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BITCH



# Girls' Power

– A compilation from the conference on  
Gender Equality, December 2000

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# Why a Conference on Girls' Power?

Introduction by Leif Linde, Director General of the Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs.

– *There are many reasons to discuss power with reference to boys and girls, says Leif Linde, director general of the Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs, not least because this complex of problems is to be found in our own lives. Neither adults nor young people need to search far in everyday life to find examples of an unfair power order.*



– Those of us who work in youth policy can see how public investments favour boys and how the budgets of the municipalities are advantageous to boys. We can unmask this fact by studying what persons, young men or young women, occupy the leading positions in various associations, and it is shown in politics. From 1994 to 1998 the number of young girls in local public function has decreased, and polling has fallen among young women, says Leif Linde.

- The fact that the participation in the general elections has gone down and that fewer young women can be found in positions of trust reflects several things. It is a matter of generation, but it is also - which is important to bear in mind - a question of power.

## **No legal protection against sexual harassment**

Exposure to sexual harassment is an everyday experience to many pupils. But while law protects teachers there is no legal protection of the same kind for pupils. Of course a pupil can turn to the headmaster and get support in this way, but a pupil is not covered by the same regulations, as is a teacher. This is a legislation mistake that affects young people, not least young women.

Leif Linde also wants to draw attention to other tendencies we ought to be on our guard against. It is proved over and over again that girls will be found at the bottom of the list as soon as public financial support is involved.

- In the 1970s and 1980s when rock was a hit rather large public resources were invested in music houses and music associations. It soon appeared, however, that few girls benefited by those projects.

- About the same pattern could be observed a few years ago when computers and IT entered the youth activities. The boys at once began to dominate at the expense of the girls: it was the boys who were the users of the computers and it was the boys who got the advantage of the investments in IT.

– However, our latest investigations show that girls are now using computers to almost the same degree as boys, adds Leif Linde.

As far as music and IT are concerned the imbalance in favour of the boys led to the starting up of special girls' projects to compensate the girls. Many of those have been successful but it is nevertheless important to be conscious of the fact that there are some risks connected with them.

Leif Linde points out the investigation made by the National Board for Youth Affairs, *Flickorna och frigörelsen* (1998). The report showed that it is essential to bring the



*photo: Cristián Serrano*

surrounding society into focus when investing in girls' projects, or you will risk ending up in biologism or stereotyped gender roles, for instance having a girls' project just to "let girls be girls". The important thing concerning girls' projects is to take the injustice between the sexes in our society for granted and on the basis of that prerequisite insist on equal rights to power and free scope for girls.

### **Cocky Girls**

Another subject taken up by Leif Linde is what he calls "the cocky young girls". What will happen when the order of gender power gets broken? When young women have decided to grab their rights?

– When a girl puts her foot down it often makes things hum. The view of girls as nice and compliant is deeply rooted, but for boys

it is quite okay to be noisy and unruly. Girls who take up space often catch a packet, says Leif Linde.

– I fully understand that it may be hard to accept a person who doesn't stay where she has been put. But at the same time - we want authoritative citizens, don't we? I think it is vital to make pedagogues realize that it is indeed quite okay with cheeky - or as I prefer to call them - cocky girls.

– They let us know what they think. They flatly speak their minds. Isn't that exactly what we want them to do?

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**Footnote:** The report *Flickorna och frigörelsen* (1998) by Agnes Börjeson can be bought via the Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs.

# An Unfair Power Order

A summary of the speech by Britta Lejon, Minister for Democracy and Youth

*- Power is not equally distributed in Sweden even if our country is often described as one of the most equal and democratic societies in the world. But it is easy, much too easy, to take the result of the work by earlier generations for granted, both in terms of equality or of democracy and distribution of power, says Britta Lejon.*

Britta Lejon, Minister for Democracy and Youth, points out that in the 1990s Sweden has become a country where the differences in power and influence have actually increased.

– We are heading towards a Sweden where dialogue and understanding between people are being rendered impossible because of the fact that our experiences and images of reality are becoming more and more different, she says and then emphasizes that one of the important power dimensions is the difference between the sexes.

Yet it seems as if many young people do not realize the difference in power existing between men and women, a fact shown for instance by the evaluations made by the National Swedish Agency for Education among pupils in the grundskola (nine-year compulsory school). In these investigations boys as well as girls declare that there is no need to discuss gender equality because "it is no problem".

– Unfortunately the view held by these young people does not exactly square with reality, says Britta Lejon and then adds:

– I venture to say that in many aspects we live in a society where the power structures have been created from a male perspective, and where the definitions, values and norms of grown-up men set the rules for what is

relevant, what is important and what view of reality we are to have. It is a matter of course that this state of condition exerts an influence on the power, opportunities and lives of girls as well as of boys.

## **17 per cent higher pay to boys**

Britta Lejon gives several examples of the fact that the unequal society is a reality also among young people.

- The pay differential among young boys and young girls aged between 20 and 24 is evident. On the average young men earn 17 per cent more young women.
- Of young people aged between 20 and 24 who live together homework is distributed so that the young men work about 14 hours per week at home, the young women almost twice as much: 22 hours per week.
- Of young people aged between 20 and 24 who are parents, barely 12 per cent of the men take parental leave.
- Of young people aged between 18 and 29 with municipal commissions of trust 60 per cent are males.
- In group discussions at school or at other public arrangements the young boys often take the most space. A sociological study, made among young people aged between 16 and 18 who considered themselves fully equal, showed that "gender equality" meant

that the boys talked for two-thirds of the time, that the boys determined what subjects to deal with and that the boys were those who interfered with the contributions of the others to the greatest extent.

### **Lopsided power balance is an issue for all**

Another approach to young girls' power - or powerlessness- brought out by Britta Lejon, is about the signals from the media and the market. It is not a new public debate, she says, but it is still of immediate importance whether you discuss why young women have eating disorders or why the clothing trade has become so sexualised.

– The fact that women are made objects and victims instead of actors shifts the power from the women themselves to the various interested parties of the market, Britta Lejon goes on, adding that the great political challenge will be to create opportunities for a more fair distribution of power between

- Private consumers and operators of the market
- Young and old and
- Girls and boys.

In this work it is essential to pay attention to the fact that the lopsided distribution of power is not only a "girls' issue" but a question of power with reference to both boys and girls.

### **Measures taken by the Government**

What then has the Government done to try to change the structures that are unfair to or discriminate young women? Britta Lejon calls attention to some of the initiatives taken by the Government to consolidate the position



Britta Lejon,  
Minister for Democracy and Youth.

*photo: Christian Serrano*

of women and young girls. Through the Swedish State Inheritance Fund the Government has been able to give financial support for girls' activities, such as music training at the Modern Soul Academy in Stockholm, and various projects aimed at preventing violence towards young women.

The Government also commissioned the National Board for Youth Affairs and the National Integration Office to analyse the conditions of young girls from other ethnic and cultural backgrounds than that of the majority population of Sweden. In the report by the National Board for Youth Affairs it was shown quite clearly that the experiences made by Swedish girls and girls from other ethnic and cultural backgrounds have more of unifying features than of diverging ones. Gender is superior to ethnicity or - to put it in another way - : gender is a more significant power dimension than is ethnic background.

– Unfortunately, Britta Lejon says, the two groups - the Swedish girls as well as the girls from other ethnic backgrounds - have a joint disadvantage: they are subjected to an oppression of both conspicuous and invisible

kind due to the fact that they do not belong to the gender which is the norm.

At the same time Britta Lejon wants to point out that starting up specific girls' projects is not a quite uncomplicated way to improve the situation:

– There is always a risk of marginalizing the group we want in fact to strengthen because in backing it up we might at the same time point it out as a group with specific problems. It is thus essential to let all our efforts rest on a power analysis of the whole society. Measures taken by us must originate from the principle that it is society itself that must be changed, not the individual.

### **Mainstreaming in Youth Policy**

According to Britta Lejon all is about creating a society which can give every individual a good chance from the start so that the Government or other authorities need not step in at a later phase to try to set unequal structures right. This is also the intention of the mainstreaming policy of the Government: gender equality work is to go on within all political areas and is to be included in all activities. Only in this way can we get a proper balance between the sexes as to resources, power and opportunities, maintains Britta Lejon.

It stands to reason that mainstreaming applies to youth policy, too. Britta Lejon declares that she is very eager to study the report on youth policy that the National Board for Youth Affairs is going to present in the spring of 2001. Have the aims laid down by the Government concerning influence and participation left any concrete traces? How do the chances of influence and participation

look as to young women and young men respectively? The idea of mainstreaming must be put into practice also in this respect.

Britta Lejon concludes:

– Using the report as the basis I want to go further to see to it that youth policy, too, will become a powerful instrument for improving gender equality.

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**Footnote:** The report from the Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs on girls from other ethnic and cultural backgrounds appeared in the spring of 2000. The title is "Rapport om flickor med annan etnisk och kulturell bakgrund" (Report on girls from other ethnic and cultural backgrounds). Ann-Marie Liss Tung has worked it out.

# With Your Braids Caught in the Drawer

A lecture by Gertrud Åström, social scientist

*What does it mean to stand with your braids caught in the drawer? What is power and what is jämtegregring? Those are a few of the many questions put to us by Gertrud Åström as she gives us a winding story of power and gender equality in Sweden.*



photo: Cristián Serrano

To stand with your braids caught in the drawer doesn't exactly sound an enviable position. Nor does it strike one as much better to let them catch in the letterbox. But, as Gertrud Åström tells us, this is the phrase used in the report *Varannan damernas* (1985) (*Shared empowerment and shared responsibility*) (SOU 1987:19) to describe the deadlock women might land in when fighting for a gender-equal society:

*It is said much too often that women's subordinate position in society is a matter of attitude. It is of course a question of attitu-*

*des, too, but underlying those attitudes there are power structures that have to be brought to open light if woman's subordinate position in society is to be changed. Otherwise we run the risk of standing there, our plaits stuck in the letterbox.*

The real purpose of this is that we have to make a power analysis or we will risk standing here getting nowhere. What then does it imply to make a power analysis? First and foremost Gertrud Åström points out that it is all about realizing that men profit by the values women and girls have the right to.

She starts out from a classic definition of a patriarchy, namely *a social order on an economic basis, which implies that men profit by values created by women and children* (free from Heidi Hartman).

### **Power is the right to word the problems**

But to be standing, your plaits caught in the letterbox, is not only a question of being deprived of actual, material values; it can also be a question of being defined as a problem and robbed of your chances to act. For what is power? Before answering the question Gertrud Åström first wants to define what politics is, using a quotation from a Norwegian expert on political science: "the fight for defining reality".

Now, power can be defined in many ways but Gertrud Åström starts out from a very simple device: namely  $A \rightarrow B$ . It can be read as: A has power if A can make B do something that B otherwise would not do.

– By this you can learn that power is not a quality, Gertrud Åström goes on. Power is a relation. Power is something you have in relation to others and in this relation there is a direction.

– Then, does there exist something like a basic power resource? she asks and immediately gives the answer by an emphatic "Yes!".

– A basic power resource is to have the right to word the problems. And to have the right to define what is the problem is as a matter of fact equal to the political fight for defining what to debate: Who decides what should be looked upon as an issue to debate? Who decides what we should pay attention to anyway?

Consequently, to stand there your plaits stuck in the letterbox, can be equal to being defined away as negligible. Still another way of standing there, your plaits stuck in the letterbox, may be to work in a girls' project where the girls themselves are defined as being the problem ("they have a poor self-confidence", "they can't grab what they want in the way boys do") when in fact the problem does *not* lie with the girls. This specific instance - that the gender equality issue has never quit the young girls' world so to speak, and that girls and women find themselves saddled with demands for making the changes - is just what Gertrud Åström pictures by the formula "standing there, your plaits stuck in *the drawer*". That situation is perhaps the very hardest for it is to be powerless indeed and yet burdened with demands for shifting the power.

– Of course we should have girls' projects. But what problem are the young girls to tackle? On whom is the pressure for changes to be put? Are the girls to push it all alone? I find that preposterous. My opinion is that girls have the right to expect support, sympathy and concrete measures from the society around.

– I also think it is important that the results you want to attain in a girls' project should be put in clear words. What persons are to make the changes we want? We ourselves, in the girls' project? If that is what we think we should be able to ask: What scope have we got? What organisations, what movements can we make work for the change we want?

## **Mainstreaming**

### **– make changes where power is**

The basic idea of mainstreaming is to work on making concrete and specific claims for a change. It is a method or strategy to implement gender equality in practice and Gertrud Åström describes it in the second part of her speech. Mainstreaming simply means that gender equality should permeate through all activities and that the gender equality work is to be carried out by those engaged in the permanent activity wherever it is going on: day care centres, the Government Office, the cemetery administration, the supermarket.

– Equality is not something for the chief mourners, it is not a small secondary question brought up and worked on by real enthusiasts while we others are occupied by our ordinary doings. It is something that must be carried out by all of us.

– Consequently gender equality puts pressure on the permanent actors themselves to act for a change, and at the same time it is an expression of hope that the change is in fact possible, that it can in fact be reached, says Gertrud Åström. But the most important thing about mainstreaming is perhaps the power aspect: that the responsibility for the changes will move into the permanent structures where the power lies.

– This also implies that the responsibility for placing half the power with the girls and women does not rest exclusively on the women, it rests on the ordinary decision-making structures, which in its turn means that all chairpersons are responsible. Or you can put it like this: Mainstreaming is a way to bring power and responsibility together.

– An immense amount of work to establish better gender equality has been carried out

by placing the responsibility where no power is - and no responsibility where the power is!

### **”Jämtegrering” – a new concept**

Gertrud Åström is not fully satisfied with the concept of mainstreaming, however, for there is a risk of misunderstanding it and mixing it up with other concepts. Because of that she has introduced the Swedish word ”jämtegrering” which has the same meaning. The Swedish Association of Local Authorities as well as the Swedish municipalities use that word.

The point is the same, however, either you say jämtegrering or mainstreaming: gender equality work is about focusing the surrounding society and seeing to it that changes are being effected within existing structures. The definition given by the Council of Europe reads as follows:

*Gender mainstreaming is the (re)organization, improvement, development and evaluation of policy processes, so that a gender equality perspective is incorporated in all politics at all levels and at all stages by the actors.*

Of course mainstreaming is not brought about in a coffee break. If you are to change, organize and re-organize - and above all improve - by jämtegrering/mainstreaming you must on one hand have a conception of what is good, on the other hand know the way matters are. This in turn means as far as the Swedish authorities are concerned that mere policy documents about gender equality are not enough. There should be claims for a re-reporting to the Government and the authorities should be able to pick out key figures in various ways. This will make it possible to see what effects are brought about by various and different measures and also how far the gender equality work has

advanced. It is all about acting and being able to evaluate.

– Very often it happens that the policy and the level of doing do not hang together, says Gertrud Åström and mentions a report from the Swedish National Audit Office which has shown that the authorities are seldom subjected to claims for re-reporting, nor is their assessment work satisfactory.

Gertrud Åström also points to the fact that the complexity of our society can make it easy to "tie oneself up" instead of "developing". In plain Swedish: you are so busy doing something that you can find no time for doing what you are there to do - like writing policy documents about gender equality but never having got the time to start implementing them.

– What we should really work on is to reduce the distance between beautiful documents and our actual doings.

### **A good position for action**

Gertrud Åström holds the opinion that there are exceptionally fine opportunities for action as matters stand. Just now is the time when we should be able to carry out what is needed to create a gender equal society.

– We have the knowledge, we have lots of "fine people" and we have any amount of policies to establish better gender equality. I would say that we are in a formative position, a position when a change is possible. And I suppose you have all noted the crowd in the feministic ministerial posts? I think we should be delighted at the fact that so many people want to call themselves feminists - and at the same time we should of course make use of the situation.

– For what is feminism? asks Gertrud Åström, insisting upon an answer, both exact and concrete, because it is by exact and concrete arguments that you assert your right.

– Well, as a matter of fact the definition consists of two parts. On one hand you realize that society is distinguished by a suborder of women, on the other hand you declare that you want to change the situation. Simply: if you are a feminist you want to do something.

– Now that our big parties and politicians have declared themselves feminists, the consequence is that they have tied themselves up for a change.

### **Examine your lawn mowers!**

If anyone still despairs as to jämtegrering that person should bear Gertrud Åströms concluding and edifying anecdote in mind. It is about a group of women in Skåne who put the concept of jämtegrering into practice in their area, the cemetery administration. People in general may not think it possible to jämtegrera a cemetery, but yes - it certainly is. This is how the elected representatives thought: Who are in the cemetery, except the dead? Well, generally elderly women. What do they do there? Well, they take charge of relatives, their loved ones. Then, for whom are the cemeteries projected? Well, to speak the truth very seldom for elderly women and their needs. When scrutinizing the matter we will find that most cemeteries are projected – for the breadth of the lawn mower.

And this is what Gertrud Åström wants us to inquire into: simply to find out how lawn mowers are ruling our lives - and ask ourselves if we want it like that in the future.

# Gender Power Orders - Girls' and Boys' Conceptions of Power

A lecture by Birgitta Fagrell, the University of Sports

*As early as the age of 7 to 8 girls begin to willingly subordinate themselves to boys. Both girls and boys believe that girls are not as good at sports as the boys, though there is no physical distinction of capacity between them at that age. Birgitta Fagrell shows this in a quite fresh doctor's thesis.*



photo: Christián Serrano

Any mother and father hoping for a gender equal future for their children probably have reasons to get thoroughly scared when she or he studies the result of Birgitta Fagrell's research. What is made clear by it is the fact that children have adopted the gender power structure to a great extent as early as the age of 7 to 8 - not in the way we might wish it but as we meet with it in practice behind all the beautiful words as soon as you scrape the surface.

Thus, what Birgitta Fagrell shows in her research is that children very early take in a power structure which is to the disadvantage of girls and which locks both sexes up in a rather traditional way of thinking. The notions that girls should be nice and the boys rowdy and perhaps charming – are two basic

notions, which seem to be exceedingly well cemented already at the age of 7 to 8.

– Both boys and girls think that the normal thing for a girl is - not to belong to the female sex - but to be nice, says Birgitta Fagrell. This attitude was apparent in an immense number of situations in my interviews. It is as if the female body becomes a symbol of kindness. What should a woman be like? Oh yes, *kind*. What are girls like? *Kind*. What do you do if you are kind? You help making somebody's bed, you give things away, you buy sweets to give to others - and even if these actions are not typically female yet the kindness they represent is linked to femininity.

– Rowdy behaviour on the other hand is linked to masculinity. Boys are noisy and cocky.

But you forgive their rowdy behaviour. They are like this, boys and men, aren't they!

### **The little constructors**

Birgitta Fagrell, however, does not hold the opinion that what we describe as male and female is a condition given by nature in some way or other, or even that there exists something specific male or female. As a whole her doctor's thesis *The Little Constructors- Girls and Boys about Female and Male in Relation to Body, Sports, Family and Work* (HLS, 2000) is based on the thought that all the time we all take part in the creating of the categories of gender. At the same time and in the same way we all help staging and embodying the conceptions of gender handed down to us.

To children aged between 7 and 8 who are on the way of growing up it is vital to find out what it means to be a girl or a boy, what the rules of the game are and how the ground is. In other words Birgitta Fagrell has studied how children "do gender": what they interpret as typical for boys and girls and for men and women respectively in various situations. In her interviews she has made use of pictures which the children have been able to make up their minds about, and then she has put questions about for instance men's and women's bodies, which sex wins the games, what is typical for boys and girls and so on.

A "gender rule" which seems very strong among the children is that girls are poorer at sports (table tennis, ice hockey, football) than boys. That attitude is manifested again and again.

– Children at the age of 7 have got the picture of girls BEING poorer at sports, though they have not tested if it is true and though

there does not in fact exist any physical distinction of capacity between the sexes. If a boy and a girl were to run a race it is not at all certain that the boy would win, and yet the children think so.

Another "rule" or power structure pointed out by Birgitta Fagrell as quite frequent is the conception among the girls that they should not compete. Added to this there is a "readiness" to make themselves poorer than they are or to underestimate themselves.

– Many times girls refrain from the fight, she says, adding that it often both boys and girls seem to embody male norms, giving a lesser value to what girls do than to what do boys. This is apparent when the children talk about work: women "potter about" and go to girls' dinners, but men "work hard". This attitude also holds good for sports:

– Girls as well as boys generally believe that typically female kinds of sport are a bit ridiculous compared to male ones. "Boys don't want to be so silly as girls", says for instance one of the girls interviewed, as an answer to the question why boys don't dance as she herself does.

### **Hidden regimes**

What speculations can we make from this research information? Why do girls refrain from competing, why do both girls and boys think that boys win the games? Why are female performances belittled? Birgitta Fagrell gives the answer that all is about the fact that boys as well as girls adapt themselves to what they think is normal. The "rules" or the hidden gender regimes, as Birgitta Fagrell words it, are extremely strong just because they are tied to our notions of what is nor-



*photo: Christian Serrano*

mal. Very seldom the thought enters into our world of conception that these notions are as a matter of fact negotiable.

– No, it is not a matter of course to be able to realize that our gender conceptions are relative; that view is not taken for granted even on an academic level. That's why it is of such great importance to talk about gender and to relativize it. We can indeed stop staging our conceptions of male and female - for we are the only ones able to change the relation between the sexes, says Birgitta Fagrell. Then she adds as a pleasantry that she herself has just started to oppose the regime maintaining that women should be nice and say yes all the time. But she also points out the import of realizing that voluntarism is circumscribed as to gender regi-

mes. The person who offends against a gender regime, e.g. against what is considered normal, will be punished. Female boxers as well as male ballet dancers can testify to this fact and of course children are conscious of it.

– When we offend against what is considered normal the existence of gender power orders is made obvious, says Birgitta Fagrell. That's why it is both useful and essential to reflect on various concepts of power.

I find Gertud Åström's definition of power interesting: Power is when you make somebody do what *you* want, though the person in question may not have intended to do it.

– From another point of view it can be said that power is when you make somebody do what she herself or he himself wants, because what she or he wants has become so neutralized that it is considered normal.

Consequently, what Birgitta Fagrell points out is that power is linked to normality, for quite freely we want what is normal even though it may imply suborder. The same goes with our square notions of boys as tough and cocky but girls as namby-pamby and timid. And that is actually how most of the children aged between 7 and 8 describe the gender differences, says Birgitta Fagrell.

### **The physical body**

Still another interesting result of Birgitta Fagrell's research is the view held by the children of the physical body. When Birgitta Fagrell asked them to describe a man and a woman respectively it was obvious that they entered into the subject of the actual body only when talking about men.

– Men have beards, they are hairy, and they have got muscles. One girl even gave the

description that her father had hair on his nails. The body standing out in these descriptions is rather rough: a man is allowed to look unkempt; the man's body is obvious and tangible.

– The female body on the other hand doesn't exist in the children's world! When they describe her it is done in a sort of attributive way: lipsticks, shoes with heels and earrings. She doesn't seem to have a real body. Women are thoroughly cultivated in the children's world of conception, says Birgitta Fagrell.

– You can reflect on what effects this may have on girls - our aim being to develop strong physical bodies capable to stand stress - when girls as well as boys have got a notion that women's bodies should be so well-kept. You can also reflect on what are the implications of so often characterizing girls as timorous and anxious compared to boys, not daring to be as tough or to choose as tough sports as boys.

Birgitta Fagrell declares that pedagogues and leaders of the sports movement should take it as a mission to point out these conceptions as nothing but conceptions. It is, however, also a matter of fact that not all the children in Birgitta Fagrell's interviews have adopted the most traditional form of gender power structure.

– Some girls go against the pattern: they do want to compete against the boys even though the majority of the girls refrain from it. From general viewpoint boys define work, competition and sports as something male, but all girls do not. I think a change is on the way for some girls can easily define work as something female. There are cracks in the picture of traditions and that IS positive.



photo: Christian Serrano

### To you who are a pedagogue and/or work in the sports movement:

#### Be careful to...

...question the conceptions of the way boys and girls "are".

- Boys are not born with a greater liking for competition than girls are, but they are encouraged to compete.
- Girls aged between 7 and 8 are not poorer at sports than the boys, but both boys and girls think so.
- Girls are not typically kind and boys are not typically rowdy, but both boys and girls think so.
- Girls aged between 7 and 8 have as strong and capable bodies as boys.
- Branches of sport typical for girls are held up to ridicule or are labelled as corny by both boys and girls, in spite of the fact that they are at least as qualified as "male" sports.

# Girls do Not Turn Football Pros in Italy

A lecture by Anja Gatu, football coach and one of the authors of the book *Fittstim*

*Together with 17 other young women Anja Gatu wrote the book Fittstim. It attracted much media attention and has been paid much tribute to by women all ages. Anja's part of the book deals with football - and what girls who like playing ball can expect to meet with.*



photo: Christian Serrano

– Anja, for how long time exactly *may* I play football?

That worried question opened Anja Gatu's eyes for the different terms applied to boys and girls in the football ground. Because why does a 7-year-old girl wonder how long she is allowed to play football while the question doesn't even exist to 7-year-old boy?

It was one of the girls in the girls' team, trained by Anja, who put the question and it goes without saying that Anja answered: - As long as you like of course, you can play football till you are ninety if you wish.

But though Anja's answer was right in one way it is not at all true if you look at it from another angle. To a 7-year-old girl who notices that all girls at the age of about 14 have stopped playing football it is very obvious that there must be invisible dividing lines or perhaps even fixed regulations for her rights to keep on with the kind of sport she approves of so keenly.

These invisible limits and invisible prohibitions can be connected with the fact that girls who start playing ball are not ranked as high as boys, neither by trainers, mates among the boys or the media. Anja gives as example that the boys in her class took it for granted that girls are bad at football just because they are girls - not because they are unpractised.

– To me it was quite natural that I was bad to begin with because I had not trained football before, but the boys meant that we were poor because we were girls - and then they had not even watched us play, says Anja Gatu.

## **The girls' money goes to the boys**

In field after field Anja Gatu demonstrates how girls who are engaged in football are belittled or discriminated: there are football associations which take the bingo money collected by the girls' teams away from them

and invest it on the boys instead and girls often get bad training times. You can open any daily and note as an obvious fact that women's football gets a fraction of the space bestowed on men's football. And if the girls want to go to a match and watch adults play, as did the girls in Anja's team, the glaring truth will manifest itself: that men's teams play at Råsunda for a crowd of 15 000 while women's teams are directed to some tiny, miserable football ground in the suburbs with perhaps 150 spectators.

– To bring a girls' team to a women's match is often equivalent to telling the girls straight to their faces that they are not worth as much as the boys. I don't think anybody should be exposed to an actuality of that kind when you are seven years old and believe you are quite as good as the boy sitting beside you at the desk at school, says Anja Gatu.

However, Anja Gatu and her girls managed to go to an international women's match (Sweden-Spain) with an almost full audience and quite massive media coverage. The girls were in the seventh heaven and talked about becoming international players as grown-ups, but for all that the point of Anja Gatu's talk is very clear:

The social patterns make it enormously much harder for a girl to keep on playing football than it is for a boy. They make it

worse for her to think that she is as good as he; they render it more difficult for her to dream the same dreams as a boy. A girl doesn't say that she is going to turn a pro in Italy. Not even though her play is quite as good as that of the boys - or even better.

– We have been somewhat criticized for not having given any suggestions in *Fittstim* (DN, 1999) of how to solve the problem, but in fact we never meant to. Our aim was simply to throw light upon some specific social problems and make girls feel that they are not to be blamed for those, neither as a group nor as individuals. We wanted to be a big sister who could tell each one of them: - It is not your fault!

– Girls are fantastically clever at football and there is an enormous interest in football among them. It is definitely not their fault that they do not get the same chances as boys when they want to devote themselves to the sport they like so very much.

– And then I believe that girls are realists, Anja Gatu says. They realize that a more professional concentration on football will involve two jobs: they must have an extra job to earn their living and the prospects of succeeding are small. In this situation they choose something else. But the reason for that is definitely not that they are poorer at football than the boys.

*photomontage: Christian Serrano*



# Seize the Power! – Methods for Young People to Establish Gender Equality

A lecture by Doris Marydotter, gender equality consultant

*– Girls are afraid in many situations. I know girls who avoid going to the lavatory at school because they are afraid of what may happen. I know girls who are afraid of walking through the corridor because of all comments. There exists an incredible everyday oppression of young women, which is sanctioned by adults - an everyday oppression that has become normalized.*

Doris Marydotter is a consultant on gender equality and has travelled around visiting schools for five years, working with girls as well as boys, individually and in groups, to increase their consciousness of gender roles patterns but also to work in a concrete way against the everyday oppression that girls are subjected to.

Her method is as simple as it is ingenious. It is about making it possible for girls to

- 1) put their experiences into words
- 2) tell people what is wrong
- 3) declare how they want things to be

– e.g. simply to go from being a victim to seizing the power in various situations.

The method may seem treacherously simple but when sexual harassments and sexualised violence at school is involved those three

steps are often difficult to take. Many girls keep silent about their experiences, many adults have no idea of what sexual harassment in fact is and school seldom gives the kind of support a girl needs to be able to feel that she has the right to her own body and the right to say no.

– Kalle pulls Lisa's hair. What do we say to Lisa? Well, that Kalle is in love with her, says Doris Marydotter, hereby giving a tangible example of the way we as adults normalize an assault by teaching Lisa to associate love with pain and also by preventing Lisa from saying no.

And yet Kalle's pulling Lisa's hair is but a mild breeze of what is actually going on at some schools.



photo: Claudia Torres

– A girl was raped in the school library. What do you think happened? Oh yes, the girl had to leave school.

– A girl was thrown up on a ping-pong table and held there by four 14-year-old boys while one of them put his hand under her waistband. What would you call that? Rape? And what did the girl feel, do you think?

– Sexual harassment is a question of what you yourself feel as an exposed person. You have to put it into words. Only you can say what is a violation to you, says Doris Marydotter.

### **Measures against harassment**

The teaching method Doris Marydotter puts into practice is a kind of compensatory pedagogic. The girls shall get support in all the three links above: to name their experiences, to express what they feel to be an assault and to get assistance to act. The boys for their part shall get opportunities to express empathy and sympathy to a greater extent than is generally done, and of course also get a clear notion that adults will interfere because they do not accept sexual harassment.

– What young boys need at school is not more men playing bandy with them, but grown-up men who can meet and answer their questions.

Doris Marydotter doesn't drone her teaching methods to a passive audience. On the contrary, the audience is made to speculate on girls' and women' fears and on what initiatives can be taken to prevent sexual harassment at school, such as boys calling out four-letter words behind the young girls in a corridor or taking part in still grosser sexual harassment.

### **There are many suggestions:**

- Intervene as soon as you notice that something is going on
- Give support to the exposed person
- Draw attention to it and make the offender responsible
- Go to the headmaster and other persons of responsibility
- Talk to other adults about sexual harassment
- See to it that there is a plan of action for sexual harassment.

Doris Marydotter considers all the steps above important but she emphasizes the support and assistance to the exposed girl:

– Put questions: *What has happened to you? How did it happen? Who were there?* Ask above all: *What can I do to help you?*

The exposed girl should get assistance to act on her own terms and in her own time. It may be about going to the headmaster to report what has happened, but also about giving the girl a chance to take her whole lot of mates and an adult with her as a support. Doris Marydotter also stresses the import of calling attention to the offenders and pointing out to them what in fact they are doing:

– What do you think boys can get out of calling a girl a whore? They feel superior. That goes without saying for it is all about power. But adults seldom dare to realize that is a question of power. We must be able to say: - We can't accept this.

### **"You are touching my breasts..."**

To every single woman and every single girl power is also about the right and possibility to say no. The last part of Doris Marydotter's talk becomes a practical demonstration of

how girls can learn not to be victims: simply to seize the power in situations where men can behave in a pushy and dangerous way.

– Say that you are waiting at a bus station and a boy comes along and asks what time it is. It is late, you are alone and he stands too close to you and puts his hand on your shoulder. What do you do?

– First of all: Stand with your legs wide apart and turn your body towards him, your whole front. When a man sets about a woman he has pictured a victim. Show him that you are not.

– Put his behaviour into words: *You are touching my body...* Tell him what you want: *I won't have it.* Criticize: *You can stand here but you mustn't touch me.* Repeat if necessary: *You are touching my body, I won't have it, stop it.*

Doris Marydotter stages several close-ups that are easily recognizable: a freaked out man wanting to cadge a cigarette, an unknown man who puts his hand on your thigh in the bus, somebody putting his hand on one of your breasts at a party. Act after the same

principle all along: Name. Tell the person what you want. Criticize. The more painful the sexual offence, the more important to say aloud what is happening: "You are touching my breast. I won't have it. Stop it." "You are rubbing your dick against my behind. I don't like it. Stand somewhere else."

Still another side of sexual exertion of power, illustrated by Doris Marydotter, is that women's sexual organs have become synonymous with an insult and that those of men often have a positive nuance: "You've really got balls." But why accept that estimation? Originally in Old Swedish "fitta" (cunt) had the meaning of "a moist meadow by the waterside".

– That's rather fine, isn't it? Says Doris Marydotter. And "kuk" (cock) means "a small outgrowth". All this raises laughter in the audience and it is easy to take in Doris Marydotter's concluding words:

– Let's go out now and give girls the right to make claims. Let's give girls a name to their genitals. And let's give girls a BIG living space.

photo: Cristián Serrano



## Lift the Fog Away From the Gender Power

A lecture by Mia Hanström, consultant on youth- and gender equality

*We have deluded ourselves and also young people into the belief that gender is of no great importance, despite the fact that gender is our strongest pattern of organization, says Mia Hanström who works with developmental activities for gender-equal leisure time at youth recreation centres and schools and in associations. Her advice is: Make the gender power in our society visible; girls as well as boys have everything to gain by a changed system.*



photo: Cristián Serrano

Mia Hanström, recreation leader and gender equality consultant, has drawn up activities and group activities for young girls at recreation centres and in associations since the end of the 1980s. She describes the development of the activities for young girls during three different stages.

– During the first period we worked in a rather one-sided way to strengthen the girls and teach them to take what they want the way boys do. It never crossed our minds to problematize the boys. We thought gender equality would come automatically if only the girls learnt to put their foot down, to choose the right jobs and stop behaving now this way, now that.

– The second period, too, was about supporting and bracing the girls but also about raising the estimation of traditional girls' interests. "Let girls be girls", we said and "We must raise the status of girls' interests".

– Then came the third phase when we began to call matters into question. Are girls'

groups and girls' activities really a good thing? We could see that lots of young girls' activities had been developed; some good, some less good, and we could see plenty of disastrous boys' activities. When I say disastrous I don't refer to the activity itself that I am sure could be good - but disastrous from the angle of gender equality. The traditional gender roles were strengthened by them in spite of the fact that our intentions were the best conceivable.

– In this period there was also an animated and widespread debate going on concerning singularity and similarity and during my lectures I got questions about hormones and apes: "This thing about gender, it has to do with biology chiefly, hasn't it?"

– Mia Hanström says that she really had to sharpen her arguments when maintaining that gender is socially done, and that this way of looking at gender and gender differences was - and still is - the most constructive one. It should be the starting

point for today's work with youth activities, too, whether girls' groups or boys' groups or mixed activities are involved.

### **To see and identify patterns**

What knowledge has been obtained from those three periods? Mia Hanström maintains that it is quite obvious that adults have to make visible the real facts of the gender power structure, because to strengthen the self-confidence of girls or to work with girls only is not enough.

– Just keeping on bracing the girls will get us nowhere if at the same time we make the power structure invisible. We have to point out the invisible patterns that sustain the gender power even though it may be painful, difficult and tough, she says.

The contract which Mia Hanström describes, the gender contract, is based on a symbiotic relationship between men and women in which both parties are directed by more or less invisible codes: man is superior to woman but at the same time both parties benefit by preserving the contract. Thus the man's code is: "Don't say no, don't complain, compete." The woman's code is: "Be nice and pretty, don't compete, wait for your turn." What the man can gain is for instance power and praise and admiration from the "nice" woman; what the woman can gain is a man who acts in her place, a prince.

– There are many things that help to make the fog stay around the gender power. Men as well as women actively contribute in various ways to making suborder and superiority invisible, for instance by talking of suborder as a voluntary choice: "Women choose low-paid jobs, men choose to get more power and money".

Carin Holmberg, a sociologist, expresses it like this in her doctor's thesis:

What is specific about the so-called modern couples is that the woman subordinates herself to the man referring to his personal qualities, not to his gender, because male dominance is not legitimate. The woman receives a positive confirmation if she makes her suborder look voluntary and like something else but suborder.

Another thought-figure contributing to the spreading of the gender fog is the argument: "You can if you really want to, gender is of no importance". That is to say: A woman who sets her mind on reaching a high position can of course succeed; moreover, there are many examples of that.

– The Norwegian scientist Hanne Haavind calls this phenomenon "relative suborder". Nordic women can for instance get any job today so long as they work in relative suborder to the men around. We can have female business executives, just not too many of them. Women can earn much money but seldom more than their husbands. Women can fight their way into fields charged with prestige but if they begin to dominate the whole branch of profession can lose prestige, says Mia Hanström.

### **Young girls are indeed conscious of suborder**

That "the fog of gender equality" is spreading more and more is not at all strange; it is easy to swallow the arguments given above, it is easy to let ourselves be deceived and it is easy to think that we live in a gender equal society.

But Mia Hanström points out that the awareness of the actual conditions might be greater among young women than they seem to be at first. In 1998 she made an investigation into the question of girls and power: she had discussions with pupils (aged between 16 and 17) at various schools and also carried through

an inquiry.

– In every class there were only one or two pupils that didn't think we live on an equal footing. "Gender equality is no problem among young people", the rest of them said in the discussions. But in the inquiry close on 50 per cent of the girls held the opinion that there is a difference between boys and girls as to the chances of getting one's voice heard and speaking one's views.

Thus one half of the number of girls thought that their actual possibilities of expressing their opinions were less than those of the boys, but they did not dare or did not want to say so in the classroom.

– My interpretation of the result is that young women realize the gender injustices to a relatively high extent, but they remain silent because they do not want to talk about the problem: it is something not legitimate. Besides, many young girls think that young people are more gender-equal than adults; they think that women today are better at taking what they want. This is hopeful and good but makes work with developing gender equality quite complicated.

### **Make visible by talk and knowledge**

What can be done then? Mia Hanström points out some ways she regards as practicable:

- Consider the gender contract a symbiotic relationship where there are gains to be had in both positions but be aware of the limitations, too. Traditional gender roles cut down the chances for both sexes to grow to whole human beings. The man's role: Inflexible, tough, and hard. The woman's role: To exist for others, to look pretty, to serve.
- Examine the structures of your activity. For whom are they made, to whom are they

comfortable, what is the norm? Who can speak their minds?

- Work according to "cold facts". It is not possible to get the hang of existing injustices until you begin systematically to measure what various activities actually give to girls or boys respectively, and likewise systematically to find out who sit in the leading positions, and so on.
- Make reality, the real state of the case, visible by talk and knowledge
- Demonstrate the way socialization works for girls and boys respectively and how the gender contracts constitutes a restriction and an obstacle. Give examples of for instance
  - How girls and women make themselves invisible and are made invisible
  - How strong women and girls are opposed and held up to ridicule
  - How men's violence towards women is looked upon as a woman's problem when in fact it is a man's problem
  - How women and girls are considered dominant when taking up more than 30 per cent of the public attention.

Mia Hanström also says that of course she finds work with single-gender activities important but she emphasizes that it must always be performed in a deliberate way. Often the strength of the young girls' groups and the young boys' groups is due to the fact that the groups have developed out of the so-called cluster culture, which is not hierarchic but has one or two to three central leaders. This structure gives great opportunities for every individual to change and get backing-up from the group. In a good cluster culture people dare to break the bounds and enter new halves of the ground - that is they are not automatically restricted just because of the fact that they happened to be born a boy or a girl.



## Participants:

### Conference on Gender Equality:

Leif Linde, Director General of the Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs

Britta Lejon, Minister for Democracy and Youth

Gertrud Åström, Social Scientist

Birgitta Fagrell, Phd, University of Sports, Stockholm

Anja Gatu, football coach

Doris Marydotter, Gender Equality Consultant

Mia Hanström, Consultant on Youth- and Gender Equality

Ingegerd Sahlström, National Council for the Protection of Women against Violence

### And representatives of

Norma group in Strömstad

KSAN and ROKS

Association Revolt

Youth League of the Centre Party

Network Allt är möjligt

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# Current Method Work

## The National Council for Women's Peace

*Nationellt råd för kvinnofrid*

### Ingegerd Sahlström

The National Council for Women's Peace is a two-year project, started in the summer of 2000 according to a government decision. The council is to collect suggestions and views from scientists and representatives of organisations on issues concerning violence towards women, from assaults to sexual harassment, female circumcision and prostitution. The idea is that the council should work as a consultative body for these questions but also pay attention to fields that need being attended to.

– Men's violence towards women is the most extreme manifestation of gender inequality in our society. Roughly 19 000 women reported having been maltreated in 1999 but the hidden statistics is very high. According to the National Swedish Women's Centre in Uppsala only about 40 per cent of the women pursue their notifications, says Ingegerd Sahlström who works at the council. She also emphasizes that ideas and views from persons engaged in these questions are very much welcome.

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## His Tongue Should Be Just Big Enough When We Kiss

*"Lagom tunga ska han ha när vi kysser varandra"*

### The Norma group in Strömstad

The Norma group in Strömstad has produced a body of information for enjoyment about the subject of normalization. What is normal? What does it imply to adapt to norms and conceptions of how to be and behave? What living-spaces exist for young girls and boys? Those questions and a lot more are dealt with in the book *"Lagom tunga ska han ha när vi kysser varandra"*, which is a kind of documentary collage about subjects as love, sex, body, gender and violence. More than 50 young people and adults contribute to the book, which is edited by Karin Askberger Jernelius. The book addresses perhaps especially young people, and like other matters that the Norma group has helped to produce it aims at creating scope for discussions on existential issues and young people's objects in life. The Norma group, which consists of persons from women's refuges, schools and guidance centres for young people, has also participated in the production of the film *Feminister, egoister och konservatister* by Astrid Askberger and Johanna Högberg. The film depicts three young women with strong and in part conflicting views of what is important in life. By the way it proved to be an appreciated feature of the conference.

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# Current Method Work

## Fire, Fire!

*Elden är lös*

### **KSAN and ROKS**

*Elden är lös* is the title of a method booklet by KSAN and ROKS for young girls' guidance centres and other activities working with young girls' projects or young girls' groups. KSAN stands for the Co-operation Board of Women's Organization for Alcohol- and Narcotics Issues and ROKS stands for the Swedish National Association of Women's and Young Girls' Refuge Centres. The method booklet *Elden är lös* contains ideas of how to plan study circles on subjects such as power and gender. Here you can find descriptions of how to practise valuation and how to work with forum plays in your young girls' group and it also contains suggestions for how to reach for instance schools in an effective way. *Elden är lös* has been produced on the basis of the joint experiences of eleven girls' refuge centres, but it is pointed out that the booklet is meant for all kinds of activities for young girls, not just for young girls' refuge centres.

### **More info:**

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## Power and Gender in the Everyday Life of Young People

*Makt och kön i ungas vardag*

### **The Association Revolt**

*Makt och kön i ungas vardag* is a day devoted to a particular theme, developed for schools by the association Revolt. During the day (it can also be a half day) lectures are mixed with valuation practice, media analysis and physical exercises about subjects such as gender roles, sex harassment and power structures in society. At the present Revolt consists of five young people, all with a feministic background, who work actively for a gender equal society. The aim of the day is to raise the level of consciousness, to inform and - not least - give tools for analysing from a gender point of view the everyday life of young people as well as the world in broad outline. Revolt works with single-gender groups and consequently addresses both girls and boys. Among other things the young girls can work with feministic self-defence and the young boys with forum plays about group pressure.

### **More info:**

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# Current Method Work

## We Will Break the Power

*Vi bryter makten*

### **The Youth League of the Centre Party**

In 1997 the Youth League of the Centre Party (CUF) started a great project to increase gender equality in the league. At that time close on 67 per cent of the heads of the divisions were young men while nearly all the secretaries of the divisions were young women. Now, three years after the project, the figures may not have changed in the thorough way as was hoped for (60 per cent of the heads of the divisions are young men today) but the trend is obvious. Young women are becoming more frequent in leading positions and there is a greater consciousness of gender equality questions in the league.

What CUF did during its gender equality project was among other things to engage a person on half-time to bring gender equality questions out for debate, instructing and discussion. During the league assemblies gender equality lunches and federation classes in gender equality were arranged. Work with mentorship and with Berit Ås' rulers' gender strategies was begun.

### **More info:**

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## Starter Pack for Media Critics

*Startpaketet för mediekritiker*

### **The network Allt är möjligt**

#### **(Everything is possible)**

The media critical network *Allt är möjligt* has worked out several method booklets and suggestions for how you as a consumer can influence and criticize stereotyped descriptions of men and women in media and commercial advertising. In 1998 *Allt är möjligt* published a handbook in media criticism which on one hand contains an analysis of the clichés figuring in the noise of mass media, and on the other hand gives concrete suggestions for how to act as a consumer when for instance you find H&M's advertising pillars tiresome and sexist or when you are disgusted by the way characters are portrayed in the TV-soaps. Now *Allt är möjligt* has also prepared a starter pack for media critics which among other things contains action postcards and stickers and which gives a short instruction of how to see through the media noise. *Allt är möjligt* started as a discussion group among journalists but these days it has grown to a network for media critics, which can be entered by anyone. As a member you will get a newsletter four times a year among other things. The association also arranges lectures at schools and work places.

### **More info:**

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# Mission statement of

## The Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs

The Swedish Parliament's youth policy goals are that youth in Sweden should be given the pre-requisites to lead independent lives, that they should have real influence, and that society should avail itself of the resources that youths have to offer. The National Board of Youth Affairs is a government agency that collaborates with others to achieve these goals.

- we co-ordinate follow-up of central and local government initiatives for youth.
- we monitor development, analyse and propose measures to improve living conditions for youth.
- we work to encourage regeneration of youth activities organised by local government and organisations.
- we are responsible for the EU Youth Programme and other forms of international collaborative youth initiatives.
- we allocate public funds to youth organisations.
- we disseminate information and generate public opinion on youth policy issues.
- we spread civic information via the Ungdomskanalen web site.

Our target groups are primarily decision-makers and people working with youth issues.



## The Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs

[www.ungdomsstyrelsen.se](http://www.ungdomsstyrelsen.se)

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