

my skin will crack off
I'll be a newborn piglet underneath

Juha's a fine man for his age
he skied both here and back
the red tassel flying on his hat
he killed the old sow clean
just one blow with Gus's hammer"

KANADALAINEN

To have left behind the language
that flowed like spring water
the easy seepage
of fresh words every hour

To have come to a land
of thorough drought
with a dry tongue

To have to pump the handle
like a child again
lifted off the platform
by every upstroke
the pump so stiff
the well so dark
you doubt the alkali earth
will ever release its sour water

To hang a new pail
from the knuckle
on the pump mouth
watching the water trickle
slowly at first
then slowly faster
until the pail is overflowing,
only to stumble on a root
on the path to the house

To watch the pumped water
settle and seep
into insatiable
Canadian earth

To have believed the words
would ever flow together
into sentences

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Some Reflections on Equality, Democracy & Identity in Sweden & Canada

by Ingrid Ljungberg van Beinum

The other day I read an article in a Swedish magazine about a woman who is an actress, dancer, educator, as well as many other things. What really struck me was her statement: "I'm Swedish, I'm black." These words triggered off a forceful image because of their inherent strength and impossibility. Swedish people are after all, mostly blond and blue-eyed. Ingrained perceptions can be very deceiving. Being blond, blue-eyed and Swedish myself, although I've lived in Canada for 10 years and outside of Sweden for 18 years, it reminded me of my own identity and how it is linked to the notions of equality and democracy, and how these change over time.

In this discussion I will take the view that being sure of one's own identity is necessary to understand equality and to be able to participate in a "real democratic" society. The three concepts are, as I see it, positively correlated.

Instead of following an academic discourse of comprehensive definitions and analyses of equality, democracy and identity, I will focus on more general and operational definitions as we use and understand them in our daily reality. Although I am very much aware that these questions are pertinent to all the different groups that make up society, I will limit my remarks to women and men and their relationship. I think that if we cannot clarify the "equality and identity crisis" between men and women, we will have little chance of making any progress in improving the relationship between the various other groups in society. As the picture with regard to the latter is somewhat gloomy, learning about the role and relationship between women and men is a matter of urgency.

I will begin with a few remarks about the meaning of the three concepts and how I use them, and then I will try to link

them to some examples, mainly from Sweden but partly from Canada as well.

Equality

In Sweden there was a lively discussion in the late 1950s and early 1960s about equality in the field of education. The debate was largely about whether equality means people are basically the same or whether equality means that people should be treated equally although they are different. The debate led to a school system allowing equal opportunities for dissimilar people which included a compulsory 9 year education for everyone.

In Canada the Royal Commission on Equality in Employment for women, native people, disabled persons and visible minorities, which was chaired by Judge Rosalie Abella, has expressed its views as follows: equality "means that no one is denied opportunities for reasons that have nothing to do with inherent ability." Further, "discrimination...means...limiting an individual's or group's right to the opportunities generally available because of attributed rather than actual characteristics," and "sometimes equality means treating people the same, despite their differences, and sometimes it means treating them as equals by accommodating their differences."¹

These are broad and humane definitions. To treat people in a certain way does not, *per se*, mean one does so out of an inner conviction. It may well be the result of environmental forces such as legislation or peer pressure.

The point is that unless we recognize, understand and believe in equality as discussed in Judge Abella's report, we cannot deal with it in a genuine fashion and consequently society will have great difficulty in developing equality as an authentic cultural characteristic.

Discussing equality and differentiation between men and women, Sr. Prudence Allen, a Canadian writer, describes the relationship between men and women as follows:

1. sex polarity, which refers to the idea that men and women are different but not equal,
2. sex unity, which means that men and women are equal and not significantly different,
3. sex complementarity, which is based on the notion that men and women are equal as well as significantly different.²

Historically, sex polarity has been the prevalent view in our society and is in accordance with Genesis 2, in contrast to Genesis 1. It forms the base value of Western patriarchal culture.

With the emergence of the women's movement, the second perspective, sex unity, became important as a counterweight to the first one. However, if our society is serious in its attempt to achieve equality between men and women, only the third alternative, that is sex complementarity, would offer true equality between women and men. This will be the position I will adopt as the basis for my reflections.

Democracy

One cannot reflect upon equality without doing so in the context of democracy, because democracy is the social expression of equality.

For the purpose of this discussion, I will distinguish between:

- a) representative or indirect democracy, and
- b) participatory or direct democracy.

The concept of democracy is usually associated with the first type, with parliamentary democracy and the right to vote. One has influence via others, i.e., representatives.

In participative democracy one has the opportunity to have direct and personal influence. One is functioning in structures which allow one to be directly involved in the decision making process that will affect one's situation, such as the work environment or the community one is living in.

Democracy and equality are of course highly interdependent. Democracy is based on the value of equal rights, and equality can only be expressed and de-

veloped in a society governed by democratic principles. However, if the democratic features of our society are mainly based on the principles of representative democracy, and if our daily work, community and even family environments are characterized by bureaucratic structures, asymmetrical relationships and hierarchical controls, then equality cannot be fully developed. There is not sufficient space for expressing, testing and developing our personal sense of equality in a meaningful way. In today's complex society, representative democracy is not enough and its corresponding bureaucratic structures are definitely a hindrance.

For equality to flourish we have to further democratize the infrastructures of society by means of introducing and developing participatory structures and processes. Only then can equality in the sense of sex complementarity, which recognizes both the equality and the differentiation of men and women, develop in a true and sustained manner.

Identity

Identity has to do with knowing oneself, with having a feeling of who one is. And because we are who we are as a result of our relationships with others, there is a basic need for a continuous interaction between oneself and the "other" — the outside world. Understanding ourselves is a continuous process of learning from and particularly with other people.

This holds not only for individuals but also, albeit on a different scale, for groups with their specific characteristics, e.g., men, women, ethnic groups, visible minorities, native people, etc. (I am using the term group here in a very broad and general sense).

As part of groups we also have an identity which influences the behaviour of the members of the group and the way in which the group is being perceived from the outside. This identity is for a variety of reasons much more difficult to "manage" than an individual identity. To change the identity of a group from the inside is no easy matter, particularly when that identity is riddled with stereotypes, or when there is no real drive or motivation among the members to change this identity. As a result people stay "locked up" in a super imposed self image.

Probably the most important single factor influencing the identity of a group is the amount of power ascribed to that group. Power differences between groups and the fact that society is inclined to rank-order groups in terms of importance and influence, greatly determine our individual sense of identity.

We talk so easily about the richness of a multi-cultural society in which there is equality, recognition and cultural space for differences in ethnic background, language and religion. The hard reality often shows that prejudice, misunderstanding and fear are not far below the surface of manifest acceptance. It is a difficult process to accommodate both equality and differentiation.

Using Sr. Prudence Allen's ideas about the relation between sex and identity, one could consider group polarity, group unity and group complementarity in a similar way. In this sense the legislation with regard to equality and human rights represent a move from group polarity to group unity. The real cultural challenge of group complementarity is still to come.

Equality, democracy and identity form the cornerstones of the quality of life in a mature and healthy society. Equality in the sense of having equal rights, does not only include the right to be different, but also recognizes the importance and indeed the necessity to be different. It is the driving force of democracy. It is both cause and effect. However, equality will have only a shallow meaning if it cannot be allowed to be developed and pursued in the context of the search for our identity, both as individuals and as group members.

Equality, Democracy and Identity in Some Real Life Situations

Orientation and values, which are some of the components which make up our identity, may change over time. An example is the way the women's movement has changed during the last decades. In the earlier days the struggle was about equality in the sense of "on equal terms." Women were as good as men, and as able; women could do anything a man could do. And of course we can. But at the same time we are slowly recognizing some important differences. We are, after all, in certain respects different and can allow ourselves to be different without being

less equal.

Being equal really means that we, men and women, should have the same opportunities in all walks of life, while being allowed to be ourselves. It also means that being a man is not better than being a woman — and vice-versa.

After all, as human beings, we are more similar than different. Feminine and masculine characteristics are to be found in us all. It is the recognition of the feminine and the masculine within men and women as well as between women and men which forms the basis of our humanity.

To understand our differences as well as our similarities will enable us to complement each other, learn from each other, while appreciating and learning from the differences. Sex complementarity is the only way to achieve equality between men and women. Men have for millennia been able to say: I'm a man, I'm O.K. Some women still have difficulties saying: I'm a woman, I'm O.K.

If we look at the Swedish scene, we see that the Swedish man is not O.K. at present. In a manner of speaking he is in a state of turmoil. There has been a gradual but important change in the last couple of decades which affected both men and women and which is illustrated by the introduction of parental leave (1974). This means that the nine months of 90% paid leave can be utilized by the mother or father in any way they want. It also means that any one of them can stay at home with sick children 12 years old or younger up to a certain number of days per year.

However, in spite of this legislation, women in Sweden, as elsewhere, continue to be the main care-takers of the family and household. In view of this situation the Ministry of Labour initiated a project in 1982 on the changing role of men in Sweden.

The idea behind this project was that "equal opportunities concern both women and men and that the new pattern of life presupposes changes in the roles of both sexes. A change in the role of women also demands a change in the role of men...In order for any further progress to be made, men will have to approach women in debate and reality."

In this connection it is important to realize that a very high percentage of women in Sweden are engaged in the workforce and by the early 1990s it is expected that

the number of men and women gainfully employed will be the same. However, "men still behave as though they were married to full-time housewives."³

In Sweden, contrary to the common perception and expectation, men still occupy most positions of power in the business world. And here as well as in most other countries, women are not able in general to compete with men on equal terms. This consideration was the rationale behind the project.³

The project started with trying to identify some of the phases in a man's life when he would be most sensitive to change. The stages they thought important were when a man:

1. is having children
2. is becoming a grandfather
3. makes a choice about his career
4. is going into the military service
5. is having a crisis⁴

Between 1984 and 1987, a number of workshops were organized which attracted top level participants from virtually all sectors of Swedish society. A total of seven different one day workshops were held on the following topics:

- the "Dream of Fathers", the role of fathers,
- the "Role of Men in the Work Situation,"
- "If You had Feelings," how men react to aggressiveness and other feelings,
- "Studies about the role of men," how to change the role,
- "Breaking the Tradition," a workshop about men working within female-dominated work areas,
- "Research about the Role of Men," a meeting of researchers
- "Men and Separations," separations and child-care issues,

The proceedings of each of these workshops were written up and published. This project, called "Man in Transition," is a good example of how on a societal level an attempt is made to help a group to change and understand its identity. To say: "I'm Swedish, I'm a man" is perhaps slowly taking on a new meaning.

A lot of research is being done in Sweden on women's issues. It covers a wide variety of topics, including:

- the structural changes of the labour market and its impact on women,
- the influence of new technology on women,
- strategies for increasing the number of women in non-traditional occupations,

- working conditions for women,
- the representation of women in political life,
- the meaning of the fact that men are employed in 300 occupations and that the majority of women are found in only 11 of them.⁴

It is important to note that very little of this research, with a few exceptions, is concerned with the identity of women, with what women believe in, and how they think and feel. Consequently little attention is given to the meaning of these issues in organizational structural terms.

In social research there still seems to be a lack of recognition that women might be different from men other than from a reproductive point of view. This does not surprise me. When I consider my own experience of being a working woman in Sweden during the 1960s, I can hardly recall any incidents where I, as a woman, felt discriminated against or was not given the same opportunities as my male colleagues.

While in the rest of the Western world the women's movement was taking off, Swedish women during the 1960s and '70s were, on the whole, not very concerned. After all, our mothers and sometimes grandmothers had already been working women. And in addition a lot of enabling legislation was already in place:

- 1859 women become eligible for certain teaching appointments,
- 1873 women become entitled to take university degrees, with certain exceptions (theology and higher law degrees),
- 1874 unmarried women become legally competent at 21 years,
- 1919 women acquire the vote and become eligible,
- 1921 married women become legally competent at 21. The new Marriage Code treats husband and wife as equals,
- 1923 women become eligible for national government appointments,
- 1937 maternity benefits are introduced,
- 1938 contraception becomes legal,
- 1958 women admitted to the priesthood,
- 1974 parental insurance introduced, entitling parents to share leave of absence in connection with childbirth,
- 1979 parents of infant children entitled to a six-hour working day.⁵

These are just a few examples of the results of the efforts made by the mothers

and grandmothers of my generation.

While women in other countries were, during the 1960s and '70s, involved in wave after wave of the women's movement, Swedish women seemed to be hibernating.

It seemed that Sweden had already, at an early stage, moved from sex polarity (men and women are different and not equal) to sex unity (men and women are not different, and equal in all respects).

The next phase, which is concerned with sex complementarity, is only just starting to surface in Sweden and is taking place at this moment as a societal dialogue. I expect though that in the coming decade this is going to change dramatically. The recognition and development of "equality with differentiation" is going to accelerate rapidly and will become an integral part of Swedish society. My views are based on a number of considerations:

- there is a strong enabling legislation dealing with both the home and the work environment,
- the development of the relationship between men and women is an important component in Swedish formal and informal education,
- equality is a dominant element in Swedish culture and its various societal expressions, and
- most important, the rapid increase of participatory democracy in industry and other areas will provide the basis and the context for this development.

On Being an Immigrant

Ursula Franklin, who is professor of Metallurgy and Material Sciences at the University of Toronto, has in her writing used the analogy of women engineers being immigrants within their own field. She describes a situation where women engineering students encounter the world of their male counterparts through a student newspaper. The paper, according to Franklin, is "essentially a filthy, sexist and racist rag and quite often offensive." Referring to discussions with female students she continues: "Several of these students were officers of the Engineering Society, the student body responsible for the publication. The encounters resulting from these attempts were revealing and actually quite sad. The women students assured us that they were not offended at

all by the sexist or racist jokes or cartoons; they thought many of them were really quite funny and that, after all, boys-will-be-boys. It was painful for me to see how most though not all of them, were trying so hard to become part of the "tribe" that they were losing their own identity, their common sense and their judgement...I now see why women who have entered the technological order cope with adjustment to the new milieu and their new loyalties by denying their origins. They seek conformity in language and habit, absorb the new culture and defend the new system without necessarily understanding it. For others, the cultural and emotional isolation brought about by immigration can result in a vague feeling of malaise...It must be recognized that it is not incompetence, lack of ability or stamina, but the breaking down of the ties with a natural community that is at the bottom of this malaise. What is needed is affirmation that community can be established, ties can be strengthened and reinforced, loneliness can be admitted and collectively overcome.⁶

This analogy to immigrants holds not only for women engineers, but generally for all women entering the labour market. It is especially valid for women working in non-traditional areas, such as in technical male-dominated occupations or as senior executives. Women trying to make a career in business often find themselves put in a situation where they have to struggle with dual and even false identities. As we all know, we are not only required to behave as a man during working hours, but we are also expected to behave as the caring and serving woman and mother during the remaining part of the day. This feeling of having dual identities holds not only for women, but for everyone crossing a significant psychological and cultural boundary and thus becoming "an immigrant" in a new situation.

If our environment keeps us locked up in different identities, we can only behave in a maladaptive fashion. We cope by means of segmentation, dissociation and superficiality.

If, on the other hand, we are allowed to enter the new territory on the basis of equality, and have the opportunity to search for a new identity in a democratic dialogue with others, we can explore and discover a new level of self and authen-

ticity.

It is time we recognize that both men and women are "immigrants" in the realm of sex complementarity.

To democratize the relationship between men and women, we must further democratize the infrastructure of our society. Under these conditions we can start to build a world which will allow us to be "different from" as well as to "belong to."

Sweden, with its democratization of both work and family, provides us with a hopeful development.

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³*Side by Side, A Report on Equality Between Men and Women in Sweden 1985*, Ministry of Labour, 1985.

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⁵See 3.

⁶Franklin, Ursula M., "Will Women Change Technology or Will Technology Change Women," in *Knowledge Reconciled, A Feminist Overview*, CRIAW, Ottawa, Canada, 1984, pp. 77-91.