

# CONCEPTIONS OF GENDER EQUALITY; SIMILARITY AND DIFFERENCE

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## INTRODUCTION

Finland has often been considered a pioneer in the struggle for equality between women and men. However, Finland has also gained a reputation (at least in Scandinavia) as a backwater of feminism and Women's Studies. Finland's image as a leader in the field of equality has been based on three factors. The first and most well known of these factors is the fact that Finnish women were the first women in Europe to gain the right to vote, in 1906. Secondly, it is argued that a greater measure of economic equality had been achieved, because Finnish women were active in the wage labour force far earlier and in greater numbers than women in many other Western countries. Thirdly, there is a relatively advanced social security system in Finland, which provides for extensive maternity leave, maternity allowance, municipal daycare etc. Why then the reputation as a feminist and Women's Studies hinterland? This relates to two factors. For one thing there has never been a strong feminist movement in Finland in the same respect as in many other Western countries. On the other hand, Women's Studies on a larger scale did not gain ground in Finland until the 1980s.

This article focuses on the Finnish dilemma of equality. Is Finnish equality so "perfect" or advanced that there has never been any need for a women's movement or radical women's studies inspired by such a movement? The steps taken in the field of Women's Studies during the past decade constitute enough evidence to show that the position of women in Finland is not so "perfect". In Finland, as in other European countries, women are almost totally absent from the higher echelons of political and economic life. Women vote for women and men but men do not vote for women. At work as well as in the home one still finds the prevailing sexual division of labour, with routine work at the bottom of hierarchies being predominantly carried out by females.

In this article I limit myself to the question, whether the notion of equality still prevails as an ideal in the Finnish discussion on gender relations? Do we still mean by equality the same thing as 20 years ago? Has the concept of equality remained unchanged during the past three decades, and if not, how has it changed?

This is not to imply that the Finnish debate on gender relations includes only discussions about equality or that Finnish Women's Studies include only studies on equality. In contemporary discussions about equality there are few people who claim that Finnish women and men are equal in all respects. Just as rare are those who would insist that perfectly achieved equality would resolve all problems in gender relations. What is predominant, however, is the fact that equality is still considered to be a kind of basis-parameter in the discussion on gender relations. It is assumed that the achievement of equality is essential; without equality more profound changes cannot take place in the way people think and act.

I will critically discuss the notion of equality as the parameter of gender relations. As a contrasting perspective I will utilize the concept of sexual difference found for instance in Italian feminist thinking. I have in mind the Italian feminism as a point of comparison because I have been studying the concept of sexual difference in Italian feminism. Of course the Finnish and Italian gender systems, as well as the ideological traditions and political systems, differ in many respects. This is one of the reasons why the ways of approaching "woman question" are also clearly different. Italian feminists took a critical distance from the notion of equality in the 60's. They never regarded the state as a tool to be used in aiming to improve "women's condition" in society, but focused on the notion "personal is political" and tried to redefine the prevailing concept of politics. This kind of criticism did not rise in Finland before the end of the 1970's. Comparing such different cultures can, however, help us to find and formulate better questions and to call into question self-evident arguments.

In Italy one of the starting points of feminist action and thought was and still is woman's different sexuality. On the other hand, sexuality has never played a very important role in the discussion on gender relations in Finland. The Italian concept of sexual difference denies the commensurability of women and men. Sexual difference is regarded as a fundamental difference which outlines human life and existence in the world. There are no pure human beings without sexual differentiation and human beings are always divided into men and women. In contrast, the contemporary concept of equality contains the principle of commensurability, as if sexuality could be detached from the person.

#### EQUALITY AS A RELATION BETWEEN MEN

The roots of the Western equality concept are in the social contract theory. According to theories of social contract all men are born equal (and free). Thus in a theoretical starting point, in the state of nature, all men are alike. Individuals who make contracts are impartial, neutral, serial and abstract individuals. Between these abstract individuals it is impossible to outline differences based on for instance class, origin or sex.

According to the Italian Adriana Cavarero, who among others has written about the genesis of modern political theory, it is through theories of social

contract that the invisible commitments of the contemporary equality concept must be deconstructed and analyzed. It is characteristic of the concept of equality that all differences are obscured with the result that all human beings are considered to be basically alike. The Western political theory thus outlines a picture of a neutral individual - a so-called subject - for whom categorization of gender/sex is something secondary. Human beings are primarily seen as human and only secondarily as men and women. (Cavarero 1988, 69) Cavarero notes that this gender/sexless, neutral individual is a theoretical abstraction, that is, not found in reality. More importantly, however, Cavarero points out how theories of social contract do not maintain their "logic of neutrality", but the individuals who are sexless at the moment of contract are later seen exclusively male. (Cavarero 1988, 70).

According to Cavarero, the theories of social contract in the political theory share a common characteristic with philosophy. This dimension is that of a masculine gender, which hides itself behind apparent neutrality and universality. In reality, upon closer examination, one finds that both philosophy and political theory are based on the assumption of masculine gender. (Cavarero 1988, 70-71) In Western philosophy and political thought the self-evident and privileged parameter of human action is man. At the same time the sexual difference of woman is made insignificant; it is swept away. If a woman aims at becoming a political subject, she is obliged to compare herself with a man, and the parameter of her political action is male. (Cavarero 1988, 71) Gender is thus both evident and inherent in philosophical and political thought - but only as male sexuality. The female sexual difference remains insignificant. A woman is not able to identify or find herself in political theories. She finds herself with the destiny of Sisyphus. She can try to become similar to men but the result of this effort can never be perfect.

#### HOW TO DEFINE EQUALITY?

On the basis of Cavarero's analysis it can be argued that from women's point of view the notion of equality is a double-edged sword. It is through the ideal of equality that women have gained the same political rights as men have and the equal legislation prevents (at least partly) the arbitrary treatment of women. However, the original concept of equality does not recognize differences between particular individuals. As a matter of fact, the principle of similarity is inherent to the concept of equality. The system works in such a way that those different from each other are compared with the same parameter, which is assumed to be valid for everyone. In other words, the demand for equality between women and men is based on the presumption that women and men are commensurable with each other, i.e. essentially alike, proportional individuals.

Equality and difference appear to be *alternative* concepts. To be more precise, that is how they have been understood in the liberalistic political

tradition from the times of the social contract theories until today. In other words, equality and difference have been understood to be concepts on the same level. In this respect, difference has become the reverse side of equality. One of these terms has gained a positive value whereas the other one has obtained a negative connotation. In the liberalistic political tradition it has been the concept of equality that has been considered a positive value. In addition, it has been assumed that the ideal of equality could be realized by means of (equal) legislation. In practice, this has meant that formal (i.e. legislative) hindrances in the way of equality has been abolished. Another version of equality as a positive value speaks about equal resources. This means that the possession of the same or equally appreciated social resources must be combined with the abolition of formal hindrances to enable the realization of substantial equality. In this article I will regard equality as a concept which obscures differences. At the end of the article, however, I will ask if there are other possible ways of delineating the relation between equality and difference.

### FINNISH GENDER IDEOLOGY IN TRANSITION

In this article I will examine the different definitions of equality which have been in use in Finland from the 1960's onwards. Basing my considerations on the notion of sexual difference and on the idea of "hidden masculinity" of the Western political theory, I will examine how the concept of equality and the gender ideology have changed in Finland. First of all I will outline the definitions of equality on the axes of equality-difference and progress-reaction. I will ask, if the question of equality has been understood as a question of "hindrances" or a question of resources, or something else. How did the rise of Women's Studies influence the terminology and the concepts in use? How is the concept of gender defined by Women's Studies in the 1980's? Does the reconsideration of the concept of gender entail the reformulation of the concept of equality? Finally, I will make some suggestions how to get forward both theoretically and in practice in social scientific Women's Studies. I will also discuss the possibility of surpassing the dichotomy equality-difference by critically reconsidering the dichotomy of gender-sex.

As a way to investigate these questions I have examined studies and pamphlets published in the field of social sciences from the 1960's onwards. The studies under examination were relatively widely spread and many of them were relatively well known also outside the university world. They describe quite well the discussion on gender relations of the era. As such, they can be seen as reflections of gender ideologies of the period. Through the analysis of these texts it is possible to distinguish some essential features in the Finnish way of understanding gender relations. I have chosen such texts that discuss explicitly the concept of equality and give an explicit definition of it. By comparing different definitions from different years I have outlined the conceptual changes, as well as conceptual permanencies. I have tried to be faithful to the terminology in

use. That is why I do not speak, for example, about "Women's Studies" before the end of the 1970's: the term was not used in Finland before that. I have tried to keep in mind the general social contexts in which the concept of equality was discussed in order to avoid being wise after the event.

### **The debate on sex roles**

The debate on sex roles started in Finland in the middle of the 1960's. In the 1950's there was a Scandinavian discussion and research on sex roles basing on the role sociology of the 50's, which turned into a predominant form of thinking in the 1960's. Speaking of sex roles today gives an impression of a superficial and limited way of outlining gender relations, but in the 1960's it reflected the context in which gender relations were examined. Each sex was linked with more or less distinct social "roles"; women and men were seen as carriers of these roles. Besides the sex role debate of the 60's meant a step away from the previous gender ideology, according to which the most important mission of women is motherhood.

In Sweden one of the most influential participants in the sex role debate was a sociologist called Edmund Dahlström. His articles and ideas were discussed also in Finland. That is why I start from him. In 1963 Dahlström analysed the ideologies behind role concepts. He concluded that there were two main sex role ideologies, *moderate* and *radical*. According to Dahlström, along with social progress, the major part of the so-called general "old liberal" ideology had been realized in the Nordic countries. Thus legal and formal equality between the sexes had been achieved, although in practice it was often found deficient. (Dahlström 1963, 20-21) According to Dahlström attitudes towards housework formed a clear boundary between moderate and radical sex role ideologies. While moderates claimed that the value of housework must be recognized, the radicals claimed that women should have an equal opportunity to work outside home. From the radical viewpoint role differences, as well as any other differences, served to discriminate against women, and because of that radicals called for equal opportunities and treatment for everyone. (Dahlström 1963, 22-27)

The difference of ideologies which lies behind these claims is emphasized. The moderate concept of the differentiation of roles is derived from the belief of *essential difference* between men and women, while the radical concept of equality is based on the *essential similarity* of men and women. We can now see that in the Scandinavian debate on gender relations the borderline between radical and moderate thought was drawn in such way that any kind of stressing or even acknowledgement of differences was seen to be reactionary. Employment was seen as a necessary pre-condition for the emancipation of women. Housework was regarded as an unavoidable burden, something to be minimized. It must be emphasized that the sex role debate of the 1960's was never limited only to men and women but was extended to include the equality of humankind as a whole, as well as man's new role. (See *Sukupuolten roolit*, 1966)

One might draw a conclusion that the proper purpose was not to raise "man" as the ideal, as the parameter for all, but instead to call into question man's role. I believe, however, the goal that lurks behind these demands was not the "feminization of men" but rather *the notion of sexual neutrality as an ideal*. Sex role differentiation and inequality were understood as problems which could be resolved in a relatively short period by extending democracy and "increasing" equality. In the ideal society of the future one's sex would no longer have any social significance.

### **Adverse laws of male society**

"...the debate about sex roles does not concern only the question of facilitating women's condition, but also concerns the question of ameliorating the condition of men. Changes in women's condition mean also changes in men's condition. The emancipation of women in the field of employment requires man's emancipation in family life. Both parties are enriched by this." (Eskola (ed.) 1968, 8) <sup>1</sup>

This quotation crystallizes the main principle of the Finnish sex role debate, i.e. the endeavour to *become unfastened from sex roles by mixing them*. It was written in 1968, the time at which feminist movements were springing up in many other countries. We can see that gender relations were called into question about at the same time as elsewhere. Another similarity with the countries in which feminist movements were springing up is the fact that at the beginning sex roles were being discussed by both men and women. Otherwise the Finnish way of posing the question of gender relations differs clearly from the other countries. For example in Italy (as in many other countries), men were thrown out of groups working for women's liberation, thus paving the path for an autonomous feminist movement to develop. In Finland men's position as participants in the debate was never questioned. On the contrary, men's involvement was considered important. The "narrow" debate on woman's condition was widened to include the general discussion on equality. In many other European countries feminists were stressing the specificity of women and trying to locate a common political action by women, whereas in Finland the question of emancipation was linked to a wider social vision of a better future.

In a similar fashion, criticism of the traditional women's organizations were of different nature than in many other countries. Italian feminists, for example, accused traditional women's organizations (such as the women's sections of political parties) of taking part in masculine politics as unquestionably accepting the masculine way of doing politics, whereas in Finland separate women's organizations were declared out-dated, because they emphasized the "woman question" as a specific matter and underscored the specificity of women. Essential in this Finnish way of identifying and understanding women's condition is the belief that exploitation of women could be abolished in conjunction

with wider social political reforms; there was no need for a separate women's struggle.

There was also a curious difference in terminology in use. Italian feminists called into question the concept of *emancipation* because it was understood to mean "rising up to the same level with man". They asserted that instead of emancipation one should speak about women's *liberation*. Liberation was understood to mean autonomous process of getting rid of the state of oppression and becoming free in women's own terms. In Finland the concept of emancipation was never questioned. Perhaps, this is at least partly due to the fact that the terms emancipation and liberation are translated in Finnish with one and the same word, *vapautuminen*. The Finnish language does not do any immediate difference between these terms.

Where did the belief in wide social political reforms come from? A partial answer may be found in the view of a contemporary. In her article in "Adverse laws of male society"<sup>2</sup>, Katarina Eskola searches for an answer to the question why the sex role debate in Finland began in the 1960's. She specifies five crucial factors: 1. women attended school and went to work outside the home in higher numbers than before, but society did not support this change in any way, for example by arranging daycare. 2. expanded opportunities for family planning. 3. internationality of the sex role debate. 4. social sciences broke through and became "fashionable". 5. sex role debate penetrated to the state apparatus. (Eskola 1968, 12-14)

The 1960's are usually considered to be a decade of great social upheaval. The factors enumerated above may be seen as indicators of this upheaval. In the 1960's Finnish women were in many respects in a new situation, a turning-point of old and new, which presented new pressures for them. Was the edge of women's protest broken off by the legislative reforms aimed at reducing these social contradictions (as factor 5 suggests)? It does not seem so because many reforms introduced in the 1960's were not realized until the 1970's. At the end of the 1960's women still came across many practical difficulties in everyday life, among others the shortage of daycare facilities and the problem of double burden. Besides, although family planning was possible, attitudes towards contraception were still quite secretive and the abortion law was extremely limited.

I mentioned earlier that it was assumed that changes in the women's role also required changes in the man's role. Did Finnish men respond favourably to this challenge? According to Eskola this was not the case, at least in 1968, as she claims that until then it was mainly women who were involved in sex role discussions, although newspapers and reviews quite willingly gave room in their pages for these discussions. (Eskola 1968, 15-16)

Now let's return to my question. What made Finnish women believe that the problem of women's subordination could be resolved through wider social reforms? Although I am not able to give a complete answer to this question, I believe a partial answer may be found by contrasting the feminist idea "personal

"is political" with the Finnish tendency to solve problems through social (i.e. governmental) reforms.

In Italy the idea "personal is political" formed the basis of feminist thought and politics. Feminists arrived at this idea through the notion of anti-authoritarian politics, which was one of the leading principles of the student movement in the 1960's. The women who participated in the student movement (and other movements of the decade) came to learn that the ideal of anti-authoritarian politics was never realized in practice within these movements. On the contrary, women were once again relegated to the roles of outsiders and routine workers, whereas men reserved themselves the right to draw the line of political strategy and make important decisions. Because of this many women left "mixed" political groups and formed their own all female groups.

Why didn't Finnish women react similarly in corresponding situations? Evidence shows that women in Finland were also left outside the major decision-making processes. Clearly, many factors in everyday life in Finland in the 60's would seemingly have awakened questions about women's inferior position. In Italy many feminists found it impossible to engage in politics together with men in the traditional, hierachial way, but in Finland women active in sex role debate directed their demands to the political and state apparatus. This belief in state-centred solutions was not only characteristic of women. Above all, it was characteristic of the Finnish left to believe that permanent solutions should be made through legislation. Underlying this belief there was the ideal of democratic socialist society, in which every person is able to participate in the decision-making process. While bourgeois society was declared rotten and corrupted it was also declared that profound changes in the social system could be achieved only by using the apparatus of the very same system. In Italy, as in many other Western countries, the idea "personal is political" led feminists to argue that the focal point of women's oppression lies in repressed sexuality. In Finland the oppressed position of women was exclusively seen as a social problem.

It has often been argued that Finnish women have long been more independent from men than women in many other countries. This argument is usually based on the fact that Finnish women have "always" worked a lot also outside the home and they have had to shoulder responsibility for household duties when men have not been able to do so. Thus it could be imagined that just because of this higher rate of independence Finnish women would had also been more ready to keep their distance to the male-centred society. As we have already seen, however, this was not the case, at least in the 1960's. Another usual argument is that class conflicts have been rough in Finnish society, which may have made sexual difference disappear as secondary. Women's status in society has depended strongly on her class, too.

The Finnish women's trust in general social reforms reflects the fact that sexual difference as such has not been considered a decisive factor on the existence of an individual. Other factors, such as class, education, age, etc.

have been considered much more important. This still leaves the decisive question open: why has sexual difference been so "hidden" in Finland?

### Finnish woman and man

The social atmosphere in Finland in the 1960's was not too favourable for women's separate political action, nor were women willing to withdraw themselves from male or "mixed" political organizations. At the beginning of the 1970's the Finnish organization for equality, Association 9, ceased its activities after concluding that such a group was no longer needed<sup>3</sup>. However, in the 1960's there was a certain demand for studies concerning women. The literature concerning sex roles available in Finnish expanded. One of the influential books of the 1960's is the pioneer work of Finnish studies on women, Elina Haavio-Mannila's "Finnish Woman and Man", published in 1968. (Haavio-Mannila 1968) Haavio-Mannila's studies are basic mappings of the position of women in Finland<sup>4</sup>. In this article I am interested in placing the book in the context of the contemporary debate on equality. By doing this we can measure its impact on the formation of the modern concept of equality.

In the introduction Haavio-Mannila states that women's strivings for autonomy and liberty began in Europe in the 19th century in the spirit of the doctrine of human rights, which was expanded after the American struggle for liberty and the French revolution. (Haavio-Mannila 1968, 1)

"Partly thanks to the women's movement there are now in Finland only a few passages of law and other official provisions in which women are not bestowed with the same liberties and rights as men. Thus women are to a great extent formally liberated from their submissive position, but the liberty has not brought with it equality in all areas of life. The official equality between sexes in front of the law is not yet complete. On the unofficial level there may still be discerned many inequalities and different treatment. The efforts to realize fraternity between men and women and human solidarity to abolish sexual segregation are still largely unconscious." (Haavio-Mannila 1968, 1)

Two points immediately arouse attention in this quotation. For Haavio-Mannila liberty is clearly a judicial concept, almost synonymous with the concept of justice<sup>5</sup>. Women are officially free, i.e. they are not legally in a lower position in relation to men. They have the same legal rights. Equality, instead, is for Haavio-Mannila a concept which describes the actual situation between women and men: it refers to "real circumstances". For Haavio-Mannila the problem is practical and not a question of principle. Official equality in front of the law had not yet led to equal treatment in practice.

The other notable aspect of the quotation is the line "the fraternity between men and women". This sounds quite odd today. The feminist idea of sisterhood had not been discussed in Finland and nobody spoke of the masculinity of

language. Haavio-Mannila did not see anything odd or mistaken in speaking of fraternity, but she used it as synonym for solidarity or humanity. (As a matter of fact this kind of interpretation of the term fraternity is not at all so "out of date" even today as a one could imagine. On the contrary, now and then someone suggests that "fraternity" should be used as a term which refers to solidarity and equality between all human beings.) What is important is that she sees fraternity as a category superior to either womanhood or manhood. In the ideal situation solidarity will prevail and the sexes will not be segregated. It seems clear that in the 1960's the inherent reference in the concept of fraternity as solidarity among men was not discussed. Perhaps that is why Haavio-Mannila did not question inherent commitments of the concept of equality either.

Haavio-Mannila's way of using the concepts of fraternity and equality seems to prove that she complied perfectly with the mainstream notion of sexual neutrality found at the time. Later on in the book this view is modified. Haavio-Mannila pointed out that women do not have the same individual opportunities as men to realize their liberties and rights in practice. There are some *hindrances* in the way, primarily based on deeply-rooted values and attitudes, attitudes which are justified by referring to the biological differences between women and men. She suggested that legal rights should be indispensable but not sufficient preconditions for equality between the sexes. The sufficient preconditions will come into play only when all other possible ways of social participation are realized. What are these other possible ways? Haavio-Mannila pointed out that men and women have different means available to attain a socially valued status. Equality is not a synonym for similarity. (Haavio-Mannila 1968, 2-3)

I believe this sentence is decisive for understanding Haavio-Mannila's viewpoint. She sets the "common good" as a goal of social action, but emphasizes that women and men have different means of contributing to the common good. (ibid.) By saying this Haavio-Mannila clearly tried to avoid the trap of similarity and commensurability, which always "lurks" behind the idea of absolute equality. She conceded that the action of women and men can be different without being unequal.

Haavio-Mannila's formulation differs from other concepts of equality in the 1960's, because it does not automatically consider the possibility of women's different action reactionary. On the contrary, she demanded more room for women "as women" in social action for common good. She also pointed out that women, as a new group breaking into society, are in a sense "marginal persons". The process of becoming independent, liberating themselves from the exclusive family role, breaking into the labour market and other social activities has led for the time being to a situation where women are tottering between the family and full social participation. (Haavio-Mannila 1968, 15-21)

I think the idea of women as marginal persons illustrates women's situation in the 1960's quite well. On the other hand, however, its limitation is the fact that it directs attention towards male society without questioning the existing values and ways of action of this society. On the contrary, women's full

participation becomes an ideal. In the final analysis she does not question society itself.

### **Equality seen as same social resources**

In 1970 Association 9 was no longer considered necessary. The sex role debate of the 1960's did not, however, disappear without leaving any trace. In 1972 the Council for Equality between Men and Women was founded (See Holli's article in this volume). During the 1970's several international "classics" of feminism were published in Finnish<sup>6</sup>. In addition, there were treatments of women's position in the labour market and political decision-making. These studies usually juxtaposed women's position with that of men. The problem of comparing women with men is that "man" easily becomes a model of human action and women appear to be some sort of exceptions of this model. On the other hand, thanks to these studies there is now a lot of "hard data" on woman's position in society. Compared with the sex role debate of the 1960's, however, the following decade may look seemingly "silent" in regard to the "woman question". As far as I can see, this apparent silence is mainly due to two factors. For one thing studies made by women on women did not arouse too much public attention. Here we come across the well-known "invisibility" of women's activities. Secondly the new feminist movement was born in Finland some years later than in many other Western countries.

At the beginning of the 1970's the discussion on women's position in society was often linked to the discussion on social and family policy. The abortion question was one of the most elucidating examples of the Finnish way of posing the question.

The feminist movements of the 1970's called for the right of self-determination, including their own body and sexuality. The availability of abortion was understood to be a part of the reacquisition of one's own body. A new abortion law was also passed in Finland in 1970<sup>7</sup>. This happened without the same kind of struggle as was needed in many other Western countries. There was, however, a lively discussion on it. The new abortion law was seen rather as a part of the reformist social policy. In fact, the question of abortion was not considered solely a woman's concern; the interruption of pregnancy was a decision belonging equally to men and women, a matter to be decided together. The positive side was that this interpretation stressed men's responsibility in pregnancy, but on the other hand it also emphasized men's right to influence the women's decision whether to give birth or not. Also a child's best was emphasized; it was claimed that every child should have right to be born as desired.

The Finnish attitude towards abortion shows how women's position was continuously treated according to the principle of equality and how this way of thinking often turned against women in practice. The abortion case illustrates both shared responsibility and denial of right to autonomous and different individuality based on the fact that women actually give birth. (Räsänen 1984, 149-150)<sup>8</sup>

It has been pointed out that Finnish legislation is mainly equal. Glancing at the laws written in the 1970's and affecting women one notices that sexually neutral laws which treat everybody in the same way form the heart of the legislation. (Koskinen 1983) Despite Finland's reputation as an exemplary country of formal equality, the very laws which feminist movements in other countries chose as their objects for struggle did not take a very radical form in Finland. The abortion law mentioned above is quite moderate generally and from a feminist point of view it clearly *disregards* women's right to self-determination. Laws concerning other woman issues were passed quite late in comparison with other Western countries. It was only in the 1980's that a new surname law was passed as well as a new equality law. A law against sexual violence has not yet even been discussed in Finland.

In the 1970's Riitta Auvinen continued Haavio-Mannila's tradition with her doctoral thesis called "Woman in Man's Society". (Auvinen 1977). Although almost ten years had passed since Haavio-Mannila's study, the way of posing questions is strikingly similar in some respects. Haavio-Mannila suggested that the question of women's equality should be defined as women's opportunity to fully participate in social action. She acknowledged that some obstacles exist, which hinder women's full participation. She also claimed that women's abilities and opportunities to contribute to the common good may differ from men's.

Auvinen, instead, speaks of resources:

"Women's strivings for equality must be treated, not so much from the point of view of realizing her needs, but more so from the direction of the resources, which a woman has for acquiring socially valued merits and abilities. In this study the equality of women with men is posed as a question of resources: to what extent are women allowed the same social resources as men; in other words are women discriminated against and if so to what extent are they discriminated against in the acquisition of social resources?" (Auvinen 1977, 124)

For Haavio-Mannila it took only one sentence to mention that equality does not mean similarity, whereas Auvinen tries to define it more precisely. She notes that the Western concept of justice requires equal treatment of people. Yet differences between individuals create some problems. According to Auvinen the traditional definition of justice runs as follows: "For everyone that which pertains to him". This definition contains two parts. The first part states that all humans are equal. The basis of this lies in similarity. The second part, however, has difference as its basis; justice does not mean simply equal treatment of like people. Auvinen interprets this to mean that equality between women and men cannot mean similarity, proportionality between like persons, but instead must mean relative equality; women and men should be equal in relation to a certain criterion. (Auvinen 1977, 123)

Reasoning thus, Auvinen ends up by suggesting that the availability of resources is decisive for the equality of women. Without resources it is impossible to gain access to the group which defines the criteria of equality. The advantage of this formulation is in its political nature; equality is a question of definition, its contents can be influenced, it can be changed. On the other hand, Auvinen does not question the ideal of equality as the main parameter of human relations as such. On the contrary, she suggests that in modern society the "circles" (i.e. spheres, T.P.) in which men and women act are becoming more and more alike; in the future society it is no longer possible to speak about men's spheres and women's spheres. (Auvinen 1979, 120) In this way Auvinen sets the gender neutral way of looking at things as an ideal.

### **From studies on equality to Women's Studies**

As I mentioned earlier women's position at work as well as women as political actors (especially as voters) were studied in the 1970's. One can even argue that especially these two research traditions had gained by the 1980's already a stable position. The shortcomings of these traditions did not lie so much in the quantity of the research as in the quality. Sexual difference had not been taken into account but women had been compared with men without asking if this was possible in every case.

In sum, it can be argued that from the 1960's until the end of the 1970's studies on women were mainly studies on equality. From the vantage point of equality it was first of all advisable to examine women's work. It can still be asked, though, where this emphasis came from? As far as I can see the answer lies in the already mentioned fact that Finnish women were very active in the wage labour force. As long as women's difference was not realized (or perhaps admitted) women were studied in the same terms as men, i.e. in terms of work and equality. It is important to note that the Finnish gender system is such that it is not possible to do a simple division between "a public world of men" and "a private world of women". In a large scale Finnish women have been integrated into society (although not very much to the top positions) quite early. The differences begin to come to daylight only if it is asked from which position women and men relate themselves to "private" and "public" spheres. On the other hand, it can be argued that just because women have been so integrated into society, the apparent similarity between the sexes has been emphasized.

The rise of Women's Studies had also an effect upon the terminology. In 1977 Riitta Auvinen still spoke of "*women's position*". In 1980 the Academy of Finland arranged, along with the Council for Equality, a seminar on *Women's Studies*. The report of this seminar provides a picture of the sort of water-shed, which rose in the Finnish way of thinking about gender relations. For the first time a great number of scientists tried to take distance from studies on equality and attempted to define a concept of Women's Studies.

At the seminar Auli Hakulinen appraised the previous Finnish studies on women as follows:

"Research has been done in a certain sense in the spirit of J.S. Mill; the point of departure has been the assumption that women's role is thoroughly more miserable than men's role. Since it is after all a result of historical development the situation can be consciously corrected. From the perspective of today the research has aimed to be objective and value-free but unconsciously it has been done in the same way as men's studies." (Hakulinen 1980, 7)

Hakulinen also took her stand on the relationship between studies on equality and women's studies:

"Contemporary Women's Studies are not, at least not only, studies on equality. This is because the new women's movement defines its goals in a larger sense than merely aiming at equality with men. The importance of finding women's own identity, which differs from that of men, is stressed." (Hakulinen 1980, 13)

A little earlier Hakulinen encapsulated the goal of Women's Studies:

"It can be called goal-oriented research. And the endeavour is the liberation of women; not only setting her at same position as man, but liberating her in her own terms to participate in social reform work." (Hakulinen 1980, 10)

These quotations capture the character of Finnish Women's Studies at the beginning of the 1980's. No longer studies only on equality, they attempt to go further. Studies on equality are not totally ignored or abandoned: they are recognized as having their own significance in terms of producing hard data, but they are only one component. Just using the term Women's Studies already serves to distinguish current work from the previous "equality" directed point of view. That older view is considered insufficient and even partly erroneous or misleading. In the report mentioned above Haavio-Mannila writes:

"This trend of studies (on equality, T.P.) can be criticized for being value neutral and too cautious in bringing up any criticisms of society (nothing can be said without empirical evidence), being too distant from the everyday life of women, and finally for defining equality as similarity of the sexes, or in other words, as a male-centred model according to which women are a sort of exception from the real human being - man. Avoidance of the use of the concept of subordination meant that the research point of view became narrower. Women's position was explained by using the concepts, theories and methods of men's studies." (Haavio-Mannila 1980, 28)

Also Haavio-Mannila points out that Finnish Women's Studies have paid particular attention to women's position at work. (Haavio-Mannila 1980, 30) Studies on women's work do not lose their position even in the 80's. On the contrary, a very labour-centred focus leaves its mark on how the concept of gender is defined and the "woman question" is approached in the studies of the 80's. I will return to this question later.

The breakthrough of Women's Studies in Finland signalled at least two things. First of all, women who do research and feminists tried to keep critical distance from earlier interpretations of equality and locate a new, more women-centred point of view. Second, the discussion of women's position in society got new life as the publication activities did. However, the women-centred viewpoint did not always prevail. Especially in books directed towards a "wider reading public" a clear effort was made to surpass the "narrow sex-oriented" point of view and take "humanity" into account.

In 1984 the Ministry of Education published a collection of articles called "Man - Woman - Human" (Mies - nainen - ihminen). It is a good example of this tendency. The title alone emphasizes the entirety of humankind and the uniformity of men and women. The subtitle, "Viewpoints of science on the differences between the sexes and equality" refers to something the articles confirm; it is argued that at the present time there are no scientific reasons to consider women essentially inferior to men. The subordination of women is seen as a socially-produced condition which can be changed if so desired.

Earlier I mentioned that the sex role debate of the 60's emphasized that equality should not be viewed narrowly as a part of gender relations but rather it should be understood as a general principle of justice. In the above mentioned collection of articles Osmo Lampinen states:

"Extending equality between men and women has been accepted in Finland as an important goal of social policy. During recent years this dimension of equality has dominated the political debate to the extent that nowadays equality politics refers only to equality between the sexes." (Lampinen 1984, 210)

So, since the 1980's, within the debate about social politics equality has been a self-evident demand. The concept of equality is mainly used to refer to gender relations. One might think that a woman-centred way of thinking had taken at least a small step forward. But the tone of the quotation above speaks against this assumption. Lampinen clearly regrets this tendency and wants to say that the concept of equality has been *reduced* to refer only to men and women. Instead of regarding the gender-oriented way of looking at things as an extension of the viewpoint it is condemned to be a reduction.

Lampinen divides definitions of equality into *traditional* and *radical*. He defines the traditional as one calling for women's equal opportunities to par-

ticipate as individuals in social action. He connects the radical interpretation with the new women's movement, which has identified women as a group or category, who have common values and endeavours. Women have common characteristics and inclinations, which separate them from men. According to Lampinen the new women's movement emphasizes a demand for deep and substantial equality. (Lampinen 1984, 211-213)

The other definitions of equality in the 1980's support this statement. In her article "New Women's Movement and Equality" Hilkka Pietilä seeks to define the relationship between equality and feminism:

"The basic idea of the new women's movement is that women and men are different from each other in many respects besides reproductive functions. In spite of this they should be able to be equal with each other in employment, society and all aspects of life." (Pietilä 1983, 111)

Pietilä claims that equality with men is not enough for the new women's movement, but:

"Only through a more profound self-consciousness will women be capable of giving their own unique contribution to social development and without such contributions a balanced development cannot be successful. In this way women's participation becomes critical and it is no longer necessary to fight for it only as a question of equality." (Pietilä 1983, 117)

In the discussion on gender relations equality has still been defined as an ideal of this relations in the 1980's, but at the same time the definition of equality has changed. On the other hand, the new women's movement suggests that pure equality should not be enough, but its significance as a sort of minimum aim is not denied. It had been stated that the road of formal equality may have come to its end; the case of the Finnish sexually neutral legislation demonstrates that difficulties in gender relations cannot be intermittently "repaired" by means of legislation. In addition, gender neutral treatment does not necessarily do justice to individuals, who in any event are never pure human beings, but always men and women. (Koskinen 1983)

The discussion on the insufficiency of equality may be understood as an endeavour to surpass the previous narrow viewpoint of the similarity of the sexes. At the same time the continuing adherence to the importance of equality may stem from a profound conviction that the sexual origin of an individual should not constitute a destiny, which restricts his/her possibilities in life. In my reading, it is against this background that Women's Studies in the field of social sciences in the 1980's have tried to redefine the concept of gender.

## Gender as a socially produced category

"The starting point is a concept of gender as a socially produced category and as system of relations, which is closely and in many ways entwined with the institutions of the political system and to their operation at every level." (Saarinen et al. 1987, 5)

"It is understandable that Women's Studies have wanted to take distance from biologism, but now it is time to ask from a new perspective what kind of significance does corporeality play in gender. Every kind of corporeality is not biologism; the human body can be examined also in a social sense...In Finland sexuality has been studied very little. According to Karen Widenberg Nordic Women's Studies in general are marked by a concentration on the relation between the sexes in the labour market and on the parental relations, but sexuality and corporeality have been forgotten. If we wish to move forward theoretically we need more courageous and many-sided studies." (Rantalaiho 1988, 38-39)

These quotations are taken from the books published quite recently in the field of social scientific Women's Studies. I think they provide a good example of the stance from which the notion of gender has been examined during the recent years. To say that gender is a socially-produced category is in principle a definition elastic enough to leave room for many interpretations<sup>9</sup>. In Finnish Women's Studies it is sometimes, however, reduced to mean a category produced in *the sexual division of labour in society*. It can be asked, why the concept of gender is defined by means of the concept of labour. Obviously this is partly due to the labour-centred vantage point of the research; a large portion of Finnish studies on women's work starts from the assumption that the sexual division of labour reflects the (former) division between private and public spheres. Women are seen as supporters and caretakers of society. Caring and support work formerly made in the home are located outside of the home in a modern welfare state but they are still mainly women who do this work.

From the standpoint of sexual difference this labour-focused definition of gender is not necessarily erroneous, but it is quite narrow, and even more importantly, it is also in a way bound to the "male perspective" of the public, whose main components are often considered to be work and politics. Gender, however, is not only a question of the division of labour, but it is something which exists also in other ways. In other words, the structure of human culture cannot be reduced to the division of labour.

## TOWARDS A CONCLUSION

Lampinen's classification scheme of traditional and radical interpretations of equality reveals an interesting conceptual transition from the 1960's to the 1980's. In the 1960's Edmund Dahlström spoke about moderate and radical sex

role ideologies. He defined moderate sex role ideology something that emphasized differences between the sexes, while the radical sex role ideology based on the idea of essential similarity of the sexes. In the 1980's, instead, Osmo Lampinen regards the traditional interpretation of equality as something that bases on the similarity of the sexes whereas the radical interpretation of equality, which aspires after substantial equality, bases on the differences between the sexes. Thus the fact that was radical in the 1960's has become traditional in the 1980's and vice versa. It is also important to note that along with this conceptual transition also progress and reaction have changed places. In the 1960's the radical sex role ideology basing on the similarity of sexes was considered progressive, whereas in the 1980's the traditional concept of equality basing on the similarity of the sexes is classified reactionary. Correspondingly in the 1960's reaction was bound to moderate sex role ideology basing on differences, while in the 1980's reaction is bound to the traditional concept of equality basing on similarity.

At the beginning of this article I asked if the notion of equality still prevails as an ideal in the Finnish discussion on gender relations. On the basis of the analysis made above it can be concluded that the ideal of equality has maintained its position as the basic parameter in the discussion on gender relations. At the same time, however, the definition of equality has changed. It can be asked, to what extent the equality discourse of the 80's is equivalent with that of the 60's? In fact both Osmo Lampinen's as well as Hilkka Pietilä's definitions of equality show that in the 1980's the concept of equality is clearly understood to be a twofold concept. For one thing it refers to *formal equality*, which can be achieved by means of legislation. On the other hand, it refers to *substantial equality*, which aspires after being able to prescribe relations between originally different individuals. The contemporary criticism of equality for the most part concerns the level of formal equality; it is seriously asked whether the legislation is capable to guarantee equal treatment of different individuals.

The other level, that of substantial equality is, however, more interesting. For one thing speaking about substantial equality reveals the fact that the contemporary concept of equality has surpassed the limits of the traditional liberalistic concept of equality, through which it was not possible to delineate any kind of differences between individuals. On the other hand, it can be asked to what extent it is reasonable to try to prescribe the relations of different individuals in terms of the concept of equality? The effort to prescribe the relations of different individuals in terms of equality creates at least two kinds of problems. First of all it leads to "practical" difficulties in legislation: should the aim of legislation be equal or different treatment. Secondly, remaining in the framework of equality means the same as keeping in the "male paradigm" in two ways. For one thing, the questioning of principles and basis of society and its political, ideological and cultural structures is not needed. On the other hand, the concept of (substantial) equality is not able to do any difference between the sexual difference of woman and other kind of differences. Broadening the

concept of equality in the 1980's has not meant that it would have lost its apparently sex neutral nature, behind of which the masculine gender as a parameter is hidden. On the contrary, it can be argued that the contemporary concept of substantial equality is more capable than the previous concept of equality of prescribing the relations of different but sexless individuals, while the sexual difference of women still remains insignificant. The example of Finnish discussion on equality leads also to a conclusion that keeping in terms of equality easily directs attention to the sphere of labour, while the other spheres of human action remain intact.

I have showed how in the field of social scientific studies on women in Finland there has been a shift from the more or less sex-neutral concept of equality of the 60's to the concept of gender as a socially produced category of the 80's. In order to get forward both theoretically and also in practice I suggest that the notion of gender should not be taken as a self-evident and one-sidedly positive category to be used in Women's Studies. On the contrary, we should reconsider the dichotomy gender/sex. To escape the danger of biological reduction this dichotomy is very useful. In social sciences it is a widely accepted principle that social scientific analyses should avoid all kind of biological reductions. On the other hand, we are often reminded of the fact that women have "always" been defined inferior beings by means of sexual/natural/biological difference; arguments based on sex/nature/biology can be and are used against women all the time. However, the example of the Finnish sex-neutral legislation shows that this problem cannot be resolved by simply forgetting sexual difference. More importantly, however, I would say that if the dichotomy gender/sex is accepted without any doubt, the real basis of women's subordination may disappear from the sight.

Carole Pateman states:

"The meaning of the "individual" remains intact only so long as the dichotomies (internal to civil society) between natural/civil, private/public, women/individual - and sex/gender - remain intact. Women's inclusion into civil society as members of a gender, as individuals, is also their inclusion as members of a sex, as women." (Pateman 1988, 225)

To define gender as a socially produced category tells only a part of the story of the terms of women's subordination. As Carole Pateman shows in her book "The Sexual Contract" women are subordinated *as a sex*. Social contract, made by brothers, is constructed in such a way that women can become citizens of the civil society only as "individuals", never as women, whereas the "individual" is constructed from a male body so that his identity is always masculine. (Pateman 1988, 222-223)

Pateman writes:

"For feminists to argue for the elimination of nature, biology, sex in favour of the "individual" is to play the modern patriarchal game and to join in a much wider onslaught on nature within and beyond the boundaries of civil societies." (Pateman 1988, 226)

Indeed, why should women in general and feminist researchers in particular worry about a danger of biological reduction as they have been men to do such a reduction defining women "naturally inferior" and leaving them by definition outside of the realm of civil society? Wouldn't it be better to ask over and over again why we are so zealously advised not to take "biology" into account in social scientific research?

I suggest that "gender" should be reconsidered as a component of "binary oppositions" inherent to the conceptual system of Western thought. On the other hand, it should not be forgotten that women have been and still are subordinated (made inferior) as a sex. Women's subordination is indeed based on a strange biological reduction which in itself is a political construct in the sense that biology/nature/sex postulated in (male) social and political theories and philosophy is a political construct.

I agree with Carole Pateman as she writes: "Women can attain the formal standing of civil individuals but as embodied feminine beings we can never be "individuals" in the same sense as men. To take embodied identity seriously demands the abandonment of the masculine, unitary individual to open space for two figures; one masculine, one feminine." (Pateman 1988, 224)

The abandonment of the masculine, unitary individual calls into question also the principle of equality as a parameter of gender relations. Sexual difference cannot any more be understood as a reverse side of equality; in other words equality and difference cannot be understood simply as alternatives. On the contrary, the abandonment of the masculine, unitary individual, suggests that equality and difference can be understood as *incommensurable* with each other (i.e. being in different levels). Each of them opens an important and irreplaceable dimension of relation between men and women. The notion of sexual difference does not abandon the level of formal equality, but it broadens the view to new areas.

If the notion of sexual difference is taken into account, it can be asked, what does it really mean. Does it refer to *differences* between diverse individuals or to the *difference*? This is, indeed, an important question and open two different views. Speaking of differences between diverse individuals is possible in terms of the notion of substantial equality. As I already pointed out above, the limit of this notion is in the fact that in terms of substantial equality (i.e. in terms of differences) the sexual difference of women still tends to remain intact. That is why the notion of sexual difference is necessary both in research and other discussion on relation between men and women. It directs attention to that

which culture has suppressed and suffocated. It hints at something, which is absent, which has not been able to manifest itself. In order to understand the whole story of women's subordination it is necessary to identify that which has remained in the margins of human (male) culture.

#### NOTES

1. All the Finnish books quoted here have been written in Finnish. The translations are mine.
2. You can find the original Finnish titles of articles and books in the bibliography.
3. Association 9, a Finnish organization for equality, was founded in 1966. See Holli's article in this volume.
4. After "Finnish Woman and Man" Haavio-Mannila has studied among other things sex roles in politics, women as political actors, women in economic, political and cultural elites and trade unions' influence on policies affecting women. One of the important works in the 1980's is her contribution to "Unfinished Democracy. Women in Nordic Politics" (Keskeneräinen kansanvalta), which was published in 1983.
5. It must be mentioned that the Finnish language does not make any difference between "liberty" and "freedom". That is to say that we have only one word, "vapaus", for both of them.
6. The Feminine Mystique of Betty Friedan was published in Finnish already in 1967. For example books of Germaine Greer and Aleksandra Kollontay were published in the 1970's.
7. According to the new abortion law the interruption of pregnancy could be made during the first 16 weeks of pregnancy. After that the interruption was permitted only if the mother's or the foetus' health was in danger. In the 1978, the law was "adjusted" so that according to the new formula the interruption may be made during the first 12 weeks.
8. According to the abortion law interruption of pregnancy may be made on medical as well as on social grounds. In practice there have been no difficulties in getting an abortion, but the point is, that in other social circumstances the law could be used against women. The decision is made by one or two doctors and the State Medical Board.
9. The Finnish language lacks a division into "sex" and "gender". We have only one word to refer to both of them, "sukupuoli". We have to speak of "social sukupuoli" and "biological sukupuoli" if we want to express the difference which is always made in texts written in English.

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