

Women narratives from Tornedalen -  
Northernmost Sweden  
*Gender and Culture in Perspective*

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**DOCTORAL THESIS**

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Luleå in January 2008

Ann-Kristin Juntti-Henriksson



## ABSTRACT

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This thesis concerns gender issues based on 103 interviews with women from the northernmost borderland of Sweden (Tornedalen area). The interviews became women narratives as told from their lives, including anecdotes of particular events as well as a vast amount of information related to gender and equality. Feminist poststructuralism inspired me in this thesis. I believe that approaching feminist poststructural theory and practice may help in understanding how the local culture has influenced gender relations in Tornedalen. Each and every woman is unique and shaped by various discourses throughout her life. However, when combining all unique women into a group of women we can see both differences and common characteristics in the group. By drawing on discourse and feminist poststructural analysis I have attempted to convey my understanding of the respondents' narratives. On the one hand, they are very different from each other, and express contradictory views; on the other hand, they have common characteristics that are shared by many women. I believe that it is important to consider all possibilities opened up through feminist poststructural analysis.

The thesis comprises six papers which emphasizes different aspects on how women have adapted their lives according to the local culture of Tornedalen. The findings also reflect a historical perspective from the middle to the late twentieth century, including moving from a time when most women were full-time housewives to a time when most women work outside the home. The traditional culture in Tornedalen still existed in the late 1990s with pressure seemingly coming from the older generations to maintain traditional gender functions. Tornedalen women often seem to be preoccupied by imagery of what the local society expects and/or demands of them. Altogether, the knowledge of the participants in this study has produced multiple truths about gender and about women's lives. As would be expected, experiences of the women differed, as did their understandings of equality issues and ways of talking about it. Most women in Tornedalen seem to have a good knowledge of equality issues; however, in their own words, they believe equality has not changed significantly in Tornedalen from the 1950s to the late 1990s. The thesis provides new knowledge as to

how inequality may persist in (a) local area(s) ruled by traditional norms. It also provides insights into women's lives and how identities evolve in (a) small local society(ies).

*Keywords:* gender, narrative, northernmost Sweden, Tornedalen, discourse, feminist poststructuralism, local culture, equality, inequality.

## **Appended papers**

### **Paper I**

Juntti-Henriksson, A-K (in press), Strong, aware, and unequal; women's lives in Tornedalen (Northernmost borderland of Sweden) *Equal Opportunities International*. Used with permission from Emerald Group Publishing Limited.

### **Paper II**

Juntti-Henriksson, A-K. (2003), 'May I buy strawberries?' A study of control of money and household spending in marriage in the northernmost borderland of Sweden. *The 5th European Gender Research Conference – Gender and Power in the New Europe*.

### **Paper III**

Juntti-Henriksson, A-K (2006), To be "a real woman"; local culture and gender roles in The northernmost Sweden (Tornedalen area). *The 6th European Gender Research Conference – Gender and citizenship in a multicultural context*.

### **Paper IV**

Juntti-Henriksson, A-K (accepted), Creating inequality by spoiling their sons? – Women's views of mothers bringing up children in Tornedalen (Northernmost Sweden). *Proceedings of the 11<sup>th</sup> Research Conference (2007), Dilemmas of Identity, New Public Management and Governance*.

### **Paper V**

Juntti-Henriksson, A-K (submitted), Gender relations and local culture in northernmost Sweden (Tornedalen area): men in women's perspectives *Gender issues*.

### **Paper VI**

Juntti-Henriksson, A-K (submitted), The quiet words of Tornedalen women; dreams and (be)longing in Northernmost Sweden (Tornedalen area) *Gender, Culture & Place*.



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# **1. Introduction**

The first chapter of this thesis gives a brief introduction to my thesis project and to my research as well as some comments by me, as a researcher. The chapter begins with some background reflections on my own life and how it has been shaped throughout the years. The chapter continues to follow up my background and explains why my interest got targeted towards the theme of my specific research area and the focus of this thesis.

## **1.1 The thesis project**

It has been a struggle and long learning process to realize how complex it is to study reality. I believe many of us are custom to viewing the world in a modernistic or structural way, as I was when starting my PhD studies. During the process of reading new (to me) literature and encountering theories which view reality in new ways, I have come to realize that our world can be viewed in different ways. The standpoint which I have taken is to view (and relate) reality in a feministic poststructuralistic way. I have also used discourse analyses as base for my analysis and my view of the world. For me, reality is not a dichotomy which can be organized (in black or white). Instead, I view the world and the people that inhabit it as complex.

I would like to make a few comments on the PhD project including my contribution of papers. I have tried to make a worthwhile contribution by putting forward six different papers, each with a different theme; and all with me as the single author. The papers are concentrated around various aspects of gender in the area of Tornedalen (northernmost Sweden). The papers demonstrate new knowledge together with relevant creative and critical perspectives in its field, moving beyond what others in the field have done. All different papers intentions are to make original contributions and to spur critical thoughts in the readers' minds on the different topics chosen. In this overview and summary of this thesis, I try to reflect on all various papers together and try to put them into a broader perspective. I also try to give a general rationale and some thoughts of the project from beginning to end. For example, the thesis includes gender issues of local cultures and problems of inequality in such areas. This includes demonstrating equality situations in parts of the welfare state of Sweden. Further examples are that new use of methods has been developed, including using feminist

poststructuralism on large empirical data sets.

## **1.2 Aim and scope of thesis**

The purpose of this thesis was to explore women's experiences and ways of understanding gender and to relate this to areas of equality in their lives; and to examine these using an interdisciplinary approach. The different papers are all based on a large number (103) of interviews of women made in Tornedalen during 1995-96. This empirical material was used to identify several different phenomena, which resulted in different themes in the various papers. These themes are summarized and discussed as a part of the summary of the thesis. Most of the studies conducted within the frame of this thesis also had a general aim to improve the methodology. The particular aim of this focus was to render feministic poststructuralism more useful. This in some ways seemed very useful and at times seemed to be of an absolute necessity in order to make poststructural feminism useful for the large empirical material used. The earliest study (from 2003, paper 2) lack this methodological depth of analysis, however the results are still important and the results are needed for the full completion of the results in this thesis. The rest of my papers aims to give a poststructural analysis of the Tornedalen narratives.

## **1.3 Thesis outline**

This chapter has so far introduced the aim of this thesis, and briefly outlined the means of achieving this aim. The next chapter, chapter two, presents information on the geographical and cultural setting studied. Chapter three presents methodological and analytical frameworks for studying gender and culture. In chapter four I will explain how the empirical material was gathered. The fifth chapter includes a summary of the different papers presented in this thesis.

## **1.4 Explanation of thesis title**

I decided to give my thesis the title: *Women Narratives from Tornedalen - Northernmost Sweden: Gender and Culture in Perspective*. This title gives

brief, but good information about my PhD project. The thesis title refers to all those *narratives* told to me about women's lives in *Tornedalen*. The word *narrative* is here used in its most original meaning, reflecting the actual words and stories told by the respondents during interviews. So many interesting stories have been told by women living in *Tornedalen - Northernmost Sweden*, which can be seen as documents of women-history. I have further labelled my thesis: *Gender and Culture in Perspective*, referring to the main interest in my thesis; the study of *gender and culture* and its relationships to each other. This includes studying gender and equality issues brought up in the narratives and relating these to the local culture of Tornedalen. All studies are made through my own lens of knowledge and through my own understanding; through my own *perspective*. *Perspective* is also used because of the broader *perspective* I have wanted to put into all my different papers. The broad *perspective* means that I want readers to view the papers in an International *perspective* where local cultures (globally) may have similarities to the local culture of Tornedalen. The material also includes a historic *perspective*, ranging from around the middle to the late twentieth century.

## **1.5 Reflections on my own life**

My interest in Tornedalen probably comes from my past. I grew up in Kalix in the County of Norrbotten. My father is from a village in Tornedalen and he speaks both Finnish and Swedish. As a child, I found the borderland between Sweden and Finland quite exciting, listening to stories about smugglers. In my youth, I heard lots of stories with a clear focus on what men had accomplished. As a young girl, I remember myself seeing the division of men's and women's work and functions as something natural. Later on in life I moved to Uppsala, a student city, and very much different from my hometown Kalix. In Uppsala, I experienced a quite different and academic life. Since graduating in Uppsala, I have lived in Germany and Spain, and at different places in Sweden. Today, I can see myself as a person with a multiple cultural experience. I can also see many clear differences from my thoughts as a young person to my thoughts today as a more experienced person. As a consequence, I now know that people are continually being shaped by their experiences.

In my own life, a quite recent event changed my view of life: my husband's kidneys quite suddenly stopped working in 2004 and I decided to give him

one of my kidneys to quickly get him out of dialysis. The mental pain as well as the physical pain of going through this process changed my view of life. Today, I and my husband live a good life with both of us, each, just having one functional kidney. Thus, where I lived (cultures) and what has happened to me (personal experiences) all has had effects on me as a person. My view of the world is thus shaped and is being continuously shaped by the discourses to which I am exposed.

## **1.6 Development of research interest**

My research interest has probably grown out of my background as well as from the particular courses I attended as a student at Uppsala University. My past teachers and supervisors in Uppsala, many who have been extremely knowledgeable in my chosen fields, inspired me to delve deeper into my chosen field. The finishing of my studies in Ethnology and Women Studies in Uppsala made me think in new ways regarding gender and equality. In combination with my own independent exploration as a project leader for various women projects has made me targeted towards gender and equality studies. Since starting my PhD studies in 2002, my interest has grown even deeper in the specific area of women and cultural studies. It has been a very interesting journey to learn even more about gender and culture throughout the course of this thesis project.

I can also feel that I am directing attention to a most important issue, the equality issue. To study and work for gender equality is also quite personally rewarding because it is an important development and human rights issue. I cannot say that this thesis gives answers to about what a society based on gender equality would be like. Nor do I think that women and men in different societies necessarily can make easy and quick choices based on any research results regarding gender and equality. Still, this PhD project is an initiative with a commitment to increase understandings as well as to work towards more gender equality in society.

## 2. Geographical and cultural area of study

In this second chapter, the geographical area is described. This chapter includes descriptions of the Tornedalen area in a perspective where I start to put Sweden and its equality issues in somewhat perspective to the rest of the world. The chapters end with some notions on the geography and culture of Tornedalen.

### 2.1 Sweden in perspective

Sweden is geographically a large country (449,964 km<sup>2</sup>) with around nine million inhabitants. Sweden has a low population density except in the major cities; over eighty percent of the population lives in urban areas, which take up only a little over one percent of the total land area. Åke Daun (1996), in his book *Swedish Mentality*, expresses Sweden as a country with several different cultures:

*Anyone seeking a “Swedish culture” will find a multicultural Sweden, not necessarily a single uniform national culture. What appears are different local cultures, professional cultures, youth cultures, class-bound cultures, and minority cultures (Daun, p.37).*

Of course, as Daun (1996) continues to explain in his book, several common features of Swedish citizens exist, still there are many dissimilar regions and local cultures in Sweden.

The concept of gender equality has a long history in Sweden. Although the “act on equality between men and women at work” was only passed in the 1980s, women’s right to work had already been acknowledged in the 1930s (Myrdal and Myrdal, 1934) in Swedish society. Hence, women have been encouraged to take place in the labour market for a long time. It has also meant that men are encouraged to take equal responsibilities for housework and childcare (Statistiska centralbyrån, 1992). Sweden is the society that, perhaps, has done the most to acknowledge that both mothers and fathers have economic and care taking roles. There is a general political consensus in Sweden on the principles of gender equality. Swedish gender equality policy is fundamentally concerned with the ability of each individual to achieve economic independence through gainful employment. Just as

important are measures to enable both women and men to combine jobs with parenthood. It must also be possible for everybody, regardless of gender, to develop and participate in all aspects of community life according to their capabilities. Indeed, the goal is gender equality, meaning that men and women have equal responsibilities in the areas of economic support of the family, housework, and child care. Although the Swedish society is considered to be one of the most gender equal cultures of the world large local variations in gender equality have been observed (Sundin, 1996; Schough, 2001).

## **2.2 The county of Norrbotten**

The county of Norrbotten is the largest county of Sweden. The province of Norrbotten, in which Tornedalen is situated, covers about one fourth (98,911 km<sup>2</sup>) of the total area of Sweden, but is populated only by about three percent of the total population. A quarter of a million people lives in Norrbotten and most of the population is concentrated in towns and urban centres. The population is concentrated in the cities along the east-coast and around mining industries. The coastal region is the most densely populated part of the county. The other major population concentration is in the Orefield's region in the north.

The culture of the Norrbotten County is in many ways different from the rest of Sweden, since different cultures can be found here including the Sami culture and the Tornedalian culture. Many of the old Swedish and Finnish dialects have survived in the area and are spoken by a significant number of people.

At the regional level, Sweden's 21 county administrative boards are responsible for coordinating national and local policies. Since 1995, there has been a regional expert on gender equality issues in each of the counties. The main task of these experts is to promote mainstreaming of a gender perspective into all policy fields and support efforts to achieve equality between women and men in their regions.

## 2.3 The Tornedalen area

Tornedalen is a bilingual (Swedish/Finnish) area located in the county of Norrbotten on the borderland with Finland. In this area, men dominate the population: being a result of the fact that emigration (mainly to the southern regions in Sweden) is higher among young women than among young men. The County administrative board of Norrbotten reported women emigration to be about twice as common compared to men in the 18-24 years age group in 2005. The local economy in Tornedalen is significantly worse than the rest of Sweden (based on the aggregate value of all goods and services produced), and in 2004 it was about 50-70% of the average in Sweden (County administrative board of Norrbotten, 2007).

Some years ago a book was written about Tornedalen women (Finnmyrten, 1998). Below is an excerpt of the introduction, giving a brief and exciting introduction to Tornedalen women-history:

*A woman describes her mother in law: “She managed everything at home and in the barn. Milking cows and had the dinner on the table when the men came home from work. She always gave of herself and never asked to get anything back, as if her own self did not exist”. While other women, in secret, carried dreams about becoming something themselves, to get an own job. “Women never had time or could afford to take care of themselves. Then I decided to get myself a real job, so I could support myself” says Gerda. “ No man should stop me from realizing my dreams” says Astrid, who said no to a fiancée with 25 cows to realize her dream to become a midwife. Fifty years ago there were cows in almost every yard and lots of children in every house. What actually happened when farming ended and the cows disappeared? When less children were born and one bought a washing machine? What happened to all those women whose picture of them was so strongly rooted in work? “When we ended farming I missed the animals so much, sometimes I dreamed about them at nights” says one woman. It was then women started to leave Tornedalen (Finnmyrten, p. 13).*

This excerpt is a good example of Tornedalen culture and history. Some people in Tornedalen have a saying: "I am a Tornedaling" probably meaning that they really feel that they belong, geographically and culturally, to Tornedalen.

Compared to other areas in Sweden, the northern area, especially its rural parts, acquired modern standards of living rather late (Blehr, 1994). This is explained by the fact that remote areas were often isolated and also because of the socio-economical situation of the countryside.

Some studies have shown that Tornedalen is a specific (and isolated) cultural area. During the last decades Tornedalen has been noticed for the large escape of women (Cullblom, 1994; 1996; County administrative board of Norrbotten, 2005; 2007). Ester Cullblom (1999) describes how many Finnish women moved to Tornedalen during and after the Second World War resulting in many marriages. Lars Elenius (2001) have described Tornedalen in a linguistic and historic perspective in where he gives many stories and explanations of the Tornedalen history the years from 1850 to 1939.

### **3. Methodology and theoretical perspective**

In this third chapter, I focus on the methodology I have used and the theoretical perspective I have chosen in analyzing the women's narratives. It has been an interesting journey to learn about different theories used in gender research. It has also been a learning process, to take part of different theories and methods and to give them meaning in relating them to my empirical material.

#### **3.1 Positioning myself as a researcher**

Our assumptions colour the attitudes and perspectives from which we view the world around us. Many of our assumptions are so deeply embedded in our own cultural values and the contemporary world view we have, that we may not realize that there are alternative ways to think. In this section of the thesis, I point out some subjective assumptions about the nature of reality, about the relationships among components of reality, and about the criteria for valid scientific efforts. I do this in order to call attention to the underlying biases we bring with us. I have come to the conclusion that the world we view is based on our own presumptions which are not necessarily (or even seldom) shared by others. I have also realized the complexity of life, which I as a researcher have to face. As a researcher I need to be aware of the discourses to which I have been exposed and the discourses to which I am exposed to (see also chapter 1.3 reflections on my own life, p. 8). These discourses will form my view of life and will naturally affect my analysis of others. The impressions that shape our view of the world are made through influences in our lives:

*Although every day we are exposed to outside influences through reading newspapers and watching television, we are most profoundly affected by our own lives, by our living conditions, by direct experiences and impressions. Some of this we take in consciously, sometimes enthusiastically. Other impressions reach us unreflectively, but these too are filed away in the brain. Nothing goes unregistered – not even the sounds that penetrated our mother's womb in our very first moments of life. Just this, our sensitivity to all impressions,*

*explains why people differ so much from one another. We have been brought up in different ways by different adults, have lived in different places, and are thereby exposed to a variety of impressions – some of them similar, some of them not (Daun, 1996, p. 11).*

Any person involved in research needs to position herself among competing theoretical positions. It is also important to be self-reflexive in order to see how we have ended up seeing the world in a certain perspective. My own identity is made up of a variety of contexts which make me different than other people. For example, the fact that I am a woman makes me see things from a certain angle. Also many other facts make up my view of the world; the fact that I am Swedish certainly makes me view things in a certain way. I also have a personal history from Tornedalen, which could make my view of Tornedalen somewhat different than others.

I am aware about reflexivity in my own studies, and that this may have affected both empirical data, analyzes, as well as final results. However, by being strongly aware about reflexivity, I have done my best to take reflexivity into account in my different studies. The connections between the researcher and what is researched is something that has been discussed frequently in literature:

*In doing research of any kind, there is an assumption that we are investigating something outside ourselves, that the knowledge we seek cannot be gained solely or simply through introspection. This is true for both the social and natural sciences, although in the latter the separation of researcher and research object may appear more self-evident and more readily attainable. On the other hand, we cannot research something with which we have no contact, from which we are completely isolated. All researchers are to some degree connected to, a part of, the object of their research. And, depending on the extent and nature of these connections, questions arise as to whether the results of research are artefacts of the researcher's presence and inevitable influence of on the research process. For these reasons reflexivity is important for all forms of research. (Aull Davies, 1999, p. 3)*

One can say that there is a relationship between reflexivity and objectivity; still, these are two quite different things. When one tries to be objective in research one tries to avoid or to limit the effects of the research upon the situation. However, I believe that even the most objective aims in social research are also reflexive:

*Reflexivity, broadly defined, means a turning back on oneself, a process of self reference. In the context of social research, reflexivity at its most immediately obvious level refer to the ways in which the products of research are affected by the personnel and the process of doing research. These effects are to be found in all phases of the research process from initial selection of topics to final reporting of results (Aull Davies, 1999, p. 4).*

Hopefully, this knowledge about self-reflexivity allows us all, me/the participants/the readers, to better understand the embeddedness of me within this study as well as the knowledge relationships that shape the presented findings.

### **3.2 Background theories**

Gender research is a quite new research area that began to develop in Sweden around 1970-1980. In gender studies the term gender is used to refer to proposed social and cultural constructions of masculinities and femininities. In this context, gender excludes biological differences, to focus on cultural differences.

Gender tends, very often; to be seen in dualistic and oppositional terms with the result that there are just two gendered positions available, the masculine and the feminine, within which men's and women's experience can be located, thus limiting the opportunities for more complex and contradictory gendered positions to be noticed, let alone explored. Within our everyday life, we often associate certain characteristics with either the female or male sex. For example, we might associate competitiveness with males and cooperativeness with females. In a heteropatriarchal society, such gendered associations exist inequitably in a hierarchical relationship. As these stereotypical constructions find their way into public discourse, they affect how we address gender equity issues. Rather than relying on the

male/female sex dichotomy in order to create a more gender-equitable society, I believe we should recognize a continuum of multiple socially-constructed genders (numerous masculinities and femininities) that are context-dependent and in interactional fluid over time and space and not anchored to one's sex category.

A discussion of background theories related to gender and to my studies will put forward a theoretical framework for the continuation of this thesis:

*Gender is a social category which refers to lived relationships between women and men; gender relations are those by means of which sexual divisions and definitions of masculinity and femininity are constructed, organized and maintained. Every aspect of social life is gendered; sexual divisions are constructed and maintained not only within the family and private life, but also in work and employment, in education, in politics, in leisure activities and cultural production. In every aspect of experience whether we are male or female has implications (Bradley, 1996, p. 96).*

### **3.2.1 Gender and Culture**

Culture has many definitions, but here (in this thesis) culture is used to describe the beliefs and practices of a society, particularly where these are seen as closely linked with tradition. Culture is part of the basics of every society, it shapes “the way things are done” and our understanding of why this should be so. Culture, as I see it, is the whole complex of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features that characterize a society or a social group. It includes not only arts and letters, but also modes of life, the fundamental rights of the human being, value systems, traditions and beliefs.

Societies and cultures are not static. They are living entities that are continually renewed and reshaped. Change is shaped by many factors, cultural change occurs as communities and households respond to social and economic shifts associated with, for example new technologies, environmental pressures, (armed) conflicts, development projects, and globalization, and so on. Change also results from deliberate efforts to influence values through changes in the law or government policy. New

cultural definitions are formed through a process in which some segments of society promote change through advocacy and example, while others resist it. Societies are not homogeneous and no assumptions can be made about a consensus on “cultural values.”

Expectations about attributes and behaviours appropriate to women or men and about the relations between women and men, in other words, gender, are shaped by culture. Gender identities and gender relations are critical aspects of culture because they shape the way daily life is lived in the family, but also in the wider community. Gender functions are an organizing principle for a society because of the cultural meanings given to being male or female. This is evident in the division of labour according to gender. In most societies there are clear patterns of “women’s work” and “men’s work,” both in the household and in the wider community and cultural explanations of why this should be (Berg, 2000). The patterns and the explanations differ among societies and change over time. While the specific nature of gender relations varies among societies, the general patterns is that women have less personal autonomy, fewer resources at their disposal, and limited influence over the decision-making processes that shape their societies and their own lives (Berg, 2003). Cultural values are continually being reinterpreted in response to new needs and conditions. Some values are reaffirmed in this process, while others are challenged as no longer appropriate. Changes in gender relations are often highly contested, in part because they have immediate implications for everyone, women and men. This also means that gender roles, and perhaps particularly women’s roles can be symbols of a cultural change or a cultural continuity.

### **3.2.2 Gender and Equality**

Within our everyday language, we often associate certain characteristics with either the female or male sex. For example, we might stereotypically associate competitiveness with males and cooperativeness with females. As these stereotypical constructions find their way into public discourse, they affect how we address gender equity issues. Gender, in general, tends to be seen in dualistic and oppositional terms with the result that there are just two gendered positions available, the masculine and the feminine. This limits the opportunities for more complex and contradictory gendered positions to be noticed. In contrast, keeping the subjects of male and female in play, and

seeing identities as fragmented and in flux, injects a more nuanced notion of gender and opens up greater possibilities of change.

What it means to be a woman has varied throughout history and also varied between countries and cultures. Given that experience is so differently felt by women of different ethnic groups, ages, religions, nationalities or sexual orientations, it is evident that there are multiple versions of view of gender and womanhood. Not only is the category of women as an identifiable collectivity with a common political identity unstable, both our individual self consciousness of ourselves as women is fluid. Most of the time we think of ourselves as a person; moreover, to accept being a woman is to accept being part of a category discursively presented as inferior. Discourses of gender induce us to act in certain ways because we are socially defined as being a man or a woman. For example, despite claims that marriages become more equal and that domestic work are being shared, surveys often and persistently shows that women still take the major share of housework and childcare even when both partners work. In this way the idea of women's responsibility for domestic labour still persists.

I agree with Davies and Banks' (1992) who view the current gender order as problematic and locate the problem in its dualistic and hierarchical nature. The gender structure we construct, directly impacts identities and their relationships. Identity thus makes a difference, for individuals in a group setting and for groups in a social setting:

*Those who grow up in the same environs, in a particular kind of community, perhaps in a neighbourhood where people from only one social class live, share similar experiences. Children are exposed to class related experiences; they imitate their parents' language as well as food habits, leisure activities and much more (Daun, 1996, p. 114)*

My aim was to study the existing gender structure and to explore the continuous construction of a gender identity. To view gender as something that is "done" rather than an essential attribute of an individual, is to place gender within the social realm where individuals accomplish their gender through agreed norms of a local culture. The intention was to look at the empirical data with a critical understanding of how identity forms in interaction with the local culture.

### 3.3 Discourse analysis

Discourses are systems of communication that involve the use of language as well as the activity of everyday life. The word “discourse” means conversation, speech or statement. Discourse analysis is a general term for a number of approaches to analysing written, spoken or signed language use. Discourse analysis is mainly built on the original works of Foucault (1972; 1982; 1990; 1994). According to Foucault (1994) several discourses exist at the same time, but with different levels of importance. Foucault indicates that a discourse is anything that can carry meaning. Language, images, stories, scientific narratives and cultural products are all discourses. By differentiating between temporary and lasting discourses, Foucault means that some discourses disappear when the action that created them terminates. Discourse analysis has been taken up in a variety of social science disciplines, including linguistics, anthropology, sociology, cognitive psychology, social psychology, international relations and communication studies, each of which is subject to its own assumptions, dimensions of analysis, and methodologies. Discourse researchers typically work with texts. Texts include, perhaps most commonly, transcripts of recorded conversations such as interviews. Discourse analysis enables a deep look into an empirical material without losing contradictions and nuances.

Discourse analysis, in my view, is a great tool to interpret the ways in which the respondent shapes her own world by giving it meaning. I have chosen this method to look for contradictions and variations as well as trying to determine the general meanings of the respondent. In this view, language and practical methods construct women’s lives through a form of socialization into ways of acting and thinking. The meanings, however, could change through the influence of alternative discourses:

*Discourse analysis involves trying to develop a theory of language in use. This effort forces the scientist to acquire further reflexivity and self-consciousness around method. When an interview is being analyzed for example, what assumptions are being made about language and how far the talk represents events and mental states? (Wetherell et al. 2001, p. 73)*

Discursive accounts of gender place emphasis on the meanings which are attached to being male or female within society, emphasizing the role of language and of culture (Alsop et al., 2002). Thus, to give a discursive

account of gender is to examine how individuals, within specific social settings, create and negotiate gender. To illustrate this discursive perspective, I will focus on the work of Judith Butler. Drawing on the postmodern and poststructuralist work of Foucault and Derrida, Judith Butler (1999) claims that gender is a performance, continually changing, and not an inherent aspect of whom a person is. This places identities in a state of flux and challenges the belief that they are “persisting through time as the same, unified and internally coherent” (Butler, 1999, p. 22). Butler believes that “identities can come into being and dissolve depending on the concrete practices that constitute them” (Butler, 1999, p 22). Thus to give a discursive account of gender is to examine how individuals, within specific social settings, create and negotiate gender. A respondent interprets her world by situating herself or / becoming situated in different discourses.

In my analysis, I use the language expressed by the respondent to mediate their understandings, thoughts and feelings. In the same way, I use language as to supply the reader with my understanding of the woman’s thoughts, feelings and choices. Different ways of life, and the principle of acting in accordance with society's norms or the beliefs one holds, are related. The first step is to adapt a theory of identity to empirical research; that is, to look at data with a critical understanding of how identity may play a role. At the most basic, identities are theoretical constructions that enable us to read the world in specific ways. Individuals and groups form their own views on what would be appropriate for them:

*The study of minds, selves, and sense making is about construction of psychological order in discourse: the construction of identity, the process of making sense, and the emergence of collective and individual mind. Once more, the interest is in the possibilities that discourse and its normative and conventional organizations make available, and what people do in discourse (Wetherell et al. 2001, p. 5).*

### **3.4 Feminist poststructuralism**

Feminist poststructuralism, as I see it, provides a most important tool to get a thorough understanding of cultural, social and historic occurrences. To understand feminist poststructuralism I first will make a few comments about how poststructuralism evolved from structuralism. Structuralism notes that much of our imaginative world is structured of, and structured by, binary oppositions (for example; being/nothingness, hot/cold, culture/nature). Structuralism, as a term, refers to various theories, many of which share the assumption that structural relationships between concepts vary between different cultures/languages and that these relationships can be usefully exposed and explored. Structuralism could be described as an approach that explores the relationships between fundamental principal elements in language, literature, and other fields upon which some higher mental, linguistic, social, or cultural structures and structural networks are built. Through these networks meaning is produced within a particular person, a system, or a culture. This meaning then frames and motivates the actions of individuals and groups. For the structuralist the individual is shaped by sociological, psychological and linguistic structures over which he/she has no control, but which could be uncovered by using their methods of investigation. Originally labelled a structuralist, the French philosopher and historian Michel Foucault came to be seen as the most important representative of the post-structuralist movement. He agreed that language and society were shaped by rule governed systems, but he disagreed with the structuralists in two ways. Firstly, he did not think that there were definite underlying structures that could explain the human condition and secondly he thought that it was impossible to step outside of discourse and survey the situation objectively.

Poststructuralist theory focuses on language, where language is understood as the place where our sense of ourselves is constructed. According to this, subjectivity is socially produced in language and is a site of conflict between different meanings recognized by different interest groups. Individuals are seen only as inhabiting subject positions within language. Jacques Derrida (1976) developed deconstruction as a technique for uncovering the multiple interpretations of texts. Derrida suggests that all text has ambiguity and because of this the possibility of a final and complete interpretation is impossible. Poststructuralism (alone, without a feminist approach) emphasizes the ways an individual's subjectivity is

formed through language, concluding that there is no knowing, rational subject, only the subject that is constructed through systems of discourse. Poststructuralism's understanding of language comes from the work of structural linguist de Saussure (1959), as well as modifications of his theories by Derrida (1976). In essence, de Saussure's assertion is that words have no intrinsic meaning within themselves. Instead, words acquire meaning from their relationships with other words. In addition to removing any inherent connection between language and reality, Derrida's practices of deconstruction allows us to see that a word's meaning also shifts over time and place and is highly context dependent. Thus, we can never know exactly what something means and we can never get to the bottom of things. Once we see how language is used to create reality, rather than to merely reflect it, we open up greater possibilities for change. Judith Butler (1995, p. 118) has made a summary of how poststructuralism works:

- 1. The experience of being a person is captured in the notion of subjectivity. Subjectivity is constituted through those discourses in which the person is being positioned at any one point in time, both through their own and others acts of speaking/writing. One discourse that contradicts another does not undo one's constitution, another does not undo one's constitution in terms of the original discourse. One's subjectivity is therefore necessarily contradictory. It is also to some extent outside of or larger than those aspect of being that come under rational or conscious control.*
- 2. The "choices" that the individual makes may be based on rational analysis, but desire may subvert rationality. Desires are integral to the various discourses through which each person is constituted and are not necessarily amenable to change through rational analysis. Subject positions that individuals may take up are made available through a variety of discourses. One subject position, more often made available to white middle-class males than to others, is of the agentic person who can make rational choices and act upon them.*
- 3. The concepts of the individual and the collective are not understood in terms of a dualism. The individual is constituted through the discourses of a number of collectives as is the collective itself. One can only ever be what the various discourses make possible, and one's being shifts with the various discourses through which one is spoken into existence.*

*The individual or heroic “I” is understood as a discursive construction, not stemming from the particular characteristics of that person but from the subject position made available to her/him.*

- 4. Fragmentation, contradiction, and discontinuity, rather than continuity of identity, are the focus. Investment in particular discourses, embodiment, and the material force of the discourses through both the individuals and social structures of which we are constituted are the major explanations of the experience of continuity.*
- 5. Stories are the means by which events are interpreted, made tellable, or even livable. All stories are understood as fictions, such fictions proving the substance of lived reality.*

The feminist approach expands on this notion of subjectivity and consciousness, to include the notion of agency and acknowledge the embodiedness of the individual within society. Through feminist analysis, the concepts of discourse and subjectivity take a further step than the poststructuralist focus on language. A feminist poststructuralist sees the need to address the social meanings produced within institutions in society and throughout history and not just in language, and conceive individual subjectivity as existing not solely within language but being shaped by these institutions while at the same time holding the potential of being agents of change (Weedon, 1997).

### **3.4.1 Feminist poststructuralism in practice**

Feminist poststructuralism inspired me in this work. I believe that approaching feminist poststructural theory and practice may help in explaining how the local culture has influenced relationships between women and men in Tornedalen. In this research, the methodology I have used, by which women tell about their experiences is compatible with feminist poststructuralism as explained by Weedon (1997).

Feminist poststructuralism, on my reading, provides opportunities to develop a thorough understanding of cultural, social and historic occurrences. By using the concept of gendered identity and conceptualizing it as a shifting process, feminist poststructuralism provided a useful theoretical framework. From this perspective, the identity of a Tornedalen woman, as any identity,

is not a fixed entity, but rather an unfinished project, which is affected by a variety of competing discourses. A multiple gender identity thus exist which changes over time. This paper also finds many similarities with Ropers-Huilman's (1998, p. 42-43) use of nomadic imagery to describe the notion of multiple identities:

*It is somewhat to look at a borderless map. Many of the landmarks have posted names; indeed, I have lived in places called White and Woman. Once a location, an identity, is a part of me, I cannot disown it. Yet it need not own me. Rather, I can visit, through careful listening and interaction, other locations whose characteristics and opportunities provide lessons and insights as well. While some people travel more frequently and enthusiastically than others, the process of travelling is endless.*

Thus, from a poststructuralist perspective, identity is not a fixed entity, but rather a constantly moving, unfinished project, that includes a range of competing discourses (Britzman, 2000; Jackson, 2004; Sarup, 1993; 1996; Weedon, 1997; 2004).

By approaching feminist poststructuralism in a somewhat untraditional way I will try to expand and elaborate its meaning to become more useful to large data sets. Some authors (e.g., Archer, 2000; 2003; Clegg, 2006), discuss various ways to render feminist poststructuralism more useful by suggesting that it be given a broader meaning by also including common characteristics in the analysis. This is a view that I believe could be important when exploring both differences and similarities in empirical materials. Each and every woman is unique and shaped by various discourses throughout her life. However, when combining all unique women into a group of women we can see both differences and common characteristics in the group. Therefore, I argue here that we have to take a step and go further in order to develop a way of using feminist poststructuralism in a broader sense to make it more useful for large empirical materials. This could be a fruitful new way to approach large data sets. By thinking in new terms of feminist poststructuralism, I argue we can gain important insights into differences in large amounts of empirical material as well as enabling us to delve deeper into other aspects of the data.

Each and every woman is unique and shaped by various discourses throughout her life. However, when combining all unique women into a group of women we can see both differences and common characteristics in the group. Therefore, I argue that we have to take a further step to develop a way of using feminist poststructuralism in a broader sense to make it more useful for large empirical materials.

Through discourse and feministic poststructural analysis I have tried to express my understandings of the respondents; on the one hand, they have common characteristics shared with many women, and on the other hand they are different and express many different and own views. This means that each woman is in fact part of a bigger (and common) context, but still has many underlying differences that cannot be ignored in analysis. I believe one has to see all possibilities opened up in feministic poststructural analysis. Not only can the differences be important to my analysis, but also the common characteristics. By using this reasoning I believe we give the analysis a more fruitful outcome.

### **3.5 Discussion of theories**

Finding value in various theories, the lives of women in Tornedalen are analysed. A feminist poststructuralist approach to this research addresses some of the difficulties of the seemingly contradictory points of view held by the participants. The data from the interviews were sorted into themes related to gender and to women's lives, and by incorporating quotes from this material into the written presentations; it has been possible for the women's own perspectives to be heard. Doing this research has meant drawing from a variety of theoretical explanations, relating them to the women's own accounts of their lives.

I view gender as something that is “done” rather than some essential attribute of an individual. By that I place gender within the social realm where individuals accomplish their gender through agreed social norms. The gender structure we construct, a structure that is filled with inequitable relations, directly impacts gender identities:

*The very subjectivity (or subjective experience of being a woman) and the very identity of women is constituted by women's position. However, this view should not imply that the*

*concept of women is determined solely by external elements and that the woman herself is merely a passive recipient of an identity created by these forces. Rather, she herself is art of the historicized, fluid movement, and she therefore actively contributes to the context of within her position can be defined (Alcoff, 1994, p. 434)*

This study utilizes feminist poststructural accounts of gender in order to facilitate my understanding. In turn, this holds the possibility of contributing novel perspectives about the issue of gender equity from a unique standpoint. Me as a researcher holds a great responsibility in shaping how the science question is portrayed and how the results come out as well as how the research answers are formulated. I believe, this holds true for any researcher regardless of their relationships to science data (qualitative or quantitative).

## **4. Materials and narratives**

In this chapter, I will explain how the empirical material was gathered. During 1995-96, I worked in a regional women's project called "women, culture and future in Tornedalen". The original aim of the regional project was to "visualize" the women in this area and to gather historic information about women's lives. Women history and life-conditions in Tornedalen were to be documented through life-history interviews. Another, original goal of the project was to find possible improvements for the lives of women in Tornedalen.

The interviews became narratives as told to me of various aspects of the women's lives. Overall, the materials form narratives that build on women's experiences and provide a treasure of women's thoughts, views and experiences. The historical perspective of the material is of utmost importance, where the narratives refer to a time span from about the 1950s to 1995-96. This time span forms much of the foundation for the different themes studied and presented in the various papers in this thesis.

### **4.1 Interviews**

In the start of the project "women, culture, and future in Tornedalen" it was needed to organize and plan the project. I supervised the project and had help from three women who I educated in interview techniques: I made these three interviewers very much aware of the fact that interviewing participants is not a simple process of information gathering that occurs in some context-free situation (hermetically sealed off from the rest of the world). Instead, I informed them that the subjectivities of all involved, the time and location of the interview, and the subject matter all influence the interviews.

Each interviewer on the team was being responsible for a certain number of interviews. We gained entry into the different homes after talking with the women about some of the goals of the project. Most women decided to take part and we were happy to feel a great enthusiasm from many of the women. The interviewer went out to respondents, first talked to them to make them feel at ease and then made semi-planned interviews. We used interactive methods, similar to Gunnarsson (2006), and made all efforts possible to

interact with the respondents in a way not to disturb the naturalness in discussion. All interviews took place in the women's own homes to set their minds at rest and enhance their confidence. The interviews lasted, generally, from two to four hours. Most women were pleased to have the opportunity to tell their narratives and were impressed that they were listened to. Ethical practices of doing research were followed, including taking measures to maintain confidentiality.

I, myself, conducted numerous (38) semi-structured interviews with respondents. Informal conversations during the interview were common, both when the tape-recorder were on and when they told me to switch it off. The nature of the interviews did not change as the study progressed, even though looking back at this time it is quite possible that some of us (the ones who did the interviews) put more emphasis on specific questions than others, while some may have used a more open interview technique. Still, the collaborative meaning of making interviews was that we all used the same technique and guided respondents in the same manner.

The questions were broad and, in the main, the respondents were free to discuss whatever was on their minds. Sometimes, however, interviews had to be guided in the direction of the focus of the project's aims although the questions were still open-ended, allowing for new insights to emerge.

The interviews were recorded on tape and then transcribed. From the transcriptions I went through each of the participants' narratives, sometimes checking back with some of the women to ensure that they were appropriate. The interviews revealed lots of information about various aspects of gender relations. The interviews included narratives told to me of their lives, anecdotes of particular events, and lots of information and knowledge related to gender and equality. The narratives included both modern and historic (over the last about 50 years) reflections.

## **4.2 Observations**

Over the course of the twelve months project in where I lived in Tornedalen, I spent an extensive amount of time in different homes and out in the local society observing and interacting with different women. I observed people and events around me in the local society. When I got home, I wrote down "memory notes" of what I just had experienced. Although there were quite a

few observations I have only involved this as a minor part in this thesis; the absolute major part of the results comes from the interviews.

### **4.3 Respondents**

The target group was women of all ages who lived in Tornedalen. The respondent's ages varied from 17 to 81 years old; and a total of 103 women were interviewed in the project. Of the 103 respondents, most were married or lived together in a close relationship with a man (63 women). A few women were single (14 women); some of these were divorced (five women). Many of the oldest women interviewed had become widows (26 women). Overall, the women represented an average group of adult women of all ages in Tornedalen.

### **4.4 Narrative/data/text selection**

In line with the theoretical position I have adopted in my research, the empirical material on which my papers are based on, seek to explore the thoughts, meanings, attitudes and knowledge of the people that are studied in relation to their lived experience in Tornedalen.

Texts selected from the interviews were presented as excerpts in the different papers in this thesis. The different themes selected for the various papers made selection of data natural. As expected, the narratives included many various views of the themes chosen. The primary objective of the text selection was to adequately answer the research questions in the different papers. The selection of quotes presented in the different papers was primarily driven by the various views on the research question.

Data collection revolved around exploring the participants' understandings of gender, as well as their own shifting gendered subjectivities. Overall, I somewhat looked for interesting themes in which gender intersected with local culture in ways that either sustained or challenged the existing gender structure. In other words, conceptualizing gender as a shifting effect of the local culture, I looked for how the language and cultural practices was negotiated through the time period studied. I allowed myself to choose themes that interested me. This process of simultaneously collecting and analyzing data is often recommended for qualitative research:

*At the onset of a qualitative study, the investigator knows what the problem is and has selected a sample to collect data in order to address the problem. But the research does not know what will be discovered, what or whom to concentrate on, or what the final analysis will be like. The final product is shaped by the data that are collected and the analysis that accompanies the entire process (Merriam, 1998, p. 162)*

Recognizing “productive problems” was an important guide in my narrative/data/text selection processes and guided me to choose data while also trying to find interesting themes.

#### **4.5 Historical perspective**

The material includes a historical perspective, where the narratives refer to a time span through the middle (and sometimes even earlier) to the end of the twentieth century. It is my view that very little information from before 1950 is present in the narratives. The absolute majority of narratives refer to events spanning a time beginning in the 1950s and ending with present day presentation from the late twentieth century (1995-1996), at the time of the interview.

In society as a whole, and in more recent history, the gender function of women has changed greatly. Traditionally, women were typically involved in domestic tasks emphasizing child care, and did not enter paid employment. For some women, ideals and economic necessity may have compelled them to seek employment outside the home. Pateman (1997) argued that the peak of modern patriarchal institutions was between the 1840s and the 1970s, a period in which the marriage contract played an important role in shaping male-female relations and female citizenship. Since then, there have been major changes in social and gender relations. One of the most significant of these has been the changing relations between men and women in the family (Dench, 1997). Women’s structured inequality is now contrasted with evidence of major changes in personal relationships and gender expectations. “But perhaps most important of all, the influence of feminist ideas has so permeated our culture that the very legitimacy of the old style sexual contract has come under unprecedented challenge from the majority of

women who now reject the idea that a man's place is at work and women's place is at home" (Wilkinson, 1997, p. 97).

Over the time span studied (about 1950-1995) there have thus been major changes in society, including transition from a time when almost all women were housewives to later times when this has become more and more rare. A change which should have had major effect on identity shaping processes in Tornedalen.

## **5. Research results**

The papers that constitute this thesis are here summarized. I choose to present the different papers by focusing on the main findings and conclusions of each paper. The summary is mainly built on excerpts from the various papers.

### **5.1 Paper I: Strong, aware, and unequal: women's lives in Tornedalen (Northernmost borderland of Sweden)**

#### *Introduction*

The general idea of this paper is to study equality issues and to explore gender functions in the Tornedalen area. The study focuses on women's views of their own lives and how the local culture forms identity. By analysing a large number of women's narratives through approaching feminist poststructuralism, the analysis focuses on how women have adapted their lives according to the norms of the local society.

For this study, I analyse narratives of women living in Tornedalen and I attempt to understand their lives through their own points of view. By the time of the interview, most women had undergone many experiences in their family and public life and had developed different ways of understanding them, experiences that might seem to contradict one another. Of course, the world has gone through a great deal of social and historical change in their lifetimes. Attitudes towards the nuclear family, working wives and mothers, and sexuality have changed considerably. In today's world, women in general have multiple functions in the family, in social life, and at work. Thus identity shaping processes and factors may have changed considerably over time.

Many Tornedalen women have, for all or parts of their lives, been housewives and responsible for childcare and housekeeping. In many of the narratives, they explain themselves as strong and being the backbone of their families and responsible for getting things to work at home. Many narratives also identify a masculine culture where men are the ones who have the power in a relationship. Traditional leisure activities, done by most men, such as hunting and fishing, are something that many women say they dislike. Many women express a quite negative view of men and talk about

Tornedalen men in a very generalized and pessimistic way. However, other women have a quite positive view of Tornedalen men. This view is almost exclusively expressed when women mention that their own husband is different from other men and that they live in a more equal relationship than other couples in Tornedalen.

### *The local culture of Tornedalen*

Women's identities form through experiences in their lives together with influences of change coming from the world outside of Tornedalen. Many similarities and quite a few dissimilarities exist in the 103 narratives when talking about the culture of Tornedalen. The respondents often explain the local culture of Tornedalen as being traditional, explaining how division of gender functions follows an old-fashioned way that women take complete care and responsibility for homes and children. On the other hand, there are women who signal a deep concern in explaining how society has, over the years, changed towards more equality and that men and women now (1995-1996) have more similar gender functions. There are also a few women who want to hang on to traditional gender functions. These women are of varying ages and say that they do not want any influence from the outside world and that they want to maintain traditional gender functions. It is possible that these women perceive a frightening threat that will change their traditional and highly regarded values.

A multiple process influences the formation of identity. The woman knows from tradition what expects of a woman. In many of the interviews women explain what women's tasks are (and what they are not). This knowledge seems to help create a pattern of normalized relationships in Tornedalen. Certain manners and performances are normal, and even natural, in this context. Furthermore, normal or even common is something of value. A situation seen as normal for a husband and wife is thus good and something to strive for. The power of normality may influence equality and thus identity in many ways in societies and cultures. For example, if an equal division of power and labour is the normal situation of a society, then it can seem to be something desirable. On the other hand, if the normal situation of a local society is inequality, it may be more complicated. Creating a normal identity in such a context may reflect gender inequality. This is something that women bring up in the narratives and claim that the local society demands certain behaviour from women and certain behaviour from men. When looking at Tornedalen relationships many women rooted their

explanations within their relationships seen from their point of view. Some women feel that their husbands dominate the family. Some women said that they like it this way; other women felt this to be a great injustice.

When women try to explain how inequality persists in Tornedalen, they most often mention how mothers have spoiled their sons and encouraged them to accept an understanding of gender relationships where no household tasks are involved.

### *Identity as a process*

By using the concept of gendered identity and conceptualizing it as a shifting process (Sarup, 1996), feminist poststructuralism provides a theoretical framework which was used as a guide in this study. Poststructuralism challenges the very ways in which we talk about our experiences and ourselves. The culturally specific resources made available at any one moment of interpretation will determine how an individual makes sense out of life and self. Poststructuralism argues that no one is “the simple sum of a set of fixed experiences”. Instead, one shifts and changes as one gains access to new sets of meanings. An identity is a constantly renegotiated effect, an ongoing process rather than a predetermined essence such that “the repudiation of a fixed self means that gender is not fixed, but that the self is positioned in gender discourse” (Francis, 1999, p. 383). When reflecting on the identity of the Tornedalen women, it is valuable to take the Davies (2000c, p. 89) view into consideration where she remarks that the “constitutive force of each discursive practice lies in its provision of subject positions”. In other words, each discourse provides an array of normal, understandable identities with which individuals can identify themselves and take up. Francis (1999, p. 383) provides the useful example of how two competing discourses can give very different accounts of what it means to be a woman. “A housewife, for example, could be positioned as fulfilling her natural role through traditionalist discourses of gender essentialism, or could be positioned as a victim of oppression in some types of feminist discourse”. In the Tornedalen narratives similar competing discourses lead to, for example, women who are impressed by masculine men who dominate the family, whilst at the same time, seemingly, expressing concerns for equality issues. This can also involve women who are impressed by other women who are exceptionally good at taking care of the home, and at the same time challenging the entire community that holds on to traditional beliefs and old-fashioned gender functions.

To take up a particular subject position is to become subjected to that discourse. Individuals are not “passively shaped by active others, rather they actively take up as their own the discourses through which they are shaped” (Davies and Banks, 1992, p. 3). This process of subjection is double edged. In one sense, it provides the individual with a productive means of making sense of the world. On the other hand, it limits and sets boundaries to this process, constructing other ways of knowing as marginal and out of reach: “the assumption by the individual of a particular form of subjectivity is at the expense of the qualities, structures of feeling and thought offered in competing forms of subjectivity and denied by the one that the individual assumes” (Weedon, 1997, p. 92). Thus, from a poststructuralist perspective, identity is not a fixed entity, but rather a constantly moving, unfinished project, that includes a range of competing discourses (Britzman, 2000; Jackson, 2004; Sarup, 1993; 1996; Weedon, 1997; 2004).

Identity processes involving how to understand reality shape the identity of the Tornedalen woman; how these women see their place in society and in the family and how they form their dreams. Moreover, their motherhood, age, and interests combine with other identity forming agent that also change with time. There are, of course, many more ways in which they construct their identity as a female, as a mother, as a grandmother, or as a wife all through traditional commonsense discourses. Nevertheless, the woman also challenges gender norms through very explicit thoughts about what it means to be a woman in Tornedalen. This interplay of working for change whilst also resisting change in many ways is not uncommon (Cockburn, 1991; Acker 1992; Wahl and Höök, 2007). Many Tornedalen women, for example, hope for a more equal future; and at the same time (and even the same woman) express deep concerns as to how women should take the most responsibility and care of children and be fully responsible for household work.

A variety of ways create, as effect of practice, changing identities. The resultant gendered negotiations affect a woman’s own identity constructions, and there is an intimate relationship between identity and the way society is progressing (including changes from the 1950s to the 1990s). The women interviewed seemed to indicate both being shaped by current dominant discourses and at the same time challenging those beliefs by virtue of their actions and in some instances through their ways of thinking about their lives. By looking at women of different ages, it seems that a middle-aged woman (40-60 years old) could have a view that the next generation (her

daughters and sons) would live in more equal relationships. However, the youngest women (20-25 years old) often indicate that they live in relationships that they feel are unequal.

By elaborating on Weedon's (1997) explanation of functions of discourse within poststructuralism, I shift to her explanation of how discourses shape identity. Weedon (1997) suggests that discursive fields consist of competing ways of giving meaning to the world. They offer the individual a range of modes of subjectivity. Within a discursive field, such as for example the family, not all discourses carry equal weight or power. Some discourses are likely to be marginal to existing practice and dismissed by the hegemonic system of meanings and practices as irrelevant or bad (Weedon, 1997). Weedon (1997) describes a process by which competing discourses fight for the manner in which people make sense of their experiences, thus the very way in which they define themselves.

This means that personal identity, social identity, and cultural identity combine to make up many multiple identities. The numbers of multiple gendered identities are probably as many as the respondents in this study and also changing with time. However, some part of gender identity is (or maybe seen as) common to most respondents. I believe that also the common characteristics of identity can be helpful in determining the meanings of the respondent's narratives, where each respondent also carries her own (multiple) identity.

#### *Culture and the Tornedalen women*

Being constituted and constituting oneself as a Tornedalen woman involves what Britzman (2000, p 31) has talked about in terms of "making sense of ourselves through the construction of the other". The women seem to be preoccupied by imagery of what the local society expects and/or demands of them. In this study, women identify themselves as Tornedalen women, as it sometimes seems that to have more in common with female youth than with men of the same age. They also identify themselves geographically, as women living in Tornedalen and thus being specific Tornedalen women. Given that very few women move into Tornedalen it is difficult to tell whether these "new" Tornedalen women have different views than those who have always lived there.

In a gendered perspective, the interviews often reveal feelings of being in a subordinate position as women in relation to men. Women often refer to

expectations from others, trying to explain how the local culture puts pressure on preserving traditional gender functions. Furthermore, the local culture seems to influence how people look upon themselves, which also affects young people growing up and even the very few people who move into the local society of Tornedalen. This altogether seems to create identities by strong influence of local norms of normality.

Many common gender identity characteristics exist, including feeling as a Tornedalen woman and thereby having an identity which comprises (a feeling of) being a strong woman (to be able to live in Tornedalen) and (a feeling of) being very much aware of (and claiming) local gender inequality.

The importance of being strong is mentioned in most of the narratives; indeed many women identify themselves as being particularly strong. It is commonly argued that the women had to be strong to cope with children and farm work as well as the pressures of the local society. Some women see mental strength as most important (in order to be able to cope with men and inequality). Other women mention physical strength as most important (in order to take care of children and farming).

A clear awareness of equality issues and of local inequality exists. Women have gained knowledge about equality issues from many different sources, including friends, family, workplaces, and the media. A woman's particular life experience as a citizen, for example, would also influence her understanding of gender. Altogether, the knowledge of the participants in this study has produced multiple truths about gender and about women's lives as they grow older. As would be expected, experiences of the women differed as did their understandings of equality issues and ways of talking about it. Most women in Tornedalen seem to have a good knowledge of equality issues; however, in their own words, many believe equality has not changed significantly in Tornedalen from the 1950s to the 1990s.

The diverse views of the women in this study indicate that there is not one way of experiencing or thinking and acting in respect to equality issues. Women make sense of their experiences through discourses that are internalized and which seem a natural part of their lives. It is possible that women who had a strong urge for equality moved away from Tornedalen and that these women in fact made their progressive movement towards a more equal life through the act of moving from Tornedalen. Otherwise, very few of the respondents could be referred (in their own words) to having

taken strong serious action in favour of more equality. However, if we instead look at this in a broader perspective, there may be a few women who left their husbands with the aim to live without a man and thus changed to live a life without inequality. Still, some women struggle for a change; while many others are happy with their situations. A few women may also have some doubt about the need for more equality in society. There are also women who seem to be afraid of change; these women also express a deep concern that no one (from outside of Tornedalen) should come and tell them how they should live in Tornedalen.

### *Transition in time*

It may be interesting to note that the gender relations and gender functions expressed in narratives representing times around the 1950s often are quite similar to those expressed in narratives representing the middle of the 1990s. This might seem surprising considering the fact that so much has happened in society over the fifty years, including transitions from an almost exclusively rural to a more urbanized life (located within the countryside setting): from a time when almost all women were full-time housewives to a time when this has become a rarity. There are a few women who explain that changes in favour of more gender equality have occurred, but the vast majority of Tornedalen women consider themselves as living in an unequal world, where men are favoured and have a number of advantageous.

Some fifty years ago women in this area saw themselves as fully responsible for the household and all work connected to this; this could even extend to handling animals, including milking of the cows. The transition from the 1950s to the 1990s has meant that professional tasks have changed considerably, with most women in the 1990s having regular jobs, seeking an education or becoming unemployed. Family life and professional life today are complementary (e.g., Blätte-Mink et al, 2000). This means that women most often have double or dual responsibilities. Before these changes, women perhaps had clearer responsibilities; today, a challenge of different values perhaps, creates problems over unclear responsibilities and double workloads.

The traditional culture still exists in Tornedalen with a pressure seemingly (but not much talked about) coming from the older generations to keep things as they have been. The women in Tornedalen have identities that might have become more fragmented over time, being in many ways shaped

by local cultural traditions. It seems that the pressure of the local culture is indeed important in shaping gender functions and identities.

## **5.2 Paper II: “May I buy strawberries?” A study of control of money and household spending in marriage in the northernmost borderland of Sweden**

### *Introduction*

No questions regarding economy were asked in the interviews. However, many women brought the subject of economy to the surface. This study focus on the women’s own experiences of the money in their households and the control of money in marriage.

It is a complex and multifaceted story to follow the process of economy in the household. Therefore, the following discussion is targeted towards gender (and power) relationships in marriages. Marriage today is usually thought of as a relationship between two equal partners based on love, intimacy and companionship. Over several decades, however, sociological research has accumulated which demonstrate that marital relations do not always live up to this ideal, that gender inequalities pervade the most personal of relationships and that what happens within the private life of each couple cannot be understood as separable from the wider social inequalities and cultural mores in which it is embedded. There has also been increasing awareness of the diversity of family and household forms and the complexity of marital and non-marital couplings and uncouplings (Smart and Neal, 1999). Drawing on existing research Bernard (2002), argues that the husband’s marriage and wife’s marriage are not identical, that structurally and experientially they differ, so that the accounts each partner gives of the “reality” of their marriage are commonly discrepant. Delphy and Leonard (2002) describe how wives “should make a house a home: They manipulate the environment to make it comfortable, warm and undemanding. They do (should) not complain, or engage in controversial activities which could embarrass their husband in the community. In other words, a wife should look after her husband’s life so he is free to devote himself to living: to being an efficient worker or entrepreneur, and when he is not doing that, to enjoying his free time”.

*The Tornedalen marriage and a “sexual contract”*

The concept of the sex-gender system or a “sexual contract” refers to principles of organizing relationships between the sexes in a given culture. According to Yvonne Hirdman (1990), the basic principles of the Western sex-gender system are the logic of the separation of the sexes (dichotomy) and the logic of the male norm (hierarchy). Dichotomy is here referring to all the various practices of separating the sexes, for example division of labour and differences in clothing. Gender hierarchy sets men as the norm and treats women as exceptions of the norm and also places a higher value on the male gender. According to Hirdman, the rule of dichotomy generates and legitimizes hierarchy. Dichotomy comes first and hierarchy comes second. Therefore, changes in arrangements of separation lead to changes in the value disparity between the sexes, Hirdman argues.

The Tornedalen narratives support a view of a sex-gender system or sexual contract which subordinates the women. This sexual contract shaped the relations between men and women, providing the conditions for the operation of a social contract. Pateman (1988) points out that without an understanding of the relationship between; on the one hand, the processes of the historical legacy of women’s subjection to men through a sexual contract, political theorists would be unable to describe the social order. When reflecting on the nature of the sexual contract Pateman (1997) argued that the peak of modern patriarchal institutions was between the 1840s and the 1970s –a period in which the marriage contract played an important role in shaping male-female relations and female citizenship. Since then, there have been major changes in the social and sexual contracts. One of the most significant of these has been the changing relations between men and women in the family (Dench, 1997). Dench emphasizes in “Rewriting the Sexual Contract” (Dench, 1997), that late modernity has witnessed major changes in how men and women relate to each other. Moving away from the notion of a contract as formal rights and statuses, Dench (1997) argues that there are now numerous sexual divisions of labour in the public and family spheres. Women’s structured inequality is now contrasted with evidence of major changes in personal relationships and gender expectations. “But perhaps most important of all, the influence of feminist ideas has so permeated our culture that the very legitimacy of the old style sexual contract has come under unprecedented challenge from the majority of women who now reject the idea that a man’s place is at work and women’s place is at home” (Wilkinson, 1997).

Catherine Hakim (1997), reports a complex situation. On the one hand, most European countries have social customs and public policies that favour directly or indirectly a single form of sexual control, either through what she calls an egalitarian symmetrical role model of the family or a clear division of labour between the sexes. The EU appears to be favouring the rapid adoption of the egalitarian symmetrical role model of the family developed, for example, in Sweden. However, there is no evidence that one or the other model is to be found in practice. The evidence suggests that an increasing diversity of models of “sexual contract” can be found in the various populations.

#### *Males in Tornedalen and hegemonic masculinity*

Several narratives suggest that (many) males in the Tornedalen area have typical masculine interests such as hunting and fishing as well as having dominant behaviours. These males may reflect to hegemonic masculinity which can be defined as the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women. Hegemony relates to cultural dominance in the society as a whole. Within that overall framework there are specific gender relations of dominance and subordination between groups of men. Normative definitions of masculinity, as noted especially in Tornedalen, face the problem that not many men actually meet the normative standards. In the local Tornedalen culture there exist a negative expression “knapsu”: a word used for men who do household tasks such as e.g. housecleaning, doing the dishes etc. in a household. A “knapsu” in this local culture is considered to be both “feminine and strange”. However, the total number of men rigorously practising the hegemonic pattern in its entirety may be quite small. Yet the majority of men gain from its hegemony, since they benefit from the patriarchal dividend, the advantage men in general gain from the overall subordination of women (Connell, 1987, 1995).

The study suggests that women’s lives have been ruled by norms and values which are more adapted to male interests in such a way that they affirm male dominance while limiting and subordinating the female sphere. Some of the narratives also illustrate how women have used more or less indirect, strategies to attempt to compensate for these limitations, and also how they have tried to defend certain values which some women were able to develop better in their own “zone”. Male desires for hegemony and female indoctrination may not be the only explanation. To the extent that men have

tried to keep women in the place where they best served men's interests, they have been well assisted by the traditional local culture. Throughout the entire period under study there seem to have been, among several of the respondents, attempts to break out of the confinement of traditional culture.

### *Conclusions*

Ages of respondents varied significantly and their words represent either the present-day situation or a situation that occurred sometime over the last fifty years. Despite historical changes, this study suggests that there is a strong gender difference in household spending (and household tasks). It is here concluded that patterns of spending were differentiated by gender. Women were in many cases likely to get household money for paying for food (from their husbands or from their collective budget), but did have very little to spend for their own personal needs. Responsibility for spending varied according to the control of the money within the household. The results support a view of a sex-gender system or sexual contract (Hirdman, 1990; Pateman 1988) which subordinates the women. In many cases, the sexual contract (male dominance) in marriage was clearly evident in terms of household money since women took much less for their personal needs than did the men. The gendered differences could refer to culturally formed patterns of masculinity (or even hegemonic masculinity) and femininity, that is, forms of behaviour of men and women, respectively, explained by a cultural-lag. It seems that the female and male roles have been strongly cemented in this part of Sweden during the late twentieth century. The conclusion is that old traditional gender roles have existed during the late twentieth century and do still exist in this part of Sweden. It is suggested that, in at least some marriages, a strong gender inequality (including household money) exist in the local culture of Tornedalen in the northernmost borderland of Sweden.

## **5.3 Paper III: To be “a real woman”; local culture and gender roles in the northernmost Sweden (Tornedalen area)**

### *Introduction*

Many women brought the subject of gender relations to the surface. This study focus on the women's own experiences of the gender relations.

The interviews reveal a complex story where gender equality is a subject, which is of concern to most women. Many of the women have a fairly good knowledge of gender and equality issues. Set apart from the context of the women's lives, the narratives reveal little about from what times the thoughts were perceived. It is sometimes difficult to tell if the women speak about the present day situation (1995-96) or situations occurring many years ago.

Different ways of thinking about gender issues are observed. The narratives illustrate many similarities, as well as some diverse views. However, there seems to be somewhat of a resistance in society, both among men and among many women to take action towards gender equality. To many women taking care of the family and keeping the house cleaned seem to be of great(est) importance. Women are also impressed of other women who are exceptionally good at taking care of the household and these women seem to be much less impressed of women who make professional carriers. There often seem to be a strong envy targeted towards women who “make a perfect home”. Most women have also accepted the tradition of old fashioned men. Many women know (believes) that equality has gone further in other parts of the country.

#### *A feminist poststructuralist approach*

A feminist poststructuralist approach to this study addresses the various views expressed in the narratives. The data from the interviews are related to women's lives, and by incorporating typical gender related quotes from the large material into this presentation; it has been possible to present the women's own perspectives. Analyzing the experiences and perceptions of the respondents, from a feminist poststructuralist perspective, the collection of differing quotes of women is fairly appropriate.

Many different experiences and views combine to make up an individual multiple thinking and various thoughts. Different expectations, needs as well as psychological strength also have an influence on how individuals view their own world. Rather than to analyze the quotes in detail, the women's views and personal experience can be left for readers to contemplate and draw from to form their own understandings. The collection of quotes about homecare and equality issues made by the participants in the study is just a few examples of all what was mentioned in the large material. However, the selection represents most of the Tornedalen women's concerns, their experiences, and their ways of perceiving equality issues. The women's own narratives give us insight into how women think and into their lives as wives,

mothers and as persons. The aim was to include a diverse selection of women of different ages, reflecting a variety of experiences and ways of thinking, and I believe the study achieved this objective in this research, the life story methodology used, by which women tell about their experiences, is compatible with feminist poststructuralism as explained by Weedon (1987).

The different ways of life, and the principle of acting in accordance with society's norms or the beliefs one holds, are related to the notion of discourse. Discourses are systems of communication - of language - understood as "competing ways of giving meaning to the world" (Weedon, 1987, p.34). The subject of women and housework is complex, but discourses on this subject change, as society as a whole move forward. It might be unusual for women, in society as a whole, to hold on to the traditional gender roles today.

#### *Women's lives through their lived lifespan*

Emily Martin (1987, p. 22) asks; "is there anything approaching a woman's alternative vision of modern existence, a woman's ideology, or are there many alternative visions, refractions of women's many different places in the social order?" This is as a complex question, which may be answered in a complex way. For this study, I used narratives of women and attempted to understand their lives from their own points of view, and have here presented my findings. By the time of the interview most women have undergone many experiences in their family and public life and have developed different ways of understanding them, some of which might seem to contradict others' ways of understanding. The world has naturally gone through a great deal of social and historical change in their lifetimes. Attitudes towards the nuclear family, working wives and mothers, and sex have changed considerably. Today, women's lives can seem fragmented as they deal with the multiple roles in family, social and work. Nevertheless, in what ways, and how much change is required of the society as a whole? Moreover, how much has changed in the local society? In addition, what have been the results for these women?

I have included here samples of the variety of perspectives that women have revealed to me about their life experience of gender relations, and have explained how I treated the interview data in the original research, presenting it in ways that, to me, seemed the most appropriate, given the similarity and differences among them. From the point of view of Tornedalen women in general, acknowledging that there are different

perspectives and that women can have a variety of experiences related to their gender role.

### *The construction of the Tornedalen women*

Being constituted and constituting oneself as a Tornedalen woman entails what Britzman (2000, p. 31) has talked about in terms of: “Making sense of ourselves through the construction of the other”. What preoccupies the women is the imagery of what the local society expects and/or demands. They conceive themselves as Tornedalen women with, as it sometimes seems, more in common with female children and youth than with men in the same age. This is probably because this is a subject position which is more readily at hand; i.e. that they are more familiar with the gender role. The interviews often reveal the subordinate position of women, in relation to men/husbands.

Women often expressed what others expected from them by others. They also expressed what they expected from themselves; that they as women wanted to have the perfect home by being “a real woman” and was proud of it.

However, (silent) protests against inequality and local culture traditions have been common. The women live in a reality of local culture traditions and accept this (at least on the surface), but wishes for something else. Moving from Tornedalen (which is common among young women) might also have been such a protest.

### *Getting to be “a real woman”; desire and resistance*

In the following explanation, I try to give a background to the Tornedalen production of the “real women”: Agency, writes, Ellsworth (1997), is resistance to the banalities of normalisation and the resistance to a perfect fit between social norms, how we feel, and what we want to become. However, agency might even be a more complicated matter in terms of the subjectification process suggested by Foucault (1990) and Butler (1997). What we want is most often also, what we resist. And, whatever practice we chose to take up, and thereby also subject ourselves to, we will also to some extent resist, both as a result of its normalising effect on us, but also as an effect of our inability to perform and repeat it correctly (Butler 1995, 1997). We have to be aware of not replacing one set of truths with another, where the individual subject is emancipated as she/he becomes the judge of her/his own as well as others behaviours and beliefs in relation to the new set of truths. The feminist poststructural approach makes us aware of that we have

to move into a more complex understanding of how the subject is subjected and subjecting her-/himself in a process where, as Butler (1995, p. 237) states “submission and mastery take place simultaneously, and it is this paradoxical simultaneity that constitutes the ambivalence of subjection. //.....// The lived simultaneity of submission as mastery, and mastery as submission, is the condition of possibility for the subject itself “. Delphy and Leonard (2002, p. 138) describe how wives “should make a house a home: They manipulate the environment to make it comfortable, warm and undemanding. They do (should) not complain, or engage in controversial activities which could embarrass their husband in the community. In other words, a wife should look after her husband’s life so he is free to devote himself to living: to being an efficient worker or entrepreneur, and when he is not doing that, to enjoying his free time”. Pateman (1997) argued that the peak of modern patriarchal institutions was between the 1840s and the 1970s –a period in which the marriage contract played an important role in shaping male-female relations and female citizenship. Since then, there have been major changes in the social and sexual contracts. One of the most significant of these has been the changing relations between men and women in the family (Dench, 1997). Women’s structured inequality is now contrasted with evidence of major changes in personal relationships and gender expectations. “But perhaps most important of all, the influence of feminist ideas has so permeated our culture that the very legitimacy of the old style sexual contract has come under unprecedented challenge from the majority of women who now reject the idea that a man’s place is at work and women’s place is at home” (Wilkinson, 1997, p. 97).

The study suggests that women’s lives are ruled by norms and values, which are more adapted to a time when most women were housewives. Some of the narratives also illustrate how women have used strategies to compensate for this, and also how they carry a protest in themselves. To the extent that tradition has kept women in their traditional house caring role, they have been well assisted by the traditional local culture. Throughout the entire period under study there seem to have been, among several of the respondents, attempts to break out of the confinement of traditional culture. However, breaking traditions seem to have been difficult in Tornedalen, for example, if a woman were seen to be different from the other, their credibility might be damaged.

The paper includes quotes from life-history interviews with Tornedalen women. Ages of respondents varied significantly. For this study, women

between the ages of nineteen and seventy-eight described their understandings of their place in society, and in so doing, created a text of alternative visions. Their words represent either the present-day situation (1995-96) or a situation that occurred sometime over the last fifty years. A feminist structural approach helped in addressing the various views of the respondents. In general, the different quotes presented makes sense in each and one of them, but also as a combined group together. The gender relations expressed in narratives from the 1950<sup>th</sup> are often surprisingly similar to those expressed in narratives from the 1990<sup>th</sup>. Good knowledge of equality issues was a more or less unified phenomenon, but combined a multiplicity of views. This study covers a period from the 1950<sup>th</sup> to the 1990<sup>th</sup>, a period that have seen a rapid change in society. Encompassing a time when modernization has acted to bring women to work. In Tornedalen, this has resulted in a change of thinking about gender equality issues. However, this has not resulted in a true change of gender roles related to housekeeping and so on.

The conclusions of the study suggest that a multiplicity of views do exist, however many similarities may be seen. For many of the women in this study house caring was indeed of great value in their way of thinking about themselves and their lives. For each of them, I believe, self-realization was an important goal, although the ways they sought to achieve fulfilment varied somewhat. In society today, women can have the opportunity to contribute from their own knowledge and life experience, and from their skills and talents. Women described their place in the family and the local society. Very often women had to act in a certain manner to fit into society. This paper has identified both desire and resistance of women to take active part in the social formation of their gender role.

The processes involved in conserving gender relations may be explained by local culture traditions. Most women were aware of gender equality issues including their own situations. However, instead of working towards equality, the women themselves may have acted to preserve traditional and unequal gender roles. The women seem to have guarded their gender roles by exercising group-pressure towards each other. One example is the female idolization of “a real woman” meaning women who cleans their houses very carefully, makes well-prepared food and always keeps the children neat and tidy. The local culture has influenced the women’s lives through all generations covered in this study. The strong norm system with its cemented

gender roles may have been hard to accept for young women growing up in Tornedalen.

#### **5.4 Paper IV: Creating inequality by spoiling their sons? – Women’s views of mothers bringing up children in Tornedalen (Northernmost Sweden)**

##### *Introduction*

The aim of this study was to shed light on gender differences associated with parenting as expressed by the women themselves. The focus the analysis was set to women’s views of how mothers has brought up their children since this was commonly mentioned in the narratives. The material was analyzed in a feminist poststructuralist way in line with Butler (1995; 1999). It is my belief that feminist poststructural theory and practice aids when addressing questions about gender relations and is an important viewpoint to take when analyzing local culture and gender functions.

For this study woman-narratives related to parenting were analyzed and I attempted to understand this in relation to the local society of Tornedalen. The interviewed women seem to have a view that it is the women who bring up children and have a much stronger responsibility than men in doing so. The reason for this view is unclear, but Tornedalen women often have a quite negative view of men (Juntti-Henriksson, in press). From the narratives it is obvious that sons often have been raised quite different than daughters in Tornedalen. Many women described their (two) parents as almost “mother single-parent” and neglected mentioning their father. In many cases the interviewed women had strong opinions on their mothers’ ways of bringing up children. However, the interviewed women do not mention (in any of the interviews) how they, themselves have tried to bring up their own sons. Instead the narratives include lots of blame on other mothers in creating spoiled sons. The blame on mothers sometimes goes further too even hold mothers responsible for creating inequality in Tornedalen. Several women claim upbringing of sons to be an important factor in creating an unequal society in Tornedalen.

Tornedalen women often seem to be preoccupied by imagery of what the local society expects and/or demands of them. They also identify themselves geographically, - as women living in Tornedalen and thus being specific Tornedalen women. The interviews also often reveal the subordinate

position of women in relation to men (Juntti-Henriksson, 2003). Women often expressed what was expected from them by others, thus trying to explain how the local culture puts pressure on preserving traditional gender functions.

Why then do so many women criticize/blame other women (mothers) as causing inequality, while not mentioning men (fathers at all)? To put forward an answer it may be fruitful to look into the different role experiences of mothers and fathers in Tornedalen explained in the narratives. It seems that differences in parental strain could be linked more strongly to the gender function than to the parental function, in that women are traditionally socialized (much more than men) into taking responsibilities for the household and the relationships and therefore more likely to experience greater responsibility (and stress) associated with upbringing of children. So, instead of working towards equality, the women themselves may, at least in some cases have acted to preserve traditional inequality due to the way they brought up their children. In these cases women seem to have preserved traditional gender functions by spoiling their sons.

The local norm system seems to strongly influence men and women in Tornedalen. The local culture may have strong expectations/demands of what it means to be a man/father and a woman/mother, respectively. It is clear that women identify themselves as Tornedalen women, (and it most often seems that they feel more in common with female youth than with men of the same age) and mothers. By bringing gender differences in the parental function into the next generation women it is definitely possible that women see themselves (and their gender function in Tornedalen) as almost completely responsible for upbringing of children. Being a parent thus puts women into great(er) pressure in a local traditional culture such as that of Tornedalen.

## **5.5 Paper V: Gender relations and local culture in northernmost Sweden (Tornedalen area): men in women's perspectives**

### *Introduction*

The 103 women-narratives include a vast amount of information about gender relations. The focus of this particular study was set to the women's own experiences of men as told in the narratives. The interviewed women

had strong opinions about men and about gender equality. The narratives include many negative views of men and lots of complaints on the behaviour of men. Many women described men in Tornedalen as almost totally dominant in relationships. Still, there are quite a few women who have positive views of men; these views are most common when women speak about their own husbands. The study also involves a historical perspective from the middle to the late twentieth century. The views of men expressed in narratives representing times around the 1950s are in many ways similar to those expressed in narratives from the 1990s. This might be surprising considering all the society changes that have occurred over the time-period studied. Most women had great knowledge of equality questions including the equality situation in Tornedalen, claiming Tornedalen to be less equal than the rest of Sweden. Overall, a picture of Tornedalen men emerges that are strongly linked to a local culture with cemented and strong traditions.

The feminist poststructuralist approach to this study addresses the various views expressed in the narratives. The narratives are related to women's lives and experiences. Many different experiences and views combine to make up an individual multiple thinking and various thoughts. Different expectations and needs, as well as psychological strength have an influence on how individuals view their own world. The collection of quotes represents most of the Tornedalen women's views of men. The views are related to the women's own life experiences, and also to their ways of perceiving equality issues. The women's own narratives give us insight into how women think and into how they live their lives as wives, mothers and as persons.

By using feminist poststructuralism as a theoretical framework and including all different views; the study involves separate views held, perhaps by only a few (or even a single) women, but also many common views and meanings hold by many women. In many cases the interviewed women had strong opinions on Tornedalen men and about equality. The narratives include both positive and negative views of men. Many women describe men in Tornedalen as masculine, strong, targeted, trustworthy, and hard working. Men are also considered to be egoistic, boring, silent, dominant and too traditional. In fact, some of these different characteristics seem to be viewed as either positive or negative depending on which woman who tells the story. Many women portray relationships in Tornedalen as unequal; and that men often dominate relationships and avoids doing household tasks; a situation which many women considers being unfair. The behavior of men is in many ways often negatively described. Positive views of men are most common

when women speak about their own husbands. Most women explain Tornedalen as a place with strong inequality and that there is a strong traditional division of gender functions.

#### *A historic perspective*

Over the time span studied (about 1950-1995) there have been major changes in society, including a transition from a time when almost all women were housewives to later times when this has become more and more rare. It is noted that gender relations, and views of men, expressed in narratives representing times around the 1950s often are quite similar to those expressed in narratives representing the middle 1990s (see also Juntti-Henriksson, 2003; in press). This might seem surprising considering the fact that so much has happened in society over the fifty years covered, including transitions from an almost exclusively rural to a more urbanized life (in the countryside) - from a time when almost all women were full-time housewives to a time when this has become a rarity. There are a few women that explain that changes towards more gender equality have occurred, but the vast majority of Tornedalen women consider themselves as living in an unequal world with men still being the dominant part in a relationship.

#### *Ages of respondents*

Respondents of varying ages do not seem to have different views of men. Women in ages around twenty often have similar views of men as older women. Many of the older women claim that the younger generation lives in more equal partnerships today. Still the young women express their husbands and boyfriends as typical Tornedalen men being dominant and having strong masculine characters. The conclusion may be drawn that no age depended view of men does exist. Instead, views of men are strikingly similar in different age groups of respondents.

#### *Local society and gender issues*

The diverse views of the women in this study indicate that there is not one way of experiencing or thinking and acting in respect to equality issues. Still, the narratives often reveal a subordinate position taken by women in relation to men. Women often expressed what was expected from them by men. They also tried to explain how the local culture puts pressure on preserving traditional gender functions. The local culture seems to strongly influence gender issues and equality. The strong traditions of Tornedalen also affect young people growing up which affects both men and women and shapes gender relations. Many women have a negative view of men and often blame

the local society for producing inequality and strong differences in gender functions. The local culture seems to have strong expectations/demands of what it means to be a man and a woman, respectively. It is clear that women identify themselves as Tornedalen women, and it most often it seems that they feel more in common with female youth than with men of the same age. Most women also had great knowledge of equality questions including the equality situation in Tornedalen, claiming Tornedalen to be less equal than the rest of Sweden.

### *Men in women's perspectives*

Many women have a clear positive view of men in Tornedalen and describe them as masculine, strong, targeted, trustworthy, silent, and hard working. Some women even feel that Tornedalen men are the ideals of what men should be like.

The narratives suggest that most men in Tornedalen have typical masculine interests such as hunting and fishing. Gender related differences in interests are common everywhere and men often have a strong focus on certain interests (e.g. Cockburn 1983; Edwards, 2006). However, according to many Tornedalen women; the male interests in fishing and hunting often goes to the far extreme and some women does not at all like that men have such strong interests in these areas.

Some women claim that many men have quite dominant behaviours. These men may reflect to hegemonic masculinity which can be defined as the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women (Connell, 1995). In the local Tornedalen culture there exist an extremely negative expression “knapso”: a word used for men who do household tasks such as e.g. housecleaning, doing the dishes etc. in a household. A “knapso” in this local culture is considered to be both “feminine and strange”. No man in Tornedalen wants to be called a “knapso”. This is one of probably several difficulties in Tornedalen in the progression towards equality. The total number of men rigorously practicing the hegemonic pattern in its entirety may not be so large. However, men gain from its hegemony, since they benefit from the patriarchal dividend, the advantage men in general gain from the overall subordination of women (Connell, 1987, 1995). The overall interest of men to work towards equality may therefore be low.

The study also suggests that women's view of men is a result of local norms and values which are more adapted to male interests in such a way that they affirm male dominance while limiting and subordinating the female sphere. If, and to the extent that men have tried to keep women in the place where they best served men's interests, they have been well assisted by the traditional local culture. Throughout the entire period under study there seem to have been, among several of the respondents, criticisms of the traditional culture.

#### *Final thoughts and conclusions*

Many different ways of thinking about gender issues and men are observed. Women describe men in Tornedalen as masculine, strong, targeted, trustworthy, and hard working. However, men were also considered to be egoistic, boring, silent, dominant and too traditional. Many women described relationships in Tornedalen as unequal and that men often dominates relationships and avoids doing household tasks; a situation which many women considered to be unfair. Most women have to some degree accepted the tradition of old fashioned and dominating men. Many women believe that equality has gone further in other parts of the country. The interviews often reveal a view of a subordinate position for women (in relation to men or husbands). The study suggests that women's views of men are based on norms and values which are more adapted to a time when most women were housewives. Some of the narratives also illustrate how women carry a protest in themselves, protesting against inequality and dominating men. To the extent that traditions have kept women in house and child caring functions, they have been well assisted by the local culture.

The conclusions of the study suggest that a multiplicity of women views of men do exist, however many similarities may be seen. For many of the women in this study men is considered to be dominant and self-focused. Inequality is, for these women, a natural part of their lives and in their thinking about themselves and about men.

Overall, a picture of Tornedalen men (as expressed by women) emerges that are strongly linked to a local culture which keeps on to strong and old traditions.

## **5.6 Paper VI: The quiet words of Tornedalen women; dreams and (be)longing in Northernmost Sweden (Tornedalen area)**

### *Introduction*

In this paper, I look at how discursive practices form people in relation to the landscape. I will try to deconstruct the common traditions of separating the natural and the cultural landscape. The core of this paper is focused on the ways in which women are thinking about their lives in relation to the landscape in where they live. The study focuses on women's views of their own lives; and how the local culture forms and shapes their dreams and longings. By analyzing women's narratives through approaching discourse and feminist poststructuralism, the paper draws attention to different thoughts, views and feelings of Tornedalen women. Inspired by Davies (2000a) and Kröyer (2004) the expression of body(landscape) and be(longing) could be used to enlighten the meaning of the dreams and longings of Tornedalen women. I also attempt to make a further move on the body/landscape expression through the development of a somewhat different approach to body/landscape relations. This novel approach is achieved through observations and analyses of women narratives, and also through an analysis of the discursive constructions of body and landscape by elaborating on the body/landscape expression of Davies (2000a). Furthermore, I use the expression of (be)longing as describing ways of thinking and dreaming about the landscape or other landscapes in a discursively constructed world.

I will attempt to express my understanding of the respondents' narratives through discourse and feminist poststructural analysis. It is important to consider all possibilities opened up through feminist poststructural analysis. By looking at both similarities and dissimilarities I believe that a fruitful analysis of results is achieved. Many of the narratives share similar thoughts, although they still are very different from each other. Some contradictory views are sometimes present even in the same narrative. It is also quite easy to see why narratives differ. Women are exposed to a variety of discourses including different life experience, cultural backgrounds, and socio/historical contexts. Different expectations and needs also have an influence on how individuals view the world. Women's thoughts and dreams have thus been formed through many competing discourses.

### *The landscape of Tornedalen*

In discursive practices, landscapes are often defined in terms of that which is natural as opposed to unnatural or man-made. In contrast I want to follow the discursive move done by Davies (2000a) in where all landscapes are natural, in the sense that anything might be inscribed as natural, once it is placed in a binary opposition with the unnatural or the manufactured, or the discursively constituted. The natural, just like the unnatural is a discursive construction (Davies, 2000a).

Tornedalen hosts a wild nature with large forests, many lakes and the big Torne River (which divide Sweden and Finland). In Tornedalen, summers are short, light and hot, while winters are long, dark and cold. The temperature commonly reaches 30 degrees below zero during wintertime. It is a sparsely populated area with only a few bigger villages. Many women describe Tornedalen as a place with beautiful nature, and several women describe the wild nature and the low population density as something that creates a feeling of great freedom. Still, other women feel discomfort over the large distances they have to travel to reach friends or to go shopping. Many women complain about the climate being too hard to cope with. For many it is a life in the wild nature with long distances to go to school or to go to a grocery store. The local culture is by many women considered to be somewhat old fashioned in a way the traditional gender functions are preserved (Juntti-Henriksson, in press). Most women in Tornedalen consider this a place where equality has not gone as far as in other parts of Sweden. Some women complain about the local culture which they feel quite uncomfortable to live in. It seems that the Tornedalen women often feel that they are part of a landscape in which they are not sure they belong to. Sometimes directly and sometimes indirectly difficulties with men are mentioned as negative to the landscape. In a gendered perspective, the narratives often reveal feelings of being in a subordinate position as women in relation to men. Women often referred to what was expected from them by others, thus trying to explain how the local culture puts pressure on preserving traditional gender functions. The local culture of Tornedalen is often explained as being traditional in the narratives, explaining how gender functions are divided in an old-fashioned way that women often take complete care and responsibility for homes and children. Furthermore, the local culture seems to influence how people look upon themselves, which also affects young people growing up and even the very few people who move into the local society of Tornedalen. This altogether seems to create a landscape that is strongly affected by local values.

The diverse views of the women in this study indicate that there is not one way of thinking and acting. Some women enjoy their lives and are quite satisfied to live in Tornedalen while other seems to not at all feel at home in Tornedalen. Of course, women make sense of their experiences through all discourses they are affected by, and which seem a natural part of their lives.

Davies (2000a) suggest that the body is viewed as part of a landscape that embraces it. For Davies (2000a; 2000b) a landscape is the place where we are, it could even be the landscape of a working place or the landscape of our home. These and other landscapes are in constant change as people move in and out of them. In this paper I concentrate my analysis to the landscape of Tornedalen and how women feel about this landscape. However, even if the landscape of Tornedalen is in another physical dimension than the landscape of a room or a working place, the same theory may hold truth about landscape as transformable. People move to and from Tornedalen (mostly from), which changes the landscape of small villages and neighborhoods. Small villages become even smaller which affects the society and people living in them in many ways. Thus, all landscapes are transformable, over time, or through the arrival of a different presence in them. The original body/landscape descriptions (from Davies, 2000a) questions easy assumptions such as separation and distinctions of where bodies begin and end and where landscapes take up. The body is not separate from landscape; indeed the landscape affects the body in many ways. Bodies and landscapes exist in much more complex dependence and landscape should be understood as much more than a mere context in which embodied beings live out their lives (Davies, 2000a). Bodies may be understood as continuous with landscape, and landscape, in turn, may be seen as alive and active. The body is generally understood as natural, and as such is taken for granted. The awareness of being embodied, and in particular, being embodied in relation to landscape, is something we have little knowledge about. However, we all know that our bodies react to cold or to heat. Furthermore, several things affect our bodies which we might not directly think about, we might react with higher blood pressure when we are confronted with certain people or at certain events that makes us nervous.

Women often seem to view men as more at home in the landscape of Tornedalen, perhaps in part due to their heavy involvement in fishing and hunting. At the same time, women often question their own place in the landscape of Tornedalen. Naturally, women's thoughts and feelings are formed through all discourses to which they are subjected in the place where

they live (e.g., Kern, 2005). This together with influence and discourses coming from the outside world through media, traveling, and friends and so on form the thoughts and feelings about the place and the time they live in as well as thoughts and feelings about other times and places.

### *Longing and belonging in Tornedalen*

The study suggests that women often have thoughts and dreams to move from Tornedalen. As a beginning point to trouble is the quite common longing for moving away from Tornedalen. The narratives sometimes tell of a struggle towards feeling as one with the landscape, but then again thinking and dreaming of something else. Many women feel that they do not belong to Tornedalen and wants to move to other places. This longing seems to come from a feeling of discomfort in Tornedalen due to a long list of factors. Women often feel that the distances to travel around in Tornedalen is problematic, furthermore they dislike the meteorological climate in Tornedalen. Other examples of things they lack in Tornedalen are shops, cultural events, and educational possibilities. Women also feel discomfort over the Tornedalen culture which many says causes inequality and preservation traditional gender functions.

There are also many women who really like to live in Tornedalen and feels united with the landscape. Some women have certainly worked hard for becoming “real Tornedalingar”. For example, the old woman who has lived for almost all her life in Tornedalen and people around her makes jokes about how she is becoming a “real Tornedaling”. However, being born into a particular landscape like Tornedalen gives no guarantee of belonging there (Davies, 2000b).

The expression (be)longing was introduced by Davies (2000a) to describe how people experience their bodies in relation to the landscape and how one can long to really belong to a landscape. I believe our relations to the landscape can be explained by the expression of (be)longing. (Be)longing can thus be seen as a continuation of the body/landscape relation. Davies (2000a) put brackets around be in belonging to emphasize that also a longing, either to really feel at home in that particular landscape or to carry a longing to some other place. Krøyer (2004) used (be)longing in explaining how workers feel at their workplaces often longing to another place. I use a somewhat progressive aim and tries to expand the use of (be)longing as describing ways of thinking and dreaming about landscapes as well as

thinking about the past and the future. Longing in (be)longing in my view can both be to a place or from a place, it can also be longing to a future or a time in the past. The narratives include a vast amount of different thoughts and dreams about moving from Tornedalen. Many of these dreams are not completely fixed; instead they only suggest moving from Tornedalen as a solution to a better life. Other dreams are more focused with a specific place to move to. Several dreams about moving to bigger cities or to place with lots of cultural events exist. Common dreams are about a better climate, both meteorologically and culturally.

The women often appear to be concerned by what the local society expects of them. They often also categorize themselves geographically, as women living in Tornedalen and thus being specific Tornedalen women. Constituting themselves as Tornedalen woman involves what Britzman (2000, p.31) has talked about in terms of: “making sense of ourselves through the construction of the other”. Many women signal quite great concerns over equality issues. Some of the narratives illustrate how women carry a protest against inequality in themselves. It is possible that women who had a strong urge for equality moved away from Tornedalen and that these women in fact made their progressive movement towards a more equal life through the act of moving from Tornedalen. Some women who continue to live in Tornedalen feel a great need for change and hopes for a more equal future. This hope is most commonly expressed when mothers mentions their daughters.

Thoughts and dreams of the future in Tornedalen are sometimes quite negatively expressed. Many women feel that local culture traditions have kept women too much into a traditional house caring role. Throughout the entire period (about 1950-1995) there seem to have been many dreams of breaking out of the traditional culture in one way or the other.

### *Conclusive ideas*

By using the women’s own histories from a feminist poststructuralist approach, the study emphasize on how women think about the past, the present, and the future. Many similarities and quite a few dissimilarities are found in the 103 narratives when talking about dreams and longings in Tornedalen. The study involves looking beyond the actual words told by the respondents. The findings also reflect a historical perspective from the middle to the late twentieth century, including moving from a time when most women were full-time housewives to a time when most women work

outside the home. Many women lived their lives (day-)dreaming of a change. Inspired by Davies (2000a) and Kröyer (2004) the expression of body(landscape) and be(longing) could be used to explain the dreams/longings of the Tornedalen women. Many women expressed a great love of their place of origin in Tornedalen and would never, not even in their dreams, move to another place. These women truly believed that their souls belonged to Tornedalen. Still, most of these women either longed for a better future while a few women had retrospective thought of things being better in Tornedalen in the past. Sometimes the dreams included total gender equality (in their beloved landscape of origin). Many women had a longing to another place where they believe their dreams can be fulfilled. Their physical bodies were in Tornedalen, but in their minds they dreamt of moving to another location where they believe they could live a better life. Questions of gender equality were sometimes central in the dreams of another life.

The broader conclusions of this paper are that different and varying discourses results in different solutions for each woman. By expanding the concepts of body/landscape and (be)longing we may enable a different understanding of the ways landscapes interact with women. This enables us to talk about bodies and place, and the relation between them differently, leading to new ways of achieving deeper knowledge into the functions of our discursively constructed world.

The study may also enable new readings of the ways women position themselves, in particular in terms of identifying the different discourses through which body/landscape relations are constituted. The analysis may enable new readings and understanding of the experiences of women in their familiar landscapes and in being positioned in a culture ruled by traditional norms.

## **6. Discussion and conclusions**

In this sixth chapter I want to discuss all papers together and try to summarize them as well as giving a conclusion to this thesis. The theoretical background together with the large empirical material made up an interesting task to explore women's lives in Tornedalen over the last about fifty years of the twentieth century.

From a poststructuralist perspective, the value of narratives is enormous. Women's own stories give us insight into how women think about themselves and their lives. The many narratives contain lots of information regarding gender relations in Tornedalen. A number of quotes from the more than 100 interviews were extracted for the presentation of the different papers. The different themes of the paper cannot be taken to represent all views encountered in the material. However, I believe that the papers represent a fairly good picture of views and thoughts expressed by Tornedalen women. The views are related to the women's own life experiences, and also to their ways of perceiving equality issues.

The material includes women of different ages, reflecting a variety of life experiences. Many different experiences and views combine to make up an individual multiple thinking and various thoughts. Different expectations, needs as well as psychological strength also have an influence on how individuals view their own world. Feminist poststructuralism certainly provides a means to understand how women's gendered subjectivities are continuously constructed and negotiated within various discourses.

Women's own experiences reveal discourses suggesting many interesting phenomena in creating specific gender functions. Some women have renegotiated relationships so that their needs are taken into consideration, while other feels very uncomfortable by which they live their lives together with a man. Moreover, many women have drawn on their experience to offer guidance to the next generation. Indeed, many women can also signify the beginning of women's pursuit of careers in their own creative interests of equality. Alternative discourses such as these suggest that many Tornedalen women really feel that they live meaningful, worthwhile and purposeful lives.

Respondents of varying ages do not seem to have very different views of gender. Women in ages around twenty often have similar views as very old women. Many of the older women claim that the younger generation lives in more equal partnerships today (1995-96); and thus have a different gender function than what they have had. However, the young women view their husbands and boyfriends as typical Tornedalen men being dominant and having strong masculine characters. This discrepancy was difficult to understand. Maybe the hope (regarding equality) of the older generations was much stronger than the real changes occurring in Tornedalen. The conclusion which I have drawn is that no clear age depended views exist. Instead, views are often similar in different age groups of respondents.

Set apart from the context of the women's lives, the narratives reveal little about which times certain events happened or the age of the respondent. As a consequence, it could be difficult to tell which ones were grandmothers, which were career women, and which woman was only twenty years old. Still, by knowing their age, their marital status and where they were in their "life cycle" I could see that the narratives differed very little to each other.

In the Tornedalen culture there is an extremely negative expression of "knapso": a term used for men who do household tasks such as housecleaning or doing the dishes. A "knapso" in this local culture is considered to be both "feminine and strange". No man in Tornedalen wants to be called a "knapso". This is one of several difficulties in Tornedalen in the progression towards equality. For example, women have tried very hard to get their men to do more household tasks.

The analyses of gender and culture which is closely related to equality issues in Tornedalen reveal that everyday life practices contributes to the formation and maintenance of unequal divisions between men and women. These "injustices" are often taking for granted or at least accepted. Sometimes it seems to be more important for women to maintain harmony, than to challenge these inequalities.

The different views held by women on the desirability of being totally equal to men are another example of views that seem to be in opposition to one another. Different ways of thinking about gender issues are observed. The narratives illustrate many similarities, as well as many diverse views. Many women know (believe) that equality has gone further in other parts of the country. Most women explain Tornedalen as a place with strong inequality

and that traditional gender functions exist. Many women have a quite negative view of men; still this is not a complete uniform picture. The Tornedalen man is also described in many positive ways.

The study suggests that women's lives are ruled by norms and values which are more adapted to a time when most women were housewives. Some of the narratives also illustrate how women have used strategies to compensate for this, and also how they carry a protest in themselves. To the extent that tradition has kept women in their traditional house caring role, they have been well assisted by the traditional local culture. Throughout the entire period under study there seem to have been, among several of the respondents, attempts to break out of the confinement of traditional culture. However, breaking traditions seem to have been difficult in Tornedalen, for example if a woman were seen to be different than the other, their credibility might be damaged. Many aspects of women life strategies can be seen as direct or indirect reactions to the conditions at home and in their local surroundings. Their wish to break out of the tradition seems to have been counterbalanced by the fear of losing credibility.

## **6.1 Concluding thoughts**

All papers suggest that the local culture has had a strong influence upon the women lives lived in Tornedalen. In this study, women identify themselves as Tornedalen women, as it sometimes seems to have more in common with female youth than with men of the same age. They also identify themselves geographically, as women living in Tornedalen and thus being specific Tornedalen women.

The interviews often reveal the subordinate position as women in relation to men. Women often expressed what was expected from them by others, thus trying to explain how the local culture puts pressure on preserving traditional gender functions. This altogether seems to create identities that are strongly influenced by local norms. The identity of a Tornedalen woman is not fixed, but rather an unfinished project that is affected by a variety of competing discourses. However, common gender identity characteristics include feeling as a Tornedalen woman and thereby having an identity which comprise being a strong woman (to be able to live in Tornedalen) and being very much aware of local gender inequality.

Most women in Tornedalen seem to have a good knowledge of equality issues; however, in their own words, they believe equality has not changed significantly in Tornedalen (from the 1950s to the 1990s). The gender relations expressed in narratives representing times around the 1950s are often surprisingly similar to those expressed in narratives from the 1990s. The traditional culture in Tornedalen still existed in the late 1990s, with a pressure coming from the older generations to keep traditional gender functions.

Despite historical changes, this study suggests that there is a strong gender difference in household spending. It is here concluded that patterns of spending were differentiated by gender. Women were in many cases likely to get household money for paying for food (from their husbands or from their collective budget), but did have very little to spend for their own personal needs.

The studies suggest that women's views of men are created through norms and values which are more adapted to a time when most women were housewives. Some of the narratives also illustrate how women carry a protest in themselves, protesting against inequality and dominating men. To the extent that traditions have kept women in house and child caring functions, they have been well assisted by the local culture. For many of the women in this study men is considered to be dominant and self-focused. Inequality is, for these women, a natural part of their lives and in their thinking about themselves. Overall, a picture of Tornedalen men (as expressed by women) emerges that are strongly linked to a local culture with cemented and strong traditions.

Many women expressed a great love of their place of origin in Tornedalen and would never, according to themselves, move to another place. These women truly believed that their souls belonged to Tornedalen. Still, most of these women longed for a better future in Tornedalen. Other women had more of a longing to another place where their dreams could be fulfilled. Questions of gender equality were most often central in the dreams of another life.

The interviewed women seem to have a view that it is the women who bring up children and have a much stronger responsibility than men in doing so. From the narratives it is obvious that sons often have been raised quite different than daughters in Tornedalen. In many cases the interviewed

women had strong opinions on their mothers' ways of bringing up children. Several women claim upbringing of sons to be an important factor in creating an unequal society in Tornedalen. The local norms seem to strongly influence men and women in Tornedalen. The local culture may have strong expectations/demands of what it means to be a man/father and a woman/mother, respectively.

Instead of working towards equality, the women themselves may have acted to preserve traditional and unequal gender functions. The women seem to have guarded their gender roles by exercising group-pressure towards each other. One example is the female idolization of "a real woman" meaning women who cleans their houses very carefully, makes well-prepared food and always keeps the children neat and tidy. The local culture has influenced the women's lives through all generations covered in this study. The strong norm system with its cemented gender functions may have been hard to accept for young women growing up in Tornedalen.

The conclusions of the study suggest that a multiplicity of views do exist, however many similarities may be seen. For many of the women in this study house caring was indeed of great value in their way of thinking about themselves and their lives. For each of them, I believe, self-realization was an important goal, although the ways they sought to achieve fulfilment varied somewhat. In society today, women can have the opportunity to contribute from their own knowledge and life experience, and from their skills and talents. However, many women described their place in the family and in the local society. Very often women had to act in a certain manner to fit into society.

The various papers of this thesis have identified both desire and resistance of women to take active part in the social formation of their gender function.

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