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Authority in Multiethnic Norway**

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by Hilde Lidén

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Negotiating autonomy: Girls and Parental Authority in Multiethnic Norway

Introduction

Gender, equality and autonomy are key concepts in the discourse on multi-ethnicity in Norway, highlighting intergenerational relationships and processes of cultural continuity and change. In policy documents and in the media, debate on the integration of the relationship between parents and children has become the focal point, particularly with regard to how they practice autonomy and authority.¹ The practices of ethnic minorities are compared with those of the ethnic majority, which are used as the standards of normal freedom and independency. However, the actual practice of autonomy and authority is taken for granted and seldom made clear. My intention in this paper is to explore what is involved in the process of becoming independent in contemporary Norway. I shall examine the sources of autonomy and how these are linked with the practice of parental authority through studies of four 15 year old girls growing up in a multi-ethnic neighbourhood in Oslo.² They are all classmates; two of the girls, Johanna and Karen, represent the ethnic majority while the two others, Leyla and Aysha, allow us to describe family practices of the ethnic minorities at the school.

Theories of youth cultures and the new sociology of childhood have used peer relations as the main interpretive context of how young people develop their interests, identities and self representations.³ Family relationships are hardly ever included. My intention here is to discuss how the family delineates the cultural bias as well as the skills that the children acquire. This means that relationships in the family have a great

¹Papers discussing the implementation of the *UN Convention of the Rights of the Child* emphasise migrating youth as the main receivers of chore programs for action (St.melding No. 39 2001-2002, BFD 2003). The media discourse on young people and integration has been tensed and dichotomised, and stands as an important frame of reference, as we shall see, for the young people and their parents, as well as their political actions (see Gullestad 2003a, b)

²The analysis is based on a study of young people and power relations in everyday life.

The empirical material is based on participant observation in a junior secondary school and in youth clubs in multiethnic suburban areas in Oslo. Fieldwork included semi structural interviews with 16 boys and 21 girls, all aged 15 – 18. I did not interview their parents; however, I have discussed different aspects of the subject with parents in the same multi-ethnic neighbourhoods as well as with teachers and staff at youth clubs. Their interpretations of socialisation, of relationships among young people, and intergenerational relations are used as a contextual framework. .

³In theories of youth cultures the notions of cultural production, identifications and hybridism of cultural forms are closely connected to peer relations. This emphasis is significant in most of the studies of young migrants in Scandinavia (Mørch 1998, Lien 2002, Ålund 1997) as well as in Britain (Back 1996, Alexander 2000, Wulff 1988, 1995). The emphasis on children as agents and interpreters of cultural production in schools, leisure activities and kindergarten have been the main research interests of the “new sociology of childhood” (see for example James, Jenks and Prout 1998, Frønes 1995).

impact on the interaction among peers as well as on defining their interests and identifications. I shall focus on how the girls interpret their subjectivity. Although their practices of independence differ in significant ways, because of their parents' gendered expectations and the social and cultural contexts of the family, they all strongly feel a sense of agency.

Until recently Norway was defined as a multi-ethnic society, although the northern Sámi people have been part of the nation state for centuries. However, in the late 1960s immigrants from Third World countries started arriving in Norway. In 1979, six percent of the immigrant population came from Asia, Africa and Latin America; in 1998 the figure was 50 percent. Four out of ten non-western immigrants live in Oslo, with a total population of half a million inhabitants, where today one third of the pupils in primary and lower secondary schools are children with a mother tongue other than Norwegian.⁴

Immigration policy has followed the pattern of most European countries, with the implementation of a moratorium in 1975. Since then immigration from the third world has been mostly through family reunification, joining refugees, students and asylum seekers who acquire residence on humanitarian grounds. Despite the peripheral geographic position of Norway for most migrant flows, it

⁴The largest groups of immigrants come from Pakistan, Iraq, Iran and Somalia.

is puzzling that the Norwegian government operates one of the most restrictive immigration policies in Western Europe. Unification was the Norwegian principle of equality of treatment and opportunity structure for all within its national borders. There was concern that the welfare state not incorporate systemic differences and marginalization on ethnic lines. Since welfare benefits were limited, restriction of access was deemed to be necessary (Brochmann 1999). The equal opportunity approach is fundamental to Norwegian values, a basic premise being that a just society is one with a high level of equality. Norwegians are known to have limited tolerance for individual and personal differences, and accordingly, exert fairly strong social control, particularly in smaller communities. Such a bedrock of control follows from an attachment to and dependency on welfare provisions, especially on the part of the immigrants who for various reasons may have problems finding appropriate jobs or adjusting to local conditions.

Notions of citizenship are intimately related to the notions of becoming an autonomous young (wo)man. Citizenship defines the relationship between the individual and the state. In the Nordic countries integration policies are based on principles of individual rights and equality. Citizenship is closely linked to autonomy, and hegemonic discourses on autonomy highlight gender equality and economic independency, and downplay age hierarchy. Inclusion in the Nordic welfare system imposes on

immigrants the need to adjust to the standards of cultural behaviours of the majority, which are seen not as culturally specific, but as if representing the modern, civilized world based on human rights and a secular state, in stark contrast to the cultural and religious traditions of the immigrants. The hegemonic discourse on autonomy is therefore defined as the norm.

Individual autonomy is closely connected to modernity and to individuality, and individualization and detachment from cultural traditions are a taken for granted consequence of growing up in a post-modern Western society (Ziehe 1989, Giddens 1990, 1991, Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002). These theories are advanced at a high level of abstraction and contribute only to a limited degree to understanding the practices and challenges of how young people develop independence. At the same time, psychological and sociological research calls attention to the normative and liberal basis of these theories, which reflect an individualistic ideology that does not question the Western understanding of children's development towards independence is not questioned (Gillies 2000).

Autonomy is both a normative concept, defining the right to have a say and to choose one's own ends and purposes, and a descriptive one that treats the individuals as part of multiple relationships and positioned in hierarchical communities, where the social contexts define certain expectations and

obligations. In this sense autonomy is always *relational*, displayed through generational relations (see Gilligan 1993, Mackenzie & Stoljar 2000). As such, in various cultural and social contexts autonomy is linked to *authority*. The legitimacy of authority is challenged in different ways; such challenges are ambivalent, emphasizing both external and internal control.

When analysing autonomy, there is an additional important argument. As Bourdieu (1977, 1999) has emphasized, practices are embedded in culturally specific understandings and motivations.⁵ Divergent frames of reference delimit the boundaries of these practices, although at the same time they open up spaces for individual interpretations and choices. Both subjectivity and self-determination and cultural continuity and change are, then, dynamic processes.

Comparative perspectives on family practices expose variations in minority as well as majority family relationships (Priour 2002, Østberg 2003, Bjerrum Nielsen 2004, Brannon 1996). I shall look first the cases of Johanna and Karen. Johanna exemplifies in many ways the hegemonic model of autonomy and authority in contemporary Norway, while the case of Karen shows,

⁵With the concept of *habitus* Pierre Bourdieu (1977, 1999) describes how dispositions are integrated through daily routines and interactions with significant others. *Habitus* implies continual change when internalising new experiences, however this is not fundamental, since new inputs are interpreted by the meaning system that is already developed (Bourdieu 1999, Connerton 1989).

however, that there are significant variations even among ethnic Norwegians. Aysha's adaptation includes elements of the way both Johanna and Karen cope with parental relationships. Leyla, on the other hand, expresses the limits of her parents' authority when she refuses to accept their boundaries, and we shall see how she uses cultural differences as a means of power, as well as a frame of reference, when interpreting her family relationships and her own agency.

'Maybe I boss too much': Johanna

Johanna is an only child. After school she comes home to an empty flat, sometimes with friends. However, she loves to be alone, sometimes drawing or doing her homework while listening to music. She goes to aerobic classes once a week and once in a while she visits the youth club to chat with friends and the staff. Most evenings she stays at home. As is the case for more than a quarter of Norwegian children, her parents are divorced; in Johanna's case she was 6 years old. She stays most weekdays with her father, and three weekends a month and every Wednesday with her mother, and this more or less has been the pattern since the divorce. Her mother is educated as an artist and a nurse, and she works part time at a hospital and as an artist. Her father is an historian, working at Oslo University.

Johanna has a certain feeling of freedom. However, some of the arrangements limit her moves. For example, when she tells me about the agreement they have made for

her stay with each of the parents, the limits of her choices were obvious: "Now I can decide a little more. But I can't decide, actually. I can change where I stay occasionally for one day. I would prefer just to turn up at my Mum's place or Dad's place whenever I wanted; however, I know this would be hard for them to cope with."

She takes for granted that most of the everyday decisions are made by her parents, and many choices are made without consulting her. Negotiations go on in the interval between the extreme points of this continuity. Her feeling of freedom is defined by her approval of these negotiations, and Johanna is asked for her opinion. Her parents may argue over their interpretations and their principles, but discussions seldom turn into a quarrel; they often accept her arguments, although they may express concern. She then often adjusts her behaviour to their expectations. In this way she gets involved in commitments. At the same time, she knows very well how to negotiate around her parents' interests when she needs to:

"I sometimes feel guilty about my Mum, because I do my own thing. She is too kind in a way, always obliging. She lets herself be pushed. My dad is more direct, arguing about new clothes, for example. I think this is good. I don't want them to say 'yes' whenever I suggest something, and I don't want to obey either. You have to argue for what you really want, for

your opinion. However, you also have to adapt."

Her relationship with her mother differs from her relationship with her father, since her mother is both flexible and obliging, but at the same time demanding. She knows very well the expectations of her mother, which she usually expresses as disappointments or reminders. She complains about her constant use of the telephone, and goes on at her about being responsible and socializing more. It is easier to cope with her father, who is more outspoken and strict. Although her father listens to her arguments, he also uses his authority to define fixed rules, for example the time she has to come home in the evening. She likes the fact that her father disagrees with her:

"Well, we don't really argue much at home. I discuss serious things with my father. About politics, my father is quite interested in politics, and then I learn something from it."

Her relationship with her father is not exclusively based on his being a parent and carer; she also acknowledges him as a person with strong opinions. Johanna loves to stay up late in the evenings when he discusses politics or professional themes with his visiting friends. She also values her mother as an artist and appreciates the attention she gets from her. However, her mother is not always happy; she is often tired, lacking in energy, and she complains. Then her mother needs her as an intimate

friend to talk with, and this is quite demanding. The relationship with her mother is thus complex and ambivalent, and Johanna feels that she can't always comply with expectations.

She sometimes feels that the attention she gets from both of her parents is somewhat overbearing:

"Maybe I miss having a sister or a brother, so as not to have all my parents' attention focused just on me. They would be occupied with someone else and I sometimes could escape all their worrying – someone elder than me who had failed and survived. Now I get all the attention."

Her close relationship with them also makes her feel responsible for them. This is a double-edged sword: she knows how to manipulate them to get the freedom she wants but at the same time she must prove that they can have confidence in her, and this constrains her:

"I am quite honest about drinking alcohol and smoking. But they don't know everything. They know I have not smoked cigarettes and so on. I don't want to have that habit. But they don't know everything. However I don't want to freak out totally. May be they are too naive. They think I have not tasted wine. In this respect they are quite strict. I prefer them to be. However, they're not very suspicious. They trust me. In a

way it's a bit disturbing. They think I'm very clever, as I was when I was 12. Then I didn't dare to argue. Now it is easier to say no when someone asks me to do them a favour. Maybe it's because I see my family in a different way now and I talk more with my friends."

Johanna has extended the boundaries of behaviors established by her. She knows her parents accept the limits are flexible and that she and her friends are searching for new experiences. They both understand that this is part of the process of becoming independent. Johanna balances between making her own decisions, and making sure she is not "freaking out" too much. In this way she resolves the ambivalence that her parents express by both defining moral limits and ignoring them. Their control lies in their expectation of intimacy, which allows them to monitor her other relationships. Since she was a child, her parents expected her to communicate feelings and interests. Through asking her daily about her thoughts and emotions they feel confident they know the kind of person she is. However, when they are too intrusive she uses counter-strategies to fend them off and to create boundaries around her presumed autonomy, withholding information about her outside activities, or threatening to do so, thereby testing her parents and exposing the invisible power structure on which the relationship rests.

Johanna illustrates how moral precepts and interpretations are internalized through the daily socialization of family life, which leads

her mostly to fulfill her parents' expectations. At the same time she insists that she does this not because she is obedient, but because it's her own choice and she feels a certain amount of freedom: the more self discipline, the more she feels a free individual.

"I'm quite dutiful. So that means they have a lot to say. And I don't do things I shouldn't, or that they worry about. And if I do something stupid, there's only me to deal with the consequences, there is no one else to blame."

Johanna's is a negotiating family free from great controversies. Because her parents seldom interrupt, she has the feeling of being in control. She does her school work properly, as her parents expect her to, not out of duty, but as something reasonable and preferable, and as something she has chosen herself. She plans to go on to higher education; she is doing well at school and appreciates the positive response of her parents and teachers. Among her friends she likes to voice her own opinion, not only to go along with expectations and interests. She is eager to discuss political issues as well as more mundane things with friends, and reacts strongly to racism, injustice and inequality. She wants "to be herself," and to stand out among friends, to underline her individuality. For her, to be pretty, to enjoy her education and to spend time on her own are all significant expressions of her authenticity. When balancing her own agency against the expectations of others, she gets a feeling of freedom. However, her

independence and choices are interwoven in a network of relationships with mutual obligations and confirmations.

Equality is a crucial part of Johanna's relationship with others. She expects to be treated on equal terms not only by peers, but adults as well:

"Maybe it's because I'm used to talking with adults. I always feel angry if they don't take me seriously. I've always had the opportunity to express myself. I don't think I find it hard to speak with different kinds of people. I really expect other people to take me seriously. It has to do with respect."

Johanna takes it for granted that people respect her as a person with her own volition. Growing up oriented towards rights has taught her to expect equality and to be accepted as independent, regardless of her age. This accords with the policies on children's rights in the Norwegian welfare state during the last couple of decades (Kjørholt and Lidén forthcoming). Emphasizing communication among equals and anti-authoritarian relationships, children's rights discourse has spread through the media, legal reforms and social and political participation projects (Lidén 2003). The individualisation of the child is increased by divorce. Johanna is expected to bridge the gap between parents and her peers. The situation leads her parents to under-communicate hierarchy and control, and to ensure relational reciprocity and intimacy. She

understands her position as autonomous, a person who has to take care of herself and her relationships with separate peer groups, although she is still economically and emotionally dependent on her parents.

'My parents should have more confidence in me': Karen

The case of Karen reveals a more explicit kind of control at work among families in contemporary Norway, in particular the control of young people's actions through strict timetables, and the authority of parents through rigorous rules.

Karen lives with her parents and two brothers, one younger and one older. Her father is a salesman and her mother is a shop assistant. Everyone in her family is keen on sports. She is a skillful handball player in the local team. Her mother practices aerobics, her older brother does the triathlon, her younger brother plays ice hockey, football and goes cross-country skiing, while her father is the coach of her brother's football team. Twice a week Karen spends most of the afternoon with the local handball team, and also attends the local youth club where she is on the board, planning activities for younger members. At weekends Karen goes to handball matches or joins the rest of the family watching the matches of her brothers. They often spend nights at their summer house. She enjoys being together with her family, although she sometimes prefers to stay with friends. Her parents support her in her tasks and underpin her sense of

belonging, while their joint activities reinforce the ties between family members.

In Karen's case sporting activities and associations are an important arena for reproducing family relations and family morality. The time and emotional investment that they all invest in sports implies a gift giving system inside the family that produces cohesion and maintains the family as a social and moral community (Archetti 2003). In Norway more than half of the children and youth under 20 years of age are members of sports associations. Their parents feel obliged to take turns as leaders to support the team practically and to give financial support.⁶ This reinforces the relationship of the family with the local community, while at the same time strengthening bonds within the family.

Family rhythm is adjusted to meals, housework and sports activities, and frames Karen's daily life. The way her days are organised creates certain forms of conduct and routines. Her parents appreciate punctuality and responsibility. They expect her to be responsible for specific tasks, and because of the tight schedules of the family members, they all depend on each other. She thinks that she has to deal with stricter rules than her schoolmates. If she has not cleaned her room properly, her mother tells her to

finish it before she can leave the house. If she returns a few minutes too late in the evening, she has to come home earlier the next day. Her parents obtain authority by insisting on obedience. They stress the difference in structural position between parents and children. This makes her stick to the rules most of the time. She sometimes negotiates; however, mainly she feels that she is in control when she fulfils the expectations of her parents and at the same time can spend most of her time on things she likes.

Karen thinks her parents should have more confidence in her. They know that they have nothing to fear, because she does not drink alcohol and smoke cigarettes:

"None of my best friends attend parties where they drink alcohol. Sometimes my classmates invite me, but I prefer not to go. I don't like those kinds of parties. I'm not that kind of person."

She seldom attends the parties of her schoolmates, because she prefers other friends, and because she is too busy at the weekend. She is not in the group of "popular" girls in her school class, and she does not feel comfortable among them:

"The popular girls are just interested in looking perfect, in their appearance. If you don't fit in you aren't invited join the gang. It doesn't bother me, because I'm my own self, I've always been like this. Maybe I'm quite childish. It's just how I am. Sometimes they ask if I want

a cigarette, but I don't dare. None of my friends smoke, so refusing isn't that *hard*. I've never tried smoking."

Her sense of 'being herself' is expressed in contrast to the so-called popular girls. This is a thorny position. However, she gets credit because she is a good handball player and they also know that her brothers are very good at sports. Her strict rules at home disgrace her in the eyes of her classmates. However, when I observed them during my participation in the classroom it became obvious that they also respected her because of her self-control and the courage of her choices and convictions. For example, when she was still quite young, she decided to be a pre-school teacher. Her aunt is a pre-school teacher, and every school holiday Karen visits the children in the kindergarten that her aunt runs, and the children are very excited when she comes to play with them. Her aspiration to be a pre-school teacher gives her a certain respect among her schoolmates, who find it difficult to decide on the course of their further education.

Parental authority among Norwegians

The families of Johanna and Karen revealed two different ways in which parents can claim authority. Johanna's parents practice a *competence based authority*, in contrast to Karen's, who combine this with *position oriented authority*. A competence based authority derives from intimate relationships, in which the parents acquire information and gain an understanding of the conduct of

their child (Hennum 2002). Intimacy involves attention, reciprocity and empathy. Parents as well as children interpret social action and negotiate practices. Decisions are often made in context-specific ways. The expected competence of parents includes insight into local youth culture as well as the possible consequences of the decisions made by themselves or their children. The family is seen as a unit of members, each with his or her individual rights. Equality and privacy is valued. Unlike families that use a position oriented authority, usually ascribed as a working class mode of control, the middle class families prefer a personal mode of control (Bernstein 1975, see also Brannen 1996). Children expect to be treated as competent individuals, and the condition for parents to be regarded with respect is to demonstrate trust, recognition, reason and integrity. The dilemma for Johanna is that she must cope with relationships that are hierarchical yet at the same time emphasise equality. The parents express continuity in boundaries even as they open up for negotiations, independence and context specific decisions as part of the process towards autonomy. Independence is emphasized, although the relationships also reveal mutual dependencies, control and adjustments. In this way the relationships reveal ambiguities and contradictory expectations and understanding.

The middle class practices of control have become the hegemonic discourse, although not necessarily the only one. The hegemonic discourse presents some dilemmas for the

⁶The practical and financial support of giving time and working jointly by all in a community, called *dugnad*, is an old tradition in Norway and is a concept used of in different arenas such as kindergartens, schools, and housing co-ops, in both rural and urban local communities. There is a strong moral expectation of taking turns contributing, and this in turn defines and expresses membership of the community.

performance of parenthood. When children reach adolescence, they are expected to enjoy increasing autonomy. Autonomy is seen as the end of the socialisation process. The authority of their parents becomes less taken for granted and legitimate. Still, authority is expected to be part of the relationship between parents and children. The authority of the parents enforces common values and notions, although this is not now presented in the form of obligations and guidelines. As we have seen, in both cases implicit moral expectations guide their performance as part of the relationships between parents and the girls. Both young girls accept to a certain extent the values of their parents, their frame of reference and their expectations at the present time and for the future. Although Johanna emphasises her freedom and Karen her independent standard of behaviours, and in this way their value of self-determination, this never leads them into serious quarrels and trouble. The adjustment of the daughters to the expectations of their parents ensures the relative absence of conflicts in the two families.

‘If they don’t show me respect, I don’t respect them either’: Leyla

The values and expectations of Leyla’s parents are more outspoken than Johanna’s and Karen’s, partly because she opposes them. This leads to conflicts and dilemmas in the transforming of cultural identification and belonging. She lives with her parents, and with an older brother. Her mother is a nurse and her father an assistant nurse who

also works part time as a tram driver. Her parents were born in Iran and have lived in Oslo for more than 16 years. Leyla was born in Oslo. The family lived in Malaysia for two years because of work when she was ten to twelve years old. They have many relatives in Oslo, but these are scattered and do not see each other regularly.

Leyla has problems at home, because she is not really taking her parents’ expectations seriously. She says:

“Most often I do what I want. We argue. Still, I do what I want anyhow. Then they have to say OK, they know they can’t force me. If I say I will be out as long I want, they get angry. I show up when I decide to. [Pause.] Of course I do remember what they say, all the time. And they call me on the mobile and ask me where I am. I decide when to go home, but, it’s more or less the time they have told me to. In a way I listen to what they say anyhow.”

Leyla expresses ambiguity in her relationship with her parents, especially her mother. Like several of her school-mates, she rebels against the expectations of her parents about how a girl should behave. Many of her friends and their parents see quarrels as an inevitable part of growing up. The most common conflicts between Leyla and her parents arise over time she has to be home, her homework, her clothes, her way of behaviour, and how she talks to her mother. Leyla states her right to her own opinion.

When she was younger, she used to go out a lot. “I went out to play and I easily made new friends. My mother didn’t like it very much. I just left.” For a long time she has done her thing against her mother’s wishes. Her parents are worried about her choices, her friends and her future. They are unable to cope with her and to control her behaviour. She doesn’t seem to be worried about getting a bad reputation, which means that she is resistant to this source of social control. She explicitly resists the idea of family honour. She wants to live her life in her own way, like her friends; but although she fights her parents, she is very aware of their expectations, and adapts to them in her own rebellious way.

Leyla copes with different expectations and value orientations as a part of her daily life. In socially and culturally mixed neighbourhoods, the lives of young people are woven into different religious, ethnic and gendered knowledge and systems of meaning. This forms them into complex individuals, or as Fredrik Barth (1989:140) expresses it, “each person is ‘positioned’ by virtue of the particular pattern of the coming-together in her of parts of several cultural streams, as well as particular experiences.” Young people creatively negotiate the forces of ethnicity, religion, class, gender and race, as well as multiple forms of cultural identity available to them at home, at school, within popular culture and in media discourses. However, discourses reify a particular cultural order, a set of hierarchal values and standards. Their self-

representation is, then, an attempt to cope with cultural subjugation as well as individual aspiration.

For Leyla, her relationships with her peers are the most important at the moment. This puts her in a situation of conflict that she cannot really cope with. It is difficult to find solutions that both she and her parents can accept:

“My friends live by other rules Their rules are not so strict, and that bothers me a lot. I think it’s because I come from a different background and culture. My parents were born in another country. I don’t feel like a Muslim. All my friends are Norwegians, and they take me for a Norwegian. They don’t call me a foreigner. I feel that I am Norwegian, because I don’t really feel I belong to the culture of my parents’ country, where a girl must stay at home all the time and look after her younger siblings. I can’t stand that.

My parents expect me to stay at home all the time and to tell them about my thoughts and feelings and what goes on at school and with my friends. But I don’t want to sit down and talk with my mother. She will never accept my point of view. For example, I’m not expected to have any relationships with boys, but I have mostly boys as friends. I have always liked to be just friends with boys, from when I was in kindergarten. In a way I feel more like a

boy than a girl. My parents know, they are afraid I'm going to have sex. You mustn't have sex before you are married. But I shall never marry an Iranian boy. I'll marry a Norwegian. When I tell them, my mother complains and starts to discuss the issue of being a Muslim and a Christian, that I can't marry a person who is not a Muslim. I shall move out when I am eighteen years old and then I can decide for myself. Actually, I do that already."

Leyla identifies herself as a Norwegian. She stresses her right to choose her life, and opposes the gender expectations of her parents and the norms they express, which define her as a member of the family unit, as a girl and a woman. Gender relations have become the key symbol for the kind of freedom she wants, and which her parents see as a threat. She enjoys being friends with boys and having a boyfriend. When she was younger her friendships with boys were more accepted, and during that time she acquired the codes and skills of boys. *I feel like a boy.* She appreciates their freedom in comparison with that of girls. She enjoys fixing motorbikes and doing woodwork, and has always wanted to be a carpenter. Her experience of being seen as an attractive girl by the boys is flattering as well. Her relationships with girls are more ambivalent. She is not familiar their codes of friendship, with their concurrent competition and intimacy. Often she quarrels with her female classmates, and thinks it is because they are jealous.

Like Johanna's parents, Leyla's expect relational intimacy. Leyla, however, refuses to share her feelings and thoughts in order to avoid the costs of commitment and implicit control. Like Karen's situation, but unlike Johanna's, the rules set by Leyla's parents give her little room for negotiation and adaptation. Their principles are related to Islamic doctrines, with very clear limits:

"As a Muslim I'm not allowed to drink alcohol. I taste it sometimes, just socially. I don't drink much, so I don't get home drunk. If I did so they would throw me out. I know the limits of their patience."

Although she does not share her parents' expectations and values, their norms still function as strong forces for adjustment. Leyla feels that she is forced to break the rules because they give her no room for negotiation, and affect her main relationships and interests and make her situation difficult.

"It's difficult to lie to my parents, but I can't tell them what I'm doing. It's difficult that they don't accept what's so important to me. I listen to what they say. It's not that I don't respect my parents. I don't respect the fact that they don't respect me. In a way they make rules that I can't fulfill. I have to break them if I want to be out with friends. I'm growing up differently. I got Iranian culture first, and now I am part of Norwegian culture."

Leyla is aware of her right to decide for herself, and of the value of generational equality. She expects to be able to choose friends, interests and lifestyle. She assumes that she won't be economically dependent on her family when she grows up. But emotionally her parents and her extended family are important, although she does not always admit it. This makes it hard to cope with the code and expectations of her daily life. She feels that her parents don't have confidence in her and do not accept the person she is, or wants to be. Leyla herself emphasises the value of confidence between parents and children, a value she wants for her own children, but cannot apply herself, because she feels that her parents force their interpretations and rules upon her, and that it is not an equal discussion. They don't understand her position:

"If I had a child I would bring it up like I am. I would let it do more what it wants, be friends with boys. Then I think it would want to tell me about what happens. I really want that. If I brought up my children how my mother has done with me – not that she has done anything wrong.... But, I won't tell my mother what I feel and do. I can't. My mother has never been young in this country. My life is different from hers. She doesn't know how young people in Norway think."

Leyla refuses the confidence that her parents require of her because she sees their interests and worries as forms of control. Their

relationship has become too tense. She explains the problems in terms of cultural differences. To ascribe her parents a lack of cultural competence becomes a means of power. In fact, their worries do not necessarily derive from a their lack of familiarity with Norwegian society, since both her parents were educated in Norway and have jobs that give them insights into how it works:

"In a way my parents are Norwegian too; they've lived here for 15-16 years, and they speak Norwegian fluently. My elder brother thinks the same way as my parents and he tries to control me. He thinks that I'm really destroying my future. He's doing very well at school, and next year he'll start studying at university."

Her parents are keen to give their children an education and to help them adjust to Norwegian society, but not in the way Leyla is attempting to. Like her brother, they think that she is really destroying her future.

Although she acts like a Norwegian, Leyla does not get the respect she expects. She wants people to accept her on equal terms; however, they expect her to be different. Her challenges are more definite, with little room for negotiation and, in contrast to Johanna and Karen she feels she often has to give in to smooth things over. This comes through when she talks about her relationships with her teachers and her friends:

"I don't like teachers. I almost always have problems with them, especially the ones that don't know me. We often start to quarrel, and then they don't like me. I shout back. One of the teachers agreed with me once that the pupils deserve respect from the teachers. Next time he disagreed, he said that the duty of a pupil is to show teachers respect, and that I had to listen and obey. I opposed him of course. If teachers don't show me respect, I don't respect them either. They think they can decide for us. My view is that we have to decide for ourselves. I sometimes accept what the teachers say, but not always."

Although Leyla identifies herself as Norwegian, her behaviour does not fit well into middle class norms and those expected by the teachers at school. She does not understand the double standards of hierarchy, intimacy and adjustment to discipline that Johanna and Karen have acquired and employ skilfully. Leyla finds the expectations of intimacy and the culturally specific combination of equality and authority difficult to cope with. She is not familiar enough with the nuances to be able to negotiate, adapt and establish the confidence that her teachers expect. Her friends, many of them defined as troublemakers, also failed to conform to the expectations of teachers. Her relationships with the Norwegian girls at school are not close. Since she is not included in gender-specific peer relations she fails to acquire the dominant distinctions and codes of how to become a young Norwegian

woman. Hence her ideas of Norwegian behaviour do not necessarily coincide with the concepts held by Johanna and Karen.

Leyla's unhappiness about her troubled situation at home and school encourages her to change; she wants to make new friends and to have a say in the things that affect her. She has joined a political youth organisation, and through this will acquire new skills and understanding of her situation as a member of a minority, as well as the cultural bias and social structure of the majority society.

'There must be equal rights for men and women': Aysha

Aysha was born in Oslo and has lived in the suburbs nearly all her life. She is the second oldest of six siblings. Her father moved from Punjab to Oslo in the late 1970s to join his father who was already working there. He was the same age as Aysha is now and he finished secondary school in Oslo before starting work in a grocery. He then married, and after some years his wife joined him in Norway. He now runs a restaurant. When she was 7 years old, Aysha's family returned to Pakistan for more than a year. "They wanted us to learn the language, to read and write, and to learn about our culture. We went to an English school, and it was very difficult to learn both English and Urdu. After a while, my parents felt the situation had become too insecure, because there were a lot of thefts, although we lived in a big city."

The parents of both Aysha and Leyla have typical occupations of immigrants, and both families have also lived in Asia for short periods. They have close relationships with relatives in Norway as well as in their hometowns, but Aysha lives in an extended family, while Leyla does not. The sister and brother of Aysha's father stay with them, as does her grandmother sometimes, although she mostly lives in Pakistan. They have many relatives in Oslo and frequent visitors, both kin and friends, from other European cities and from the Punjab. The day before I interviewed Aysha, for example, her father was giving a party for some friends who had arrived from Pakistan. Social events like this strengthen the gendered division of the family and as the family unit as a whole. Aysha said of the party, "There were about five or six men, and then my uncle and my brothers. Although I was exhausted when I arrived from school, my mother asked me to help. My mother and my aunt prepared the dishes, and my sisters and I helped them. Afterwards we had a lovely time, we sat in the kitchen, chatting."

Unlike Leyla, Aysha's daily life is family-oriented. When Aysha told me about it she described gender specific duties and uses of space. She loves her family. At home she speaks mostly Norwegian with her siblings and Urdu with her parents and aunt. Her mother understands some Norwegian, but doesn't speak it. I asked her if they speak Urdu when they have supper. "No," she replied, "because when we eat we are not allowed to speak at all. We are used to

being quiet." Although her father grew up in Norway, he prefers silence, as this is the expected behaviour of his Punjabi background.

In the evenings, Aysha and her sisters usually sit together and chat. Sometimes they watch videos on their own, particularly Bollywood films. She helps with the daily housework although there is a lot of schoolwork to do this year. She works hard: "Sometimes I'm really exhausted. I work every Saturday and Sunday and I never get any spare time. It's too much." Her schoolwork takes much of her time. In spite of planning her days carefully, she feels inadequate. She does not manage to meet the expectations made of her, nor her own educational goals. Since she was a child, she wanted to be a doctor, but she has not got the necessary grades and so she will train as a medical secretary instead. Although she is working very hard, she is not getting the results she wants. This makes her feel exhausted.

At the age of fourteen she left her Koran school. She had read the Koran several times, and though she repeated the verses routinely, they made no sense anymore. Her parents opposed her withdrawal, but they were too busy to really object. Leaving the Koran school illustrates the way she defines the limits of her autonomy: free in principle, but restricted by duties. Her decisions must also be accepted by her parents.

"Usually I can decide what I want to do. I sometimes discuss things with my

parents. As long as we do things that won't destroy our lives we can decide, my father says."

Like the other girls, she emphasizes self-determination; however, the space for action and negotiations differs. The boundaries between Aysha and her parents' fields of responsibility are defined partly by their cultural traditions and partly by the rights and values of the welfare state, which they appreciate. While acquiring his education and growing up, Aysha's father learned some of the values and practices of Norwegian society. Both her parents are familiar with the discourses on gender equality, education, and autonomy expressed through the schools and the media. However, they are explicit on certain values and boundaries and are very aware when proper conduct is at stake. Aysha adjusts to their expectations of her own free will and not because she has to obey. For example, she is allowed to go to school parties, but she does not like them, and chooses not to join in. She hardly has time to go out in the afternoon, and prefers to spend her time with her sisters and to go shopping with them.

For Aysha, her autonomy is explored in relationships within her family and their common social network of friends and kin. Leisure time spent with her schoolmates does not appeal to her. They are not significant options in relation to the social network of her parents, and the social and religious events they attend. Her acceptance and appreciation as a decent person is linked

to expectations of her as a young Muslim girl. She also feels the power of rumour in the Pakistani community. While accepting and appreciating the relationships and values of their common network, she avoids the challenges of reconciling the expectations of her parents and schoolmates. Her identification and belonging is religious and ethnic. In the way she positions herself, she confirms her individuality as an independent and reasonable person, and as a modern Norwegian-Pakistani woman:

"I prefer to wear Pakistani clothing, because I feel much freer. Trousers and jumpers are too tight; I prefer my cultural dresses, which I wear in the summer. But it's too cold in the winter, my mother has decided, and she wants me to wear trousers and jumpers – my father too. I want to wear my own cultural dresses, then I can move more easily. I'm not interested in fashion; I have too many other things to do. When I go to weddings and other celebrations, I wear Pakistani clothes. They are really beautiful; I also buy shoes in Pakistan. They are much more elegant, we can't get shoes like that in Norway: summer shoes, to feel free in.

I think I have a Pakistani way of thinking. And I have a Norwegian way of thinking as well, because I have lived here for many years. I really think there must be equal rights for men and women, not like boys can do one thing and girls must do another. But I think it

is OK for women to wear the *shalween*, the Pakistani garment, and for men to wear their traditional clothes. It is their choice."

When describing her preferences she uses concepts such as "culture" and "different cultural behaviours," "feeling free," "equality," "choice" and "to be herself" She uses clothing as a means of underlining her personal identity. Wearing specific clothes is significant in her presentation of self and her interpretation of the kind of person she is and wants to be. The feeling of freedom while wearing her ethnic clothes, a kind of freedom felt because of loose-fitting dresses, may also be because of her feeling of personal coherence in contrast to the unfamiliar fashion of her class mates. Her attempts at "being herself" are expressed in her use of the *hijab*, the headscarf:

"I had one at home, and I put it on one day. But I'll stop using it, it makes me sweat too much. I won't carry on wearing it. It is too important a choice to decide now. I don't know why I started. What it means to me. Everyone asked me, why are you wearing it, why now? I don't know. I suddenly wanted to. In a way I've always wanted to. My sisters don't wear a shawl; it's only me. When I leave school in the afternoon I feel really exhausted, and my hair is all wet under the shawl, and I get exhausted from that too. On my way home I take it off. Never at school, because then they will say she is just

trying to cut a good image, she is pretending to be religious. So I can't take it off. But I sweat too much and I don't feel comfortable."

Wearing the *hijab* was done on impulse. Maybe the taking of her school picture made her reflect on the image she presented of herself? There was no pressure from her parents to wear it, and her sisters are not thinking of doing so. When she put the *hijab* on she discovered that it was a more significant decision than she thought it would be, and she regretted it. She wanted to make a statement about her religious and ethnic identification, and to stand out as a person; it was more serious than she had suspected, and now it was too late to change her mind. She felt caught and exhausted, and uneasy, as she is a shy girl and it was getting her a lot of attention. She felt trapped because she could not just take the *hijab* off because of the potential rumours. She wanted them to interpret her *hijab* as an authentic expression of religious faith and not as pretence.

Aysha defined herself in contrast to the behaviours and interests of her sisters, and this expresses her individuality. However, to a large degree decisions are taken for them, defining their position as girls in the family and in the school, and they take these decisions for granted. They are seen as institutionalized relationships that they do not question. Arranged marriage is one such issue. It is up to her parents to decide when the proper time is to start thinking seriously

about marriage, although Aysha expects she will have a say in the matter.

"My mother thinks it's too early. We have to finish school first and complete our education. My parents aren't interested yet. I don't know what they think about it. We've never discussed it really. Sometimes I talk with my sisters about what will happen, how it will be to get married and have children.

I know we'll have a say as to who it is going to be, and we will want to speak with him before the wedding. If we were forced to marry a man we do not like I would be really disappointed, and I would disagree with my parents. They aren't like that at all. It's not like my mother telling me: you have to marry that man. That has never happened in our family. The girl is asked and she gets to know something about him. However, we haven't discussed marriage very much."

Up to now, the romantic dreams of marriage have been nourished by films and gossip. Aysha wants to follow the practice of arranged marriage, combined with gender equality and co-determination. Her views on marriage express her attempts to combine traditions with new discourses and practices in order to simultaneously maintain traditions and create new forms of behaviour. Her solution reflects the social situation of the young people of immigrant origin. In her future plans, Aysha includes higher

education, employment, and gender equality, along with the practice of her ethnic and religious traditions. Her actions will be defined by the obligations she feels towards her present and future family units as well. The premises she takes for granted thus define her field of self-determination.

Embodied practices of independence

To conclude, I want to highlight four aspects of how autonomy is interpreted and negotiated.

A discourse on equality and autonomy is used by all the girls but embodied in different practices.

Socialisation in contemporary Norway is influenced by folk-interpretations of development psychology and the social policy of the welfare system in stressing "the best interests of the child" as well as children's participation. Popular concepts such as "boundary-setting" (*grensesetting*), "self governing" (*sjølførløst*), "play without adult interference" (*fri lek*) and "freedom with responsibility" (*frihet under ansvar*) are used to understand and legitimate socialisation practices (Gullestad 1997). The emphasis on equal rights, in spite of gender and age differences, articulates the status of children as participants, as self-governing and independent actors (Lidén 2000, Kjørholt and Lidén forthcoming). The girls do not use these concepts themselves but they embody the values.

For all the girls gender equality is fundamental. They expect gender to not be of importance when choosing their aims and interactions. However, the analysis verifies gender specific practices and relationships. For all the girls, gendered aspects of family relations are manifest in subtle ways. The relationship with their mothers is different from that with their fathers, and gender shapes the way they accept the boundaries, wanting to be sensible and decent on the one hand, and independent on the other. The desire to combine multiple ambitions successfully gives them positive acceptance as girls. Leyla, however, opposes the gender specific expectations of her parents, which she finds odd and limited by the standards of her schoolmates and the hegemonic discourse of gender equality.

Equality is also related to age and therefore to parental authority. Hierarchical family relationships are justified implicitly or explicitly with reference to age. For Johanna, covert forms of authority emphasising individuality, understood as difference on equal terms, play down the unequal structural position. The respect for seniority and the authority of parents is more explicit for the other three girls. For all of them, however, the strongest force of parental authority is when the girls have internalised the values of their parents, and choose to behave how they are expected to. For example, although Aysha's parents are more explicit as authorities, legitimised by their cultural emphasis on respect for the elders and on the family as an economical and

social collective, their authority is more powerful when they are not forcing her to do what they want. This may lead her into not challenging the boundaries that she takes for granted at first glance. For all the girls, internal as well as external controls are at work. The implicit boundaries defined by Johanna's parents possibly lead her to limit her actions more than her parents expect her to, because she has to convince them that she has the situation well in hand.

The girls express the cultural ambiguities of how to become young women in contemporary Norway, but they do not necessarily interpret the concepts of freedom, choice and intimacy in the same way. They define themselves in contrast to other categories of youth and adulthood, and in relation to where they belong and to role models they admire. The process of individualisation is not a break from existing relationships, but forces each person to take responsibility for the relationships they initiate, and to choose among the many possibilities open to them (Beck and Beck-Gernheim 2002).

In addition to the discourse of equality, the migration situation in itself affects the interpretations of autonomy and authority. Leyla's and Aysha's families display different strategies of adaptation to Norwegian society. The two girls position themselves differently among peers, in the family and in kin networks. Their experience shows how a family-oriented strategy combined with educational goals promotes social mobility

as well as individualistic and peer oriented strategies; however, this may be a more lonely and thorny route.

Autonomy, class and ethnicity

Their position as individuals and as members of a family unit has significant consequences for the girls' future life path. Both Leyla and Aysha are reminded every day that they belong to stigmatised ethnic minorities in Norway, and they cope with this in dissimilar ways. Growing up in an ethnic minority means that you are placed in a class structure, which defines access to welfare, power and control, as well social recognition. Johanna, as member of an academic family of the ethnic majority, takes for granted that she belongs to the upper middle class, and expects no obstacles in her path to social and economical independence. Karen has already made her decision about her future education and employment. This puts her socially in a gendered middle class position with a safe, but not high-income, job as an employee in the welfare system. Hence personal autonomy concerning the realisation of individual rights and economic independence are met from different social and structural positions in society by these four girls.

Adaptation to cultural expectations goes along with a strong sense of subjectivity

Although cultural discontinuity is ideologically paramount to young people's sense of autonomy, the relationships and practices in the families discussed display continuity in cultural transmission and

practice, except in the case of Leyla. To a large degree, the expectations of their parents shape their actions, although skills and motivation acquired, which influence their opinions and choices, differ. Growing up within a tight family unit, with siblings and an extended kin network, bring about different relational experiences and practical skills to those of an only child of divorced parents. The everyday rhythms of family life are incorporated in body and mind and imprint the interests, knowledge and the frames of reference.

The girls adjust, yet at the same time they are very aware of themselves as independent people. They see their decisions as being influenced by their own choices. They do not act out of obedience, but from a feeling of obligation towards themselves as well as their family.⁷ The notion of "being oneself" is in this way connected to cultural continuity, intimacy and responsibility and not defined by separateness and discontinuity.⁸ However, the field of co- and self-determination is differently constructed, due to the implicit understanding of rights and duties, of children, childhood and socialization.

Multiple expectations and interpretations define their interactions; however, despite the ambiguities they live through, they

⁷The cultural transformation of values in Norway, from obedience to desire, is well interpreted by Gullestad (1996). See also Collier (1997) for a comparative study from Spain.

⁸See Gullestad (1996) for a discussion of the notion of "being oneself."

experience their life very much as cohesive. This is partly so because of the meanings articulated in specific contexts, some aspects lying in the forefront and others not, making ambiguity less obvious.⁹

Relational autonomy and growing up

For young people, the process of becoming independent is part of the process of growing up: acquiring new skills and resources to enable them to manage life on their own. The girls are faced with two interpretations of what it means to be more mature: on the one hand individuality and being able to cope individually with new public situations and relations, on the other, taking responsibility in relationships and collective purposes and goals. The families of Johanna and Aysha can be placed at the opposite ends of the continuum, emphasising individuality at one pole and collective responsibility at the other. Usually these aspects are not seen as coupled, but as contested premises of maturity and autonomy. The four girls, however, demonstrate that they are intertwined. Being more independent seems to derive from the degree to which the individual is given respect and recognition, and their ability to speak for themselves, and what having a say means to them in the short and long terms, are core elements as well. All these features are

⁹Erwing (1990) criticizes how western theories of selfhood have made a dichotomisation between the individualistic sources of self in western countries and the collective sources of self in Asia. She calls for a more complex understanding of the multiple selves. See also Strathern 1992.

involved in the process of growing up, although in different ways among the four. For example, independent choices conflict more extensively with the family and ethnic group of Leyla. Aysha may feel the pressure as well. Making decisions is always context-specific. For example, the decision to use a scarf was made exclusively by Aysha, but when it comes to the question of marriage more people are involved.¹⁰ Her many allusions to "being exhausted," "worn out," "sweat," "to smell badly," etc. in situations when she is out of control, may indicate a feeling of powerlessness in contexts which are important to her, such as her education and the ascription of her ethnic and religious identity.

In multi-ethnic Norway, the interrelated complex of gender, equality and autonomy has become a normative standard of individuality and independence and a means of defining boundaries between "us" and "them." In policy documents, as well as in media debates on integration, the standard of autonomy is used in defining divergent practices as problematic. My aim has been to reveal the complexity of this value; the way autonomy is relational, linked to practices of authority, to subjectivity, and to varying interpretations of key concepts such as gender, equality, parenthood, children and childhood. The results of this analysis gives little justification for dichotomised positions

¹⁰The last years arranged marriage has been very much discussed in the media and in policy documents in Norway. See Bredal 1999, forthcoming.

and ethnic essentialism, since they do reveal the negotiation of context-specific challenges of which the migrant situation provides a variety of examples, and the ethnic Norwegian situation is similarly hetero-geneous.

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