ABSTRACT

THE IMPORTANCE OF MARRIAGE?
SWEDISH WOMEN NEGOTIATING FAMILY LIFE.

Anna Adeniji, Department of Gender Studies, Linkoping University.

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

Marriage isn’t an obligation in Sweden today and divorce is very common. A lot of women wish to stay unmarried and the feminist movement has made that a possible solution. For some, to stay unmarried is the ultimate way to express the independence of the typical Swedish woman. But still, is there a way to really qualify or understand kinship without the recognisable family form, the nuclear family?

At the same time as Swedish heterosexual couples make the highest divorce rate in the world gay people are still struggling to get the same rights as heterosexuals. Polyamorous relationships aren’t even close to getting their families confirmed by the Swedish state.

The thesis I am working on is about contemporary Swedish notions of “the family”, and of so to speak “marry and settle down”. I want to argue that the image of the normal family, distributed through media, magazines, and authorities is based on a logic where gender and sexuality are symmetrical bricks in a system of binary opposition. The monogamous marriage is still the ideal symbol of forming a recognisable family form and therefor an important dividing line. There are also specific ideas about age, class and ethnicity, which organise both cultural representations of Swedish families as well as peoples possibilities to make own families.

The empirical data will also tell us something about the Swedish, contemporary cultural image of “The Normal Family” and which possibilities there are to cross the borders between normal and deviant behaviour regarding to class, ethnicity, age and sexual practises.

My paper is a work-in-progress and will include thoughts and experiences from the empirical data I’ve collected so far. I am interviewing Swedish women of different age and ethnicity with a range of sexual and relational practises who have in common that they don’t wish to get married. I’m interested in their views about family life and possibilities of making kinship and family relations without the supervision of the institution of marriage.