

## **2 Boys – upbringing, early childhood and school years**

*Goals for a gender-equal childhood:*

*Gender equality in the raising of children implies that girls and boys meet gender-conscious parents who reflect the diversity of the community, and that boys as well as girls get support according to their individual needs and capabilities rather than according to traditional perceptions of gender roles.*

### **2.1 Introduction**

The Equality Research Report has revealed that men and women have different perceptions about childrearing. The differences in opinion among young people, is less than among older people. A large majority of both men and women agree that children should experience equal conditions and treatment during childhood regardless of gender. “Childhood shows the man, as morning shows the day.” These words of the English author John Milton illustrate that what is exhibited and experienced by a boy in childhood will influence the characteristics of the man he becomes. Both genetic factors and social learning characterise the individual, be that individual a man or woman, boy or girl. For the government, it is essential that the individual, boy or girl, is enabled throughout childhood to be able to choose and adapt to society on the basis of their individual capabilities and resources, regardless of gender, functional capabilities, ethnic origin or other background factors.

Thirty years of focus on, and work towards, equality between the sexes has changed society’s perceptions about what is “natural” to be - and do - for both girls and boys, women and men. Along with these changes in perception have come changes in the way boys and girls play and conduct themselves in daily life. But although the repertoire of acceptable activity has been broadened for both boys and girls, there are still clear gender differences among young people in attitudes and in the choices of educational and recreational activities they make.

Most boys (and girls) experience childhood in Norway as a good and harmonious time. In fact, a greater number of young people said they enjoyed school, had positive relationships with their parents, and felt that they were accepted and valued in 2006, than in a similar survey done ten years earlier.

However, the clear differences between girls and boys, both in the results they achieve at school and the conditions they report living under, give cause for concern. The ministry is concerned about this, because these differences greatly influence what choices will be open for boys later in life. According to the research, an adolescent boy nearing the end of childhood has far weaker prerequisites for succeeding in higher education, employment and social life than a girl has. These differences are such that society must regard them as unacceptable.

Boys who act out get a lot of attention from teachers, politicians and the media. These boys are also foremost in our minds when we are forming our opinions about whom boys are today. But who is “the normal boy” today? What characterizes him? How does he form his identity as a boy? What does he need to do to be included in the hierarchy of boys, and what causes him to be excluded? It is not only girls that struggle with poor body image and sexuality. What picture do we have of the nature of male sexuality? Many boys do not recognize themselves in the images they meet of aggressive and violent masculinity. Current

research on today's boys is lacking. It is easy to forget that there are actually many types of boys. There are quiet and almost invisible boys in the classroom, the ones that the teacher may even forget the names of. The research has mainly focused on a small group of boys who have behavioural difficulties and special needs, the ones who need to be evaluated by pedagogical/psychological services. However, the group of boys who have learning difficulties is far larger than the group with behavioural difficulties. Both research on gender and education must turn their energies towards understanding and helping boys who struggle with cognitive processes and socialisation. It is necessary to make boys a priority as a focus for research on socialisation and learning.

This chapter does not contain a general discussion of preschools and schools as institutions, but tries to focus on the challenges that society still faces with regards to the desire to give boys and girls the same socialisation opportunities within these institutions.

### **2.1.1 Trends in development**

The nature of childhood has changed significantly for both sexes since the eldest in our society were once children. Historically, childhood has in many ways been very different for boys and girls, and has been quite naturally influenced by the cultural and socio-economic norms of the time. There are indications that differences in the conditions of childhood between the genders has been reduced, and that girls and boys currently experience a greater degree of equal treatment. At the same time there is still much disparity, partly as a result of stereotypical gender perceptions. When one looks at traditional family forms in a historical perspective, one sees a community engaged in production, often a combination of several generations in a comprehensive network of relatives and neighbours. There are still many of the eldest men in society who remember a childhood and adolescence marked by strong contact with adults, both women and men, and with large flocks of siblings. Many spent a lot of time with the father doing the daily tasks in the fields, in the forests, fishing and other types of work. Most teachers at school were men. At home, the mother was likely to be the most accessible adult.

Boys who concluded their schooling early, often ended up in apprenticeships with older boys and men who became their mentors. The culture was easier to interpret, and the community set simple standards and requirements for behaviour, in the sense that each sex had its place. If you were a boy, it was expected that you would be like your father and hopefully follow in his footsteps. Your gender role was largely biologically defined; in addition there were norms dictated by your societal class for you to follow.

A simplified picture of boys who grew up in the 1950's, 60's and the early 70's is one of the child with a mother who was emotionally present and a father who was emotionally distant. Most people lived in tight quarters. There were clear expectations that the home should be neat and tidy. There was little space for indoor games and little understanding of any need for them. Children played mostly outside. The housewife had her period of glory in the 50's and 60's, and the differences between the employment and working hours of men and women were significant. The average father took little or no part in any housework or basic childrearing.

The distribution of male and female teachers in schools was evening out, although in the middle of the 60's the majority of teachers at the middle school level were still men.

Throughout childhood, now as before, it is in the home and family that children experience the first impulses and input towards socialisation. This experience forms the psychological foundation for the child's meeting with the outside world. But input from the world comes to the child in many cultural and social forms: in literature, media and art. Children today

experience a wider variety of early input from society than ever before through the influence of the media. The majority of two-year olds begin in ECEC. Then children go to school and participate in more or less organised extracurricular activities, managed by adults who are not members of the family. The Ministry of Children and Equality believes that the best foundation for socialising children towards gender equality is a type of parenting where the division of labour between home and workplace is evenly distributed between mother and father. A conscious awareness of gender issues in preschools, day-care and schools is also necessary in order to ensure equal treatment and opportunity for boys and girls, and provide the conditions for positive socialisation.

Another significant social arena for children is the peer group that the children meet outside institutions and the family, what we call the "free life of children", a life not controlled or organised by adults. Traditionally, girls have had the heaviest workload within the home. Boys have usually been exempted from such duties; consequently they often have had more time to gather in social groups outside the family. Girls have historically been more controlled by adults, while childhood for boys has often been freer. In Norway today, much of that free time is now used for media play of different types, both by individuals and groups, and media use is especially prevalent among boys.

It is only from the middle of the 1990's that ECEC became an option for the majority of Norwegian children, and today over 84% of children between the ages of 1-5 go to preschool and day-care, and of all of the children who start school, 96% have spent one or more years in preschool. That means that early childhood education and care has become an essential part of children's upbringing today. From 1997, the starting age for school became 6 years and schooling from the age of 6 to the end of middle school (around age 16-17) is compulsory. All children in Norway are in principle covered by this provision. Many of the youngest school children are in afterschool day-care programs at their schools (SFO in Norwegian). Almost all children are in some form of organised activity most of the day from the time they are 2-3 years old (many from the age of 1) to the time they leave compulsory education at 16-17. In addition, many children spend their free time in one or more organised activities. Childhood has become thereby institutionalised, a fact that is clearly presented in table 3.1, which shows the situation in 2008 compared with the time up until around 1970.

*Table 2.1. Some key figures on childhood 1970 and 2008*

<b><i>Up until ca. 1970:</i></b>	<b><i>In 2008:</i></b>
<b>86 % stay at home (mothers)</b>	<b>16 % stay at home (mothers)</b>
<b>4 % children in preschools (estimated)</b>	<b>90 % children in preschools</b>
<b>80 children in afterschool activity centres</b>	<b>136 000 children in SFO</b>
<b>7 years obligatory education</b>	<b>10 years obligatory education</b>
Few children in organised activity after school (bands, scouts, organised sports and other activities like Sunday school)	90 % of all children participated in organised sports and other organised activities , like cultural school, etc.

Source: Ministry for Children and Equality

A large proportion of childhood in 2008 is structured, organised, planned and led by adults. The table also shows that the time children have to freely play games of their choice has become significantly shorter during the past 20-30 years. As a consequence of the gender roles of the 1960's and 1970's, boys had more free time than girls. So this change in society has had a greater impact on them in terms of socialisation. The institutionalisation of children's free time and the increase in adult supervision and management of childhood leads to a decrease in the differences between the play habits and manner of being together of boys and girls.

The institutionalisation of childhood means that the public has plenty of room to influence childhood through providing common norms, perceptions and goals for socialisation. Parents are dependent in a new way on the role that these institutions play in the rearing of their children, since the time spent in these institutions has dramatically increased. This only emphasizes the importance of close cooperation between schools / preschools and parents. In terms of gender socialisation, this can be a challenge, especially when there is a discrepancy between the gender equality policy goals that schools and kindergartens are working towards, and the gender experiences the children bring with them from home.

The Gender Equality Survey shows that traditional perceptions about gender roles still have a strong foothold in the population, albeit weaker than before. In particular, boys and girls in ethnic minority groups may experience the strong differences between what the schools and preschools say, and what they learn at home. The children end up in a cultural dilemma, caught between the Norwegian gender equality ideals and the traditional gender ideals of their culture.

An essential part of gender socialisation happens through media and entertainment culture. The review in this chapter shows that much of what is imparted through advertising, film and music is gender stereotyped and contributes to insecurity in both girls and boys. Gender stereotypes are prevalent in everything from toy stores to the web, in films, music, electronic games and typical gendered magazines. These images contradict and work against the goals of the gender equality project and the values society wants to convey through schools and early childhood education, and ideally through families.

Because what the media offers is so prevalent and extensive, and takes up so much of the free time of the children, the Ministry of Children and Equality sees the need for changes in the role of the media as a particular challenge in the future.

### **2.1.2 Boys, gender and identity**

Being a man or a woman, a girl or a boy, makes up a significant part of one's identity. How we play our role as a boy or girl is not just the result of biology, but also has cultural and societal origins. Gender roles are defined as expectations of certain behaviours and attitudes in a given society. A societal structure assigns norms for behaviours to girls and boys and the expectations are passed on from generation to generation. The modern society is characterised by a greater degree of flexibility and a wider array of choices for the individual. This influences the perception and construction of gender identity. Masculinity and femininity can be identities that each individual constructs through choice and activity in daily life. Actions, and consumer goods that are associated with actions, can be seen in the context of how they contribute to the creation of gender through habit.

Male identity has traditionally been explained with the premise that men find their identity more through work and production than consumption. Consumption has been an area more often consigned to female identity. Women have also traditionally acquired their identity from what they are, rather than what they do. While boys participate in different activities,

deriving a sense of identity through those activities, girls have traditionally evaluated themselves, and been evaluated by others, on the basis of their appearance. Identity and gender are concepts that the individual is actively involved in forming, and new, hybrid forms of identity are currently emerging. A number of young men are beginning to show other sides of themselves. They are concerned with aesthetics and their appearance, as evidenced by the appearance of more and more hair and skin products for men.

There has been an increase in body image obsession among girls and boys, which has contributed to the development of poorer self-image. Certain boys become obsessed with the thought of acquiring a bigger body, while a number of girls and boys respond to commercial images by extreme dieting. Some boys respond by using inordinate amounts of time on training and bodybuilding. For certain boys, this can become an illness; the masculine counterpart to anorexia is megarexia, where the boy constantly sees himself as weak and puny and becomes obsessed with bodybuilding. Some go so far as to use anabolic steroids and other medications to build the ideal body faster. There are studies that have shown that there are boys who begin to use anabolic steroids already in their early teens.

In advertisement, the male body is portrayed in several different ways. On the one hand we see the muscular macho man, on the other the metrosexual man who uses hair and skin products. The media stimulates consumption of products by men by using action, speed and power, which men tend to be more attracted to than women. Advertisement uses this attraction. Male roles in advertisements are varied according to the commercial interests involved.

Gender is an important key to understanding what young people are interested in. One study has explored how gender and the construction of identity even influence how much pupils in schools show interest in the sciences.

The study shows the tendency of 15-year olds to fall into gender stereotypes when choosing what topics to study within the sciences. The boys show more interest in "hard topics" such as technology and space (nuclear bombs, weightlessness in outer space, explosive chemicals, rockets and space travel). The girls tend to show more interest in topics that have more possibility for mystery, wonder and philosophy (dreams and their interpretation, mindreading and telepathy, life on other planets, health and well-being). Answers by Norwegian youth were compared with results from other countries; the results show that the gender differences are actually *greater* in modernised than in traditional societies. Norwegian students were more obviously choosing typical "girl topics" and "boy topics" than students in Malaysia, for example. In less modernised countries such as Uganda, Bangladesh and the Philippines, there was less of a difference between boys and girls with regards to their interest in topics like dreams and their interpretation. In countries like Denmark, Iceland and Norway these differences are more striking; the girls are interested, the boys are not. The researcher explains this rather surprising result by concluding that the individual in a modern society is less bound by tradition, and more likely to define and develop their identity on their own. In developing countries and traditional cultures, children are more often born into a particular role. There is no teenage culture corresponding to the youth culture of modernised countries.

### **2.1.3 Boys and their spheres of action**

In the study "Attitudes of youth towards sexual violation and assault", researchers asked 18-year old boys and girls what characteristics they ascribed to themselves when they thought about masculine and feminine attributes. Their replies showed little difference between boys and girls with regard to what is traditionally seen as masculine attributes. Almost as many

girls as boys described themselves as independent, having a strong personality, strong, dominating and aggressive. If any difference did exist, it was that more girls than boys described themselves as "independent" and "aggressive". However, the difference between boys and girls with regards to their attitude towards traditionally feminine attributes was striking. Boys used characteristics like "warm", "tender", and "comforting" to describe themselves much less often than girls. These answers indicate that women in a modern and equality based society like Norway are able to incorporate masculine attributes into their identity to the extent that these attributes no longer have the same meaning. Boys and men have not, on the other hand, embraced attributes that they perceive to be feminine.

One conclusion that can be drawn from this survey is that boys and men still perceive that there is little opportunity to be different from the others. To do something or be something that is perceived as feminine is still regarded as unmanly. To cross over this culturally defined line is to open oneself to accusations of homosexuality. To a far greater extent, girls are allowed to be and do things that are traditionally connected to masculinity without fearing that they will be judged as unwomanly. However, girls are still subjected to accusations of being a "whore" if they cross a certain line and appear too liberal, for example in their sexual behaviour.

The commercial image of boys seems to be much more limited than the image of girls. Girls can play with "boy stuff", but boys cannot play with "girl stuff". There is a narrower range of identities for boys, and if a boy likes or is interested in something perceived as a bit "pink" (girly), he begins to see himself, and is also perceived by others, as a loser. Girls are allowed to be tough. To be a tomboy is now positive. To be a "girly-boy" however, is not.

#### **2.1.4 Boys as consumers**

Children in 2008 become consumers at a much earlier age than before, and they have a high consumption compared with children only a generation back. Several studies show that boys have the highest total consumption measured in dollars and cents, but also that boys and girls spend on somewhat different things. Boys have the highest consumption in all areas except clothing and makeup, where girls top the list. There are some areas of consumption that seem particularly important for boys, for example computers and electronics. Furthermore, boys top girls in their consumption of articles related to sports and other spare time activities. Looking through the types of "wish lists" that Norwegian children have sent to "Santa", one sees strong variations in the types of gifts desired by boys and girls. The worlds of boys and girls seem to contain quite different types of objects. The Christmas wish lists of boys were characterised by speed, action and structures. There were sporting goods, vehicles and action figures on the lists, as well as building sets and electronic items. Desires associated with appearance and aesthetics (like decorating a room) dominated the lists of girls, containing objects like Barbie dolls, other dolls, stuffed animals and pets that require care.

Since the patterns of consumption seem to be different for boys and girls, marketing strategies and persuasive tactics have been developed differently for the two groups. One sees an overarching, traditional (dominant) perception of masculinity and femininity, with tough boys and nice girls. We see this in most of the images portraying girls and boys, in advertisements, videos, newspapers and magazines. Boys are portrayed as wanting action; there must be fighting, speed and excitement. Girls are portrayed in close relationships, often inside. The dominant themes related to girls are calm and order, harmony and aesthetics. Boys remain in an alien universe where battles rage between "the good guys" and "the bad guys", or worse, where violent actions without moral guidelines predominate, as in some games and films.

Children exhibit genderised play, and commercial images of children have also been highly genderised. It is reasonable to suppose that this gender division contributes to the establishment of identity, and links the individual to an image of what a boy or girl is supposed to be like. Variations in consumption lead to variations in daily life practice. Certain games lay down guidelines for how a game should be played, and certain clothes and accessories become important in how one is perceived by others. While boys channel their desires into sport, war and engineering, girls channel theirs into care giving and decorating themselves, children and their homes. These desires can be interpreted as a social practice contributing to the development of the adult man or woman. This does not mean that all boys will become men who build bridges or fight wars, or that all girls will become stay at home housewives who only care for children, but that, whatever their future gender roles might be, those roles will be influenced by these earlier patterns, because the objects they have surrounded themselves with as children and adolescents carry with them patterns of social behaviour. Most of the items that are marketed for boys, and the advertising that accompanies them, are characterised by action. This action may be about sports and competition; boys are told that it is important to be the best and have the best equipment. The action may also contain violent images. This is especially true of items like action figures and electronic games that boys use.

Parents seem to support boys more than girls in their consumption habits, which to them may appear to have aspects that parents think will be useful and important, like activity, athletics and computer skills. Girls have a consumption more tied to clothes, makeup and aesthetics. Today, an increased focus on body image is drawing a higher numbers of younger and older men into the consumption of specially designed skin products. The spectrum within fashion has also been broadened for men. Girls and boys have different patterns of usage of the products they buy, even when the products are the same. This applies particularly to the use of technology. Internet and mobile telephones are used in different ways and for different purposes among boys and girls.

## **2.2 Boys' private and public lives**

The mother is the most important caregiver for both boys and girls. The ministry bases this statement on the Gender Equality Survey of 2007 and other surveys of adults in the years since 2000. Such surveys show that the mother of the family still has or takes most of the responsibility for the childrearing in the family. It is while being with the mother that the child meets his or her first gender ideal and experiences connected with gender, and it is in those experiences that traditional gender patterns are still prevalent, although the Gender Equality Survey shows a clear trend towards the father taking more responsibility for the children. Still, in most Norwegian families, the mother takes or receives most of the responsibility for family life. The father has become increasingly participatory when the mother asks for his participation.

The parents' background and influence are very important factors in children's socialisation, educational choices and career choices. Gender socialisation begins already in a child's first meeting with adults after birth. In the first 5-6 years of life, both boys and girls are given a clear picture of what is good and bad about being a boy or girl, and what is appropriate for boys and girls to do.

Changes in family structure have a strong effect on the socialisation of boys and girls, but not always a negative one. Seven of ten children in Norway live together with both parents. Among those who do not live with both parents, most live either with just the mother, or with the mother and a new partner (or husband). A small but increasing group live together with

just the father after a break-up, and others live equal amounts of time with father and mother. In larger cities there is a tendency for children not to live with both their parents. Boys and girls of ethnic minority families live with both their parents to a larger extent than ethnic Norwegian children, while the opposite is true of families made up of mixed ethnicity (where either the father or the mother is an ethnic Norwegian). The largest group of children who do not live with both parents is found in East Oslo, where only one of three children lives together with both parents.

The vast majority of boys and girls seem to have a positive and close relationship with their parents. The majority feel that they can bring up issues and problems with their parents, and that their parents respect them for who they are. Surveys of the relationships between adolescents and parents indicate that girls feel that their parents monitor them more closely, and their actions are more controlled by the parents. There is a difference on this point between what ethnic Norwegian and ethnic minority youth report. The differences are therefore not only a result of gender, but also of other social and cultural influences.

## **2.3 Boys in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC)**

ECEC is an important arena in the child's life. More and more children have started in preschool in recent decades. Today, 96% of 5-year olds attended preschool before they started school. Boys and girls under the age of 6 are key players in each other's development.

The Framework Plan for Content and Tasks in ECEC expands upon the duties of the institutions with regards to gender equality as follows:

Equality of sexes should be reflected in the pedagogy of the ECEC. The institutions should raise children to be able to meet and create an equal society. They shall structure themselves on the principle of equality between the sexes. Boys and girls should have equal opportunities to be seen and heard, and encouraged to participate in the community in all activities in ECEC. The personnel must reflect upon their own attitudes towards boys and girls and society's of girls and boys. (The Framework Plan for Content and Tasks in ECEC, the Ministry of Education 2006, p. 10)

According to this plan, all ECEC institutions should have a conscious attitude towards equality in their daily care of the children, in any pedagogical undertakings, and in the planning, documentation and evaluation of the structures and activities. However, in 2003 employees reported that gender equality was one aspect of the plan that was least attended to. In kindergartens, it is customary to talk about children, rather than boys and girls.

Gender differences between children have undergone major changes in the last 30-40 years. One researcher argues that boys have become more like girls and girls more like boys. They have more common interests and play more games across gender lines. Teasing because of gender doesn't happen as much anymore. However, looking at the play of boys and girls, it seems that boys and girls know the cultural codes for their gender early on.

The new ECEC Act makes it clear that the institutions must take account of differences between groups of children based on gender, level of functioning, and social, ethnic and cultural backgrounds. The good institution is a one works towards evening out these differences, so that children get a good start in school and later learning, and so that behavioural problems in schools can be prevented. In recent years there is more understanding of how the experiences of early childhood influence later learning and identity formation. Researchers refer to the ECEC as the foundation of the knowledge-based society. They point out that, as more children attend ECEC, those who do not will find it more and more difficult to keep pace with the development of the children in the ECEC.

Gender differences and equality have taken up little room in Norwegian research on ECEC. This lack of research may have hindered preschool teachers from getting enough information



about gender issues during their training. The Ministry of Education sees a need for research that will increase the competence of teachers in recognising how boys and girls develop a gender based identity, and what impact gender has on everyday life in the institutions. Even less research-based knowledge exists about how gender equality in the ECEC can be achieved. Most projects have been narrow in scope and possibly outdated. The Ministry of Research has given NOVA, the Norwegian Institute for Research on Childhood, Welfare and Aging the task of putting forth an overview of the research that has been done. This report presents the results from various research projects about gender and equality in the ECEC.

### **2.3.1 Boys and gender identity in ECEC**

The collaboration between children and adults in the ECEC contributes to the formation of what it means to be a girl, and what it means to be a boy. Children constantly explore new roles and try out new behaviours. From the reactions they get from adults and children around them they form perceptions of what is appropriate behaviour for each gender. The children try out their roles and identities through play. Play is therefore important in learning about gender identity. In line with social developments in recent years, it is primarily girls who have expanded their repertoire of roles; they are quicker to break the established boundaries of gender-based behaviour. The price is higher to pay for boys who want to play “girl games”, because traditional masculinity is still connected to power and position within groups of boys. It is still common for boys and girls to choose segregated play, and when they do play together, they usually divide the roles along stereotypical lines.

A report from Vestfold University College shows that gender equality ideals are held high in ECEC, and members of the staff of kindergartens believe that they treat boys and girls alike. But in actual practice, it has become clear that staff members, even unknowingly, transfer their own gender role patterns to the children.

ECEC institutions where the staff has worked on their own attitudes towards gender can actually see smaller differences among the children. They have realised certain patterns that need to be worked on. Boys are generally less supervised in their activity than girls. This is partially due to the fact that the boys want action and use a larger area for their activities, while girls remain more often indoors and do calmer activities. Boys get more negative attention than girls. Staff members are often surprised over such observations, for they truly believe they treat boys and girls alike. Research also shows that the expectations that staff members have of the abilities of the children to show self-control are very different for boys than for girls. Staff members are generally less aware over such differences than they believe themselves to be.

Patterns of gender roles among children have changed over time and become more diverse. Therefore it is important that the research in this field be updated. Surveys should be done to examine the consequences of these changes in patterns in order to better help teachers development and learning.

An important task for employees in early childhood education and care is to do their best to contribute to positive upbringing and development. Any success that has been achieved on this front must be attributed to voluntary adherence to the policies and pedagogical principles of the institution. The values brought to the preschool and kindergartens by the children from their homes have also played a role. However, most of the focus of this work has been on girls. We need to give the same energy and focus to both genders. There are systematic differences between boys and girls in school, in terms of learning outcomes, behavioural issues, and effort and habits connected with schoolwork. The ECEC can be a contributing factor to the prevention of such problems by becoming aware of gender differences when putting initiatives in place for those children in risk of experiencing problems of mastery in

school, for example, children with little support in the home and children who speak a different language at home than at school. The ECEC can be active in developing a perspective on gender that may allow differential treatment of boys and girls at times. Boys and girls may sometimes need different types of impulses and ways of expressing themselves at this age. At times, unequal treatment can work to ensure true equality in upbringing.

The systematic differences between boys and girls in learning outcomes, school effort and behavioural problems (see Chapter 3.4) seem to indicate the need for active work on gender equality in the preschool years, with a particular emphasis on the development of boys.

### **2.3.2 Men in ECEC and schools**

Both ECEC (90%) and elementary schools in primary education (88%) are strongly female-dominated workplaces.

How to get more men to work in early childhood education and schools has long been on the agenda for the government, including in the national action plan for 2004-2007, "The good ECEC is a gender equal ECEC." There is no research evidence that tells us that boys need men as role models, or that girls need women. Relationships with all adult caregivers are important, and research has established that children do not necessarily need to experience a close relationship with a specific gender to develop into healthy and normal children. There is also no evidence to prove that more men working in early childhood education automatically leads to better gender equality.

However, the survey does show that most men and women desire a workplace where there is an even gender distribution. Several studies show that an even distribution of men and women in a workplace makes for a better work environment. Such a distribution therefore benefits both adults and children.

This challenge - more men in educational institutions – does not imply that someone might be doing a bad job, or that women cannot be good teachers for boys. Rather, the question of needing more men in these institutions should be seen as part of the greater issue of understanding what gender equality really means. If there is a predominance of employees of one gender (women) working in education, children throughout childhood get the impression that women are the ones in society who work with children and are responsible for them. Then, when they become adults, boys may not view the teaching profession as something "natural" for them and do not choose it. Getting more men into education can help break this vicious cycle. The feminisation of schools is not essentially a pedagogical issue, but a gender equality issue.

In any case, both the men and women working in early childhood education should reflect the complexity of the society that the child meets outside of the institutions. ECEC needs men with different types of background experience, different ages, and varied cultural and ethnic backgrounds in order to offer the children the diversity of society.

About measures to get more men into early childhood education, and how to keep them there - see Chapter 3.

## 2.4 Experience and achievement of boys in school

“The training girls and boys receive in primary and secondary education, according to Act 17 July 1998 No. 61 on primary and secondary learning (Education Act), should promote human equality and gender equality, intellectual freedom and tolerance, ecological understanding and international responsibility.”(Education Act, Section 1-2)

Apart from some larger surveys on mathematics and science, there are few broad large-scale surveys of gender equality in schools. One of the exceptions is a survey from 1995. At that time the Ministry of Church, Education and Research gave the Department of Education at NTNU in Trondheim the task of conducting a quantitative evaluation survey of gender equality in primary schools. Since then no similar large-scale surveys have been carried out. It is essential for the understanding of boys in school that more research been done on this topic.

This survey from 1995 confirmed many gender differences that had been supposed since the 1970's. What was remarkable was that these differences still existed after more than 20 years of work on gender equality in schools. Very few schools had mentioned gender equality specifically as an agenda item in their annual plans. The survey documented that the work on gender equality, to the extent it happened, was largely left up to individual teachers and those who burned for the issue. The issue of gender equality has not been seen as a common issue for an entire school. The individual teacher plays therefore an important role. At the same time, it is clear that more of an effort is required to bring gender and equality onto the school agenda as a whole.

### 2.4.1 Learning outcomes and achievement of boys

Grades and test results from middle schools mainly reflect the cognitive skills of the pupils. Schools in Norway have also aimed to foster other types of skills, including cooperation and social behaviour in accordance with current norms. This expertise (or lack of such expertise) may be essential for students later in life and is highly relevant in an overall assessment of the learning outcomes pupils have at each school.

Girls achieve better grades than boys. When grade points were measured in primary schools, the average difference between boys and girls was 4.4, which corresponds to 0.4 points per subject. An overview over the final written Norwegian language examinations in 2005, shows that the average rating was 3.59 for boys and 3.94 for girls. Across the board the girls make the best grades, but the differences between boys and girls are somewhat smaller among the highest achievers of both genders.

The differences can be seen in table 2.2, where the pupils (boys and girls) are divided into percentile rankings. The first line shows the average Primary School points among the top ten percentile, first all children, then boys and then girls. The bottom line shows the corresponding Primary School points among the ten per cent of the weakest results.

Table 2.2 Grade points according to gender. Percentiles

Percentile	All	Boys	Girls
90 %	54,83	53,00	56,00
75 %	51,00	48,50	52,50
50 %	44,50	42,00	47,17
25 %	37,40	35,20	40,33
10 %	31,17	29,50	34,00

Source: Education Directorate

Girls read better than boys, and this is not a phenomenon restricted to Norway. Girls read better than boys in all the 35 countries that participated in the PIRLS-survey. In Norway, six out of ten of the poorest readers are boys, while among the best readers there is an equal distribution of boys and girls. There are also large gender differences among 15-year-olds; boys are overrepresented among the poorest readers. This has also come to light during the international PISA survey of 2003. New figures show that boys actually read more than previously thought, but that they do not report all that they read as reading, thinking that the questions about reading only pertain to fiction.

The Norwegian results for the fourth class are the poorest among OECD countries that participated in the survey in 2006. There is no change in average scores for Norway compared with results in 2001, but the range has become somewhat narrower. This is because there are fewer weak, but also fewer good students. Norwegian girls score thus better than boys.

There is little variation among schools in the PIRLS-survey. Neither is there much difference between the different aged classes (in the PIRLS-survey the selection is based on classes / age groups).

After fourth grade, researchers have found that there seems to be less emphasis put on learning to read. Pupils in the fifth grade report that they receive little reading instruction in their schools. This confirms the suspicion that reading instruction is still seen only as practicing basic decoding skills, rather than comprehensive work with strategies for reading and comprehension of text.

The PISA and PIRLS-surveys together provide an image of Norwegian schools that is not complete in its representation of the goals of Norwegian schools, but must be taken seriously all the same. In both surveys, we find weak results and a negative trend in the period 2000-2006. PISA covers the three subjects of reading, science and mathematics. Students in the PISA 2006 scored a half-year behind students in the PISA 2000 reading. Boys had lower scores than girls. This means that the weakest boys are more than half a school year behind. Norway is furthermore one of the countries with the greatest gender gap. One positive fact that has arisen out of the comparisons is that there are fewer boys now that say they never read for fun.

The strategic plan, "Make room for reading", which was implemented in many of the schools in 2004, has led to increased reading activity among boys, but this has not yet resulted in a measurable bettering of reading skills.

Pupils of both the fourth and fifth class were tested in PIRLS 2006. These students started school in 2001 and 2002 and have followed the curriculum called L97.

One has attempted to explain why girls achieve better grades than boys in Norwegian schools by two different models. The first looks at school as an institution and how boys and girls manage in the learning situation provided by the institution. The premise is that the girls have a way and manner of being which promotes learning to a greater extent than boys. The second model, which is adhered to by more researchers, is that there is a difference in how well the values that boys and girls bring to school are in accordance with the values that the school represents. In other words, boys and girls have different social learning strategies already in the preschool years, and that the structure of learning in schools enhances the differences in learning outcomes between girls and boys. A possible explanation for gender differences in learning outcomes may be that schools are more suited to the way that girls learn and behave, and that boys to a greater degree distance themselves from the values and organisation of schools. This model has as its premise that there has been a feminisation of the school culture.

The “Young in Norway” survey indicates however, that the differences between how 16-year-old boys and girls view school are quite small. Both girls and boys say they have a positive attitude towards school, and they agree that it is important to have good grades, that their schooling will be useful to them later in life, and that they learn a lot of exciting things at school. Girls have a somewhat more positive attitude towards the values in schools. More girls than boys think that the teachers should be stricter towards pupils who make trouble in class. More boys than girls say they are more interested in being with their friends than achieving high marks in school, and more boys than girls express the opinion that it is fairly boring at school.

Researcher Tormod Øia points out that the differences between girls and boys are less than one might expect, and the idea that girls are more positive, obedient and adapted to the learning situation in school appears to be a myth. This conclusion is in accordance to what has been said about men in early childhood education. However, it is a fact that boys end up in conflicts with their teachers more often than girls do.

The variations in measured learning outcomes are not associated with gender alone; the level of education of parents and other social factors also play significant roles. There are also differences in achievement between linguistic minority and majority students. Differences that we find between the boys and girls within the ethnic Norwegian population are similar to the differences found among minority ethnic groups. But when we compare the immigrant population with the total population, and make allowances for the educational background of parents, there are no differences in grades. This suggests that a large part of the observed difference between linguistic majority students and linguistic minority students cannot be attributed to immigrant background itself, but rather to the fact that students with linguistic minority background have less educated parents.

Classroom research also suggests that Norwegian pupils may be required to take on too much responsibility for their own learning, and that self-motivation and self-discipline are prerequisites for success in school. Here, gender differences may give girls the advantage. In addition, international surveys have revealed that Norwegian teachers follow up lessons and provide feedback on the work students do less than teachers in other countries.

International research shows that teachers often have preconceived notions of what girls and boys are capable of, and that this affects both achievement and the subject choices students make in higher education.

If teachers and others, consciously or unconsciously, falsely communicate that boys are less able to learn languages, or that girls are less capable of mathematics and science, the students’ self confidence may suffer, and they may lose interest for such subjects. Since classroom studies seriously got started in the 1960s, more than one survey has shown that teachers communicate differently with girls and boys in the classroom, which can have an effect on to what extent and in what manner boys and girls participate in their own education, and on what kind of emotional bond they have to school. If schools are to be a factor in gender equality socialisation, then social relationships within the classroom should be given as much or more importance as the curriculum in the textbooks.

One may assume that there are differences in the way that male and female teachers communicate with the boys and girls in their classes; however, this is one of the areas of classroom research that we do not have abundant or updated information on. Norwegian classroom research is 20-30 years old, and studies of boys in schools is just about nil, one of the reasons being that classroom research has been strongly focused on girls. Therefore, it is important to note that the Centre for Interdisciplinary Gender Research at the University of

Oslo has been in the process of carrying out an umbrella project from 1.1.2008 called “New gender, other requirements? Children of gender equality in the schools and in the families”.

In 2007, the Ministry of Education commissioned NOVA to review the research literature on gender differences and achievement in schools and the reasons behind those differences. NOVA concludes that there is relatively little research on this topic, particularly topics like poorer learning outcomes for boys. Gender research in schools has traditionally taken as its topic problems facing girls. Educational research has largely not concerned itself with explaining differences in performance, or it has explained the differences by citing factors that lie outside school. The studies that have been made however are still useful in clarifying some aspects of boys’ school situation.

The study shows that teachers historically have given, and still give, more attention to boys than to girls. There is little to suggest that this gender difference is due to systematic and deliberate discrimination against girls by teachers. Much of the difference in attention from the teacher is in the form of negative responses triggered by what the teacher considers as disruptive or unproductive behaviour.

What might make assessment methods in schools better suited for girls than boys is also a phenomenon that has not been fully researched. One Norwegian study suggests that methods of assessment, particularly those that are based on a “text culture”, may give an advantage to girls. When it comes to the unwritten norms and rules to which students are expected to adapt, it also seems that girls have an advantage. Teachers seem to have greater expectations of girls. In addition to the general disparity between girls and boys when it comes to reading skills, there are also differences to be found in general learning outcomes and grades. Can the cause be that school is more adapted to the way that girls behave, and that boys to a greater degree distance themselves from the values and organisation of schools? NOVA concludes in its report that there is no support in the research literature for the premise that the school in itself creates gender differences in scholastic achievement. Patterns of gender differences seem to be consistent over time, across nationalities and among schools within the same country. These patterns occur, in other words, despite enormous variation in school policies, in the pedagogical methods used and in the organisation of the school structure itself. This point in the direction that the schools serve only to reproduce gender differences that already exist. Both the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Children and Equality believe that research needs to look more closely at the causes of gender differences in scholastic achievement. Their goal must be to reduce the differences that are observed over time. Here it is also important to look at how gender socialisation actually occurs in the family and preschool years.

#### **2.4.2 The learning environment for boys**

Most girls and boys enjoy school, whether they are in primary or secondary education. This conclusion has been reached both in the evaluation of School Reform L 97 and in reports made by student inspectors. Nevertheless, there is a group of students who are not enjoying or adapting well in Norwegian schools. The PISA-survey shows that classroom unrest and disruptive behaviour is a major challenge in Norwegian schools. From a gender equality perspective it is alarming that more boys than girls seem unhappy and maladjusted in Norwegian schools. Eight of ten students in schools that have serious behavioural problems are boys. This is an expression of the clear differences that exist between the sexes when it comes to the learning environment. Such differences may have serious consequences in later life.

The bulk of research in the field concludes that teachers for the most part do not give equal attention to boys and girls, that it is boys who get most of the attention, including negative attention. This may influence how much and what kind of participation boys and girls exhibit, and what relevance they find in school.

Boys' everyday experience of school is different from that of girls. A student survey (Education Directorate 2007) has been established as part of an overall national quality control system, in which the pupils in Norwegian schools have the opportunity to state their opinions about the school they go to and how they enjoy it. These student surveys have found a small gender difference when it comes to prioritization of schoolwork. This difference lays in the fact that girls reported that they consciously made schoolwork a priority. Further analysis shows a slight tendency for boys to feel more often that the teachers tell them what they should do so that they will be better in a particular subject area. There is also a tendency for girls to be willing to do homework in more subject areas than boys. Results show a further small difference between the sexes when it comes to how they experience setting their own learning goals. Boys to a greater extent than girls feel that they help to set their own learning goals in a subject. We also find that more boys than girls report that other students at school have harassed them.

Further analysis also shows that more boys than girls report that they have been involved in harassing or bullying one or more pupils at schools in recent months, and boys report more often than girls that they have been subjected to unfair treatment or discrimination at school because of nationality. Girls are slightly more prone to report that they are nice to their teachers. We also see that fewer girls than boys admit that they disturb other students when they work.

A Swedish survey that studied verbal harassment, like teasing, ridiculing, threats and negative characterisations aimed at fellow students, shows that harassment plays a role in the formation of gender identity among girls and boys. The research shows that boys use harassment as a way to prove their identity as "properly masculine". In conclusion the researchers point out that schools and teachers must be aware of the different functions that verbal harassment and other forms of bullying have when they put into effect measures to prevent such behaviour. According to the report, it is not likely that rules and bans against some words and phrases alone will have any long-term effect on behaviour. Both teachers and pupils must be made conscious about how verbal harassment plays a role in establishing power relationships, gender roles and sexual identity.

From a Norwegian status report about gender-related bullying among children and adolescents from 2007 comes the conclusion that schools need more knowledge about the phenomenon, and that teachers have few skills for how to deal with conflicts that are based on gender and sexuality. Considering the negative consequences that gender-related bullying can have for the victim, this is a challenge that schools must come to grips with. Gender-related bullying often creates serious health problems for both victim and those who are witness to the harassment. Harassment because of sexual orientation is pointed to as an explanation for the high suicide rate among young homosexuals. Boys who are labelled as "gay" show an increased risk of being exposed to hate crimes, that is crimes arising from a lack of acceptance for another's background, in their creed, colour, national or ethnic origin, or in their sexual orientation or lifestyle.

To be labelled a "whore" has been shown to increase a girl's risk for being physically or sexually abused. In a comprehensive survey of 18-year-olds in the five Baltic countries and Norway from 2007, results show that 84% of Norwegian teenagers who have experienced unwanted sexual acts, are girls. The performers of such acts are almost always boys. A little

under half of the unwanted sexual acts happen between a girl in her teens and a boy that is about five years older, but still in his teens. As many as 10 % of Norwegian girls had experienced at least one incident of sexual intercourse against their will. For 19-year olds the statistic is 17.5%. Around 8% of boys have experienced sexual intercourse against their will (10% of the 19-year-olds). These are frightening statistics that indicate that schools must work seriously with students' attitudes towards sexuality, body image and boundary setting.

The new state curriculum, Knowledge Promotion, contains competency goals for students for each grade level. That means that each school is largely free to decide how different topics should be treated. The competency goals for youth and sexuality in the 10th grade are that students will be able to discuss the relationship between love and sexuality in light of cultural norms. The curriculum gives room to bring up the subject of sexuality and relationships in several instructional arenas.

International research has revealed that gender stereotypes may have an adverse effect on school performance. The researchers explain this with the fact that exposure to a negative gender stereotype causes a student who belongs to the stereotyped group may become afraid to be judged according to these prejudices. That, in turn, can lead such students to fear any test situation. Negative stereotypes can become self-fulfilling prophecies. Continuous subjection to gender stereotyping can cause students to drop out of a particular subject or distance themselves from it.

A survey of how tenth grade students view their own capabilities, states that students' confidence in their own abilities follows a traditional gender pattern, even when one compares girls and boys who are performing at the same level. Boys are more positive in their assessments of their own facilities for mathematics than girls with similar achievement in math. Girls seem to need to perform about half a grade better than boys before they have faith in their facility for the discipline of mathematics.

When asked to evaluate their abilities in languages and compare the answers with the grades actually achieved for English, the pattern is the opposite. Girls have a greater faith in their ability in these subjects than boys who receive the same grade. It seems as if boys and girls evaluate their abilities more according to gender stereotypes than their actual results would dictate. A more realistic and positive image of their own skills might possibly contribute to smaller gender differences in learning outcomes and the choices that boys and girls make with regards to higher education.

Individual effort is also vital if students are to achieve good results. The "Young in Norway" survey of 2002 (NOVA) shows that, on average, both girls and boys do less homework in 2002 than they did in 1992. Girls put more effort into their work and use more time on schoolwork than boys, both in middle schools and secondary schools. It may be a challenge for schools to motivate boys towards greater effort in schoolwork.

### **2.4.3 The importance of early intervention**

The educational system is one of the most important arenas where one can promote social equality. There are great differences in the competence pupils and students have both when they enter school, and unfortunately also when they go out, and the differences are linked with the students' family background. Seen in comparison with gender and ethnic background variables, surveys show that it is social background – that is the family - which is the strongest factor. This not only affects school performance but also how well one succeeds in being a member of society and the workplace later on.



In White Paper. No. 16 from 2006 "... and no one was left behind "Early efforts for lifelong learning" a strong focus was put on early intervention as an important factor in social equalisation. Early effort refers to both efforts early in life and early intervention when a problem occurs or is revealed in the preschool years, school years or in adult life.

### *Special education*

Early intervention also includes special education. There are a heavy number of measures being put in place now to solve the learning problems of boys. The primary school information system (GSI) has no exact figures to report on this situation. Some research and statistics collection has been conducted, but without gender as a variable. There is a need for more research on the relationship between gender difference in special education and learning outcomes of special education instruction.

The gender perspective in early intervention is discussed in both the White Paper. No. 16 (2006-2007) (see above), and in the White Paper. No. 23 (2007-2008) "Language builds bridges". On the basis of registered cases of special education it has been pointed out that it is important to keep a focus on boys. An important precondition for early intervention is that teachers, school leaders and employees in early childhood education get accurate information about the cognitive and skill levels of the pupils. Measures to uncover any problems early will be set in place, including the publishing of guidelines for cooperation between schools and preschools in the evaluation of skill levels of pupils.

When it comes to special education for the individual in accordance with the education Act Section 5-1, there are statistics from the SSB from the academic year 2007-2008 that show that there are more than twice as many boys as girls who receive special education, around 28 000 boys and 13 000 girls.

This is true at all stages of primary education. In all, there are about 620 000 pupils in primary schools. Of these, around 41 000 receive special education, and the majority of them receive between 76 and 270 hours of special education per year. The statistics say nothing about the problems that have triggered the decisions to set in motion intervention.

Why there are so many more boys receiving special education, we do not know. We must research more to find explanations. In general, special education is given because of problems with vision and hearing, motor coordination problems, communication problems, psychosocial problems, specific learning difficulties, ADHD and general learning difficulties.

The government is aware that good, inexpensive and available places in ECEC can contribute to equality among children. Early childhood education is the most important preventative arena outside the home for children under the age of 6. Most of the children of this age now have places in ECEC. In order to uncover problems in early childhood and facilitate early intervention, specific knowledge about conditions in the ECEC is required. There is currently relatively little systematized knowledge about the quality of Norwegian early childhood education and care, and we know little about how equally girls and boys participate in activities that stimulate language development. There is therefore every reason to look at whether boys really get the language stimulation they need in the early years of childhood.

A survey of social competence and gender in ECEC indicates that boys tend to be offered more action, and girls tend to be offered language. The Reading Centre at the University of Stavanger points out that the observations from one of their projects, BOKTRAS, may indicate that the boys choose linguistic activities less often than girls. In White Paper 23 (2007-2008) (see above) there is an emphasis on the need for support in language development already in the preschool years, with follow-up through concrete language stimulation initiatives if the need arises. The goal is for municipalities to have a continuous

chain of interventions, so that all children who are delayed in language development or need extra training in Norwegian can begin a follow-up programme as early as possible.

In connection with “Make room for reading! Strategy for the stimulation of reading motivation and skills 2003-2007”, half of the schools that participated in the strategy, worked to develop their own measures for boys. The bulk of these measures were designed to improve the reading conditions and motivation of boys. Many schools also purchased books specifically written to interest boys. Evaluation of the strategy shows that it has been successful to set boys and reading in focus; it has made school leaders and teachers more observant of the challenges that are linked to boys and reading.

#### **2.4.4 The “Cultural Rucksack”**

The Cultural Rucksack is a national commitment to help pupils in schools experience, be familiar with and develop an understanding of professional art and cultural expression of all types. This effort is the result of collaboration between cultural and educational services. The cultural rucksack is largely financed by gaming assets.

Regional governments have a particular responsibility to manage gaming assets for the scheme. Regional governments provide the actual art and culture, offered to schools, and distribute funding directly to counties who then can develop local offerings.

Surveys show that the patterns of how people avail themselves of culture are different among women/girls and men/boys. We know that girls read more than boys. The basis for an interest in art and culture is usually laid at a young age; the consequences, both in use of recreational time and choice of occupation are clear. One finds that girls not only are more active in cultural areas in their free time, but that they also more often than boys choose to educate themselves in one or another cultural area.

A strength of the Cultural Rucksack programme is that it reaches all students regardless of gender, social background and other traditional lines that separate people with regards to access to and interest in various art and cultural activities. Because of this, the Cultural Rucksack scheme can contribute to the erasing of gender-based differences we see in this field.

White Paper No. 8 (2007-2008) “Cultural Rucksack for the future,” states that anyone who works with the Cultural Rucksack, be they artists, administrators or teachers, should take a critical look at how gender is represented through the production and art expressions that pupils meet.

#### **2.5 Gender segregated organised recreational time for boys and girls**

Non-profit organisations and various forms of voluntary work have long traditions in Norway. Some organisations have a history that goes back to the mid-1800s.

Today, Norway has an abundance of clubs, teams and activities. Over half (58%) of the adult population participate in voluntary work in the course of a year, and more than 113 000 yearly man-hours of work have been performed by voluntary or charitable organisations. To participate in such organisations promotes a sense of community, provides learning experiences and contributes to the development of the ability to exercise democracy. Volunteer work gives people the opportunity to use and develop themselves, to feel useful and meaningful in life.

The organisation community has undergone major changes in the last 40-50 years. In the period from the 1950s to the present, the sport, culture, nature, environment and hobby organisations have shown substantial growth. The social and humanitarian organisations, which previously were dominant, are weaker today. Increased internationalisation and changes in modern communication methods have given society, the individual and voluntary organisations changing conditions and new possibilities for action.

Results of a survey of volunteer work show that separate community organisations for women, like religious, social and humanitarian organisations, have had a significant decline in the survey period 1957-1998. At the same time, men have made inroads into this part of organisational life and today make up around 40% of the members and volunteers.

The gender segregated organisation community, where women and men each have their organisations, is currently waning in size as a whole.

But a type of organisation that breaks with this trend is the hobby club, where men dominate more than ever. During the 1980's, more purely male clubs were founded than female clubs. Many of them are fellow clubs, like freemasons and the like. While the founding of female-dominated clubs has slowed dramatically, male-dominated clubs are a new and growing segment of the organisation community.

There is a higher participation of men in most types of organisations than women. Middle-aged men with good jobs and financial security are over-represented in the membership of clubs, especially those activity-oriented organisations.

Volunteer work and recreational activities are carried out in all populations. They also constitute an option for children and young people.

The diversity of children and youth organisations is at least as large as that of adult organisations. The activities range from Scouting and outdoor activities to role-playing games and skating, from choir, band, and folk dance to environmental and political organisations. The organisations are very important when it comes to developing and keeping up a positive child and youth culture. Positive leisure activities give children and young people the opportunity to cultivate their own interests, develop themselves in a social context containing both peers and adults, and provide a valuable platform for activity later in life.

There is a need for increased knowledge about civil society and the voluntary sector in Norway. New research may enable organisations and the authorities to adapt better to new times. In this context the government will establish a new research program with start-up in 2008. The program will initially run over three years.

### **2.5.1 Athletics**

In ECEC, children play with other children, regardless of gender, but as children begin school, their activities and play become more segregated by gender. Football is popular with both boys and girls between the ages of 6-12, but is most dominant among boys. From an overview of membership in the clubs belonging to The Norwegian Olympic and Paralympic Committee and Confederation of Sports (NIF) one can see that 49% of boys between the ages of 6-12 are active members in The Football Association of Norway. In second place is The Skiing Association of Norway, with 14% of the active boys in this age group.

NIF is the largest organisation for children and young people in the country. Over two million members were recorded in the NIF by the end of 2006. This reflects a doubling of the number of members since 1975. Overall, there are more men than women members in sports clubs.

Boys and men account for just under 1 245 000 memberships, while about 827 000 members are girls and women.

Around 37% of members in 2006 were children and adolescents aged 6-19 years of age. Around 460 000 boys, aged 6-19 years are registered members (and around 362 000 girls).

A survey from 2007 states that roughly 85% of boys and 80% of girls aged 8-19 years engage in physical activity in the form of training and exercise. Boys train generally more than girls in sports clubs. Slightly less than 52% of boys and 45% of girls in the same age group report that they train or compete in sports clubs. Children aged 8-12 years are the most likely to join sports clubs: 67% of boys and 55% of girls in sports.

Among boys aged 8-19 years, football is the mostly widely played club sport. Almost 40% play football. Although football is also the most popular activity among girls in the same age group (20%), there is no single sport that dominates girls' activity as it does for boys. Many girls participate in handball (17%) and dance (12%). Skiing (8%) is the second most popular activity among boys.

It is a known fact that a number of teenagers quit organized sports when they are between 15 and 19 years old. The Gender Equality Survey mentioned reports that almost half of those who have quit sports, say that they quit because it was not fun anymore. There are no major differences between boys and girls on this issue. But far more boys than girls quit because they become injured, while a significant higher proportion of girls than boys quit because they felt there was too much focus on competition. These differences may indicate that the coaches and adults still impart the ideals of competition and winning in a stronger manner to boys than to girls.

Very little systematized research has been done on gender differences between boys and girls when it comes to their involvement in voluntary organisations. Gone is the strong dominance of boys when it comes to leadership positions in voluntary organisations. Among children and youth organisations, there has been a significant role change over the last 20 years, and the girls have gone from a minority to a majority among leaders. In 2000, 55% of leaders were women, against 41% in 1980.

While boys dominate in sports and sports clubs, participation is lower among boys than among girls in cultural and recreational organisations, including child and youth political organisations, environmental organisations and humanitarian work.

Voluntary organisations are an important supplement to gender equality work taken on by the state.

There is a need for updated research on gender equality in these organisations. What are the clear trends for boys and girls when it comes to participation in organisational life - how many participate, how they participate, what activities and organisations they engage in, and how often are they engaged?

White Paper No. 39 (2006-2007) "Volunteering for everyone" proposed that measures relating to the research on the voluntary sector shall contribute to increased knowledge of gender differences.

This government is committed to an inclusive society. Sport is an important arena for inclusion, and it is important that athletics are open to all groups. Norwegian athletes are working actively towards the goal of open and inclusive athletics. In the sports policy document passed by The National Congress of Sport in the spring of 2007, it is clearly established that athletics should have zero tolerance for discrimination and harassment on the basis of gender, ethnic background, sexual orientation or disability. As a step in this work the

NIF in 2007 entered into a partnership with National Organisation for Lesbian and Gay Liberation and Norwegian People's Aid. NIF has allocated money to a project on preventing and counteracting discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation both locally, regionally and nationally, through preventing and counteracting homophobia and harassment of homosexuals in organized sports.

### **2.5.2 How young people view athletics and gender**

Teenagers who participated in a survey in the direction of the NTNU (National Technical and Nature Science University) in 2007, placed great emphasis on their looks and weight when they were considering their own worth. The survey looked at the body characteristics which young people perceive as masculine and feminine, and how they assess their own body and their own physical attributes. It turns out that stereotypes rule their judgment more than expected. Young people expressed a fairly traditional view of what is masculine and feminine with regards to perceptions of the body. And it is important for them to live up to the stereotypical ideal.

To be good at sports is considered to be an important masculine trait, and boys attach enormous importance to endurance, strength and visible muscles. For girls it seems more important to look good than achieve high athletic performance. There were clear gender differences with regards to body image as well. Boys tended to have a more positive view of their own bodies than girls. Boys gave themselves higher scores than girls on ten of eleven areas of the survey, including strength, endurance, appearance and general body image. The only area of the survey where boys and girls gave themselves the same score was flexibility.

There is no purely biological reason that prepubescent boys and girls cannot perform equally well in many sporting activities. Gender differences must be attributed to social factors, such as different expectations and different responses from parents, coaches and friends, and not least the influence of the media. Results may suggest that stereotypes have changed little since the 1970s. Young people considered ballet, aerobics and gymnastics girl sports, while football, boxing, motor sports and hockey were considered appropriate for boys. The same conclusion was confirmed when students were asked to sort the various sports into the "masculine", "feminine" and "neutral". Replies were as good as 100% the same for boys and girls. This suggests that common cultural attitudes are more resilient and less flexible than the most optimistic researchers have wanted to believe. Gender stereotypes and the authority they have over our physical self-perception, can have serious negative consequences for both the individual and community. Everything suggests that this is harmful to any boys who do not feel as masculine as the stereotypes. To dance ballet is still a fairly stigmatized activity for a boy.

New trends are always evolving which may influence attitudes. Some examples are modern dance forms and cheerleading, which have seen an increase in participation among boys.

Children and teenagers in Norway, both boys and girls, have widely participated in organised athletics. Organised sports offer a large number of different sports activities for children and youth. Within some sports however, there is a clear over-representation of one or the other gender. The Norwegian Olympic Committee, Paralympic Committee and Sports Association (NIF) have focused on measures to recruit under-represented groups into sports through active funding of children and youth in the various sports organisations. This has been done to try to even out differences in recruitment by gender.

There are a number of measures also in place in some sports organisations themselves, like hockey, gymnastics and snowboarding, to try to increase recruitment of the underrepresented gender.

NTNU's survey shows that gender stereotypes still live on in sport despite these measures, and NTNU should be able to provide more input to the NIF about what can be done to reverse this.

## **2.6 Gender differences in unorganised leisure time**

To construct one's own identity means to identify oneself as someone unique and different from others (creating a personal identity), but also to realise what one has in common with others (creating a social identity). Exploration and experimentation through trial and error are important activities necessary for these constructions. This is particularly important in the teens, when who one is, and how others view one, are key issues. Many find building material for this identity construction in the media.

### **2.6.1 Boys and electronic media use**

Information and communication technology, and particularly the Internet, has led to major social changes in society. In this context, it is a common perception that men and boys use computer technology to a larger extent than women and girls. The survey "Young in Oslo" shows that many of the boys aged 14-17 years are using most of their free time on the computer. 25% of boys use more than three hours daily sitting in front of the computer screen. This pattern of usage is changing in a number of areas. Boys still seem to be more interested in IT technology and games than girls, while girls consider the computer to be an important tool for communication, graphics, music and school-oriented activities.

Teenagers have been called "the seismographs of culture". If we look at age as one parameter, some interesting trends emerge. Boys and men are using home computers significantly more often than girls and women. This difference we find in all age groups except the youngest. In the age group 9-15 years, there are more girls than boys (60% vs. 52%) who use home computers daily. This might be explained by the fact that boys are more active outside in their free time during these years, while the girls use the Internet more as a source of information for their homework.

Looking for information on the Internet is the most extensive activity PC's are used for, with small gender differences. Computer games are one of the most popular activities among boys. This is where we find the largest gender differences. A third of boys in middle schools play PC games every day, compared with only 4% of girls. Of the boys who played PC games in middle schools, 10% played games on the computer more than four hours a day.

There are also systematic differences when it comes to what types of games are preferred by boys and girls. Boys play sports games, action games and strategy games. The girls game most smaller games on the Internet, car games, platform games and The Sims. The heavy players among boys (more than four hours per day) play predominantly shooting games and strategy games. A study from Statistics Norway shows the same picture. Boys use the PC for games and entertainment, and for business purposes, while girls to a larger extent than boys use the computer at home for educational purposes and schoolwork. It is largely younger computer users who use home-PC for entertainment and games. 59% of boys aged 9-15 years play video or computer games daily; 33% of girls do the same. In the next age group, 16-24 years, the statistics are 32% boys and only 7% girls. In addition, boys use more time playing games than girls. According to the survey "The digital life of youth" it is not so much active *use* of the PC that entails negative consequences for youth. Results show that young people

are more social when they use computers. The question is however *how* they are social, and if this way to be social is good for language competence and general competence among boys.

It is important to note that certain types of Media consumption are more extensive in specific life stages. For example, youth have long been large consumers of recorded music, while this use appears to decrease a great deal as one gets older.

## **2.6.2 Boys and use of Library**

The overall use of the library is detailed in a report from Statistics Norway. Contrary to what one finds in the adult population, the largest percentage of a group to have visited the library was found among boys up to 16 years; a full 71 percent have been to public libraries during the past year. 67 percent of girls in the same age group visited the public library in the same period. The percentage of children, who visit the public library within the past year, increases with age up to a certain point. But then it goes down again with increasing age. This applies to both genders. But despite these numbers, surveys such as PIRLS/PISA- surveys that have been mentioned earlier, show that boys read fewer books than girls. There are projects that seek to stimulate boys to read literature, such as “Book of choice”. This is a web search page designed for young people that opened in September 2007. The idea is to help young browsers to find books they would like to read, for instance by “constructing” the content themselves. The organisation “!Read”, has worked specifically to help boys become more interested in reading. The organisation has a major project in progress, “Sports and reading”. When it comes to reading newspapers, boys score as high as girls.

## **2.7 Gender-equal upbringing for boys and girls – initiatives**

The difference between how much time boys spend today with adults, both men and women, need not have unilaterally negative or positive consequences for them later in life. The quantity, quality and manner of contact between adults and boys play an important role. However, the government would like to see childhood and youth as a time of diverse types of contact with adults. The variations one sees in society should be reflected in what happens in ECEC, schools and recreational activities. This is true for both boys and girls. From a gender perspective, the present unequal distribution of men and women who work with children and youth is a challenge that must be met. Lack of diversity, especially lack of male employees, may have more negative consequences for boys than for girls. Under the present circumstances, boys do not experience that it is natural for men to work with children and teenagers.

When boys leave primary and secondary schools with significantly weaker academic results than girls, intervention is necessary. White Paper No. 16 (2006-2007) emphasises the importance of early efforts to help avoid these poor outcomes, and to prevent absenteeism and desertion from higher education.

Another important area to work on is teacher training. Gender equality is important for adults working in early childhood education and schools, not just for kids. It is the practice of adults, and the early cementing of traditional gender roles caused by children not seeing men in these activities, that are challenges. Until ECEC and schools actually have more diversity in staff, and adults are more observant of themselves as communicators and “makers” of gender, children will not learn to see and understand themselves as individuals, independent of gender.

The Ministry of Education’s Action-plan for Gender Equality in Early Childhood Education and Care, and in Basic Education (2008-2010) takes aim to do something with this. Increased emphasis on research will be necessary.

Gender stereotypes characterize upbringing through the media, sports and culture. The Ministry would invite wide discussion on possible measures to break these harmful stereotypes. The notion of an ideal body that increases the risk of unhealthy and unwanted lifestyle habits for boys (and girls), must be met with measures that make young people more conscious and able to resist these influences.

### **2.7.1 Upbringing within the family**

Dismantling of gender stereotypes and traditional beliefs about gender roles should be done as a cooperative effort between the parents, preschool and school. Children, who experience a large discrepancy between the equality practice in the home and the expressed values in schools and nurseries, have a particular challenge to overcome. The Ministry of Children and Equality will further continue and expand its work developing a parental guidance program that emphasizes the modern equality ideal. The Ministry proposes measures to increase parents' use of parental leave in Chapter 4. A more even distribution of care giving tasks between women and men is a significant contribution to increasing equality between the sexes.

Through ongoing projects such as “Sustainable families – gender equality in parenting”, the government will work to ensure that coordination between the public services for children (preschools, health clinics) and parents will be built on the equal treatment of parents.

The more equal the parents are, the better children learn about equality in practice. The more equal the parents are, the less possibility one will find for a breakup of family. And finally – children growing up in a gender equal family will experience quite lesser violence. (The Gender Equality Survey)

### **2.7.2 Boys in early childhood education and care**

The government will review the activities in early childhood education to make sure boys get the same contact with adults, the same follow-up and guidance as they engage in activities, as girls. Other measures are proposed in the new action plan for gender equality in early childhood education and care and in schools.

The research about what early childhood education means for gender socialisation must be strengthened. Early childhood education can in several ways help to even out social differences and provide equal opportunities and conditions for all children. It is also important to take account of regional differences in this work. Having a difference between educational levels for boys and girls has unfortunate consequences for society. The difference is particularly significant in small coastal areas and in inner Finnmark (county, far north in Norway), where girls often leave the area for higher education, while the boys stay behind. This has far-reaching consequences for family structure, employment, innovation and culture.

### **2.7.3 The learning environment and learning outcomes for boys**

In the autumn of 2006, the Ministry of Education set forth White Paper No. 16 “..and no one was left behind. Early intervention for lifelong learning”. This white paper took the perspective that learning is something that happens throughout life and it discussed the entire span of education for children, from early childhood to adulthood. In White Paper No. 16, the need for support in language development already in the preschool years is emphasised, with extra follow-up through concrete stimulation when individuals need it. The government will expand research that sheds light on the reasons for the large differences in learning outcomes between girls and boys shown by results from schools over the last 20 years. Measures that



will help schools to contribute to the evening out of such differences are to be put into action on the basis of new understanding about causal relationships.

Half of the schools that participated in the project: “Make Room for reading! Strategy for the stimulation of reading interest and competence 2003-2007”, worked with their own measures for boys. The bulk of these measures were designed to improve the conditions and the motivation for reading among boys. Many schools bought books specifically aimed at boys. Evaluation of the strategy shows that it has been successful to put the spotlight on boys and reading, and that this focus has served to make school leaders and teachers more observant and aware of the challenges boys face in learning to read. On the basis of further analysis of the survey on bullying among Norwegian pupils, the government will implement special measures aimed at boys, both as victims and as bullies.

Through “Strategy for the learning environment in primary education 2005-2008” and action guide for the school year 2007-2008, work has been done to improve the physical and psychosocial environment of schoolchildren. The Education Directorate, in cooperation with the Health Directorate, will evaluate the resource book *Relationships and Sexuality*, and it must do a review of the curriculum for teaching about cohabitation, relationships and sexuality in primary education. The material must be analyzed on the basis of its relevance to the total curriculum known as “Lift of Knowledge”. In developing this resource material, special attention will be paid to the topic of harassment and mobbing on the basis of gender and sexual orientation.

Ministry of Education and the Education Directorate support The Organisational Committee of Russ (members of a graduate class of a gymnasium) in connection with a youth campaign on sexuality, gender-related bullying and boundary setting. The campaign is targeting all pupils in secondary education, but with a particular focus on senior students. The campaign provides information about sexuality, seeks to prevent sexual abuse and encourage clear boundary setting when it comes to one’s own sexuality. The project started in the fall of 2007 and will continue until the summer of 2009.

The website [www.skolenettet.no](http://www.skolenettet.no) has their own web pages on sexuality and relationships. The pages have information designed for pupils and teachers. It also contains information handouts and teaching material.

#### **2.7.4 Organised leisure time**

The government will initiate a collaborative effort with the National Council for Norwegian Youth Organisations to consider measures aimed at evening out gender differences in the memberships of the organisations.

The government will use the Cultural Rucksack to put special emphasis on the varying ways of cultural expression among girls and boys.