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Feminist reflections on ethics in ultrasound scanning

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LUND UNIVERSITY

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Abstract

Utrecht June 2009

7th feminist research conference

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Feminist reflections on ethics in ultrasound scanning

This paper originates in fieldwork and interviews done to research how midwives and obstetricians learn how to do and interpret routine ultrasound during pregnancy (week 18). I have in this research especially focused on how midwives and obstetricians learn to recognize the pathological or the deviant, and how they distinguish this from the normal.

I will in this paper through a feminist perspective map how and where questions and discussions on ethics surfaced and further critically discuss how these instances can be understood in the framework of ultrasound being a fully integrated part of antenatal care in Sweden, as part of a institutionalized work organization and as part of what constitutes obstetricians, midwives and parents.

I will especially explore the tensions that arise when on the one hand ethics is already decided since almost all pregnant women in Sweden do ultrasound scans and where the images are part of popular visual culture and private family photo albums, as well as institutionalized medical diagnostics. And on the other when ethics is constantly made into an individual standpoint/opinion (for staff) or an individual choice (for the parents) where the only actual option offered in response to a finding seems to be abortion. I will place the locations of ethics in ultrasound scanning in Sweden within feminist debates around the gendered dimensions of the welfare state, as well as making an effort to think through the ethical implications together with feminist ethicists and relate this to issues of old and new eugenics.