

# **Extracts from Porn, Whores and Feminists**

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**(Translated from Swedish)**

This is an excerpt from the book 'Porn, Whores and Feminists' (published in 2006). It is currently being translated into English and upon completion will be published online in its entirety as a free Open Source Project. This document contains the translated Foreword and the whole of Chapter 3. I give full permission for this document to be quoted and distributed freely. Please support the fundraising campaign, the details of which can be found at my website: [www.petraostergren.com/pages.aspx?r\\_id=196898](http://www.petraostergren.com/pages.aspx?r_id=196898)

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## **EXCERPT**

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## Foreword

“Oh goodness, you are difficult,” said Jeanette with a chuckle, as she put her arm round my shoulders. “Do you really have to make everything so complicated?”

I had just met the editorial staff at the publishers and spoken rapidly and intensely about the book I wanted to write. This was important to me. I wanted to say something different from what feminists had said time after time about sex, power and violence. A book would provide me with the tool to reach out without having to simplify my arguments in debates on TV or in newspapers.

I spoke about topics such as pornography, prostitution, sex workers’ rights organisations and same-sex domestic violence with enthusiasm. I ended my presentation a little out of breath. After a moment’s silence, one of the bosses asked: “But Petra, what *actually is* a sex worker?” I realised that they hadn’t fathomed a word I’d said, so I sat down and we had a conversation instead; this time with better results. They understood what I had wanted to convey, and it was then, as I left the meeting, that Jeanette put her arm around me and laughed about me being difficult.

But if the publishers and the powerful Jeanette thought I complicated matters for them, they should have seen how much of a nuisance I had become for large parts of the women’s movement.

## My Background

For many years, I had worked as a self-defence instructor for women – for that reason I had had a good reputation as a feminist, at least amongst those who worked against men’s violence or who themselves wanted to learn self-defence. Perhaps I had also had the sympathy of many people because my mother had been murdered, beaten to death by a man she had left after a short relationship. It was after my mother’s death that I started to teach self-defence full time. I had previously studied Social Anthropology. My aim had been to become a scholar, but the shock and the sorrow following my mother’s death meant that I had to discontinue my studies. Instead, I started my own business and held courses in self-defence throughout Sweden. I also wrote a book about self-defence, and later another one about me and my mother. Additionally I found myself unable

to engage in feminist issues as I had before. I followed the public debates but sometimes I wished I had more time and energy to think and write. Interesting things were happening as feminism grew stronger.

The feminists that I had contact with during this time – at the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s – were engaged in the women's shelters movement, ROKS (the National Organisation for Women's Shelters and Young Women's Shelters in Sweden) and with organisations they collaborated with. They were the ones I cooperated with, and it was through them that the self-defence courses were commissioned which in turn generated more and more work. It was to them, too, that I turned to understand male violence against women. In those days mainly psychological, social and cultural explanatory models were used. Men abused women because they themselves had been abused as children, or were alcoholics, or came from a particular social background or culture. But that didn't explain why it was men in particular – and not women – who battered and raped.

The feminists that I had contact with provided an explanatory model that I liked better. It was simple, easy to understand and dealt with gender aspects: There is a gender hierarchy within society, and the violence is a result of men's power over women. Violence functions as a component in a vicious cycle – the cause of violence is that men have structural power over women, and, through violence, this structure is maintained. But men's violence is not a given in terms of nature. It is something men learn in the patriarchy we are all a part of. Later, I understood that this explanatory model was not shared by all feminists – it was 'radical feminist' – but at that time I greatly liked the explanation. It provided hope. If men learned to abuse and rape because they had power over women, well, then one could change that! By creating a society with gender equality, the violence would automatically disappear.

Now, in retrospect, I believe that I liked the theory because it was so simple, as it can be tempting to embrace simple solutions to complex problems. Because I had my doubts. Through my self-defence courses I came into contact with women who had been battered by their female partners and women who had suffered sexual abuse in their childhood from female relatives. But that was too complicated to contemplate. Instead, I embraced and advocated the radical-feminist theory. Men battered and raped because they were men, and that was that.

## **A Huge Commotion!**

The moment when I was no longer able to ignore the discrepancy between what I taught about violence and what I knew violence between people looked like coincided with the final phase of the grieving process after my mother's death. I think many who have experienced a trauma can recognise the feeling of being trapped inside a bubble, of not really being present, and of one day noticing how something has changed. That you can suddenly participate again; can see your surroundings a little more distinctly without that membrane that had sealed you in and protected you for a long time. At least, that is what it was like for me. About six years after my mother had been murdered, I could finally complete a book about me and her. At the same time, I recovered my desire and ability to think about and question a lot of what the radical feminists proclaimed.

At different seminars and with the leaders of the women's shelter movement, I tried to discuss the problem of women's violence and same sex domestic violence – but was met with no response. I also began to question other things the radical feminists claimed such as the idea that porn degrades women and is a form of male violence against women. Yet again, I drew comparisons with the homosexual community, where there was plenty of porn by and for gays. How could gay porn be degrading to women and an example of violence against women? When I read the radical feminists' anti-porn pamphlets to learn more, I didn't get much help; instead of logical reasoning I found emotional arguments and a rhetoric that seemed similar to clichés. I thought the debates I took part in were imbued with an aggressiveness which didn't allow for unreserved and profound discussion. And among the feminists I mixed with, the norms about appearance and sex were so strict – you had to look and behave in a certain way. It wasn't always directly expressed, but it permeated the articles, books, conversations and atmosphere in a way that was impossible to ignore or avoid. On the whole, their take on the world seemed to be black-and-white; there was only one way of understanding things.

There was something else I started to think about too: Feminists considered prostitution to be one of the worst and most violent things that occurred in the patriarchy, but why was it that you never heard what the women in prostitution thought and how they reasoned? Everybody else seemed to have a lot of opinions about prostitution. That was strange. Because the people with their own experience of prostitution surely ought to have the best knowledge on the subject and know what should be done about it?

In the midst of my musings, I was asked to review a newly published book about violence against women. I read it and was disappointed – yet another book in which women’s own violent behaviour was excluded. I wondered how we would ever be able to reach viable solutions to this complex problem if we continued to ignore uncomfortable facts.

I wrote an article which had greater consequences than I could have possibly imagined<sup>1</sup>. I suspected it would cause controversy, but I really did hope it would result in a dialogue with the radical feminists more versed in theory.

Aside from expressing my dissatisfaction with yet another book about violence that ignored women’s violent behaviour, I asked three questions: I wanted to know why nobody ever mentioned the abuse that goes on in same-sex relationships. I questioned why women who sold sex were not given a say. And I wondered why there was such a huge commotion when women wanted to explore parts of their sexuality that were not considered ‘politically correct’. Apart from porn, I had understood that phenomena such as ‘sexy’ lingerie, sex toys and sadomasochism were ‘bad’, and were seen as expressions of patriarchal dominance.

And what a huge commotion there was! In just a few weeks and months, my reputation and my position in the women’s movement was transformed. The radical feminists and I had already started to follow different paths, but now there was a definite rift. I was no longer a ‘good’ feminist that others should have contact with. Colleagues, acquaintances and employers were contacted by the inner circle of radical feminists and urged to distance themselves from me. I was no longer invited to conferences about violence and, if I came as a participant, my presence was questioned. Women that I had known for years ceased to say hello. Others wrote angry letters.

I understood that my questions had touched upon something sensitive and important, so besides being hurt and angry, I also became curious. What was it that caused women and feminists to react in this way? Some confided to me in private that what I was being subjected to was unjust, or even bullying, but they didn’t dare protest for fear of being subjected to the same treatment and losing positions and work. What had happened to the sisterhood that was so often spoken about? I decided to find out what was so threatening about my questions.

## **The Book**

I had tackled a large subject, and I had to focus on a few of the questions. At first I was engaged with transgender issues, which are interesting from a feminist perspective because they destabilise the very notion of there being only two genders, and show that it is not only women who are discriminated against in terms of gender. But since porn and prostitution were what aroused most feelings, this is what I concentrated on. To gain more knowledge, I returned to university where I studied Sexology as well as Social Anthropology. I traced the various movements against porn and prostitution that had existed since the mid-1970s and carefully examined their arguments. I also read feminist literature and texts about sexual politics from different countries, met some of the authors and built up a network of contacts in Sweden who had knowledge of these issues. And I looked at pornography and interviewed women who had experience of prostitution – I wanted to know whether the arguments against porn and prostitution were valid.

I found all aspects of my studies fascinating. Academics such as Michel Foucault, Gayle Rubin and Carol Vance helped me to understand why the debates were so emotionally charged and contradictory. By way of pornography, which wasn't really what I thought it would be, and through the women in the sex industry, who had completely different stories to what I had expected, I grew to understand that the opposition to porn and prostitution has other messages and functions than were first apparent.

In the end, I came to learn something about the effects that old ideas about sex and what is considered manly or womanly can have on feminism and gender equality politics, but also something more generally applicable to Sweden. For it is not only a puzzle as to why my questions were, and are, so sensitive for the women's movement. It is also a puzzle as to why there is such a compact and unified consensus on porn and prostitution in Sweden in particular, why the policy of other countries provokes such a strong degree of condemnation, and why Swedish deviations in thought and action inspire such strong reactions. By tracing the ways in which this attitude towards porn and prostitution came to reign supreme in Sweden, I could also reveal many of the indirect ways that power operates.

This book is a result of what I concluded, and is comprised of two parts. In the first half, with the aid of the aforementioned theories and my own field

studies, I primarily discuss pornography and the arguments against it. In the second part, I focus on prostitution.

My aim is not to defend the phenomena of porn and prostitution as such. Instead I want to create conditions for a more open, in-depth and nuanced discussion which will better allow us to understand these phenomena and the debate around them. Hopefully this can lead to a feminist sexual politics in which freedom of expression is not restricted and people do not suffer – which is what occurs now.

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### **Chapter 3**

#### **The Sexual Morality of Gender Equality**

The most important figure within party politics in Sweden in the struggle against porn and prostitution has been a Social Democrat, Inger Segelström. She was one of the founding members of the women's shelter movement, she led campaigns against 'violent pornography' during the 1980s and she made sure that the ban on sex purchase was passed by parliament while she worked as an MP and the chairman of the Women's Caucus in the Social Democratic Party. She then went on to become both an MEP [Member of European Parliament] and the chairman of the Swedish Media Council [Mediarådet] – a sort of advisory government organisation.<sup>2</sup>

I had often heard Inger Segelström claim that the ban on sex purchase was not about sexual morality, which I asked her to elaborate on when we met on one occasion: "Well, what I mean is that this has nothing to do with sexuality. This has nothing, nothing to do with this being a moralistic view." Because if it had been a moral issue, then all prostitution would have been forbidden long ago, in Inger Segelström's opinion, and this was because there have "always been plenty of moralists in [the Swedish] parliament". The Sex Purchase Ban was instead a "gender equality law". Men should not be able to buy women and their bodies with money, just as women should not be discriminated against by being paid less than men. I wondered whether this wasn't exactly what morality was: to say how you wanted things to be in society? No, she answered, it wasn't morality, but "setting norms" which was about "values" and "how we wanted women and men to live together in this country."<sup>3</sup> Quite what she thought

morality meant then, she didn't say. But regardless, there are problems with Inger Segelström's reasoning. As I previously referenced in Chapter 1, she denies the fact that prostitution is about sex, and doesn't seem to understand what the terms mean.

Norms are generally accepted rules for what people in a particular culture ought and ought not to do. The word 'morality' refers to a person's actual act that can be good or bad. 'Ethics' involves theoretical reflections on human values and acts. So according to current usage, ethics is the theory, the norm is the rule, and morality is the act.<sup>4</sup> Sexual morality is the combination of ideas about what makes particular sexual acts moral or immoral. So one can't claim that norms and morality are separated from one another. Nor can you distance yourself from the concept 'sexual morality' and at the same time express a moral opinion – that men and women should live their lives in a certain way.

### **“It isn't about sexual morality” – a Paradox**

Denying that the opposition to porn and prostitution is about sexual morality is another paradox which ought to be examined and challenged. It actually conceals what I believe to be one of the most important functions of the debate on porn and prostitution: to be an arena in which a certain sexual morality can be discussed, constructed and cemented. Since the norms and notions are not expressed directly, but instead work covertly as an undercurrent, it is possible to avoid any examination and questioning of them. As we know, paradoxes confuse and paralyse the recipient. But the denial also makes the prescriptive function of the anti-porn and prostitution movement more invisible. Sexual morality functions as the negative surface against which the good, 'normal' or 'gender-equal' sexuality can appear.

There are many examples of this paradox, particularly in the arguments against prostitution. Criminalising men who buy sex had already been proposed during the first wave of opposition to porn and prostitution in the late 1970s.<sup>5</sup> An influential person during that period was the therapist and author Hanna Olsson, the secretary in the Prostitution Inquiry [Prostitutionsutredningen] which began then. Just before the ban against purchasing sex was passed by parliament and two decades after her entry into the debate, she said that the ban was extremely good. It was a distinct standpoint and the 'tiny grain of sand' that would have the capacity to 'irritate' in various international contexts. Sweden

would be able to say to other countries that this is how we see things: it is criminal to buy sex, but not because Swedes are ‘moralists’, Hanna Olsson claimed, but because prostitution damages those who are used.<sup>6</sup>

“Most – if not all – of those people from the Swedish side who participate in the debate do so not on the basis of sexual morality, but on the basis of a woman’s right to decide over her own body and her sexuality,” claims Marianne Eriksson, the former Left Party MEP. The questioning of prostitution also shows that “sexuality is unique for every individual”, is not for sale, and “should not take place at somebody’s expense, but ought to be enjoyed with passion, imagination and be completely free”.<sup>7</sup>

Hanna Olsson’s paradox is that her reasoning is based upon it being bad if women are injured – which is a moral stance. Marianne Eriksson’s paradox is that she first denies that the debate is about sexual morality, but then articulates her sexual morality: that women should have the right to preside over their own bodies and sexuality, that sex must be experienced in specific ways and be gratuitous. Within this paradox there is also another common paradox regarding Swedish gender equality policy: on the one hand, women should have the right to decide about their bodies, whereas, on the other, women should not be able to choose what they want to do with their bodies (such as accept payment for sexual services). Women are only free to make the right choices with their lives and bodies.<sup>8</sup>

The fact that opponents of pornography and prostitution deny that their commitment is about sexual morality might be due to a confusion about terminology. But it could also be a tactical move. Sexual morality is a negatively charged term that feminists and gender equality activists wish to distance themselves from, especially if they are addressing a progressive or younger public and don’t want to be regarded as condemnatory and old fashioned.

## **Buzz Words**

There are various rhetorical techniques that the opponents of pornography and prostitution use to mask their underlying sexual morality. One of these is to define commercial sex as men’s violence against women. Another technique is to use buzz words such as ‘gender equality’.

It is rewarding to use buzz words in a debate since they have a strong positive charge combined with a vague content. The user is not expected to define exactly what is meant by the concept. Nor is anybody expected to discuss or question the definition of terms such as ‘gender equality’ or ‘democracy’ or protest against the message that is presented. Who wants to be regarded as being against gender equality?

ROKS uses the various rhetorical techniques skilfully. In the brochure that urges people to book porn-free hotels, they use the voice of the hotel cleaner to tap into spontaneous and emotional negative reactions that many have about porn. But they also appeal to the conscience of the good citizen: “Making a porn-free booking is an affirmative action *for* gender equality and *against* the degradation of women and violence against women and girls.”<sup>9</sup>

Another handy thing about buzz words is that they can be adapted according to the target audience. Olle Schmidt, a Swedish Liberal [Folkpartiet] MEP, uses the term ‘liberal’ rather than ‘gender equality’<sup>10</sup>:

I am not a moralist. I’m a liberal. But there is a limit when it comes to repugnancy for all the pornography that gushes forth. Now that limit is close to being reached. And there is a distinct link between prostitution and the increasingly extreme pornography and repression and violence against women.

Regardless of whether it is called gender equality, liberalism or something else, the opponents of pornography and prostitution nevertheless express a sexual morality. One or two of them do indeed admit that their standpoint is about morality. Ylva Thörn, the chairman of the Swedish Municipal Workers’ Union [Kommunal] says that she has considered whether she is old-fashioned since she doesn’t want to call prostitution a profession and does not want trade unions to work for the rights of people who sell sex. But she has concluded that she isn’t old-fashioned. Instead, for her it is a matter of “dignity, ethics and morality”.<sup>11</sup> Jens Orback also maintains that the criminalisation of sex buyers is a moral issue.<sup>12</sup>

It is perfectly acceptable to have an opinion about what is right or wrong. And one of feminism’s tasks is to identify what is wrong in a society from a gender perspective – how are people wronged or privileged on the basis of their perceived gender identity? – and then try to overcome the injustices. Morality

also governs individuals' actions and is the basis for laws and policy. The stumbling block is what that morality consists of.

## **Power and Sexual Value Systems**

Sexologists argue that there is a 'script' in every culture that regulates how people may behave sexually. The script is about who can do what with whom, when, where and how. Together, the scripts form a particular 'sexual ideology'.<sup>13</sup>

There are many different sexual ideologies in the world and it can be tempting to make use of anthropological research to help to illustrate how varied they can be. Such as that in one culture it is considered right to bite each other's earlobes until they bleed, or that in another it is the older women who choose younger men as their lovers, and then dump them when they feel like it. Furthermore, others only have sexual intercourse in a sitting position and think that it is most improper to kiss. But it can be just as illustrative to draw comparisons in one's own society. Because what applies to the majority society, does not necessarily apply for various sub-groups.

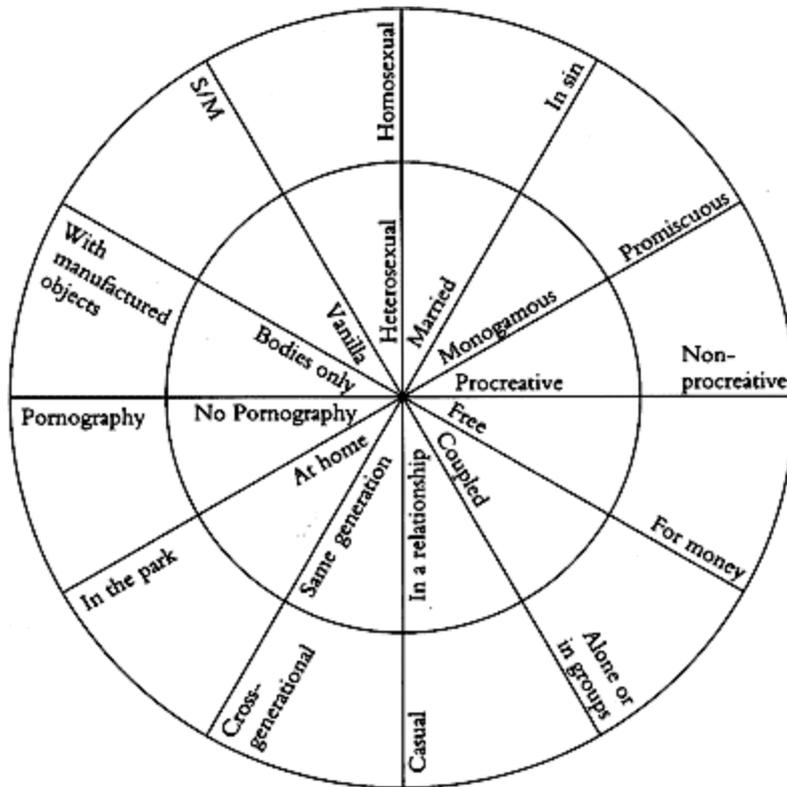
When I discussed sex and norms with a group of LGBT-activists (LGBT is a collective term for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender peoples) some of them pointed out something that I hadn't thought about before. A new norm that has been established is that if a homosexual woman and a homosexual man want to have a child together, then they shouldn't have sex with one another. The activists revealed that even though it had become more acceptable for lesbians and gays to sometimes sleep with each other (earlier there was a more negative attitude towards bisexuality) there were certain limits. Sex could only take place if the purpose was pleasure, not procreation. Perhaps that norm is connected to the act becoming too 'heterosexual' and would thus challenge the participants' own identity, I don't know, but it does at least clearly show how something that is taken for granted in one group, is unthinkable in another.

Other sub-groups with other sexual ideologies than the culturally dominant one are, for example, the people who practice S/M or who engage in commercial sex. These groups are not, however, 'without' sexual norms, they simply have *other* sexual norms. Sometimes, the norms in these groups are stricter, or at any rate more apparent. They have distinct codes of conduct and discuss which sexual frames shall apply before they have sex with one another.

Apart from sexual ideologies changing between groups and societies, they also change over time, sometimes extremely fast. During a lecture I held for hospital personnel, a lady in her sixties raised her hand. She held a management position and looked very clean-cut and competent in her two-piece suit. With an authoritative voice she said: “Well, what was natural for us when we were young just isn’t any longer.” I expected her to go on and say something like that they certainly didn’t behave like young people today who didn’t have any norms, but instead she continued: “In those days it was common to have group sex, but that doesn’t seem to be the case any longer!”

## **Sexual Hierarchy**

Sexual ideologies thus contain limits that separate good sexual behaviour from bad. Gayle Rubin emphasises power dynamics when it comes to how sex is organised and for that reason speaks of a hierarchical system of sexual values. To illustrate this system, Rubin paints a picture of what the sexual hierarchy looked like in the USA in the shift between the 1970s and the 1980s. At the very top of the hierarchy were the reproductive married heterosexual couples, and just below them were the un-married (but monogamous) heterosexual couples. Stable and long-term homosexual couples were on the verge of being accepted by society, although their casual sexual contact in bars or in parks was not. These homosexual couples in turn circled just above the lowest group at the bottom of the pyramid – people who sold sex, transvestites, fetishists, sadomasochists and those who engaged in cross-generational sex. To illustrate the system, Rubin used a model of a ‘charmed circle’ that consists of a circle inside another circle, divided into ‘segments’.



The inner circle is the good, what she calls the 'charmed', sexuality. This is what is often called 'vanilla sex' (a gentler form of sex as opposed to, for example, S/M-sex) that takes place between monogamous men and women from the same generation and the purpose of which is to conceive children. In the outer circle is the bad and 'condemned' sexuality. Within this outer circle one finds sex between same-sex couples, casual sex, masturbation, porn, sex for money and sadomasochism.

Like the sexologists, Rubin is of the opinion that there is a continuous discussion about which sex should be allowed to be included on the 'good' side. Values are not static, rather the borders are moved.

The sexual hierarchy is maintained in various ways, according to Rubin. Individuals whose behaviour stands high up in the hierarchy are rewarded in various ways, while those whose behaviour is low down are punished.

Those at the top enjoy prestige in society. They have judicial privileges, institutional support, material advantages, access to social and physical mobility, and are regarded as being mentally healthy. Those whose sexual behaviour is lower down the scale are, on the other hand, considered to be criminal, to lack honour and decency, and to have mental health problems.

Their social and physical mobility is limited; they don't have the support of the authorities or institutions, and are subject to various economic sanctions.

Another way that the low status of the sexual dissidents is maintained is a punitive stigma. According to Rubin, the stigma has its roots in Western religious traditions, but today comes from medicine and psychiatry and functions as an effective sanction against those who engage in these behaviours. The judicial persecution of people at the bottom of the hierarchy, Rubin states, is also justified through a well-developed ideology; an ideology that classifies people as 'dangerous' or 'inferior', as undesirable in society and without the right to be left in peace.<sup>14</sup>

This sexual hierarchy is one of the patterns of thinking that is continuously being reproduced, argues Rubin, even under a radical flag. As an example, she named the radical feminist anti-porn movement which had a progressive language but condemned and opposed the same sort of sex that the rest of society did.

### **A 'small population'**

The French historian and philosopher Michel Foucault presents a background to the sexual ideology that Rubin describes. He addresses how contemporary Western sexual morality, and the way it is maintained, is connected with the development of the modern state.

During the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the attention of those in power was directed towards the population since it was they and their offspring who were needed for the labour force. People's sexual behaviour became a concern of the state and the object of analysis and interference – the people were prevailed upon to reproduce and stick together. Once this had been achieved, those in power dealt with the sexuality that did not centre on the family and which could pose a threat to the same. The married couple of good standing thus became a 'more silent norm' against which a "world of perversion" started to take shape.<sup>15</sup>

Foucault writes poetically about 'a small population' that was born, forced by the new bourgeois order: "This was the numberless family of perverts who were on friendly terms with delinquents and akin to madmen." In this family there were figures such as sexually aware children, precocious little girls and ambiguous school boys. There were fetishists and 'dirty old men'. These unwelcome figures ended up in reformatories, were incarcerated in psychiatric

hospitals and prisons, or themselves sought help from priests and doctors for the shame they had learnt to feel.<sup>16</sup>

Foucault points out that, from the point of view of repression, there was an ambiguousness during this period. At the same time that judicial punishments for sexual deviations became milder, the controlling authorities and surveillance mechanisms became stricter. He explains this as being because the most important factor is not the *amount* of power, but the *form* of power. For the negative elements of power – such as prohibition, censorship and denial – are but one of many techniques for the practice of power. Power, which is mobile and can be found everywhere, also works positively and productively. It makes people think and act in certain ways.

An example is the influence the new science and its classifying activities had, which was something that sexuality also fell victim to. The ‘perversities’ became a part of medical science through which new types of individuals were specified. Sodomy, for example, which had previously been a wide sexual category, now referred to men who had anal sex with other men. And where the sodomite had previously been a recurring sinner, now the ‘homosexual’ was created as a person whose sexuality pervaded his entire being. He became a species with a certain type of personality, a certain background, certain feelings and certain thoughts. It was no longer about a sexual behaviour, but about a certain person.<sup>17</sup>

Foucault also talks of “the psychiatrization of perverse pleasure”. Sexual instinct was isolated as a separate biological instinct and clinical analyses were made of all anomalies that could possibly affect it. Sexuality was attributed an influence, normalising and pathologising respectively, on the behaviours of the entire individual – and then the new science tried to find methods to cure all the defects.<sup>18</sup>

## **The Sexual Morality of the Anti-Porn and Prostitution Movement**

There are several ways of finding out what sexual morals the opponents of porn and prostitution hold and advocate. Sometimes they clearly express what they think sex is or ought to be. Sometimes they contrast good sex with bad sex, like when erotica is contrasted with pornography. One can also investigate which forms of sex in porn and prostitution are criticised and which bad forms of sex

that porn is said to lead to. And, of course, one can use the method of elimination. Which form of sex is *not* criticised?

To find out which sexual activities are bad, you only have to read carefully. I have already given many examples. It is not good if a vagina is penetrated by anything other than a penis, for example a dildo, an object or a hand. Nor is it good if penetration takes place too often or by too many people. For a penis to penetrate something other than a vagina, such as an anus or other orifices, is not good either. Fetishist sex, such as sadomasochism and sex which contains domination, submission, bondage, rubber, leather, role-play, urine and faeces, is bad. Nor should sex take place too often.

It is also evident which persons should not be sexual. It is not good that women who are pregnant, fat or have a disability, have sex. Opponents of pornography also seem to disapprove of elderly and overweight men being sexual. Fat old men are named as disgusting consumers of porn, never handsome young men. On the whole, it doesn't seem to be popular for porn to depict other people than those who are comparatively young and attractive and have bodies that function normatively.

As I will demonstrate in Chapter 5, homosexuality is only okay under certain conditions. If there is role play, sex toys or lesbian sex which is intended for the heterosexual male public, that is not good. Nor is group sex or sex between animals and human beings.

In fact, the only kind of sex that the porn and prostitution opponents don't criticise is penis in vagina intercourse which is carried out by two similarly aged heterosexual individuals without physical failings in a stable relationship.

What the purpose of sex should be is also evident. Both parties must feel pleasure and the sex should be an expression of tenderness and love. I have already given examples of this, but there are many more. In one of the publications produced by the 1970s campaign against porn and prostitution, a spokesperson protested that in porn, no emotions other than the "purely erotic" were expressed, and that there was no "tenderness, contact, mutuality and respect".<sup>19</sup> And in a blunt manner she exclaimed<sup>20</sup>:

I am prepared to cry out a new campaign slogan: 'Save sexuality!' Save it for what it really is and ought to be – a genuine, human source of life fulfilment, with flowing veins of tenderness, sensuality and intimacy, with hot streaks of sexual passion and pleasure!

Influenced by the 1970s mass movement against porn, RFSU [the Swedish Association for Sexuality Education] adopted new principals and policies. Previously, they had emphasised the positive effects that porn could have, but now porn was seen as an entirely bad thing, because there was no intimacy, nor sensuality nor tenderness. It reinforced an emotional coldness in sexuality and worked against a “deeper and truer” understanding of the functions of sexuality in relations.<sup>21</sup>

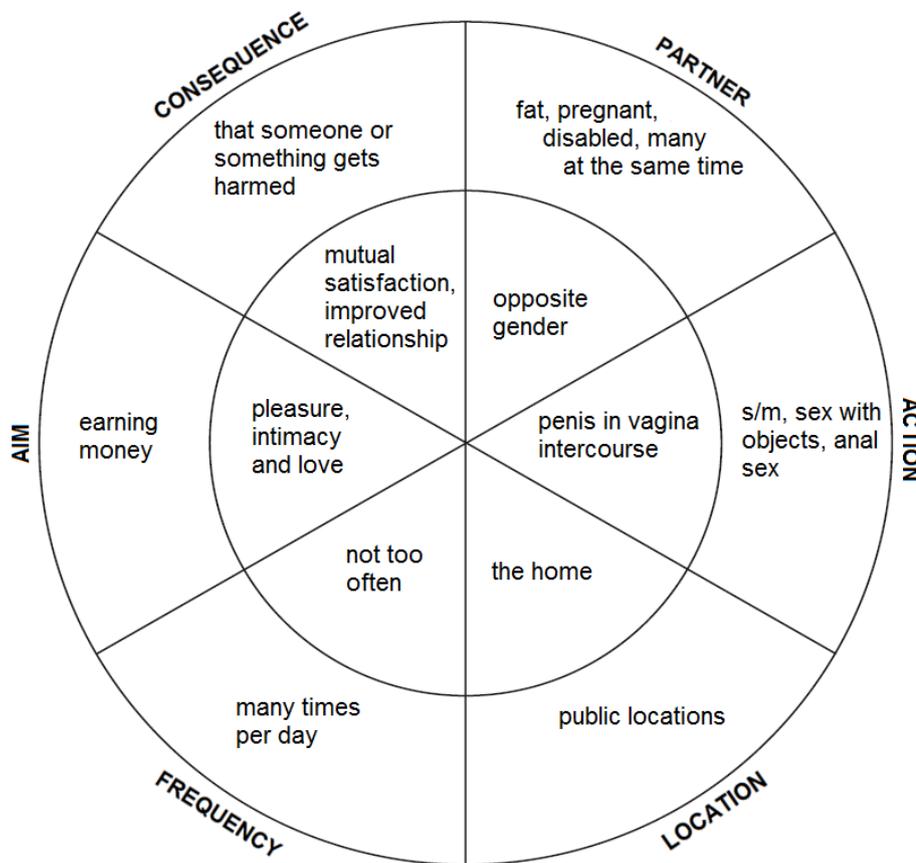
A group of researchers and social workers who wrote a book about male sex-buyers during the intermediate period in the 1990s, have similar views. Sex in itself is a “source of pleasure”, while prostitution is a curse for all involved, because, in prostitution, sex ceases to function as a deeper communication between two people.<sup>22</sup> As I will demonstrate later, Margareta Winberg, too, thinks that sex must be linked to mutuality, gender equality and genuine intimacy.

That sex must contain certain emotional components, is something that is less common to hear from the radical feminist side. But activists Bettan Andersson and Gerda Christensson have claimed that porn is bad because it doesn't contain any intimacy, desire to share and discover each other or have a joint experience.<sup>23</sup> One of them has also criticised porn because the sex there is without joy and tenderness.<sup>24</sup>

The opponents of porn and prostitution rarely directly express that sex must be linked to love, but there are exceptions. Ulrica Messing for one considers sex to belong to loving relationships and contemporary Christian Democrats oppose prostitution because sexuality “is one of love's strongest means of expression.”<sup>25</sup> Women from the Social Democrats, the Left Party and the Liberal Party also wrote in a joint parliamentary motion that sex is about “passion and love, human feelings and respect” that must not be bought and sold.<sup>26</sup> ROKS doesn't directly state that sex must be about love, but since they print and sell postcards with a large lilac heart and the text “Liberate love, fight porn!” they probably think that there is a link. The Left Party also has a T-shirt with the same message.

To more impartially examine and illustrate what a certain sexual morality looks like, one can use a modified version of Rubin's model and the sexologists' ‘script’. Instead of having a fixed content in the various ‘segments’, these can represent various aspects of sexuality which together make up a sexual ideology: partner, act, place, frequency, purpose and consequence. If the

inner circle is good sex and the outer one bad, the sexual morality of the anti-porn and prostitution movement can be illustrated thus:



### A Traditional Sexual Morality

The sexual morality that is expressed in the opposition to porn and prostitution has traditional and almost idyllic features. It should be penis in vagina intercourse in permanent relationships accompanied by tenderness, intimacy, joy and love. It might seem paradoxical that radical and feminist movements don't have a more permissive sexual morality, but, as Rubin points out, basic patterns of ideas about sexuality tend to return time after time. This particular sexual morality has strong roots in Western middle-class culture that developed in connection with the modern state.

## **Sex in Permanent Relationships**

At the same time as it became important for the state that nuclear families should stay together, strict sexual norms became a way for the middle class that was developing in large towns to acquire status. This new class did not belong to the highest caste – the nobility – because for that you had to have blood bonds. The bourgeoisie could, however, through various norms for behaviour, ensure that they could attain a position above that of the peasants and the new urban proletariat. Sexual norms for the different social classes were not the same. In the countryside and in the working classes it was more acceptable to have sexual relations before marriage (as long as the woman did not become pregnant) and in the upper class a more libertine and libidinous way of living had long been more acceptable. Marriage was important for social and economic reasons, while sex and love lives each had their own, albeit discreet, place.

The sexual norms were also influenced by medical attitudes. For a long time, female sexual enjoyment and voluntariness were understood as important for reproduction. There was no knowledge of ova, rather it was thought that when the woman's and the man's body temperatures rose and they achieved ecstasy together then their 'seed' would flow and a pregnancy would result. Pleasure was also seen as a question of health for women. If too much seed collected in the body, this could result in poisons which led to sickness in the womb. Women whose seed was not emptied got yellowish, puffy skin and could die, often 'wasted away' and became manic, and the only cure was marriage and regular sexual intercourse. Many of these ideas were supported by, for example, Martin Luther, who had broken with the celibate demands of the Catholic Church and got married. He proclaimed sex to be something beneficial and recommended intercourse twice a week, and to depressed young men he recommended that they should meet their friends, drink and think about a beautiful girl and what he would do with her.<sup>27</sup>

This more affirmative attitude, however, declined considerably in connection with the expansion of the bourgeoisie during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries – and when the ovum was discovered. Ovulation took place and pregnancies occurred regardless of inscriptions and tremors and rosy cheeks. The norms around women's sexuality became much stricter. Within the increasingly expanding middle class, a woman should be the home's immaculate 'angel'.<sup>28</sup>

## The Requirements of Love and Reformism

There are other sexual norms that are observable amongst the porn and prostitution opponents and which come from this period, such as the masturbation taboo. It is specifically male ejaculate left in hotel rooms in connection with the watching of porn films that is regarded as a problem, not the bodily fluids that are left by copulating couples or by families on holiday.<sup>29</sup>

This might lead one to believe that at least one component of the anti-porn and prostitution movements' sexual ideology is new – the requirement of love and tenderness. But no, already a hundred years ago feminists and 'cultural radicals' sought a sexuality of love.

Cultural radicalism in Sweden [kulturradikalism] was a movement that developed in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century within which famous authors, artists and social critics challenged bourgeois values, double standards, censorship and religious power. One of the issues that cultural radicals advocated was that a couple should not need to be married. The radicals did not, however, demand 'free' sexuality; sex should still be within a relationship, but that relationship should be based on love rather than obligation.<sup>30</sup>

In a book about the 'morality of feminism' from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the author Frida Stéenhoff espoused the opinion that instead of the unjust order of things – where a woman was divided into the private and the public spheres, where the wife should be a mother and faithful to her husband, whilst the whore should be erotic and available to many men – a new sexuality between woman and man should see the light of day. It should be an "erotic unit" between spirit and gender [kön] which she terms a "sexuality of love".<sup>31</sup> Doctor Johan Almqvist also proposed similar ideals. The prudish attitude towards nudity and sexuality was what contributed towards vice and thus the secretiveness must cease. But sex should certainly not be practised in any old way – it should take place within marriage or between 'sound' people in permanent relationships where there was spiritual love.<sup>32</sup>

These cultural radical ideas were incorporated in the social transformation that took place in the 1920s and 1930s in Sweden, and are – for example – to be found in the Population Commission Report on Sexual Issues [Befolkningskommissionen] where Alva and Gunnar Myrdal were involved. Besides creating a basis for a sounder people, the state's mission was to work towards a better sexual morality. Among other things, the Population Commission proposed that measures should be taken to reduce prostitution and

that one should pay special attention to “sexual licentiousness” when seeing to the social needs of the people and questions of genetic hygiene.<sup>33</sup> Marriage was still the ideal for the Commission but they considered extramarital sexual relations’ “intrinsic ethical value” to depend on the “seriousness and responsibility” that was experienced, as well as the strength of the emotional base, the longevity of the relationship and fidelity.<sup>34</sup> “Loose and impersonal” relationships were not appreciated.<sup>35</sup> Moreover, they believed that, from an ethical perspective, it was critical whether or not “the sexual drive appears as separated from other emotional moments or if it is subsumed into a higher, emotional context”.<sup>36</sup>

The reasoning of the cultural radicals, like that of the Population Commission, is thus almost identical to the reasoning that the relationship reformers [‘samlivsreformists’, see Chapter 1] in the various movements against porn and prostitution used half a century later.

Nor is there anything new in the demand for men who buy sex to be punished. Already at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a group that described themselves as “educated married women” thought that it was the man who ought to be punished and stigmatised, because the man was considered to be the guilty part – if he didn’t pay, then women wouldn’t sell sex.<sup>37</sup> And in the Population Commission too, the sex buyer was blamed.

Another parallel lies in the social engineers of their time and the contemporary state feminists’ idea and ambition to create a better society via heterosexual marriage or partnership. During her stint as Deputy Prime Minister, Margareta Winberg, together with Louise Eek (writer and former sex seller), published an article where the state’s aims with the work against prostitution was clear: to create the basis for a gender-equal society. The path to which goes via sexuality<sup>38</sup>:

Our purpose is to create the basis for a society with new forms of co-habitation and shared responsibility that brings together women, men and children in a reconstructed gender-equal family that is better suited for free women, enlightened children and stable men. When sexuality is linked to mutuality, gender equality and genuine intimacy between two people, it simultaneously excludes the possibility to objectify, manipulate and ‘buy’ each other. It is ultimately about changed relations between women and men.

Even the politician who has most adopted the profile of a radical feminist – Gudrun Schyman – believes that the path to a gender-equal society is via love and relationships between two people. Although she, like Frida Stéenhoff, does not link love and sex, but love and feminism.

On one occasion, I met Gudrun Schyman to discuss porn, and the question of prostitution cropped up. She said that she was against prostitution because sex is a feeling and trade creates a power structure which has nothing to do with that feeling. But she emphasised that the feeling that sex should be linked to did not necessarily have to be love or long-term relationships because people have “moralised and hush-hushed” around sex for far too long.<sup>39</sup> However, since she became involved in feminist politics full-time, it is love rather than female sexual desire that she considers important.<sup>40</sup> Gudrun Schyman often emphasises that she doesn’t hate men; quite the opposite – she loves them (she is now “on her fourth”, as she says). The objects of her hate are things she regards as accompanying the patriarchal power structure; push-up bras and stereotypical gender roles – which she considers to be a threat to love. Feminism is a “rescue action” for love, because it is through feminism that men and women can meet and society be improved.<sup>41</sup>

Her new political party, Feminist Initiative, also has a thorough plan for increasing love in society. Every year, they arrange a special ‘love week’ (this can be compared with ROKS which has long had an anti-porn week at around the same time of year) and they have a special 6-point programme to increase love in society.

## **A Problematic Sexual Morality**

It would surely be fantastic if every time people had sex they felt intense pleasure, genuine intimacy and loving trust. Or that the parties were entirely equal and felt completely secure and loved. This sort of sex, which is advocated by the porn and prostitution opponents, is something that many people desire but few are granted. But aside from the fact that this isn’t perhaps the objective of, or possible for, everybody, the question is what the consequences of this sexual morality are when it forms the basis for a policy of gender equality and sexuality.

Because it is a most difficult project to value a certain sexuality as higher than another without giving a detailed motivation for why, problematising

assumptions and examining what the consequences will be. Besides, when sexual morality is always present (albeit being invisible and denied) in a powerful debate such as that of porn and prostitution, it is hard to question it, challenge it, and provide alternatives.

From a feminist perspective, the requirement of love and a relationship is also exceedingly problematic. Feminists, and especially radical feminists who are critical of the nuclear family, have long pointed out and criticised how the very idea of love and the expectations that are placed upon women in relationships affects their lives. They are ideas and expectations of romance, love and relationships that contribute towards women restricting their own thoughts, lives and dreams – everything from socialising with female friends for an evening, to failing to finish one's education or have a career. These are what lead women – without complaint – to make sure that the home is cleaned, the laundry is washed, the children's noses are blown, and that the man's bits and pieces are picked up after him. Not to mention all the being pushing around that she has to put with and all the blows that have to be forgiven – in the name of love and the holy twosomeness.<sup>42</sup>

So how, then, can this traditional (and for women potentially limiting) sexual morality not only be accepted but even be advocated and implemented by Swedes promoting gender equality – and not be questioned more?

## **Sin Turned into Ideology**

Sexual ideologies have been created and maintained by virtue of certain acts having been made religious sins, criminal acts or pathological deviations. Feelings of guilt and shame, social-exclusion mechanisms, psychiatric treatment and judicial punishments have caused people to restrict their behaviour and their thoughts. But today, with a few interesting exceptions such as those that apply to sex buyers, sexual acts way down in the sexual hierarchy are rarely seen as being about sin or mental illness.<sup>43</sup> Nor is there nowadays talk of genetic hygiene or social care of the people. Now, instead, it is said to be about gender-unequal structures, patriarchal men, and women who fall victim to them.

The motivation for the Social Democratic government's work against prostitution has been that it is a necessary part of the Swedish aspiration for gender equality since gender equality cannot be achieved "as long as men buy, sell and abuse women and children by prostituting them."<sup>44</sup> It is also

“undignified and unacceptable” that men can buy casual sex with women in a gender-equal society.<sup>45</sup> Some Social Democrat MPs are of the opinion that porn too is an obstacle for ‘real’ gender equality and legislating against all porn is therefore a ‘natural’ step towards greater gender equality.<sup>46</sup>

The leader of the Left Party, Lars Ohly, believes that prostitution is “totally incompatible” with a gender-equal society.<sup>47</sup> The Green Party thinks that prostitution is based on the exercise of power, degradation and submissiveness, and wants the output of porn to cease.<sup>48</sup> The Christian Democrats consider porn and prostitution to be associated with men’s violence against women and for men’s violence against women to be associated with gender equality and the distribution of power between the sexes.<sup>49</sup>

But sexual morality and the sexual behaviours that are condemned or advocated with the aid of gender equality rhetoric, is nothing new. Sex that was previously understood as a religious sin and later as a mental deviation is now regarded as an ideological crime. Admittedly, the explicit social condemnation and restrictions were formerly directed at women, as opposed to today when they are directed at men but, as I will show in this book, it is still the women in prostitution who fare the worst.

What happened in Sweden at the end of the 1990s was that sin went from being psychologised to being ideologised. With the help of gender equality ideology, undesired sexual behaviours can be condemned, controlled and punished without attracting attention and protests from people who usually stand up for vulnerable groups. The ideology also provides a smoke screen obscuring any normally clear sighted feminist analyses. In this way, strict sexual morality and demands for love and relationships can pass unnoticed.

This is where a modified version of radical feminist theory becomes useful. Criticism of the nuclear family and the ideology of love is left out so that what remains is just criticism of commercial sex. Porn, prostitution and sexual perversions are men’s violence against women, and men’s violence against women is both the cause and the result of a gender-unequal society. Those who are engaged in these activities, or who don’t agree with the reasoning, are no longer lost souls, condemned or mentally ill. They are simply not sufficiently ‘gender equal’ [jämställd].

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<sup>1</sup> Östergren (1996).

<sup>2</sup> See The Swedish Media Council's [Mediarådets] website, [www.mediaradet.se](http://www.mediaradet.se). The council is unique as, in reality, it is a committee which is usually limited by a timeframe, is inquiring about certain issues and is required to present a report. The Swedish Media Council is not working according to these standards, which means, in practice, that it has the status of a formal authority or a department.

<sup>3</sup> Segelström (2002).

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Nilsson-Schönnesson (2002).

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, Garpe and Osten (1977).

<sup>6</sup> "It's about the one who is used." ["Det handlar om den som används."] (1996).

<sup>7</sup> Eriksson (2001), (2002).

<sup>8</sup> For a discussion on Swedish gender equality policy and women who are only free to make the "right" choices, see Rabo (1997).

<sup>9</sup> Roks (no date available). Italics in original.

<sup>10</sup> Schmidt (2004).

<sup>11</sup> "Profession? That's bizarre, says Ylva Thörn." ["Yrke? Det är bisarrt, säger Ylva Thörn."] (2002).

<sup>12</sup> "Party moralism." ["Partimoralism."] (2005).

<sup>13</sup> Nilsson-Schönnesson (2002).

<sup>14</sup> Rubin (1992), p. 286f.

<sup>15</sup> Foucault (1980), p. 52.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 54.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 60f.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 132f.

<sup>19</sup> Nordin (1979), p. 44.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 64.

<sup>21</sup> For a more positive view of pornography, see for example RFSU (1976), p. 102f. Extracts of the Programme of Ideas that they developed is reprinted in Nestius (1984), p. 8. Today, RFSU is only critical to pornography which is "offensive" and when the actors are mistreated, see RFSU (2004).

<sup>22</sup> Sandell et. al. (1996), p. 165.

<sup>23</sup> Andersson and Christensson (1991), p. 17.

<sup>24</sup> Christensson (1985).

<sup>25</sup> See, for example, Åbjörnsson et. al. (1997/98).

<sup>26</sup> Persson, Pilsäter och Sahlström (1992/93).

<sup>27</sup> Ekenstam (1993), Foucault (1980), Gårdfeldt (2000).

<sup>28</sup> Ekenstam (1993).

<sup>29</sup> For a more comprehensive discussion on "problematic" male masturbation, see Kulick (2006).

<sup>30</sup> See, for example, Ekenstam (1993), Hirdman (2000), Lennerhed (1994).

<sup>31</sup> As referred to in Olsson (no date available) and Hirdman (2000), p. 74.

<sup>32</sup> Söderblom (1992), p. 200.

<sup>33</sup> SOU 1936:59, p. 107.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 77.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 76.

<sup>36</sup> SOU 1938:58, p. 145, in Hirdman (2000), p. 149.

<sup>37</sup> Svanström (2004), p. 227.

<sup>38</sup> Eek and Winberg (2002). Don Kulick has also noted that the quote: "When sexuality is linked to mutuality, gender equality and genuine intimacy between two people, it simultaneously excludes the possibility to objectify, manipulate and 'buy' each other", comes from Sandell et. al. (1996), p. 174. See Kulick (2005), p. 108.

<sup>39</sup> "Hear our demand; sex for everyone!" [Ropen skalla, sex åt alla!] (1998).

<sup>40</sup> Schyman (2006).

<sup>41</sup> Schyman (2005:a), (2005:b).

<sup>42</sup> See, for example, Holmberg (1993) or Kipnis (2004).

<sup>43</sup> For a discussion about people who buy sex, see Kulick (2005).

<sup>44</sup> The Ministry of Enterprise and Innovation (no date available).

<sup>45</sup> The government's proposition 1997/98:55, p. 22.

<sup>46</sup> Palm (2003/04).

<sup>47</sup> Ohly (2004).

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<sup>48</sup> The Green Party's [Miljöpartiet] Party Programme (2002).

<sup>49</sup> Svensson et. al. (1994/95).