

The Gendering of Pastors in Contemporary Nordic Films: Norms, Conventions and Contemporary Views

SOFIA SJÖ*

Abstract

The article examines how Lutheran pastors are gendered in six well-known Nordic films. Building on the theory of mediatisation of religion, the study argues for the need to look at how media shapes religion and gender for a thorough understanding of views on religion today. The film analyses show a connection between female pastors and less problematised forms of religion, but also traditional ways of undermining women in films. The films are argued to present a problematised religious view on sexuality, mostly connected to male pastors. Both aspects of gendering religion are tied to larger debates and discussions of religion and gender in the Nordic countries today. The article suggests that media have the potential to challenge traditional religious norms and to present their own norms, and highlights the need for further comparative studies.

Keywords

Mediatisation; religion and film; Nordic countries.

Author affiliation

Sofia Sjö, Dr. theol., is an associated lecturer and researcher in comparative religion at Åbo Akademi University, Finland. Her research interests are religion and film, religion and gender, and religious change.

Introduction

Recent studies suggest that in the Nordic countries most information about religion is received via media (Lundby 2010; Lövheim and Bromander 2012). This is no doubt true in other parts of the western world as well. Though processes of secularisation are not as simple and straightforward as earlier perceived to be, some changes are obviously under way and religion is altered in the process

*Correspondence: Sukkulakuja 1 A 7, 20100 Turku, Finland. E-mail: sofia.sjo@abo.fi.

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(Molendijk, Beaumont and Jedan 2010; Nynäs, Lassander and Utriainen 2012). One obvious change does seem to be that nowadays it is not religious institutions that set the agenda for how religion is represented and communicated, but the media. Furthermore, religions have had to adapt to the demands and norms of the media. Thus, to understand religious and social change and contemporary views on religion, one needs to take media into account (Granhölm, Moberg and Sjö 2015).

Danish professor in media studies Stig Hjarvard uses the term 'mediatisation' for the process through which the media more and more set the agenda for how religion (among other things) is understood. Hjarvard sees mediatisation as a process that is challenging the authority of religious institutions and forcing religion to be shaped in accordance with the logic of the media (Hjarvard 2011; 2013). Hjarvard's theorising has not gone un-criticised (Lövhelm 2011; Lynch 2011). Many agree that one needs to take media into account when exploring religion, but Hjarvard's insistence that processes of mediatisation are linked to processes of secularisation has been questioned. Hjarvard has also been criticised for oversimplifying the way the media works and insufficiently acknowledging the agency of religious groups (Lövhelm 2011; Moberg and Sjö 2012). However, whether one fully accepts Hjarvard's theory or not, it does introduce important questions, such as what aspects of religion interest the media.

One aspect of religion that I argue must be viewed in relation to media to be properly understood is the gendering of religion. The link between gender and media has long been highlighted (Kearney 2011). Many studies have problematised how different media construct gender. In my particular field of interest, film, several early studies highlighted the degradation of women in films and questioned the narratives of female subjugation that prevailed (Haskell 1987). Studies have also challenged an overly simplistic view of film and gender and highlighted the ability of film to confront common ideas of gender and introduce new ways of performing gender (Mennel 2012). As views on gender have changed, so have the ways gender is presented in films. This is not to say that films are direct reflections of society. Films represent, they do not reflect (Turner 2006), but in recurring representations common views come across and the norms that guide us appear. This, I argue, is true for the way religion is gendered in media too. In other words, media representations of religion and gender can illustrate general notions of how many people today see the relationship between religion and gender.

In this article I explore a very specific area of religion, gender, and media: the gendering of Lutheran pastors in contemporary Nordic films. The Lutheran pastor is probably the most notable religious character in Nordic films. In my analysis, I focus particularly on the way gender is constructed visually in the films and argue that these visual representations are related to wider debates and may be comprehended through these debates. Though one must not overstate what filmic representations can suggest about notions of religion and gender, or how they can affect contemporary views, I argue in line with contemporary theorising on reception (Lynch 2005) that the fact that many people today do not have a personal relationship with a pastor makes media representations of pastors more important, since these may be used to fill in the gaps. This is particularly so if, as I illustrate, the representations pick up issues related to religion and gender in the cultural debate at large and in this way come to seem more general.

Below I introduce six films and highlight the ways pastors are gendered in the films. I argue that we are dealing with questions of gender when male and female behaviour are contrasted, but also when different ways of performing femininity (or masculinity) are contrasted which each other. I also see questions of sexuality as closely linked to questions of gender. My understanding of gender is based on Judith Butler's (1999 [1990]; 2004) notions of gender being performative. Gender is something one does, not something one is and gender is continually constructed in line with or against norms, and in ways we are more or less aware of. This perspective makes in particular the norms that guide how gender is performed and constructed of interest. In the case of films, comprehending gender as performative entails exploring how actors and actresses choose or are directed to perform a character according to or in contrast with certain gender norms, but also to highlight how gender is constructed with the use of film language (camera, lighting, sound, editing etc.). As I will show, the films analysed here largely work with rather traditional ideas of gender, but to some extent they also construct alternative ways of being male/female and suggest alternative norms that are linked to religion. To understand the values and norms underpinning filmic representations, however, one needs to take the context of the films into consideration. Let me therefore begin with a short introduction to religion and film in the Nordic countries.

The Nordic Context(s)

In many studies, independent of subject, the Nordic countries – Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden – are treated as one, but this is simplifying matters a great deal. There are similarities between the Nordic countries, but there are also differences. However, regarding religion, there are some obvious connections between the countries. The Lutheran Church is the biggest religious organisation in all the Nordic countries and in film too, it is this institution one most often encounters. Traditionally, the Nordic national Lutheran churches have filled the function of state churches. Today the bond between state and church has in several of the Nordic countries been cut or loosened, but the churches still fill the function of folk church, to which a majority of the countries populations belong. Despite national differences in the official status of the Nordic national Lutheran churches, among the members the churches are valued fairly similarly. Belonging to the church is often considered to be something typical for someone from the Nordic countries, but church attendance is low. The welfare work the churches do is considered important and the churches are generally defined as liberal (Gustafsson and Pettersson 2000; Kühle 2011).

Regarding gender, female pastors are prevalent in the Nordic Lutheran churches, and films partly highlight this, too, even as they suggest that some male dominated power structures prevail in the churches, as they also seem to do in part in reality (Tsokkinen 2014). In all the Nordic national Lutheran churches there are, however, to be found female bishops and the organizations strive for gender diversity and equality. In 2012 Agnes M. Sigurðardóttir became the first woman to be elected Bishop of Iceland and head of the Church of Iceland and in 2014 the Church of Sweden received its first female arch bishop

when Antje Jackelén was installed in office. Regarding gender, the churches have gone through a lot of changes during the last century; changes that have not always come easy and are at times still being contested by groups in the churches, but that have come to challenge many traditional religious gender norms.

Despite the dominance of the Lutheran Church in the Nordic countries, it is essential to keep in mind that the Nordic countries are all becoming more and more religiously plural, some faster than others (Riis 2000). This has also had an influence on the gendering of religion in Nordic films. Since the turn of the millennium, a number of films have focused on religious minorities and presented outlooks on what it means to be, for example, a Muslim in Scandinavia today (Sjö and Danielsson 2013). These films have also dealt with issues of gender, often presenting quite traditional religious views on gender, but also a need to challenge these views (Sjö 2013a)

As can be expected, considering the similarities in religious background, one can find similarities in how religion is represented in Nordic films, particularly in how members or representatives of the Lutheran churches are imagined, both when focusing on gender and when focusing on other aspects (Sjö 2012; Sjö and Danielsson 2013). Still, one should consider that there are some differences between films from the different Nordic countries (Soila 2005). Though there are similarities between the countries when it comes to filmmaking – state support of cinema is common, co-productions are essential and films that situate themselves somewhere between art cinema and American genre fiction are the norm –, the films vary when it comes to both domestic and international interest, genre preferences and the specific topics treated (Nestingen 2008; Nestingen and Elkington 2005; Thomson 2006). All the films discussed in this study can thus be argued to highlight essential aspects of religion and gender in their particular Nordic contexts. However, the films are also noteworthy on a general Nordic level, as they are treated here.

***Restless/Levottomat* (Aku Louhimies, FI 2000) – A Moral Voice or Just another Body?**

As with the other films chosen for this study, the Finnish film *Restless* was very popular in its country of origin. The film has been argued to be one of the milestone films marking a change in Finnish filmmaking at the turn of the millennium. This change partly had to do with a re-focusing of film financing (Pantti 2005). However, the success also had to do with a new generation of filmmakers who dared to try something new.

Restless was director Aku Louhimies's first feature film. A large part of the film's popularity has been argued to be its explicit sex scenes, but the subject matter was also new and was judged to capture the feel of the time. The main character in the film is the doctor Ari, who declares in voice-over during the first scenes in the film that he feels nothing. Ari's life is filled with work and sexual relations with random women, both of which are illustrated visually at the start of the film. Tiina is one of the women Ari seduces, but she manages to get Ari to start dating her and through her, Ari is introduced to Tiina's four closest friends. What follows is a drama of love, deceit and possible change, where characters are brought together, thrown apart, but in some cases also find ways of moving forward.

Though it is Tiina who is first introduced as the female lead, in the end she does not fill this role. This role instead falls on Tiina's friend Hanna-Riikka, who is a pastor. Hanna-Riikka starts off as a minor character, but slowly develops into Ari's main love interest, and also into a character who through her actions forces Ari to contemplate his life. As Árni Svanur Daniélsson (2009) has illustrated, Nordic film pastors are often given a moral function. This is obviously the case with Hanna-Riikka. Throughout the film, Hanna-Riikka is the one to demand that the others take responsibility for their actions – their cheating, abuse and lies – and she also follows her own advice.

Restless is a film where the naked female body – and sometimes also the naked male body – is very much in focus and femininity is linked to physicality. In several of the sex scenes, the camera lingers on the bodies of the actresses and the lighting also highlights their physiques. However, in comparison with the other female characters, Hanna-Riikka's body is less in focus. She is both visually and narratively constructed as different from the other women in the film and as presenting a different form of femininity. Hanna-Riikka is, for example, shown dressed in baggy clothes, rather than in the closely fitting dresses that the other female characters often wear. Though Hanna-Riikka, too, is shown having sex with Ari, this scene is mostly about her internal emotions in contrast to several other sex scenes, where a lot more focus is on the act as such and the naked female body. In the scene with Hanna-Riikka and Ari, the camera focuses on Hanna-Riikka's face, providing her with control and agency. In short, Hanna-Riikka is never just her body, although like other female pastors in Nordic films, she is shown to be sexually active.

Italian for Beginners/Iteliensk for begyndere (Lone Scherfig, DK/SE 2000) – The Good Leader or Just another Outcast?

Italian for Beginners is a romantic comedy made according to the rules of Dogma 95 (which among other things state that one must shoot on location, use a hand-held camera and must not use non-diegetic sound), as well as a film that challenges the ideas of what a romantic comedy and a Dogma 95 film can be (Schepelern 2005). A lot of Dogma films are dramas focusing on the outcast and difficult issues. The films are also often ensemble films. *Italian for Beginners*, too, focuses on serious problems, but at the same time offers a humour-filled narrative. The film does not have a main character, but the pastor character is in many ways the central link.

Andreas has moved to the area where the film is set to take over a congregation led by an elderly pastor, Wredmann, who has become estranged from his congregation. Andreas and Wredmann are both widowers, but while Wredmann has turned his back on life, Andreas always seems to have time to listen to people in need. Similarly to Hanna-Riikka, he also becomes a moral voice in the film, challenging the characters to be better and dare to connect. However, like Hanna-Riikka, he does not do this by putting himself above others. Instead he is in many ways just as broken and lost as the other characters in the film.

As a male romantic comedy character, Andreas falls into the quiet, listener role. However, in contrast to some of the other male characters in the film, he also presents an alternative way of being male and of being a leader. Humour is a central part of this, but so is daring to be present and to be himself. In contrast

to some of the other male characters, Andreas is often filmed on the same level as the other characters or even as physically below them, such as in a scene where he is spoken to while he is in a swimming pool. Still, Andreas manages to lead the other characters forward in ways that are represented as beneficial. Characters work through conflicts, find love and lost relatives and the courage to try something new.

Though one can argue that Andreas challenges some norms guiding ideas of suitable male behaviour in films – he is, for example, never shown physically dominating anyone – in some ways he still comes across as a typical male film character. Andreas is represented as more of a leader than several of the women, and also as more emotionally balanced, particularly in comparison with Olympia. Olympia is represented as extremely clumsy and unable to hold down a job. Andreas becomes a safe haven for Olympia, and it is, not surprisingly, Olympia Andreas falls in love with. Though he, too, is lost, she can be argued to allow him to still ‘be a man’.

***In Your Hands/Forbrydelser* (Annette K. Olesen, DK 2004) – The Lost Shepherd or the Shepherd Who Lost?**

The Danish film *In Your Hands* is also made according to the Dogma 95 concept. This film, however, is clearly a drama. Similar to Hanna-Riikka and Andreas, the pastor Anna in *In Your Hands* is a fairly young person with scant experience of being a pastor. Like Andreas, Anna, too, connects well with the congregation. However, Anna’s congregation is something different from Andreas’s. Both pastors are dealing with people who are represented as lost or outcasts, but Anna’s congregation is so in a more literal sense: they are convicts in a women’s prison.

As Yvonne Tasker (1998) illustrates in her study *Working Girls: Gender and Sexuality in Popular Cinema*, there is an obvious tendency in Hollywood films to represent the professional woman as sexually available and to focus more on her private life than on her professional life, often allowing the private life to take over and cause problems in the professional life. This, as Tasker argues, is a way of controlling the image of the professional woman, making her less threatening for an assumed male audience. One can notice some of the same tendencies when analysing how female pastors in Nordic films are represented.

Already Hanna-Riikka’s sexuality was focused, and having sex with Ari would seem to make it harder for her to do her job and be there for her friends. But in *In Your Hands*, personal life and sex are even more strongly represented as having problematic effects on a woman’s professional life. Anna does not think that she can have children. When one of the inmates, Kate, who is considered by some of the prisoners to have special powers, informs Anna that she is pregnant, Anna does not believe her at first. But Kate is correct and in several scenes Anna is shown being happy. However, soon it transpires that Anna’s unborn baby is most likely very ill. This shocking news causes Anna great distress and affects her work negatively. Anna is no longer able to connect with the inmates. Instead of the close and intimate shots that are common in the first part of the film, Anna is now more often filmed from a distance. When she finds out that the reason Kate is in prison is that Kate

caused the death of her own child, Anna no longer knows how to relate to Kate. In a last, desperate attempt to save her unborn child, Anna goes to Kate, but her faith in Kate falters and she accidentally reveals Kate's crime to the other prisoners.

Anna thus fails in her job as a pastor and this failure is connected to what is happening to her in her private life and to her female body. Compared to the many truly appalling pastors that one comes across in contemporary Nordic films, Anna does not seem that bad, though. Rather, what happens to her comes across as tragic, and at the same time makes her very human. With her doubts, Anna also has a lot in common with other pastors in Nordic films.

***As It Is in Heaven/Så som i Himmelen* (Kay Pollak, SE/DK 2004) – Religion as Norm or Love?**

The doubting pastor is a classic Nordic film trope (Johansson 2005; Sjö 2012). In *As It Is in Heaven*, a Swedish mega-success directed by Kay Pollak, there are two religious leaders. One is a lot like Andreas. He brings people together, listens and evolves. The other is the opposite. He talks of sin and redemption, judges others, loves his position in society and falls to pieces when this position is threatened, doubting everything and everyone. The first is a famous musician who turned cantor, Daniel; the second is the pastor of the local church, Stig.

The religious aspects of *As It Is in Heaven* have been discussed in a number of studies (Sjö 2013b). In the film, two very different takes on religion are presented, as well as two very different takes on being a religious man. As characters, both Daniel and Stig are familiar from other films, but here they are brought together in a very noteworthy way. Since Stig is the pastor I focus on him here, but it is worth keeping in mind that the masculinity and religiosity linked to the musician Daniel can be found in Nordic films both inside and outside the Lutheran church. Compared to Daniel, Stig is represented as shallow and hypocritical, and, like other minor characters, he is obviously constructed in contrast to Daniel to highlight Daniel's different nature. Stig is the one who invites Daniel to the village. He does this with a Bible in hand, underlining his belief in rules and norms.

In the next scene, Stig is shown interacting in a friendly way with the third central male figure in the film, Conny. Conny bullied Daniel as a child and as a grown-up, he is shown abusing his wife. While Daniel tries to stop him on several occasions, Stig does not seem to care.

Stig and Daniel are thus to a large extent constructed as each other's opposites, but there are also similarities between them. Both seem to have problems with physical intimacy. However, while Daniel learns to love and feel through his relationship with the character Lena and also helps the choir members to break free and start really living again, Stig's problems with his sexuality are another aspect of him that turns him into a 'bad guy', but also into a fairly typical male film pastor: male film pastors often seem to struggle with their sexuality. This almost always means that they are represented as not being all the man they could be, according to the norms of the films. As with female pastors, this brings sexuality and religion together and connects religion to bodily aspects. In turn, it has been theorised that the women in *As It Is in Heaven* are represented

as in contact with their sexuality on a religious level as a reflection of the idea of women as more connected to nature (Wallengren 2006). Over all the film can be seen as a challenge of a faith based on norms and highlighting a form of modern spirituality instead, a spirituality where the body and sexuality are seen as essential not sinful (Johansson 2005).

***Troubled Water/DeUsynlige* (Erik Poppe, NO/SE/DE 2008) – The Pastor or the Mother?**

Troubled Water, the third instalment of Norwegian director Erik Poppe's Oslo trilogy, presents another female pastor whose private life impinges on her work. However, this is a character who also brings new issues to the pastor role. Once again, the pastor is a young woman named Anna. This woman, however, does not struggle with how to become a mother like the Anna in *In Your Hands*; she already is a mother, a role that brings its own challenges to her life. In *Troubled Water*, Anna is a single mother who has never been married. She mentions that this could have been a problem in an earlier time, but that the new leaders of the church have allowed her to become a pastor.

Like Stig, Anna is not the main character in the film, which means that she has to be understood in relation to the lead character. The main character is the former convict Thomas. Thomas, like Kate, has served a prison sentence for causing the death of a child. Thomas has never admitted to the crime, but has served his time and is now trying to start a new life. In the church he is given a new chance by being offered the job of organist. After the first shock of meeting Anna's son Jens, a boy who looks a lot like the boy Thomas was accused of killing, Thomas connects with Anna and her son. Thomas and Anna are shown spending time together and making love. Anna is thus Thomas's love interest, but also a person who challenges him morally. Anna's and Thomas's relationship indicates that Thomas's life has perhaps taken a new turn.

However, all is not as it seems with Thomas. The film shows events from two perspectives, first from Thomas's and then from Agnes's, the mother of the boy Thomas was accused of killing. In the end, the two stories are brought together. Anna and her son also play a part in this ending. Agnes kidnaps Jens to save him from Thomas. The event finally brings Agnes and Thomas together. Thomas admits his part in what happened to Agnes's son which seems to offer Agnes what she needs to go on with her life. When Thomas brings Jens back to Anna, she has been told about Thomas's background and seems to turn away from him. What happens to them in the future is left open.

***Letters to Father Jacob/Postia pastor Jaakobille* (Klaus Härö, FI 2009) – Old Doubt or a New Man?**

Films often use contrast to tell a story. Characters are made different from each other to highlight tensions, bring the story forward and guarantee certain emotional responses. Gender is often a central aspect, but so is age. In Nordic films, female pastors are sometimes contrasted with male pastors, but even more often, young male pastors are contrasted with older male pastors. In several films about young women growing up in conservative religious communities

the young women are contrasted with the male religious leaders, who often try to control the women in different ways (Sjö 2011). These leaders may often bring to mind Stig, who is not just contrasted with Daniel, but also with his wife, a follower of Daniel. Together these different films often present women and the young as more balanced and linked to a more positively imagined faith, while the old (and often men) are linked to a faith in rules and norms that is constructed as problematic. However, there are also films that offer alternative ways of contrasting men and women, and alternative ways of imagining old, religious men. One such film is *Letters to Father Jacob*.

In some ways, the main male character in the Finnish film *Letters to Father Jacob* is a fairly typical Nordic film pastor. Most importantly, he struggles with doubt.

However, compared to other elderly, doubting pastors, Jacob comes across as mild and understanding. Jacob does not have a visible flock of followers, but through the letters that people send him asking for prayer and advice, he is shown to be loved and needed. However, when the letters stop arriving, something happens with Jacob.

Leila, the other main character in *Letters to Father Jacob*, in contrast to Jacob, comes across as physically strong and emotionally restrained. This is shown visually through Leila's physique and in her lack of response to Jacob's attempts at conversation. Her tough physique and lack of emotions make Leila a rather unusual female film character. However, Leila's encounter with Jacob does change her, as encounters with pastors in Nordic films tend to do. Leila comes to Jacob directly from prison after having been pardoned against her will and offered the job as Jacob's assistant (Jacob is blind and needs help answering the letters sent to him), a job she only reluctantly accepts and half-heartedly performs, seeing no meaning in it or in her life as a whole. At the film's major turning point, Jacob unknowingly interrupts Leila's suicide attempt. Afterwards Leila tries to inspire Jacob, who is struggling with depression linked to religious doubt, to find a reason to live again, finally revealing her own tragic background. She grew up with an abusive mother, spending her childhood protecting her younger sister. Witnessing her sister's husband continue the brutal abuse, Leila has killed the man in rage, taking away all that the sister had, an act for which Leila sees no possible forgiveness. Leila's revelation allows Jacob to show Leila that she is forgiven, which allows her to move on. Jacob dies, but not, as it seems, without having found his faith again.

By being allowed to be the guide that helps someone to move on, Jacob does become a rather typical film hero. By dying Jacob also brings to mind several Christ-figures in film, who bring change and inspiration and die when their deed is done. However, by being contrasted with the physically strong Leila, Jacob also, like many other male pastors in films, challenges the idea of the physically strong male being the only real hero. In this case, religion would seem to be the key factor that allows for alternative ways of being male to be represented.

Representations in Context

The film presentations above suggest that pastors in Nordic films can fill many different functions and be gendered in various ways. However, to understand

them and the way they are gendered, both visually and narratively, they must also be understood as mediated, that is to say as shaped by the needs and interests of the film medium. From this perspective, for example, it is understandable that the pastor as bad guy is given a line of traits that undermines him as a traditional man, as this helps the audience perceive him as an antagonist. It is also understandable that the female pastor as love interest is represented as sexually available to the male lead, as this is how love interests are commonly represented. However, the ways pastors are gendered in Nordic films also suggest something about common understandings of religion and gender in contemporary Nordic society. On their own, the representations might not say that much, but when linked to wider media debates, their possible normative character appears.

The way female pastors in Nordic films are represented for the most part positively, as both visually appealing and generally helpful, illustrates the mostly positive attitude to female pastors in the Nordic countries. The fact that several of the Nordic countries were relatively early with admitting women to the priesthood is often pointed out, and those who speak out against women pastors are usually framed as regressive. The road to acceptance has not always been easy (Salmensaari 2003; Sjöberg, Sjöswärd and Sundman 2008), but female pastors fit well with the general liberal outlook often argued to be common in the Nordic countries (Pettersson 2000), an outlook which the film media also contributes to.

On a general level, then, women pastors in a Nordic context are seen as something natural and unproblematic, but it should be pointed out that at least in the world of film, the Lutheran Church is still in large part represented as male dominated. Elderly female pastors and their stories seem to interest few, something that is no doubt suggestive of the cultural climate more generally. Over all, religions are becoming more and more feminised, but perhaps because religion is at the same time becoming more privatised, this is not something that apparently stirs up a lot of cultural or media interest, though it is the focus of several academic studies (see for example Trzebiatowska and Bruce 2012). Instead the existence of different ways of being religious is often represented in films as a struggle between two men, one in support of change and community, the other in support of norms and rules. In this construction, I argue, one can observe both the male dominance of film in the Nordic countries (Lindell 2004) and the notion that religious power struggle is a male affair.

Though it is noteworthy that female and male pastors respectively are represented as less and more linked to what are considered problematic forms of religion, it is still the frequent, often visual connection between religion and sex in films that most clearly establishes a link to common media debates. In Finland, the public news channel Yle aired a program in the summer of 2014 on the ideas of sexuality offered at confirmation camps. Confirmation camps are very popular in Finland, so the issue can be argued to concern many young people, but the program led to a debate on why the church's teachings and ideas on sexuality were considered so interesting. Several commentators linked the explanation to the existence of a common idea of religion and sexuality as being tightly connected, but also perhaps the notion that religious perspectives on sex are perceived as problematic (see for example Komulainen 2014).

It has been hinted in the analysis above that religion and sex fascinate, and that ideas about how sex and religion relate to each other also affect how religion is gendered in films. However, my overview also illustrates that the issue is complex. The way that some female pastors are very visually presented as sexually active can be related to the notion of religion and sex as titillating. It fascinates because it is considered slightly forbidden. The same reason can be found behind the common focus in films on the sexual desires of nuns (Pesonen 2010; Sabine 2013). This, however, is not the whole issue. The way that sexuality is represented as a problem, particularly for male pastors, highlights the idea that some religious views on sexuality are considered problematic. These views are connected to a form of religion based on rules and hierarchies, a religion often gendered as male and very obviously in conflict with what in films are represented as secular norms.

Not surprisingly, this interest in religion, and what can be argued to be constructed as incorrect sexual behaviour, is also something one can notice in media more generally. Sexual misconduct by religious representatives tends to be given a lot of media attention. Of course, this is important, particularly in cases of paedophilia or sexual abuse, but it is also clearly the case that these stories seem to tie into a more common idea of religious views on sex being in some sense wrong.

Representations of pastors in Nordic films do not, of course, capture all aspects of religion and sexuality in the Nordic countries, but the way the representations tie into more common debates and representations in other media highlights the way in which the films obviously represent common ideas and norms. But the films must also be understood to influence this debate, to some extent. The question is whose norms one encounters here, and who is setting the agenda. No simple answer can be given to this question, but it is obvious that ideas of religious views on sexuality and gender are not exclusively in the hands of religious groups, and that the media challenge what are understood to be traditional religious norms.

However, one must not forget that although sex is often allowed to play a part in filmic representations of pastors, the sexual conduct of pastors in films is not always something that sets them apart from the general public. On the contrary, sex can also be something that highlights the humanity of characters and underlines their normality. The way that religion in films is allowed to open the way for alternative ways of gendering characters must also not be forgotten. Religion might allow for alternative images of particularly maleness.

It is also worth highlighting the moral voice that is given to many pastors, both male and female, a voice that is far from always criticised and that can be connected to a generally accepting outlook towards the national Lutheran churches in the Nordic countries. The story of pastors connecting with convicts or former convicts and offering them a way back into society is common in Nordic films. This story places the church somewhat on the borders of society, but by focusing on these borders simultaneously gives the church centre stage. Furthermore, this is a story in which some traditional notions of gender are reproduced, but where gender norms can also be challenged and religion can be argued to offer alternative ways of gendering characters, ways that both break with traditional religious norms and secular notions. In short, the image of religion and gender that Nordic films highlight is far from one-sided.

Conclusion

The focus of this article has been on representations of Lutheran pastors in contemporary Nordic films. Six fairly well-known films have been discussed, and some recurring features of how religion is gendered in the films have been presented and related to more general debates and media discussions of religion and gender. As I argued in the first parts of the article, films must always be understood in context, particularly when questions of ideology are of interest. This means that the findings of this study are true for the Nordic contexts, but a different context will most likely have different results. The importance of media in many contexts today, however, suggests the need to seriously take into account media representations when discussing the gendering of religion and normative images. The need to take this discussion further and probe how both media and religion are gendered is highlighted in the edited volume *Media, Religion and Gender: Key Issues and New Challenges*. As Lövheim argues in the introduction, an 'analysis of how gender shapes representations of religion in media as well as individual use of the media in everyday religious practice is necessary to understand ... if and how the mediatization of religion ... can challenge patterns of authority and normative boundaries established by traditional religious discourses' (Lövheim 2013: 5). This study has offered one perspective, but many more are worth exploring.

The many different voices that determine how religion is gendered and how religion and gender are comprehended today also obviously present a challenge towards religious organisations to take media seriously. What can happen if the power of media is not comprehended was illustrated powerfully in Finland in the fall of 2010 when a program discussing religious views on homosexuality was aired. In the program, critical views were expressed especially by the leader of the Christian political party, Päivi Räsänen. Though Räsänen is not a representative of the church, the television program led to a flood of people, approximately 30,000, resigning from the church. The church had not grasped the importance of a program of this kind, or the power of the media to influence particularly members with no or only a weak connection to the church. The event can arguably be understood as a case of mediatization of religion, but what happened after the event also points to what has been termed self-mediatization by the church. In short, the church actively used media and the event itself in its campaign to get people to vote in the church election that was held the same autumn (Moberg and Sjö 2012).

Though the national Nordic Lutheran Churches still have a great deal to learn when it comes to how to handle and use media and media images, the importance of taking media such as film seriously can be argued to be something several of the Nordic Lutheran Churches have taken to heart. Several of the churches give out film awards or in other ways recognise films they find fit with their message. The attention given to Lutheran pastors by contemporary Nordic filmmakers can also be argued to suggest that the national Nordic Lutheran Churches and their pastors are still considered to fill an important symbolic function. Whether the interest in representing pastors in films will continue only time will tell, but it is very likely that films will continue to shape ideas of religion and gender and also challenge contemporary views on gender. Whether the Nordic countries and Nordic films are typical or unique in

their interest and focus on religion and gender will hopefully be revealed in future studies.

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