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Masculinities, Gender Equality and Violence

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Abstract

Based on new data on the impact of gender equality on interpersonal violence, the paper offers a critique of the gender-based violence view and presents an alternative view where gender inequality is central. This is connected to recent theory developments regarding gendering as an ontoformative (reality-shaping) process, focusing on how gender inequality becomes manifest especially through sexual harassment and sex-related violence.

Keywords: gender equality, violence, sexual harassment, gendering, theory development

Masculinidades, Igualdad de Género y Violencia

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Resumen

Este artículo está basado en nuevos datos sobre el impacto de la igualdad de género en la violencia interpersonal, en él se presenta una crítica a la visión existente acerca de la violencia de género y describe una visión alternativa donde la desigualdad de género es central. Ello está conectado con los desarrollos teóricos recientes sobre género entendidos como un proceso ontoformativo (visión de la realidad), centrados en cómo la desigualdad de género se manifiesta especialmente a través del acoso sexual y la violencia sexual.

Palabras clave: igualdad de género, violencia, acoso sexual, dimensión de género, desarrollo teórico

Why is it that men are associated with violence, so much more than women, in our society? This is not just a sociobiological rule of most societies, but also a social and cultural rule in our own society (Hagemann-White et al., 2008; Edwards, 2006; Hearn, 1998). The gender selection regarding violence is clearly not just a "natural" state of affairs.

This paper uses new data that show impact of the degree of *gender equality* on the level of violence, challenging conventional assumptions about *gender* and violence. It uses this evidence to discuss gender-related violence as performance, as reification, and as ontoformative. The paper discusses gender and violence on the basis of improved methods where gender equality measures are included.

Background

Over the last decades, gender studies have helped make gender into a more central focus of violence research, together with a general development towards more emphasis on the socially constructed character of violence (e.g in Norway, Råkil, 2002). A part of the violence, especially violence in close relations and private life relationships, and in particular violence between men and women, can be seen as “gendered” or “gender-based” violence (Ferguson et al., 2004).

Thereby, in light of the theories of gender as configurations of practices (Connell, 1995; 2003) as well as performances (Butler, 1990; 2004), violence has been investigated as a gendered question, with increasing attention, first, to the victims of violence, and gradually also to the perpetrators. This development was pioneered by feminists demanding investigation and reduction of men's violence against women (Ericsson, 1998), and has been important also for prevention of violence work.

Yet the new gender paradigm also had limitations. Even if feminists saw gender equality as a main issue, it has seldom been systematically studied in relation to violence. Gender, rather than gender equality, became the operative term. And what exactly does “gender-based” violence mean? The main focus has been on men's violence against

women, and the relationship between this supposedly “directly” gender-based violence and other “indirectly” gender-based forms of violence, including women’s use of violence in close relations, was not clarified, and has remained unresolved.

Violence surveys and other research has generally shown that men perform most of the physically harmful violence in private or interpersonal relationships. In this sense, the feminist model of men’s violence against women as a central trait of gender discrimination has proven true. However, besides the portion of violence performed by women, with studies showing more gender balance in the less physically harmful types of violence, there are also other traits that play important roles, including social class and demographic variables (Pape & Stefansen, 2004; Straus & Gelles, 1986; Finkelhor, 2007; 2008). Some studies of violence against children indicate that women are as involved (or, in some contexts, more involved) than men (Christoffersen, 1996). Many men are non-violent, while some women are violent (Råkil, 2002; Jungnitz, 2004). One might say that the gender-based violence paradigm has worked a bit too well for its own sake, engaging too many stereotypes. Popular versions of the model have been used in fundamentalist ways, making violence inherent in masculinity, and have simplified the complex empirical picture.

Therefore, revised gender models of violence have been discussed, starting e.g. from ‘modified’ feminist poststructuralism and practice-oriented discourse theory (e.g. Butler, 2005; Reeser, 2010; Edwards, 2006; Fairclough, 2010). The aim is a more “situationist” approach, a socially and culturally located theory (Connell, 2012; Sæter & Holter, 2011). Gender is not always an endless chain of references that govern other action - but it can rise to this level at times, in certain situations.

These “violence-prone” situations can be differentiated in many ways, but they also have common attributes. Although sociocultural factors are of key importance for understanding why situations turn violent, it remains the case that biology and psychology have a say regarding who becomes violent in those situations (Baker, 1999; Anderson, 1997). It is clear that institutional and organizational levels of analysis are important, and that a main aim is to understand structures and actors combined.

A gender model of violence has its main starting point in men's violence against women. Other related forms of violence are less well clarified, including violence against men, and violence between men. Most violence studies show that men, and especially young men, are more often victims of violence in public areas, women more in private or close relations. Are these just isolated phenomena, and if not, how are they linked? Some gender regime and patriarchy models do put major emphasis on the ranking between men, which could help explain the large extent of violence between men in some contexts, especially public sphere violence. Yet this is not well worked out in today's research.

Different forms of hierarchy combine or intersect in the creation of violence, for example, the gender, class, ethnicity, sexuality, age and function / handicap hierarchies. The combination or intersection affects the violence chance at the structural as well as individual level. Power is a central theme, although as we shall see, the connection between power and violence varies and can be complex.

A wide model of several interacting forces is necessary in order to understand a typical empirical trait, the "clustering" of violence. In Norway data, for example, the chance of interpersonal violence is associated with gender (male), with an insecure or lacking work situation, with couple insecurity, with age (young adult), with lower social class, with other forms of violence in the local environment, and others (Pape & Stefansen, 2004). However, gender equality variables are often missing or very limited in violence surveys.

Also, the evidence that does exist, is often conflicting. According to the *resource hypothesis*, violence is what people (or, mainly men) turn to, when other resources are lacking (Goode, 1971). If a man feels threatened by losing his status vis-à-vis his partner or wife, the chance of violence will rise. This view has some empirical support, especially in surveys from some decades ago (Anderson, 1997; McCloskey, 1996). Historically, women's vote may have increased violence against women (Websdale, 1992).

On the other hand, the *empowerment of women* hypothesis also has support, especially in new studies, pointing in the opposite direction – stronger women reduces violence (Kaya & Cook, 2010). Empowerment

of women is associated with actual gender equality although not identical.

Studies discussing gender equality and violence are often restricted to measurements on the attitude level. The actual practice is not included. For example, men's hostility towards women at the attitude level is a known risk factor, but is not the same as whether the men are living in a gender equal or unequal couples.

New data, presented below, throw new light on the issue. They bring up a theme from the "classical" feminist tradition, where it was *gender inequality* or the *oppression of women* that produced violence, rather than *gender* as such.

New data

A new survey method was developed in Norway 2007, putting the main focus on gender equality in different age periods and areas of society (childhood, youth, adult work life, private life and others), using several hundred variables in a multidimensional approach (Holter, Svare & Egeland, 2009). Gender equality was measured on the practices level in several ways, including power and decision-making (in jobs and families), and division of housework and care work (in families). Different types of attitudes, as well as personal gender identity measures, were included. The survey also contained sets of questions about health and quality of life.

The questionnaire started with a section where respondents were asked about the period when they grew up and the conditions in their childhood home and local environment. The questionnaire also included a set of questions about violence in adult life, in private and public arenas. The private life questions included questions on violence in the current relationship, compared to the former relationship. The results showed a strong tendency that former relationships were portrayed as more violent than current relationships. The data on violence in adult relationships were somewhat contradictory, probably as an effect of underreporting of current relationship violence.

Compared to this, the retrospective childhood data were more consistent. For example, men and women of different age groups gave a

very similar and consistent picture. Respondents of both genders reported that the level of violence against children was reduced by about two thirds, in the period covered by the survey. Also, the survey questions about health and quality of life showed similar effects of childhood violence, later in life. [Figure 1](#), shown below, shows the decreasing incidence of childhood violence (including physical punishment) over time.

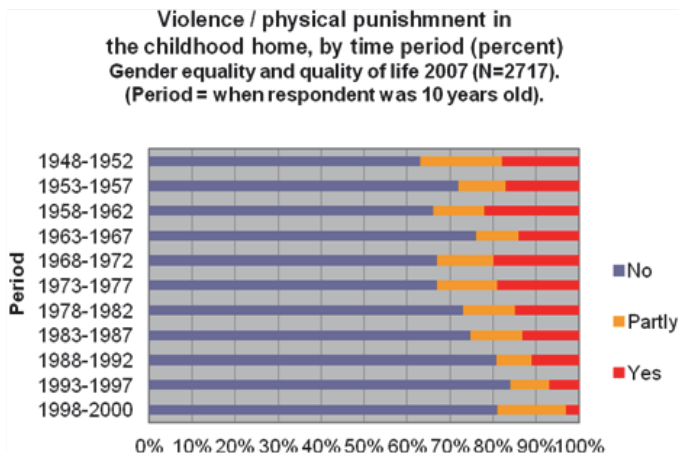


Figure 1. Violence against children in different age groups (Norway 2007)

Throughout the 1948-2000 time period, the data indicates that violence against children was much less frequent in gender-equal homes, than in gender-unequal homes. This main result is shown below.

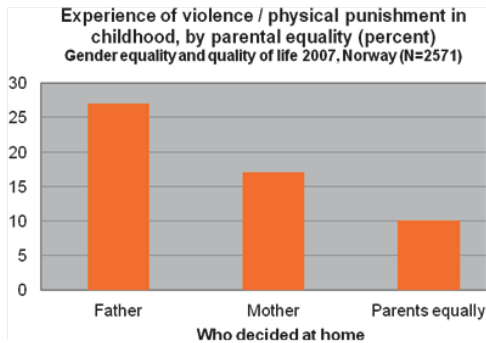


Figure 2. Violence and gender equality in the childhood home

The results show almost two thirds less violence in gender-equal homes, compared to traditional gender-unequal or father-dominated homes. Mother-dominated homes were in the middle. As we shall see, this pattern has recently been confirmed in an international survey also.

How realistic is this finding? Could it be a data or survey design error? In the Norway survey, the respondents were first asked a series of questions about their childhood and conditions in the childhood home. “Who decided at home” (who had the final say) was asked as a summary question, as an indicator of the degree of gender equality between the parents, and this seems to be how it was understood (for example, not a higher level of “don’t know” answers). The question made sense. If men and women decide equally or not is a core of the gender equality concept, at least in the Norway context. Further, varied analyses of this association between parental gender equality and (lower) violence show a consistent pattern across other variables. The chance that the result is spurious is small. It could be objected that the results are likely to be influenced by today’s “political correctness”, but this does not appear to be a major factor (see below), and it can be seen as a plus that the phrase “gender equality” was not directly used.

The findings indicate that gender equality will, roughly, reduce the chance of violence by one half to two thirds. As mentioned, the association was remarkably strong and consistent across control variables. These included whether the parents divorced or not,

harassment/mobbing in the local childhood environment, as well as standard background variables like education, age and gender. For example, the pattern was much the same across age groups (not shown) and across education levels, as shown in [Figure 3](#) below.

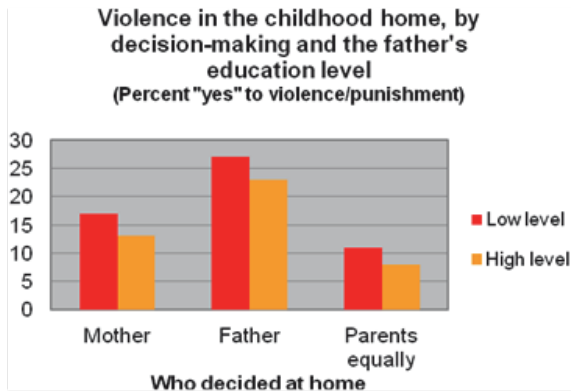


Figure 3. Violence and gender equality, by education level

It is noteworthy that the preventive effect of gender equality at home was as strong among the younger respondents, as among the older ones, and that the negative health effects of childhood violence were no less strong (in fact a bit stronger) among the young than among the older respondents.

It might be assumed that since violence has become more focused in public and media debate, the threshold for reporting violence has become lower. Since less serious cases are included, this should mean that the negative health effects of violence should be lower among the younger than the older respondents. However, that was not the case. The violence concept, among the younger respondents, did not seem “diluted”.

A main feature of the new results is that men and women give an almost identical picture of violence and gender equality in childhood. Their experiences seem far less “gender-divided” than has often been assumed. For example, aggression problems later in life, associated with

early life experience of violence, have been seen as a special masculine issue, but in the new results, aggression problems appeared as a quite similar pattern across gender (even if the type of aggression problem may vary by gender - for practical reasons, the survey’s health detail was limited). The self-reported health and quality of life effects of violence in childhood were much the same for women and men, as well as the extent and content of the problems described. This does not fit a model where gender-based violence leads to strong gender differences among the victims.

Recently, the main Norway results have been confirmed in the international IMAGES survey, partly building on the Norwegian questionnaire (Barker et al., 2011). This survey included a question on partner violence, showing a similar pattern. Data from the first countries of the survey is used in Figure 4 below (based on Holter’s analysis of the Images data file 2011, published with consent from the Images team).

Besides violence against the respondents themselves (as children), the respondents were asked about violence against the mother. The results showed that gender unequal homes and especially father-dominated homes were more often violent, on both indicators, compared to gender equal homes.

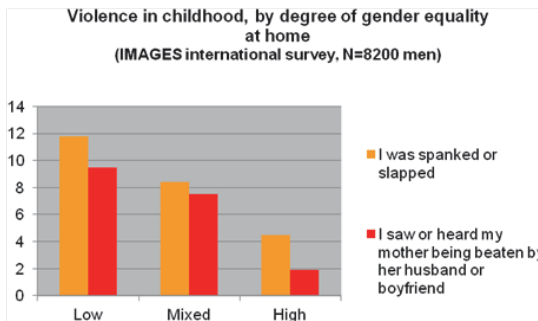


Figure 4. Childhood violence and partner violence in an international survey

The figure speaks for itself. High gender equality in the childhood home, defined as the mother and father having an equal say, is associated with lower violence. Even more clearly than in the Norway survey, gender equality appears as a main factor reducing the chance of violence against children, and also, violence against women.

In summary, the data indicate that gender equality works more preventively than has so far been acknowledged in international research. There, the opinion has often been split, for example, the hypothesis that gender equality can increase violence in the short run, even if it might reduce violence in the longer run. This argument has been typical especially in gender-traditional contexts where, it has been assumed, *men may feel threatened* and become more violent with more gender equality. In view of the new results, this does not appear very likely, or rather a *minor effect*, compared to the violence-reducing effect of gender equality.

International research has also often portrayed men's violence as a fairly stable affair, occurring across different contexts. This idea also becomes dubious, in light of the new data.

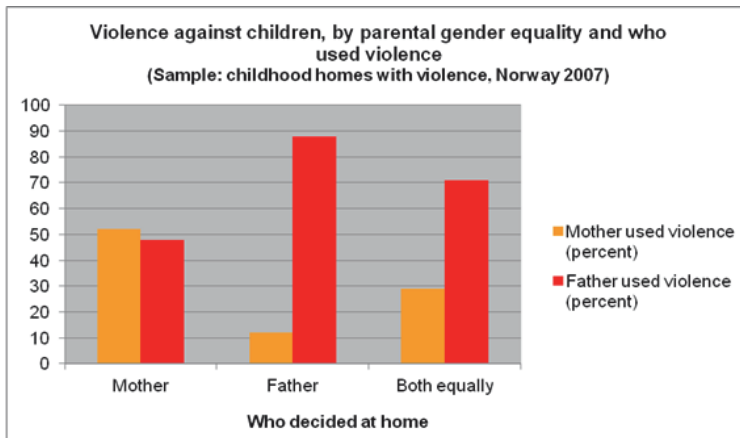


Figure 5. Violence against children, by parental gender equality and perpetrator's gender

This figure shows that there is no such thing as a “gender effect as such”. Men were the more overall violent persons, in the main part of the picture. But this was not the case in homes where the mother decided. There, instead, the mothers were in a slight overweight among those using violence. Also, even if the use of violence in equal-decision homes remained mainly male, the gender imbalance among those using violence was notably lower than in male-decision homes.

In homes where the father decided, the father was the one who was violent in 89 percent of all the violence cases. In homes where the parents decided equally, the father stood for 70 percent, and in homes where the mother decided, 48 percent. In other words, mothers were slightly more often violent than fathers, in mother-dominated homes. Note that the “mother-dominant” category in this (and similar) contexts is a more mixed category than the two others, including quite traditional patterns as well as exception cases.

The main pattern can most economically be explained by two coexisting tendencies: violence follows the line of power, and men are more associated with violence. Of these, the first appears to be strongest – rather than the conventional idea that violence follows gender or is inherently a masculine domain. This appears also if we also consider the extent of violence in the three types of households – gender-equal households have a much lower violence level.

The violence data in the new data set is part of a broader investigation of gender equality. Here is an example (from the Norway survey) of how different factors influence the chance of gender equal practices (decision-making and work/care division) in the couple. Note that gender equality in childhood, as a whole, seems to have a small impact on adult life gender equality.

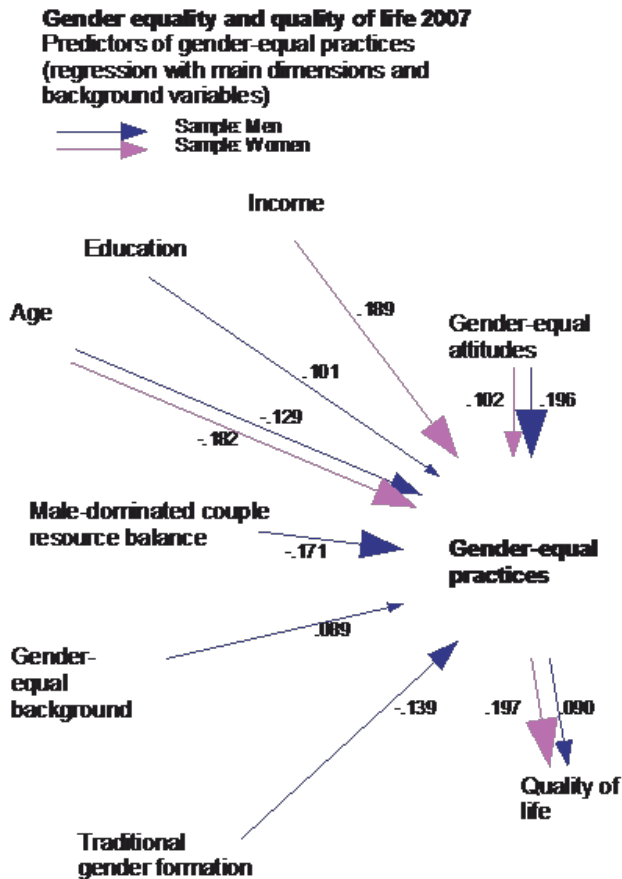


Figure 6. Predictors of gender-equal practices (Norway 2007)

In this diagram, based on regression analyses of the gender equality subdimensions of the survey, the independent variables are pictured on the left, the dependent on the right. The gender dimensions are mapped along with three background variables - income, education and age. The size of the arrows shows the approximate effect.

The main dependent variable, gender-equal practices, is shown to the right, with gender-equal practice defined as balanced decisions and household work in married and cohabitating hetero couples. The

diagram includes the effect of gender equality on quality of life.

From this overall analysis, it appears that gender-equal background (childhood and youth) has a rather small overall impact on the situation today, not even clearly significant among women (no arrow). How can this be explained, if gender related violence in childhood has such a strong impact on later health and aggression?

Theory discussion

The new data is the result of a method development that places gender equality issues in the center, and uses many variables concerning everyday life, including aspects like conflict, violence, discrimination and health. The detail “from below” approach to gender equality is new, and this type of data has not existed before. They show a strong and consistent tendency, both in the Norway case and in the international case. Gender equality, especially the dimension connected to power and decision-making, *lowers* the chance of violence. The pattern is similar regarding violence against children, and partner violence.

Compared to this set of representative surveys, much of the earlier research debate seems speculative and based on too restricted data. For example, comparing age groups, we find no tendency that violence may rise for a period, as has been argued in the international debate, based on the hypothesis that gender equality is controversial at first and may increase the risk of violence in private life. Instead, the pattern is quite uniform – higher gender equality decreases the chance of violence against children, regardless of the time period.

However, even if this macro trend is clear and central, it is not the only tendency in the material. Gender equality is violence-reducing in some but not all of the subdimensions measured. While economic and educational gender equality in the parental couple had mixed or unclear effects, the power and decision-making aspect of gender equality stood out, with a reduction effect on the chance of violence. Gender equality at the decision-making level was surprisingly strongly manifest as a violence-reductive factor across control variables, while gender equality in terms of “untraditional” work division in the home, and equal

education, were not statistically significantly correlated, or in other words, a mixed picture.

This can be interpreted as *some* limited support for the idea that increasing gender equality may also *increase*, not just decrease, the chance of violence. Unfortunately the data are limited here, there may be more “problem” households in the “untraditional” group, and the term “untraditional work division” was not clarified for the respondents (although the response rate was high, what is gender-traditional or not was not an especially difficult question to answer).

Other patterns in the data (in the Norway survey) confirm the impression that gender equality is positive in *some* senses, but not necessarily all. The sample was surprisingly egalitarian in some ways, like 90 percent wanting an equal sharing of household and paid work, and surprisingly gender-conservative in others, for example, seeing equity (or ‘different but equal’, equal worth, Norwegian *likeverd*) as more important than gender equality (equal-setting, *likestilling*). Most men and women, on the survey’s personal gender identity scale, scored fairly traditional (men as mostly or very masculine, women as mostly or very feminine). A minority, largest among women, scored mixed or somewhat like the other gender. However, not a single respondent checked off the option of being very like the other gender. The scale results show some gender liberalism but within certain limits, indicating a taboo against “too much” likeness.

A way to interpret these mixed results is that the democratic, decision-making aspect of gender equality has historically been the first and main form of gender equality development. Advances in other areas have been slower and more controversial. In this view it is no wonder that equal power is especially clearly linked to reduced violence, not because other equality arrangements (like untraditional work division) were more destructive, but because they were more controversial and less of a “winning option” than equality in decision-making. They worked out less well, and therefore did not reduce the chance of violence as much as the decision-making factor.

This interpretation fits with historically oriented feminist theory of gender contracts and gender work division, including modern gender stratification recreated through production/reproduction imbalance

(Holter, 1984; Pateman, 1988; Acker, 1990; Hagemann & Åmark, 1999). The work positions (male breadwinner, female homemaker) can be seen as more “hard coded” and less easy to change, than the democratic or power-related positions. The material processes take time. In Norway as in other countries gender equality first appeared as a development of women’s status in cultural, social and political terms. Business and material life have been a harder proposition for gender equality, and changes in the economic sphere are smaller than in the political sphere in Norway and the other Nordic countries (Holter & Rogg, 2009).

In this perspective, gender equality is not just something “created” by (post) modern life, or increasingly in demand by more meritocratic organizations, or even by “selfish men” who now, due to increasing returns on human capital, become more sensitive to women’s career demands, e g towards their daughters (Farre, 2012). It is also something that is often countered, put on the waiting list, toned down, or turned away from its objectives (NOU, 2012). This happens during a long historical process of struggle. Gender equality, in this perspective, is a key part of the struggle for a democratic society. Since gender equality has worked better on the political than the economic level, in the period of the survey, it is not surprising that it has a stronger effect on violence. As far as can be judged, the respondents tried to be realistic about their childhood in the 2007 survey as well as in a smaller “prototype” 1988 survey (Holter, 1989), that showed a similar tendency.

The normative pressure towards gender equality found in surveys in Norway (e g Skjeie & Teigen, 2003) fits with this historical view. However it does not explain the remarkable consistency of the Norway and the international results, with countries where gender equality is much more controversial. Also, the results generally discourage the idea that normative or political aspects of gender equality is the only or even the main aspect of gender equality development. Other aspects are important too, especially the material balance in the couple. Gender equality emerges as a *broad civil society process*, not just a political change (not surprisingly, designing a sociological detail study of gender equality, we found that gender equality is – in fact – sociological).

A problem with any theory argument that runs to history or tradition,

is the question “why is it still there”. If we have economic gender discrimination today, but less political discrimination, why has only one of them been significantly reduced; what keeps the other going?

This question is relevant. Gender in/equality clearly involves material structures as well as actor systems, disciplinary systems and governmentalities, logics of practice, and practicalized discourses. None of these perspectives have “expired”, although they must all be reoriented to help clarify the issues at hand.

It is clear, in the Norwegian context especially, that gender equality is increasingly *seen* as a benefit for personal and family life, and that the normative pressure in this direction has become stronger over the last decades (NOU, 2012). In the 2007 survey, there were strong associations between experienced gender equality in the couple relationship on the one hand, and satisfaction with the relationship and quality of life on the other hand. The chance of having seriously considered divorce was far lower among those who evaluated the relationship as gender equal, compared to the rest. However, this may not directly translate to a lower divorce rate in practice, over time. A recent Norway survey, linked to registry data, instead showed a higher rate among the gender-equal, six years later. The researchers think that the result is due to an underlying “liberal” factor which is associated, both, with a higher chance of gender equality, and a higher chance of divorce (Hansen & Slagsvold, 2012).

Once more, we see that “all” gender equality is not one and the same, the way it works depends on the context. There are in fact different aspects involved, some of them ambiguous and contradictory. Historically, this is what we would expect - gender equalization is realized in skewed, imbalanced, imperfect ways. Social innovation, in this case gender equality, runs uphill at first (Holter, 2007). It develops through different paths, and gender *equalities* (plural) is more relevant than any unilinear model of (singular) gender equality.

Another important finding concerns the association between violence in childhood, and health problems later. As mentioned this link did not vary much with age (not “milder” over the period) and was also surprisingly similar across gender. We thought that having a problem with aggression later in life was a typical male reaction to childhood

violence, as was found in the 1988 survey, but as mentioned, the 2007 data shows that it is a female reaction too, quite similar across gender. Although we could not go into the types of aggression problems, the 2007 survey confirmed the 1988 survey concerning one important detail variable – having been involved in traffic accidents with personal injury. The 1988 survey showed that among men, the proportion involved was more than three times higher among those with violence in childhood, compared to the rest. In the 2007 survey the proportion was almost two times higher, similar among men and women. Perhaps the association has become weaker over the span of a generation, but it is still remarkably strong.

A recent survey in Finland gives similar results.

Not only is there no significant difference in the violence inflicted on children by mothers and fathers, the intimate partner violence witnessed by children is evenly distributed between the genders. The findings demonstrate that the accumulation of familial violence clearly occurs by household, not by gender (Ellonen et al., 2008, p. 6).

Like in Norway, the violence level was reduced over time, due to women being more critical in partner selection (Savolainen, 2005) and other factors.

The new results confirm other studies showing that early experiences of violence are “formative” and become “embodied”, but also go further. They show links from childhood violence to later life health and violence. Why are these links more clear here, than in the gender equality dimension, even though gender equality, especially the subdimension of power or decision-making, is clearly a main causal variable, lowering the chance of violence? As we saw, gender inequality among the parents, especially regarding power, lowers the chance of violence, and thereby also the chance of health or violence problems for the child later in life. This is a main finding. Yet it seems to become manifest in health and violence terms, not in terms of gender equality as such. This is more puzzling.

A possible interpretation is that violence is more “effective” than just

gender power on its own. It sets deeper marks. This is why it shows up as a stronger cross-generational pattern, while the overall impact of gender equality in childhood is lower (in some respects quite low) on later life gender equality, compared to the impact of material circumstances and other factors. In brief terms, gender in/equality experiences have been easier to change, more open for individual choice, than violence experiences.

This makes social psychological sense, according to qualitative studies, fitting also with the historical view above. Thereby, we can explain, both, why gender equality in childhood does have some positive impact on adult life, and why the negative impact of violence in childhood is stronger and clearer.

In a qualitative study of men using violence against women, including expert interviews (therapists working with the men), we found that two tendencies were especially prevalent, “brutality” and “objectification” (or reification). The “brutality” factor was linked to early childhood trauma and “social inheritance”, yet there was also an objectification factor, with underlying misogyny, since the violence primarily targeted women (Holter & Aarseth, 1993).

In the introduction I asked about gender as a repeating and governing pattern – what are the circumstances for gender-related behavior to rise to this level. It is clear that violence one central part of this context, like feminist theorists have for long argued, an “institutional domain” of gender discrimination (Walby, 2009, p. 449; 1994). According to the new material, these contexts are characterized more by gender *inequality*, than by any specific *gender* constellation. The power aspect is central. At the same time, studies of violence warn that violence is not simply an “imprint” of gender power. In the qualitative study mentioned above, the therapists emphasized that most of the men who had been required to go to therapy for their violence problems could be described as “weak” or even “effeminate” - they were not necessarily very masculine in their gender identity (Holter & Aarseth, 1993). Similarly, studies have found that violence may sometimes be the response of those who are *not* in a power position (in the direction of the resource hypothesis). Yet the main picture resembles the one from research on bullying and harassment in organizations, which have

different forms and causes, but usually follow the path of power rather than the other way round (Stackelbeck & Langenhoff, 2002).

The results support the empowerment of women hypothesis, although more on the political than the material level, while the resource hypothesis makes sense only if gender inequality is assumed. In the Norway context, there is a notable lack of the effects we would expect if the “threat to male superiority” view was true. We do not find any sign of an A curve, which should have appeared, but rather a quite constant reduction over the c 1950-2000 time period.

Finally, what do these findings say regarding the question of *gender power*, an issue that lies beneath most of the gender and violence discussion? My comment here concerns only one specific aspect, namely the *difference between “setting a rule” and “conforming to a rule”*, which has come to the forefront in recent gender theory debate (Connell, 2012).

We can identify a set of gender acts that sets a rule, distinct from a set of acts that just follows existing rules. We know that in practice these two categories, “*formative*” and “*conformist*”, are often overlapping. Every gender-related act has a bit of both. Yet the distinction can be useful and analytically important for understanding gender, inequality and violence. Although the categories are seldom distinct in private life, they can be distinct in other areas, for example when states create rules favoring women with many children (natalist policy), and in effect *set a rule* for motherhood, and implicitly for both genders, or when aggressive regimes use “identity” to create support (Sen, 2007; Jones, 2004). Rule-setting agendas can appear quite clearly in family life too, for example in connection with the mother-in-law, who is often seen by the wife as imposing her own rules on the household, or even making her husband into a “mamma’s boy” (Sæter & Holter, 2011). In such cases psychological violence and what Galtung (1969) called “structural violence” become relevant.

What does the new data say on the issue of interpersonal violence as the “policing” of gender inequality, a major way that a gender-inequal standard is “set”, in the final practice? This line of inquiry is not contradicted in the new data. But is it supported?

In a recent paper, Connell (2012, p. 866) emphasizes the

“*ontoformative*” aspect of gendering – the way the gender elements in social relations are linked to established social realities, and can *create* these realities.

To treat gender as performative and citational is not enough. In feminist social science, gender is *ontoformative* (...). Practice starts from structure but does not repetitively cite its starting point. Rather, social practice continuously brings social reality into being, and that social reality becomes the ground of new practice, through time.

This is based on the organization research of Martin (2003, pp. 344-355), who writes:

Many gendering practices are done unreflexively; they happen fast, are "in action," and occur on many levels. They have an emotive element that makes people feel inspired, dispirited, happy, angry, or sad and that defies verbal description by all but the most talented novelist. Think about capturing in words an inspirational talk or "bawling out" by a boss. (...) Although people are "gender-agentic," that is, active practitioners of gender, I suggest that their practices are guided only sometimes by intention relative to gender (...). Defining agency independently of intention leaves us free to assume that individuals and groups practice masculinities and femininities at work without consciously intending to.

Martin distinguishes between *gendering practices* (what I call formative acts) and *practicing gender* (conformist acts), and uses “being bawled out by a boss” as example. The act is linked to power, has an “emotive element”, and works on the self-concept of the employee. Clearly, more than just “doing gender” is involved. *Gendering practices* can usefully be defined as the meta level or “command code” of *practicing gender*. Gendering practices can be seen as a superset of the wider practicing of gender.

The gendering is strongly linked to the type of gender regime in the organization (workplace, family). Martin describes gender-divided, homosocial and masculinity-oriented US business organizations. It is

also connected to what Goffman (1974) called framing (and, also, stigma), and to power techniques like gestures and erasure (Connell, 2007). However, organizations do not have to work this way (Puchert, et al., 2005). The command code is a power aspect, not primarily caused by the actual gender proportions of the organization, work divisions, and so on, but almost always influenced by the latter. In hierarchical organizations, the same act, or a similar act, usually has more of a formative gendering aspect if performed by a superior, compared to an inferior. The larger the power element, the larger is usually the formative aspect, beyond conformism.

This view differs from the “collective male dominance” view of violence (May & Strikwerda, 1994), and also a view where male bonding is necessarily central (“domestic violence is another way in which men exert power and control over women. (..) Violence is restorative, a means to reclaim the power that he believes is rightfully his” - Kimmel, 2000, p. 262). However, homosociality and male bonding can be central in some contexts. Gender-unequal forms of solidarity between men can inform men’s sexual violence against women (Boswell & Spade, 1996); violence against gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender persons in public spaces (Herek, Cogan & Gillis, 2002); and military combat (Page, 2002; Flood, 2008, p. 342). Yet violence evidence tells us that masculinities are only part of the problem, violence in couples is clustered, it occurs especially in the phase with small children, and is associated with unemployment and social difficulties (Haaland, Clausen & Schei, 2005), as well as custody disputes (Nordborg, 2005). Masculinities are changing, and can also involve cooperation against men’s violence (Connell, 2005). Although masculinity or patriarchy is important (Hearn, 1998; Ferguson et al., 2004), it is not enough to explain violence (DeKeseredy & Schwartz, 2005). The new findings show a broader picture. They build on a Nordic research tradition where violence has been more extensively studied (Eriksson, Nenol & Nilsen, 2002; Sogn, Lorentzen & Holter, 2006), including studies of bullying in school (Mossige & Stefansen, 2007) and sexualized violence (Sætre, 1989).

Gender inequality and violence in childhood both have effects later in life, but they are stronger in the case of violence. As argued, gender

inequality experiences have been more open to later life influence than violence experiences, and have been easier to rework for the individual. Violence experiences are harder to rework or reframe beyond the rule-setting of the original incident. In this perspective it is no surprise that aggression problems is the most frequently reported later life effect of the violence. On a social psychological level, it is possible to “turn against” the violence, but difficult to “go beyond” it, although possible, as shown by studies of victims of sexual abuse reshaping the meaning of their experiences in ways that leave both the victim and the aggressor positions behind (Andersen, 2009).

In a relatively gender-equal social context like today’s Norway, an explicit setting of a gender-unequal standard is likely to attract negative attention. Gender inequality remains an underlying issue, while the rule-setting or gendering of practices appear more indirectly, through other means. Recent studies of harassment in Norway show high levels of verbal sexual harassment in school contexts especially (NOU, 2012). No-one is “against” gender equality, but it is dangerous to be stamped as “whore” or “homo”. Gender and sexual discrimination appears to have some functional equivalence, to use Merton’s term. Likewise, in the Norway 2007 survey, many respondents seemed to express ambivalence with gender equality indirectly, through negative views of homosexuality and “rule-breaking” gender identity.

It is possible, therefore, to interpret sexual discrimination as a manifestation of gender inequality, or a way the “policing” of the gender system is done. It is especially related to the hierarchy between men, and fears of being seen as an “effeminate” man. It is also shameful and embodying. With an “ontoformative” act, there goes, in principle, “bystanders”, “underlings”, and “supporters”, in the power and hierarchy perspective. Primary characteristics of bullying or mobbing are stigmatizing, and manipulating the victim; personnel management action favoring the view of the victim's workmates; and expulsion (Leymann, 1990). There is a social psychological process, implanting embodied shame in the victim, supported by informal (and often, formal) social structures. Note that this perspective links main issues in queer theory and gender equality theory – fields that are often seen as separate.

This new view of gender-unequal violence, mediated through gender and sex, also allows research to more specifically focus on well-known contributing causes of violence in modern society, including humiliation and lack of human dignity, including the construction of masculine “shame spots”, creating a more general “fear of falling” among men (Ekenstam, 2007). Such spots and locked situations, in the background of much of the statistics of violent acts, can be better understood.

Conclusion

A useful distinction has been made between the gendering of practices and the practicing of gender. Gender as ‘command code’ differs from gender as performance.

The paper discusses men’s violence against women as, both, a way of practicing gender, a performance, and as a more formative act, a way of “gendering practice”, or even, policing the gender system. The starting point is emerging new data suggesting that gender in/equality, not gender by itself, is a main dimension for understanding variations in violence levels.

Most of the empirical material in this paper is from Norway, in the frontline of gender equality development (e g according to the Gender gap index). The Norway situation differs from the one in many countries south and east in Europe, for example Spain, which has stronger gender-traditional elements and a larger burden of patriarchy. Violence against children is very common globally (Pinheiro, 2006), and violence in the media is one of the contributing factors (Krug et al., 2002). Many traits are similar, and the same main pattern appears across countries in the international data.

The Norway material shows long-term change, as the gender order has developed in the last decades. Even in a country increasingly emphasizing gender equality, gender inequality continued to cause violence against children, partner violence, and sexual harrasment. The extent of the violence was gradually reduced. Yet the problem effect of inequality (rising risk of violence) was not diminished in the period studied.

Today, the effects of unemployment on interpersonal violence is obviously a main concern. These effects vary with context but are mainly negative, especially regarding long-term unemployment. The “resource” hypothesis (lower resources, higher violence) may become stronger. On the other hand, there are cases where men’s unemployment is used to promote couple equality and invest in other projects. It seems that empowering women and creating a gender equal local setting, with societal and cultural support, can make a difference.

The political message of the new data is clear. If we want to reduce violence in private life, we should invest in gender equality (Holter, 2005). A balanced European parental leave system could be a way to ensure that both parents are parts of decisions at home, and thereby, that children have better socialization environments that are less exposed to violence.

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