruses.

This first process gained some popularity among the men involved in sexual selection studies during the first three quarters of the 20th century. They excelled in studies on the males wonderfully adapted fangs, horns, penises and sperms. (Zuk 2002)

In the second sexual selection process fighting is of less importance. Instead choice is the key component. The rationale for this is that an individual can use certain characteristics to estimate the genetic quality of a potential mate. This line of argument has been used to explain behavioral and morphological traits in for instance many male birds that sing, have hopelessly long and colorful feathers or build nests decorated with blue flowers and Fosters beer bottle caps (Andersson 1994).

In the beginning Darwin was ridiculed for his ideas that females estimate male quality and choose their partners. It was argued that females simply couldn’t be capable of making such complicated decisions. The American zoologist Marlene Zuk argues that this might have been one of the reasons why Darwin’s ideas about choice were left to one side for long (Zuk, 2002). These theories implied that females are something different from the expected, not the passive receivers and incubators of the seed of life.

Sexual selection theory predicts that a broad set of behavioral classes such as coyness and offspring care come as a package. In the walrus, the females got this package and if the environment changes the package moves to the males, such as for the broad-nosed pipefish where the males seem to prefer dominant and decorated females showing off and competing for male attention (Berglund & Rosenqvist 2001).

Hence people who look at animals with a schematic understanding of sex differences are in for a rude awakening. Because the association between behavior and sex does not follow rules set by sex. Instead, it is a historical selection pressure, the specific evolutionary history of each species and current day trade-offs that regulate if a behavior will be connected to one sex or more.

No sex or many sexes

Furthermore, we have come to realize that two sexes, separated into two main types of bodies, what we normally call sexes, is not a biological rule. Instead, most species lack sex totally. Many have more than one sex in each body and the capacity for flexible sex expression is widespread. For
these species biological sex is not genetically determined but a historical–genetic, a current–behavioral and possibly cross-time–cultural response to the physical and social environment.

Other species have a multitude of sexes. At this stage the terminology about sexes falls apart and scientists are forced to use the term “mating-types” (Hurst & Hamilton 1992). Instead of reformulating the general terminology and thinking on sex, organisms like protist Tetrahymena with seven and the slime mold Physarum with up to thirteen sexes seem to have been defined to be outside the general logics of sex.

Male arguments and female drivel
The alpha male aggression is often regarded as the primordial and cross-species form of aggression about which we can generalize. This is partly because male aggression is readily observable in the species scientists choose to study, but also because of the very definition of aggressiveness and the baffling ways female aggression can be ignored. In 1992, John Marzluff and Russ Balda published a study of dominance hierarchies in a bird species called the Pineon Jay. However, despite the fact that the really striking aggression was to be seen between females they brushed this aside and called it the bird world’s equivalent of PMS! Marzluff and Balda believed that while the males had rational reasons to establish hierarchies Balda believed that while the males had rational reasons to establish hierarchies, the females were suffering from unconscious reasons to establish hierarchies. A later re-analysis of the birds revealed that the hierarchies were established by the females and the males were followers (Lawton et al., 1997). The example is not fair as a description of contemporary zoology, but in one strike it demonstrates how androcentrism and gender stereotypes can twist theory interpretation, study setup, result interpretation and editor acceptance in the most remarkable ways.

So far, the research on gender and animals has focused almost completely on the role of animals in our own gender-producing processes, ignoring the animal as subject, ignoring the weaker part, excluded from all chances to protest. Perhaps it is time to look at how animals are affected. It might not be a problem only for pets, farm animals and ornithologists. Aristotle classified all the spotted hyenas as males (Wilson 2003). In the spotted hyena, the female clitoris has developed into an erectable structure almost indistinguishable from the male penis. The females are dominant over the males, the female penis plays a part in communicating power and the alpha female leaves her kids in the kindergarten. These animals are altogether lovely and socially very complex, but they certainly cross boundaries. If you open Google and do a search on “lion conservation” you will get around 16,500 hits. For “hyena conservation” you will get around 16,500 hits. For “hyena conservation” the number is 65. This example and many others raises questions about to what extent we are looking at animals at all, and to what extent we are, in the most sophisticated ways, gendering them to a life, death and disappearance in the periphery.

REFERENCES:
Gender Equality and Fertility
In the Nordic countries, women enjoy a high degree of participation in working life while at the same time giving birth to a relatively large number of children. This is often interpreted as indicating that the Nordic family policy model has high sustainability with respect to equal opportunities policy. With fertility rates close to the reproduction level, the Nordic countries are better prepared than most other western countries to meet the demographic challenges associated with low population growth and a rapidly aging population. More detailed analyses of the development of fertility patterns provide only conditional support for this assumption. There are signs that a higher level of acceptance of equally shared parenthood is also necessary in order to maintain a sustainable level of fertility.

**Small Differences**

At the beginning of the 2000s there are small variations in fertility level among the countries, whether we consider period fertility (Figure 1) or cohort fertility (Figure 2). The trend in the direction of a common fertility level is even more pronounced for cohort fertility than for period fertility. The development in fertility after the “gear change” shows clear common characteristics, with effective recuperation of delayed births later in life. The rather large differences between countries in the average number of children for the cohorts of women born in the early 1940s have given way to significantly smaller differences for the cohorts born early in the 1960s. Icelandic women show the highest average and are still well above the reproduction level for the 1963 cohort (2.4 children). Behind them come Norwegian women, who are at about the reproduction level (2.1), while women in the remaining countries are below the reproduction level, with about 2.0 children in Sweden and 1.9 in Finland and Denmark.

**Variations in Development**

However, more detailed analyses of the fertility pattern show a good deal of variation in the development towards relatively equal cohort fertility in the four countries covered by the analyses. The first birth rates and the proportion of childless women have shown a generally similar development, but some variations are notable. The postponement of first births started first and was most pronounced in Finland. In the cohorts born in 1965-69, Finnish women showed the highest median age for the first childbirth (29 years). Finland also has the highest number of childless women (17 per cent) at 40 years of age. For its part, Sweden showed the highest rate of third child births in the 1980s and the lowest throughout the 1990s. However, as a result of the rising Swedish rate of third births after the mid 1990s, Sweden and Denmark are at approximately the same level at the beginning of the 2000s.

**Greater Variations for Second and Third Births**

With regard to the trend in birth rates for the second and third child, the variations between countries have been greater. The most important reason for this is the considerable variations in Swedish second and third birth rates from the end of the 1970s to the end of the 1990s. However, towards the end of the analysis period we see a clear convergence between the countries also with regard to the level of second-birth rates, and a more bifurcated pattern in the level of third birth rates. Finland and Norway show the highest third birth rates throughout the 1990s and have remained consistently close to each other in the entire period. Denmark’s third birth rates have also been stable throughout the 1990s, but at a significantly lower level. For its part, Sweden showed the highest rate of third child births in the 1980s and the lowest throughout the 1990s. However, as a result of the rising Swedish rate of third births after the mid 1990s, Sweden and Denmark are at approximately the same level at the beginning of the 2000s.

**The Effects of the “Nordic Model”**

A distinction must be made between the direct effects of changes and differences in welfare systems and family policy regulations and the indirect effects of an economic, social and political development with characteristics clearly common to the Nordic countries. We assume that the significant similarities in the development of the childbirth pattern can to a large extent be ascribed to such fundamental common characteristics in the development of the welfare state, among other things the early assumption of the right to education for women and an increasing emphasis on the introduction of family policy schemes in the post-war period, with possibilities for combining paid employment with child raising.
**Essential demographic terms**

**Total fertility rate (SFT):**
A measure of the fertility level adjusted for age, in a country in any given year. Sometimes also referred to as the period fertility level. SFT shows the average number of children a class (born in the same year) of women will have if their birth pattern over their lifetime corresponds to the birth rates for the individual age groups of women in the same year.

**Cohort fertility:**
The average number of children a given birth cohort (born in the same year) of women at the end of their childbearing age (49 years of age). The birth rates of women in the age group 40–45 years has been stable at a relatively low level over recent decades. The average number of children at the age of 40 therefore gives a good indication of the final level of cohort fertility level for women born in that same year.

**Reproduction level:**
An estimated figure showing the average number of children that women born in the same year have to have in order to maintain a constant population size, see also e.g. Brunborg and Mamelund (1994, pp. 14-15) for a more exact definition. The figure is influenced by the infant mortality rates and death rates for women of childbearing age. Due to low mortality rates the reproduction level has remained stable at just under 2.1 children per woman in all the Nordic countries in recent decades.

**Median age**
– e.g. for the first birth for a given class (born in the same year) of women: The age by which half of the women of that year group had had their first child.

**First, second and third birth rates**
show the trends for different parities, that is the sequence of births (first child, second child, etc.). The “first birth” rates for a given year are estimated for example as the number of women who had their first child that year, divided by the number of women who still had no children at the start of the year. The “second birth” rates is the number of women who had their second child, divided by the number of women who had one child at the start of the year.

We interpret the convergence in cohort fertility and the trend towards a more similar childbirth pattern for women with higher education as indicators that these indirect consequences are an important element of the effect of the “Nordic Model”.

**The Contraceptive Pill**
The direct consequences of family policy schemes are most easily identified in the case of schemes which show variation and differences between the countries with regard to regulations and the time at which initiatives and regulations are introduced. For example, differences from country to country in the time of transition to delayed first birth can be associated with differences in when those countries made the new, self-administered contraception technology (contraceptive pills and IUDs) available to women. Finland was the first country to make the contraceptive pill generally available, in 1961, and Norway was the last, in 1967.

**The Swedish “Speed Premium” (Repeated Pregnancy Benefit)**
There is also clear evidence that the sharp increase in Swedish second and third child birth rates in the 1980s can to a large extent be ascribed to the effect of the so-called “speed premium”2 in the parental leave scheme introduced in Sweden in 1980 and expanded in 1986. At the same time it should be stressed that the cohort fertility has remained very stable in Sweden throughout the period, so this periodic increase in fertility in the 1980s has not resulted in an increase in cohort fertility. Even so, it is not impossible that the speed premium has contributed to keeping Swedish cohort fertility at a higher level than it would have been at without such incentives. Sweden is also a good example of how good general conditions in family policy cannot on their own maintain a high fertility level when the economic situation worsens. The fall in fertility in the 1990s is associated with a sharp increase in unemployment which particularly affected young people with only elementary education.

**Finnish Homecare Allowance**
The trend in the birth rate pattern in Finland, which was also affected by unfavourable economic conditions early in the 1990s, is in contrast to the development seen in Sweden. Unemployment in Finland was significantly higher than in Sweden, but the effects on second and first birth rates in the period were significantly smaller. Analyses of developments in Finland indicate that the Finnish homecare allowance3 scheme may have had a positive effect on the development of Finnish third birth rates and contributed to the increase in Finnish cohort fertility towards the end of the 1990s. At the same time, the development of Finnish birth rates indicates that economic conditions in Finland may also be one of the reasons why Finnish women have not compensated after the age of 30 for delayed childbirths to the same extent as women in the other countries.

**Norwegian Transitional Benefit**
A third distinctive feature of developments in fertility is the higher incidence of early births among women with elementary education in Norway. This must be seen in the context of the fact that Norway, by providing entitlement to transitional benefit4 from the National Insurance, gives more secure financial support to single parents than in the other Nordic countries, where corresponding benefits are generally associated with the unemployment benefit and social security system. There is reason to believe that this scheme may have been of significance in maintaining the higher level of early first births in Norway, especially early in the 1990s when Norway had a period of relatively high unemployment among young people. The increase in unemployment had little effect on Norwegian first birth rates.

**How sustainable is the Nordic model?**
In broader international comparisons the Nordic combination of high participation of women in paid employment and relatively high fertility rates is often interpreted as indicating that
the Nordic family policy model has high sustainability with respect to equal opportunities policy. Lower numbers of childless women with higher education have also been emphasised as an important indicator with respect to the sustainability of equal opportunities policy. With cohort fertility rates close to the reproduction level, the Nordic countries are better prepared than most other western countries to meet the demographic challenges associated with low population growth and a rapidly aging population. More detailed analyses of the development of fertility patterns provide only conditional support for the assumption that current family policy schemes are capable of combining a sustainable fertility trend with a sustainable development in the direction of equally shared parenthood.

The Gender Equality Deficit

There are many elements of uncertainty in fertility trends in relation to sustainable population development. These are associated particularly with the increasing proportion of childless women and the falling cohort fertility in younger generations of women. All of the countries face a development where the increase in birth rates after the age of 30 does not compensate fully for the reduced fertility in the age groups before 30 years.

True, the Nordic development shows that a family policy which aims for a combination of career and childcare is a necessary condition and an important foundation for the relatively high fertility rate in the Nordic countries. Having said that, however, the actual development in the fertility pattern shows that the expression gender equality deficit can be a justifiable description of the development trends for young people of today and for coming generations.

An important trend is the increasing diversity in the fertility pattern among the younger generations of today. Norway and Sweden, for example, have higher cohort fertility than Finland and Denmark, but are also characterised by more gender-segregated labour markets and higher proportions of women in part-time jobs. The growing diversity in fertility trends within the cohorts can be associated with variations in fertility behaviour among women in different sectors of the labour market. So far, the positive fertility-related response to generous family political schemes among those with higher education has had consequences particularly among women trained for female-dominated occupations in the public sector. In these professions, there is a high proportion of mothers with reduced working hours, which tends to indicate limited equality with regard to work-sharing between parents.

Other factors which indicate a gender equality deficit are the increase in the proportion of childless women with higher education and the marked increase in the number of men without children. This may indicate that women with higher education experience difficulty in finding men who satisfy the requirements and expectations they have of men as partners and involved parents. Women who wish to combine the parental role with a professional career outside the more protected areas of the labour market will be dependent on a partner who is available and shares parental responsibilities to a higher degree than we see among couples who practise only limited equal opportunity.

Motivation for Equally Shared Parenthood

In recent generations the number of women with higher education has increased more rapidly than that of men with higher education, which probably implies an increase in the number who stress equally shared parenthood as an important condition for having children. The pronounced increase in childlessness among Norwegian men and the increased recirculation of resourceful men to renewed fatherhood in the younger generations seems to indicate increased competition for men on the “top shelf”.

The development of the fertility pattern suggests that it is necessary to increase the understanding of men and their employers of the necessity of both parents, as well as the public and private sectors, sharing responsibility for social reproduction. The Nordic family policy model faces major challenges with regard to motivating men and their employers to show more support for, and become more extensively involved in, family policy schemes which promote equally shared parenthood.

1) Mothers can retain the same benefits from one parental leave to the next without returning to work, provided that the next child is born within 30 months (24 months before 1986).
2) The Finnish cash benefit scheme gives parents with small children the option of a cash payment for a limited time or a place in a municipal day-care centre. The scheme was introduced at the end of the 1980s and was fully implemented in 1990. See Rønsen (2004) for a detailed description of this scheme.
3) The benefit is in the form of a guaranteed minimum income for single parents who qualify for benefits (means tested according to the income of the single parent). The scheme was modified in 1998. See, for example, Kjeldstad and Skevik (2004) for a more detailed description of the scheme and the modifications in 1998.

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This article is based on the research project,
“Family policies, fertility trends and family changes in the Nordic countries: How sustainable is the "Nordic model" of family welfare?”. This is a network project which co-ordinates ongoing research into the development of fertility in Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden on the basis of recorded data from these countries. The results of the project has also been presented in an expanded version of the article in Statistics Norway’s periodical “Samfunnspenget” No. 2/2006. Reference should also be made to the more thorough analysis in Rønsen and Skrede (2006).

REFERENCES


Russian Women in Grey Zones of Nordic Welfare

In Europe, the term “new migration” refers to the mass movement of people from Eastern to Western Europe after the dissolution of socialist rule and the eastward enlargement of the European Union. Along the northernmost borders in the Barents region, on their way to the Nordic countries migrants cross the deepest welfare divide on the globe. While the Nordic states are celebrated for their inclusiveness both in social and gender terms, many immigrant women find their agency being restricted due to discriminating institutional boundaries, time lines and the construction of degrading social categories.

WOMEN MIGRANTS VARY BY their social characteristics and their status in the countries of arrival. The situations within the EU member states and other Western countries are so different that it is not easy to make valid generalisations. In the south there are numerous refugees and semi-legal or illegal migrants, while in the north most women have come legally for marriage and partnership. In the Alps and Adriatic Sea region and Central Europe much attention has been paid to “irregular” care workers in private homes and trafficked women. Migrant women do care work in Northern Europe as well, but mainly as newly trained professionals and co-workers in public institutions. Moreover, trafficking is not a major problem here, yet. Irrespective of these diverging trends, there are also similarities. The construction of gendered and sexualised “others” appears to thrive in binaries of same/different, of equal value/inferior in all parts of Europe.

In spring 2006 the RWN – Russian Women as Immigrants in “Norden”: Finland, Norway and Sweden project invited twenty scholars to Helsinki for an exploratory workshop for discussions at an all-European level. The workshop was structured around the three RWN “prisms”: thematic and multi-disciplinary problematic on everyday life, citizenship and participation and social justice and cultural recognition. As RWN is targeting the Barents region, we wanted especially to include the other East-West transregions, the Baltic Sea region, Central Europe and the Alps and Adriatic Sea region as well. Among the participants were scholars from...
two other East-West teams, the Central and South European Grine and the Nordic-Russian-Baltic Feminore.4

The Nordic countries – “friendly” to immigrant women too?
The Nordic countries have been celebrated for their inclusiveness both in social and gender terms. It was easy to assume that the Nordic countries were a model regime, both in European and global contexts, also in the view of immigrant women. But the Nordic debates on gender have mostly been concerned with the cultural majorities (Saarinen 1996). Throughout the equality- and woman-centred phases in the 70s and 80s the research on migrant women was left to migrants themselves (Knocke 1986; Ålund 1991). The issue was placed on common agendas at the end of the 90s thanks to the cultural turn and the deconstruction of women’s sameness. By that time, more migrant women had been included in academia but that did not result in a critical revisiting of the welfare regime theories from the point of view of female immigrants.

Birte Siim’s (2006) updated analysis of the recent developments in Denmark and the call for approaching the Nordic regime from the angle of new minorities is therefore both timely and well-grounded. In the 2000s, including cultural rights in the classic list of citizen rights is one of the key issues concerning the Nordic countries as social and political entities. In line with this, we need to explore and theorise how the welfare, political and gender regimes, and, finally, the immigration regime are constructed per se – and, most importantly, how they interrelate when dealing with so many social and cultural inequalities and divisions. New debates on inter-sectionalities are essential in this respect.

Grey zones in the labour markets
In confronting this challenge the RWN research team has become interested in traps in the form of grey zones. Immigrant women’s agency can be restricted due to institutional boundaries, time lines and the construction of social categories.

The RWN research team has interviewed altogether 65 Russian women individually, in groups and as so called experts with Russian background working in public and civic institutions. The analysis of the interviews is still going on. The majority of our research participants are marriage migrants. Few of them have sought contacts through agencies or the Internet. In border areas in particular, women have met their future partners in Nordic-Russian enterprises, transregional organisations and on brief visits, through relatives, friends and neighbours.

Under the Soviet regime, work was one of the civic obligations for women as well as men, but it was also a source of personal fulfilment and happiness. In the turmoil of the post-socialist transition, many women have decided to move to the West to live everyday lives, in which both work, family, children and grandchildren have a central place (Hägg 2006). In other words, they look like “ideal” migrants for the Nordic regime. They are indeed welcomed, above all in the rural areas struggling with ageing and depopulation. “Native” women leaving their villages are replaced by well-educated and work-motivated women aspiring to fully contribute to their new families and communities. However, our analysis of women’s inclusion/exclusion in these small-scale labour markets shows that many have ended up in grey zones, in between being/not being a professional, active/non-active, worker/housewife etc. As their professional education is often not fully recognised, they might be employed only part-time, seasonally or occasionally. A downward career move or spending several years on another education are the two other alternatives, besides being unemployed, relying on subsidies or on their Nordic partner.

Comparing the situations in Russia and in the Nordic countries, the migrants have often changed an established work position for a marginalisation in the labour market. Still they do not feel themselves to have gone from bad to worse. The minimum social subsidies and the relatively well-functioning welfare services in the Nordic countries guarantee a better life than the salary below the poverty line and a meagre support from what remains of public safety nets in Russia. Many stress that “there is more socialism here than there ever was in the Soviet Union” (Saarinen 2006).

Gendered violence and citizenships
When asking the immigrants what is brought to their mind by the term “women-friendly”, the reply tends to be the same: support to lone mothers. Immigrants are assured that they and their children will be able to cope since it is possible “to rely on the state” – as opposed to Russia today.

So, the Nordic welfare regime does offer some social shelter against economic hazards. But migrants are very worried about surviving the first years. “Doing time”, an expression familiar among prison inmates, is repeated in the interviews. If the migrants have arrived as wives or co-habitants, they depend on their partners for the right to stay during the first few years. The RWN interviews confirm the analysis in the Norwegian project When Women Cross the Borders (Lothrington and Fjortoft 2006). It is worth noting that in Finland the Norwegian “three-year rule” and the Swedish “two-year rule” has become a “four-year rule”. After the Finnish Alien Act became harmonised with the EU regulations in 2004, marriage migrants must wait two more years to get an individual permit for residence.5

In summary, grey zones are constructed also with regard to time lines. At worst, it is difficult to escape violence in a relationship without undergoing the risk of deportation or possibly leaving the Nordic-born child or children behind. Violations of migrant women’s human rights happen at every turn irrespective of global mobilisation against gendered violence. Clearly, within the multilevel order of politics and democracy, the legislation and policies of nation-states and the EU gain the upper hand in relation to the UN women’s human rights conventions. For different “quasi-citizens” (Castles & Davidson 2000, 88), let alone illegals, it is not easy to navigate within the multilayered and complex orders of the national, EU-European and global citizenships.

Lack of cultural recognition
In addition, immigrant women face many constraints that are linked to the past and the erosion of women’s social positions in Eastern Europe. At all ages, they are being confronted with the stigma caused by prostitution in and from Russia. This is especially the case if they live in some specific communities targeted in the mid-1990s by media discourses and local mobilisation against the most visible forms of the organised sex trade (Feminore; Stenvoll 2002). It might even be appropriate to speak about prostitution-related harassment, which in women’s own words is comprised of “dirty
We look forward to the analysis of these society institutions. In a strange way, the division of women into prostitutes and wives, which was again added to legal maps in Europe and in the Nordic countries (Petersen 2006), becomes blurred. All women arriving across the Russian-Nordic border can be suspected of prostitution – or at least of having been involved in it earlier. To put it tersely, during the Cold War the Eastern “enemy” was a male soldier. After the opening of the borders the “enemy” has been transformed into a woman who is coming to the country to “sell sex” (Sverdljuk 2006). Within the Nordic regime, based on the ideal of working woman and mother, this is fatal as it harms women migrants badly in the labour market and consequently as welfare recipients. Normatively seen, the problem here is that lack of cultural recognition and human dignity results in a lack of economic and social justice as well. In fundamental ways, this is in contrast to the basic principles of the “women-friendly” regime, the quest for autonomy, self-respect and bodily and moral integrity. It affects women’s political agency negatively as well (Sverdljuk 2006a; Frazer 1997).

**Multi-positionalities**

Deep-rooted perceptions of the Nordic countries as a region with successful welfare societies constitute a hindrance to facing the factual exclusion of the many minorities. The immigrants can become part of collective identity and acquire a sense of belonging, only if we question the “other definitions” and proceed from open or hidden discrimination and “tolerant” multiculturalisation toward true transculturalisation. RWN turned to the natives as well to see whether they critically approach the regimes constructed in the presumably homogeneous times. In addition to experts, we also interviewed 20 “natives” working in public and civil society institutions.

**Transversalism**

We look forward to the analysis of these complexities. Hopefully, listening to such a variety of voices will inspire us to a conscious multi-positioned approach – a kind of transversalism (Yuval-Davis 1997), change of subject and object positions, in which “self” and “other” definitions complete and contradict each other and contribute to critical self/reflections of identities or identifications within all groups. At best, this lays the basis for linking together the micro and macro levels, which is a “must” in exploring the gender, welfare and political regimes, the structures, culture and agency from the perspective of immigrant women.

We also suggest applying transversalism as a critical research practice. Promoting Russian-Nordic dialogue throughout the research process, the RWN team is itself composed of both groups. Jana Sverdljuk (Oslo) is ethnic Ukrainian with Russian citizenship while the rest of the team, Kerstin Hägg (Umeå) and Aino Saarinen (Oulu/Helsinki), are classified as Nordic “natives”. Both have however been involved in development work in North-West Russia and Aino Saarinen has, moreover, been an (academic) migrant worker in Sweden and Norway in the 1990s.

**Methodological issues regarding qualitative approaches** were discussed at the ESF workshop as well, especially those of interviewing and oral history. They bring up the problematic of inter-subjectivity (Capussotti 2006). It must be confronted in all phases – in sample-making, interviewing and memorising, regarding the languages to be used, transcription, translation, interpretation of meanings and analysis. In our experience, the co-existence of both “we” and “they” in both groups, in the “objects” and the “subjects” of research, is an exciting challenge, sometimes painful but certainly worth facing. □

**LITERATURE:**


Towards a Family Equality Policy?

The abandonment of the male bread winner family model

How have welfare policies in the Nordic countries been influenced by developments in the European Union? How have changes in the division of paid and unpaid labour between the sexes influenced welfare and family policy and led to changes in family formation? A team of researchers has analysed trends and changes in employment and family issues in eight northern European countries.
WITHIN THE NORTHERN European context, there is a clear trend for the “male bread winner” model being abandoned and replaced with alternative family models where both parents share the responsibility for supporting the family. This is a huge adjustment to make since it is not just about practical issues, but also about a mental and ideological rethinking of gender, dependency and finances as well as regarding childcare and relatives requiring care.

This process of change started many decades ago in the Nordic countries, while in other northern European countries such as Germany, Holland and Britain, real change started in the 1980s and 1990s. The picture that emerges shows the ambivalent attitude of politicians to the situation. The Nordic countries have maintained a high profile with respect to the development of publicly-financed childcare. In Germany, an active effort is being made to develop child-care services. In Britain, there is a 10-year plan for developing publicly-subsidised childcare to make it more economically available. In Holland, all childcare is private and has been planned accordingly, with the state taking no financial responsibility for its development. In all the countries studied mothers are now entitled to paid parental leave, though in a very restricted form in Holland.

Women's paid work is required

In the comparative study of all five Nordic countries, Germany, Holland and Britain the focus has been on changes during the 1990s up to 2003. This period has been chosen because of a desire to study how the 1990s, which from an economical point of view were a turbulent period, influenced family establishment and employment patterns among mothers and fathers in the countries studied. In all the countries, employment among mothers increased and there was a clear trend towards convergence, i.e. the pattern is becoming more similar in all the countries.

A pervasive feature is the recognition that the gainful employment of women is needed for many reasons, not least for economic growth in Europe. Furthermore, there is an awareness that the combination of an ageing population and low birth rates poses a problem for national economies in the future. It is also increasingly recognised that this problem affects both women and men. For example, in Sweden the trend towards bringing back care for the elderly into the home is quite prominent and it has major consequences for relatives of elderly living nearby (Socialstyrelsen 2006), while childcare services were developed even during the economically difficult years of the 1990s (see also SOU 2005:66).

Strengthening fathers' rights and responsibilities

Hence, in all countries the focus of family policy has been on mothers' gainful employment and working conditions. Family policy has been enhanced in the Nordic countries. But there are some conflicting trends. On the one hand, there is a clear effort towards strengthening fathers' rights and responsibilities as regards care for children. This is exemplified by the introduction of parental leave for fathers (“Father leave” or “father quota”) within the framework of general parent’s social insurance. Father quotas have now been implemented in Sweden, Iceland and Norway. Entitlement to parental leave for fathers now also exists in Britain and Germany, but the financial compensation is low (Germany) or non-existent (Britain).

The effort to strengthen fathers’ responsibility of care is also evident in the framework for how divorces, care issues and care of relatives are administered. Father’s rights have increased and been reinforced, as has fathers’ duty to provide for children they don’t live with regularly after divorce or separation.

Child care allowances

On the other hand another objective is to expand the possibility of taking time off work to look after children in the home (childcare allowance) (See Leira, 2002). In Norway and Finland these rights are in place and they are mostly taken up by mothers. In Sweden, the childcare allowance was abandoned after a short time and Denmark has placed restrictions on extended leave. In Germany, the right to prolonged childcare allowance existed for a long time, but there have been major reductions in the amount of financial compensation. In Holland there is no childcare allowance, but the tax regulations favour a situation where mothers take care of children at home. There is also a lack of general rights to paid parental leave for both mothers and fathers.

Childcare allowance is indeed gender neutral. However, the combination of long leave and low financial compensation does not provide an incentive for men to avail of it. As men tend to have higher incomes the financial loss to the household would be too great. Moreover, long absences from the workplace may entail a risk of losing competitiveness in the job market – a risk men does not want to take. However, staying at home with the children is considered by many to be the best thing for the children, which is due to a complicated mixture of gendered moral rational reasoning and access to acceptable alternatives for childcare (Duncan and Edwards 1999).

However, in all the countries there is increasing political awareness of family policy and the opportunities for mothers to remain active in the labour market after they have had children. This is expressed partly in policies concerning parents’ rights to leave to take care of small children and partly in policies on making childcare available and financially viable for parents in paid employment. Childcare shortages are a recurring problem in all countries. Particularly difficult is the cost of childcare, also in the Nordic countries where demands have been made for a maximum
cost of child care both to the users and to society. Maximum rates are in place both in Sweden and in Denmark.

The Nordic countries: political responsibility
The Nordic countries stand out by virtue of the fact that childcare is viewed as the clear responsibility and that it has to be of high quality. But children’s developmental opportunities have become an urgent objective in all the countries, and on a rhetorical level this is expressed by that children must be regarded investments for the future. This leads to politicians increasingly emphasising the importance of children receiving early education. The pedagogical aspects of childcare are held up as being particularly important before stressing the childcare aspect. Childcare is carried over to become the responsibility of the Ministry for Education and the objectives are emphasised in terms of educational policy. This may be seen as contrasting with the policy of supporting childcare in the home.

In all the Nordic countries, employment for women has been maintained at a relatively high level, within the international context. Mothers remain in the workplace on a part-time and full-time basis in all of the Nordic countries, but Iceland stands out by having even higher percentages. A characteristic feature of the Nordic countries is that the work intensity for men of “childbearing” age is somewhat lower that for the other countries, which to some extent can be seen as reflecting the fact that men are increasingly making use of their right to parental leave.

Single mothers
A common trend for all the countries is the increasing percentage of single mothers. This trend must be understood in the light of increasing instability of family relations – divorces and separations of cohabiting parents, rather than women choosing to have children without a steady partner. Indeed, the last is also an increasing trend, but it is still very small compared to children born to couples in a relationship. In all countries single mothers endure a strained financial situation, which in part is due to their situation in the labour market and their opportunities for providing for themselves. Women’s wages are generally lower and single mothers find it harder to combine work and family, which is reflected in the fact that they are to a greater extent confined to jobs with less stable conditions (part-time, irregular working hours, low wages). A rising employment rate is particularly noticeable among single mothers.

In all the countries except Norway, the political goal is to get single mothers back to work. The main reason for this is that dependency on allowances among single mothers for prolonged periods reduces their employability and will contribute to their exclusion from the labour market in the long term. The common political opinion is that mothers’ ability to provide must be improved for the sake of the children. The percentage of children living on tight financial margins and in poverty is particularly high among single mothers. Overall, the Nordic countries manage better at keeping children out of poverty than the other countries. Within the Nordic countries, Sweden is the most successful in this respect while Denmark is the least successful. One study shows, however, that measures to improve employment rates must be combined with other financial support and child care (Skevik, 2006).

Differences in demographic patterns
So, can we discern any differences in demographic patterns between the countries? The results of the study show that there is a more individualistic pattern in the Nordic countries. For example, the proportion of unmarried women is higher in the Nordic countries compared with the three other countries and there is a particularly high percentage in Sweden. But the birth rate is also higher and women give birth at a comparatively younger age. The percentage of childless women is lower in the Nordic countries (except Finland).

In this study we have also observed that childbirth is delayed, which is indeed a trend in all the countries. Delayed childbirth is an effect of education, but also of how the system for financing the education is organised. In the Nordic countries, student funding provides the students with economic independence in a radical way, whereas students in the other countries are more dependent on their parents to finance their education. Added to this is...
the fact that the availability of affordable childcare is significantly more difficult in the other three countries compared to the Nordic countries, where students also have access to childcare. The effect is that more women (and men) delay childbirth until they have completed their studies. More highly-educated women have children and have more children in the Nordic countries compared with the other countries (Björnberg, Eydal and Olafsson, 2006). But a general trend in all the countries is that uneducated or less educated women have fewer children. Childlessness among less educated women is unique to the Nordic countries.

A distinctively Nordic pattern
The Nordic countries have been identified, in various studies, as social democratic welfare models (Esping-Andersen 1990; Kauto et al. 2001; Korpi 2000). With respect to family law the Nordic countries have been working together since the early part of the 20th century, which has resulted in considerable similarities in family law and family policy (Therborn, 2004). Our studies show that the similarities have prevailed up to the turn of the century. Thus, there is a distinctive Nordic pattern for institutional conditions affecting demographic characteristics and division of labour between the sexes. The period of 10 to 15 years covered by the study does indeed show considerable differences in economic development in the various countries. In Denmark, Iceland and Norway economic development has been positive while Sweden and Finland underwent an economic crisis during the 1990s. Both those countries are again experiencing positive economic development but with significantly higher and more persistent unemployment levels than before the crisis. Despite these different conditions the Nordic countries, in general terms, show a separate pattern compared to Germany, Britain and Holland. Out of these three, Germany comes closer to a Nordic approach.

The road to increased equality between the sexes in the Nordic countries as well as the Northern European countries we have studied is rough and uneven. Women have in more respects been able to achieve economic independence, but the psychological and ideological adjustment to the new conditions lags behind. Women, and in particular single mothers, mothers with low education and on low income are inadequately compensated.

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Gender, citizenship and social justice in the Nordic welfare states: — A view from the outside

To what extent have the Nordic welfare states been successful in promoting a women-friendly, gender-inclusive model of citizenship? What are the biggest challenges for the Nordic model?
equality of status but to what some would call “equality of condition”, an equitable distribution of material resources such as tax-funded public services the Nordic state could be described, in some ways, as the “social investment state” at a seminar on “good child and with good childhood” (Lister, 2003; 2006).

The Nordic model of child care and education, with its more holistic, pedagogically-informed approach, has offered a better balance between future-oriented investment and a concern with the child qua child and with good childhood. Helmut Wintersberger (2005), in a book on childhood, suggests that the Nordic model is better equipped to accommodate the rights-oriented approach enshrined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child than Conservative welfare states, where citizenship is more closely tied to labour market status. It is important not to lose sight of the perspective of the child in the face of the promotion in Europe of the more instrumentalist social investment model.

Towards a women-friendly, gender-inclusive citizenship?

Women have also been treated rather instrumentally in that model – with an emphasis on the needs of the labour market, in the context of fertility and wider demographic trends, rather than on gender equality as such. In contrast, Kari Melby’s final report in the Nordic research programme, explains that the point of departure for the project on “gender equality and welfare in Scandinavia” is that “gender equality is one characteristic hallmark of the Nordic welfare state model” (Melby, 2006: 1). Indeed, she writes, “gender equality is to be seen as one of the prerequisites for claiming a Nordic model” (even if there are differences between the Nordic countries)(ibid). The original class-based “passion for equality” gradually was extended explicitly to embrace gender so that, according to Arnlaug Leira, gender equality is now “integral to Scandinavian citizenship” (Ellingsæter and Leira, 2006: 7). This shapes the gender culture within the future of policies for children. The social investment strategy propounded by Esping-Andersen and by proponents of the third way tends to put greater emphasis on profitable investment than good child- hood. As such it is largely instrumentalist, treating children as citizen-workers of the future, with insufficient focus on children’s well-being and citizenship in the here and now (Lister, 2003; 2006).

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MORE THAN ANY OTHER welfare state model, the Nordic or social democratic model is not just a label applied by welfare regime analysts but is worn with pride by Scandinavian governments and citizens. In the words of Robert Cox, “the core values of the Scandinavian model are not only important to the scholars who observe the model, but they are widely shared by the citizens of Scandinavian countries and constitute an important component of national identity in those countries” (Cox, 2004: 207). He suggests that it is the belief in the model at the level of an ideal which represents Scandinavian path-dependency, so that policy developments are interpreted so as to fit with the model.

Equality, solidarity and universalism are values, which explicitly underpin the Nordic model’s commitment to the principle of inclusionary and equal citizenship – even if that principle is not fully achieved and is under some strain in the face of growing immigration (an issue to which I will return). They are values that are mutually supportive, as underlined by Esping-Andersen’s description of universalist welfare: “the universalistic system promotes equality of status. All citizens are endowed with similar rights, irrespective of class or market position. In this sense, the system is meant to cultivate cross-class solidarity, a solidarity of the nation” (1990: 25).

Moreover, the commitment is not just to equality of status but to what some would call “equality of condition”, an equitable distribution of material resources such as to promote well-being and to enable all citizens to flourish and pursue their own life projects (Levitas, 2004). As far as I can see, this “passion for equality” as it’s often described, avoids the false dichotomy between equality of opportunity and equality of outcome, which bedevils British debates on the subject. And it integrates the issue of poverty into wider concerns about overall “levels of living” or quality of life rather than ghettoizing it (Lister, 2004).

The emphasis on solidarity translates into a model of citizenship, which places greater emphasis on the bonds between citizens and to varying extents – participatory citizenship than do those models which focus on the relationship between individuals and the state. At the same time, it is premised on a much more positive construction of the state than exists in liberal models of citizenship. Less distant from civil society and citizens than in many other countries, Kangas and Palme write that historically “the state was not perceived as such a hostile and alien force to the individual as in many other countries” (2005: 19). This may partly explain what appears to be a widespread acceptance of taxation as the necessary means to help make a reality of the values of equality, solidarity and universalism, rather than the resentful grumbling about it as a “burden” in liberal welfare states with much lower levels of taxation.

With its commitment to universalistic tax-funded public services the Nordic state could be described, in some ways, as the “social investment state” avant la lettre. Social investment is widely regarded as key to the new social policy agenda in the EU and wider OECD. In his scientific report commissioned by the Belgian Presidency, Esping-Andersen articulated the general goal of “a child-centred social investment strategy” as the foundation stone for a “new European welfare architecture” (2002: 26ff, 5). He suggests that “perhaps the most important lesson to be learned from Scandinavia is its quite successful investment in preventative measures” (ibid: 14). And while he qualifies that successful with “quite”, it is the Nordic welfare states that emerge time and again as having gone furthest with the kind of social investment strategy he advocates.

A word of caution though. I was invited recently to speak about the “social investment state” at a seminar on “good childhood – profitable investment” organised by ITLA, the Foundation for the Funding of Finnish Child Research, to discuss the future of policies for children. The social investment strategy propounded by Esping-Andersen and by proponents of the third way tends to put greater emphasis on profitable investment than good childhood. As such it is largely instrumentalist, treating children as citizen-workers of the future, with insufficient focus on children’s well-being and citizenship in the here and now (Lister, 2003; 2006).

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which specific policies operate in the Nordic welfare states.

Nevertheless, as the summary for the project on family policies points out, “several studies have documented that there are considerable differences between the Nordic countries with regard to... the extent to which present family policies also integrate gender equality as an explicit political goal” (Anon 2006: 4). And while the Nordic welfare states tend broadly to be characterised as among those that have moved furthest towards a dual-earner or adult-worker model, the policy mechanisms deployed to support those with care responsibilities differ in terms both of the specifics of policy and of the gendered citizenship models underlying them.

More generally, Borchorst and Siim suggest that, even though “scholars agree that it is possible to identify a Nordic gender model in terms of women’s political representation and in relation to their participation in paid work”, more detailed analysis reveals “important differences in the form of women’s mobilization, their inclusion in political parties as well as the extent of institutionalization of gender equality” (Borchorst and Siim, 2002: 92).

Just as there are differences between policies for gendered citizenship between the Nordic countries, so there are differences among feminist scholars in their evaluation of the Nordic model. Such differences can reflect differing normative positions as to whether the goal is an ostensibly gender-neutral or an explicitly gender-differentiated model of citizenship or some combination of the two (Lister, 1997/2003). Nordic policy discourses have generally been gender neutral with the explicit aim of promoting equality between women and men. However, some policies, even though still couched in gender-neutral language, arguably are more consistent with gender-differentiated models of citizenship, in which women’s particular responsibilities and needs are recognised. The prime example is the Finnish and Norwegian home child care allowance scheme, of which more later.

In contrast, in a classic article, Lewis and Aström argue that Sweden, although not necessarily transcending the dichotomy between equality and difference, “has constructed a distinctive equal opportunity strategy by grafting the right to make a claim on the basis of difference onto a policy based on equal treatment”. More specifically, “since the early 1970s”, they write, “Swedish women have first had to become workers to qualify for parental leave at a favourable benefit level, but paradoxically, having taken a job, they could then exert a claim as mothers and stay home for what has proved to be a steadily lengthening period” (Lewis and Aström, 1992: 75).

Distinctive too among some Nordic welfare states has been the attempt, however tentative, to promote a more gender inclusive model of citizenship in which men as well as women are able to play a part as citizen-earner/carers and carer/earners. This points towards what the political theorist, Nancy Fraser (1997), has termed the universal care-giver model in which men become more like women, rather than the universal breadwinner model in which women are expected to become more like men. Nowhere, needless to say, has achieved the universal care-giver model.

The relative success or not of such policies is important to overall empirically-based judgements as to the extent to which the Nordic welfare states have achieved their goal of gender equality and their potential as “women-friendly” welfare states, following Helga Hernes’ much-used term. She defined a women-friendly state as a state in which “would not force harder choices on women than on men, or permit unjust treatment on the basis of sex” (1987: 15), although as Borchorst and Siim (2002) point out, it is difficult to operationalise particularly in cross-national analysis.

Again, the degree of progress is a source of dispute between feminist scholars. Crudely, given that I think that all would agree that some progress has been made, particularly when compared with other countries, it is a question of whether the glass is half full or half empty. It is also a question as to “which women?”, for, in the 20 years since Hernes coined the term “women-friendly” state, there has been increased recognition of the diversity among women to the extent that some feminist scholars have now rejected the term as biased in its failure to acknowledge this diversity, particularly racial/ethnic diversity. Gender-inclusive citizenship has to be inclusive of women in their diversity. I will return to the issue of diversity when offering the “half-empty” perspective, but first, inevitably perhaps as an outsider, moreover, a British outsider, I feel compelled to give the “half-full” account of progress in achieving gender-inclusive citizenship in the Nordic welfare states. I realise that the half-full/half-empty distinction is not exactly scientific. Nevertheless, it conveys the relative nature of judgements on the Nordic model from a gendered perspective.

The “half-full” analysis

In terms of women’s overall position, as measured by the UN gender equality indices, the Nordic countries lead the world and they hold the top 5 places in the World Economic Forum gender gap index. The report on the latter observes that “it is a disturbing reality that no country has yet managed to eliminate the gender gap”. But “those that have succeeded best in narrowing the gap are the Nordic countries, with Sweden standing out as the most advanced in the world” (Lopez-Claros and Zahidi, 2005: 11). Women have advanced as political citizens in the formal public sphere to a greater extent than elsewhere, with a regional average of 40% parliamentary representation – more than double the rest of Europe (www.ip.org/wmn-e/world.htm).

The extent to which this has been the product of women organising “from below” in the feminist movement or from “within” the established political parties has varied between countries but either way, according to Karvonen and Selle the improvement in women’s political representation “has changed the whole face of politics”. They continue “It is perhaps not an exaggeration to say that the increased proportion of women in political life is the most important single change in Scandinavian social life in the post-war era” (Karvonen and Selle, 1995).

It is important not just as a marker of women’s political citizenship but also because of its potential implications for policy, particularly the policies that underpin social citizenship. There is some disagreement in the literature as to the difference that women’s political presence makes to policy. Female politicians do not necessarily promote “women-friendly” policies. However, many do and they are more likely to make a difference if women represent a critical mass in the
political arena, which they do in the Nordic countries. Hege Skjeie wrote of Norway a decade ago that “within political life women now take an active part in creating those definitions of reality on which efforts to effect changes rest...Women’s inclusion is perceived as having caused changes in party attitudes on a wide range of political issues” (Skjeie, 1993: 258).

Although in Sweden and Denmark important social rights such as childcare preceded the increase in women’s formal political representation, childcare and other social policies today bear the mark of women’s political agency from both below and within the formal political system. Indeed, in a study of women’s claims making on childcare in Norden, Solveig Bergman suggests that it is this interplay between state feminism and autonomous women’s organisations which “continues to characterize Nordic gender policies” (2004: 238).

It also therefore helps to shape women’s social citizenship. Key here to the half-full analysis is the highly developed social infrastructure of services and leave provisions, which have contributed to women’s increased economic independence through paid employment and low levels of poverty. According to Kari Melby, in her project report, economic independence “is probably the most important issue for women’s empowerment and human dignity in the last century” (2006: 1).

Although Esping-Andersen’s original welfare regime analysis focused on cash transfers, other scholars have argued that it is the infrastructure of services, which is key to understanding the distinctive Nordic welfare model, particularly from a gendered perspective. Arnlaug Leira writes that “state sponsoring of social care services served to maintain the form of institutional welfare state developed in Scandinavia and facilitated women’s gainful employment” – both through provision of care services to support mothers’ employment and as employers of female labour (2006: 31). However, I hadn’t realised until reading Melby’s report, that family policies and gender equality policies are not integrated in all the Nordic countries; Anette Borchorst writes of “Danish exceptionalism” in terms of the narrowness of its gender equality project (Borchorst, 2006).

Nevertheless, there are sufficient similarities among social care services in the Nordic countries (with the exception I believe of Iceland) to allow identification of what Arnlaug Leira terms “a ‘caring’ state” (2006: 30) and Anttonen and Sipilä a Nordic “social care regime” (1996), characterised by extensive provision of public care services for both children and frail older people in line with the value of universalism, even if, as Anneli Anttonen (2002) points out, the universalist trademark does not always fulfil its promise. She suggests that “we might argue that caring has become an acknowledged part of social citizenship in the Nordic countries. From the feminist point of view, a radical extension of social citizenship has taken place, and citizens have won the right to certain social care services; for example a comprehensive and universal municipal day-care system” (Anttonen, 2002: 76).

Important here from the perspective of gendered social citizenship (and also the rights of children) is the characterisation of child care as a citizenship right, most explicit in Finland but effectively realised in Denmark and Sweden also and aimed for in Norway, according to Leira (2006).

As well as, for the most part, being in the vanguard of developing childcare provisions to support an emergent dual-earner model, the Nordic welfare states have pioneered new parental leave arrangements to enable parents (not just mothers) to look after very young children at home. (I’ll discuss the home care allowances introduced in Finland and Norway later.) Interestingly, the Nordic countries have not all followed the same model of parental leave in terms of the relationship between leave and public childcare provision. Nor is there a single position with regard to encouraging fathers’ use of parental leave and involvement in childcare more generally.

This last issue is an element of the Nordic welfare model, which I have identified as particularly important for gendered citizenship in my own work (Lister, 1997/2003). For it represents recognition that men and women’s access to citizenship rights and ability to act as citizens in the public sphere is differentially affected by their responsibilities in the private sphere. Women have been changing faster than men and their increased participation in the public sphere of the politics and the labour market has not been matched by men’s increased participation in care work in the private, domestic sphere – which in a number of feminist accounts has been constructed as a citizenship responsibility in its own right equivalent to paid work. As far back as 1988, a Swedish Ministry of Labour sex equality document observed that “to make it possible for both men and women to combine parenthood and gainful employment, a new view of the male role and a radical challenge to the organisation of working life are called for” (1988: 5).

While I will discuss the limitations from the half-empty perspective, it is important to acknowledge the significance of what has been attempted. As Leira observes, “the schemes, and especially the father’s quota, are remarkable as examples of state intervention not only in the general framework of employment, but also in the internal organization of the family. Everyday family life has been made into an arena for the promotion of gender equality” (2002: 85). The attempt to promote active fatherhood “by gentle force” is, Leira maintains, “an innovative and potentially radical approach to updating the gender contract” (ibid: 87).

Particularly striking here is Iceland, which tends to be left out of many accounts of the Nordic welfare state but which has not just a daddy month or two but three months. The father’s quota has been most successful in increasing fathers’ use of the leave there and in Norway (up to 80% and 90% respectively from tiny proportions); Johanna Lammi-Taskulu (2006) suggests this may be because it was added on to the existing parental leave period, whereas in other countries it involved some loss of the leave previously available to mothers.

From a British perspective it is this aspect of Nordic welfare and gender equality policy which is most striking, for although British politicians have now started to talk about active fatherhood and the government has indeed extended opportunities for paternity leave, they have been reluctant to intervene in the private, domestic sphere by actively promoting a more equal gendered division of care labour through measures such as the daddy month(s) of parental leave.

So, taking the range of social policies together, cross-national comparisons, such as Gornick and Meyers’ (2003) study of
policies to support employed parents and Daly and Rake’s (2003) study of gender and the welfare state, tend to support the half-full analysis: the Nordic countries generally score well on most indicators of gender equality and gendered social citizenship. However, if one takes “gender equality” as one’s benchmark rather than comparison with other industrialised societies, as does, for instance, the Swedish Political Platform for a Feminist Initiative, then the glass starts to look half-empty.

The half-empty analysis

Anette Borchorst observes that for all the achievements in embedding gender equality in public policies, the Nordic countries “are all characterized by noticeable gender equality paradoxes and policy inconsistencies. There is a discrepancy between intent and outcome and between the overall objectives and the actual position of women and men” (Borchorst, 2006).

This can be seen in the gender division of labour in both public and private spheres, the effects of which interact with each other so that on the one side gender divisions in the labour market affect decisions about who uses parental leave and home care allowances and on the other side, policies to help parents reconcile paid work and family responsibilities are seen by some as contributing to inequality in the labour market because it is still primarily mothers who make use of them. In other words, it is a vicious circle in which policies and practices reinforce each other to undermine the very commitment to gender equality, which frames those policies.

Despite women’s educational achievements and increased labour market participation, they enter a labour market, which remains highly segregated both horizontally and vertically. Women are more likely to work in the public sector (where leave arrangements are more generous) and men in the private (where pay is on average higher); they are more likely to work reduced hours when children are young and are less likely to achieve top positions in the private sector. The degree of occupational segregation often comes as a surprise to outside observers who often assume that the commitment to gender equality will be reflected in greater labour market equality. That said, because these are relatively egalitarian societies overall, the gender pay inequalities that result from occupational segregation do not translate into such wide economic inequalities as segregated labour markets do elsewhere.

In the private, domestic sphere, where women still do the bulk of the caring work, two very different policy logics can be observed. On the one hand there is the gender-explicit policy logic of the “daddy leave” (in Norway, Sweden and Iceland) or extended maternity leave (in Finland, provided the father also takes the two last weeks of parental leave), in which the stated aim is to shift the gendered division of labour by encouraging men’s greater participation in the care of young children. On the other hand, there is the supposedly gender neutral policy logic of child care allowances (again Finland and Norway), which are highly gendered in their effect. Here is an example of Danish exceptionalism, as it appears in neither list, having abandoned its short-lived “daddy leave” policy with the change of government.

Unfortunately, the embedded resistance of the gendered domestic division of labour to significant change means that the gender-neutral policies seem to have more of an impact in inadvertently reinforcing the gender division of labour than do the gender explicit policies in shifting it. It is overwhelmingly women who make use of home care allowances. The significance of this for gender equality and women’s citizenship is disputed (see, for instance, Bergman, 2004). Some point to the temporary nature of the break from the labour market and the value to those mothers who would otherwise be unemployed (see, for instance, Salmi, 2006).

Others, including the OECD (2005), argue that it harms women’s longer term labour market position. Some feminist scholars interpret it as a “new familialism” and a difference-based model of citizenship in which difference spells unequal (Mahon, 2002). Morgan and Zippel conclude from a review of such schemes that “as currently structured [they] satisfy neither the advocates of difference or equality, in that they provide only a weak valuation of care while undermining women’s place in employment” (2003: 77). They argue that superimposing such schemes “on highly gendered labour markets” simply reinforces “the current division of labor in the workforce and the home” (Ibid.). This, according to the OECD, is particularly the case for “mothers with lower levels of education, who have worked in less skilled occupations [and who] are most likely to take these low-paid leaves, which may further marginalise them from the labour market” (OECD 2001: 33, cited in Mahon. 2002: 352). Thus, the policies can exacerbate class stratification.

Highly gendered labour markets, together with workplace cultures which emphasise male indispensability, also blunt the impact of the daddy month policies. Even in Norway and Iceland, where they are most successful, mothers still take more parental leave overall than fathers. According to Lammi-Taskula (2006), only in Iceland have the number of fathers taking parental leave and the length of leave taken by fathers been growing at the same time. Thus some conclude that the value of the policies lies more in what they symbolise – a belief in the importance of a more equitable division of labour and the role of public policy in achieving that – than in their impact on the actual division of labour.

Interestingly, while the Nordic governments (other than in Denmark) stand out in their willingness to treat the domestic division of labour as “a structural problem”, as Magdalena Andersson (2005: 176) describes it, they were generally slow to acknowledge issues of bodily integrity as matters of public citizenship requiring rights of protection – more so than in liberal welfare states like the UK. While this did change, thanks to feminist movements, a recent evaluation of the major reform package adopted by the Swedish government in the late 1990s to counteract male violence against women identifies significant shortcomings in its implementation. Karen Leander, of the Stockholm Centre for Public Health writes that the report and subsequent discussion have revealed “persistent resistance to the general “institutionalization” of efforts against men’s violence against women and “structural obstacles to gender power-conscious work” (2006: 124).

However, according to Maria Eriksson, writing in Gender Research in Sweden 2005, male violence is more readily acknowledged in the immigrant population. In other words, male violence is racialized and, she argues, “gender equality and
child-friendliness become ethnic and racialized markers" of Swedishness (2005: 28). Similarly in Denmark the political Right have adopted the rhetoric of gender equality as a means of framing, particularly Muslim, minorities as the Other. This brings me to my final point: the challenges to the Nordic model in general and the women-friendly state in particular created by immigration and multi-culturalism.

While the Nordic welfare states are said to belong to the same worlds of welfare and gender, they are to some extent responding to these challenges in different ways (Anttonen et al., 2007). In some accounts, immigration is presented as the answer to the demographic challenges facing the Nordic welfare states; at the same time in Denmark, at least, the immigration regime has become much more restrictive and the principle of universality of social rights has been breached for immigrants and refugees. However, despite the Danish exceptionalism, she notes that “studies of lived citizenship of ethnic minority women have identified common problems in the relation between the Nordic gender equality norm, women's rights and multiculturalism” (2006).

Siim is one of a number of Nordic feminists who have for some years been drawing attention to how not all women fare equally in women-friendly states and, in the Danish context, she has pointed to new patterns of class polarisation and the need for new forms of gender solidarity able to embrace women of different ethnic and religious backgrounds (Siim, 2000). More recently, she – and others like Barbara Hobson and colleagues (Hobson et al., 2006) in Sweden – have argued the need for mechanisms that enable immigrant women to be full participating citizens so that their voices are heard in their own right rather than lost in translation when mediated by others (2006).

More generally, a number of commentators have been warning that diversity stands in tension with the values of solidarity and universalism that are so central to the Nordic model. This is a challenge that faces not just the Nordic welfare states but it is perhaps here that it stands in particularly sharp relief. Others, such as Peter Taylor-Gooby (2005), have argued that empirical analysis does not support the thesis that we have to choose between diversity and solidaristic welfare states. Indeed, in a globalizing world it is possible to identify alternative, more inclusive, conceptualizations of solidarity, which go beyond the cross-class solidarity identified by Esping-Andersen as underpinning universalist welfare: for instance, a “cosmopolitan solidarity”, which, Ulrich Beck (2005: 140-1) argues, values diversity and “multiplicity” over “sameness and unity”, or what the American political theorist Jodie Dean calls “reflective solidarity”, appeals to which rest on “our awareness of and regard for those multiple interconnections in which differences emerge” (1996: 16). So perhaps one of the biggest challenges for the Nordic model is to develop new forms of gender-inclusive citizenship rooted in these cosmopolitan or reflective forms of solidarity.

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These are the main findings in an Internet-based, quantitative study carried out among Danish, Norwegian and Fennoswedish youth in autumn 2005 (Sørensen & Kjørholt 2006). The study was carried out via a questionnaire posted on the homepages/communities of the public service channels NRK, DR and YLE, and comprised 1,776 respondents in the 12-20 age group. The study was not based on a representative selection, and thus, the results cannot be generally applied to the population of adolescents in this age group.

The results indicate that there are major gender differences in the adolescents’ experience of and attitudes towards pornography, but that the differences between the three countries are marginal. The results of the study are compared in this article with the findings from a similar, contemporary study from Iceland, carried out by Dr. Guðbjørg Hildur Kolbeins (Kolbeins 2006). Both studies are part of the Nordic Council of Ministers’ research project “Youth, Gender and Pornography in the Nordic Countries”, which was carried out under the direction of the Nordic Institute for Women’s Studies and Gender Research (NIKK).

Pornography in youth culture
In the past 10 years, porn has glided from a relatively closed universe into our everyday media and daily life. Porn is, to an increasing degree, a topic for TV documentaries and magazine articles. Advertising, fashion and the music trade use signs, symbols...
and aesthetic shapes which are not necessarily pornographic in themselves, but which refer to a pornographic universe. In consequence, it can be argued that pornography has attained a new mass cultural status (McNair 2002; Sørensen 2003). This change is caused by protracted cultural processes attached to the dismantling of conventional understandings of sexuality, and to the massive market forces behind the exploitation of human sexuality in the media.

However, the information and communication technological development is also a central motivational force. The development has caused a great reduction in the production costs of pornographic material, something which has led to both an increase in the number of products and lower prices. In the 1970ties, a pornographic celluloid film cost around $350,000 to produce. In comparison, a production from a company such as Evil Angel Video cost approximately $8,000 after the video camera became standard equipment for recordings in the 1990ties. According to the New York Times, 686 million porn films on video were rented out in the USA in 1998, which represented a ninefold increase in 10 years (ibid.). The development has led to increased accessibility of pornography while the Internet has simplified distribution significantly. The transaction is moved into the private sphere, where the consumer has access to porn at home via his personal computer, the access is geographically independent and unrestricted in terms of time. Moreover, the consumer’s anonymity is guaranteed.

This mainstreaming of pornography has significance for children and adolescents because even if it is a general aspect of the mass culture, it is first and foremost appearing in media products aimed at adolescents. TV programmes, lifestyle magazines, music videos and advertisements with young people as the target group are playing with pornographic codes and scenarios (ibid.). Simultaneously, the porn industry promotes their products via youth cultural channels – for example, the former Norwegian Internet site www.hotnot.no, where dominating advertising banners invited young people to click onto hardcore pornographic Internet sites (Knudsen 2006). Thus, relations are forged between pornography and youth culture, which is somewhat a new development. The results of the investigation therefore provide a useful insight into how adolescents in the Nordic countries behave in relation to pornography at a time when one can assume that their approach to this phenomenon is undergoing change.

Use of porn

Pornography can be defined in many ways. As a consequence, there is a need to ascertain as a starting point the definition of pornography used by the respondents, in order to transfer the results of the investigation into new insights about adolescents and pornography. There is reasonable agreement between the participating young people about what can be identified as pornographic and what characterizes the pornographic genre. Almost everyone has stated that “pictures of naked people having sex, and where the sexual organs are visible” are pornographic, something which concurs with the findings in the Icelandic investigation. Many of the respondents also think that pictures of “naked people touching each other” or “touching themselves” can be defined as pornographic. There are no notable gender differences in how young people define pornography, except that the youngest boys have a tendency to include “softer” categories in their notion of pornography, for example pictures of “naked people” or “breasts”.

92 percent of the study’s respondents state that they have seen porn at least once – 99 percent of the boys and 86 percent of the girls. The vast majority of the young people say that they had seen porn by the age of 12–14 – before they reached the sexual age of consent and at a time when few of them had made their sexual debut. The young people had seen a wide section of the porn genre, but it is the conventional hard core genres that stand out; sex between a man and a woman, sex between two women, group sex and oral/anal sex. Conventional hard-core porn is also what the young people state as their main preference. The primary media used for both gender’s consumption of porn is TV, Internet and porn magazines. They mostly watch it in their own homes. The consumer frequency is in contrast gender-specific, as boys make up the major part of the high-frequency users, while girls are in the majority in the low frequency group. For both genders, however, the consumer frequency increases with age. This trend is well in accordance with the Icelandic study, both in terms of the exposure’s media base, the young people’s genre preferences and the gender differences in consumer frequency. In terms of the group which had seen pornography, however, the gender differences are somewhat less significant in the Icelandic study (96 percent of the boys and 88,7 percent of the girls).

Moreover, the study provides an interesting insight into how boys and girls are socialized in different ways into using porn. The youngest boys are more inclined to view porn in the company of other male friends, while the older boys more often watch porn by themselves. For girls, the opposite was the case. The younger they are, the greater the group who view porn on their own, while the older girls to a larger degree watch it together with others, either with female friends or a partner. Also, the motives for watching porn are divided along gender lines. The boys are in a much greater degree than girls ready to attach a sexual potential for desire to their use. Girls more often state motives such as “curiosity” or “for the fun of it” as reasons for why they watch porn. This tendency is also present in the Icelandic study.

Attitudes to pornography:

The respondents have relatively clear attitudes towards the representation of sexuality in pornography. Most think that pornography depicts that “sex can be practiced in many ways” and that “sex is enjoyable”, and only a few consider that the pornography depicts “sex the way it really is”. These findings are also reflected in the Icelandic study.

The adolescents are, however, more unsure when it comes to evaluating the portrayal of gender power expressed in the pornographic story. The most pronounced findings are from the questions regarding who, according to pornography, “is in charge of the sex life”, and for whom the pornography is best adapted. In the first question the answers are divided equally between the alternatives “men are in charge”, “both are” or “don’t know” – but almost no one states that “women are in charge”. In the second question more than half state that porn is “made for men”, but
almost no one thinks that it is “made for women”.

Young people are relatively critical of the actors who participate in pornography. Many consider both the male and female actors as “cheap” or “ludicrous”, and only very few see them as “stars”. The male models tend to be considered ludicrous and the female cheap, which also concurs with the Icelandic investigation. Among the respondent’s positive assessments are the views that the female actors have “beautiful bodies” and “large breasts”, and that the male actors have “a large penis”. There are certain gender differences in this response, as girls are more critical than boys of both the actors and pornography’s portrayal of sexuality and gender power.

The respondents’ evaluation of pornography’s possible influential power is also marked by distinct gender differences. About half of the young people think that porn can “improve your sex life”, and here the boys are in the clear majority. Approximately one third think that it could “damage your sex life”, and here the majority are girls. Many state that they get “sexually aroused” as a result of viewing porn. Many also report that “they are enticed to try what they have seen” – the boys are in a majority here. The girls are, however, in the majority on more negative assessments of porn’s influence, for example that they “feel inadequate” about their bodies, get “performance anxiety”, “are provoked”, or that “it is a turn-off”. This tendency must be viewed in light of the fact that, meanwhile, the girls are more inclined than the boys to assert that they are “not affected at all”. This interpretation of pornography’s influential power is confirmed in the Icelandic material.

Access and control of pornography:
The question of young people’s involuntarily exposure to pornography has been central in the Nordic debate in recent years. The background for this is the cited mainstreaming of pornography and pornographic references in media, but is also connected to technological development and access to new media.

The majority of the respondents in the study declare that they “rarely” or “never” have seen porn “without wanting to”. However, this response is not completely clear, as the context seems to be decisive in defining involuntary exposure. Many of the young people state that they have encountered pornography via spam-mail and pop-ups on the Internet, without describing this as involuntary exposure. Still, one out of five states that they “often” or “mostly” watch porn against their will, and the majority of these are girls. The numbers who considered themselves as having been exposed to pornography involuntarily were higher in the Icelandic study. This can be linked to the differences in design and analysis of the investigation, but it is still worth noting that the studies diverge on this point.

Nevertheless, when the respondents were given the opportunity to freely comment on the questionnaire, quite a few of them wrote about what they experience as untimely exposure: Porn magazines displayed in the news agent, a porn film which appears unexpectedly when one changes TV channels, etc. A large part of the comments dealt with the media’s focus on sex, about the wish to shield children against pornographic material and, especially, about the right to choose when and where one wants to deal with pornography. This is mirrored in the adolescents’ attitudes to the accessibility of pornography. Most agree that pornographic material is “easily accessed”, regardless of both gender and country. In terms of the regulation of pornography, only a few say that it “should be banned”. Over half of the adolescents, however, say that it is “ok that porn exists, but it needs to be limited”. The Icelandic respondents also express this opinion. The broad based agreement is especially interesting in the Nordic perspective. The Nordic countries regulate pornography differently, and Norway and Iceland have a more restrictive policy in this area than the other countries. Even so, the young people view pornography as easily accessed regardless of what country they live in. They also agree that porn should not be banned, but needs regulating.

Further normalization of porn in the future?
Cultural and technological development mean that today’s young people, to a higher degree than their parent’s generation, are exposed to pornographic material and pornographic references, both through their access to the Internet and cable/satellite TV and their use of mass cultural products (Kaiser Family Foundation Report 1999). Adolescents in this study start relating to pornography at a young age. They have personal experiences with porn, and they form opinions on what they see. Even if there are distinct gender differences in consumption and attitude, there are signs that girls are in the process of entering what was previously considered a male domain. Maybe this is a sign that young people behave differently towards this genre than earlier generations have done, that the definitions are changing or that existing taboos surrounding pornography are breaking down. If so, one can speculate whether the use of porn will be further normalized – or whether an aggressive pornographic presence could work as a catalyst for renewed criticism amongst the young.

Literature


The article was first published in Norwegian in NIKK magasin 2-2006.
Different porn careers?

Girls' and Boys' Porn Consumption

The easy access to pornography in modern society makes adults both angry and worried. But what is the reality of young girls' and boys' experience and consumption of pornography and how do they reflect on their experience? What difference does age and gender make in this regard?

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This article focuses on some of the results that have emerged in a study based on conversations with Swedish young people about their experience and perception of porn. The study has been carried out as a part of NIKK's Nordic project on young people, gender and porn.

In recent years, “adult society’s” concerns about the consequences that the increased exposure to porn might have for the next generation, for children and young people, have become increasingly explicit. The debate has created big waves. Expressions such as sexualisation and/or pornification of public space have been used to describe a perception of how porn and its visual language and sexual codes infiltrate and pervade everyday life and culture in late modern society.

We have interviewed 73 Swedish young people between 14 and 20 years of age, both individually and in focus groups. The purpose has been to gain knowledge about their experience with porn, what they use it for, in what kind of situations they consume porn and what implications and consequences young people perceive that it has for them and their views on gender and masculinity.

Our analysis sets out from a social-constructionist perspective on sexuality, sexual expression and behaviour (Weeks 1994, Lewin 1994). A basic assumption of this perspective is that it is through interaction with others that we learn how to think and act sexually in different situations. We employ Gagnon’s and Simon’s (1973) classical theory on sexual scripts. Through sexual socialisation we learn our scripts the same way actors learn their roles. We learn why some things make us feel sexy and others don’t. Put simply, the script is a manual for the when, where, how, with whom and why of sexuality. However, the scripts are never static, and they are also different from culture to culture. And they can also vary according to the situation, who is involved and to the previous experience with which an individual enters into a sexual situation. An interesting question,
of course, is what role porn plays in the development and content of these scripts, for both men and women.

Everyone has seen porn
The interviews show that young people see themselves surrounded by and continuously exposed to images and messages with an explicit sexual content, both in real and virtual space, i.e. through advertising, popular culture and the internet. All of them report that they have come into contact with porn, either voluntarily or involuntarily; voluntarily meaning that they have gone looking for it themselves, involuntarily meaning that they were exposed to porn in the form of text or images without actively seeking it. Without comparison, the internet turns out to be the most important force behind the explosive increase in exposure to porn in the last few years. On the net the consumer can come into contact with porn both anonymously and in a manner that has not been previously possible.

Overall, some clear differences between boys and girls emerge regarding behaviour patterns with respect to porn. This also goes for attitudes towards the phenomenon. In our investigation, significantly more boys than girls are more active consumers of porn and also more positive in their general attitude towards it. In this regard, the results are entirely in agreement with other contemporary Swedish and Scandinavian studies in the area (Hammarén & Johansson 2002, Rogala & Tyden 2003, Tydén & Rogala 2004, Häggström-Nordin et al 2005). Despite these differences, there is an agreement on one point; both boys and girls see it as “natural” that boys are more interested in porn than girls, not least because it is made “by and for men”.

Form of social interaction
We can identify three main uses for porn or functions of porn in young people’s lives. These are: porn as a form of social intercourse, porn as a source of information and porn as inspiration for sexual arousal. Porn as a form of social intercourse is not primarily about becoming sexually aroused, instead the interaction between the viewers takes centre stage. What happens on the computer or TV screen more or less constitutes a pretext for observation and testing one’s own and others’ reactions to the porn actors’ and actresses’ actions, looks and bodies. Through the comments made in the room, information is communicated, both directly and indirectly, about what is regarded as normal or deviant. The jokes, laughs and sighs become a normative guideline for the young and perhaps sexually inexperienced viewer.

Source of information and inspiration
Porn sometimes also works as a direct source of information for young people. They think that they learn things they didn’t know beforehand. They get tips on, for example, new or different positions for intercourse and/or on how to satisfy a partner sexually. Our impression from the interviews is that this information is critically reviewed by the young people themselves; there is usually nothing that is digested uncritically. Information gathering through porn does not happen in a vacuum. Just like in other areas of life information on sex is acquired from different directions, depending on what sources one has access to and consider reliable and useful – which in turn depends on one’s previous experience. Clearly, porn is perceived as a “reliable” source sometimes. But more often young people judge the content as exaggerated, distorted or downright false. In some cases this knowledge engenders direct resistance in young people. They distance themselves or simply tune out. In this respect girls more often than boys are among the unsparing critics. The third field of application is, at least on the face of it, the most obvious, namely porn as inspiration for sexual arousal, either in solitude or with some partner.

Our interview material also displays some interesting differences between young people of different ages. Usually experience comes with age and to young people a couple of years can make a lot of difference. Against this background, we are of the opinion that one can talk about different “porn careers”. In this there is a correlation between age and sex. There is an observable pattern with boys. They watch a lot of porn in the early teenage years. As their own sexual experience accumulates, their interest in porn seems to cool off somewhat. The use of porn as an information source and to some extent as a form of socialising decreases. Porn is mainly used as inspiration and to stimulate sexual arousal.

For girls this “career” appears different. In principle, it is the exact opposite compared to the boys. The older they get, the more they consume porn, although they still consume it considerably less than the boys. When they watch porn, it is usually together with someone they are going steady with and/or have a sexual relationship with. The girls who had the most positive attitude towards porn were among the older ones in our material. At the same time it is among the older girls that we find those who are the most critical to porn. Throughout, there is a much greater ambivalence towards the entire phenomenon among the girls than among the boys. Sometimes porn can be viewed as sexually arousing, interesting and exciting, but more often it is seen as disgusting and off-putting (see also Svedin & Åkerman 2006). Nevertheless, there seems to be a certain degree of convergence between girls and boys in the later teenage years. Girls become somewhat more positive towards it the older they get, whereas the boys become more critical and negative, which means that they meet somewhere in the middle of the scale.

So how should we interpret the fact that some girls become more positive towards porn the older they get? Does it mean they...
In such a discussion there is reason to examine exactly what is eroticised in the male dominated porn script. Dworkin maintains that submission and degradation is the very core of the image of sexual pleasure communicated in porn. In that perspective it is not hard to understand why pornography doesn’t normally attract women, other than for very specific reasons. Furthermore, our culture is steeped in sexist misconceptions about women’s sexuality (Kimmel 2005, 84). In these are included conflicting fantasies about women as, on the one hand passive and sexual and on the other hand insatiable and demanding. These misconceptions confuse both men and women. In extreme forms they tend to paralyse women and suffocate the right to their own sexuality. When we observe that these misconceptions are the basic elements in most of the male-oriented pornographic material distributed to adults and young people in our society, we understand that its erotic attraction for women is limited.

**Reinforcing inequality?**

We also know that porn is an important part of the male sexual script, which in turn works as a vital, not to say essential, confirmation of masculinity. Against this background, we understand that no area of sexuality, and certainly not porn, can be separated from the implications of the relations between the sexes in our society. Certainly, we know that the pornographic scenario is more about fantasy than reality. But the material for this fantasy is not without a basis in real life. Rather, it is a case of real encounters being recreated and eroticised in the fantasy. Thus, porn tends to legitimise and reinforce an unequal and prejudiced view of sexuality and the relationship between the sexes.

How young men and women deal with these messages is, naturally, an important question. The overall picture our study presents tell us that porn, in a way never before seen in history, is a part of young people’s everyday reality. The penetration of the pornographic script is clear. All the young people we have spoken to have been influenced to the extent that the script has brought about the duality and ambivalence that is found in the individual herself and in her environment, as regards sexuality in general and porn in particular. Porn’s characteristic of forbidden pleasure, the tension between danger and desirability is both enticing and offensive. On the one hand the dangerous and destructive elements are emphasised, on the other hand the normal and everyday characteristics are pointed out – “everybody watches it, everybody does it, it is everywhere”.

**Not without resistance**

To grow up with a ubiquitous presence of easily accessible pornography seems for some to result in a relatively down-played and sometimes trivial view of sexuality, both among girls and among boys. However, in conversations with young people we have also come across many examples of the critical, scrutinising viewer. Most do not swallow the message of pornography without resistance. Some, mostly girls, get actively involved against pornography and support each other in standing up against the boys’ persistent demands that they have to be “porny”. But the boys are not uncritical, either. Porn is alluring, but also scary, not least in its lack of humanity and warmth. The picture we find is thus both complex and far from unambiguous.

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