1. Introduction

This project is about public intimacies. Public intimacies describe the current situation in which intimate, sexual and personal matters are part of the public domain. Cultural repertoires and discourses in the form of representations and aesthetic, performative and communicative modes forge and inform about new intimate and sexual relationships. Leading questions are: What implications do the changing discourses and values concerning intimacy in the Norwegian public culture have for contemporary understandings of intimacy, sexuality and gender? How do public representations of intimacy change the public landscape? The project has three broad objectives: to develop new knowledge from the perspectives of the humanities about public intimacies and the interrelations between cultural representations and the politicizing of these matters in Norway, to engage in dialogue with international theories and debates in the field, and to communicate with public audiences on reflections and understanding of new forms of intimacy and sexuality.

The investigation of contemporary changes in intimacies and sexualities in Norway has mainly been developed in the social sciences (e.g., Brandt and Kvande 2003, Andersen 2003, Bolso 2002). We will develop an interdisciplinary research and teaching environment within humanities to which PhD students may be recruited and in which other students may participate. This project application is one step in a larger process which aims to develop new knowledge about changing intimacies in the transforming landscape of Norwegian public culture. The project builds on previous work funded by the Research Council of Norway in this area: Jørgen Lorentzen’s postdoc project *The History of Fatherhood*, part of the co-project *Men and Masculinities*, which he leads at the Centre for women’s and gender studies (SKK), University of Oslo, and Wencke Mühleisen’s postdoc project *Reflexivity and Authenticity*, part of the co-project *The Queer Turn*, which she leads at SKK. Both projects found that transformations in intimacy lead to major destabilizations of gender and sexuality and are crucial to understanding current changes in public culture and representations about personal life. The project also builds on an international conference on this topic organized by the applicants at the University of Oslo (12-13 October 2006), which brought together leading Norwegian and international researchers in the field (from the UK, USA and Germany), including Lauren Berlant (University of Chicago) and Sasha Roseneil (Birkbeck, University of London), who will be part of this research project. This conference led to a special issue of *NORA – Nordic Journal of Women’s Studies* (no 2/3 2007). As a next step, it is our intention to use this application as a platform to lead the development of a European integrated project in this area.

2. Background

Public intimacies

The meaning of the concepts the public and the private related to gender, intimacy and sexuality has a long theoretical history (e.g. Habermas 1989, Sennett 1976, Young 1987). This project will investigate in which way the existence of aestheticization and representations within the market economy, among other things, implies a reconfiguration of the private and the public in which the pursuit of intimacies and sexualities is facilitated, not hindered. (Bernstein 2001, Illouz 2007). Likewise, the trend of intimization and sexualization in culture...
is part of public intimacies and implies a shift in tendency from morals and ethics to taste and aesthetics (Attwood 2006, Lorentzen 2004, Juffer 1998). At the same time, there exists a broad engagement amongst various publics and counter-publics that are discussing and evaluating new intimate and sexual relationship practices. From a critical perspective ethical questions are crucial in analyzing public intimacies. Attention towards ethics will bring into critical discourse reflections upon cultural values that might otherwise be free floating or manipulated (Rainsford and Woods 1999). There is a diverse range of representations of intimate and sexual discourses that cannot automatically be understood as being radical or subversive (McNay 2000, Mühleisen 2007), nor as being exclusively part of commercial colonialization (Genz 2006). This is one of the issues we wish to investigate.

The entire cultural field opens up for insight into contemporary negotiations and interpretations of legitimate discourses. This cultural field plays out the aesthetic, ethical, moral and normative dilemmas and social challenges of these transformations. During the past few decades, the media and cultural field have moved to the very centre of the political spectrum, and form the discursive frames for the priorities of politicians (Dahlerup 2004). This development in the media and culture implies a politicizing of culture and at the same time a culturalization of politics (Engel 2002). This implies that the cultural field plays a crucial role in changing opinions and social and political agendas. Our study aims to investigate these interrelations between politics and culture by studying contemporary cultural repertoires and public debates about changing intimacies and sexualities.

Late modernity is characterized by diverse and constant public talk and a proliferation of discourses around how personal life should be lived and about how we should relate to each other, which bring with them tensions, contradictions, anxieties, and contestations (Beck and Lash 1994). Public performances of intimacies and sexualities surround private citizens, which suggest that it is appropriate to study the cultural interpretations, public debates and discourses that this study sets out to analyze (Berlant 2000, Priest 1995, Plummer 2003). Our focus will be on high and low/popular cultural representations about intimacy which inhabit different positions in the cultural hierarchies and are potentially in conflict with each other and inhabit different relations to aesthetic and social conventionality. There are also counter-cultures and counter-publics and social practices which resist assimilation into mainstream culture, challenging dominant cultural aesthetics and forms, highlighting the ‘trouble with normal’ (Warner 1999) which this project sets out to analyze.

To be able to analyze representations in different media, this study uses trans-disciplinary theories which we find in the traditions of cultural, visual and performance studies, underlining the interrelations between cultural representations and the politicizing of these matters.

Social background
The widespread transformation in the organization of personal life has been conceptualized as “individualization” (Beck 1992, Giddens and Lash 1994, Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 1995 and 2002). This historical change from modernity to late modernity has led to new forms of intimacy and sexuality, such as a greater degree of gender equality, diversity of family patterns and parenthood. Changes in the organisation of intimacy and sexuality have also led to practices that can be understood as counter-normative. These practices challenge dominant models of intimate relationships which grant privilege to the co-residential conjugal couple relationship above others: the importance of friendship, the decentring of sexual/love relationships, and formations of non-conventional partnerships (Roseneil and Budgeon 2004, Roseneil 2007).

The context of the international research on this area is first and foremost Anglo-American and German. Conclusions based upon societies that differ in considerable ways
from the Norwegian/Nordic context often lay down the premises for the research into the Nordic context as well. This is a problem since Norway has a specific history in terms of transformations of gender relations, family forms, intimacy and sexuality which may be summed up as the Nordic welfare model and the establishment of state feminism (Hagemann 2003, Halsaa 2006, Herne 1987, Holst 2005). Social liberalization, increased plurality and freedom of choice are predominant traits in other European countries as well. However, a key difference is Norwegian state feminism. This means a closer affiliation between feminism, the state, institutionalized politics and research than in Anglo-American and German contexts. In addition, men’s participation in caring about and in sharing ideas of gender equality is one of the main findings of Norwegian research on men (Holter 2007, Lorentzen 2004, Brandth & Kvande 2003). How this influences the understanding of intimacy and sexuality in current representations is part of the project, and an important supplement to the international debate.

In the Nordic countries, we also see that new forms of individualization are combined with a relatively high degree of stability. Even a high frequency of divorce, new family and cohabitation models and same-sex relationships, a high number of single person households and the prioritization of friendship may not necessarily need to be interpreted as the decline of community and social capital, or selfish and self-obsessed identities and lifestyles (Bauman 2003, Sennett 2006, Hochschild 2003). The project aims to analyze the Norwegian social, cultural and public specificity in dialogue with international research, and to discuss the consequences this might have for the understanding of and theories regarding the conditions of intimacy and sexuality through the negotiations in public culture.

3. Theoretical and methodological perspectives

Theoretically, we will concentrate on four key concepts and theoretical tools that draw on different theoretical traditions: art of existence, governmentality, circulation and performativity.

We find it relevant to turn to Michel Foucault’s notion of the art of existence to grasp the meaning of ongoing processes of individualization and construction of identity (Foucault 1988/1990). In his History of Sexuality vol. II and III he raises the question of the process of individualization and how to take care of the self. In studying sexuality and intimacy, we are trying to understand forms of subjectivity in a particular society and cultural context where the subject is understood as a desiring subject. Individuality more than ever, in late modernity, implies different forms of use of pleasure as aesthetics of existence. Studying late modern representations and performances of new forms of intimacy and sexuality necessarily entails looking at forms of self-fashioning. Theoretically, Foucault’s understanding of individuality as an art of existence needs to be discussed in relation to the critics of the negative dimensions of individualization (Bauman, Sennett, Hochschild). We will relate this theoretical discussion to the Norwegian/Nordic context as formerly described. It will be necessary for the project to develop theoretical insights to come to terms with the often paradoxical processes of individualization, and the co-existence of conventionality and new forms of intimacy and sexuality.

Another useful term in this discussion is the notion of governmentality, which proposes an understanding of self-normalizing processes as internalizations of social norms (Foucault 1986). Governmentality is a form of power particularly suited for the monitoring and control of intimacy, family, sexuality and the body. Today intimacy and sexuality must be understood to be under a kind of double pressure; by welfare-state regulations and legislations and market-governmentality. It is in this field of tension between the potentially subversive and egalitarian forces on the one hand and the repressive and disciplining dynamics on the other that the representations of intimacy and sexuality that this project will study exist.
In the analysis of the material, we will methodologically try to refigure the relationship between texts and the cultural system in which they were produced. This means a rejection/modification of both the autonomy of aesthetics and the traditional image of art as a mirror or reflection of reality and ideology. By using the concept social circulation, borrowed from Stephen Greenblatt, we will be able to see how boundaries between cultural practices and other forms of practices are possibly transgressed and by that find the collective making of new forms of intimacy (Greenblatt, 1988 & 1990). This means that understanding of “representation” does not seem to be adequate concerning the performative and relational aspects of cultural enactments (Bourriaud 2002). For this reason “the performative turn” offers an important theoretical and methodological resource for this project. Performative theory is involved with culture and aesthetic practices at large as well as in the arts and performance-based expressions (film, theatre, music, dance etc) (Loxley 2006, Schechner 2006, Gade & Jerslev 2005). The project takes the deconstructivist understanding of performativity as its point of departure (Derrida 1980). This implies a move towards a more communicative and relational, but still conventional and contextual, understanding of language (Gade & Jerslev 2005). In Judith Butler’s (1990, 1990B, 1993) theory of the performativity of gender, a central aspect is the concept of repetition or citation that is an unavoidable part of language, social structures and normative regulations of both subjects and discourses. The interesting point for us is how the circulation of citations differs from the “original” and how displacement of meaning creates spaces for negotiation and transformation in shifting contexts. The concept of performativity is especially fruitful for the research questions of this project because we gain a theoretical and methodological way of understanding stability and change in both structures of meaning and structures of gender, sexuality and intimacy.

4. Overview of the project
This project is situated in the trans-disciplinary concentration of research on intimacy, sexuality and gender at the Centre for Women's Studies and Gender Research at the University of Oslo. The present application consists of six strands that are closely interrelated thematically, theoretically and methodologically and which focus on different media, communication technologies, modes of communication and aesthetics. These six strands are underpinned by the same research questions, which are:

- How are the widespread transformations in the organization of intimacy negotiated in contemporary representations in the Norwegian public culture and how is the public landscape affected by this?
- What kind of aesthetic and discursive codes become translated into legitimate public intimacies and virtues relating to personal life, gender and sexuality?
- How are the borders between normative and counter-normative practices of intimacy, gender and sexuality drawn, and how are these borders negotiated and performed within representations?
- What are the interrelations between performativity in contemporary cultural expressions and a conceptualization of the performativity of intimacy, gender and sexuality?
- In what way are femininity and masculinity as a dualistic and complementary portrait of differences within gender, sexuality and intimacy preserved or confronted and deconstructed in public culture?

These questions will be key focus in all of the five empirical strands of the project, and they will be the focus for the sixth theoretical strand, in dialogue with the main international literature in the field. The research group intends to analyze the different representations of
the five strands in collective processes to be able to investigate important similarities and differences in genres and cultural fields.

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**Strand 1**
This strand focuses on Norwegian art and literature since the mid 1990s. The project sets out to conduct discourse analysis of a sample of Norwegian literature specially literature that incorporates notions of feminism. The sample of art-works consists of performance-art, relational art and photos/videos in addition to how these are received and critical inquiries into the fields. The project focuses in particular upon cultural circulations of normative and counter-normative performances of intimacy and sexuality.

Across a range of genres, literature and visual culture plays a decisive part in the development of representational trends that are crucial in the construction and contemporary conceptions of self, intimacy and sexuality: sexualization and reality-trend/documentarism (Gamson 1998, Jerslev 2004, Mühleisen 2003). Issues of identity, autobiographical aspects, gender, body and sexuality are also closely interrelated to form and content in the art field (Gade 2005, Amelia 1998). The art field and literature negotiates and transgresses conventional norms and ethics of intimacy and sexuality, such as the apparent breakdown of boundaries between the private and the public (in representations about queer sexualities, non-conventional performativities of gender and body, non-monogamous/non-romantic intimacy and sexuality, etc). These interventions are part of the critical, conceptual and contextual concerns of the field. Therefore transgressions are often perceived as problematizing, subversive or political. Popular genres in literature focus on similar themes and trends and are often perceived as a problem under the headings of intimization, sexualization (pornographization) and commercialization (McNair 2002, Arthurs 2004). In addition, the performative elements in literature and art are suited for an investigation into how the
performativity of gender, intimacy and sexuality is played out in these fields (Fischer-Lichte 2004, Jerslev and Gade 2005).

**Strand 2**

This strand plans to investigate Norwegian literature and films in the period from the mid 1990s to the present day. International literature or films that have had any important impact on the ongoing debates in Norway may also be relevant material. Since the focus of the project is not aesthetization as such but the meeting point between the aesthetic and the social, the reception of and critical inquiries into the literature will be used in the study. It will also be of special interest for this study to look particularly at the performance of masculinities in literature and film and public debates around gender and masculinities in the chosen documents, not least because there has been a preoccupation with masculinities in Norwegian fiction and documentary films and literature over the past decade. Books by authors like Erlend Loe, Lars Ramslie, Carl Frode Tiller, Vigdis Hjorth, Eirik Ingebrigtsen and Dag Solstad, and films such as Den brysomme mannens, Sønner, Salmer fra kjøkkenet, Alt om min far, Jenter and Pornostjerne will be examined.

Since the 1990s, there has been a growing critical interest in families in Norwegian literature. Young authors like Ørstavik, Ramslie, Renberg and others rooted their novels in reflections upon functional and dysfunctional families as a way of reformulating new forms of intimacies. This trend was followed up in Norwegian films like Buddy, United, Detektor and others. While this new interest in families was widely debated a few years ago (Hverven 1999), there was almost no debate about the parallel negotiations around new forms of sexuality, intimacy, friendship and romantic love in the same material. This aesthetic reformulation and different performances of art of existence and ways of being together mould and reshape our modern culture and are an important part of the circulation of ideas of intimacy that create new practices among young people.

**Strand 3**

This strand represents a critical field analysis of theoretical discourses on intimacies and sexualities in Norwegian/Nordic research on gender, gender equality and sexuality. The analysis will cover studies of research in both humanities and social science the last to decades.

The Nordic context is based on the model of the Nordic welfare state with gender equality, state feminism and in the last decade inclusion of men in research and gender equality politics. Which theoretical discourses and debates on intimacies and sexualities exist within Norwegian/Nordic research? Where are the theoretical and thematic frontlines and how do researchers negotiate the specific Nordic context? What types of differences and antagonism do this research field struggle with, and how is power versus counter power positioned in the field? The strand will also look for “silent areas” within intimacies and sexualities in the Norwegian/Nordic research.

**Strand 4**

This strand plans to investigate how contemporary discourses in Norway since the 1990s regarding personal life are constituted and politicized in counter-publics and how they are met with acceptance or resistance by the mainstream media/public. This project will place the discussion in the field of social theory about the public sphere and discussions about intimate public and citizenship (Berlant 2000, Priest 1995, Plummer 2003). Examples of counter-publics that politicize new forms of personal life in Norway are the monthly gay interest magazine Blikk and the feminist magazine Fett, and blogs and web-communities like Underskog, Femaile bonding and Dagens onde kvinner. The project will investigate a
sample of these counter-publics as well as dominant strands of debates on the legitimacy of changing intimacies and sexualities in the main national newspapers. In addition, a sample of advisory columns about intimacy and sexuality from the national newspapers will indicate contemporary hegemonic understandings of personal life.

New interpretations of intimacy and sexuality, negotiations of practices, values and ethics will often first arise in counter-public spheres and popular genres correspondent to ongoing cultural and social changes (Fraser 1992, Warner 2002). Some of these new discourses of personal life become assimilated and translated into legitimate public virtues by the mainstream media. In Norwegian public debate, we can identify intense negotiations about changes in personal life especially related to intimacy, sexuality, gender and feminism and these debates increasingly lay down the premise for what is politicized (Dahlerup 2004). Current negotiations are related to sexualization/pornographization, rights of homosexuals (same-sex marriage, adoption), adultery, gender equality, the singles-culture, feminist sexual politics and sexual ethics/practices that break with Nordic/western conventions.

**Strand 5**

This strand focuses on Norwegian television since the mid 1990s. The project sets out to conduct discourse analysis and visual analysis of a sample of Norwegian television programmes in the genres like fiction, reality-tv and docu-fiction/documentary. The project focuses in particular upon cultural circulations of normative and counter-normative performances of intimacy and sexuality.

Across a range of genres, television plays a decisive part in the development of representational trends that are crucial in the construction and contemporary conceptions of self, intimacy and sexuality: sexualization and reality-trend/documentarism (Gamson 1998, Jerslev 2004, Mühleisen 2003). Issues of identity, autobiographical aspects, gender, body and sexuality are also closely interrelated to form and content. Television negotiates and transgresses conventional norms and ethics of intimacy and sexuality, such as the apparent breakdown of boundaries between the private and the public. Television focuses on themes and trends that are often perceived as a problem under the headings of intimization, sexualization (pornographization) and commercialization (McNair 2002, Arthurs 2004). The performative elements in television are especially suited for an investigation into how the performativity of gender, intimacy and sexuality is played out in these fields (Fischer-Lichte 2004, Jerslev and Gade 2005).

**Strand 6**

This strand aims to make a major Nordic contribution to international theoretical debates on intimacy and sexuality, and it is vital to have research time to do this. For this reason we apply for one more year to be able to synthesize the five other strands and to ensure that the project is more than the sum of its parts. In strand 6, the two lead researchers will write a more explicit theoretical book and publish it internationally. There are two main rationales for this. Firstly, the combination of the Nordic social welfare model and inclusions of feminist ideas in state policy and the participation of men in gender equality create a specific gendered discourse around intimacy and sexuality. There is a need to develop theory from a Nordic social and cultural perspective and to have dialogue with international theory and research on these matters. Secondly, there is a need for research from the humanities and the theoretical understanding of discourses, representations and the circulation of pleasure and desire to enter the debate on new forms of intimacy and sexuality. With five strands going into forms of intimacy in a range of media, we will build enough empirical knowledge to broaden and deepen the humanities’ participation in this theoretical debate.
5. Organisation of the project

Project management - a contribution from the research environment

The Centre for Gender Research (STK) at the University of Oslo is the largest gender studies research environment in Norway, and is well known for its research into gender and modernity and into gender and family, intimacy and sexuality. The Centre represents a solid scientific platform on which to build a research project on new forms of intimacy and sexuality. Two of the centre’s other main research areas are multiculturalism and the socialization of boys and girls, and both will add substantial theoretical and methodological knowledge to the project.

The project is administered by STK and will be directed by Jørgen Lorentzen (STK) and Wencke Mühleisen (UiS). STK has qualified experience in administering large research projects, and Mühleisen and Lorentzen have been in gender research for many years and both have experience of managing large projects. Lorentzen/Mühleisen have also worked together for many years, among other things they edited the first Nordic interdisciplinary introduction to gender studies. STK is used to housing Ph.D. candidates and will offer them very good conditions, both academically and practically. STK is a part of the Nordic Research School in Interdisciplinary Gender Studies, which continuously organizes Nordic Ph.D. courses, and STK itself also frequently offers Ph.D. courses.

The University of Stavanger (UiS) has established their own network to focus on gender research. From spring 2008 associate professor Wencke Mühleisen is employed at UiS as head of this network. One of her main tasks is to found gender research at UiS. It is therefore important to draw on already established experience on research and competence within this area. This project will thus be used to support the gender research environment at UiS through linking research, teaching and guidance at UiS and STK. One important part is that the PhD student (strand 5) will be located to UiS, as a part of building up gender research activities at UiS.

National and international cooperation

Being together will establish cooperation with some key national and international researchers on gender. So far there is an established partnership with two other institutions/projects in Norway (both financed by the Norwegian Research Council): Gender in the Boardroom being conducted by the Department of Interdisciplinary Studies of Culture at the University of Trondheim and When the personal became political being conducted by the Stein Rokkan Centre for Social Studies at the University of Bergen. Internationally, cooperation has been established with Prof. Lauren Berlant of the Department of English, University of Chicago and Director of the Lesbian and Gay Studies Project, Center for Gender Studies, University of Chicago, Prof. Sasha Roseneil and Prof. Lynne Segal from the University of London, Birkbeck College and Ass. Prof. Rune Gade from Department of Art and Cultural Science, University of Copenhagen (see letters from partners for more detailed information).

These partners will open up possibilities for theoretical and methodological comparisons as well as cross-cultural comparisons of empirical findings, and they will cover different dimensions of necessary input for the project: historical, social, cultural and aesthetic.
It will be important for the project to establish and maintain a dialogue between the different partners throughout the project, but especially at two international workshops (2009 and 2010). These seminars will encourage discussions of literature, data and analysis. The seminars will also involve Masters students. There will be especially close co-operation with the University of London, with the exchange of Ph.D. students and researchers as well as of comparative analyses results. This will strengthen the unity of the project since Sasha Roseneil from Birkbeck College is Prof. II at SKK and because *Gender in the Boardroom* has already established cooperation with Prof. Lynne Segal at the same College. This will be an advantage for this project too.

The Centre has moreover extensive international contacts with distinguished researchers within the area and establishing a Nordic/European network in this field will be an important part of the project.

6. References


Boyd, Danah, 2006 'Friends, friendster, Top 8: Writing community into being on social network sites', in First Monday, Volume 11, number 12, December.


