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<CT>Gender (In)equality and the Finnish Welfare State during the Post-War Era

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<A>Abstract

The Finnish welfare state was created during the post-war decades in 1950–80. One of its objectives was to recognize equal rights and opportunities for every citizen in society and in all fields of life. Gender equality was promoted, for example, by giving financial support to families with children and contributing to childcare arrangements. The new policy improvements enabled mothers' employment outside the home and gave them the opportunity to achieve financial independence. This paper addresses a working-class community who lived in a neighbourhood called Vaakunakylä, in the outskirts of the city of Oulu, Finland, during the founding decades of the welfare state. The archaeological record found on the site illustrates that women's wellbeing was improving in terms of social, physical and economic factors. Although policies and social reforms were starting to build greater gender equality, the material culture seen through the lens of feminist theories shows that there were still gender biases woven deep into the fabric of a society.

## <A>2.1 Introduction

Finland has been in a vanguard position in gender equality for decades on the global scale. Finland was the first European country to allow women to vote and the second country in the world to permit women to stand for election, in 1906. After the Second World War, Finland developed into a Nordic welfare state promoting the equality and the social rights of all individuals by providing social security including cash benefits and various services equally to people in different life situations. Gender equality, especially, has been one of the cornerstones of the Finnish welfare state model, and today Finland is viewed as one of the best countries in the world for women.

Nevertheless, there are still major challenges in obtaining equality between women and men in the Nordic welfare countries. Recent reports have shown that women are still expected to bear a greater caring responsibility. Another problem is that, in the public sector, women represent the majority of the workforce. Wages in the public sector are lower than in the private, which means that women earn less than men. Gender segregation and the wage gap in labour markets are seen as two main issues in the way of achieving gender equality (Tanhua 2020; see also Kuitto et al. 2019).

Furthermore, in Finland the politics driven by right-wing parties are very much gendered, as labour conditions and contracts are being undermined and significant cuts made to various care activities, which are all largely feminine industries (*Daily Northern* 2024; Lehto 2024). Harsh neo-liberal ideology has led to a situation in which the emerging care crisis in the welfare state is real indeed (on the care crisis in the Nordic welfare states see Dahl et al. 2022). The structures supporting gender equality are being slowly dismantled, and thus a political, social angle to gender has become more relevant than ever. Archaeologists need to study gender, gendered social norms and the historical roots of gender models as well as manifestations of gender bias in modern society (cf. Moen 2019). Under a binary gender system, the concept of gender defines the cultural meanings attached to men's and women's roles that are considered to be characteristics of males/females. The gender norms, in turn, cover the expected and desired behaviors and actions for males/females that

are considered acceptable in society (see e.g. Stewart et al. 2021). These gender roles, norms and expectations influence our construction of social reality and play a significant part in the way we live our lives.

Gender relations have been studied in both prehistorical and historical settings (see e.g. Gero and Conkey 1991; Lawrence 1998; Donald and Hurcombe 2000; Baugher and Spencer-Wood 2010; Moen 2019; Weismantel 2022; Matic' et al. 2024; Moen and Pedersen 2024; Palincas and Martins 2024; Hyttinen, in press) but are rarer in the field of contemporary archaeology. Although research topics have covered social issues, such as homelessness (Zimmerman et al. 2010; Singleton 2017; Kiddey 2018), ethnicity (Nordin et al. 2021), class (Wurst 1999, 2006, 2024; Papoli-Yazdi 2021; Ribeiro and Giamakis 2023; Matila et al. 2025) and race (Mullins 2006; Mullins and Jones 2011), the gender equality of the recent past has not been widely researched (for exceptions see Battle-Baptiste 2016; McAtackney 2024; also Pacheco, Chapter 6 in this volume).

This chapter examines gender (in)equality from an archaeological perspective in post-war Finland, focusing on the working-class community of Vaakunakylä (Engl. 'Coat of Arms Village') in Oulu, Northern Finland. The Vaakunakylä neighbourhood came into being during the Second World War when Finland joined forces with Nazi Germany. In the Continuation War (1941–44), fought jointly by Finland and Nazi Germany against the Soviet Union, Finland allowed German troops to be stationed in Finland and Germany in turn provided Finns much-needed material and military aid. Located on the eastern shore of Hietasaari island, Vaakunakylä functioned as a military camp to accommodate the German soldiers who worked in the nearby Toppila harbour between 1942 and 1944. Altogether, 28 barracks, including accommodation barracks, horse stables, garages, kitchen, canteen, storages, sauna barracks and latrines, were erected to serve the everyday needs of the German army.

After the war, the former German barracks were left empty. As the city of Oulu struggled with a

severe housing shortage, it decided to sell the barracks to people who were left homeless during the war. In the late 1940s, the barracks were auctioned, and over the following years the military camp area was transformed into a residential neighbourhood, inhabited mainly by working-class families with children (Lasanen 2020: 140–52). As it was a former military camp, the material conditions were modest in Vaakunakylä. There was no waste management, and all rubbish generated in the households, from food scraps to hazardous and toxic waste such as batteries and paints, was dumped into shallow rubbish pits dug in the residents' backyards. Living next to these miniature landfills could have caused several health problems for the inhabitants (Matila et al. 2025: 208–10). The barracks did not have plumbing or running water, and people had to fetch their drinking water from a nearby communal water post. Despite the lack of modern conveniences, the residents loved and cherished their quiet neighbourhood close to nature (Pohjamo 2011; Matila et al. 2021). However, at the end of the 1980s, the city of Oulu evicted the residents and tore down the barracks. Since then, the Vaakunakylä waterfront has been used as a marina, and the former housing area has served as public parkland, although in an overgrown and unmaintained state.

The character of the area changed drastically in 2025 when a new high-end residential area was completed onsite. This construction project resulted in the need for a salvage excavation by the University of Oulu, in which the everyday materials of this unique site from Finland's formative welfare state period were gathered for analysis. In 2020–22, 20 rubbish pits (materials spanning from the 1940s to the 1980s) and the remains of three building foundations were fully excavated: a German laundry barracks later turned into a sauna, a German accommodation barracks refurbished as family housing, and a German latrine turned into a septic tank (Seitsonen et al. 2024; Fig. 2.1). Along with archaeological research, memories and stories concerning Vaakunakylä were collected via interviews with former residents and Oulu citizens in 2021.

[Insert Figure 2.1 near here]

The excavated materials afforded a gendered analysis. Even the smallest of items, from make-up packaging to deodorant spray bottles, revealed the underlying gendered expectations that were placed on women and men in the modern Western world. From the eighteenth century onwards, industrialization started to shift the rural and agrarian society towards urban and industrial settings, and gender roles became redefined: the role of the breadwinner was given to men, and the role of a caregiver in the domestic environment to women (Timm and Sanborn 2018 [2007]: 76–77). These conceptions of gender roles and norms – ingrained so deeply into the structures of modern society that we often fail to recognize them – resulted in many types of inequalities between men and women.

This chapter discusses gender roles and inequalities from an archaeological, material culture perspective based on the Vaakunakylä materials. We mostly concentrate on gendered artefacts, like personal care products and cosmetics, but also discuss goods needed in daily life and health care, such as tableware and pharmaceuticals (Table 2.1). The chapter proceeds as follows. First, we discuss the historical origins of gendered labour practices and power relations in Finnish society. Secondly, we examine gender roles before the Second World War and how they changed during the post-war years. Thirdly, we explore the material realities of the Vaakunakylä residents from a feminist and gender archaeology perspective and interpret what gender (in)equality looked like during the decades of the initial development of the Finnish welfare state, from the 1950s to the 1980s. Our main focus is on the rights of women and conceptions of womanhood, but we also consider gender equality from the male perspective.

[Insert Table 2.1 near here]

## **<A>2.2 Gender Roles before and after the Second World War**

In the traditional Finnish agrarian society, gender norms and roles rested on a gender-binary system in which gender was classified into two distinctive forms, man and woman. Although society was

patriarchal, both men and women had their specific vital roles and tasks, making both sexes equally important in agricultural work. However, the borders between female and male tasks were fluid, and some margin existed for crossing the borders of female and male chores (Apo 1999: 15–16).

Finnish women also had a degree of independence that allowed them – to some extent – to make autonomous life choices already at the turn of the twentieth century, when patriarchy was still in full bloom (Julkunen 1994: 182).

Nevertheless, patriarchal structures did dominate women's lives, and women were men's subordinates. Women were under the guardianship of their spouses or male relatives, which resulted in women being politically powerless. It was not until the late nineteenth century that patriarchy started to weaken, and women's legal rights became strengthened when the first wave of feminism and the women's rights movement arose in Finland. Girls' right to education was emphasized from the mid-nineteenth century onwards, and full political rights were granted to all adult women in 1906. In 1930, women broke out from under patriarchal control when the new Marriage Act was legislated and men's guardianship over women was abolished (see e.g. Kuusipalo 1994; Lähteenmäki 1999). The introduction of these improvements gave women a more equal standing with men, in their political, public and private lives.

After the Second World War, industrialization and urbanization accelerated, and the establishment of a welfare state was set as a future goal. The grounds of the welfare state were largely laid on family-centred maternalism, in which the woman's primary role was to be a mother – because of her ability to reproduce – and a caretaker of the domestic sphere, while the man was positioned in the role of a breadwinner who financially supported his family (Anttonen 1997: 172). In essence, one might ask whether the foundations of the welfare society can be seen as fundamentally unequal in terms of gender (see e.g. Rönkä 2010; Kantola et al. 2020: 8).

The anxieties over declining birth rates and the wars fought in 1918 and in 1939–45, which caused tens of thousands of deaths, made the Finnish state start to consciously pursue population growth by

investing in both mother's and children's wellbeing and health care. To reach these objectives, subventions of the state were introduced, one of them being the maternity grant provided for the first time in 1938. At first, the benefit – a maternity package or alternatively a cash benefit – was granted only to low-income mothers, but from 1949 onwards it was extended to cover all mothers-to-be. A child was seen as a woman's 'gift' to the nation, and the state expressed its gratitude by granting a maternity benefit to the mother (Särkelä 2013: 2).

The maternity package contained nurturing products for the newborn and hygiene products for the mother. We found some lotion tubes (pits 6 and 7) and shards of glass baby bottles (pits 5, 6 and 11) that were part of the maternity packages' contents during the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s. These finds illustrate that the development of the welfare state indeed promoted equality and the wellbeing of mothers and children across all social classes. It has been argued that the invention of the welfare state freed women from the patriarchal system, but at the same time made women reliant on the state and the care that it provided (see e.g. Julkunen 1994: 203). In Nordic countries, the welfare state has been viewed mostly as a positive feature in women's lives, not a patronizing one (Anttonen 1997: 198–201; Julkunen 2010: 199–205).

Emphasizing the mother's role as a child's primary caregiver meant inequality for the father, whose main role was seen as that of a provider for the family, not an active parent participating in child-rearing. Fathers working outside the home spent less time with their children and thus were left out of children's lives for the most part. The gendered division of labour discouraged fathers' involvement in their children's lives and social development. In pit 13 we found a ceramic coffee cup broken into four pieces bearing the text *Isän kuppi* (Engl. 'Father's cup') and floral decorations (Fig. 2.2). These cups were produced by the Finnish ceramic company Arabia in 1943–49 (Leppänen and Lehtola 2016: 97, 222). While the pit held male hygiene products and children's toys and school supplies, there were no female personal care products, except 16 packages from wet wipes which were in marketing targeted to women but were not gender-exclusive in practice. The

lack of female items might suggest that the household in question was the family of a single father (cf. Matila 2025). If this is the case, the personalised ‘Father’s cup’, which might have been a Father’s Day gift or a birthday present from the children, is particularly interesting in terms of fatherhood. As a tangible expression of affection, the cup highlights the importance of a father’s role in the family.

[Insert Figure 2.2 near here]

The Finnish sex-role association Yhdistys 9 (Engl. ‘Association 9’), established in the 1960s as a result of second-wave feminism, promoted gender equality by claiming that both man and woman should be equally responsible for raising and nurturing children and for the financial support of the family (Kurvinen and Turunen 2022). However, just from 1978 onwards, fathers’ rights in parenting have been increasingly advanced, and their participation in their children’s lives has been encouraged, for instance, by providing an equal opportunity to take paid parental leave during the child’s infancy (see e.g. Eerola et al. 2019). Still, fathers have not received similar recognition until recently. While Mother’s Day has been celebrated since 1918 (it was made an official flag day by law in 1947), Father’s Day was introduced as late as the 1940s, and only in 2019 did it gain the same status as Mother’s Day as an official flag day by law.

### **<A>2.3 Striving for Post-War Economic Independence**

The new gender ideologies of the 1960s and 1970s challenged the traditional family-centred notions of motherhood. Instead of being devoted mothers who took decisions that benefited children and husbands at the cost of their own wellbeing, women were seen as individuals with their own life goals (Nätkin 1997: 230–34). The period witnessed laws on daycare (1973) and other legal measures, improving women’s participation in the labour market and striving towards gender equality (see e.g. Julkunen 1999: 88).

One of the interviewed elders acknowledged that most of the women with a family were stay-at-home mothers in Vaakunakylä, while men worked outside the home as truck drivers, skippers, dockworkers and timber-drafting workers (informant XV; Lasanen 2020: 142–52). As mentioned above, after the war the ideal was for women to be stay-at-home mothers, and their primary duty was to procreate, raise children and maintain the home. Only if one could manage these duties alongside work was the latter encouraged. One informant who spent her childhood and youth in the vicinity of Vaakunakylä recollected that her father would not allow her mother to work in the nearby candy factory Merijal (established in 1915), because ‘a woman’s place is in the house’, as her father had stated (informant VII). Most jobs in the Merijal factory were held by women, since candy was manufactured by cooking – a chore which is often perceived as a female domain. Still in 1985 women, made up over 90 per cent of the company’s workforce (Oulun yliopisto 1985: 46; Huhta 2011: 21). If their husbands allowed it, industry provided women with the first steps towards economic independence.

Some of our informants recollected that there was a seamstress living in Vaakunakylä (informants VIII and XVI). In pits 6, 8 and 15, sewing-yarn bobbins were uncovered. Pit 6 held three bobbins (made by the Mölnlycke company), which were accompanied by needle packaging from the brand Needleworks. In pit 20 and in the laundry barrack (which served after the war as a washing facility, or possibly as a sauna), we found two oil bottles for a sewing machine. Once artificial fibres were introduced to the market in the 1940s and 1950s, clothing repair became somewhat unnecessary, because of a simultaneous drop in clothes prices (Smelik 2023). However, the sewing supplies in Vaakunakylä indicate that, in addition to its being a successful trade for some, many women also mended family clothes at home after the 1950s. Sewing and patching skills reduced living expenses, and a sewing business as a small entrepreneurial activity provided meagre added income for families.

In addition to being seamstresses, the women living in Vaakunakylä worked, according to memoirs, as sauna-heaters, coffee-shop workers, landlords, and one also as a traditional *jäsenkorjaaja* (literally ‘limb-fixer’, a type of folk healing practice or physiotherapy). One woman also worked in traditionally masculine jobs as a bricklayer and dock worker (Lasanen 2020: 151–52). Some of our informants mentioned that there was also prostitution in post-war Vaakunakylä, and they strongly indicated one particular household where a single lady lived (informants XI and XII). Interestingly, several of our informants also remembered a supernatural story related to this household of the assumed prostitute. The inhabitant was allegedly sleeping on her couch when two women suddenly burst in. The person had enquired what business the women had there, causing them to leave as quickly as they had appeared, and when the inhabitant went to check the door, it was still locked. The women reportedly wore ‘fancy clothing’ and were thus interpreted as the ghosts of ‘Germans’ sweethearts’ from the time of the Second World War, allegedly killed by the German soldiers. This is perhaps an indication of lingering transgenerational wartime traumas (Seitsonen and Matila 2022: 279) but also of the anxieties and tensions that such a profession would have caused in the community. According to interviews, some local women had sexual relations with the German soldiers living in Vaakunakylä during the war, and there were also stories about the German troops raping local girls. The women who went out with and dated Germans were labelled as immoral and labelled as ‘hookers’. Calling women ‘whores’ can be seen as an attempt to control them (Saarikoski 2012), and such ghostly experiences in turn can reflect changes in the traditional societal control and power relations – Finnish women had challenged the traditional male control and power over them by choosing German soldiers during the war (Gordon 2008; Seitsonen and Matila 2022: 279).

However, we found only two condom packages in the excavations – one in pit 7 and one in pit 8 – dating to the 1970s and 1980s, and no contraceptives at all in pits associated with the cottage in question. The lady who was rumoured to be a sex worker presumably lived in Vaakunakylä from the end of the 1940s to the 1960s, and thus the dating of the uncovered condoms and of this lady’s

period of residence are mismatched. However, the lack of contraceptives obviously does not exclude the possibility that the woman in the household could have been involved in prostitution, though it nonetheless raises some questions about these long-lived rumours.

Prostitution, often associated with poverty, was no longer needed as a livelihood strategy when the living standards rose with the development of the welfare state, and the number of sex workers in Finland indeed decreased notably over the course of the 1960s and 1970s (Haasio and Mattila 2022: 178). However, women continued to hold mostly low-income jobs, which did force some of them to engage in prostitution to make extra income (Markkula 1981). Since the Vaakunakylä neighbourhood was inhabited by working-class people – some of them probably with low-paying jobs – it is possible that sex work could have been one way to earn additional income for some women living in the area. In that case, the alleged prostitution could be evidence of gender inequalities in the structures of the welfare society, in which women with low incomes were compelled to rely on prostitution as a means of survival.

Perhaps the single woman in Vaakunakylä was not engaging in sex work at all, but a person who had recognized her own right to personal autonomy and sexuality. Since sexuality was rather strongly bounded until the 1960s and 1970s by traditional, tight moral conceptions, a woman engaging in sex liberally, and thus stepping outside the gender norms according to which females were expected to be passive and submissive, was exceptional. Endendijk et al. (2020) have noted that the consequences of this kind of behaviour can be highly negative for an individual who violates social standards. Perhaps the tight-knit Vaakunakylä community wanted to ‘keep the norm-breaker in line’ and penalized her inappropriate behaviour by calling her a ‘hooker’, a reputation that stuck for decades.

Women also sought personal autonomy in the public sphere, for instance, with increased use of alcohol. The new and more liberal alcohol laws of 1968 for the first time allowed women to enter a bar or a restaurant without an accompanying male, and the selling of less than 4.7 per cent alcohol

in the grocery stores. The national surveys that followed indicated that with the new legislation women's drinking increased in the home environment, whereas men's drinking in establishments outside the domestic sphere increased. Women's drinking kept on increasing over time, both inside and outside the home, and got noticeably closer to the drinking culture formerly associated with men, as indicated by the growing numbers of drinking situations between spouses (Mustonen and Österberg, 2010: 82–83). The alcohol use of women was not as visible as that of men, as it was still often bound to domestic settings, whereas in a wider social sense alcohol in the post-war society was seen as a manly subculture isolated from the home sphere (Mäkelä et al. 2010: 39–53).

Alcohol-related artefacts, such as bottle caps and drink glasses, dating from the 1950s onwards found inside the excavated barracks in Vaakunakylä might indicate that this division between female and male alcohol use was not that strictly drawn even before the documented changes in women's drinking habits brought by the new legislation. A small, ornamented glass belonging to a carafe set for liqueur or sherry was found in pit 13. This vine-patterned set manufactured from 1940 to 1976 highlights the presence and consumption of alcohol in the home sphere, as it is a decorative object meant to be seen and appreciated. Wine and liqueur were stereotypically seen as drinks for ladies in the 1960s, an image strengthened by advertising in women's magazines, while they also called for the need to 'civilise' men's drinking by encouraging them to drink beer instead of hard drinks (Törrönen and Juslin 2009: 512–14). In the national drinking habits survey of 1976, women mentioned the social aspects of drinking at home more often than men, who more often emphasised culinary and medicinal aspects (Simpura 1983: 115). Having a service set with a matching carafe and glasses could point to this social aspect, though the bottle-cap finds from the same pit pointed towards harder drinks, stereotypically in the sphere of 'masculine drinking'.

Bottle tops from mild wines found throughout Vaakunakylä could be connected to women, who reportedly started drinking wine with dinner before men did (Österberg and Mäkelä 2010: 99–113), though drinking alcohol at meals was predominantly a white-collar practice in general in and before

the 1980s (Simpura 1983: 115). All in all, the alcohol-related find materials of Vaakunakylä seem to be a blend of masculine and feminine images of drinking in contemporary Finland, and the gendered spheres of alcohol use were not as strictly separated as stereotypical cultural narratives would suggest.

#### **<A>2.4 Angel Faces and Playboys: Gendered Stereotypes and Norms**

As a consequence of the second-wave feminist movement in the 1960s, the modern debates on equality between women and men began, and traditional gender roles and norms came to be questioned and criticized (Kurvinen and Turunen 2022). The new ideal was an individual who expressed both femininity and masculinity at the same time, for instance, by wearing unisex clothing (Frisk 2019: 138–44). Two napkin liner bags labelled Piccolo from the Finnish company Suomen Vanutehdas (active between 1902 and 1998) dating to the 1980s were discovered in pit 6 (Fig. 2.3). Although this product was meant to be gender-neutral – the label informs that the package contains washable large-sized napkin liners for babies aged six months to two years – the desirable gender roles were embedded in the imagery of the product packaging. The packaging design displays two cute mascots with anthropomorphic features: a puppy dressed in blue overalls playing a bugle, followed by a kitten carrying a handbag and a balloon, wearing a pink dress with oversized high heels and pussybow neckwear. Both mascots represent clearly gendered stereotypes, as the male is the active leader and the female passively follows, with both wearing gendered colours and girly/boyish outfits. Paoletti (2012) has stated that gendered colours as well as decorations on fabrics, for instance, airplanes, cars and dogs for boys, and flowers, lace and cats for girls, help children in the gendering process and ease their adaptation into their expected roles as a woman or a man. The cover of a napkin liner bag thus underlines the prevailing culturally acceptable gender norms and roles according to which parents were expected to raise their children. Although gender equality was expressly pursued from the 1960s and 1970s onwards, the traditional norms and roles kept on reappearing in different contexts.

[Insert Figure 2.3 near here]

Other gendered artefacts we found included toiletries, such as spray deodorants and beauty cosmetics, dating from the 1950s to the 1980s. Most of the antiperspirants and spray deodorants for women had floral scents, such as rose, apple blossom, orchid and forget-me-not (all four from the brand Odette), or other natural scents, including spray deodorants with the scents ‘morning dew’ (from the brand Mondial) and ‘fresh as a flower’ (from the brand Rexona). From the Middle Ages onward, a delicate and gentle femininity ideal has been promoted in Christianity, in which different flowers represented various feminine virtues. Attributes of femininity, such as sexual purity, sensibility and beauty, have also been represented through flower motifs in art throughout history (Stott 1992). There is also a close association between women and nature, because of woman’s reproductive potential and ability to nurture – the same abilities that are possessed by ‘Mother Nature’ (Liu et al. 2019). The cosmetic industry – as well as, as previously discussed, the baby and children’s products industry – capitalized on the established traditional gender roles and behaviours by using them in marketing, and thus maintaining and reinforcing gender norms.

In pit 8, we found a face-powder pack from the American brand Pond’s (established in 1846). The powder is called ‘Angel Face’ and is a talcum powder that is still sold. Pond’s was subsequently owned by various companies, ultimately merging into the company Unilever in 1987. The powder pack found in Vaakunakylä was manufactured by the Chesebrough Manufacturing Company, dating between 1955 and 1987 (Caldwell 1986). There is curious symbolism in the brand name Angel Face. An angel is a kind, loving and caring protector. Even the idiom of calling someone an angel means that they are especially kind and caring. There is a somewhat culturally universal tendency, at least in the Western industrialized world, to consider women ‘angels’, always good and never showing signs of aggression or anger (see Chaplin 2015). Such subtle messages continue to be given to women by the cosmetics industry: i.e. having an angel face is appropriate and makes them more desirable. Angels also allude to purity – an attribute that has been associated with femininity,

since woman's role was seen naturally as that of a tender and unselfish nurturer – through their divine connotations. Lorimer (2023) points out that 'unquestionably, of all body parts and skin surfaces, it is the face which is most freighted with cultural meaning about the human condition'. This cultural association, deeply entrenched in Western ideology, whereby the face has come to define personhood and identity, is not without its problematic cultural burden.

Whereas women are expected to be accommodating, passive and nurturing, men are perceived to be strong, active, aggressive, brave and sexually driven (Courtenay 2000; Eerola 2014; Endendijk et al. 2020: 163–64). The new gender ideology of the 1960s mentioned above promoted a more feminine and 'softer' manhood which was achieved, for instance, by hiding unpleasant body odours and consuming fragrances and perfumes (Frisk 2019: 144–47). It has been argued that the use of deodorants among men in Finland became more common only in the 1970s (Frisk 2019: 122–23); however, our archaeological materials from Vaakunakylä included men's spray deodorant tins and shards of glass and plastic aftershave bottles and jars from the 1950s to 1980s that suggest a different reality. The abundance of male toiletries indicates that, even in a somewhat sidelined working-class context without modern amenities, the men did consume scents already in the 1950s and onwards. In the post-war period, the Finnish working class was integrated into global consumer culture, and different kinds of commodities, such as personal care products, were more accessible to all. Perhaps material culture related to men's personal hygiene also implies negotiations of a new understanding of gender roles in which showing a softer side of masculinity was more acceptable.

The names of the male-oriented spray deodorants, however, are interesting. Among the finds were one spray deodorant that was sold under the name Hero and another named Playboy (neither deodorant brand was identifiable from the packaging) (Fig. 2.4). Whereas feminine scents are associated with very concrete entities or things, such as nature and flowers, the scents considered to be masculine seem to be more abstract. What does a hero or a playboy smell like, if the odour can be artificially imitated? In any case, it seems deodorant and other cosmetic product names were

strongly gendered, following persistently traditional, established gender norms according to which females and males were expected to behave in the eyes of the society.

[Insert Figure 2.4 near here]

At the core of Western masculinity lies characteristics such as rationality and the ability to hide emotions (Jokinen 2010: 128). According to harsh traditional masculine roles, men should be fearless heroes and callous playboys. In the 1960s, the Finnish gender-role movement mentioned above, Association 9, demanded, along with men's liberation from their established role as breadwinner, men's right to express their emotions and talk about their feelings because emotional repression had been linked to men's mental and physical problems, such as stomach issues (Turunen 2024; Turunen 2025). An empty bottle of Samarin (pit 12), a tablet jar bearing the name Titalac (pit 15) and a Valmarin mineral solution bottle (pit 1), all medicines used to relieve the symptoms of heartburn commonly caused by stress, suggest that gendered expectations might have had physical consequences for the men living in Vaakunakylä.

## **<A>2.5 My Body, My Rights?**

The 1960s and 1970s were decades of sexual revolution. The social and cultural movement, resulting from the second-wave feminist movement, pursued both genders' equal rights, opportunities and responsibilities in sexuality, and challenged the traditional sex roles (see e.g. Kurvinen and Turunen 2022). Women's right to their own body and especially women's reproductive rights were acknowledged (Anttonen 1997: 194). One of the main accomplishments of the movement was the legalization of abortion, allowed for social reasons in 1970 (see e.g. Kurvinen and Turunen 2022). Modern birth control methods, such as hormonal contraceptives, replaced traditional mechanical contraceptives and gave women more freedom in sexuality, and a more active role in family planning. Oral contraceptive pills especially, introduced into the Finnish market in 1962, transferred the prevention of pregnancy to the hands of the women.

There is no direct archaeological evidence that women in Vaakunakylä used contraceptive pills as a birth control method. The number of condoms, which were then considered male contraceptives, was small as well. We found only four condom wrappers, two of which were from the brand Golden-tex (dating to the 1960s), one from Mamba (dating to the 1970s) and one from Sultan (dating to the 1980s). The paucity of contraceptives in the archaeological material could suggest that they were not commonly used among Vaakunakylä residents. Although rubber condoms were introduced already at the beginning of the twentieth century, their availability improved significantly in Finland only in the 1970s, and condoms became more widely available by the 1990s (see e.g. Ritamies 2006). Condoms and contraceptive tablets, alongside the withdrawal method, were the most common birth control methods used by women aged 18–44 years during the 1970s in Finland (Ritamies 2006: 282).

Barriers to using contraceptives might have been the costs and the perceptions that people had about birth control methods. Condoms were considered expensive and unreliable because of their poor quality and became associated with casual sex and immoral lifestyles, which diminished their popularity (Arnipuu and Aarnipuu 2012; Haasio and Mattila 2022: 240–41). There was also regional variation in contraceptive pill prices (Ritamies 2006: 278). It has been noted that higher social status, together with higher education and wages, seem to be linked to the use of contraceptive pills in Finland at least in the 1960s (Pasila 2011). Given that the Vaakunakylä inhabitants were working-class people living in a tight-knit, somewhat marginalized neighbourhood, the residents' socioeconomic status could be one explanatory factor in the absence of contraceptives. Condoms and pills might have been shunned due to their high prices and unreliability, or there might have been a general unwillingness to use them. Instead, natural birth control methods, such as withdrawal and rhythmic methods, might have been used to prevent pregnancy. Consequently, although women's reproductive rights were improved in the post-war decades, these improvements did not reach all social classes at once. Based on the archaeological

material, it took tens of years until all working-class women were able to access the birth control methods available in the market.

Initially, we expected to find plenty of period products in the domestic rubbish pits, as these are objects closely linked to womanhood and women's bodily rights in the context of the Western welfare state. Surprisingly, only one feminine hygiene product, that is, a sanitary napkin package bearing the brand name Samettiset (a product of Finnish company Farnos from the early 1980s) was uncovered from a former German laundry barrack (which was later turned into a sauna by the post-war residents). Sanitary towels were only introduced to the market in Finland in the 1930s and 1940s, but due to poor availability and high price, pads gained popularity slowly and it was only from the 1960s onwards that they started to replace homemade cloth towels (Sohlman 2007: 44–45, 65).

The paucity of modern period products suggests that the women in Vaakunakylä used largely washable cloth rags or knitted towels (which were burnt after multiple uses) long after disposable menstruation napkins and tampons had entered the market. Did women think that modern, disposable sanitary pads were an unnecessary waste of money, and thus they preferred to use old-fashioned and cheaper menstrual pads? Or perhaps, was it the deep-rooted period stigma and shame surrounding menstruation that prevented women from buying pads and tampons (cf. Konola 2009: 57, 93)?

Menstruation has been stigmatized for centuries in the Western world, and it originates from Christianity, which sees menstruation as part of God's penalty for women for Eve's sin (Buckley and Gottlieb 1988: 32). One of the causes of this stigma is that there has been a culture of silence surrounding periods, as connotations of dirtiness, embarrassment and shame were connected to the menstruating female body (see e.g. Konola 2009; Sohlman 2007; Oinas 2021). Many of the advertisements of the 1960s and 1970s utilized the concept of menstrual blood being dirty and embarrassing, and periods were still very much a taboo until the marketing of single-use sanitary

towels removed some of the shame surrounding the topic (Frisk 2019; Simonen and Liborakina 1996, 102; Sohlman 2007). However, period stigma did not change quickly. The aforementioned menstrual pad package unearthed from Vaakunakylä is a stark reminder of this; the product description underlines the absorbing capacity of the product and the quality of being discreet. Monthly bleeds were still in the 1980s something that should be hidden and be ashamed of.

Rubbish pit 13 had 16 Savett-intime wipe packages from the Swedish company Cederroth (Fig. 2.5). Savett-intime wet wipes with pink wrappers were launched in 1970 and were targeted to women, encouraging them to maintain their intimate hygiene during periods and in relation to sexual intercourse. Laura Saarenmaa, who has analysed Finnish hygiene product advertisements during the 1960s and 1970s, has noted that the advertising message to women seems to have been that they should use the wet wipes to keep themselves clean, fresh and desirable in the eyes of men (Saarenmaa 2012: 44–46). We also found the cover of a Savett-toilet multi-package box (pit 8), which was, in turn, a wet towelette targeted to men. Savett-toilet wet wipes, which entered the market in 1973 (manufacturer Cederroth company), were intended to be used after using the toilet. According to advertisements, the purpose of these towelettes was to maintain personal cleanliness not to make men more attractive, but instead to prevent annoying rectal pains (Saarenmaa 2012: 46–49). Hygiene marketing of the 1970s was strongly gendered: female bodies were addressed as inherently dirty and smelly, whereas male bodies were represented as sexually attractive and perfect (Saarenmaa 2012). This notion underlines the power hierarchies between genders: the male sex was still considered the norm and the female sex as the defective ‘other’, despite the endeavours of the sexual revolution of the 1960s and 1970s.

[Insert Figure 2.5 near here]

## **<A>2.6 Conclusions: An Archaeological Perspective on Gender (In)equality in Post-War Finland**

The archaeological and material culture approach opens new perspectives on gender (in)equality during the period when Finland became a welfare state, from the 1950s to 1980s. During this period, the rights of women and gender equality – two central values and goals of the Finnish welfare society – were promoted by legislation and other legal measures. In the grand narrative, the ‘golden age’ of the Finnish welfare state occurred in the 1980s, when social equality seemed to reach its peak. However, as our archaeological study on the contemporary working-class neighbourhood of Vaakunakylä in Oulu has shown, gender equality was not fulfilled, and traditional gender roles, norms and discriminatory gender power hierarchies prevailed in the society.

As Hannele Harjunen (2009) has pointed out, societal expectations for women, including those around birth control and beauty products, materialize them bodily. This also emerges from our archaeological material from Vaakunakylä; women were expected to be delicate, beautiful and caring, and these attributes were achieved bodily by using various kinds of products, such as floral scents, beauty cosmetics and personal hygiene items. Although more and more modern birth control methods and menstrual products became available for women, we argue that the intersection of gender norms and social class continued to impact the lives of the working-class women in Vaakunakylä long after these became available, making them unequal not only with men but also with women from higher social classes.

On the other hand, there were also strict norms for masculinity according to which men were expected to behave and interact with other people. Archaeological finds exemplify the idea that appropriate manliness included aggressiveness, insensibleness and toughness. Numerous local stories collected in the interviews also underline these traditional understandings of harsh masculinity, many of them connected to drinking, fighting and semi-illegal activities. Nowadays these traits might be associated with the controversial term ‘toxic masculinity’ (see e.g. Harrington 2021), which includes culturally accepted albeit often harmful social norms associated with being a man.

The Finnish welfare society was founded on traditional gender roles in which the woman was a caregiver at home and the man an income-earner. Although second-wave feminism introduced pressures for women to join the workforce in the 1960s and 1970s, only certain types of work were seen as appropriate for women. As oral histories and archaeological material of Vaakunakylä suggest, mostly jobs associated with motherly tasks, such as cooking and dressmaking, were acceptable. This kind of thinking maintained and reinforced traditional gender roles and stereotypes.

To sum up, although gender equality has progressed and women's rights improved as the welfare state developed over the decades, the archaeological material makes it clear that traditional gender roles and norms were deeply rooted in people's fixed ideas and social conventions in this society. Due to these gendered stereotypes and roles, real gender equality was not actualised in the welfare state model of the 1950s–1980s, at least not in working-class settings marginalized from the outside.

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## <B>Interviews

Informant VII, Oral history project interviews of Oulu city and Vaakunakylä project, University of Oulu. Katariina Vuori (interviewer), 27 May 2021.

Informant VIII, Oral history project interviews of Oulu city and Vaakunakylä project, University of Oulu. Katariina Vuori (interviewer), 7 May 2021.

Informant XI, Oral history project interviews of Oulu city and Vaakunakylä project, University of Oulu. Katariina Vuori (interviewer), 1 June 2021.

Informant XII, Oral history project interviews of Oulu city and Vaakunakylä project, University of Oulu. Katariina Vuori (interviewer), 1 June 2021.

Informant XV, Oral history project interviews of Oulu city and Vaakunakylä project, University of Oulu. Katariina Vuori (interviewer), 10 May 2021.

Informant XVI, Oral history project interviews of Oulu city and Vaakunakylä project, University of Oulu. Katariina Vuori (interviewer), 20 May 2021.

## Figure captions

Figure 2.1. A German wartime map of the Vaakunakylä encampment drawn in 1942. Red dashed lines indicate the excavated areas, and red dots the locations of the rubbish pits. To maintain the privacy of former Vaakunakylä residents, the excavated features have been left numerically unidentified on the map. Image: Oulu City Archives. Edited by the authors.

Figure 2.2. A coffee cup personalised with the text *Isän kuppi* (Engl. ‘Father’s cup’). Photo: T. Matila.

Figure 2.3. Empty Piccolo napkin liner bag. Photo: A. Kelloniemi.

Figure 2.4. Playboy deodorant. Photo: H. Karppinen.

Figure 2.5. Wrapper of a Savett-intime wet wipe. Photo: A. Kelloniemi.

Table title

Table 2.1. Personal care and hygiene products unearthed from the rubbish pits and barracks,

Vaakunakylä