



INSTITUTIONEN FÖR SOCIALT ARBETE

**SEXUELLT SAMTYCKE**  
**BLAND UNGA**  
*MELLAN IDEAL OCH PRAKTIK*

av

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Akademisk avhandling

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# ABSTRACT

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In 2018, Sweden implemented a revised sexual offence law based on voluntariness (SFS 2022:1043), and the year prior the #MeToo movement shed light on the power dynamics between men and women, emphasising the importance of consent. These changes have led to discussions about sexual boundaries, violence, gendered power relations and, not least, sexual consent. Politicians have advocated for a culture of consent, and several initiatives have been presented to promote this, including a change introduced to the school curricula that requires young people to learn about consent. In this sense, consent is framed as a solution to problems related to sexuality, which makes it important to explore it as a concept in itself, as well as how it is understood and practised by young adults.

Therefore, this study aims to understand young adults' narratives about the presence and absence of sexual consent in various situations, as well as potential ambiguities they might perceive. It also aims to highlight and provide an understanding of young adults' narratives on sexual consent as a concept and in practice. The empirical material consists of 31 qualitative interviews with young adults between 16 and 21 years old, 13 female, four male, one nonbinary and one gender fluid. The interviews were conducted during 2020–2022. The theoretical framework consists mainly of interactionist theories, such as symbolic interactionism, sexual scripts, interaction rituals, concepts from the sociology of emotions and gender theories.

This dissertation contributes to a broad and nuanced image of sexual consent. The results show that the young adults are highly informed about consent, but their understandings of consent are not always consistent with their narratives of how sexual consent works in practice. Analysis shows that different ideals affect how the young adults navigate and understand their sexual experiences. These ideals are connected to prevailing discourses about consent, narratives pertaining to sexual self-awareness and competence in sexual communication and, for boys, behavioural expectations about being 'nice' and gender equal. Other ideals identified in the analysis related to sexual competence and sexual experience. Girls were expected to be considerate, affirmative, sexy and desirable, as well as respectable. Boys on the other hand, were expected to be active, dominant and initiate sex and to have an insatiable sexual desire. The analysis shows that the young adults in the study try to live up to these different ideals – even though they can be both contradictory and utopian. They also reflect upon and try to reconcile the discrepancy between these ideals and practice. The results show the importance of creating room for young adults to reflect upon and question different ideals related to sex and sexual consent.