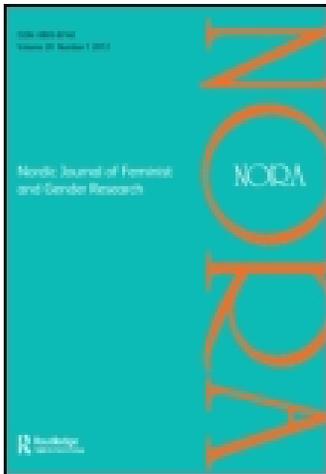


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Klara Arnberg^a

^a Department of Economic History , Stockholm University , Stockholm , Sweden

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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

For Men, by Men? Women's Business Activities in the Pornographic Press Compared to the Overall Publishing Industry in Sweden 1950–1972¹

KLARA ARNBERG

Department of Economic History, Stockholm University, Stockholm, Sweden

ABSTRACT *This article focuses on women's business positions in Swedish porn publishing from the 1950s to the 1970s, i.e. when pornography was legalized and when sexually explicit magazines made their commercial breakthrough. The research draws on statistical information on women's entrepreneurial roles in the overall publishing industry, which is then compared with women's agency in porn publishing. According to the findings, women seem to have had a slightly more central role in pornography than within the mainstream publishing industry. The analysis is also expanded with details about a few key female pornography entrepreneurs, tracing their publications and business strategies connected to the Freedom of the Press legislation. It is argued that women's presence in pornographic print and in the overall publishing industry were in fact similar, with a high ratio of family businesses. Women's entrepreneurship in pornography thus followed a more general historical pattern whereby women engaged in small-scale business with relatively low barriers to entry.*

Since the commercial breakthrough of mass-produced, legal pornography in the 1970s, the issues of pornography's gender implications and its possible regulation have been battlefields within Western feminism. An often-repeated statement has been that pornography is produced for men, by men (e.g. Hardy 1998: 49; Kimmel 2005: 65; cf. Larsson 2007). By asserting that pornography is a male genre (symbolically and in terms of control), feminists have made strong and important claims about the gender inequalities involved in pornographic production and consumption (cf. Rubin 1984:

Correspondence Address: Klara Arnberg PhD., Department of Economic History, Stockholm University, S-106 91 Stockholm, Sweden. Email: klara.arnberg@ekohist.su.se

307–308; Ross 2000). By studying businesswomen in early Swedish pornographic print, the historical accuracy of the notion of a male-controlled pornography industry is questioned in this article. A comparison is made with women's representation in the overall Swedish publishing industry, as sole proprietors, on boards, and as Chief executive officers (CEOs) in limited companies, to see if women were actually under-represented in these power positions in pornographic printing. The article shows that a number of women played important entrepreneurial roles in making pornography a mass-market commodity by challenging the obscenity regulations before the 1971 decriminalization of pornographic publishing in Sweden.

After Denmark (1969), Sweden was the first country in the world to fully legalize pornographic publishing. From the late 1960s onward, however, the Swedish pornographic press was relatively extensive and sexually explicit. Although Sweden was considered one of the leading porn producers during the 1960s and 1970s, the Swedish pornographic press mainly consisted of small companies during this “golden age of porn” (Arnberg 2010: 286, 298). As I will argue in this article, women's porn entrepreneurship followed a more general historical pattern whereby women engage in small-scale business with relatively low barriers to entry. The historical presence of women pornographers must therefore be analysed in relation to women's entrepreneurship and economic power in general.

Gender-historical aspects of business

Historical research on women's entrepreneurship and business activities in general stresses that historical gender difference in this field is a result of both formal restrictions in, for example, property and civil rights, and informal restrictions such as gendered norms. While formal restrictions have been removed over time, informal restrictions and economic inequalities have remained (Scott 1998: 246; Svanström 2003). For both men and women, self-employment has been used as a subsistence strategy during times of unemployment. Women have also sometimes chosen self-employment as a strategy for avoiding gender discrimination and other gender inequalities in the labour market. Combining work and family duties has often been easier for self-employed women than for women who were employees. As in labour, the division between different sectors has been clearly gendered, although the gendering of many sectors has changed over time. Men have generally been more mobile between sectors following fluctuations in profits, structural change, and opportunities, whereas women have been more reluctant to leave their sector and take risks. Mostly, women have also run smaller businesses than men, with fewer employees. Self-employed women have historically often been found in work-intensive, low-paid, and seasonal sectors where the level of formal training needed was low. Women have also had a harder time financing their business ideas (Göransson 1993; Svanström 2003; Andersson-Skog 2007; Nordlund 2008; Svanlund 2011).

Entrepreneurship and business leadership have been coded as masculine in Sweden and elsewhere. Nevertheless, as well as a few individually successful female business leaders, such as Sophia Gummaelius (1840–1915) who started the first advertising firm in Sweden, or Estrid Ericson (1894–1981) who founded the furniture and decorating store *Svenskt Tenn*, women have often acted behind the scenes in leading

companies as wives or daughters, sometimes with significant influence (Göransson 1993; Svanström 2003; Hedenborg & Wikander 2003: 96–97; Nilson 2009: 290–291). Subsisting through self-employment and other entrepreneurship involving employees has, however, been marginal compared to waged work in Sweden. In the late 1970s, three-quarters of the self-employed had no employees, making sole proprietorship by far the most common form of entrepreneurship (Göransson 1993). During the twentieth century, the levels of women's self-employment decreased from the 1940s to the 1970s and then increased again to a quite stable level from the 1990s onwards (Andersson-Skog 2007; Svanlund, forthcoming).

There are different definitions of the term entrepreneurship. Within economic theory it is commonly understood as introducing something new to the market, such as new products, working methods, materials, or organizational forms, following Joseph Schumpeter's theoretical framework (Schumpeter 1934). This kind of entrepreneurship theory focuses on the interaction between the individual businessperson and economic change, picturing entrepreneurs as engines of economic change and growth in the process of competitive "creative destruction". Theories on entrepreneurship have been criticized for lacking empirical grounds and being gender-biased, i.e. tacitly characterizing the entrepreneur as a (white, middle-class, and Western) man, largely independent of his social environment (Ahl 2004; cf. Peiss 2001; Lindgren & Packendorff 2007). Women entrepreneurs have accordingly been both marginalized and made invisible in entrepreneurship research (Holmquist & Sundin 2002). In this article, some businesswomen will become visible, while the term entrepreneur is used in the Schumpeterian sense to distinguish between entrepreneurs and the self-employed in general (cf. Scott 1998: 247–248).

The notion of a particularly male genre

One might wonder why it has been more important to state that pornography is male than that other genres are. Supposedly, this has to do with the claim that pornography, more than other media genres, contributes to the (sexual) subordination of women (e.g. Dworkin 1985, 1993), that it is central to our culture (Kipnis 1996: 161), or that it is one of the most popular gendered discourses constructing sexuality in Western societies (Williams 1989; Weeks 1991: 91–96). Historical research on pornography often focuses on its changing character, both in terms of content and discourse (i.e. what has been meant by the term pornography) (e.g. Kendrick 1987; Hunt 1993: 11). Although, historically, pornography has sometimes challenged authority, sexual norms, and regulations, it has also been a powerful yet unstable and changeable discourse about sexuality in itself (cf. Weeks 1991; Meyerowitz 1996).

If pornography has been strongly influential in the conception of possible sexual practices and identities, the control over pornographic publishing (and film-making) can be considered an important power position. Since women's organizations have often worked against pornography, and since its availability has historically been restricted beyond male upper-class circles, the consumption of pornography has generally been coded as masculine and the resistance to it as feminine in public discourse (cf. Meyerowitz 1996; Isaksson 2007; Larsson 2007; Arnberg 2010).

However, some scholars have questioned the apparent predestination of the fact that the women's movements eventually came to oppose pornography. Before the 1970s, magazines such as *Playboy* often took a progressive stance when it came to topics like abortion and contraceptives, and Swedish sex films of the 1960s and 1970s, just like the "new women's movement", often advocated women's sexual pleasure (Schaefer 2005: 7; Pitzulo 2008; Larsson 2010; cf. Isaksson 2007; Arnberg 2009). Within the Swedish women's movement of the 1970s, however, pornography came to be framed as the worst and most significant form of the oppression of women in patriarchal and capitalist societies both in its production, where young, working-class women were exploited, and in upholding patriarchal ideology through its product (Isaksson 2007; Arnberg 2010; Larsson 2010).

During the period studied in this article, however, pornography was largely debated in gender-neutral terms. In the extensive debates about filth literature and porn magazines during the 1950s, Christian and conservative debaters argued that consumption would paradoxically lead to either sexually aggressive behaviour or to enervation. The concern was mainly that young people would abandon the values of "real" love and (heterosexual) marriage and that secular society would lose its morals and become over-sexualized (Arnberg 2010; cf. Friedman 2003). This was the position that the 1960s sex-radicals argued against when they advocated free abortions, better sex education in schools, and a deregulation of pornography (Lennerhed 1994). Some of them argued that the quality of pornography would be improved by deregulation and that women would therefore increase their consumption (e.g. Silbersky & Nordmark 1969). As Maria Larsson (2007) has argued, this reflected problematic ideas of gender differences where female (hetero)sexuality was viewed as more sensitive, complex, and cultivated than the rough male version. Larsson also stresses that women have been used in legitimizing pornography both now and during the 1960s: if they liked it, it would not be as problematic (cf. Juffer 1998: 172–175).

Female pornography producers and directors have been a part of the feminist pornography debates since the late 1970s and 1980s "sex wars", as both participants in and the subjects of discussion and theorizing (cf. Williams 1989: 246–264; Royalle 1993; Straayer 1993; Williams 1993; Juffer 1998). These women have been seen as exceptions breaking male dominance within the porn industry, often from a feminist or queer perspective. They have thus been held up as examples and as proof that pornography as a genre can change, but they have also highlighted contemporary masculine and heterosexual norms within pornography and other cultural representations (e.g. Conway 1997; Ryberg 2012).

Unlike pornographers, ordinary publishers are often portrayed as idealistically driven, innovative, and creative business leaders (e.g. Gustafsson & Rydén 2001: 13–17). With their strong connection to the central democratic principle of Freedom of the Press, publishers have also been described as a sort of democratic entrepreneurs. Partly because publishing pornography has been criminal, pornographers, on the other hand, have been seen as villains driven by their desire for profit but still forerunners in adopting new technology (Lane 2000; Peiss 2001: 17–18; Paasonen et al. 2007). Both mainstream and pornographic publishers are

commonly described as having entrepreneurial roles, where the former are viewed as heroic and the latter impudent.

Since both pornographers and entrepreneurship in general have been coded as masculine, female pornography entrepreneurs can in this context be seen as a twofold anomaly, further rigidifying the notion of pornography as a male industry.

Method, sources, and definitions

The material used in this article to measure the overall publishing industry derives from Gendered Entrepreneurship Research Data (GERD), based on the Swedish business censuses (*Företagsräkningarna*). The Swedish business censuses used here were carried out in 1951 and in 1972 and include (with a few exceptions of certain industries) all business entities operating in the respective year. The enterprises included in the censuses were found with guidance from business and tax registers (SCB 1951, 1972). Since the data used in this study were collected by starting from the enterprise rather than from individuals' livelihood questionnaires, the underestimation of women's business activities in the Swedish population and housing censuses, which have otherwise been used to study women's entrepreneurship, can be avoided (cf. Sundin & Holmberg 1989; Nyberg 2005). The firms analysed here are those that declared publishing as their main business activity.

For the pornographic press, a compilation of such publishers has been used (Arnberg 2010: Appendix II). This compilation is based on the "locked collection" in the Swedish National Library, the monopoly-positioned distribution firm *Pressbyrån's* register of pornographic magazines, the Swedish Register of Periodicals and magazines that were objects of prosecution due to obscene content (cf. Arnberg 2010: 40–43). The definition of pornography used in the compilation is thus, briefly, whatever the library deemed pornographic when it was received, whatever the distribution company deemed pornographic when it was distributed, and whatever the Chancellor of Justice found pornographic enough to be prosecuted. This definition makes pornography a variable concept that changes over time, and means that some of the magazines published by the firms studied here might not be considered pornographic by a contemporary consumer.

When it comes to limited companies (Swedish: *aktiebolag*), the measurement of female business activity is of a more complex nature than for the sole proprietors (measured by names and personal numbers indicating gender). One could measure female ownership, female board membership, or the number of female managing directors (cf. Svanström 2003). In this article, the two last-mentioned are measured to see if women were main business leaders (acting both as members of the board and as CEOs) or if they had minor influence (sitting on the board together with men).

Since both the business census and the compilation of pornographic firms lacks information on gender for limited companies, the data have been supplemented with gender information for CEO positions and board membership from the Swedish Patent and Registration Office (*PRV*) and the Swedish Companies Registrations Office (*Bolagsverket*). From these sources, family ties have also been measured using surnames. Probably, this slightly underestimates family firms, especially when it comes to married daughters on the boards. In one case, such an error has been

corrected using information from a secondary source (Storn 2005). There may also be some errors due to common surnames being shared without any real family connection.

Qualitative material on individual pornographers is scarce, except in cases where they were prosecuted (cf. Peiss 2001: 18). On the other hand, some of the police investigation material offers insights into the business of pornography. It is, however, important to take into account that the information is based on statements made under interrogation for a crime that could theoretically lead to imprisonment.² In the last part of the article, a qualitative analysis is made of this interrogation material. The material is restricted due to secrecy concerning personal data. Therefore, personal names will not be used. In the last part, a few examples of porn magazines have also been studied as well as the press debate on specific Freedom of the Press cases.

The overall publishing industry

The Swedish press and publishing industry is historically characterized by family businesses, with the Bonnier family as the leading actor (Karlsson Stider 1999; Gustafsson 2002). From a gender perspective, the family ownership model is quite complex. On the one hand, a family business can give women both formal and informal power at the top of the business structure. On the other hand, the transition of power and training for leadership within families has often followed a father-to-son pattern, excluding women from the power heritage (Göransson 1993: 14; Svanström 2003; Martinez Jimenez 2009). A clear-cut division between editorial and economic power has also characterized the Swedish publishing industry. This means that the owner of a publishing company does not usually have power over the media content, at least not in a direct way (Djerf-Pierre 2007: 141).

For 1951 there are only limited pooled data (Table 1) about the overall publishing industry concerning sole proprietorship, but it still reveals something about gender difference.

The table shows that women constituted a minority of the sole proprietor publishers, although there seem to have been some female family members behind the scenes (cf. Karlsson Stider 1999). The proportion of women is also low in comparison with the overall self-employment rate, where women constituted 19% of all self-employed people in 1950 (Andersson-Skog 2007: 464). Women were also in a minority when it came to employees. It is worth noting, however, that the 1950s are sometimes seen as the only “housewife period” in Swedish history, since post-war growth and prosperity made it possible for women to stay at home within the framework of a male breadwinner norm (Florin & Nilsson 2000: 25–41; Hedenborg & Wikander 2003: 107–109; Stanfors 2007: 72–117), even if this norm itself has clearly also affected the labour statistics, which have tended to underestimate women’s work and should be used with caution (Nyberg 2005). The small proportion of women in the publishing industry work-force at this time is therefore not surprising but is in fact just above average. Table 1 only accounts for sole proprietors, however, and does not say anything about publishing companies organized as limited companies. As a comparison, only 7% of the firms registered in the Swedish Industry Association’s

Table 1. Sole proprietorship in the Swedish publishing industry 1951.

Number of sole proprietors	Women sole proprietors	Proportion of women	Family workers	Female family workers	Proportion of female family workers	Total number of employees	Women employees	Proportion of female employees
185	22	11.4%	31	20	65%	21,017	5,922	28%

Source: Gendered Entrepreneurship Research Data (GERD), compilation of sole proprietors who reported their main activity to be newspaper and magazine business with printing (*Tidningsverksamhet komb med tryckerier*), newspaper and magazine business without printing (*Tidningsverksamhet ej komb med tryckerier*), publishing business with printing (*Förlagsverksamhet komb med tryckerier*), and publishing business without printing (*Förlagsverksamhet ej komb med tryckerier*) to the Swedish Business Census (*Företagsräkningen*) 1951.

Table 2. Sole proprietorship in the Swedish publishing industry 1972.

	Number of sole proprietors	Proportion	Total turnover (SEK)	Proportion	Total profit before appropriations and taxes (SEK)	Proportion
Women	24	23%	1,147,000	10%	384,000	19%
Men	79	77%	10,044,000	90%	1,647,000	81%
Total	103	100%	11,191,000	100%	2,031,000	100%

Source: GERD.

industry calendar (*Industrikalendern*) as being in the business of pulp, paper, paper products, publishing, or printing in 1953 had at least one woman on their boards (Svanström 2003: Table 2: 2).³

In 1972 the publishing industry consisted of 103 sole proprietors and 380 limited companies. As Table 2 shows, one can observe that the proportion of women as sole proprietors had increased since 1951, constituting 23% in 1972. This development was in direct contrast to the overall trend, where the proportion of women in self-employment had decreased from 19% in 1950 to only 12% in 1970 (Andersson-Skog 2007: 464; Svanlund 2011: 48–51).

As Table 2 shows, women sole proprietors generally ran smaller companies, with an average turnover of about 48,000 SEK, compared to male-run companies at ca. 127,000 SEK. Men also generally made more profit, with an average of 21,000 SEK compared to women's profit of 16,000 SEK. It is worth stressing, however, that individual differences were vast, with total turnover ranging from 0 to 252,000 SEK for women and from 0 to 1,580,000 SEK for men (GERD, sole proprietorship publishing 1972).

Table 3 shows board memberships and CEO positions in Swedish limited publishing companies in 1972. The table gives a general picture of the gendered power relations in the publishing industry, indicating a relatively strong male dominance. In comparison with the gender pattern of sole proprietorship, women had weaker power positions in the limited companies. When more data are measured than just the share of female-controlled companies, this picture is further strengthened, with 91% of the total turnover coming from all-male companies and only 0.3% from all-female ones. This difference did not match the work intensity, however, even if larger companies such as the male ones seem to have generated more hours worked in the company.

Table 3 shows that 75% of the companies had men in control on the board and as CEOs, representing 93% of total turnover, even if some of the female family deputy members could sign for the companies themselves.

When sole proprietors and limited companies' leadership are measured together, a similar pattern appears, with only 8% (Categories: Women as CEO, male family deputy member and Women) of the companies mainly controlled by women in 1972 (Figure 1).

The conclusion can thus be drawn that the publishing industry in general was male-dominated in terms of sole proprietorship, board membership, and CEO positions.

Table 3. Limited publishing companies 1972.

Gender	Number of Companies	Proportion	Total turnover (1,000 SEK)	Proportion	Number of hours worked, average	Proportion
Men	218	57%	1,151,499	91%	52,128	64%
Man as CEO, female family deputy member	67	18%	22,752	2%	5,318	7%
Mixed	71	19%	77,078	6%	15,614	19%
Woman as CEO, male family deputy member	4	1%	827	0.1%	1,763	2%
Women	11	3%	3,673	0.3%	3,036	4%
n/a	9	2%	4,959	0.4%	3,646	4%
Total	380	100%	1,260,788	100%	81,505	100%

Sources: Swedish Patent and Registration Office Archive, Companies Register (series D1AA, D1ABB, and D1ABC); Swedish Companies Registrations Office, excerpts from the companies register; GERD. Women/men with the same surname as the director have been counted as family members.

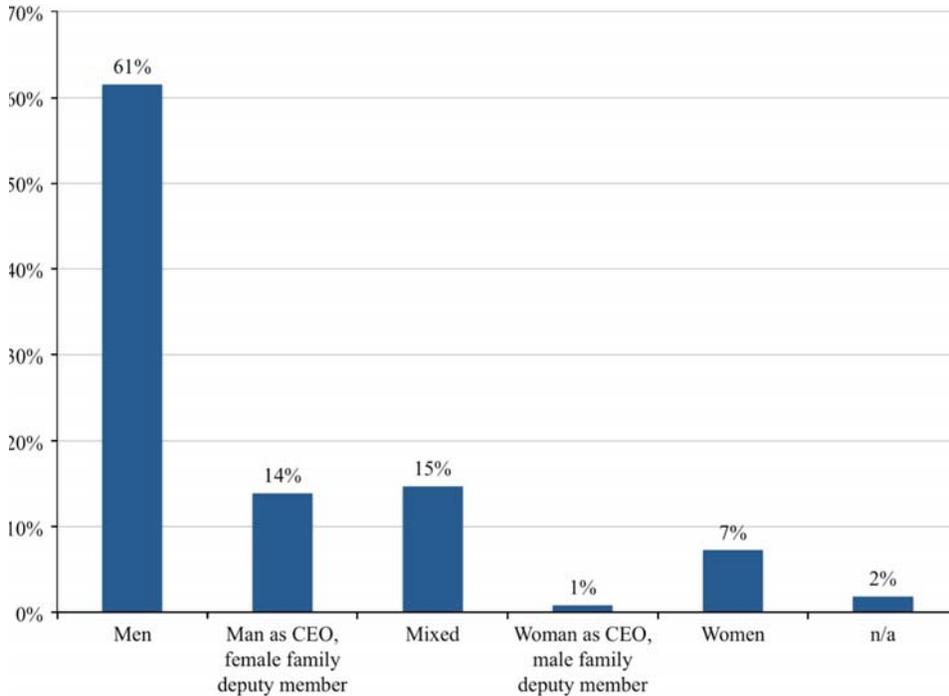


Figure 1. Swedish publishing companies 1972 by gender of sole proprietors, CEOs, or board members. Sources: Swedish Patent and Registration Office Archive, Companies Register (series D1AA, D1ABB, and D1ABC); Swedish Companies Registrations Office, excerpts from the companies register; GERD. Family membership is measured by surnames.

Male dominance was also high in relation to the overall self-employment pattern in Sweden. In addition, male-controlled companies generally had larger turnovers and were slightly more work-intensive than female-led ones. In the material studied here, one can trace some of the women behind the scenes as family members, deputy members, or women sitting on the boards with the power to sign for the companies. Women (as well as other men) may also have had entrepreneurial positions within the companies that are not shown here.

The pornographic press

Just like the overall publishing industry, the pornographic press was male-dominated. When measured over time, women only represented a small share of the publishers (see Figure 2).

Even though a majority of the pornography companies were run by men (i.e. the categories *Men* and *Man* as CEO, female family member as deputy member), women were in leading positions in the industry from its early days, both as female deputy members and as CEOs. As a comparison, estimates of the overall proportion of self-employed women in Sweden were 19% in 1950, 17% in 1960, and 12% in 1970 (SCB, *The Housing and Population Census 1960*; Andersson-Skog 2007; cf. Svanlund, forthcoming). When tracing all the individuals sitting on the boards, working as deputy members or as sole proprietors in pornographic press companies, the pornographers consisted of 97 individuals during this period (1950–1972), of whom 22 (23%) were women. Compared to the overall publishing industry in 1972, the proportion of women in the pornographic press seems to have been somewhat larger, with 11% of women or women CEOs with male family deputy member and 14% of mixed companies (compared to 8% and 15% in the industry overall, see Figure 1).⁴

Figure 2 also shows some trends. Just as in the ordinary publishing industry, porn-publishing companies were initially primarily run as family businesses. Even though female business leadership increased until 1968, the massive growth in the 1960s primarily consisted of male-controlled companies. Another trend is that mixed companies, i.e. with board members of both genders with no family connection and with equal power positions (in terms of being able to sign for the company), increased from the beginning of the 1960s until 1972. In contrast, the share of companies run as family businesses with both male and female CEOs decreased towards the end of the period.

The reasons for this masculinization process and the move away from family businesses can be examined at different levels. Firstly, it might possibly be explained by a change in the pornographic product. If misogynistic content were necessary to make a pornographic magazine profitable, maybe women would be less attracted to enter the industry and start new magazines. However, studies carried out on content do not support a clear misogynistic trend during the late 1960s, even though the magazines became increasingly sexually explicit (Arnberg 2009, 2010; cf. Peiss 2001).

Another way to explain the changes in gendered business activities is to refer to the general trends in women's entrepreneurship from a historical perspective. If the same trends were visible in other industries, these changes would only be part of a general pattern. Both female and male self-employment was, however, decreasing during this

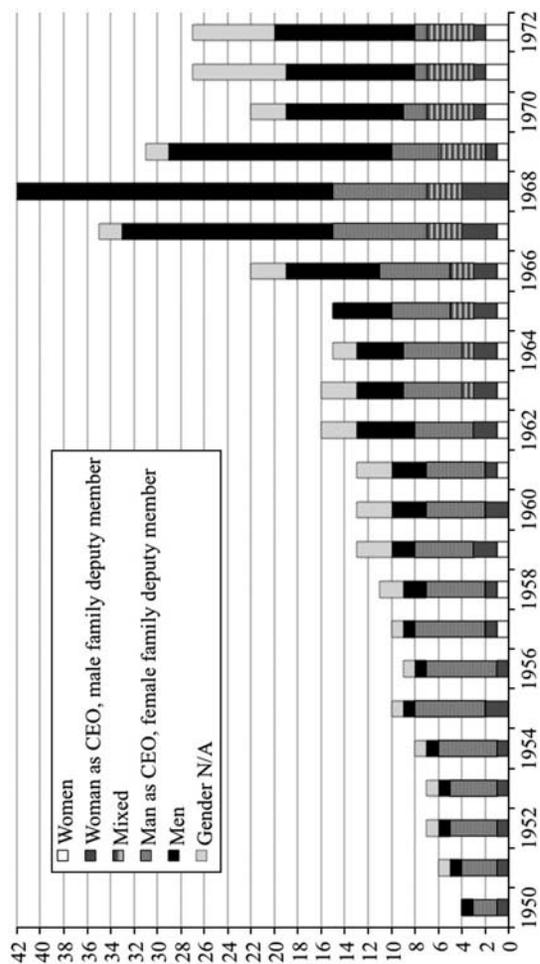


Figure 2. Swedish pornographic press companies 1950–1972. Sources: Arnberg (2010): Appendix II; Gender-specific data from Swedish National Archives, Swedish Patent and Registration Office Archive, Companies Register (series DIAA, DIABB, and DIABC); Chancellor of Justice Archives; Stockholm and Gothenburg County Administration Business Register (*Handelsregistret*); Storn (2005). Family membership is measured by surnames.

period in Sweden, but at different rates; hence, women represented a decreasing proportion of the self-employed (Svanlund, forthcoming). This general trend, together with men's historical behavioural pattern of higher mobility between sectors could be one explanation for the masculinization of the pornographic press, which was constantly being depicted as lucrative during the late 1960s (cf. Göransson 1993; Arnberg 2010). Since, historically, women have often engaged in small business for their own livelihood rather than to expand into big business, the growth of the industry and increasing competition might thus have attracted men rather than women and transformed family businesses into larger, male-based constellations. Related factors, of course, are technical changes, regulating the amount of initial capital needed to start a viable enterprise. When magazines began to compete with four-colour printing in the late 1960s, for example, making a profitable magazine certainly became more expensive (cf. Arnberg 2012).

Pornography entrepreneurs?

To home in on women pornographers, the following section analyses some of their business strategies within the frame of the regulatory settings.

One example of how women acted as deputy members can be taken from the early days of one of the largest pornography companies, *Hsonproduktion*. The wife of the director, Curth Hson Nilsson (1924–1988), was amongst the first to try to escape legal punishment through the method of hiring a “dummy” as legally responsible for a magazine. She contacted a distant relative, who was an old woman, and asked her if she would be legally responsible. The relative had few resources, she later told the police, and therefore accepted that her name would be in the magazine in exchange for a monthly payment. The relative claimed that she was used as a “front” for the company; she was not able to review the magazine beforehand, and she was not a partner. The court found it wrong to consider the relative as legally responsible, and therefore Mr Nilsson was fined for the magazine content (Chancellor of Justice Archives, main archive, EIIIa 1956: 1982, 1989).

The reason for hiring a “dummy” to be legally responsible was not only to escape the risk of imprisonment or remarks in the police files, but also to get lower fines, since these were based on the person's income. In this case, Mr and Mrs Nilsson⁵ did not succeed, but later it became a common approach when pornographers challenged the pornography laws (Arnberg 2012). Mrs Nilsson seems to have been active in the company and the instigator behind this specific tactic. Later, after her divorce from Mr Nilsson in 1958, she also started her own company (Pigalle), publishing both pornographic magazines and books.

The former Mrs Nilsson was later prosecuted for the content of the magazine *Qvinna* (Woman), published by her own company. When *Stockholmstidningen*, a Social Democratic morning paper based in Stockholm, interviewed her about the use of pictures of nude women in the magazine that supposedly might be alluring to readers with “abnormal emotional lives”⁶ and to youth, she replied:

All women are provocative, with or without clothes. Why shouldn't these women allure men? If they did not, it would be a fraud to take 5 SEK for it. (*Stockholmstidningen* 28 November 1963)⁷

This statement might have been a comment on the fact that some people found both the women in her magazine and the former Mrs Nilsson herself provocative. She also stressed that *Qvinna* readers were mainly gentlemen seeking elegance but not filth, relating to the common understanding that pornography was a threat to (male) youth: “Young people have the girls in their cars and in their hands; they don’t read things like this”,⁸ she claimed (ibid.). By emphasizing that youngsters already had amorous relationships, she also drew upon the contemporary understanding that pornography was a substitute for love and sexual relations, thus making it unnecessary for anyone who was not lonely. The former Mrs Nilsson’s statement in *Stockholmstidningen* also bears witness to the content of the magazines: pictures of nude women. Before the end of the 1960s, this was commonplace in pornographic magazines, and the pictures were often bought from foreign countries, usually France. This was the case in *Qvinna*, and in the same article the former Mrs Nilsson’s lawyer also stressed the legal problems with it:

Here is a picture of a nude girl in a magazine not subject to prosecution. The same girl in the same pose occurs in the magazine prosecuted today. Why is she criminally obscene in one picture and not in the other? And how is a publisher supposed to determine that? (*Stockholmstidningen* 28 November 1963)⁹

Comparing magazines not subject to prosecution with the ones under prosecution, or comparing magazines to uncensored films containing scenes of nudity and sexual intercourse, such as Vilgot Sjöman’s *I am Curious Yellow* (1967), was later used by other lawyers defending pornographers (Silbersky & Normark 1969). The former Mrs Nilsson was, however, fined for the images in *Qvinna*, and the issue was confiscated. She went to the Court of Appeal, but to no avail, and she received no recognition from the Supreme Court (Chancellor of Justice Archives, EIIIa 1963: 200).

The most important female pornographer was, however, a young woman from Malmö. She took over two publishing companies, *Bokförlaget Folket* and *Firma Berwe*, from her parents in the 1950s and continued to run them with her mother for some years. The young woman was prosecuted for the content of the magazine *Ögat* (The Eye) several times during the 1960s, and the magazine was denied distribution by *Pressbyrå*, a firm owned by the joint Swedish press and thus with a monopoly position on national distribution. If the number of interventions made by the authorities and the Advisory Board of the Press controlling *Pressbyrå*’s distribution is anything to go by, *Ögat* was the most distracting and provocative magazine of the early 1960s. When *Pressbyrå* refused to distribute *Ögat*, the Malmö woman engaged two retailers on commission for private distribution. Later, others who also wanted to sell more sexually explicit magazines than *Pressbyrå* allowed used this distribution channel too, and the Berwe distribution network was also used by one of the international pornographic distribution firms (Chancellor of Justice Archives, EIIIa 1960: 43, 48, 70; 1963: 142). This kind of strategy was a nightmare for the politicians, who had hoped for self-regulation by the press via *Pressbyrå*, instead of politically sensitive Freedom of the Press proceedings (cf. Arnberg 2012). The Malmö woman thus played an important role in challenging the distribution system in the

short run, and the legal system regulating pornography in the long run. Berwe was also early in producing magazines for export. Out of the total circulation of 15,000 copies of *Berwe:s modellstudier* (Berwe's Model Studies), for example, 10,000 were sold abroad (Chancellor of Justice Archives, EIIIa 1963: 141).

Another important woman in the pornographic press was the owner of Prince Press. The company stayed on the market for a relatively long time, from 1969 to 1983. When she was prosecuted for the pornographic content of the first issue of *Prince* in 1969, she argued that the pictures only showed "a natural act between man and woman"¹⁰ (Chancellor of Justice Archives, EIIIa 1969: 209). This kind of statement was also used by the most famous Swedish pornographer, Berth Milton Sr. (1926–2005), when he printed what he claimed to be the first picture of sexual intercourse in a colour magazine, in 1969. In a comparison between three pictures of war and violence and one of intercourse between a man and a woman, Milton argued that it was unjust that pictures of murder and violence were permissible, while photos of sexual intercourse between men and women—seen as the most natural, loving human act—were not (*Private no 8: 2–3*; cf. Arnberg 2009: 482–483). This argument, that (hetero)sexuality was a normal, loving human expression, was widely used as a reason to abolish the regulation of pornography. Like Milton's *Private* magazine, *Prince* also used the image of the sexually liberated Swedish girl, relating to "the Swedish sin" previously connected to famous art films with nude content, and a critique of the Swedish welfare state, which supposedly made people shallow yet sexually promiscuous, as a kind of marketing tool. The woman at Prince Press was also prosecuted for the second and third issues of *Prince*. She was, however, freed in all three cases (Chancellor of Justice Archives, EIIIa 1969: 209; 1969: 237; 1969: 354; cf. Lennerhed 1994; Arnberg 2009).

Not all the women running pornographic press companies can be considered entrepreneurs, however. For example, the law stipulated that only a Swede could start and run a publishing company (pornographic or not). There are examples where this meant that foreigners had to start an enterprise with a Swedish girlfriend as director and cover for a de-facto, foreign-run (male) publishing company. This seems to have been the case for *Duo-förlaget*, run by a Danish pornography publisher together with his Swedish fiancée (Chancellor of Justice Archives, EIIIa 1967: 330; cf. *ibid.* 1968: 103 and 1969: 48, where a foreigner used his fiancée's father as director of a pornography publishing company that he ran himself). There are also a few examples where the women directors or deputy members were described as not being involved in the business but only having formal positions (e.g. the married couple running *Anson Production*, Chancellor of Justice Archives, EIIIa 1967: 367).

Additionally, there were examples of women who acted behind the scenes without formal positions within a business. When the police searched for the woman legally responsible for *The Passionated Love Makers* No. 10B, they discovered she was touring Sweden selling magazines together with the owner of *Europrint* (the publishing company). Even though she was legally responsible and obviously working closely with the owner, she had no formal managerial position in the company (Chancellor of Justice Archives, EIIIa 1969: 238).

A quick overview of the magazines that were run by women shows no obvious difference from other contemporary porn magazines. Most of them had pictures of

women in their underwear or nude, sometimes together with erotic short stories. The magazines were also clearly directed at (heterosexual) men, with slogans like “All Gentlemen’s Magazine” (*Ögat* 1958: 5) or “Photo Magazine of the Gentlemen [original in English]” (*Qvinna* 1964: 15). In Hsonproduktion’s *Piff*, run by Mr and Mrs Nilsson, this was commented on in a letter to the editor by a woman called Titti. She asked why there were no pages for women in *Piff*. She claimed that many women read the magazine and that they, like herself, wanted to see pictures of “nude, forceful men” and short stories where “the woman is the aggressive one and the man is passive” (*Piff* 1956: 20). It is of course possible that the letter was faked, and did not actually signal an early critique of the focus on male consumers. Hsonproduktion nevertheless later introduced one or two pictures of a male model in every issue of their magazines. However, Mr Nilsson claimed that this was secretly directed at homosexual male readers and that potential female readers were only used as an excuse (*Aftonbladet* 29 Oct 1967).

There was one magazine (*Expedition* 66) that could be termed an early version of feminist pornography. Nina Estin, a journalist who criticized porn publishers for picturing only naked women for male consumption, became editor when a publisher of nudist magazines asked her if she wanted to edit a sex magazine for women. *Expedition* 66 was filled with pictures of nude or scantily dressed men, some of them muscular in daring poses, together with critical articles about sex roles and sex (e.g. *Expedition* 66 1966: 2; 3). The magazine got some media attention but did poorly economically and was withdrawn after only four issues (Estin 1969; Lennerhed 1994: 195).

Conclusions

Pornography is a male-dominated industry. In comparison, however, the Swedish post-war pornographic press did not stand out as exceptionally masculine. It even had a slightly higher proportion of women in leading positions than the overall publishing industry, although the pornographic press showed similar patterns of family ownership and women acting behind the scenes as in mainstream publishing. Even though the share of men increased during the so-called “porn wave” of the late 1960s, when sexually explicit pornography made its commercial breakthrough, women did not leave the industry when new male pornographers entered it. Although the use of misogynistic content has not been comprehensively measured in this study, there does not seem to have been any simple connection between the content and the presence of women pornographers. The idea that content would have implications for possible female entrepreneurship in this way, something that is also implied by the “by men, for men” idea, refers to the historically continuous essentialist understanding of female sexuality as being more sophisticated and selective when it comes to the consumption of pornography (cf. Larsson 2007). On the contrary, in the case of Prince Press, the woman pornographer used the image of the “sinful” Swedish girl in the same way as other male pornographers, indicating that at least not all women were averse to using sexualized images in order to make a profit.

A few women pornographers stood out as entrepreneurs in the Schumpeterian sense when introducing new sexually explicit magazines onto the market and organizing sales and distribution in new ways. The entrepreneurial approaches

studied here were, however, closely linked to the limits of the law. The challenging of the Freedom of the Press regulations by both men and women pornographers was key to opening up the market for pornographic products and facilitating its growth in Sweden and elsewhere.

If the pornographic product and its historical changes cannot explain women's presence or absence as pornographers, and if there are no larger differences between pornography publishers and regular publishers, we have to turn to theories of gendered industries, female entrepreneurship, and economic power in general. The small differences between the ordinary publishing industry and the pornography industry may thus be a question of the initial capital needed (related to the general size of firms), historically rigid male structures of power, and differences in prestige. With low barriers to entry and the relatively high price of pornographic products, together with low prestige and even stigma, the capital needed was low before the "porn wave" and the possible gain quite high even though the personal price and the risk of prosecution could have been significant. This might have opened a window for both women and men lacking financial resources. Instead of focusing solely on the product produced, it is important to consider economic inequalities and notions of gender that structure behaviour and circumscribe possible entrepreneurship. On an individual level and with small samples, as in this study, however, these general structural explanations must be used with caution. Even though women's business behavioural patterns found in other studies can also be traced here, some individual women took great risks when publishing material on the fringes of the law and some of them certainly aimed for large-scale business.

More historical and contemporary research on women pornographers in different historical, geographical, and regulatory settings is required. A longer historical perspective and a broader comparative analysis might further highlight the patterns of women's pornographic business activities and entrepreneurship. Only then can it be determined whether the Swedish 1950s and 1960s are exceptions or whether pornography is in fact very similar to other industries in terms of gendered power positions and entrepreneurship.

During the Swedish post-war period, pornography was predominantly made for men by other men. However, this was also the case for a lot of other products and can be viewed as being the result of women's lack of economic power. Although the publishing companies studied here were relatively small, this study shows that some women had powerful positions in the construction of pornographic images of heterosexuality and male desire at a time when pornography was transforming into a mass-produced and legal product. By making these women visible, common understandings and generalizations about a (historically) male pornographic industry can be challenged.

Notes

¹ This article is part of the project "In the shadow of the Swedish welfare state: Gendered entrepreneurship 1950-2005", led by Prof. Lena Andersson-Skog and funded by Vinnova. The research was carried out at the Department of Economic History, Umeå University.

² No sentence led to imprisonment during this period, even though the greatest legal punishment for publishing pornography was 6 months imprisonment.

- ³ As Svanström notes, the industry calendar did not include all, or even most, companies. They focused mainly on “supply-heavy industries” and manufacturing.
- ⁴ It should be noted, however, that the proportion of n/a data is much higher for the pornographic press than for the overall publishing industry, making the exact outcome somewhat uncertain.
- ⁵ Mr Nilsson’s wife never took the surname Nilsson, but kept her maiden name. Due to issues of anonymity, however, she is here called Mrs Nilsson.
- ⁶ “läsare med onormalt känsloliv”
- ⁷ “Alla kvinnor är utmanande vare sig de har kläder på sig eller inte. Varför skulle inte flickorna på dessa bilder egga män. Gjorde de inte det vore det ju bedrägeri att ta en femma för tidskriften”.
- ⁸ “Ungdomarna har ju flickorna i bilen och handen. Dom läser inte sånt här”.
- ⁹ “Här är en nakenbild av en flicka i en tidning som inte åtalats. Samma flicka finns i samma pose på en i dag åtalad bild. Varför är hon brottsligt sedlighetssårande på den ena bilden men inte på den andra? Och hur ska en förläggare kunna avgöra det?”
- ¹⁰ “en naturlig företeelse mellan man och kvinna”

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Klara Arnberg, PhD, is affiliated to the Department of Economic History, Stockholm University. She wrote her doctoral thesis on the commercial breakthrough of the pornographic press in Sweden 1950–1980 and is currently working on a postdoctoral project about the gender and sexuality aspects of advertising in Sweden 1850–2010. Publications include: “Under the counter, under the radar? The business and regulation of the pornographic press in Sweden 1950–1971”, *Enterprise & Society*, 2012, 13 (2), pp. 350–377; Arnberg, Sundevall & Tjeder, eds. (2012) *Könspolitiska nyckeltexter I: från äktenskapskritik till sexualupplysning, 1839–1930* [Key texts in gender politics I: From marriage criticism to sexual education 1839–1930]; Arnberg, Sundevall & Tjeder, eds. (2012) *Könspolitiska nyckeltexter II: från befolkningskris till talibantal, 1930–2002* [Key texts in gender politics II: From population crisis to “the taliban speech”, 1930–2002]; “Mellan organisationspress och sensationell nakenhet: Nudist- och naturistpressen i Sverige 1951–1968” [Between popular movement’s press and sensational nudity: The nudist and naturist press in Sweden 1951–1968] in *Presshistorisk årsbok 2012; Motsättningarnas marknad: den pornografiska pressens kommersiella genombrott och regleringen av pornografi i Sverige 1950–1980* [A market of antagonism: The commercial breakthrough of the pornographic press and the regulation of pornography in Sweden 1950–1980], diss. 2010; “Synd på export: 1960-talets pornografiska press och den svenska synden” [Exporting sin: The pornographic press and Swedish sin in the 1960s], *Historisk tidskrift*, 2009, 3. This article is part of the project “In the shadow of the Swedish welfare state: Gendered entrepreneurship 1950–2005”, led by Prof. Lena Andersson-Skog and funded by Vinnova. The research was carried out at the Department of Economic History, Umeå University.