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Equality on Male Terms or Reconstruction of Gender Roles? Association 9 and the Finnish Sex Role Ideology of the 1960s

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ABSTRACT

The public and political discussion on women's position in society and gender equality was initiated in the Nordic countries in the 1960s in the form of the so-called sex role debate. Previous studies have characterized sex role ideology as narrower in its goals than the radical feminist ideology of the late 1960s and 1970s. Sex role ideology has also been criticized for understanding equality on male terms, whereas feminist ideology has been thought to aim at radically reform gender roles and society. In this article, I argue that the Finnish sex role association called Association 9 had a much broader vision of gender equality than has been previously claimed. The starting point of the sex role ideology that the Association 9 represented and aimed at to promote was, similarly to feminist ideology, to reconstruct society by re-evaluating gender roles, particularly by demonstrating that they are socially constructed. In addition, they both aimed to deconstruct the gendered division of society into the masculine public sphere and the feminine private sphere.

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Introduction: Categorizations and Narratives of Second-wave Feminist Activism

The establishment of the “new women’s movement” in the 1960s and 1970s reformed the public and political discussion on women’s position in society and had a lasting imprint on gender equality policies in many Western countries. The significance and legacy of the movement, which is also known as the second-wave feminist movement, has been debated ever since. Women’s activism followed different paths in different parts of the world and consisted of several feminist ideologies and types of activism (e.g., Bergman, 2002; Jenson, 1995; Molony & Nelson, 2017). In the Nordic countries, the second-wave feminist movement started in the form of the so-called sex role debate in the early 1960s. Sex role activists demanded that women and men should have equal positions in society (Bergman, 2002, pp. 134–138; Dahlerup, 1998, pp. 134–135; Florin & Nilsson, 2000, pp. 44–54; Jallinoja, 1983, pp. 123–190; Olsson, 2011, p. 24). The sex role debate faded at the turn of the 1970s mainly for two reasons. Firstly, as new gender equality policies that were based on sex role activists’ demands started to come in effect, there was less need to promote them (Bergman, 2002, pp. 138–139; Mickwitz, 2008, p. 53). Secondly, the newly established women’s liberation movement that called itself the “feminist movement” reformulated the discussion of women’s position by introducing new concepts and theories that were based on socialist, radical, and cultural feminist ideologies and discourses (Bergman, 2002, pp. 144–146; Dahlerup, 1998; Isaksson, 2007, pp. 31–58; Jallinoja, 1983, pp. 198–247).

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In this article, I discuss the aims and ideology of the Finnish sex role association Yhdistys 9 (Association 9), which was active from 1966 to 1971. I provide a fresh analysis of the role of the association in the history of second-wave feminist activism by demonstrating that it had a much broader vision of gender equality and gender emancipation than has been previously claimed. In existing studies, the Nordic sex role ideology of the 1960s, with Association 9 as its representative, and the feminist movement of the 1970s and 1980s have been characterized as representing two different or even opposing ideologies. The former has been defined as an ideology that understood gender equality on male terms, whereas the latter, according to both activists themselves and researchers, questioned the relationship between genders, criticized the structure of society, and demanded more recognition for women's values (Bergman, 2002; Hirdman, 1994; Holli, 1988, 1990; Isaksson, 2007; Jallinoja, 1983; Julkunen, 1994; Koivunen, 1996; Kuusipalo, 1999; Parvikko, 1990; Schmitz, 2007).

Analyses of Nordic sex role ideology and theory have, however, been mostly based on American sex role research although they represent two very different theoretical traditions (Olsson, 2011, pp. 32–33). Nordic sex role ideology has also been equated with 1960s American liberal feminism (see, e.g., Isaksson, 2007, p. 39; Jallinoja, 1983, pp. 138–139; Koivunen, 1996, pp. 78–84; Parvikko, 1990) without thoroughly scrutinizing whether these seemingly similar movements that preceded the feminist activism of the late 1960s and the 1970s shared the same ideology. In the Finnish context, conclusions have also been drawn on Association 9 and sex role ideology by analysing gender equality and social policies that were based on sex role ideology (see, e.g., Holli, 1990; Julkunen, 1994; Kuusipalo, 1999). However, Association 9's agenda was significantly broader than that of the Committee for Women's Status, for example, which laid the foundation for the gender equality policies of the 1970s (Kurvinen & Turunen, 2023).

Previous analyses have mainly followed and reproduced the dominant narrative of second-wave feminism that sees the establishment of radical and socialist feminist activism in the late 1960s as an important watershed moment for feminist history and theory and emphasizes the distinction between these two different eras of women's activism. In this narrative, the radical, socialist, and cultural feminist movements of the 1970s are presented as radical and transformative, whereas liberal feminism and sex role ideology are portrayed as merely reformist and narrow in their goals (Hewitt, 2010a; Hartmann, 2011; Henry, 2004, pp. 52–72). My aim in this article is to deconstruct this narrative by demonstrating that the aims and ideology of Association 9 had many similarities with the feminism of the 1970s. I argue that instead of seeing Association 9 and 1970s feminism as two different or opposing ideologies, they should be regarded as a continuum in feminist ideology, sharing many aims and premises.

This article contributes to studies that have deconstructed the wave narrative by demonstrating the continuity between and multiplicity of women's activism during, before, and after the "waves" of the standard narrative (Barakso, 2004; Dahlerup, 2004; Gilmore, 2003; Laughlin & Castledine, 2011; Molony & Nelson, 2017; Tarrant, 2005). In the Nordic context, Drude Dahlerup (1998, pp. 134–135), Solveig Bergman (2002, p. 134), and Leena-Maija Rossi (2010, p. 26) have questioned the previous analysis of sex role activism by pointing to elements of continuity between it and the feminist movement (for this criticism, see also Kurvinen & Turunen, 2018). My article is also inspired by recent studies that highlight the role of feminist activists and scholars themselves in creating narratives of the feminist past and present. A "new wave" of feminism is often established by a younger generation of women who, through the wave metaphor, both differentiate their movement from previous feminist activism and justify the need for a "new" wave. It is therefore important to critically review interpretations and characterizations of the feminist movement by contextualizing their origin in contemporary debates and theories (Gilmore, 2003; Dahlerup, 2004; Hartmann, 2011; Hemmings, 2011; Henry, 2004; Hewitt, 2010b; Lønnå, 2004; Molony & Nelson, 2017; Reger, 2005a, 2005b).

Research Material and Methods

This article is based on the analysis of original material issued by Association 9 and is the first comprehensive study of the sex role ideology represented and promoted by the association. My research material consists of archival sources and publications of Association 9 as well as media sources discussing sex role ideology and the aims of the association.

The archival material used in this article consists of the association's constitution, the minutes of its constitutive meeting, its annual reports (1966–1970), statements, and newsletters, and the reports of its working groups. The minutes of the constitutive meeting, annual reports, and newsletters were intended for members only. The reports that analysed and proposed solutions to gender inequality issues were targeted at politicians, policymakers, and the media. Statements were also released in conjunction with demonstrations.¹ In 1968, Association 9 compiled a book entitled *Miesten mailman nurjat lait* (The Harmful Laws of Men's World, Eskola, 1968). The book consisted of 13 articles written by active members of the association and discussed the aims of the association as well as women's and men's position in contemporary society.²

The association and its members participated actively in Finnish public discussion by writing articles and opinion pieces published in newspapers, cultural magazines, and pamphlets. The aims and actions of Association 9 also aroused a lot of public attention in the media, but in this article, I focus on those articles and opinions that were written by the members themselves to explain sex role ideology and the association's goals. I start my analysis of the media material from newspaper articles published before the establishment of the association in autumn 1965 as they were written by core members of what would become Association 9.³

I analyse these original materials by asking: what were the aims of the association, and how did it define sex roles, gender equality, and gender emancipation? I also contextualize and contrast the association's ideology and aims with the history of the Nordic sex role debate of the 1960s as well as that of Finnish and Swedish feminist activism of the 1960s and 1970s.

Goal: A Just and Functional Society

Association 9 was established in 1966 to “create a society in which people have the possibility to fulfill their potential without any restrictions placed on them based on their sex.” The aim of the association was to transform society into a more just and functional one. By “just,” it meant the opportunity of every individual to achieve self-fulfilment in all spheres of life, and by “functional,” it meant the efficient deployment of individual resources in the service of society (Constitution of Association 9; Rotkirch, 1968, p. 65). Association 9 demanded that both women and men should be given the possibility to choose their education, occupation, or profession and role in the family based on their own interests and skills, not their gender (Constitution of Association 9). The starting point for the ideology and activism of Association 9 was the concept “sex role,” which was used to stress that women's and men's social roles were not based on biology but were products of culture and society and could therefore be changed (Mickwitz, 1965b, p. 6; Rotkirch, 1968, p. 63). Association 9 consciously dissociated itself from the “woman question” and later from feminism as well by arguing that gender equality should be discussed as a “human question” that concerned both women and men (Mickwitz, 2008, pp. 32–34; Rotkirch, 1968, p. 66). It was not a women's association either: around one third of its members were men (Mickwitz, 2008, p. 34).

Association 9 had its origins in the Swedish sex role debate that began in 1961 with the publication of journalist Eva Moberg's article “Kvinnans villkorliga frigörelse” (Woman's conditional release). Moberg argued that women should be liberated from their traditional family-oriented gender role, and men and women should have equal positions in the labour market, at home, and in political life (Moberg, 1961). Moberg's writings popularized the ideas of Nordic sociological sex role research, which had started in the late 1950s. The main publication of this new line of research, *Kvinnors liv och arbete* (Women's life and work), edited by Edmund Dahlström, was

published in 1962.⁴ The following year, Moberg, Dahlström, and other Swedish sex role debaters established Grupp 222 (Group 222) in Stockholm to discuss and promote gender equality (Florin & Nilsson, 2000, pp. 50–53; Olsson, 2011, pp. 89–90).

The Finnish public sex role debate started in autumn 1965 when Margaretha Mickwitz's and Ritva Turunen's articles were published in the newspapers *Nya Pressen* and *Uusi Suomi* (Mickwitz, 1965a, 1965b, 1965c; Turunen, 1965a, 1965b, 1965c).⁵ The articles introduced the concepts *sukupuolirooli* ("sex role" in Finnish) and *könsroll* ("sex role" in Swedish) and the aims of Nordic sex role research and the Swedish sex role debate to the Finnish audience. As the articles sparked a vivid debate in the Finnish media, Finnish sex role activists decided to establish an official association to promote their aims. Association 9 was founded in February 1966, and Mickwitz was chosen as its first chair (Newsletter of Association 9, spring 1966; Mickwitz, 2008, pp. 27–30; Peltola, 2008, p. 202).

The association had a board with nine members and operated through altogether 18 working groups that studied the contemporary situation of gender roles in areas such as schools and education, legislation, labour market, sexuality, media, marriage, as well as housing and urban planning and made suggestions on how gender equality should be improved in these fields (Annual reports of Association 9; Mickwitz, 2008, pp. 37–43). While the Swedish Grupp 222 was a small and closed lobby group (Florin & Nilsson, 2000, pp. 50–53; Olsson, 2011, pp. 89–90), Association 9 was open to all, and in 1970, it had circa 800 members in total. It participated actively in the public discussion on sex roles, organized demonstrations and other events, and published research reports and other publications discussing gender equality (Annual reports of Association 9; Mickwitz, 2008, pp. 37–49). The inspiration for this kind of extra-parliamentary activism derived from other Finnish "single-issue" movements of the 1960s that originated from the left-wing student movement and cultural radicalism (Bergman, 2002, pp. 134–135; Saksholm, 2020).

Concurrently with the establishment of Association 9, the Finnish government appointed a Committee for Women's Status to discuss and find solutions to improve women's position in society. The committee consisted of representatives from several political parties and civic organizations such as Association 9. The committee's white paper was published in 1970. It represented the aims of sex role research and ideology and included suggestions such as the liberalization of abortion, foundation of a parliamentary council for gender equality, establishment of inexpensive communal daycare for children, extension of maternity leave, and introduction of paternity leave (Bergman, 2002, p. 138; Kurvinen & Turunen, 2023; Mickwitz, 2008, pp. 44–45). These were also Association 9's main aims. As the political apparatus soon started to promote several suggestions put forward in the white paper, and the decision to found a state organ for gender equality was made,⁶ the need for a civic gender equality association seemed to cease, and Association 9 disbanded itself in 1971 (Bergman, 2002, p. 138; Kurvinen & Turunen, 2023; Mickwitz, 2008, pp. 53–54). The first feminist groups, *Marxist-Feministerna* (*Marxist Feminists*) and *Rödkärringarna/Puna-akat* (Red Hags), were established in Finland in 1973 (Bergman, 2002, pp. 144–146; Jallinoja, 1983, pp. 198–199). In Sweden, Grupp 222 had already been disbanded in 1967, and the first feminist group, Grupp 8 (Group 8), had been formed in 1968 (Elgán, 2015; Isaksson, 2007; Schmitz, 2007).

Radical Sex Role Ideology: Criticism Towards Women's Two Roles

The theory and concept of sex roles were established in the 1940s by American sociologist Talcott Parsons. He saw the sex-based family division in which the husband was the breadwinner and the wife dedicated her life to mothering and homemaking as functional in modern society because the opposing and complementary roles of the spouses maintained the social system of both the family and the larger society (Edwards, 1983, pp. 387–388; Tarrant, 2005, p. 337). Parson's theory was criticized in the US by Mirra Komarovsky, who noted that women's social and political situation were changing, and old sex role norms were no longer functional. Komarovsky demanded that

women should have the right to have a career and educate themselves (Komarovsky, 1953; Tarrant, 2005, pp. 336–341). Betty Friedan’s best-selling book *The Feminine Mystique* (Friedan, 1963) popularized the same criticism towards traditional gender roles and called for the liberalization of women from the role of a housewife. *The Feminine Mystique* and the founding of the National Organization for Women (NOW) in 1966 (with Betty Friedan as its first chair) contributed significantly to the establishment of the new women’s movement, the liberal feminist movement, in the US. It demanded women’s full participation in American society (Friedan, 1998, pp. 109–115; Wolfe & Tucker, 1995, pp. 440–441).

At the turn of the 1970s, the discussion and activism on women’s position were radicalized in the US by young women who had been active in the civil rights movement and the New Left. They started to call themselves “feminists” to differentiate themselves from other women’s movements (Echols, 1989; Ferree & Hess, 2000, pp. 69–71; Wolfe & Tucker, 1995, pp. 441–441). The first Swedish and Finnish feminist groups represented socialist feminist ideology as well and saw women’s oppression as a result of the structure of capitalist class society (Bergman, 2002, pp. 146–150; Elgán, 2015, pp. 23, 213–216; Isaksson, 2007, pp. 99–180; Schmitz, 2007). Around the mid-1970s, “women’s culture” (*kvinnokultur*, *naiskulttuuri*) became Swedish and Finnish feminists’ main concept, which was used to address the subordinate role of feminine aspects of culture and women’s experiences in patriarchal society. Cultural feminists noted that social hierarchies and values were based on the male norm. Instead of asking women to adjust to them, such patriarchal norms should be questioned and changed (Bergman, 2002, pp. 166–168; Isaksson, 2007, pp. 181–252; Echols, 1989, pp. 6, 243–286; Elgán, 2015, pp. 252–253; Yoken, 2021, pp. 125–128). Women’s studies, which emerged in Finnish universities at the turn of the 1980s, were based on these feminist theories, especially on cultural feminism. Feminist scholars criticized the prevailing gender equality discourse and brought up themes of gendered power relations (Bergman, 2002, pp. 187–188; Peltonen et al., 1979).

In their analyses, Swedish and Finnish feminist activists and scholars echoed the criticism presented by American feminists and feminist theorist towards Friedan, Komarovsky, the liberal feminist movement, and sex role theory and ideology—namely, that they aimed to integrate women into the existing social system and therefore accommodated or even promoted the status quo. For example, Friedan and Komarovsky expected that women would continue to bear the main responsibility for children and the home. Feminists argued that women’s emancipation was not simply a question of changing attitudes, women’s identity, and the labour market: structural changes were also needed in society. The concept and theory of sex roles were also criticized for not being able to explain why women’s position in society was subordinate to that of men (Bergman, 2002, p. 148; Connel, 1987, pp. 50–54; Echols, 1989, pp. 3, 15; Ferree & Hess, 2000, p. 42; Isaksson, 2007, p. 39; Jallinoja, 1983, p. 196; Liljeström, 1996b, p. 117; Scott, 1982; Schmitz, 2007, pp. 115–116; Tarrant, 2005, pp. 344–345).

However, Swedish and Finnish feminists and feminist scholars omitted from their analyses the differences between the Nordic sex role debate, contemporary American sex role research, and liberal feminism. Particularly in Sweden, the Parsonsian model had already been considered outdated in the 1950s, and social scientists and politicians had actively sought a new family model which would enable women to combine motherhood with paid work (Florin & Nilsson, 2000, pp. 62–74; Olsson, 2011, pp. 39–42). Alva Myrdal and Viola Klein, for example, had suggested in their influential proposal in 1956 that women should educate themselves and have a job before getting married. They would then stay at home at least until their youngest child went to school and return to (part-time) work after that (Dahlström, 1962, pp. 23–27; Myrdal & Klein, 1956).

The Nordic sex role ideology of the 1960s represented criticism of Myrdal and Klein’s gender model. Association 9 and other Nordic sex role activists called it a *moderate sex role ideology* (Dahlström, 1962, p. 23; Rotkirch, 1967, p. 64) and criticized it for a limited understanding of gender equality: “As long as men have only one role, the professional role, but women have two roles, those of a mother and a working woman, gender equality will not be achieved,” noted

Mickwitz (1965a, p. 6). Nordic sex role researchers and activists claimed that they themselves represented and promoted a *radical sex role ideology* that was based on the argument that both men and women should be equally responsible for supporting the family and being a close parent to their children. This meant that men's social role would be radically reformed as well (Dahlström, 1962, pp. 27–31; Mickwitz, 1965b, p. 6; Rotkirch, 1968, p. 64; Sundström, 1966, pp. 5–6; Turunen, 1965a, p. 18).

Feminist scholars have argued that it was the feminist movement and theory of the 1970s that, through the concepts “sex” and “gender,” highlighted the difference between “sex” as a biological category and “gender” as a social and cultural construction and a product of socialization (e.g., Gordon, 2014, pp. 82–85; Liljeström, 1996a, p. 15). However, a central aim of Nordic radical sex role research and activism was indeed to emphasize the same idea and teach people the difference between biological sex and the socially constructed sex role. Association 9 based its argumentation on anthropological studies, and especially on Margaret Mead's⁷ research that demonstrated that expectations, norms, and values regarding men and women and their roles were socially constructed (Lausti, 1969, p. 9; Polttila, 1966, pp. 116–117; Sundström, 1966, pp. 4–5; Turunen, 1965b, p. 21). As Turunen (1965b, p. 21) noted, “most of those characteristics, probably all of them, that we are used to thinking of as masculine or feminine are not inborn traits but created by culture, and every generation must adapt to them.” Therefore, neither the traditional nor the moderate family model that emphasized women's role as a mother was based on men's and women's “natural” roles or biological facts but was a social construction based on “values, attitudes, and quasi-biological evidence that exaggerate the differences between the roles” (Turunen, 1965b, p. 21; see also Mickwitz, 1968, p. 1; Polttila, 1966, p. 116).

Instead of the Parsonsian functionalism that treated “role” as a normative and static concept, Association 9 put forward ideas of social interactionism in which role playing was considered a process. The interactionist perspective also recognized the problematic relationship between the interests of an individual and the role expectations held by society (Edwards, 1983, p. 392). Tapani Lausti, a member of Association 9, noted how harmful the psychological consequences of strict gender roles were: “Humanity fractures under the pressures of manipulative codes of behavior. Women are manipulated into being interested in things that men are not allowed to be interested in, and vice versa” (Lausti, 1969, p. 2). Instead of helping women to adjust to the conflicting role expectations, both women and men should be liberated from gender-based role expectations.

Individuality and Equality of Opportunities Instead of Masculine Standards

Association 9 demanded that all people should be treated as individuals, not as gendered beings; it wanted to render gender irrelevant. In feminist analysis, it has been concluded that Nordic sex role ideology and Association 9 represented the idea of gender neutrality, which emphasized the similarity of genders and aimed to eliminate all differences between women and men. Sex role ideology has been criticized for understanding gender equality on male terms because the sex role debate and activism focused on women's problems in the labour market and demanded for women the same rights that men already had. It has been noted that rather than giving women the opportunity to choose between a family and a career, sex role activists created a new strict norm—a working mother. Therefore, Association 9 did not liberate women but introduced a masculine standard for women's role and aimed to make women as much like men as possible (Holli, 1988, pp. 328–329; Jallinoja, 1983, pp. 125–126; Julkunen, 1994; Koivunen, 1996, pp. 82–84; Kuusipalo, 1999, pp. 64–71; Parvikko, 1990).

The ideology of Association 9 was, indeed, based on the norm of paid work. However, in analysing Association 9's aims, attention must be paid to the social context of the Nordic countries in the 1960s. Women's participation in paid work was seen as an important part of the modernization of society, and in Finland in particular, it was also a necessity for many women and families. In the mid-1960s, women formed a significant part, 43.5%, of the workforce, and 58% of married

women were employed in paid work. One in five families were supported by a single mother. The father was the sole supporter in only 38% of families (Haavio-Mannila, 1967, pp. 1–2; Mickwitz, 1968; Polttila, 1966, pp. 118–119; Pesonen & Haarma, 1969; Wrede, 1969). As Gunnel Wrede, (1969, p. 3.), a member of Association 9, pointed out, married women were not given the chance to choose between staying at home or going to work: “What are the options between which she can de facto choose? [...] She chooses between the double role of a working mother or the role of a housewife.”

During the 1950s and 1960s, society and social policy were also reformulated based on the so-called “two-breadwinner model.” Full citizenship as well as modern social security benefits became to be based on every individual’s responsibility for their own economy and not on one’s gender or role in the family (Anttonen & Sipilä, 2000, pp. 54–72; Florin & Nilsson, 2000, pp. 25–26; Olsson, 2011, pp. 39–41; Uljas, 2014, pp. 73–104). As Holger Rotkirch (1967, p. 1) noted, “in modern society, it is the duty of every individual to support themselves with their work.”

Association 9’s activism was based on the notion that women’s possibilities to fulfill this duty were restricted by social institutions, labour market practices, and even the law. Sex role researchers and Association 9 did pioneering work in studying contemporary society from a gender perspective. Their studies revealed notable problems of gender inequality by showing that the labour market and vocational education were strongly segregated by gender; women were typically employed in traditional feminine and low-paying jobs, while men had masculine and higher-paying jobs; and women were underrepresented in managerial positions and without chances of promotion (Haavio-Mannila, 1968, pp. 41–98; Mickwitz, 1968; Olsson, 2011, p. 94; Pesonen & Haarma, 1969; Turunen, 1965a, p. 18; Wrede, 1969). In discussing the problems of the labour market, Association 9 stressed that the labour market represented the male norm, but it was not possible for women, particularly women with small children, to live up to that norm and have full autonomy and equality. For example, professional day care was only available to 9% of the children who would have needed it (Report on children’s daycare, pp. 1–2).

The contemporary educational system was criticized for giving only boys the skills and abilities needed in the labour market, whereas girls were educated into the traditional role of a mother (Polttila, 1966, p. 117; Sundström, 1966, pp. 5–6; Turunen, 1965b, p. 21). The legal group of Association 9, which consisted of legal experts such as legal scholars, also noted that even though the Constitution of Finland was based on social equality, there were laws that restricted certain jobs and professions to either women or men only. The legal group also strongly criticized the practice of family taxation and the paying of widow’s pension to women only (Reports of the legal group). These laws represented the traditional family model but were in stark contrast to the two-breadwinner model.

Association 9 pointed out that solutions representing the moderate sex role ideology were inadequate in emancipating women because they saw parenting solely as women’s duty, assigned women the double task of paid work and housework, and regarded the husband as the main breadwinner in the family. Moderate sex role ideology was also criticized for causing women mental problems as they were encouraged to educate themselves for a professional career but expected to leave their own career ambitions aside, focus on the role of a housewife, and support their husband’s career. Moderate sex role ideology also ignored the pressures men faced to have a successful career to be able to support their family (Mickwitz, 1965a, p. 6; 1965b, p. 6; Sundström, 1966, pp. 5–6; Turunen, 1965a, p. 18; Wrede, 1969).

Association 9 pointed out time and time again that in radical sex role ideology, gender equality meant equality of opportunities. Changing stereotypes and attitudes was not enough; the emancipation of both women and men required the deconstruction of the structure of society and the labour market. All education, for example, should be open to all, and career choices, employment, and salary should be based on the skills of the individual and requirements of the job, not on their gender and role in the family. Employees should be taxed on their own salary, not based on the joint income of spouses. Small children should be provided with inexpensive daycare of good quality and

close to home so that both parents could have a full-time job (Reports of the labour market group, children's daycare group, education groups, and legal group).

Women and men's equal social and labour rights, which Association 9 called for, have typically been seen to represent liberal feminist ideology, but they were also the main aims of the radical and particularly the socialist feminist activism of the 1970s (see, e.g., Boucht & Nyström, 1976, pp. 56–58; Echols, 1989; Elgán, 2015, pp. 97–123; Gordon, 2014, pp. 128–133; Isaksson, 2007, pp. 68–139; Jenson, 1995; Schmitz, 2007; Siegel, 2007, pp. 79–81). In the late 1960s, Association 9 was in fact using the same Marxist argumentation that contemporary socialist feminists used in Sweden and the US (see, e.g., Echols, 1989; Isaksson, 2007; Linsiö & Mikkola, 1969).

Typical “feminist” topics such as questions of women's body rights, sexual violence towards women and pornography, and the importance of “women's culture” (*kvinnokultur*) were introduced into Swedish and Finnish feminists' agenda only in the mid-1970s (Bergman, 2002, pp. 177–186; Elgán, 2015, pp. 252–253; Isaksson, 2007, pp. 67–77). The main difference between Association 9 and feminist activism (liberal, radical, socialist, and cultural feminism) was that the former also paid attention to the social rights men were lacking. Association 9 demanded that traditional women's professions should be opened up to men, that widow's pension should be paid to men too, and that in addition to maternity leave, there should be a special paternity leave with equal duration so that parenting could be shared by the mother and the father (Reports of the labour market group and the legal group; Statement “A man is a human too”).

Strict Division of the Public and Private Sphere as the Source of Gender Inequality

Nordic feminists of the 1960s and 1970s and later feminist scholars have criticized Nordic sex role ideology and Association 9 as well for understanding gender equality purely as a question of women's right to access the public sphere and for leaving out the analysis of power structures and hierarchies (Bergman, 2002, p. 135; Isaksson, 2007, p. 39; Jallinoja, 1983, pp. 153–155; Schmitz, 2007, pp. 115–116). In Sweden, the founders of the feminist Grupp 8 criticized sex role debaters for issues such as not paying attention to the fact that marriage represented a capitalist institution in which women were economically dependent on their husband (Schmitz, 2007, pp. 115–116). In Finland, Birgitta Boucht and Carita Nyström declared in the first Finnish feminist book, *Denna värld är vår* (*This world is ours*), that the feminist movement differed from all the previous women's movements because it aimed to radically reform the structure of society and culture (Boucht & Nyström, 1976, pp. 13–14).

Finnish feminist scholars have concluded that in Association 9's ideology, women and femininity represented deviations from the male norm, and the activities of the private sphere were of little value, unimportant, and ineffectual, which is why women were asked to leave them behind. The only “feminine right” that was demanded for men was the right to participate in the education of their own children (Holli, 1988, pp. 328–329; Jallinoja, 1983, pp. 125–126; Julkunen, 1994; Koivunen, 1996, pp. 82–84; Kuusipalo, 1999, pp. 64–71; Parvikko, 1990). It has also been noted that Association 9 did not aim to “feminize men” but rather understood gender neutrality as an ideal (Parvikko, 1990, p. 94). In the Nordic countries as well, one of the main arguments of radical and cultural feminists was that to improve gender equality and tackle oppression, the focus should be shifted from the public sphere to the private sphere and questions such as sexuality, body, and cultural issues; the differences between men and women should be acknowledged; and feminine values should be given more appreciation instead of seeing women's value on the basis of their work (Boucht & Nyström, 1976; Bergman, 2002, pp. 146–149; Dahlerup, 1998, p. 41 ff; Isaksson, 2007, pp. 77–98, 180–252).

Sexuality was, however, one of the main topics of Association 9. The sexuality group of the association was formed to demand the liberalization of abortion and free availability of contraceptives. It also called for the modernization of traditional sexual mores that mystified sexuality and emphasized men's sexual activity and women's passivity (Reports of the sexuality group).

The role of marriage as an “institution of maintenance” for women was also continuously brought up by Association 9. Mickwitz and Turunen noted already in 1965 that one of the main problems of the contemporary gender order was that girls were socialized to see marriage as their main goal in life, and that during marriage, women’s primary role was to be a servant to their husband and the whole family. She was only secondly a human and individual. Married women were also both economically and socially dependent on their husband. The main problem of the marriage institution was that for women, marriage, and not a job, was understood as the main source of support (Mickwitz, 1965a, p. 6; Turunen, 1965a, p. 18). Rotkirch pointed out that marriage and the role of a housewife also led to women’s isolation from other people as they were both economically and mentally dependent on their husband. Men, in turn, had to bear the sole responsibility for supporting the family while being isolated from emotional and family life (Rotkirch, 1968, pp. 63–64).

Association 9 did also pay attention to other problems of the private sphere because its main argument was that the problems of women’s and men’s social roles stemmed from the segregation of society into the “masculine” public sphere and the “feminine” private sphere. In Association 9’s ideology, the theory of sex roles also included an explanation of gender inequalities: women’s position was subordinate to men’s because women’s social role was tied to the private sphere, and men’s to the public sphere. For Association 9, gender emancipation meant that this division would cease to exist. It envisioned a future in which sex and gender would not dictate one’s life choices, and tasks and responsibilities would no longer be divided based on gender. The association emphasized that it did not set out to reform women’s social role as per men’s role in contemporary society (Rotkirch, 1968, p. 66). For example, Turunen pointed out that radical sex role ideology did not mean that women would be given benefits at the expense of men. Men would benefit too, partly at the expense of women, from sharing the responsibilities of supporting the family and raising children, as well as from being able to choose between family and work (Turunen, 1965a, p. 18).

The housing group of the association noted that modern urban planning that placed homes in suburbs and workplaces, shops, and services in the city centre or elsewhere outside residential areas, made it difficult or impossible to combine parenting with a full-time job. The emancipation of both women and men required the deconstruction of such urban planning that supported the gender-based division of the private and public sphere. The housing group suggested that urban planning should be based on multifunctional areas including homes, workplaces, shops, services, and recreational spaces where the private and public spheres overlapped each other (Reports of the housing group; Turunen, 2023).

Association 9 argued that although gender-based segregation of the public and private sphere seemed “traditional,” it was actually quite a recent invention because in agrarian society, both parents worked together to support the family. The roles of the spouses had differentiated from each other during industrialization and urbanization, which had led to women’s isolation from society, men’s isolation from the family, and the spouses’ isolation from each other (Lausti, 1969, pp. 4–15; Rotkirch, 1968, pp. 63–64; Turunen, 1965c, p. 19). The division of the private and public spheres was therefore a cultural construction that caused gender inequality.

Association 9 drew attention to the problems of men’s contemporary social role repeatedly by noting that while men benefited from their gender role, they also committed more crimes, had more physical and mental health problems, got into accidents, died, and committed suicides more often than women (Jaakkola, 1968; Lausti, 1969, pp. 7–8; Mickwitz, 1968, pp. 3–4; Sundström, 1966, pp. 4–5; Turunen, 1965b, p. 21). Boys were also socialized to admire the ability to bear blows and take risks, and men were obliged to support their family even when they had no possibilities to do so. Association 9 called for men’s right to show their feelings, work in jobs that were typical women’s jobs, free themselves from the role of the sole supporter of the family, and be as close a parent to their children as their mother (Statement “A man is a human too”).

In the original material issued by Association 9, the important value of “feminine” characteristics was also emphasized on several occasions. The ideas of paternity leave and an extended maternity

leave, in particular, represented aspects of Association 9's ideology that aimed to improve the status and tasks of the private sphere. Instead of considering the feminine activities of the private sphere to be of little value, unimportant, and ineffectual, Association 9 emphasized the role of family, education, and socialization in society (e.g., Rotkirch, 1968, pp. 63–64; Turunen, 1965c, p. 19). Turunen also argued that men's role had already changed during the past one hundred years even though public discussion had focused on the improvement of women's status:

The democratizing of society, the increased interest in both social reforms and people in need represents a cultural shift in a more “feminine” direction. For men, this has meant the possibility of richer and more nuanced experiences in the sphere of emotional life than ever before. (Turunen, 1965b, p. 21)

Association 9 also promoted a broader discussion of the role of family and marriage as social institutions: in 1969, a new working group, *marriage and society*, was established to focus on these questions. Lausti, chair of the group, pointed out that the strict division of the private and public spheres mystified family life and the role of the mother, which prevented critical discussion of the problems of the mother's role and the hierarchical relationship between the spouses (Lausti, 1969). Brita Polttila noted that the idea that childbirth transformed a woman into an ideal parent was a myth that functioned to thrust the responsibility for children's education solely on women. The myth was harmful and cruel to both women, who had no freedom to choose whether to stay at home or go to work and children, who were not provided with sufficient daycare centres (Polttila, 1966, p. 121).

The argument that the association only valued the public sphere and saw little importance in the tasks of the private sphere was commented on by Turunen and Mickwitz already in 1965 and later by Polttila. Turunen argued that it was contemporary society that saw a successful career, high income, social status, and productivity at work as the most important values and gave the housewife a lower status in society (Turunen, 1965c, p. 19). Although the mother's role was valued and even praised, Turunen noted that

the appreciation of housework will hardly increase as long as the aims and values in society do not change into more family-oriented ones. If the tasks of the family—the socialization of new members of society and the safeguarding of well-balanced close social relationships—were as important as the social merits in men's lives, the family would be released from the current segregated dichotomy between women and men. (Turunen, 1965c, p. 19)

Polttila argued that parenting was such a great, important, and valuable duty that men should also take responsibility for it:

It is particularly important for the child because they need both a male and a female role model to grow and develop, to create well-balanced relationships with both men and women. (Polttila, 1966, p. 120)

The reconstruction of the marriage institution and new roles for men and women would mean that men would be more interested in their children, which, in turn, would strengthen the relationships inside the family. The collective responsibility for children would also increase: “Greater child-friendliness would surely lead to the organization of good circumstances for all children, regardless of whether they are one's own children or not” (Lausti, 1969, p. 23). Making the family more open to society rather than keeping it a hermetic unit would also help children to form close relationships with other people:

People would collectively take responsibility for children, regardless of their gender. In a society that values children, the quality of kindergartens would be of special interest. There would also be less pressure to form a certain kind of family. The formula father-mother-children would not be sacred anymore. This would also give people true freedom of choice in cases when relationships break down. (Lausti, 1969, p. 4)

The children's daycare group also emphasized children's right to high-quality daycare as a central part of organizing communal daycare systems (Reports of the daycare group).

Conclusion: Continuity between Association 9 and Radical Feminist Ideology

As Finnish sociologist Bergman has noted, social movements are political constructions; they exist as they are claimed and believed to exist. They are constantly changing, and they often consist of several parts and narratives that compete in defining and interpreting the movement (Bergman, 2004, p. 24). In this article, I have critically reviewed interpretations and narratives of Finnish second-wave feminist activism by analysing the aims and ideology of Association 9, representing the sex role ideology and activism of the 1960s. In previous studies, Association 9 has been interpreted to represent an ideology that focused on gender neutrality and understood gender equality on male terms. However, such interpretations have not been based on detailed analysis of the association's original aims but rather on American sex role research, American liberal feminism, or Finnish gender equality policies. As I have argued in this article, these analyses of Association 9 have served to explain the need for radical, socialist, and cultural feminist movements as well as 1970s academic feminism. Feminist activists themselves and later feminist scholars have emphasized the difference between their ideology and the previous women's movements and gender equality policies to justify the need for a new movement and its goals. However, I have shown in this article that they were not closely familiar with the aims, theoretical tradition, and ideology of Association 9. Feminists' interpretations of Association 9 represent feminist storytelling about generational distinctions that sees a new wave of feminist activism as more radical and progressive than the previous one (Hemmings, 2011; Henry, 2004).

In this article, I have deconstructed the above-mentioned generational narrative and categorization that emphasize the differences between 1970s feminism and 1960s sex role ideology by demonstrating that Association 9's ideology shared many elements with radical, socialist, and cultural feminist ideologies. Although Association 9 shared similar aims with the liberal feminist movement—such as women's liberation from the role of a housewife and their full social and labour rights in society—its agenda was not limited to these questions. Instead of aiming to transform women into men—as has been claimed—Association 9 wished to liberate both women and men as well as boys and girls from traditional gender-based expectations so that they could develop themselves, find their calling, and choose their education, profession, and role in the family based on their own interests and skills and not on their biological sex.

A central premise of both Association 9 and feminist ideologies of the 1970s was their criticism towards liberal feminist ideology—which Association 9 called moderate sex role ideology—because it assigned women the double task of paid work and the role of a mother. Association 9's radical sex role ideology demanded that gender equality should only be achieved through reconstructing the social roles of both women and men. Association 9 also significantly contributed to the development of understanding of gender as a cultural construction. The discussion of the difference between biological sex and socially and culturally constructed gender emerged in feminist discourse in the 1970s, but I have demonstrated in this article that it was also already a central premise of the Swedish and Finnish radical sex role ideology of the 1960s. Similarly to radical and cultural feminist ideologies, the starting point of radical sex role ideology was to reconstruct society by re-evaluating gender roles, particularly by demonstrating that they were socially constructed.

Sex role theory has been criticized for not providing an explanation for why women's position was subordinate to men's position. Feminists of the 1970s argued that gender inequality and women's oppression derived from the hierarchical patriarchal structure of society that valued the masculine sphere and men's experiences over feminine values and women's experiences. Along similar lines, Association 9 clearly saw that gender inequality resulted from the hierarchical relationship between the masculine public sphere and the feminine private sphere. It did not view gender roles simply as stereotypes that could be changed by reforming the role expectations or encouraging women to adopt a more masculine role. The association argued that changing gender roles would require a radical restructuring of society. As it suggested reforms in the labour market, educational system, urban planning and architecture, as well as

children's daycare and marriage, the underlying principle was the deconstruction of the hierarchical division of society into the public and private spheres. It visioned a future in which people's lives and position in society would no longer be restricted by institutional structures based on the idea of the public sphere as a more valued men's sphere and the private sphere as a less valued women's sphere.

The ideology of Association 9 has been criticized for aiming to eliminate all differences between women and men, but my reading of the original materials issued by the association rather demonstrates that it wished to encourage diversity and a multitude of ways of being an individual woman or man. If gender-based expectations, categorizations, and limitations no longer guided and restricted people's lives, they could start to embrace their individual personality and skills, which, in turn, would give room to a multiplicity of (gendered) identities.

The public sex role debate and activism faded in Sweden in the late 1960s and in Finland in the early 1970s, simultaneously with the emergence of radical and socialist feminist activism. Feminists represented themselves as the "new women's movement," which differed radically from all the previous women's movements. They brought new topics and concepts into the public and political discussion of women's position, including women's body rights, patriarchy, and women's culture, as well as slogans such as "the personal is political." Feminist ideologies of the 1970s were, however, not radically different from radical sex role ideology. My reading of the ideology of Association 9 supports the interpretation of a continuity between radical sex role ideology and 1970s feminism: many elements commonly regarded as typical features of 1970s feminist theories and ideologies of the 1970s, were already included in Association 9's ideology in the 1960s. Unfortunately, previous historiography has paid more attention to the differences between Association 9 and 1970s feminism.

Notes

1. The archival material, reports, and statements were collected from the Archive of Association 9 in the People's Archive. The minutes of the board meetings were not archived, but their content was reported to members through a newsletter after each board meeting.
2. The books discussing women's position and sex roles that were translated into Finnish from Swedish and English by the members of Association 9 are not included in the research material.
3. The media materials published from 1966 to 1970 were collected based on the annual reports of the association, which listed newspaper and magazine articles written by the members.
4. The book was published in the UK in 1967 and in the US in 1971 with the title *The Changing Roles of Men and Women*.
5. *Nya Pressen* was a Swedish-language newspaper, and *Uusi Suomi* a Finnish-language one. Before this, in spring 1965, sex role ideology had been discussed in the cultural journal *Nya Argus* and the student newspapers *Medisiinari* ja *Ylioppilaslehti*. See Saksholm (2020).
6. For example, abortion was legalized in 1970, a parliamentary council for gender equality was founded in 1972, and the Act on Children's Daycare took effect in 1973.
7. Mead (1901–1978) was an American cultural anthropologist who studied attitudes towards sex in South Pacific and Southeast Asian traditional cultures in the 1920s and 1930s. Her studies demonstrated a vast cultural variety in gender roles and sexual conventions.

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