The Queer-Friendly Danish Welfare State?
On Heteronormativity and Institutionalized, Restricted Recognition

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Presented at Gender and Power in the New Europe, the 5th European Feminist Research Conference, August 20-24, 2003, Lund University, Sweden

In this paper I discuss the queer-friendliness of the Danish welfare state, and hence the citizenship status of lesbians and gays. Whereas current trends in citizenship studies, concerned with the welfare state’s organization and regulation of citizens’ sexualities, have focused upon equality with heterossexuals and the achievement of rights, the aim of the paper is to contribute to a theoretical turn, focusing instead upon recognition, participation and social justice. The paper enquires for the analytical gains of this turn in studying processes of in- and exclusions of lesbians and gays and in establishing a normative foundation for critique of current laws, as they affect the legal status and political position of lesbians and gays.

In outlining this turn, I try to join, although only in a very tentative way, theories of citizenship, of recognition and finally of justice.

The paper addresses four essential questions:
- What is the role of recognition in citizenship?
- What is recognition analytically understood, and how are we to understand its relation to social justice?
- How do the structures of recognition of the welfare state look like in regard to sexuality?
- And finally, do these structures promote or prevent status equality between lesbians and gays respectively heterossexuals?

Considering these questions, I focus empirically on Danish legislation, concerning family and reproduction issues, including the law on registered partnership, the law on adoption of stepchildren and children from abroad, the law on assisted reproduction, and finally the law on parental leave. All laws reveal restricted recognition, or misrecognition of lesbians and gays due to the institutionalization of heteronormativity. This implies not only denial of full civil rights and welfare services, but also objectification, as this group of nominally equal citizens are treated as objects and subjected to the deliberations and decisions of others, who see them as less than human beings.