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The Gendered Parenting of Political Leaders

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Do we have different expectations of male and female politicians regarding parenting when young children are involved? If so, what are the implications for political citizenship? The aim of this article was to examine the construction of parenting and gender in the portrayal in Swedish print media of high-ranking politicians Gustav Fridolin, leader of the Green Party, and Birgitta Ohlsson, a Liberal Party member of the Swedish Government. The study covers reporting from 2010 up to the end of 2012. Methodologically, a discourse analysis based on discourse theory was performed, implying a textual analysis of 39 articles through gender theoretical lenses. Although fathers were seen as primary caregivers in some of the articles, a recurrent phenomenon was the repetition in Swedish newspaper articles of the idea that mothers rather than fathers should be considered primary caregivers. Furthermore, since Ohlsson was criticized for not choosing parental leave and the critical remarks about Fridolin were instead about him choosing parental leave, the different expectations on women as mothers and men as fathers in politics imply that even in a Nordic country context young children are a greater obstacle for female rather than for male politicians. Thus, gender inequalities between women's and men's political citizenship continue to persist in Sweden.

Keywords: parenthood, gender, politicians, leadership, citizenship, discourse

Introduction

Numerous studies of media representations have revealed the gendered expectations of female politicians (Van Zoonen, 2005, 2006; Garcia-Blanco & Wahl-Jorgensen, 2011; Hammarling & Jarlbro, 2012; Ross et.al 2013); and male politicians (Kimmel, 2006; Messner, 2007; Whitehead, 2008; Katz, 2013). These portrayals hamper efforts to achieve a gender equal political citizenship. Many of those studies comment upon motherhood and fatherhood. However, few of them deal with the new expectations of women as mothers and men as fathers, related to the introduction in the Nordic countries in the 1960s of a dual-earner/dual-carer model. Still fewer include both men and women and relate their findings to ideas about fatherhood and masculinity as well as to motherhood and femininity.

The aim of this article was to examine the constructions of parenting and gender in Swedish print media's presentation of two leading Swedish politicians: Birgitta Ohlsson (BO), a Liberal Party member of the Swedish government, and Gustav Fridolin (GF), Green Party spokesperson in the Swedish parliament. These two politicians both became parents, and as a result, the subject of media attention, at around the same time. In February 2010, BO was appointed Minister of EU affairs, despite the fact that she and her husband were expecting a baby only a few months later. As long as the four party alliance that had governed Sweden since the autumn of 2006 remained in

office, BO would make use of none and her husband of all of the available parental leave. In July 2011, just a few months after GF had been appointed one of the two Green Party spokespersons, his wife gave birth to the couple's first child. His wife was on parental leave for the first year, while GF took over on 1st July 2012, remaining on parental leave for the following six months.

We do not claim that the cases of BO and GF are similar other than in terms of timing and national context, but both involve images presented in the Swedish print media about the appropriate way for a political leader to deal with trade-offs between the demands of work and family life with young children. On the contrary, our intention is to highlight the difference between them as BO's choice not to make use of any parental leave constitutes a more obvious challenge to Swedish gender norms than GF's decision to take parental leave for six months. The comparisons we make in our study therefore mainly concern relating BO's parenting to various ideals of motherhood and femininity, and GF's parenting to those of fatherhood and masculinity.

Our empirical study was guided by the following questions: What images do the Swedish print media present of BO's and of GF's parenting? What kinds of discourse emerge? To what

extent are fathers also constructed as primary caregivers? How is gender constructed to support specific views of fathers and mothers as caregivers? The first question contains elements of media evaluation of the approach to parenting taken by political leaders. In contrast, the other questions explore the basis for the evaluations, which includes the gender ideals in which these evaluations are grounded and subsequently reproduced.

Literature Review

Historically, expectations on male and female parents have differed. Attributes and practices associated with motherhood have been considered essentially different from those related to fatherhood. A key difference is that in traditional motherhood mothers are the primary caregivers, while fathers are breadwinners rather than caregivers. To a great extent, the different expectations on mothers and fathers were a result of the ideology of separate spheres in society for women and men (Moen, 1989; Axelsson, 1992). This ideology also implied totally different expectations concerning politics, as the exclusion of women from the public sphere meant that for a long time they were denied political rights, such as suffrage and being entitled to run for political office. Politics were in the public sphere and therefore not appropriate for women, who were expected to fulfill their duties as mothers in the private sphere (Lister, 2003). This is in sharp contrast to the current situation in the Nordic countries where the proportion of women in cabinet and parliament is more or less equal to that of men, and women do become prime ministers and presidents as well (Dahlerup, 2011). However, the remarkable recent advances in women's political citizenship do not of necessity imply the end of different expectations of women and men in Nordic politics. Despite being political leaders in the present Nordic context, women might still have to comply with expectations on them to be primary caregivers when young children are involved in comparison to male politicians who do not. If so, young children are a greater obstacle to women's than to men's political citizenship.

In her seminal work *The Cultural Contradictions of Motherhood*, Hays (1996) referred to a dominant late modern cultural image of appropriate motherhood, labelled the ideology of "intensive mothering". This ideology constructs the good mother as the sole primary caregiver and as users of intensive mothering methods, i.e. practices that are guided by experts, child oriented, labour intensive, emotionally absorbing and financially draining. Importantly, Hays considered the logic of intensive mothering to differ fundamentally from that of the (labour) market. The former constructed children as innocent and pure and mothers as unselfishly registering and responding to their needs without a view to personal gain, while in the latter there is no innocence but only competition among rational, self-interested actors maximizing their own material interests without caring about the needs of others. The tension between the two logics means that women face a fundamental dilemma, as femininity and economic independency/career seem to preclude each other.

In Sweden, the introduction of the dual-earner/dual-carer model in the 1960s has supported women's efforts to combine intensive mothering with work on the labour market (Forsberg, 2009; Klinth, 2002; Klinth & Johansson, 2010). Thereby became a norm of two workers within the household established, implying that, from now on, it was considered normal for women to work, and thus strange or deviant not to, as this was seen as essential to a modern womanhood and modern women's strife for gender equal relations with men. It also paved the way for an ideology or cultural norm of "involved parenthood", referring to an idea that fathers should also "be responsible for their children, spend as much time as possible with them, and try to develop close relations to them." (Forsberg, 2009, p. 11).

Particularly in the Nordic countries, the new expectations of men as fathers implied the emergence of new, child-oriented masculinities (Holter & Aarseth, 1994; Klinth, 2002; Klinth & Johansson, 2010). Furthermore, Ylva Elvin-Nowak and Heléne Thomsson (2001) found in a study on Swedish women discursive positions where modern femininity was partly separated from motherhood, as well as discursive positions where femininity even when constructed as motherhood still was dependent on women's paid work. The authors also found a third discursive position, where femininity was harder to combine with paid work. However, this position was much more challenged in their material than in the study conducted by Hays in an American 1990s context.

Thus, studies of femininity/motherhood and masculinity/fatherhood need to be sensitive to country context. Particularly relevant in a Nordic context is the strong commitment to gender equality between men and women and the dual-earner/dual-carer model associated with it (Holter & Aarseth, 1994; Bäck-Wiklund & Bergsten, 1997; Aarseth, 2009; Egeberg Holmgren & Hearn, 2009; Klinth & Johansson, 2010).

The dual-earner/dual-carer model rested in Sweden on two main pillars. First, there was a huge investment in public day care centers, relieving families from practical hindrances to be at work and also employing many women. Second, there was the replacement in 1974 of maternity leave by parental leave. From then on, it was considered illegal for employers to stop men from abstaining from work for the purpose of taking care of young children. It also implied the replacement of a maternity leave benefit by a parental leave benefit. Paid parental leave has since then been perceived as an important policy instrument in Sweden for establishing gender equal distributions of responsibilities and possibilities regarding work and family (Kamerman, 2000; Klinth & Johansson, 2010).

Since its introduction in Sweden in 1974, the parental leave benefit has been subject to several minor revisions, which, however, do not have changed its main characteristics and principles. Currently, the following applies: In most cases, i.e. when mothers and fathers have joint custody, both parents are entitled to parental leave benefit for 240 days. 60 of those days are reserved for each parent. The remaining 180 days can be transferred to the other parent. 390 of the days are on a so called

sick leave benefit level. Most of the parents then receive 80% of the income from work in parental leave benefit. The remaining 70 days are on a basic level that is not related to declared income from work.

The intention was to introduce a public policy that would bring the Swedish fathers back home (Klinth, 2002). Currently, men account for 24% and women for 76% of the outlet of parental leave (Statistiska centralbyrån, 2012). Thus, men still account for only a minor, although increasing, part of the total outlet of parental leave.

By the existence of a “paternity leave deficit” it becomes clear that although the dual-earner/dual-carer model in Sweden has its merits, it has its shortcomings as well. Particularly relevant for the empirical study that we conduct, allocation of formal decision-making rights/responsibilities or distributions of the total amount of time spent with/for the child, do not exhaust the subject concerning distinctions between primary and secondary caregivers in discussions about motherhood and fatherhood. Although not generally recognized as being connected to the Nordic/Swedish gender equality model by scholars or policy makers (Bekkengen, 2002; Eriksson, 2003; Klinth & Johansson, 2010), our own approach acknowledge the allocation of parental leave the very first time of the newborn’s life as a matter of locating primary and secondary caregivers as well.

Method

Our study is based on social constructivism. Since our premise is that it is neither possible nor relevant to discuss a reality that could be unrelated to our assumed perspective and categorizations, the critical methodological question pertaining to the research design is not how to select cases that maximize the opportunities to make generalizations but how to reason in relation to the selection of an appropriate interpretative context for the analysis.

We employed discourse analysis for textual interpretation. As there are different discourse analysis approaches, the one we used was mainly inspired by the discourse theory presented by Ernesto Laclau and Chantale Mouffe in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001). Thus, our discourse analysis was grounded in relativistic ontology. This also implied using theory-driven interpretation rather than local contexts where others, for example newspaper readers, set the interpretative context. The reason we dealt with the methodological problem in this way is the current lack of empirical studies on gendered parenting on the part of political leaders. It is therefore extremely important to ensure that our reading of the articles focuses on gender and parenthood in relation to political leaders, which would be far more difficult to achieve using local contexts.

The concept of discourse can be applied in different ways. Our use of the term is based on the poststructuralist premise that individual perceptions of the world have an impact through language (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 2000). Furthermore, we employ the term “discourse” to refer to the pattern of norms and values that occur in statements about what men and women do

and should do and make no distinction between language and practice. The starting point of our analysis is that virtually everything can be understood as text/discourse including that which is unexpressed (Hill, 2007).

Our empirical study began in 2010 and continued until the end of 2012. The data were collected through google.se and mediearkivet.se, using the keywords “Birgitta Ohlsson”, plus one of the following: “mamma” (mother, mum), “mammaledighet” (maternity leave), “föräldraledighet” (parental leave), and “Gustav Fridolin” or “Fridolin” plus one of the following: “pappa” (father, dad), “pappaledighet” (paternity leave) and “föräldraledighet” (parental leave). Based on assessments of relevance to the aim, 22 (Fridolin) + 17 (Ohlsson) articles were retrieved, thus 39 articles formed the basis for the empirical analysis.

From our discourse theoretical perspective, it is not very relevant to make distinctions between types of article, such as editorial articles, journalistic reports or letters to the editor submitted by the general public. Or between articles that appeared in newspapers and weekly magazines. Nor is our aim to compare the form and content of the different types of articles. Having said that, an overwhelming majority of the articles included in our study are journalistic reports, i.e. written by journalists employed by the newspapers in our sample. They have no (party) political agenda and are not editorial articles. However, we did include some editorial articles as well as one article submitted by a member of the general public. Two articles were published in weekly journals and the remaining 35 in daily newspapers either in print or digitally via the Internet.

Results and Findings

Parenting and Gender in Swedish Print Media Presentations of Birgitta Ohlsson

Image and Discourses

The data revealed that BO’s parenting is controversial, opinions appear to be polarized and include expressions of direct condemnation:

She is not only a dangerous role model. She also shows that she has not understood anything about herself, about life and what it means to be a parent. Birgitta Ohlsson says we cannot live in the past. But she is no precedent, but a relic from the days when we did not understand what children need. (Sternberg, 2010, p. 4)

The article states that there are expectations that women should be more like men in order to further themselves and their careers, but that society must realize that women and men are different, primarily because women should be honest to themselves and their children (Sternberg, 2010). This theme recurs in an article criticizing the “way of thinking that women should be like men” as well as the alleged feminists who adopt “the man as a role model”: “they do not represent women today, who think that motherhood is the most important thing.” (Karlsson & Sörbring, 2010). It also argues, with reference to a TV series, that BO’s parenting primarily reflects a metropolitan phenomenon.

That one should be like a man is a metropolitan phenomenon. This is what the "Sex and the City" series is about. Well-educated women in large cities with high paying jobs. But the series also ends when they marry and have children. (Karlsson & Sörbring, 2010)

In another article, a famous person expresses the view that ministerial assignments are not ordinary 9-to-5 work and that BO's decision should therefore be accepted (Utter, 2010a). Nevertheless, the author "developed stomach ache thinking about how women and men in politics and business live, women popping out kids and rushing to work" (Utter, 2010a). Other articles presented opinions, where people expressed that it was inappropriate for BO to take the job as Minister for EU Affairs, as she was expecting a baby (Karlsson & Sörbring, 2010; Magnusson, 2010; Mamma vet bäst, 2010; Thurffjell, 2010; Winberg, 2010).

What all these criticisms seem to suggest is that BO does not live up to the ideal of "intensive mothering" discussed by Hays (1996) and as a result is deserving of criticism. First, BO is presented as a mother who resigned from the role of sole primary caregiver. Second, she is described as not sufficiently child-oriented. In fact, she is depicted as the total opposite because she seems to be more interested in and occupied with her own career, i.e. as a woman who selfishly acts in accordance with a logic that may be appropriate in the marketplace and when doing business in a corrupt world outside the family, but which is completely at odds with what is deemed appropriate behaviour when the innocence and purity of a child and its needs are taken into account. In accordance with the ideology of intensive mothering, the negative image of BO's parenting seems to be mainly based on a discourse about the difference between the sexes, where men and women are constructed to differ fundamentally in their characteristics and expected activities. More sporadically, a gender power perspective (criticism of feminist projects with "men as role models") and a diversity perspective (criticism of which women BO can claim to represent) also occur.

However, based on a discourse emphasizing the fundamental similarity between men and women, other parts of the material provide more positive images of BO's parenting. Here, her parenting is linked to a gender equality project, as in one article she is described as a symbol of gender equality (Lundqvist, 2010), while another presents her as a "role model for young women" (Winberg, 2010, p. 4). Other sections of the data describe a shift in the statistics by women continuing to work and allowing men to take parental leave, which is considered unusual but necessary for gender equality (Mellin, 2011). BO is also said to have a "gender equal partner [...] who has been on parental leave from the day Stella was born" (Utter, 2010b).¹

While the diversity perspective is invariably missing in articles that express support for BO, a few contain a gender power perspective.

It's a totally different yardstick for male and female ministers [...] male ministers [...] never get any criticism or have to explain how they manage to be both father and politician. A male minister with children is called "super dad", a female one accused of being a bad mother. (Brolin, 2010)²

In summary, the view of BO's parenting is polarized, with several articles criticizing it and others expressing support. While support is consistently provided in the name of gender equality, it is somewhat less clear what the criticism indicates. However, our interpretation is that it is mainly formulated as gender equality projects. What distinguishes the antagonists in the debate is that rejections of BO's parenting are formulated from a perspective on gender equality emphasizing the fundamental difference rather than the similarity between women and men (Nordberg, 2005). However, the conflict also involves different views about the child's best interest (Elvin-Nowak & Thomsson, 2001).

Constructions of Caregivers and Gender

The divergent views about BO's parenting indicate different opinions related to the issue about whether both fathers and mothers rather than just mothers can be considered primary caregivers, in particular regarding the very first time in the newborn's life. The articles that draw on sex difference discourse construct mothers as the only possible primary caregiver while those who draw from the sameness discourse construct both fathers and mothers as primary caregivers.

Moreover, the diverging views can be supported by different attitudes to gender. The criticisms of BO's parenting seem to consider compliance with the ideology of intensive mothering as a way for women to be regarded as feminine. This means that a woman with a newborn cannot abstain from being the sole primary caregiver without losing much of her femininity. However, such a view on femininity does not by necessity imply that there is no place for paid work or even a career within it – giving that up is not necessarily what the critics want from BO. Thus, it should not in any simple way be seen as an ideal of traditional femininity. In our interpretation, what the authors of these articles seem to defend is a particular version of modern femininity. This construction should be seen as a hybrid consisting of attributes that have been traditionally associated with men – paid work and orientation towards career – and attributes traditionally ascribed to women such as being the sole primary caregiver for her own children.

However, as those who support BO's parenting approach seem to suggest, the new woman can also be constructed in a different way where not only career orientation but also abstaining from being a sole primary caregiver become a part of what defines womanhood. Furthermore, such novelties in the construction of womanhood can co-exist with attributes traditionally ascribed to women, paving the way for yet another version of hybrid femininity. Such attributes may be constructions of women as heterosexuals and as empathetic and caring, especially towards other women but also towards men and children.

Focusing instead on the constructions of men, a defining feature of the new man referred to in studies on men and masculinities is often said to be his orientation towards children (Messner, 2007; Klinth & Johansson, 2010). In the literature, such orientation towards children is typically equated with taking parental leave. Although an understanding of BO's husband is never explicit in the articles, he nevertheless appears as a "shadowy figure" justifying both the criticism against and support for BO. What can be said is that although the articles expressing support for BO's parenting constructs her husband as embodying the new fatherhood and associated new masculinity (Werner, 2010), the critics rule out the possibility of a (sufficiently) child-oriented masculinity, constructing him instead as relatively fixed in a traditional male role.

Parenting and Gender in Swedish Print Media Presentations of Gustav Fridolin

Image and discourses

The sources mainly describe GF's parenting in terms of appreciation. It is argued that GF contributes to new attitudes, including a more accepting view of parental leave among politicians (Hammarqvist, 2011; Mamma + pappa = MP, 2012). In so doing, the value of having the father at home is emphasized, which is said to be beneficial for both the child and the father. With regard to the latter, it is argued *inter alia* that GF develops his political role by taking care of his family (Fridolin tar pappaledigt, 2011).³

GF's parenting is also constructed as part of a gender equality discourse. A struggle is described between the parents about the distribution of parental leave benefits, where the mother's right initially wins, but that after discussions with his family GF decided to enjoy as much parental leave as possible (Sundberg, 2011). GF's parental leave is constructed as a consequence of a gender equal family relationship, which has a positive impact on his decision.

Other articles highlight the relationship between GF's parental leave and gender equality by means of assumed implications for the spokesperson Åsa Romson:

For the first time, it gives her an opportunity to be a party leader without having to fight for space with Gustav Fridolin – a young man who rarely misses an opportunity to speak to journalists. (Larsson, 2012)

Gender equality is also in evidence by the description of GF as "a young man", due to the fact that it is commonly perceived as an age issue where young individuals are considered more gender equal than older ones (Höök, 2001).⁴

Although the link to a gender equality discourse is an integral part of the positive evaluation of GF's parenting, we note the absence of any gender power or diversity perspectives in the articles that express approval of GF's approach to parenting.

Criticisms of GF's parenting were not found in the data. However, some ambivalent attitudes were expressed, in that it

was claimed that GF's parental leave caused problems for himself or for the Green Party, or was something that does not have any proper care orientation.

The ambivalent attitudes can be seen in descriptions of how GF missed an important political event, the Almedal week (Almedalsveckan) on Gotland (Engqvist, 2012; Fridolin missar Almedalen – är pappaledigt, 2012; P. Karlsson, 2012a) because of his parental leave. There are also hints that GF risks being overshadowed by Åsa Romson (Engqvist, 2012). An image of what GF is missing is provided, without any reference to the opportunity for personal and professional development offered by parental leave.

In some articles, it is claimed that GF's role as Green Party spokesperson has been damaged due to parental leave (GT, 2011; Blandade betyg bland bossarna, 2012; Fridolin missar Almedalen – är pappaledigt, 2012; Jakobson, 2012). It is stated that GF will lose political credibility by his failure to participate in public discussions about policy. One of the articles presents a survey on trust in party leaders over time, where GF's ratings dropped because of paternity leave, which the author states should not influence voters but nevertheless has an impact when politicians do not appear often enough in the media (K-J. Karlsson, 2012). In another article, the Green Party is said to have been completely silent as a consequence of GF taking parental leave (Frisberg, 2012). The question of how the party will cope without him was also raised (P. Karlsson, 2012a).

One article seems to suggest that although men (like GF) take parental leave, their parenting is not really care oriented:

Now, one of the two Green Party spokespersons chooses to take a short break from politics, instead focusing on nappies and baby food. From July 1, Gustav Fridolin will be on parental leave for six months. (P. Karlsson, 2012b)

GF's parental leave is described as if he had abandoned an important assignment to devote himself to nappies and baby food, rather than as an expression of love for and wishing to be emotionally and physically close to his child. The authenticity of the care orientation of GF and men in general seems to be questioned. This article also contains a sarcastic comment about GF being praised for his parenting skills even before taking parental leave as he was voted "public dad" ("Papa") 2011 in a poll conducted by a magazine. This can also be understood as questioning the authenticity of GF's alleged concern for his child; was it not mostly about marketing himself as a politician? Thus, it is hinted that GF's approach to parenting is that of the traditional man rather than an expression of a new masculinity.⁵ However, one can also interpret the quotation in terms of a new, positive masculinity, where the coupling of care orientation and extended parental leave on a voluntary basis becomes so obvious that it does not require comment. This means that a boundary has to be established in relation to the "soft man" by making references to traditional masculinity expressed in terms of a man who can 'choose', 'focus', is sustainable and interested in gadgets. What was interpreted as a quirk must also be

understood as raising the credibility of parental involvement by emphasizing continuity and others' appreciation of it.

In summary, a positive view of GF's parenting is dominant, in which he is portrayed as a desirable part of the gender equality project and as promoting men's use of parental leave. However, there are some more ambivalent statements, which describe GF's parental leave as problematic for him or for the organization of which he is a member.

Constructions of Caregivers and Gender

Irrespective of whether the focus is on the distribution of parental leave during the first months or overall, GF is not constructed as a primary parent, but rather his wife. In the articles, his wife was reported as being on parental leave for the first and longest period. Although this could have been discussed by the Swedish print media as problematic, especially in terms of gender equality, this aspect was not addressed.

However, in the articles GF is not depicted as a traditional but rather as a new, modern man. First, he is seen as representing a child-oriented masculinity, constructed and framed as desirable for other men. Second, he is constructed as oriented towards gender equality. In studies of men and masculinity, both of these attributes are considered central elements in the construction of new masculinities.

As already indicated by the fact that GF is not constructed as a primary parent, the image of his child-oriented and gender equal parenting also contains elements of hybridity, where the descriptions of the new masculinity contain traditionally male coded properties. Furthermore, he is associated with a traditionally male coded area, political leadership, while traditionally male-coded properties also occur, for example when GF is considered a 'fighter', comfortable with "the project manager role" (Berg, 2011); someone who makes a choice, is sustainable, interested in gadgets and good at 'focusing' (Aftonbladet, 2012b). Our interpretation is that the many references to traditional masculinity can explain much of the positive evaluation of GF's parenting and the associated new masculinity. Thus, in contrast to a perceived 'soft daddy', he can take parental leave without running the risk of losing his masculinity.

Importantly, the child-oriented masculinity associated with the new man might be embodied differently by men depending on whether they are constructed as secondary or primary caregivers. Correspondingly, for women who opt to pursue their own career, the new career oriented femininity may take a different form, depending on whether or not they are constructed as sole primary caregivers to their children.

In the articles the 'shadowy figure' of GF's wife is constructed as a new woman in that she has her own career and lives in a gender equal relationship. However, in the reporting about GF's parenting, the new woman could have been constructed differently. The same, of course, holds for the new man.

Conclusion

Although fathers are sometimes seen as primary caregivers, a recurring phenomenon in our study is the perpetuation in the Swedish print media of the idea that mothers but not fathers are primary caregivers. Taking the different contexts concerning media descriptions of BO's and GF's parenting into account, we see no reason why this should not also hold for media accounts of other Swedish political leaders, or of political leaders in other countries, although we have to await further empirical studies before making any stronger claims. Thus, the overall pattern in the data indicates a lack of media support for the idea of fathers as primary caregivers. Remaining paternity leave deficits in countries legally supportive of parental leave should be viewed against this background.

Furthermore, since BO was criticized for not choosing parental leave and the only critical remarks about GF, although more implicit than explicit, were instead about him choosing parental leave, our study implies that even in gender equality model countries are young children still a greater obstacle for female than for male politicians. Thus, gender inequalities between women's and men's political citizenship continue to persist.

A result of our investigation is that GF's parenting and approach to gender are questioned far less and are more widely approved than BO's. Thus, the analysis indicates that men who choose parental leave create a modern masculinity and are perceived as innovative and positive for political development, while women who choose careers are not necessarily perceived as modern and desirable. The "hegemony of men" (Hearn, 2004) can thus be seen in the images of political leaders' approaches to balancing parenthood and work. In addition to this, our empirical findings also give further support to Liesbet van Zoonen's idea about the greater difficulties women face as compared to men in both being personal and respected as political leaders (Van Zoonen, 2006).

In previous gender studies conducted by scholars from the Nordic countries, orientations towards gender equality have often been presented as something peculiar to the construction of "the new man" or "the new woman" in a Nordic context. Our study indicates that this also applies to the gendered constructions of men and women as political leaders, which has not previously been investigated to any great extent. In contrast, the studies available on this topic in other contexts have often highlighted other attributes as being more central.

However, this discursive emphasis in the Nordic context on gender equality does not imply that there is also consensus about what gender equality really is. In fact, there is one particular aspect of the criticism of BO that was not emphasized in the empirical part of this article, but that we want to highlight here instead. This aspect is less about notions of motherhood/parenthood specifically, but more about something we interpret as a critique of the fundamental starting points of Swedish gender equality policy in general. Our interpretation is that the criticism of BO's parenting blend into a critique of the focus on traditional male "virtues" that guided the gender equality policy in general. A number of commentators have

pointed out that gender equality policy since its introductions in the 1970s had a bias towards labour market policy and economic autonomy, rather than the issues of care and shared parental responsibility. Not infrequently, a more right-wing feminist movement criticized these starting points, but criticism has also come from the left direction.

Furthermore, also in the contemporary Nordic context do attitudes on gender equality restrict what is perceived intelligible and legitimate ways to express femininity or masculinity. Central to the modern masculinity represented by some of the 'new men' is the role of primary caregiver. Correspondingly, for some of the 'new women', sharing the role of primary caregiver with a male partner is equally central to the modern femininity they represent. In our view, the fact that such positions might be perceived as peripheral to prevailing gender norms in society makes it even more important to highlight them.

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much emphasis on the sex difference discourse, although we do acknowledge that the citation can be interpreted as an expression of it.

¹See also Utter, 2010a and Brolin, 2010.

²Also see Winberg, 2010.

³For more examples of how GF's parenting is described in positive terms, see Berg, 2011; Mp:s toppnamn redo för pappaledighet, 2011; MP:s toppkandidat väntar barn, 2011; Sundberg, 2011.

⁴As exemplified by the statement that he "never misses an opportunity to speak to journalists", constructions of GF as gender equal do not exclude that he simultaneously can be given attributes associated with the traditional rather than the new man.

⁵In view of the fact that this is not the only possible interpretation of the citation above and as we have not found an unambiguous perspective on the differences between sexes in other articles about GF's parenting, we do not wish to place too