



## **IARTEM *e-Journal***

### **Volume 3 No 1**

#### **Volume 3 Number 1**

---

### **With Gender Awareness: Improving the reading of gender in educational texts and illustrations**

Susanne V. Knudsen  
Vestfold University College

#### **Abstract**

The article gives examples from analyses of textbooks and computer games, observations in 8<sup>th</sup> grade in a Norwegian school and interviews with some students. The theoretical inspiration comes from gender research on “doing gender”, and gender is studied in constant interchange and negotiation. The textbooks confirm traditional gender and equality of the genders. However, with gender awareness the texts, tasks and illustrations in the textbooks open for exploring femininities and masculinities in plurality. The observations of the students work and interviews with the students working with computer games pointed towards other constructions of femininities and masculinities than the constructions in the computer games. The different constructions of femininities and masculinities are examples of the transformation from computer games published for use in spare time to their representations in a school textbook.

#### **Introduction**

Gender research related to education in primary school, secondary school and upper secondary school commenced in the 1970's. Since then, gender research has gone through a series of changes. The research has been inspired by theoretical shifts within feminist and critical studies, and has continually responded to socio-cultural changes. Research on gender in education has also developed from what could be

labelled as 'gender as category' into 'gender as construction' and 'gender as deconstruction' (Knudsen 2005). In the Scandinavian countries the changes of representations of gender in textbooks and educational media follow to some degree the debate over girls and boys in schools in the media and political sphere.

In the 1970's and most of the 1980's, the debate focused on girls as losers in the Scandinavian schools, especially on the so-called "silent girls." In textbooks, this focus was followed with more texts and illustrations that applied to girls: i.e. fiction rather than non-fiction, romance fiction with women and girls as narrators and main characters, non-fiction texts and illustrations presenting electronic equipment to be used in everyday life.

In the 1990's and 2000's the debate has focused on the under-performance of boys in doing schoolwork and their low scores in reading tests (PISA and Pirls). Critical voices were raised against the lack of physical stimulus for boys in school. In the Scandinavian countries textbooks and educational media reflected this debate through texts and illustrations that applied to boys: i.e. non-fiction rather than fiction, sports and cartoons with men and boys as narrators and main characters, science fiction, splatter stories and illustrations of competing boys and boys experimenting with electricity. However, textbooks and educational media could become more open to gender diversities and deconstruction of gender stereotypes. This can be seen in gender research of a multiple understanding of femininity as femininities and of masculinity as masculinities, and in crossing femininity and masculinity.

In this article I will give some examples from new Norwegian textbooks in the subject of mother tongue. The theoretical inspiration comes from gender research on "doing gender" (West & Zimmerman 1987); the article will begin with a presentation of this inspiration and its implications. Secondly, examples from new Norwegian textbooks in the subject of mother tongue for eighth grade will be analysed and discussed. Thirdly, observations from classrooms using inspiration from these textbook to work with computer games are presented. Interviews with some of the students that have been observed working with computer games will form the fourth section of the article. Fifthly and finally, the article will draw some conclusions from the analysis, observations and interviews.

### **Theoretical inspiration**

In critical research, including gender research, we refer to 'a linguistic turn.' This linguistic turn implies a focus on how language constructs meaning and is meaning-making. What positivist inspired researchers think of as reality, turns towards a research of reality as representation. In gender research the linguistic turn means a shift from studying gender roles to studying gender as construction (Knudsen 2005 with reference to Kuzmic 2000, Lempiäinen 2003). The studies of gender roles are criticised for having a view on gender that is based on the concepts of 'biology' and 'essentialism'. With gender as representation and construction, it is about "doing gender" (West & Zimmerman 1987). Thus, gender is analysed in constant interchange and negotiation. Researchers handle the interchange and negotiation of gender differently: they can emphasise the importance of, for example, a socio-

cultural, a psychological, or a phenomenological perspective (Gressgård & Jacobsen 2003, Haavind 2003, Moi 1998).

From a biological perspective there is a difference between the female and the male body. However, differences of the body do not tell about different identities, as can be analysed from the psychological perspective. Neither do differences of the body point towards the socio-cultural meaning-making of the body or of its social positions. What is at stake with bodily difference are the ways that the body is interpreted. This representation is a matter of interchange and negotiation. It concerns “the signs of the bodies” (Søndergaard 1996). It is not the breasts and the chest as such that signal the gender difference. It is our interpretation in interchange and negotiation that gives meaning to the combinations of female and breasts and of male and chest. Through language we construct the breasts and the chest just as we construct some breasts and chests as beautiful or ugly, dis/abled, well-known and unknown. In the meaning-making of bodies there are norms and interests that can be connected to aesthetically, religiously, biologically, psychologically or socially oriented argumentation (Reisby 1999). Also, the doing gender has been proved through research in the changes of history. For example, femininity, the 1940’s femininity in connection to the housewife, has changed to the 1960’s concept of femininity including work outside the home, and the 1990’s concept of femininity in higher education (Rosenbeck 1987, Søndergaard 1996). Furthermore, the doing gender has been studied as a situated and ongoing process. Researchers have examined the instability of gender in, for example, the Scandinavian schools (Bjerrum Nielsen 1997, Knudsen 2004).

With theoretical inspiration from “doing gender,” the concept of femininity and masculinity can be analysed as historical constructions, connected to contexts and situations. However, gender can also be deconstructed. Subjects as agencies contribute to the constructions, and they can also be made aware of the constructions through deconstruction. Although subjects are constructed within a community (or a discourse, as Foucault-inspired researchers describe it) it is possible to resist the community or discourse (Flyvbjerg 2003, Knudsen 2008). Foucault writes about a counter discourse within discourses (Foucault 1984).

In my research on masculinities, I have been inspired by sociologist Robert W. Connell. His book *Masculinities* introduces the position of ‘hegemonic masculinity’ (Connell 1995, Knudsen 2005). The position of hegemonic masculinity is characterised by leadership and dominance. This masculinity is practised by the patriarchal father or teacher, who sets boundaries that are implicit, not to be discussed, and severe. Hegemonic masculinity is enhanced in different communities, contexts and situations, and changes through history. Research has analysed the construction of hegemonic masculinity in order to handle masculinity in a suitable manner in social interactions in classrooms and schoolyards (Frosh, Phoenix & Pattman 2002, Koefoed 2005). In his studies of males in a working class group and among schoolboys in Australia, Connell identifies the positions of subordinate masculinity, marginalised masculinity and complicity (Connell 1995: 76 ff). The position of subordinate masculinity between males supports the hegemonic masculinity by dissociating, for example, homosexuality or ‘the soft male.’ The position of marginalised masculinity between males is “always relative to the

*authorization* of the hegemonic masculinity of the dominant group.”(Connell 1995: 81, 1996).. If the authorization is a tough male, then the crying male will be in the position of marginalised masculinity. The position of complicity underscores a historic given hegemonic masculinity without necessarily being able to practise a hegemonic masculinity.

In the same way that Connell has explored different forms of masculinities connected to the position of hegemonic masculinity, I will try to explore the positions of hegemonic femininity, subordinate femininity, marginalised femininity and complicity. Research on femininities has been conducted in empirical studies of pupils in school and students in academia, and different positions have been developed in relation to the situations and contexts observed (Mørck 2005, Søndergaard 2005). Furthermore, the crossing of femininity and masculinity has been studied with concepts of ‘female masculinity’ connected to positions as ‘butch’ in lesbian communities and connected to queer studies of drags (Halberstam 1998).

### **Confirming gender in educational texts and illustrations**

The examples in this article are taken from the systems of two Norwegian educational texts, published in 2006: *Fra saga til CD* (From Saga to CD, Jensen & Lien) and *8-10 kontekst* (8-10 Context, Blichfeldt et al.).<sup>1</sup> Both systems are published for use in the subject of mother tongue in Norway. The systems include basic books; anthologies with ‘borrowed texts’ from articles in newspapers, short stories, etc.; CDs, and digital homepages. Tasks are included in the textbooks and the digital homepages. The system ‘From Saga to CD’ is designed for eighth grade (13 to 14-year-old students), whereas the system ‘8-10 Context’ can be used from the eighth to the tenth grade.<sup>2</sup>

In *From Saga to CD*, authors with male names are over-represented in the ‘borrowed texts,’ i.e. the short stories and excerpts from novels and poems (Jensen & Lien 2006a,b). This over-representation signals a change since 1997, when the ‘borrowed texts’ had a more equal division of texts written by female and male authors (Jensen & Lien 1997a,b). The represented fiction also had more boys and men as main characters in 2006 than in 1997. Possibly, the authors in the textbooks from 2006 try to compensate for the dominance of the boys’ representation in one task by asking the students to split “the class in boys’ and girls’ groups” to list the most popular cartoons. (Jensen & Lien 2006a: 97).<sup>3</sup> Then, the students are asked to find the difference between the boys’ and the girls’ lists. If the students have listened to the CD following this course about cartoons, they have learned that boys and girls prefer different cartoons (Jensen & Lien 2006c).

---

<sup>1</sup> The analyses of the systems in the educational texts, and of observations and interviews, have been conducted in relation to the project “The Reading of Expository Texts as a Basic Skill in Curricular Subjects” (2006-2009). The project has been ongoing at Vestfold University College in Norway. The observations and interviews have been conducted by Anne-Beathe Mortensen-Buan and Susanne V. Knudsen.

<sup>2</sup> The authors of the system ‘8-10 Context’ recommend chapters and sections for the different grades. But they also underscore that the students have to choose the material with their teacher.

<sup>3</sup> My translation from Norwegian to English here and in the following.

In *From Saga to CD*, there are texts about daring to speak in public spaces that appear rather gender neutral. However, illustrations suggest an orientation towards boys. One illustration introduces the students to exercises called “Catch the word!” It shows three students: two girls and a boy. The boy is placed in the middle, and raises his hand to catch the word. One of the girls is looking towards the ceiling, while the other girl holds a hand over her mouth. In this textbook, most of the illustrations have boys and males as speakers, readers and writers. When the authors present ways of exercising speeches in the public space the text is illustrated with a photo of the former Soviet president Nikita S. Krushev. A caricature of a classroom shows a male teacher dragging the ear of a boy, while another boy has his hand raised with zealous enthusiasm. A girl is sitting with her hands folded.

The students studying cartoons and illustrations in *From Saga to CD* will be confirmed in rather stereotypical gender oppositions with active, outgoing boys and silent, introverted girls. The opposites underscore that boys prefer discussions and competitions, whereas girls want to work with feelings and to listen.

In *8-10 Context*, texts in the anthologies that include ‘borrowed texts’ have an equal distribution of male and female main characters (Blichfeldt et al. 2006b, 2006c). Illustrations with human beings have both girls and boys represented. The teacher’s guide says that the texts are selected to “appeal to both boys and girls.” (Blichfeldt et al. 2006f: 10). Generally, the system confirms equality as the norm in Norway and the Nordic welfare countries (Borchorst & Siim 2002, Borchorst (ed) 2002). On the homepage’s link to Ung.no (Young.norway)), a text explains gender identity: “Do you feel that you can do “boys’ things” and “girls’ things” without anybody noticing? Our gender identity is connected to the body – to the biological. However, to feel like a gender, like a boy or a girl, is also a result of a social and cultural process.” ([www.gyldendal.no/kontekst](http://www.gyldendal.no/kontekst), chapter 2, course 6, link to Ung.no, downloaded September 22., 2009). However, in the author’s texts and in the tasks, gender is not questioned. Instead, the basic book and the digital homepage seem to strive towards presentation in a gender neutral language. For example, the gender neutral language appears in a text giving information about ways of using the Internet:

Internet, you can use:

- because you can find very much very easily
  - to find specialised information that can be hard to find in other places
  - because there is an extensive chance to find updated information
  - because the Internet has additional elements like graphics, sounds and links
- (Blichenfeldt et al. 2006a: 57).

In this initial stage of reading these educational texts and illustrations with gender awareness, I find that traditional gender oppositions are confirmed. The confirming reader in the texts and illustrations mirrors traditional images of boys and girls (Aamotsbakken & Knudsen 2006, 2009, Knudsen 2008). However, the two systems confirm gender oppositions in different ways. In *From Saga to CD*, the confirming reader is an identification with traditional gender roles, in which, among different characterisations, boys are active and girls are introverted. *8-10 Context* shows the confirming reader as an identification with gender equality, where boys and girls are different, having different biological bodies and passing through different social and

cultural processes. But gender in *8-10 Context* is also presented as sameness in a gender neutral language.

### **Exploring gender in educational texts & illustrations**

*From Saga to CD* and *8-10 Context* give few possibilities for exploring gender, i.e. for challenging traditional genders and the neutrality of gender. However, there are some opportunities for exploring gender in both systems. In *From Saga to CD*, the task which asks students to divide into boys' and girls' groups in working with cartoons, and to discuss the differences in the groups' lists, can lead towards an exploration of gender as construction. Some of the cartoons can be read as gender stereotypes, whereas other can be read as questioning gender norms. Some students may want to challenge other students in their choices of cartoons. The teacher can be aware of destabilizing the reading of traditional gender roles, and put gender in focus as a representation of socio-cultural constructions. Also, the inclusion of different cultures in a basis book's examples from Japanese, American and Norwegian cartoons is a way to challenge gender constructions. In *8-10 Context*, the exploration of gender is at stake in the teacher's guide when it highlights that the texts are selected to "appeal to both boys and girls". Of course the possibility of exploring gender depends on the teacher's awareness of and interest in the importance of gender.

A possibility for exploring gender can be found in the introduction of computer games in *From Saga to CD*. The examples of computer games are in texts and illustrations: *Spider-Man*, *Sims 2*, *Need for Speed Most Wanted* and *Dream fall – The Longest Journey*. Illustrations from the covers of the computer games show a car with spinning wheels (*Need for Speed Most Wanted*) and a young heterosexual couple (*Sims 2*). An illustration from another cover shows two females warriors and one male warrior. The male is in skin and fur, looking like a Viking, and one of the females is dressed in black and looks like a femme fatale (*Dream fall – The Longest Journey*). The female in the front of this cover is presented with a nude stomach and a sexy attitude.

The cover illustrations are followed by a text telling the students that they can join the narration and become one of the main characters: "You can be Peter Parker in a game like *Spider-Man* or build a house and make family narratives in a game like *Sims* (Jensen & Lien 2006a: 101). In connection to *Dream fall – The Longest Journey*, the text tells us that the computer game is placed in the twenty-fourth century. Furthermore, if the students use these computer games in the school, they can explore constructions of various femininities and masculinities.

In *Spider-Man* the role model connected to a male is the superhero, who rejects help because he can perform himself. The superhero represents a masculine identity that is constructed as a unique and lonely person. This is a hegemonic masculinity belonging to a person in a dominant position. This masculinity can be connected to a military power, and it can have elements of violence and brutality. The position is oriented towards competition. There is no doubt that power is related to hegemonic masculinity in the figure of Spider-Man. This masculinity is closely connected to the

warlike masculinity, but the warlike masculinity is not necessarily hegemonic. The warlike masculinity is not always a unique and lonely person, but can also be found in a crowd of males and females within computer games constructing warlike battles. This masculinity can represent a position of complicity that underscores the hegemonic masculinity without necessarily being able to practice it. The position of complicity is a masculinity that concentrates on muscles and courage as necessary for surviving and defeating evil. In an existential sense, the warlike masculinity is a battle between good and evil in life.

Masculinity in computer games is the construction of an outgoing position. This masculinity can be warlike, but it can also simply participate in a motor race as in the computer game *Need for Speed Most Wanted*. In this computer game, the acting masculinity engages in a series of films and games with police in car chases. This masculinity can also participate in other positions that demand physical display as for example in computer games where a player controls the game in badminton, baseball or table tennis with the help of a remoter in front of the television screen. Such games are not mentioned as examples in *From Saga to CD*; however, such games with this acting masculinity can turn up in the students' examples of computer games.

The computer game *Sims 2* includes a family-oriented masculinity. This masculinity is represented by a male building a house and living in a nuclear family. The care-giving is connected to a *pater familias* position who protects the family. This position can act patriarchal and hegemonic, but is then attached to the hegemonic masculinity. However, the male can also be pregnant in this computer game. In this case we can find a masculine femininity with traditional female femininities such as care and sensitiveness attributed to the male. Furthermore, *Sims 2* presents a position of marginalised masculinity. That happens when a male is placed behind strong females and males. This marginalisation can motivate the students to explore what it is like to be in a powerless position. Is this a weak masculinity? Or has the marginalised masculinity its own strengths, such as helpfulness and more introverted behaviours?

A feminine masculinity is a female who acts with physical and mental strength. She is in a position that differs from traditional female positions by playing with her gender through choices of clothes and hairstyle. She looks like a male. She gives the impression of a social and cultural construction connected to the male gender, whereas the biological gender indicates the female gender. In sexual relationships she can prefer her own gender, and in such a relationship she is referred to as "the butch". The butch is the masculine lesbian, whereas the partner is referred to as "the femme," the feminine lesbian (Halberstam 1998). A hegemonic femininity can be connected to a feminine masculinity which expresses itself in a leading position, whether it is practiced in a homo- or a heterosexual relation. The hegemonic femininity is presented on the cover to *Sims 2*. On this cover the female displays her muscles, and she is placed in front of the male. She is the leader, and she shows the male that she is the dominant. In the computer game, she can appear in a position that historically is connected to *mater familias* and a matriarchy with the mother as the powerful figure. She is the big mother, who embraces the fellow players in such a

way that she is the one having the physical space. This female can play the usurped mother, who will not relinquish her control over her 'children.'

In *Sims 2* we also find a romantic femininity. This happens when a female gives herself to her boyfriend with great joy. She looks at him with love, and she dances with closed eyes and a pleased facial expression. However, there is also a lot of humour in this computer game, so in the position of romantic femininity she takes the initiative to break with trivial, everyday life. She can be seen in the position of complicity that relates to hegemonic femininity. The complicity underscores a hegemonic femininity that is associated with the concept of the femme fatale. This position can be called a femme fatale femininity, i.e. a fatal female who seduces the males and females by disguising her intentions. Apparently, she is sweet-tempered, but under the surface she is a fighter, an enemy agent or a murderer. She shows her strength by kicking the male if he touches her against her will. Also, she takes the initiative, as she does in *Sims 2*.

As a seducer the femme fatale femininity intersects with the sexually-exposed femininity. This position we find in *Dream fall – The Longest Journey*, where the main character is in a coma, exposed in a bed with nude shoulders and closed eyes. The players can follow her from this position among others into a ghostly landscape and into taking action to find her way out of labyrinths. In this game, the female is sexualised in ways that can be recognised in commercials displaying bodies with large breasts and bulging hips (Hirdman 2007, Knudsen 2007, Siibak 2009). In the sexually-exposed femininity, the female is the object for the male's gaze and for a (hetero)sexual fantasy, and thus can be seen to construct the position of subordinate femininity supporting the romantic femininity by including a passive position.

These masculinities and femininities are located in the computer games that are mentioned in *From Saga to CD*. They can have other positions in other computer games, and more femininities and masculinities than those mentioned can be constructed in other contexts. With the use of *plurality*, the positions are analysed within a two-gender binary; however, they also give possibilities for positions across the female and the male gender, as we can see in the construction of masculine femininity and feminine masculinity.

### **Observations of working with computer games in 8<sup>th</sup> grade**

The teacher with a female name introduces extracts from the textbook *From Saga to CD* on a power point.<sup>4</sup> With gender awareness, she reads statistical data from this textbook. The data confirms that boys use the Internet more than the girls.<sup>5</sup> She quotes the textbook to mark boys' and girls' different choices of computer games: "The boys prefer action games and military strategy games. The girls prefer social

<sup>4</sup> The observations are of lessons in two different classes, but with the same teacher repeating the power point and the tasks for the students. The lesson is 45 minutes. Observations took place May 2008. In the first class there were 7 males and 9 females, and in the second class there were 8 males and 15 females. The observations were conducted in handwritten logs in the situations by two researchers; Anne-Beathe Mortensen-Buan focused on the activities connected to mothertongue, whereas I focused on gender positions.

<sup>5</sup> The data tells that in 1997: 10% of males and 3% of femals from 9 to 79-year old in Norway used the Internet. In 2004 it was 51% of the males and 38% females from 9 to 79-year old in Norway that used the Internet (Jensen & Lien 2006a: 103).



games without very much violence and conflicts.” (Jensen & Lien 2006a: 102 with reference to The SAFT-project and MMI (The Institute for Market and Media from 2003 and Norwegian Media Barometer from 2004). The teacher gives examples of the computer games that are mentioned in the textbook. After the introduction and some discussions with the students in the classroom, the teacher gives the students tasks to work with on computers. The tasks ask the students to list the computer games that they play and to reflect on girls’ and boys’ choices of computer games. Furthermore, the tasks ask the students to comment on how many hours they themselves play computer games and to discuss violence in computer games. The students are free to form groups. They choose groups with their ‘own’ gender, or work alone.

The students in the observed 8<sup>th</sup> grades confirm the gender difference between girls and boys in giving examples of computer games. In the classroom, the students with female names are mostly silent. Only one student with a female name responds to the teacher’s questions. This student responds to the question: “Are there other computer games than *Sims*?” This student mentions the computer game *Black & White* without any further commentary on the content or narrative of the game. Several students with male names join the discussion with the teacher in the classroom. This happens when the teacher asks them to answer her questions, and when they launch themselves, unasked, into the discussion without having the teacher’s permission. These students with male names mention action games like *Icy Tower*, and they defend children playing computer games. Harald and Knut participate with eagerness and motivation in the classroom discussion.<sup>6</sup>

In the students’ work with tasks at the computer, Harald and Knut confront the teacher with a problem they have with the first question. To list computer games will take them hours and be voluminous, they tell her. Working with this task, Harald and Knut write a long list of computer games. Also, they discuss the wrong use of the word ‘webpage’ in the textbook. Answering the question of time used at the computer, they find that they play seven hours on weekdays and eleven hours on weekend days. In the class discussion and in the work with the tasks, Harald and Knut are knowledgeable and reflective students. Furthermore, they like to take a playful position.

Anne and Linn work together with the tasks. They discuss the questions before writing answers on the computer. Although they only play between 15 and 30 minutes per day, these students know of several computer games. On the computer, they list sixteen examples of computer games. During their work with the tasks, they are very eager to get through the questions.

## Interviews with students in 8<sup>th</sup> grade

---

<sup>6</sup> Here and in the following the names of the students are anonymous.

In the interview, Harald and Knut elaborate on the wrong use of the word 'webpage' in the textbook.<sup>7</sup> They talk about contradictions in the text about computer games. They find such contradictions very frustrating, they say. In response to the question about gender difference in the use of the Internet, Knut says: "There is a tremendous difference," and Harald takes over and explains the gender difference with the data from the textbook. In the observation and interview, Harald and Knut represent what in a school context could be called an academic masculinity and a nerdy masculinity. In the academic masculinity, one presents an expanded vocabulary, is knowledgeable and reflective. Also, the academic masculinity enjoys finding contradictions in the material and in the teacher's presentation. The two students with male names are "strong students" according to the teacher interviewed about Harald. Knut and Harald are in the position of hegemonic masculinity. The nerdy masculinity is connected to the academic masculinity. However, the nerdy masculinity also relates to a habit of suggesting that they know more than the textbook and the teacher. Also, Harald and Knut like to tell us that they play sophisticated computer games in their spare time. In the interview, Harald says that he is different from the other students in his class in reading. He finds that he is different when he reads: "I am different. In the beginning of a week, I read very much. Afterwards I read nothing. I don't know what the advantage is in my reading. I do not take notes. Now and then I look over the tasks, but I don't read them." He also finds himself and Knut different from the other boys in the class, because they like to read fiction. "We are not the norm here". Thus, Harald places himself and Knut in a position of marginalised masculinity.

In the interview with Anne and Linn, they tell us that they find satisfaction in working with the tasks about computer games. Anne says that the tasks were "quite fun, because it was fun to get an overview." Linn supplements Anne by adding that "the tasks are not boring. They are not super-easy. You have to think and check your work." Also, Linn finds that "in the beginning, the tasks are about what I know and what I am doing. From number seven the tasks start to become questions." When a task is worth working with, Linn finds a task with the word 'discussion' included, for example: "What do you think is good with the computer games that you like to play. Discuss." (Jensen & Lien 2006a: 104). Anne and Linn represent what in a school context could be called the hard-working femininity. Although all of the initial tasks are not very interesting, they work through them as the textbook and the teacher tell them to. Thus, they place themselves in the position of complicity. On the other hand, they are in the position of hegemonic femininity as they are the most knowledgeable and reflective students among the females in their work with computer games. Of all the students, they like the questions that ask them to discuss best. However, it is the written – and not the oral – discussion that they prefer. In the classroom, Anne's and Linn's voices are not heard in the discussion between the teacher and the students. As knowledgeable and reflective students who do not participate in the classroom discussion, they are in a position of an academic femininity. The silent, academic

---

<sup>7</sup> The interviews were conducted in May 2008 by Anne-Beathe Mortensen-Buan, and I wrote the answers on the computer, Now and then I followed up some of the questions. We used semi-structural interviews with four main themes about reading. We interviewed in pairs with the same gender: 3 pairs/6 boys and 2 pairs/4 girls. The reason for this choice of gender was that interviews in December 2007 in the same two classes were conducted with 2 pairs/4 boys and 3 pairs/6 girls.

femininity is possibly the reason why the teacher in the interview does not comment on Anne's and Linn's positions as students, as she does in naming Harald "a strong student."

To a certain degree, the gender differences among the students' preferred computer games, and among the preferred genres in reading, appear in the interviews. Students with female names say that they prefer to read novels with elements of love and fantasy. Some of these students point out that they are interested in reading historic stories, stories about poor children, and also thrillers and crime novels. Students with male names tell us that they like to read cartoons, non-fiction about historic events, football and the news. Several of these students say that they prefer reading on the computer to reading a book. A student with a male name reports that he never reads books in his spare time. He states in the interview that reading on the computer and reading digital text messages (msm) makes him a reader.

When the students in the 8th grade change system from *Saga to CD* to *8-10 context*, some students with male names find that the new textbook is boring because it has too much text. Instead, they want a textbook that separates information, without giving all the important messages at once. Students with female names prefer the new textbook. They report that they find good stories and interesting tasks in this textbook. They find the tasks interesting because they can choose themselves what they want to work with, and because the tasks encourage them to write 'free' essays. The students with female names also report that they appreciate texts about other students their own age and in their own situation.

In the interviews, the students confirm traditional gender positions. The students with male names speak about reading and doing school work with a discipline that make them flow without working too much, and they describe having fun in school. The students with the female names speak about being diligent and concentrated when reading and doing school work, but now and then without enthusiasm. They simply do the work to move on to the next lesson.

However, there are also exceptions among the students in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade when they talk about using educational texts and illustrations. Anne and Linn find that the tasks with the computer games are rather interesting, if they are not too easy. They prefer texts and tasks where they have to think and check their work. When they are asked to explore the Internet, they find the tasks challenging. They do not only want to have previous knowledge. Not only do these students with female names use a hard-working femininity and an academic femininity. Furthermore, they use a female masculinity that is connected with ambitions to be challenged as exploring readers. Not only do Harald and Knut use an academic masculinity and a nerdy masculinity as observed in their work with computer games. They are also involved in a male femininity when reporting that they are different from the other boys in the class because they like to read fiction.

## **Conclusion**

The two Norwegian educational systems to be used in the subject of mother tongue confirm gender as an essential difference. *From Saga to CD* confirms traditional gender, and *8-10 Context* confirms the equality of the genders. However, with gender awareness there are texts, illustrations and tasks that can provide opportunities for exploring femininities and masculinities in *plurality*. Focusing on the proposed computer games in this system, I found an acting masculinity, a warlike masculinity and a family-oriented masculinity, and I found a romantic femininity, a femme fatale femininity and a sexually-exposed femininity. The femininity and the masculinity can be constructed as hegemonic masculinity/femininity, complicity, marginalisation and subordination.

The constructions of femininities and masculinities in observations of students and in interviews with the students working differed from the constructions in the computer games. The students' constructions were related to the school context. The different constructions are examples of the transformation from a "primary 'text', i.e. computer games that are published for use in spare time and not meant for use in school, to a "secondary text", i.e. texts and illustrations in a textbook (Knudsen 2008 with reference to Skyum Nielsen 1995). In the school context, Harald and Knut constructed the academic masculinity and the nerdy masculinity within the position of hegemonic masculinity. Anne and Linn constructed the hard-working femininity and the academic femininity within a hegemonic femininity. By exposing themselves as different and not the norm in the class, Harald and Knut constructed a male femininity within a position of marginalised masculinity. On the other hand, Anne and Linn constructed a female masculinity. However, neither our observations nor the girls placed themselves in a position of marginalised femininity. If the computer games have been used by the students in the school, the construction of femininities and masculinities may differ from the positions that are observed and found in the interviews with students.

The findings in the three stages of empirical research point towards the possibilities in being aware of context as a resource for different doings of gender positions. The analysis of the textbook and the computer games explore a contradiction between gender stereotypes, masculinities and femininities within the two-gender binarity and crossing the two genders. In the observations, other masculinities (and femininities) than those in the presented computer games were in play. Also, the interviews showed different positions than in the computer games and than in the observations. By opening for gender positions in plurality, within masculinities and femininities, gender is a matter of varying constructions - and of deconstructions of the different contexts. With inspiration from Connell's concepts of masculinities, emanated from the hegemonic masculinity, and my view on femininities, emanated from the hegemonic femininity it is obvious that the power in a given context is related to a hegemonic position, but also that the hegemonic position and the other positions are presented in different constructions of masculinities and femininities. Such findings can improve on the deconstruction of gender stereotypes and lead to counter discourse within a school discourse, within a computer game discourse and within a gender discourse. Also, an improvement can be considered by emphasising that "I am different" and that "we are not the norm here".

**Teaching and learning resources referred to in this paper**

Blichfeldt, Kathinka, Heggem, Tor Gunnar & Larsen, Ellen. (2006a). *8-10 kontekst. Norsk for ungdomstrinnet. Basisbok* (8-10 context. Norwegian for secondary school). Oslo: Gyldendal Norsk Forlag AS.

Blichfeldt, Kathinka, Heggem, Tor Gunnar & Larsen, Ellen. (2006b). *8-10 kontekst. Norsk for ungdomstrinnet. Tekster 1* (8-10 context. Norwegian for secondary school. Texts 1). Oslo: Gyldendal Norsk Forlag AS.

Blichfeldt, Kathinka, Heggem, Tor Gunnar & Larsen, Ellen. (2006c). *8-10 kontekst. Norsk for ungdomstrinnet. Tekster 2* (8-10 context. Norwegian for secondary school. Texts 2). Oslo: Gyldendal Norsk Forlag AS.

Blichfeldt, Kathinka, Heggem, Tor Gunnar & Larsen, Ellen. (2006d). *8-10 kontekst. Norsk for ungdomstrinnet. Oppgaver* (8-10 context. Norwegian for secondary school. Tasks). Oslo: Gyldendal Norsk Forlag AS.

Blichfeldt, Kathinka, Heggem, Tor Gunnar & Larsen, Ellen. (2006e). *8-10 kontekst. Norsk for ungdomstrinnet. CD* (8-10 context. Norwegian for secondary school. CD). Oslo: Gyldendal Norsk Forlag AS.

Blichfeldt, Kathinka, Heggem, Tor Gunnar & Larsen, Ellen. (2006f). *8-10 kontekst. Norsk for ungdomstrinnet. Ressursperm* (8-10 context. Norwegian for secondary school. Resources) Oslo: Gyldendal Norsk Forlag AS.

Jensen, Marit & Lien, Per. (1997a). *Fra saga til CD. Norsk for ungdomstrinnet 8A* (From saga to CD. Norwegian for secondary school 8A). Oslo: Forlaget Fag og Kultur.

Jensen, Marit & Lien, Per. (1997b). *Fra saga til CD. Norsk for ungdomstrinnet 8B* (From saga to CD. Norwegian for secondary school 8B) Oslo: Forlaget Fag og Kultur.

Jensen, Marit & Lien, Per. (2006a). *Fra saga til CD. Norsk for ungdomstrinnet 8A* (From saga to CD. Norwegian for secondary school 8A). Oslo: Forlaget Fag og Kultur.

Jensen, Marit & Lien, Per. (2006b). *Fra saga til CD. Norsk for ungdomstrinnet 8B* (From saga to CD. Norwegian for secondary school 8B). Oslo: Forlaget Fag og Kultur.

Jensen, Marit & Lien, Per. (2006c). *Fra saga til CD. Norsk for ungdomstrinnet 8A og 8B. CD* (From saga to CD. Norwegian for secondary school 8A and 8B. CD). Oslo: Forlaget Fag og Kultur.

Jensen, Marit & Lien, Per. (2006d). *Fra saga til CD. Norsk for ungdomstrinnet 8. trinn. Resursperm for læreren* (From saga to CD. Norwegian for secondary school, 8th grade. Teacher Resources). Oslo: Forlaget Fag og Kultur.

### **Webpages referred to in this paper**

[www.frasagatilcd.no](http://www.frasagatilcd.no)  
[www.gyldendal.no/kontekst](http://www.gyldendal.no/kontekst)  
[www.Ung.no](http://www.Ung.no)

## References

- Aamotsbakken, Bente. (2006). The relation between the model reader/-s and the authentic reader/-s. The possibilities for identification when reading curricular texts. In: Éric Bruillard, Mike Horsley, Susanne V. Knudsen and Bente Aamotsbakken (eds). *Caught in the Web or Lost in the Textbook?* Caen: IARTEM, stef, lufm.
- Aamotsbakken, Bente and Knudsen, Susanne V. (2009). Walking and wandering in a theoretical scenery. The usefulness of reader-response theories in today's work with educational texts. In: Mike Horsley and James McCall (eds). *Peace, democratization and reconciliation in textbooks and educational media*. [www.iartem.no](http://www.iartem.no)
- Bjerrum Nielsen, Harriet. (1997). Moderne køn – mellem mangfoldighed og tydeliggørelse (Modern gender – between diversity and clarification). In: Adda Hæstrup, Erling Petersson & Lene Pind (eds): *Kønnet koger – om pigerne og drengene i gymnasiet/2- årigt HF* (The gender boils – on girls and boys in the upper secondary school). Odense: Fyns Amts Trykkeri.
- Bjerrum Nielsen, Harriet. (2000). Inn i klasserommet (Into the classroom). In: *Kvinder, køn & forskning* (Women, gender & research) no 9, 6-24.
- Borchorst, Anette and Siim, Birthe. (2002). The woman-friendly welfare states revisited. In: *Nora: Challenges to gender equality in the Nordic welfare states* no 2, 90-98.
- Borchorst, Anette (ed). (2002). *Kønsmagt under forandring* (Gender power under change). Copenhagen: Hans Reitzels Forlag.
- Connell, Robert W. (1995). *Masculinities*. Sydney: Allen & Unwin.
- Connell, Robert W. (1996). Teaching the Boys: New Research on Masculinity and Gender Strategies for school. I: *Teachers College Records* nr. 2, 206-235.
- Flyvbjerg, Bent. 2003 [1991]: *Rationalitet og magt*, bd. 1 (Rationality and power, vol. 1). Århus: Akademisk Forlag A/S.
- Frosh, S., Phoenix, Ann og Pattman, R. (2002). *Young Masculinities: understanding boys in contemporary society*. London: Palgrave.

- Foucault, Michel. (1984). The Ethic of Care for the Self as Practice of Freedom. In: James Bernauer & David Rasmussen (eds): *The Final Foucault*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Pres.
- Gressgård, Randi & Jacobsen, Christine M. (2003). Questions of gender in a multicultural society. I: *Nora: Gender and ethnicity* no 2, 69-77.
- Haavind, Hanne. (2003). Masculinity by rule-breaking: cultural contestations in the transitional move from being a child to being a young male. I: *Nora: Gender and ethnicity* no 2, 89-100.
- Halberstam, Judith. (1998). *Female masculinity*. Durham and London: Routledge.
- Hirdman, Anja. (2007). 'Please Vote Nicely' Visualizing Gender On-Line. In: Susanne V. Knudsen, Lotta Löfgren Mårtenson & Sven-Axel Månsson (eds): *Generation P? Youth, Gender and Pornography*. Copenhagen: Danish University of Education Press.
- Knudsen, Susanne V.(2004). Gender paradoxes and power – theoretical reflections with empirical awareness. I: *Nora: Gender and power* 1, nr. 2102-112.
- Knudsen, Susanne V. (2005). Dancing with and without Gender – Reflections on Gender, Textbooks and Textbook Research. In: *Has Past Passed. Textbooks and Educational Media for the 21st Century*. Bratislava: Stockholm: Stockholm Institute of Education Press 2005.
- Knudsen, Susanne V. (2007). Free, young and gendered – internet pornography and self-representation on websites. In: Susanne V. Knudsen, Lotta Löfgren Mårtenson & Sven-Axel Månsson (eds): *Generation P? Youth, Gender and Pornography*. Copenhagen: Danish University of Education Press.
- Knudsen, Susanne V. (2008). De umulige muligheders begreb – læsning og læseren i og af "pædagogiske tekster" (The concept of impossible possibilities - reading and the reader in and of educational texts). In: Susanne V. Knudsen and Bente Aamotsbakken (eds) *Tekst som flytter grenser. Om Staffan Selanders 'pædagogiske tekster'*. (Text that crosses borders. On Staffan Selander's educational texts. Oslo: Novus forlag.
- Knudsen, Susanne V. (2008). Lærebogen i modvind – nogle teoretiske og metodologiske indspil til studiet i norsk lærebogshistorie (The textbook in headwind – some theoretical and methodological reflections to the study of Norwegian history of textbooks). In: Dagrun Skjelbred & Bente Aamotsbakken (eds): *Norsk lærebokshistorie – en kultur- og danningshistorie* (Norwegian history of textboks – a history of culture and education). Oslo: Novus forlag.
- Kofoed, Jette. (2005). *Holddeling: Når der gøres maskulinitet og hvidhed* (Group division. When doing masculinity and whiteness). In: *Kvinder, køn & forskning* (Women, gender & research) no. 3, 42-52.

- Kuzmic, Jeffrey J. (2000): "Textbooks, Knowledge and Masculinity. Examining Patriarchy From Within". In *Masculinities at School*, ed. Nancy Lesko. Thousand Oaks, London, New Delhi: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Lempiäinen, Kirsti (2003): *Sosiologian sukupuoli. Tutkimus Helsingin ja Tampereen yliopiston sosiologian kurssikirjoista 1945-2000* (Gender of Sociology. A Study on the Sociology Textbooks in University of Helsinki and University of Tampere 1945-2000). Tampere: Vastapaino.
- Lykke, Nina, (2008). *Kønforskning. En guide til feministisk teori, metodologi og skrift* (Gender research. A guide to feminist theory, methodology and scripture). Copenhagen: Samfundslitteratur.
- Moi, Toril. (1985). *Sexual/Textual Politics. Feminist Literary Theory*. London, New York: Methuen.
- Moi, Toril. (1998). *What Is a Woman? And Other Essays*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Mørck, Yvonne. (2005). Interseksjonalitet og diversitet: Fadimesagen (Intersectionality and the case of Fadime). In: Henning Beck & Anne Scott Sørensen (eds): *Kultur på kryds og tværs* (Scouring culture). Århus: Klim.
- Reisby, Kirsten. (1999). *Projektets byggesten* (The building stones of the project). In: Kirsten Reisby (ed): *Kønsblik – på forskerrekuttering i universitetsuddannelser* (With gender vision – on research recruitment in university educations). Copenhagen: Danmarks Lærerhøjskole.
- Rosenbeck, Bente. (1987). *Kvindekøn. Den moderne kvindeligheds historie* (Female gender. The modern history of femininity). Copenhagen: Gyldendal.
- Siibak, Andra. (2009). *Self-presentation of the "Digital Generation" in Estonia*. Tartu: Tartu University Press.
- Spivak, Gayatri Chakraworty. (1993). *Outside in the Teaching Machine*. New York: Routledge.
- Staunæs, Dorthe.(2003). Where have all the subjects gone? Bringing together the concepts of intersectionality and subjectification. In: *Nora: Gender and ethnicity*, no. 2, 101-110.
- Staunæs, Dorthe. (2004). *Etnicitet, køn og skoleliv* (Ethnicity, gender and school life). Copenhagen: Forlaget Samfundslitteratur.
- Søndergaard, Dorte Marie. (1996). *Tegnet på kroppen* (The sign on the body). Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanums Forlag.



Søndergaard, Dorte Marie. (2005). Making Sense of Gender, Age, Power and Disciplinary Position: Intersection Discourses in Academy. In: *Feminism and Psychology* 15.

West, Candace and Zimmerman, Don H. (1987). Doing Gender. In: *Gender & Society* no 2, 125-151.

## **Biographical Note**

### **Susanne V. Knudsen**

Vestfold University College,  
Department of Humanity and Education  
Raveien 197, 3184 Borre, Norway  
E-mail: susanne.knudsen@hive.no

Dr. Susanne V. Knudsen is a professor at Center for Educational texts and media at Vestfold University College, Norway, President of the International Association for Research on Textbooks and Educational Media. She has published scientific books and articles within gender, intersectionality, literature, media, youth culture, textbooks, educational media, semiotic and post-structuralism.