Effects of the girl and boy group method

– A gender and social psychology perspective on gender equality youth work on Åland and in Latvia

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**Challenging Gender Roles
for Prevention of Trafficking**

The Åland Islands Peace Institute

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Preface

This is the thirteenth report published by the Åland Islands Peace Institute (ÅIPI) since its report series was established in 2007 with the purpose of bringing to a wider public and in an accessible manner the results of research conducted within and around the ÅIPI. It is, however, the first time that we can present a report which is a triple pioneer. It is an effort to initiate scientific knowledge and interest on the girl and boy group method that has been used in the Nordic countries and elsewhere for some time and where Åland has been an eager actor. However, not much structured and comparative documentation and evaluation has taken place. It is also the first time research has been conducted by the ÅIPI on a method which is used in its practical work. In this, the report is an outcome of the combination of practical experiences with theoretical analysis. Of course, this study is an insiders' view as the researchers involved have all been part of the entire project itself. This is why it needs to be followed by other researchers, including within other academic disciplines, in order to enlarge the understanding of the method, its effects, strengths, weaknesses and its development potential. The present report is pioneering also for a third reason. It represents the interdisciplinary meeting of two scientific directions, i.e. social psychology and gender studies. Dr Egita Gritane has been responsible for the social psychology study and Golnar Bahar for the qualitative analysis in a gender perspective. They have been supported and guided by Jenny Jonstoij who has tied the two strands into one coherent whole. The researchers have benefited vastly from comments from their respective teams in Latvia and on Åland. Cooperation over multiple borders is seldom easy, but very often fruitful indeed.

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1.Introduction

This research report is part of the project Challenging Gender roles for Prevention of Trafficking, which is a joint Åland-Latvian project, aiming to combat stereotypical gender perceptions at a grassroots level in order to reduce conditions for the development of gender related violence, including human trafficking for sexual purposes. The project was carried out by the Åland Islands Peace Institute, Åland, Finland, and the Resource Center for Women Marta, Riga, Latvia from October 2009 until December 2011. The project was financed within the framework of the INTERREG IV Programme of the European Regional Development Fund.

The focus of the project is on preventive work through the empowerment[1] of young girls and boys, within the framework of girl and boy groups. The girl and boy group method is a Nordic model of practical work with young people, aiming to strengthen individuals, enhance the participants' possibilities to become active members of society, while questioning prevailing gender stereotypes and norms, in order to achieve greater gender equality and a non-discriminatory setting for individual development. The project trained girl and boy group leaders, who then started girl and boy groups in Latvia and in Åland. Throughout the duration of the project, these leaders received advanced training and support from an instructor and the project staff. There were six groups in Åland and twenty three groups in Latvia that were operational, each consisting of one or two leaders and five to ten participants. In total, there were approximately 230 teenagers involved in a girl or boy group within this project. Another part of the project concerns research. A team of two researchers assessed the effects of the method on, amongst other things, perceptions of gender norms, empowerment and social attitudes among the participants. A third aspect of the project involves informing the wider audience about the importance of making the connection between empowerment, gender equality and gender based crime, including trafficking. The project highlights the importance of youth empowerment as a tool for promoting more respectful gender relations, thereby reducing the risk of gender based crime.

Girl and Boy Groups – the Nordic method
Many projects around Sweden, Finland and the Åland Islands have used the girl and boy group method(s)[2] during the last two decades. In the beginning of the 1990's, youth workers at youth centres in Sweden noticed that activities at the youth centres did not attract girls as much as they did boys, seemingly because the activities that received the most resources were those traditionally dominated by boys. This notion sparked a reaction with the youth leaders who wanted to give girls an option to partake in organised spare time activities. Apart from gender, social background and success in school were other factors that influenced the extent to which a young person participated in organised spare time activities. The youth centres' work with "troubled youngsters" focused on activating and doing, and it turned out that it was hard to get girls interested in these activities, in a gender mixed group.

1   The term empowerment is discussed in the section called definition of terms and explained further in the theory chapter.

2   The girl and boy group method has varied in focus depending on what project has used it. For example: Folkhälsan, a health organization in Swedish speaking Finland, has focused on health; stating that challenging gender roles can lead to better personal health for participants. Save the children Sweden, on the other hand, has focused on the UN children's convention and a norm critical approach (Folkhälsans förbund 2004, Karlsson 2006, Svensson 2008).

The idea was then to establish activities exclusively for girls, and methods for these activities were developed through the years. A majority of the methods started to adopt a gender equality approach, with the aim to empower girls (Hanström 1994:5). The thought behind the gender equality and empowerment approach was that girls do not take up as much space as boys do in the classroom, the youth centres and life in general. Girls do not have the same acting space as boys do, due to gender norms and expectations, and thereby do not participate on the same terms as boys do. A gender separatist activity, such as girl groups, was presumably a sanctuary where girls could participate, speak and act on their own terms, free from gendered expectations and behaviour.

Keeping in mind gender perspective and gender equality, youth leaders that had worked with the girl group method for some years realised that gender norms and equality also concerned boys. They recognised that, in order to achieve gender equality in different areas of society, men had to be involved in the endeavour towards gender equality. Furthermore, gender norms and expectations that society imposes upon boys can be as limiting and harmful as the ones subjected on girls. In the schools, youth clubs and areas where there were girl groups, boys had shown a keen interest in also participating in a group. With that in mind, civil society actors argued that boys should also have the opportunity to be empowered and take part in gender equality work. In the beginning of the 2000's, boy groups started emerging through different projects in Sweden and Åland (Hanström 1994, Karlsson 2006, Svensson 2008).

What is a girl and boy group?
A girl or boy group is a method of working with youth, to deal with certain issues[3]. A girl or boy group usually consists of six to eight participants between the ages of 13 and 16, and two group leaders trained in issues concerning gender equality. This size is the ideal limit, where there are enough participants to enable a discussion and just the right number of people to ensure that everyone can be seen and heard and feels secure with one another. The age difference between the participants should not vary too much, since it can affect the discussions and the group climate negatively. The group leaders preferably work in pairs, in order to work with group unity and potential conflicts in the group. The leaders undergo training before starting a girl and boy group, to assure that they are familiar with the method, the empowerment approach and gender equality, which are necessary competencies to run successful girl and boy groups. The groups usually meet once a week, for about an hour and a half to two hours (Hanström 2002:7, Karlsson 2006:13).[4]

There are several reasons for the separation of the groups according to gender. One reason is that girls and boys abide by different gender norms and expectations. Boys deal with issues such as (use of) violence, aggression and demands on performance. Girls, on the other hand, relate to demands on being beautiful, behaving considerately and being pleasing towards others. Furthermore, since men and women limit their acting spaces in accordance with different gender norms, the empowerment of boys and girls consequently differ according to gender[5]. The empowerment of girls involves encouraging them to speak up, formulate their own opinions and increase their acting space. Boys, on the

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3   The aims of girl and boy groups within this project are explained further on.

4   For further information about the set-up and content of girl and boy group meetings, and information about the girl and boy group method, see Hanström 2011.

5   Gendered norms and expectations will be discussed further in the theory section of this report.

other hand, need training in listening to others, talking about emotions and feelings, and resolving disputes with non-violent methods.

The basis of the girl and boy group meetings are "coffee break conversations", i.e. gathering, drinking coffee or tea, discussing various issues that are relevant for the participants and doing activities. The group meetings are open forums, free from judgement, where a small group of people can have critical discussions about things that matter to them. The group members themselves, together with the leaders, decide what activities to do and which topics to discuss, with regard to what the group members want, and what the leaders see that the group needs. Furthermore, since this is a method for working with gender equality, it is the responsibility of the leaders to include the gender perspective in the discussions as much as possible (Folkhälsan 2004:7). The leaders undergo training and receive suggestions regarding useful methods to tackle different discussions and possible problems that might appear during the meetings.

Girl and boy groups are voluntary spare time activities, which is an essential aspect of the method. The groups are neither therapy groups, nor are they school classes, where teachers, or in this case, the leaders, provide the "correct answer" in discussions. Rather, the groups are a way for the participants to develop their critical thinking. In addition to utilising discussions as a way of dealing with issues, girl and boy groups also use methods such as value clarification exercises as a means of facilitating discussion. In value clarification exercises, the leaders pose questions on a topic that has no easy answer. The participants then take a stand and explain their points of view, and these statements become the starting point of a group discussion. Value clarification exercises vary in form, but the intention is to train the participants to take a stand, analyse issues and open up their minds to different perspectives (Hanström 2005:26).

The goals of the girl and boy group method applied in this project are the following:

- To problematize gender norms and gendered power structure(s): to highlight normative structures in society that limit the acting space[6] and behaviour of people, and to question the perception that these are static and naturally given.
- To raise the self-esteem of the participants: to raise the participants' belief in themselves, their abilities, their views and opinions, to empower[7] them.
- To raise the independence of the participants: to help the participants take a stand in different issues and formulate their own opinions.

Differences between Latvia and Åland
There are substantial differences between Latvia and Åland regarding gender equality due to, e.g., historical, cultural, economic and social differences. When considering formal and non- formal gender equality, the Ålandic and Latvian society show rather significant differences. The legislation, as well as the gender norms and expectations, differ between the two countries. Åland has achieved greater formal gender equality than Latvia through legislation and policy-making. For example, in 2010, in the Latvian parliament that consists of 100 members, only 20 were women, including the speaker. In the Cabinet of Ministers, only three of the 14 ministers were women. Three out of seven judges in the Constitutional Court were women, and 23 of 44 judges in the Supreme Court were women. In Finland, however, there were 84 women in the 200-seat parliament and 12 women in the 20-member Council of State (cabinet), in 2010. The president, the prime minister, and the president of the Supreme Court were all women.

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6 The term acting space will be discussed in the chapter Definition of terms.

7 The term empowerment will also be discussed in the chapter Definition of terms.

The differences in the discourse on gender equality in the two regions were also apparent when the training of the girl and boy group leaders for this project began. The Ålandic leaders were, at least to some level, all acquainted with the gender perspective. Some had used this approach in their previous work. The Latvian leaders, on the other hand, were not familiar with the gender perspective and had less comprehension of the implications of it. Although Latvia is taking concrete steps to promote equality between men and women, the structural causes of gender inequality have not been as prioritised in the political agenda, as much as they have been in Åland.

Although there are differences between the societies, the vantage point of this joint Åland-Latvian project remains the same, since it is the same gender structures that reinforce the imbalanced power relations between men and women in both countries.

Research needed on the Nordic boy and girl group method

Sweden and the Swedish speaking parts of Finland have used the boy and girl group method, to empower young people, for nearly two decades. The Åland Islands Peace Institute has previously led the training of girl group leaders, and established groups, together with partner organisations in neighbouring regions such as Lithuania, Kaliningrad, Belarus and Russia. Although the girl and boy group method has been present in Åland for about 20 years, the Peace Institute has never before run boy and girl groups in Åland itself. In Latvia, the girl and boy group method is not a wide spread phenomenon. As far as we know, this project and the Resource Center for Women Marta are first to introduce the girl and boy group method to the Latvian civil society.

One study recently made in Sweden, shows the need of both a gender perspective in preventive youth work, and of research evaluating preventive methods with a gender perspective. In her literary study on Nordic research on the prevention of violence among youths, Swedish sociologist Lena Berg indicates, that violence prevention programmes all lack a gender perspective, although they recognise that boys/men are the majority users of aggressive and violent behaviour, as well as the majority of victims of violence. Berg concludes that there is no prevention program in the Nordic countries which prevents violence, including sexual violence, which also applies the gender perspective and/or gender pedagogy (Berg, 2007: 8ff). Berg notes that one has to leave the formal prevention programmes and go into the field of "group based youth work" to find the gender perspective. Furthermore, Berg questions the lack of a gender perspective when it comes to understanding and preventing violence, since violence cannot be separated from processes of masculinity[8]. According to Berg, the reproduction of masculinity needs to be addressed in all preventive work, in order for boys and men to obtain tools to choose other ways of performing masculinity characterized by non-violent practices (Berg 2007:38). This research report both seconds and answers Berg's call for a gender perspective in preventive youth work; it analyses the outcomes from the Nordic girl and boy group method, which is part of the larger preventive youth work field, in regard to gender equality and empowerment.

Although there have been girl and boy group activities in the Nordic countries for almost 20 years, there have not been any substantial research done on the method and its effects on the participants. This is rather surprising and is the key motivator to why this project includes research on the method. It is necessary to evaluate the girl and boy group method and its effects on the group participants to improve the method.

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8   We will further explore the connection between masculinity and violence in the theory section of this report.

There is also a need for research that evaluates whether or not the method is an effective way of promoting gender equality, in order to advocate the continuation of girl and boy groups.

1.1 Aim and research questions

The aim of the paper is to analyse the Nordic girl and boy group method by assessing the effects of participation in a girl or boy group in relation to gender norms, gender equality, social attitudes and empowerment.

Research questions

- Does the girl and boy group method challenge gender norms and stereotypes and raise participants' awareness regarding gender (in)equality in society?
- Does the girl and boy group method empower the participants?
- Does the girl and boy group method change the social attitudes of the participants towards gender sensitive occupational groups?

1.2 Definition of terms

In this section, we will define the terms that are pivotal to and often occurs in the study. Gender theory uses the term gender to make a distinction between the social aspects (behaviour, expression, language, referred to as gender) and the biological aspects (the body, referred to as sex) of gender. The perception of gender clearly differentiates between two antipodes; man and woman. This constitutes a dichotomy, i.e., two unmistakeably separate categories that are in an oppositional relation to each other. The use of the term gender in this study denotes the social aspects of gender, which we will further discuss in the theory chapter of this report.

Another concept crucial to this study is the term norms, which we see as a set of unwritten social rules that are broadly accepted within one context. Norms are connected to ideals and different power structures. We deliberate this term comprehensively in the theory section of this report. We will concentrate mostly on gender norms, which in this study refers to socially constructed rules for and expectations on people's behaviour, depending on their gender, changeable over time and depending on context. Gender norms are incorporated into societal behaviour and performed (often unintentionally) through language, movement, expressions and expectations on others. Socially, gender norms define what is and is not acceptable for a person to do, depending on if they are perceived as a woman or a man, limiting their acting space, i.e., the frames within which an individual's behaviour is deemed suitable or not (see Lorber 1994, Butler 1990).

Stereotypes, a term used in the field of social psychology, refers to the simplistic generalisation of behaviours, values and characteristics prescribed to an individual due to his or her membership to a concrete category or group (see Fiske 2000). This is comparable to gender norms; where acceptable behaviour for a person is defined according to their gender. Gender can, in this case, be interpreted as a social group (Scott 1986:1054). Every individual belongs to a number of social groups of high importance to them; so called in-groups. The norms and values shared there within these relevant in-groups constitute a person's social identity. This is the bases for their behaviour, values, attitudes or overall perception of the world (see Brewer & Pierce 2005, Roccas & Brewer 2002).

Another term used in this report is empowerment. In gender theory, empowerment often refers to women gaining opportunities. In this research, however, we use empowerment to refer to all participants gaining more possibilities, regardless of gender. We will further explore the term empowerment in the theory section of this report.

1.3. Limitations

Some limitations must be taken into account in the undertaking of this study, the first being that there is a time limit. The girl and boy groups are operational for about seven months. One must take into consideration that the effects of the method might be more visible, if the groups continued for a longer time. In other cases, groups are in operation for a longer time. This gives the participants an opportunity to develop stronger bonds to each other, and they have more time to discuss different issues in depth. However, since this research only follows the groups for seven months, we can only speak for how the girl and boy group method affects the participants during this period.

Bearing in mind that other power structures in society, such as class, ethnicity and sexual orientation, and norms connected to these structures, also influence the lives of people, the second limitation of this study is that it mainly focuses on the gender perspective. However, since this is a method that aims to challenge gender norms in particular, this research will not take other power structures into account.

The third limitation in this research is the openness of the girl and boy group method. Since the participants themselves create the structure of the group meetings, the effects of the method can vary depending on individuals and groups. However, after having participated in meetings and having looked at the leaders' documentation from group meetings, it is apparent that many of the discussion topics are similar in all groups. Additionally, the inclusion of the gender perspective in the method depends on the leaders' knowledge of gender issues, their proneness to include it in the group work, and the leaders' own participation in group leader trainings and supervisions. In this project, all leaders took part in the same trainings, by the same trainer, giving them a common base of knowledge.

2. Theory

The theoretical perspective in this research derives from two different but related approaches; gender studies and social psychology. Using a two folded approach gives us the possibility to make several, and sometimes different, analyses at the same time. This gives us a more complex analysis of phenomenon such as gender norms, gender equality, empowerment and social attitudes. We will explain the two perspectives, starting with gender theory.

2.1 Gender as a socially constructed dichotomy and hierarchy

The theoretical understanding of gender and gender norms, in this case, is that the construction of gender as a social binary category remains through the division of man and woman, male and female. Society justifies this differentiation with the notion that there are two given biological sexes that lead to social dissimilarities between men and women (Butler 1990:110, Connell 1995:52, Lorber 1994:2). In other words, we behave in gendered ways because we are biologically different. However, as R.W. Connell puts it, social "gender roles exist because biology doesn't decide the social" (Connell 1995:110), and all biological differences do not have social effects (Chambers 2005: 327). To exemplify this, we can examine the norms surrounding parenthood. Women as a group stay home with their children more often than do men. Society views this pattern of behaviour as a consequence of women having a biological sense of motherhood, and of being more nurturing than men from birth. However, it is clear that people usually encourage young children to behave in different ways depending on their gender before they, themselves, are of aware of gender. People applaud girls when they are nurturing, pleasant and considerate. People also often give girls toys that mimic parental behaviour, such as dolls.

Taking this into consideration, we can see that already at an early age we learn and internalise gender. When adults of a certain gender then behave in a certain way, we perceive this behaviour as related to their biological sex.

According to a post-structuralist interpretation of gender, we are what we are, for example, women or men, because of how we behave; what we say, how we dress, how we carry our bodies. Gender and other dimensions of identity, do not exist beyond the actions we undertake on a daily basis, i.e., there is no biological or natural gender (sex) that defines our identities (Ambjörnsson 2004:12, Young 1994:716). The way we perceive bodies and assess behaviours are effects of our social and cultural context. This system of norms not only describes the ideal, or how people should be women or men, but also inculcates in us that we must be either women or men, with no room for variety. What these norms indicate differs according to context, for example, geographically or over time. However, the binary structure of these two opposing categories always exists in one way or another (Butler 1990:111, Young 1994: 716).

The two gender categories are only comprehensible in relation to each other's differences (Butler 1990:16ff, Young 1994:714). What it means to be a woman cannot be understood without a notion of what it means to be a man, and vice versa. This manner of differentiating between men and women, making them each other's opposites, defining them as having different qualities that are in contrast to each other, constitutes a dichotomy (Scott 1986:1054). For example, society describes men as determined, reliable and brave, while women receive labels such as undetermined, unreliable and sensitive. Another example is that people in general perceive women as communal and men as agent and instrumental (Ridgeway and Correll 2005:512-513).

In addition to the horizontal dimension of the differentiation between men and women, there is a hierarchical element to it, a status of inequality. Society perceives certain qualities as more or less desirable. More often than not, society views the qualities associated with men as having a higher status and considers men as more competent at the things that "count most", e.g., instrumental rationality. Society sees women as being better than men at communal tasks. However, these skills receive less regard and women deemed less competent (Ridgeway and Correll 2005)[9]. Neither the dichotomy, nor the gender categories themselves, are free from value; they make up a hierarchy where men and women are unequal. Another term for this gendered system is gendered power structure. This is a well-known term in the sphere of gender studies used to emphasise that the order is not neutral; in fact, one group of people (men) gets advantages due to the system, at the expense of the other group (women)[10].

Gender contract

This differentiation of the two gender categories is what historian Yvonne Hirdman calls the gender contract. Hirdman means that the social relationship between the categories are contractual, something that is "agreed" upon by both men and women (Hirdman 2001:83, Hearn 2004:52-53). The idea of a contract does not, in fact, point to a written contract. Instead, Hirdman refers to widely accepted and unchallenged norms in society. According to Hirdman, the gender contract consists of 1) differentiation and 2) hierarchy. In the gender contract, women and men have their defi-

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9   These descriptions make clear that gender norms are presented as universal depictions of women and men, defined by a narrow set of features. But this can also be questioned, since no person is just a man or just a woman, unaffected by attributes such as race or level of education (Ridgeway and Correll 2005:512-513).

10   This order is what is commonly called a patriarchy. See for example Hearn 2004:52.

ned social roles that trace back to (perceived) biological differences. People, therefore, see these roles as static rather than dynamic. Behaving according to these roles does not abrupt the hierarchical system. Not behaving according to the gender contract, however, will have a negative social outcome the person who has "breached the contract" (Hirdman 2001:83-88). Hirdman has received criticism for her use of the word contract, since it appears to imply that it is a conscious choice to limit oneself to a frame of behaviour. In the context of this study, the word contract points to situations where "everyone" knows the appropriate way to behave without having to think about it.

The heterosexual matrix

Judith Butler states that the clear distinction and categorization between man and woman can only exist within a heterosexual frame of understanding. Butler calls this the heterosexual matrix. The only positions available are that of man and woman, and gendered norms dictate to which category society perceives that a person belongs. Butler explains that these two gender categories are then constructed as two opposites that complement each other bodily and behaviourally. Consequently, if a person wants to be whole, these complementing halves must unite. This contributes to the fortification of heterosexuality as a norm. Men and women are expected to yearn, have sex and form a (monogamous) relationship with each other (Butler 1990:112, Skeggs 1997: 191ff, Rich 1980:632).[11] In adolescence, one becomes aware

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11   To be defined as a woman, one has to 1) have a body expected of a woman (vagina, breasts), 2) behave as expected of a woman (dress like, talk, stand, walk in a "feminine" way) and 3) yearn for and only have sex with men. Only then is a person seen as a "real" woman. If body, behaviour or desire does not follow the heterosexual matrix, one becomes an "anomaly" (Butler 1990:112). Since the focus of this research is on gender roles, the factor of interest is that of behaviour.

of gender norms and starts to conform to them in different ways. In the everyday life of a young person, behaving according to these gender norms can be a strategy for survival. Adolescents may change their behaviour because they learn that it is inappropriate for their gender and that the opposite sex perceives it as unattractive. According to Butler, this is an expression of the heterosexual matrix (Butler 1990, Connell 1995:112). In the case of the girl and boy group method, there is a theoretical problem. The groups aim to challenge gender norms and differentiation, at the same time, they are divided on a presupposed difference. When challenging the binary gender system, the long term goal is to reduce the importance of the idea of gender difference. However, since gender still is a significant social category which gives gendered expectations, there is a point in working with gender equality in gender homogeneous groups.

2.2 To do gender – femininity and masculinity

Qualities, expressions, professions, emotions, body language, language, clothes and accessories connected to men/masculinity and women/femininity are different. These are the aspects referred to when talking about performing gender (see Butler 1990, Lorber 1994). As early as 1949, Simone de Beauvoir stated that "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (de Beauvoir 1949). Doing gender can be explained in terms of performing masculinity or femininity. According to the norm, one should perform conformably to ones gender, i.e., a woman should be feminine, and a man should be masculine. Although one chooses not to perform according to the norm, i.e., not be feminine as a girl and vice versa, one still has to relate to the norm.

Femininity

It is evident that society associates femininity with such traits as moderation, thoughtfulness, empathy, caution and beauty (Ambjörns-

son 2008:57ff). The binary gender system that ranks men and masculinity higher than women and femininity, affects the self-image of women, as well the strategies women use to increase their status. Historically, femininity was as a trait that could describe middle class women, if they, with their appearance and behaviour, succeeded to prove their respectability. Women of the working class were, however, marked as physical, sexual and different; the opposite of femininity (see Skeggs 1997, Ambjörnsson 2008). Femininity can be used as a strategy or investment. Investments in femininity can be beneficial in areas such as heterosexual relationships and family. At the same time, femininity can be disadvantageous in areas such as the labour market and the educational system (Skeggs 1997:158ff). Expectations on femininity, regarding, for example, physical appearance, puts pressure on women and can result in unhealthy lifestyles, self-criticism and lower self-esteem.

Masculinity

Masculinity has often been described in terms of negations, meaning that the definition of masculinity derives from what it is not, which is most likely related to the fact that men are the norm in society (Fundberg 2003, Kimmel 1996, 1998). To be masculine is to reject unmanliness, femininity and homosexuality. In relation to the feminine traits mentioned above; moderation, thoughtfulness, empathy and caution, masculinity, then, is to be the opposite. In critical masculinity theories and violence oriented gender theory, there is an understanding of masculinity as closely connected to violence and aggressiveness. Masculine gender norms need to be addressed, to understand, and thereby prevent, violence. (see Hearn 1998, Pringle 1995, Connell 1995, Fundberg 2003, Mac an Ghaill 1994, Jeffner 1997, Johansson 2005, Berg 2007). Aggressiveness, toughness and the use of violence is heterosexually encoded and is still a way for boys and

men to demonstrate masculinity. In society, there are mixed messages about using violence. On the one hand, society condemns all forms of violence, at the same time, society teaches (primarily) men that the use of violence is acceptable in some situations. In movies and computer games, the hero is often a man defeating his enemies by means of violence. Violence also heavily influences toys directed to boys, as is evident in, for example, action figures. In sports, the message is the same. A brutal tackle in the hockey rink or on the football field provokes retribution; the team expects its players to stand up for themselves and the team. Men are, in this way, bred into a violent culture where violence is something they can use, if justifiable; e.g., as self-defence, as payback, as irony, in sports or if someone "deserved it" (Svensson 2008). There are often elements of violence present, in forms of pushing, pulling, wrestling and verbal assault, when boys interact with each other. When asked about this behaviour, a majority explains it as something they do just for fun and something that should not be taken seriously. Although defined by most as playfulness, the violent nature of their interaction means that boys always have to be on the alert, even when hanging out with close friends or family (see Svensson 2008). All boys and men relate to violence every day when doing masculinity. Therefore, boys' violent behaviour should be understood in terms of normality rather than anomaly (see Connell 1995, Hearn 1998, Pringle 1995).

Hierarchy

Masculinity and femininity are hierarchically ranked. Qualities associated to masculinity are perceived as better than those connected to femininity. This is evident in that women, to a further extent can, and are sometimes even encouraged, to behave in masculine ways, while men are discouraged from adopting femininity. Young girls who like to do "boyish" things are often called

tomboys, a word with a quite positive connotation. However, there is no comparable word for a boy interested in so-called "girly" things. When men are feminine, or are interested in traditionally female activities, they risk withstanding social punishments (see Hearn 2004); being feminine equals losing power and stepping down in the hierarchical ladder. With that said, a woman who is not feminine can also incite various social punishments.

2.3 Gendered expectations

Gender norms create expectations to which men and women must relate; people are judged on how well they perform their gender. Men and women who live up to these expectations receive rewards, while those who fail, risk punishment. Rewards and punishments are, in this case, connected to social relations to others, inclusion and exclusion. Rewards for living up to gendered expectations can, for example, be that one is listened to, given attention and encouraged, while punishment for not living up to the expectations may be taunts and bullying. The pressure to conform to gender norms can either come from outside, in the form of peer pressure, harassment, violence or discrimination (Ambjörnsson 2006:69, Butler 1990:51-52), or inside, manifested in the longing for acceptance, place and purpose.

The expectation that women are more amiable than men when dealing with others, leads to the idea that women are more suited to be mothers or wives, rather than business professionals. When people violate these expectations, penalties follow. Brescoll and Uhlmann (2008) found that both male and female adult participants perceived working mothers as more selfish than stay-at-home mothers, working fathers, or stay-at home fathers. These authors suggest that society negatively evaluates working mothers because they violate a traditionally sanctioned role for women. Frowning upon women who do not live up to their traditionally sanctioned roles is

an accepted opinion in society (Christopher and Wojda 2008:65).

Usually, the norm is imperceptible until someone breaks it. One example is women who choose not to have children. When a woman who does not have a child reaches a certain age, and people around her start having children, only then will she personally become aware of the norm that all women should want to have children. People question the one who does not have, or does not want to have children, not the one who does. The norm is never questioned, but rather taken for granted.

2.4 Norms and power relations

People who fulfil societal norms, also have more possibilities to challenge them. When a person is in a position of power, which is given those who belong to the norm, the room for occasional 'mistakes' is greater. Thus, norms give some people more power and privileges than others (Young 1994:722). One example is the football player David Beckham. Because he is a football player who is white, heterosexual and has a family, he can break masculine norms by having longer hair, earrings, caring about his looks, without having his masculinity questioned. If he did not have the status he has, or if he, for example, were not heterosexual, he would not be able to break the norms without receiving repercussions.

Clearly, norms affect people differently. Some have greater possibilities to challenge the norms, while others are more vulnerable in relation to norms and expectations (Ambjörnsson 2006:69, Butler 1990:51-52). Individuals who break the norms are more likely the object of different social punishments, including discrimination and violence. For example, a man who does not perform masculinity, but instead is feminine, may be exposed to bullying, exclusion, ridicule or violence. Norms and the consequences of breaking them are more palpable and negative for those who cannot, or choose not, to fulfil the norms,

because norms are often not even visible to those who embody them (Hearn 2004:53).

Norms are related to the notion of "normal", which refers both to what is the most common and what is the most desired (Ambjörnsson 2004:21). The notion of normal is not just descriptive, but it is also regulating, and, therefore, interprets relations of power (Young 1994:715). According to Foucault (1977), society exercises power through people conforming to norms. Oppression is, therefore, a relation built into and expressed through every day encounters and seemingly trivial interactions. The social process of "becoming a girl" can, in this light, be seen as a collective result of power, self-discipline and the often unspoken demands on normality. This is called the process of normalization (Hearn 2004:52, Young 1994:715, Lorber 1996:145).

2.5 Empowerment

The theory of empowerment was coined in the 1970's by Frerie who suggested that the liberation of oppressed groups in society could be achieved through education. The idea was to gain power and self-determination through knowledge (Hyung Hur 2006:523). Peterson and Hughey (2004:533) define empowerment as a "social action process by which individuals, communities and organizations gain mastery over their lives in the context of changing their social and political environment to improve equity and quality of life". Like Frerie, Naila Kabeer also emphasizes that the oppressed or those who have a subordinate social position can gain from empowerment (Kabeer 1999:435, Kabeer 2005:13).

The element of power is central to the theory of empowerment. The conventional way of seeing power is that it is a "zero-sum" game. When one gains power, it is always at the expense of someone else. Seen in this light, power is a domination tool over subordinates; it can neither be shared nor distributed equally (Hyung Hur 2006:524, Kabeer 1999:436). However, power

can also be seen as a "plus-sum" game, where the gaining of power for one part does not mean a loss of power for another part. It can also be seen as a sense of not dominating someone else, but rather the ability to make choices. However, for there to be a real choice, certain conditions must be fulfiled:

- There must be alternatives; the ability to choose differently[12].
- Alternatives must not only exist, they must also be visible.

Power relations are most effective when they are not perceived as such. Gender often operates through the unquestioned acceptance of power. Thus, women who, for example, internalize feminine norms such as being moderate or well-behaved, do so because they consider behaving otherwise as being outside the realm of possibility. These forms of behaviour could be said to reflect 'choice', but are, in fact, based on the denial of choice (Kabeer 2005:14). In the context of teenagers, this can be exemplified through the use and acceptance of violence among teenage boys. It is considered that boys are naturally violent and that they choose to use violence. For the young boys themselves, it might seem that there are no other possibilities than to fight, since not fighting is seen as a sign of weakness (not masculine enough).

Foucault's discourse theory states that power is not just exercised by the elite in the societal hierarchy, but rather on all levels of society, and is bound by context and discourse (Charmes and

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12   Poverty and disempowerment generally go hand in hand, because an inability to meet one's basic needs, and the resulting dependence on powerful others to do so, rules out the capacity for meaningful choice. This absence of choice is likely to affect women and men differently, because gender-related inequalities often intensify the effects of poverty.

Wierenga 2003:421-422, Hyung Hur 2006:524, Kabeer 1999:436). Another way of seeing power with regard to gender structures is where power functions "invisibly"; power that is not necessarily exercised but is rather built in to a structure. Being part of a limiting gendered structure does not necessarily leave a person feeling oppressed or wronged, since the structure is experienced as a static state (Bourdieu 1977, Lukes 2005). It is far more difficult to accept gender inequality when these positions seem to be chosen by people themselves; it appears illogical for people to choose subordinate positions for themselves (Kabeer 1999:440).

From this perspective, power lies in that norms and their limitations are naturalised, taken for granted, thus making other ways of behaving seem impossible. Empowerment does not mean telling people what to do, e.g., change their gender expression. Instead, it means deconstructing the norm to gain the possibility to choose otherwise. By producing competing discourses and challenging the "truth" in the existing norms, a process of empowerment can be done (Watson 2005:72). According to Judith Butler, gender equality, or the emancipation of the repressed, can only be reached if the binary categories of gender are challenged (1990:50). Challenging this structure gives people greater knowledge and power over their behaviour; it enables them to make self-determining choices.

When we talk about empowerment in this report, we refer to the challenging of gender norms in society. Knowledge about the gender norms will give people a better understanding of themselves as well as the rest of society. This will lead to the increase of gender equality. This understanding will open up for alternative ways of behaviour, which is a precondition for being able to problematize norms and make independent choices. This in return can lead to increased feelings of self-worth and self-esteem. To become empowered, thus means to have power over one's life and choices.

2.6 Social identity and social categorization

The quantitative part of the study is based on the concepts derived from social psychology, in order to supplement evidence based research within gender studies, as well as to merge two approaches regarding gender based violence; gender studies and intergroup relation studies. Social identity theory (Tajfel, 1978; Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Turner, 1975, as cited in Brewer, 2007) represents the convergence of two traditions in the study of intergroup attitudes and behaviour; social categorization and social comparison. The theoretical perspective rests on two basic premises:

- Individuals organise their understanding of the social world on the basis of categorical distinctions that transform continuous variables into discrete classes. Categorisation has the effect of minimising perceived differences within categories, while accentuating intercategory differences.

- Because individuals are themselves members of some social categories, social categorisation carries with it implicit ingroup/out-group (we–they) distinctions. Because of the self-relevance of social categories, the in-group/out-group classification is a superimposed category distinction with affective and emotional significance.

This implies that human cognition processes, besides aforementioned explanations derived from gender studies, seek any possibility to perceive the world through more or less classified categories, where one of the categories is gender. The understanding that individuals value, favour, and conform to the groups they belong to (in-groups), rather than to groups to which they do not belong (outgroups), is one of the most well-established phenomena in the field of social psychology. The essential characteristics of an individual's relationship to in-

groups are loyalty and preference (Sumner, 1906, as cited in Brewer, 2007). Loyalty is manifested in adherence to in-group norms and trustworthiness in dealing with fellow in-group members. Preference is evident in the differential acceptance of in-group members compared to members of out-groups, and the positive evaluation of in-group characteristics that differ from those of out-groups. However, there is also evidence of so-called out-group favouritism (Jost, 2001; Jost, Banaji, & Nosek, 2004; Sachdev & Bourhis, 1991, as cited in Brewer, 2007), which indicates the existence of out-group favouritism in isolated cases.

For example, members of lower status groups evaluate high-status out-groups more positively than their in-group when assessing status-relevant dimensions. In effect, they are simply acknowledging objective differences in status, power, or wealth and resources. Characteristics representing masculinity are measured as superior to those representing femininity. This is a typical example of out-group favouritism. People need to believe they live in a fair and honest world (Greenwald, et.al, 2002). The shared belief that masculinity is more valuable than femininity is one of the reasons why many women accept the existing divisions of power, even though these are divisions detrimental the women themselves.

Members of a large and complex society are subdivided along numerous significant social dimensions, including gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, occupation, social status, economic background, religion, political ideology, and recreational preferences. Each of these elements provides a basis for shared identity and group membership that may become a vital source of social identification. The structure of multiple social identities is significant because representations of one's in-groups affects, not only one's self-concept, but also the nature of relationships between self and others.

This can be related to the gender theory term intersectionality. Intersectionality explains that power relations cannot be understood in separated categories, such as gender, ethnicity, class or sexual orientation alone, since people do not exclusively belong to one category (Ridgeway and Correll 2005:512-513). Intersectionality can, therefore, be used to problematize and visualise that relations of dominance and subordination depend on several different hierarchical structures. The simultaneous effect of several structures, such as gender, sexual preference and class, are pivotal parts of the constitution of power (De los Reyes and Mulinari 2005:14). Intersectionality makes evident the way in which power structures and categories intertwine, and is also a means of challenging the legitimacy of these structures[13].

Furthermore, when there is extensive overlap between in-groups defined by different dimensions of categorisation, identification is relatively straightforward; the individuals who constitute the in-group versus out-groups are the same for any categorisation. For instance, if all women were housewives and all men paid workers, then the in-group members based on gender comprise the same individuals as the in-group members based on the division housewife vs. paid worker. However, when in-groups defined by

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13   One example of the need to look at gender issues from an intersectional perspective is the view on masculinity. Masculinity has, in the feminist research, not been problematized as such, since the category of men in the gender structure is the norm and the advantaged group. However, looking at masculinity, not as a fixed and heterogeneous category, but rather as a category in the gender structure with many differing sub-categories (white/black men, heterosexual/homosexual men, men with high/low level of education etc.), one can see that it is also necessary to look at different masculinities in the study of gender (Connell 1995).

different dimensions of categorisation overlap only partially, the implications for social identification become more complex. In this case, some of those who are fellow in-group members on one dimension are simultaneously out-group members regarding another aspect. For instance, a female who is a top manager may identify as both a woman and a professional. When a social context emphasizes professional identity, she is likely to perceive a male colleague as an in-group member. In a situation, however, that emphasize her identity as a woman, she is likely to define the same male colleague an out-group member. Since femininity has a lower hierarchical status than masculinity, female top managers can receive discriminatory attitudes from, for instance, male managers, who perceive them as abnormal; categorising them as either extremely masculine women, or as feminine and, therefore, inherently weak managers.

The openness to recognise different social identities, allowing diversity within categories, is influenced by the accessibility of different in-group representations and the existence of cognitive resources that can integrate those multiple representations (see Higgins 1996, as cited in Roccas & Brewer, 2002). The accessibility of complex representations of social identities, are influenced by three factors: (1) the complexity of social experiences, (2) individual differences in the motivation to perceive complex information, and (3) situational factors that temporarily affects the understanding of certain identities. The first two factors cause lasting individual differences in complex representations of in-group members, whereas the third factor causes temporary changes. Girl and boy groups are believed to encourage new social experiences, as well as raise the motivation of participants to perceive complex information regarding gender related stereotypes, where gender is a common identity for each participant.

Complex representations of in-group catego-

ries influence intergroup attitudes and behaviour in ways that reduce bias and discrimination (Roccas & Brewer, 2002). Research (Brewer & Pierce, 2005) on the relationship between diversified groups, tolerance and inclusion, shows, that complex social identities are associated with reduced in-group favouritism, and increased tolerance and positivity toward out-groups in general. Reduced stereotypical perception of gender and gender norms allows for more possibilities to perceive in-groups in diversified ways, thus paving the way for less discrimination and less power differences.

People identify each other according to, for example, race, gender and age. We perceive all people belonging to one group as similar, while we see those belonging to different groups as dissimilar; e.g., men vs. women or Russian speaking vs. Latvian speaking (Arcuri, 1982; Taylor, Fiske, Etco, & Ruderman, 1978, as cited in Fiske, 2000). This classification of people leads to the ascribing of certain characteristics and behaviours to all those associated with a certain group. This process is the process of stereotyping. Stereotyping determines how one person will relate to another, what attitudes someone has and how someone responds in different situations. In other words, stereotyping guides the process of one person responding to another. The responses and attitudes are not based on the individual characteristics of that person, but rather on social categories with which the person is associated (Capozza & Nanni, 1986; Tajfel, 1970; Taylor, 1981, as cited in Fiske, 2000).

When people view groups as homogeneous (Wilder, 1986, as cited in Fiske, 2000), they perceive and remember information about the group that confirms existing stereotypes (Rothbart, Evans, & Fulero, 1979, as cited in Fiske, 2000). People also tend to pass judgements more quickly according to the stereotypes about a defined group because this needs less cognitive effort (Hamilton, 1981, as cited in Fiske, 2000).

When society treats a person according to the stereotypes affiliated with the group this person belongs to, a certain psychological phenomena can occur; the stereotyped persons start to act in a way which confirms those stereotypes. For example, if somebody reacts towards a woman expecting that she will be weak and naïve, she unconsciously may tend to behave accordingly (Darley & Fazio, 1980; Snyder & Swann, 1978; Word, Zanna, & Cooper, 1977, as cited in Fiske, 2000). The complexity of social content overwhelms the limited human mind, which then employs a number of simplifying strategies.

Since stereotypes are communicated, maintained, and transmitted between individuals, they also serve social purposes. For instance, there is evidence that educators influence the stereotypical views of their pupils (Stephan & Stephan, 1984, as cited in Wigboldus, Semin, & Spears, 2000), parents can affect the views of their children (Epstein & Komorita, 1966; Fagot, Leinbach, & O'Boyle, 1992, as cited in Wigboldus, Semin, & Spears, 2000), and mass media has an impact on the views of their recipients (Van Dijk, 1984, 1987, as cited in Wigboldus, Semin, & Spears, 2000). Participating in the girl and boy groups is a new experience and can motivate the participants to look for individualised information regarding representatives of different groups. Leaders of the girl and boy groups can be understood as socializing agents with the power to change existing stereotypes regarding femininity and masculinity.

Studies on stereotyping processes show that these processes respond to systematic principles generalizable across different instances of stereotypes, and are, presumably, stable over time, place, and out-group. Stereotypes are built by two dimensions, warmth and competence. Individually positive stereotypes on one dimension do not oppose prejudice, but, instead, are often functionally consistent with unflattering stereotypes on the other dimension. This can be exemplified with the stereotype that women are warm but incompetent. Moreover, the two variables identified as significant in intergroup relations, status and competition, predict dimensions of stereotypes (Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, & Xu, 2002). According to these dimensions, four classes of behaviour can be described:

(1) Active facilitation (i.e., acting for); one explicitly aims to benefit a group. Interpersonally, these behaviours include helping, assisting, or defending others (e.g., opening a door for someone). Institutionally, these behaviours include assistance programs for the needy, corporate charitable giving, progressive tax codes, and antidiscrimination policies;

(2) Active harm (i.e., acting against); one explicitly intends to hurt a group and its interests. Verbal and sexual harassment, bullying and hate crimes all constitute interpersonal active harm. Institutionally, active harm can range from discriminatory policies, to legalised segregation, to mass internment or even genocide;

(3) Passive facilitation (i.e., acting with); one accepts obligatory association or convenient cooperation with a group. Interpersonal examples include hiring the services of an out-group member (e.g., as a domestic) or choosing to work with a member of a group assumed to be smart on a team project. Institutionally, this can be evident in real political cooperation with a disliked regime. Passive facilitation acts with the group for one's own purposes, but simultaneously benefits the other group as a tolerated by-product;

(4) Passive harm (i.e., acting without); one demeans or distances other groups by diminishing their social worth through excluding, ignoring, or neglecting. Interpersonal passive harm includes avoiding eye contact, being dismissive, or ignoring out-group members. Institutionally, passive harm involves disregarding the needs of some groups or limiting access to necessary resources such as education, housing, and healthcare. In passive harm, one denies the existence

of a group, harming its members by omission of normal human recognition (Cuddy, Fiske, & Glick, 2007).

Cultural stereotypes result from the structural relations between groups in two primary ways. First, that out-groups are perceived as more competent, to the extent that they are perceived as powerful and high status, or as less competent, to the extent that they are perceived as powerless and low status. Thus, changes in the stereotype contents regarding the four dimensions would show the capacity of boy and girl groups to challenge existing gender stereotypes and gender norms according to gender studies.

Self-esteem normally rises when participating in any group activity that focuses on its members, where no competition exists and where every participant is valued individually. Since boy and girl groups question gender, which is an essential part of one's identity, the method's effect on self-esteem should also be analysed.

3. Method

The main methods for collecting data for this report have been semi-structured interviews and a questionnaire. To complement these methods, observations and interviews with leaders were also conducted. In this chapter, we will explain the methods used in this study and the manner in which we attained the analysis.

3.1 Semi-structured interviews with group participants

Part of the aim of this study is to identify the possible changes in the understanding of gender norms and gendered power structures that the participants experience through partaking in the group meetings. For the assessment of these changes, we used semi-structured interviews. Qualitative methods such as semi-structured interviews are suitable tools when attitudes, values and perceptions are in focus, i.e., when the contents of the interviewee's answers are relevant.

When gender norms are the focus of a study, it is important to find out which perceptions of gender norms exist in the interviewee's daily life. A semi-structured interview is suitable in this case, since it gives the interviewees a chance to explain their thoughts and beliefs with their own words. This reduces the risk of the researcher applying her or his own norms in the interpretation. It is important to bear in mind that it is difficult, if not impossible for researchers to be completely objective. The method of semi-structured interviewing is based on an interview guide, which in this case consisted of questions posed under five categories or themes. The categories used were the following: gender roles, relationships and friendships, violence and harassment, sex and gender equality. We chose these themes because they are fundamental parts of a teenager's life. Furthermore, these themes are clearly connected to gender norms, and are, therefore, relevant when analysing the perception of norms.

However, as we conducted the interviews, it was apparent that some of the interviewees did not comprehend the meaning of some of the themes in the first round of interviews. During the second round, the interviewees were able to discuss the themes more adequately. This was a likely effect of the fact that the interviewees discussed these themes in their group meetings. Not all questions in the interview guide were posed in all interviews. It was rather the conversations themselves that lead the interviews on. The non-fixed format enabled us to pose follow-up questions that clarified and nuanced the interviewees' answers. For the choice of methodology and structure of the interviews, the references used were Jeffner 1997, Trost 2005 and Rabionet 2009.

Approach

The interviews with the participants took place at two different occasions, in order for the possible changes to be visible; once in late 2010 or early 2011, and once at the very end of the school year, i.e., May 2011. The interviews were taped with the consent of the interviewees, and either transcribed as a whole or in parts by each researcher in their own language. Parts of the interviews were translated and shared between the researchers. The interviews were anonymous; the interviewees names in the report are not their actual names, this to protect their identity.

In the first round of interviews, the aim was to get a picture of the participants' views about gender. During the second round of interviews, the researchers aimed to deduce if there were any changes in the participants' perceptions concerning gender. Since gender norms are bound to context, time and place (Butler 1990:111, Young 1994: 716), we wanted to explore the participants' views within their context. Taking for granted that norms are always the same everywhere would have reinforced the researchers' own notion of norms onto the interviewees.

To evaluate if the girl and boy group method is effective, we needed to get a clear indication of whether or not the method correlated with the participant's perception of gender. The first round interviews have, therefore, been analysed carefully and given a fairly substantial part in the analysis.

When reviewing the material collected in the first round of interviews, we looked in to what perceptions of gender norms and gender equality existed among the interviewees. Aspects of interest for this research report were how the participants expressed themselves concerning their own expectations, and those of their teachers, parents and peers. The questions posed towards the data from the first round of interviews were the following:

- Does the participant have a clear understanding of what gender equality is?
- Does the participant view gender as binary and hierarchical?
- Does the participant perceive gender as static or dynamic?
- Does the participant perceive gender in terms of masculinity and femininity?
- Does the participant feel that there are gendered expectations?

The aforementioned questions were also relevant in the analysis of the second round of interviews. However, additional questions put forward in order to see any changes were the following:

Does the participant perceive gender and gender equality in a different way? Does the participant express her/himself in a different way regarding gender equality? Has the participant become empowered?

Sample for interviews

Because of time constraints, and the large amount of both participants and leaders, we chose to interview only one participant and one leader from each group. The choice was made

randomly, but participation was, of course, optional. One of the participants from Åland and three of the participants from Latvia were only interviewed once because of illness and drop-outs from the group. One group in Åland did not participate in the research at all because their activities had a late start.

When choosing which groups that would partake in the research, the groups that started at an early stage were prioritised. The interviewed group members are all between the ages of 13 and 16. Altogether, five groups from Åland and 10 groups from Latvia participated in the research. In Åland, two girls and two boys were interviewed[14]. In Latvia, five girls and five boys were interviewed[15].

3.2 Questionnaires
Sample for questionnaires

All girl and boy group members and leaders selected to participate in the research filled in the questionnaires. The participants answered questionnaires at two separate occasions; once in late 2010 or early 2011, and once at the very end of the school year in May 2011. Administering the questionnaires twice gave us the opportunity to study possible changes in self-esteem and social attitudes. The researchers visited the groups

during their usual weekly meeting hours and distributed and collected the questionnaires. The participants responded to the first questionnaire during the first to the fourth meeting of the group, and they answered the second questionnaire after not less than five, but not more than six months later. In this quantitative part of the study, participation was voluntary, but most of the participants did take part.

During the first round of quantitative data collection, 86 group participants filled in the questionnaires (26 from Åland and 60 from Latvia), their ages varying from 12 to 17 years (M = 14.44, MD = 1.17). Of those who participated, 48 were girls and 38 were boys. During the second round of quantitative data collection, 78 group participants filled out the questionnaires (21 from Åland and 57 from Latvia), their age varying from 12 to 17 years (M = 14.69, MD = 1.17).

Measurements

We used a 10 item scale to measure the self-esteem of the participants. Girl and boy group participants had to read ten different statements, such as "All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure", "On the whole, I am satisfied with myself", "I feel that I have a number of good qualities". The participants had to choose one of four given answers that would best correspond to their own judgement regarding each statement; (1) absolutely agree, (2) partially agree, (3) partially disagree, (4) absolutely disagree.

We measured the social attitudes of the group participants with stereotype content inventory (Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, & Xu, 2002). Stereotype content directly influences social attitudes towards members of different social groups. Gender norms reflect stereotypes regarding two social groups; women and men. If we assume that certain social groups are closely related to gender stereotypes, then we can expect that challenging gender norms would lead to changed attitudes towards those groups.

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14   Three participants from the city of Marie-hamn, Åland were interviewed; one girl, Lina, 15 years old, and two boys, Rasmus, 14 years old, and Viktor, 15 years old. From the countryside in Åland, one girl, Elisabeth, 13 years old, was interviewed.

15   From the capital city of Latvia, Riga, one boy was interviewed. From a city located near Riga, one girl was interviewed. The rest of the interviewed participants came from other cities or villages in different regions of Latvia; cities like Cesis, located 80 km from Riga, Dobele, located 70 km from Riga, Jekabpils, located 140 km from Riga, and the small village of Birzi, located 160 km from Riga.

Stereotype content inventory includes sixteen statements related to four dimensions of stereotype based attitudes and opinions towards different groups of society; warmth, competitiveness, competence and status. Group participants had to choose answers ranging from one to five, where the number one stood for "not at all" and the number five stood for "a lot". In this study, we measured the social attitudes towards five different occupational groups. The basis for choosing the occupations included in this study was on the fact that they are commonly perceived, in both Latvia and Åland, as either significantly masculine or significantly feminine. The selected groups are as follows: models, kindergarten teachers, police officers, teenagers who have become mothers or fathers and prostitutes. We divided all the groups according to gender, meaning that we measured social attitudes towards both genders of respective occupational groups separately. For example, attitudes towards both female and male kindergarten teachers were measured separately.

To measure perceived warmth, we asked questions such as "how kind-hearted are female/male police officers". We asked questions such as "how much professionalism do female/male police officers have", to measure competence. To measure the perceived status of an occupation, we asked questions such as "how prestigious is the job of female/male police officers". Finally, we measured perceived competitiveness of the different occupations with statements such as "the more power female/male police officers have, the less power is it likely that people like me have". The data analysis was carried out using parametric statistical methods for data processing; the SPSS statistics program, version 18.00. For the analysis of the data, appropriate parametric statistical tests were used.

3.3 Semi-structured interviews with group leaders

To collect more data for the study, we conducted semi-structured interviews with the leaders of the boy and girl groups. Since the leaders were involved in the groups already from the start, they have had the opportunity to observe changes in participants' behaviour and perceptions. During the interviews with the leaders, they were asked to give their opinion on if and how the group members had been affected by participation in the group, and to illustrate this by concrete examples that they perceived as relevant. This has been an invaluable part in studying the empowerment and self-esteem of the group members, since the leaders could give their view on whether or not the group members had started to think more independently, if they questioned norms, were more prone to speak their mind or were more involved in societal issues.

Similar to the semi-structured interviews with the girl and boy group participants, the basis for the leader interviews was an interview guide. The guide consisted of three categories/themes, under which several questions were posed. The themes we chose to focus on were meetings, method and gender perspective. The questions asked in regard to meetings concerned the structure of the meetings, the environment in which the meetings were held and the nature of the discussions deliberated in the meetings. Regarding the second theme, method, we sought to grasp the leaders' perception on whether or not the girl and boy group method was easy or difficult to comprehend and carry out, and what the leaders saw as advantages/disadvantages with this method. The last theme was gender perspective. We focused on this theme to find out how the leaders see the use of gender perspective in the girl and boy groups. The leaders were asked to judge whether or not it was easy or difficult to integrate the gender perspective in their work as leaders, and whether they perceived this method

as a good way of challenging gender norms. This was a significant way of getting feedback, especially from the Latvian leaders who had never previously worked with this method.

Sample for leader interviews

The goal was to interview one leader from each girl and boy group within this project in both countries. Five leaders from Åland were interviewed; three girl group leaders (all three were female leaders) and two boy group leaders (one female and one male leader), their ages ranging between 18 and 49 years. Since there were 23 groups in Latvia, not all leaders in Latvia could be interviewed. The leader in one of the groups that started their activities later than when the first data gathering was made could not be part of the research. In total, eight leaders were interviewed in Latvia, their ages ranging from 22 to 54, all of them female.

3.4 Participatory observations

The researchers administered several observations of all the groups in both countries. They attended meetings, and afterwards wrote down notes on the group dynamics (if some participants were dominating and some shy, or if everyone talked a lot) and interesting occurrences (things participants said, the way they behaved that was out of the ordinary). The leaders in each group were, after every meeting, assigned to document good and bad aspects of the meeting, the discussions deliberated, and how they had integrated the gender perspective in the group activity. This documentation was used by the researchers as a complement to their conducted observations.

4. Analysis

4.1 Gender equality and gender norms

The first question we aimed to answer is: Does the girl and boy group method challenge gender norms and stereotypes, and raise participants' awareness regarding gender (in)equality in society? In order to do this, we analysed the transcriptions of the interviews with the girl and boy group participants by posing questions to the texts. We sought information on whether or not the participants see a clear division between women and men, if they consider gender as a given or changeable and if they have clear views on gender (in)equality. We looked for answers to these questions by analysing the data we collected from the first round of interviews. We also wanted to examine whether or not the participants' opinions had changed; if they saw wider possibilities for behaviour and if their awareness regarding gender (in)equality had developed. To analyse these issues, we reviewed the data from the second round of interviews.

First round of interviews
a) Gender equality

We analysed the first round of interviews to see what level of awareness the participants had, regarding gender equality. Examining the interview transcripts showed that not all participants understood the notion of gender equality. This, in particular, was the case with the Latvian participants. We also wanted to see if, and in what way, the interviewees associated the concept of gender equality in their everyday life. In the case of the participants in Åland, it is clear that the interviewees had all heard about these issues. For example:

> Lina: That everyone is treated exactly the same. That is, that no one should have to be treated differently... or in a better way than anyone else. That everyone has the same value.

Here, Lina expresses that equality is when everyone has the same value in society. She especially highlights the absence of advantages for some, and hence, one can guess, disadvantages for others. Viktor also has a clear understanding about gender equality, but highlights respect for everyone's differences instead of being treated equally:

> Viktor: I think gender equality is that you respect others for what they are and kinda leave it at that. I think everyone should be allowed to be the way they want… and that you shouldn't look that much at gender but more at the individual.

Elisabeth, on the other hand, focuses on the disadvantages that women experience, and gives a few examples where this could be corrected:

> Elisabeth: That everything is the same. That women have the same right to vote, that you have equal salary, and that everyone is included, that it's not just guys.

Rasmus has a similar point of view:

> Rasmus: […] the same salary, being treated the same.

Although not comprehensively, the interviewees can explain the basic aspects of what gender equality in their society entails. It is apparent that they have heard about this issue. On the other hand, when asked if they discussed gender equality in school, at home or among their friends, none of them said yes. Therefore, one can conclude that this is not an issue that they previously have discussed with others, or about which they have built a clear opinion. Even though the participants have a general knowledge of what gender equality is, their awareness about the broad issue of gender equality is not extensive.

When asked about gender equality in their social environments, i.e., at home and at school, most of the interviewees said their homes were gender equal, and some said that their school was a gender equal environment. Elisabeth, for example, said that she lives in a gender equal home, even though her two brothers are not expected to do as much around the house. She then goes on about her parents:

> Elisabeth: My mom cooks food and cleans and stuff, but when my dad has the time, he helps her out. When my mom gets tired and wants help, she asks and then my dad usually helps.

Lina also believes her parents have a gender equal relationship. She has a similar response as Elisabeth when asked what her parents do around the house:

> Lina: Well, my mom does the dishes and my dad mostly lies on the couch, so… yeah.

Both of these interviewees also explain that their parents expect them to do more domestic work than their brothers. Evidently, although both these interviewees have an understanding of the concept of gender equality, and are able to define it in general terms, they do not have the tools to apply this knowledge in their everyday life. When asked if they perceive their home environment as gender equal, they say yes. However, when they explain who does all the domestic work, their accounts do not fit their expressed definition of gender equality.

b) Gender as dichotomy and hierarchy

Many answers in the first round of interviews can be related to gender as a constructed dichotomy and hierarchy. The interviewees also noticed gender roles, or rather, patterns of behaviour according to gender, that exist in the realm of friendship. The participants were asked a num-

ber of questions regarding their friendships, e.g., if they had close friends, if they saw any difference between being friends with a girl or a boy. Most of the interviewees said that they did see differences between the friendships of girls and boys. Rasmus talks about what he perceives to be the difference between having male and female friends:

> Rasmus: I don't think there's any difference for me being friends with girls or boys. But it's easier to become friends with boys.
> I: Why do you think that is?
> Rasmus: No but.... it's always been like that... that you are a boy yourself and... I don't know.
> I: Do you have more in common with other boys?
> Rasmus: Yes. You can be different around boys. You don't have to think about things and stuff.
> I: What is it that you have to think about when you are with girls?
> Rasmus: Stuff...like your looks. You can't be yourself around girls in the same way.
> I: Do you feel like you are expected to behave in a certain way around girls?
> Rasmus: Yes.

Kārlis also talked about friendships with girls:

> I: Do you discuss the same things with them [his female friends] as you discuss with the boys?
> Kārlis: No, I feel ashamed. I can talk freely with the boys. I cannot talk so freely with the girls. I can talk to them about spare time activities, music. I can talk about everything else with the boys, completely freely. I feel I have to be careful what I say to the girls I am acquainted with.

Uldis made a similar statement when talking about friendship:

> I: Do you also have friends that are girls?
> Uldis: Mainly classmates. I have more friends that are boys, of course.

> I: Why do say "of course"?
> Uldis: I hang out more with my friends that are boys.
> I: Why do you think that is, that boys stick together with boys and girls with other girls?
> Uldis: Boys are open with each other, they have the same interests. Girl talk is completely different. They talk about TV-programs, hair.
> I: And what do boys talk about?
> Uldis: Current affairs of the world, sports. About news, documentary films. We exchange information. I would say that this is more serious than girls.

The quotes above are examples of how the gender contract functions. The gender contract consists of differentiation and hierarchy (see Hirdman 2001). Rasmus, Uldis and Kārlis all express that it is easier to become friends with boys and that they have more in common with other boys than with girls. These are examples of how the differentiation between girls and boys start at an early age, and that, at the participants' age, it has become ingrained in the teenagers that there are differences between boys and girls. These differences seem, to the participants, to be so fundamental, that having friendly relationships with a person belonging to the other gender category seemed difficult. Not only did Uldis confirm what Rasmus and Kārlis described; he also believed that the interactions between boys are "more serious" than that of girls. In other words, he perceived girls' conversations as being more superficial. Uldis' account is an expression of the hierarchy of the gender contract; the behaviours and activities of girls and boys are valued differently. Girls' interests are seen as of less value (Hirdman 2001:83) than those of boys. Uldis also accurately identifies the norms attached to masculinity (serious, intellectual) and femininity (superficial, stupid). This shows the unmistakable hierarchy between the gender categories and the disadvantageous effects this has on girls and women as a group.

In the examples above, there is also a shared belief that it is harder to become friends with someone of the opposite sex. The boys explain that one has to behave in "another way" around girls than around boys; that one has to "think about your looks" and that one "can't talk freely to girls". There is an assumption that girls and boys cannot be friends in the same way, due to presumptions of heterosexuality; sexual attraction is always a risk when boys and girls interact with each other, in a manner of speaking. The way in which the boys talk about the problems involved with being friends with girls can be connected to the heterosexual matrix. Men and women are seen as complementary opposites that yearn for, and attract, each other. In this equation, the perceived differences and the yearning are not good grounds for platonic friendship (Butler 1990:120). The consequences of the heterosexual matrix are visible in how boys and girls interact. Boys and girls often play in mixed groups, until the notion of differences between the genders becomes ingrained in them. As young girls and boys grow older, the idea of gender as difference influences them; they start conforming to the assumption that it is easier to become friends with people belonging to the same gender group as themselves.

c) Doing gender– masculinity and femininity
During the first round of interviews, the participants gave examples on how they understand gender in terms of masculinity and femininity. Their answers showed that all participants have a strong notion of what is seen as masculine and feminine. For example, Pēteris, 13, expresses that he finds it easier to talk to his mother than his father at home, and that his mother cooks and takes care of the home and the children. He states:

> Pēteris: I think it is women who should cook.
> I: Why?
> Pēteris: Because it is kind of a feminine duty.

> I: And do you think you will, like your father, also have little interaction with your children in the future?
> Pēteris: I think so, yes… Depends on what we talk about, if it's something that I am interested in.

Here, the interviewee expresses a binary perception of gender roles in the home, basing it on what he has seen within his own family. He expresses that some things, e.g., cooking and taking care of children, are female duties. He also believes that he, in the future, will follow the same path as his father and not take care of his children, but rather interact with them when it fits him ("if it's something that I'm interested in"). From an early age, children make sense of gender by looking at their surroundings. This gives them an awareness of how biological sex becomes gender, including the social implications and expectations it entails. The differences in behaviour expected of girls and boys are also obvious to Pēteris:

> I: What are boys here occupied with in their spare time?
> Pēteris: You have to work, some have gardens.
> But girls don't care.
> I: And what do girls do?
> Pēteris: They go to parties, they drink alcohol.

Here, Pēteris expresses that in his community, being a boy means that one has to work and be responsible, in contrast to what he believes girls his age do. He expresses several times in the interview that he thinks girls are not responsible, while boys have to be. This is a clear expression for the gender norm in his community, and it is also apparent that he finds it frustrating that girls are not expected to do as much. Pēteris has a typically binary view on gender roles, where girls are subordinate to boys. Butler and Skeggs explain that male and female are positioned

on two opposing ends of a spectrum; their roles are differentiated, but at the same time, complementary (Butler 1990, Skeggs 1997). Pēteris' thoughts on gender differences can also be interpreted in terms of feeling pressured to fulfil masculine norms. Pēteris thinks boys have to be more responsible than girls, and finds it to be annoying that girls are not expected to do as much. Although he does not express it clearly, a critique of masculine norms may be imbedded in his (mis)directed frustration towards girls' "easy situation".

Another example of perceived gender roles is expressed by Lina when she discusses friendship. Lina says at first that she has friends that are both boys and girls, and that she does not think that there is a significant difference between girls and boys, but then goes on to say the following:

> I: Do you think there is a difference between hanging out with a bunch of girls and a bunch of guys?
> Lina: There is a big difference. With a bunch of guys, you would probably sit and play video games, but with a bunch of girls you sit and talk and gossip and stuff...
> I: so, there is a bigger difference between hanging out with girls and boys in groups than it is when you are alone with them?
> Lina: Yes, there's a bigger difference in groups.
> I: Why do you think that is?
> Lina: I think.... Well, when there are several guys, they start to behave like guys.

Here, Lina expresses that her relationship with her friends is not essentially dependent on their gender, but rather in social contexts; when there are more boys around, the boys start to act in a way which the interviewee sees as typical for boys. From a theoretical perspective, one can say that the interviewee observes that the boys act in norm configurative ways when there are several boys in a group. The norms change depending on the context; in this case, the boys adhered to

different norms in a gender mixed group compared to a more gender homogenous group. The expression that Lina uses, "they start to behave like guys", also implies that this "boyish behaviour" is so well established that it does not need to be explained further. The gendered norms and expectations evidently increase in gender homogenous groups; for boys, the pressure to behave masculine, for example, by being tough, intensifies. The element of control becomes greater in same sex groups, since it is the other boys/ girls who judge how well one performs masculinity/femininity (compare Foucault 1977, Fundberg 2003). To avoid diminutive nicknames, like "coward", "girly" or "gay", boys "behave like guys" when around their male peers. Berg points out that boys, already early in life, normalise affectation; the goal is to hide how one truly feels. The norm for a boy is "being cool", which affects how boys become men. Girls, on the other hand, incorporate behaviours in accordance with the norms for femininity when they are in gender homogenous groups; they sit and talk about their emotions. This differentiation can cause problems in friendships and heterosexual relationships, since boys and girls may have different needs of, for example, talking about emotions. Conflicts may also occur if girls disapprove of their boyfriends' "more masculine" behaviour when in a male dominated group compared to their "less masculine" behaviour when alone with their girlfriends (Berg 2007: 63).

When discussing friendship, most of the interviewees said that they see differences between the friendships of girls compared to that of boys. When making an observation, Rasmus comments on masculine norms and its affects:

> I: Do you have a friend or someone that you feel that you can say anything to?
> Rasmus: No.. I mostly have... Sure, I have friends but no one that I can say everything to. Among girls, I think it's like that.
> I: Do girls have closer friends?

Rasmus: Yes.
I: Have you felt a need to have this kind of friend?
Rasmus: No, I haven't felt the need, but sure, it would be nice to have that.

Rasmus identifies the norms for girls and boys when expressing that he believes close friends are something that girls have, but that boys do not. Having close friends is perceived as feminine, therefore, boys/men are not expected or encouraged to have close friends. Some examples of traits typically associated with masculinity are competitiveness, strength and not having the need to show emotions. It can even be considered weak for a boy/man to have the need to have a close friend, since it is so connected to femininity and women's perceived need to talk and confide in each other (Hearn 2004:56). Rasmus tells us that he does not feel the need to have close friends, but at the same time, he says it would be nice to have them. To admit having needs (that one has not been able to satisfy) is, per se, not in line with traditional masculine norms. Rasmus' denial of having a need for close friends is comparable to Burcar's research on male crime victims. Burcar's research shows that male crime victims need to disassociate themselves from being a victim, and explain that they were not passive and vulnerable when subjected to the crime. The notion that men are not vulnerable, passive or scared characterises how these young men make sense of themselves as crime victims (Bucar 2005). Rasmus' denial of needing close friends can be a way for him to make sense of the apparent difference between the friendships that girls and boys have. It can also be seen as a criticism towards masculine norms and their consequences on male friendships, since he does expresses that it would be nice to have closer friends.

Viktor, 15, also discusses expectations on girls and boys to give another example concerning masculine norms. Viktor expresses that he does

not see these expectations in school, i.e., he has not noticed that teachers treat girls and boys differently. On the other hand, he expresses that he knows of statistics showing that this phenomena exists. Viktor further explains his thoughts concerning gender norms and expectations on girls and boys:

> Viktor: I would say that when it comes to boys, there is a lot of performance stuff that is on you ... that comes from different directions. And there are pretty huge demands that you should be masculine, and not show weakness. Which I think is a pity... you don't dare to show what you really feel and how things really are. You are just supposed to cope with everything and carry anything. So... for me it just feels like gender overall is a burden. Women have their burdens and men have theirs.

Viktor clearly states that he is aware of the different expectations on girls and boys that are connected to masculinity and femininity. He also expresses that these norms are a burden for both men and women. He is critical to the "demands that you should be masculine, perform and not show weakness" and thinks it is a pity. Compared to Rasmus, Viktor is more outspoken and clear in his critique of the gendered expectations, which for him equals demands on being masculine. Hence, he feels uncomfortable showing emotions or weakness (although he would like), since he knows it is not considered appropriate masculine behaviour. This exemplifies how masculine and feminine norms limit the lives of individuals. Ambjörnsson and Butler state, that there is no room for varieties in behaviour when there is a dichotomy between male and female. What is considered acceptable conduct is dependent on one's gender (Ambjörnsson 2004, Butler 1990). Furthermore, Berg refers to the British researcher Frosh, who points out that boys need contexts where they can reflect on how masculinity is constructed. When boys get this opportu-

nity, in time, it becomes clear that the notion of boys not wanting to talk about more emotional and private parts of life is not true. This myth has a negative impact on boys' behaviour; they remain quiet and construct a protective façade (Berg 2007:65 or Frosh et.al. 2002, also see Pease 2003). Viktor articulates it clearly when he says, that as a boy, "you don't dare to show what you really feel and how things really are".

d) Gendered expectations

Gender norms define a set of rules and social expectations on how a person should behave on the basis of their gender. In the first round of interviews, all participants reinforced the idea that girls and boys receive different treatment because of these gendered expectations. In most cases, the interviewees expressed that they perceive differences in what parents and teachers expect from boys and girls. Gendered expectations regarding sexuality were also discussed, and some of the interviewees gave an account of what they think is expected of girls and boys regarding sex. However, it became obvious to the researchers that questions regarding sexuality were not easy to pose to all interviewees. The Latvian participants were not keen on answering questions regarding sex and sexuality. Also, the youngest participants in Åland had a hard time grasping the issue. However, the interviews that did include a conversation on sexuality gave illustrative examples on what gendered expectations there are concerning sex. Rasmus, for example, gives his view on how he thinks that girls and boys perceive sex:

> I: Do you talk to your female friends about sex?
> Rasmus: No.
> I: Ok... Do you think girls have a different view on sex than boys have?
> Rasmus: Yes.
> I: What is the difference?
> Rasmus: People think that... I don't know...

> You would think that they [girls] are more careful and stuff.

Rasmus does not seem to have a clear picture of whether or not there is a difference between the sexuality of girls and boys, but he is, however, aware of what the norm is regarding sexuality; i.e., girls are expected to be more careful when it comes to sex. Although he states that he does not talk about sex with his friends that are girls, he still has this normative picture in mind. Viktor, on the other hand, says that he talks to both his boy and girl friends about sex, and expresses that he thinks that, even if some boys are open about sex, girls are more open when talking about these issues. He elaborates:

> Viktor: I would say that it's individual.
> I: So you don't see any patterns regarding this?
> Viktor: Well, it's the stereotypical thing that... boys are like.... the pure physical, the intercourse, while girls are more towards the romantic.
> I: Do you see it that way?
> Viktor: Well, I do see some tendencies like that, but I wonder if it really is like that or if it's because it's supposed to be like that

Viktor shows that he is well aware of the gender norms concerning sexuality and that the behaviour of people around him tends to correspond to these norms. However, Viktor questions if this phenomena, in fact, is static (or "natural"), or if it exists because there is a notion that girls and boys are supposed to behave in certain ways.

Austra reflects about the same issue:

> I: Is sex different for boys and girls?
> Austra: Yes, completely different. For the girls it is something special... for the boys it is sometimes a hobby. It is also about popularity, they compete who will have more, for the sake of their status
> I: Why is it so? Are they born with it?
> Austra: No, but there are predispositions that the person cannot rule over.

I: So its men's gender, their biology that determines it?

Austra: To some extent. But it's about how we think about it ourselves, if we can control our emotions…

Austra articulates that she sees significant differences in boys' and girls' view on sex. She states that girls' sexuality is more connected to emotions, while boys take sex less seriously, which her use of the word "hobby" indicates. Similar to Viktor, Austra talks about "predispositions" to explain this gender difference in relation to sex, while, on the other hand, she states that this also depends on the control of emotions. This indicates that Austra takes both biology and people's will into consideration when deliberating on why the attitudes of boys and girls towards sex differ.

Lina also talks about how she experiences that girls and boys around her talk about sex:

Lina: I think it's easier to talk to girls, because they kinda know…

I: Do you think boys talk in a different way when they are together… your friends that are boys for example… than how they talk to you about it?

Lina: I would think so. I think they talk more openly… I think it's easier for them to talk to other boys.

I: Why do you think that is?

Lina: You have different standpoints. It's like… I don't know how to put it. It's so different for boys and girls when it comes to sex.

I: Do you think girls and boys have different needs sexually?

Lina: Yes, I think so.

I: What's the difference?

Lina: I think boys want to have more sex.

I: Why do you think that is?

Lina: I don't really know, but I think so.

Lina expresses that she believes, although she is unsure, that boys have a greater sexual need than girls. She also thinks that girls and boys perceive sex in different ways because they have different standpoints. Lina cannot categorically express what she means with standpoints, but it is clear that she sees a difference between boys and girls when it comes to sexuality. She does not express what the norm is, but does, however, express that there is a norm.

All interviewees confirm that they believe there are different expectations on girls and boys regarding sex. Masculinity entails being sexually active and dominating, while femininity indicates being passive and submissive. Men supposedly take charge and are active, while women must be respectable; they should not be interested in sex, but at the same time, they must not refuse sex.

All the interviewees in Åland and Latvia stated that they only talked about sex in organised forms, i.e., during mandatory sex education lessons in school. However, sex education in schools only deals with anatomy, not emotions, opinions or the social context of sexuality. With this in mind, the boy and girl groups are a rare opportunity for these teenagers to discuss sexuality from these perspectives. All the leaders in Åland explained that sex and sexuality was the subject that the group participants showed most interest in, and that resulted in the most engaging discussions. In Latvia, on the other hand, it was relationships between boys and girls, not directly sex and sexuality, which was the most popular subject.

Austra, 15, explains the different expectations on girls and boys in her social contexts; she maintains that girls are goal oriented and concentrate on their studies, while boys are self-confident and strong. Austra has a positive image of boys and girls, but she still perceives them in different ways. She goes on:

Austra: There are many stereotypes for girls in general, they have to be beautiful. We have talked about that girls are expected to be faultless.

I: Do you think it should be so?

> Austra: I think no. It is again a stereotype, there is no beautiful or ugly, there are only point of views, stereotypes.

Austra expresses that she is aware that girls have to live up to expectations of being beautiful and flawless. She also believes that these expectations do not exist in the same way for boys. Austra is aware of the existing gender norms around her, but when asked if she thinks that these norms are reasonable, she stresses that these feminine ideals of being flawless and beautiful are just stereotypes, not necessarily a static fact. Norms regarding femininity limits the acting space of girls; they feel a pressure to be perfect. Later in the interview, Austra expresses that even though girls and boys around her conform to gender norms, there are always people who do not behave that way. She has the following thoughts regarding the division of labour at home:

> I: In the future, who will clean the house?
> Austra: Me, but the husband should join in too, for example, do the dishes.
> I: Do you like a clean house?
> Austra: Yes.
> I: But you think that boys don't?
> Austra: They like it too. It is again a stereotype that boys don't do anything. I think that boys   clean too.

All of the interviewees express that they are aware that there are different expectations on girls and boys in their social surroundings. When asked if these expectations are a burden or hard to live up to, on the other hand, the answers were different. Most of the interviewees gave examples of situations where being a girl or a boy means being treated unfairly. However, they did not express whether or not gendered expectations and norms affected them. Nor did they share their thoughts on if they were aware of alternative ways to behave. This, in spite of the fact, that all interviewees expressed that there are expectations based on gender. Lina states, for example:

> I: Do you feel that you are urged to behave in a certain way because you are a girl?
> Lina: Maybe. I do feel that you have to behave in a certain way.
> I: Do you find it is easy to live up to these expectations?
> Lina: It's pretty easy.
> I: Does it come automatically or do you have to think about it?
> Lina: It comes automatically.

Lina's reflections relate to post-structural theory on gender stating that people perform and treat others according to the norms associated with their gender. Often, we do this unconsciously, and we do not perceive it as something others impose on us; we seemingly choose gender normative behaviour ourselves (see Butler 1990, Hearn 2004:53). The interviewees all recognise that there are differences in what girls and boys are expected to do, but behaving in accordance with these expectations is not always a conscious choice. Although the interviewees see the gendered expectations that people have on them, most of them have not thought about or problematized this issue before. Data from the first round of interviews shows that the participants did not often speak openly about these issues in their everyday lives.

The fact that girls and boys perform according to gendered expectations can be related to how power relations operate. Power, and to become empowered, can be understood as the ability to make independent choices. Real choice only exists if there are apparent and conceivable alternatives. Power relations, as, for example, gender norms, are most effective when they are not perceived as such. Stereotypical male or female behaviour can look like active choice, but they can also be based on the denial of choice (Kabeer 2005:14). When people have forums where they can problematize and discuss gendered norms and expectations, the chance for active choices will increase (See Berg 2007, Kabeer 2005, Frosh et.al. 2002).

e) Punishment and reward
– consequences of gendered expectations

Societal gender norms result in gendered expectations on how to behave as girls or boys. These expectations can come from the outside; from parents, teachers, friends and media. They can also come from inside; from feelings of pressure to fit in and be "normal". Those who succeed to fulfil gendered expectations get rewarded, while those who fail to fulfil these norms can receive punishments for their behaviour. Although many of the interviewees gave examples on what expectations they perceived around them, not many could connect the expectations with punishment or reward. However, some of the interviewees expressed what could be interpreted as social implications for not following the norm; punishments that afflict those who break norms. For example, as Lina expresses it:

> Lina: If boys have sex without having a relationship, even with quite a few people, then no one cares, but if a girl does that, then people think she is a whore.

Lina's example underlines a common norm in western society connected to gender and sexuality. Boys are expected to be sexually active, experienced and have (many) different partners. When boys fulfil this expectation, "no one cares", i.e., the order is not disrupted, but rather, the norms are reinforced. Girls, on the other hand, are not expected to be as sexually active and/or have as many different partners. If a girl behaves in the same way as the boys, it can result in her being talked to/about in a negative way, i.e., called a whore. This can be seen as an expression of the social punishments that can arise from not being seen as normal, i.e., behaving in a way, or perceived to behave in a way that breaches the norm for women's sexuality (Ambjörnsson 2006:69, Butler 1990:51-52).

Uldis, 16, gives another example that can be understood in terms of consequences following the failure to fulfil gendered expectations. He talks about gender norms connected to different professions:

> I: Businesses are more often managed by men. Why is it so?
> Uldis: Many say it is because men are smarter.
> I: Is that also your opinion?
> Uldis: No, I think men and women are equally smart.
> I: Why do you think that men are in managerial positions more often then? Is it something that we are born with?
> Uldis: There is no difference. It's because of environment that we think that only men can be builders. But they [women] are the same as we. They can do anything.
> I: But they don't?
> Uldis: But we can also wear skirts, but we don't. It wouldn't be accepted.

The interviewee seems to be well aware of what norms and presumptions there are about girls and boys (boys are smarter, girls cannot become builders). At the same time, he believes that the roles we have are socially constructed. He expresses that there is a social framework that dictates and limits what we can and cannot do if we want to be accepted in society. Boys can wear skirts in theory, but if it did happen in reality, it would not be accepted by others. Uldis expresses that there are gendered expectations, that these gender roles are socially constructed, and that there are real consequences of not behaving as expected by society. The example the interviewee gives clarifies how gender norms are upheld; through social rewards and punishments (Hirdman 2001, Ridgeway and Correll 2005, Hearn 2005). The social punishment for non-conformity can take different forms; boys, for example, may experience taunting, name-calling or even physical chastisement. Boys who fail to live up to masculine norms can be called "gay" to underline that the norm breaking behaviour has lessened the person's masculinity. Wasshede researched

men who defined themselves as heterosexual feminists and norm breakers who sometimes wore skirts. Her research shows that even in these conscious norm breaking situations, there are limits to consider. The men in her study only wore a skirt in so called safe environments, i.e., around other male heterosexual feminists. Also, the skirt was combined with a shirt and tie, i.e., masculine encoded cloths. Even these men who wanted to challenge masculine norms did not want to risk being perceived as being overly feminine or "gay" (Wasshede 2005). Breaking the norms can lead to social exclusion, harassment and violence. A man wearing a skirt takes a risk, since it can trigger a violent response in some men. Evidently, the norms do not affect everyone equally, since some people can choose to break the norm or not, whilst other do not have that choice.

Lina, 15, exemplifies limitations and punishments that come with the norm:

> Lina: Some teachers, that are men, they favour girls and give them higher grades and stuff. And at home... my brother has totally different curfews than I had when I was his age.
> I: What's the difference? Does he have more freedom?
> Lina: Yes, he has more freedom, much more freedom than I have.
> I: Do you think this is because you are a girl?
> Lina: Yes, I think so.

Later in the interview, Lina continues to state that grown-ups treat girls more carefully than they do boys. When asked if she notices this in her everyday life she answers:

> Lina: I notice it all the time. My dad... he treats me very... he is extremely careful with me, but my brother can do whatever he wants.

Elisabeth, 13, also expresses her thoughts regarding expectations from adults:

> Elisabeth: Most adults think that girls should be well behaved and stuff... you notice it pretty clearly, because often they are much more tolerant towards boys.
> I: In what way?
> Elisabeth: They expect boys to forget to bring pens and stuff, but when a girl forgets you get a bad remark immediately.
> I: And if a boy forgets?
> Elisabeth: No, they can forget many times and teachers just say "that's ok".

Rasmus, 14, observes the same norms as Elisabeth spoke about in the section above:

> Rasmus: I think the teachers have an impression of boys that they are a bit messy and stuff.

Elisabeth, Lina and Rasmus, express that adults around them treat them in gender specific ways. Specifically, they underline an expectation, or norm, that boys are (or ought to be) more active, loud and can take care of themselves, while girls are (or ought to be) more passive, well behaved and need to be looked after. In Lina's example, it is about having less freedom and more rules to abide by at home, while Elisabeth gives an example of having to behave in a calm and collected way in school. Both are examples of gendered expectations that are evidently differentiated according to gender and that have a constraining effect on the lives of young girls and boys. Rasmus says that teachers expect him to be messier. He does not explain this further, but his statement shows that he perceives this gender normative expectation.

The abovementioned examples show how gendered expectations relate to social punishment and reward, and how they impact the everyday lives of teenage boys and girls. Girls are favoured by the teachers at school, while they do not have as much freedom as their brothers at home. For boys, it is the other way around. This is related to masculine and feminine norms, since

boys can, supposedly, take care of themselves to a higher extent than girls. Furthermore, it is related to parents' fears of girls risking to become subject to male (sexual) violence. The interviewees' statements also manifest that boys get rewarded for behaving in a certain way, while girls receive punishment for the same actions.

Second round of interview

In the second round of interviews, the interviewees were again asked questions regarding gender norms and gender equality. This, for us to see if taking part in the girl and boy groups had given them tools to problematize norms pertaining to gender, i.e., if their perspectives had changed.

a) Gender equality

According to the group leaders, all of the groups tried to discuss gender equality in one way or another during the group meetings. One of the group method's goals is to raise participants' awareness concerning issues of gender (in)equality in society overall, associated to themes that are relevant for the youth. To be able to put words on one's views on inequalities and unjust situations can be seen as an empowerment process. In the second round of interviews, several group members pointed out that they had a lot of discussions concerning issues of gender equality. They went on to say that the girl and boy group was one of the few, if not the only, places where this was possible. In the interview with Ilze, she talks about the group's discussions about gender equality:

> I: What is the best thing you experienced in the group?
> Ilze: The best thing was that we could discuss themes that we haven't been able to discuss outside the group.
> I: For example?
> Ilze: There was, for example, about boys and girls, about gender equality... We usually don't discuss such things, and here there was a possibility to discuss it.

> I: And you found it interesting?
> Ilze: Yes.

In the second interview with Uldis, this theme also immediately comes up:

> I: What [theme] did you like the most?
> Uldis: The theme about gender equality. This has stayed in my mind the most.

He goes on talking about the state of gender equality in Latvia, as he perceives it:

> Uldis: The women are not excluded, but men are given more possibilities.
> I: Do you observe that somewhere?
> Uldis: No, but usually men are employed more often than women... women have less opportunities in difficult jobs, for example, as fire-fighters.

After having discussed the issue of gender equality in the group, Uldis observes that women have fewer opportunities in the job market. He links this phenomenon to gender equality, which he defines as:

> Uldis: when you try to achieve that women are not excluded, that they are able to do the same things that men do.

The interviewees both say that gender equality has been one of the most interesting themes of the group discussions. Austra also expresses her views on gender and power in society. When asked if she thinks women and men are treated differently in society, she says:

> Austra: I see it very much as a fight between the genders. From my point of view, society accepts boys more. The boys are said to be the strong gender, only men are elected into the parliament. Maybe people don't trust women, to some extent.

In this statement, Austra agrees with Uldis, and

points out that the greater acceptance of men in society can lead to more men in decision making positions, such as being elected for the parliament. None of the Latvian interviewees had, according to themselves, had the chance to discuss these issues outside the groups. This can also explain why they had problems talking about it in the first round of interviews. It is clear that all of them have developed their way of talking about gender (in)equality. Theoretically speaking, these statements show that the discussions in the group have underlined the imbalance of power that exists in society, where men (and masculinity) are perceived as superior to women (and femininity) (see Hirdman 2001). The discussions in the groups have made the participants think about, and to some degree, question this gendered power structure.

In Lina's group, the issue of gender based violence was introduced by watching a film about a rape case in a small town in Sweden. The rape victim, a young girl, had become an outcast after news about the rape case had been spread. The rapist was a highly regarded boy, and neither adults, nor young people, believed the girl's story, and the boy later raped another girl. Lina recollects the group's discussion after watching the film:

> Lina: It was strange that no one believed her and that another girl was also raped and the priest was totally sick that allowed him into the church. But we all had the same opinion about it.
> I: What was that opinion?
> Lina: We all thought it was wrong, that it was strange that it happened.
> I: Do you think it would be different if it happened at your school?
> L: It depends. Since the boy was… he was seen as a good guy. I think there would be doubts here too… yeah, it could happen.

The topic of sexual violence was discussed in the group and the participants all apparently had the same opinion on the matter; that it was wrong and unfair of the people around the rape victim not to believe her just because the offender had a high status. Since the girl group was the only place where the girls had an opportunity to discuss these issues, one can conclude that awareness on the issue of rape, from a gender perspective, has risen. What is even more interesting, is that Lina also believes that these mechanisms of mistrusting the rape victim because of the popularity of the offender could also be a reality in her own school. The interviewee clearly connects the subject matter of the film to her own surroundings. This indicates that the group discussions helped raise the focus from the individual case to the structural level, thereby expanding the girls' level of awareness regarding gender inequality in society (see Jeffner 1997).

Another example of discussions regarding gender equality comes from a boy group in Åland. At the last group meeting, two of the participants started discussing why the local men's football team and the local women's football team received significantly different amounts of attention in the local media. The participants had noticed that although both teams played in the highest division, and the women's team usually got better results, the men's team attracted much more attention in local media. After studying the papers their hypothesis was confirmed; the paper did report more on the men's team. Moreover, articles pertaining to the men's team were often longer and accompanied by larger pictures than reports on the women's team. According to the leaders of the group, the interest in gender issues related to media started after discussing gender roles and norms and the power relations it entailed. This shows that the group discussions about gender norms gave the participants the tools to question the same structures in their everyday lives. This can be compared to Ilze's answer regarding what discussions linked to gender equality she can recall:

I: If we talk about boys and girls, about gender equality, what is the theme you remember the most?
Ilze: Somebody read a story and there were different versions of the answers, we had to choose one. This was exactly about gender equality. There was, for example, Anna and Pēteris, they were both playing basketball, and the chairman of the town council had to choose who would get uniforms. It was given to the boys, the girls had to buy uniforms themselves, and in the newspaper they put the picture of the boys too, not the girls.

Another theme deliberated in the groups was gender based violence. Most of the participants stated in the first round of interviews that sexual violence such as sexual harassment, rape and trafficking were topics they did not discuss with adults or their friends. Rape was the only issue discussed in some of the participants' surroundings, but only connected to current rape cases. In the second round of interviews, on the other hand, many of the participants mentioned that they discussed these issues. For example, Austra talks about her overall impressions of the group:

Austra: I liked it very much, I learned a lot of new things.
I: For example?
Austra: I have seen a lot of material about human trafficking. It made me think about it.

Austra states in her second interview that her participation in the girl group was a positive experience; she learned a lot, for example, about trafficking. This statement shows that the discussions in the group regarding this subject made an impression on her and raised her awareness about issues like trafficking. Knowledge of gender based violence and gender equality in the broad-spectrum, evidently empowers the participants. Awareness of gender (in)equality in society also enables the participants more alternatives for action; knowing that expectations and injustices partly depend on gender based expectations, gives them the option of acting differently. The structure of hierarchy between men and women, masculinity and femininity, enables gender based violence, such as rape, harassment and sexual trafficking. It is the extreme expression of gender inequality. Knowledge about gender inequality and gender based violence has given the participants a greater understanding of, and provided them with tools to help them associate imbalanced structures in society to situations in their everyday lives.

b) Gender as dichotomy and hierarchy
In the second round of interviews, we were interested to see if the interviewees had a different view of the changeability of the social expression of gender and gendered behaviour. When Viktor is asked if he thinks there are different expectations on girls' and boys' behaviour. He responds:

Viktor: I don't think we are treated differently everywhere, but there are occasions.
I: why do you think people on some occasions treat girls and boys differently?
Viktor: Because you are taught from the beginning that girls and boys should be different, girls get pink toys and dolls and stuff…cooking stuff and pretend to be house wives and so on and guys are supposed to play with action figures and do sports and things like that.
I: have you talked about these things in the group?
Viktor: Yes, at least a little.

Here, Viktor expresses that in the group, there has been some discussion on these issues, and he clearly connects behaviour and gender norms to what people are taught when they grow up. This shows that he sees the different expectations on girls and boys as social constructions, i.e. changeable to some extent. The interviewee's perception of gender has not entirely changed, but

he expresses himself differently and it is evident that there have been discussions on these issues in the group that have affected him.

Another example is given by Kārlis who explains why he thinks girls are different from boys:

> Kārlis: From my point of view, yes. Because girls are raised differently since childhood. Therefore I think girls are so different.
> I: How do you think… How would it be made more equal?
> Kārlis: I think it is alright [the difference]. I didn't want to play with Barbies when I was a baby.
> I: Do you, for instance, make clothes?
> Kārlis: Yes. My mummy taught me to sew, so now I sew.

Kārlis expresses that he believes girls are different from boys, and goes on to say that he thinks the differences are "alright"; that the differences are not a problem and do not need to be changed. At the same time, he realises that the differences are socially constructed. He draws a connection between how boys and girls are brought up and the differences between them. Kārlis states that parents' encouragement is important in the development of girls' and boys' interests; Kārlis probably likes to sew because his mum taught him. Kārlis can link different behaviour to different interests in childhood, but he cannot quite connect it to the availability of other options; if he had been encouraged to play with Barbies by his mum, Kārlis might have liked playing with them. Kārlis' statement shows that the discussions in the group have given him knowledge about the social construction of gender norms and expectations. However, he does not think this is a problem.

In the first interview with Pēteris, he had a clear opinion on how girls and boys were constituted. He also saw great differences between the sexes in his future. In his world view, gender roles had a pivotal position where men's and women's realms of behaviour were completely separate and static. The topic of gender roles and family life came up again in the second interview:

> I: Have your thoughts about roles in the family changed?
> Pēteris: I can see that women can do men's work. They're good at it and like it. There is nothing wrong with that.
> I: Who has to be the breadwinner?
> Pēteris: It depends on you… on education and everything else. If you are lazy or hardworking.

Here, we can detect a slight change in the interviewee's opinion on the differences between girls and boys. In the first interview, gender based division of labour was fairly apparent in his statements. Although Pēteris still talks about "men's work" in the second interview, he now seems to think that what work one is capable of doing depends on, for example, education rather than gender. The discussions in the group have seemingly given him the tools to problematize the normative views he had on the gendered division of labour. To some extent, he questions the perception of gender as being static and with clear-cut limits for what men and women are able to do. However, further on in the interview, Pēteris expresses that he thinks it is "natural" for boys and girls to live "different lives", because they are boys and girls. Despite initially questioning the clear dichotomy of gender roles, he later expresses that he sees the differences between girls and boys as natural or given. In several other sections of the interview, the interviewee insinuates that the group work has changed the way in which he sees others around him, most notably, girls. In summary, the interviewee still views girls and boys as inherently different; however, he is beginning to question gender roles and norms. For example, he now believes that people can do things that are not necessarily in accordance with what is expected of their gen-

der roles. The fact that he describes this change in his outlook as a result of the group discussions tells us that participating in the group has challenged his views.

The second interview with the participants sought to answer the question of why girls and boys are treated or why they and behave differently. Gender norms in society are often internalized and seen as static by linking the differences to biology (see Butler 1990, Connell 1995). Hence, it is interesting to see what the participants see as the root of the differences in the behaviour of and expectations on girls and boys. Austra, for example, answers in the following way when asked if she believes that girls behave in a certain way because they are born that way:

> Austra: From birth, small children play together very well. But when they grow up, people say that there is gender, and that they are not allowed to behave in a certain way.

Clearly, Austra does not perceive social gendered behaviour as fixed, or given from birth. In the first round of interviews, she spoke about stereotypes depicting girls and boys, but did not elaborate on what she believed to be the root causes for the difference in behaviour between girls and boys. In the second interview, however, her answers indicate that she believes gendered behaviour has to do with what we are taught as kids, implying a belief that gender is a social construction.

c) Doing gender – masculinity and femininity
Gender norms reinforce and differentiate "normal" feminine and masculine behaviour from "abnormal" ones through language, how we act, how we treat others and what we expect of them (Hearn 2004:53). These norms are upheld by the hierarchy between the genders, where masculinity is superior to femininity. One aspect of the

girl and boy group method is to deliberate on how society constructs femininity and masculinity, examine the gendered power structure, and to connect injustices in daily life to this gender structure. In the second round of interviews, we examined if the group discussions provided the participants with the tools to apply the knowledge they had acquired about gendered expectations and norms on their everyday lives.

In the second interview with Rasmus, he explains that there are expectations and pressures on boys around him to do well in sports:

> I: Have you noticed if there is any pressure of this kind on boys around you?
> Rasmus: Yes, absolutely. I don't have that. I don't do sports, but, yes, yes, there absolutely is. Especially regarding those who play football, they have a hell of a pressure.
> I: How have you noticed it?
> Rasmus: Most of them feel pressured to go to practice just to get to be in that gang.
> I: Is there a difference between boys and girls who play football in that matter?
> Rasmus: I don't think girls have as much pressure; they seem to do it more for fun.
> I: Why do you think boys have more pressure on them?
> Rasmus: It's always been like that, that boys get more attention through sports and that's probably why.
> I: Why do they get more attention?
> Rasmus: I have no idea, but it's always been like that, unfortunately.

After discussing the pressure boys feel to do well in sports, Rasmus notices this phenomenon among his classmates and indicates that he finds it problematic. However, he cannot answer why he perceives the situation in this way. He also shows that he is critical to the fact that boys attract more attention than girls regarding performances in sports. His use of the word "unfortunately", reveals that he finds this unfair to girls. The concept of gender equality, or empowerment, is often understood as improving the

situation for women and girls. The advantages that men might gain from gender equality are usually ignored. Discussing masculine norms is a crucial element in the boy group method, since gender norms not only limit girls, but, also impacts the lives of boys. These pressures and expectations can be avoided through the deconstruction of gender norms.

Another example concerning masculine norms is given by Viktor. When the participants were asked about the different issues they had talked about in the groups, it appeared that a lot of the issues were not talked about anywhere else.

> I: Which was the discussion you remember best from the group?
> Viktor: I think... everyday violence.
> I: What did you talk about then?
> Viktor: All kinds of violence that is in your everyday life, that you kinda... don't think that much about, but that exists a lot. That you actually use violence all the time.

The topic of violence was one that the boy group leaders especially were encouraged to talk about with their groups. The subject deals with how boys often use violence, even in playful situations, as a way of expressing themselves. Studies on masculine norms show how these norms restrict boys from physical touch among friends, other than when the touch is an expression of aggression (Connell 1995:134). Both Rasmus and Viktor express that participating in the boy group, has given them a place where they could reflect on and question masculine norms like pressure to perform well in sports or everyday violence. Viktor also expresses that after talking about these subjects in the group, he started to notice it in his social surroundings and now questions if it is a good way to express oneself. Boy groups are one of a few arenas where boys have the possibility to talk about feelings and norms, which they usually are not encouraged to do (compare Berg 2007:65 and Frosh).

Kārlis gives another example that can be linked to masculinity and violence:

> I: Has anything changed in your [group participants'] relationship?
> Kārlis: Yes, we speak our minds more, we make more jokes with each other. Both in the group and outside it. We already did this previously but now it is even more.
> I: Do you make jokes that are "friendly" or are they "insulting"?
> Kārlis: It depends. Sometimes it is insulting, but nobody takes it to heart because we live at the boarding school and you come across that all the time. I don't take that kind of stuff to heart anymore.

Kārlis' example is similar to that of Viktor's earlier about violence in the lives of boys. In the everyday lives of boys, violence is present in several forms, not least in violent behaviour that is meant to be "just for fun". Verbal assaults, in forms of, for example, jokes which Kārlis talks about, is part of this. Although it is "just for fun", it has the effect that boys always have to be on their guard, even when hanging out with close friends. For boys, violent behaviour is normal (see Connell, Hearn 1998, Pringle 1995). The strict limitations surrounding masculinity leave few possibilities for young men to express alternative interpretations of masculinity; therefore, discussions in boy groups that help deconstruct the norms surrounding gender can have a positive effect on boys. Kārlis' participation in the boy group has not led to changes in his behaviour concerning everyday violence, such as verbal assault; however, he expresses other thoughts that indicate some changes:

> I: You have been in the group since January. Have you noticed any changes in yourself during this time?
> Kārlis: Yes, I'm a bit more understanding. For example, if somebody cannot do something, I don't push him to do that but I do it myself.
> I: Do you remember your behaviour at

the beginning of the group - has anything changed?

Kārlis: Yes. At the beginning cookies were given to us, I screamed and everybody fought … now I distribute them to everybody carefully. And everybody takes two or three cookies. At the beginning of the year when we had a free lesson we "tumbled" into the computer classroom and then we were thrown out. Now we have learned to not go into the classroom if the teacher is inside.

According to Kārlis the boys have become more considerate to others. He also explains that he is more understanding and does not push others as much as he did before. Kārlis' behaviour has changed, to some extent, which can be understood as a result of his participation in the boy group. His perception of the norms concerning masculine behaviour has evidently been challenged with the introduction of non-violent behaviour as alternatives.

Ilze also expresses some thoughts on masculinity that is similar to what Lina expressed in her first interview; that boys in a group start to "behave like guys":

> I: Maybe you have talked about how boys and girls behave?
> Ilze: Yes.
> I: What have you talked about?
> Ilze: That the boys behave stupid at school. If they are not in a group, then they are quite all right.
> I: What do you mean by stupid?
> Ilze: They behave silly; they pull your hair, throw papers around and spit. If they are alone, they are very polite.
> I: How do you think … why do they behave this way?
> Ilze: Maybe they want to please their group, other boys.

In this example, Ilze highlights one crucial aspect of doing gender; we perform gender in relation to others. As a teenager, it is especially important to relate to others when doing gender.

Since other boys are the ones confirming or rejecting your behaviour, by rewards and punishment, masculinity is first and foremost done in relation to other men. Lina's statement that boys in a group start to "behave like guys" is an observation that Ilze confirms. For Lina and Ilze, it seems to be obvious that boys act differently when with other boys. Ilze's answer shows that this is an issue that they have discussed in her girl group. Above all, they also probably discussed why we perform gender in gender homogenous groups; boys act like boys in a group of boys because "they want to please their group, other boys". In other words, Ilze's group has discussed how gender is constructed.

Elisabeth gives another example of the construction of gender when she talks about a film they saw in the group about reversed gender roles:

> Elisabeth: Two boys were acting like really girly, and there was this girl who was acting really boyish. We discussed it afterwards like... "could it be like this in reality?" and we were like "yeah.. it could". But if a guy acts like that in reality he would be called gay … I thought it looked really weird.
> I: Do you think girls and boys behave differently in reality?
> Elisabeth: Yes.
> I: Why do you think that is?
> Elisabeth: I don't know, it's always been like that, that boys are more masculine, they are tougher and they take care of all the girls.

Elisabeth's example shows that her group has discussed masculinity and femininity, and the notion that men ought to be masculine and women feminine. In order to challenge the limitations that masculine and feminine gender norms create for people, there needs to be discussions and knowledge about them. Otherwise, the norms stay unseen and alternative ways of behaviour cannot become possible (Ambjörnsson 2006:69). However, Elisabeth's statement also shows that depictions of

reversed gender roles still create negative reactions; "I thought it looked really weird". Also, her statement that a guy behaving in a "girly" way would, in reality, be called gay, shows that, to Elisabeth, it seems unthinkable that someone would behave outside of the gender norms and expectations, because of the social punishment it might entail. The fact that Elisabeth comments on boys being feminine rather than on girls being masculine, exemplifies that men being feminine is seen as "stranger" than women being masculine. Women have more possibilities to adapt masculine behaviour than the other way around, since masculine behaviour is seen as superior to feminine behaviour. Moreover, the interviewee's answer shows that even though there have been some discussions on gender roles, she does not problematize the root to why girls and boys are expected to behave differently. She still seems to take for granted that girls behave in one way, and boys in another.

d) Gendered expectations and their consequences
In the first round of interviews, all of the participants confirmed that girls and boys in their surroundings were treated differently. Some indicated that this was unjust, others that it is because girls and boys, in fact, are different and, therefore, expected to behave differently. In the second round of interviews, several of the interviewees questioned the gender norms that they talked about in the first round of interviews, and were critical to gender norms determining people's behaviour.

Lina expresses that, in her group, they discussed how girls and boys are treated in school, and how teachers have different expectations on girls and boys:

> Lina: We talked about that when a girl is being wild in school, something must be wrong with her, while if a guy is, it's totally normal.
> I: Did you recognise this in your everyday life?

> Lina: yeah, I guess it's like that… that it's easier for girls to get bad remarks from teachers for not behaving than it is for guys. For guys it's normal behaviour.

In the first interview with Lina, she spoke about how she had noticed that some male teachers favoured girls and gave them (unjustified) higher grades than boys. After discussing the issue in the group, she now, also seems to notice that some behaviour is ok for boys, but not for girls (e.g. "being wild"). Lina's example underlines that there are some expectations on girls that do not coincide with "being wild", which, on the other hand, is seen as ok, or normal for boys. The discussion in the group has shed light on gender norms and power structures. In the example that Lina gives, being "wild" is not considered normal for a girl; therefore, people react negatively ("there must be something wrong with her"). These are complex relations that are taken for granted and can only be revealed by discussing, challenging and deconstructing the norms surrounding gender (Lorber 1996: 145). Judging by her answers, we can deduce that Lina has become aware of gender norms and structures because of the discussions in her group.

In the first round of interviews, Lina expressed that, since girls and boys have different positions regarding sex, there are significant differences on how they view sex. During her second interview, Lina states:

> Lina: I think it depends from person to person, it's not dependent on if you are a girl or a boy.

In this answer, she shows a more multifaceted view on gendered sexuality. Seeing sexuality as depending on individual preferences rather than on gender affiliation is a sign of questioning the norm that girls and boys have different positions concerning sex.

In the first round of interviews, some of the

participants believed that the gender norms connected to sexuality is static and linked to biology, i.e., that the normative social behaviour that people manifest is connected to unchangeable biological factors. In his second interview, Viktor talks about the discussions they had in the group about this issue:

> Viktor: Boys are expected to be really...
> horny all the time and... girls somehow get
> dominated and... yeah...
> I: Do you recognise this in your surroundings?
> Viktor: Yes, I do recognise the expectations regarding this at least.
> I: Why do you think these expectations exist?
> Viktor: Well, once again, it's an imaginary picture of what is male and what is female, how to behave to be normal.
> I: Does it have anything to do with biology?
> Viktor: I think. ... men tend to be in a certain way and women in another, but it's not fixed, it's totally individual.

Viktor challenges the view that masculine and feminine behaviour are not changeable. Compared to his statements in the first round, his understanding of male and female sexuality does not seem to have changed. However, he expresses himself more clearly in the second interview. We can guess that this development is related to his participation in the boy group. It can also be said to be a possible outcome for all the participants since the girl and boy groups are, according to the participants themselves, the only place where they have the possibility to discuss these issues.

Nearly all interviewees acknowledged that another area where there are strong gendered norms is in the realm of school. Elisabeth explains:

> Elisabeth: We talked about how girls are organised and neat and stuff compared to boys, and that they get better grades.
> I: Do you agree with that?
> Elisabeth: Yes, the majority is like that.

> I: Why do you think that is?
> Elisabeth: Girls are just more organised, I guess.
> I: Why do you think they are more organised?
> Elisabeth: Well... they just are.
> I: Have you started thinking about this after you discussed it in the groups?
> Elisabeth: Yeah, you start to think "it might be like this, but it might also be in some other way".

Compared to her answers in the first interview, Elisabeth does not seem to have changed her outlook concerning the issue of gender stereotypes. For example, she seemingly has not problematized or questioned the norm that girls are better behaved; "they just are". However, she seems to have appreciated the discussions in the group and expresses that she has started to think about the issue; "it might be like this, but it might also be in some other way". There needs to be visible alternatives before any form of empowerment or liberation can be possible. Power relations in regard to gender operates and survives by being unseen, and, therefore, unquestioned. This in turns makes normative behaviour seem like active choices, when it instead, is based on the denial of choice. Starting to question why girls are more organised can be interpreted in terms of the emergence of possible alternative behaviour, which is essential in the process of empowerment (compare Kabeer 2005:14).

Rasmus gives other examples on gendered expectations and his views on why they exist:

> I: I did check-up our last interview when we talked ... about gender roles, how girls and boys act, and behave, if there was any difference. And also expectations on how boys should act and how girls should act. Have you talked about that in the boy group?
> Rasmus: Yeah, well I ... yeah, I think we have. Yes, but, it is more like that many [people] have preconceptions about that

girls are shy and stuff, but that boys are more like … yeah, what should I say … Like well … it has always been that boys should be more obsessed with sex then girls …

I: You mean that it is something that is expected?

Rasmus: Yes.

I: Is it a preconception?

Rasmus: Yes.

I: Why do you think one has preconceptions then?

Rasmus: It might be that girls are quieter about their thoughts and that boys expresses themselves in another way about their thoughts and views.

I: Why do you think there is kind of a general difference in that behaviour? Do you have any thoughts on why?

Rasmus: No.

I: Do you think this is natural or is it because of how we have been treated or how… yeah …

Rasmus: It doesn't have to do with how we are treated I think, I think it has just happened like that, I don't know, it is about preconceptions a lot but … I don't know …

Rasmus says that there are different expectations on boys and girls because of preconceptions concerning gender. He explains that people believe that boys are obsessed with sex, while girls are shy, but he cannot explain why these stereotypes exist. However, he repeats that it has to do with peoples' preconceptions. At the same time, he says that it does not have anything to do with how people treat girls and boys. This is a contradiction, because how people treat others, usually has something to do with what preconceptions they have about that person. The group may have given him tools to understand girls' and boys' behaviour in terms of gendered expectations and preconceptions, but he is not quite able to link this to how people treat girls and boys. Post-structural theory states that people adapt their behaviour to how others speak to them, what they are encouraged or discouraged to do, or if they are included or excluded in social contexts.

e) Punishment and reward; consequences' of gendered expectations

There is a close link between gendered expectations and social punishments and rewards. The social punishments are a way of making sure the norm, or gendered expectation, is followed (compare Foucault 1977). In the second round of interviews, the participants gave us some examples pertaining to expectations and punishment.

Kārlis, who attends a boarding school, gives us this example on consequences of gendered expectations:

> I: Have you discussed different attitudes towards boys and girls?
> Kārlis: Yes, I have noticed that, especially at school. We moved together the beds, to watch a movie, then the teacher came and said that it is not allowed to do so. We said that the girls are allowed to do so, but she said that we are not girls.
> I: How do you think … why did the teacher do that?
> Kārlis: I think it is because the girls are more obedient. But that is not a reason.

Kārlis has observed that the girls and boys at his school follow different rules, just because they are girls/boys. He thinks the girls are allowed to move the beds because they are more obedient than boys. He concludes by saying that "that's not a reason". After participating in the boy group, he is more aware of gendered expectations in society that affect boys and girls differently. He does not give an example of how girls can be affected by gendered expectations. It is, however, understandable that he, as a boy, focuses on gendered expectations affecting boys. One of the challenges with the boy groups is making sure to address the hierarchy between genders, and, at the same time discuss gendered norms for boys. If discussions in the boy group does not incorporate a gender equality perspective, there is a higher risk that the boy group will, in fact, reinforce existing tra-

ditional gendered power structures instead of challenge them (See Svensson 2008).

Another example connected to social punishment is mentioned by Lina, who, in both her interviews, discussed how her parents treat her compared to her younger brother. In the first interview, Lina stated that her younger brother enjoys a greater freedom to do what he wants compared to what she had when she was his age, which she felt depends on her gender. In the second round of interviews, it appears that there has been a discussion about this issue in her group:

> Lina: It turned out that almost everyone's parents are over-protective, they have a bit of a short leash and that many girls in the group don't dare to talk to their parents about everything.
> I: Because they are over-protective?
> Lina: Yes, a little, but then again, you cannot really talk to your parents about everything.
> I: Do you notice any difference between girls and boys your age regarding this, how they are treated by their parents?
> Lina: Yes, boys' parents seem to be like much calmer than girls'.
> I: Did you discuss why this might be?
> Lina: Well ... people probably believe that much more things can happen to girls, like she can be raped, she can be this, she can be that, but for boys ... no.

Here, Lina expresses that she can see a pattern of how girls and boys are treated, which they also have talked about in the group. In the first interview, the focus of this discussion was on Lina's own family, and how she felt that she was being unfairly treated. After having discussed this in the group, however, she now sees somewhat of a pattern; that others around her are treated the same way; that it is not just a matter in her own family, but rather a part of a greater structure. The discussions in the girl group have made Lina aware of gendered power structures.

4.2 Empowerment

In this study, we also wanted to answer a second research question: Does the girl and boy group method empower the participants? To do this, we analysed the transcripts of interviews with the participants, focusing on the sections of the interviews that showed changes regarding empowerment, compared to the first round of interviews. Group observations and interviews with group leaders have also served as a source of information to answer this question. Furthermore, quantitative data gathered at the beginning and end of the girl and boy group activity were analysed. There are several elements of empowerment that we look at in this part of the analysis. Empowerment can be defined in many different ways[16], but the elements used as indicators in this research are the rise of the feeling of security, self-esteem, critical thinking, being able to express one's opinion, and being an active member of society. Becoming empowered by gaining knowledge and tools that can be used to change one owns life can have spill over effects, and in the long run make one a more active member of society.

Results

Already in the first part of analysis, we could see one indicator of empowerment in the interviewees; tendencies of critical thinking concerning gender norms. A majority of the participants seem to question gender norms and expectations in the second round of interviews. They do this by explaining that gender norms are, for example, imaginary and stereotyped ideas. Furthermore, the participants question if gender should be what dictates the division of labour regarding, for example, house hold work, profession, childcare and possibilities in life. Being aware of gender norms allows a person to think critically and act beyond the norms. These all indicate empowerment of the participants.

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16   See, for example, the theory section of this report.

In the second round of interviews, several participants expressed that they have become much better at expressing their opinions, viewpoints, and overall self-expression; they have gained a voice. Pēteris from Latvia says:

I: Have you observed changes in your behaviour? Maybe in relation to listening to others or expressing your opinion?
Pēteris: I talk more easily to people also outside this group.

He also reported that he has started to talk more with his parents about school, his hobbies and other things. His relationships with his sisters and brothers have also changed according to him:

I: What else is different in your life?
Pēteris: Relationships with my family, for example, with my brothers and sisters. Earlier I didn't care about that. We play more, play football outside, hide and seek, go fishing.

Furthermore, according to Pēteris, the boy group members have started to have meaningful conversations also outside of the group; they talk about family issues and individual interests, which they never did before, although they are classmates. The relationship with his family as well the relationships between the boys in the group seems to have become closer. The increase in meaningful conversations with peers and family can also be interpreted in terms of increased self-confidence. According to social psychology, the family unit is a person's first and foremost societal experience. Active communication and relations in the first societal context is a precondition for becoming empowered and an active citizen of society.

Another participant states the following:

I: Can you tell me your general impression about the group? How was it?
Ilze: I liked it. Honestly if I had low self-esteem earlier, then now it has risen.

I: How can you see that?
Ilze: I am not aggressive anymore as I was earlier … And I can realise who to trust and who not to trust.
I: Is there something you have changed your mind about as a result of being in the group?
Ilze: About the fact the people should act more peaceful. I previously thought that people wanted to do me harm, now, I don't care, but I am friendly with those who I can trust.
I: How about your ability to listen to others and say your opinion - are there any changes in this, too?
Ilze: Yes … now I listen carefully and I am not afraid to say out loud what I think.
I: And if others don't agree and laugh at you what do you do?
Ilze: I take it easy …

Ilze expresses that her self-esteem has risen after participating in the group. She also explains that she is more capable of listening to others and more comfortable speaking her mind. Furthermore, Ilze states, that before her participation in the girl group, she was easily insulted. Now, she "takes it easy" when people say something insulting. Her reactions no longer depend as much on what others say to, or about, her. Also, other people's actions do not affect her in a negative way anymore. This has also resulted in her not reacting in an aggressive and destructive way anymore.

Most of the interviews show that group participants express their opinions more openly than they previously have, even amongst others who do not share their opinions. They are also able to defend their standpoints. They now believe that having different opinions is okay and one opinion is not necessarily better or worse than the other. Learning to respect and listen to other opinions, gives the participants new perspectives and viewpoints, which can strengthen their reliance on their own beliefs and choices.

One boy from Åland expresses himself in the

following way, regarding speaking and giving each other room for dialogue in the group:

> I: Have you seen any change in your own behaviour?
> Rasmus: Well, in the beginning it was like a lot of ... it's become much better in the group ... much better, how do I put it ... unity in the group since we started. People dare to talk much more and stuff …
> I: Do you mean that you give each other more space?
> Rasmus: Yes.
> I: So, in the beginning, some were quieter and some talked more?
> Rasmus: Yes, we feel much safer now.

Another boy confirms this observation:

> I: all of you in the group study together and live together [at boarding school]. Has anything changed in your relationship?
> Kārlis: Yes, we express our minds more, we joke more with each other, both in the group and outside it. We already did before, but now it is more.

One girl from Åland talks about being able to talk more openly after participating in the group:

> I: Do you think your behaviour has changed since you started attending the group?
> Lina: Maybe a little, I talk more. But I don't know if it's that much.
> I: How was it when you just started out? Do you remember if it was like that when you were discussing. Did everyone start talking at the same time or were people quiet?
> Lina: We always start with a round. So in the beginning, everyone was shy, but then in the end everyone started telling everything.
> I: Has this also spilled over into your everyday life ... do you talk more outside the group?
> Lina: No, I don't think so.

Lina's example shows that the form for the group discussion; a round in the beginning of each

meeting, has resulted in the whole group daring to speak more, in contrast to the beginning, where they were shy and did not say much. However, for Lina, the group seems to have functioned as a "bubble", i.e., even though the she dares to stand up and speak within the group, it has not had a spill-over effect into other spaces. However, this is not necessarily the case for all participants. In Kārlis case, participating in the group discussions and sharing each other's opinions seems to have spilled into his daily life, and those of his fellow group members'. However, since they all go to boarding school together, it can be argued that the "bubble" also exists outside the group. Also, Kārlis does not specify if members of his group discuss and share their opinions to people outside the group or just between themselves. It is, however, evident that different groups' participants experienced different levels of change in expressing their opinions and discussing their thoughts and feelings openly with others.

The examples above indicate some changes compared to the first interviews. After participation in the girl or boy groups, the participants tend to rely more on themselves. Instead of just reacting to what people around them think and say, the group participants now formulate their own thoughts and take an active part in discussions with others. Discussing different subjects in a secure environment seem to have made the participants more self-confident than before. They feel safe to share and talk about subjects that they are not used to doing. These aspects tend to lead to an increase in the self-esteem of the participants.

However, the quantitative data measuring the self-esteem does not show a statistically significant change in self-esteem of the girl and boy group participants. In figures 1, 2 and 3, axis Y indicates the level of estimated self-esteem (from 1.50-4.00) in the quantitative measurement, i.e., the questionnaires. The participants answered ten questions regarding overall self-es-
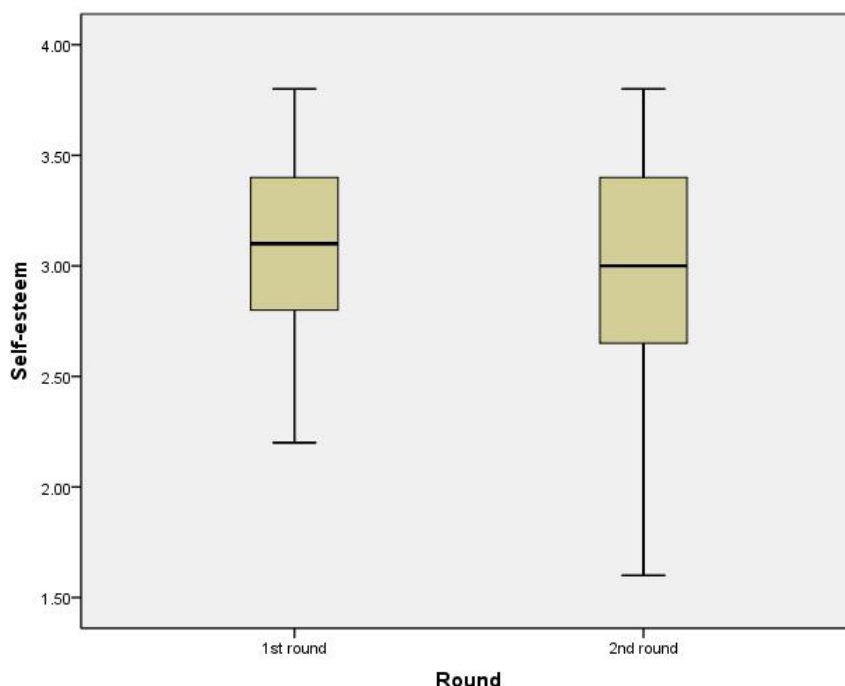
Figure 1. Level of self-esteem in the first and second round of data gathering.

teem, choosing one of four given answers that would best correspond to their own judgement regarding each statement; (1) absolutely agree, (2) partially agree, (3) partially disagree, (4) absolutely disagree. The response options were revised on questions three, five, nine and ten, so they instead read as follows; (1) absolutely disagree, (2) partially disagree, (3) partially agree, (4) absolutely agree[17]. After examining each of the participant's answers, their average score was calculated; the higher the score, the higher the perceived self-esteem of the participant (the scale being 1.50-4.00). The area within the "box" indicates the level of estimated self-esteem of fifty per cent of the group participants. The horizontal line within the box indicates the average level of self-esteem of all participants. The rest of the group participants' self-esteem levels are depicted by the horizontal lines above and below the box. If somebody has evaluated his or

her self-esteem on a considerably different level than the rest of the sample, it is represented as a circle separated from the rest of the group's values. The small circle (shown in figure 2) indicates extreme value, in other words, a result which is significantly different from the rest of the group's results[18].

Figure 1 above shows, how the level of self-esteem was spread at the beginning and end of the girl and boy group activities.

Participation in the girl and boy group activities has not resulted in a statistically significant rise of self-esteem for group participants, when looking at the whole sample of participants.

17   The questionnaire is attached in the appendix.

18   The Cronbach's alpha for the scale of self-esteem in the research was 0.67 (N = 165). This coefficient indicates that it was appropriate to calculate the average value of the ten statements that the participants were asked to answer, to assess their self-esteem. They correlated with each other on a sufficient level.

There was no statistically significant difference in the level of self-esteem between participants of the girl and boy groups when comparing the first and second round of interviews (t (158) = 0.1, p > .05). The total score of the participants who took part in groups for more than 5 months reported about the same level of self-esteem (M = 2.99, SD = 0.48, N = 75) compared to the beginning of the group work (M = 3.1, SD = 0.38, N = 85). This does not, however, mean that the level of self-esteem has not risen for individual participants. However, the average level of self-esteem of the sample that filled out the questionnaire has not changed.

Figures 2 and 3 below show that similar images appear when separately assessing girls and boys.

The scale measuring self-esteem used in the research reflects the overall self-esteem of a person. Since the method aims at challenging and breaking the traditional gender norms, it is not surprising that the overall level of self-esteem has not risen. The reasons for this are several; one being that obtaining knowledge about existing gender norms and structures can lead to feelings of incapacity. Awareness raising efforts among, for example, underprivileged groups can often result in the group feeling hopeless, as a first reaction, since structural change can seem almost impossible. However, awareness about gender structures and gender norms can also contextualise and explain situations and feelings the participants have not been able to explain before.

The uncovering of power structures, expectations and limitations, may render one feeling powerless, rather than empowered, at first. People stereotype and categorise others into clear social groups because of the psychological need to feel secure within one's surroundings. When people act according to the roles prescribed by norms and stereotypes, it is possible to predict the consequences of their actions. Stereotypes also give people the possibility to make quick evaluations about others. Not knowing what to expect, however, requires more of a person. When social structures that we take for granted are challenged, we need time to adapt to them. As a result, self-esteem levels can be lowered, which might be the case for the girl and boy group participants in this research. On the other hand, the girl and boy group meetings provided a safe and non-judgmental environment for the participants. These types of environments often strengthen people's sense of security and self-confidence. Therefore, there are mixed results regarding this aspect of the girl and boy groups' effects on the participants, especially given that the groups were operational for such a short amount of time.

Another possible explanation to why the quantitative data does not show increased self-esteem among the participants can be related to time. As stated above, an initial reaction to awareness of gender inequality and gender norms can leave people with a sense of hopelessness, at first, while later reactions may be more positive and liberating. When people are able to put words to their feelings, as well as discuss norms and consequences thereof, in groups, people gain tools to handle gendered expectations and can thereby see alternative possibilities. Since these groups were only up and running for approximately six to seven months, the mixed results can be due to that it is too early to see the full effects of the method. Because the level of self-esteem is spread on a wider scale in the second round measurement (see Figures 1 to 3), it is reasonable to deduce that the evaluation took place too early for the full impact of the method to be measurable. Higher variations of the levels of self-esteem indicate that, for a few of the group's participants, self-esteem has risen while, for others, it has been lowered.

Another explanation to why we did not obtain statistically significant differences might be that the self-esteem of the participants was not extremely low in the first place. In fact, it
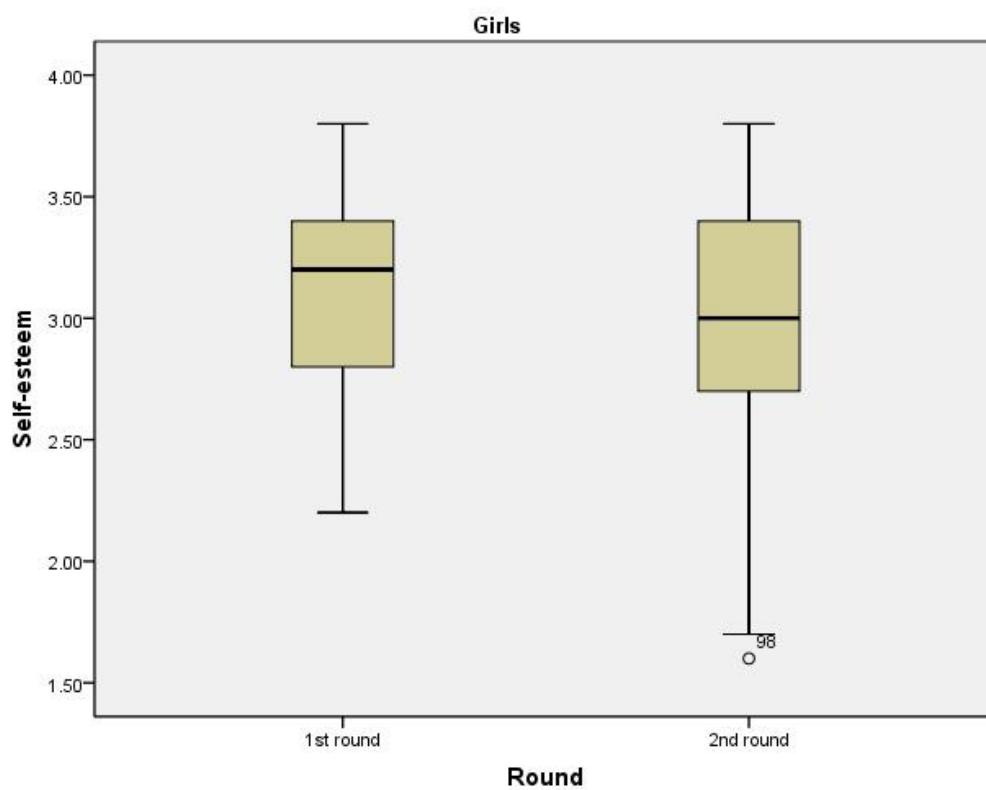
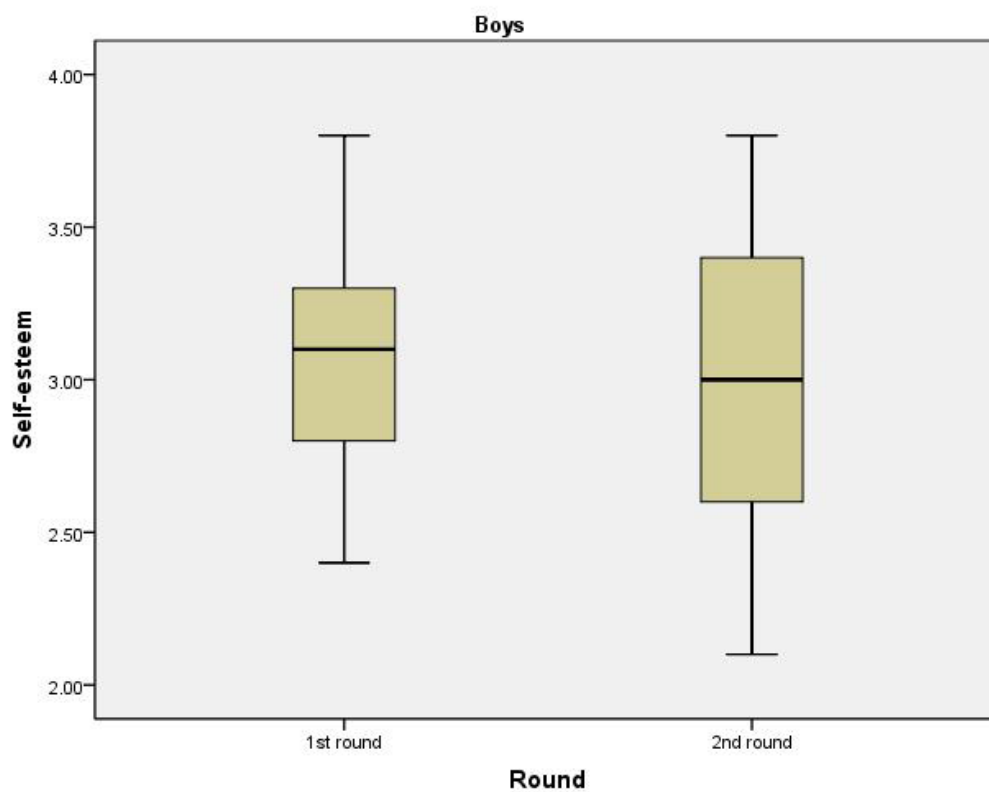Figure 2. Level of self-esteem of the girls in the first and second round of data gathering.

Figure 3. Level of self-esteem of the boys in first and second round of data gathering

was about average on the scale. During teenage years, it is common that girls and boys question themselves, their roles, behaviour and purpose, because they are in the midst of forming their identities.

The following quotes from interviews with group leaders show the changes in the behaviour of group participants outside of the group work.

> I: What has changed over this time?
> Leader Gunita: Over this period, the barrier that I am "teacher Gunita" has been crushed, now I am just Gunita. Now there is a different [more positive?] attitude towards our village, people are smiling etc. when meeting in the street. There has been discotheques, which has made us closer, because they are now interested in cultural work. It has been a great contribution to our little village, since the girls come to help prepare events, voluntarily, and boys come to other events also and they help organizing. They have become involved in local social life, in the most literal way.

Gunita's group was based in a small village outside the capital of Latvia, Riga. All the participants knew Gunita before the group started since the only cultural life in the village took place in the Centre of Culture ran by her. The Centre of Culture organised folklore dance courses and other spare time activities, one being discos for youth. Gunita explains that, at first, there was a barrier between her and the group participants; she was "teacher Gunita" to them. After a while, however, this barrier was overcome, and she was now "just Gunita". Gunita states that, participating in the boy group activities have led to the boys volunteering to organise activities in the Centre of Culture. The discotheque Gunita mentioned in the interview was organised for boy and girl groups as a group activity. These examples show that participating in the groups have empowered the boys and girls to start actively taking part in their local community.

The next interview shows how boys in a group, in another city, in Latvia, have started activating themselves after being part of a boy group:

> Leader Signe: My group was quite special. It consisted of children from troubled families; some of them had problems of their own. I cannot praise myself for making radical changes. The most important thing was that the boys kept coming.
> I: You mentioned that they don't have many things they like to talk about. What are the things they do like to talk about?
> Leader Signe: Every time that someone asks a question about last weekend, there is someone who says that he doesn't remember anything. Because of drinking alcohol, but I think that they are joking. Maybe someone drank in the weekend, but alcohol is what they like to joke about.
> I: What have you learned during this time?
> Leader Signe: I try to discover what they like and what they are interested in. The boys could not make a list [of topics] right away, but what we discovered unintentionally was, for example, our passion for Geocaching [modern version of scavenger hunt with gps].

The next extract shows how experience gained in the group have resulted in the participants taking more responsibility than they did previous to their participation in the group. Group leader Tija, explains how she got one unmotivated boy to become more interested in the group:

> I: Was it easy for you to prepare the group sessions?
> Leader Tija: in the beginning I had to arrange the tables and those sorts of things, but last time, the boys arrived earlier and did it all by themselves, without me asking for it. They wanted to start as early as possible. If they want something to happen, they do it themselves.
> I: Was there something hard, challenging; do you have examples?
> Leader Tija: I had one temperamental boy,

sometimes I thought "that's it", I won't be having any group. He was ruining everything. But then I was suggested to ask him to prepare the meeting. And he did. After that he was calmer. That helped.

I: He prepared the theme for group meeting?

Leader Tija: Yes, from those that had been chosen before. And also, he chose the theme for the next time. I participated as one of them [the other participants] … only helped him a little bit, I couldn't resist.

The examples above show that girl and boy group members have started to become more active in their social contexts. Leaders have witnessed a change in the participants' attitudes towards their families (having more open discussions with them) and their towns/villages (started volunteering). They also show signs of being more responsible than before, in the sense that they help each other, the group leaders or their society in different ways. This can be seen as a first step to empowerment.

To conclude, we can see that the participants overall have become empowered as a result of participating in the girl and boy groups. Qualitative analysis of interviews with participants and leaders show results in these areas: increased ability to think critically regarding gender norms, increased sense of security, increased tendencies to express their opinion, increased tendencies to become active members of society and better self-esteem. The quantitative analysis, however, include measurements in only one area, self-esteem. The results from the quantitative analysis show no statistically significant change in self-esteem among the participants. From the results of the quantitative and qualitative analyses, several conclusions can be made. If the quantitative measurements had included the other areas of interest (critical thinking, feelings of security, ability to express opinions and active participation in society), we might not have seen changes in them either. This leaves us with the conclu-

sion that changes have occurred for several individuals in the groups, but not for everyone. This can be interpreted as a time constraint issue; that more time is needed to achieve changes for the whole group and to assure that the girl and boy group method fulfils its goals. Qualitative analysis shows, that some changes have occurred during the short period that the groups have participated in this research.

4.3 Social attitudes

A third research question we wanted to answer in this study was: Does the girl and boy group method change the social attitudes towards gender norm sensitive groups? We analysed quantitative data gathered at the beginning and end of the Girl and boy group work with the scale of Stereotype content inventory (Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, & Xu, 2002). Stereotype content inventory measures a person's attitudes and opinions towards different social groups that society consists of. The attitudes and opinions measured are not individual views, but rather widespread outlooks and shared perceptions, i.e. norms. It can come from the viewpoints of one's family, peers, teachers in school or from media. Stereotypes regarding femininity and masculinity are, from a gender theoretical point of view, called gender norms. The third part of this study deals with social attitudes, stereotypical attitudes that are socially constructed and upheld. Stereotypes and norms are shared within societies and perceived as objective reflections of reality. However, on an individual level, norm critical thinking, individual experiences and motivational factors influence one's tendency to question stereotypes and norms.

To measure the stereotypical attitudes of participants, we used a questionnaire based on Stereotype content inventory, which measures four dimensions of attitudes towards any social group: warmth, competence, competitiveness and status. Every person in society is a member of and

identifies with several social groups. We compare different social groups to each other, based on, for example, which one we think has more status or is more competitive. There is also an emotional element of how we perceive different social groups. For example, housewives are seen as not competitive but score highly regarding warmth (Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, &, Xu, 2002).

The Stereotype content inventory scale is not specifically constructed to measure gender norms. Instead, we assume that the overall stereotypical attitudes are also influenced by gender norms and if gender norms are challenged, stereotypical social attitudes should change towards some groups which are perceived as strongly connected to one gender. As described earlier, we chose five different occupational groups towards which we measured the participants' attitudes. These groups were: female and male models, female and male kindergarten teachers, female and male police officers, teenage mothers and fathers, and female and male prostitutes.

In addition to the questionnaires, we also looked for indications of change in social attitudes by analysing the transcripts of the interviews with the group participants. Below, the results from the quantitative data analysis are presented, combined with examples from the qualitative data. We analysed changes in the social attitudes of the girls who participated in the group work separately from those of the boys. We did this partly because the basis of this paper is the notion of gender roles and norms as differentiated by gender, therefore, change of social attitudes might also occur differently for girls and boys. Furthermore, since the group method in itself separates girls and boys and the groups are gender homogeneous, relying on the understanding that girls and boys have different preconditions and opportunities, there is a point to see if attitudes change differently between boys and girls.

Results

Participation in the girl group has resulted in a statistically significant change in the girls' attitudes towards several social groups. For one, they now think that female models are smarter (M = 2.47, SD = 1.33, N = 51) than they thought they were at the beginning of group work (M = 1.83, SD = 1.14, N = 47), t (96) = -1.94, p < 0.05. Also, they evaluate the female models as more competitive than they previously perceived them to be. Before the girl group, they thought that female models did not have as many special advantages (M = 1.83, SD = 1.15, N = 47) as they thought they did after group work (M = 2.47, SD = 1.33, N = 51), t (96)= -2.54, p < 0.05. The results concerning male models indicate a similar pattern. Male models were evaluated as smarter (M = 2.83, SD = 1.08, N = 51) after group work, compared to before (M = 3.27, SD = 0.9, N = 48), t (97) = -2.22, p < 0.05. Also, they were perceived as more competitive (M = 2.47, SD = 1.33, N = 51) after group work than before (M = 1.75, SD = 1.1, N = 48), t (97) = -2.92, p < 0.05. However, when we looked at the attitude change of boys who participated in the boy group work, quantitative measurement did not show any change in relation to female and male models.

Modelling is stereotypically perceived as a feminine profession. Gender theory has showed us that the gender norms dictate that femininity is ranked lower than masculinity. Therefore, behaviour, traits and professions that are seen as feminine are valued less than those seen as masculine (see Hirdman 2011, Hearn 2005). Challenging this viewpoint leads to change in attitudes towards social groups who have gender related stereotypic characteristics, such as models.

The girl and boy group method relies on members participating in the decision concerning issues that will be discussed in the group. In line with this, we have observed that boy groups did not discuss topics related to looks, clothes and beauty; topics that are usually connected to

femininity. We assume that this depends on a lack of interest from their side. However, this does not mean that boy groups did not discuss topics related to femininity and masculinity. They discussed femininity and masculinity in relation to job division at home, advantages of being boys and girls, ideals connected to girls, amongst others. Some girl groups chose beauty as a discussion theme, which no boy groups did.

One boy group in Latvia chose girls as a topic of discussion; issues such as femininity and masculinity, advantages and disadvantages of being a girl or boy were discussed.

> I: Which themes come to your mind when talking about gender equality?
> Uldis: We talked about presumptions about what women and men do.
> I: What kind of conclusions did you come to?
> Uldis: That is doesn't differ very much.
> I: It seemed previously that it did differ.
> Uldis: Yes. At the beginning we talked about what men think, what themes are interesting for him and also what women do. There are women that think the same way. They are interested in the same themes - about technology, science, political things.
> I: And earlier it seemed that women are interested only in "Barbie-things" and looks?
> Uldis: Young girls - yes.
> I: Now you understand that the girls in your age group are different, too?
> Uldis: Yes ... we were introduced with examples ...
> I: Where else have your opinions changed?
> Uldis: They did not change so much, I knew a lot before.
> I: Is the most important thing that you realised that girls your own age are different?
> Uldis: Yes.
> I: Has the way you look to your ideal girlfriend changed now?
> Uldis: Yes. At the beginning I looked at everything in general, now I think that it is possible to find characteristic features that are similar to me.

> I: What else is important?
> Uldis: Characteristic features. So that she is tolerant, modest, doesn't quarrel. Usually they do a lot of that and just run away. They are thinking all the time, talking a lot then they become silent and disappear.
> I: So there are such girls you have been friendly with, they are given a lot of attention and then they disappear?
> Uldis: Yes.
> I: Do you now pay more attention to what interests she has?
> Uldis: Yes. Now I also pay attention to what is she planning to do in her future. I am asking more questions about her aims... to become acquainted.
> I: You can say that you become closer?
> Uldis: Yes. Since I found out more about women, I know now that there are different girls.

At the time of the interview, Uldis did not have a girlfriend but was rather talking about it hypothetically. According to him, he has not experienced being in a serious relationship, but in the first interview, he expressed the opinion that it is impossible to have a real conversation with girls. In the second interview, however, he has realised that women are also interested in issues that men are interested in, such as, technology, science and politics.

The example above shows, that although Uldis still wants his girlfriends to be docile and timid, he has started to understand that social categories are not homogeneous. He now sees that not all girls are the same and not all of them are like the commonly understood stereotypes and gender norms, allowing him to have more multifacetted perceptions of girls and women. This process starts with understanding that the world does not consist of homogeneous social groups and categories but rather of unique individuals.

We also performed quantitative measurements on the change in the participants' social attitudes towards police officers. At first, the girl group members saw female police officers as more independent and self-reliant (M = 4.50,

SD = 0.8, N = 48) compared to their viewpoint several months later (M = 4.18, SD = 0.92, N = 50), t (96) = 1.84, p < 0.05. An interpretation of this can be that the girls, at first, perceived the police profession as being masculine, and only those women who have a "masculine behaviour" (for example are independent) can become police officers. Also, in the beginning, female police officers were rated, by the girl group members, to be highly educated (M =4.46. SD = 0.71, N = 48), while their answers in the second questionnaire show a lower rate regarding the level of education of female police officers (M = 4.06, SD = 1.09, N = 49), t (95) = 2.12, p < 0.01.

From a gender perspective, it can be argued, that women who work in traditionally masculine professions, have more to prove than men. Since women are expected to be feminine (and men expected to be masculine), women have to prove their capabilities in masculine coded environments, for example, by having a higher education than men. This is connected to the gender hierarchy, where masculinity is ranked higher than femininity (see Hirdman 2001). Women in male dominated professions are at risk of getting double punishment. Firstly, their competence is questioned; can they truly be skilled at their profession even if they are not men? At the same time, their femininity can be questioned if they succeed in doing their job; since they are competent, they must be masculine and, therefore, not feminine enough.

Female police officers were rated as less kind-hearted, by the girl group members, in the second round of questionnaires (M =3.36, SD = 1.16, N = 50) compared to the first round (M = 3.83, SD = 1.06, N = 48), t (96) = 2.11, p < 0.05. This can be interpreted as an expression of one of the norms concerning femininity; that women are more kind-hearted than men. The perception of police officers, on the other hand, might not be that they are kind-hearted. It is, therefore, interesting that the attitudes towards female police officers have changed. This could indicate that the girl group members no longer consider gender as a definitive factor in people's behaviour; that they no longer perceive women as being kind-hearted just because they are women. This, due to the discussions in the girl groups.

The boy group members' attitudes towards female police officers have also changed. They rated female police officers as less self-confident in the second round of questionnaires (M = 3.37, SD = 1.28, N = 27) than that of the first round (M = 3.89, SD = 3.37, N = 27), t (63) = 1.73, p < 0.01. Also, intelligence was rated lower in the second round (M = 3.66, SD = 1.05, N = 38) than in the first round (M = 3.07, SD = 1.23, N = 27), t (63) = 2.8, p < 0.05. Regarding how sympathetic female police officers are perceived, similar change in attitude has occurred (M = 3.07, SD = 1.21, N = 27 compared to the first round of analysis M = 3.66, SD = 1.05, N = 38), t (63) = 2.08, p < 0.05.

These results can be understood as an effect of the critical discussions about gender norms that were deliberated in the boy groups. The boys have changed their attitudes towards female police officers because they might no longer take gender into consideration when judging police officers. However, this can also be interpreted in terms of gender inequality. Women (and femininity) in general are less valued than men (and masculinity). One consequence of this is that men (and women) rate woman as less competent, i.e., not as smart or self-confident as men (see Ridgeway and Correll 2005). From this perspective, one can, theoretically, interpret the boys' attitudes towards female police officers as traditional, where the existing gender norms are reproduced, instead of deconstructed. It is, however, difficult to determine if this interpretation is correct, since the quantitative data does not give any insight into the thoughts behind the participants' rating.

However, if we look at the results for the ques-

tions regarding male police officers, we can see similar tendencies. In the second round of questionnaires, the boy group members rated male police officers as less confident (M = 3.41, SD = 1.15, N = 27) compared to the first round (M = 4.08, SD = 3.41, N = 38), t (63) = 2.41, p < 0.05. Similarly, the rate of male police officers' competitiveness is lower in the second round (M = 3.38, SD = 1.34, N = 26) compared to the first (M = 4.11, SD = 1.01, N = 26), t (62), 2.41. This could indicate that since the boy groups have discussed masculine norms, their perceptions have changed. At the start, masculine traits were considered necessary in order to be a (male) police officer. After participation in the group (and having critical discussions on the notion of masculine norms), the boys no longer perceive high confidence and competitiveness as necessary in order to be a police officer, i.e., the ideal for a suitable police officer has changed. However, it is vital to emphasise that this is a theoretical hypothesis that we cannot state for sure and needs to be studied further.

The following quote shows how a boy's perception has changed concerning gender roles in the division of housework:

> I: Have your thoughts about roles in the family changed?
> Pēteris: I can see that women can do men's work. They're good at it and like it. There is nothing wrong with that.

Another gender sensitive occupational group included in the questionnaires were prostitutes. The girl group members rated female prostitutes as more intellectual (M = 2.55, SD = 1.08, N = 51)and smarter (M = 2.25, SD = 0.99, N = 51) in the second round of questionnaires than the first round (M = 1.94, SD = 1.12, N = 48), t (97) = -2.77, p < 0.05 and (M = 1.83, SD = 0.88, N = 48), t (97) = -2.22, p < 0.05. Also, they were perceived as more kind hearted (M = 2.73, SD = 1.11, N = 49) and decent (M = 2.52, SD = 1.15,

N = 48) in the second round compared to the first round (M = 2.31, SD = 1.04, N = 48), t (95) = -1.99, p < 0.05 and (M = 2.11, SD = 0.99, N = 46), t (92) = 1.86, p < 0.05.

During discussions about prostitution in the beginning of the groups, we observed, in the Latvian girl groups, that almost every girl expressed the opinion that female prostitutes have weak moral and questionable behaviour. Overall, the girls had a negative view on prostitution and prostitutes. The fault for prostitution was considered to be with the prostitutes themselves, with no thought given towards the sex buyers or society's role in the existence of prostitution. The result from the questionnaire can, with this in mind, be interpreted in terms of a greater understanding of prostitution as a complex phenomenon. Possibly, the discussions in the groups on gender norms and gender equality can have affected the girls to the extent that their attitudes concerning prostitutes have changed to a more positive direction.

The girl group members' attitudes have changed in a similar way towards male prostitutes. They rated them as more intellectual (M = 2.43, SD = 1.01, N = 51) and smarter (M = 2.25, SD = 0.99, N = 51) in the second round of questionnaires than the first round (M = 1.96, SD = 1.03, N = 48), t (97) = -2.31, p < 0.05 and (M = 1.92, SD = 0.94, N = 48), t (97) = -1.75, p < 0.05. Also, they were perceived as more educated (M = 2.20, SD = 1.04, N = 51) in the second round compared to the first round (M = 1.64, SD = 0.85, N = 47), t (96) = -2.9, p < 0.05.

There was no statistically significant change found regarding boy group members' attitudes towards male or female prostitutes. One has to keep in mind, that the issues discussed in the groups, can be an explanation of change, or lack of change, in the participants' attitudes. Changes in attitudes amongst the girls may be because the girl groups discussed prostitution; while the lack of change in the boys' attitudes may be because they did not discuss prostitution.

The analysis of the participants' answers regarding kindergarten teachers and teenage parents did not show any statistically significant change. In addition, as shown above, the results regarding the other three occupational groups are inconclusive. The stereotype inventory scale used in this study has not previously been used to measure attitudes towards social groups differentiated by gender. Also, it has also only been used on adults. To conclude, we can stress that more nuanced and sensitive measurement instruments than those used for this study is apparently needed in order to measure teenagers' attitudes based on differentiation of genders. The studied age group, i.e., between the ages of 13 and 16, might also still be forming their opinions and perceptions, therefore, making the results inconclusive.

5. Conclusion

The conclusion is divided in three parts. Firstly, we will answer the research questions and summarise the results from the analysis. Secondly, we will propose some policy oriented suggestions and lastly will we discuss future possible directions for research.

5.1 Gender equality and gendered norms
Grasping gender (in)equality – everyone should be treated equally

The awareness and knowledge regarding gender (in)equality in the first round of interviews varied significantly between the participants. Particularly, the results show differences between the Latvian and Ålandic participants. The Ålandic participants were all familiar with the term gender equality, whereas the majority of Latvian participants had never thought about it prior to the girl and boy group activities. The Ålandic participants defined gender equality in terms of equal voting rights, equal pay, that everyone should be valued and treated equally. When asked questions concerning the state of gender equality in their surroundings, i.e., at school and at home, they viewed their social surroundings as gender equal. However, when asked questions about division of labour in housework, it did not correlate with their own definition of gender equality, which Lina's quote shows:

> Lina: Well, my mom does the dishes and my dad mostly lies on the couch, so... yeah.

In the second round of interviews, there are notable changes in how the participants talk about gender equality. The majority of the participants expressed that the discussions about gender norms and equality were those they got the most out of. The most discernable change can be seen in how the Latvian parti-

cipants express themselves; not only are they able to define gender equality, but they also elaborate on it and give examples. Uldis, for example, defines gender equality as "when you try to achieve that women are not excluded, that they are able to do the same things that men do" and adds that he thinks that "men are given more possibilities" in society. A majority of the participants, both Latvian and Ålandic, expressed that the boy and girl group was the only place where they had a chance to discuss these issues.

Gender dichotomy – something thought when growing up

The participants all state that girls and boys in their surroundings are different, i.e., they have a clear vision of how girls and boys supposedly behave in the first round of interviews. For example, the majority of the participants expressed that being friends with someone of the opposite sex was more difficult than being friends with someone of the same sex. Many participants mentioned that behaviour is dependent on individual traits, but in general, they showed that they saw significant differences between men and women and that these differences were linked to gender. The participants did not question this general differentiation.

In the second round, however, there were noticeable changes in the participants' perceptions. Several participants expressed that the differentiation between girls/boys, women/men depended on what people are taught from childhood. For example, Viktor states that the differences between men and women depend on that we "are taught from the beginning that girls and boys should be different". Uldis expresses that the differences between girls and boys are due to that "girls are raised differently since childhood". Some interviewees also challenge the idea that men and women are different from birth by pointing out that there are alternative ways of behaving. Austra states that:

> Austra: From birth, small children play together very well, but when they grow up, then people say that there is gender and that it's not allowed to behave in a certain way.

The participants seem to have gained tools with which they question what they took for granted before. There are signs that some participants see individual characteristics as more possible, and the differentiation based on gender is not as important as it previously was.

A hell of a pressure: doing masculinity and femininity

In the first round of interviews, some of the participants express their views on femininity and masculinity in a rather static and traditional frame of understanding. Pēteris, for example, expresses that he thinks "it is women who should cook". When asked why, he answers "Because it is kind of a feminine duty". Other participants, on the other hand, make rather advanced and critical analyses of gender norms already in the first interview. For example, Viktor states that:

> Viktor: […] there are pretty huge demands that you should be masculine, and not show weakness. Which I think is a pity, […] you don't dare to show what you really feel and how things really are […] for me it just feels like gender overall is a burden.

The greatest changes, when comparing the first and second round of interviews, are seen in the boys who have started to notice gendered expectations. Rasmus, for example, expresses that he, after participating in the group, has noticed that society puts pressure on boys to, for example, relate to sports. Also, Viktor has started to think about everyday violence, which he did not think about before the boy group. The discussions about gender expectations have seemingly affected the boys and made them think

about certain issues for the first time. Another noticeable change is that the boys have become less aggressive and violent. Kārlis, for example, expressed that he is more understanding and that he does not force others to do things as much as before.

Girls are, in general, more used to talk about these issues, which might explain why they do not express the same feeling of epiphany as the boys, when discussing gendered expectations. However, the girls also show some indication of change. For example, Ilze expresses that they have talked about how boys behave in her group:

> Ilze: […] boys behave stupid at school. If they are not in a group, then they are quite all right.

When asked why she thinks they behave like this, she answers that "Maybe they want to please their group, other boys". Ilze's example shows that they have discussed boys' and girls' behaviour and why they behave in certain ways. In other words, they have discussed how gender is done, in this case, how masculinity is performed.

Feminine men – still weird

Even in the second round of interviews, it is evident that femininity is not considered to be an appropriate expression for men. In Elisabeth's group, they watched a movie about reversed gender roles. Elisabeth explains that she thought "it looked really weird" seeing boys act feminine in the movie. This shows that masculinity, evidently, is the norm. Therefore, a woman being masculine is easier to accept than men being feminine.

Gender expectations – It might be like this but it might also be in some other way

In the first round of interviews, all of the participants reinforced that girls and boys in their surroundings were treated differently. Some indica-

ted that this was unjust, while others stated that girls and boys, in fact, are different and, therefore, expected to behave differently. There were also some participants, for example, Austra, who maintained that gender expectations or stereotypes are social constructions. Some of the participants discussed the consequences of gendered expectations. Lina, for example, pointed out that people do not react to boys who have multiple sexual partners, while a girl who does is called "a whore". Compared to the first interview, it is evident that changes in the participants' viewpoints are present in the second interview. Several interviewees challenged the gender norms that they talked about in the first round of interviews, and were critical to gender norms defining how people should behave. The discussions in the group seem to have provided the participants with tools that enable them to challenge the norms and shown them alternative ways of doing gender. Furthermore, they can now talk about gendered expectations in terms of stereotypes, which a majority of them could not do in the first interview.

Understanding gender as structure

Lina has also changed her opinion in regard to gendered expectations. In Lina's group they discussed overprotective parents and Lina concludes that girls have more overprotective parents than boys because they believe that girls are more vulnerable than boys. In the first interview, Lina only reflected these issues in regard to her family. After having discussed this in the group, however, she now sees a pattern; that also others girls around her are treated the same way. The discussions in the group have shown her that this is not just a matter in her own family, but rather a part of a greater structure. In this sense, the discussions have contributed to raise the participant's awareness about gendered power structures, and to lift her experiences and problems, from an individual level, to a structural level.

Vocabulary – a precondition for challenging gender norms

It was evident that the participants, in the first round of interviews, had problems expressing themselves and explaining why, in their opinion, girls and boys were/acted/expected to be different. This is illustrated in Lina's quote regarding gender expectations and sex:

> Lina: You have different positions. It's like... I don't know how to put it. It's so different for boys and girls when it comes to sex
> I: Do you think girls and boys have different needs sexually?
> Lina: Yes, I think so.
> I: what's the difference?
> Lina: I think boys want to have more sex.
> I: Why do you think that is?
> Lina: I don't really know, but I think so.

Furthermore, in regard to gender determined behaviour, Lina says:

> Lina: Maybe. I do feel that you have to behave in a certain way
> I: Do you think it is easy to live up to these expectations?
> Lina: It's pretty easy
> I: Does it come automatically or do you have to think about it?
> Lina: It comes automatically.

The first example shows that Lina has problems explaining what she thinks about gender expectations in relation to sex. A majority of the participants had this problem in the first interview. The second example shows that living up to expectations comes automatically; there is no active choice for or against it, which can be presumed to be true for a majority of the participants.

Looking at the data, from the second round of interviews, it is clear that all participants have gained a wider vocabulary of gender related terms. This is a prerequisite to be able to discuss, and in the long run, challenge gender norms. Being able to put feelings and experiences into words is necessary to understand gendered power structures. In turn, this understanding gives the participants' the tools to question existing norms and shows them that the normative way of behaving is not the only alternative. This shows the participants that there are other possibilities from which to choose. This can lead to the empowerment of the participants. Knowledge about gender norms and gender equality, gaining a new vocabulary, and discussions in small groups, are factors that give the participants the tools they and the power they need to make their own free choices.

5.2 Empowerment

The majority of the interviewed participants express that the group discussions and activities have been rewarding. Analysis of the qualitative data indicates that the participants have become empowered, while the quantitative measurements, which only included self-esteem, do not show statistically significant results.

The qualitative analysis shows changes in mainly two areas. The first being the ability to think critically concerning gender norms. Prior to the group activities, most participants did not discuss gender norms. Some had not even thought about it previously. After taking part in group discussions, however, most participants criticised how girls and boys are treated differently, gendered division of labour and gender inequality. This shows that discussions concerning these issues have given the participants the tools to critically analyse their surroundings and to notice alternative ways of behaving. This can be seen as a process of empowerment. The second area where we see change regards the participants becoming more active members of their society. A majority of the participants and/or group leaders expressed that the participants have become more active and interested in their immediate social surroundings, such as their family or community. This can be understood as

an increase in the participants' self-confidence. It is evident that changes towards being more active members of society, in the long run, can be interpreted as a process of empowerment.

Furthermore, we see tendencies of change in three other areas. Some participants show signs of increased feelings of security and safety, which is apparent, for example, in their improved ability to speak their mind. In some cases, the participants' wish to express their opinions openly has extended into their daily life, i.e., their family and school. For others, however, it has stayed within the group, which is seen as a safe environment. The last aspect of empowerment that we looked at was self-esteem. During interviews and observations, we saw several signs of increased self-esteem. For example, we observed that, with time, some participants dared to speak their mind more often. Several interviewees state that their self-esteem increased because of participation in the group. However, the quantitative data collected from questionnaires show no statistically significant change in the participants' self-esteem.

On the other hand, since the girl and boy groups present new knowledge to the participants and challenges things they have taken for granted in the past, there is a possibility that self-esteem does not rise, but instead, becomes lower. When power structures, expectations and limitations are exposed, it can leave one feeling powerless rather than empowered at first. When social structures that we take for granted are challenged, time is needed for us to adapt to them. As a result of this, one's level of self-esteem can become lower, which might be the case for the girl and boy group participants in this research.

At this stage, the result regarding self-esteem is highly inconclusive. However, as was argued in the analysis, the ability to think critically can have a positive impact on the participants and empower them in the long run. The inconclusive results in this study underline the need for further research on this matter. Measuring changes

in the participants' self-esteem after a longer period of time, for example, one year, could better give insight in the long term effects of the boy and girl group method.

5.3 Change in social attitudes

The results from the participants' interviews indicate that they question gender norms and gender inequality more after participating in the groups than they did prior to their participation. The part of the questionnaire about stereotypes of different gender sensitive occupational groups, however, did not show a conclusive result regarding change of stereotypical attitudes. The analysis regarding kindergarten teachers and teenage parents did not show any statistically significant change. Furthermore, the results regarding the other three occupational groups were inconclusive.

The participants' attitudes were more negative towards some occupational groups, but at the same time, less in line with the gender stereotype. When measuring social attitudes towards female police officers, for example, they were perceived as being less self-dependent in the second round of questionnaires than in the first. This can be interpreted as an indication of a change in attitude towards female police officers. The results are, however, inconclusive since the participants also rated the male police officers similarly.

On the other hand, the data collected from the interviews with participants, show that change in attitude has happened. Some participants express stereotypical attitudes and perceptions regarding girls/boys and women/men in the first round of interviews, but in the second round of interviews, they challenge the norms surrounding gender. For example, when Pēteris is asked to evaluate any change in his own perception he says: "I can say that women can do men's work. They are good at it and like it. There is nothing wrong with that". Also, Uldis expresses that his

view of the "ideal" girl has become more multi-facetted than earlier. This shows that even if it is difficult to say if the participants' social attitudes towards the occupational groups examined in this study have changed, they show changes in attitudes towards people in their community; girls/boys their own age, their parents and other grown-ups.

We further conclude that the measurement instrument needs to be adjusted. The stereotype inventory scale used in this study has not before been used to measure attitudes towards social groups differentiated by gender. Also, it has only previously been used on adults. The results show that more nuanced and sensitive measurement instruments are needed to measure the attitudes of teenagers differentiated by gender. Research should also be conducted on what gender sensitive societal groups the youths, themselves, recognised. This, to understand what social groups this age group are aware of; this could differ significantly between, for example, Åland and Latvia, due to differences in context. Finally, the measurement instrument should also be specifically created or altered to better measure change in gender stereotypes and norms.

5.4 Policy oriented suggestions

Based on the results of this research, we have established a number of policy based suggestions that are essential in order to ensure the future for the girl and boy groups as well as gender equality perspective in working with youth.

Girl and boy groups have an important function in today's society, since all participants express that there is no other forum for them, other than the girl or boy group, where issues of gender equality and gender norms are brought up and discussed. Therefore, girl and boy group activity should be prioritised, at a political and civil society level, in order to strengthen and ensure a stable future for the girl and boy groups. It is also evident that the activity should be increased so

that a greater number of teenagers have the possibility to participate in a girl or boy group.

Issues concerning gender and gender (in) equality should also be discussed in other areas of the participants' lives, not least in school, since not all teenagers will have the possibility to participate in a group. Discussing questions about gender equality, gender norms and their effects, identity and self-worth, should be prioritised at a school level since these questions are part of subjects such as democracy, human rights and psychological and physical well-being.

The girl and boy group method should exist as a possible spare time activity in places where young people are present. For example, in non-formal youth education centres, cultural centres, youth centres, schools and other institutions in the care of municipalities.

Sex education is one aspect that needs to be strengthened within the school system. A majority of the participants stated that they had little to non sex education in school. Furthermore, sex education did not incorporate issues on the subject of norms, expectations or pressure, which are also relevant to discuss, besides discussing the health issues related to sexual practice.

Violence preventive youth work should always integrate a gender perspective. The result in this research shows that gender is not a background variable. Instead, it is evident that gender expectations, and masculine norms in particular, are vital topics of discussion in order to understand violent behaviour.

5.5 Future research

In the course of this study, the interviews have given us a large amount of information regarding how gender norms are constructed, and how the Ålandic and Latvian participants perceive them. This should be used for future research on the effects of the Nordic girl and boy group method, and can be a source for developing more sensitive measurement tools for examining change in

the perception of gender. Quantitative measurement tools should also be developed to fit the age group and research purpose better. When studying people in their lower teens, it is important to take into consideration that there are many factors that affect one's life during this period. Qualitative measurements regarding perception and attitudes, as well as measurements of self-esteem, should take place regularly when studying girl or boy groups, and during a longer period than was done in this research. Also, the measurements should be cross-referenced with control groups, especially since rapid developments in personality occur during teenage years. This research has been conducted with a two-folded theoretical approach, combining social psychology and gender studies. Doing this has made it evident that the two fields could benefit from taking inspiration from each other. In the field of social psychology, there has been little notice paid to gender norms and their relation to power. The field of social psychology would benefit from incorporating theory development done in the field of gender studies. For example, theory concerning gendered norms and norm critique could enrich the theory regarding stereotypes and social attitudes within the field of social psychology. Similarly, the field of gender studies benefits from including approaches from the field of social psychology.

6. References

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7. Appendix

7.1 Appendix 1: Interview guide for participant interviews

A. General questions

A.1. Name, age, which grade in school

A.2. Family structure (parents/grown-ups, siblings, others close to the family)

A.3. Spare time (what do you do besides go to school and girl/boy group, spare time activities, things you like to do?)

A.4. How come you joined a girl/boy group? (What were your expectations? How has it been so far?)

A.5. How do you feel about being in a girl/boy group? (What are your expectations?)

B. Gender roles

(what are their perceived norms on being a girl/boy? Do they conform/resist? Do they think it is "natural", given?)

B.1. What does it mean to be a girl? What does it mean to be a boy?

B.2. How does one act feminine? How does one act masculine? (Can girls act masculine/boys act feminine? If, yes, why do they do that? If no, why can't they?)

B.3. Is there a difference between how girls and boys are? (what is the difference? Is it important that girls and boys behave differently? If yes, why?)

B.4. What sorts of expectations are there are on girls/boys in your surroundings? (Is there a difference between expectations on boys and girls? Do you feel that these expectations are on you? Are they easy to live up to? Do you behave in the way that is expected?)

B.5. What is the best/worst thing about being a girl/boy (ask this to both boys and girls)? (Is this something that only a girl/boy can be or do? Why/why not?)

B.6. Is your appearance important to you? (What do you do in terms of looking after your appearance? Why do you do that? When do you do that?)

B.7. What do you want to do in the future? (Do you have a dream job? What is it that you like with that job? Do you think that is what you will work with? I s it attainable?)

C. Relationships outside of family

(What roles are played in relationships? What do they think means to have relations with others outside their families? What do they expect of other people that they have relationships with?)

C.1. How is a good friend? (Any qualities that you expect from a friend? Any things you think friends expect of you?)

C.2. How is one a good girl-/boyfriend? (Any qualities that you expect from a girl/boyfriend? What do you think is expected by you as a girl/boyfriend?)

C.3. Is there anyone you can say everything to? (Who is that? What makes that person a good person to say everything to? What do you say to that person that you don't tell anyone else?)

C.4. Do you talk to anyone about romantic relationships? (Who do you talk to? What is discussed then?)

C.5. Are you friends with both boys and girls? (Is there a difference between being friends with a girl or a boy? If yes, why? Is the gender of a friend important? If yes, why?)

C.6. Are romantic relationships important? (Why? Why not? How is a good romantic relationship? Do you have to act in a certain way when you are in a relationship?)

C.7. What does it mean to be in love? (How do you know that you are in love? Do you act in a certain way when you are in love?)

D. Violence and harassment

(What is "normal" violence and what is too much? Why do they think some people are vi-

olent? Do they perceive aggression as a normal part of male behavior?)

D.1. Is there any violence in your school? (What kind of violence? Have you ever seen it? Are boys and girls equally violent? If not, how are they different?)

D.2. Is there any bullying? (What do you define as bullying? Why do those who bully do it? How are they? Why do those who get bullied get bullied? How are they?)

D.3. What do you see as sexual harassment? (Is there any sexual harassment at your school? Is the jargon is school sexual (talking sexually about someone, commenting others bodies etc.)? Is that sexual harassment? What should you do if you think you are being sexually harassed?)

D.4. What is your definition of rape? (Is scaring someone into having sex rape? Paying for sex? If someone refuses?)

D.5. Is there something one can do in order not to be raped? (Situations to avoid? Behaviors to avoid?)

D.6. Are there any discussions about rape in your surroundings? How are those discussions?

E. Sex
(What is their conception of sexuality? What is the norm around sexuality? Do they see male and female sexuality as "naturally" different (derived only from biological factors)?)

E.1. Is sex something that is talk about in your surroundings? (In class? With parents? With friends? What is said in those discussions?)

E.2. Do girls and boys talk about sex in different ways? (If yes, what do girls talk about? What do boys talk about? What is the difference? Why is there a difference?)

E.3. Do girls and boys see sex differently? (Do they have different needs? Do they have different expectations?)

E.4. Is having sex important? (Why is it important/not important? When is it important? Is there expectations on that one should have

sex? Is there a connection between love and sex? Do boys and girls have different understandings of this?)

E.5. How do you know that someone is attracted to you/wants to have sex with you? (Do they have to say it? Do they show it with their body language? What do they say/do?)

E.6. When is it ok to have sex? (Is it ok to have sex with different people? If no, why not?)

E.7. Is it ok to buy sex? (Why do people that pay for sex do it?)

E.8. Is it ok to sell sex? (What is your definition of selling sex? Do you think your friends/peers/classmates have the opinion as you about selling and buying sex?)

F. Gender equality
(What do they see as gender equality? What is the norm? Is there a difference between what they say should be and the way they say things are?)

F.1. What is gender equality according to you?

F.2. Is it gender equal at your school? (What is equal? What is unequal? Are the expectations on girls and boys the same? Do girls and boys talk equally much in class? If no, why do you think they don't?)

F.3. Is it gender equal at home? (How is the relationship between parents, if there is more than one? Do you have siblings? Brother/s or sister/s? What kind of things are you asked to do around the house? Do you do them? What kinds of things are your sister/s brother/s asked to do? Does s/he do them?

7.2 Appendix 2: interview guide for leader interviews

1.Background
1.A. Name, age

1.B. What do you do when you don't lead a group? (Job, studies etc.)

1.C. How come you wanted to be a group leader?

1.D. Did you have any experience of girl/boy groups before this?

1.E. Do you have experience of leading other groups?

1.F. What were your expectations beforehand?

2.The meetings
2.A. How have you decided what you will talk about/do at each meeting?

2.B. Have you as leaders suggested issues/activities that you have seen a need of? (What was it? How come you suggested this? Was the idea well received by the youth?)

2.C. What subjects are the participants most interested in? (Why do you think that is?)

2.D. How is your relationship to the participants? (Have you seen a change? Do they dare to talk more openly with you?)

3.The method
3.A. So far, how has the group process /to be the leader of the group/the experience of leading the group been in comparison to your expectations? (Has something surprised you? In that case what?)

3.B. What are, in your view, the most important results that you have seen with the participants? (Have they changed their view on anything? Has the group dynamics changed? Has their behavior changed? Any examples?)

3.C. As a way of challenging gender roles, is the girl and boy group method effective? (if yes, have you seen any results? If no, why not?)

3.D. Is it easy or difficult to follow the method? (Why? Why not?)

3.E. Do you have any interesting examples of when it was difficult to lead the group?

3.F. Have you learnt anything yourself? (Has it been a positive experience so far? Have you engaged in discussions concerning gender equality, gender based violence etc?)

3.G. Has the educations and group work made you more aware of gender norms?

3.H. Have you applied your new knowledge anywhere else? (at work, in daily life etc)

4.Gender perspective
4.A. 2.D. How have you integrated the gender perspective during the group meetings? (Has it been difficult? What topics concerning gender norms have you talked about?) Give some examples

4.B. Did you discuss/do anything that you see as gender norm breaking? (If yes, how was that received by the youth? What was it? If no, did you hesitate to do something because you saw it as gender norm breaking?

4.C. Has something come up in the groups, related to gender norms, which was perceived as controversial by the group? (if yes, what was it? How did the group react? Why didn't the group agree/ why did they think it was controversial?)

4.D. Do you have examples where you have seen widened understanding of gender norms with the participants?

4.E. Do you think the majority of the group members think gender equality is more important now than they thought before they started in the group? (If yes, how have they expressed this?)

4.F. How have you talked about gender in relation to power, in the group? (Give examples. What has the reactions been from the participants?)

4. G. Have you talked about gender in relation to sexuality and/or violence, in the group? (Give examples. What has the reactions been?)

7.3 Appendix 3: Questionnaire

1. I feel that I am a person of worth, at least on an equal level with others.

1	2	3	4
Absolutely agree	Partial agree	Partial disagree	Absolutely disagree

2. I feel that I have a number of good qualities.

1	2	3	4
Absolutely agree	Partial agree	Partial disagree	Absolutely disagree

3. All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure.

1	2	3	4
Absolutely agree	Partial agree	Partial disagree	Absolutely disagree

4. I am able to do things as well as most other persons.

1	2	3	4
Absolutely agree	Partial agree	Partial disagree	Absolutely disagree

5. I feel I do not have much to be proud of.

1	2	3	4
Absolutely agree	Partial agree	Partial disagree	Absolutely disagree

6. I take a positive attitude towards myself.

1	2	3	4
Absolutely agree	Partial agree	Partial disagree	Absolutely disagree

7. On the whole, I am satisfied with myself.

1	2	3	4
Absolutely agree	Partial agree	Partial disagree	Absolutely disagree

8. I wish I could have more respect for myself.

1	2	3	4
Absolutely agree	Partial agree	Partial disagree	Absolutely disagree

9. I certainly feel useless at times.

1	2	3	4
Absolutely agree	Partial agree	Partial disagree	Absolutely disagree

10. At times I feel I am not good at all.

1	2	3	4
Absolutely agree	Partial agree	Partial disagree	Absolutely disagree

Following section will contain a list of questions regarding different groups within society. In order to have enough strength and patience to answer all the questions, please, answer not thinking too long about your impression regarding each of these groups. There is no right or wrong answer. Please circle number 1, if your answer is "not at all", 2 – if "not too much", 3 – if "moderate", 4 – if "little bit", 5 – if "a lot".

How scholarly are girls who are models?

Not at all	1	2	3	4	5	A lot

How self-confident are girls who are models?

Not at all	1	2	2	4	5	A lot

How self-dependent are girls who are models?

Not at all	1	2	2	4	5	A lot

How competitive are girls who are models?

Not at all	1	2	3	4	5	A lot

How professional are girls who are models?

Not at all	1	2	3	4	5	A lot

How smart are girls who are models?

Not at all	1	2	3	4	5	A lot

How tolerant are girls who are models?

Not at all	1	2	3	4	5	A lot

How sympathetic are girls who are models?

Not at all	1	2	3	4	5	A lot

How kind-hearted are girls who are models?

Not at all	1	2	3	4	5	A lot

How decent are girls who are models?

Not at all	1	2	3	4	5	A lot

How well-educated are girls who are models?

Not at all	1	2	3	4	5	A lot

My life is made more difficult, because of special advantages that girls who are models are having.

Not at all	1	2	3	4	5	A lot

The more power girls who are models have, the less power people like me are likely to have.

Not at all	1	2	3	4	5	A lot

The possibilities that girls who are models have, diminish possibilities for people like me.

Not at all	1	2	3	4	5	A lot

How scholarly are boys who are models?
How self-confident are boys who are models?
How self-dependent are boys who are models?
How competitive are boys who are models?
How professional are boys who are models?
How smart are boys who are models?
How tolerant are boys who are models?
How sympathetic are boys who are models?
How kind-hearted are boys who are models?
How decent are boys who are models?
How prestigious the job of models is for boys?
How much of economic well-being do boys who are models have?
How well-educated are boys who are models?
My life is made more difficult, because of special advantages that boys who are models are having.
The more power boys who are models have, the less power people like me are likely to have.
The possibilities that boys who are models have, diminish possibilities for people like me.

How scholarly are females who are kindergarten teachers?
How self-confident are females who are kindergarten teachers?
How self-dependent are females who are kindergarten teachers?
How competitive are females who are kindergarten teachers?
How professional are females who are kindergarten teachers?
How smart are females who are kindergarten teachers?
How tolerant are females who are kindergarten teachers?
How sympathetic are females who are kindergarten teachers?
How kind-hearted are females who are kindergarten teachers?
How decent are females who are kindergarten teachers?
How prestigious the job of kindergarten teachers is for females?
How much of economic well-being do females who are kindergarten teachers have?
How well-educated are females who are kindergarten teachers?
My life is made more difficult, because of special advantages that females who are kindergarten teachers are having.
The more power females who are kindergarten teachers have, the less power people like me are likely to have.
The possibilities that females who are kindergarten teachers have, diminish possibilities for people like me.
How scholarly are males who are kindergarten teachers?

How self-confident are males who are kindergarten teachers?
How self-dependent are males who are kindergarten teachers?
How competitive are males who are kindergarten teachers?
How professional are males who are kindergarten teachers?
How smart are males who are kindergarten teachers?
How tolerant are males who are kindergarten teachers?
How sympathetic are males who are kindergarten teachers?
How kind-hearted are males who are kindergarten teachers?
How decent are males who are kindergarten teachers?
How prestigious the job of kindergarten teachers is for males?
How much of economic well-being do males who are kindergarten teachers have?
How well-educated are males who are kindergarten teachers?
My life is made more difficult, because of special advantages that males who are kindergarten teachers are having.
The more power males who are kindergarten teachers have, the less power people like me are likely to have.
The possibilities that males who are kindergarten teachers have, diminish possibilities for people like me.

How scholarly are females who are police officers?
How self-confident are females who are police officers?
How self-dependent are females who are police officers?
How competitive are females who are police officers?
How professional are females who are police officers?
How smart are females who are police officers?
How tolerant are females who are police officers?
How sympathetic are females who are police officers?
How kind-hearted are females who are police officers?
How decent are females who are police officers?
How prestigious the job of police officers is for females?
How much of economic well-being do females who are police officers have?
How well-educated are females who are police officers?
My life is made more difficult, because of special advantages that females who are police officers are having.
The more power females who are police officers have, the less power people like me are likely to have.
The possibilities that females who are police officers have, diminish possibilities for people like me.

How scholarly are males who are police officers?
How self-confident are males who are police officers?
How self-dependent are males who are police officers?
How competitive are males who are police officers?
How professional are males who are police officers?
How smart are males who are police officers?
How tolerant are males who are police officers?
How sympathetic are males who are police officers?
How kind-hearted are males who are police officers?
How decent are males who are police officers?
How prestigious the job of police officers is for males?
How much of economic well-being do males who are police officers have?
How well-educated are males who are police officers?
My life is made more difficult, because of special advantages that males who are police officers are having.
The more power males who are police officers have, the less power people like me are likely to have.
The possibilities that males who are police officers have, diminish possibilities for people like me.

How scholarly are teenage girls who are mothers?
How self-confident are teenage girls who are mothers?
How self-dependent are teenage girls who are mothers?
How competitive are teenage girls who are mothers?
How professional are teenage girls who are mothers?
How smart are teenage girls who are mothers?
How tolerant are teenage girls who are mothers?
How sympathetic are teenage girls who are mothers?
How kind-hearted are teenage girls who are mothers?
How decent are teenage girls who are mothers?
How prestigious for teenage girls is to be a mother?
How much of economic well-being do teenage girls who are mothers have?
How well-educated are teenage girls who are mothers?
My life is made more difficult, because of special advantages that teenage girls who are mothers are having.
The more power teenage girls who are mothers have, the less power people like me are likely to have.
The possibilities that teenage girls who are mothers have, diminish possibilities for people like me.

How scholarly are teenage boys who are fathers?
How self-confident are teenage boys who are fathers?
How self-dependent are teenage boys who are fathers?
How competitive are teenage boys who are fathers?
How professional are teenage boys who are fathers?
How smart are teenage boys who are fathers?
How tolerant are teenage boys who are fathers?
How sympathetic are teenage boys who are fathers?
How kind-hearted are teenage boys who are fathers?
How decent are teenage boys who are fathers?

How prestigious for teenage boys is to be a father?
How much of economic well-being do teenage boys who are fathers have?
How well-educated are teenage boys who are fathers?
My life is made more difficult, because of special advantages that teenage boys who are fathers are having.
The more power teenage boys who are fathers have, the less power people like me are likely to have.
The possibilities that teenage boys who are fathers have, diminish possibilities for people like me.

How scholarly are girls who are prostitutes?
How self-confident are girls who are prostitutes?
How self-dependent are girls who are prostitutes?
How competitive are girls who are prostitutes?
How professional are girls who are prostitutes?
How smart are girls who are prostitutes?
How tolerant are girls who are prostitutes?
How sympathetic are girls who are prostitutes?
How kind-hearted are girls who are prostitutes?
How decent are girls who are prostitutes?
How prestigious for girls is to be a prostitute?
How much of economic well-being do girls who are prostitutes have?
How well-educated are girls who are prostitutes?
My life is made more difficult, because of special advantages that girls who are prostitutes are having.
The more power girls who are prostitutes have, the less power people like me are likely to have.
The possibilities that girls who are prostitutes have, diminish possibilities for people like me.

How scholarly are boys who are prostitutes?
How self-confident are boys who are prostitutes?
How self-dependent are boys who are prostitutes?
How competitive are boys who are prostitutes?
How professional are boys who are prostitutes?
How smart are boys who are prostitutes are?
How tolerant are boys who are prostitutes?
How sympathetic are boys who are prostitutes?
How kind-hearted are boys who are prostitutes?
How decent are boys who are prostitutes?
How prestigious for boys is to be a prostitute?
How much of economic well-being do boys who are prostitutes have?
How well-educated are boys who are prostitutes?
My life is made more difficult, because of special advantages that boys who are prostitutes are having.
The more power boys who are prostitutes have, the less power people like me are likely to have.
The possibilities that boys who are prostitutes have, diminish possibilities for people like me.

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