BODY CLAIMS

EDITED BY
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Centre for Gender Research
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Janne Bromseth, Lisa Folkmanson Käll & Katarina Mattsson

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The image on the cover is an altered depiction of plaster casts of bodies buried beneath volcanic ash in Pompeii.

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Acknowledgements

This book is the product of a collaborative seminar at the Centre for Gender Research at Uppsala University. The seminar started as a reading group, bringing together a number of scholars from a wide range of fields around theoretical issues concerning the body and embodiment in the autumn of 2007. Close contacts and discussions at seminars as well as more informal talks over “fikas” and lunches made it clear that body issues, in their most broad sense, brought together many individual researchers. In close readings and engagement with theoretical texts, our mutual interest in body and embodiment served as a concrete node for interdisciplinary communication and exchange of ideas.

The idea of bringing together our various individual research projects in a volume was later raised, and in a collective process the articles of this book have been written, presented and discussed in what has since been informally called “the Body Group” at the Centre for Gender Research. In our reading and engaging with each other’s texts, productive questions have been raised as an effect of our various disciplinary backgrounds. Also, arguments have been sharpened and deepened, interpretations have been formulated and questioned, and texts have found their individual shapes.

Thus, this collection truly demonstrates the outcome of transgressive encounters between different perspectives and points of departure, at the core of the idea of Crossroads of Knowledge. The essays included in this collection not only range over a great number of disciplines and fields of research, but also contribute to
an ongoing deconstruction and reconstruction of traditional disciplinary boundaries. Although this was not originally a part of the Excellence Program of GenNa at the Centre for Gender Research, in retrospect we can see how it has influenced the mix of scholars who were brought together in the reading group and later in this volume.

We would like to thank the Centre for Gender Research and GenNa for making this publication possible. We also thank our colleagues at the Centre for reading and commenting on many of the articles at our internal seminar. We are grateful to Judith Rinker Öhman for copy-editing the manuscript and to Håkan Selin for typesetting and designing the cover. Last, but not least, we would like to thank the Body Group, including Jens Eriksson-Stanislaus and Birgitta Wistrand who are not represented in this collection, and the contributors to this volume for a fruitful and inspiring time.

Janne Bromseth, Lisa Folkmarson Käll & Katarina Mattsson

Uppsala January, 2009
Within feminist discussions over the past few decades, the body has been claimed and reclaimed in a number of ways. Since the slow occurrence of what might be called a bodily turn almost twenty years ago, much feminist theory has directed its focus toward the materialities of bodies often seen to have been neglected in discussions concerning identity construction. A wide range of questions concerning bodies and their meanings have been raised from various perspectives and positions governed by different aims and agendas. What is a body? What does it mean for a body to be? What claims can be made and are made about bodies? What kind of processes are bodies involved in? How are bodies constitutive of and constituted by these processes? What materialities and immaterialities do bodies contain? What expectations, desires, thoughts, and emotions do bodies evoke? What kind of subjectivities do bodies reflect and give rise to? How are bodies connected to other bodies and how do they receive their meanings in relation to one another?

These are only some of the questions around which the bodily turn revolves, and they are raised against the background of a long history of feminist thinking concerning the body. The body and materiality have been topics of feminist theorizing for much longer than the past two decades. We might even say that the body has always figured in one way or another into the field of feminist theory and that contemporary understandings of the body have been directly or indirectly shaped by this field. From discussions of motherhood, pregnancy and abortion, of pleasure and sex, of
eating disorders and the incorporation of disciplinary regimes to theoretical discussions of embodiment and individuation of bodies, feminist thinkers have played a key role in forming different ideas and understandings of the body in numerous areas.

The “new” feminist theory of the body to which the fairly recent bodily turn gave rise has to a great extent defined itself in negative relation to its own history. In fact, much contemporary feminist theory is plagued by a widespread understanding of its own history as having overlooked or even downplayed questions about the body and materiality, instead focusing on different ways identities are socially and culturally constructed as gendered. Elizabeth Grosz, for example, goes as far as saying that the body has been passed over with silence as “a conceptual blind spot” of feminist thought. Confronting and disarming the overshadowing threat of biological determinism, thinkers of the bodily turn have called for a thorough and nuanced account of bodies, rescuing them in their very fleshiness from the risk of disappearing and being reduced to a position in language or a product of textual play.

Other voices in contemporary discussion more or less forcefully reject this common understanding of the body as the unexplored territory of feminist thought and instead bring to light a rich history of feminist theory of the body and materiality. Sara Ahmed is one who raises the question of what it might mean for feminist theorizing to routinely refer to its own past and much of its present in terms of a social and cultural constructivism blind to bodies and materiality. What are the implications for the field of feminism harbouring an understanding of itself and of its own history as not carrying any other view of the body than that it is something that can be disregarded on the basis of its obviousness, its impenetrability, or its insignificance to theories of gender
construction? Regardless of the field’s relation to its own history, however, in recent years feminist theorists have shown an enormous interest in exploring issues concerning embodiment and materiality, and writings in the field of body theory have increased exponentially. It is quite clear that the body does not constitute a conceptual blind spot in current feminist theoretical discussions. Quite to the contrary, feminist theory of the body is a prospering field of very diverse research. The body has become a veritable hot spot, marking itself as a boundary concept that forcefully disrupts given disciplinary identities and fields of investigation. The body is a contested zone in feminist theorizing, giving rise to productive and open-ended answers, continuously generating new questions and reframing old ones. Bodies make themselves present at the very core of a range of different phenomena, such as emotions and desires, identity and agency. The materiality of bodies sticks to our thinking in not always comfortable ways, and their singularities disrupt the very possibility of retaining stability in generalizing notions and frameworks of thinking.

This volume gathers a number of texts that all deal with claims made about bodies – ranging from common everyday claims about the positions and belongings of bodies to specific groups made by both self and other, to theoretical claims marking our conceptual understanding of what bodies are and can do, and their ontological and epistemological status. The authors of this volume engage in body talks with a wide variety of theoretical and empirical claims about bodies, and suggest that the understandings of what bodies are, and can be, are of imperative importance for power structures on several different levels.

Claims made about bodies, indeed, have far reaching implications, and many of the essays in the present collection are informed
and motivated by a radical project of placing body questions at the forefront as a mean of a deeper understanding of societal orders and norms. How certain claims about bodies become privileged over others is crucial to this understanding. How bodies are and become inscribed with meaning also installs them with actions and agencies, subjectivities and positions, spaces of privileges and futures or non-futures. The ideas that shape the powerful constructions of bodies as normal or deviant, male or female, functional or non-functional, same or other, also mark some bodies as more frightening than others, and other bodies as more open and available to others. Bodies are not simply created as extraordinary objects but also continuously produce and reproduce themselves in relation to their surrounding milieu, fields of meaning and other bodies.

Further, the symbolism of some bodies is more marked or emphasized than that of others. Indeed, “the othered body” – which through processes of othering and marginalization becomes the carrier of the symbolism of otherness – is heavily installed with meaning; sometimes so heavily that its historicity seems to speak for itself before any claims have been explicitly articulated about it. Its hyper-marked status makes the body itself a forceful signifier with the power of cutting through intended markers, whether these come from oneself or external, generalized and concrete others. Normative bodies, while installed with all sorts of imagery, often escape such marked and accentuated claims. Thus, conceptualizing this inequality of the “markedness” of bodies becomes a way of destabilizing some of the powers embedded in different bodies.

At the same time, the different texts in this book show how the materiality of bodies – their shapes and spatiality, visuality
and biologicity, material flexibility and plasticity – can be incorporated into the understanding of bodies, without restricting this understanding to these aspects or making deterministic biological claims. Rather, the livability of bodies, as the “most solid and concrete dimension of our self-experience” (Käll), rests on these immediate and material aspects of bodily presence. Still, even if the materiality of bodies is a pre-condition for human existence, the understanding of such a pre-condition, as many of the contributions show, can never be isolated from the social and cultural dimensions of body matters.

The bodies in this book are multiple and installed with disciplinary differences. There is the historical “extra-ordinary” body of detailed empirical coverage (Larsson), the pregnant body of the sociological researcher that opens up for new questions in the field (Eriksson), the female disabled body that points at societal body norms (Malmberg), the phenomenological lived body developed by Maurice Merleau-Ponty (Käll), the highly visible but silent symbolism of the female white body (Mattsson), the “tolerated” and othered non-heterosexual bodies in Swedish classrooms (Bromseth), the heterogeneous body of feminist theory, irreducible to either sociality or biology (Holmberg & Palm), and finally the queer animal body that transgresses traditional notions of biology (Ah-King).

The book is organized in three parts, Body Shapes, Body Talks and Body Matters, loosely binding together the different chapters in a particular way (with the full awareness that they could be organized, and certainly read, in a number of sequential ways), in an attempt to enhance a specific theoretical or contextual aspect.
Body Shapes

Part I, *Body Shapes*, takes the shape of material bodies as point of departure and examines how different body shapes become installed with various normative meaning. More specifically, it looks into how some bodies with particular shapes are constructed as being outside the normative body boundaries, as deviant, non-functional or less professional. Even temporary changes of body shapes, like pregnancy, change the connotations of a body, which shows the flexibility of the systems that install bodies with meaning. The importance of medical discourses in making powerful scientific claims about different bodies’ statuses as healthy, functional or being capable of certain activities also binds the three articles thematically. The impatient claim that can be read throughout the articles in this part is that even body shapes are shaped by the specific socio-historical context. Thus the taken-for-granted discourses and categories shape bodies at a certain time and in a certain context in ways that have direct and sometimes violent consequences for the subjects living them.

In the first article, *From Frightening Beast to Primitive Stage – On the Normalization of the Monstrous Body in Swedish Medicine*, ideas of normality and normative bodies have a need for bodies of corrections, Maja Larsson states in her Foucault-inspired study of the construction of monstrosity in eighteenth-century Swedish medicine. In her chapter, Larsson shows how historical claims about the so-called “monstrous body” – in the Swedish *vanskapta, missfoster* and *monstra* – have used metaphors of animality and images of animal features in the depiction of these “extra-ordinary bodies” as holders of threatening and ambiguous features. As markers of the outermost limits of human identity, the extra-ordinary bodies of conjoined twins, for example, reflect body ideals and construc-
tions of humanity and its limits of the époque. As Larsson maps the medical interest in “monsters” as standing outside the regular order of nature, she claims that “taming the extra-ordinary bodies” through their incorporation into the regular order of nature also made them less threatening and uncertain.

The theme of normality is also at the core of Denise Malmberg’s article, *Bodynormativity – Reading Representations of Disabled Female Bodies* in which she introduces the term “bodynormativity”. The female body is seen from the perspective of bodynormativity, investigating the hegemonic notion of the female body through interviews with women with physical disabilities. Bodynormativity refers to “the norm that shapes modern society’s outlook on and relationship to the body and bodily ideas”, something that is historically and culturally situated. The chapter focuses on what it means to have a body that does not conform to the norm in contemporary Swedish society, and more specifically on what it means to have a female body with a physical disability. The physically disabled body clearly affects how other people treat and immediately react to the disabled person, often reducing the person to her disabled body, a third gender, Malmberg argues. What does this imply when it comes to the intersectional relationship between gender, body and sexuality? The chapter is a thought-provoking contribution to looking at the material aspect of social norms, and which gendered and sexual positions are and are not made available to normative and disabled bodies.

In *The Pregnant Body at Work – (Un)Professional Bodies Claiming Professional Credibility*, Kristina Eriksson explores the body as a symbolic system in relation to the female pregnant body in a professional everyday context at the hospital. Using ethnographic material, she looks at gendered professional constructions amongst
physicians, focusing particularly on co-constructions of a pregnant female body and a professional body as doctor and surgeon, on the one hand, and the meaning of her own pregnant body as a researcher in the hospital environment, on the other. Using, amongst others, the work of Jorun Solheim as a theoretical point of departure, she shows how the symbolic connotations of women’s bodies as “more open”, lacking the distinct and firm boundaries culturally attributed to the male body, have consequences for professional credibility. Eriksson argues that the hyper-feminine, marked pregnant body seen as lacking boundaries, control and consequentially judgmental and logic abilities, is far from the masculinised connotations of the medical profession as well as science and knowledge production.

**Body Scripts**

Part II, *Body Scripts*, looks into the ways narratives and historicity of different bodies preposition individual subjects. The texts in this part are held together by a theoretical interest for how lived bodies and subjectivities are affected by everyday claims made about bodies. The specific narratives on gendered, sexualized, racialized, functional, ageing bodies influence how bodies are read and positioned in our everyday lives. We are born free, and yet, trapped in material and discursive narratives of different bodies’ possible and impossible participation in varying spaces and activities. We are indeed born into body scripts, a sort of situated meanings of human bodies and their inter-subjective relations. Yet, as the articles show, individual subjects and social movements contribute to changing the scripts every day, posing claims for other futures, and re-claiming more liveable lives outside the restricted roles our bodies have been ascribed.
Turning to Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology of the lived body, Lisa Folkmarson Käll argues in her article, *A Being of Two Leaves – On the Founding Significance of the Lived Body*, for an understanding of the body as the very condition of possibility for experience, understanding, and knowledge. Käll aims to clarify the structures of the lived body and its relation to other bodies and the world. She argues that any categorization of bodies in scientific terms, whether natural, human, social or cultural, is secondary to the immediate experience of the lived body as a self-affecting unity. This body is not primarily an object of knowledge but rather that which founds all objects and knowledge claims. The lived body, Käll argues, is characterized by a fundamental indeterminacy as it escapes being fully determined by representational categories. At the same time, it provides an immediate and unquestionable presence of the self to itself.

In *Not Me, Yet Part of Me – Destabilizing the Silence of Visual Whiteness*, Katarina Mattsson examines the generalized layers of symbolism and historicity attached to the “the female white body”. The starting point for her text is a memory from a vacation in Tigray, Ethiopia, when the imaginings of white femininity, as she writes, “imposed themselves on (her) as an urgent need for clarification”. In close body talks with Frantz Fanon and Sarah Ahmed, Mattsson aims to destabilize the silence of a racialized body in her text. She proposes the concept of visual whiteness to understand how a culturally and socially constructed bodily position of white femininity is produced and reproduced through constructions of body similarity.

In the next article, *Learning the Straight Script – Constructions of Queer and Heterosexual Bodies in Swedish Schools*, Janne Bromseth looks at how heteronormativity is constructed in Swedish
school space through images of marked and normative bodies in classroom interaction and textbooks. Building on queer phenomenological scholars such as Sara Ahmed and Judith Halberstam, she shows how non-heterosexual bodies are constructed and positioned as Other through spatial structures and temporal narratives. She argues that a heteronormative narrative of reproduction structures the positioning of heterosexual and queer bodies in the school space – more specifically, through a discourse of tolerance, an active promotion of the heterosexual couple as lifestyle norm and a lack of tales of possible futures for queer bodies.

**Body Matters**

**Part III, Body Matters,** takes social constructivism as a point of departure for the contemporary understandings of what bodies are and how they can be understood. The feminist non-engagement with issues of biology and biological questions is indeed a response to severe and taken-for-granted biological determinism, which rarely serves a feminist project. However, rather than leaving the biological, or perhaps more correctly the material, dimension as a dark unexplored continent, the authors of Part III want to engage in making feminist claims about the biological, or material, body. In different ways and with different points of departure, the articles in this part contribute to transdisciplinary efforts to create an understanding of the body that incorporates the materiality and biologicity of the body, without reducing it to this. The articles thus re-claim biological subjects as part of the feminist research agenda.

Tora Holmberg and Fredrik Palm explore different ways of incorporating biology into feminist theory in a non-essentialist fashion in their chapter *The Body that Speaks the Gap – Feminist
Theory and the Biological Question. Proceeding along the lines of feminist theorists such as Anne Fausto-Sterling, Donna Haraway and Rosi Braidotti, they elaborate a position in relation to the body that does not start out from an aprioristic distinction between sociality and the biological. By presenting and reflecting around these theories they sketch a concept of the body that, perhaps, could form an ontological starting point for feminists interested in “bridging the gap between the social and the biological”. Throughout the article, the authors return to the burning question of the possibility of creating a feminist conception of the body across scientific paradigms such as social and cultural theories, on the one hand, and a natural scientific discipline such as biology, on the other. They argue for a conception that tries to avoid the pitfalls of reductionism, broad enough to encompass new materialist ways of understanding the body as well as approaches focused more upon how the body is produced in and through language and social practice.

Finally, evolutionary biologist Malin Ah-King's article Queer Nature – Towards a Non-Normative View on Biological Diversity explores the potential of a queer understanding of nature and animal bodies. The biological field, Ah-King argues, has a range of ways to determine sexes among animals and plants, and in her article she draws on the heterogeneity of examples of how sex is determined, changes and is altered by environmental influences. In Ah-King's understanding, sex distinction must therefore be theoretically treated as something flexible and unstable, rather than fixed and unchanging. In a subversive project that involves a feminist approach to biology, Ah-King argues that exploring biology and biological variations is a more fruitful feminist path of action than leaving the biological field open for determinist claims. Ap-
proaching biology from a queer theoretical perspective, Ah-King concludes that nature is genuinely queer, and transgresses boundaries of sex, gender and sexuality “much more than we imagine”.

In the work of editing this volume we have chosen to align the individual bodies of text in one of many possible manners. At the same time, we acknowledge a horizon of intertextuality and want to end this introduction by pointing out some possible co-readings of texts that we hope can work as a way of binding the different parts together.

Several texts formulate a critique of the inherent inability of rational science to deal with body anomalies and boundary bodies. Such bodies are, for example, those that transgress boundaries or escape easy categorization. The borders and boundaries of humanity comprise one such recurrent delimitation of acceptable and unacceptable bodies, which in a more general sense is reproduced in the scientific disciplines themselves. The inclusion of a queer perspective on animals in this volume might therefore be seen as part of a critical engagement to broaden the span of the living body. The scientific categorizations of bodies have indeed been a crucial part of the construction of bodies of unequal powers. Through the inclusion of some bodies and the exclusion of others, through the marking of some bodies as subjects and others as objects, and through the systematic claims of some bodies being normal and others abnormal, deviant and other, historical authoritarian scientific claims about bodies still structure the exclusion/inclusion of bodies, lives and experiences in the academic everyday space.

The relational understanding of bodies that permeates this volume thus claims the impossibility to understand bodies in isolation and instead stresses their dependency and interrelationality.
The lived body of researchers is a prerequisite for thinking, but has often been neglected as a source of knowledge of academic importance. In line with the idea of situated knowledge, several texts in this volume show how lived experiences from everyday life or fieldwork can open up for critical projects, in which the researcher's body and lived experiences are taken as a point of departure for the formulation of subversive narratives. As a boundary being, the body has the potential of opening up new spaces and dialogues.

Through the various readings and engaged dialogues with an open horizon of claims made about bodies, this collection makes its own body claims. What does it then mean to claim, or even reclaim, a body? Can such a thing be done? One way of thinking about the possibility of re-claiming bodies in academic conversations is that re-claiming has to do with the processes of delimiting the boundaries of the sciences – human, social and natural sciences – and the power of definition in these processes. The volume can be read with these questions in mind, even though it might not give or even intend to give a straight answer. If anything, the volume shows how the marked and unmarked claims made about bodies are part of some bodies’ potential and possibility for claiming physical, symbolic, scientific and theoretical space. With our diverse disciplinary backgrounds and different approaches to the area of the body and embodiment, we share the common objective of exploring this field as an open site where theoretical and empirical perspectives alike would contribute to a questioning of given assumptions and a deepening of conceptual understandings.
List of Contributors

MALIN AH-KING, PhD, is an evolutionary biologist and researcher in Gender and Animal Studies at the Centre for Gender Research at Uppsala University. She aims at problematizing the portrayal of biological sex as stable, making visible stereotypic gender notions in theory and research as well as developing non-normative models of variation of nature’s sexes and sexualities.

JANNE BROMSETH received her PhD in Interdisciplinary Studies of Culture at NTNU, Norway, studying constructions of identity, gender and sexuality norms in lesbian sub-cultural mailing-list communities, in light of the queer turn. She currently works as a researcher at the Centre for Gender Research at Uppsala University, analyzing normativity in educational approaches to strategies of change in different learning contexts, from the school to the lgbt movement.

KRISTINA ERIKSSON has a PhD in Sociology and works as a researcher at the Centre for Gender Research, Uppsala University. Her current research interests/projects are: a) how gender is co-constructed symbolically, metaphorically and in practice in relation to professional and organizational processes and practices; and b) how gender and gender (in)equality are constructed in heterosexual couples’ everyday lives.
TORA HOLMBERG, PhD, is a sociologist in the field of Feminist Science Studies. Her scholarly work delves into nature/culture complexities in different fields, including twin and animal research in behaviour genetics, experiments with transgenic animals and biological bodies in feminist research. She is also a programme coordinator for GenNa: Nature/Culture and Transgressive Encounters.

LISA FOLKMARSON KÄLL, PhD, specializes in Contemporary Continental Philosophy, especially the philosophy of Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Her main research interests are in the area of feminist theory of subjectivity and deal with issues concerning lived embodiment, intersubjectivity and the bodily constitution of sexual difference and sexual identity.

DENISE MALMBERG, Senior lecturer at The Centre for Gender Research at Uppsala University, Sweden, has in her research mainly focused on issues related to gender and the female body. Her latest publication is on disabled persons as victims of crimes. Malmberg is working on a book about disabled women and their experiences of embodiment, sexuality and gender.

KATARINA MATTSSON, PhD in Human Geography, is a researcher at the Centre for Gender Research, Uppsala University. Her previous research has shown how a gendered and racialized symbolism instils the Miss Sweden beauty pageant with national constructions of white femininity. Her current research explores post-colonial relations and embodied constructions of whiteness in ethnic tourism.
Fredrik Palm, PhD, teaches at the Department of Sociology at Uppsala University. He is the author of *Det odödas analys: En studie av centralproblematiken i Slavoj Zizeks samhällsanalys* (Undead-analysis. Observing the Social Theory of Slavoj Zizek), and is currently working on a project on anonymous sex.
Part I:

Body Shapes
MAJA LARSSON

From Frightening Beast to Primitive Stage – On the Normalization of the Monstrous Body in Swedish Medicine

In this text, attention is paid to so-called monstrous bodies and how they changed meaning in Swedish medicine in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century.¹ How could vanskapta, missfoster and monstra transform from paradoxical, unnatural and frightening beasts to mere pathologies, fully explicable in the frame of embryological research? And what happened to the once elusive mix of human and animal when physicians began to include monsters in the regular order of nature? Did early nineteenth-century embryology erase the old associations between human malformations and animals? Or did it rather place all human bodies on the same developmental line as animals, hermaphrodites and monsters?

To interpret medical classifications, representations and diagnoses is an interesting task from the perspective that medicine is not only a secondary reflection of ill or healthy bodies but is also an important producer of historical subjects and categories (Jordano-va 1995: 361–381). Medicine fills bodies with meaning, and from a historical perspective it is obvious how physicians have given rise

¹ A preliminary version of this paper was presented at the conference “Society, Animals & Gender” at Uppsala University in 2007 and at the first meeting of the Gender, Body, and Health Network in 2008. My thanks to all concerned, to the Bank of Sweden Tercentenary Foundation for financial support and to Skuli Sigurds-son for helpful comments.
to authoritative notions on normality and deviance, monstrousness and pathology, regular order and transgressed boundaries. Scientific modes of representing bodies are never innocent and in the analysis of how monstrous bodies transformed in the early nineteenth century I have found the concept of normalization fruitful. Under this rubric Michel Foucault has described the effects of a general technique of power which not drives out, excludes, banishes, marginalizes, or repress but rather fashions, observes, knows, and multiplies itself on the basis of its own effects.2

Theoretical discussions and actual cases of children, described as having too few or too many, or unusually shaped, placed or conjoined body parts, can in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century be found in The Transactions of the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences, the publications of the Swedish Society of Medicine, obstetric and forensic handbooks, and different medical journals. A first step in the attempt to approach the monstrous body in Swedish medicine will be to examine three handbooks from three different centuries in which the formation, delivery and status of vanskapta, missfoster and monstra are discussed from medical, forensic and civil rights perspectives.

At the limit of human identity
The extraordinary bodies of vanskapta, missfoster and monstra have been an issue of official debate in Sweden at least since the seventeenth century, and in the early nineteenth century they were still

charged with a considerable amount of uncertainty and ambiguity. What were they? And how should they be treated? One fundamental notion in the biology of humans, as well as of other species, had since ancient times been that they reproduce beings that are similar to themselves (Huet 1993: 3; Schutzer 1758: 187). Species were fixed and unalterable from the moment God created the universe, and it was far from easy for surgeons, obstetricians and physicians to explain the existence of an offspring that was not at all reminiscent of its parents. The extraordinary body challenged, as we will see, the regular order of nature and posed a paradoxical threat to the rules of taxonomy in both medicine and law.

The first Swedish handbook for midwives, and also the first complete medical textbook to be published in Sweden, is Johan von Hoorn’s Den Swenska Wälöfvade Jordgumman from 1697. In this text, malformations (wanskapeliga Missväxter) or monsters (Monstra) are divided into two categories: those who look like humans and those who are reminiscent of some kind of beast. The first kind comprised children with two heads or too many limbs, but also included those who only were deformed on a certain part of the body, such as the child with a beautiful face whose body was covered with fish scales (Fisk-Fiäll). Conjoined twins were also placed in this category, and von Hoorn mentioned two such children without arms whose parents displayed them in their playpen for money. According to von Hoorn, the twins looked human – a distinguishing mark also valid for the one-year-old child he had seen with his own eyes who lacked a navel and was neither a boy nor a girl (von Hoorn 1697: 116–118).

Extraordinary bodies like this gave rise to a number of crucial questions concerning the limit of human identity. Could a child without a navel actually have grown in the uterus of a human
mother? And how could a child be covered with fish scales instead of skin? The repealed distinction between human and animal is only implied in von Hoorn’s first kind of malformations, but becomes more obvious in his second kind, those who were not at all reminiscent of humans but rather of beasts (Odjur). Doctor von Hoorn had never seen a beast delivered or even spoken to someone who had. In spite of this, he gave an account of such creatures and said that they could be delivered by a human but looked more like a rat, mouse, dog, kitten, mole or bat. A beast could also be attached to, or born at the same time as, a well formed but haggard child from whom it took all its nourishment. After the delivery, the beast could fly or run around in the room with such speed that it was hard to catch and suffocate. If such a creature was not immediately done away with it could try to crawl back into the womb and cause the woman’s death. This issue was discussed in Jan Baptist van Lamzweerde’s Historia Naturalis Molarum from 1687, but while this Dutch doctor questioned the genuineness of such descriptions, von Hoorn did not want to fully dismiss the possibility of a woman giving birth to a beast (von Hoorn 1697: 119–120).

Could there actually be a transgression between human and animal? This question was also raised in Jonas Kiernander’s handbook in forensic medicine from 1776, in which judges and lawyers were offered guidance in issues of law that had a medical aspect. Concerning malformations (missfoster), the author referred to the well-known sixteenth century surgeon Ambroise Paré, who claimed to have seen people with ox, calf, elephant and dog heads. Kiernander himself was less convinced of the existence of such mixed beings, and pointed out that many learned authorities questioned the possibility of humans being born to soulless animals, as
well as the other way around. The issue is, as he said, the subject of a great deal of uncertainty (Kiernander 1776: 709–710).

But how was it possible to explain cases when the offspring was covered in hair, had signs on its body or broken limbs, or showed different animalistic marks, if species could not mix? Kiernander saw one explanation for this in the communication between mother and unborn child through nerves and imagination: “There is almost daily evidence of children who are tainted either by the imagination or fright of the mother, such as the hare-lipped”.

But there were also monsters (Monstra), impossible to explain even with the most vivid imagination, such as when the intestines were too many or unusually placed. Kiernander mentioned that specific parts of the body can be shaped against the order of nature (emot naturens ordning), such as the foetus born with a lump of flesh in place of a head (Kiernander 1776: 702–708).

From the forensic point of view, the character of the malformation had relevance for the individual’s whole life, and special attention was paid to the head. For example, the difficult decision for a doctor to put a malformation (Missfoster) to death could only be motivated in cases in which the offspring, or its father, was definitely considered a soulless animal. But who is definitely without a soul? Kiernander indicated the importance of a well-shaped head and stated that children with no head whatsoever lacked the right to be christened, whereas an offspring with a dog’s or another animal’s head could be killed. Children with a human head had the right to be christened, though those with a sign on their chest and whose body was otherwise reminiscent of a soulless animal were not, whereas children with two heads should be baptized with two different names (Kiernander 1776: 712).

3 “Man finner ju nästan dagigen, huru som Barn Blifwa skämdes igenom Modrens, antingen Imagination eller skrämsel; såsom harnynta” (Kiernander 1776: 701).
The two-headed child gave in the eighteenth century rise to a number of questions about the limits of the individual human being, its rights and obligations. Kiernander asked himself whether children with two heads had the right to inherit as one person or two. Should they make one will each, or one together (Kiernander 1985). Actual cases of children with two heads and one body are described in Swedish medicine at least three times during the century, and in two of them the conjoined twins are pictured with claws instead of nails, as if the vague distinction between the two individuals also made way for other transgressions (Schützer 1756: 126–128; Hagström 1791: 152; Flodin 1791: 79–80).
Michel Foucault has described similar forensic questions that could be raised in the case of a delivery of a monstrous child. For example, was it reasonable for a shapeless, dying infant to be seen as an heir? Should a monster with two bodies or two heads have one or two baptisms? Should it be considered one child or two? How was it suitable to punish a criminal who had a conjoined twin? Could he or she be sentenced to death, or would this kill an innocent person as well? What made a human monster a monster was, according to Foucault, not only that it was an exception to the form of the species but also that it introduced disorder into the legal system of marriage laws, canons of baptism and laws of inheritance (Foucault 2003: 64–65, 324).

From a juridical perspective, it was still in the middle of the nineteenth century difficult to fit extraordinary bodies into existing categories. According to Fredrik Schrevelius, author of a textbook in Swedish civil law, some offspring could not be counted as humans or physical persons with certain rights and obligations:

> Only humans are physical Persons. From this follows that a Monstrum is not a Person, even in the case that it is delivered by a human mother.\(^5\)

Schrevelius’ definition of a *Monstrum* is related to certain characteristics of the head. A person with a human head should be considered human, no matter how malformed (*vanskaplig*) he is in other aspects, whereas someone without a human head could not be considered human (Schrevelius 1844: 39–40).

In the second edition of this textbook Schrevelius questions

\(^5\) “Endast menniskor äro, såsom sagdt är, physiska Personer. Deraf följer, att ett Monstrum, om det också vore framfödt af en mensklig moder, icke är någon Person” (Schrevelius 1844: 39).
whether a missfoster or Monstrum has ever existed or could exist (Schrevelius 1851: 59). He does not develop this question any further, and there is reason to speculate why. Children were sometimes born with different injuries and malformations related to the head, and Schrevelius’ doubts concerning their existence should perhaps be seen in the light of the old associations between physical irregularities of the head and a soulless, animalistic state. Was there a soul in a malformed head? What was a human without a soul, if not a soulless animal? Could such creatures have humans as parents? The human head signified authority, reason, order and rationality, and the headless monster has been described as one of the most horrific features of malformed humans (Cressy 2004: 41, 63). Still in the middle of the nineteenth century, a malformed head seems to have been a marker of the limit of what is human. It introduced disorder into the legal system and in Swedish civil law there was simply no conceptual space for persons with such features.  

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6 According to Foucault, the breach of natural laws was not enough to constitute monstrosity in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. It was only when the confusion overturned or disturbed civil, canon or religious law that it was a question of monstrosity. He points out that a disabled person, perhaps even in modern thinking, does not conform to the law but that the law still provides for him or her in one way or the other. Monstrosity, on the contrary, is a kind of natural irregularity that calls law into question and disables it. In such cases the law must either question its own foundations or its practice; silence, abdicate or appeal to another reference system; or invent a casuistry. “Essentially, the monster is the casuistry that is necessarily introduced into law by the confusion of nature” (Foucault 2003: 63–64).
The soul and its physical centre, the well-shaped head, distinguished the human from the animal in Swedish medicine. But what was an offspring who was obviously delivered from a woman but who had no head? From Kungliga Svenska vetenskapsakademiens handlingar, 1818 (left) and 1785 (right).
Maternal imagination and shapeless monsters

The handbooks by von Hoorn, Kiernander and Schrevelius show that the remarkable bodies of so-called *vanskapta*, *missfoster* and *monstra* blurred some fundamental distinctions between man and beast, body and soul, you and me, in both a medical and a juridical tradition. *Monstra* were, as Kiernander said, against the order of nature, and attempts to explain the formation of extraordinary births were surrounded by a great deal of uncertainty among European physicians and scientists. Did the parents’ positions during intercourse have anything to do with the unusual birth, or was the answer to be found in the conception and contribution of bad seed from the mother or father? Were monsters perhaps an effect of the exited imagination and feelings of the pregnant woman (Ritvo 1997: 138–140)?

In Swedish eighteenth-century medicine, the last alternative dominated if physicians and surgeons at all wanted to explore the secrets of generation. There was a general assumption that strong impressions and imaginings of a pregnant woman could put direct marks on the foetus and give rise to physical irregularities, especially before the fourth month of pregnancy (Schutzercrantz 1786: 170; Wahlbom 1761: 75). As pointed out by Kiernander, the communication between body and soul through nerves, fantasy and imagination was important in explaining why a monstrous body came into being (Kiernander 1776: 700–701).

Again, animals played a crucial part in the process and it was often said that a malformed child was reminiscent of an animal or that its mother had met with a strong impression of an animal during her pregnancy. In 1762, Swedish obstetrician and professor

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7 Describing the generation as a secret or as something one hesitated to comment on was common in eighteenth-century Swedish medicine (Westring 1796: 43).
in medicine David Schultz examined a child who had lived for only five hours and whose heart, liver, spleen and intestines were located on the outside of the body. Schultz explicitly did not want to get into a discussion about the reasons for this, but stated that the mother had neither been frightened, seen a strange painting, nor witnessed a cut-up animal during pregnancy (Schultz 1763: 32).

Many reports of extraordinary births contained images, perhaps to underscore the authenticity of the unusual body. From Kungliga Svenska vetenskapsakademiens handlingar, 1763.

The supposed power of female impressions and imagination is also expressed in a report from the physician Otto Christian Ekman. In 1819 he described how a gardener’s wife in Skåne, Mrs. Görlows, at an early stage of her pregnancy, saw an insufficiently closed cof-
There was a gap between the lid and the coffin and, according to the peasants in the area, the sight of this could have such a bad influence on a pregnant woman that her child would run the risk of being born with a harelip. Mrs. Görlows shared this notion, according to Ekman. She was frightened by the open lid, and worried for the rest of her pregnancy about the consequences this would have. As soon as the child was born she asked if it had a harelip, and when the midwife thoughtlessly answered that this was the case Mrs. Görlows immediately became ill (Ekman 1819: 236).

Such notions of children with harelips, hairy skin or unusually placed intestines as a result of maternal imagination appear as a remarkably persistent line of thought in Western history. As described by Marie-Hélène Huet, for many centuries this power has been understood as usurping the role of the legitimate father in the shaping of the progeny: “Instead of reproducing the father’s image, as nature commands, the monstrous child bore witness to the violent desires that moved the mother at the time of conception or during pregnancy” (Huet 1993: 1). This meant that the monster was nothing more than a sign of disorder in a system whose objective was to reproduce beings similar to their progenitors.

The power of female imagination has also been interpreted as an expression of a male worry that the body would consume the soul and turn the human into a creature without identity, integrity and reason. A woman who gave birth to a malformation indicated the possibility that the mind, the essence of human identity, through embodied impressions could transform into materiality. Giving birth to a monstrous offspring meant that the body had begun to consume the soul. Personal identity began to collapse and the self lost its contours and became, as Dennis Todd has described it, a shapeless thing – a monster (Todd: 1995: 52–63, 136, 203).
In Swedish medicine, the power of maternal imagination still posed a valid explanation in the early nineteenth century. As late as 1828 there is a report published in the Yearbook of the Swedish Society of Medicine about how strong emotions and impressions during pregnancy could materialize in the foetus (Ekström 1828: 23). By this time though, an important shift in the history of the extraordinary body had begun to take shape and, as we will see in the next section, the origin of vanskapta, missfoster and monstra would soon be incorporated into a fundamentally different frame of medical understanding.

**Comprised of the knowledge of nature**

The interest in extraordinary births intensified in the early nineteenth century and old notions of shapeless monsters as the result of maternal imagination slowly gave way to interpretations and theories of the formation and development of the foetus itself. This can be seen in a report on a woman in Gothenburg who in 1802 gave birth to a child without a brain. Local surgeon Eric Arvidson wondered over the mystery that a child without this crucial body part could live and move, if only for a few minutes. In an attempt to explain the case, he explicitly distanced himself from older authorities who were accused of deriving the creation of malformations from many both ridiculous and fantastic causes. Arvidson asserted that a superstitious language of dark religion, in combination with insufficient knowledge of nature and a general inability to do proper research, had often silenced reason in favour of the misguided beliefs that were these authorities’ foundation and comfort zone.8

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8 (Arvidson 1804: 208). However, the notion of older authorities as superstitious (vidskepliga) perhaps says more about Arvidson’s effort to establish an image of himself and his contemporaries as rational scientists than about earlier attempts to approach malformations.
Medical descriptions and illustrations of brainless children indicate how vague the distinction between humans and animals still was in the early nineteenth century. The eye socket of the boy on the right is described as standing out just like in frogs (liksom på grodorna), whereas the ears of the child on the left were compared to those of an ape. From *Kungliga Svenska vetenskapsakademiens handlingar*, 1804 (left) and 1809 (right).
Tab. VII.

From Frightening Beast to Primitive Stage — On the Normalization of the Monstrous Body in Swedish Medicine
Arvidson commented on the shape of the nails of the offspring just like surgeons and physicians had done in the eighteenth century, and pointed out that the ears of the child “drooped down and forward like in apes”. A more original aspect of this report is that it is one of the earliest in which the formation of an imperfectly shaped foetus (ofullkomligen danadt Foster) was interpreted without any mention of possible impressions and fantasies of the pregnant woman. Instead, according to Arvidson the most probable theories of generation were “Evolutio and Epigenesis”.

Different theories of organic generation such as the preformationist and epigenetic theories had been competing in eighteenth-century European embryology. For the preformationists, the individual embryo did not develop in a modern sense but was rather seen as a preformed miniature person with all its necessary organs in place. During pregnancy, the organs simply grew bigger as they were filled with matter. According to the preformationists nature in itself was not an active agent, carrying its own ends and means. Instead, God played an active part in the formation of the living body and as a force from outside created all beings simultaneously and encased within one another. Like Russian dolls, individuals of the following generations were encapsulated in the embryo and had only to wait for their turn to unfold, according to a strict order. Epigenesists, on the other hand, argued that each embryo is newly produced through gradual development from unorganized material. New organs could appear from the originally simple embryo, and the organism was created through the influence of an inner power. The living body appeared to have a self-organizing ability, and it seemed as if the embryo could build itself up, from

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9 “slokade ned och framåt liksom på apor” (Arvidson 1804: 204).
10 “Evolutio och Epigenesis” (Arvidson 1804: 208).

In eighteenth century Swedish medicine, the development of a foetus could be described in a number of ways and references to preformationists or epigenesists were seldom more than implicit. Like in Herman Schutzercrantz’s obstetrical textbook from 1786, in which the foetus is described as a shapeless embryo, living an imperfect, vegetative life (*plantlikt lif*) before delivery (Schutzercrantz 1786: 169–170, 189–190).

According to the Swedish surgeon and obstetrician Herman Schutzercrantz this is a human egg (Människoägg) containing a foetus in its right position at the beginning of the pregnancy. From Herman Schutzercrantz (1786) *Om Förlossnings-Vetenskapens Theoretiska Del I Systematisk Ordning Til Uplysning För Unga Studiosi Chirurgiae* (Stockholm).
Arvidson made in 1804 an explicit announcement of his support of the epigenesists’ focus on the development of the foetus and its changing stages of growth in the womb. This theory had certain implications as it claimed that humans no longer began their existence as perfect creations, but as vulnerable embryos and potential monsters. As described by Michael Hagner, predetermination was replaced by chance and risk, and life was provided with its own history. “At that moment, monsters lost their status as threats to classification and taxonomy, and as singularities” (Hagner 1999: 214).

A more obvious step in the normalization of the monstrous body was taken when anatomists and embryologists begun to claim that monstra obeyed the same rules of formation as everybody else. In 1816 the secretary of the Swedish Society of Medicine, Christofer Carlander, reported on a treatise by Dr. William Lawrence about a child without a brain who survived for no less than four days. According to Lawrence, just like the supply of nourishment the formation of the foetus followed from the function of the blood. The impressions and feelings earlier associated with the mother’s easily moved mind no longer had anything to do with the formation of monstra (Carlander 1816: 302-303). This made it reasonable to pay attention also to the rare shapes of nature. As Carl Trafvenfelt emphasized in the yearbook of the Swedish Society of Medicine from the same year:
The Swedish Society of Medicine, which considers itself to fulfil its destination to the best of its abilities, when, in the use of findings and examinations in science, it does not abandon the way of nature and experience, always counts findings on the deviances and anatomical pathological observations of nature as an important part of its work.11

Malformations were no longer impossible, paradoxical or against the order of nature but were rather to be considered an important part of the knowledge of nature. Two years later, anatomist Arvid Henric Florman expressed a similar standpoint: “For the reason that knowledge of nature should not only comprise the normal shapes of nature, but also embrace the unusual and rarer, I have been thinking that the following occurrence deserves to be commented on and remembered.”12 What Florman saw as worth attracting his colleagues’ attention was a calf with a deformed (van-skapadi) head.

A hydrocephalic calf.
From Kungliga Svenska vetenskapsakademien’s handlingar, 1818.

11 “Läkare Sällskapet, som anser sig säkrast uppfylla sin bestämmelse, då det, vid begagnandet af rön och undersökningar i Vettenskapen, icke öfvergifver Naturens och Erfarhetens väg, räknar alltid forskningar om Naturens afvikningar och anatomiska patologiska iakttagelser; som en vigtig del af dess arbeten” (Trafvenfelt 1816: 1).
12 “Af den anledning, att Naturkännedomen icke blott omfattar de normala Naturens former; utan ock sträcker sig till de ovanliga och mera sällsynta, har jag trott följande händelse förtjena att anmärkas och från glömskan förvaras” (Florman 1818: 161).
The ambition of making malformations an important part of scientific research, Florman was, by this time, sharing with many of his colleagues around Europe. Actually, a whole field of research was devoted to the study of monstrosities during the early decades of the nineteenth century. In 1832, Anders Retzius, the most prominent Swedish anatomist and anthropologist at the time, described the medical field devoted to pathological malformations as being in its childhood during the previous twenty years but as having a huge reach as well as being remarkably beneficial to both medicine and law. He compared the scientific study of monstrosities in recent years with a competition: “During the past twenty years, physicians and anatomists have competed with each other with incredible diligence in the exploration of changes in the organism, which arise from or are produced by diseases.”

Well-known in the scientific study of monsters was French zoologist Isidore Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire, who in the 1830s coined the term *teratology* for the new science. According to Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire, anatomical irregularities could probably be explained by the same laws that explained the typical shapes. He emphasized that an individual can only be considered abnormal in comparison with other members of its group, not through a set of absolute norms. Since there is no ideal type in a race or species but instead only a simple average, the deviation from this is always a question of degree. Also, radical monstrosities could accordingly be considered to be the result of gradual variations in the embryological development of an individual.

The first volume of Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire’s *Traité de teratology*

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13 “Under de sista tjugu åren hafva Läkare och Anatomer med en otrolig ihärdighet täflat, att utforska de förändringar i organismen, som upkomma eller produceras genom sjukdomar” (Retzius 1832: 137).
(1832–37) was described in a Swedish medical journal as a grand and systematic work. But the reviewers also emphasized that there were other important researchers in the field of comparative or pathological anatomy, such as Ernst Friedrich Gurtl, whose textbook on pathological anatomy they considered no less than perfect (F. & R. 1834: 400). Both Gurtl and Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire were said to have paved the way for the new science, according to which no organic body in its original form can be seen as wrong. The reviewers pointed out that what becomes monstrous during formation often has its origin in that either the whole, or a part of it, is held back at a certain level of the, among themselves so highly different, stages of development, which every animal has to pass through from the first to the last phase of its formation, and accordingly develops unbalanced.15

In both teratology and epigenetic theory, the malformed body was seen as a lower, primitive or arrested stage in the biological development of a normal embryo, which indicated that rare and earlier paradoxical or even impossible shapes of nature followed the same laws that reigned over the uniform creation (Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire 1834: 219). This incorporation of the monstrous body into theories of embryology and teratology made the monster transform from an unnatural, frightening and paradoxical mix between human and beast to a key figure in the understanding of embryological development. Serious attention should accord-

15 "hvad som under utbildningens fortgång blir monstruös, oftast har sin grund deri, att antingen det hela, eller någon del deraf, qvarhålles vid någon viss af de, hvarandra så högst olika, utvecklingsgrader, som hvarje djur har att genomgå från den första till den sista perioden af dess bildning, och utvecklar sig till följe deraf ensidigt” (F. & R. 1834: 400).
ingly be paid to dwarfs, hermaphrodites and those who were hare-lipped (Westman, 1827: 357–358).

Embryological findings allowed *vanskapta*, *missfoster* and *monstra* to appear just as natural and explicable as other beings and they were no longer at the limit of human identity. Paradoxically, though, this normalization brought with it an image of the monstrous body as incomplete and as an object for correction and intervention. As described by Michel Foucault, “the norm brings with it a principle of both qualification and correction. The norm’s function is not to exclude and reject. Rather, it is always linked to a positive technique of intervention and transformation, to a sort of normative project” (Foucault 2003: 50). Monsters were no longer excluded from the regular order of nature but had become related to the idea of a norm and at the same time transformed into anatomical pathologies and predictable errors in need of correction. Monstrosities were as Retzius said, the result of changes in the organism, which arise from diseases (R[etzius] 1832: 37).

**The ambiguous past of human origin**

But did thorough examinations, dissections and systematic classifications establish a definite distinguishing line between human and beast? An interesting line of thought in the embryological research of the early nineteenth century is Johann Friedrich Meckel’s ontogeny, which stated that each developing foetus passes through a series of stages, equivalent to the adult forms of lower classes or orders. This meant that animal types could be arranged in a single graduated rank (Ritvo 1997: 143; Hagner 1999: 210-211). Swedish anatomists, however, paid more attention to Martin Heinrich Rathke, who in the 1820s seemed to deport humans to the same level of biological development as that of fishes, at least during
their early phase of development. Rathke saw that amphibians and birds, but also humans, had gills during a certain stage of their embryological development (Ekström 1829: 15). In 1830, the Swedish Society of Medicine reported that Retzius had confirmed Rathke’s findings as he observed gills on sheep embryos (Ronander 1831: 18).

Humans, animals and plants had long been regarded as being joined by the Great Chain of Being, but with findings such as Meckel’s, Rathke’s and Retzius’ it also seemed as if every single organism on its way to maturity lived through the most important developmental phases of its ancestors. This temporalization of human existence started already with the epigenetic theories of embryological development, and in the anatomy and teratology of the early nineteenth century all forms of human corporeality were organized on the same developmental line. Paradoxically, though, in the same process they also became linked to primitive disorder and transitional forms.

Humans did not only seem to share a corporeal past with animals in their most early developing stages; human sexuality also seemed ambiguous in the young embryo. In 1829, Retzius described for the Swedish Society of Medicine how Caspar Friedrich Wolff had observed an organ in bird embryos that constitutes one of the first and most remarkable formations in the abdominal cavity of the embryo. Lorenz Oken had later found the same gland-like organ in mammals, but this gland was not fully explored until its examination by Martin Heinrich Rathke, which Retzius demonstrated for the Society by showing parts of human and animal embryos (Ekström 1829: 16). Retzius stated that ovaries or testicles

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develop from this organ, which changes its shape as the foetus grows older:

To the same extent as the testicles and ovaries develop, this organ loses its original shape and predominance and in slightly older embryos, can be recognized as the epididymis; the duct becomes the vas deferens. In female embryos it probably becomes tubæ or cornua uteri. In this way, the original similarity between the male and female sexual organs, which has long been assumed to be able to explain a number of malformations, is demonstrated.17

Testicles and ovaries shared their origin, but as the embryo grew older the sexual organs became more and more distinct and the individual could be identified as either male or female. To say that individual growth thus started from an undeveloped stage of undifferentiated sex and species definitely made the human origin seem ambiguous. Did normal men and women share their biological history with both hermaphrodites and monsters?

Taming the monstrous body
Before the nineteenth century, the elusive corporeality of so-called vanskapta, missfoster and monstra blurred, transgressed and mixed categories that were to be kept apart. Flying beasts and headless monstra were in Swedish medicine represented as beings at the limit of what is human and were described as unnatural, impos-

17 "I samma mohn som testiklarne eller ovarierne tilltaga i utveckling, förlorar äfven detta organ sin ursprungliga form och prædominance, och hos något äldre embryoner igenkänner man det som epididymis; utförsången blir vas deferens. Hos qvinno-embryoner blir det troligen tubæ eller cornua uteri. På detta sätt är den ursprungliga likheten af könsorganerne hos båda könen, som man länge antagit för att kunna förklara en mängd missbildningar, tillfyllest ådagalagd" (Ekström 1829: 16).
sible, ambiguous and noticeably difficult to explain. What was an offspring without a head? Did it have a soul? Could such creatures have humans as parents? Should they be killed? Could they even exist? *Monstra* indicated that nature was confusing different species, introduced disorder into the legal system and posed an important threat to human exclusiveness and identity.

If physicians in the eighteenth century at all wanted to discuss the origin of such extraordinary bodies, they spoke of curious results of the pregnant woman’s excited imagination. Also in this discussion, fears and fantasies concerning animals were emphasized as especially influential and able to eliminate the boundary between body and soul. This was problematic as it indicated that the essence and uniqueness of a human being – the soul – through the weak nervous system of a pregnant woman, could transform the offspring into materiality, a thing or an animal.

Associations between extraordinary bodies and animals are as old as Aristotle, and in Swedish medicine appear to be remarkably persistent. In the eighteenth century, medical handbooks and journals were full of human offspring with fish scales, harelips, apelike ears, claws and hairy skin, and in medical language malformations and animals were related through notions of similitude. Deformed or dying infants were described as looking and sounding like different animals, like the child without a proper skull who was born in Torshälla in 1780 and who, according to the examining physician, expressed a deplorable sound “like frogs” during the

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18 For Aristotle, the causes of monstrosities had to do with the generation and with that the movements, that came from the male, relapse and the material that came from the female does not get mastered. What remains is that which is most “general”, and this is the merely “animal” (Aristotle 1942: 417).
24 hours it lived. The child hovered between life and death and, in the eyes of its contemporaries, perhaps also between species. Transgressions and instabilities of one kind seemed to indicate the presence of others as well.

In the early nineteenth century, however, a growing interest in the secrets of generation can be noted. New theories on nature itself as a producer of life, malformed or not, were presented among epigenesists around Europe, and in Swedish medicine the extraordinary body moved from a strange transgression of human and animal, you and me, body and soul to a key figure in the understanding of embryological development. Monstra were no longer unnatural or impossible for scientists to grasp or systematize. Rather, they were at the heart of nature with the potential to contribute to the understanding of so-called normal human corporeality. Human malformations and hermaphrodites represented from now on a primitive or arrested stage of normal embryological development, and the once elusive mix of categories turned into a pathological error in need of correction.

In the medical acceptance of vanskapta, missfoster and monstra as a part of the regular order of nature, they undoubtedly became less bestial, threatening, impure and uncertain. But did modern embryology erase all associations between extraordinary

19 "liksom grodor" (Söderberg 1781: 318). Such notions of similitude, of one thing being "like" another is one of the most obvious ways of relating different beings or phenomena (Hampton 2004: 182).

20 In 1830 a set of conjoined twins were born in the county of Jämtland in northern Sweden. The twins were stillborn, and District Medical Officer Pehr Rissler submitted a long report to the Swedish Medical Society on the condition of their internal and external bodily organs. Unlike all earlier medical reports on conjoined twins from the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Rissler paid absolutely no attention to the children’s nails and made no other analogies between the corporeality of humans and animals (Trafvenfelt 1833: 276–282).
bodies and animals? Worth pointing out here is that the medical rationalization of the monster did not fully succeed in making a clear distinction, between either the species or the sexes. As the monstrous body was made explicable by natural laws, gills and double-sexed forms were suddenly found in the early stages of embryological development in a number of species. The monstrous body was tamed by science but it did not disappear. Rather, it was transformed from a rare and unnatural mix between human and animal to a commonplace stage of embryological development – present in the distant and primitive history of every human.

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Introduction
In the present article, I will discuss what it can mean to be viewed as ‘a bit different’ in our society from the perspective of a norm I have chosen to call *bodynormativity*. In my view, this norm shapes modern society’s outlook on and relationship to the body and bodily ideas, as well as representations of women with a disability, which are in focus here. What does it mean to have a body that is not considered to conform to this norm? To elucidate this question, I will focus on what it implies in issues of gender, body and sexuality. For the analysis, I have primarily limited myself to women with visible disabilities, because such disabilities have been clearly shown to affect how other people treat and immediately react to the disabled person (Davis 1961) as well as the disabled person’s self-perception and behaviour.

My empirical material primarily consists of eight women’s narratives, which I have collected through personal interviews. I have conducted repeated, in-depth interviews with three of these women, and my examples will be based on their experiences. The eight adult women were either born with their disability or acquired it during childhood. All have grown up in large cities. All had been married, or were married at the time of the interview. All were or had been gainfully employed. In addition to the in-
Interviews, I have used archive material,\(^1\) life histories, biographies and poems, published since the beginning of the 1980s, in which women with various disabilities describe their experiences of living as a disabled person. In this way, the experiences of the present interviewees can be related to and mirror both how other women in similar life situations have described their experiences as disabled and the prevailing values in society.

**The (dys)functional body**

Western culture is marked by an outlook on disability based on a conception of the body that starts with the notion that there is an opposition between the functional (able) body and the dysfunctional (disabled) body. The point of departure of this opposition is what Barbara Fawcett calls the descriptive level, which focuses on observable, often superficial features or characteristics (visible representations) of the body, for instance skin colour, body shape and size, as well as appearance. (Fawcett 2000:114) This approach can be traced back to the distinction between and differentiation of the physical (object) and the mental (subject), such that the latter is ascribed greater worth. Underlying these discussions on classification are ideas about what has been called *able-ism* (Hanna and Rogovsky 1991), that is, being able in a physical and mental or intellectual sense. If an individual is considered to lack these various abilities, then the body is dis-abled. It is dysfunctional. According to Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, this categorization is based on a stigmatization of bodily differences, which forms the base of the predominant value system she calls the ability/disability system. (Garland-Thomson 1997) Using this approach, an im-

\(^1\) This archive material can be found at the Nordic Museum in the *levnadsberättelser* (*life narratives*) of disabled women and men, and in the *dagboksprojekt* (*diary project*).
Impairment is classified as a physical, anatomical and/or mental bodily defect. Thus, it is objectively determined. The ‘dysfunctional’ body is defined as fundamentally disabled in a biological, material, social and cultural respect. Moreover, it is this notion of the body that causes the disabled to become “the Other”. (Wendell 1997)

What, then, is meant by the term functional body? In my view, it is a body that, according to the norm of bodynormativity, is seen as synonymous with a ‘normal’ body and a body that is ‘whole’ in both a physical and a mental sense. At the present time, it is also an unspecified youthful and white body, as well as a heterosexually oriented one. But it is also a body that has been mastered by its owner (cf. Foucault and his concept the docile body) and a body that is independent of its surroundings. Although it is a body that is meant to appear individual and personal, it is a highly controlled and, I would like to claim, objectified body (cf. the aesthetic beauty industry). It is this ideal body that is glorified and idealized today. (cf. Wendell 1989) Having such a functional body implies having a cultural capital that a person who is disabled cannot acquire.

I use bodynormativity as an analytical concept for this hegemonic notion of the body. In normativity, I include a double reference to and interplay between the normal in terms of its quantitative (most common) and qualitative (value-based) meanings. This norm-imposing meaning is also imperative. The norm, which is established by the non-impaired, determines which bodies are to be seen as normal or as deviant. Belonging to the latter group are bodies that are positioned outside or that transgress the boundaries of the normal. (cf. Douglas 1966) Thus, a normal body is described and acknowledged on the basis of comparisons with what is assumed to be its opposite: the deviant body (cf. the concept
corporeal otherness in Garland-Thomson 1994). What having a normal or a deviant body entails is not constant, but rather always changing. This leads to uncertainty as to what actually applies: When is a body normal, for whom and in what context? According to Lennard Davis, who has discussed the concept of normality from the perspective of the history of ideas, the construction of normality makes being disabled a problem in our society. (Davis 1997) He considered that the concept’s antithesis, abnormality, has also come to have solely negative connotations.

As I see it, bodynormativity, like heteronormativity, is exclusive in its practice (Rosenberg 2002) and includes a constitutive power dimension. The idea of a norm-imposing, whole body overlays our society like a sorting screen. It ranks people and lays down conditions for them: Who can be visible or should not be; who counts and belongs or should be sorted out? On a symbolic plane, the idea of the whole body becomes an invisible marker that separates people from one another. It is also the basis of the creation of various social categories or groups. (cf. Young 2000) As a marker, the idea of the whole body also places categories, groups and individuals in a rank order. Even within categories, groups and individuals are set against each other, just as different types of impairment are set against each other. At the very bottom of this hierarchy, we find developmentally disabled women or women with mental disabilities. Thus, bodynormativity is manifested in society’s, that is to say the non-disabled’s, labelling, definition and determination of the concepts of impairment and disability. Accordingly, the disabled find themselves in an object position of subordination and vulnerability. The ideas, attitudes and norms that are hereby expressed socially and culturally shape impaired bodies in both a material and symbolic sense.
**Woman or genderless**

Does a person who is both disabled and a woman also have a gender affiliation? This question may seem superfluous, especially considering my theoretical point of departure in which all bodies have an ascribed gender. However, in relation to disability, we find a clear ambivalence. When viewed through their impairment, disabled women have come to be ascribed a third gender affiliation subordinate to the prevailing two, the female gender and the male gender. With reference to the symbol used for handicap toilets, these women form a particular category. Rosemarie Garland-Thomson considers the impaired woman as a product of conceptual triangulation defined as the binary, implicitly subordinate, opposite of the male gender and as the antithesis of the normative configuration of being a woman. Thus, the disabled woman occupies what she calls an intragender position. (Garland-Thomson 1997: 288)

One recurring theme in both my interview material and the literature on women with a physical disability is that disabled women feel they are not viewed as a person, as the woman they are, but as an it, such as a wheelchair or a disease. I will let Maria, one of the women I interviewed, illustrate how this can manifest itself. She had developed a tumour, which was unrelated to her disability, and was to undergo a colostomy. She described how she was treated upon her arrival at the hospital as follows:

*This strange attitude still exists… I don’t know if I should call it an attitude or a kind of treatment // you are polio, you aren’t a person, instead you arrive there [at the hospital] and in my files it says POLIO and then everything has to be related to polio // then I’m just polio. It really feels so strange.*
In this way, the impairment is placed in the foreground and made into an object, which in turn is transposed to the individual as well as to the complex and differentiated category 'disabled'. The impairment is superordinate to gender and displaces gender by objectifying it. This objectification per se need not imply something negative, but in relation to disability it usually means that one, as a person, is reduced to 'the Other'. As several of the women expressed it, a disabled woman is lacking in worth, both as a human being and as a gender. One is genderless or belongs to a third-class category; one is viewed as 'either/or'. Maria also expressed this quite clearly. As long as she was walking she was someone, but she is not someone today, sitting in a wheelchair. She is no longer seen, as she was previously, as a person – the woman she is and feels she is – but as an it in a wheelchair. “If only I were allowed to be me, MARIA, oh how nice it would be // to not be patted here [on her head] yes, I’d like that.”

The wheelchair takes up a great deal of space in Maria’s life, both symbolically and in a tangible sense. In the eyes of others, though not in her own eyes, Maria no longer has an identity as a woman or even as a disabled woman. And people no longer speak to her. Despite the fact that she is very active and makes the most of life, her life scope has been highly restricted. Others’ perceptions of her body render her an it, a non-woman. As I see it, this cultural and social pattern can be said to function as a self-substantiated filter, through which one is not seen as the individual and person one actually is. One is stripped of one’s humanity.

Maria’s experience can be contrasted to that of Karin, who must also use a wheelchair. Karin has a very positive and pragmatic attitude toward her impairment. She reported that her mother infected her with polio, and taught her that life is difficult and that
one must always be clear about what one wants in life. Karin put it this way:

Of course, I constantly demand everything of the world around me, not that people should help me with every little thing, but I think they notice that I want to be part of things and then the situation is natural for everybody.

She is also very determined that she not be “treated with consideration, as if I can’t do anything”. Although Karin does not feel that being disabled in our society is a problem, as I interpret it, her impairment entails her constantly working for her right to be treated like a 'human being'. This further implies that, as a woman and a disabled individual, one should not violate the norm according to which a disabled person is not expected to make demands or make oneself heard, things that non-disabled girls and women are encouraged to do. As Maria put it, this norm implies that a girl in a wheelchair should be “nice, grateful and not so boisterous”. One is then allowed to be a woman. However, this does not imply being seen as a woman with a capital W, which based on the notion of bodynormativity is, in my view, a prerequisite for conforming to the dominant gender representation.

According to several feminist disability researchers, not being seen as a woman with a capital W has also meant that a disabled woman may have been spared the burden of the social expectations implicit in women’s stereotyped roles. (Fine and Asch 1988) As I see it, another aspect of this is that, as a disabled woman, one can be seen as a good role model – as a person who has broken free of the norm. This aspect is very rarely discussed, however, because along with the right to be feminine, one also wishes to affirm
being tough, verbally quick and able to say 'no' – attributes that are not in accordance with dominant conceptions of how women should be. What is crucial to stress here is that this very norm has resulted in disabled women being excluded from or denied access to arenas that are natural to non-disabled women, such as motherhood, childbirth and housework. People who are disabled have been stripped of or excluded from reproductive competence. Motherhood and childbirth are not considered to go naturally together with disability. A body defined as dysfunctional is incompatible with the ideology of care ascribed to the role of wife and mother.

Women with a disability have clearly shown how unfounded this ideology is. It is just as natural for them to acknowledge their sexuality and have families and children as to have access to education and the labour market, although resistance in the latter areas has perhaps not been as difficult to break through. However, disabled women may have different forms of expression and needs depending on their type and degree of impairment. Karin, to whom I referred above, had been set on having four children since she was young, and this was a dream she realized. It never occurred to her that being a mother and being a wheelchair user could be an obstacle. As a result of the polio, her arms function poorly. This meant she could not be what is currently considered an 'ideal' mother. For instance, she could not dress her children when they were small. Instead, they had to learn very early how to use a zipper and to button their own clothes. This took a great deal of time, but Karin had no alternative. The children often had to leave the house with their shirts inside out. As two- and three-year-olds, they even had to learn to handle sharp knives and help out around the house.
They’ve cut sausage, ham and bread with sharp knives. I couldn’t so they had to learn. //I’m there and telling them that it’s sharp, that you can cut your finger//. They knew exactly how to use the knives and they learned they should never wave them around. They also never ran away from us [their parents], because no one could go after and get them.

Even though this was not in line with notions of how people should raise their children, it was the only available method for Karin and her husband. As I interpret this, the cultural and social expectations for childrearing and the mother’s role take on interesting meanings when the body makes it impossible to comply with them.

Thus, impaired women not only have to fight against discrimination as disabled people (disablism), but they must also argue against sexist behaviour on the part of and in relation to their surroundings, behaviour expressed through stereotypical thinking about women as a gender and particularly about disabled women. Moreover, they must fight for conceptions of women that are considered essentialist in feminist theory construction: being allowed to be a wife, a mother and a lover – rights viewed as natural by every non-impaired woman. (Morris 1992)

Especially in this regard, several feminist disability researchers, as well as impaired women, have sharply criticized what they see as feminism’s questioning of traditional women’s roles. The most frequent criticism concerns how feminists fail to prioritize these issues and instead diminish, or even eliminate, the importance of reproduction as a marker or special feature of women’s physical differences. (Brook 1999; Morris 1995) In this regard, research in the area of gender theory works against impaired women’s desire and struggle to maintain conventional women’s roles, and thereby
accentuates societal discrimination. (Hannaford 1985; Morris 1995; Wendell 1989) Feminist disability researchers Michelle Fine and Adrienne Ash state that even if women as a gender are subject to oppression, the type of sexism is not the same for non-disabled women as for disabled women. Thus, the concept of gender has different and non-equal meanings depending on whether or not one is disabled. (Fine and Rich 1988)

One important factor underlying the fact that women with a physical disability are subject to sexism – besides the fact that they are women – is the impairment itself. The impairment is made into a reason for objectifying a woman with a physical disability by ascribing to her the status of ‘it’ and, from a gender perspective, the status of ‘either/or.’ This circumstance is simultaneously turned against these women and taken as justification for excluding and marginalizing them from non-disabled women’s natural right to competence in reproduction and care-giving.

**Attractivity – to be seen or stared at**
In our society, physical appearance is a component in the construction of being seen as a woman. In relation to bodynormativity, being attractive – in the concept’s many senses – has developed in such a way that it has primarily positive connotations. The consequence of this connection between attractivity and bodynormativity, in my view, is that a woman with a physical disability is not seen as attractive by definition. My reasoning here is that attractivity implies a whole body, implicitly a conforming body, in the sense of a symmetrical body. Thus, as Alexa Schriempf has suggested, being ascribed a body that is not considered functional means having a body that is never suitable. (Schriempf 2001) Such a body stands, or rather is placed, outside the concept of attractiv-
ity. A non-disabled woman who is considered ugly or unattractive is viewed as deviating from a normative female ideal with regard to both her appearance and the female gender. On the other hand, if one is a disabled woman, being ugly or unattractive is seen as intrinsic to disability. Disabled women are neither viewed nor treated as Women in the sense of being regarded or seen as desirable in terms of the ‘Male gaze’. Instead, these women are stared at. (Garland-Thomson 1997) Or as one of my interviewees, Anna, said, what is most difficult is that “people STARE so damned much just because you’re disabled”. This also affects how one views and perceives oneself. Thus, being stared at is of importance for how one positions oneself and is positioned by others in society.

Being considered unattractive has caused many disabled women to see themselves as ugly regardless of how good looking they may be. “You’re disabled and then you’re ugly by definition”, as one woman put it. In this situation, endeavours to be feminine and attractive may be important: “I see people with good-looking bodies, nice legs/I go to a party and sit there in my boring old wheelchair instead of having great shoes and [I see] all the slacks, nice shoes”. (Anna)

One way of compensating for this ascribed non-attractivity is to develop various strategies. I will let Maria illustrate one way of dealing with the staring gazes at her dysfunctional body. When she was a teenager, this was a matter of moving the gaze from her dragging legs, which were a consequence of polio. Because it was important to her, just as it was to all girls at her age, to be tough and look good for the boys, she played with the female ideals of the time by, for instance, emphasizing her breasts and wearing ‘tight tights’. Maria also learned to walk in a certain, sexy way – too sexy according to her father. She purposefully used the prevailing
bodynormativity by combining it with methods to attract a sexualized gaze, which allowed her to be seen, at least temporarily.

Another strategy involves being particularly careful about one’s appearance and clothing. As several of the women I interviewed reported, it is important to constantly keep oneself clean and tidy; otherwise one may confirm prejudices that exist. At the same time, at least as an adult woman, one must also deal with the prejudices disabled women may be exposed to when they care about their appearance and, for example, dress fashionably, wear make-up or shave their legs although they may be in a wheelchair. In my view, society does not consider this altogether suitable, for in doing these things one is transgressing the physical aesthetic boundary of attraction.

One example of a deliberate attempt to challenge prevailing aesthetic ideals is when the American model Aimee Mullens – whose legs had been amputated at the knee – clearly stressed, in a number of fashion reports in 1999 (Garland-Thomson 2004), that she had different prosthetic devices that could highlight her figure in various ways. These prostheses were used as a protest against the prevailing beauty template at the time and can thus be interpreted as violating, on a symbolic level, current ideals in the fashion world. As I see it, however, her prostheses reinforced the opposite, namely that in order to be accepted as attractive, one must have a whole body, not a mutilated one. Thus, a transgression of boundaries may also entail reinforcing the very thing it is supposed to help mitigate, in this case the lack of acceptance of asymmetrical bodies.

In the labelling of women with disabilities, it is clear that their bodies are conditional in several respects. The more one’s body approaches a whole and symmetrical body, the greater the accept-
ance and the more one is allowed to be non-disabled, that is, a woman and a human being.

The undisciplined and dependent body

It is not surprising that the body is a sensitive issue for many women with a visible physical disability. Several women I spoke with experience a constant aversion to their own body. This is also a recurring theme in research and literature on women and disability. For many women, not being physically sufficient has been a life trauma, making it difficult to befriend their body, in relation to how it looks and functions, or rather does not function. This is particularly difficult in our age of body fixation, when well built, supple and attractive bodies are important in so many respects. Anna clearly expressed the impact on one’s self-image of staring gazes directed at dysfunctional bodies. She reported finding it difficult to be naked in front of others, even her husband. “I was ashamed, I thought I was angular and ugly.” She also found it difficult to look at her own body and like herself. According to Anna, this was all self-imposed. Her present husband, who she pointed out is not disabled and is several years younger, does not see anything deviant about her body. On the contrary, “He thinks I’m beautiful”.

I claim that Anna judges her body on the basis of a normative template of attraction based on a symmetrical body. This template concerns not only the outer forms – the visible representations, as Barbara Fawcett calls them (see above) – but also implies a body that is controlled and independent. Thus, falling under the heading 'attractive' becomes problematic, by definition, when one’s body is marked by a physical disability since in many cases this implies having a body requiring operations, hospital stays, painful
bandage changes, foundation garments and other aids that chafe and irritate the skin. For many, aches and pains are part of every-day life. In such cases, it is difficult to have control over or master this body, as the notion of bodynormativity presupposes. Susan Wendell has discussed how not being able to control one’s body is, on a symbolic level, one of the meanings of disability most related to power. (Wendell 1996:61)

A physical impairment also implies dependence on other people. The body, to varying degrees, belongs to or is surrendered to so many other people, such as relatives, assistants, healthcare workers, etc. These people need to wash, dress, turn and lift the disabled person’s body if everyday life is to be managed at all. Cheryl Wade is quite explicit in her realistic description of this situation: “To put it bluntly – because this need is blunt as it gets – we must have our asses cleaned after we shit and pee. Or we have others’ fingers inserted into our rectums to assist shitting”. (Siebers 2001:747)

One certainly gets used to being touched by others and to always needing assistance, even with bodily functions that today still have a certain aura of taboo associated with them. “I guess it’s not so easy at first // because getting help with your body is very intimate somehow” (Karin). Such help can involve changing a tampon or sanitary napkin during menstruation or assistance in using the toilet. Disabled women and men may also need help with their sex life. They may need to accept having someone beside them who helps move their body into the ‘right’ position.

Dependence is not limited to everyday care of the body, but may also involve help in achieving a functioning social, material and cultural life. In our Western culture, however, there is a boundary beyond which dependence changes from positive to negative.
Taking a taxi to work is not viewed as negative dependence and may even increase the individual’s social status, as opposed to using the same taxi as transportation service for disabled people. According to Anne Finger, the latter form of transportation has been associated with a kind of shameful dependence. (Finger 1991)

The boundary separating positive and negative dependence would seem to be difficult to define. As I interpret this boundary, one central factor is that dependence may not be a necessary condition for managing daily life. However, for a person with a physical disability, this is not a temporary form of dependence, but is absolutely essential to the person’s life. What is completely natural to a disabled person – not managing alone, but requiring technical and/or human assistance – is thereby rendered unnatural. Thus, what is defined as negative dependence is directly related to the fact that the body is dysfunctional, because if this body is to function, it must be dependent on something external to itself, on human and/or technical help.

Disability researcher Harlan Hahn writes that a disability seems to bring out a kind of existential and aesthetic anxiety in the non-disabled (Hahn 1988) – anxiety about being affected or infected by a disability (Corrin 1999) or about “becoming one of those”, as one of my interviewees put it. Anna provided numerous examples of how she has encountered this ‘fear’. She was born without legs, and on one occasion, when she asked her half-sister why she did not want to get pregnant, her half-sister answered, “I’m so afraid it will be like you!” As if the disability were contagious!" When Anna married her non-disabled husband, she heard his friends and neighbours say, “He could have had anyone he wanted and he chose that thing”. In my view, this type of offensive comment, which the non-disabled can make in front of a disabled person, is
legitimized by the prevailing representation of having a body that does not function and of the life this body is assumed to imply.

For most people with a visible physical disability, the material body makes itself known to the highest degree in the disabled person’s daily life and living conditions, and thus life must be tangibly adapted to the body’s limitations and needs. In this area as well, feminist disability researchers have criticized the field of gender theory and stressed how important it is that discussions and theories be based on a comprehensive view of the body, in which the body’s materiality and physically situated experience are considered, recognized and problematized. Also of importance is that representations of the body not be based on traditional thinking involving opposite poles, as this line of thought has formed the basis of the differentiation of able/unable bodies, whereby the latter are viewed as insufficient.

Sexual, asexual or hypersexual
The consequences of bodynormativity also encompass sexuality. The cultural and social representations – and I would like to add the medical representations – of disability are based largely on one assumption: that sexuality and sexual attraction are incompatible with being disabled. According to Sumi Colligan, it would seem as though sexuality is thought to be reserved for heterosexual, symmetrical and “genitally specific bodies”. (Colligan 2004:50) Several feminist disability researchers have discussed how sexuality is the source of the most severe oppression that particularly women with a disability must encounter and combat. It is also the source of the greatest pain. (Finger 1991) One cause of this pain is that sexual attraction and reproductive competence are not considered compatible with having a dysfunctional body.
I will let Anna illustrate how this notion can affect how one is treated. She told me about a return visit to a doctor following a necessary abortion (her body cannot take a pregnancy to term). At this visit the doctor, whom she had never met, said, “Is it necessary to have sex when you are 37 years old and look like you do?’ And he blurted this out when I was lying there exposed in the gynaecologist’s chair”. The fact that Anna, despite her disability, had been able to get pregnant was very important to her identity as a woman and a spouse, but the doctor’s comment sent the opposite message. This message was reinforced by her childhood years at an institution, where boys and girls were kept strictly apart during lessons and where she internalized the picture that she, as a disabled person, did not have the right to love.

You didn’t even get to hold hands even though you were a teenager. What was so bad about that? But just holding hands gave you a kind of warmth that made you real happy, but then I didn’t think that was anything that was part of me or other kids in my situation; somehow I wasn’t privileged to love.

The doctor’s treatment of Anna manifested a conventional outlook in which sexuality, reproduction and age are linked together in an offensive connotation, seen through his internalized view of physical disability and gender.

Disabled women are viewed as asexual or – the exact opposite – hypersexual. (This general line of reasoning has major points of agreement with discussions on lesbian sexuality during the 1970s and 1980s.) Asexuality is commonly associated with a physically impaired body, whereas hypersexuality is more often ascribed to mentally impaired bodies. (Engwall 2000) Harlan Hahn has used
the concept of asexual objectification, which refers to the prevailing assumption that sexuality is inappropriate for the disabled in a twofold sense. (Garland-Thomson 1997) According to Hahn, the disability per se can impede or prevent sexual relations, on the one hand, and can lead to the perception that a woman who is disabled is not sexually attractive, on the other. What the latter expresses is an implicit assumption that the function of the female partner is to give (an assumed) male partner sexual satisfaction. Asexuality, too, is not seen as a possible and active choice, a self-chosen identity, for the disabled woman.

One often overlooked aspect of the asexual objectification of disabled women is that it reinforces an infantile view of these women. Being deprived of one’s sexuality also entails being deprived of one’s right to an adult life, as well as the need for sociosexual relations. Included in this is the right to lesbian and bisexual relationships. (Fine and Asch 1988; Thompson and Andrezejewski, 1987) At the same time, however, a homosexual orientation is not perceived as problematic: A disabled woman who is lesbian, or queer, never constitutes a threat to heteronormativity. She is asexual. For this reason, Alexa Schriempf considered that a kind of cognitive dissonance (Schriempf 2001) exists in attitudes toward disabled women and sexuality. Thus, if one has a dysfunctional body, one is classified as either asexual or hypersexual. One is also denied sexual feelings and relations, by definition.

With regard to being deprived of one’s sexuality, another consequence is that it is not considered justified or even necessary to provide disabled women (and men) with information on sexual issues or on how the body works, since it is assumed that sexuality is not of interest to the disabled. Not receiving adequate information on sexuality and the body is also experienced by many non-
disabled young people. There is, however, a crucial difference: For the non-disabled, knowledge and the practice of sexuality are seen as a question of time and a matter of course, the implicit meaning being 'when you're grown up'. But for the disabled, these things are not considered necessary at all.

One consequence of not having received information about one's body is that many disabled people lack or have insufficient knowledge about how the body works and about what to call various body parts and bodily functions. This may imply that disabled people do not always know where to draw the line regarding their own physical integrity. Above all, this may lead to difficult problems in cases of sexual abuse and exploitation, and may even have legal consequences.² Recent studies in Sweden and abroad have revealed that various types of sexualized violence, some aimed particularly at women with physical, mental or cognitive disabilities, occur much more frequently than is indicated in official information and documents. (Malmberg and Färm 2008) Sexual abuse begins in childhood or early youth and occurs repeatedly. The perpetrators are usually known to the woman and are often people on whom she depends, such as family members and neighbours but also institutional staff, assistants and taxi or bus drivers – people who, given their professional role, should be trustworthy. The vast majority of perpetrators are men. Most assaults occur in the women's everyday environments, for instance in the home, at the youth recreation centre, at school, in the workplace or in the transportation service vehicle on the way to and from these en-

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² The legal system assumes that the woman can name the various parts of her body as well as in detail describe what has happened to her and how the assault took place; otherwise it is highly likely that her case will be dropped on account of lack of evidence. (Malmberg and Färm 2008)
environments. A new and rapidly growing arena for sexual abuse is the Internet. Here, women are lured in various ways into making pictures of their naked bodies available over the Net under the pretext that the pictures will only be seen by the man who has made contact – for it is usually men who seek and establish contact – and that they will not be published on the Net.

The sexual vulnerability of the disabled also corresponds in many respects with the sexual violence that non-disabled women are subject to. One important difference, however, is that for disabled women, the reason for the assault is twofold: Men direct their expression of violence at the impairment itself and use the impairment as a reason to perpetrate violence. Another serious problem is that sexualized violence against the disabled has long been played down. Sexual abuse of a disabled person has also not been perceived as an obviously criminal act. The norms vary depending on whether one is disabled or non-disabled.

As I see it, this ascribed non-sexuality is a manifestation of an objectified view of women with disabilities. One consequence is that this has been used to justify denying them knowledge of and insight into sexuality and the body, which has made them sexually and legally vulnerable. In my interpretation, this withholding of information may even be an expression of the existential anxiety discussed above. There exists an unfounded fear that these women will reproduce disabilities (cf. the issue of abortion and foetal diagnosis, Hubbard 1990) – a fear that does not seem to encompass men with disabilities. At the same time, however, this ‘non-sexuality’ has not excluded or protected women with various types of impairments from being subjected to sexual abuse. This would seem to mean that when a woman is classified as asexual or hypersexual, men are ‘entitled to’ exploit her sexually. The ob-
jectification of a disabled woman constructs a ‘logic’ according to which one is not assaulting a human being, but instead a ‘thing’, which leads to the view that the act is not criminal. However, one is not sexually abusing an object, but rather a woman, who has a gender – in both senses of the word. Yet, disabled women are neither genderless nor non-sexual. Maintaining the representation of disabled women as objects is a manifestation of a power strategy being pursued by the non-disabled.

Conclusion

In the representation of disability, here not limited to visible physical impairments, bodynormativity is a structural dimension. At a normative level, bodynormativity is associated with something positive and desirable. It symbolizes the form and function of the ideal body. By not fitting into this body norm, disability has primarily come to have negative connotations – of deviance, thereby confirming the norm. Bodynormativity affects perceptions of the body, including how it should be mastered, experienced and looked at. However, bodynormativity is not limited to body discourses on attractiveness, as in the present article, but is also associated with related discourses, such as those on motherhood and sexuality. The female, motherly, attractive and sexual body is clearly coded as functional. Yet if the body is dysfunctional, one is placed outside these positionings, which in Western society are strongly tied to the female gender.

In several respects, being a woman with a visible physical disability means being viewed and treated, from society’s perspective, as someone else. This ‘othering’, however, is not unequivocally synonymous with alienation or discrimination, although this is a serious consequence; it also includes an important potential for
subject positioning. This makes it possible to reinterpret prevailing gender attributes – a potential whose articulation is remarkably absent, not least from most feminist theory. Women in wheelchairs who get married or divorced, have children, have sex and invest in attractiveness would seem to be awkward for both society and parts of feminism. By entering women’s classical positions, the disabled body, which is dysfunctional in society’s eyes, can both reinforce and confirm these positions, challenging the tacit way we take for granted that the female body is functional. When the dysfunctional body shows that it is able, despite the marginalization and discrimination disabled women have been subjected to, this also entails a forceful challenge to predominant body perceptions.

We could say that a dissonance exists between the experiences physically disabled women can have – experiences found in my interviews – and society’s representation of their disabilities. The latter is still of importance, since it affects the individual’s perception of herself as well as how she is treated by and treats others. How this is manifested varies at the individual, social and structural levels. (cf. Lonsdale 1990)

Neither attractiveness, sexual desire nor motherhood – characteristics and phenomena that are of great importance in the construction of femininity – are automatically bound to how the body is constituted. This has been shown with striking clarity by disabled women who have violated established norms and ‘come out’ as disabled – a metaphor alluding to homosexuals’ strategies that is often used in the disability literature. ‘Coming out’ is primarily used to mean acknowledging to oneself one’s disability. It also represents, as David Halperin has stressed, reclaiming a certain interpretative privilege with regard to being disabled. (Halp-
erin 1995) I would claim that it is instead society that must ‘come out’, not only by recognizing that dysfunctional bodies are equal to functional bodies, but also by eliminating the prevailing negative representation of being disabled in our society, as this representation both objectifies the disabled and implies alienation – or otherness.
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Introduction

In March 1998 I had been doing field research for about four months, observing and interviewing physicians and couples for the purpose of my doctoral thesis,\textsuperscript{3} when I found myself, six months pregnant at a doctors’ meeting, taking the following notes:

Doctors’ meeting.
Present at the meeting: Five man surgeons, one woman surgeon.\textsuperscript{4} The design of a form is being discussed. Woman surgeon (senior registrar) is asked to get it. The form needs to be revised. The rewriting is assigned to woman surgeon […]. Man surgeon demonstrates new ultrasound camera.
Man surgeon (chief physician) addresses me: "Couldn’t we have a look at you? Your stomach?"
Me: "Sure"…

\textsuperscript{3} My PhD project concerned how a group of people constructs gender by means of symbols, metaphors and (inter)actions in two settings: in their everyday lives as professionals (physicians) and while talking about work and responsibilities at home with their partner/spouse (Eriksson 2003).

\textsuperscript{4} In writing and talking about man and/or woman surgeon/physician instead of male and/or female surgeon/physician I wish to emphasize that body signs, traditionally seen as the (biological) foundation for gender, are but one of several signs through which we become and are seen as either man or woman (cf. Kessler & McKenna 1978, Søndergaard 1996).
However, the man surgeon ends up demonstrating the ultrasound on his own throat, whereupon the chief physician comments: “‘That looks like a woman in her sixties’ (laughter)...” (Field note, March -98)

Studying how physicians (re)present themselves as proper and credible physicians with professional authority and how they simultaneously do gender, I saw this incident as one of several examples of how woman physicians’ professional credibility and position were subtly undermined. The process of undermining was, to my understanding, related to the highly gendered expectation of woman physicians’ availability to others – being at others’ disposal, assisting, caring and creating a pleasant atmosphere – and their preparedness to adhere to and realize the very same expectation.

Busy (re)presenting the proper professional researcher myself, i.e. focusing on the physicians’ doings and keeping a professional distance from my own body, doings and feelings, I did not at the time recognize how my own position as a professional researcher was undermined in the very same incident. Being made and related to as a pregnant body – a body expected to be available for in(tro)spection – I was no longer an observing researcher but was rather made an object possibly available for observation. And instead of (re)claiming professional authority and credibility, my instant preparedness and acceptance to be available reinforced this process of repositioning.

This incident occurred almost ten years ago and I still recall it vividly and quite often. And every time I do – just reading the excerpt, for example – I become uncomfortable and uneasy. This is not surprising given the situation as a whole, i.e. the undermining of women’s professional authority (including my own) and
the man surgeon’s available body being jokingly constructed as “a woman in her sixties”. However, I remember being puzzled rather than feeling uneasy and awkward at the time. Something made me not feel uneasy or awkward; in my understanding, this had to do with the professional context and the position of professional researcher I was striving hard to position myself within. This puzzling experience made me start pondering on the relationship between the (available) body, constructions of gender and professional credibility.

In this article I engage in the relationship between professional credibility, the symbolic body and availability, paying close attention to the pregnant body and pregnant embodiment in a medical professional context.5 With data from my thesis project as the point of departure, the concerns of the article are twofold. Firstly, I bring to the fore the nexus between openness/availability and the feminine and how it is established in everyday professional situations. Second, I consider how expectations of women’s availability are pervasively and symbolically written on and experienced through the pregnant professional body. I argue that, and discuss how, the pregnant body – the sign par excellence of femininity – is constructed and experienced in opposition to professional authority, thereby undermining (pregnant) women’s professional positions.


5 “The pregnant body” here refers to the body pregnant with various and ambiguous meanings as well as the body “being-with-child” (Draper 2003: 743).
(inter)relation between body, gender and professional boundaries, I believe that reading the pregnant body (from outside and from within) in particular opens up interesting and fruitful analytical avenues. A marked body in rapid change and growth, increasingly taking up space, a non-taken-for-granted body, is a body that makes the usual invisible, unmarked professional and subjective body more visible (cf. Draper 2003: 747, Warren & Brewis 2004: 220).

The analytical focus in this article is thus on physicians’ stories and experiences of pregnant bodies and pregnant embodiment within a professional context. However, alongside their stories and experiences I also reflect upon some of my own ambiguous experiences of being pregnant and having a pregnant body myself while conducting my fieldwork. This means that I study the (pregnant) body as a symbolic construction (object) in which I am, simultaneously, inscribed and experience myself as a subject. This is not only an “empathetic engagement with data” that can further insights into meanings and experiences of bodies and embodiment (Warren & Brewis 2004: 223, Young 2005, cf. Mattson, this volume). It is, as Solheim points out, in fact an epistemological necessity (Solheim 2001: 11, cf. Käll, this volume).

The pregnant body in research
In recent decades the cultural discourse on natural sex differences has been challenged in various ways within gender studies and feminist research. Fuelled by the ongoing individualization process in Western societies at large (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim 2002), these challenges have to some extent destabilized the sex difference discourse more generally. Women are no longer necessarily seen as naturally (overly) emotional, irrational and out of control
in contrast to distanced and rational men being in control. Unless they are pregnant. In the Swedish media, popular science and elsewhere one can – without any extensive research – read about pregnant women being consumed by raging hormones, overwhelming feelings and overall uncontrollable bodies. Accompanying the fragile, instable and unpredictable pregnant body, there is a loss of the capacity for reasoning rationally. Instead, pregnant women and recent mothers have, to replicate a frequently used metaphor, “porridge in their heads”. Added to these somewhat disturbing messages is often the (un)comforting reassurance that one is not to worry, it is all totally natural – when pregnant or caring for an infant (cf. Malmberg, this volume).

Seen as a powerful signifier of both sexual difference and women’s responsibility to mother and due to its strong socio-cultural association with biological determinism, the attitude toward the pregnant body within gender studies has been cautious (Bailey 1999: 337, Hird 2007: 2). These facts are, as Käll correctly states, simultaneously strong arguments for not disregarding but rather further exploring the body (Käll, forthcoming, cf. Ah-King; Holmberg & Palm, this volume).

A central issue in the growing body of research on the (pregnant) body and (pregnant) embodiment is the pervasive idea of women’s bodies as boundless, fluid and permeable (Schmeid and Lupton 2001: 33) in contrast to men’s bodies as inherently more controlled, autonomous and contained (Draper 2003, Lupton & Barclay 1997, Gill, Henwood & McLean 2005). Of concern is also how this prominent cultural sign of masculinity, i.e. the contained, autonomous and controlled body, is constructed as the ideal human body from which women’s bodies deviate (Draper 2003: 743). Other concerns in the research field are the challenges that wom-
en’s bodies – the pregnant body being a case in point – pose to this normative body ideal, to our understanding of individuality and ownership and, in a wider sense, to the stability of society (Draper 2003, Longhurst 2000).

In *Den öppna kroppen. Om könssymbolik i modern kultur* (2001), Norwegian social anthropologist Jorun Solheim engages in the modern symbolism on body and gender. She argues that “the female body’s anatomical more-openness” is symbolically elaborated in ways that construct the open, that which lacks distinct and firm boundaries, coinciding with the feminine in ways beyond our immediate awareness (cf. Draper 2003, Longhurst 2000, Mullin 2002). Thus, in Solheim’s understanding gender is a “mythological system, a self-referring chain of meanings intertwined in ways that make the constructions of meanings slip through our fingers. The seams become invisible” (Solheim 2001: 18). Following Solheim I see the identification between openness and femininity not as inherent in biological sex differences, or limited to the anatomy of the female body. Instead it is an ongoing process that comes into force through various repetitive and subtle ways and signs at various levels and in different situations in everyday life.

Through the symbolic elaboration of “the female body’s anatomical more-openness” (Solheim 2001) and the idea of women’s bodies as fluid, boundless and uncontained, threatening to break and become dirt – a “matter out of place” (Douglas 1984: 36) – women’s bodies are seen and constructed as dangerous, especially when pregnant. Thus pollution and danger are, as Draper suggests, central concepts when discussing body boundaries. The pregnant body’s unpredictability and capacity to pollute and disturb sur-

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6 The Open Body. Gender Symbolism in Modern Culture.
roundings makes it an unreliable and provocative body (cf. Draper 2003: 748). Pregnant women come to “occupy a borderline state as they disturb identity, system and order by not respecting borders, positions and rules” (Longhurst 2000: 467). This unpredictable body creates feelings of unease and needs to be confined, especially in relation to public space (Monaghan 2005: 104). Historically, considerable efforts have been applied to hide, camouflage and remove the transgressive female – and pregnant – body, for example through the use of clothing and various spatial restrictions on women (Draper 2003: 750, Longhurst 2000: 467).

The pregnant body furthermore challenges our understanding of individuality and ownership (Bailey 1999: 340, Draper 2003: 747, Hird 2007: 3). Its boundaries are blurred and ambiguous as it contains both the woman and the foetus/child (Draper 2003: 749, Longhurst 2000: 468, Mullin 2002: 38, Young 1990). The modern view of subjectivity “privileges notions of autonomy and the individuated body/self, with a well-defined conceptual boundary between one’s body/self and that of others” (Schmied and Lupton 2001: 33). Replacing one’s position in the social structure, the body has become the central base and vehicle for a person’s construction and sense of a stable authentic selfhood and identity (Giddens 1991) - a vehicle that we are seen, or at least supposed, to exercise control and ownership over (Draper 2003: 747, cf. Bordo 1993, Gill, Henwood & McLean 2005: 39-40). No longer operating “as a physical marker of individuality” (Bailey 1999: 340) the pregnant woman’s jurisdiction over her body is no longer a matter of course. Thus being a public concern and – read from within a hetero-normative reproduction discourse – a product of a hidden private act of sex, the pregnant body also blurs the boundaries at the private-public margin (Draper 2003: 756, Longhurst 2000).
The pregnant, growing and expanding body thus not only threatens to break, but also challenges and endangers several central cultural, more or less taken-for-granted, assumptions and values. This is also the case – maybe even more so – when the firm and distinct boundaries of the male body threaten to break or, in fact, are broken. During my fieldwork I encountered some situations and stories that brought this theme to the fore. Talking about performing abdominal examination on man patients, a surgeon (woman) said: “you don’t simply pull down their pants immediately (laughter)”. She explained that when examining men’s inguinal hernia or when “you are to examine their bottom and perform rectal examinations […] This can be awkward, embarrassing and immensely hard on some.” She added:

At the same time, the fact is that woman patients are constantly exposed to this, with men. I don’t know if we women are… (sigh) Well, everything from the fact that we have exposed ourselves in another way, we’ve been to gynaecological examinations, we give birth, and in these situations you’re not alone, but instead do it surrounded by staff. I don’t know if we maybe accept it easier.

According to the surgeon, women’s reproductive bodies provide us with experiences that make us accept our bodies being available to others, whereas for men – lacking similar experiences – having and experiencing their bodies exposed to and made available to others can be “awkward” and “immensely hard on some”. Furthermore, the (physician’s) penetration of the man’s body is, literally, a transgression of the firm, contained and unavailable male body. Given the centrality of this body in constructions of selfhood, identity in general, and men’s gender identity in particular, the
awkwardness that men – as well as the woman surgeon – experience in this situation might derive from the experience of men being deprived of their bodily integrity and, thus, their gender identity (cf. Gill, Henwood & McLean 2005). As Draper suggests, the inverted gender order in a situation “where woman is seen to be strong and man to be disempowered and weak”, where men are re-positioned as vulnerable and marginal presents challenges for male embodiment and challenges conventional or hegemonic masculinities (Draper 2003: 750). The situation in question also challenges cultural notions of passive women (objects) and active men (subjects), as well as the heterosexual matrix’s stipulation of whose body is to be available for whom. And when the gender order and the traditional doctor-patient order clash, like in the example, this causes trouble.

As Lupton and Barclay state:

[B]ecause of the sociocultural meanings attributed to the importance of containment of one’s body/self, to maintain hardness and dryness, and because of the deeply gendered nature of those meanings, for men more than women to blur one’s boundaries with another, to become plural and interdependent rather than autonomous (whether it be one’s sexual partners or child) is potentially to incite anxieties and fears. (Lupton and Barclay 1997: 33)

It has been suggested that the male body is increasingly becoming “an object of the gaze rather than simply the bearer of the look” (Gill, Henwood and McLean 2005: 38–39, cf. Monaghan 2005: 83). However, as illustrated, experiencing being re-positioned from the bounded body (subject) to the unbounded body (object) might still not be a matter of course (cf. Mattson, this volume).
Gender, (un)professional bodies and boundaries

As the core object of medical science and intervention, the prominence of the body within medicine is obvious. As Larsson states: “Medicine fills bodies with meaning” (this volume). Taking the body in a medical professional context seriously also means acknowledging that physicians treat and deal with bodies, they experience and (inter)act and they (re)present themselves as physicians with and through their own bodies. Thus, the complexity of physicians having and being bodies needs to be acknowledged.

In my thesis I argue that physicians, while doing what they do in their professional everyday lives, are involved in a “physician forming project”, i.e. by means of symbols, metaphors and practices they are in the process of (re)presenting themselves as credible physicians with professional authority (Eriksson 2003: 44-46, cf. Annfelt 1998). Within this project the physicians relate, on the one hand, to a disembodied and genderless professional ideal and to a huge and massive body with masculine body signs on the other, as a central symbol of the ideal physician(ship). This body is seen as housing necessary capacities for the professional physician, such as disassociating oneself from the patient, the private, emotions, the body and sexuality, as well as being mentally strong, controlled and stable. This is, so to say, an embodiment of the disembodied physician ideal permeated by implicit masculine connotations (Annfelt 1998: 137–147, Monaghan 2005: 83, Witz 2000). According to my analysis, woman physicians are to strive for this ideal, while simultaneously signalling that they do it as women. They are to balance between professional norms of being distinct and distanced and norms of femininity, practicing heterosexual benevolence, i.e. sexual, social and emotional availability (Annfelt 1998: 304, Brantsæter 1992, cf. Ah-King, this volume). Simultane-
viously, they are to (re)present themselves as normal women, i.e. staging proper femininity by combining unanimous signs of femininity assumed to correctly represent who they really are - their authentic inner selves (Lundgren & Kroon 1996, Monaghan 2005, Sennett 1992). In doing so, however, they are seen as indistinct, boundless and blurry, lacking the capacity to establish and maintain distinct professional boundaries – i.e. the prerequisite for being a credible physician credited with professional authority (cf. Annfelt 1998: 347–360, Haste 1993: 80). Depending on what it signifies the body is, thus, potentially a resource or a problematic load in the professional and physician forming context. Despite significant indications of the pregnant body belonging to the latter, it is an empirical question as to what it means to have and be a pregnant body in the context in question.

The available body and the embodiment of availability
Returning to the introductory excerpt, it is in many ways a case in point of how the identification between availability and the feminine is established at various levels in an everyday (professional) situation. At this meeting, within the space of a few minutes, the nexus between femininity and availability is subtly established in several ways. The woman surgeon is expected, prepared and in fact takes on the administrative assignment that no one else is expected, prepared or seems particularly eager to carry out (be available to others). My pregnant body is implicitly expected to be available for in(tro)spection and I immediately confirm my stomach as such. Finally, when the man surgeon’s body/throat is made available – symbolically opened up – for in(tro)spection, it becomes the throat of an older woman.

Participating in the physicians’ everyday rounds at two uni-
versity clinics, I experienced several situations similar to the one above in which woman physicians were expected and prepared to take on and carry out assignments that their man colleagues were not. They were similarly expected – and showed a noticeable preparedness – to create a pleasant atmosphere and interrupt their own work to assist colleagues and staff members in theirs (Eriksson 2003: 92–93, cf. Magnusson 1997, Widerberg 1992). The woman physicians’ availability and their “emotional labour for others” (Bailey 1999: 349) was also expected and practiced in relation to patients. As one woman surgeon stated: “They [the patients] expect me to care for them at the ward, but they do not expect me to carve in them.” Yet another surgeon (man) confided in me how disturbed he was by woman colleagues who, in his opinion, kept too much of a distance in relation to the patient and, thus, “take on a role that they don’t have naturally”.

Expectations, as well as the realization of women’s availability to others, are thus conveyed both implicitly and explicitly in the everyday rounds at the clinics. Being available, in terms of being at others’ disposal, assisting and creating a pleasant atmosphere – often with a smile on their faces – becomes, in the professional context, what Widerberg has referred to as a “woman’s (professional) qualification” (Widerberg 1992, cf. Magnusson 1997).

Availability to others, seen as a coveted and appreciated natural woman’s quality in the physicians’ daily rounds, is simultaneously constructed as a problematic deficiency. It becomes a problem in relation to women’s (re)presentation of themselves as proper credible physicians, i.e. in relation to the gendered “physician forming project” (Eriksson 2003: 44–46). In this project, professional distance is imperative for both men and women. However, practicing distance, enforcing professional boundaries and the ability to keep
things apart is seen as natural for men and unnatural for women. Thus the “woman’s qualification” – practicing availability – is a qualification at odds with (re)presenting professional authority and credibility.

The problem of running out of visiting time when seeing patients recurs in the physicians’ stories as a problem facing woman physicians. Maria (gynaecologist) tells me that her man colleagues are able to manage their visiting times since “they can more easily distance themselves from the patient” and because men have a “more distinct body language”. Maria implicitly constructs woman physicians as more indistinct and therefore not able to keep and practice distance in relation to patients. However, she also confides in me that “women are almost being discriminated against when it comes to dealing with patients’ psychosocial problems, especially when it comes to more heavy cases. They get to do it because they are woman physicians.” Here, woman physicians’ problem of running out of visiting time becomes not primarily a question of how (different) women and men are, but rather of the different conditions and expectations they are faced with in their everyday professional work.

As indicated above, woman physicians’ problems distancing themselves from patients and others in the professional context, thus (re)presenting themselves as credible and proper physicians, need to be related to the view of women’s (care) availability as a natural woman’s quality, discussed above. To shed some light on this relationship, I now turn to the pregnant body and pregnant embodiment in the medical professional context.
Pregnant and/or professional?
The woman physicians describe in detail how they talk, move and
dress their bodies to blend in as professional physicians and how
they experience (bodily) discomfort, and sometimes shame, when
they fail to do so (cf. Sheppard 1989). These accounts indicate
experiences and an awareness of the (female) body as problematic
and, as such, the importance to tone it down when in a profes-
sional context.

How to tone down and avoid drawing others’ attention to the
(female) body is brought to a head in relation to the pregnant body
(Longhurst 2000). As Anna, a surgeon in her 30s, states: “you can’t
get rid of a pregnancy bump when giving a lecture”:

A: You can drape it in black, so to speak, but… I don’t know if you draw
the attention from the overheads […] It’s just, kind of, it’s inappropriate.
Yeah, it’s as if it disturbs the picture…
K: The picture of what?
A: Well, I don’t know really. But you should be more like the ‘male flock’ I
think.

In her story, Anna expresses the experience of her pregnant body as
“inappropriate” and disturbing – as a “matter out of place” (Douglas
1984: 36). Interestingly, her experience and explicit awareness of
having and being a faulty body in the given professional situation
does not seem to be paired with any clear conception of how or
why she – her pregnant body – is wrong and inappropriate. Thus,
through her body, Anna challenges and violates ideal body and
professional boundaries and in doing so experiences rather than
intellectually acknowledges the implicit unmarked professional
body, i.e. the proper (re)presentation of a professional lecturer in
medicine. Anna goes on, telling me about her efforts to dress to “appear” less “provocative” (and pregnant) and more surgeon-like:

You didn’t wear anything big and flowery when giving a lecture. I wore some sort of black blouse. I think it had also something to do with experiencing yourself as big and... maybe provocative. [...] I think men are provoked by the fact that women manage being pregnant and go on working. I think it bothers them sometimes.

Anna’s worries and anxiety of being “provocative”, pregnant and “big”, and her various attempts to conceal her growing belly imply, to my understanding, once again the experience of having and being a problematic body, a provocative body out of control, taking up (too much) space, literally and professionally – a marked body trying to conform to “the organization’s disciplined bodily basis” to be(come) an un-marked professional body (cf. Bailey 1999: 342, Longhurst 2005: 440–443).

Dragging the body and the personal into the workplace, the pregnant woman also violates the separation of personal and professional life (Bailey 2001), as illustrated when a woman physician expresses a desire for more man gynaecologists and obstetricians, explaining:

For one thing, I believe that an even sex ratio is good. It makes it more fun. Furthermore, men are gender-neutral. They do not advertise their sexuality and re-productivity. That’s of course good in cases of infertility and when you’re dealing with issues of reproduction. It’s definitely something else when a woman physician, with a big bump, is to discuss these issues with infertile women or couples. (Field note, Nov. - 97)
This physician’s explanation seems to imply that, through her body, the pregnant physician advertises her (hetero)sexuality and re-productivity. This strongly gendered and private matter – a “matter out of place” (Douglas 1984: 36) – intimizes and privatizes the professional situation in an inappropriate and provocative way, according to the physician. Signifying private matters such as the body, sex, sexuality, reproduction and emotions, the pregnant body (not unlike the patients in question) challenges and simultaneously highlights the proper body (re)presentation of a credible physician with professional authority.

The pregnant body is furthermore a deviant and problematic sign in relation to both colleagues and patients, not least within the medical field of surgery. In her study on hegemonic positions and negotiations of professional identity within medicine (during education), Trine Annfelt (1998) points out three recurring and hierarchically organized images of the physician in which “the ruler over life and death” is attributed the highest prestige. She argues that, and shows how, this image is co-constructed with the (re)presentation of the surgeon and a hegemonic masculinity characterized by physical and mental strength, etc. (Annfelt 1998: 147–171, cf. Eriksson 2003). How to be and (re)present oneself as “the ruler over life and death” while having and being a pregnant body – a body signifying both physical and mental instability and fragility – is thus far from self evident. Talking about her professional experiences, Anna clearly indicates how her pregnant body undermines her position and professional credibility as a surgeon.
Anna: I was really huge back then and I went there [an international medical congress], where they are maybe a bit more conservative, even more conservative. When I walked around at the congress people stared at me as if I were an alien (laughter). And then, when I talked to people and they heard about my work, that I was a general surgeon, they just shook their heads. No, they didn’t get it at all. That was a bit awkward.

Foreign men can sometimes be a bit challenging, especially when I was pregnant. It was hard on some. […] This patient had an inguinal hernia that I was to evaluate since I was doing the operation. But when he saw that I was a woman and nine months pregnant, he snapped, or, well, he just refused. He could not believe that I was a surgeon and, well, he left the surgery, in spite of the fact that I had explained that I was one of the head surgeons. So, that was a bit awkward. […] I think it was just too much to him and, also, I was really huge so, it probably looked provocative.

The problematic relationship – the incongruence – between being and having a pregnant body and (re)presenting a credible professional surgeon recurs as a theme throughout Anna’s story. Through the lack of correspondence between a heavy sign of femininity (the pregnant body) and a sign of masculinity (surgeon), Anna’s provocative pregnant body undermines the credibility of her surgical physicianship. The combination of these clashing signs creates a cultural reference chain of incongruent and provocative meanings, resulting in feelings of unease (cf. Søndergaard 1994 & 1996). And, as discussed by Entwistle (2001), feelings of discomfort and shame are not only about clashing signs, but also about the person’s misbehaviour and “an expression of the failure to live by the moral in the social room” (Entwistle 2001: 48). Thus, in her twofold (re)presentation – the pregnant woman and the tough sur-
geon – Anna challenges the notion of the fragile pregnant woman as well as that of surgery as the toughest and most demanding speciality in medicine (Eriksson 2003: 122–124, Longhurst 2000: 461). Anna recalls another “pretty strong experience” of being and having a body out of place:

It was awesome! I remember one morning, doing the morning rounds, we, three pregnant women, entered the room. It must have looked pretty funny and none of us was particularly tall and we were all very big. I think that was a pretty strong experience. One should almost have taken a picture. There was a lot of discussion about this at the time, that there was some sort of contagious epidemic (laughter).

Through the metaphor “epidemic”, the pregnant body becomes a deviant morbid feature in the professional context – a contagious body, threatening to seep into and infect others (cf. Draper 2003: 748). The pregnant physician is hereby associated with bodies in need of medical treatment (object), rather than with the physician practicing his/her profession (subject); the private, sexual and reproductive woman is thus distinguished from the contained professional physician. Anna’s bump also became the object of “a lot of discussion” among the staff, as well as of their concern and touching. Her experiences make more or less explicit other people’s expectations of her pregnant body being available – and her preparedness to be available. “People came up to me and said ‘I just have to touch your bump’. Not that I minded, but it was different.”

The pregnant woman as fragile and in need of care – and control – was also part of my own experience of pregnant embodiment. Overall, my field notes from the last two months of obser-
vation reveal several examples of how my growing belly became available to, and the object of, others’ attention, touching and comments, and I became the object of their increasing consideration and care. Some of their comments, “You don’t get to see too many horrible things now, while you’re pregnant?”, “Are you up to taking the stairs?”, and the concerned question from a candidate when performing an X-ray: “Should you really be in here right now?”, bring the question of my individuality and jurisdiction over my own body to the fore. Was I the object of their consideration, or was it the foetus? And am I (or is the foetus) being cared for and/or is my behaviour being implicitly criticized and policed? My body simply became available, and of public concern, in a way that would hardly have been the case had I not been pregnant.

Pregnant bodies also become the target of – and available for – jocular comments. Draper suggests that in the professional context the use of humour and jokes can be seen as a way of symbolically concealing unprofessional bodily processes and dispersing the pregnant body’s “potential for pollution and danger” (Draper 2003: 758). Pregnancy as contagious was a recurrent theme during my fieldwork, often provoked by the presence of more than one pregnant body in the same room:

Man surgeon enters nurses’ office. Looks at my bump, then at the secretary [also pregnant], and finally, addresses the woman physician [not pregnant]:
Oh dear, oh dear… well, well… My God! And you dare to be here?!
Woman physician: Yeah, it’s alright. It’s not contagious you know.
Man candidate (also present): Are you sure?!
Woman physician: Maybe I should be wearing mouth or radiation protection, just in case! (Field note, March -98)
Furthermore, a surgeon (man) commented that I had been following and observing several of the physicians on their daily rounds at the clinic by saying: “You must have been with everyone?!” A woman colleague instantly replied: “So she’s been with everyone? Is that why she’s in the state she’s in?! (laughter)”. Needless to say, the jocular implication of my previous heterosexual activities – and my own laughter at the time – did little to confirm or strengthen my professional position or credibility.

Finally, I will round off as I started, with another situation and experience that still sticks in my mind – and my body. Eight months pregnant, I was making my final observations in the field when my ambiguous and considerably huge – probably provocative – pregnant body triggered a chief physician to challenge me and test what I was made of. As “the social boundaries from both within and beyond” (Bailey 2001: 121–2) my body were being dissolved, I experienced an erosion and invasion of my personal as well as professional space and integrity.

May 1998. I am eight months pregnant, sitting in an operation theatre observing and taking notes on the surgeons’ practices and procedures during surgery. Just as I have another toffee to alleviate my sickness, the head surgeon approaches me with a bowl in his hands. He places it one inch under my nose, making it impossible for me not to see and catch more than a whiff of the bloody, mucous and addled piece of malignant organ he just removed from the body on the bunk. With a confident smile on his face, carefully registering my reaction, he says “And what do you make of this?” (Field note, May -98)

It is difficult to see this incident and the surgeon’s actions as anything else than a demonstration and manifestation of power. It
was, in my understanding, a deliberate and effective way of constructing and manifesting his superiority and – simultaneously – my subordination; a process of ordering and hierarchization than involved our positions as professionals (surgeon-researcher in social science), bodies and gender.

Concluding discussion

In this article I have considered some aspects of the symbolic body and the experience of pregnant embodiment within a medical professional context. In general, physicians disassociate themselves from phenomena with private connotations, such as body, sex and sexuality. However, when it comes to the pregnant body/woman it seems as though the boundary between the professional and the private can be – and often is – transgressed. In the professional context in question, the private pregnant body/woman becomes a public concern, available for others to touch, comment on, joke about and “try out” (cf. Draper 2003, Longhurst 2000, Mullin 2002). The pregnant body is furthermore, as stated earlier, “a body that is clearly marked as having participated in sexual intercourse” (Longhurst 2000: 463); it is a sign of (previous) heterosexual availability, i.e. a sign interpreted as having been involved in heterosexual activity. Also signifying care availability (in the near future), the pregnant body can be seen as the incarnation of women’s heterosexual benevolence (Brantsæter 1992).

The examples and discussion above convey a picture and understanding of the pregnant and private body as one lacking distinct boundaries: a private body that threatens to overflow, invade and break in the professional arena and that thus needs to be controlled. Given the examples and discussion above, I argue that in their everyday doings physicians are constructing, policing and liv-
ing in/appropriating gender behaviours and identities, regulating normative masculinity and femininity (Gill, Henwood & McLean 2005: 37–38). As one woman surgeon noted: “We are expected to be a bit nicer and happier and not take up space, not put our foot down and things like that.”

Visibly pregnant physicians thus challenge and transgress professional and cultural gender norms prescribing how much – or little – space an actor with female body signs is allowed to occupy and how (un)controlled she can be when, or without, challenging the boundary between the private and the professional. In various ways they challenge symbolic boundaries for women and the socially and professionally defined room they – as women – are to manoeuvre within.

To conclude, the discussion of the recurring identification between availability and femininity in relation to the pregnant body and pregnant embodiment casts some light on how the body, in everyday life situations, becomes a heavy cultural symbol and a silent, albeit material, argument for and naturalization of cultural expectations and norms of women’s availability to others and women’s and men’s respective room to manoeuvre. The pervasiveness of women’s availability – at work, in organizational practices, in mothering, in social contexts and its inscription on the body (embodiment) – makes this cultural norm a characteristic of proper, normal women. And in the professional context women’s availability is, on the one hand, a “women’s qualification”. On the other hand it is, as shown in this article, a qualification clearly at odds with the (re)presentation of professional credibility and authority.

Reading the pregnant body and pregnant embodiment thus makes visible the invisible specific body, gender and professional
boundaries, conditions and spaces that women and men, respectively, constantly face, live and act within/from in their everyday lives (cf. Bromseth, this volume). This visibility does not, however, necessarily make the pregnant body and pregnant embodiment any less ambiguous. Longhurst captures this eloquently when she states that specific meanings of “gender, performativity, and spatiality meld into a myriad of ways in/on the site/sight of the pregnant body. And yet, pregnant bodies are often talked about as though they are simply and unproblematically natural” (Longhurst 2000: 461).

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Part II:

Body Scripts
A Being of Two Leaves – On the Founding Significance of the Lived Body

Introduction
Our bodies provide perhaps the most solid and concrete dimension of our self-experience. When we are in ecstatic pleasure or excruciating pain, when we blush in shame or feel chills running over our skin, when we push ourselves past our limits and eventually discover new ones, when we feel and see the signs of ageing, of change as well as permanence, our bodies are immediately present as central to our subjective lives and to a sense of place in relation to others. Our bodies are also the site of external markers of identity, ascribed by ourselves as well as by others; they are cultural artifacts that are continually exhibited and exposed in both old and new fashions. The ways our bodies are marked, visibly or invisibly, constitute the basis for group formation, for drawing lines of demarcation that include certain bodies and exclude others, and that make inclusivity something of an exclusive affair. As marked to matter or not matter, bodies expose our vulnerability and are constantly, in different ways and with different senses of urgency, made manifest as threatened forms of human subjectivity. Ethnic cleansing, war rape, moral stigmatization and criminal prosecution of homosexual desire, honor killings, hate crimes, and domestic violence are only some examples of bodies pressingly demanding our ethical and political attention.
While providing grounds for identity and group formation, our bodies are at the same time characterized by a fundamental indeterminacy and they continuously escape given categories of representation. In point of fact, “the body” does not exist, whether it is for instance “the biological body”, “the female body”, “the Latina body”, “the disabled body”, “the lesbian body”, or, lo and behold, “the white, male, able-bodied, heterosexual body”. This indeterminacy of our bodies has taken center stage in recent feminist theory of the body and embodied subjectivity. Contesting the idea that the female body can be easily identified and contained, many feminist thinkers are concerned with exploring how bodies are lived at the limits and margins of established categories of identity. The sexed body can no longer be taken as the foundation for feminist theorizing, for the way bodies are sexed depends on a multitude of other factors such as race, age, weight, disability, sexual orientation, social and cultural position, etc. Further, bodies are not simply represented through the demands of their surrounding temporal and spatial context; rather, as Elizabeth Grosz, for instance, convincingly argues, bodies are actively produced in their spatial and temporal context as bodies of determinate types (1994:x).

Even though “the body”, strictly speaking, cannot be said to exist, we can, and should, nevertheless say something about the structures of embodiment and explore what founding significance the body might still have. If we say that our singular bodies shape the different ways we experience the world and come to understand and know our surroundings, then we must inquire into this fact of our embodiment, i.e., that it is constitutive of experience, understanding and knowledge. Such an inquiry is precisely what I am concerned with here. In the following, I will argue for an
understanding of embodiment as the very condition of possibility for any categorization of bodies, such as “the biological body”, “the female body”, “the Latina body”, “the disabled body”, or “the lesbian body”. In order to bring to light the foundational structure of the body and its relation to the world I will turn to the phenomenological notion of the lived body, specifically the way it is described and developed in the writings of the French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty. I am not concerned with specific representations of the sexed body or even with any given specificity of what the sexed body is. I am not interested in categorizing the body as an object for any science, whether natural, human, social, or cultural. My concern is rather how to understand the body as it is given to itself and constitutes the very foundation for perception, knowledge and reflection, which in turn give rise to categories of description and analysis. The human body is, to speak with Sara Heinämaa, “ultimately not an object of knowledge, but a precondition for all objects and all knowledge claims” (1996:291).

The lived body

As is well known, Merleau-Ponty rejects an understanding of the body in strictly naturalistic or mechanistic terms in favor of the lived body. He inherits and develops the notion of the lived body from the philosopher Edmund Husserl, who provides extensive analysis of the structure of the body and makes the now classic distinction between two different ways in which the body can be experienced, as a physical thing under an objectifying descrip-
tion (Körper) and as subjectively lived (Leib). This well-known distinction and the notion of the lived body offer a way to move beyond a dualistic thinking of the human being divided into mind and body, by taking into account the body as it is subjectively lived and by understanding consciousness as fundamentally incarnate.

Its potential of disrupting the mind-body dualism is one reason feminist thinkers have been eager to explore the notion of the lived body as a fruitful venue for theorizing sexual subjectivity and identity. As one of the key figures in feminist phenomenology, Heinämaa argues, for instance, that a phenomenology of the body offers promising possibilities for theorizing about the meaning of the notion of “woman” since it introduces theoretical concepts that refuse to abide by familiar dichotomies (1996, 1999, 2003).

In agreement with Heinämaa, Silvia Stoller suggests that Merleau-Ponty’s account of the lived body provides an understanding of difference in terms of a process of differentiation that resists the reification of categories of identity (2000).

Merleau-Ponty describes the lived body as “a being of two leaves, from one side a thing among things and otherwise what sees them and touches them”. This double belongingness, he writes, “reveals to us quite unexpected relations” between the orders of the subjective and the objective and it forces us to give up any unambiguous distinction between them since “each calls for the other”

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1 The distinction between Lieb and Körper can be understood in several ways, e.g., as the distinction between the inner experience of my own lived body that is immediately and directly experienced as mine, and the outer perception of any physical thing including the bodies of other people; as the contrast between the specific body of an existing person, and the anonymous and impersonal body-thing studied by science; or quite simply as the distinction between the body-subject and the body as object (Behnke, 1996:139).
The ambiguous relation between the two leaves of touching and touched makes up the phenomenon of double sensation, which is unique to lived embodiment and which holds a key position in Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy. He repeatedly returns to it throughout his writings in establishing the structure of the lived body, its relation to the surrounding world and other people, and its foundational role in understanding and reflection. For Merleau-Ponty, the figure of my two hands touching, which illustrates the phenomenon and experience of double sensation, is the figure upon which all other forms of reflection are modeled (Merleau-Ponty 1968: 204). It is thus in this figure that we will ultimately find the source of the possibility of signification and language through which we come to categorize different bodies in different ways as female or male, feminine or masculine, black or white, young or old, thin or fat, etc. Whether this categorization is made in biological, cultural, social, geographical, neurological, historical, or any other terms or combination of terms, it entails marking specific features and qualities as those that will determine how to name a specific body and how to make that body visible as an object of experience and knowledge.

Prior to any name or categorization, the phenomenon of double sensation is a fact of the lived body, already there, and has a founding significance in the sense that it conditions not only the

2 Elizabeth Grosz expresses a similar point when stating that the body “is never quite reducible to being merely a thing; nor does it quite manage to rise above the status of thing” (1994: xi).

3 Dillon points out that the phenomenon of the lived body in its reflective, self-affecting structure of sensing and sensed provides Merleau-Ponty with “the clue to a new ontology” (See Dillon 1997: 131, 157. Also see Merleau-Ponty 1962: 93, 1968: 271). The description of double sensation and the image of the touching hands are critically approached by Luce Irigaray in her reading of Merleau-Ponty’s ontology. The image is transformed and taken further in Irigaray’s description of self-affection and her image of two lips speaking together (Irigaray 1993).
possibility of naming, but, moreover, the very possibility of experience. Although it is the same lived body that manifests itself as both sensing and sensed in the phenomenon of double sensation, these two aspects of the body are never simultaneous. Rather, according to Merleau-Ponty, the two aspects of my body present “an ambiguous set-up” of alternating roles (Merleau-Ponty 1962: 93). Embodied self-reflection, he writes, “always miscarries at the last moment” and “coincidence eclipses at the moment of realization” so that when the touched hand starts touching, the touching hand correspondingly alters into the role of touched (Merleau-Ponty 1968: 9, 147, 260f.) Although the touching and touched never completely coincide, they flow over into one another, each having the same capacity, each being of the same flesh, of the same lived body. Each aspect carries the other as an horizon into which it collapses and from which it escapes. It is precisely in this ambiguous dual structure that the unity of the lived body is conditional of the possibility of experience. My very self-awareness is predicated on the fact that I never quite coincide with myself, but as one, embody two aspects in reversible relation, thereby continuously differentiating myself from myself. The phenomenon of double sensation is a matter of being open to myself in such a way that I distance myself from myself. The drawing together of touching and touched, Merleau-Ponty writes, “at the same time takes away and holds at a distance, so that I touch myself only by escaping from myself” (Merleau-Ponty 1962: 408. cf. 1968: 249, 254; Vasseleu 1998: 29).

The element of non-coincidence is necessary for the lived body to be sensible to itself; without distance or differentiation, experience would not be possible since experience is always a relation between the experiencing and the experienced, even on a level at which these two are not clearly defined (Merleau-Ponty 1968: 147, 260f.)
Here it is important to differentiate between, on the one hand, the experience I have of external objects in the world, from which I explicitly distance myself in the process of objectification, and, on the other hand, my most intimate, subjective experience of myself in which I am at one with myself. In the first case, there is an obvious distance between my own body and objects external to my body that I can reflect upon, describe, and make claims about in different ways. In the second case there is no such obvious distance between the dimensions of sensing and sensed of my own body, since they are both dimensions of one and the same body. The hiatus or hinge in the chiasmatic crossing between sensing and sensed is, as Merleau-Ponty writes, “not an ontological void” but “spanned by the total being of my body” (1968: 148). Although embodied existence is certainly one and at one with itself on a fundamental level of self-affection, it is important to recognize the self-relational and self-affective structure of this one-ness, which allows for and demands its own moment of differentiation opening up for higher forms of reflection and objectification. A completion of this reflexive movement between touching and touched in the structure of the lived body would, in fact, as Renaud Barbaras argues, result in the complete splitting of one’s own body. If, he writes, the body came to an actual coincidence, in terms of a pure subjectivity, “this subject would not have a body” and “would not be its own body” (2004: 154). Instead, he continues, the body would “emigrate to the side of the objective world” and we would find ourselves right back in a strictly dualistic framework in which my own body is an object to which I in some way must attribute my own-ness in order for me to experience it as mine. What is brought out here is the insufficiency of reinstating the body in the order of the subject while not at the same time also rethinking
subjectivity in terms other than those of self-coincidence. Even if we do move beyond a strict mind-body distinction by way of the notion of the lived body, not much is gained if we do not also carefully think through the actual impact of embodiment upon the mind. Experiencing one’s own embodiment not only reveals that the body as a sentient thing is, as Barbaras puts it, “‘higher’ than the exteriority of the physical object”, in so far as even the most distanced self-objectification never succeeds in reducing one’s own lived body to the status of an external object. This experience also, and as a consequence, resists an understanding of the body as a pure subject in favor of understanding it in terms of an incarnate sensibility that unites interiority and exteriority (Barbaras 2004: 154f. cf. Busch 1992: 110).

It is not difficult to see how a recognition of the lived body as a self-relational unity founding experience has significant implications for theorizing the body beyond established categories of identity. Such a recognition is of key importance in any attempt to account for not only how bodies are given meaning and categorized in terms of sex, gender, sexuality, race, age, ethnicity, etc., but also how they are lived as and in relation to the ways they are signified. What is at stake in coming to an understanding of embodied subjectivity is precisely this node in which the relation between the interiority of subjective life and the exteriority of naming and categorization continuously reproduces and reconfigures its terms as separate from one another and yet intimately intertwined. The way embodiment is lived and experienced subjectively is formed by the way my body is given meaning in its specific spatio-tem-

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4 In *The Visible and the Invisible*, Merleau-Ponty describes the body as “a sensible for itself” and “an exemplar sensible” (passim).
poral situation and the way this meaning is communicated and transmitted is in turn formed by the way it is lived and articulated in singular instances.

**Situated and embedded in the world**

One of the reasons the notion of the lived body can be so fruitful in theorizing sexual subjectivity is that it brings out the situated character of the self and recognizes the complex interplay between interiority and exteriority. The lived body’s relational structure of touching-touched is not enclosed upon itself in complete isolation and does not end at the surface of the skin. Rather, embodied subjectivity is situated and embedded in a surrounding world, with which it is engaged in ongoing dialogue. The body, according to Merleau-Ponty, “is our general medium for having a world”; its thickness and two-dimensionality, instead of rivaling the thickness of the world, is the sole means by which I can reach and come to know things in the world (1962: 146; 1968: 135). Here, Merleau-Ponty rejects the idea that knowledge is only possible through detachment and dissociation from one’s body. Instead, he reinstates the body as the very condition of possibility for knowledge. By bringing to light the internal relation between the embodied self and its surrounding material world, he opens up the possibility for a notion of knowledge that takes responsibility for what it knows and a concept of objectivity that, in Donna Haraway’s words, is about “particular and specific embodiment and definitely not about the false vision promising transcendence of all limits and responsibility” (1996: 254). From feminist perspectives this move is pivotal, since the notion of ideal knowledge as detached objectivity is assumed to be reached through a transcendence of nature, matter, and body, which throughout history have been conceptu-
alized as feminine and often identified with the actual lived being of women. Women have thus effectively been denied the ability of transcending the body and of achieving knowledge. With his turn to the structure of the lived body, Merleau-Ponty demonstrates that the detachment and dissociation of objective knowledge in fact by necessity rest on the self-sensing embodiment of the knower. It is because my body touches itself and sees itself that it can also touch and see the world. In turn, since the world and things in it have a depth and dimension that go beyond a flat surface, they are only accessible to an embodied being and demand the embodiment of their perceiver in order for them to be perceived at all. As Donn Welton puts it nicely, it is “the very materiality of experienced things that demands that the body be characterized not as a physical body but as a lived-body” (1999: 44). Since everything that appears always appears for someone, and since what appears always appears at a certain distance and from a certain perspective, the experiencing subject must have a spatial location and the subject can only have this spatial location due to its embodiment. The embodied self, Merleau-Ponty writes, “takes its place among the things it touches, is in a sense one of them, opens finally upon a tangible being of which it is also a part” (1968: 133). This move of reinstating the body as the condition of possibility for all knowledge is important not only for the reason that it deepens our understanding of objectivity in line with Haraway’s suggestion. By

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5 Pointing to the fundamental embeddedness of the seeing subject in the seen world, a bit further on in the text Merleau-Ponty continues: “he who sees cannot possess the visible unless he is possessed by it, unless he is of it, unless, by principle, according to what is required by the articulation of the look with the things, he is one of the visible, capable, by a singular reversal, of seeing them – he who is one of them” (1968: 134f, italics in original). cf. 113: “The visible can fill me and occupy me only because I who see it do not see it from the depths of nothingness, but from the midst of itself; I the seer am also visible.”
removing us from the illusion that objective knowledge requires a detachment from our embodied situation and a strict separation between the knowing subject and the object of knowledge, it furthermore forces us to recognize that the knowing subject is never a neutral position. It unveils this normative neutrality as already sexed, thereby throwing light on the unmarked body and marking this as male and masculine.

Being embedded in the world is not something that is added to my being as embodied; instead, it is an essential dimension of my embodiment. How then am I, as embodied and embedded in the world, related to this world? It is quite clear that we are not in the world in the same way as a chair is in a room or water is in a glass. The relation of embodied subjectivity to the world must not be understood as the relation between the being of separate entities extended in space regarding their location in that space. In the same way as my body cannot be understood as a mere vessel for the mind, the world cannot be understood simply as a container for the lived body. And, it is equally misguided to view the mind as a vessel for either body or world. To speak with Merleau-Ponty, “We have to reject the age-old assumptions that put the body in the world and the seer in the body, or, conversely, the world and the body in the seer as in a box” (1968: 138).

Rather than having an external, objective relation to the world I, as embodied, find myself in a space in which I move freely and directly and which I navigate through my movement. I do not find my body, or parts of it, at one point of objective space and from there move it, or them, to another as I would an object. My experience of myself is not that of an ‘I’ standing in an external relation to my body or body parts. I do not have a body like I have a pair of reading glasses with which to see better, a fork with which to eat,
or a pair of sneakers with which to improve my cross-country running. As I use these tools, and others, they are rather incorporated with my embodiment in my situation. Here, we are reminded of Merleau-Ponty’s often quoted illustration of how the blind man’s stick has ceased to be an object for him and is incorporated as an extension or prolongation of his own body (1962: 143). The same applies to everyday experiences of, for example, navigating a bike through a half-closed gate, using the computer keyboard for typing an email message, or chopping vegetables with a sharp knife. I do not picture the bike, the keyboard or the knife as objects; rather, they are incorporated into my embodied situation, toward the goal of my movements.

While my embodiment is a necessary condition for me to be able to interact with the world, my own lived body would hinder this interaction if it were to stand out as merely an object before me. My own body is a necessary blind spot for me, making the rest of the world and objects perceivable. If I were to directly focus on and objectify each step I make when swirling across a dance floor, my swirl would be seriously inhibited. External perception and the perception of my own body is, as Merleau-Ponty writes, “immediately synonymous” as “two facets of one and the same act” but they are at the same time radically different. The body plays a constitutive role in experience by having the double feature of grounding perceptual awareness and at the same time remaining in its horizon; my body is at all times perceived and never leaves
me, but remains marginal to all my perceptions (1962: 205f, 90). The perception of my own body silently falls into the background of external perception and in an adverbial manner taints the perception of objects. Conversely, my external perception impacts the way I experience my embodiment in relation to the external world of which it is part. So, rather than first and foremost having a spatial meaning in terms of being extended in exteriority, my embodied being in the world is a matter of inhabiting and dwelling in a surrounding that through the very dwelling is and becomes familiar to me.

**Self-objectification**

Although our primary relation to our embodiment is one of simply being embodied from a first-person perspective, we do also have the ability to assume a perspective on our own bodies almost matching that of an outside observer, and we do this regularly in everyday life. In normal cases, this perspective is not separate from our first-person perspective, but, rather, stems from and rests on it. The grounding of our self-objectifying perspective in our embodied first-person perspective is what prevents us from ever perceiving our own bodies completely in the same way as we perceive things or other living bodies in the world. As Merleau-Ponty writes, in order to be able to observe my body as a thing in the world “I should need the use of a second body which itself

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6 In *The Absent Body* (1990), Drew Leder discusses the effacement of the lived body and argues that it is precisely this quality of self-concealment that is at the root of the tendency in Western philosophy to neglect or depreciate the body. By falling into the background, or becoming present mainly as an absence in our everyday dealings with the world, the lived body, according to Leder, actually invites its own neglect.
would be unobservable” (1962: 91). I cannot step out of my body and perceive it from all sides and distances, and there are parts of my body, such as my face, that I will never see without the help of a mirror. My own body as object can only appear or give itself to me in a restricted number of ways. And yet, at the same time, we must bear in mind that even though the experience I have of being an object in the world requires that I as a subject have this experience of myself, it is only by virtue of being visible within the world that I can also see the world and myself. My body is thus both what makes perception possible and what limits perception.

Merleau-Ponty insists that my first-person experience of my own embodiment involves the experience of being intersubjectively accessible precisely as embodied; how I experience my own lived body is intimately tied to how I experience my own body

7 As Merleau-Ponty puts it in Phenomenology of Perception, “What prevents its ever being an object, ever being ‘completely constituted’ is that it is that by which there are objects. It is neither tangible nor visible in so far as it is that which sees and touches”. And, a few pages later, he continues, “In the matter of living appearance, my visual body includes a large gap at the level of the head” (1962: 92, 94). In the former passage, Merleau-Ponty makes reference to Husserl’s then unpublished manuscript of the second book of his Ideas, in which Husserl points to this partial invisibility and writes that my own lived body is a “remarkably imperfectly constituted thing” (Husserl 1989: 167). The manuscript of Ideas II made such an impression on Merleau-Ponty that he described his reading of it as “an almost voluptuous experience” (Rojcewicz & Schuwer 1989: xvi). In spite of his enthusiasm, Merleau-Ponty only makes this one explicit reference to Ideas II in Phenomenology of Perception. Later in the work, he refers to “Husserl’s unpublished writings”. In the article “Maurice Merleau-Ponty et les Archives Husserl à Louvain”, published the year after Merleau-Ponty’s death, Hermann Van Breda recounts Merleau-Ponty’s visit to the Husserl Archives at the time of his preparation of the manuscript to Phenomenology of Perception. There is much written on Merleau-Ponty’s reading of Husserl. See, for instance, Fisher’s “The Shadow of the Other”; Tuedio’s “Merleau-Ponty’s Refinement of Husserl”; Merleau-Ponty’s Reading of Husserl, ed. Toadvine & Embree.

The restriction of perspective is of course also true regarding the constitution of objects. Although an object can be given to me in an infinite number of ways, my embodiment limits the number of ways I can perceive the object.
as it is open for the experience of others. Lived embodiment, he writes, reveals with clarity that the order of the subjectively experienced and that of the intersubjectively accessible call for one another and “to feel one’s body is also to feel its aspect for the other” (1968: 137). The way my body is perceived, understood and assessed by others will undoubtedly have an impact on the way I experience and live my embodiment. Particular and generalized others have a hold on me and partly determine who I am. In fact, the lived body is not only the outside manifestation of my intentions, but also a site for the inscription of social and cultural norms and values that I incorporate into who I am. Before I have said anything, my body has already silently spoken by being the carrier of meanings that go beyond any individual intention or creation, but are at the same time transmitted through individual embodiment. I am born into meanings of my identity that are not of my creation and that precede me by generations. To a large extent, these meanings are based on identifi able features of my bodily being. And, even though I might not completely identify with the meanings ascribed to my body by virtue of its sex, race, color, posture, age, size, etc., they are all the same part of who I am. I cannot deny that the identities and meanings I embody through the necessary situatedness of my existence are part of all that which makes up my selfhood. Since I am not the creator of the meanings into which I am born, there is always an aspect of my own being that eludes me but is nevertheless part of my being. When I am identified as

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8 It is perhaps somewhat misleading to say that identities and meanings are given to me through my situatedness, as if the me existed somehow without the given meanings. This is of course not what I am getting at here. Quite to the contrary, there is no me independent of the identities and meanings that make up the me, although the makeup of the me cannot be limited to the identities and meanings given from the outside.
a white, heterosexual, single woman in my mid-thirties I am in an important sense trapped in the signification of this identification in a specific spatial and temporal context, whether I am aware of it or not. Being aware of it can lead me to react against it and point out its insufficiency in describing who I am. Although, this awareness and active reaction can clearly be a strong potential for change, it is important to bear in mind that change or alteration is not only the result of awareness and reaction. In as much as my necessary situatedness implies that I am condemned to meanings that are imposed upon me from the outside and that play a major role in the shaping of my identity, it also implies a necessary, and perhaps involuntary, alteration of these meanings as they are lived out in singular embodiment.

The reaction against a certain outside objective determination of the self presupposes and is accompanied by the demand to be recognized as a self-determining subject. However, as we know all too well, neither subjective self-determination nor external determination is enough to give a satisfactory account of selfhood. The ambiguity of embodied selfhood must be found precisely in the fact that it includes both interiority and exteriority and that these dimensions are intimately interconnected with and co-constitutive of one another. Embodied selfhood is both self-determined and determined from the outside by external others. The recognition of this ambiguous structure of selfhood is clearly articulated by thinkers such as Frantz Fanon and Simone de Beauvoir, who in different ways express the predicament of selves constantly and urgently finding themselves emerging in the middle ground between an externally imposed meaning of what they are and their own subjective experience and expression of their identity. A more forcefully imposed objectification might in fact give rise to
a stronger recognition of the objectively identifiable part of selfhood as always part of the self and not something that can easily be shed in the name of subjective expression. However, this recognition will not as easily serve to do away with the feeling of being trapped in a body that hides who I am and that, at least initially, hinders me in my interaction with others. As we all know well, the experience of being hidden within the external shell of one’s body is not uncommon in different situations throughout life, but it is undoubtedly of a completely different caliber when one’s body is marked by disfigurement or as falling outside the bounds of normality.

Bodily inscriptions have a bearing on the first-person experience of embodied selfhood. They come to saturate and take a hold of the experience of embodiment and thereby in part give rise to the experiencing self. The processes of perception, reflection and objectification give substance to representation and specificity to our embodied and embedded being in the world, which provide the ground for these very processes. Recognizing intersubjectively

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9 On this, see my “Fashioned in Nakedness, Sculptured, and Caused to Be Born: Bodies in Light of the Sartrean Gaze” (Forthcoming). I am thinking specifically here of Frantz Fanon’s pointed, passionate, and, at times, wretched descriptions in Black Skin, White Masks of being caught within the “infernal circle” of the black color of his skin. A number of feminist thinkers have long expressed women’s situation of being trapped and determined first and foremost by their sex. Here, Simone de Beauvoir’s analysis of woman’s condition as Other in The Second Sex stands out as groundbreaking and foundational as it brings out woman’s otherness as being multi-dimensional and as encompassing all that which normative male and masculine identity excludes.

The objectification of one’s own body takes many different forms but is perhaps most pressingly made manifest when the body is experienced as dysfunctional in one way or another. In cases of pain, injury, disease or social ostracism, for instance, the body comes out of hiding and instead of effacing itself toward the aim of its actions, stands out as a thematic object demanding immediate and undivided attention, making what was previously important fall into oblivion.
determined meanings as an essential part of my being is not to say that these meanings account for my entire being. Quite to the contrary, meanings inscribed on me from my surroundings are intertwined with my own subjective self-determined articulations of my identity and generate my own specific style of being.\(^\text{10}\) While the force of these inscriptions should in no way be exaggerated at the expense of the freedom of each individual self, it would be equally wrong to deny its impact on lived selfhood. In fact, insofar as subjectivity is always embodied, it depends on these meaningful inscriptions for its very existence. The fracture within the lived body, between that which is subjectively experienced and that which is inscribed from the outside, stems from their original relation of mutual impregnation and entwinement.

**Conclusion**

Turning to Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenological descriptions of the lived body, my aim here has been to show how lived embodiment constitutes the condition of experience and knowledge and thereby of any possible categorization of human bodies, whether in terms of sex, gender, sexuality, race, age, or something else. Even the categorization of the human body as a lived body is conditioned by lived embodiment prior to its categorization. Any attempt at categorizing the self-sensing structure of the lived body will ultimately fall short. Lived embodiment continuously escapes representational categories and cannot be originally grasped by reflection, but it is nevertheless only through reflection that the insufficiency of representation and reflection is realized. It is only by

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\(^{10}\) As Merleau-Ponty writes, “others, such as they are or will be, are not the sole judges of what I do. If I wanted to deny myself for their benefit, I would deny them too as ‘self.’ They are worth exactly what I am worth, and all the powers I accord to them I give simultaneously to myself” (1973: 85f, italics removed).
naming something as something that I can make it visible and represent it in different ways, but the moment I name something as something it slips out of that name. In this respect, the lived body as it is lived rather than described is characterized by a fundamental indeterminacy while at the same time being a solid dimension of experience and providing an immediate and unquestionable presence of the self to itself.

Here my concern has not been to categorize the body as an object that can be described as having certain features such as a sex, a race, an ethnic background, an age, etc. My concern has rather been to describe the way the lived body in its universality, lived embodiment as such, is given to itself and founds the possibility of experience and knowledge. Such descriptions can in turn enable us to understand the structures and processes of categorizing bodies in specific ways. Careful description of the structure of the lived body and its relation to its surrounding world and others can facilitate our understanding of the constitution of subjectivity as relational and as endlessly emerging at the intersections of numerous dimensions of meaning. The notion of the lived body has the advantage of bringing together various dimensions of subjectivity as they are interrelated and does not necessitate the breaking out of, for instance, gendered or raced aspects. A shift of focus from the body determined from an external third-person perspective in terms of, for instance, a biological entity or a social construction, to the body as it is lived and immediately experienced in its relation to the world and others puts us face to face with the dynamic structure of embodiment and raises questions of how to understand the very becoming of the lived body.

Claiming with Merleau-Ponty that lived embodiment constitutes the condition for perception, knowledge, and reflection is not
a way of invoking the body as a stable ground separate from and untainted by discursive meaning and reflection – quite to the contrary. The lived body, as we have seen in the descriptions above, is not isolated from its surrounding world but rather situated in the midst of this world and saturated with its multitude of meanings. The lived body is only a lived body by virtue of its situated character and is foundational to reflection as already emerging in a field of knowledge and reflection. Knowledge, language and categories for thought and description settle and are sedimented in bodies in the world where they come to form the background through and against which new knowledge and categories are brought forth in reflection. As Linda Alcoff so rightly points out, Merleau-Ponty’s account of lived embodied subjectivity “allows us to understand how it is constituted by and through historically specific cultural practices and institutions” without isolating these practices and institutions from the way they are expressed in and also express embodied realities (2000: 263). As foundational and conditioning perception, knowledge, and reflection, the lived body is no mere passive surface upon which meaning is inscribed; nor is it solely an active force whose trajectory is already determined by the seeds of its constitutional make-up. The notion of the lived body challenges any such reductionism attempting to determine the ontological status of the human body in terms of either an untainted *tabula rasa* or a pre-determined and unchanging nature.

By calling into question the very framework that generates reductionism into either cultural or natural determinism, the notion of the lived body can help us in addressing one of the central issues at stake in recent feminist theories of embodiment, namely that of understanding the ontological status of the sexed body. Elizabeth Grosz expresses this issue clearly:
Is the sexed body (a body presumably given by biology) the raw materials of modes of social inscription and production? Or do modes of social inscription produce the body as sexually specific? Which comes ‘first’ – sexed bodies or the social markers of sexual difference? (1995: 69)

The issue at stake, described here, is thus one of primordiality and the ontological status of sexually specific bodies becomes a question of whether bodies are originally sexed as male or female or whether they are ontologically neutral and not marked by any sexual difference. These are not the only options, however. It would in fact seem that phrasing the question of the ontological status of sexually specific bodies in terms of an either-or to some extent misses the crucial point and fails to account precisely for the lived body that expresses singular articulations of sexual markings. Asking whether bodies are sexed as male or female prior to social inscription or whether the surface for social inscription is an unmarked and neutral *tabula rasa* rests on an understanding of human embodied existence as a strict dualistic structure that posits a surface that can be traced as an origin prior to social inscription. The problem is thus not one of whether the primordial surface is posited as neutral or sexed. Rather, what is problematic is the very positing itself of a primordial surface that can be distinguished from the inscriptions that give it symbolic identity and place it in society and culture.

But what about bodies sexed as specifically male or female? The body is, after all, perhaps the most forcefully used tool in stabilizing and naturalizing a binary, hierarchical configuration of sexual difference. The body is, to speak with Trinh T. Minh-ha, that which provides “the most visible difference between men and women” and since it is the only phenomenon that seems “to offer
a secure ground for those who seek the permanent, the feminine ‘nature’ and ‘essence,’” it remains “the safest basis for racist and sexist ideologies” (1989: 100). Given that the body carries the mark of sexual difference in such a forceful way, we must ask whether an inquiry into the meaning of sexed subjectivity does not require us to focus on the specificity of sexed bodies. Can we really shift focus as easily as I have done here from the specificity of the female body to the universal structures of lived embodiment and the specific ways these are brought to articulation? The answer, I believe, is both yes and no. Perhaps paradoxically, an inquiry into sexual subjectivity necessitates a shift of focus from the specificity of the female body precisely because this specificity seems to be so evident and unquestionable to experience. And, perhaps equally paradoxically, the shift of focus to the universal structures of lived embodiment that are brought to singular articulation and expression will bring to light the specificities of female and male bodies and reveal that they do not exhaust the possibilities of lived embodiment. Universal and particular dimensions of the lived body are not separate from one another. Rather, the specific, singular ways the universal structures of lived embodiment are instantiated and brought to expression would not be known in their specificity if they were not articulations of a universality that infuses them and can be recognized within them. This universality cannot be captured by categories of description or explanation, but is simply the fact of human existence of being embodied as a self-affecting unity in relation to the world and to other bodies.
References


Käll, Lisa Folkmarson (Forthcoming) *Fashioned in Nakedness, Sculptured, and Caused to Be Born: Bodies in Light of the Sartrean Gaze.*


Memories
I will start by recalling a memory from my stay with a family in a small country village in the region of Tigray where I was visiting Roman, a relative of a good friend, Aster. One day, like any other day during the stay, Roman, Aster and I were having coffee, served in the time-consuming manner of Ethiopian coffee tradition, which means washing and roasting the beans in front of the guests. In practice, this means that we were sitting and having a quiet chat about nothing and everything for hours. Since the world championship in football was being played at the time, the TV was usually showing images from different matches, and we sporadically followed the game at the same time.

Aster speaks English and interprets when needed, and sometimes Aster and Roman speak to each other in Tigrinya. As I am not able to follow the conversation even fairly well, I talk to one of the children through pointing and facial expressions. Sometimes I lose myself in thinking and daydreaming. As often happens during this trip, I think about what kind of world we live in. The poverty and harsh living conditions in Roman’s family are obvious, as are the intelligence and beauty of her and her children. The unfairness and global inequalities leave me with a huge “Why?”.

As we sit and chat, there is a distinct knock at the door. A young
woman with a child on her back enters the room. Her name, I learn later, is Sinait. She greets Roman first, then Aster. Familiar with the ritual, I stand up, making myself ready to say hello and perform the complex kissing of cheeks, but I find myself standing there unnoticed for a time. Sinait is standing with her back to me, and apparently didn’t notice me when she entered the room. I even have the time to start to feel, not neglected, but worried that I have done something wrong, as this feels like a demonstrative act, not greeting me but all the others.

When the child on Sinait’s back starts to cry, she turns around to pick him up. It then becomes obvious that she hasn’t seen me at all until now. I am most certainly two heads taller than she is. And on top of this, I am moving toward her to say hello, which probably adds to the tenseness of the situation. At the same moment as my body enters Sinait’s line of vision, her body immediately and unconsciously reacts to my presence. She flinches back and falls down on the stairway that separates the living room from the kitchen. Tears are pouring from her eyes. It feels like everything stops, and thousands of thoughts are running through my mind. I don’t understand. “What have I done? Why was she scared?”

After a while, Sinait sits down properly at, from what I understand, a “safe distance” from me. She speaks rapidly in Tigrinya. Looks at me. Cries a bit more. Looks at me again. After a while, her face turns into a big smile. I ask Roman if she is okay. I am not far from crying myself. Slowly, with the help of Aster, Sinait starts to tell her story. She recalls that when she turned around and saw me, she was struck by memories from her childhood without any warning. As a small child, she says, she fled with her family from their home, staying for a long time at a refugee camp on the border to Sudan. She says that when she saw me, she immediately remembered feelings,
smells and memories of the armed attacks that forced her family to flee from their village

I am stunned. “But why did the memories come back when you saw me?” I ask her through my friend. “Because, at the refugee camp, there was this woman, a ‘foreigna’. She looked just like you”, Sinait answered. “She gave me candy, and that’s why I remember her in particular. She was kind and helpful.”

Writing vulnerably
I recall this long passage from my personal trip, not to argue, of course, that white people are kind and helpful, or that Sinait was unaccustomed to seeing white people and thus make the silent claim to being the “first white in the village” or any of the kind of racialized comments that slip through in the everyday social fabric of whiteness. No, I want to go back to this moment as a way of writing vulnerably and to make full use of my own experiences of living in a white body (cf. Behar, 1996). Not as an introspective project, or reflexivity in and of itself, but because I believe, as Behar has beautifully stated, that writing vulnerably and with a personal voice opens for important and difficult social issues (Ibid.).

Indeed, the first somewhat naïve feeling of discovering the silence of my own racialized position later developed into a more mature sense of wanting to take an academic and political responsibility for deciphering the racialized position of whiteness and the layers of symbolism and power structures embedded in this memory. Throughout my journey, the gendered and racialized representations of bodies in the global circulation of visual images echoed as a set of standards and stereotypical figures to which my own bodily conduct and presence were compared. As a generalized body, preceding my particular body, this figure of the
white woman often granted me unwanted attention of extraordinary service or unjust privilege. It also felt like an entrapment, not in the sense of being trapped in any material sense, but rather trapped by the imaginary spaces my own body opens up in encounters, and by the spaces it closes down.

Like others, I believe that critical reflections on whiteness must resist the tendency of becoming “a safe space” for white researchers writing about racism (cf. Jackson, 1998), and instead move towards a responsible and critical anti-racist standpoint. Writing vulnerably can thus be one way of moving from the common position of “white guilt” and forcefully resisting any claim of a coherent white identity, instead carefully examining the conditions for one’s own privileges (Mohanty, 2003: 106). Being an anti-racist researcher and at the same time passing as “white” for me add up to a resistance to resting in a comfortable, distant position. Using crucial moments and memories for the purpose of opening up for formulations of a critical narrative of whiteness strikes me as a more ethical path of action from an anti-racist point of view.

In line with other works in the field of critical whiteness studies, I argue that the rhetorical silence of white normativity calls for a close examination of whiteness as an outcome of the active making of race, rather than a stable and fixed category (Best, 2003). Unmasking whiteness as a normative centre of racialized discourses and structures must always search to unmask the conditions for the reproduction of such a centre, as well as its detailed and fuzzy logic. At the same time, I have tried to be careful not to overuse this memory, but to instead see it as a starting point for a radical engagement in examining and destabilizing the positions of whiteness.
Reading Fanon
In a similar, though not comparable, passage in *Black Skin – White Masks (1967)*, Frantz Fanon recalls his discovery that in the eyes of the white passengers he “is” black and will always be so. One day on the train, a small child starts to make comments about Fanon’s body: “Look, a negro!” the child first says, and Fanon politely smiles back at the child. “Look, a negro!” the child continues, and Fanon calmly smiles back at the child. Then, after the third exclamation of “Look, a negro!”, Fanon explicitly makes it clear to the mother of the child that he is amused. But when the child hysterically continues, “Mom, look at the negro, I am afraid!”, the efforts of laughing away the child’s fear are gone. Fanon writes:

I could no longer laugh, because I already knew that there were legends, stories, history, and above all *historicity*, which I had learned about from Jaspers. Then, assailed at various points, the corporeal schema crumbled, its place taken by a racial epidermal schema.

In the train it was no longer a question of being aware of my body in the third person but in a triple person. In the train I was given not one but two, three places. I had already stopped being amused. It was not that I was finding febrile coordinates in the world. I existed triply: I occupied space. I moved toward the other… and the evanescent other, hostile but opaque, transparent, not there, disappeared. Nausea…

I was responsible at the same time for my body, for my race, for my ancestors. I subjected myself to an objective examination, I discovered by blackness, my ethnic characteristics; and I was battered down by tom-toms, cannibalism, intellectual deficiency, fetishism, racial defects, slave-ships (sic!), and above all else, above all: “Sho’ good eatin’.” (Fanon, 1967: 112)
When Fanon discovers his own blackness, or the blackness he is trapped in, he sees himself in the eyes of the scared child. The white gaze that reviews his body and creates him in third person, an effect of a web of told and retold stories and anecdotes. “The negro” as a concrete and generalized set of ideas and imaginings – told and passed on from generation to generation for several hundreds of years – crystallizes in a trivial everyday situation: a frightened child, a mother who fails to silence her child, and a man who walks out, angry and humiliated.

The influences of phenomenology and the idea of the lived body are evident when Fanon talks about the true dialectics of the body, which allows him to, for example, reach out his hand and hold a box of matches, as a body. But in the white gaze, another dialectic relationship, dictated by racism and racial thinking, is imposed on him — a dialectic, not between his body and the material world, but between the symbolism of his body and the white gaze. In this dialectic, it is no longer Fanon himself who moves or his body scheme that meets the world; instead, the layers of symbolism and historicity of his racialized body fold around him as a membrane between him and the world. The fixation of Fanon’s body replaces his embodied being in the world, and becomes the product of the white gazing that dissects him as he moves.

The violent racialization of Fanon’s black male body leaves him in an almost completely enclosed, or even claustrophobic, space where the generalized image of the black man again and again precedes him. The fatigue of a man, entrapped in a violently racialized body, soaks the text as he continues:

On that day, completely dislocated, unable to be with the other, the white man, who unmercifully imprisoned me, I took myself far off from my own
presence, far indeed, and made myself an object. What else could it be for me but an amputation, an excision, a hemorrhage that spattered my whole body with black blood? But I did not want this revision, this thematization. All I wanted was to be a man among other men. I wanted to come lithe and young into a world that was ours and to help to build it together. (Fanon, 1967: 112)

The first time I read this passage from Fanon’s book, it puzzled me to such an extent that for several years I returned to it and tried to sort it out in my mind. There was something in this intense discovery of the brutal and systematic force of racism and racialized mapping of Fanon’s body that left me with more questions than answers. After my own intense “discovery” of the symbolism attached to my body, I again returned to this passage several times, as a node for thinking about and examining what had actually happened that day in Tigray. To discover one’s own position in a racialized landscape, Fanon shows, is to meet the gazes of others, in the constant play between one’s own lived body and the scripts attached to this body by others (see Käll this volume). Through Fanon’s straightforward language, the social construction of race becomes evidently clear yet distressingly reinforced: “The Negro is not. Anymore than the White man is” (Fanon, 1967: 231). The constant play between releasing his own body from the racial dialectics and the essentialism drained in the categories of the time works, I believe, as an injection of analytical insight into the processes of racialization that install bodies with meaning and symbolism.
Silences

Evidently, white bodies are as full of symbolism and imaginative desires as are black bodies, but hold the particular difference of resting in a “rhetorical silence” (Crenshaw, 1997; Morrison, 1992). The told and retold stories and anecdotes that diminish the spaces of Fanon’s body have notoriously buffered and loaded the white body with a very particular symbolism that renders possible the normative powers of structural whiteness (Dyer, 1992). The use of the colour white itself has these normative functions, as it is often thought of as a non-colour and holds a set of values and symbolism that is regarded as positive: purity, trustworthy and so on. Indeed, the powers and privileges inscribed in being regarded as white have turned the white body into a powerful sign of power itself (cf. Dyer, 1992).

Thus, the white gaze that so forcefully positions some bodies as “the other body” in everyday life most often leaves other bodies as “the same”. But moreover, it also structures the frames and contexts of such a passing. As has been shown, passing as a Swede is intrinsically interwoven with passing as white (Mattsson, 2004, 2005; Sawyer, 2000; Lundström, 2007). Moving around in a white body in the Swedish society thus, most often, means the privilege of not being forced to reflect on one’s own racialized position. This means that the racializations of white bodies and the dialectics of reading a white body are most often silent.

Or should I say silenced? hooks (1992) has argued that while many “whites” live in the comfortable belief that their own bodies are neutral and objective – or even see the white body as a mark of neutrality and objectivity – the thoughts, dreams, fears and ideas attached to whiteness might be more evident to people who are not read as white. hooks points to the historical fact that slave
owners controlled and disciplined the gaze of black slaves and maids through punishment when they were caught in the act of gazing at their master. hooks argues that it is not uncommon that whiteness in the black imagining is attached to traumatic fear and anxiety, because of the historical and contemporary dominance exposed on others in the name of whiteness (hooks 1992: 169).

At the same time, white people can imagine themselves to be invisible in the eyes of black people. hooks writes that her white students often react with the same kind of naïve surprise that I have described, when black students and students of colour look upon them with a critical gaze (Ibid: 167). She ends by saying that “Their [the students] amazement that black people watch white people with a critical ‘ethnographic’ gaze, is itself an expression of racism” (Ibid.). It follows that the white body is a body that becomes unmarked only through ignoring, silencing and marginalizing critical observations and claims made about its marked status.

The figure of the “white body” and the constant silent reading and passing of bodies as “whites”, then, rests on the web of symbols and values attached to this imaginary body space. Sheshadri-Crooks proposes an understanding of how systems of racializations are founded on whiteness as ”a master signifier” (Sheshadri-Crooks, 2000: 20). At the same as it produces the logic of differential relations and enables the system, the master signifier remains “outside the play of signification” (Ibid.), which is a more eloquent way of saying that white bodies most often can escape blunt and outspoken racializations. Indeed, the unequal markedness of bodies is part of the structural reproduction of some bodies as normal and others as othered. I would like to add that the silent claims made about white bodies often escape close examination.
Encounters
So, going back to my encounter with Sinait (or should I say Sinait’s encounter with the symbolism of my body?): When Sinait reacted with tears at the mere sight of my bodily presence, this not only became one of many cherished memories from a personal vacation, but the layers of a generalized gendered and racialized symbolism attached to “the female white body” also imposed themselves on me as an urgent need for clarification. In her book Strange Encounters (2000), Ahmed argues that encounters or meetings are not only made in the present, but that there is always a historicity of an encounter, which holds traces of broader relationships of power and antagonism. All encounters, in Ahmed’s words, “reopen prior histories of encounter that violate and fix others in regimes of difference” (Ibid: 8).

Encounters never happen in a void, but are instead always loaded with past, present and future encounters. They stretch out in space and time and therefore become the most intriguing things. They cannot be isolated from the power relations and structures that made them possible, and are therefore installed with asymmetry and unequal powers of even defining the encounter itself. As Ahmed argues, a face-to-face encounter is never simply an encounter between two individuals facing each other, but rather involves and “presupposes other faces, other encounters of facing, other bodies, other spaces, and other times” (Ibid: 7). At the same time, she points to the absence of knowledge in encounters, which makes impossible any full control or prediction of its outcome. While simultaneously genuinely open and unable to foresee, encounters “involve both fixation, and the impossibility of fixation” (Ibid: 8).

Thus, being simultaneously structured (but never completely
structurable) and private (but never only private), every particular encounter always bears traces of the generalized encounters between pre-fixed figures of “strangers” and “the same”. These figures already operate in the encounter, Ahmed suggests, since the recognition of someone as a stranger is never about “anybody that we don’t know”, but rather a particular someone: “The figure of the stranger is far from simply being strange: it is a figure that is painfully familiar in that very strange(r)ness” (Ibid: 21). In a discussion of the same passage from Fanon, in The Cultural politics of Emotions, Ahmed (2004) suggests that emotions attached to certain bodies “work to shape the ‘surfaces’ of individuals and collective bodies” (Ahmed, 2000: 1). The white child’s recognition of Fanon as a frightening stranger thus paradoxically rests on the familiarity of the figure of the black man. It is in this way that the stranger only becomes a “figure” through proximity. It is known and recognized as frightening, not in a general sense of being frightened of anyone I have not seen before, but in a particular sense: the child’s fear of the male black body and the construction of male black bodies as dangerous bodies in Western cultures.

**Imaginings of white femininity**

Feelings, smells and memories were indeed attached to the presence of my body that day, and the encounter between Sinait and me echoed from encounters in the past, but Sinait’s reaction to my bodily presence was not one of antagonism or fear. The track of associations rather moved from my body to the image of a Red Cross worker from Denmark, and seemed to rest on a powerful ideological construction of white femininity. In an analysis of the globally mediated and iconized image of Princess Diana, Shome (2001) defines white femininity in a manner that I find helpful in
understanding the merged symbolism attached to my body. White femininity, Shome argues, is an ideological construction “through which meaning about white women and their place in the social order are naturalized” (Ibid: 323). The white female body, I would like to argue, has its own historicity, its own familiarity and strangeness: it holds certain emotions and resists others.

Through a diverse set of recurrent themes in the representation of white women, Shome argues, the position of white femininity has become the locus, the site, where racialized, gendered and heterosexualized boundaries are drawn, secured and scrutinized. Moreover, the figure of the white woman has been represented as a symbol of motherhood, a marker of feminine beauty, and a site and reproducer of national domesticity and unity (Ibid.). This figure is therefore central in the heterosexual reproduction of nations and “races” (Ibid.). The construction of white femininity therefore reflects negotiations and definitions of the same and the other, and of being both a gendered and racialized position, and it holds the somewhat paradoxical traces of being marked by both oppression and privileges (Carby, 1997; Hill Collins, 2000; hooks, 2000). Being both an insider and an outsider in relation to a racialized nation, this double-edged position is reflected in the ways representations of white female bodies are present almost everywhere, yet at the same time are silenced as a racialized symbol and norm.

Another theme in representations of white femininity has to do with its function of forming, naturalizing and seemingly rendering harmless the relations of white nations with other nations. White women’s involvement in travelling and international “charity work”, and the symbolism that has been attached to images of the helping and missionary white woman reaching out to people in need, Shome (2001) argues, plays a crucial role in naturalizing
imperialistic and colonial relations. In her analysis of the image of Princess Diana, she recalls the well known and widely distributed image of Princess Di walking around in a refugee camp in Angola, and images of Diana holding, carrying and touching sick and starving children, and points to this example of how the expansion of colonial logic is carried out by the image of a white woman missionary’s travels abroad:

The production of white femininity in relation to natives of “other worlds” continues to be a mode through which western cultural postcolonial modernity writes itself. Whether it is white women’s roles in international diplomacy, their images in discourses of human rights, or their civilizing missions in “developing” worlds, western cultural imperialism has needed the racialized and gendered domesticity of white femininity to enact its national masculinism in the project of imperialism. (Shome 2001: 333)

Hence, it was not by hazard that Sinait’s associations ran from my body to the well known image of a white missionary woman, but this is an example of how encounters are never made in a cultural or power-free void. Rather than installing white female bodies with fears, these imageries seem to install them with a strange, but familiar, symbolism of being detached from imperial and colonial relations of power (cf. hooks, 1992; Mohanty, 2003). As Shome (2001) argues, this is an imagining that plays a crucial role in the relations of imperialism and colonialism, since it translates relationships of power and domesticates them. The specific silences of the racialized symbolism of white female bodies must be understood in this way, I believe, as a way of silencing power structures and rendering them more difficult to grasp.
Visual whiteness

Still, there is one intriguing question I want to discuss. When Sinaït explained her reaction to my body’s presence, she explicitly (at least in the translated version) used the wording that the Red Cross worker “looked like me”. She was not only leaving me a space of individuality that I could fall back on, but was also upholding a significant difference between “being like someone”, as in sharing some characteristics, personal traits or cultural values, and “looking like someone”, as in sharing bodily traits and a having a similar bodily presence. This has made me think about the difference between sameness and similarity. In my view, borders and boundaries of difference are established through naming, categorizing and delimiting collectives of the same, thus separating them from collectives of the different. On the other hand, any notion of similarity will emphasize certain body markers and de-emphasize others, and in the construction of notions of physical similarity delimit bodies from other bodies. Of course, these processes are deeply interconnected and interrelated, but I believe that the analytical separation of the conceptual construction of “looking similar” on the one hand and “being the same” on the other can shed some light on the understanding of processes of racialization.

Race is a category with no biological or material ontological value – there is no such thing as natural or even stable racial categories, but as a socially constructed and culturally imposed category of thinking, race thinking still works as a system of privileges, evident in the difference in living conditions between people, places and nations. Rather than an evident and stable category, whiteness may be seen as a “discourse for racialized privileges which doesn’t correspond to any particular group of people” (Jackson, 1998: 105). It rests on arbitrary and historically produced boundaries
and geographically, the markers and signifiers used for delimiting
imaginary communities have varied, even if the construction of
the imaginary spaces of “whites” shows a rather remarkable his-
torical stability in the location of the core of whiteness to Europe
(Bonnett, 1998; 2000). The detailed boundaries and delimitations
of national communities thought of as “whites” at the same time
shows a remarkable flexibility (Dyer, 1997).

Whiteness, I argue, is a globally stretched-out norm, and
a locally situated privilege. Moreover, it attaches notions of the
somewhat amoebic imagined space of the transnational commu-
nity of “whites” and “westerners” to the micro-geography of the
white body; I thus propose the concept of “visual whiteness” for
understanding the cultural and symbolic processes in which white
bodies become racialized and installed with normative symbol-
ism. Visual whiteness, in my view, is a socially constructed and
reproduced bodily position, rather than a naturally given entity
or category.

Still, even if whiteness as a privileged position has no self-ev-
ident relation to physical looks, the foundations of the structural
powers of this racialized position still point at, and rely on, con-
structions of racialized bodies and bodily similarities. Thus, de-
spite the fact that it is culturally shaped and socially reproduced,
the bodily position of visual whiteness is occupied by certain bod-
ies more easily than others. For example, the visuality of bodies
is central in any process of structural discrimination and distribu-
tion of wealth, since it upholds a relationship between individual
bodies and generalized figures, and makes them possible targets
for privileges. One such privilege, I believe, is to be able to fall
back from the generalized imaginings attached to one’s body, and
escape the claustrophobic feeling of Fanon’s text, instead of being constantly deported and locked into the generalized version of oneself.

Regimes of looking
As a last step in this essay, I will propose that the deconstruction of a naturalized way of seeing bodies is crucial for understanding how the white body is transformed into a mobile source of power. Again, Sarah Ahmed (2000) offers an understanding of how this effect of similarity is produced and how bodies become marked by difference. Ahmed discusses “how ‘bodies’ come to be lived through being differentiated from other bodies, whereby differences in ‘other bodies’ already mark ‘the body’ as such” (Ibid: 41). She suggests that bodies, rather than being pre-existing signifiers of difference, become marked by differences, through techniques and practices of differentiations – in linguistic positionings as well as visual cultures. Difference, Ahmed claims, is not only found or located in a body, but “is established as a relation between bodies” (Ibid: 44). For example, images of bodily differences are often used as “a signifier for cultural difference”, in the same way that race is often given a metaphorical status to connote differentiated bodies in recent feminist work on the body.

Again and again, the raced body is thus given a sort of pre-discursive status (Ahmed, 2000), and the processes of racialization are dependent on a constant and repetitive reproduction of highly standardized bodily images in which the notion of similarity is constructed. For example, the repetitive images of white female bodies as representatives of beauty in the global circuits of TV shows and visual cultures actively create the notion of similarity and dissimilarity, rather than mirroring pre-existing physical dif-
ferences (Mattsson & Pettersson, 2007). Through “the powerful repetition of the norm” (Ibid.), notions of similarity become part of what Malmberg in this volume has called Body Normativity.

In a similar line of argument, Sheshadri-Crooks (2000) develops an understanding of the racialization of bodies in her book *Desiring Whiteness*. The reproduction of (dis)similarity, Sheshadri-Crooks argues, becomes naturalized through dominant and conventional visual regimes. Sheshadri-Crooks argues that the processes in which visual markers of the body become signifiers for race have even been left out of critical studies of race. This has contributed to the taken-for-granted status race has in many discursive-oriented studies of how imagined communities are reproduced. Sheshadri-Crooks criticizes theorists who define race as a system of classification, but rest on the presumption of bodily marks, and she asks for a theoretical engagement in the actual processes in which bodies become racialized and established as naturally given facts.

Race, Sheshadri-Crooks writes, must be thought of “as a regime of looking” and she concludes that “nothing about the body, its functions, its marks, or its sensations can be expected to carry any stable meanings across time and space” (Ibid: 19). Still, the body and its physical character, and visuality, rest at the centre of her analysis:

> While the visible references of race can realign visibility according to the historical need, the fact of visibility itself remains constant. (Ibid.)

This makes Sheshadri-Crooks’ approach helpful in my understanding of whiteness as a visual bodily position, but not a biological or essential one. Even critical gazes may uphold this distinction
and use, or try to use, the visuality of bodies for radical purposes. The lure of body visuality, I believe, is that it makes boundaries of sameness and differences accessible and recognizable. It creates the kind of close distance that the “familiar stranger” upholds, and can be used to spot the stranger or even make unconscious domestica-
tions of face-to-face strangers.

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In the end I can, somewhat relieved, conclude that it was not me
Sinait saw that day, but someone else: a particular someone cre-
ated through history and located in space, a highly concrete and
complex lived space, a symbol and a text, a carrier of historicity.
More painful is the insight that there is a part of my body that
is not me, yet is part of me, of my becoming in the world – a
membrane between me and the world: the white body as a mask
strapped onto white skin, simultaneously a powerful sign and a
historical accountability. So, while leaning on Fanon’s words, “The
white man is sealed in his whiteness. The black man in his black-
ness.” (Fanon, 1967: 9), I want to try to find a more visionary way
of ending this essay.

I see the radical potential of lifting the white body out of its
detached and naturalized space of distance, and engaging it in em-
bodyed practises in a local and grounded setting. The acknowl-
edgement of its normative powers can always only be a first, albeit
important, step. There is an academic and political responsibility
for destabilizing the silence of the white body in a manner that
opens up new spaces of radical constructions of sameness. Such a
radical claim of sameness exceeds the mere speaking of whiteness
and must be involved in creating notions of sameness in which no-
tions of similarity do not set the limit for community.

Like Fanon, I want to be a woman among other woman, drink-
ing coffee and chatting about nothing and everything, and live my body to its full extent. Indeed, after recovering from the raging emotions, we gradually moved back to drinking coffee and chatting about other things.

The TV is still running in the background. Cups are passed back and forth, and Roman is carefully serving the regular second and third cups of coffee. The two sons of the house, both around 8 or 9 years old, are watching the world football cup on the TV, sitting on the floor close to the television, to get a close look at the players. At the same time, they are also constantly turning their heads and gazing at me, amused by the visitors speaking English and by my bodily presence. I am again reminded of the difference between fear and wonder, between being forcefully racialized and curiously gazed at — of the impossibility of comparison, yet the constant need to compare.

References


If sexual orientation becomes a matter of being, then being itself becomes (sexually) oriented. (Ahmed 2006: 69)

Prologue
I had just started working for an anti-harassment organization in Sweden called Friends, and was accompanying one of my colleagues to a school to watch his lecture to the teachers on harassment. Before the lecture, we had coffee with the school’s principal, who told us enthusiastically that earlier the same day two school informants from the local lgbt organization had visited one of the classes.

Me: That’s interesting – actually, Friends is just about to start a project focusing on how to prevent harassment related to gender and sexuality that I will be working within.

Principal: Are you sure Friends should be working with these issues? Isn’t it better that they take care of this themselves?

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1 I want to thank Hanna Wildow, along with whom I collected the original material for the article, and Åse Røthing and Stine Helena Svendsen for fruitful discussions about the ideas developed in the article. Thanks also to the internal seminar at the Centre for Gender Research in Uppsala and to Katarina Mattsson in particular for constructive comments on the text itself.
This little dialogue stuck in my mind, because these few lines capture the very core of heteronormativity and classical identity sexual minority politics. On the one hand it tells us that it is the marked and othered bodies themselves who can best talk about ‘deviant sexuality’ because they ‘represent the lgbt group’. ‘This’ thus seems to refer to educating people about sexual minority identities and ‘authentic experiences’ from lived queer lives – not about sexuality in general. On the other hand, the use of ‘they’ in reference to non-heterosexual people indicates that the principal did not expect non-heterosexual bodies to exist in a mainstream anti-harassment organization like Friends, and consequentially neither myself nor my colleague were expected to be anything other than heterosexual. Nor was the organization we were working for expected to take any ‘special interest’ in what is positioned as obvious ‘minority issues’. Implicitly, the dialogue also says a great deal about the school as a heteronormative institution, the knowledge it should teach, and the bodies that are imagined to inhabit school spaces as teachers and pupils. When the representatives of the lgbt organisation comes to the school, then, their sole presence contributes with ‘something else’, with non-heterosexual bodies and experiences that are not seen as being there in the first place. This example is not unique or extraordinary in any way, but is rather in line with a range of studies concluding that non-heterosexual bodies are constituted as something other in the school space, and simultaneously (re)produce and constitute heterosexuality as the default norm (Kumashiro 2002, Lundgren & Sörensdotter 2004, Røthing 2007, Røthing & Svendsen 2008 and forthcoming, Martinson 2007, Reimers 2007, Martinsson & Reimers 2008, Epstein et al. 2003). This is also what my colleague and I found when we eventually set out to study how teachers, school leaders
and students at four Swedish schools did equal opportunity work at the schools where they spent most of their weekdays (Bromseth & Wildow 2007). Challenging traditional gendered representations and patterns of behaviour of boys and girls was at the centre, whereas teaching about ‘homosexuality’ was seen as a different matter that seemed to be difficult to find time for in teaching and strategies of change. As one teacher expressed it: “Sexuality [in teaching] is mostly about the right to your own sexuality, but it is usually heteronormative, we haven’t had time to talk about it [homosexuality] yet” (Ibid: 82).

Based on our study and other Scandinavian research, in this chapter I will look into how non-heterosexual bodies are sculpted and positioned in schoolbooks and teaching. Further, how are heteronormative constitutions of queer bodies in school spaces in Sweden connected to temporal and spatial dimensions? Where are queer bodies located, and how are they constituted and oriented in everyday practices?

**The school: a heterofactory**

The school is a ‘heterofactory’, as Rossi has called it (2003, cited in Røthing & Svendsen 2008), actively (re)producing a particular heterosexual identity and lifestyle as the valued norm through curriculum, teaching and learning practices, giving children specific frames of reference for how they should live their lives when they

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2 This article is based on a study that Hanna Wildow and I carried out for the Swedish anti-harassment organization Friends with support from Allmänna Arvsfonden, researching four schools’ strategies for change related to gender and sexuality norms (Bromseth & Wildow 2007). The material consisted of interviews with 35 teachers and school leaders and 40 pupils, and shorter periods of observations of teaching at each school. All schools were carrying out projects aiming to change gender norms in teaching and learning.
In Sweden today, this particular encouraged and privileged heterosexual lifestyle, which Gayle Rubin (1984) describes as society’s ‘charmed circle’ of valued heteronormality, is the heterosexual monogamous couple with children. Heteronormativity is based on the concept of hierarchical difference, by which a certain heterosexual lifestyle is privileged and other sexualities and non-normative lifestyles are systematically and repeatedly presented as deviant, less desirable and even as having less worth (Butler 1991). Further, difference always “exceeds singular categories since identities are already multiple and intersected” (Kumashiro 2002: 56). Difference is created through social and cultural practices, processes that Avtar Brah calls othering (1996). Othering simultaneously also constructs the boundaries of normalcy by naturalizing the norm and giving it a taken-for-granted firstness. In most situations, bodies and practices that occupy normative positions do not have to explain themselves or be described by adding extra labels. White, heterosexual, middle-aged, middle-class, functional bodies usually form the point of departure for deviance.

In Western countries, the processes of producing heteronormality as a socializing narrative in school contexts are character-
ized by a similar pattern. This is firstly done through actively encouraging certain (heterosexual) practices and ways of life by presenting them, explicitly or implicitly, as ‘natural’, ‘best’ and ‘preferred’. Secondly, it is accomplished through silencing, stigmatizing and morally judging non-heterosexual sexualities and lifestyles, as well as gender-subversive performances and identities, in different ways (Takács 2006, Epstein et al. 2003). A third aspect of reproducing heteronormativity that is common in Scandinavian schools is the discourse of ‘homo-tolerance’. In Sweden, same-sex couples have nearly the same legal rights to marriage and reproduction as heterosexual couples, and LGBT people are legally protected from discrimination, even in schools. A new law has placed strict requirements on the school to act against discrimination and work strategically to prevent discrimination on the basis of gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, ethnicity/race, religion, age and functionality. Hetero-privileging processes are thus only partly discursively explicit; morally degrading non-heterosexuality or directly harassing non-heterosexual people is seen as unacceptable (Reimers 2007, Røthing & Svendsen 2008). At school, there is a great deal of worry about pupils’ verbal homo-negativism and

5 Of course, how the school as an institution is heteronormative is inseparably entwined with national discourses of sexuality and moral values, human rights and laws, as the school is strictly regulated by the state.

6 The Act, 2006:67, ‘Prohibiting Discrimination and Other Harassing Treatment of Children and Pupils’, went into force April 1, 2006. Schools are obliged to have an equal opportunity plan for each of the seven reasons of discrimination and how they will work to prevent discrimination, as well as how they will act upon it acutely. What is quite unique with the law is that the child can take their school to court if it neglects its responsibilities according to the law, and the burden of proof is then on the school to prove that they have in fact been doing what the law requires of them in order to act upon the particular case of discrimination/harassment the child has been exposed to. If they cannot submit this proof, they are in many cases sentenced to pay compensation to the child.
harassment, as this collides with the value of being a good tolerant Swede/Norwegian (Reimers 2007, Røthing & Svendsen 2008). In the Swedish pedagogic guidance documents and strategies, the tolerance and acceptance of ‘other sexualities’ is portrayed as a desired value. This view is in line with what is communicated in the schools’ basic values, that are explicitly stated in the national curriculum for public education as forming the ground for all education in Swedish schools. It explicitly states that a school should teach “the equal value of all people” and “encourage solidarity for the weak and vulnerable” (Lpo 94, quoted in Reimers 2007: 30). As Eva Reimers puts it:

This means that when lgbt perspectives are motivated by one or several of these values, the focus is not on the heterosexual norm, but on deviations from the norm, and problems that can be expected to arise due to these deviations. This makes it into a discourse of tolerance, based on the notion of a normal and unproblematic majority who are encouraged to tolerate the divergent “other.” (Reimers 2007: 31).

Thus, heteronormativity in the school as an institution today takes on a more subtle form, hidden under a surface of tolerance, making the co-existence of homophobia (fear of one’s own homosexual desire) and homo-tolerance intelligible, Røthing and Svendsen.

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7 What is seen as ‘other’ is, however, limited to homo- and bisexuality as sexual desires. Other ways of creating social and sexual relations is not a subject, for example polyamorous relations.

8 What is interesting here is what is communicated by the Equal Treatment Law (2006) on the one hand, and the basic values in the national curriculum on the other. Both could be interpreted in a range of different ways, and the strategies for change applied to create equal opportunity vary, and can also be contradictory depending on the understanding of difference and norms.
argue (2008).\textsuperscript{9} Whereas a particular heteronormative lifestyle is taken for granted as desirable and actively encouraged, other ways of living can be tolerated, but are not encouraged as possible happy lives – something that is also visible in strategies of teaching.

**Constructing a heterosexual ‘we’ in sexual education**

What characterizes the narratives of queer bodies in schools; when they are made visible? In a summary of different strategies of change, Kevin Kumashiro (2002) writes that the most common equal opportunity pedagogical approach in education is ‘teaching about or for the Other,’\textsuperscript{10} whereby minority groups are made an explicit focus in teaching. The thought is that giving children more information about queer Others and the problems they face in society will increase the (taken-for-granted) heterosexual students’ empathy (Ibid: 42). Through an understanding of how difficult it must be to be afraid to come out, to be harassed, etc., the tolerance for the Other will increase. This also seems to be the common point of departure in creating strategies in Scandinavian schools.

Sexual education is the most common subject in which queer bodies are explicitly introduced in the classroom. It is usually structured by a discourse of difference and homo-tolerance, most often taking place within heteronormative frames, several studies show, positioning queer bodies explicitly as deviant from the

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\textsuperscript{9} Here, I refer to homophobia as an individual’s fear of his/her own homosexual feelings or desires, whereas ‘homo-negativism’ will be used to refer to negative verbal responses towards homosexuality or LGBT people, a distinction proposed by Røthing (2007). An important point she makes is the paradox of the co-existing homo-tolerance in Norwegian school space with particularly boys’ homophobia, fears of thinking about desire towards the same sex, something I will return to.

\textsuperscript{10} Here, Other refers to marginalized minority groups, on the basis of particularly gender; ethnic background, race, sexuality and class.
norm in various ways (Røthing 2007, Røthing & Svendsen 2008, Bäckman 2003). My colleague and I (Bromseth & Wildow 2007), Reimers (2007) and Martinsson (2007) have found that when non-heterosexuality is addressed in Scandinavian classrooms and textbooks, it is particularly centred around the problems that queers are expected to experience due to harassment and homophobia (on the other hand, homophobia is rarely raised as an explicit societal problem equivalent to sexism or racism). The anticipated heterosexual pupil is thus positioned as someone who could help ‘them’ by being nice and tolerant, thus creating better life conditions for the queer, as the quote below shows, in which the students’ task is to reply to a ‘letter’:

Hi! I have a big problem. Lately, I have been uncertain about my feelings towards boys and girls. I have had strong feelings for girls ever since I was a little girl. I have forced myself to date boys, in more than one way… These days I cannot even look at a boy without getting goose bumps. No one knows about my sexual orientation. There is nobody I can confide in. I have no friends (I am rejected) and my parents hate homosexuals like Hitler hated Jews. What should I do? I am so unhappy. Suicide has crossed my mind several times. Please, give me advice!

(Quote from Swedish sexual education textbook, cited in Bromseth & Wildow 2007: 28)

Here, non-heterosexuality is turned into something else, creating a presumably heterosexual reader, ‘we’, and a non-heterosexual object, ‘them’ – the suffering person the reader should pity. Thus, ‘we’ learn that ‘they’ are suffering, socially excluded individuals who are dependent on others’ active acceptance to go on living, to
put it bluntly.\(^1\) But this also implies that the future life scenarios created in education look quite different for queer and heteronormal bodies.\(^2\)

In a study of sexual education in Norwegian secondary schools, Åse Røthing also found that whereas heterosexuality is usually presented as the taken-for-granted point of departure when discussing love and sexuality with students, homosexuality is taught as an addition to the other subjects. For instance, in one of the observed sexual education lessons, the class was asked to discuss topics in four different groups: birth control, abortion, sexually transmitted diseases and homosexuality. What was in focus in the discussion of homosexuality was, however, not love relations and sexual practices, but homosexuality as an ethical and political issue. This was apparent in the pupils’ conclusion in the group discussion, in which they stated that they ‘did not have anything against homosexuals.’ One consequence of this strategy is that homosexual practices are excluded from knowledge about sexual relations, sexual diseases, love and protection from sexually transmitted diseases, since these issues are exclusively taught as related to heterosexual sexual activity and relations.\(^3\) Further, homosexuality becomes a question of a complete identity package, where

\(^1\) Obviously, this is not a desirable position in current neo-liberal society. Being needy and suffering is so stigmatized in the values of the neo-liberal Western world of today, Lynne Layton (2002), argues, that the only way to survive is to distance oneself from vulnerable others.

\(^2\) Here, heteronormal body refers to not only a heterosexually oriented body but also a white, (non-dis)abled body.

\(^3\) This can be understood in the light of the normalizing discourse of homosexuality, where toning down the sexual aspect of same-sex relations has been a common strategy for moving away from an understanding of homosexuality as a sick and perverted form of desire, in the lgbt movement as well as in heteronormative society (Rydström 1996).
same-sex relations and a homo-/bisexual identity are presented as inseparable. What is discussed in class when homosexuality is introduced is thus civil rights of homosexuals, and not same-sex sexual relations.

Røthing writes that the teacher’s intentions to make the students ‘discuss homosexuality’ are often a wish to increase acceptance of and tolerance towards homosexuality – a pattern that Eva Reimers also found in her study of student teachers (2007). However, the consequences of this are problematic in several ways. Firstly, a heterosexual ‘we’ is used as the point of departure, taking for granted that the students present in the classroom are heterosexual. It both implicitly excludes the possibility of students with other sexual identities and/or preferences being present in the classroom, and reproduces heterosexual privileging. Heterosexuals are thus given the privilege of ‘accepting’ the queer others, but not the other way around. Secondly, it also contributes to locating the ‘problem’ somewhere else; the LGBT people we’re discussing, as well as homophobic people, are not here, but somewhere else (Reimers 2007). Positioning the deviant other at a distance or as completely absent from the here and now in everyday school life is a common way of constructing and maintaining hierarchical difference. As Lena Martinsson puts it:

Homosexuals seem to be special, and situated at some other place, not in school and not in the world of children. This is a way to underline homosexuality as the other, something strange, and also something wrong and problematic. (Martinsson 2007: 80)

Further, as homosexuality is often connected to ‘sex’, and sex is seen as incompatible with childhood and children on moral
grounds, because it will break their innocence, non-heterosexual lives are rarely an integrated part of the curriculum (Epstein et al. 2003). However, children implicitly learn the heteronormative life narrative scripts for boys and girls in ‘the hidden curricula’ of the school every day: in fairy tales and in talking about families and relations as well as societies’ culture and structure (Ibid.). This particular script can be understood as a straight line (Ahmed 2006).

The location of queer Others in textbooks and teaching

When queer bodies occupy a space at all, it is as something different than heterosexual bodies – and often in problematizing ways, where the possible cost of not following ‘a straight line’ is implicitly communicated, as in the previous examples. In school, the absence of queer bodies on the one hand, and their positions as special and deviant when they are present, on the other, have the spatiality of that which is characteristic of how non-normative Others are constructed: as deviant from the point of reference (Skolverket 2006). This is characteristic of both the teaching and learning processes taking place in the classroom, as we have seen, but also of the most common textbooks used in compulsory school (Rosén and Larsson 2006, Ryng et al. 2005, Røthing & Svendsen forthcoming).

How do the spatial constitutions of straight and queer bodies in textbooks and curricula contribute to creating and maintaining hierarchical difference, through dimensions like "left" and "right", "front of" and "behind", "up" and "down", and "near" and "far". (Ahmed 2006)? Several studies show that it is no longer a pattern of morally judging or completely silencing non-heterosexualities that characterizes most Scandinavian textbooks, as it was previously (Ryng et al. 2005). Rather, the constructions of meaning in
schoolbooks on history, religion, biology and society are dominated by an explicit othering of non-heterosexuality within a discourse of tolerance, Rosén and Larsson show (2006).

Spatial terms are materially as well as linguistically/metaphorically important in meaning-making processes, attaching different values to bodies. In the school textbooks analyzed, what occupies the space as the norm and what is positioned as an ‘addition’ show a clear pattern. In history, for example, the norm-person is usually white, heterosexual and male, whereas women are explicitly mentioned in relation to social history, or placed in a separate section about famous female historical people, as an appendix to the history book. If anything is mentioned about sexuality and sexual orientation, this is usually situated as an appendix to women’s history – which is already an appendix, Rosén and Larsson (2006) state ironically. Which space different bodies occupy is thus related to both the quality of the content and their spatial placement throughout a book, here receiving meaning through a ‘front-back’ dimension. The heterosexual male is the silent norm occupying the front position and major corpus of the book, whereas women and homosexuals occupy a tiny and explicit space as an addition in the background. Another important sexually differentiating pattern is related to which bodies are present and near, distant or absent in the books, and which bodies are presented as subjects or objectified. Whereas examples in schoolbooks are often illustrated with other named youths so that the pupils can

14 For example, fat and slim bodies are given different moral values, and are associated with levels of self-control and intelligence (Kulick & Maneley 2005). Colonial, Western discourses have long otherized non-Western cultures and non-white people in exoticizing ways as more primitive and closer to animal behaviours – hypersexualized, less clean, more emotional – than the ‘civilized cultures’ of the West, see for example (Ahmed 2004 ).
identify with them, queer bodies are usually not presented with names as subjects (Rosén & Larsson 2006). Instead, they are introduced as ‘the homosexual/bisexual’, and are often positioned as representatives of the group of non-heterosexuals. Homosexual or bisexual people rarely exist without being explicitly enhanced as such in stories and examples, and trans-people are totally invisible, the Swedish textbook analysis concludes (Ibid.). Another common representation of queer bodies in teaching is that if the examples do contain named persons, they are usually adults, ‘far away’ from the students’ own age. This suggests that homosexuality is something that should not exist amongst youth, but rather comes at a later point in life (Røthing 2007). If same-sex desire amongst young people could be ‘just a phase’, as one popular Swedish biology book suggests, then why confuse the youngsters, leading them in the wrong direction? Queer bodies are thus objectified and held at a distance in textbooks and exercises, contributing to upholding the hierarchical difference between the heterosexual ‘us’ and the queer ‘them’ as meaningful and important.

**Who has a future?**

Whether we describe heteronormativity metaphorically as a straight line as Sara Ahmed does, or as ‘the charmed circle’ as Rubin (1984) does, they both symbolize points of reference from which deviance is measured and created. The narratives of queer and straight practices and bodies discursively create desired, less valued and unwanted directions, prescribing certain orientations and choices, warning against others. That heterosexuality is compulsory, as Adrienne Rich (1983) once claimed, is almost as true

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15 Cited in Ryng et al. 2005.
in today’s Scandinavian school. The images of queer and heterosexual bodies that are painted in the open and hidden curricula also contribute to entwining sexuality as part of the linear future vision of what a possible life should look like, which Judith Halberstam refers to as ‘a middle-class logic of reproductive temporality’ (2005: Ibid: 4).16

The future scenario most often repeated in Scandinavia is a late modernity tale of the white, middle class, heterosexual, relatively gender-equal man and woman, who attain higher education and realize their dreams until it is eventually time to marry a partner of the opposite sex, have children and settle down (Martinsson 2007). As Kulick (2004) writes, these heterosexual scenarios as part of parents’ future dreams for children start early on. The toddler girl and boy playing together often provoke a half-humorous comment from their parents about a possible future romance between the two, whereas the same comment about two boys in the sandbox would be considered impossible. The heterosexual narratives are not exclusively ‘happy tales’, whether they appear in films, literature or textbooks, but are almost exclusively the point of departure from which conversation begins, creating the normative ground for a desired life (Martinsson 2007). Boys and girls, and the attraction between them, is the point of departure and the end goal for a successful life. As a socializing institution, the

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16 This reproductive temporality is ruled by a “biological clock” and “strict bourgeois rules of respectability and scheduling for married couples”, Halberstam writes (2005:5), to which she places “queer temporality” as a counter-logic. The reproductive narrative is also tightly related to ‘the time of inheritance’, and the concepts of familial and national stability. The interest of the family/nation is often used rhetorically to reproduce conservative values, privileging capitalism and white heterosexual men. That same-sex relations are not ‘naturally reproductive’ is a common argument against gay marriage, for example, something that can only make sense within a logic frame in which marriage has the role of regulating reproduction (see Butler 2002, Spilker 2006).
school plays an important role in contributing to leading pupils in the right - straight - direction in different ways. For example, this could include the social rule of not allowing same-sex couples to go to the school ball together,\textsuperscript{17} or dividing the class into gender-separate girls’ and boys’ groups when talking about love and sexuality, letting them write questions to each other (Ahlsdotter 2006). Physical education lessons are another arena for heterosexual matchmaking (see also Larsson 2005). Consider this quote from an interview my colleague and I conducted with a physical education teacher, in which she tells us about teaching the children to dance the jitterbug, and her struggle to get the boys and girls to dance with each other in couples:

Janne: Did they get to choose partners themselves?
Teacher: But it was so difficult to get them to dance with each other. When I said ‘Now you two have to dance with each other’ they said ‘No, no, I don’t want to’, and that they would rather be with their friend.
Hanna: And you still wanted to couple boys with girls?
Teacher: Yes, yes! I definitely did, because they were supposed to dance the jitterbug, I think, or something like that. So that’s what I wanted.
Hanna: And you cannot dance the jitterbug in same-sex couples?
Teacher: Well, of course you can, of course you can. But I thought that they should dance together…I always have to force them to work together in pairs. Almost no-one chooses someone from the opposite sex to work with. So then I have to choose for them instead.

(Bromseth & Wildow 2007: 82)

\textsuperscript{17} I 2006, a same-sex couple at a Swedish high school was denied permission to go to the school ball together, whereby they pressed charges. The school later rescinded the restriction, after thorough consideration.
This quote suggests that coupling the children in opposite sex couples is such a taken-for-granted goal for the teacher that she really had to think twice when we asked her why this was necessary — so necessary and important, in fact, that when the children chose someone of the same sex to dance with, she had to ‘force them’ to pick a partner of the opposite sex instead. “If the two sexes don’t meet here, in the physical education lessons, they will not meet anywhere,” she explained, slightly frustrated, pointing to the gender-secluded social life of the schools’ pupils.18

Whereas heterosexual love and the straight monogamous couple with children are painted as the desired future image — the goal of the life journey that pupils are encouraged to reach in their future lives — other lives are not positioned as desired futures. These latter lives include not only queer lives but also single lives, with or without children, or having love or sexual relations with more than one person at a time (Martinsson 2007). This is even present in gender pedagogy, aiming at changing traditional gender patterns. For instance, in a popular book on the pedagogy of gender, creating gender-equal masculinity ideals is an important part of the rhetoric in reaching gender equality through teaching. The challenge is thus to make boys choose paths other than being wife beaters who earn most of the money in the relationship and do not help with housework or children. The gender-equal heterosexual nuclear family is thus held up as a better and more desirable choice for a happy future. As Martinsson points out, there is nothing wrong with this, but why are there not other alternative lives that are positioned as possible good futures in school? “In this strategy

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18 The teachers at the school perceived sexuality as more strictly regulated amongst the youth at this school than at most Swedish schools as most of the pupils there had a multi-ethnic background (over 90%).
for gender equality, everything else is made invisible. Where are the homosexual couples, the singletons, and the families with one parent? No alternative is given” (2007: 81).

**Directing bodies through ‘the straight line’**

Bodies are oriented by how they take up time and space, in discourse and materially. By looking at how specific bodies are positioned in time and space, we can also see their meaning in society, Sara Ahmed (2006) writes, reworking phenomenological theories with queer theory. Orientation is organized through discursive and social practices, where bodies are gendered, sexualized and raced by the way they extend into space, she argues:

> [t]he body gets directed in some ways more than others. [...] What if direction, as the way we face as well as move, is organized rather than casual?’ [...] In moving this way, rather than that, and moving this way again and again, the surfaces of bodies in turn acquire their shape. Bodies are “directed” and take the shape of this direction. (Ahmed 2006: 15)

Heterosexuality is created as normal through repetition, and the (sexual) orientation of bodies are part of these repeating processes in mutually constituting ways. This implies that male and female bodies are expected to be naturally sexually attracted to each other to be understood as ‘real men and women’, a co-construction of gender and sexuality that Butler (1993) has called the heterosexual matrix. That men and women are different from each other, and naturally desire each other, is constructed as ‘the straight line’, where heterosexual desire becomes normative through naturalization (where the importance of reproduction and kinship plays a central role). Gender performances or sexual
orientation that do not follow the straight line are thus interpreted as deviations that need explanations or correction, whereby the homosexual subject is read as having “got lost on the way ‘toward’ the ‘other sex’” (Ahmed: 79). The gender inversion theories from the 40’s, still alive and kicking, are a good example of this, trying to get queer desire back into the straight line again by explaining same-sex desire as men born in women's bodies, or women born in men's (Ibid: 78). When the straight line is the invisible normalized understanding of gender and desire and the connection between them, everything else will be read as a deviation from that line, and is what ‘shapes the very tendency to go astray’ (Ibid: 79). What is astray does not lead us back to the straight line, but shows us what is lost by following that line, she writes poetically. This might imply recognizing the loss of privileges that not following the straight line gives - through heterosexual marriage and reproduction, and the privilege of not being stigmatized, harassed and othered because of one's gender identity and/or sexual preferences. With the plurality of lives that exists in Scandinavia today, it is quite striking how ideals of the most desired lifestyle come down to one singular form that is actively produced though constructing possible futures while silencing other forms of life in the heteronormative school space. Young people tend to organize their social relations in queerer ways, separating sex and relationships more than previously, and prioritizing friendship over the co-living romantic relationship and family-building (Roseneil 2007).

It is in many ways a paradox, then, that the school space continues to uphold the heterosexual reproducing couple as the singular way to happiness, in ways that also imply excluding and othering non-heterosexual and transgender bodies. Or to say it like Ahmed does: “How is it possible, with all that is possible, that the same
form gets repeated again and again? How does the openness of the future get closed down into so little in the present?” (Ahmed 2006:82).

To summarize, in spite of teachers’ often good intentions to encourage tolerance towards lgbt-people, the strategies based on a discourse of tolerance constitute queer bodies as distant, pitiful and problematic, and non-heteronormative lives as having no future. There are, however, also educators who seek to look beyond a discourse of tolerance in their strategies of change in teaching, and instead use what is referred to as queer pedagogy as a point of departure in the classroom, which I will illustrate in the last part of this article (Bryson & de Castell 1993, Britzman 1995). How can heteronormativity be interrupted, and in doing so, which aspects of heteronormativity are challenged? What remains unchallenged, in relation to creating, repeating and reformulating narratives and images of intelligible and desirable lives?

**Strategies aiming at challenging heteronormativity**

How can teaching and learning processes in the obligatory educational system contribute to not reproducing, but to interrupting the privileging of heteronormativity that is actively produced at all levels of society? Even if the examples are few, pedagogical strategies that are not built upon a tolerance pedagogical point of departure do exist in Scandinavian school spaces, first and fore-

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19 The term queer pedagogy was launched by Mary Bryson and Suzanne de Castell, writing about their teaching experiences from the course “Lesbian Subjects Matter: Feminism/s from the Margins?”, and how they grappled during the course with poststructuralist and essentialist theories of identity in the context of the classroom setting.
most as used by individual teachers. Also here, it is usually in relation to sexual education that heteronormativity is challenged. When the whole school is not working strategically in the same direction, the total domination of heteronormativity in subjects like history, English, physical education, etc. becomes something of a contradiction of what is explicitly stated as important equal opportunity goals. As one of the students in our study mentioned, in spite of the few classes in which gender and sexuality norms were an explicit topic of discussion, “there are hardly any gays in the history books” (Bromseth & Wildow 2007: 57). There is thus a double message in what is communicated explicitly and implicitly at school, through discourse and teaching practices, between what is said and what is done. This is particularly present in schools that do not work consciously with a norm-critical perspective on sexuality, and whose staff in general have not been trained in how to change gender and sexuality norms (Bromseth & Wildow 2007). Teaching about gender and sexuality norms is not an obligatory part of teacher education in Sweden, in spite of the legal requirements to prevent discrimination, and the schools are left to provide additional education on their own.

Queer pedagogy has become the term used for educational

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20 In our study, we searched for schools in Sweden that had worked strategically against heteronormativity as part of their equal opportunity work. However, we only managed to find one school that believed it could possibly fill such a criterion. There are also a few other schools working to change sexuality norms, but they are far between. In addition to this, the school information service of the Stockholm department of the national organisation for LGBT people (RFSL) also works from a queer perspective, challenging heteronormativity rather than focussing on the Other (Bromseth, forthcoming). See Edemo & Rindå (2003).

21 96 per cent of teachers at all levels of primary education feel that they have received no knowledge of sexuality norms and strategies for how to prevent homophobia in the classroom, or even in the teachers’ lunchroom, Sahlström shows (2006), but many teachers ask for further training.
strategies in which gender and sexuality norms are challenged in different ways, building on the tradition of critical pedagogy, queer theory and post-structuralist perspectives (see Britzman 1995, Sumara and Davies 1999). For example, Kevin Kumashiro (2002, 2004) has been working extensively to develop pedagogies that challenge and interrupt power relations and norms, from a post-structural and intersectional perspective. As Kumashiro argues, it is important, but not satisfying in itself, to simply ‘include’ non-normative bodies in the existing knowledge, which as a strategy is also problematic in many senses. For students to be able to see how unequal power structures are produced, and to challenge and question them, they need to develop a norm-critical gaze. It is not even enough to inform students about society’s oppressive norms, that has been characteristic of structurally oriented pedagogical strategies of change (Kumashiro 2002: 47). Rather, what is central is to show how these very norms are produced in knowledge structures and by ourselves in everyday life. In order to produce other narratives about society, we need to question master narratives and see what social messages they convey. Simultaneously, it is necessary to look critically at our own attitudes and practices as educators, and thus also at the notion of ourselves as part of


23 Even ‘including’ marginalized voices is in itself problematic, as it builds on an objectivist view on knowledge as something that can be complete and representative of reality. The marginalized voice is further often portrayed as representing the ‘minority group’ as such within these frames (Kumashiro 2002: 56). Rather, using a post-structuralist view on knowledge as a point of departure, showing how knowledge is always situated and partial can reveal how different representations of reality have different social consequences, and how cultural master narratives are based on racist, sexist and heterosexist discourses.
constructing knowledge claims and relations in and outside the classroom.

Interrupting norms as a strategy in teaching and learning is never a comfortable process, Kumashiro underlines, as it implies looking critically at ourselves, our actions and relations to others. Changing power relations is thus often not a desired choice of action because it requires actively changing ourselves and society. The teacher must ask herself how she has contributed to maintaining unequal power structures in the classroom. As one of our informants, who had been teaching for almost 40 years, said: “it has been painful to look back, because I thought then that I was doing a good job in a gender perspective”. In contrast to ‘accepting the other’, which does not require any structural changes, it is here the norms, how they produce power inequality in society, and our own role in these processes as individuals, that are made visible (Britzman 1995). What is usually invisible, the white and heterosexual body, becomes visible and questioned, through looking at its privileges in society, and how privileging is made possible through knowledge claims – amongst others through othering. The production of hierarchical difference through norms is thus placed in focus, turning the gaze away from the other as such, to the production of others. This strategy also often creates resistance in the classroom.

Gender pedagogues Kristina and Martin were two of the few informants in our study using a heteronorm-critical perspective in developing their teaching strategies, something that had several
consequences. Firstly, they worked to include non-heterosexual subjects in the ordinary teaching in all classes, and to not present them "as something weird or as homosexuals as such", as Martin expressed it. "It might as well be Sven and Bertil [both Swedish male names] buying a house in the example in math lecture", he explained (Bromseth & Wildow 2007: 84). Films with non-heterosexual main characters had been used to discuss issues of love and relationships in general. Secondly, a norm-widening strategy was combined with approaches in which heteronormativity was explicitly challenged. Kristina gave us an example of a sexual education lesson about which she had decided that this time they would not invite informants from RFSL and talk about 'homosexuality':

"We did a role play, where I interviewed romance novelist ‘Barbara Cartland’ on a TV show, about how her heterosexuality had influenced her writing and her characters in the books." The students were extremely frustrated (laughs) – they immediately recognized how homosexuality is usually talked about, and didn’t understand why heterosexuality should be questioned in the same way.

Here, the sexuality norms are made visible through turning them upside-down; instead of putting homosexuality and bisexuality

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24 Gender pedagogy (gendepedagogik) is a specific education for teachers in Sweden, aiming at giving specific competence in changing traditional gendered patterns of behaviour. One of the intentions of the education is that particularly trained teachers will have specific positions in schools, working with creating strategies and training other teachers. This was the specific assignment Kristina and Martin had at this school too, working both strategically and as pedagogic resources for the school’s teachers and work teams, in addition to teaching ordinary classes.

25 This exercise was printed in the first queer pedagogical exercise book for teachers published in Sweden, ‘Någonstans går gränsen’ (‘The line has to be drawn somewhere’) (Edemo & Rindå 2003).
in the spotlight, heterosexuality is made into a meaningful label for the writer’s life and work. It causes strong emotional responses through protests, but for Kristina this is not threatening but rather a sign that she has managed to interrupt norms. “Then we can talk about it afterwards, and reflect on why it felt funny and wrong”, she says.

Thirdly, the emerging insights regarding how they as teachers contributed to reproducing heteronormativity also had another effect on Martin’s and Kristina’s teaching. How did they produce norms in their own language? Do we anticipate that all students are heterosexual, or that they have a particular family consisting of a mum and a dad? The result was a strive towards a more gender-neutral and inclusive language, to avoid contributing to creating compulsory heterosexuality in the classroom – or in addressing the student’s families and close relations. At this school, the school leader was also very thorough in creating an inclusive and anti-normative social environment. When families were addressed in letters from the school, all care provider positions were explicitly addressed – mums, dads, extra-parents, grandparents, and other care providers – showing and considering the multiplicity of the students’ care providers and social relations, not only the 50% living in a heterosexual nuclear family.

At the time of our study, the school had been working strategically with equal opportunity issues from a conscious norm-critical perspective for over five years (including implement queer theoretical perspectives), whereby educating the existing staff and hiring new staff with specific competence was a central key to change. When we visited the school, teachers had just started implementing these perspectives in practice, and into the ordinary teaching plans for the different class levels. Of course, heteronorm-
critical perspectives were not systematically present in the written plans or in all teachers’ classes, and in spite of teacher training using queer theoretical perspectives, not all teachers worked in line with Kristina and Martin. Resistance to challenging the heteronormative gender and sexuality norm also existed amongst the staff, even if they, according to Martin, were slowly changing their attitudes from being sceptical to “seeing the light”, as he expressed it.

Norm-critical approaches also require self-reflexive teachers, looking critically at their own practices and attitudes; not only in terms of ‘teacher’ but also as a human being, Kumashiro argues. For many, this is too threatening, uncomfortable or painful, as the norms conveyed in a school’s curriculum are also maintained by teachers. The insight that we are all producers of norms, as they are deeply rooted in our minds and actions is, however, also how change is made possible. No one is ‘without guilt’, but by being consciously aware of how we reproduce norms, it is also possible to work on changing our actions – even if we will always also continue failing (Bondestam 2007). In teaching, it is necessary to repeat heteronormative ‘truths’ in order to make them visible and interrupt them when they occur in the classroom and in textbooks. But it is also necessary to add something new. In order to create other narratives and images of bodies, alternative story lines must be produced, images that are not built on the repetition of hierarchical difference (Kumashiro 2002: 53).26

26 Through this, Kumashiro also criticizes parts of critical pedagogy in which raising consciousness about dominating power structures is the main pedagogic activity. In addition to creating resistance and a will to change oppressive structures, this might also contribute to feelings of helplessness in marginalized individuals.
On the limits of heteronormality – queer challenges

The cultural productions of young people’s bodies take place in and outside the classroom, with competing discourses offering different truths about the position and value of gendered and sexualized bodies. With this article, I have wanted to show how heteronormalizing discourses and practices take place in the school space, and how they direct bodies through the images of possible, conditioned and impossible lives and sexualities that are produced in textbooks and teaching. I have also wanted to reflect on how heteronormativity can be interrupted and challenged in school, contributing to questioning oppressive social structures and cultural practices, and to offer a plurality of images of possible lives.

The institutional, cultural and social meanings of the main events ruling the reproductive timeline itself have certainly been challenged over the past decade; of youth/adulthood, marriage, reproduction and social relations. As Halberstam (2005) points out, queerness has certainly contributed to opening up for a range of alternative ways to exist and relate to other people – simultaneously making visible the taken-for-granted norm:

> Obviously, not all gay, lesbian and transgender people live their lives in radically different ways from their heterosexual counterparts, but part of what has made queerness so compelling as a form of self-description in the past decade or so has to do with the way it has the potential to open up new life narratives and alternative relations to time and space.

(Halberstam 2005: 3)

An interesting question to bear in mind when it comes to (hetero) norm-critical strategies of change, is what parts of heteronormality are challenged and questioned, and what kind of queerness
is allowed into the classroom. Do they disturb the basic concept of the temporal narrative of the heterosexual nuclear family as a liberal tale that safeguards conservative values and privileges white middle/upper-class people (Halberstam 2005)? These ideals are indeed also accessible to and desired by queers, as Duggan argues (2002). The lgbt movement is coloured by a homo-normativity supporting the hegemonic liberal heteronormative lifestyle through an assimilative political strategy – in which marriage and reproductive rights for same-sex couples are the political goal.27 This strategy, as much as it challenges heterosexuality as a norm, still reproduces other social norms and power relations, of race, class, gender and functionality, of which lived lives are considered more valuable in a capitalist society.

Considering the strong position of the couple in contemporary Western culture, also communicated through Swedish schoolbooks (Eilard 2008), the white middle-class monogamous same-sex couple, possibly with children, might eventually be fitted into what is considered ‘heteronormal’ in the near future in Scandinavia – as long as they live up to other values considered morally good and do not break any other norms, that is. What is inside and outside the charmed circle of heteronormality, thus, always needs to be the result of an intersectional analysis in which the heteronormal is an empty and situated entity. Critically queer approaches to challenging heteronormativity, then, should never be

27 This was visible, for example, in the public debate about same-sex marriage and reproduction rights in how adoption and insemination for lesbian couples were legitimized, Røthing and Svendsen (2008) point out. Being a respectable and morally good Norwegian was tightly connected to the ideal of the heterosexual family, meaning a heterosexually couple with children, something that is held up as the most ‘safe and stable’ way of living and, implicitly, the best for maintaining a stable reproducing nation.
satisfied with readymade answers, but must continuously look for different discriminatory norms. As Lena Martinsson urges us, in all kinds of work for social change we need to constantly ask ourselves: What is now being made into the norm? (Martinsson 2007: 62). Continuing to reproduce images of bodies built on essentialized and hierarchical understandings of group difference rather preserves the very same scripts that lock certain bodies into problematic futures, as well as singular and de-contextualized concepts of identity.

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Part III:

Body Matters
The Body that Speaks the Gap – Feminist Theory and the Biological Question

In recent years, feminist theory has developed some new and interesting ideas about how to “bridge the gap” between social and natural science.¹ This development seems necessary, since the sharp division between social and cultural theories of gender on the one hand and natural science on the other has brought with it a rather disturbing problem of credibility for feminist theory, both theoretically and politically (Birke, 1998; Fausto-Sterling, 2003). And still, we would argue, this rapprochement must not be thought of as leaving the historicist or constructionist lessons behind. On the contrary, one of the great challenges of this new reappraisal of biology within feminist theory lies in the question of how to incorporate biology in a non-essentialist fashion.² This

¹ We would like to thank Katarina Mattson for a thorough reading and constructive suggestions on how to improve the text. Thanks also to Keith Pringle, Elvira Scheich and Lisa Folkmarson Käll for constructive comments on an earlier version of this paper.

² In using the term “biology” we incorporate the whole clustered equivalence chain of meanings associated with it: nature, body, sex and matter. As a range of influential feminist theorists have already pointed out, these meanings come together, and to try to separate them would be to reinvent boundaries that never were (Haraway, 1991; Butler, 1993). One could also note the essentially ambiguous nature of “biology”, which as a term denotes both biology as a body of knowledge and biology as objective nature (in sharp contrast to, for instance, sociology, which as a subject is rarely confused with its subject matter). In a rather ironic sense, this confusion illustrates the constructivist questioning of the common-sense distinction between knowledge and reality, which ultimately has rendered distinctions like the one between epistemology and ontology rather difficult to maintain.
development has often taken place with a view on how to perceive biological and gendered bodies. These attempts come from a frustration with, on the one hand, the sex/gender division, leaving the “biological” issue out of feminist theory (Haraway, 1991), and, on the other hand, the alternative approach to the biological body as socially constructed (Butler, 1990). One critical question within feminist theory is what the ontological and epistemological status of this construction is. It could mean, and sometimes does, that we can never know of the biological body per se, but

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3 As is well known, feminist approaches to “the biological question” have taken two somewhat different routes from the 70’s and onwards. Early on, feminist theory, such as standpoint feminism, reclaimed the body from scientific discourse and stated the privileged role of everyday knowledge of women when it came to bodily matters (Hartsock, 1983; Oakley, 1972 & 1984). Typically, scientific biological knowledge about women became problematic within the perspective of these movements, due to the fact that biological facts had historically been used in order to prove the validity of women’s subordination. Paying close attention to the power asymmetry between, on the one hand, knowledge produced by the scientific community and, on the other hand, women’s own experience, the intimate connections between biology as a supposedly neutral science and the patriarchal oppression of women were highlighted (Birke, 1998; see Harding, 1996; Keller & Longino, 1996; Hubbard, 1979). As a tool for producing feminist critique of science, the sex/gender distinction was embraced. Carving out gender as an analytical concept enabled feminist science studies scholars to see how the knowledge production of sex was influenced by notions of gender and sexism (Keller & Longino, 1996). In the 80’s this critique of biology as part of a patriarchal science was extended into a more general critique of essentialism. This movement – with its postmodern, historicist, and social constructionist influences – levelled its critique of essentialism not only at biology, but, more importantly, at the early feminist enterprise in itself and its reliance on, for example, the category of “women” (hooks, 1982; Butler, 1990). A fundamental concern here was the crucial notion of historicism (and later “new historicism”), that reality is always approached from within a concrete historical context, which means that a scientific fact is always the product of a particular social constellation, always historical and social in essence. As such, all attempts at theorizing phenomena in terms of biology, sexuality and the body were increasingly conceived of as originally trapped in the social, historical and linguistic structures. In feminist theory and gender studies, the fear of essentialism led many researchers for some time to avoid the biological question by simply excluding “natural phenomena” like biology and sex from their field of interest, focusing entirely on gendering processes.
only of our conceptions of this body. But it can also mean that the biological body becomes – it *materializes* out of cultural practice and discourse (Butler, 1993, Grosz, 1999). The standard objection from the more objectivist perspective, and from what has been labelled a wave of “new materialism” within feminist theory, is that constructionism/constructivism\(^4\) neglects the material reality and that gender researchers therefore deny the biological body, e.g. that they are anti-biology, or even “bio-phobic” (Wandermassen, 2004; see also Ah-King, this volume). But, as Sarah Ahmed rightfully points out, this is not a fair label if one considers all the empirical and theoretical concern feminists have put into the “biological question” (Ahmed, 2008).

Arguably, this is exactly the risk feminist theory runs when it tries to solve the deadlock constructionism has confronted with the body problematic, by way of biology.\(^5\) To risk a repetition of our argument, this view – in today’s rather common merger between critical realism and a soft version of constructivism – neglects the productive and constituting power of discourse in Butler’s perspective, as well as the question of the limits of construction. For, as Butler seems aware of, interpreting the limit of the construction process as an external one is but a way to save the very same process from its own internal limit. Because construc-

\(^4\) For reasons of simplicity, in the following discussion we skip over the question of this distinction between constructionism and constructivism, using the terms interchangeably.

\(^5\) A case in point is Simon Williams and Gillian Bendelow’s critique of the so-called “epistemological” or “linguistic fallacy” in constructionism, the tendency to reduce everything to discourse (2003), a critique that not only takes recourse to the problematic distinction between epistemology and ontology, but also tends to equal biology with ontology, so that biology becomes to discourse what ontology is to epistemology, that is, the real foundation on which discourse evolves. Or, to go back to our initial discussion, biology (as ontology) emerges as the solution to the limit of discourse (as epistemology), again as it is expressed in the body problematic.
activism is not primarily blocked from the outside but from within, and the limit is thus one that makes construction possible, at the same time as it thwarts every hope of ever ridding itself of a certain gap. In Butler’s theory of performativity, we note again how a driving theme in her argument is the open character of gender construction, which makes sexual identities and particularly the “heterosexual matrix” fundamentally unstable. Also, as noted, this equally applies to the body, which is always already a contingent product within a particular normative framework and as such is also open for negotiation, in a sense that makes it always already failed (Butler, 1990).

The aim of this text is to understand and reflect upon the limits and possibilities of some contemporary feminist third way positions, in which the body as simultaneously sexed and gendered is addressed. Through the reading of these scholars, we come up with a formulation of a body that is neither a limit nor a lack of constructivism, but a body that speaks the gap. In what follows, we interrogate three different such attempts at redefining the very way in which the relation between sex and gender is considered.

Our own position and interest in the matter comes from close engagement with the biological question and feminism, on the one hand, and with Butler’s theoretical work on the other (Holmberg, 2004, 2005, 2007, 2008, Palm, 2007). Even though in this specific article we do not bring Butler in as our main discussant, we want to stress that her work on performativity, gender, sexuality and bodily matters is of great importance to how we frame our questions; the radical constructivism of Butler is where we come from and where we also return to, but with insights coming from engagement with some other discussants (see also Lykke, 2008, Chapter 4). Centring on the question of the body, already evoked above as
being of crucial interest for feminist theory, we in turn address: Anne Fausto-Sterling’s work with “bridging the gap” between social science feminist theory and biology; a way to conceptualize the body through Donna Haraway’s idea of the material-semiotic; and a Deleuzian feminist approach to the body as Real. This leads us to conclude with a discussion of the body as constitutively split (that is, “speaking the gap”) that refutes the opposition between nature and culture, sex and gender. This does not amount to be an exhaustive survey of existing third ways, but is rather an attempt to think through the reading of three influential and, in our own research, inspiring such approaches together.

The third way
One example of how vibrant the issue of bodily matters within feminist/gender studies is has recently been noted in a study of Swedish gender researchers and feminist scholars (Holmberg, 2007 & 2008). The study both focused on how gender researchers relate to the nature/culture divide in research concerning, for example, sexuality, violence and other bodily matters, and analysed the possibility of transgressing this divide within gender research and feminist theory. Questions were asked about: how the gender researchers relate to biological research and knowledge; the participants’ understanding of the biological body/bodies; the participants’ theoretical frameworks, as well as the conceptual and methodological problems and openings they articulate within these frameworks. Consisting of interviews with twelve prominent gender researchers interested in the divide, together with an analysis of their scientific production, the project’s aim was to highlight the premises of the nature/culture divide with Swedish gender studies as the point of departure, investigating under-
standings of the biological and the social through concrete gender research projects in the humanities and social sciences as well as in medicine.

In particular, the study observed a tendency among these scholars to regard with suspicion the radical social constructionist understandings of the sex/gender problematic, i.e. the idea of taking the body as yet another construction. Even if there were important exceptions, the radical constructivist perspective of the biological was generally described as being too theoretically abstract, and as disregarding the bodies of real people (Holmberg, 2008: 29). In the same vein, the post-modern position in which everything is taken as culture is effectively opposed, for example by a (re)introduction of a more materialist one.

Now, even though most of the senior gender researchers in the study – who nearly all entered the field of women’s studies in the late 70’s or early 80’s – are eager to position themselves against similar “butlerist positions” – although not necessarily against Butler – they also acknowledge the opposite danger of essentialism (or even worse: biologism). The researchers in the study work with issues like mothering, menstruation, menopause, violence and depression, and the study shows how they collectively run the risk of emphasizing bodily matters – or simply women – too much and, consequently, being labelled essentialists. Generally, this critique of essentialism is experienced as misplaced, one participant even speaking of a “taboo” within the gender research community in the late 80’s against even talking about “the biological”. According to the participants this seems to have changed, and the butlerism paradigm seems to have lost some of its dominance, but even so there do not seem to be many alternatives to the polarization between essentialism and constructionism.
However, one alternative we would like to highlight is sometimes brought up in interviews as the search for a “third way”. The third way rhetoric is interesting in many ways. It is framed as a promising escape from the epistemological poles of biologism and constructionism, a middle way. Stephanie Genz arguably writes that the third way is a sister of post-feminism and third-wave feminism, and as such, ironically challenges binary categories and traditional identity politics (Genz, 2006). But it does bring with it some problems, too. The middle way, the consensus solution, risks being quite empty. For example, it is described as a mainstream notion (“what everyone wants”), something that is not at all controversial (Holmberg, 2008: 33). As a consequence, it cannot be framed as a subversive solution, something that will seriously challenge either the constructivism-essentialism dichotomy or the sex/gender divide. It therefore still in many ways leaves us with the problem of how to conceptualize the “biological”. Overall, the lack of concepts for understanding bodily matters is a common and strong theme in the interviews.

This position of the third way seems to place us at a crossroad. For, if we – say as feminist social scientists sensitive to the question of how our everyday reality is, in essence, historically constructed – are to recognize biology as an autonomous body of knowledge, what does this effectively amount to? How could we approach this knowledge from within our own scientific position? These are of course questions that are dealt with in various ways, but, roughly, we could divide the answers into two incompatible positions. The first one would treat biology and social science feminism as two different epistemes, along the lines of the traditional “two culture” divide. Biology would be thought of as the branch of science that, for instance, studies how human sexuality is shaped as a biological
process, while from a more sociological approach, an accumulative sense would complete this knowledge with its study of gender processes. This is obviously a position that, during the heyday of social constructionism and postmodernism, came increasingly under pressure since any final distinction between sex and gender could hardly be made. That is, the very attempt to address biological sex “in itself”, as an objective process outside social gender processes, only seemed possible from a certain epistemological perspective doing away with sociality. From the perspective of constructionism or historicism, this could amount to nothing but sheer essentialism, feeding on and reproducing traditional dichotomies such as nature/culture, objective/subjective, and body/mind. This is, of course, acknowledged by most third way feminists. Still, the very step towards a third way position contains a risk similar to that of essentialism. This risk would consist in placing social scientific knowledge beside biological knowledge as if the division between the two in an unproblematic fashion merely reflected a difference in subject matter, and as if the respective perspective naturally springs from these particular subject matters. This would imply that we, at a certain point, must be able to indicate a boundary at which sociality and social theory ends and biology begins.

Incorporating biology
A different approach, the second alternative to recognizing biology, consists in redefining the relationship as such between sociality and sociology, on the one hand, and biology, on the other. This seems to come close to the important theoretical challenges posed by, for example, Donna Haraway and Bruno Latour. Breaking with conventional oppositions as social-natural, subject-object, semiotic-material, these challenges suggest a rapprochement constituted
on a radical epistemological transformation of the scientific community’s way of considering the whole relationship not only between the social and the biological, but, furthermore, between the social and natural sciences.

Our way in to the question of how to incorporate biology in a non-essentialist fashion concerns the feminist interest in the question of the body. One theoretical attempt to re-evaluate the role of biology we find in Anne Fausto-Sterling’s texts and her suggestions for understanding nature and culture, biology and the social, in analogous ways. She departs from a systems theoretical position and collects, together with feminist theory, inspiration from developmental biology (2000). In her thorough analyses of how sexual identity is constructed both politically and scientifically, historically and contemporarily, she finally suggests a view of sexual identity as woven together by genetic, cellular, psychological, social, cultural and historical relations (2000: 254). With the help of the metaphor of the Russian doll, she develops a bio-cultural systems framework, in which all these layers are woven together, and all layers are equally important in understanding human sexuality and sex(ed) behaviour.

Fausto-Sterling’s theory provides a number of openings. To biologists, as well as to sociologists and feminists, there is a need to stick to some of the thought structures and repertoires we are used to. This could be described as a kind of “pragmatic boundary work”. For a behavioural geneticist, for example, it would be uninteresting to discuss causes of behaviour in genetic terms, unless one did not believe they would be possible to reveal. The same must apply to sociologists. When we by definition are interested in social action, we must for practical reasons hang on to the idea that the “social”, at least analytically, can be distinguished from
other dimensions. But, according to Fausto-Sterling, we must realize that the knowledge we have is only partial (see also Haraway, 1991). Her solution is to bridge the gaps by gathering all the parts into a whole system. Through this move we can provide better, less false, knowledge. This perspective creates the potential of making alliances across disciplinary boundaries and provides a valuable, humble and fruitful model for inter- and multi-disciplinary knowledge production.

However, there are some important critical points we feel are worth discussing. In Anne Fausto-Sterling’s (2003) otherwise stimulating critique of the well-known tendency within social science to reduce biology to some inert or stable matter not affected by social circumstances, we note that her suggestion for how to bridge the gap implicitly relies on a limited definition of the social. Even though her argument that biology must be imagined in relation to the social milieu as a form of embodiment in becoming, so that for example brain anatomy develops in response to social practice, seems convincing, it nevertheless neglects the question of how a more subjectivist-oriented understanding of the social, dealing with meaning, might inform the understanding of these practices.

Indicative of this bias is her statement regarding the possibility of merging her own developmental systems theory (DST) with Judith Butler’s theory of performativity (1990 & 1993), thereby extending the latter’s focus upon social gender practice to biological development in general. In opposition to Pheng Cheah (1996), who has argued that the major shortcoming of Butler’s theory lies in its isolated treatment of human sexuality, Fausto-Sterling claims that:
DST can provide accounts of how gender materializes in the body that will work for all animals, not just humans. Granted there are some big discussions about consciousness and intentionality in non-human primates that must be held along the way. But stretching claims such as Butler’s about repetitive performance to develop a systems account of the biological materialization of gender in humans, will open the door to understanding biological development more broadly, and confront untenable claims that human materiality differs fundamentally from that of other animals. (2003: 126)

The question to be raised here concerns precisely how we perceive the bridge between sociality and biology. For even if we agree that it is “untenable” to maintain any “fundamental” difference between human and animal “materiality”, if by this we imply biology and the interplay between biology on the one hand and action/environment on the other, as social scientists we would be hard pressed to abandon our fundamental concern with the specific reflexive nature of social interaction (whether taking place in the human world, between humans and other animals, or between non-human animals, see for example Sanders, 1999). One could therefore doubt whether questions of “consciousness” and “intentionality” (among others) could ever be taken to be secondary in social science, something we discuss along the bridge to biology.

In brief, Fausto-Sterling’s version of bridging the gap seems to feed on an externalist emptying of similar, internal phenomena. Of course, this does not necessarily amount to a problem, unless your ambition is to knit together social science feminism and biology. However, this is ultimately what Fausto-Sterling is trying to achieve, and therefore the critical note must be that her opening
up of the social towards biology is breached through a new troublesome reduction.

Returning to Butler’s idea of performativity, it is easy to understand Fausto-Sterling’s point that sex is performatively constituted in certain phases of biological instability. Less clear is the way this will affect Butler’s theory more generally. For example, if we have periods of biological flexibility, there obviously have to be more conservative periods not open to negotiation — phases during which we stabilize as gendered individuals. If this seems intuitively reasonable, it nevertheless breaks with Butler’s perspective in the sense that it understates the importance of discourse and signification in the formation of gender identity in general, and the way Butler understands the formation process against the background of “the illimitable process of signification itself” in particular (Butler, 1990: 143).  

In this context the limit of the work of construction is certainly not biology, but the limit of construction itself. If gender formation then, for Butler, is a process whereby the body emerges as body through an illimitable signification, this implies that there is no imaginable way we can step out of, or escape, this process. This in turn, implies that every attempt to explain this formation from the outside, and not from its own internal logic, must be distrusted, for the simple reason that it runs the risk that every

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6 Another attempt to use Butler’s concept of performativity in a creative way, also transgressing the nature/culture divide, comes from Lynda Birke, Mette Bryld and Nina Lykke in an article titled Animal Performances (2004). In this, the authors twin the idea of performativity with Karen Barad’s concept of intra-action, and the outcome is the realization that human-animal relationships are built up through constantly rehearsed acts, within existing power relations. Contrary to Fausto-Sterling’s understanding of the performativity as acting upon the biological body, Lykke et al. use the concept to understand non-human animals from within a constructivist framework (we will return to this standpoint in our next section).
supplement in signification runs, namely to work as that element that arrests signification, bringing its endless movement seemingly to a halt.

**A material-semiotic body**

In a reminiscent manner, in her numerous publications on the problematic of separating nature from culture, Donna Haraway has argued for a view of the body as material-semiotic (1991, 1997). In short, this means that she calls into attention the simultaneity of materiality and meaning, the fleshy and the metaphor, fact and fiction, and thus refuses to reproduce the line between the social and biological. As she argues, any such distinction must in itself be conceived of as artificial, always a result of power relations within techno-science and modern naturecultures, and in opposition to it she thus places biology and the social on the same level (Haraway, 2000). Her twist is to invoke certain material-semiotic boundary walkers, or figures, to do the job of highlighting how arbitrary and fluid any such distinctions are.

As such a figuration, the gendered *trickster body*, carries with it the possibility of articulating and elucidating nature/culture without yielding to making distinctions (Lykke, 2008: 96). In many ways, the trickster has a kind of boundary existence: It is both fictional and real, animal and human being, man and woman — simultaneously (Haraway, 1991). By this merge she of course opposes the essentialist gesture of taking biology or body as the foundation for social constructions or epistemes. Equally important is that she opposes the reduction of the body to the social, as well as other scientific objects, to a “blank page for social inscriptions, including those of biological discourse” (1991: 197). The body is thus not endlessly unstable. Discourse does not come first; neither does flesh.
Stories constitute bodies, but are in themselves material; they are worldly.

Moreover, the notion of the material-semiotic body calls into account its inseparability from the epistemological practices, and highlights “the object of knowledge as an active part of the apparatus of bodily production” (1991: 208). In Haraway’s words, we can speak of the production of material-semiotic bodies and bodily entities as “corporealization”:

The bodies are perfectly “real”, and nothing about corporealization is “merely” fiction. But corporealization is tropic and historically specific at every layer of its tissues. Cells, organisms, and genes are not “discovered” in a vulgar realist sense, but they are not made up. /…/ The processes “inside” bodies – such as the cascades of action that constitute an organism or that constitute the play of genes and other entities that go to make a cell – are interactions, not frozen things. For humans, a word like gene specifies a multifaceted set of interactions among people and nonhumans in historically contingent, practical, knowledge-making work. A gene is not a thing, much less a “master molecule” or a self-contained code. Instead, the term gene signifies a node of durable action where many actors, human and nonhuman, meet. (1997: 142)

With this placing of the social and the biological on the same level, Haraway clearly breaks with the notion that separates social constructive processes from biological processes, and that renders this opposition along the lines of the distinction between epistemology and ontology (discussed above as a possible problem with Fausto-Sterling’s position).

The body is a result, and simultaneously the object, within the historically specific knowledge production that produces it. Now,
this implies that there is no way out of this level on which biology and sociality intertwine. In fact, we are never outside it and cannot be, something that logically must apply even to the experience of something limiting social processes. For the material is, according to Haraway, not working on the social from without, but from within the same level, meaning our subjective experience is always already mediated through this internal, essential tension.

Bodies and organs
The break with traditional dualisms such as body/soul, matter/ideality, nature/social, etc. has, of course, been characteristic of most postmodern theory, not least in feminist appropriations of the philosophies of Gilles Deleuze and Jacques Lacan. Thus, it became important for feminist theorists like Elisabeth Grosz, Moira Gatens and Rosi Braidotti not to conceive of the body as being simply outside or in opposition to discourse. Significantly, the elaboration of a more complex perspective on the body as corporeal came to focus on the Deleuzian topics of “positivity” and “becoming”.

Following Deleuze and Guattari, Grosz, for example, questions Butler’s focus on the productivity of discourse. According to her, this is a focus that reproduces an imaginary metaphysics, leaving women in the position of that which men lack. Deleuze and Guattari heavily questioned this economy of lack, and claimed that lack, ultimately, must be conceived of as an effect of the symbolic order, and its totalizing logic. As for negativity, lack was something that philosophy should rid itself of. This is, for example, the point with Deleuze and Guattari’s appropriation of Artaud’s concept of “bodies without organs”. In their work, these bodies mark exactly the possibility of real bodies liberated from or not
yet totalized by any form of totalizing instances. This, however, should not be interpreted as a simple return to any autonomous real beyond language. If “sex”, according to Grosz, cannot be seen as a posited truth expressed by the discursive operation of gender, it is precisely because we are not actually dealing with two different levels of which one expresses or represents the other. Rather, sex is always already in itself expression (Grosz, 1995: 212).

This unification of the real and discourse not only does away with the dualism of materiality/ideality, but, furthermore, implies an abandoning of the idea of being as substance. Treated as active and affirming becoming, the body is no longer that which resists meaning or an outside of meaning, but a constant process of becoming meaningful — not a materiality secondarily given meaning by representation, but a being that exists through its activity as an “immanent power of active nature” (Gatens, 1996: 148) and in which, conversely, ideality or mind is seen as always already embodied (Braidotti, 2006: 162). As Braidotti points out, this also allows us to think of desires, not as something excessive, but as a dimension of the fundamental positivity of being as passionate and affective becoming. There is “only one substance: an intelligent flesh-mind-matter compound” (Braidotti, 2006: 184). Thus, in her “nomadic feminism” (“nomadic”, of course, indicating Braidotti’s Deleuzian influences) the radicality of “the feminine” lies in a certain “movement of destabilization of identity and hence of becoming” — that is, in a “virtual feminine” that redefines female subjectivity (Braidotti, 2006: 183).

This argument has a very precise significance for the feminist “third way”, being as Braidotti herself explicitly states, a way out of the essentialism-constructivism impasse. The idea of a flesh-mind-matter compound allows feminism to conceptualize sexual
difference, simultaneously avoiding the essentialist metaphysics of a genuine female nature, and the constructivist trap of thinking mind as fundamentally neutral to sexual difference. In Claire Colebrook’s provocative statement, this new opening does not however result from giving an increased significance to the concept of sexual difference, but from the fact that sexual difference for nomadic feminism is simply no longer “a problem” (Colebrook, 2000). For these authors, the problem is instead the postmodern denial of sexual difference and the “homologization” of female and phallic sexuality, which only marks a new form of subordination of women. In this sense, the anti-essentialism of constructivism also becomes a problem, insofar as its relativism may play into the hands of a gender regime that works through suppressing the specificity of women’s lives in our society.

In contrast, bodily differences in the nomadic sense become both “a banality and a cornerstone in the process of differentiation of variation”. Referring to Genevieve Lloyds Part of nature: self-knowledge in Spinoza’s Ethics, Braidotti states:

> Given that the mind is the actual idea of the body, sexual difference can reach into the mind as the mind is not independent of the body in which it is situated. If bodies are differently sexed, so are minds […] Lloyd stresses the continuing relevance of sexual difference, against the theoretical illusions of an infinitely malleable, free floating gender. Grounded and situated, sexual difference as a mode of embodied and embedded actualization of difference shapes the space-time continuum of nomadic subjectivity (Braidotti, 2006: 185).
In other words, we get a female assemblage combining sex and gender in subtle ways, in an open-ended process of becoming—a “becoming-female” as an event in itself, never possible to trace either to a pure bodily or textual cause; a becoming female that, rather than some pre-given femaleness, evolves as a process opening up against new possibilities (or “lines of flights”), in a constant becoming other (Colebrook, 2000: 60). This becoming female as becoming other would, perhaps, be what Braidotti notes in Virginia Woolf’s work as her “ability to present her life as a gesture of passing through” (Braidotti, 2006: 189). This “passing through” precisely marks the process in which biology/matter and sociality/ideality are placed on the same plane of immanence, never to be thought of in isolation from one another.

In this sense, a real body would amount to a positive aspect of the production of the only constant that, according to Colebrook, remains in time—“the Same as the power of not remaining same” (Colebrook, 2000: 60) — a body that produces difference by way of repetition, becoming other while remaining same, never determined to take on any decided, pre-given meaning. Such is the real body in Braidotti’s nomadic discourse. A positive and real becoming-body contrasting any idealist notion of a body completely subordinated under social practice or performative work of construction. The crucial feature of this Deleuzian response to the essentialism-constructivism debate thus seems to be its refusal of postmodernism’s and constructivism’s shared relativist and idealist tendencies. As noted by feminists of the third way, this idealism seems not only to rid feminism of any shared political point of departure, but also of the specific features of women’s experience.
A body that speaks the gap

The promise of constructivist theory lay in its potential of allowing feminism to conceive of sex and bodies as material effects of gendered practices. Insofar as it came to emphasize these practices, concerns were raised over a possible reduction of the body to mere constructions. Not only did feminists constantly run into a certain real body in everyday life experiences of women, but constructivism in its dominant modes also seemed particularly difficult to reconcile with sciences like biology.

From the perspective of Fausto-Sterling, Haraway and Deleuzian feminism, we see a constant struggle with the question of how to rethink the status of biology and materiality in gendered practices and theory. All these efforts suggest ways of dealing with dualisms such as construction/reality and idea/matter. Approaching the body from Haraway’s perspective, feminism cannot retain the ability to understand it as a naturalized or reified product of social processes, since these cannot be singled out from biological and other processes. Instead, it has to be conceived of as simultaneously material and semiotic, in an inseparable manner. Genes matter, flesh matters, just as discourse matters. In contrast to Fausto-Sterling, this cannot imply a reliance on any complementary relationship between the social and natural sciences. It does not allow for a strict division into social reality, on the one hand, and natural reality, on the other. Instead, the division between a social and biological body is substituted for a bio-social body.

While acknowledging Deleuzian feminism’s idea of the body as a materiality in becoming, as well as its questioning of constructivist idealism, we would argue that at least some poststructuralist authors that the former criticizes, like Butler, work with concepts of the symbolic, the text and the semiotic that effectively breaks
with any such simple division between symbolic logic and material bodies without organs. Haraway makes this break even clearer, since she refuses to talk about these concepts, but instead consistently discusses material-semiotic, natureculture, etc.

The issue here is not over idealism versus materialism. The important issue is rather that feminists like Butler and Colebrook work through this very same dualism starting from opposing positions. Thus, “substance” for Butler and “text” for Colebrook come to occupy homological structural positions in their respective arguments, fulfilling similar metaphysical functions. In a similar manner, the body is always already approached from a particular position of enunciation, making it at times complicit in the metaphysical operation of phallocentrism, at times a force disrupting it. The concept of the body that speaks the gap is an attempt to account for this constitutive dispersion, posing the body as something originally manifold, never One or identical with itself – sometimes playing the role of a substance-body reproducing gender relations; at other times blocking the smooth operation of gender construction, in the shape of a monstrous or abject body; at other times still, forming a material-semiotic figure or a flesh-mind-matter compound that disrupts and transforms the very relationship between matter and idea.

A concept like the suggested one might seem inflated, and still, this inflation only seems to reflect and account for the very original dissemination of meanings attributed to the enigmatic fact of the body within feminist theory, many of which seem impossible to exclude from feminist analysis, and therefore ought to be included in any attempt at defining what the body “is”. Indeed, this suggested formulation of the body problematic does not imply a rejection of the biological perspective as such. Still, we argue that
the latter must not, for structural reasons, be approached as the solution to internal conflicts in social scientific explanations, conflicts that as it were – and according to us – should be confronted in their proper domain. The crucial point is that the bodies in objectivist biology and subjectivist constructivism are two quite different phenomena. They are the products of and operate within separate theoretical contexts or epistemologies, which is why they also take on different functions within these. As a consequence, a possible project of rapprochement between biology and the social sciences must include a meditation on how these different meanings could be incorporated or at least thought of in relation to one another, from the point of view of a constructivist inclined social science, avoiding the trap of approaching biology as a filler in the discursive body of knowledge.

Our suggestion could, perhaps, be seen as a possible formulation that could maintain the productive constructionist thesis conceiving of the body as constituted through social practice, at the same time taking note of recent concerns as expressed above. What this amounts to is an attempt to inquire as to what the body could be within a constructionist epistemology, not taking the limits of construction as the ultimate limit of constructionism or as reason enough to dispose of its fundamental concern with discourse and social practice. As already stated, this leads us to view the body as a basically split phenomenon, at the same time constructed and what expresses the limit of construction – in short, a phenomenon that in itself harbours an unbridgeable gap or “speaks the gap”, and that should be taken as a point of departure rather than something to be bridged, even in a possible rapprochement with biology.
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Queer Nature – Towards a Non-Normative View on Biological Diversity

Introduction

Biology and biological facts have often been used to define what is natural and morally acceptable (e.g. Haraway 1989). Facts about nature have frequently been used to justify sexism, racism, homophobia and other kinds of inequalities. Biological determinism, the hypothesis that biological factors determine an organism’s behaviour, is frequent in biology (Rose et al. 1984) and even more common in popular presentations of biological research (Bagemihl 1999). In the biological determinist argument, human gender differences in behaviour are accounted for by biological differences in genes, hormones or brain structure and conventional sex roles have evolved adaptively (Rose et al. 1984). Strict biological determinism receives little support among biologists as they are aware of the influence of environmental and social factors, though biological determinist arguments are still prevalent. For example, some claim that the fact that women are not promoted to the same extent as men are in academia is a consequence of biological sex differences (see counter-argument in Barres 2006). There is a paradox within biology that the theory is restricted to two sexes, although there is knowledge of an enormous variation in sexes. Evidently, there is a variety of understandings within evolutionary biology. Evelyn Fox Keller has pointed out that the sciences
contain a multiplicity of theories and that ideological influence, such as androcentric bias, is probably strongest when disregarding certain theoretical interpretations (Fox Keller 1982).

On the other hand, social constructivist analyses have focused heavily on the social construction of gender, leaving the biological body invisible (Grosz 1994; Birke 1999). Change is often assumed to take place in the gender part of the sex-gender dichotomy, since the physiological body is supposed to be invariable (Grosz 1994). However, like other biologists before me (e.g. Hrdy 1984; Fausto-Sterling 2000; Birke 1999; Zuk 2002; Gowaty 2003), I believe that there is great potential in exploring biology rather than treating it like something fixed and unapproachable, as has often been the case in cultural analyses (Birke 1999; Holmberg and Palm this volume).

In parallel to feminist and post-colonial theory, which question androcentric and racial biases, queer theory investigates biases built on the assumption that heterosexuality is the only natural sexuality. Queer theory challenges heteronormativity, that is, the ways heterosexuality, through everyday speech and acts, is made the only natural and normal way of living while simultaneously defining other sexualities as abnormal (Kulick 2004; Bromseth this volume). Norms of gender are inextricably entwined with those of sexuality, at the same time as male and female are made opposites, and in a hierarchal relation, heterosexual desire is made natural (Butler 1990). The heterosexual norm is made invisible through its presumed naturalness and upholds a hierarchy of difference across genders and sexualities. In this article I use queer theory for inspiration when criticizing heteronormativity and challenging categorizations of sex. My aim is to criticize the heteronormative view of biology by surveying the diversity of sexes and sexualities
as well as pointing towards a notion that includes variation in sexes and sexualities. This project is a subversive one; my objective is to open eyes and minds to a more variable view on sex, gender and sexuality in nature.

**Heteronormative biology**

Feminist biologists have demonstrated the androcentric bias in theory and research. Males are often supposed to be dominant and aggressive, while females are supposedly passive, caring for offspring (Hrdy 1981; Bleier 1984; Gowaty 1997; Fausto-Sterling et al. 1997).

For example, mating systems theory is based on the assumption that female reproduction is limited by resources that males monopolize to gain access to females. In fact, however, females are not passive possessions of males; mating systems are rather the outcome of dynamic interactions between females and males (Gowaty 1997). Thus, feminist biologists have illuminated stereotypical notions of females and males. However, there is a close connection between norms of gender and norms of heterosexuality. Heterosexuality in evolutionary biology is taken as a given, since reproduction is crucial to organisms’ existence; unless organisms reproduce, their genes are not transferred to the next generation. Animals try to survive and pass their genes on to the next generation. Heterosexuality is assumed to be the only natural sexuality and other sexualities are thereby defined as abnormal and in need of scientific explanation (Bagemihl 1999; Roughgarden 2004). This norm is problematic as it excludes some forms of sexes and sexualities.

Instead of painting a picture of evolution’s rainbow of sexes, genders and sexualities (Roughgarden 2004), species and life forms
that do not follow this norm are called *alternative*. Parthenogenetic species (consisting of only females) are described as evolutionary dead ends; those animal variants that do not conform to the choosing-female-and-competitive-male pattern are labelled as using “alternative reproductive tactics” and the vast array of same-sex sexuality has, for a very long time, been neglected altogether (Bagemihl 1999).

**Examples of reiterations in society**
Reflections of these norms are also seen in the media. In nature films shown on Swedish television, scenes showing sexual behaviour are with few exceptions heterosexual, and if homosexuality is shown it is often described as a mistake. The term *family* is often reserved for animals living in heterosexual, monogamous, nuclear families (Ganetz 2004).

Heteronormative ideas about nature are reiterated in many institutions in society. For example, in a secondary school book on biology (Peinerud et al. 2000), descriptions of animal strategies follow the heterosexual norm of two sexes. Despite the enormous diversity found in nature, the choice of animals presented in this book is in accord with this norm, for example birds living in monogamous pairs. The depiction of animals follows the same expectations as those for women and men in our society today.

Yet another example is the political debate, in which conservatives argue that same-sex couples should not be allowed to marry. Their argument is based on the naturalness of reproduction as the foundation of marriage; since man and woman were created for reproduction, an opposite-sex couple is the only option (e.g., Christian Democrats in the Swedish Parliament). Thus, ideas about biology are used to justify inequality in society and, at the same time,
biological science is shaped by dominant ideologies in society. This process is called a cultural boomerang – first, our cultural norms are applied to nature and then this version of nature is used to naturalize the same norms (Ganetz 2004).

Sex and gender in biology
Gender is not commonly used in evolutionary biology except as a synonym for sex, but could be seen as sex differences in behaviour, or as suggested by Roughgarden (2004), “the appearance, behaviour and life history of a sexed body”. There is no dichotomy between sex and gender (appearance and behaviour) in evolutionary biology; both are viewed as functions of how ecological variables influence organisms.

In biological terms, being female or male is defined by the production of eggs or sperm, but there are numerous mechanisms of sex determination in biology (i.e., the process that determines which sex an individual will belong to). For example, sex may be determined by genetic differences between individuals, like in mammals and birds, by temperature like in crocodiles and lizards, or by the social environment like in some fish. Indeed, mechanisms of sex determination are very flexible, having changed numerous times between different genetic, temperature-dependent, hermaphroditic and unisexual systems (Policansky 1982; Munday et al. 2006a, Mank et al. 2006). In mammals, males have two different sex chromosomes, while in birds females carry the heteromorphic sex chromosomes. During the evolution of reptiles and fish, the sex determination mechanisms have changed frequently and have repeatedly produced different sex chromosomes (Bull 1980; Froschauer et al. 2006). From what we know about sex determination in well studied species, a cascade of gene and hormone reactions
produce what in the end becomes an individual’s sex (Ah-King & Nylin ms). Each step in this genetic and hormonal cascade is open to mutation that may thereby change the sex determination system.

As an example of the multiple ways of determining sex, bees have a special form of sex determination in which females have two sets of genes and males have only one set. The males develop from unfertilized eggs and thus have no father and cannot produce sons, as fertilized eggs always develop into females. This sex determination system has the benefit of the females determining the sex of each egg and thereby producing males only during the part of the season when mating flights take place.

There are also a number of animals that procreate without sex. These species are called unisexual, and since new individuals develop from unfertilized eggs all individuals are female. The mechanisms differ, and in some species, for example the Amazon molly (fish), females need to mate with a male from a closely related species for the eggs to develop, despite the fact that this does not fertilize the eggs. In a lizard species, females mate with each other to initiate egg development. In yet other species, such as aphids, several generations of only females are followed by a generation containing both males and females. Thereby, the benefit of fast reproduction by all females is combined with the benefits of recombination of the genes through sexual reproduction.

Evolutionary biologists often call these parthenogenetic species dead ends, despite the fact that many of them have endured for millions of years (Ebeling 2006). Descriptions and naming of these species (e.g. Amazon Molly, Amazon after Greek mythology’s nation of woman warriors) reveal the mythological and often fearful attitude towards procreation without males (Ebeling 2006).
Changing and ambiguous sexes

In contrast to the commonly perceived image, ambiguous sexes and sex change are common in many animals, and sex differences alter due to environmental influences. Hermaphrodites may be simultaneous, producing eggs and sperm at the same time, or individuals that change sex during their life. Hermaphroditism is common in snails, nudibranches, fish, shrimp; most plants are also hermaphroditic.

Also, sex change has been reported in numerous animal species, among them fish, worms, sponges, shrimp and snails (Policansky 1982; Munday et al. 2006a). Sex change may be induced by temperature, when a certain body size is reached or by the social environment (Policansky 1982; Munday et al. 2006a). In most shrimp, all individuals are born male and become female at a given body size. The coral goby lives in coral reefs, and any individual may change sex. They breed in monogamous pairs, and should a mate disappear, the other mate searches for a new mate and when two individuals meet, either of them may change sex to form a new female-male couple (Nakashima et al. 1996).

In the blue-head wrasse, fry are unsexed, but depending on their social environment become females or males. In isolation, most fry become females. In groups of three, one individual usually develops into a male (Munday et al. 2006b). Furthermore, this species has two kinds of males, a small variety that is similar to the female (with a yellow body and a black stripe along its side) and a larger sort with a blue head and yellow body.

Thus, biology and sex differences are not as stable and fixed as is often presumed. This is also true for appearance. In hummingbirds, plumages vary from female-like to male-like in both sexes. In this case, rather than being an effect of mate choice or compe-
tition for mates, the plumage seems to be an effect of ecological factors and a sign by which dominance hierarchies are determined at food sites (Bleiweiss 2001).

**Reproductive strategies**

Nature’s diversity in sexes and genders is also shown in reproductive strategies, which vary between species. The Bluegill sunfish is an example of a species with several different reproductive strategies. In this species males have three different morphs, one being a large parental male, another a tiny sneaker male,¹ and a third morph, a medium-sized satellite male whose appearance is similar to that of a female. All three of these male morphs also behave differently - parental males defend territories and care for eggs and fry, whereas sneaker males and satellites join in when parental males mate (Gross 1991). Coho salmon have two kinds of males, usually termed hooknose and sneaker males. In a recent study, the roles of these males have been questioned. According to traditional sexual selection theory, the larger males are thought to be preferred by females and male body size is thought to have evolved through both male-male competition and female choice. However, another hypothesis is that males also may coerce female choice through their large size and aggressive behaviour. Accordingly, a behavioural study of mating in Coho salmon suggests that females prefer mating with the small males while large males aggressively coerce females to mate with them (Watters 2005). Females lay more eggs when there are small males around, and they may mate with small males only. Thus, Watters (2005) suggests that large males instead be called “coercers” and small males “co-operators”.

¹ Small males are called sneaker males since they are presumed to sneak fertilizations from the large males.
Some animals also show flexible sex roles. In evolutionary biology, “sex role” is not the same as in the social sciences, e.g. perceived norms of behaviour for males and females in a given social group. Instead, it is often defined according to sexual selection theory, and conventional sex role is when males compete among each other for females (Vincent et al. 1992), which often coincides with females performing mate choice. The term sex roles is most often used in terms of reversed sex roles. Thus, biologists do not refer to animals that follow the perceived usual pattern as performing conventional sex roles unless in comparison to those with reversed sex roles. Here, as in the case of alternative reproductive strategies, what is perceived as being outside the norm is given a label. Sex role may also be defined with respect to a certain life history characteristic, such as incubation sex roles (e.g. Wallander 2003).

Two-spotted gobies are small fishes that can be found along the Swedish west coast. At the beginning of each summer, males compete among themselves for access to females, and the females in turn choose which males to mate with (Forsgren et al. 2004). At the end of the season these roles are reversed, with females competing for males and the males choosing. In this species, the change in sex roles over the breeding season is correlated to a change in adult sex ratio. At the beginning of the summer, there are plenty of males performing courtship to arriving females, but as the season proceeds breeding males become scarce, possibly dying. It is not known why this is, but it might be due to intensive competition earlier on or exhaustion from providing care. Later in the season, there are more females than males available for mating, and this overturned balance in available mates leads to female-female competition and male mate choice.
Another example is the formation of family groups. Animals live in all sorts of constellations. For example, oystercatchers (birds) often form a bisexual group of three individuals that breed and raise their offspring together. In many other species single parenting is the rule, whereas yet others breed and care for offspring communally. Acorn woodpeckers, for example, form communal breeding groups that engage in courtship as well as hetero- and homosexual activities, and raise their young together (Bagemihl 1999).

Various sexual practices
In surveying variation in sexual practices, I rely on Bruce Bagemihl’s foundational work in which he has summarized earlier research (Bagemihl 1999). Sexing is not always easy; for example, it is difficult to tell female and male gulls apart. When two gulls are seen together they are often assumed to be a heterossexual couple. Researchers working with gulls have even used mounting behaviour to define which sex an individual has – males are the mounters and females the mounted. However, sexing gulls with DNA technology has revealed that homosexual couples are very common, for example 16% in Black-headed gulls. Regarding homosexuality as animals’ inability to correctly identify other animals’ sex is one way researchers have tried to explain it. Sometimes, the mere occurrence of homosexual behaviours is taken as evidence that the animals cannot tell the sexes apart. Other examples of methods of disregarding homosexual behaviour in animals include de-sexualizing terminology of homosexual behaviours, inadequate recording and repression of information.

2 This is also true for humans, a small fraction of whom at birth cannot be sexed according to the dichotomous labels of female and male (see Fausto-Sterling 2000).
There is an immense variety of sexual practices among animals. Masturbation is widespread among vertebrates and is known to occur in primates, rodents and bats, for example. Sexual interaction between different species is known in dolphins, primates, seals, and sea lions. The list of non-procreative sexual behaviour is long: male-male pair bonding in Greylag geese, copulation in pregnant Northern Elephant seals, sexual encounters between adults and pups, reverse mounting in which a female mounts a male or another female, etc. At least 300 species of vertebrates are known to perform homosexual behaviours, and the same individuals often also perform heterosexual behaviours. Many animals that engage in heterosexual encounters never breed and many that perform same-sex sexual behaviour do. Reproduction is often a marginal activity in animal lives (Bagemihl 1999).

These biological examples from different levels - the microbiological level (genes, hormones and cells), the whole organism (behaviours and experiences) and the evolutionary level (e.g., how sexes have evolved over evolutionary time) - show that biological sex from an evolutionary perspective is highly variable. In conclusion, mechanisms of sex determination, sex change and sexual behaviours are much more variable than the two-sexed heterosexual norm presented in traditional evolutionary theory.
Evolutionary theory – an explanation of nature’s diversity

Evolutionary theory has explained the diversity in nature in terms of survival and reproduction. The theory of natural selection explains evolution of adaptive characteristics as a result of enhanced survival of individuals possessing certain traits in a certain environment. This enhanced survival until reproduction leads to a higher frequency of these traits in following generations. Sexual selection is the process in which mating success, as opposed to increased survival, brings forth traits. For example, if an individual with colourful plumage brings forth more offspring than others do and this trait is heritable, the next generation will have more individuals with colourful plumage.

Traditional sexual selection theory is often presented briefly as follows (e.g. Futuyma 2007): Females per definition invest in large eggs, and males in small sperm. This difference is an important factor influencing the reproductive strategies of males and females. If given the opportunity, a male can easily mate with many females. Therefore, he loses relatively little in reproductive success if one of the females turns out to be unsuitable (such as...

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3 A common misconception about evolutionary theory is that individuals do what is good for the species. In general, however, selection operates on the level of the individual and not the group. This means that if an individual has to choose between doing something that is good for itself or something that is good for its species, it will be selected to do what is good for the individual which will lead to higher survival or reproduction. It is also important to note that all characteristics need not be adaptations, because as the environment changes, a species need not change all its characteristics in order to survive. Nor need every environmental change influence a species’ survival. As natural selection is a process without goal, we should not expect it to lead to progress or to follow a certain path. This process leads neither to perfection, harmony and balance of nature, nor to morality and ethics (Futuyma 2007). Natural selection will result in adaptations that are compromises between various selection processes.
being of the wrong species, of poor quality or a poor genetic match to the male). A female, on the other hand, can have all her eggs fertilized by a single male. The reproductive success of such a single-mated female would be significantly compromised if her mating partner happened to be inappropriate. This investment in eggs/sperm together with the investment in parental care also influences reproductive behaviours. Therefore, in most species, males compete among themselves for mating with females and females choose their male mating partners. Darwin described male and female mating strategies in the following words:

...the male is the more active member in the courtship of the sexes. The female, on the other hand, with the rarest exceptions, is less eager than the male...she is coy, and may often be seen endeavouring for a long time to escape from the male... (Darwin 1891)

These processes have led to male weaponry such as horns or sharp teeth as well as showy characteristics, such as the peacock’s tail or elaborate songs. There are exceptions, for example in some pipefishes, whereby males invest more time in parental care and females compete for mating partners. These species are called sex-role reversed, and species in which males compete for females and females are choosy are described as having conventional sex roles.

The current understanding among evolutionary biologists is essentially the same, though research has shown that sexual selection is more complex than initially recognized. For example, sex differences in egg/sperm size do not determine the parental care system; instead, these systems coevolve and may have complex feedbacks (Clutton-Brock 2007; Kokko and Jennions 2008). The classic way of describing sexual selection mirrors the traditional
view of biology, or the “Noah’s Ark view” (Bagemihl 1999) – with two sexes, a female and a male, that reproduce in a heterosexual pair. Thereby sex change, hermaphroditism and variable sexualities are often described as exceptions to this norm (Bagemihl 1999).

Towards a non-normative perspective on nature’s diversity

Above, I have described how multi-faceted the animal world is in terms of reproductive strategies and sexual practices. In this section, I put forward non-normative perspectives on nature’s diversity challenging the conventional account of biological sex. These explanations are not in opposition to evolutionary theory, but rather present a way to change focus when observing nature. This endeavour is in line with Evelyn Fox Keller’s suggestion that we should change science from within by pointing out biases in the scientific paradigm and exploring marginal theories that have been left out because they are defined as being outside the norm (Fox Keller 1982).

Sexual selection research has been formed by cultural assumptions about sex – heterosexuality, two sexes, etc. But how can we explain the fact that such an immense diversity in sexual behaviours has evolved?

I believe one clue to this question can be found in ethological research on animal cognition. For example, in “Pleasurable Kingdom”, Jonathan Balcombe (2006) describes the evolution of pleasure. If pleasurable experiences increase our survival or reproduction, then these will be promoted. In every moment, animals are not preoccupied with ultimate goals such as survival and reproductive success, but rather immediate experiences (Balcombe
Thus, animals do what makes them feel good, and this has been promoted by evolutionary processes. One example from Balcombe (2006) is explanations for why we eat spicy food. There are numerous evolutionary explanations: to benefit from the antibacterial effects of spices, to get micronutrients, to facilitate cooling by making us sweat more. But when we eat spicy food, we are usually not thinking about expelling bacteria or avoiding malnutrition. Spices increase the tastiness of food as well as our pleasure in ingesting a meal. The immediate motivation to eat the spices is that they taste good, but at the same time this may have evolutionary benefits.

When animal behaviours are described in popular accounts, the animals are often depicted as doing everything for an evolutionary purpose. However, evolution has no goal or purpose. If procreating were always the motivation behind sexual behaviours, animals would not perform them when there is no chance of producing offspring – but they do (Bagemihl 1999; see above). Responses to sexual interactions suggest that animals enjoy sex (Balcombe 2006). For example, bonobos are known to grimace and scream during female-female genital rubbing. Non-procreative sex may be performed merely for the pleasure of it, but it may also have fitness benefits such as releasing social tension, giving practice and keeping the sexual function in shape. Diversity in animal sexual behaviours requires acknowledging sexual pleasure as a motivating force (Bagemihl 1999).

Sex and sexual characteristics are not static, and depend to a high degree on environmental effects. In collaboration with Sören Nylin, professor in Animal Ecology, I have developed a model of sex from an evolutionary perspective (Ah-King & Nylin ms). In order to depart from static views of biological sex, we present
contemporary biological understanding of variation in sex and related characteristics. A striking feature is the importance of environmental effects on sex and gender. We suggest that sex can be viewed as a reaction norm. One set of genes in interaction with different environments can give rise to a range of appearances, and this range is the reaction norm (Figure 1). In each species, sex develops in different steps that are more or less dependent on environmental influence. Sex-determining genes start a cascade of gene expression, hormones are released and responded to differently, and social interactions affect behaviour and morphology. In some species the sex determination mechanism itself is environmentally determined; for example, in crocodiles eggs are unsexed, with sex being determined depending on incubation temperature (Pieau et al. 1999).

**Figure 1:**

Sex can be viewed as a reaction norm, i.e. interactions between genes and different environments give rise to a range of appearances. In this case, unsexed turtle eggs develop their sex depending on incubation temperature, high temperature result in females and low in males.
This is an example of sex being a reaction norm, but even in species with strict genetic sex determination, like mammals, characteristics associated with one sex will be expressed differently due to environmental effects. In these species the sex may be viewed as the inner environment determining the expression of sexual characteristics. Intersexuality as well as changes in sexual characteristics due to hormone intake illustrates the variability of sexual characteristics. Actually, the genes coding for sexual characteristics exist in both sexes. Therefore, in an evolutionary sense, sex is just another characteristic that may be selected upon. In some species bright plumage is associated with females, in others males. Apart from the actual production of eggs and sperm – the biological definition of female and male – there is no feature that is definitely associated with being a female or a male in an evolutionary sense.

The implications of this insight are numerous. Since the majority of genes exist in both males and females, it is probable that most characteristics overlap between the sexes. Therefore, we should not expect sex differences to be innately dissimilar and fall into discrete categories. Seeing sex as an interaction between genes and the environment is one way to acknowledge variability. This way of thinking may reduce gender bias and dissolve the dichotomous portrayal of femaleness and maleness.

When it comes to humans, there is no disagreement about culture’s great influence on gender, but biologists do disagree on the degree to which evolutionary biology may explain human behaviour (e.g. Wilson 1975; Rose et al. 1984). Furthermore, the current understanding of environmental influence on sex determination mechanisms and the expression of sex-related characteristics demonstrates the variable disposition of biological sex. Even in
humans, with a genetic sex determination system, the expression of sex characteristics is susceptible to environmental influence, as illustrated by hormonal sex change, because all individuals carry genes for both male and female sexual characteristics. The expression of any characteristic is thus merely a question of the regulation of these genes, which explains why variation in most cases is larger within sexes than between sexes.

Some conclusions
In this article I have reviewed the variation of sex and sexualities in evolutionary biology. My aims were to problematize the heteronormative view of sexes and sexualities and to present a non-normative perspective. I have shown here that heteronormativity, the cultural construction of heterosexuality as the only natural way of living, is sustained in evolutionary biology. Heteronormative ideas influence research and questions posed in biology, and these ideas are then reiterated in schoolbooks about biology, how nature is accounted for in nature films on TV and how biology and nature are understood in society. Traditionally, sex/gender differences have been problematized within the nurture part of the nature-nurture dichotomy. Here I show that evolutionary biology can also be used to problematize sex/gender in nature. I highly approve of the metaphor “Evolution’s rainbow” (Roughgarden 2004). We can name and classify a number of colours - but in reality they are innumerable.

Natural facts are often put forward to support conventional views on sexuality and sex roles. Biological sex differences are often depicted as essentially separate and static, with sexualities other than heterosexuality being labelled abnormal. However, reviewing the variation of sexes and sexualities in nature reveals an
unimaginable diversity. In reality, nature sees no boundaries of sex, gender and sexuality, exceeding the traditional constructions of biology presented in the media as well as by traditional evolutionary biologists. There are plenty of species whose bodies and sexualities transcend the heteronormative boundaries normally constructed of sex, gender and sexuality. There are bodies that transform from male to female depending on their social environment, bodies that include both female and male functions, and eggs that are unsexed but receive their sex due to the temperature during incubation. All these bodies are often described as exceptions to a norm of two-sexed heterosexual species in which individuals have fixed sexes. Though males and females in a certain species may differ, in an evolutionary sense, producing eggs and sperm are the only features that are definitely associated with being female and male; all other characteristics vary. How can this insight change our understanding of nature, animals, sex and sexualities?

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What is a **BODY**? What expectations, desires, thoughts, and emotions do bodies evoke? What kind of subjectivities do bodies reflect and give rise to and how do they receive their meanings in relation to one another? In what ways does the materiality of bodies stick to our thinking?

In both feminist theorizing and our lived cultures, the body is a contested zone that invites our attention and elicits inquiry. The articles in this volume all deal with claims made about the body – ranging from critical analysis of how bodies are positioned and marked in everyday cultural practice, to theoretical contributions to our conceptual understanding of what bodies are and can do.

Through the various readings and engaged dialogues this collection makes its own bodily **CLAIMS**. Covering and crossing a wide variety of disciplines and fields of research, the different articles contribute to an ongoing deconstruction and reconstruction of traditional disciplinary boundaries.