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BARBRO LENNÉER AXELSON

GENDER RELATIONS FOCUSED ON MEN

LES RAPPORTS DE GENRE CENTRÉS SUR L'HOMME

- *Les différentes étapes et les points critiques du processus d'égalité entre l'homme et la femme.*
- *Les attitudes et les réactions des hommes à propos de l'égalité entre l'homme et la femme et l'accès au pouvoir des femmes («empowerment»).*
- *Conflits du genre et négociations dans les rapports de couple relatifs à l'égalité entre l'homme et la femme.*
- *Mesures gouvernementales d'appui aux changements de la culture/rôle de l'homme.*

Les expériences de la Suède.

Gender equality is a social phenomenon that only starts having wind in its sails all over the world. When this movement of change was intensified in the late 60s and 70s in Scandinavia, many men hoped that this was a temporary trend that would quickly blow over. But gender equality has really arrived to stay. If we want to support this global, democratic and humanistic movement, all of us have to learn and accept that men and women have the same value, the same rights and the same responsibilities. We need to develop *gender consciousness* instead of being stuck in *gender blindness*.

This struggle towards equality is important as *gender is the most fundamental and stable social category of all*. Our age changes, we are able to

change works, to change partners, social class might be changed upwards or downwards, etc. But *we are women and men forever*. It is both fascinating and scaring, especially if men and women do not have the same opportunity to develop as best a life as possible in a rapidly changing society.

There are two dimensions of gender equality: the *qualitative* and the *quantitative*. The first one is a necessary base for real efforts and improvements of quantitative changes. Qualitative changes demand continuing education and knowledge at all levels, from family life and day care centers to politicians, so we are able to understand the implications of gender blindness in our private lives and in the social structures and barriers in the society.

In Sweden many gender discussions have taken place in all social systems over the past two decades. I dare to say that everybody has been more or less influenced, especially in theory although not always in practice. Nowadays people very quickly notice if a man or a woman expresses traditional or discriminatory gender views. In this context I need to tell you that Sweden is a small country (about 9 million people), which has not been at war since 1814 and we have had a stable political situation. So we have had both time and resources for social development including gender equality and a rather high quality of life. You can find the same gender equality processes all over western Europe, but it develops on a slower tempo outside Scandinavia. Gender equality laws and regulations exist in many countries. One difference is that the political commitment and implementation have been stronger in Sweden.

Gender culture is the total sum of historical norms, traditions and values and is very strongly influenced by the system/arrangement of production and reproduction in society. The most common pattern all over the world is that women are responsible for the the small world (home and children) and men for the breadwinning and activities in public society. *The man is the superiority norm* is a common expression in Swedish working life. What the man thinks, says and how he acts is always right. All of us are more or less stuck in this gender system because of the influence of the gender culture. It is

important to support both men and women to become more holistic in their inner personality, in their actions and concerning all positions in society. This is called the *androgynous personality*. A man is permitted to be both strong and weak, a man can take care of children, cook and be a good manager at work, etc. There are nowadays a lot of these men in Scandinavia, especially in the younger generation, who have the capacity to function well both in public and private life and who are able – however stressed – to balance their time and energy between both sectors. This results also in a better life balance and stronger empowerment for their wives.

WHY ARE WOMEN EMPOWERED AND MADE EQUAL IF THERE ARE TOO FEW “MODERN” AND EQUAL MEN?

After the UN conferences in Cairo 1994 and Beijing 1995, there is a global consensus in written documents on a *holistic approach* towards both gender issues and reproductive health. One key concept is *women's empowerment*: the strengthening of women's autonomy and ability to influence or make their decisions and *choices* in all life spheres, improving women's level of education and their position on the labour market, promoting social and economic development for women. One-sided work on women's empowerment however becomes a drop in the ocean, if women do not meet men who respect them as individuals and men who have equal and responsible behaviours. The two sexes are intertwined. A system theory approach is necessary to balance this social change in a positive direction. *Gender equality must include both women and men*. Therefore *proactive strategies of male involvement and male responsibility* are necessary – yes, it means a life important contribution to facilitate women empowerment but also for *men's own identity and life quality*. Men are human beings, not only the society's working machines or marginalized unemployed men! Men's gender role repertoire must be widened.

THE PROCESS OF GENDER EQUALITY

All changes take time and pass through different steps. The social psychologist Kurt Lewin (1951) has identified the following phases of change, which I here apply on the development of the gender equality process.

1. THE UNFREEZING PHASE

Old values, attitudes and behaviours began to be questioned at this stage. Women's entry into the Swedish labour market in the 60s and 70s and the introduction of the contraceptive pill in 1964 were of strong importance for questioning the traditional gender order. Swedish women in general in their private relationships, *women's NGOs*, *female politicians* (nowadays 43%) and *female journalists* have had significant influence as pressure groups in this context, hastening improvements. *Gender research*, mostly from a feministic perspective was of course important. *Massmedia* in all forms has been an important contributor of course to push the gender equality process through these different stages as well as *education efforts* in school, in working life, etc.

Many women have also initiated *divorce* in Scandinavia during the last two decades because of lack of gender equality, which has been a real gender equality lesson for many men. There is a Japanese saying: "Healthy men should not be at home!" I had a woman client who said the opposite when she planned to divorce. "I am tired of providing care for a healthy man at home."

Swedish men were mostly silent – and confused – during the 70s but there was one exception after some years, which was a real "kick-off" for discussions about men's roles and life-situations. Many *divorced men complained* in media, to lawyers and in family counselling because they had severe difficulties to meet their children often enough. These men had mostly been involved as fathers as a result of gender equality so they experienced real traumatic losses. In 1984 the Swedish Government created a special committee, which explored both good and bad parts of the male role, from fatherhood to violence. An intensive public debate developed.

Some *crisis centers for men* therefore started (Lenn er Axelson 1989) as a specific support system. The male staff, notice just male staff, support these divorced fathers and guide them in their divorce coping process. Many men felt also a need of more self-knowledge, knowledge about couple relationships and about children. Custody laws after divorce have also been changed. Divorced parents have now joint custody if none of them objects. However most children still spend most of their time with their mothers.

2. THE MOVEMENT STAGE/THE IMPLEMENTATION PHASE

When this point is reached, it is time to test new alternatives. Individuals have to face a relearning process at practical, intellectual and emotional levels. The Swedish gender equality process is still mainly at a late stage of this second stage. Different groups commonly find themselves at different stages of a change. There are "believers" and "doubters". Most women of all ages are still more ahead of men together with middle class younger men. One of the major sources of conflict in marriage and also at many work places has been the far more rapid transformation of the role of women compared with that of men. Women have a lot to gain as they used to be ignored and their resources and wishes disregarded. Many men thought – rightly or wrongly – that they could lose their privileges. Because of women's traditional lower status it is also more difficult for men to move into the women's sphere than for women to enter the "male world". It is still very difficult to recruit men to day care centers, as teachers for the younger children, etc., because of both lower status and salaries.

Some groups of men, especially older ones, have kept to their traditional roles and are still in stage number 1. This is probably also valid for some frustrated men who beat their wives. They have not been able to adapt to the modern society, to stronger women and the change of the traditional male dominant role.

The movement stage is always complicated in all types of changes. It is not easy to change either individual attitudes and behaviours or well established society structures, even though most people agree on gen-

der equality in theory. Some sociologists have stated that it might take at least three generations before we reach phase number 3.

3. THE STABILIZATION/CONSOLIDATION PHASE

A change must go through all three phases to become a real change. This means that the change has been more or less internalized among men and women. This is the stage when it becomes self-evident that women and men have the same value and options and no gender is discriminated in any life spheres. Swedish education is equally available for both young men and young women. There are no legal barriers but many women have their own inside barriers and still prefer shorter education and both sexes still choose to a great extent gender-stereotyped education/work tasks. Almost the same number of men and women earn their own money but women about 20% less than men. Sometimes also for the same job!

Almost all men are nowadays present at childbirth and take a far bigger part of raising their children. As regards to the house work many men are still in stage number two but they make progress, especially the younger ones.

Compared to a lot of other parts of the world, Scandinavia is excellent at gender equality in the fields of sexual and reproductive health and rights, but gender violence is regrettably still there. In 1998 a special commission on Violence Against Women has proposed some new and strengthened laws in that area.

GOVERNMENTAL SUPPORT SYSTEMS/ GENDER EQUALITY PROCESS

During the movement stage, forces are constantly in play that strive for renewal and at the same time counterforces attempt to maintain the status quo in stage 1.

If the balance of these forces is to be upset to allow old patterns to break up, the factors that favour progress must be strengthened and/or the conservative forces weakened.

It is therefore important to develop support systems at different levels, which both push gender equality forwards and reduce those tensions and conflicts which arise during changes: new laws; a special responsible Minister for gender equality; Equal Opportunities Ombudsman (Jämo) who inspects and controls how gender equality is followed in society and working life; obligation for employers to actively promote work on gender issues; obligatory gender equality plans, which must be renewed every second year; special gender equality committees at work places. The same salary for the same work is one gender motto nowadays. Gender research from both female and male perspectives and gender statistics exist in most areas. Gender education is going on in all social systems and especially for specific professions as teachers, managers/chiefs in working life, etc.

Psychosocial support systems such as family counselling, parental groups, crisis center for men in divorce and violent men, etc. Well, it is a lot of talk globally about *mainstreaming of gender equality*, which simply means that gender perspectives must be considered in every issue of importance at every level of society, especially in the analysis and formulation of policies and projects (SIDA 1997).

MEN'S OWN EXPERIENCES OF GENDER EQUALITY BENEFITS/GAINS

From my own study (Lenneér Axelson 1989/1996) of 87 men, 25-40 years old, the following results came out concerning gender equality. First it is important to note that only 10% of these men could not find any benefits/gains at all. The men ranked as number one the following as the most important gains:

INCREASED FATHER INVOLVEMENT: 36%

Of all aspects in the equality process, what men most appreciate is their more engaged fatherhood together with a much closer relationship to their children.

These men found the following aspects most important:

- ❑ increased awareness for children's world
- ❑ more time for the children
- ❑ deeper contact with the children
- ❑ more fun to be a father
- ❑ shared parental responsibilities for children
- ❑ stronger love between father and children
- ❑ men have learned to talk with their children
- ❑ men are maturing emotionally through deeper contacts with children
- ❑ more legitimate for men to take care of the children.

BETTER INTERPLAY BETWEEN MEN AND WOMEN: 26%

In these men's opinion, the increased equality has facilitated more open, more natural and friendlier relations with women – both at home and at work. Women's work outside the home had also relieved men of some of their burden as breadwinners.

Sexuality has also become more enriching. Women express a stronger sexual lust when gender equality has improved.

LESS BURDENSOME AND MORE RELAXED MANLINESS: 24%

These men said that the greatest benefit is that they dare to show and express an extended register of feelings. The norms of the traditional man's role with its themes of self-control and emotional repression have begun to loosen up somewhat.

GENDER EQUALITY CONFLICTS FROM MEN'S PERSPECTIVE

As mentioned before, it is always difficult to immediately reach only the benefits, when there is a change going on. Specific problems and conflicts also arise.

NEGATIVE EFFECTS ON FAMILY LIFE: 8%

This group thought that women spend too much time at work and for their own self-realization.

MORE ROLE CONFLICTS IN MARRIAGE: 34%

Gender equality has of course increased conflicts in marriage. In the past men were only under one kind of pressure – do do their job well. These men find it difficult to come from a traditional upbringing to enter a relationship with a woman who demands gender equality. They found it difficult to combine work and family life in a way that satisfies both – and their bosses. Equality had also in their opinions created uncertainty as to what demands a man and a woman can and should make on one another.

THE MAN'S ROLE IS NO LONGER WELL DEFINED: 26%

The men in this group expressed uncertainty as to what a man should be like nowadays. They find it difficult to find a synthesis between gender equality and retaining their “manliness”. Examples: “It is difficult to be a dishwasher but still be charming and seductive”. “We men have not found our role. We are to promote equality but still hold the door open for women”, etc.

When asked about disadvantages and limitations of the traditional male role, 1/3 of the men state that the greatest strain in being a man is *always to be brave and strong* and “*You always have to prove that you are good enough.*”

Other problems with being a man is *fear of and lack of practice in talking about feelings* which is something today's women demand since we are now living in the feeling- and communication-based family. One group of men also thought that it is problematic to be put into “the male pigeonhole”, meaning that women often considered them unemotional or emotionally “disabled”.

WOMEN ARE HARDER TO DEAL WITH: 24%

These men thought of women as tougher and expressing themselves more. Women want to make the decisions too often and this gender equality has a tendency to work in favour of women.

A large group of men felt that women would have to be patient. They want *time and knowledge* to be able to adapt to today's gender roles. One man said:

“We are a generation caught slightly in the middle. Our upbringing did not prepare us for the new roles. Time after time we find ourselves *ill-equipped* but being interpreted as showing *ill will*.”

Other men complain that their wives find it difficult to share the privileges associated with maternity and being the woman at home. Women also need to change! They thought that as men finally began to be more active caretakers as fathers, women's own ideals of equality were really tried out. “Women say a lot of pretty words about gender equality but they still see the home as their domain and the children as theirs – not ours.” This shows that women are also stuck into traditional roles, having difficulties to let their men into their traditional life spheres.

GENDER EQUALITY

AT DIFFERENT STAGES OF COUPLE RELATIONSHIPS

Conell (1995) underlines that dialectic relations construct gender identity. Gender is a relational category. Gender is social actions, a gender project. This also means that both men and women construct their gender in many different ways, and thus it is necessary to talk about masculinities, not just masculinity as there are a lot of differences among men as regards to social class, ethnicity, sexual orientation, etc. However Hearn (1996) calls in to question the diffuse concept of masculinity/ies. He prefers that research concentrates on “Men's practices” or “What men do or think or feel?” instead. Levinson (1978) already found that the content and mean-

ing of the male role/masculinities also change in relation to expectations and realities of the life cycle and many other factors. It is impossible to talk about men without relating them to women. Therefore I would like to integrate gender equality into different stages of a couple relationship and some critical points in these love relationships.

FALLING IN LOVE — OR THE ATTRACTION/CONFIRMATION PHASE

Cohabitation/marriage in Sweden are built on a free choice between the two partners. There are no family-arranged marriages. It is not necessary to marry for religious, moral or economic reasons. Cohabitation/marriage is based on love. In the initial stage of passion or falling in love, feelings are unequivocally strong between a couple. *Gender equality conflicts are mostly not a problem at all at this stage.* They adore and idealize each other. The close physical and psychological contact makes the couple feel the same, which results in a low level of conflict. Their decision making process is democratic and generous. People are also such good listeners when they are in love that the communication runs smoothly which strengthens both understanding and openness. At this stage men behave more like traditional women, expressing more emotions, tenderness, etc. The sexual feelings are strong — both partners want sex often and even at the same times at this stage! Thus, women behave at this stage more like traditional men. That is not always the case in a more longlasting marriage, where most men want sexuality more often than the woman.

EVERY DAY LOVE AND PARENTHOOD — THE INTEGRATION PHASE

I use the term every day love for longlasting relationships, when a couple lives together year after year, mostly also as parents. (Lenn er Axelson 1979/1997).

Love and conflicts are not in opposition to each other. It is the reality and this stage is somewhat more complicated because of more ambivalent feelings compared to the intensive passion stage. When the couple starts to develop several and stronger bonds between them, i. e. joint possessions and economy, children, relatives, the risk for disagreements and conflicts increases. In this stage there is a pendulum between conflicting emotions: love and aggressions, closeness and remoteness, freedom and dependence, stimulation and boredom.

Paying attention to, supporting and confirming each other are the necessary platform of a good marriage. Adjustments must constantly be made with regards to time and energy in work and parenthood. Lack of respect for each other easily leads to disappointments and a lower self-esteem. In many studies around the world women state that men in general are bad listeners. One reason might be that men have the opinion – consciously or uncounsciously – that *women have a lower status* and therefore need not to be listened to. The other reason is that *women are much better trained in relations*, showing empathy, caring, etc, which is women's classic domain. Still another reason is that women are not able to understand men's expressions of love. Many men prefer to express their feelings in practical every day actions instead of a lot of talk.

A couple's private life is not an isolated factor. The American researcher David Olsen (1989) has found that couples who have the happiest marriages are those where both enjoy their work outside the home. This leads to increased gender equality, self-confidence and an appetite for life which gives positive spin-off effects also in private life. One of the most important and unsolved issue is how to synchronize work life and family life. One common complaint from both Swedish men and women is fatigue, stress and lack of time which in turn easily leads to irritations and conflicts.

Family problems tend to erupt at transitions. One such critical point from a gender equality perspective develops, when the *couple become parents*. Then gender equality from stage one is at risk, if the man and the woman are not able to *negotiate* how to share the child care, work

inside and outside home and economy in a fair way. Loyalty is an important part of a marriage project. Gender equality is one part of this loyalty. Instead of talking about gender equality you could talk about *fairness*, about *shared power*, well, simply about caring for each other (Lenn er Axelson 1999).

GOVERNMENTAL SUPPORT SYSTEMS TO FACILITATE PARENTHOOD/FATHERHOOD

It has already been underlined that the society's support systems of different forms are very important to facilitate the gender equality process. One such support strategy linked to parenthood and fatherhood is *parental education groups*. 6-7 group meetings during pregnancy and some sessions after the birth of the child focused on preparation for the delivery, the care for the baby, on different issues of parenthood including gender equality and sexuality, for example advice to men not to push for sexual intercourse too soon after delivery. This is a strategy to involve fathers at an early stage.

About 60% of the Swedish men becoming fathers participate in these groups nowadays. Research has also found that an early attachment between the baby and the father promotes the quality of their long term relationship. Children develop a stronger self-esteem and basic trust if they have a good contact with both the mother and the father. This parenthood arrangement is also very important from a long term gender equality perspective. Then both girls and boys would have better options to develop a more holistic and less stereotyped gender identity/roles.

Parental leave for fathers is another important gender reform. 10 days are paid for parental leave for husbands after the delivery. 85% men use these days. *1 month of the total parental leave – 360 days (75% of the salary) is obligatory for the fathers since 1995 in order to strengthen the couple equality and parenthood.* 27% men use another 1-3 months of the rest of the parental leave but still women use the majority of the total parental leave! Mothers still take the main responsibility for children, and employers attitudes towards men's parental leave vary in different companies. One positive example from work life is the

following: Ericson Company decided in 1999 to compensate for the money both men and women lose when they are at home with their children. It is of course a PR strategy but also in line with the Swedish debate just now to introduce a special *gender equality certificate in business companies* to attract women customers especially.

LOVE AND COMMUNICATION COLLAPSE AND BREAK-DOWN – THE DESINTEGRATION/SEPARATION PHASE

It is not easy for all couples to keep their love and respect alive year after year. Some are not able to balance and stay at stage 2. Conflicts escalate, sympathy transforms into indifference or antipathy and a desintegration process might start. If this period does not last too long and the couple previously enjoyed a good relationship with each other for several years, there is a good chance of improving the relation and return to stage 2, provided that both are motivated to change. Some couples need professional help. If passion is experienced as “Heaven”, everyday love as “Earth”, then the third relationship stage can be likened to “Hell”. The couple relationship might develop into a cold war or a hot war. If the first stage - falling in love – was dominated by admiration of each other, stage number 2 by respect, the third stage is dominated in the worst case by lack of trust or even disgust or hate. The risk is very real here for physical beating.

COMMUNICATION AND NEGOTIATION COMPETENCE – IMPORTANT PARTS OF GENDER EQUALITY, CONFLICT MANAGEMENT AND SHARING OF POWER

It is of course impossible to avoid conflicts in a marriage. Repeated destructive conflicts might deteriorate the quality of a marriage. Constant disagreements and hard conflicts might result in both depressions and aggressions. Repeated disappointments as well as

distanced nonchalance hollow out the base for a meaningful togetherness. First until you reach a more balanced conflict level, the loving and caring feelings can get more room.

Family researchers have raised the question: "Do happy couples have the same conflicts as unhappy couples?" They have found that the conflicts are generally the same. The difference between the two groups is that the first ones solve their conflicts in a more democratic way with fewer disappointments as result. They also set about their conflicts at an early stage, before the problems have been too severe.

During a transition stage between traditional and modern gender roles, the conflict level is of course raised because gender roles nowadays are more flexible and the need for negotiations increases. Most Swedish middle-aged couples today have parents who lived in more or less traditional marriages. But there is a change among younger couples, whose parents were the first pioneering generation of gender equality in Sweden in the 60s and 70s. Our now adult children are much better prepared. These young men have learnt to cook and clean the house already during their childhood because their mothers worked more or less outside the home. They have also experienced conflicts between their parents and sometimes separations related to gender equality. They have also received some gender education already in school.

Communication is an essential part of decision making and sharing of power in relations, both in family life and working life. Constructive communication prevent conflicts, and communication is the main tool for dealing with differences, disagreements and conflicts.

Couple negotiations have become a very important part of modern relationships/marriages, when men and women cannot just lean on clear traditional role prescriptions in their togetherness. The modern family democracy, where women no longer are subordinated to men is a "young democracy". Gender patterns no longer decide for the tasks distribution between the couple. The woman and the man must discuss and reach agreements about who should do what and when.

The modern family life could be described as a *gender equal and negotiating family* (Lennéer Axelson & Thylefors 1997).

A negotiation is a process where *different interests should be mutually coordinated and adjusted*. Every family needs to negotiate common rules and norms in order to get the every day life to function smoothly. How to spend money, how to raise the children, how to share the domestic work, what to do in leisure time, etc.

What I hear around the world when I raise this negotiation issue is that there is too little communication between men and women. "They do not talk to each other. That is the big problem" is a repeated comment.

Especially women are dissatisfied with men's restricted ability to negotiate (Mufune 1999). Often a traditional man just orders or decides what he wants to do without consulting the woman. Women have to obey. The word NO is a very dangerous word for many women. Researchers who focused on couple negotiations (Gottman & Krokoff 1989, 1995) have found that a common male pattern is that they either are conflict-avoiding or belittling common problems in one way or another or they are too action-oriented, a traditional part of the male culture. They want to come to a solution too fast before the couple have arrived to a shared problem analysis.

Negotiation is a very important *mirror of dependency and power in a relationship*. Who dares to say what and when and who has the final word in the decision making process? Swedish women mostly have no difficulties giving their opinions and saying no to their husbands, including saying no to sexual intercourse if she has no sexual lust. I have never heard about a Swedish man who has forbidden his wife/girlfriend to use contraceptives. As the ideal is two children in Sweden there are no complicated discussions of the number of children. If the two persons disagree, the woman has the final word. The same is valid as regard to an abortion decision.

The *negotiation dialogue* is a more conscious, structured and goal directed problem solution compared with an intensive quarrel or unstructured discussion. A constructive negotiation communication

is a cooperative dialogue where the man and the woman look at each other as *partners instead of opponents*. The goal is to find a mutual and acceptable solution, where nobody suffers too big losses or disappointments or none of them dominates the other constantly. In a constructive negotiation the couple listen to each other's opinions and feelings but without attacking each other. Individuals with a good enough self-confidence are able to be assertive but without splashing aggressive feelings around them. Aggressions only tend to feed counter-aggression, which easy leads to conflict escalation. Men are more often raised to dominate and compete in interactions both with women and other men to keep the power. To be assertive means that you communicate in such a way that you defend your own needs, rights or opinions but without treading other people's justified needs and rights. It is about training *democratic communication*. *Democracy starts at home*.

One of the biggest traps in negotiations is *defense reactions*: power struggles and attack-accusation patterns, control and domination over the other part, etc., which very easily result in aggressions. In relationships, when men have used violence against their wives, constructive negotiation very rarely develops. These men in particular lack communication – and negotiation competence – or do not want to use it ?

DIVORCE AND LIFE AFTER DIVORCE

Gender equality is also linked to divorces, especially during a transition periode between traditional and modern gender roles. In Scandinavia more and more women abandon those men who are too dominant or do not take their responsibilities in marriage. Women's increased education, their strengthened self-esteem and the fact that their voices are heard both in society and in the bedroom are breaking up the patriarchal control underneath and inside.

Different studies show that more men than women benefit from marriage. Many women develop a much better health and generally

adjust better than do men after divorce. Women get an increased ability to control and govern their life.

A large group of divorced men have been found to exhibit impaired health, physical as well as mental. More men also experience an impaired financial situation. 84% of the women reported improved self-confidence compared to 37% of the men (Wadsby 1994, Lennéer Axelson 1996). Most divorced couples have joint custody of the children but the children live most of the time with their mothers.

Men's gender relations include of course also their relations to the same sex. *Male bonding* is important in working life. This also excludes women empowerment in this sector. However, in private life women have a wider and closer social network compared with men in most parts of the world (Rubin 1985, Cohen 1992). In my study just 1/3 of 87 men had personal friends, often both men and women. 1/3 had action friends, men who they socialized, practised sports with, etc. 1/3 of them had no friends at all (Lennéer Axelson 1996). My opinion built on experiences of about one thousand of male clients in crisis therapy and psychotherapy during thirty years is that a man's life is mostly excellent *if he has good job and a good woman*. But if he loses one of these or especially both, he is very vulnerable. Despite all statements of men's power and control, men are in the end much more dependent on women than they show – or know – for their private lives and also to be able to function in hard work in public life. Men's power is often connected to *position power and roles* more than to *personal power*.

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN – A MALE ISSUE

Gender violence is much more extensive globally than the total violence produced by wars. We have nowadays in Europe a lot of women's shelters, mostly run by women volunteers. But there is also a great need to influence and promote changes in attitudes and behaviours of violent men. Many of them are not reported to the

police and many men repeat the violence in their next woman relationship, if the actual marriage end in a divorce. Very traditional men and men with a weak self-confidence get more easily scared of women's empowerment and regress to aggressive anti-feminism and archaic male patterns. Therefore there is a strong need to complement women shelters with treatment services for violent men. The mere existence of special crisis center for violent men makes this big problem visible in society and signals that violent behaviour is not a "normal" part of masculinity. As well as sex education is an important part of general school education, aggression education to prevent violence is necessary. The main message is that *a strong man does not use physical violence*, even if he experiences that he has been verbally provoked by his girlfriend/wife.

(See separate article : Violence against women – a male issue, IPPF 1997).

WHAT KIND OF MAN ?

We really need a *world wide responsible male movement* in order to get a better working life, a better balance between working life and family life, less unhappy families as well as constructive role models for children, not least for boys. Perhaps this is one of our greatest challenge for this millenium. The traditional male role also costs the society a lot of suffering and money: awful wars, criminal men in and outside prisons, drug users, violent men hurting women, men who break contacts with children after divorce, etc.

It is not men as private persons we should accuse, it is some traits in the traditional, hegemonial *male culture*, which need to be changed. It is not an easy social process and it will take time.

Finally some comments on the issue for this IUED conference *What kind of man ?*

My personal answer stems from the Children's Convention/United Nations. Which traits and behaviors in the male role benefit children's wellbeing and which threaten children's development?

Firstly it is important that *a child is welcome and hopefully more or less planned*. Therefore a man's involvement and responsibility is important as regards to *contraception*, but also so that he survives and is *not infected with HIV/AIDS*, and he does not put his wife and children's lives in danger. *Caring and nurturing fatherhood* from delivery to the daily care for children year after year is of course another essential part. Committed fatherhood also means gender equality in couple relationships. Indeed too many children long for their distant fathers, both in families and after divorce.

I am sure that increased father involvement also makes men's extra-marital affairs decrease.

Improvement of men's communication, negotiations, shared power, democracy and conflict management in couple relationships is another critical point. Men's violence against women have tremendous negative effects, not only on women but also on their children. It is a real trauma to see a violent father and the suffering and crying of a mother. Especially for boys who are at risk of identifying with their violent fathers and will often repeat their destructive behaviors as adults. The same is relevant to uncontrolled use of *alcohol and other drugs*.

Let us really remember that there are many good men all over the world, who support gender equality and peace instead of violence. It is therefore tremendously important that not just women but also all mature and wise men themselves – including male politicians – raise their voices concerning dissociation from other men's destructive actions and take an active part in the gender equality process in all its aspects.

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