

ABORTION PREVENTION

Lesbian citizenship and filmmaking in Sweden in the 1970s

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In the late 1970s, in the midst of the so-called gay liberation era, two pivotal lesbian films were shot in Sweden: the documentary short *The Woman in Your Life Is You* [*Kvinnan i ditt liv är du*] (1977), directed collectively by members of the organisation Lesbisk Front [Lesbian Front] in Stockholm, and the short educational fiction *Eva and Maria* [*Eva och Maria*] (Marie Falksten, Annalena Öhrström and Mary Eisikovits, 1983), directed by three women who ran a company called Tjejfilm ['Chick Film'] in Gothenburg. Both were funded by the state agency Socialstyrelsen [The National Board of Health and Welfare] and are the first cases of publicly funded films made by, with and about open lesbians in Sweden. Paradoxically, the same state agency was at this time also in charge of the official classification of homosexuality as a mental disorder (Socialstyrelsen, 1968). However, just a few years later the classification would be dropped and an official government report, 'Utredningen om homosexuellas situation i samhället' (1984) ['Investigation about the situation of homosexuals in society'], would put homosexuality on the official political agenda as a legitimate social and civil rights issue in Sweden, paving the way for cohabitation, anti-discrimination, parental and marital rights during the following decades. The two rare lesbian films examined in this chapter, largely forgotten and overlooked in Swedish film history as well as in feminist and queer historiography, anticipate these crucial shifts in the official medical, legal and social understanding of homosexuality in Sweden in the 1970s and 1980s.

Undertaking a close reading of the two films' funding processes in this chapter, I investigate the ambiguous sexual citizenship (Bell and Binnie, 2000; Evans, 1993) shaped by the interplay between formal sexual policy-making and lesbian film production in Sweden at a moment in time when

homosexuality was on the threshold of becoming recognised as a civil rights issue. Drawing from original archival research and interviews, I shed light on the rhetorical twists and euphemisms through which lesbian filmmaking was inserted into the National Board of Health and Welfare's budget and administered as an issue of birth control education. Looking closer at the two films' representation of lesbianism, noting how they downplay sexual desire, I argue that rather than simply exemplifying the transnational lesbian feminist movement's alleged anti-sex politics, this articulation of lesbian identity should be understood as shaped by the interaction with official sexual policymaking in Sweden at this crucial moment in time. These neglected films and their production histories, I contend, are unique cases illuminating the official shift from regarding homosexuality as a mental disorder to regarding homosexuals as a vulnerable group exposed to prejudice and discrimination. The notion of vulnerability, I demonstrate, plays an instrumental and multifaceted role in the production of lesbian citizenship and audio-visual self-presentation at this time.

AFFIRMATION FILMS: *EVA AND MARIA AND THE WOMAN IN YOUR LIFE IS YOU*

In Sweden, like in other Western European countries, the LGBT movement grew more radical and visible in the 1970s, influenced by the Stonewall riots in New York in 1969 (Silverstolpe and Söderström, 1999: 667). In addition to Riksförbundet för sexuellt likaberättigande [the National Organisation for Sexual Equality] (RFSL), that had been formed in 1950, new groups like Homosexuella Socialister [Homosexual Socialists], Gay Power Club and Lesbian Front also emerged (Ahlberg, 2000).

The documentary amateur short *The Woman in Your Life Is You* was directed in 1977 by a group of women active in the newly proclaimed organisation Lesbian Front in Stockholm. The names of the filmmakers are not credited in the film. Instead, the closing credits read: 'In front of the camera: us'; and: 'Behind the camera: us'. According to one of the women who formed part of the team, Birgitta Olsson (2014), about five to seven women were involved in the production, which was rather improvised as none of them had any previous filmmaking experience. Documentary scenes, shot on a shaky Super-8 camera, show women taking part in a photography workshop and self-defence sessions, attending a women's summer camp, demonstrating in the streets, and executing direct action against sex-shops in the centre of Stockholm (see figure 11.1). The political analysis behind and aims of these activities are pedagogically explained in voiceover, stating for instance that self-defence strengthens women's



Figure 11.1 Lesbian Front meeting in *The Woman in Your Life Is You*.

self-esteem, that women are allowed to be themselves at the summer camps and that ‘pornography is capitalism’s opium for the male population’ (author’s translation). One woman also tells a more personal story about how before she met the group she did not know that other lesbians existed. ‘True, it really is possible to live as a lesbian, I now dare to feel what I do’ (author’s translation), she declares.

With its documentary insistence on the very existence of lesbians and the very possibility to live as a lesbian, the film fits into the category of transnational filmmaking emanating from the liberation movement that Richard Dyer has called ‘affirmation films’, characterised by the key aim to represent homosexuality as ‘a positive thing to be’ (2003: 217). Affirmation films, he contends, were informed by the practices of lesbian and gay organising of the time, such as coming out, consciousness raising, analysis/activism and the creation of positive images (see also Ryberg, 2015; 2017).

The narrative short *Eva and Maria* was directed by three women in Gothenburg, Marie Falksten, Mary Eisikovits and Annalena Öhrström, and shot by an entirely female crew. Unlike *The Woman in Your Life Is You*, the film was carefully scripted and shot on 16mm film during the summers of 1977 and 1978. The editing was completed in 1983. The film tells the story of Eva and Maria, two young women who fall in love during their driver’s



Figure 11.2 Eva and Maria go to the archipelago.

education course. The focus is largely on the interaction between the women and with Maria's parents. The couple face homophobic comments from friends and Maria's father, but also acceptance from Maria's mother who supports them and encourages them to go on a romantic trip to the archipelago (see figure 11.2).

With its emphasis on the romantic couple, beautiful images of the natural landscape and a happy end stressing the women's self-confidence, pride and joy, this film also fits well into Dyer's categorisation of affirmation films as essentially being about 'exchanging negative feelings about homosexuality with positive' (2003: 201; see also Ryberg, 2015).

In addition to fitting well into Dyer's category of affirmation films, and albeit their aesthetic differences, the two films share other similarities. Both insert quotations from Norwegian writer and activist Gerd Brantenberg's book *Opp alle jordens homofile* [*Arise You Homosexuals of the World*], published in 1973 and translated to Swedish in 1981. According to literary scholar Karin Lindeqvist (2007: 14), the book epitomised the new unapologetic attitude of lesbian activism at the time by fiercely attacking gender roles, homophobia, capitalism and the prevailing idea that homosexuality was an illness. The book differed significantly from other available representations of homosexuality, including those by LGBT authors and press, Lindeqvist

argues. The fact that both films include quotations from the book, at a time when it was not yet translated from Norwegian to Swedish, is also an indication of its popularity and impact at the time (Ryberg, 2015). The passage that both films quote accounts for a range of contradictory psychological explanations of the origins of homosexuality. Homosexuality is claimed to be caused by growing up in a family with a single mother; with a dominant father and submissive mother; with a dominant mother and submissive father; with brothers only; with sisters only; without parents, and so on. By juxtaposing such mutually exclusive explanations, the book undermines the very idea that homosexuality is caused by some unfortunate family constellation. Hence, by quoting this passage, both films take issue with the notion of homosexuality as a deviance in need of explanation.

As already mentioned, the two films were shot more or less parallel to each other during the years 1977–78. At the same time, a gay male short was also produced in Sweden: *Damned Queers* [*Böjävlar*] (Gunnar Almér et al., 1977), supported by Filmverkstan [the Film Workshop], an organisation funded by the Film Institute and Swedish Radio, supporting amateur and less-established filmmakers (Andersson and Sundholm, 2014; Ryberg, 2015; 2017). The three films are unique not only as the first known examples of publicly funded lesbian and gay self-presentation (by which I here refer to films explicitly made by, with and about open homosexuals) on film in Sweden, but also because no other such films were publicly supported in Sweden until the 1990s (e.g. *Väninnor* [*Girlfriends*] (Bergström and Neant-Falk, 1996)). This moment in time around 1977, which was also the year of the first liberation march in Stockholm, evidently provided fortunate, unprecedented conditions for lesbian and gay filmmaking in Sweden (Ryberg, 2015). It is important, however, that in the case of the two lesbian films, these conditions were not provided by the regular contexts of moving image production and distribution. *Eva and Maria*, the more professionally made film of the two, was rejected when the team applied for support from institutions such as the Swedish Film Institute, the Film Workshop and the Swedish Arts Grants Committee (Falksten, 2013). *Damned Queers*, on the other hand, was supported by the Film Workshop and broadcast on Swedish Television, whereas *Eva and Maria* was not.

The realisation of the two films instead depended on the National Board of Health and Welfare, the same government agency that upheld the classification of homosexuality as a mental disorder. Both films were funded by the National Board of Health and Welfare's department *Nämnden för hälsouppllysning* [the Committee for Health Education], a committee responsible for issues of diet and exercise (notoriously recommending the Swedish population six to eight slices of bread a day), addictive substances, sex and cohabitation and other health issues. Both films were funded by the

Committee's division for sex and cohabitation issues, and their specific sub-division for contraceptives and birth control (Riksarkivet [hereafter RA], n.d.a; RA, 1977b). *Eva and Maria* was supported under the banner 'collaboration with cultural producers,' an allocated budget post that formed part of the division's information work about contraceptives that had begun in 1973 (RA, n.d.a; Utredningen om homosexuellas situation i samhället, 1984: 209–12). *The Woman in Your Life Is You* was funded by a budget allocated for the purpose of 'abortion prevention' that the National Board of Health and Welfare received from the parliament when free abortion was legalised in Sweden in 1975 (RA, 1974b). The purpose was to support sex education work within youth and women's organisations in order to prevent unwanted pregnancies and abortions.

As much as the two films are characteristic products of the liberation era and lesbian activist organising – as affirmation films making lesbianism publicly visible, shot the same year that the first liberation march paraded in Stockholm, and in their invocation of new lesbian literature and music – I propose that their articulation of lesbianism was not only enabled but also shaped by the interaction with the National Board of Health and Welfare and their official policymaking around sexuality and birth control. Before shedding light on this, a more detailed historical contextualisation is necessary.

HOMOSEXUAL CITIZENSHIP: FROM CRIMINALISATION AND MEDICALISATION – TO VICTIMISATION?

Despite a widespread and self-celebratory idea of sexual liberalism and progressiveness in Sweden since at least the 1950s (e.g. Lennerhed, 1994), the National Board of Health and Welfare upheld its classification of homosexuality as a 'mental disorder' (Socialstyrelsen, 1968) until the end of the 1970s. The classification had come into existence when homosexuality was decriminalised in 1944, following a decade of investigations (*Promemoria angående ändringar i strafflagen beträffande straffsatserna för särskilda brott m.m.*, 1936; *Strafflagberedningen*, 1941) drawing from medical expertise influenced by German sexologists such as Richard von Krafft-Ebing and Magnus Hirschfeld (Edenheim, 2005; Rydström, 2003). Homosexuality, it was argued in these investigations, was to be understood as a medical condition and not as a matter of criminal acts to punish. Rydström (2003: 330, also 164, 166) points out that this shift comprised a mobilisation of vulnerability as the basis for calls for compassion and empathy for 'the unhappy few'. The investigations shaped a notion of homosexual identity as an inherent

property in some people, forming the basis both for medical attempts to cure it and the organised struggle for acceptance and rights that began in Sweden when the RFSL was founded in 1950. According to Rydström (2003: 325), the 'medicalization of homosexuality comprised at least three important areas, the explanation of homosexuality, its diagnosis, and its possible cure.' Explanations of homosexuality were influenced by the notion of 'sexual inversion' and diagnosing involved evaluating bodily and behavioural signs of inversion (Rydström, 2003: 326). Whether or not homosexuality was able to be successfully cured was debatable, but applied treatments included psychoanalysis and hypnosis, as well as surgery. Castration, however, was advocated as a method not so much for curing homosexuality as for inhibiting the drive. This treatment was voluntary but, according to Rydström (2003: 327), often coerced. In the history of sexual reform work in Sweden, such notions of voluntarism and choice also informed the forced sterilisation programme that ran between the years 1935 and 1975 (1997 års steriliseringsutredning, 2000). Lena Lennerhed (2000a) demonstrates how, in the 1930s and 1940s, sterilisation, but also contraceptives and abortion, were debated and advocated from the points of view of both authoritative regulation on the basis of what was beneficial for society and individual rights on the basis of helping people.

When the RFSL was founded in 1950, the organisation proposed a slightly different view to the dominant medical classification of homosexuality as an illness. According to Andréaz Wasniowski (2007: 223), the RFSL advocated an understanding of homosexuality as not essentially different from heterosexuality, but as a matter of degree on a continuous scale. The organisation's goals included 'humanitarian, social and legal equality', which meant that homosexuals should have the same civil rights and obligations as heterosexuals (Wasniowski, 2007: 93). The RFSL defined the main problem as intolerance due to lack of knowledge and advocated enlightenment (Lennerhed, 2000b). The organisation, however, did not have any significant impact on the public debate until it became more radical and visible in the 1970s. In August 1979, activists occupied the National Board of Health and Welfare's office building in Stockholm, demanding that the illness classification be removed. The board had previously rejected these demands, but the newly appointed director general Barbro Westerholm declared that the classification would be dropped (Svensson, 2001). Preceding this crucial change and indicative of the shift towards regarding homosexuals as equal to rather than deviant from heterosexuals was the 1978 legal reform that lowered the age of consent for homosexual sexual relations from eighteen to fifteen, the same age that already applied to heterosexuals.

This was also the year when the official government investigation that would be published as the report 'Utredningen om homosexuellas

situation i samhället' in 1984 began. This report put the issue of homosexuality on the political agenda by proposing that 'homosexuals are to be given equal status with other minority groups who through legislation are given particular protection against unfavourable legislation and discrimination' ('Utredningen om homosexuellas situation i samhället', 1984: 271). The proposal is motivated by the statement that 'the only certain difference between homosexuals and heterosexuals is that homosexuals are emotionally attracted to persons of the same sex', and therefore should 'not be discriminated against' (271). In the report, vulnerability is mobilised in descriptions of homosexuals as a group experiencing many 'difficulties' and 'complications'; and it is even stated that 'discovering one's homosexuality can be a shattering experience for a young person' (271). Such difficulties, the report stresses, are not caused by being homosexual, but by 'the expectation on the part of society and the general public that one should live in a heterosexual fashion' (272). In addition to legislation, the report also advocates information and improved education – just like the RFSL did in the 1950s.

Critically analysing this and other official government reports regarding 'deviant sexuality and gender', Sara Edenheim (2005) contends that the main difference between early reports concerning the decriminalisation of homosexuality and those from 1984 onwards is the shift from regarding homosexuality as a deviance and illness in need of treatment to regarding homosexuals as victims of discrimination and prejudice. In the reports from 1984 onwards, the position of the victim becomes the basis and prerequisite for proposing rights and legal reforms, Edenheim (2005: 131) argues. Recognition and rights are from now on based on the idea that homosexuals should be seen as the same as heterosexuals, which presumes the exclusion of same-sex desire and non-binary gender.

An individual can ... demand certain rights as a homosexual *only* if homosexuality is destitute of independent values or specific significations, i.e. only if homosexuality is victimized and ascribed a will to adopt to a heterosexualized lifestyle. As a consequence, a homosexual individual can only be recognized by the law if that individual simultaneously repudiates any abject desire different from heterosexual desire; in other words, the homosexual subject is perceived as an impossibility before the law. (Edenheim, 2005: 243)

Moreover, the reports are based on male-centred definitions of body and sexuality, Edenheim shows. There is a recurrent inability to address and handle lesbianism and lesbian desire, which is either 'inconsequentialized or excluded from the reports altogether' (Edenheim, 2005: 242). Only in sections dealing with monogamous love relationships and parenthood does lesbianism become part of the discussion (Edenheim, 2005: 115).

Edenheim addresses several critical aspects of the discursive shift towards an official recognition of homosexuality in Sweden that are relevant for the understanding of how the films *Eva and Maria* and *The Woman in Your Life Is You* were administered by the National Board of Health and Welfare. However, these lesbian films manifest that this discursive shift also opened up for other, if unexpected, opportunities and creative forms of agency than the picture of self-extinctive assimilation and interpellated victimhood that Edenheim paints of homosexual citizenship allows for. In what follows, I demonstrate how making strategic use of the language of vulnerability at this crucial moment in time resulted in unique cases of self-presented lesbianism on film that would most likely not have been made otherwise.

EVA AND MARIA: STATE-APPROVED LOVE BETWEEN WOMEN

The production of *Eva and Maria* was granted funding in 1977, more than a year after the three filmmakers' initial contacts with the Health Committee (Marie Falksten's private archive [hereafter MF], 1976b), indicating that the decision to provide funding was not made quickly on the part of the Committee. In June 1976, the filmmakers were invited to a conference where they gave a lecture about 'lesbian love' (Falksten, 2013; MF, 1976a). The conference, and the ensuing support of the film, formed part of the Committee's collaboration with cultural producers for the purpose of education about contraceptives that had been initiated through an allocated budget in 1973 (RA, n.d.a). In 1977, the production was granted 70,000 SEK (RA, 1977d); in 1978 an additional sum of 50,000 SEK was given to the project (RA, n.d.b); and in 1983 the film was granted a last small sum of 5,000 SEK (MF, 1983). Whereas the filmmakers' lecture in 1976 was explicitly about 'lesbian love', decision and budget protocols in the National Board of Health and Welfare's archive describe the project as 'a film about love between women' (RA, n.d.a; 1977d, author's translation of all archive documents). Lesbianism or homosexuality are not explicitly mentioned. Letters from the filmmakers to the Committee also employ a vocabulary avoiding these words (MF, 1976b).

In one paragraph motivating the funding, it is stated that the Committee has received many requests about 'material about love between people of the same sex' (RA, n.d.a). According to the paragraph, there is a lack of material about 'this subject' and a need for 'discussion material'. The purpose of the project, it is stated, is to 'shed light on love between women and with this theme as a starting point initiate a discussion about the concept

of love, sexuality and relationships between people'. It is suggested that the film will be very useful at youth centres, but also in the Committee's own education of counsellors.

These notes from the Committee's protocols show how lesbianism could find its way into the official records when described in terms of love, just as in the case of the official government reports that Edenheim investigates. Moreover, it is addressed not as essentially different from other types of relationships, but as a useful starting point for a general discussion about 'the concept of love'. The fact that the words 'lesbianism' and 'homosexuality' are not used by the National Board of Health and Welfare at a time when the illness classification was still running is perhaps not surprising, but still noteworthy. The editing and postproduction of *Eva and Maria* stretched over several years and the film was not completed until 1983 – the year before the report 'Utredningen om homosexuellas situation i samhället' was published and after the illness classification was dropped. In protocols, correspondence and other archive material from the later parts of the film's production as well as distribution, lesbianism and homosexuality are spelled out explicitly (e.g. MF, 1983), and notions of discrimination and prejudice come into focus, reflecting the ongoing shift towards a new official vocabulary for addressing the issue.

For instance, an information sheet from Skolöverstyrelsen [the National Board of Education] includes a paragraph about *Eva and Maria* under the heading 'Health education – cohabitation' (MF, 1984). The film is now called 'a film about love between two girls', and the presentation states that 'homosexuality is a taboo area for many people' and that fear and insecurity of the unknown and society's view on homosexuality result in many teachers' avoidance of the issue. It is stressed that the audience is invited to relate to the feelings of love and tenderness between the girls in the film. The statement is largely in agreement with how the need for information and improved education is highlighted in the 1984 official government report. Again, the universal aspects of the feelings between the girls are emphasised, implying that these are not essentially different. Importantly, an agreement between the filmmakers and the National Board of Health and Welfare states that both the film and the accompanying education material should be approved by the National Board of Health and Welfare (RA, 1977e). Another document states that the teacher's guidelines will be elaborated in collaboration with the National Board of Education (MF, n.d.e).

The above statement reappears in other information brochures (MF, n.d.b; n.d.c) that were distributed with the film. In one fact sheet it is also stated that homosexuals do not experience difficulties because of their homosexuality but because of prejudice and homophobia – again in agreement with the report. 'The film is about ordinary people. Through the

warmth and the low-key humor one can easily relate to the feelings and situations in the film,' it is stated in one brochure (MF, n.d.d). Furthermore, the brochure argues against associating homosexuality with tragedy. 'The film concentrates on the happiness and joy in a lesbian relationship, not on the possible problems and conflicts,' it is stated. Another brochure argues that in contrast to negative role models such as tragic lesbian and gay artists, like Oscar Wilde, Karin Boye and Pjotr Tjajkovskij, that make young homosexuals see themselves as tragically different, 'one should highlight happy and successful homosexuals' (MF, n.d.a).

Produced during the same years that the official government investigation that would ultimately put homosexuality on the official political agenda in Sweden was ongoing, and collaborating with state agencies for health and welfare as well as education, *Eva and Maria's* production and distribution history clearly evokes the shift from an official understanding of homosexuality as an illness and of homosexuals as worthy of compassion on the basis of being deviant and hence vulnerable, to an understanding of homosexuals as a vulnerable group exposed to society's prejudice and discrimination due to misconceptions that homosexuals are different and unhappy. This shift is also evoked in the film.

As mentioned already, one of the ways in which dominant misconceptions about homosexuality is addressed and discarded in the film is the inclusion of Brantenberg's book. While spending time together in the archipelago, Eva reads out loud from the book in a theatrical voice, quoting the passage where the origins of homosexuality are explained in a number of contradictory ways. The girls laugh about the different theories. Another scene taking issue with the official view on homosexuality as a deviance takes place in the classroom at Maria's high school. The teacher awkwardly explains that homosexuals have distorted relations with different groups in society, such as with family and friends. The scene is parodic, but Maria gets upset after class when a classmate comments on homosexuality as being disgusting and the teacher's voice echoes in her head as she takes the bus home. In a later scene, Maria is confronted with her father's prejudice when finding out that the two girls share a bed in the cottage in the archipelago. 'You have always been a real girl', the father says, and Maria yells back: 'Are you a real girl only if you fuck boys?' (author's translation of the film's dialogue). The mother defends Maria when the father says that Eva and Maria's relationship is sick and unnatural: 'Maria has the right to love whoever she wants, the right to one's feelings is important', she pedagogically states. The film shows that Maria is unhappy only when confronted with people's prejudice, not when she is with Eva. In only one scene does she express doubts about her feelings, asking her mother: 'Is it wrong if two women love each other?'. The mother replies: 'It can never be wrong for people to

love each other', stressing the general aspects of love. The dialogue takes place in the kitchen while Maria and her mother set the table for dinner. Several other scenes also take place in domestic settings, emphasising the characters' ordinariness.

The interaction between the two girls Eva and Maria is gentle, caring and sexually innocent. The scene where Eva reads from Brantenberg's book is followed by a scene where the women lie naked on a blanket in the grass in front of the cottage. Eva caresses Maria's back, they kiss gently, touch feet and roll around laughing. Although the images do not show any further sexual passion or action, the music rises to a climax, suggesting that sex possibly does happen. This is also implied through the invocation of a well-known trope in the history of moving image sex in Sweden – that of the young couple's escape to nature in order to live out an attraction condemned by societal norms. Just like in iconic scenes from *Hon dansade en sommar* [*One Summer of Happiness*] (Arne Mattsson, 1951) and *Sommaren med Monika* [*Summer With Monika*] (Ingmar Bergman, 1953), Eva and Maria go skinny-dipping and enjoy relaxed and healthy nudity in the natural landscape, far away from those who see their love as sinful or wrong. The film inscribes itself into this cinematic legacy and into a national narrative of sexual enlightenment that has progressively come to see 'sin', such as pre-marital sex in Bergman's and Mattsson's films, as good and sound. Now, homosexuality should be afforded the same kind of enlightened acceptance, I propose the scene suggests. The film's softening of sexual desire and emphasis on romantic love and 'the right to one's feelings', I argue, are instrumental in the articulation of a notion of lesbianism that could be recognisable and legible in the context of Swedish sexual policymaking, cultural imaginary, and medical, legal and social discourse in which lesbian desire is constructed as an impossibility (Edenheim, 2005: 110).

THE WOMAN IN YOUR LIFE IS YOU: LESBIAN DESIRE BELOW THE RADAR

According to two of the filmmakers, Birgitta Olsson (2014) and Sonja Rosenqvist (2014), the production of *The Woman in Your Life Is You* began when members of Lesbian Front learned about the National Board of Health and Welfare's budget for abortion prevention that was allocated on occasion of the new law granting women free abortion. Altogether, 7.4 million Swedish crowns were allocated for information work within youth and women's organisations between 1974 and 1978 (Ryberg, 2015). The notion of 'abortion prevention', it is stated in a memo that was distributed to women's and youth organisations (RA, 1974b; see also 1980 års abortkommitté, 1983),

should not be interpreted too narrowly, but understood in a larger context of issues such as cohabitation and gender roles. This invitation to a broad interpretation of the purpose of the budget was evidently perceived as an opportunity for the members of Lesbian Front. The group submitted its application in late 1976 and received funding in the beginning of 1977. The original application did not indicate any plans for a film production (RA, 1976). The group applied for a relatively large sum of 220,000 SEK for organising a Nordic women's camp and an information campaign including work in schools and youth centres, consciousness-raising groups and conferences. The goals of the application are stated as: 'to inform women in order to fight prevailing gender roles'; 'to conduct enlightening activities about alternative forms of cohabitation'; and 'to raise women's consciousness about the right to their own body' (RA, 1976, author's translation of all archive documents), hence invoking one of the key slogans of the new women's movement. 'Women's rights to their own bodies' was the broad heading under which women demanded free contraceptives, free abortion, pain-free childbirth, and a ban of the objectification of women in pornography and advertising (Isaksson, 2007: 79; Lennerhed, 2008: 182).

Lesbian Front was granted only a small part of the sum it applied for – 30,000 SEK. The official decision from the Committee states that Lesbian Front was granted this sum for the purpose of information about contraceptives and issues of sex and cohabitation (RA, 1977c). The letter also states that the Committee paid attention particularly to the goal to 'produce information material with the purpose of education about alternative forms of cohabitation and raise women's awareness of the right to their own body'. Hence, informing 'women in order to fight prevailing gender roles' is not encouraged here. 'The support is not meant to cover costs for camps', it is also stated. This same statement was also published in a press release (RA, 1977a).

Like in the protocols regarding the funding of *Eva and Maria*, there is no explicit mention of lesbianism or homosexuality in Lesbian Front's application or official statements about the support from the Committee – aside from the organisation's name. The declaration that the support is intended for an information campaign and not a women's camp indicates that education is considered valid and in line with the purpose of the budget. Whatever assumed activities that a Nordic summer camp for women organised by Lesbian Front might enable, however, are considered to fall outside of the scope of the Committee's budget. The Committee hence explicitly regulates how Lesbian Front can use the funding. Like in the case of *Eva and Maria*, lesbianism is covered by generalised concerns such as 'women's right to their own bodies' and 'alternative forms of cohabitation' – concerns that also fitted within the notion of 'abortion prevention'.

The very combination of the terms (free) ‘abortion’ and ‘prevention’ epitomises the entanglement of regulation and rights claims in the history of sexual reforms in Sweden (Lennerhed, 2000a). Produced under the banner of abortion prevention, *The Woman in Your Life Is You* reactivates both a notion of the individual woman’s right to free abortion without having to motivate her choice, as well as the regulatory, eugenic, medical and educational approach to sexual policymaking in Sweden in the twentieth century. I contend that inserting lesbianism into this equation implies, on the one hand, acknowledging lesbians as women entitled to reproductive rights by their exposure to the risk of unwanted pregnancies (‘women’s rights to their own body’); and, on the other, acknowledging lesbianism as birth control (‘alternative forms of cohabitation’). Lesbianism in itself, as Edenheim shows in the case of official government reports, is an impossibility within this framework. Even more absurd therefore is the criticism that the report ‘Utredningen om homosexuellas situation i samhället’ aims at the National Board of Health and Welfare for not explicitly including and addressing homosexuality in its work with abortion prevention (‘Utredningen om homosexuellas situation i samhället’, 1984: 211–12). Not only is the fact that the illness classification was still running at this time disregarded, but Lesbian Front’s project and approved application also appear to have been undetectable and invisible even to the government investigators evaluating the Committee’s commissions. *Eva and Maria*, on the other hand, is mentioned in the report (212). Significantly, Lesbian Front had also been approached by the investigators, but declined to participate as study objects in the report (538). The fact that the perspectives of lesbians are largely absent in the report is only commented upon briefly (Edenheim, 2005: 109). Hence, in these instrumental official records dealing with sexual policymaking and homosexuality, lesbianism is erased and rendered invisible on multiple levels (Edenheim, 2005: 118).

However, when Lesbian Front supplemented its application with a report about the progress of the project in 1978, one year after receiving the funding, it not only declared that it had made a film, but fiercely put the issue of lesbianism back on the agenda. Lesbian Front wrote:

We’ve worked from the premise that there is a lack of information about lesbians, by lesbians, for lesbians and that many lesbians live alone and isolated. Society uses us as bad examples by calling us mannish, man-haters, frustrated bitches, sexually abnormal – in order to reproduce the myth about women as womanly, motherly, surrendering, dependent, leading to submission to men. An active lesbian manifestation is a necessary part of the liberation movement that is necessary in order to break down society’s oppression. (RA, 1978, author’s translation)

This unapologetic statement largely differs from the first application’s emphasis on generalised goals and evokes a different, more confrontational

politics than in the case of *Eva and Maria*. While lack of information motivates both films, Lesbian Front here claims that its work is intended for a lesbian audience rather than an allegedly misinformed and prejudiced majority that needs to learn that homosexuals are not so different, and hence should be accepted. The statement that many lesbians live alone and isolated can be read as confirming a negative image that *Eva and Maria* explicitly rejects as part of its aim to 'highlight happy and successful homosexuals'. Lesbian Front does not claim that lesbians are just the same as heterosexuals, but instead attacks dominant gender roles and notions of femininity as such. The function of homophobic descriptions of lesbianism, it is suggested here, is to reinforce oppressive ideas about women's role in society. Rather than positive images of ordinary people, this statement advocates 'an active lesbian manifestation'.

In stark contrast to the production of *Eva and Maria* which, as I have shown, is largely in agreement with the language of the then-ongoing government investigation about homosexuality, the politics of *The Woman in Your Life Is You* falls outside of the framework of official recognition. One striking difference between the two films is that the romantic couple is absent from *The Woman in Your Life Is You's* articulation of lesbianism. The film instead emphasises collective activities such as consciousness-raising, self-defence and demonstrations, evoking notions of 'women-identification' and sisterhood that Hanna Hallgren (2008: 290) shows were central in lesbian feminist discourse production at the time. In the closing sequence, three women go skating together, holding each other's hands, again stressing lesbian sociality as something other than an issue of love between a couple.

In contrast to how *Eva and Maria* mobilises vulnerability in accordance with the emerging official view that homosexuals are a minority exposed to prejudice, *The Woman in Your Life Is You* rather mobilises vulnerability as a matter of women's oppression at large. Women's vulnerability to patriarchal oppression is addressed recurrently, for instance in regard to the fashion industry and the limited set of roles available for women in society. 'The housewife, the whore, the fashion girl and the little kind, quiet and sweet one; these roles are so narrow, they shatter me' (author's translation of the film's voiceover), the voiceover states over images of mannequin dolls in department store windows and women walking in high-heels. 'Self-defence is a method for heightening women's self-esteem in order to cope with the pressure', it is stated. Here, vulnerability is not about being recognised as vulnerable and therefore worthy of protection and rights. Instead, vulnerability is instrumental in collectively organising against oppression, both in terms of supporting and caring for each other and for outwards manifestations. Vulnerability forms the basis for demanding rather than deserving rights. One scene shows how the women prepare for a demonstration, sewing and painting banners. The voiceover reads the slogan out loud: 'We demand the

right to our own bodies and sexuality', and continues: 'Women have been deprived of this right for centuries.'

In another scene, the women paint slogans on porn shops in central Stockholm. The voiceover criticises how women's bodies are seen as goods to consume. 'This is how the male society sees us, it has nothing to do with women-love', it is stated as the camera pans over porn tabloids about 'female homosex' and 'lesbian games'. The notion of 'women-love', I propose, here implies another meaning than the notion of 'love between women' in the case of *Eva and Maria*. Contrasting the porn tabloid's objectifying image of lesbianism, 'women-love' contributes to an articulation of lesbianism as not simply about sex, but about sisterhood and love among women rather than between just two women (Hallgren, 2008: 156–9). Unlike *Eva and Maria*, where the word 'lesbian' is never mentioned in the film, lesbianism is stressed throughout in *The Woman in Your Life Is You*, from the opening sequence where one woman jumps up from a bed exclaiming: 'I am a lesbian!' while the others cheer, to the closing credits including still photographs of women to the sound of American lesbian singer-songwriter Sue Fink's 'The leaping lesbians'.

According to Hallgren (2008: 159–63), the lesbian feminist politicised notion of lesbianism was articulated in opposition not only to a notion of the 'pornographic lesbian' but also the 'mannish lesbian'. Just as the figure of the 'pornographic' lesbian is rejected, *The Woman in Your Life Is You* also takes issue with the figure of the 'mannish' lesbian. In an early sequence, the various family constellations that Brantenberg mockingly suggests cause homosexuality are enacted by the women in the film. Impersonating the roles of fathers, mothers and children, they pose in front of the camera as if to have their family photograph taken. The sequence, however, opens with the enactment of yet another constellation associated with lesbianism: a butch-femme couple. This constellation is also presented as a false, outdated and ridiculous stereotype, emphasised by theatrical outfits and exaggerated acting. The ironic voiceover classifies lesbians as either 'not real women, more like men' or 'bored upper-class women'. Nevertheless, the enactment paradoxically also enables a lustful and campy performance of lesbian desire and seduction. Unlike the family constellations where the women pose for the camera, the butch-femme couple interacts with each other in a small role-play sequence ending in an embrace where the entangled couple slowly sinks out of the picture frame, clearly taking great delight in the action. The very act of playing out – in order to reject and disown – the negative stereotype creatively turns into the film's only opportunity to explore lesbian desire (Ryberg, 2017) in much the same way that the regulatory framework of 'abortion prevention' unexpectedly enables 'an active lesbian manifestation'.

CONCLUSION: VULNERABILITY AS A STRATEGIC KEY TO SEXUAL CITIZENSHIP AND AGENCY

Eva and Maria and *The Woman in Your Life Is You* are unique cases of lesbian filmmaking in Sweden in the 1970s. As the first known publicly funded Swedish films by, with and about lesbians, they both foreshadow the removal of the illness classification and official recognition of homosexuals as a discriminated group in need of legal protection. Anticipating this crucial shift in the public view on homosexuality, they both take issue with the dominant medical understanding of homosexuality as something abnormal in need of an explanation and cure. Such views are criticised in scenes quoting Brantenberg's fierce parody of theories of the origins of homosexuality; mocking sex education in schools; rejecting the figure of the 'mannish' lesbian that informed sexological notions of 'gender inversion'; and the figure of the 'pornographic' lesbian. The main aim of this chapter has been to illuminate how this lesbian criticism was paradoxically enabled and supported by the very same state agency in charge of the classification of homosexuality as a mental disorder.

By excavating the films' production histories and highlighting the interplay with the National Board of Health and Welfare, I have read the films not simply as examples of oppositional and autonomous lesbian feminist cultural production and politics, but as shaped by official sexual policy-making in Sweden at the time. While the de-emphasising of sexual desire in both films could well be read as manifesting a 'woman-identified' lesbian feminist politics focusing more on sisterhood and love among women than on sex, a politics that Hallgren (2008: 314–27) shows was articulated in the movement at the time, I claim that the two films are more exclusive cases illuminating where the borders for public recognition and inclusion were drawn and where the loopholes were located in Sweden in the 1970s. The official handling of the two films in the National Board of Health and Welfare's records demonstrates how lesbian filmmaking could be inserted into the budgets and protocols under the guise of generalised notions of information about sex and cohabitation and through a strategic use of euphemisms. The board's assigned mission to raise the population's awareness about contraceptives on the occasion of the legalisation of free abortion, but also situate the information in a 'social and psychological context' (RA, 1974a), was broad enough to include the production of these rare films, although lesbianism in itself was not possible to spell out or motivate support for at the time they received funding.

I propose that the rhetorical twists through which the films entered into the official records and earned their funding are far from random, but significantly strategic. They show that, in both cases, vulnerability is the very

key to inclusion and legibility, although set in motion in different ways in the two films. Formally recognised as a film about 'love between women' that can provide the backdrop for general discussions about 'the concept of love' and 'relationships between people', *Eva and Maria*, as I have shown, mobilises vulnerability in large agreement with the government report that shortly followed in understanding homosexuals as victims of discrimination and prejudice due to lack of knowledge and misconceptions that they are deviant and different from heterosexuals. *The Woman in Your Life Is You*, on the other hand, was not formally handled or recognised as a film about lesbians but as about 'women's rights to their own bodies', invoking one of the key slogans of the new women's movement at the time. Vulnerability is here set in motion in terms of women's oppression under patriarchy and as the basis for organising and resistance. As I have shown, these two different takes on vulnerability enable different politics and articulations of lesbianism and lesbian desire. I argue that the striking fact that two lesbian films were able to find funding from the same Committee at almost the exact same time – the official decisions to fund the projects are dated February 1977 in the case of *The Woman in Your Life Is You* and April 1977 in the case of *Eva and Maria* – depends precisely on these two separate ways of mobilising vulnerability, and hence testifies to the multiple potential of this language at the time.

Finally, however, it is important to point out that this potential and the loopholes through which the two films entered the state agency's administration did not remain open for long. The removal of the illness classification and publication of the official government report 'Utredningen om homosexuellas situation i samhället' did not entail any new inclinations to support LGBT filmmaking in Sweden. To this day, Swedish film culture remains firmly heteronormative, despite an officially embraced idea of 'LGBT friendliness'. In this chapter about the fascinating and rich cases of *Eva and Maria* and *The Woman in Your Life Is You*, I have shed light not only on the key function and unexpected productivity of the language of vulnerability, but also on the brilliantly strategic and creative agency and success of lesbian activism against the odds at a crucial moment in the history of sexual policymaking in Sweden.

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