

## Abstract

**Title:** Brunettes and Blondes. Youth and sexuality in multi cultural Sweden.  
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**Key words:** Youth, sexuality, respectability, hybridity, girls, romantic love complex, ethnicity  
**Distribution:** Göteborg University, Department of Social Work, Box 720, S-405 30 Göteborg  
**ISBN:** 91-86796-51-8  
**ISSN:** 1401-5781

This thesis is about adolescents and sexuality and has a special focus on girls living in multicultural contexts in Sweden. The study has two overall aims. The first is to explore eventual changes in young people's attitudes towards sexuality and relationships during the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The second is to study how norms, values and patterns of activity, appear in a situation where youths with different cultural backgrounds, live together in a Swedish context. The study combines a quantitative and a qualitative approach. Overall patterns and indications of change were studied through a review of earlier research about youth and sexuality in Sweden, and through a questionnaire answered by 1331 adolescents in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade of the comprehensive school's senior level (approx. 15 years old) and the 3<sup>rd</sup> year of upper secondary school (approx. 18 years old). Observations and interviews were made with three groups of girls in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade and four groups of older girls (approx. 16 – 18 years old).

The study concludes that a main change in Swedish sexual life occurred in the 1960s and shows that on an overall level the theory of a weakening of the romantic love complex is strengthened. A closer analysis modifies the overall picture and shows that gender is a determinative factor for freedom of movement regarding sexuality, exemplified with girls responding to questions related to the ideology of love in a more restrictive way than boys. The most probable explanation of this result is the strong position respectability holds in the girls lives. The gender difference is strongly accentuated among adolescents with an immigrant background, putting girls with an immigrant background in a particularly restrictive position. The third parameter of significance, (after gender and background), influencing the respondent's attitudes, is age. Among the older respondents the gender differences are strongly diminished, the largest change between younger and older respondents being found among girls with immigrant backgrounds.

Observations and interviews show that on the youth arena, the girls are striving to place themselves in the position of "the good and respectable". By referring to others as dis-respectable, they can reach higher positions in the youth hierarchy of respectability. By referring to "blondes" and "brunettes" they charge their discussions with ethnicity. The meaning of a "brunette" being a girl with an immigrant background, and, on a second level, a girl who is presupposed to be respectable. Correspondingly, "blonde" stands for a girl with a Swedish background, but could also refer to a girl who behaves in a dis-respectable way.

The strongest instrument of control seems to be the rumour, which is used to get and to guard positions in the hierarchy of respectability. A girl can become the subject of a bad rumour, regardless of how she behaves, if this suits the interest of somebody else. Also boys can become subjects of bad rumours, if they have many different (sexual) relationships with girls, i. e. act as "players". Among girls, a rumour about a "player" functions as a system of warning, but might, contradictory, lead to admiration among the boys. A boy, who is her friend, could warn a girl should she risk getting involved with a boy without knowing that he is known as a "player". If she does get involved, though, she would probably acquire a bad reputation. The explicit sexuality of the "player", would "infect" her.

The girls refer to parents who communicate many regulations concerning sexual behaviour. These systems of regulation appear to be impossible to negotiate but in every day life there seem to be different ways around them for both girls and parents.

Lust and desire are strikingly invisible in the girl's discussions but are heard of through the systems of regulation and control that enclose them. When talking about liberal sexual relations or same-sex sexuality the girls show great tolerance although they are eager to mark their own respectability. Nevertheless, they exemplify a tolerance significant for (late) modern society's individualization. A tolerance that could intensify the development, already in progress, of more liberal sexual patterns.

In the girls' ways of thinking, it is possible to trace elements from modernity, pre-modernity and late modernity in a miscellaneous mix. A consequence of this hybridity, is larger tensions between different attitudes within the (young) population. Tensions, that lead to clashes, reinterpretations, reconsiderations and disharmonies in an unpredictable social development.