Challenging gender: Normalization and beyond

Ed Siv Fahlgren
Forum for Gender Studies (FGV) is an interdisciplinary and intercampus platform from which to initiate and co-ordinate Gender Studies at Mid Sweden University. FGV shall contribute to creating a productive research environment, and the activities of FGV shall encompass the entire university. This research environment has created a network of national and international researchers called MING, The Mid Sweden International Network on Gender Studies. We are very happy to be able to publish here, as work-in-progress, some of the talks and presentations that the network members have given at the network meetings that have taken place in 2009 and 2010.
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Acknowledgements

The research programme Challenging Gender at Umeå University with Mid Sweden University as a partner was awarded the Swedish Research Council’s funding for Centres of Gender Excellence 2007–2011. The study of gender is a dynamic and growing research field which often challenges traditional forms of knowledge production. These challenges are also directed at its own activities – hence the title of this research program. One of the five themes, Challenging Normalization Processes, has its base in the interdisciplinary Forum for Gender Studies at Mid Sweden University. Its focus is on cultural normalization processes: the demands for conformity and sameness and how technologies of power create boundaries which define “them” and “us” within a wide variety of social institutions.

One of the most important objectives of this program has been to increase the internationalization of Swedish gender research. Thus two international networks were founded at Mid Sweden University; The MING network (The Mid Sweden international network on gender studies, financed by Mid Sweden University, Department of social work and Department of health science) and FlickForsk (The international network for girlhood studies, financed by RJ). This book presents, as work in progress, some of the presentations that have taken place within the MING network during 2009 and 2010 and the joint network meeting with MING and FlickForsk 2009. I have chosen to present the papers as a discussion taking place within the theoretical framework of Challenging normalization processes.

The book will be published and delivered for the international conference “Challenging gender – normalization and beyond” at Mid Sweden University in September 2011. This conference will end the research project Challenging normalization processes, and one of its purpose is to gather once again all of our international contacts. But there is also a beyond. We want this conference to be the start of both a broader and more focused international collaboration and networking. We also hope to be able to take the next step in theorizing normalization processes within the neoliberal welfare state.

I would like to acknowledge here Professor Britt-Marie Thurén for carefully checking all manuscripts and making useful suggestions and Mats Johansson for all the help with formatting the book. But of course my greatest appreciation goes to the contributors of this book, thank you for sharing your work-in-progress-papers with us.

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1 Introduction:
Challenging gender – normalization and beyond

Siv Fahlgren

Normalization is a contested concept. The post-war era could be seen as an era of inclusion and conformity especially in welfare states such as Sweden, and the role of the welfare state was seen as a possibility to intervene to decrease social inequalities and achieve social justice (Fraser & Olson, 2008; Young, 1999). It implied active interventions designed to assist those who lacked access to the resources necessary for what was conceptualized as living a “normal” life. Normalization here took on the meaning of the right to live a “normal” life, to be treated as “normal”, and thus defined the normal as something common, desirable and achievable for all (Lindqvist & Nygren, 2006; Piuva, 2005).

During the last decades of the 20th century, the view on normalization as unproblematic in its aim for inclusiveness was challenged. Some reactions to the quest for normalization were expressed as mistrust of the harmonious society and its strategies to bring about adaptation. Questions were raised such as: Might it in fact be healthy to be regarded as deviant in a society as sick as the current one? And by the way, what was the ideal behind the norm, and who had created it? Both activists and theorists have pointed to the fact that all normalization processes also depend on and produce exclusions and deviations.

The critique of normalization since the 1970s has now been superseded to some extent by neoliberalism and its ideological representation of society as a featureless market. In welfare states in neoliberal times, the responsibility for achieving normalization has descended from the level of the state and political movements to the level of individuals. Individual freedom and responsibility have become central mantras of neoliberal governmentality. Even though the intention may be to promote participative agency among citizens through choice and taking own responsibility, these mantras reflect a shifting focus from inclusivity to exclusivity (Connell, 2008; Mulinari, 2011; Olofsdotter, 2011; Schmauch, 2011; Young, 1999). Thus normalization processes in a neoliberal time operate not only to create an integrating and equalizing context but also to exclude certain groups of people, and produce a structural inequality that in recent years in Sweden has been discussed under the term of “utanförskap” or outsiderhood (Fahlgren, Johansson & Mulinari, 2011; Mulinari, 2011; Olofsdotter, 2011; Schmauch, 2011).

With the advent of neoliberalism, the norms and hierarchies governing the processes of normalization tend to be hidden, and the processes themselves become mystified as nothing but the outcome of free individual choice (Gillander Gådin, 2011; Johansson, 2011; Schmauch, 2011). Through this mystifying opaqueness, the
normalization processes of today are given a different power. The simple dichotomies of within/without, included/excluded, belonging/not belonging seem to describe a social reality, while their simplified reductionism works to hinder incisive questions being asked about the hierarchies, values and power relations that produce and uphold a normalized gender order. To resist becomes difficult, if not impossible, since what people “normally do” cloaks that “normal doing” in a fog of invisibilization that suffocates any form of protest (Gillander Gådin, 2011; Griffin, 2011, p.viii; Johansson, 2011; Pease, 2011). This tendency of normalization processes to obscure their functioning and mask social processes is most evident when the dichotomy of inside/outside replaces all other distinctions of class, race/ethnicity and gender (Fahlgren, Johansson & Mulinari, 2011). This mechanism creates a serious challenge to gender and feminist theories, a challenge not yet given enough attention.

Within the research project “Challenging normalization processes” (CNP) we have used normalization as a central analytical tool in order to start grasping the processes within the neoliberal Swedish welfare state that define and produce what is considered “normal”, “natural” or right, and at the same time, produce what could be called a civilized oppression (Harvey, 1999) through the production of “outsiderhood”. While “the normal” and normalization are the objects of ongoing theorization in Sweden (e.g. Martinsson & Reimers, 2008; Mattsson, 2005; Piuva, 2005; Sandell, 2001; Svensson, 2007), our focus on normalization processes has enabled us to see phenomena as being just as contradictory, polysemic and historically loaded as the concept of the normal itself. It is clear that the forces of normalization are always present and always carry unwanted consequences even in their most apparently benign forms (Fahlgren & Johansson, 2010; Fahlgren, Johansson & Mulinari, 2011; Fahlgren & Sawyer, 2011).

In this introductory chapter I will discuss and outline the theoretical concept of normalization and other concepts that the discussion of normalization processes have come to depend on, and how the research group CNP at Mid Sweden University has used it for gender challenging research. Around this research group, a network of national and international researchers has been created called MING; The Mid Sweden International Network on Gender studies. We are very happy to be able to publish here, as work-in-progress, some of the presentations that these network members have given at the network meetings that have taken place in 2009 and 2010. On one occasion we had a joint network meeting with the second international gender research network at Mid Sweden University; FlickForsk! The international network for girlhood studies, so we are also presenting some papers from that occasion.

**“The normal” as the common, and the common as “the normal”**

Aiming at challenging normalization processes from an intersectional perspective, our first questions were: What is “the normal”? How does it relate to norms? And

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1 “Utanförskap”; a word frequently used by the conservative government in Sweden since 2006.
what is the meaning(s) of normalization?

“The normal” may refer, first, to the ordinary, and to normalize something thus becomes a matter of making or considering something to be common and therefore normal, or something has simply become so common that it has become normal. Katja Gillander Gådin (2011) has discussed for example how sexual harassment in elementary school, although it is condemned in legislation, may continue because it has become so common that it has been normalized as a part of a normalized gender order at schools. In other words, a common practice may become so normalized that it becomes invisible, and thus even legitimimized, even though it is condemned at the legislative and political level.

In her chapter Reflections on sexism at school on the basis of a research project conducted in Northwest Russia and Northern Finland, focusing on school-children’s experiences of physical sexual harassment in the schools of North Finland and Northwest Russia, Vappu Sunnari also shows that physical sexual harassment is common in schools in the northern peripheries of Europe. On the basis of the children’s answers to the question whether they had been touched or molest at school or on the way to school, she considers that at least one in every five of the Finnish and one in every four of the Russian girls had experienced physical sexual harassment at school or on the way to school. More than one in every ten of the Russian boys and a little less than one in every twenty of the Finnish boys had partly corresponding experiences. Thus girls constituted the vast majority of the victims of physical sexual harassment and boys constituted the vast majority of perpetrators in a gendered power pattern at school.

From normality as the common to norms and normative positions

Still the meaning of normality is evasive and tends to slide easily from the ordinary (or statistically normal distribution) by way of constituting the opposite of deficiency, deviation or social problem to the valued ideal, or how something ought to be when it is applied in social situations. Such shifts are for example obvious in social work with dysfunctional families. In a study of a Swedish home for family care, that is, a home for investigating families with social problems where the parents’ ability to provide care for their children is in doubt, Fahlgren (2011) shows how certain concepts of time are normalized by being taken for granted as providing the common, neutral grounds for “normal” social life. At the same time, this makes the values and the power relations they imply, such as those of gender, race/ethnicity and class, invisible. This normalization makes time a part of institutional disciplining, which means that certain social practices are legitimized while others are discredited in a normative way.

The normative shift also becomes obvious when Mulinari (2011) explores the construction of a “normal birth” and of a “normal woman/mother”. She finds that what the Swedish healthcare system demands of women when they are giving birth is

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2 A theme within Challenging gender, which is a project at the Center of gender excellence, Umeå University, financed by the Swedish Research Council, 2007-2011.
that they are “lagom”; a Swedish concept that may be translated as adequate or “just enough but not too much”. The staff wants pregnant women to be knowledgeable and engaged in the birthing process, but not too knowledgeable or too engaged since this would make them demanding and disrespectful of the routines of the maternity ward, and this in turn could be seen as representing an important aspect of the limits of agency in neoliberal time.

Shifting the meaning of normality from something that is (a fact) to how something should be (something normative including values) is always done within a context of power. In such a process facts and values are brought together in a comprehensible and powerful manner that is difficult to see through (Hacking, 1990; Sandell, 2001). These shifts also have political implications because in the tension between various discourses that which is or should be “normal” (and thus at the same time that which is regarded as “deviant”) is constantly being negotiated. Normality may be said to have replaced earlier notions of “human nature” that were connected to the enlightenment (Hacking, 1990) and thus normalization could be said to constitute a new power order among other power orders within society (Foucault, 1990; 1991).

The concept “norm” recalls theories of social order such as that of Talcott Parsons and of society as a normative and morally harmonious community with shared values and where integration and adaptation are stressed. But “norm” has also become a central concept in gender research, for example talking about man as the norm of society (Hirdman, 1988), although you may say that in gender studies there has been insufficient consideration of the derivation of the concept (Sandell & Mulinari, 2006). According to a sociological dictionary a norm consists of “prescriptions serving as common guidelines for social action”. Following the norm is considered “correct” and “proper” but may, even so, not always be the most frequently occurring or common pattern (Abercrombie, Hill, & Turner, 1994).

Norms, for example concerning gender, sexuality, race/ethnicity and class, are all created within hegemonic discourses and privileged practices. This encourages us to see norms in relation to power, competition and conflict in terms of historical context rather than with a focus on harmonious social cohesion and consensus (Connell, 2008; Lundström, 2007; Sandell & Mulinari, 2006). That which is normalized – and thus comes to appear as “normal” – arises out of social conflicts and struggles about how the world should be narrated. As Anders Johansson states in his chapter in this book, no individual or culture can thus legitimate their values or practices from the fact that they are “normal”, or “that’s the way it is” or “one cannot include everything or everybody”. Of course one has to draw the line somewhere, but still normality can never be the escape from the responsibility of having drawn the line (cf . Fahlgren & Johansson, 2010). That is one reason why such normalization processes have to be critically scrutinized and challenged.

In the re-reading of a university textbook, Fahlgren and Sawyer (2011) have been able to show how a normalized, neutral, unmarked author position is assumed, pre-
sented as a common “we” by for example identifying “women researchers” and “feminist” points of departure as different. Reading the book it is possible to feel how this unmarked author/reader “we”-position also appears desirable and morally superior - without this being said. This has been done for example by presenting gender research in a special section of the book and as a perspective on the discipline, thus privileging a particular non-perspective story line. “The man” can thus be regarded as the normalized, taken for granted position from where the world is normally viewed and judged. From this position, norms of gender (as well as sexuality, race/ethnicity and class) are normalized as well as silently privileged, and women are given the position of “the other” (Fahlgren & Sawyer, 2011, cf. Pease, 2010; 2011).

As “the normal” shifts between different socio-cultural contexts and historical times, normality is something that must be continually achieved in relation to the context. This means that it is not possible to relax in a condition of normality; being normal requires constant vigilance. Belonging to the normal, then, tends to give security in that one is not deviant or different, not “a problem” - one fits in - at least here and now (Fahlgren, 2005; Svensson, 2007). As social beings, we are all vulnerable to the risk of being treated as “the other”. This idea of vulnerability is closely connected to emotions of for example fear, anger, grief, shame and disgust. It is hard to imagine any social norm without appeals to emotions. Such emotions are responses to this vulnerability, and they are used in our daily lives to encourage the stigmatization of “the others” – and at the same time in the treatment of for example the disabled to discourage habits of stigmatization in the name of human dignity (Nussbaum, 2004).

Thus, within processes of normalization we are protected from some kinds of emotions to be able to feel that we belong – but subject to other kinds to learn to know the boundary between normality and abnormality, between belonging and “outsiderhood”. But this boundary is fluid and varies in terms of, for example, time, place, gender, ethnicity and class in ways that one can never be quite sure of (Hacking, 1990; Svensson, 2007). Upholding this vulnerability and uncertainty can be regarded as an important part of the power of normalization. It is in this need to belong that gender orders gather some of their force (Fahlgren, 2005).

This constant shifting, governed by power orders, will also have implications for research. The interesting thing to study will be the processes that (re)creates and produces normality, privilege, sameness, the normalization processes. Research questions of interest will be for example: How is the normalization praxis formed through intersecting power relations such as gender, class, ethnicity, race, sexuality...? What is happening? In what ways, and where? And with what result?
From normality to normalization; What does the normalization process looks like?

Normality as such is seldom dealt with either in scientific research or in institutional practices within the welfare state. When normality is produced this instead takes place through the naming and ordering of “others”. Normalization may therefore be seen as a product of the way in which various deviations and “others” are created. People’s life conditions and identities are established at the interstices of multidimensional power relationships. I therefore contend that it is important to ask how sex/gender, “race”/ethnicity, class and age are incorporated into and work together within practices of normalization (Fahlgren & Sawyer, 2011; Sandell & Mulinari, 2006).

This is shown for example in how human beings in general are spoken of in gender-neutral terms while women are pointed out as gendered (Fahlgren & Sawyer, 2011). “Swedishness” is implicitly created as “the normal” position in ethnically discriminating narratives of “the other” (Mulinari, 2011; Olofsdotter, 2011; Schmauch, 2011). Discussions about immigrant women, third world women or working class women provide Swedish middle-class women (like many of the researchers within this project including myself) with an identity of “normal” womanhood (cf Olofsdotter, 2011). It is often in relation to descriptions of the working class and its problems that the middle-class is constituted and normalized. In most of these narratives heterosexuality is an unquestioned underlying “normality”. The “normal” is thus silently established only in relation to the not normal (de los Reyes, Molina, Mulinari, 2002; Hacking, 1990; Piuva, 2005; Rosenberg, 2002; Sandell & Mulinari, 2006). Normality thus comes to be seen as obvious (unexpressed, uncategorized, colourless, genderless) since its meaning is understood, or appears implicitly, as an antithesis within such normalization processes. This makes “the normal” very difficult both to catch hold of and to question, but also important to challenge since it often turns out to be an (unearned) privileged position (Pease, 2010; 2011).

Thus normalization is a process that simultaneously produces “the normal” and a number of deviant forms, and where “the normal” is both the most regulated and the most unstable (Foucault, 1990; 1991). It works both through feelings of belonging, identity and coherence through the shaping of similarity (inclusion), and through differences and discrimination (exclusion). In this way, an integral part of discrimination praxis is an unquestioned normalization that privileges “sameness” (Essed, 2004) and silently creates privileged positions (Pease, 2010). Understanding privileged positions (eg. Swedishness, manhood, whiteness) as positions in a landscape of power makes the protection of these positions more intelligible (Mattsson, 2005, p. 146; Olofsdotter, 2011; Schmauch, 2011). The concept of the normal is thus always two-sided in its political implications; at the same time enabling and suppressing, productive and limiting (Foucault, 1990; 1991).
Normalization processes within institutions

In this way, normalization processes can be regarded as ongoing power plays that carve out particular (im)possible positions and negotiating spaces, which vary according to time and space. Social institutions, such as schools, healthcare, social services and others, constitute the physical and social framework of the power play. People’s actions, practices, identity and thoughts are shaped and limited in these processes. Available positions are created through normalization, inclusion and privileging – but at the same time also through discrimination and “othering”. (Fahlgren, 2011; Gillander Gådin, 2007; 2011; Mattsson, 2005; Olofsdotter, 2011; Sandell, 2001). In such normalization and at the same time discrimination processes within institutions, new categories of “us” and “others” are continually produced.

Thus welfare institutions also reinforce discriminating structures by interweaving normative notions of gender, “race”/ethnicity and class. Part of the power of this normalization process lies in the possibility of “the normal” to appear neutral, taken for granted, thus making the power relation within it invisible. It is often not obvious that gender, ethnicity, sexuality and class are central aspects of social relations according to which institutions create their categories. Such aspects can only be indirectly found in the way they create categories of social problems and illness (Fahlgren, 2011; Mulinari, 2011; Sandell & Mulinari, 2006; Schmauch 2011). Values and norms are always already a part of the making of differences in the most basic sense. It is important to be aware of this in order to challenge normalization processes in a structural sense rather than in terms of individualized critique. If these power relations are not made visible, notions of the “normal” may be reproduced and thus come to legitimize various kinds of discrimination and oppression.

To make these power relations visible and to question the normalization processes they create must be important for everyone who is interested in social change. Looking at the gendered dimensions of school violence, Nan Stein argues in her chapter Teaching children and youth about sexual harassment, gender violence and bullying in schools, that one way to prevent the normalization of sexual harassment in schools is to resist the temptation to speak in euphemisms, for example by calling everything “bullying”, and instead talk accurately about behaviours – if it is sexual harassment, call it that; if it is homophobia, call it that. She suggests we should actually notice the behaviours, comment on them, intervene, and make corrections accordingly instead of normalizing them. It is also advantageous if we can frame these topics as components of violence prevention and as an integral part of creating a safe school, she argues.

Challenging normalized knowledge positions

Researchers of normalization processes themselves participate in their object of study and for this reason it is important to situate one’s own research, challenging
normalized knowledge positions. An unquestioned, neutral (normal?) researcher, who does not describe his/her point of departure, playing what Haraway (1985) refers to as “the God-trick”, might appear to be entitled to make wide generalizations and knowledge claims. This kind of normalizing view may be extremely powerful in moulding a field and may be very difficult to question (cf Fahlgren & Johansson, 2010; Fahlgren & Sawyer, 2011). Expressed ideologies that reproduce colour-blindness, gender and class neutrality and the like may in this way conceal how power differentials are reproduced. Situating knowledge production could be, as Sandell (2001, p. 54) writes, a way to bring the viewers themselves into purview.

Beverly Leipert describes, in her chapter Rural and remote women and resilience, a feminist theoretical approach called photovoice, here developed specially for research on rural women. Cameras were provided to the research participants and they were asked to take pictures of their social and health promotion needs as well as resources in their rural communities. The pictures they themselves chose to show were then discussed in focus groups. At the end a Booklet of Findings was provided to each participant including a summary of the study findings that they could use to illustrate to policymakers and local officials some of the health promotion challenges that needed to be addressed in their community. Leipert describes how participating in the study enhanced the women’s lives in different ways, how they had learned and grown and how this research assisted women to develop abilities and perspectives that may help them to resilience.

In a collective biography work done within the research group Challenging Normalization Processes (Fahlgren, Gillander Gådin, Giritli Nygren, Johansson, Söderberg, 2011), one of the researchers told a memory of when she had first listened to Beverly Leipert telling about this photovoice research:

*I’m listening to a presentation that I’m not really interested in, looking at different images of rural women’s health. Suddenly, I see; in the picture I can see a feeling. I can feel the desolation. I can see the hospital that is no longer there. I can see the fear of not having a hospital to go to when I am old and sick. The further it goes, the more I find myself caught; looking, listening, and feeling. This is really challenging; this I want to do, too* (Fahlgren Gillander Gådin, Giritli Nygren, Johansson, Söderberg, 2011, p. 109).

Having seen the title of the paper, this researcher had no great hopes, but she did turn up, if mostly to show good will. Expectations such as these stem from normalized notions of what is reasonable and productive within the limits of one’s own discipline; she did not expect anything interesting to come out of another discipline. Suddenly the photographs and the story caught her attention and she realized that the research being described was challenging, and something she would like to try, too. All that we take for granted in research in our own particular field can suddenly be revealed to be convention. *It could be different.* After Leipert’s presentation, not just
one but several of the researchers at Mid Sweden University have taken an interest in and tried this photovoice research method.

Katarina Giritli Nygren and Ulrika Schmauch also discuss, in their chapter *Transcending subject–object dualism: Challenging normalized power relations in research practice*, the possibility of developing a more inclusive methodology for feminist research by using photovoice. The participants in their research project, recently arrived migrant women (and some men), were asked to tell the story of their everyday life through the use of photography. They were asked to tell about their experiences of places where they felt secure (trygga) and happy in their new town, Sundsvall. Giritli Nygren and Schmauch discuss the challenges they faced as researchers in meeting a group of people who lacked a common language and did not understand Swedish. They realized, with embarrassment, how dependent their research position was on the ability to use language to show that they as researchers were worth trusting – and that they had the (peculiar?) right to read their lives. In this way, they became aware of how dependent they were on the normalized research position they, at the same time, wanted to challenge. Taking the theoretical standpoint of “migrant women” also turned out to be problematic since they, simultaneously, wanted to challenge the understanding of migrant women as a social group rather than individuals with many differences. So they ended up in a self-reflexive question, asking if they have challenged anything else but themselves.

Another subject and knowledge position, that of The Girl, is problematized by Annelie Bränström Öhman in her chapter *Daughter-girls, sister-girls, mom-girls and old lady-girls: Thoughts on subjectivity and reflexivity in girlhood-studies*. At a conference about children’s literature dedicated to the memory of L M Montgomery, the world famous author of the *Anne of Green Gables*- and *Emily*-books, she started to suspect that there was a kind of silent agreement among the women that they all had permission to enter the *As If*-realm of fiction for as long as the conference lasted, saying: “as girls we all know that”, as if they as women could all be girls again. Referring to the feminist debates of the 1970s and 1980s that scrutinized any claim of a “universal” Woman, her question is if the same self-reflexive and meta-theoretical attention is yet waiting to be addressed to the “universal” Girl? The *becoming* rather than *being* nature of womanhood that Beauvoir pointed out, should that not go for girlhood as well?

Re-reading research and university course material has been still another way of challenging normalized knowledge positions and production within the CNP-research group. Fahlgren and Johansson (2010) have analyzed for example how a university textbook, whose aim as a genre is to represent the “normal” state of a discipline, has come to be conditioned by discursive circumstances beyond the control of individual authors. Although pluralism and tolerance was the explicit aims of the editors of the book, the consequent way of presenting certain research methods and theories as *perspectives* open for choice, came to hide normalized existing hierarchies...
of power within the discipline. Pluralism and discrimination could thus actually coexist.

In his chapter *Reading as transgressing “the normal”: On the importance of literary reading for social research* in this book, Anders Johansson outlines how to question “the normal” in relation to a discussion between Jacques Derrida and J.R Searle. Research methods can become limitations that conceal more than they reveal, he argues, limiting the understanding to what is seen as contextually “normal” within the paradigm one as a researcher belongs to. A normalized reading could be a reading of what *ought* to have been written, normally, instead of what the text might actually state. Deconstructive reading, according to Johansson, has the ambition of contesting the normal ways of interpreting, trying to be at the same time “unexcusing, unaccusing, attentive and situationally productive through dismantling”, citing Spivak (1993, p. 146). A philosophical, poetic way of reading that insists on questioning socially and culturally produced meaning without accepting any simple relativism. A kind of reading Johansson has been exploring by re-reading research (2011).

... and beyond

Far away from the categorical differences of “outsiderhood” created in neoliberal normalization processes, with difference lying in the other and normality in oneself, Bronwyn Davies, in her chapter *Listening: a radical pedagogy*, develops a pedagogy that begins with listening. It is not a question of familiar concepts of listening for meaning or to judge the correctness of the other’s understanding. Instead she opens up the concept of listening, referring to listening as an active process of opening oneself to the resonances of the other that takes one beyond the already known. And she asks questions about a pedagogical ethical responsibility in relation to this way of listening: “Do principals and teachers have an ethical responsibility to be open to continuous difference in a Deleuzian sense, and hence to the possibility of change in themselves, and the events they create between them?” A radical pedagogy, but also a radical approach to difference in which difference comes about through a continuous process of becoming different, of differenciation. It is a form of being-in-relation-to-the-other that comes from a gift of listening and openness to the not-yet-known. Indeed a challenging thought in relation to normalization theory.

If Bronwyn Davies’ chapter exemplifies the challenges in listening beyond normalization, Eva Söderberg’s chapter *From picture – to subject: Some thoughts about studying the function of speaking and clothed animals in children’s literature* shows the possibility of reading a picture both with and against – or beyond - normalized expectation. She analyzes a picture of a relatively conventional teddy bear with a typical appearance for such bears, following a kind of “teddy norm”, but the clarity and the conventionality conceal within them ambiguities that make many different readings and interpretations possible. Letting other people look at the picture, she
finds that they read the picture according to normalized influences from different disciplinary backgrounds and personal experiences, but also how the picture itself seems to challenge a normalized reading of a teddy bear. By playing with well-known motifs by breaking loose recognizable elements from their conventional settings, shifting them about and creating new meanings, we see the familiar bear and at the same time we see something else, something more, Söderberg writes. There is for example a disruption of seniority in the picture where the normal order – adult, child, soft toy – has been inverted. The soft toy has taken the position of “adult” – and the adults, on the other hand, and even the children, have in a way been positioned as soft toys in his arms. The bear has been given a powerful position as narrator, not as a “narrative moment” – something that is told to someone – as it used to be; still, his mouth is shut and he tells nothing. The appearance of a blue dressed teddy bear boy can all of a sudden appear to have similarities with an Anna-self-third motif, i.e. Maria’s mother Anna, Maria herself and the third generation, Jesus. A teddy bear challenging normalization processes.

References


25-45.


Part 1:

Challenging "the normal" and normalization process
Reflections on sexism at school on the basis of a research project conducted in Northwest Russia and Northern Finland

Vappu Sunnari

Introduction
Violence in schools has been a much discussed and much researched topic during the recent decades. Traditional research on school violence has focused on the amount and forms of violence and scholars have tried to answer the question of why a person is violent. The results obtained inform us that school violence is common, although it varies in extent between schools and school classes (Blaya & Debarbieux, 2008; Salmivalli, 1998; Smith et al.). Typical reasons named for violence have been socio-economic, marital – like divorces and abuse of alcohol in the family – and particular individuals’ special aggressiveness. Through dichotomy-based presuppositions traditional school violence research has included a tendency to consolidate essence-based presuppositions of violence (Olweus, 1999; Salmivalli, 1998; Smith et al., 1999). The ways in which schools produce or maintain - maybe even foster - violent behaviour have hardly been researched at all in these settings. Also the questions on whether issues connected to doing gender and producing and reproducing sexual identities are influential in school violence have been mainly excluded from the traditional school violence research and discussions. This is the topic area we have focused on in our research group in Women’s Studies, Oulu University. As a component of it we researched middle childhood age children’s experiences of physical sexual harassment at school.

To gather information about such complex topics as physical sexual harassment is challenging at least for terminological reasons. Sexual harassment is something that makes you feel uncomfortable about who you are because of the sex you are (Larkin, 1994).

A young woman gave the above definition of sexual harassment to June Larkin while she conducted research focused on young British women’s experiences of sexual harassment. The definition points out three features that are prevalent in most individual level conceptualizations of sexual harassment: (1) the act creates at least an embarrassed, uncomfortable feeling in a person who has been harassed, (2) the experience of uneasiness is extensive because the act often touches, at the same time, various dimensions of one’s existence – like the body, identity, social relations, the right of self-regulation, (3) one’s gender and sexuality will be used as a special means in producing the experience of unpleasantness. The definition does not explicitly point out two other pertinent features existing on the individual level of sexual
harassment, namely the harasser’s lack of care for the other and his/her violent use of power and culturally maintained images of sexuality and gender (Herbert, 1989; McKinnon, 1979; Thomas & Kitzinger, 1997; Timmerman & Bajema, 1999).

One of the central means of discrimination is what researchers call control over. Carrie Herbert (1989) divides the control over practices into female-controlling-practices and societal-controlling-practices. In her book, “Talking of Silence. The Sexual harassment of Schoolgirls” (1989, p. 147), Herbert suggests that sexual harassment as a female-controlling practice serves to keep women in a particular position vis-à-vis men especially through two mechanisms, namely the potential for being violated sexually and the experience of being sexually violated. Herbert (1989, p. 155) thinks that silence and suppression are fundamental phenomena that make it possible for sexual harassment to continue although the awareness of its existence has increased.

Herbert discusses sexual harassment as a male practice against women as do Catharine MacKinnon (1979) and Lin Farley (1978). Several studies conducted on sexual harassment confirm that actions that are conceptualized as sexual harassment are found mainly in male behaviour against women although not totally (e.g. Duncan, 1999; Dunne, 2000; Renold, 2000; Timmerman & Bajema 1999). Larry May and John Hughes (1992) from the US consider that sexual harassment causes two types of harm for women, discrimination and coercion, but only coercion for men: When the issue is about women, the discrimination is always social –meaning the discrimination of women more generally – in addition to being individual. But when the issue is about men, the social discrimination of men as a group does not occur.

In regards to the question of whether sexuality is always a component in sexual harassment, researchers have varying answers. Typically the answers include new conceptualizations, especially recently. Lynn Fitzgerald (1996) uses the terms sexual harassment and gender harassment. She uses the term sexual harassment in cases where the essence of harassment lies in the areas of sexuality. She defines gender harassment as being such verbal conduct which includes stereotypical and discriminatory attitudes like epithets, slurs, taunts, display or distribution of obscene materials, or gender-based hazing and threatening, intimidating and hostile acts (Fitzgerald 1996, p. 51). Carrie Herbert (1989) and Debbie Epstein (1996, 1997) have made a distinction between sexual and sexist harassment.

Like Fitzgerald, Epstein suggests that the term sexual harassment should be reserved to harassment explicitly sexual in form while sexist harassment should be used to refer to other harassment and discrimination based on gender and sexual orientation, and maintained by the hetero-normative culture (Epstein, 1996, p. 203). In terms of hetero/sexist harassment, Epstein argues that there is not any univocal

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With the term we I refer to the team that worked for the research project. In addition to myself, Tuija Huuki, Anu Tallavaara, Tatiana Dyachenko, Alexandra Anissimova, Irina Drembach, Olga Tillman, Olga Ilgunova, Irina Grunicheva, Marina Repina, Auli Suorsa, Sari Nyman and Jokke Karjalainen participated in it.
form of it, but rather the forms of harassment experienced shape and are shaped by the particular social locations of those who are harassed (Epstein, 1996, p. 209).

One of the central components in the definitions of sexual harassment is that it is characterized by the abuse of power. It has been argued that when the issue is about sexual harassment, it is also always about an imbalance of power. Focusing on power has brought forth a discussion about whether the harasser always has power over the harassed. For example, Linda LeMoncheck (2001, p. 266–267) argues that much of men’s sexual harassment of female peers is motivated not by women having less power than men and being vulnerable, but by their apparent power to threaten men by their presence as intellectual or workplace competitors. Kathleen M. Rospenda and her co-researchers (1998) have introduced the term contra power sexual harassment to define sexual harassment perpetrated by a person of a lower position towards a person of a higher position in order to exercise a counter power. For most of the children, the whole discussion about the term might be unknown and so might the term as a whole.

**Material and methods**

In our research, we focused on physical sexual harassment as a mistreatment that threatens the realization of full citizenship, safety, dignity and equality of girls and boys at school. 1738 children aged 11 to 12 years from 36 northern Finnish and 22 northwestern Russian school classes answered a set of questions concerning their experiences of physical sexual harassment at school or on the way to school.

We collected the data with a questionnaire. But because of the problems connected with the term, the term we used in the questionnaire was not that of physical sexual harassment, but groping. We asked the children to write down answers to the question: “Have you been groped or touched in a way you do not like, at school or on the way to school? If yes, by whom?” The children were also requested to give details of the event and of its consequences for themselves and the perpetrator. The exact formulations of the further questions were: “If you answered YES to the previous question, please tell us, a) whether the perpetrator was a girl, a woman, a boy or a man. b) Please tell us what happened.”

The Finnish research participants were from seven urban school classes and twenty seven rural school classes from four municipalities. The city schools were chosen so that they represented middle class environments, ownership-based living environments and more indigent tenement environments. Data collected from countryside schools were gathered in all comprehensive schools of the municipalities chosen for the study. In each school we concentrated on the sixth-graders, girls and boys between 11 and 12 years of age. The Russian research participants were from twenty-two comprehensive city schools from four cities, chosen according to corresponding criteria. The data in both countries were collected between November 2001 and May 2002.
While asking the children to tell whether they had experienced physical sexual harassment, whether the harassment had caused consequences, and to whom the child had told about the mistreatment, we used ready-made yes/no answer categories. But we also asked the children to describe a case of physical harassment they had experienced and its consequences. Here the children were encouraged to tell, in their own words, what they had experienced.

For epistemological reasons, in addition to ethical ones, we did not try to remain anonymous to the children. We went to the school classes, informed the children about the research project and its aims, emphasized children’s importance and independency in the research and supported their empowered orientation towards the questionnaire. In the frame of children’s independency, we told the children that everybody’s own voice is important, and that the research will be conducted in order to develop means to decrease mistreatment in children’s mutual relationships in school. As a whole, we tried to base the gathering of data on mutual respect and justice between the researchers and the school children, and we continued that orientation also when analyzing the data.

The questions were answered during a school hour. In an aim to strengthen the intention that the children would report their own, personal experiences of the issues researched, we gave each child an envelope to put the questionnaire in when they had completed it. We considered that important also from the point of view of taking care of children’s privacy. The children returned the envelopes with the completed questionnaires to the researcher.

Main results
The research indicates that physical sexual harassment is common in schools even in the northern peripheries of Europe. But in addition to explicit groping in the form of physical sexual harassment, Russian children wrote about violence they had experienced on a more general level. Furthermore, it was common for the Russian children to say that they did not want to describe the details of the experienced physical harassment. The silence of the details gave a message that the experience had hurt their intimacy deeply. Because of that, we had to group the groping descriptions and mentions into several categories:

(a) Mentions not having been groped;
(b) Mentions groping without describing details;
(c) Descriptions of groping as physical sexualized bullying / violence;
(d) Descriptions of groping that explicitly do not include a sexualized character;
(e) I do not want to reveal the details –cases; (= Don’t want –cases)
(f) Positive touching;
(g) Other.
Table 1. The amounts and the percentages of experienced groping in the different categories constructed on groping

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Russian</th>
<th>Finnish</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>girls</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pure No</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pure Yes</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explicitly PSH*</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not explicitly</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSH</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t want</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive touch</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total**</td>
<td>532</td>
<td>481</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*PHS = physical sexual harassment
** Total = Total amount of children who responded the question.

On the basis of the children’s answers to the question whether they had been groped at school or on the way to school, and on the basis of our analysis of the case-descriptions the children wrote, I consider that at least one fifth of the Finnish and one fourth of the Russian girls experienced physical sexual harassment at school. One tenth of the Russian boys and one twentieth of the Finnish boys had partly corresponding experiences.

In almost ninety percent of the cases where a Finnish or Russian girl described an experience of physical harassment, the perpetrator was a boy; and even in eighteen percent of the cases where a Russian girl wrote about physical sexual harassment, she said that one of the perpetrators, or the perpetrator, had been an adult man or woman. A couple of Finnish girls also reported having an experience of physical sexual harassment perpetrated by an adult person. In all these three cases, the perpetrator had been a man. In four cases of experienced physical sexual harassment by Finnish girls, the perpetrator had been a girl. The same was the case for two of the Russian girls. Additionally, in five cases, a Russian girl had been a perpetrator alongside a boy or a man – or in a group.

In the cases in which a boy had been harassed, the picture of the harasser was more diverse, regardless of whether the boy was Russian or Finnish. A boy’s perpetrator was in some cases a girl, but another possibility was that the perpetrator was a boy. In some cases, the harasser of a Russian boy was a group of boys and girls. The pic-
ture is very similar in the ‘Don’t want’ –cases: most often the perpetrator of a girl was a boy, either individually or together with some other person(s). The perpetrators of the explicit cases of physical sexual harassment, and of the ‘Don’t want’–cases can be seen from Table 2 and Table 3.

Table 2. The perpetrators of the explicit cases of physical sexual harassment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondent</th>
<th>Boy %</th>
<th>Girl %</th>
<th>Man %</th>
<th>Woman %</th>
<th>Not %</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RU girl</td>
<td>42+4</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>14+5</td>
<td>10+4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>51*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RU boy</td>
<td>5+2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8+6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>18*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FI girl</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FI boy</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Some respondents said that they were harassed by more than one person.

Table 3. The perpetrators of the ‘Don’t want’ –cases

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondent</th>
<th>Boy %</th>
<th>Girl %</th>
<th>Man %</th>
<th>Woman %</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RU girl</td>
<td>37+6*</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>2+6*</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>2+1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>48</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RU boy</td>
<td>3+4*</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>8+3*</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1+1</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>17</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FI girl</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FI boy</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Boy/girl was with someone else.

The following features characterized the physical sexual harassment that the girls had experienced:
1. It happened a lot.
2. It often happened repeatedly.
3. Typically harassment had meant groping one’s buttocks.
4. The perpetrator was typically an individual boy, or a group of boys from one’s own school class.
5. Typically physical sexual harassment had been an intentional act to hurt the girl or to have fun at the cost of the girl.
6. Typically the girls reported separately that harassment was unpleasant.
7. In addition to unpleasantness, physical sexual harassment produced and maintained vulnerability, shame, fear, and hate, and in certain cases other negative con-
sequences, too.

8. Silence and difficulties to deal with details often characterized the Russian girls that had experienced physical sexual harassment.

9. The means to stop harassment were sparse and non-effective.

The following issues characterize the groping experienced by the Finnish and the Russian boys:

1. All the Finnish boys who had experienced groping wrote about separate cases without a continuation. Some of the Russian boys described physical sexual harassment that had happened repeatedly.

2. The cases of groping did not construct any common picture.

3. Only some of the case descriptions were located at school, more typically they were not.

4. There were three Finnish girls who had sexually harassed a Finnish boy and they had all kicked the boy in the crotch. In one of the cases, the harassment was very clearly a counter-act.

5. The harasser of a Finnish boy was more often another boy than a girl, whereas the harasser of the Russian boy was more often a girl than another boy.

6. Silence and difficulties to deal with details often characterized the Russian boys who had experienced physical sexual harassment (Sunnari 2010).

Conclusion

In line with previous research (Leach & Mitchell, 2006; Mandel & Shakeshaft, 2000; Mills, 2001; Terry & Hoare, 2007), physical sexual harassment was most typically, on the level of the school class, a component in disempowering girls, maintaining and reinforcing a hostile atmosphere, and stereotyping girls – or groups of girls – as sexual objects. Girls constituted the vast majority of the victims of physical sexual harassment at school and boys constituted the vast majority of perpetrators. A girl was groped in nine cases out of ten by a male classmate in both the Russian and Finnish data. If the harassed child mentioned more than one perpetrator, which was quite common for the Russian children, at least one of the harassers had been a boy. But, the boys’ harassers were not very commonly girls. The harasser of the Finnish boy was more often another boy than a girl. In the Russian data, the perpetrator was in six cases out of ten a girl alone or with somebody else. The picture of perpetrators in the cases when the child wrote that she or he did not want to tell the details of what had happened (‘Don’t want’ –cases) was in line with the picture of the perpetrators in the cases that included a more detailed case-description.

In the cases where a girl was harassed by a boy classmate, it was often possible to infer messages of sexism – the exercise of, or an attempt to exercise masculinist power over girls. Sexist messages could also be deduced from some of the cases where a boy or a girl had experienced groping by a classmate of the same gender. In boys’ mutual relationships and indeed in girls’, the heterosexist norm not to be different
in sexual terms was exceptionally strong in some school classes. Children who did not, or could not, conform to the social demands of rigid definitions of masculinity and femininity were socially terrorized, ostracized, and very clearly isolated. Furthermore, typically, in the school classes that were characterized by a strong sexist culture, the reasons for mistreatment were plentiful. In addition to gender, one could be mistreated also by being “too intelligent” or “stupid”, too small or too tall, too mature or too immature in terms of physical sexuality or by dating/not dating.

Homophobic messages could also be seen in certain cases where a boy or a girl had groped a classmate of the same gender. It is important to notice here that it was not exclusively boys that gave homophobic messages, although these characteristics were more common in boys’ texts. Homophobia is a consequence of heteronormative cultural contexts that require people to struggle against, or for, being identified by others as different (Ambjörnsson, 2004; Davison & Frank, 2006; Eliasson, 2007; Willis, 1977). But as Kevin Davison and Blye Frank (2006) argue, difference as such is not a problem, and on the contrary, it can add richness to human relationships. Difference can become problematic when defined by those within the dominant social group.

It is important to emphasize that all boys were not perpetrators of sexual harassment. Nor can one assume on the basis of this research that relationships between boys and girls were, in all the schools and school classes, marked by strong boundaries in the form of physical sexual harassment.

Sexual harassment in schools is a serious issue. It teaches limited conceptions of and orientation to cross-gender and same gender relationships, and socializes girls and boys into having a narrow, simplistic understanding of gender and of sexuality. And they reproduce social and sexual inequality and marginalization. Furthermore, sexual harassment in schools leads to disrespectful relations and limits especially girls’ but also boys’ self-expression, gender identity, and patterns of children’s mutual relating.

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2 Homophobia and violence connected with it have been very little researched in educational environments, as also Fiona Leach with her co-researchers (2006) argue. On the other hand, sexism and homophobia will in some theoretical and practice-based discussions be dealt with as synonymous. In my conceptualization, homophobia is a fear of not having a mainstream sexuality orientation or of not being seen to have a mainstream orientation in the eyes of others.
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The Falmer Press.


3 Teaching Children & Youth about Sexual Harassment, Gender Violence and Bullying in Schools

Nan Stein

The title of my chapter is about “teaching” about sexual harassment (SH), gender violence (GV) and bullying in schools. In my opinion, to **teach** about these issues is more than just talking about the kinds of classroom materials that might be used for these topics (and there is indeed a plethora of them, for better or worse). Rather, to **teach** about these issues is to also explore the larger social and legal context – the battles, the alliances, the injustices, the challenges and interpretations of rights that have given rise to new concepts, new claims as “rights.” When rights become laws, they are not fixed in perpetuity; laws are not static – rather, they are always shifting and people – whether kids, parents, school staff – are always reinterpreting laws, inventing laws, distorting laws.

Her-story

As a former middle school social studies teacher, I have stayed dedicated to the belief that there is power in the curriculum and classroom content, in the power of teaching and teachers. Thus, when I was a teacher, I spent a lot of my time writing curriculum – as a social studies teacher and a feminist, trying to fill the void from textbooks which left out the many contributions and roles that women have played in our history that were overlooked in the standard, conventional notion of “his-story.” Since leaving the wilds of the middle school classroom, for the past 30 years, my research has been on sexual harassment, gender violence and bullying in schools, and along with collaboration from teachers, I have written curriculum for teachers on these subjects.

I am a researcher who looks at the gendered dimensions of school violence – that to study school violence is not merely to focus on gangs, guns and drugs; that there are gendered dimensions to school violence, and that to make schools “gender safe” we have to create a culture that does not permit and endorse sexual harassment towards girls or boys (Stein, Tolman, Porche & Spencer, 2002). Besides research on sexual harassment, since the mid-1990s, I have conducted research on the gendered dimensions of bullying, as well as teen dating violence. Since 2005, I have had federal funding for research projects that focus on middle school students and the **precursors** to teen dating violence – that being the enactment of sexual harassment.

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in schools which is often conducted in front of one’s peers and sometimes even in front of the adults in the school. My concern is that if we permit students to engage in sexual harassment in schools, a public space, they might get the message that they can do this conduct in private, and thus we might be turning schools into training grounds for domestic violence and sexual assault.

My career as a researcher began in the late 1970’s when I worked as a civil rights specialist for the Massachusetts Department of Education (like the Ministry of Education but only for the state of Massachusetts) – “hardly a feminist research institution.” This was back in the days when we could focus on matters other than high stakes testing of students; and when civil rights in education was a robust, emerging field. My job was to help school districts comply with federal law Title IX – the sex discrimination in education law which Congress passed in 1972. Inadvertently and actually beyond the scope of my job description, I happened upon the problem of peer-to-peer sexual harassment, going on right under the nose of the staff of the Massachusetts Department of Education. It was 1978.

We had six students working for the Department of Education in a Student Service Center, right in our downtown Boston office. Their job was to answer questions that students from around the state of Massachusetts might have about their constitutional rights, such as freedom to protest, dress code disputes, as well as college financial aid information. I was not their supervisor, but it came to my attention, rather by the by, that among the four girls and two boys, one of the boys was disturbing the work environment of the other students. He would tell dirty, inappropriate jokes, brag about his real or imagined sexual conquests, and physically corner the girls, frightening them. As I learned of his conduct, I realized that his behaviors sounded similar to sexual harassment in the workplace conduct, except in this case, he did not have the power to hire, fire or promote them – in fact, he had no power over their jobs. But his behavior was indeed having an impact on the quality of their work and their performance.

With the help of other colleagues, we decided to conduct a survey of high school students in Massachusetts, to find out how similar or dissimilar these experiences were. Through the various student organizations sponsored by the Massachusetts Department of Education, we were able to conduct surveys with 200 students (Stein, 1981) and found out that indeed, this was a very typical problem, experienced by a majority of students, either as targets of the sexual harassment or as witnesses to it in their schools, by their peers.

In addition, a larger group of colleagues and other educators from throughout the state next developed a curriculum published by the Massachusetts Department of Education. First published in 1979, and again in 1982, 1983 and 1986, Who’s hurt and who’s liable: sexual harassment in Massachusetts Schools described the problem, offered case studies and classroom lessons and provided guidance for school administra-
tors. There was also a legal section written by the lawyers from the Massachusetts Department of Education, providing legal guidance to school districts.

At this time, there were no federal court decisions on sexual harassment in education to give us guidance or definitions. In many ways, we put the topic on the map at the same time that we were building a social movement and a consciousness about the problem that was happening in public but was not recognized or acknowledged. A decade later (1992), I started calling sexual harassment “a secret happening in public and the public performance of gendered violence” (Stein, 1992; Stein, 1995).

I traced my work in this field so you would get a sense of how the recognition of the problem of sexual harassment among peers emerged – as part of a social movement, bottom up, from listening to young people. Eventually, federal court decisions including one in 1999 in the U.S. Supreme Court in the Davis case that involved a girl in the fifth grade (11 years old), LaShonda Davis, who was sexually harassed by a male classmate, came to agree with us, and offered rulings that require all schools to take steps to prevent peer-to-peer sexual harassment in all levels of education (Davis v. Monroe, 1999).

**Bullying and the history of zero tolerance**

Bullying on the other hand, has been a label and a discussion largely imported from the field of psychology and, at least in the education field, from European researchers. Over a dozen meta-analyses exist that document countless bullying curriculum interventions that have not succeeded in the US or with minimal effectiveness and/or inability to replicate these results (Ttofi & Farrington, 2009). The science and rigor is simply lacking (Berger, 2007; Ferguson, Miguel, Kilbrun & Sanchez, 2007; Ryan & Smith, 2009; Ttofi & Farrington, 2009).

So, we have to ask – why is teaching about bullying such a popular pursuit in the US, when anti-bullying curriculum have not proven effective and/or cannot be replicated, and when dimensions of state laws on bullying keep being stuck down by US Federal Courts (e.g.: LA, 2009; and Florida, 2010) for violations of the First Amendment of the U. S. Constitution. I contend that state legislators are passing these state laws as a quick fix to placate the public to prove that they are listening; that this law will be the panacea to school violence – but knowing full well that there will be no money attached to these laws and as an “unfunded mandate,” schools will not be required to implement them.

Let me take you on a journey back to the 1980s when the rise of the emphasis on bullying began. This means going back to a time when the term “Zero Tolerance” first arose in the lexicon.

The ideology of zero tolerance grew out of the manufacturing industry (not accepting any flaws in production), and then was applied to the drug interdiction efforts of the late 1980s, framed first by the U.S. Attorney of San Diego. The Gun Free
School Act, passed by Congress in 1994, required states that receive federal funds to mandate expulsion, on a case-by-case basis, for at least one year, of any student who brought a weapon to school (First, 2000). A weapon was defined as “guns, bombs, grenades, missile launchers, and poison gas”; it did not include knives, though some states were permitted to use a broader definition of weapons (Wasser, 2001). After the shootings at Columbine High School in April 1999, zero tolerance laws became even more expansive and found an ally in the wave of anti-bullying laws that many states started to pass. Colorado was the first state to pass an anti-bullying law, followed by another 40 states.

The contours of a post-Columbine world of schools is one where students are controlled in ways that shred the U.S. Constitution and the Bill of Rights. Students have been suspended retroactively for papers they have written, thoughts they have had, and for their drawings (Commonwealth of Massachusetts v. Milo, January 2001). Comments made by elementary-aged students in the heat of a touch football game or when the teacher would not permit a student to use the bathroom have been characterized as death threats (Zernike, 2001). In a case from Jonesboro, Arkansas, an eight-year-old boy was suspended for pointing a chicken strip toward a teacher and saying “pow, pow” (“Boy suspended for pointing chicken finger”, Feb. 1, 2001). And, not surprisingly, zero tolerance has racial implications: disproportionate numbers of students of color have been suspended and expelled under zero tolerance policies (Advancement Project, 2000; Johnson et al, 2001; Skiba, 2000, 2001).

The framework of zero tolerance both demonizes children and removes their entitlement to rights guaranteed by the US Constitution – that of free expression, association, and freedom from unreasonable search and seizure. More and more children have been removed from school with no place to go; only a few states have requirements to establish alternative schools for these suspended and expelled children. More and more young people are hitting the streets, becoming exiles, being criminalized. This trend to expel young people may also be a manifestation of the decline of our sense of collective responsibility for children and youth. One might be able to assert, as I believe, that zero tolerance is a crime against children because it is predicated on removing children, not reforming or helping children, or even viewing them as minors (Stein, 2005).

The zero tolerance mania is part of the pervasive punitive ideology and social policy that also includes trying minors as adults, deterrence theories, and mandatory sentencing. Educators now include bullying behaviors under the ever broadening umbrella of zero tolerance. Schools proudly state that they will not tolerate bullies; there are bully-buster posters around school buildings, and new rules to cover bullying and eradicating bullies is all the rage with state legislators, school officials, and consultants. Bullying, a psychological concept, has evolved to include any act of meanness, exclusion (i.e. saving a seat for a friend), threats of any sort, as well as
physical assaults. It is a very elastic notion that includes everything – even what we used to call racism, sexism, homophobia, sexual assault, anti-Semitism, etc (Brown, 2008). There is no end to this notion of bullying once the slippery slope begins.

Under the prevailing definition of bullying, almost anything has the potential to be called bullying, from raising one’s eyebrow, giving “the evil eye,” making faces (all very culturally constructed activities), to verbal expressions of preference towards particular classmates over others. I fear that there may be a tyranny of sameness that is implicitly being proposed in this pursuit to eradicate bullying behaviors. Yet, on the other hand, sometimes very egregious behaviors are named as bullying, when in fact they constitute criminal hazing or sexual/gender harassment (Stein, 2001, 2003).

The zero tolerance approach has taken over the good senses of the educational and legislative establishments. What has gotten lost in this surge of attention and new laws that impose a rather expansive notion of bullying in schools are the rights of students to go to school in an environment that is gender-safe, free from gender-based harassment and violence (Stein, 2003, 2005).

The Research Arena – Harassment or Bullying?

I see two major problems and limitations with existing bullying research studies result: (1) the conflation of the terms bullying and harassment, with the term bullying serving as a euphemism for acts of harassment and even violence; and (2) the omission or denial of gender from bullying research.

Most researchers of bullying have failed to consider the ways in which adolescent boys (and adult men) unmercifully police each other with rigid and conventional notions of masculinity and the imposition of compulsory heterosexuality, the maniacal pursuit to define oneself as “not gay.” Researchers such as Joe Pleck (1981); R.W. Connell (1987, 1995); Michael Kimmel (1987, 1996, 2000, 2001); and Michael Messner (1990) have written about this phenomenon and its consequences for several decades, yet most bullying researchers have failed to draw upon their findings or other studies of the ways in which masculinity operates (Chesney-Lind, Brown, & Stein, 2007).

Furthermore, gender is also missing from the dominant construction of school safety and violence. This omission contributes to the disproportionate focus on the most extreme, rare forms of violence while the more insidious threats to safety are largely ignored (Lesko, 2000; Stein, 1995, 1999; Stein, Tolman, Porche and Spencer, 2002). Gender is not considered when talking about extreme forms of violence either. For example, school shootings were widely reported in a gender-neutral way, when the majority of these tragedies were perpetrated by white middle-class boys who were upset either about a break-up or rejection by a girl (e.g. Jonesboro, Arkansas; Pearl, Mississippi) or who did not meet traditional expectations and norms of masculinity (e.g. Columbine, Colorado) and were thus persecuted by their peers
(National Research Council and Institute of Medicine, 2003; Perlstein, 1998; Vossekul et al, 2002).

**Call all this Violence, Not Bullying**

I am not suggesting that the word “bullying” be purged from the language entirely. It might be used more appropriately only with young children, who, unlike teenagers, might be hard pressed to understand the concepts of sexual harassment or sexual violence. But “bullying” has become the stand-in term for other behaviors that school and public health officials as well as scholars, legislators and researchers do not want to name, like violence, be it verbal or physical, motivated by racism, homophobia, or sexism. The label may also be part of a general trend to label children, particularly in a culture that tends to psycho-pathologize behaviors. And the effects of the label go beyond what it obscures and pathologizes.

In an era when school administrators are afraid of being sued for civil rights/harassment violations, “bullying” serves to deflect the school’s legal responsibility for the creation of a safe and equitable learning environment onto an individual or group of individuals that they identify as the “bullies.” Accordingly, school administrators often disguise the fact that they are liable for sexual harassment in the school, and frequently tell students and their parents that it is they who will be sued. Thus, school administrators embrace and promote the bullying framework and discourse because that way they know that they will not end up in federal court because there is no national law on bullying. There are only national laws on civil rights in education, and sexual harassment is part of that framework (Stein, 2003).

**Sexual Assault/Domestic Violence agencies**

Unfortunately, the sexual assault and domestic violence agencies have also attached themselves to the bullying framework and have left behind the core conceptualization of their work on sexual/gender violence, claiming that they will start first with the concept of bullying and work their way towards more unpleasant notions, like sexual violence (Black, 2007). This is a move generated by expediency and faulty thinking, I fear – one that will come back to haunt them.

Recently, I was alerted to a post on the List-serve funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) maintained by the California Coalition against Sexual Assault (CALCASA), posted on April 2, 2009 by an individual from a domestic violence center in Enid, Oklahoma. This post contained a new version of the Power and Control Wheel which I think distorts key elements of violence against women and also distorts both civil and criminal law.

The original Power and Control wheel was created to help explain the stages, forces and dimensions of domestic violence, and various forms of power and control that the batterer might utilize. Some of the elements of the wheel included discrete
dimensions which by themselves might be considered minor and certainly not illegal, such as “minimizing, denying and blaming” or “using isolation.” Such behaviors might include controlling the money, wanting to know everyone she (wife/girlfriend) sees, monitoring where she is going, limiting her contact with family and friends, commenting on her clothes, and various forms of humiliation. When these so-called minor, unpleasant, annoying, controlling behaviors were collected and put together, they evolved into something much bigger and more problematic and were given the name of “domestic violence” (Domestic Abuse Intervention Program, http://www.theduluthmodel.org/wheelgallery.php).

On the other hand, in the Bullying Power and Control Wheel, bullying has been elevated above both criminal and civil violations and has displaced both criminal law (like sodomy, sexual assault, gang violence), and civil law (like sexual harassment) with the much lower level concept of bullying. Bullying has no force of law; it is a largely subjective and psychological concept, and even when states pass their anti-bullying laws, they are very weak with little or no compliance/oversight. Under this proposed conception in this P & C wheel, bullying has not merely displaced law but it has also erased criminal law. The Bullying Power and Control wheel proposes that child sexual abuse, gang violence, and sexual assault be considered a form of bullying. (Prevent Connect List-serve, April 2, 2009; National Center on Domestic and Sexual Violence, http://www.ncdsv.org/publications_wheel.html).
To say that I am mortified by this conceptualization is an understatement. As a card carrying member of the American Civil Liberties Union, I will always fight for anyone’s right to speak out and propose any ideas that they choose. Nor do I have any idea how widely endorsed this Bullying Power and Control wheel may be outside beyond the inventor. However, I find that this new Bullying Power and Control wheel embodies exactly the essence of what I think is wrong with the whole formulation of the bullying framework: it is too big, too elastic, and it works to undermine existing laws and legal frameworks.

The Domestic Violence/Sexual Assault movement has shifted its focus on sexual violence and instead has moved to put the popular term of “bullying” front and center because they say that this is the only way that they can get into schools (Stein, unpublished manuscript & speeches, 2009). Even though there is good news for the efficacy of some teen dating violence programs – especially those undertaken in late middle school/early high school (8th/9th grades), particularly Safe Dates by Professor Vangee Foshee of the University of North Carolina, School of Public Health (2004, 2007, 2009), as well as some promising results from Canada (Wolfe et al, 2009), DV/
SA groups are rarely allowed in schools for eight to twelve sessions that are needed to teach these curriculum with fidelity. So, the DV/SA groups have largely abandoned them because they are lucky to get into schools for two sessions with the same students — never eight to twelve sessions. Just as reports of teen dating violence are increasing (as evidenced by the Youth Risk Behavior Surveys from the CDC, 2007), SA/DV groups are prevented from doing in-depth work in schools.

**Teaching about sexual harassment**

I’ve saved the best framework for last: sexual harassment. I think the most fruitful approach is to teach about sexual harassment, and to weave it into the discussion of violence prevention as well as a precursor to Teen Dating Violence. As a topic, sexual harassment captures the attention of school personnel, especially since the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in the Davis case in May 1999 (*Davis v. Monroe*, 1999). This case established that schools are liable for peer-to-peer sexual harassment, and provides us with an entry point that applies all over the U.S. that did not exist before 1999. However, under federal law Title IX, it is schools who are liable and who get sued for sexual harassment, for permitting an unequal educational environment (or “hostile environment”) to exist.

The details of the Davis case are stark: LaShonda Davis, a fifth grader, was touched, grabbed, and verbally harassed in school by a male classmate. The boy, known only by his initials, G.F., repeatedly attempted to touch LaShonda’s breasts and genital area, rubbed against her in a sexual manner, constantly asked her for sex, and, in one instance, put a plastic doorstop in his pants to simulate an erection and acted in a sexually suggestive manner (Brake, 1999). By no stretch of the imagination was he subtle or ambiguous; rather, he was persistent and unrelenting.

LaShonda did not respond passively to the boy’s behavior. Besides telling G.F. to stop, she also told her teachers. Her parents also complained to her teachers, and asked to have LaShonda’s seat moved. But her teachers and school officials did nothing, not even to separate the two students who sat next to each other. G.F.’s behavior was clearly having both psychological and academic consequences for LaShonda. After several months of this harassment, LaShonda’s grades fell and she wrote a suicide note. LaShonda’s parents filed a criminal complaint against the boy and also a federal civil rights lawsuit against the school district for permitting a sexually hostile environment to exist. In the criminal action, the boy pled guilty to sexual battery. And after five years of legal battles and appeals, the U.S. Supreme Court, in a 5-4 decision, ruled that schools are liable for student-to-student sexual harassment if the school officials knew about the sexual harassment and failed to take action (*Davis v. Monroe*, 1999; Stein 2003; Stein 2005). This case set a high standard for sexual harassment under Federal law Title IX, requiring “severe, pervasive or repeated,” or as the Supreme Court added, “objectively offensive” (*Davis v. Monroe*, 1999).
The other important lesson from the Davis case is to remember that if the conduct of the boy had been defined as “bullying”, then LaShonda Davis never would have had access to the federal courts because bullying is not a civil rights violation – you cannot get into federal court for claims of bullying. LaShonda would never have won her case because she never would have been in federal court in the first place — be wary of the bullying framework (Stein 2003).

**Strategies for Zero Indifference (Instead of Zero Tolerance) for Sexual Harassment**

To achieve a gender-safe school, which would mean no sexual harassment, gender violence or bullying, I think we need to employ several simultaneous strategies to ensure that sexual harassment will not have a presence there. I suggest that we call this “zero indifference,” rather than “zero tolerance,” which would mean that we plan to notice the behaviors, comment on them, intervene, and make corrections accordingly. It is also advantageous if we can frame these topics as components of violence prevention and as an integral part of creating a safe school. This might increase school personnel’s receptivity to the topics and might also serve to expand the discourse of violence prevention to one that includes matters of gender (Stein, 1995; Meyer & Stein, 2004).

Here are my strategies to create safe, fair and just schools: Integrate the subject of sexual harassment and gender violence into the whole curriculum in a cross-disciplinary way. The lessons should be long-term, engaging, fun (not lectures by the school board attorney), and age-appropriate. When the subjects of sexual harassment and gender violence are integrated into the curriculum as opposed to being tacked on as an afterthought, there is less of a burden placed on the teachers and the subject makes more sense to students. For example, these topics can be integrated into literature and English classes when reading Anne Frank, William Shakespeare, Jane Austen and many other authors, and also can be seamlessly placed into history and social studies classes, family and consumer science classes, and health education (Stein & Cappello, 1999).

1. Use evaluated and accurate materials. School personnel should use curriculum materials that have been evaluated and found to be effective, but that are also vetted for their accuracy. The popularity or expense of a particular curriculum does not guarantee its effectiveness or speak to the amount of evaluation the curriculum has undergone. Moreover, the curriculum products need to be examined for the use of euphemisms such as “bullying in a dating relationship” instead of “teen dating violence” or “sexual bullying” instead of “sexual harassment.” Such substitutions are grave distortions that in certain instances might misrepresent law while also infantilizing the students. No amount of evaluation will correct such inaccuracies and distortions.
2. Offer professional development on sexual harassment and gender violence for all school staff including the administrators, custodians, school secretaries, bus drivers, coaches, teachers, guidance counselors, playground and lunchroom supervisors, and school psychologists. The training sessions should be more than a casual staff meeting – instead offer repeated sessions scheduled throughout the school year.

3. Collaborate with staff from sexual assault and domestic violence agencies who are fluent in topics related to violence against women and children. These agency staff can offer workshops for school personnel and classroom presentations to students, and also can provide suggestions for curriculum materials on gender violence. While the agency staff may not have teaching credentials licensed by the state, they may be trained as social workers or have other relevant experience that would enhance the efforts of the school personnel. Furthermore, agency staff would be enthusiastic about partnerships with school personnel to implement on-going training sessions for both staff and students.

4. Designate several ombuds (people), diverse in gender, sexuality, race, and nationality in order to enhance approachability – individuals to whom students can bring their inquiries or concerns and who will act on their behalf. These special staff will need extra training, and possibly course release time to serve in this capacity. In addition, the placement of their offices is a matter for serious consideration, and their locations as well as their names should be publicized throughout the school community. Finally, the titles given to these special staff matter; calling them “sexual harassment grievance coordinators” or “complaint managers” might not be conducive for encouraging visits by students. (The success of “Civil Rights Teams” and “Gay Straight Alliances” to reach students who wouldn’t attend a group marked as queer-only is an illustration of the importance of titles).

5. Develop school-based disciplinary procedures for addressing sexual harassment that ensure due process rights for the accused, as well as assurances that the student who makes the complaint will be protected from retaliation from the alleged harasser and friends of the harasser.

6. Develop school-based restraining orders/stay-away orders that would include attention to class schedules, walking routes, bus assignments, lunchtime and other less regulated times and places, and would ideally function to protect the student who has made a complaint of harassment against another student.

7. Create multiple strategies for resolution which may involve face-to-face meetings between the harasser and the target, as long as these sessions are voluntary and adults are present in the room (it is not up to the students to solve the sexual harassment problem). There should be no requirements for mediation, and student mediators should not be used without adult presence. Any voluntary efforts, which may include the technique “write a letter to the harasser,” cannot take the place of
creating accountability on the part of the instigator, especially if the incident involved alleged physical contact and/or if it was a repeated event.

8. Offer compassionate responses to the harasser in addition to punitive ones. This may take the form of either individual or group counseling sessions.

9. Involve parents — both through open community forums and in private discussions, especially if their children are involved in incidents of sexual harassment (even as a bystander/witness). Provide the parents with the classroom lessons that their children are using, ask them to participate in the assignments, and show them their child’s assignments.

10. Administer sexual harassment surveys that include questions about the relationship between the harasser and the target: Were they in a dating relationship? Did one person want to date the other who was not interested? Is this harassment due to a romance (mutual or otherwise) that went sour? The answers to such questions will help to create more situation-specific approaches.

11. Collect information from the students about their environment through mapping activities and ethnographic research. Mapping areas of the school where students feel less safe (known as “hot spots” among criminologists) provides information to the staff about zones of the school where extra support and supervision might be needed at certain times of the day. Teach ethnographic research to students as a way to gather “members’ knowledge” from the students about sexual harassment and gender violence that take place within the school community.

12. Incorporate the topics of teen dating violence and student-to-student sexual harassment into college teacher-preparation courses and state requirements for teacher recertification.

Conclusion

I like to think about LaShonda Davis and the interventions that might have made a difference to her and her parents before they were forced to initiate lawsuits that took over five years to resolve, in both criminal court and in federal courts, culminating in a case argued before the U.S. Supreme Court. First and foremost, school personnel must make schools safe for students and conducive for learning—not just students who are sexually harassed but for all those who are marginalized by other students (and staff) for their non-conformity to rigid and conventional notions of masculinity and femininity.

Moreover, we must talk accurately about behaviors— if it is sexual harassment, call it that; if it is homophobia, call it that. We must resist the temptation to speak in euphemisms. As adolescent psychologist Lyn Mikel Brown has written: “Calling behaviors what they are helps us educate children about their rights, affirms their realities, encourages more complex and meaningful solutions, opens up a dialogue that invites children to participate in social change, and ultimately protects them” (Brown, 2008, p. 29).
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Part 2:

Challenging normalized knowledge positions
4 Rural and Remote Women and Resilience: Grounded Theory and Photovoice Variations on a Theme

Beverly D. Leipert

Canada is the second largest country in the world, and approximately 22% of its population resides in rural and remote areas (Canadian Institute for Health Information [CIHI], 2006). In this vast country, health status declines as one moves farther from urban centers (Romanow, 2002). Rural people have shorter life expectancies, lower incomes, fewer years of education, more social isolation, and higher rates of crime, death, infant mortality, unemployment, smoking, alcohol consumption and obesity compared to the national average (CIHI, 2006; Health Canada, 2003; Northern Secretariat of the BC Centre of Excellence for Women’s Health, 2000).

Rural women must address these issues in various ways in order to maintain and promote their health. In this chapter, I explore the resilience of women in rural and remote Canada as perceived and depicted in two research studies conducted with rural women in northern British Columbia (NBC study) and southwest Ontario (SWO study).

PURPOSES OF THE STUDIES

The purpose of the NBC study was to examine how women perceive and maintain their health within geographical, social, economic, and other contexts within northern British Columbia (BC), Canada. The purpose of the SWO study was to explore the nature of pictorial and descriptive data about social and health promotion needs and resources provided by older rural women in southwest Ontario using the photovoice method. The resilience of rural women emerged as a theme in both studies.

METHODS

Both studies were guided by a feminist theoretical approach. Feminist inquiry considers not only women’s individual voices and experiences, but also larger sociopolitical, economic, and cultural structures that influence women’s lives (MacDonald, 2001). The NBC study also used a grounded theory method to identify and describe complex and hidden processes (Morse, 2001) related to rural and northern women’s health. The SWO study used a unique method called photovoice which was developed specifically for research with rural women (Wang, Burris, & Ping, 1996). Using this method, cameras were provided to participants so that they could take pictures of social and health promotion needs and resources in their rural communities (Lei

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The women also recorded perspectives in log books and participated in two focus groups to discuss the pictorial and narrative data and their perspectives.

Setting
The NBC study included both urban and rural settings in northern BC. Northern rural settings are characterized as rural, rural remote, and rural isolated. Rural communities have a population of less than 1,000 people with less than 400 people per square kilometer (Statistics Canada, 1993). Rural remote communities are 80–400 km or 1–4 hours travel in good weather to a major regional hospital (Canadian Association of Emergency Physicians, Rural committee, 1997). Rural isolated communities are more than 400 kilometers or 4 hours travel in good weather to a major regional hospital (Rennie, Baird-Crooks, Remus, & Engel, 2000). In the north, both urban and rural settings are considered remote and isolated because of their distant location from health care and other resources.

The SWO study was conducted in four counties in southwest Ontario. These counties are considered rural because they are “outside of urban centres with 10,000 or more population” (duPlessis, Beshiri, & Bollman, 2002, p.1). Although distances are less and the number of people are greater in southwest Ontario compared to northern BC, southwest Ontario is still considered rural because farmland covers 75% of the land area (Turner & Gutmanis, 2005) and major amounts of agricultural products are grown there (Caldwell, Brown, Thomson, & Auld, 2006).

Sample
In the NBC study, the sample was constructed using theoretical sampling (Glaser, 1978) and consisted of 25 women who had lived in northern settings for a minimum of 2 years. The women were aged 21–86 years (the majority within 41–60 years), had less than Grade 9 to university education, and had incomes of less than $10,000 (n = 2) to over $60,000 (n = 5). The women reported Aboriginal, Metis, South Asian, British, Swiss, and Canadian cultural backgrounds. The majority of the women were married or living common law, employed full-time or part-time, and in good health. Two-thirds (n = 17) of the study participants resided in rural and remote settings (farms, ranches) as well as in villages of less than 100 residents and in small towns, whereas the remaining one-third (n = 8) of the participants resided in Prince George, population 75,000, the only city in the north.

In the SWO study, purposeful snowball sampling (Patton, 2002) was used to create a sample of 31 women who ranged in age from 55 to 89 years, had less than Grade 9 to a university degree, and had incomes of less than $10,000 (n=1) to over $50,000 (n=3) (not all participants answered all of the socio-demographic questions). The women claimed Aboriginal, Mennonite, Dutch, Belgian, and Canadian cultural backgrounds. The majority of the women were widowed (n=18), lived in towns of 250 to 7500 residents (n=14) or on farms (n=4), and reported good (n=11) or excellent (n=8) health.
Data Collection
Prior to data collection in the NBC study, ethical approval was obtained from the University of Alberta Health Research Ethics Board and University of Northern British Columbia Ethics Review Board. Narrative data were then collected through semi-structured interviews using open-ended questions; observational data were also collected during travels to interviews on farms and ranches and in northern communities and from written documents, such as maps, tourist guides, community histories, and newspapers (Leipert, 2006). Each participant was interviewed three times: the first interview was in person and the second and third interviews were predominantly by telephone. The first and second interviews were taped and transcribed, then imported into the NVIVO (1999) computer program for analysis. Pseudonyms selected by each woman were used in transcribing to protect participants’ identities. Notes taken during third interviews and memos containing researcher reflections subsequent to interviews were also collected.

Prior to data collection in the SWO study, ethical approval was obtained from the University of Western Ontario Health Research Ethics Board. The 31 participants consisted of five groups in four rural communities. Each group participated in two group interview sessions; both group sessions were audio-tape recorded. In the first group session, the research was explained and cameras were demonstrated and provided to the women, along with log books for recording perspectives (Leipert, Landry, McWilliam et al., under review). Participants were invited to photograph images and record reflections in log books about social and health promotion needs and resources for older rural women in rural settings. After two weeks the cameras and log books were retrieved, and the films were developed. At the second group session, the photos were returned to the women, and they were invited to select two images: one that best represented a social and health promotion need and one that best represented a social and health promotion resource. Participants were asked for titles for each of these pictures and discussion ensued as to the meaning of the pictures and their importance regarding social and health promotion needs and resources of rural older women. The second interview session concluded with participants completing a brief socio-demographic questionnaire.

Data Analysis
In the NBC study, analysis was conducted concurrently with data collection and followed the grounded theory constant comparative method (Glaser, 1978, 1992). With the assistance of the NVIVO (1999) computer program, I reviewed interview transcripts line by line and coded them for categories and themes. Participants clarified, elaborated upon, and verified emerging categories, subcategories, and relationships in second and third interviews. A fourth interview was conducted with three participants for verification of the theory that emerged in the study (Leipert, 2006). Analysis and data collection ceased when no new information or insight was forth-
coming about the categories and their relationships, and when the theory seemed to be elaborate in complexity and clear in its articulation of the central problem and the process used to address it (Glaser, 1978).

In the SWO study, data were analysed using a rigorous three-phase process. In the first phase, in the second group interview participants: 1) identified key data by selecting their photos, 2) contextualized data by explaining the meaning of photos, and 3) codified data by identifying issues, concepts, themes, and theories (Wang & Burris, 1997). These audio-recorded data were transcribed and, in the second phase, were analyzed by a minimum of two researchers using NVIVO to determine themes related to rural social and health promotion needs and resources (Leipert, Landry, McWilliam et al., under review). As a result of this analysis, themes related to rural women and resilience also emerged. In the third phase, a three stage analysis process (Oliffe, Bottorff, Kelly & Halpin, 2008) was used. In the first stage, preview, the researchers viewed participants’ photographs alongside the narratives about each picture to understand intended representations and to situate the participant within the context of their photograph. In the second stage, cross-photo comparison, the researchers developed themes that were reflected in the entire photograph collection. We reviewed the total data set of 575 usable pictures taken by the participants. The final stage, theorizing, allowed the researchers to develop abstract understandings by linking the themes to the feminist theoretical approach of the study. As resilience began to emerge as an important theme in the original analysis, the photos were re-analyzed using this rigorous three-stage process to determine more consistently and accurately findings regarding rural women and resilience.

**Limitations**

A limitation of the NBC study is the exclusion of non-English speaking women; for both the NBC and SWO study representation of various groups of women, such as very remote women, lesbian women, and women who live in extreme poverty, were limited. In addition, the grounded theory and photovoice methods used in the two research studies differed to some degree. Nonetheless, data analysis in both studies revealed rich information regarding the resilience of rural women in two diverse locations in Canada.

**FINDINGS**

**The NBC Study**

The findings and theory that emerged regarding resilience in the NBC study have been elaborated elsewhere (Leipert, 2006). Only some elements of the theory will be summarized here; the main focus in this section of the chapter will be on the findings regarding the nature of the resilience revealed by the women in the NBC study. The intent of grounded theory is to generate a theory that explains a process of
how individuals respond to a main concern or problem (Glaser, 1978). The main problem for the women in this study was vulnerability to health risks, in particular, physical health and safety risks, psychosocial health risks, and risks of inadequate health care. Women responded to these health risks by developing a process of resilience which included strategies of becoming hardy, making the best of the north, and supplementing the north (Leipert, 2006) (see Figure 1).

**Developing Resilience**

In response to vulnerability to health risks, women in the study engaged in a core process of developing resilience. This process involved strategies of becoming hardy, making the best of the north, and supplementing the north.

*Becoming hardy*. Becoming hardy for northern women involved taking a positive attitude, following spiritual beliefs, developing fortitude, and establishing self-reliance. Taking a positive attitude helped women put northern challenges into perspective and deal with them, thereby enhancing their commitment to northern life. Spiritual beliefs provided personal comfort, meaning and balance, opportunities for cultural and social connections, and a sense of peace, control, care, and belonging. Spirituality included religious and cultural beliefs, as well as friendships, personal reflection, and communing with nature. Establishing self-reliance increased women’s confidence, courage, and skills to tackle new and difficult challenges. Examples of self-reliant strategies included learning to drive, using various strategies to defend oneself against wildlife and threatening humans in isolated settings, and learning to suture wounds if women lived in remote locations.

Women were better able to develop hardiness if they were healthy and motivated to be in the north, could address isolation and other northern context issues, were able to learn about and purchase resources, and had a social support network. Women who were ill, in low income or remote situations, worked outdoors, or traveled on isolated or winter roads were especially challenged in becoming hardy. Adequate personal and social resources were essential in becoming hardy. Carmen noted, “You have to have an upbeat attitude. What makes you hardy is the fact that you don’t dwell on the fact that you’re living where it’s cold and remote,” Lilac recommended “having things to amuse you at home in winter,” and Gert valued “the company of women.”

*Making the best of the North*. Making the best of the north meant that women used and developed available resources and opportunities. These included participating in northern activities, making decisions about health care services, seeking education and information, seeking and providing social support, and working on financial and employment issues.
Women participated in northern activities by (a) enjoying the ready access to outdoor activities, such as camping and hiking; (b) developing indoor interests, such as quilting, painting, and computer use; and (c) volunteering for community groups. Sometimes making the best of the north through participation required a conscious effort. Carmen explained, “When you live in more remote areas, you have to make yourself be positive. It’s not something that just happens.” For example, Carmen planned trips to Prince George for entertainment and “to do something different.”

Study participants made a variety of decisions about health care. They tried to circumvent inadequate care by seeking a second opinion from another physician or by changing their physician. These circumventions were not always possible because of a scarcity of physicians and physician refusals in small communities to provide advice to patients of colleagues. Women also sought the more accessible and sometimes more appropriate services of public health nurses. Public health nurses were valued because they were “approachable” and took a “holistic approach to health” (Rosie), and because they accorded time, education, and respect to women. Other times, women sought health care in another northern community or outside the north. However, women with low incomes and women who were elderly, ill, or disabled often had to settle for inadequate care provided locally. To supplement the limited health care in the north, and because alternative therapies were believed to be legitimate in their own right, women also made decisions to use alternative health care such as massage and naturopathic options. Health needs, age, cultural and educational backgrounds, economic circumstances, available time, and their knowledge about care accessibility and quality influenced women’s decisions about health care.

Women also developed resilience by seeking education and information from nurses, physicians, universities, community colleges, and distance education programs. Education and information helped to change attitudes, enhanced job and career opportunities, increased knowledge and abilities regarding health and health care, and enriched quality of life. Factors that affected women’s ability to access educational resources included women’s geographic location; their access to finances for tuition and travel; time for study and travel; and access to technology, such as electricity, telephones, computers, roads, and automobiles.

Social support provided women with instrumental (practical), emotional, affirmational, and informational resources (House & Kahn, 1985). Marie explained, “When people in the north go out of town shopping, they always ask their friends, ‘Is there anything you want me to pick up for you?’” Signe noted that it was important “to find somebody to talk to, to ease the loneliness of the long dreary winters.” Frequently, northern residents had left extended family to seek employment in the north. Thus, friends often took the place of family. In addition, social support, especially by women, helped women who were new to a community become an insider and thus better able to secure friends, information, support, employment,
and other resources.

Financial and work issues included limited employment options for women, lack of child care, male attitudes about what women can and should do, inadequate remuneration, lack of respect, sexual harassment at work, and reluctance of communities to employ women who were new to the community. The boom and bust nature of northern resource-based economies compromised job prospects for men, with resultant financial implications for their female partners. Study participants addressed these limitations by engaging in diverse full-time and part-time employment in both the public and private sector. Part-time work decreased risks by decreasing travel in dangerous climates and terrains and helped women maintain control and make the most of their talents, interests, and opportunities. However, part-time employment also decreased women’s incomes.

Nevertheless, women in the study illustrated that through resourcefulness, assertiveness, and effective decision making, part-time and full-time work sometimes improved their financial and employment situations. For example, Casey capitalized on her computer and ranching resources and developed part-time employment “helping a friend do a seed catalogue, babysitting, baking, I [have] eggs and we have hay…” Ruhi developed assertiveness skills to deal with harassment at her restaurant job, and other women made decisions to work part-time, change jobs, or do volunteer work to address employment situations. With adequate incomes, women were better able to access health resources both near and far.

Supplementing the north. Supplementing the north involved being political (personally and for the community) and leaving the north, temporarily or permanently. Supplementing the north included adding to, as well as changing, what presently existed in the north, thereby enriching northern resources and minimizing vulnerability.

The main mode of political action used was that of advocacy, speaking out for themselves and others. Leah advised, “It’s important to learn to advocate for yourself with your doctor,” and Casey believed that “being your own advocate will take you far.” Women engaged in community advocacy to increase awareness about and access to resources. Community advocacy activities included participating in Take Back the Night walks, subscribing to and writing for a regional publication that focused on northern women’s interests, and serving as a member of a community committee that met with the Premier of the province about local health matters. Participation in this research was also seen as a political act. Eileen explained, “Women up here feel disempowered, under, and invisible … this research will help women become more visible to themselves and that’s part of becoming more empowered.” Women needed time and finances, as well as commitment, courage, assertiveness, and tact to be successful as political activists in and for northern communities.

Leaving the north temporarily was a strategy that every participant used to de-
crease exposure to vulnerabilities and to supplement resources. Obtaining health care in southern locations increased the quality, timeliness, and appropriateness of care, and for women who required special or more diverse care, their ability to obtain any care at all. Goods and services obtained from southern locations increased women’s quality of life by increasing choices and decreasing costs of living in the north. Women who were able to travel to vacations and events outside the north brought back expertise and experiences that enriched their lives and the lives of other northerners. Women who were poor, ill, or very geographically isolated often had greater need to leave the north; however, their ability to leave was also compromised by their needs and circumstances.

Leaving the north permanently was a resilient strategy because it required courage and self-assertion to leave friends and family and an established life in the north. Leaving permanently was a strategy that was considered especially salient for single women and for women who wanted enriched education, employment, and sociocultural options. Eileen, a single mother, was considering leaving because she felt that people in her community “look at single moms as having made mistakes, not quite fitting in, as being peripheral.” Marie, a single retired woman, was looking forward to leaving the “redneck rough crude” north to lead “the quality of life I want to lead.” Leah, a young single woman, was moving south where “all my friends are” and where she could access desired education. Although leaving permanently may increase women’s resources and quality of life, their leaving would mean that the north would lose vital resources—women with an informed vision of how northern women’s health could and should be advanced.

Women’s location within the northern context, the degree of vulnerability they experienced, and personal factors (age, health and financial status, and cultural background) affected the degree to which women could develop and use resilient strategies. Although elderly women and women who were isolated, ill, or poor experienced greater vulnerability to health risks and a greater need for resilience, their ability to be resilient was compromised by their situations. Thus, those with the greatest needs were often the least able to address their needs.

**The SWO Study**

Similar to the NBC study, rural older women in the SWO study also experienced vulnerability risks. Physical health and safety risks were associated with poor climate, especially in winter, broken sidewalks and limited rails along walking trails which con-
tributed to unsafe sites for physical exercise, and with spraying and other farming practices. For Aboriginal women, the increased use of alcohol and other drugs on their reserve contributed to physical health risks not only for the users, but also for women who lived close by. Although most of the women were retired, and thus not employed, one woman in her 80s still actively farmed and, although she did not comment on employment risks to her health, working around farm machinery could pose a risk to her physical health.

Psychosocial health risks were perhaps a larger concern for women in the SWO study. Although they were not as geographically isolated from each other compared to the NBC participants, nonetheless for this group of older rural women isolation was an issue. Isolation from friends and family due to limited transportation or the inability to no longer drive, lack of access to family members such as spouses who were deceased or in distant long term care facilities, limited abilities to travel in winter, and not having access to exercise resources in winter, such as an indoor pool, contributed to feelings of loneliness and depression. Histories of abuse and neglect experienced by Mennonite and Aboriginal women and the frequent closure of rural churches contributed to mental health and spiritual concerns. The following quotes illustrate these issues:

*All our children...were raised there...We went... across the road to the church all the time. I don’t know what I'll do when they close [the church]... We bought [our home here] because we figured the church would be there... you could walk[across the road] to church in your old age but you can’t do that I guess…*

*I got married...had eight children...This was not [a] very good...marriage...my husband left...I was always scared of him, all the time...Until we finally came across the border [from Mexico] into the States...I finally felt better...I didn’t have to watch all the time.*

*Residential schools...caused a significant loss in native cultural/identity. This can be seen in areas such as language, parenting skills, family and community values and roles, loss of living in ancestral land base, day to day living values and belief systems. [The] inflict[ion] of physical, psychological, emotional and sexual abuse...resulted in...generations of mental health issues,... post traumatic stress disorders...all of these factors have affected me during my childhood, youth, adult life and as a senior.*

The older rural women in this study also experienced risks of inadequate health care. Closure of pharmacies in rural communities, lack of access to hospitals that were close by, and poor or distant long term care facilities were major areas of concern. The following quote illustrates this latter issue:

*This is the nursing home where my husband lived. The reason we chose [it] is because it was close to where we lived...[When it closed] we had to take the first one that came up...23 km away [from home]*
Developing Resilience
Becoming Hardy. The older rural women in this study also developed hardiness as they took a positive attitude, followed spiritual beliefs as exhibited in the numerous comments (“I go to church every Sunday...I feel it helps me when I pray. I feel if there’s any problems in your family, you know, it’s like a support to you... that’s my opinion.”) and pictures of rural churches, and bibles (especially in the pictures taken by the Mennonite women); developed fortitude; and established self-reliance. One woman spoke about the importance that taking a nursing aide course had been for her in her younger years and the challenges she endured in order to take this course, “Well I had always wanted to be a nurse from the time I was twelve years old...[Being an RNA] changed my life...It gives me more incentive of living now [in my senior years].” The fortitude and self-reliance that this woman exhibited resulted in a sense of accomplishment and pride in her ability to care for others and to complete an education program especially when almost overwhelmed with child bearing, child care, and farming responsibilities. Another woman, aged 83, revealed elements of fortitude and self-reliance in her narratives of active farming and tractor driving activities, “I used to work nights all the time...I loved to come home...jump on the tractor...go out to the fields... think...I can watch the birds...the trees...the sand blow, how relaxing to get away from the stressful night’s work.” The hardiness of one of the Aboriginal women was revealed in the poetry she wrote in which she addressed past injustices and hopes for the future:

Our hopes and dreams
Became a war zone...

May our Nation
give us peace in heart
As we come together
from a broken promise
We speak with one voice
Through the wisdom
given to us by our ancestors
many moons back.
Arise, and come together
our First nation
Together we’ll heal from
a broken promise
Let our drums beat
coming together lock
Step of the way: stamping
our feet, good spirits coming together.

These activities helped the women contribute to their families and communities in the past and in the present, and gave them a sense of accomplishment, pride, independence, and agency.

Of all of the above attributes of hardiness, perhaps the most important attributes for participants in this study were their attitudes towards themselves and their past and present lives. The women in this study frequently spoke about the importance of accepting some of life’s situations, not engaging in self-pity, and enjoying what you have without constantly striving to have more and better, as these quotes exemplify: “I am happy. I have a good life. We are going through hard times but, hey, that’s life. But I am not unhappy because of circumstance. I’m glad we came to Canada.”

I think everyone here has been a role model in some way to family or friends and yet there may be a reluctance to claim that, to say that you’ve done that, even though you have been a role model…none of us really see ourselves as a leader…[but] as a mother or a daughter or anything you are a leader no matter how you look at it.

These attitudes provided peace of mind as well as the ability to be inspired and objective when considering issues and ways to address them. The many challenging situations with which the participants in this study engaged throughout the course of their lives, and the many ways they needed to develop resilience in the past to address difficult circumstances no doubt provided rich experience that formed the basis for these hardy attitudes. For example, participants had experienced extreme poverty, societal discrimination, oppression and abuse by spouses, issues related to adapting to a new country, having to learn a new language (English), raising a (often large) family in challenging circumstances, and making new friends in a new land. Thus life experiences and fortitude developed over the years in stressful and challenging circumstances may assist in the development of resilience for a satisfying older age in rural contexts.

Making the Best of the Rural Context. Several women in the study were proud of their
ability to drive, even if this was only during the good weather and road conditions in the summer. For women who were older, who lived alone, and who lived in an area where resources were decreasing or non-existent, being able to drive afforded them access to resources in other communities and social support from friends and families. A participant summarized the perspectives of most of the women in the study when she stated, “Without wheels, we’re stuck. We can’t go anywhere...there’s no bus stopping where I live...When stores are closing...and no new stores come in...makes you feel like there’s something missing...Like you can’t get what you would get, say, in a larger community.”

Examples of titles that participants gave to pictures related to their vehicle included “My Best Companion” and “Freedom.” Women with sufficient funds were able to purchase electric carts that helped them get around in town situations, although these were of limited use in more rural and unpaved contexts.

Participants enjoyed the outdoors, especially in the summer. The planting and tending of gardens was a major theme in the women’s development and enactment of resilience. Titles of their photographs, such as “Peace/Happiness” and “My Sanctuary”, illustrate the importance of gardens to these women, as do their comments, “My garden is like my haven...my peace of mind...It’s the best way to relax, sit out there and read...Look at the flowers in the morning...It’s just beautiful.” And “My little garden creates a feeling of peace and enjoyment which of course, makes me happy and healthy.”

In addition, participants enjoyed physical activities such as swimming in the neighborhood or their own outdoor pools, lawn bowling, biking, and walking. These activities helped them stay physically healthy, facilitated mental health as they interacted with grandchildren, neighbors, and friends, and helped participants support future generations, as this participant remarked:

I believe in setting a good example [for my grandchildren] for their physical health...
The other day my daughters were talking to me and they said, ‘Our parents have taught us to be physical [and] they’re still in their 70’s... and we have all followed suit’...I do feel good that they have all...said to me that I have been a good example.

Participants also believed that it was important for one’s mental health to keep busy in the winter months, when it was more difficult and risky for older people to be physically active outdoors. Some of the resilient activities in winter included meeting with friends for card and board games, quilting, baking gatherings, and indoor exercise classes. In addition, pets, such as birds, dogs, and cats provided companionship and meaning to their lives, and helped participants be resilient in the face of isolation and loneliness brought about through the loss of a spouse or the enforced isolation of being housebound in
winter. Titles of pictures of pets revealed how important they were to participants, for example “Joy”, Happiness”, and “The Loves of My Life.”

Participants were also able to be resilient in the face of adversity and health challenges because of their contributions from and to their communities. For women who lived alone, helpful neighbors who could be relied on to do chores such as check smoke detectors and pick up groceries in winter were essential and very much appreciated, “My neighbour…[helped] change the battery on the smoke alarm…Women that live alone need to have good friends and neighbours…we get so we depend on them.”

Home delivery of prescription drugs by pharmacies and access to local or home visiting health care resources such as nurses, massage therapists, and housekeeping services were also very welcome. Because participants were assisted in these and other ways to be resilient and independent, and because they could see the need for and the value of their contributions, participants were able and eager to give back to their rural communities. Thus, they contributed in many and several ways, including assisting at church and other community events, volunteering at community agencies such as the Mennonite Central Committee which provides clothing and other resources to the Mennonite community, and providing services such as transportation to others in the community.

Supplementing the Rural Context

Participants supplemented the resources in their rural communities by traveling to other towns and cities for goods and services. They also provided transportation to others and often carpooled so that they could access distant resources. Women with sufficient funds valued traveling to warmer climates in winter so as to avoid dealing with winter challenges (“I’m very fortunate that I am in Florida in the wintertime, but not everybody’s that fortunate”). Participants who did not have access to funds for travel supplemented their resilience, especially during the isolating winter months, by cultivating enjoyment of local available resources such as seniors centers, and in their creation of activities that could be experienced individually or with others, such as quilting, cooking, watching TV, reading, and enjoying pets. In addition, some women who still actively farmed enhanced their safety and peace of mind by learning to use technology as this 83 year old participant noted:
What’s helping more is the younger farmers all have cell phones in their tractors. If you get alarmed, you can phone ‘em...or they can phone you...They’ve got me educated on how to use one ‘cause I’m out driving the tractor...He (her son) can phone me and say “Are you alright mother?”

Whether and how participants wanted to, needed to, or could supplement the rural context with resilient approaches depended on several factors. Women who were healthy could physically manage to access distant resources such as health care and shopping. Women who needed health care resources were often compromised in their ability to be resilient and travel, especially in winter, to health care resources which were at a distance. Women with financial and social resources could purchase what they needed, rather than do without or with limited or delayed resources available more locally; occasionally friends, spouses, and children assisted with funds and support. Several women in the study, especially those who were older and more isolated and the First Nations and Mennonite women, depended on their spiritual beliefs and each other to help them be resilient so that they could meet needs or develop acceptance of limitations, as these comments indicate: “My church is the most important part of my physical, mental, social and general well being....I travel quite a long distance to attend services...” And, “When [I] go to church, I feel him [my husband] in the seat with me...he’s not there but... he is in spirit...” Another said,

I believe that to have a healthy sense of well being, it has to be holistic including social/emotional, physical, cognitive and spiritual. Native people...embrace their spirituality in a strong and meaningful sense...usually in a belief system that can be Native Traditional, or Christian belief. In our community most people chose one of these belief systems [for] a sense of identity, belonging, and self worth.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS FOR NURSING

Findings from both of these studies revealed that rural women in the NBC study and the SWO study develop resilience in response to a number of factors, such as life experiences, stage in life, resources and needs, and the nature of rural contexts. Although the nature and degree of resilience may have varied according to participant circumstance, geographical location, and other factors, the elements of resilience of Becoming Hardy, Making the Best of the Context, and Supplementing the Context remained relevant for women in both rural settings.

The findings also reveal some interesting differences in resilience between the two research groups. Participants in the north tended to develop and experience resilience in more geographically challenging environments that included vast distances, difficult terrain, extreme weather, presence of wild animals, and sparse populations and resources. Although participants in the south also experienced some of these challenges, such as those related to weather and limited resources, the challenges were less extreme. For example, the weather in southwest Ontario is not as
cold in winter and the cold does not last as long as in northern BC. Accordingly, and perhaps because of the increased age of the participants in the SWO study compared to those in the NBC study, the resilience developed and enacted by the participants in the SWO study tended to be more affected by age and mobility issues. In addition, the challenges faced by Aboriginal and Mennonite women in the SWO study illustrate the need to understand cultural experiences, needs, and resources, and how these might affect the nature of the resilience developed by women in various cultures. These differences, to name only three, influence how, when, and if rural women need to and can develop resilience, and obviously have implications for the nature of rural nursing practice within these contexts. Clearly, more research is needed to understand effects of the rural geographical location on the resilience of rural women of various ages, cultures, abilities, and needs. In addition, future research should explore how rural nurses can and do facilitate the development of rural women’s resilience.

It must be noted that the diverse research methods used in these two studies provide differing types of data which can both enrich and limit understanding. For example, the in-depth repeated one-on-one interviews conducted in the NBC study facilitated participants’ expressions of intimate and complex perspectives and experiences, whereas the focus group method used in the SWO study facilitated an overview perspective (Morgan & Krueger, 1998) (although several women did share intimate details of their lives in the group interviews and log books). The use of the photovoice method in the SWO study provided rich pictorial data that enhanced data collection, analysis and understanding, and dissemination and impact of findings. Thus, the diverse methods used revealed important data regarding rural women and resilience, and serve to recommend the notion that combining two research approaches (such as grounded theory individual interviews and photovoice focus group interviews in combination with participants’ pictures and log book recordings) in subsequent studies could provide enhanced understanding of the nature and context of rural women’s resilience.

The SWO study revealed that the photovoice method includes some value added features. Throughout the study, photovoice contributed to the development of enhanced knowledge, social support, confidence, agency, and resilience. Participants often remarked upon the value of participating in the photovoice study, how they had learned and grown, and how participation in the study enhanced their lives, “I had a chance to do something with other women…it gives me a chance to think for myself” and “[It was] very interesting…Educational…You’re not alone in your thoughts…[you] get other points of view [of different people].”

To facilitate ongoing development of SWO participants’ resilience and community change, a Booklet of Findings will be provided to each participant. This Booklet, which will include a summary of the study findings and examples of quotes and
photos, can be used by participants to illustrate to health care practitioners, policymakers, and local officials, such as mayors, some of the health promotion challenges that need to be addressed in their communities. In addition, the Booklet will illustrate the resilient resources of participants, suggesting strengths upon which health care practitioners and others can build to promote the health of rural older women. Successful aging and rural women’s health have been characterized as including the ability to plan ahead, be intellectually curious and in touch with creative abilities, physical activity, serenity and spirituality, caring for friendships and other social connections, and volunteering and civic responsibilities (Coward, Davis, Gold et al., 2006; Glicken, 2006; McPherson & Wister, 2008). Clearly, the photovoice method acted not only as a research approach, but, as importantly, it assisted women in the SWO study to successfully age. As such, photovoice is obviously a method to consider in rural research with rural women in other locations and age groups to assist them to develop abilities and perspectives that may help them to advance their resilience and age successfully.

Implications of the research for health care practice and health-related policy indicate that services must be expanded in rural and northern communities to include more diverse and enriched health care providers and services that address health promotion and illness prevention as well as diagnostic and treatment needs of rural and northern women. This is particularly so for older rural residents who comprise a significant and growing population in rural communities and who also may require enhanced health care support (Clark & Leipert, 2007; Keating, 2008). Indeed, in some rural communities in Canada seniors presently comprise up to 40% of the population (Statistics Canada, 2001), and it is anticipated that by 2021 one in four seniors will reside in a rural setting (Health Canada, 2002). As women tend to live longer than men and often experience greater chronic conditions and isolation (Ministry of Industry, 2006; Keating, 2008; McPherson & Wister, 2008), attention to the health of older women is an especially important aspect of rural health care.

Women form the backbone of rural communities and provide significant family and community support (Keating, 2008; Leipert & Smith, 2008; Sutherns, McPhedran, & Haworth-Brockman, 2004). Clearly, enhancing the resilience of rural women will support not only the women themselves but also their families and communities. Although findings in both the SWO and NBC study revealed that rural and northern women were indeed resilient, their resilience does not absolve governments of their responsibilities to strengthen system deficiencies and enrich rural health care resources. As health care planning moves forward, these studies clearly indicate that rural women should be included as equal partners in health care planning, policy, and practice that address rural health and health care and rural women’s resilience. Increased efforts must be made to recruit and retain health care professionals who can provide respectful and appropriate care to women in northern and other rural
settings. Northern and rural health care professionals must be comfortable living and working in small communities that are under-resourced and culturally diverse, where lack of anonymity and traditional gender roles and expectations prevail, where isolation and distance are facts of life, and where newcomers may be regarded as outsiders (Lee & Winters, 2006; Leipert, 1999; Leipert, Kloseck, McWilliam et al., 2007; Rennie, Baird-Crooks, Remus, & Engel, 2000). In addition, health care practitioners must include respect, empowerment, advocacy, community development, and coalition-building approaches in their practices with rural women (Coward, Davis, Gold, et al., 2006; Leipert & Reutter, 1998). These approaches are particularly important to help make the most of resources in sparsely populated communities and to increase support, resilience, and power for and with rural and remote women.

This study and others (Coward, Davis, Gold, et al., 2006; Leipert & George, 2008; Leipert & Smith, 2008; Sutherns, McPhedran, and Haworth-Brockman, 2004) indicate that more feminist qualitative research is needed in isolated settings, particularly regarding the health issues and resilience of women who may be more vulnerable to health risks, and women who were not well represented in this study, such as those in very remote settings and disabled women. Additional qualitative and quantitative research could expand and test components of the theory revealed in the NBC study with women in other rural and remote settings. Additional research that explores aspects of resilience, such as factors that facilitate and hinder rural women’s resilience, would provide important information for rural health care practice and policy.

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5 Transcending subject – object dualism. Challenging normalized power relations in research practice

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Introduction
There is an ongoing debate within feminist studies as to whether or not it is possible to develop more inclusive epistemologies and methodologies in order to produce more democratic and liberatory knowledge (Collins, 1990; Harding, 1991, 2004; Hartsock, 1997; Smith, 1990). The considerable challenge facing feminist scholars is how to conduct research in a way that does not oppress informants or take advantage of their vulnerability as researched subjects, but that can instead empower women without compromising scholarly integrity. Many researchers have tried to handle this problem by making women more involved in the research process (the actor-oriented and/or participatory approach) or by using themselves as the research object (for example in memory work). By adopting a reflexive language that discusses the implications of their position and their own situatedness, scholars have attempted to make their standpoints visible, destabilizing their position of power in so doing.

As feminist researchers, we too have struggled with these issues as we try to frame research that takes the knowledge of our informants in earnest and makes it possible for them to tell their stories without forcing them into predetermined categories or concepts. We take as our point of departure the ‘Mitt Sundsvall’ project, which studies how different groups claim their own ‘right to the town’ and the informal and formal channels through which claims to urban space and resources are pursued. Situating this study in the historical context of political and ideological currents in Sweden and Sundsvall, this paper presents a discussion of how visual methods can be used to capture specific and multiple standpoints.

We will consider the extent to which it is possible to break with dominant, normalized perspectives and to ensure that narratives from other standpoints are heard. The empirical material used in this discussion is taken from the part of the aforementioned project that focuses on the multiple ways in which recently arrived migrant men and women, of different ages and backgrounds, position themselves and are positioned in the urban community of Sundsvall, a town in central Sweden. In the project, our concern was to challenge the normalizing practices of knowledge production through a liberatory knowledge project inspired by the photovoice methodology developed by Wang (1999) among others, looking at the town from the standpoint of recently arrived migrants (see also Sandell 2005). Here we will discuss the challenges to be faced in creating liberatory knowledge, asking to what extent we actually challenged anything other than ourselves, and for whom our created knowledge was liberating.
**Feminist starting-points**

It has been argued that being subordinated in everyday life gives rise to a specific kind of knowledge about how subordination works that is denied to groups that are privileged (Essed, 1991; Harding 1991). Feminist philosophers of science (see, for example, Collins, 1990; Harding, 1991; Hartsock, 1997; Haraway, 1985, 1988) have criticized traditional research for its claims to objectivity and general vision – what Haraway (1985) refers to as ‘playing the God trick’ – and have redefined scientific methodology and its analytic categories. By moving the Enlightenment’s epistemological assumptions into the sphere of politics and ethics, arguing that science itself is political, they have contributed significantly to the discussion. There is no universally objective perspective from which we can view the world, since every purportedly ‘objective’ standpoint can be shown to bear the mark of social, political, and cultural influences even in its most basic assumptions (Haraway, 1988). Harding (1991) argues that modern ‘objectivist’ epistemology (which is closely associated with modern science) is a good example of a standpoint that attempts to hide its social and political origins. From this it follows that research that embraces its social, cultural, and political origins is less biased, and hence more objective. Feminist studies, argues Harding, are therefore more objective than traditional science. Feminist theory, as a way of understanding the subordination of women, continues to remind us that what is important is not only how or what we know, but what we do with that knowledge.

Social research as a social practice is itself never free from power, however. The very act of research is based on a will to find answers to posed questions – to have knowledge of others’ lives – and in this way make informants the objects of study while reserving the position of the subject for the researchers themselves. There are ways of conducting research that give informants greater opportunity to participate in the formulation of questions and analysis of data. One such method is the photovoice method developed by Wang and Burris (1994), in which participants are asked to use photography to tell the story of their everyday lives. Although the narratives are focused on a certain topic, participants have considerable autonomy in deciding which pictures to take, which ones to discuss, and which stories to recount for the researcher.

A basic assumption in our work is that ‘we can learn about ourselves at the center of the social order if we start out from the perspectives of lives at the margin’ (Harding 1991: 269). This calls attention to the fact that women are not the only subordinated group whose standpoint is valuable: other orders such as class, race and colonialism are also important if we are to understand the functioning of privilege and subordination, and the ways in which these orders are used to construct one another. Feminism should be emancipatory for every woman, not only an expression of the ‘narrow self-interest of dominant-group women’ (Harding 1991, p. 285). We can but agree with Harding and others that it is important to view things from
the perspective of both privileged and subordinated women if one’s purpose is to understand the logic behind the subordination of women in society. We regard the feminist-standpoint epistemology put forward by Harding and others as a project centred on the perspectives and knowledge of subordinated groups in order to achieve ‘liberatory knowledge’ (see, for example, Collins, 2004; Harding, 1991; Mulnari & Sandell, 1999;).

An intersectional analysis can make it difficult to engage in feminist struggle if the focus is not on the subordination of women but on marginality in general. This problem is solved by Harding’s suggestion (1991) that global, feminist-standpoint epistemology should take as its point of departure the experiences of marginalized women. To be able to understand the intersectionality of race, class, gender, and other structural features of society, it is necessary to start out from a multiple standpoint (for similar approaches, see also Collins, 1991, 2004; Hartsock, 1997).

In adopting a feminist, multiple standpoint, the researcher sets out to form a relationship with the informant where differences in power are as small as possible; where women’s experiences and narratives are taken seriously, to be learned from; and where the researcher is more of a participant among others than an expert in total control of the study (Fawcett & Hearn, 2004). Much of the literature has focused on the way in which the researcher’s own position influences the kinds of stories told during interviews and the ways in which they are analyzed. Some researchers, however, question the extent to which it is possible for subordinated groups to give voice, and, if attempts are made, what problems arise (Mohanty, 1988; Shope, 2006). One way of dealing with the inherent inequality between researcher and informant is to grant the informant as large as much of a say as possible in how the research is conducted. The degree of participation can range from a belief that only those with direct experience of an issue should research it, to the researcher asking informants for feedback on preliminary results (Fawcett & Hern, 2004).

In our project, we wanted to achieve many things, perhaps too many at the same time given that our theoretical starting-points were somewhat contradictory in nature. On the one hand, by so clearly taking a standpoint that looks to migrant women, as we have called them here, we resorted to a feminism that demands political rights for migrant women, constructing them as a group with shared experiences. On the other hand, we wanted to deconstruct the position of migrant women. Our aim was to go beyond both of these contrary perspectives. Our epistemological arguments centred on the possibility of combining an active, reflecting subject with a socially and historically situated woman without giving up the vision of the feminist project, even if it meant that we had to construe our informants as a group. We wanted to understand migrant women at one and the same time as a social group and a number of individuals.

Our approach has been sometimes problematic, drawing some warranted criticism, especially of our traditional research papers. There is a difficult balance to
strike between constructing and deconstructing; between different understandings of liberatory knowledge. However, despite the obstacles, the result has been a series of useful reflexive concepts, if only because we had to turn to different kinds of theories on spatiality in order to work extensively on the parallel dimensions of segregation–integration and inclusion–exclusion, where the first refers to the more structural dimension while the second has to do with the lived and subjective standpoints of our informants.

**Visual methodology: telling a story with few words**

Power (2003) argues that visual methods that give participants the opportunity to influence the course of the study likewise give researchers the chance to access different stories, for visual material makes it possible to communicate experiences that are difficult to put into words. In the study presented here, photos were used to determine themes that might otherwise have been overlooked in discussions or interviews. Our inquiry was centred on a class of recently arrived migrant men and women at an SFI school (which offers instruction in ‘Swedish for Immigrants’). In our study, the use of visual methods made it possible for our informants to tell us about their experiences of Sundsvall despite the fact that we did not speak a common language. By taking a participative, multiple standpoint, and by giving opportunities to the informants to collect empirical material, it became possible to focus on the numerous ways in which recently arrived migrants position themselves, and are positioned, in relation to the urban community.

During our first meeting with the informants, disposable cameras were distributed and the informants were asked to take pictures of places where they felt safe and happy (see Wang, 1999). Once the pictures had been developed, the informants were asked to give each photograph a title and then to select two or three pictures. Thus, although the informants were directed to some extent, they still had the opportunity to choose which stories to tell and how to tell them. In this way they told their stories more freely than would have been the case in a traditional interview. We would argue that research that utilizes photography in this way could make an important contribution to studies of the everyday experiences of subordinated groups. Wang (1999) suggests that this technique can be used to support feminist theories, since this method offers women, rather than researchers, the opportunity to visually represent their own experiences. By sharing and talking about their photographs, informants use the power of the visual image to communicate their life experiences, expertise, and knowledge, possibly in the process generating a critical consciousness and desire for political action (see Gaventa & Cornwall, 2001; Wang & Burris, 1994,).

In the study, we chose to give our informants as much say as possible in the course taken by the research by asking them to photograph places where they felt safe and happy (trygg). The reason for this was twofold. First, we wanted to avoid the risk of reproducing the all-too-common discourse that sees migrants’ everyday life as
fundamentally problematic – an incomplete story of that group’s daily existence. Second, we wanted to focus on the elements that could give practitioners and policymakers greater insight into the places and environments that are experienced as happy and safe, an aid in their work to create a more inclusive town.

Once the pictures had been developed we went back to the participants and, having given them a copy of each of their photos, asked them each to select two pictures they felt best matched the description ‘The places I like best’ (Figures 1 and 2). Later, they gave their chosen pictures titles explaining what they represented and why they had been selected.

**FIGURE 1** A country road. **FIGURE 2** View of the classroom.

Our aim initially had been to conduct interviews on the basis of the participants’ photographs. This is supposedly the moment when participants play an expert role as they describe their photos. When this phase was to begin, it quickly became clear that the language barrier would be a considerable obstacle. For this reason, the analytical and scholarly interpretation of the pictures consisted mainly of a location and content analysis that focused on (a) the places they chose to portray and (b) what those places represented to them. This phase of the study turned out to be one of the most reflexive as the lack of a common language became obvious. Admittedly, whether researcher and researched can ever truly understand each other is questionable, yet our informants had not yet learned the Swedish words for ‘disposable camera’, ‘research’, and ‘anonymity’. In the event, with the help of the SFI teachers, we were able to describe who we were; what we were interested in studying; that they would have full anonymity; and that they could drop out of the study whenever they chose. We found the language barrier a considerable challenge, painfully aware of how dependent our positions as researchers were on our ability to express ourselves as researchers, and how much we wanted to hold on to that position. To the question of why this was so, we ended up with the answer that if they ‘believed’ us to be researchers they would also believe us to be people worth trusting, people who had the peculiar right to read their lives.

We do believe, however, that our new-found appreciation not only of the langu-
age barriers, but also of our ascription of certain qualifications to our profession, meant that we subsequently listened in a more concentrated and unprejudiced manner, more focused on the actual content of what the participants were saying about their experiences of the town than on the specific wordings of their statements. The teachers helped by collecting cameras and later handing out pictures to those students who, for whatever reason, did not attend class on the days we were present. Another set of data consisted of posters the participants had made in their classes to present the town of Sundsvall for their families and friends (Figure 3). Although they were produced for educational reasons we were allowed to take copies of the posters and analyse them. This gave us the chance to get a sense of our informants’ understanding of the official discourse of the town.

As we proceeded with the study, we also started to question a number of our initial assumptions and methodological choices. In the beginning, our aim had been to conduct a photovoice study along traditional lines, with informants given the possibility to discuss their pictures with one another and to take a greater part in the data analysis. Another aim was for this to result in a meeting with public officials where our informants would have the chance to talk about their experiences in and of Sundsvall. As mentioned, our lack of a common language made this difficult. As we were unable to understand one another through language, our analysis of the visual material became more deductive, focusing more on a discussion about inclusion and exclusion than on the everyday experiences of our informants.

Similarly, when it came to the actual data, the stories we had expected before going into the field to hear were not the ones the participants chose to tell us. This way of conducting research, while it does not eliminate the differences in power in the research process, tends to destabilize them. In the research process as a whole, our own standpoint became visible, and we were not always comfortable about being denied our usual researcher repertoire, since it is as embedded in language as it is. Of course, as Acker, Barry, and Esseveld (1991) conclude, it is not possible to completely overcome the contradictions in the relationship between researchers and researched. This, we argue, can be used to avoid falling into the trap of what Lather (1991) calls the ‘imposition and reification on the part of the researcher’ in praxis-oriented research: ‘in the name of emancipation, researchers impose meanings on situations rather than constructing meanings in negotiation with research participants (ibid., p. 59). Using visual methodology forced us to question many of our preconceptions about the kind of lives recently arrived migrants live in our town. It is of course inevitable that, as Letherby and Zdrodowski (1995) note, researchers hold a balance of power because they choose what to do with data, how to understand it, and how to make it public. Being in such a position demands that
ing into the field to hear were not the ones the participants chose to tell us. This way of conducting research, while it does not eliminate the differences in power in the research process, tends to destabilize them. In the research process as a whole, our own standpoint became visible, and we were not always comfortable about being denied our usual researcher repertoire, since it is as embedded in language as it is. Of course, as Acker, Barry, and Esseveld (1991) conclude, it is not possible to completely overcome the contradictions in the relationship between researchers and researched. This, we argue, can be used to avoid falling into the trap of what Lather (1991) calls the ‘imposition and reification on the part of the researcher’ in praxis-oriented research: ‘in the name of emancipation, researchers impose meanings on situations rather than constructing meanings in negotiation with research participants (ibid., p. 59). Using visual methodology forced us to question many of our preconceptions about the kind of lives recently arrived migrants live in our town. It is of course inevitable that, as Letherby and Zdrodowski (1995) note, researchers hold a balance of power because they choose what to do with data, how to understand it, and how to make it public. Being in such a position demands that researchers take full responsibility for their choices and actions in order to make sure that their power is not abused.

By taking a participative, multiple standpoint and by giving opportunities to informants to collect empirical material, however, it was possible to focus on the various ways in which these recently arrived migrants both position themselves, and were positioned, in relation to different places in the urban community. We wanted, and still want, to believe that by giving our informants the task of choosing how, when, and where to collect the data, we were relinquishing some of our control over the research process – something we were not always comfortable with – and the unequal power relationships inherent in the research process were destabilized.

Picturing ambivalent spaces, unanswered questions
For the participants in this study, the everyday places they singled out as safe were their homes and the SFI school itself. These were the places, as one informant put it, ‘where I live my life’, positioning themselves in relation to public and private places. Beyond the physical places portrayed, the photographs also spoke of the social spaces where their relationships were formed and shaped. As Massey’s notion (2005) of the geometry of power indicates, the ability to move in and between places is based on the intersections of power structures. Factors that influence these processes are not genderless; rather, we found that the social relationships portrayed at school, for example, were highly gendered and depicted as mainly social relationships between women. We were also struck by the importance of how and when the appropriation of place and space was possible. Comparing the participants’ photographs with the posters of the town, it was also clear that most of the ‘favourite places’ our informants had photographed were absent, thus indicating that the meanings assigned
to various places were highly ambivalent.

Ambivalence, as Ang puts it (1996, p. 46), operates on two interconnected levels: a structural level and a subjective level. Bhabha’s concept (1990) of spaces of ambivalence was useful here, as it helped us understand those in-between spaces of sameness and otherness that exist side by side, spanning the gap between equality and difference. These places, as in the photographs of the SFI school taken by the participants, have an affinitive potential with which to transcend binary oppositions and create ‘hybrid cultural forms and meanings’ (Bhabha, 1990). We could see, for example, that many of the relationships between our female participants were intercultural friendships. From this angle, different pictures of the places where migrant women feel safe and happy offer us important information on where and when such potentially transcendible spaces occur.

Although one reason for using visual methods was the option of communicating wordlessly, the lack of a common language turned out to be a bigger challenge than we had anticipated. Even though it was possible to analyze the pictures in relation to the motif, the physical location depicted, and the title it was given, in some cases it was difficult to fully grasp what the informants were telling us. In a globalized world, symbols and signs may be widely spread (Sassen, 2000) but their meanings are still embedded in social relations and the systems of meaning within which they are produced. The picture below of what we would describe as a roadside was described by the informant as a ‘nature’ (Figure 4).

![Figure 4 'Nature'](image)

These and further findings are discussed in Giritli Nygren and Schmauch (forthcoming); and U. Schmauch, and K. Giritli Nygren, ‘The hidden boundaries of everyday places: Migrants, homeplace and the spatial practices of a small Swedish town’, unpublished manuscript 2011.
One might argue that full, mutual understanding is always impossible and that qualitative research in itself always entails an element of interpretation of what informants say. We, of course, agree. In the project presented here, however, this fact was even more conspicuous. That said, we believe that this also made our listening more concentrated and unprejudiced; more focused on the actual content of what participants were saying about their experiences than on the specific wordings. Given the small opportunities for verbal communication, what we could do with the material was also limited. Although we were at times puzzled by the photographs, ultimately it transpired that we had learned a great deal from them, irrespective of the type of analysis applied – traditional interviews, for example, would not have allowed us to see the graphic difference between our informants’ everyday places and their understanding of their position in public discourse.

Whether or not we managed to achieve our aim of creating a body of liberatory knowledge is difficult for us to assess. Although we as researchers learned much, and although this knowledge is being disseminated by the current project and in ongoing discussions with policymakers, it is doubtful that the results are liberating for those very men and women who took part in the study. Since the material was collected, the SFI school where we met the participants has moved to a different part of town and is under new management. The participants are now scattered across different classes. This makes it difficult to reconnect with them and communicate the results of the study, and so help create a knowledge that can be liberatory in the short term as well.

So, ultimately, did we actually challenge anything or anyone other than ourselves, and for whom was our knowledge liberating? The plain truth is that we do not know. We do know that we challenged our own research agendas and ourselves as researchers; we came to question many of our assumptions about research, as well as about the everyday lives of migrant women. Although we had no intention of questioning our identity as trustworthy researchers, questioning power relations between researcher and researched, the process made us realize that we could not do one without the other. And that is an accomplishment in itself.

References


TRANSCENDING SUBJECT–OBJECT DUALISM.
CHALLENGING NORMALIZED POWER RELATIONS IN RESEARCH PRACTICE


6 Daughter-girls, sister-girls, mom-girls and old lady-girls. Thoughts on subjectivity and reflexivity in girlhood-studies

Annelie Bränström Öhman

One is not born a girl – one becomes... one or another kind of girl.

With this slightly deformed travesty of Simone de Beauvoir’s most famous quotation, my paper begins with a shortcut leading to the intersection between some of the questions I have been circling around, ever since I got connected with the network Flickforsk – and at the same time with the research field of Girlhood Studies.

Instead of, or rather, beside Beauvoir, I might also use a phrase from Diablo Cody’s Academy Award-winning screenplay for the film Juno (2007). The film tells a rather unusual story about a 16-year-old high school girl who gets pregnant without losing neither her self-respect nor the respect of her friends or family. In a scene where Juno has already decided to give birth to her baby, her father gently scolds her and says: “I thought you were the kind of girl who knew when to say when.” And Juno replies: “I have no idea what kind of girl I am.”

From a totally different standpoint and age but with the same conviction, I agree and “I have no idea what kind of girl I am.” So, this indecisiveness of the cultural representations of contemporary girlhood or girl-being is the core of my working paper. And it is, within the frames of this format, more of a question than a statement.

When I initially joined the Flickforsk-network, I declared, quite defensively: “I am no girlhood-researcher. I’m just a hang-around”. A declaration which here and now demands an additional cautious remark of my current position: “I am no girl – I am just a has-been”. So, this is my perspective: an outsider looking in – or over my own shoulder. And honestly: who could deny the truth of a Meatloaf ballad?

objects in the rear view window may appear closer than they are

But as I am writing this I realize, of course, the complexity of any such claim of position...Who am I to place myself in the margin of a field where the centre is still flexible and changing? But whether from the inside or the outside: positionality is indeed an issue at stake here.

In the same passage as the famous quotation on “one is not born woman, one becomes one”, Simone de Beauvoir describes the position of girlhood as “this in between-ness between male and castrate that is called female”. A positionality, thus, defined as a profound – maybe even fundamental and determining liminality.

1 Juno (2007), directed by Jason Reitman, written by Diablo Cody (who won an Oscar/ American Academy Award 2008 for Juno in the category “Screenplay written directly for the screen”)


A map for growing up in transit. On the move, in transition. The becoming of a nomadic subject.

Some keywords to sum up and go, then: Becoming and in between-ness. Transitions. Liminal space. Transgressive thinking. Itinerary for a lost (and found?) girlhood.

Here we go.

I: [Almost Now]

It is a warm and sunny day in late August 2009. We are walking in the shadows of the trees in “Engelska parken” in Uppsala, me and my 15-year-old daughter Amanda. She is joining me for a conference dedicated to the memory of L M Montgomery, the world famous author of the Anne of Green Gables- and Emily-books. We arrive at the university, and we manage to find the right entrance. Scholars from all over the world are gathering one by one in the hallway, a couple of hundred people. Women mostly.

I notice a peculiar variety in dress code. Scandinavian and European middle age women are dressed in academic black – or bright linen fabrics of expensive cuts. Fancy haircuts and/or cool glasses and red lips.

Among them me."

On the other hand, there are a full dozen of elderly American and Canadian women, in leisure wear and ergonomic sandals, one or two in suits and flowery blouses. No makeup, only gold necklaces and earrings. And in addition Chinese women dressed in silk, discreet pastels. Younger women from all over the world in short skirts or jeans, cool t-shirts or low-cut tops, one or two in puffed sleeves, but notably no one pierced or tattooed.

Among them my daughter.

As we move along the hours, talks and days of the conference I try to make sense of this strange experience of seeing and hearing so many grown up women talking about girlhood experiences (or: occasionally – as I did in my paper – the relational “mom-daughter” experience) of reading “books for girls”. I notice that my daughter is addressed with an unusual amount of enthusiasm and cheerfulness – she immediately is “Amanda” with everyone, included and embraced. Previously, throughout the years of her childhood, in all the academic events or festivities to which she has accompanied me, barely anyone has noticed her or addressed her with more than a simple “hello” (meaning: you’re a child and this is serious business for adults – and probably you don’t understand what we’re talking about, anyway). Both she and I have got used to this polite indifference of Academia towards people whom by age, class, ethnicity, language or other more obscure presuppositions about lack of understanding are excluded from taking part.
But now something has obviously changed. Suddenly Amanda is *The Girl*. The emblematic it-Girl of Girlhood Studies. It is as if an optical illusion occurs at the same time, highlighting her freckles, dimples, blue eyes and long blonde hair into the image of *The Girl*. It is the same phenomenon as if a young man with fair skin and long hair and beard, wearing a long white shirt, would have walked into a gathering of priests on Good Friday. Could anybody avoid thinking “Jesus”?

Here it seems like everybody (except the few young twenty-something women, closer to her age than the average middle aged) who looks at Amanda thinks: “*The Girl*”. She is in the midst of the (girl-)position and (girl-)existence everybody else is addressing but has – willingly or (most often?) unwillingly – left behind them, years or decades ago. Moreover, she is the Daughter-girl that makes me visible as Mother. And by our simultaneous presence in the conference-room, the two of us together, we make all the other women who are mothers aware of the vacancy or (in a few more cases: presence) of their own daughters. The same goes for the twenty-something women, I realize, when two of them come to me and confess that they envy us – me and Amanda – and that they do wish they had had their own mothers with them at the conference, and could share this experience. But as one of them says: “We did read all the books together. Didn’t you?”

Now, ”this experience” – whatever it was – certainly was something… else. And an ambivalent one. As much as I was pleased to see Amanda being welcomed to the space and place of Academic Girlhood Studies – and in more general terms: to the Feminists within Academia (and in more, as always, vicious terms: to the eloquent and Highbrow-aesthetic Ladies of Literature )… I still couldn’t help being puzzled. I started to suspect that there was a kind of silent agreement among these women that we all had the permission to enter the *As If*-realm of fiction for as long as the conference lasted. Here the Daughter-Girls seemingly without friction or questions went well along with the Sister-Girls, the Mother-Girls and the Old Lady-girls. A paradoxical compatibility, summarized by a 93-year old lady in the audience saying: “As girls we all *know* that…”

Within this fiction it was *As If* we could all be girls again. Somewhere in this room, among the chairs and the stairs of this university hall, the secret entrance to Girlhood Lost & Found, waiting to be found anew and travelled into – just like the secret wardrobe of Narnia. The Girlhood dream of freckles and puffed sleeves as birthmarks of freedom. And the threatening disaster of getting lost in someone else’s battle, with your own life as a pledge.

II: When I Was (Am) a Girl [objects in the rear view window]

Here is the thing:
When I read an academic article or book about “girls,” I always find myself lacking the, as I guess, proper amount of identification. Whether the topic is ”girl-culture”
in general and positive terms or the “problematic”, self-destructive, abusive girls, I very seldom manage to find the “girl’s place” within my mind or memory.

In what time, place and situation was I most like or unlike the notion of a normal (or “problematic”) girl? And then, what kind of girl was or wasn’t I? And when did I cease to be the one or the other kind – if ever? No, I cannot say. The becoming rather than being nature of womanhood, as Beauvoir pointed out, goes for girlhood as well. Becoming is the ongoing; the was as never-was.

When I was a girl...is therefore an impossible statement or claim for anyone holding on to the division between fiction and reality. As a starting point for a narrative, it holds no more “truth” than an Once upon a time... But as I sincerely do not believe that “truth” can ever be the quest of science, this is no problem in itself. Instead I want to argue that we first have to deal with the fact that so many feminist scholars, within or outside the field of Girlhood Studies, are referring to different notions of the past being of “the girl” or “girlhood” as if she or it did exist in a past, positioned as one recognizable time-space. And along with that we have to deal with the equally common notion of this past being of girlhood as an experience which is possible to generalize.

One could, of course, simplify the problem by saying that the experience of girlhood is internalized in the experience of womanhood – but even so, the question remains: where is she; where is the girl? The Girl? Does she hold a separate existence, like in a summerhouse by the sea, while the grown up/middle aged woman and feminist scholar, is writing her articles or presenting her papers at conferences or network meetings like Flickforsk?!

Whereas the feminist debate of the 1970s and 1980s scrutinized any claim of an “universal” Woman Experience [who do you mean “we”, white woman?] the same self-reflexive and meta-theoretical attention is yet waiting to be addressed to the “universal” Girl. Possibly rephrased in the form of my initial declaration - I do not know what kind of girl I am.

There is, fortunately, not only one strategy to be followed in this equally complex and crucial debate. But, turning back to where I began, the Beauvoir moment of becoming, I want to suggest that we take on the challenge by starting to take a closer look at precisely what stands in front of us while we are leaning on the body of her work: the fictional space, the supposed in between-ness of girlhood, of female as transition (or even blank space?) between the male and the castrate. The point is not only what Beauvoir says, but also which style and genre she chose for saying it.

Over the years many critics have scrutinized Beauvoir’s choice of vocabulary when she describes the smells and horrors of growing up as a girl, in a becoming-a-woman’s-body, alongside the growing awareness of the forthcoming possibility of being inhabited...by an alien existence, euphemized as a baby. The mistake of such critics is obvious: they do not see the political strategy within the choice and practice
of style. By using strong metaphors and sensual imagery, Beauvoir manages to combine poetry with philosophy in a way yet unsurpassed, both in fiction and in theory. In this manner she also finds a means and a way of, at the same time, both mapping and addressing the place and space of the girl-within...within the text, within the lived experience of the author. Never ceasing to be in the becoming of one girl/woman – or another.

The list of keywords, to sum up, and go on, is now extended: Becoming and in between-ness. Transitions. Liminal space. Transgressive thinking. Itinerary for a lost (and found?) girlhood. Narrative space and time. Style.

I could die for style. [hooks]

Here we go again.

When I was a girl. I am.

[---] To be continued...

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7 Reading as transgressing “the normal”: On the importance of literary reading for social research

Anders Johansson

For some years now I have had a small fragment of a text that has remained unpublished. It has been part of several articles, but always left out in the final draft. Not because it has been unimportant, but because it has had such a delimited form – being a small paper on its own – that it could easily be taken out in its entirety, and because it has been of such vital importance for my thinking that it could fit into almost any article that I might write, at least the ones that I have been working with within a collaborative project called Challenging normalization.

This small article is about Jacques Derrida’s critique of the philosopher J. R. Searle, published under the title *Limited Inc* (1988) and it concerns “the normal” and how to question it. Ever since I first read *Limited Inc* it has been of major importance for me in my reflections on my own discipline, literary studies, and the relations between reading and method, literature and social research. When I entered the project on normalization, and thereby the multi-disciplinary milieu consisting of researchers from the social sciences as well as the humanities, Derrida’s text became even more important. Asking myself the question about what my contribution could consist of, I came to the conclusion that reading, in the Derridean meaning of displaying a text’s generalized possibilities of meaning, could perhaps be something worthwhile pursuing in this context, not the least since deconstructive reading in itself has the ambition of contesting “normal” ways of interpretation (or reading in the non-generalized way). In this ambition I also found support from Gayatri Spivak’s words about “literary training” as “the irony of the social sciences, if irony is understood as permanent parabasis” (Spivak, 2003, p.52).

This might sound as if literary training could endow the reader with a deeper understanding, that the deconstructive reader would be someone who tells social science what it really means, but I do not see it that way. In its polemical, parodying, satirizing and ridiculing manner *Limited Inc* easily lends itself to such a reading, but I insist on deconstruction actually being a way of loving attention, and not simply relativist with an ambition of finding fault. At least it was out of such a standpoint that I, as part of the project, began to read social research concerning structural and normalized discrimination.

Background
During the first six years of the present century the Swedish Social-democratic government issued forth no less than three major inquiries concerning what was called structural discrimination. Since they have produced thousands of pages of interesting, multi-disciplinary, social research, the inquiries make an excellent opportunity for reading. Here are collected a lot of empirical material and interesting conclusions about normalized discr-
minatory patterns concerning gender and ethnicity. It is this extensive material that I have been reading for a couple of years, trying to be “unexcusing, unaccusing, attentive, and situationally productive through dismantling” (Spivak, 1993, p.146). This because research is too seldom read as worth interpreting, as analyzable in the way a poem can be read over and over again, and I think that research can be worth that kind of attention. Research is never just the conclusions, and a specific study never covers a whole field of investigation. Instead, any separate study can be seen as an invitation to continuous reading and thinking. And that is what I have been trying to do (Johansson, 2011).

However, another reason why this fragment of mine has not been published might be that it feels uncomfortable to rely on a text from the 1970s for theoretical inspiration. Today poststructuralist thought has both become an integrated part of the theoretical core of social research and something seen as somehow passé. I cannot, however, avoid thinking that something might have been lost by the assimilation of the thinking of Foucault et al. in the form of social research methods. And that which has been lost is the strong connection to philosophy and literature that characterized so called “French theory” from the start. One might say that a sociologization of poststructuralist thought has taken place. By this I do not mean that research using Foucault or any other of the French thinkers is wrong. Reading the inquiries convinces me of how productive poststructuralist thought has been to social research. What I do mean, however, is that the philosophical/literary reading side of “French theory” could still be important and productive when it comes to reading texts and understanding social phenomena.

This conviction is partly the reason why I became interested in gender studies. I see feminism as not only one of the most important political projects over the latest centuries but also as one of the most important theoretical ones, especially since the 1960s and forward, with major implications for social research and literary studies. As already stated, the transformation of the social sciences and the humanities that took place during the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s consisted to a large degree of the unification of, on the one hand, an insight about the dependence of knowledge on social orders of power, and, on the other, a generalized form of philosophical reading, strongly connected to the literary avant-garde-tradition. As I see it, feminism was one of the most important fields where this unification took place.

Today one cannot open a textbook on qualitative methods without becoming aware of the importance this transformation has had. When we meet in the multi-disciplinary room of gender studies we share a common theoretical base no matter what discipline we come from. If we do not share everything, we share enough. But the productiveness of these kinds of meetings lies in the fact that we read from different angles. For my part, it is important to acknowledge the significance of art, literature and reading in the continuously expanding and changing landscape of present day social research and humanistic scholarship. And this means that I tend to accentuate how, for example, Foucault is someone who develops methods that are just as much poetic as scientific. It may be that
the cult of reading and art, which begins with the renaissance and reaches its peak with romanticism and modernism, has now lost much of its historical importance, but that does not mean that it does not contain elements worth preserving, worth insisting on. The belief in reading as a possibility to think differently, as committed to being transgressive, is still valuable, not least for gender studies.

This type of reading is not based on any conviction that qualified readers of literature have some deep, inner skill. Nevertheless it does not accept that one should not have to learn how to read. What it is based upon is the belief that the experience of reading literary texts may form a capacity to handle socially mediated structures of meaning – texts in a generalized sense – in a way that does not search for their socially accepted and normalized meanings, but their possibilities of “meaning” – generalized, subconscious or otherwise non-normal.

Reading like this means reading in close connection to literature, and it is something that unites the thinkers of what we call poststructuralism. They may be different in many ways, but they share the view on writing and reading as productivity, not just communication of established meaning. This kind of reading is what enables deconstructive exposure of the construction of meaning, but also the archaeology and genealogy of Foucault. Socially established meaning can always be questioned out of the reservoir of meaning that every text bears with it in the form of a potential generality, or, in other words, a limitless context. This questioning is a philosophical way of reading. But it also has a lot in common with artistic methods. When Foucault creates and decodes series of enunciations instead of interpreting coherent, meaningful and unified ideas, this can be seen as a version of handling Heidegger’s ontological difference, of trying to wrest Being from its settings as beings, but it depends just as much on how serial music breaks with the meaningful, let’s say normal, contexts of tonal music, as well as with how Mallarmé’s and Burrough’s different kinds of cut-up technique break with ordinary syntactic cohesion.

The Critique of Relativism

So far I have tried to give an introduction to the fragment I will present. My main point has been that an important part of poststructuralist thought is its strong connection to art and literature; that its methods – or perhaps anti-methods – depend heavily on both artistic methods themselves and ways of reading tied to these. One of the most important aspects of this kind of reading is that it insists on the possibility for thought to question socially and culturally produced meaning, values and practices – which do not mean that it would not be socially produced itself, but only that every determined, actual meaning, practice or value can always be contextualized in ways that expose its limits and blind spots, including, of course, the questioning itself. Impossible paradoxes are unavoidable, but what is important is that it is a position that does not accept any simple relativism. Nor does it accept that cultures, paradigms or contexts should be seen as ultimately legitimating specific meanings, truths or practices. Although they most often do, no culture may in and by itself legitimate anything.
What makes critique possible is thus that it is through the thinking of the impossible that one can understand what the wholly possible and actual really means. Sometimes this might mean that one posits the generalized and unreachable Laws of justice, equality or hospitality as that which questions all humankind’s actual and factual laws, morals and/or social processes (Derrida, 2001; Derrida & Dufourmantelle, 2000). That is one way of interpreting what deconstruction means. Before social processes, there are always already the ethical, not in the form of a set of rules, but as the impossible and potentially all embracing concept of the ethical, through which we can see that discrimination occurs, what it means and how it is constructed within the possible, the realized and the actual. A reading grounded in such a transgression does not have to stay within the realms of facticity, and can therefore question not just any kind of essentialism but also every form of cultural relativism, because no individual and no culture can legitimate their values from the fact that they are their normal values – or even by referring to them as being just pragmatically chosen. There is no escape from responsibility.

The question is: what is truth? Is it limited and controlled by what one agrees upon within the realms of a culture, or can one imagine a generalized concept of truth from out of which one can analyze and contextualize the truths of any specific culture?. The difference between the two alternatives is thus whether one should accept cultures as limited communities who produce their own truths or if one should maintain the possibility that every local truth can be described and analyzed within a more generalized context.

There are of course traces of the traditional philosophical way of trying to define the absolute good or true in this manner of thinking. It is a philosophical kind of reading. But the difference lies in that it does not accept definitions, nonambiguity, unity, representativeness, normality or relativity as criteria for truth. None of these criteria can sanction truth, even if they function in this way, within limited contexts. Truth is thus at the same time seen as less controllable and definable as well as more demanding and rigorous. When Foucault, in The Archaeology of Knowledge, lets a fictitious interviewer ask him if he, even if he does not acknowledge any definite ground for his analysis, at least has to accept that it is his analysis, his perspective, he answers no, the truth of his investigations cannot even be anchored in his perspective or his context: “This is because, for the moment, and as far ahead as I can see, my discourse, far from determining the locus in which it speaks, is avoiding the ground on which it could find support” (Foucault, 2002, p.226).

The Debate
The debate between Derrida and Searle concerns, in a similar manner, to what extent context can be criteria for truth, and thus about the question of how science and research legitimize their methods and results. After Wittgenstein and Kuhn, no one can believe in the objectiveness of scientific truth. Instead, one has often taken one’s recourse to the pragmatic relativism and a view of normal science being developed within ordered cultures called paradigms, or, perhaps, language games. It is against such a view that the readings
of Foucault or Derrida can be seen as opposed in an interesting way. Not denying the existence of normal science, paradigms or cultures, but questioning them as to their totalizing capacity to provide a ground for knowledge according to the logic of cultural relativism.

The debate had its origin in Derrida’s deconstructive analysis of J. L. Austin’s speech act theory in the essay “Signature Event Context”, published in *Writing and Difference* (Derrida, 1978). The main point of that essay which is relevant here is that Derrida, although he acknowledges the importance of how Austin takes the concept of meaning out of its ahistorical and logical habitat in earlier philosophy by placing it instead as historically situated performativity, that is as speech acts, he nevertheless criticizes the way Austin lets intention and context define and arrest meaning (Derrida, 1978, p.128). According to Derrida, speech act theory thus becomes dependent on what is regarded as “normal” contexts and intentions, since what is required of the contexts, if they are to perform the function of defining meaning, is that they are relevant, determinable and limited. Derrida maintains on his part that contexts and intentions (as represented in a signature), do work, do define meaning in actual circumstances, but that this cannot be made into a criterion for truth, since any context or intention can always be seen in a wider, more generalized context, and hence it can be deconstructed.

J. R. Searle can be considered a disciple of Austin, and has developed speech act theory by defining rules and criteria for how to interpret different speech acts in different contexts (Searle, 1965; 1971). It is thus not very surprising that he is, in his reaction to Derrida’s essay, much concerned with distinctions, such as the ones between misunderstanding and understanding, or fiction and non-fiction (Searle, 1977). In his answer to Searle, published as a book under the title *Limited Inc* (Derrida, 1988), Derrida, for his part, presents a text that in itself is a generalization of what a philosophical text may be, beyond all usual distinctions. He uses all kinds of rhetorical skills imaginable or not imaginable as parts of a philosophical argument. Puns are mixed with extensive and detailed argumentation, word-plays with a most pedantic listing of misquotations and misunderstandings made by Searle. In this way, Derrida questions the exclusive validity of normal writing and reading. Through his limitations to normal methodical reading, Searle does not live up to either the standard of literary writing or the “absolute”, generalized demands for accuracy and exactness, according to Derrida. Limitations and method can thus conceal more than reveal, lead to the situation where one does not see what actually happens, does not read what is actually written, but instead limits understanding to what is seen as contextually normal within the culture or the paradigm that one, as a researcher, belongs to.

What does it mean to read correctly? Is it to read what is written or what ought to be written, normally? Close reading may show how difficult it can be to differentiate between a correct and an incorrect reading; to what extent “the normal” decides what is to be counted as the best reading, no matter what the text actually states. Normality can therefore, by more attentive readings, be shown to rely on certain misreadings; something that challenges what normality takes for granted. “Normal” research contradicts itself, since it
is already contaminated with “mis-”. The generalized concept of accuracy, grounded in the reservoir of possibilities that the concept brings with it, which is unrealized in the normal understanding of the concept, lets us see what the normal distinction actually means.

If normality in this way can be shown not to know what it thinks it knows, can be proven to carry the non-normal within itself as its “inner” truth, then we have to accept that we cannot comfortably rely on methodical rules to define and limit our investigations of representative, or “normal”, social processes. As researchers we have to accept that we cannot control the field in that way, no matter what our will and our intentions. Instead we have to read even more accurately, have to be even more rigorous and attentive, since we are all the time forced to relate critically to the normal and that which is taken for granted.

Within research, method is one of the most effective instruments of normalization, and one of the things that Searle opposes in Derrida’s critique of Austin is that he does not respect the need for methodological delimitations. As to the possibility that it would be impossible to decide between normal or non-normal meanings of an utterance, Searle’s answer is that we then have to make a delimitation any way, pragmatically: “Austin’s exclusion of these parasitic forms from consideration in his preliminary discussion is a matter of research strategy; he is, in his words, excluding them ‘at present’; but it is not a metaphysical exclusion: he is not casting them into a ditch or a perdition, to use Derrida’s words” (Searle, 1977, p.205).

Searle obviously means that the purpose of speech act theory is to categorize, define and delimit, which amounts to saying that research is equal to method. Derrida’s answer questions this whole idea about what research should be. But not through rejecting it – he actually sees it as quite essential – but by pointing out that methodological stringency may very well lead to blindness if, in its normality, it becomes so self-evident that it becomes invisible and therefore not exposed to critical reflection. Method can make us see things, but it can also make us not see things. Through close reading we may see that to which method has blinded us.

This does not mean that we are forced to accept that we cannot know anything, or that we should give up research, but only that good research, in order to be stringent and true, may have to transgress the normal. Normal methodological stringency on its own can be a way of not reading. One of the ways that Derrida opposes Searle could be described as the challenging of pragmatical limits through attentive reading. The former leads to Searle not being able to read what Derrida actually says, in the most elementary way. Searle states the normal expectations of meaning before the literal meaning of the text, something that Derrida could be said to expose as strategies of normalization, often under the pretext of a “common sense” understanding that can describe Derrida’s way of reading as “mis-reading”, “obviously wrong”, “misunderstanding” (Derrida, 1978, p.41).

One can read Derrida’s critique as pointing to how an empiristic and pragmatic understanding of contextuality may result in the attentiveness of philosophical reading being superseded and replaced by pragmatic decisions that depend on a discipline’s normal tra-
tion, that in itself becomes more important than what the text actually states, more than what can be seen in any observable occurrence. Philosophical, or literary, attentiveness, as a possibility for thought to transgress the normal and actual, is opposed to methodological rigidity and predictability.

There is thus no way of legitimizing by “that is the way it is”, “one has to draw the line somewhere” or “we cannot include everything”. Of course one has to draw the line somewhere, but this does not exempt one from the responsibility of having drawn the line. Instead every decision becomes a real decision, which cannot ground itself in the fact that it is part of a culture, part of social processes beyond anyone’s control (even if that is true, to some extent). As a consequence of this, one can criticize what seem to be neutral, normal and unavoidable decisions. As I have done together with Siv Fahlgren in a reading of a textbook from the discipline of Social work (Fahlgren & Johansson, 2010).

In an afterword to Limited Inc, “Afterword. Toward an Ethic of Discussion”, Derrida situates the polemic between himself and Searle in an afterthought on the ethics of debates and the possibilities of understanding taking place in such polemically heated meetings. Here he is using another textual strategy, one more of the potentialities, namely the one of being plain and simple. Let me finish with some quotations by Derrida written in this temper, showing that deconstructive writing and reading do not have as their goal either total relativism or loss of any reference to reality:

*This way of thinking context does not, as such, amount to a relativism, with everything that is sometime associated with it (skepticism, empiricism, even nihilism). […] it does not renounce (it neither can nor ought to do so) the “values” that are dominant in this context (for example that of truth, etc.).

[…] It does not suspend reference – to history, to the world, to reality, to being, and especially not to the other…* (Derrida, 1978, p.137).

That history, the world, and so forth, is in a “constant movement of interpretation” through contextualization does not mean that all we have is non-truth – that would be a mistake equal to any naïve positivism. But it does mean that one may sometimes have to read “real social facts” with the same attentiveness as when reading a poem.

References


Part 3:

... and beyond
8 Listening: a radical pedagogy

Bronwyn Davies

A common-sense distinction between teachers and students is that the one teaches (through speaking) and the other learns (through listening). In this common-sense version of the world the teacher has correct knowledge and the student must acquire it. The teacher only listens to students to check the correctness of their knowledge, or to know and judge them as individuals and to correct their behaviour. But as Harold Garfinkel (1967) said, common-sense is the domain of cultural dopes—those who are shaped by their culture, who lack reflexive awareness and the capacity to question the ethics of taken-for-granted practices. In the radical pedagogy I want to explore here, I use radical to refer both to the inherent nature of pedagogy, and to a desire for fundamental change in the inherent forms of pedagogical encounters.

In this chapter I want to open up the concept and practice of listening, and with it the idea of what pedagogy is or might be. I want to go beyond listening for meaning, or identity, to listening, for both teachers and students, as openness to the other and to the not-yet-known. It is primarily in the field of early childhood education that teachers’ listening has begun to emerge as a significant pedagogical practice (see for example Ceppi & Zini, 1998; Dahlberg & Moss, 2005; Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 1999; Lenz-Taguchi, 2009; Moss & Petrie, 2002; Rinaldi, 2005). Carlina Rinaldi says: “Behind each act of listening there is desire, emotion, and openness to differences, to different values and points of view… Learning how to listen is a difficult undertaking; you have to open yourself to others... Competent listening creates a deep opening and predisposition toward change” (Rinaldi, 2006, p.114).

By focusing on listening, and on teachers as listeners in particular, I am troubling the familiar teacher-student binaries in which the student is othered, even abjected, as the one who does not know or who does not behave correctly. In its place I want to develop the idea of listening as a Deleuzian encounter, and as an ongoing emergence of oneself in relation to the other 1. In doing so I want to make a strong distinction between self as identity (that is relatively fixed, linked to ego and to the defense of oneself against the other), and self as process (an emergent relational being, open to the other and to the not-yet-known) (Davies, 2000). Foucault made this same distinction when he wrote: “If we are asked to relate to the question of identity, it must be an identity to our unique selves. But the relationships we have to have with ourselves are not ones of identity, rather, they must be relationships of differentiation,

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1 Two projects in particular have inspired me in this thinking. The first, with Susanne Gannon, Constance Ellwood, Catherine Camden Pratt, Katerina Zabrodska and Peter Bansel was published as Pedagogical Encounters by Peter Lang in 2009. The second, also with Susanne Gannon, and with Jonathan Wyatt and Ken Gale was published by Peter Lang in 2011: Deleuze and Collaborative Writing: an immanent plane of composition. It is also inspired by my observations in Reggio Emilia inspired schools in Sweden.
of creation, of innovation. To be the same is really boring” (Foucault, 1997a, p. 166). It is the latter, the differentiating, creative, innovative self-as-process, that I want to privilege in developing a radical pedagogy that begins with listening. With Nancy, then, I will ask “What does it mean for a being to be immersed entirely in listening, formed by listening or in listening, listening with all his being?” (Nancy, 2007, p. 4).

My first moment of being “immersed entirely in listening, [being] formed by listening” (Nancy, 2007, p. 4) that I will explore here, takes place in a preschool. The listener here is the child. The story was told in a collective biography workshop (Davies and Gannon, 2006), where the child listens to the sound of the piano and the triangle, the teacher and the other children. In this moment listening involves, in Nancy’s words, stretching the ear “—an expression that evokes a singular mobility, among the sensory apparatuses, of the pinna of the ear—it is an intensification and a concern, a curiosity or an anxiety” (Nancy, 2007, p. 5).

The teacher opened up a box of musical instruments. She asked who would like the tambourines, who would like the drums, and last of all, who would like the triangles. The small girl had never played with any of these instruments, so she did not raise her hand. The triangles were given to the last ones left who had chosen no instruments. The triangles seemed inferior, the small girl thought, when compared to the drums. The teacher demonstrated how each instrument was to be played. The triangle must be held so, by the string, and struck just so with the small metal stick. Then the teacher sat down at the piano and played them the tune they were to accompany. Then again, with the children this time, and the noise was terrible, the children seeming to ignore completely the sound coming from the piano. The small girl carefully hit her triangle, but the sound was ugly and flat. The other triangle children ran their stick around the triangle hitting all the sides, laughing, making the triangle fly off in all directions with a jangling sound muddled up with the whack and thump of the drums and the terrible jingling of the tambourines. She anxiously watched the other children’s wild experimentation with their instruments until, suddenly, she could see that she must loosen her grasp on the stick before the triangle would sing. When the piano started again she noticed the sound of her triangle came after the note she was supposed to accompany. She listened hard, focused only on the piano, the triangle and the stick. The teacher repeated the tune. The small girl found she had to begin to strike not when the piano note came, but the moment before it came. Her body discovered exactly the moment the stick must begin its descent in order for the 2 sounds to come together. The sound of the piano and the triangle exactly together made a warm feeling in the small of her back that ran down the back of her legs and into her shoes.

In this moment the child listens for meaning, but much more than this, she listens for sound. Her listening generates something new, not located in the teacher or in her, but in-between her, the other children, the teacher, the piano and the triangle. Her attentive listening is not just with ears for the teacher’s meaning or intention, or to the other children’s experimentation. She also listens with her whole body to the...
vibration of the piano and the timing of the beat. Her body discovers a new way of moving in relation to another, where the other is not just other humans (both teacher and children) but also musical instruments. Together they produce a new sound—a new capacity for engagement. The child has listened with all her being, and an emergent self finds itself co-creating a new event that she could not have imagined beforehand. In Nancy’s words:

To listen is to enter that spatiality by which, at the same time, I am penetrated, for it opens up in me as well as around me, and from me as well as toward me: it opens me inside me as well as outside, and it is through such a double, quadruple, or sextuple opening that a ‘self’ can take place. To be listening is to be at the same time outside and inside, to be open from without and from within, hence from one to the other and from one in the other (Nancy, 2007, p. 14).

It is through listening that being is made possible. This is nothing to do with knowing an essential being as a phenomenon that can be pinned down. It is a form of being-in-relation-to-the-other, the other that comes from a gift of listening and openness to the not-yet-known. The self continuously comes into existence and creates events that are evolutionary, unfolding possibilities that are not attributable to one or the other. In this very moment of listening, the self forms itself in relation, in the ongoing dynamic process of being heard.

Deleuze offers some vital concepts that can help us unfold this radical pedagogy that is emergent in acts of listening. These are difference and differenciation. Difference has generally, at least since Aristotle, been understood as categorical difference. In this model of difference, the other is discrete and distinct from the self, with difference lying in the other and normality in oneself. Identity is constructed through a string of binaries in which the other’s sameness as, or difference from, oneself is made real. Deleuze (2004) offers another approach to difference in which difference comes about through a continuous process of becoming different, of differenciation. Massey (2005, p. 21) describes these two approaches as:

1. “discrete difference/multiplicity (which refers to extended magnitudes and distinct entities, the realm of diversity)”, and
2. “continuous difference/multiplicity (which refers to intensities, and to evolution rather than succession)”.

In the first approach difference is being “divided up, a dimension of separation”, while in the second, Deleuzian approach, difference is “a continuum, a multiplicity of fusion.” Deleuze wishes “to instate the significance, indeed the philosophical primacy, of the second (continuous) form of difference over the first (the discrete) form. What is at issue is an insistence on the genuine openness of history, of the future” (Massey, 2005, p. 21). These two approaches to difference are closely linked to the
The discrete person, existing in its separation from the other is, in Deleuzian thought, a mistaken fantasy. We are in connection even when we don’t realize we are. The personal identity of liberal humanist thought is in need of continuous defence and it closes off the outside. It forecloses the acts of listening that I want to explore here. Deleuze ponders this conception of the self as self-in-relation through his collaboration with Félix Guattari:

When I said Félix and I were rather like two streams, what I meant was that individuation doesn’t have to be personal. We’re not at all sure we’re persons: a draft, a wind, a day, a time of day, a stream, a place, a battle, an illness all have a nonpersonal individuality. They have proper names. We call them “hecceities.” They combine like two streams, two rivers. They express themselves in language, carving differences in it, but language gives each its own individual life and gets things passing between them... From this viewpoint, writing with someone else becomes completely natural. It’s just a question of something passing through you, a current, which alone has a proper name. Even when you think you’re writing on your own, you’re always doing it with someone else you can’t always name (Deleuze, 1995, p. 141).

The specificity of each of Deleuze and Guattari, their material existence in the world with their particular histories are vital resources for this work-in-relation, but each is open to the other and their focus is on what emerges between them. This is what matters; the music for the small girl; the haecceities for Deleuze and Guattari; the creation of a third stream, a flow of new ideas, a movement.

Having put forward this new idea of selves as haecceities, let me step back, into the world of pedagogy as identity or entity production, where difference as categorical difference is enacted. The following story comes from Cath Laws, a principal of a school for “special” children, primary school children who cannot manage or be managed in normal school (Laws forthcoming; Laws and Davies, 2000; Davies, 2008).

Categorical Difference: Bob and Shane

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2 I draw this example from Laws (forthcoming). I have discussed this particular incident in other papers and each time I come to it I find it offers new insights into the issues I am working through.
“Striated spaces are those which are rigidly structured and organized, and which produce particular, limited movements and relations between bodies. ... Smooth spaces, by contrast, are those in which movement is less regulated or controlled, and where bodies can interact – and transform themselves – in endlessly different ways” (Hickey-Moody and Malins, 2007, p. 11). The story of Bob and Shane shows the way in which the striations of schooling, and relations of power work to constitute these particular people as recognizable according to the categories “principal” and “student”. In my analysis I do not wish to focus on Bob’s singular identity, however, but on the forces that create not just this Bob, but Bobs everywhere within schools and other educational institutions. Bob does not belong in a historical period that is past, and he does not just belong in Australia. He is a particular knotty configuration of the subject position Principal, that counter-discourses continually undo, only to find the same knots tying themselves back up again inside the striations, the rigid structure and organization “which produce particular, limited movements and relations between bodies” (Hickey-Moody and Malins, 2007, p. 11).

The story of Bob and Shane, as it is told by Cath, contains a familiar scenario between a student and a school principal. The Principal, Bob, works to position himself as Principal, that is as someone categorically different from Shane. As Principal, he has access to correct knowledge that it is his duty to impart to Shane. The student, as abject other, has no knowledge that is of value to Bob—nothing that Bob thinks should be listened to. Shane is the one who must listen and demonstrate that he has done so.

Shane had been attending Cath’s special school, and then returned to his regular school. He was suspended again when he came to the school assembly wearing a baseball cap:

Bob: Take that hat off, son, we don’t wear hats inside. You should know that.

Shane: (Does not move)

Bob: I said take it off now.

Shane: (Gets up and walks out of assembly)

Bob: Stay right there. Don’t turn your back on me, son! Come back here right now!!

In this moment, Bob, in his role as school principal, positions himself as the one, and the only one, who establishes and maintains the order of the school—establishing its striations, its rigid structure and organization, in keeping with his idea of what this school is and should be. Bob’s words lie within, and affirm the striations of, the social, legal and moral order, which Bob has the right, and even the obligation, to create and maintain. The school assembly is an ideal context for the performative display of Bob’s power to constitute the striated order of the school. Of such order Foucault says:
What characterizes power is the fact that it is a strategic relation which has been stabilized through institutions. So the mobility in power relations is limited, and there are strongholds that are very, very difficult to suppress because they have been institutionalized and are now very pervasive in courts, codes, and so on. All this means that the strategic relations of people are made rigid (Foucault, 1997a, p. 169).

Bob tells Shane to remove his “hat”, positioning Shane as the abjected other, as one who is unacceptably ignorant of the social and moral order of the school (You should know that). When Shane does not obey Bob’s order, Bob reads this in terms of his own positioning as principal. Bob and Shane are separated in this moment more by the categories than by Shane’s act. Bob cannot listen to Shane—cannot hear anything other than the affront to his own person and the position he occupies. Bob repeats his instruction, as if Shane might be deaf. To Bob’s amazement Shane does not remove his hat, and he walks out. As he walks out Bob reiterates the terms through which Shane must constitute himself as abject and obedient other—willing to be humiliated in front of the school. Shane’s action punctures Bob’s performance, and he becomes manifestly the one who is not in control of Shane. He regains his position as the person who rightfully holds power by suspending Shane for another two days. When Shane’s mother brings Shane back to Cath’s school, where he must return now that he is suspended, Shane is still wearing his baseball cap:

*Cath*: So what happened – you were doing so well.

*Shane*: I wouldn’t take my hat off.

*Cath*: Good heavens – you made that your hill to die on?

*Shane*: (Takes off his hat. He is patchily bald – a really bad haircut). I couldn’t take it off and let everyone see this!

*Cath*: No. Guess not.

Cath offers Shane a speaking position, as one who can speak and is capable of making a coherent account of his action. She opens up a relational space (in Deleuzian terms a smooth space) in which Shane can, with Cath, make his action make sense. This is more than Cath being understanding and kind, and it is more than Shane telling what he already knows. It is Cath being open to hear what she does not know already and it is Shane discovering what it is possible to say inside that open space. She does not perform as one in authority whose existing knowledges and her right to assert them needs to be defended. Her authority lies in her openness to the other, to what she does not yet know about the other, to what she makes hearable from the other. In that relational space Shane can reveal his humiliating haircut and the necessity of keeping it hidden. She does not offer a counter-narrative, that he should, for example, learn to take the inevitable harassment that the other students would have
engaged in—that he should in fact become someone she deems appropriate within the striated order of the school. She listens and so creates an event, a haecceity between herself and Shane, where something new opens up enabling her to hear what Shane says about the event in assembly.

Two days later Cath goes to the regular school with Shane for the suspension resolution meeting. This meeting is fascinating in its explicit elaboration of Bob’s philosophy—his concept of categorical difference as it operates between teachers and students:

**Bob:** You broke every rule in the book. Out of uniform, ignoring a direction and leaving the school grounds. If you don’t resolve this suspension you will not be coming back to my school. First up, I want you to admit you did the wrong thing and an apology.

**Shane:** (quietly) I’m sorry. It was wrong.

**Bob:** You’re a child and I am an adult. I have the power, and as you are a child you have no power. That is how it is. When I was a child I had no power, and I had to listen to the adults around me, my parents, teachers and other adults that were involved in my life. They knew what was best for me and the adults in your life know what is best for you. Do you understand, son?

**Shane:** (Shane has a paper clip in his hands that he has bent so that it is a straight piece of wire. He is scratching his wrist with this wire. The scratches are deep enough to draw spots of blood. He has a face like a thundercloud, but remains silent).

Although Shane produces the words that Bob requires, the wound Bob feels to his person is not satisfied by Shane’s apology or by his agreement to be positioned as wrong. Bob wants to secure his rights to the positioning through which he accomplishes the particular personhood he desires, that is, as the one who has, by right, by virtue of his own rightness, the power to create the order he desires. Shane’s expression of pain, visible in his action with the paper clip, is not visible to Bob. He is not open to Shane. The future between them is not open. It is closed. It will be contained within the striated order that Bob requires for the maintenance of his position, and with it his personal identity.

**Bob:** You must make sure that you wear your school uniform every day of the week. We don’t have school uniforms for fun you know. We have them for a reason. When you put on our school uniform, you are agreeing to obey the rules of this school. You are saying, that you know that the teachers at this school have the power and that you will do whatever it is that they tell you to do. That uniform says that you are happy to be controlled by the teachers at this school whenever you wear it. (Shane is still silent – scratching with the clip).

**Bob:** Son, do you know why I don’t speed when I drive my car?

**Shane:** Because it’s dangerous?
Bob: Well yes, but that’s not the answer I wanted, try again.

Shane: Because you will get booked?

(Cath thinks to herself that both these answers are reasonable, and has no idea where this is heading).

Bob: It doesn’t matter if I get booked, I have a lot of money. I will pay the fine. No, the reason that I don’t speed is because when I get in the car I am agreeing to obey the rules of the road. I know that the Police have the power of the road and when I drive I have to obey their rules. It is the same as when you put on our uniform and come to our school. So, I don’t want to see you near my office again. You shouldn’t need time out if you are really ready to come back to our school. (Bob rises from his chair and stands over Shane and continues). So if you agree to follow our rules we will see you back here on Monday, but I warn you, I do not want to see you in here again, because I may not be so lenient next time.

Bob attempts to remove the desire for Shane’s obedience from himself to Shane. When Shane puts on the uniform he must take up as his own the desire to obey, not out of fear of punishment, not because he might cause himself and others harm, but because he is ready and happy to be controlled, to become an appropriate other to Bob within the striated order of the school. He can come back to school only if he can perform himself as having developed the desire for and commitment to obedience. It is thus desire that is being worked on, that is being contained and limited to the particular set of striations that Bob, with his state-sanctioned authority, can ordain. Surveillance in Foucault’s Panopticon is always present, but itself invisible. The subjects under surveillance take up as their own, the desire to be appropriate subjects. But where the all-seeing eye does not succeed in re-shaping desire, surveillance may become explicit, and even brutal (Foucault, 1977b).

My question here in relation to Bob is: Do principals and teachers have an ethical responsibility to be open to continuous difference in a Deleuzian sense, and hence to the possibility of change in themselves, and the events they create between themselves and students? Accustomed to being granted the morally ascendant positioning, are there reasonable grounds for asserting that Bob’s positioning is ethically compromised if he is not able to question the absolute rightness of his position, and to open himself up to new ways of seeing, new ways of understanding the relationship between himself and the students? As Cath amply demonstrates, conflict can be resolved quite differently, through openness to the other and the related willingness to listen. She listens to Shane, and Shane, in response, listens to her, and then listens to Bob. But Bob cannot listen. There is to be no evolution here. Bob and Shane are hung out to dry on the striations of so-called normal schooling.

If Bob could listen, what might he hear? How did Shane sound as he sat in assembly with his hat on? How did he sound when he left? Although he said nothing—could say nothing—could offer no explanation—there was much that could have been heard, independent of such meaning making with words. Even silence can be
heard. What if Bob had stretched his ears in Nancy’s sense, putting his own sensory organs in motion, and putting himself to one side?

In case this story should be heard as a story about a bad individual, rather than the story of a subject caught in the knotty configurations of adult authority and pedagogy of the young, I want to tell another story of myself as adult. The moment in this story happened in Sweden in a Reggio Emilia inspired preschool called Trollet (see Davies, 2009 for more details).

At the end of this first group session, instead of going off to his allocated group, one boy decided to show me his favourite picture book. We sat together in animated discussion over his favourite picture, discussing its intricacies, he in Swedish and me in English. It was an exciting picture, with a bank in the middle and a tunnel under the bank through which robbers were crawling. One robber had already successfully robbed the bank and was running away. There were cowboys and indians on horses fighting, and a cowboy buying an ice cream at an ice cream parlour. There were dogs barking and exotic mountains in the distance. There was much here for us to discuss. He told a teacher, who briefly came into the room to see what was happening, that he found it really exciting to talk to me—and indeed he was excited, sometimes clutching his genitals in an ecstasy of delight. The teacher told me, later, that she had been surprised at his visible and voluble animation, since he is a boy who rarely talks.

Later he took me by the hand and showed me around the whole preschool explaining who was in each of the areas that we could see through the windows, and showing me what each space was for within the piazza.

There is something to be learned here in relation to listening. The boy was happier talking to me than any other child I have worked with, or played with. Here, a boy who does not usually speak initiates an encounter, in which he is able to speak with animation and excitement to someone who does not understand the specific words of his language, and therefore has her didactic tongue completely stilled. Together we sit down to explore the intricacies of the picture. He draws my attention to particular details, looking at my face to see if I am attending, then telling me more, laughing as he does so. Robbed of any capacity to engage in typical adult or teacher controlling or even guiding talk, I listen instead to the sound of his voice, and I register his happiness. Sometimes we swap words -- he giving me *hund* and me giving him *dog*, but mostly we share a space in which the meanings of words are not important, since all the meanings we need are there in the illustration and in his excitement. It is a haptic space, which Roy describes as “a space of affect rather than measures and properties, of events rather than things … it is a terrain of proliferating connections and endless becomings …” (Roy, 2005, p. 34). In this moment we have a space made up of two people and a book, not doing what they habitually do, able to take this line of flight together because the orderly plane of existence established by everyone else makes it possible, permissible. The teacher checks them, and accepts that they have gone off into another order, other than the one she was establishing.
The point that I want to take here from this story is that I did not open up a space for the boy because I’m a good person, or a better teacher than Bob, but because my usual array of adult positions, from which I might have thought I had something to contribute to his understanding or appreciation of the picture, were foreclosed.

In the radical pedagogy I am exploring here, in which primacy is given to the self-as-emergent-relational-flow, and to differenciation as evolution, listening involves stretching the ears, and all the senses. It requires a focussed attention, an intensification of attention to the other and the happening in-between. The neurons of the body must pick up, as a mirror, the being of the other, the minute details of sound and movement, of affect. Listening involves much more than the de-coding of sound for meaning. When one truly listens, the whole body is oriented toward the other. One’s lips and tongue, for example, may work to shape the sound one hears in one’s own mouth, as an integral part of coming to know or imagine what message the words carry. The neurologists speak of mirror neurons that enable us, through mirroring the pain or the joy or the movement or the sound of the other to know the other through an intimate, social synaesthesia, where the words, the sonority, the affect of one are heard in the ears of the other, but also in mouths, eyes, hearts and guts (Bradshaw, 2009).

My final story is from the same Reggio Emilia inspired preschool in Sweden. This story explores mutual openness to the other and resonances from self to self, and the relatedness of sonority and sense as these are embodied in the participants. The event that emerges between the two children playing bandy does not belong in either of them, but in the movement between them made possible by their openness to differenciation, to becoming different in relation to each other.

At playtime two of the four year olds, a boy and a girl, were playing bandy (a fast game with stick and ball not unlike ice hockey). They were in an area perfectly suited to their game—a small amphitheatre with a smooth surface and walls that could catch the speeding ball, which then bounced back ready to be hit back. They quickly gained control of their sticks and the ball, and a rhythmic play was set up between the two of them, passing the ball swiftly and effectively back and forth between them. They were relaxed and skilled in a way that was captivating to watch. Just as they were completely immersed in the movement of ball and stick and each other, to the rhythmic and satisfying sound of ball on stick, so I was caught in the circle of their haecceity.

Then a third child, a younger boy, tried to join them. He had a stick and ball. The older boy told him emphatically to go away, but he would not listen. There was only enough room for two to play in the way that the boy and girl had unfolded between them. The older boy insisted that the younger boy could not join in, but the younger boy firmly stood his ground, not hearing that he was not welcome. In frustration the older boy pushed the curved end of the bandy stick toward him, providing an unequivocal sign for the boy to leave. But the small boy would not budge. The older boy turned his stick around and poked the pointy end toward the face of the intruder, but still he would not back off. It was a fierce battle of wills, and anger
A teacher intervened. A fourth child seemed at that point to want to join in. The teacher pointed out that there were two balls and four sticks so all four children should be able to play in this space. She did not make a space in which the conflict could have any meaning other than unacceptable aggression from the older boy. The original two recommenced passing the ball between them, but both had lost their bodily co-ordination. They were awkward and could not hit the ball well. After a few passes, the girl regained her composure and skill. But the boy had lost his completely even after the two intruders had left. His body was so awkward and ungainly I began to wonder if I had missed something and it was actually another child from the one who was so skilful previously.

In the first part of this story, the children were one with stick and ball and place. They were completely present in the encounter with each other and with the physical space of amphitheatre and the game of bandy. They created a haecceity. “Haecceities are crucial to matters of ecology because they make no distinction between centre and periphery, inside and outside, subject and object and, therefore, humans and nature” (Halsey, 2007, pp. 145-6). The game takes them on a line of flight as they momentarily accomplish themselves as an exceptional team of bandy-players, in which the ball flows between them as if ball and stick and bodies and sound are part of the self-same ensemble. The skill is not just in the bodies of the children, but also in a set of complex relations between two people, a ball and two sticks and the space they are playing in.

When the third child cannot hear that he cannot join their game without spoiling it, and when the teacher cannot support their right to continue as they were, their bodily competence evaporates; the connection between bodies and ball and sticks is gone. They have been found to be in the wrong for defending the haecceity they had been caught up in. In the beginning they were completely at ease in their relationship to each other and the space between them in which they could become exceptional bandy players. Their world became the movement of stick and ball and the deeply satisfying rhythm and sound. They were powerful in their sense of bodily competence and agency as all the elements that were necessary were assembled. The intruder saw what they accomplished and wanted it for himself too. He could not bear to see that it could only exist without him. When the teacher declared his right to be there, the assemblage collapsed, and with it the older boy’s bodily knowledge of how to participate in this bandy-assemblage.

In that precise moment of play, that I was so lucky to see, when bodies and sticks and balls connected, perhaps for the first time in just that way, in an aesthetic, pleasurable haecceity, something was being accomplished that could not be squeezed into a smaller space, or afford to include someone who did not understand what they were doing. The bigger boy appeared to know that, but his knowledge was in conflict with another discourse of sharing, and turns. Harmonious group relations
require that we develop complex respectful relations, which involve respect for the
other, and for the agreed ways that things should be done, for what Deleuze calls
the molar order. The younger boy did not ask if he could enter—he did not respect
the older boy and girl, and the teacher supported his right to enter without respect
for what was going on.

Teachers find themselves resolving disputes and making complex decisions on a
moment-by-moment basis. When this teacher joined the situation it appeared that
the four-year-old boy was in the wrong, violently excluding the younger boy, not
listening to the younger boy’s desire to be part of this bandy-assemblage. The older
boy was, in this moment, not in a smooth space where his position could be made
to make sense. His outrage at the smaller boy’s intrusion could not be accommoda-
ted in the striations of the preschool context. In this particular preschool, however,
listening on the part of teachers is highly valued, and when I described the event
to them, as I had seen it, as I had listened to it, they were troubled. They wanted to
think about what happened not just in terms of predictable striations or rationalities
(he must learn to share, children should be nice to each other) but in order to listen
and to open up something new. As Foucault says:

Thought… is what allows one to step back from this way of acting or reacting,
to present it to oneself as an object of thought and to question it as to its mean-
ing, its conditions and its goals. Thought is freedom in relation to what one
does, the motion by which one detaches oneself from it, establishes it as an
object, and reflects on it as a problem. (1997b, p. 117)

The default position of the categorical difference between teachers and children had
rapidly asserted itself in the name of care and safety, making listening in that mo-
tment impossible. But because these teachers regularly meet and reflect with each
other and with observers, the moment can be examined. It can be productive of new
thought. An evolutionary process of selves-in-relation can take up the event and
work with it. The capacity to listen, and to go on listening is not ever accomplished
once and for all. It must be wrestled with, lost, found again. Openness to the future
can never be guaranteed. It can close itself off like an egg, impervious to the outside.
But

Once we start talking
Stories spill out
Lap over each other
Wash us into other stories (Gannon in Davies and Gannon, 200, p. 117).

We open ourselves up to listening, to differenciation, to becoming other, to beco-
ming in relation to the other, ears no longer blocked, eyes no longer sealed over.
The drops of blood on Shane’s wrist become vivid evidence of his pain; the joy of
the rhythmic sound of the ball, and the song of the triangle, take us toward a new
pedagogy with listening at its heart.
References


9 From picture to subject: Some thoughts about studying the function of speaking and clothed animals in children’s literature

Eva Söderberg

Anyone who delves into children’s culture will be struck by the presence of animals. Animals fill the pages of comics and they flick past on the TV screen, cinema screen and computer screen. Animals are found in children’s reference books, picture books and in classical as well as in modern literature. They are the subject of songs, rhymes, musicals and operettas. Rabbits, bears and elephants often figure just as plainly as fictive human beings. Rabbits may wear dresses, bears may wear dungarees and elephants may wear suits. We are not simply shown animals in their ordinary milieu but we see animals such as Potter’s rabbits, Winnie the Pooh and Babar the Elephant, in other words animals that in many senses live lives like our own, even though the degree of anthropomorphism varies (Furuland & Ørvig, 1990, p. 235; Nikolajeva, 2000, p. 55).

What, then, is the reason for this passion for animals gifted with speech and clad in various garments? One explanation can be found in deep roots and a powerful tradition (von Zweigberk et al, 1972). Myths and tales often connect animals and humans, and in various religions we find worship of animal gods and these gods’ feats. In fables we meet animals that can speak and that have human capacities and burdens, and in popular stories we find animals that are often talkative although they may not always wear clothes (Svensson, 1999).

As with fables, animal stories may both entertain and educate. This is most likely the reason that the formula “animal sapiens” became so well-used in children’s literature. The fact that contemporary picture book illustrators and authors continue to describe anthropomorphized animals shows that they continue to find them inspiring and useful. The animal world offers the creator of picture books creative challenges. How does a beaver decorate his house in a beaver like way? How does a female hippopotamus dress for success? There are also educational reasons: animal figures create intimacy and engagement without being too imposing, and their age and sex can be blurred (Nikolajeva, 2000; 2008). In other words, animal figures enable the creator to challenge gender orders and norms in an amusing and not too provocative way. Another explanation for the considerable presence of animals in children’s culture that has been launched besides the tradition and the esthetical and educational reasons is the fact that children are supposed to like animals. Children and animals are lumped together unreflectingly as small, inferior and not fully human beings, a fact which connects them (Nikolajjeva, 2008; Schwarz & Schwarz, 1991). Thus, this discursive parallel has, according to some researchers, cultural implications.
In this study, which will serve as the point of departure for further studies, I shall focus upon the bear. It is not an overstatement to claim that the bear has a special status among anthropomorphized animals in children’s culture. (Söderberg, 2001; Werkmäster & Kåreland, 1987). It has been present in children’s literature for a long time and with shifting gender meanings. It is found in tales, legends, picture books and novels and it is one of the most productive animal models for authors and children’s illustrators. The bear also has a special relationship to children and childhood – in part because of its role as a transitional object/toy – which makes its function as a symbol, emblem and sign interesting for analysis and discussion in relation to the concept of normality (Söderberg, 2009). The study will set out from an image, a representation of a bear, painted by one of the most well known picture book artists in Sweden. To begin with, I will present my own process of interpretation, which is theoretically influenced by gestalt theory that is how the relationship between the image’s shape, colour, balance and composition creates expressions that are significant for how we interpret it (Arnheim, 1954). The semiotics of art will also contribute to understanding. Thereafter I will discuss how persons from different disciplinary and professional fields interpret this image. Finally I will outline a larger project on anthropomorphized animals in children’s literature.

Background
An image was required for a conference that was to be held in 2008 at Mid Sweden University on animals in nature and culture. The purpose was to problematize, in a multidisciplinary context, the boundary between humans and animals, to shed light upon different human-animal relations and to discuss animal representations in children’s culture and children’s literature. Thus, we were going to actualize the same problems as in the growing research field of animal studies (Daston & Mitman, 2005; Armstrong, 2008). Those of us who were organizing the conference turned to Anna-Clara Tidholm to ask how she might present such a conference image. There was more than one reason for our choice; Anna-Clara, often together with the poet Thomas Tidholm, has for decades been producing powerful children’s books. In terms of both style and content, she has also developed literature for the youngest readers and several of her books contain animals that wear clothes and speak (Fransson, 2001; Rhedin, 2004). Moreover, she has both a critical attitude and a philosophical approach toward man’s way of use – and misuse – nature (Tidholm, 1970; Tidholm & Tidholm).

Anna-Clara Tidholm was interested in the conference theme and she immediately offered to let us use one of the illustrations from the book Adjö, herr Muffin (Good-Bye Mr Muffin) that she and Ulf Nilsson had won the August Prize for in 2002. This book contains a warm but rather sad story about a guinea pig that grows old and dies (Nilsson & Tidholm, 2002). We flicked eagerly through the book but felt that we would actually like to have a unique picture for our conference, and Anna-Clara
Tidholm then promised to produce something. “I’ll do a drawing in black and white that can be used ‘on paper’,” she wrote. “I’m not sure what it’ll be, but maybe something a bit more ‘problematic’ than Mr Muffin.” (2008-06-19, e-mail to Eva Söderberg (translation mine)).

I read the word “problematic” with a mixture of horror and delight. The Tidholms’ books had not only won awards; some of them had provoked adult readers to question their appropriateness for young readers. This was the case with Resan till Ugri-La-Brek (The Journey to Ugri-La-Brek) from 1987 and with Nice Children from 2007 and on several occasions between these. It is clear that the Tidholms challenge the boundaries between children’s and adult literature. They question suppositions about what and how a child is and can be and they provoke by introducing new and serious subjects. Sometimes their books have been classified half jokingly and half seriously by literary critics as “psychotic children’s books” (Rhedin, 2004; Sahlén, 2011).

It was for this reason that I held my breath when the thick envelope landed in my pigeon-hole a month later. What would the picture look like? What if the image was so problematic that it was off-putting? But I was also curious. What could Anna-Clara Tidholm have made of our request for an image for a conference that aimed to discuss how we try to understand not only animals but ourselves as well, and the relation animal-human within ourselves? We hoped that the conference would shed light on the symbolic value of animals and explore how we utilize animals to dramatize our perceptions of ourselves. But perhaps it would not be entirely easy to create an attractive image that would capture this goal.

I finally plucked up the courage to open the envelope.

**The conference image – an analysis**

There before me was – the bear – and he was staring out at me with his unwavering, peppercorn eyes. It was impossible to escape his gaze. He stared intently, but kindly at me. I became absorbed by the picture and was struck by how majestic he was (he dominated the picture), and how practical (he was wearing a tough pair of dungarees) and so tender (his arms were full of humanoid).

And he was absolutely not black and white.

I stood for a long time by my pigeon-hole with the open envelope and the picture of the bear in my hand. This was a bear who spoke to me and who communicated...
something without even opening his mouth. The feeling he gave me was of great tranquillity – a kind of robust security. There’s nothing disruptive about him. The lines are soft and rounded: his head, his two ears and his embrace. The composition is almost symmetric – the typical nose line of the teddy bear suggests a vertical line in the middle of the picture and the softness and roundness is accentuated and held in place by the clearly demarcated square that encloses the image.

But there’s something else about this picture … I let it absorb me for a while longer and a feeling other than calm, harmonious safety crept over me. It was not overpowering, more a feeling of dissonance, or perhaps the hint of a minor chord. This was certainly not a “psychotic” image but there was something undeniably disturbing about it. Something disrupted the overall balance and threatened the dominant feeling of harmony.

There was a background.

The bear was situated against a background.

Everything has a background or environment even if this is not always made explicit. In a picture book the background may be anything from highly detailed to minimal or completely absent: a so-called negative space. (Nikolajeva, 2000, p. 121) In this case, it was as though a scene had been created with a carefully selected decor that indicated time, space and atmosphere. As I notice this mild minor chord, I realize that it is night. Behind the bear are a deep blue-black sky and the jagged outline of a dark spruce forest. Stars light up the sky. I notice that if you draw a line between the stars you can make out two triangles, one on the right and one on the left. Even the background contains both symmetry and tension. The left-hand triangle contains four stars while the right-hand one has three. Altogether, this makes seven stars – one of the magic numbers in storytelling.

I then notice that the bear is not facing straight forward. The vertical line of his snout bends slightly to the left and the horizontal line of his mouth also pulls slightly to the left. The pale shadow on the right side of the snout also gives the observer the impression that they can see more of this side than the other side. At first, it looked as though the bear had been there for ever, but now suddenly I get the feeling that he just turned his head towards me.

How do the stars affect my experience of this image? I try to ignore them, but it is difficult. It is now obvious that the stars, which I initially failed to notice, reinforce the effect of the bear’s peppercorn eyes. At the same time they accentuate the polarity between the bear’s warm proximity and the icy distance of space. They suggest cosmic distance and existential depth. They say something about the human condition – about being thrust out into the cosmos. It is this condition that makes us long to chart, conquer and connect, and to give these inconceivably remote celestial bodies names, relationships and meanings: Ursa Major, Great Bear and Ursa Minor, Little Bear.
The epic original condition

But this bear is not entirely alone in the cosmos... He is in the company of the troop he is carrying in his arms. When I shift focus to these creatures I notice that they, like the bear, are highly stylized but with their own personalities. It is difficult to determine how old they are supposed to be. The fact that they are sitting on the bear’s lap suggests that they could be children. The boy with the large head and straggly hair and the girl with pigtails are typical images of children that are often found in Swedish children’s books. But the creature with his eyes closed and the one with the hat have different proportions and could just as well represent adults. Is this a family? I note that they have both button-hole eyes and something rag-dollish about them.

Soon other images crowd my mind and beg comparison... I had seen this composition before! So many times!

I am suddenly able to conclude: Anna-Clara Tidholm has truly created a problematic picture! Her conference image seems to me to be a play on and distortion of that which is usually referred to as “the epic original condition” that is used as a visual means of transmitting tradition from one generation to another. This is best known in the covers of Charles Perrault’s The Tales of Mother Goose from 1697 (Westin, 1998). The renowned engraving by Doré shows an old woman with spectacles on her nose sitting in an armchair and reading to children of various ages. This scene offers a template of the narrative situation: a woman reading while children listen. It is common in literary tradition for the tellers of tales to be depicted as female. We have Sibyl, the Greek prophetess, and Scheherazade and our own goddess of wisdom Saga, on the Saga Library’s publications from the former turn of the century. The idea that the audience for such tales should consist of children is also widespread. Despite the fact that many tales were originally conveyed between adults and contained material hardly suited to children, the genre has been associated with children ever since orally transmitted stories began to be written down and disseminated to children (Westin, 1998).

How is Anna-Clara Tidholm’s picture connected to this? In what way is this constellation of meanings dismantled and reassembled in her image and what does this mean?

First, there is a disruption of seniority. The normal order – adult, child, soft toy –
has been inverted. The soft toy, which is usually beneath the child’s level, has taken
the position of “adult” – a position normally occupied in literary tradition by great
grandma, grandma and maid or wet-nurse. The adults, on the other hand, and even
the children, have been demoted and placed in a subordinate position. They have in
a way become soft toys.

Bears are often depicted in stories constructed by adults for children. To repete,
they appear in tales, legends, picture books, rhymes, films and literary classics. But
in this instance, the bear has been given a powerful position which the narrator
usually occupies. Why? What is being said? The epic original condition is often port-
rayed as a “narrative moment” – something that is told to someone. But nothing
seems to be said here. The bear’s mouth is closed. Maybe, I ponder, this is a bear who
has already told his story. It is evening and darkness has already fallen. The troop
in his arms is about to go to sleep. One of them has already settled down to nod off.

I automatically think “his” ... I am certain that the picture is showing a male bear.
I decide upon the gender of the bear instantly, because of the picture book codes for
masculine and feminine with which I am so familiar: blue trousers indicate male
while a necklace, a ribbon, a skirt or eyelashes indicate female. The portrait shows
only half of the bear’s body. The braces might just as easily have belonged to a skirt
on a female bear, but the absence of any small gender specific indicator, such as a
ribbon, and the memory I have of all the pictures I have seen of male bears mean
that I do not even consider the possibility of this being a female bear. This is a he
in my mind. The fact that the bear has been set in a classic narrator situation, with
“children” in his arms, does not alter my conviction. His situation simply reinforces
his “motherliness” and the feeling of security and stability that gripped me when
first set eyes on the picture.

A substitute human and a camouflaged child

However, when I now begin to really examine this bear in detail he slowly begins to
transform himself before my very eyes, more in terms of age than gender. How clear
is he in his embrace of the four small beings? How much security can he really offer?
How safe are they in his arms? Is this embrace perhaps just an imitation, a gesture
the bear tries to emulate although he is not truly adult? The self-evident adult bear
now begins to dissolve.

Particularly since Romanticism and its view of childhood as a special phase of
life, our culture has celebrated the idea that children must be allowed to be children.
But the meaning of this may change according to time and place (Kåreland, 2009).
When I look at Anna-Clara Tidholm’s picture again I am again struck by how tightly
packed with meanings it is and how the play with relationships and proportions
enables various interpretations. This is partly due to the fact that the bear’s age is
indeterminate and uncertain. He is both the secure adult and the security-seeking
child at the same time! The fact that he is a bear and not a person means that he, like so many clothed and speaking animals in children’s picture books, may be viewed as a substitute human, a camouflaged child. One recognizes the child who stumbles towards his parents carrying far too many soft toys and looking for security. But the ages of the soft toys he is carrying are also indeterminate and uncertain. If we view them as adults, then the feeling of grief and melancholy grows stronger. A great deal is demanded of this particular bear. He is a child with a naive expression and dungarees who is carrying far too heavy a burden; he has to take care of the adult, exhausted rag-dolls. He is forced to become a shield against the dangers that lie hidden in the darkness of the forest and the endlessness of space.

This interpretation points to the heart of Anna-Clara and Thomas Tidholm’s art, which often acts as a battleground for various discourses. In Resan till Ugri-La-Brek (1987, The Journey to Ugri-La-Brek), Åke-boken (1983, The Åke Book), Vill ha syster (1991, Want a Sister) and many others we can observe how fruitful the discourse of the “competent child” is (Helander, 2003) even as these children, in Romanticism’s terms, would be seen as close to fantastical, original powers. These children have to test their abilities when their parents are absent, disinterested or even destructive. There is something tragic about their competence. In a collection of short stories by Anna-Clara Tidholm, Pappan som försvann och andra berättelser för barn och vuxna (2003, The Father who Disappeared and Other Stories for Children and Adults) we meet a boy who found it almost impossible to live with his parents because they were crocodiles; he found it so demanding that they could not do the things that other parents did with their children that he was forced to take on the role of adult.

The interpretation above also has implications for the current debate about the role of adults in relation to children, about the infantilization of society, about deposed adults, over-protective parents and so on.

Having come this far in my thinking, I noticed the bear’s gaze again. Now I saw that in the middle of those peppercorn eyes was a pale brown pupil. I thought I could discern a curious twinkle in them and to my surprise I then noticed that the right corner of the bear’s mouth was the tiniest bit raised (the left side from my perspective).

Was I just persuading myself or was he in fact smiling? Maybe he was both a little embarrassed and a little pleased about the torrent of words and interpretations that his unassuming appearance had evoked.

The process of interpretation continues…

So much for my analysis of the picture. Then a colleague walked by – a literary critic. He glanced over my shoulder and said, “Brilliant! Here we have an artist who really shifts hierarchical concepts around and gets them moving.”

He declared that Anna-Clara Tidholm was playing with well-known motifs by breaking loose recognizable elements from their conventional settings, shifting them
about and creating new meanings. We see the familiar bear and at the same time we see something else, something more...

Another colleague, who lectures on Swedish “as a foreign language”, came past. He stopped when he saw the picture, clasped his hands together and cried, “How wonderful!” The large bear got him thinking of all the children who had experienced war and vulnerability and who had been forced to flee from their country. He said it was common for such children to say “I couldn’t bring my teddy bear!” or “I had to leave my doll behind.” Then he fell silent for a moment and continued to contemplate the image. Then he said, a little softer: “But it’s clearly not only the bear that they miss... The bear stands for something much greater that they’ve been deprived of...” After a few more minutes he suggested tentatively that the bear in the picture represented the whole of the children’s culture. Then he continued, more self-assured: “There behind the bear it’s jagged, gloomy and black... Just like refugee children, the children on this bear’s knee have something dark behind them, but children’s culture can give them joy, meaning and connection. There they are in the bear’s lap, symbolizing children’s culture, and they are being embraced by it! In children’s culture they can share with one another. I think that is something beautiful.”

This piqued my curiosity about the possibilities inherent in this picture. In order to further explore its potential I threw out a few hooks. I sent the picture to some of the conference delegates and organizers. I asked them to write a few lines about what they saw in the picture and what associations it gave them. I attached the picture and it did not take long before one of the delegates, an historian of the Christian Church, sent a short e-mail saying: “I have often thought about what I see in Tidholm’s compositions. Then suddenly the penny dropped. Check the following link...”

I eagerly clicked on the website link and found myself looking at a wooden sculpture from the 1500s, in the old church of Enånger in Hälsingland. The sculpture is signed Haakon Gulleseon and it depicts the renowned Anna-self-third motif, i.e. Maria’s mother Anna, Maria herself and the third generation, Jesus.
When this historian associates the bear picture with this image, she does so because of her theological background and because of her familiarity with Anna-Clara Tidholm’s authorship and domicile for many decades in Hälsingland.

I thank her for the mail and note that we read the picture according to influences from our different disciplinary backgrounds. A scholar of comparative literature and an historian of the Christian Church clearly make different kinds of associations, I note, and send her Doré’s engraving of the “epic original situation”. The historian soon responds with further thoughts.

Isn’t it fascinating! The statue that I sent you the photo of is hanging in Enånger Church. Doesn’t she [Anna-Clara Tidholm] live around there? It shows the classical Anna-self-third motif, in which Anna is the original mother and generator of security. There’s something in her gaze, posture and function that I recognize in the Bear. And there’s the reduction of the adult bodies to miniatures. An association with Church art from the Middle Ages is maybe not the first thing that people would think of, but the more I think about it, the clearer it is. Isn’t it incredible how our different ways of seeing things are shaped by our knowledge and interests?

I thank her for the mail and remark that she sees adults in the bear’s lap, and that this may not be self-evident for all observers. She responds that she saw adults until she showed the picture to her husband who, to her great surprise, saw children! “And of course they are, when you really look,” she notes but adds that the proportions are actually distorted.

I again thank her for the mail and briefly explain my own interpretations and I confirm that it was Doré’s engraving from The Tales of Mother Goose that I had sent previously. This prompts her to reply with further thoughts:

Just imagine how many interpretations this picture suggests! For me, the picture is about security and about daring to rely on the feeling of being embraced and loved. A theological interpretation might be that the picture describes mankind’s emotional relationship with God. One could view it as an illustration of mankind’s incredible ability to project. Scholar of symbolism Nils G Holm has written about precisely this – how the infant’s earliest experiences of security and relationships are transferred to a transitional object such as a teddy bear and later on to a cognitive symbol such as our image of God. Holm does not, of course, mean that we are deceiving ourselves but rather that this is humanity’s way of symbolically relating to the world. This kind of symbol is among the most powerful we have, since it refers to another, transcendent reality. It is therefore possible to interpret the image as mankind’s relationship to God. We are embraced by something that we can only approach through the medium of our language, images and symbols but which is nevertheless there, behind us and around us.
Was this an interpretation that only a theologian could make? No, absolutely not! I noted in other comments I received about the feelings of tranquillity and security, which were among the first to affect me when I saw the picture, that these could be linked to religious notions. Another delegate to our conference, who is a scholar of comparative literature and is active in animal rights, focuses upon the closeness of the toy animal and she extrapolates from this: “The bear reminds me of toys one had as a child, and that brings feelings of security and warmth. The fact that the bear is holding the people creates unity between nature, people and animals. We should feel secure together and take care of one another.”

She goes further in her reading of the picture and makes a religious association:

I also feel that the bear has something to do with spirituality or religion. The bear is a god who takes care of us people. There’s something about unity in it.

Her final comment in her mail suggests that this is not an exhaustive account of her interpretation: “That’s how I think of this bear just now.” Maybe her thoughts will take another direction in the future.

Another observer, one of the students from the teacher training programme, describes a discussion about religion with a secondary school class. Her pupils think that God ought to look like the bear in the picture and she herself sees it as the perfect image for “The Convention on The Rights of the Child”. She describes the picture as “life-affirming” and “ultimate security”. Even an employment agent with a particular interest in literature sees the possibility of interpreting Anna-Clara Tidholm’s picture as a form of double exposure, the transitional object’s positive characteristics and the all-encompassing image of God:

I like the picture because the people look like soft toys (a bit simple but harmless and cute). The bear has human features even though he’s so obviously a “teddy bear”. The eyes are both deep and empty. There’s also something religious about the picture (cf. Guds Stora Famn/’The Great Embrace of God’ or suchlike) but with a great deal of loving melancholy. The only thing I feel a bit sceptical about is the bear’s dungarees.

But for other observers, the trousers – or rather the suggestion of trousers – may be meaningful. The bear picture does not necessarily have to be linked to religious forms of security; it may emphasize the features of the security-generating “transitional object”, which is the role ascribed to the bear in children’s literature. This bear belongs to the category of clothed animals. An example of this is mentioned by the teacher training student. She likes the picture and feels that it “radiates security”. Her first impression is of a sweet, secure teddy bear. It takes a moment for her to notice that the bear is holding something in his lap. Now she starts wondering whether it is possible to see the bear as a symbol of security:
Bears appear in many children’s books and they are rarely depicted as dangerous. They are often clothed and are given human features in some picture books. In this case, the picture of the teddy bear presents a secure lap that you can crawl up into and with whom you can experience adventures ... The picture is also coloured in warm, soft tones that are calming to look at.

A librarian comments on the bear’s male gender. She wonders whether he is:

A big daddy with all his little people-children on his knee or is it a little bear who’s grown big and wants to thank all the little children for all their love by lifting them up and comforting them?! It’s lovely anyhow, and the male image is warm and secure!

Another student, from comparative literature, who writes a great deal herself, used the picture as inspiration for a philosophical observation that rather poetically weaves together the other interpretations. It opens up with: “I am Bear. I am everybody’s and nobody’s Bear. All at once. My name is called and I’m brought out when reality becomes unreal. By everybody and nobody. All at once.”

There is something strictly testimonial about this text but it becomes a little more personal when the pronoun ‘you’ is introduced as the addressee of the bear: “You understand,” said the Bear, “that when reality becomes so horribly unreal, then everyone and nobody needs a secure Bear-hug to rest in. Not only children but also adults.” Then the author slips into the relationship between narration and the narrative:

The tales that I can tell are unreal in their own way, but they become real when everybody and nobody sits still in my lap and listens. That is the moment at which human children (which you all are) need to hear about adventures, campfires, witches, heroes and happy endings. Who can possibly give you this more competently than Bear? When Bear hugs you and starts to tell his tales, you are all children, children of experience. The tales tell of people and animals. All at once. Together, we become the tales that give reality a hint of the fantastic.

Here is a combination of the literary, the psychological and the theological perspectives. But it doesn’t stop here. The text is rounded off with questions from a meta perspective:

I wonder why I am a Bear? And why are the figures in my lap always children? When tales are applied to everyday reality in the big wide world, wolves are cruel and dangerous, owls are wise, rabbits are afraid, pigs are cheerful and donkeys are stubborn and tedious. Lambs are victims and foxes are sly and clever. Bears, however, are secure and strong, kind and huggable. Who has decided all this? And why don’t adults dare to admit that they also need to be hugged by bears and listen to stories?
Well, who has decided all this? Who gave the fable animals their characteristics, and why?

Clothed animals beg many questions. A group of students of art pedagogy began a heated discussion about the creatures in the bear's lap. A couple of them were certain that the two in the middle were female and that the outer two were male. The male figures were holding the female ones in their arms, and they in turn were held by the bear. In this way, the female forms were doubly embraced and they are also found in the position of the womb, a fact that could strengthen the interpretation of the image as a symbol of security.

As we have noticed, according to some of the interpreters, the bear as a symbol of security is also possible to question. One of them considers the teddy bear to be “the ultimate symbol of safety and security for children”, it is true. He observes that the roles are reversed in the conference image, which strengthens its symbolic value:

The bear is large and the children are small which increases the nurturing of the bear. The bear itself is rather expressionless, which adds to the security – it’s calm and can handle anything which is why the kids are so happy and content. Then looking another way – it’s probably what all kids fantasize about. Every kid would love to have, if not a parent, a giant bear that could carry them and all their friends through the night on wonderful adventures always perfectly safe.

But he continues to explore the potential of the image and add an interpretation, still based on the image content:

If you were cynical you could see the bear as evil and it has stolen these innocent unsuspecting children. It could be a goblin or ogre in the guise of a bear which is why it’s got that vacant look in its eyes, not quite managing to pull off the cuddly bear thing. The kids are oblivious to impending dinner – they will be the dinner of the bear/goblin/ogre.

Yet another way to look at it, according to this interpreter, could be that it is just an alternate reality where bears have little people dolls.

**Outline of a project**

Anna-Clara Tidholm’s picture of the bear is a point of departure – and a picture to recall. Like so many of her pictures, it is simple and clear and it belongs to her form of aesthetics. The interpretations presented above also show that there is a typical appearance for bears, a kind of “teddy norm” that Tidholm is meticulously loyal to. We see a relatively conventional teddy bear and several of the interpretations have common threads. The way of conceiving the teddy bear as something warm, kind and secure has been normalized. But the picture’s simplicity also veils a more complex interior. The clarity and the conventionality conceal within them ambiguities.
The bear image can evidently contain many shifting and sometimes conflicting meanings. This naturally depends both upon the picture, with its signs and symbols, and upon the observer. As Bronwyn Davies put it after she had listened to the different interpretations: “It seems as if the bear is like one of those Rorschach inkblots that anything can be projected onto” (Email 2009.12.19).

The way in which the bear functions in context is something I would like to explore further, both in Anna-Clara Tidholm’s work and in that of others. Above, I have used a single picture and its various interpretations. More people than the ones mentioned in this study have responded to the conference image and their observations and reflections have to be integrated in the analysis, as well as comments on the interpretations and the image made by Anna-Clara Tidholm herself. This will be part of a larger project with the working title “Of course it’s a bear!: a study of the clothed and speaking animal’s function in children’s literature.”

The overall objective of this project is to consider children’s literature and the concept of normality in relation to pedagogical, didactic and aesthetic dimensions and using a gender perspective. The image of the animal in picture books may be engaging but may also fictively create distance and thus enable us to ask questions about how we live our lives and what we do with our gendered and age-related roles. Using a number of picture books I plan to study how speaking, clothed animals are used both to create normality in terms of gender and childhood/“childishness” and to challenge dominant conceptions. For instance, what are the repertoires of girl bears and boy bears? In what ways are their characteristics and functions associated with the zoological bear (“natural bear”) and with the teddy bear (“cultural bear”) in order to manifest gender? Another intention of the project is to continue to explore how we interpret bear images: a reception study.

As part of this project, I have already published an article in Tfl (Tidskrift för litteraturvetenskap/The Journal of Comparative Literature) in 2009:1. In this article, “Olle+Björn=sant. Om barn, björnar och barndomens diskurser” (“Olle+Bear=true: children, bears and discourses of childhood”), I study both the encounter between children (both boys and girls) and bears in songs and tales and the discursive blending of child and bear in the concept of “the teddy bear”. This article also discusses the old motif of the girl and her bridegroom in animal guise and the story of Goldilocks and the Three Bears. I will relate this research to the internationally expanding research area “animal studies”.

References


FROM PICTURE TO SUBJECT: SOME THOUGHTS ABOUT STUDYING THE FUNCTION OF SPEAKING AND CLOTHED ANIMALS IN CHILDREN’S LITERATURE

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