

4.6 Gender and Confirmation Work

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4.6.1 General Reflections on Gender and Confirmation Work

The time of adolescence is intensely marked not only by questions of self-orientation and internal self-regulation concerning the individual conduct of life (cf. Gestsdottir/Lerner 2008), but also by the desire to distinguish one's own personality and sexuality in the horizon of increasing self-observation and interpersonal orientation. In connection with this, young people can feel a strong need to compare themselves with other people of their own age group and especially with ones of the other sex and their habits.

Due to this highly sensitive and comparative attitude towards their peers, it can be observed that this can very often either lead to a strong distance or a deep attraction and fascination towards their peers. Therefore, the mutual perception of the opposite sex and the willingness to acknowledge each other and work together can be rather instable and precarious.

Gender studies in the field of human biology and developmental psychology show that especially during the period between 12 and 18 years of age, there are not only deep changes in growing up, but also significant differences between boys and girls, due to hormonal and social factors with specific-effects on male as well as female young people (cf. Lerner 1999a; 1999b). »Gender identity« can, therefore, in a broader sense be defined as »an individual's self-conception as being a male or female, as distinguished from actual biological sex« (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2007). Like an individual's concept of his or her sex role, gender identity develops by means of parental example, social reinforcement and language. So age and gender play an important role in the modulation of adolescent behavioural autonomy. »Gender modulates the self-image of the adolescent« (Fleming 2005, 36). But it has also to be said that gender identity is »performatively constituted by the very ›expressions‹ that are said to be its results« (Butler 1990, 25 and recently in a more differentiating sense, cf. Butler 2009).

That can clearly be seen in the delayed development amongst the male compared to the female young people. Girls seem to mature earlier than boys and develop certain abilities like self-reflection, communicative expression and mutual understanding earlier than boys (cf. Martin, 1996). It can also be seen that they gain competences to interact in a cognitive and reflected way some years before the boys. This, of course, does not mean that boys do not have to cope

with intensive developmental processes. But what seems to differ strongly is the concrete age of developing the competences mentioned above.

These differences and effects are currently widely reflected in education theory which stresses the need to take into account not only the different habits and attitudes of young men and women but also the common needs of both sexes. Behind this lies the conviction that gender equity in and through education helps to »make a more gender equitable, productive, and peaceful society« (Klein 2007, 1; cf. Grenz 2008; Ostrouch/Ollagnier 2008).

Confirmation work is not a separate space and time of adolescence, but highly influenced by these gender-related developments because the gender-question is also relevant for the individual and common perception and performance of religion. Religious traditions and education play an important role for the construction of gender (cf. Renehan 2009; Hofmann 2004). So it is clear that confirmation time can not just ignore the specific social conditions and developments of male and female young people. But it has to be said that gender-related or gender-specific attitudes and perceptions of confirmands have not been examined closely in confirmation work research so far.

4.6.2 Data

In the horizon of the gender perspective of the study, we first look at the overall international data. As a criterion to estimate some aspect as gender-significant, a T-test has been run on the results. Only significant differences are reported. But, as even small differences are significant due to the high number of confirmands involved in the study, we have chosen to call relevant a difference between males and females in mean values of 0.3 or more. If there is a »-« in front of the number (e. g., -0.47) this means that the item is approved more strongly by the girls, if there is no »-« (e. g., 0.36) this means that the item is approved more strongly by the boys. But it also has to be mentioned that the deviation in the certain items does not automatically say something about general gender tendencies throughout the countries that have been examined, because the average result of all countries is not automatically congruent with the national data. Therefore, in case of high deviation, national results will be mentioned as well. Together with the deviation number, we also give the mean value (from 1 = not applicable to 7 = totally applicable) to show the level of affirmation and rejection of the particular item.

In a second part (II.2) additional gender specific results from the different countries will be presented to give more detailed information on the countries' »gender profile« of the expectations and perceptions of confirmation work.

Due to the very different workers' profiles in the countries as well as in the

parishes – e. g., the different professional and voluntary backgrounds of male and female workers – this chapter will focus on the confirmands only.

Overall International Data

Looking at the reasons why confirmands register for confirmation time, it can be seen that the extrinsic motives of the male confirmands are in most countries higher than that of the female confirmands. On the item »because my parents wanted me to do so« (CA06) the mean is 3.55(m) compared to 3.19(f). The gender gap on that question – which is 0.36 on average – is the largest in Denmark with 0.70. The motive »to get money or presents at the end« (CB10) – which is 0.62 on the average – is also higher; 4.94(m) compared to 4.32(f). On the other side, girls show a higher interest »to experience community in the confirmation group« (-0.34; CB02). They also have a more positive attitude towards going on daytrips or retreats/camp with the group (-0.36; CK06). The motive »to be allowed to be a godparent« (CB05), which was only asked in Germany, Austria, Switzerland and Finland, is also stated to be of more relevance amongst the girls (-0.83); 4.46(f) compared to 3.63(m).

The girls also have higher expectations of the confirmation year concerning questions of their own life and faith orientation. It is more important for the girls »to find my own point of view concerning my own life« (-0.42; CK01). That the »questions concerning faith will play a role« is also more important for the girls (-0.38; CK11) with a large gender gap, especially in Sweden (-1.00; CK11).

Asked what they think about the Church, on the average the female confirmands are more likely to have their children baptised (-0.33; CG03). Still, both sexes answer this question on a high level: 6.38(f) compared to 6.05(m). Although at a rather low level, the female confirmands in most countries are more interested »in taking part in a Christian youth group after confirmation« (-0.34; CG08); 2.86 compared to 2.52(m). Very clearly, the girls in all the countries are much more interested »to sing or make music together« (-0.90; CK07); here the gender difference in Finland and Sweden is extremely high.

This somehow more positive attitude towards the confirmation year as such amongst the girls is also connected with the interest in certain topics. The girls are more interested in:

- baptism (-0.65; CL01) with the largest gender gap in Norway (-1.11),
- in other religions (-0.59; CL07) with the highest difference in Switzerland (-0.82),
- justice and responsibility for others (-0.70; CL08), especially high in Sweden (-1.08),
- friendship (-0.59; CL09): 6.24(f) compared to 5.65(m), with an especially high gender difference in the Scandinavian countries,

- violence and crime (-0.70; CL10) and
- the meaning of life (-0.47; CL11): 5.28(f) compared to 4.85(m).

Not only the attitudes but also the gaps in the attitudes towards the confirmation year and its contents remain more or less the same at the end of the year. On the average, it is still much more important for the boys »to get money or presents at the day of my confirmation« (0.56; KB10); 5.47(m) compared to 4.91(f). Still a higher number of girls say towards the end of the year that they want to have their children baptised (-0.31; KG03); 6.42(f) compared to 6.11(m). To be »interested in taking part in a Christian youth group after confirmation« (-0.45; KG08) is also mainly a point for female confirmands. That they »became motivated to help in the church as a voluntary worker« (-0.35; KK27) is affirmed by girls more highly; 3.37(f) compared to 3.02(m). At the end of the year the boys seem to be more open to turn to a minister, »if I should have personal problems« (0.31; KG06).

The more positive affirmation of the female confirmands towards the whole confirmation time and its contents is also reflected in the horizon of perception and participation. The experiences they made during the year are estimated slightly more positively, so for example, that »my commitment to other people is important« (-0.44; KK44). That »my commitment to peace is important« is on the average also higher on the girls' side (-0.32; KK46). Obviously, the girls are also more satisfied with camp(s) (-0.30; KN11) as well as »music, songs and singing« (-0.52; KN14). Although not to a high degree, the boys in most countries tend to be more ashamed »to tell my friends that I am taking part in confirmation training« (KE07), here especially in Austria (0.83), Denmark (0.36), Norway (0.44) and Sweden (0.33).

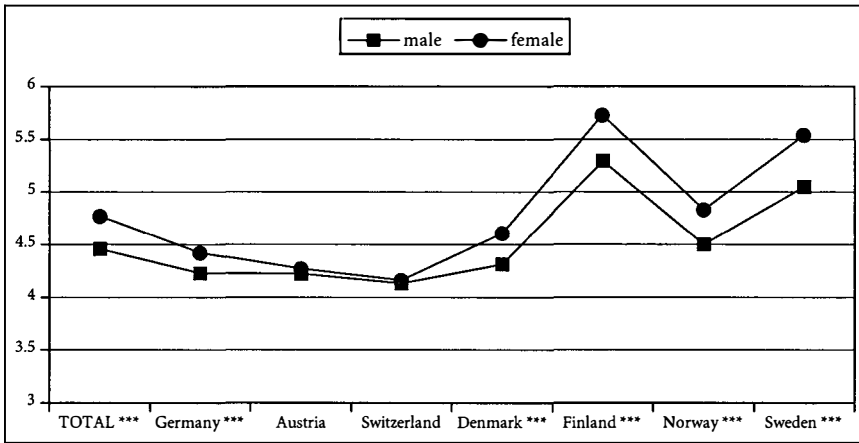
These impressions can also be proved by the Index »Satisfaction with liturgical experiences« (iKN2) that shows a higher satisfaction amongst the girls; 4.77(f) compared to 4.46(m) (cf. Figure 15). A similar effect with the strongest deviances in the Scandinavian countries shows up in the case of the Index »Ethical learning« (iKK2) with higher effects on the side of the female confirmands; 4.47(f) compared to 4.17(m) (cf. Figure 16).

Therefore, it is not surprising that for the male confirmands taking part in confirmation training is more stressful (0.35; KK10): 3.12(m) compared to 2.77(f). There is also a clear tendency amongst the boys to »prefer being confirmed without the confirmation time beforehand« (0.52; KK41); 3.82(m) compared to 3.30(f).

National Data

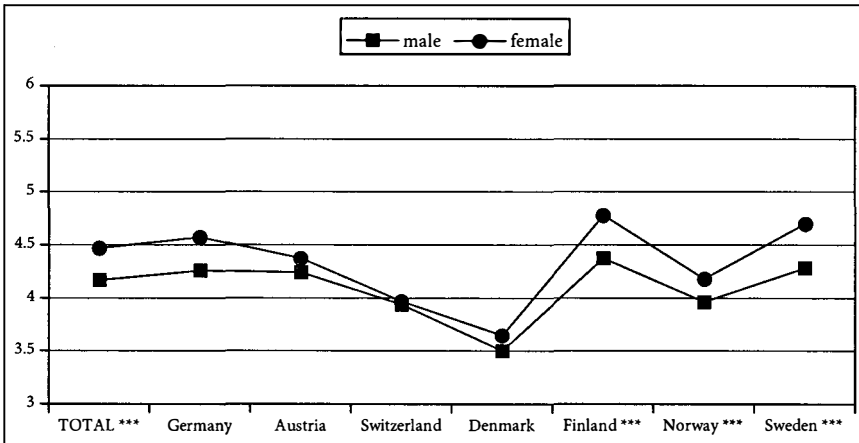
It can be seen, that there are gender differences in the countries which are not representative for all of the countries but for specific situations, and these are

Figure 15: Mean values for index iKN2 »Satisfaction with liturgical experiences« by gender



N = 17550. Scale from 1 (low) to 7 (high).

Figure 16: Mean values for index iKK2 »Ethical learning« by gender



N = 17466. Scale from 1 (low) to 7 (high).

not, in all cases, what one would expect. To understand these differences, one must look at least in some cases more deeply into the national results.

First of all, one has to say, that the results in *Germany* on the gender issue are nearest to the overall mean average – which is, for the most part, a statistical phenomenon as the number of German confirmands in the weighted sample exceeds every other country by far.

In *Austria*, some results are quite astonishing. There are many items that are

ticked by the boys at a significantly higher rate than by the girls. The reasons to have registered for confirmation time are higher for the male confirmands on the following items: »to learn more about God and faith« (0.30; CB01), »to make an important step in growing up« (0.54; CB04), »to be strengthened in my faith« (0.37; CB08), »to receive a blessing on the day of my confirmation« (0.30; CC11). Also some important statements on theology and the Church are in Austria more positive on the boys' than on the girls' side; for example, the item »Jesus has risen from the dead« (0.38; CE04), »Faith helps me in difficult situations« (0.53; CE08), »I try to live according to the Ten Commandments« (0.36; CE11) – and even the items »It is important for me to belong to the Church« (0.34; CG01) and »Our church building means a lot to me« (0.52; CG07). The boys also show a higher interest in the topics »Jesus Christ« (0.49; CL05) and the Bible (0.55; CL06). This positive affirmation of the male confirmands on these items is also repeated at the end of the year. And they also tick significantly higher than the girls on the items: »It feels good to me, when we pray in our group« (0.30; KK49) and »What we do during confirmation time is more interesting than what is usually done in school« (0.34; KK50). Interestingly enough at the end of the year, the Austrian girls have a more positive perception of the »community in the confirmation group« (-0.49; KB02) or had more »the feeling of community« (-0.52; KN04) and liked more »the action« (-0.35; KK05).

Some similar results can be seen in *Switzerland*. Here also the boys registered for confirmation time more than the girls »to be strengthened in my faith« (0.32; CB08) and ranked higher for the statements »Jesus has risen from the dead« (0.32; CE04), »I believe in God« (0.40; KE09) and »I know what the Christian faith entails« (0.38; KE10). They are also significantly more interested in the topics »Course and meaning of Sunday services« (0.31; CL03), »Jesus Christ« (0.56; CL05), the Bible (0.31; CL06). At the end of the year, these interests seem to be somehow fulfilled. So the boys state significantly higher that »I have learnt more about religions« (0.31; KB15). They still say more than the girls that »Jesus has risen from the dead« (0.31; KE04) and – like the Austrian male confirmands – they also tick significantly higher than the girls on the item »It feels good to me, when we pray in our group« (0.36; KK49). Nevertheless at the end of the year, the Swiss boys appreciate more than the girls that they had fun (0.39; KN02) and the feeling of community (0.31; KN04).

In *Denmark*, the results show that female confirmands have a higher positive attitude towards classical topics of confirmation work. As an important motive they emphasise more »to come to my own decision about my faith« (-0.32; CB03). Also, their belief in God (-0.34; CE09) and that »God loves all humans and cares about each of us« (-0.36; KE03) is stronger. They want to learn about Jesus Christ (-0.34; CL05) and the Bible (-0.36; CL06) more than their male

peers. At the end of the year, their belief in God (-0.42; KE09), that »God created the world« (-0.38; KE01) and that »there is life after death« (-0.30; KE02) is also stronger. And it is also more important for the girls, »to belong to the Church« (-0.48; KG01). In connection with this, they emphasise more strongly, that »we had a lot of action« (-0.31; KK05) and »fun« (-0.33; KN02) and that they »experienced forms of worship adequate for young people (-0.56; KK30). In connection with this, the self-description of the girls at the beginning and at the end of the year of being a Christian (-0.31/-0.42; CG09/KG09), a religious person (-0.38/-0.31; CG11/KG11) and being a »spiritual person« (-0.28/-0.20; CG12/KG12) is significantly higher than for the boys, whereas the latter state higher »I am an atheist« (0.45/0.48; CG14/KG14). The Danish results might have something to do with the fact that half of the workers are women and that in Denmark there are no male or female volunteers.

In *Finland*, it seems that the girls are much more involved in the confirmation work than the boys, emotionally as well as intellectually. They are not only much more eager »to experience community in the confirmation group« (-0.51; CB02), »to meet and get to know friends« (-0.91; CB06) and »have a lot of action« (-0.71; CK05) but they also have higher expectations »to think about what is good and bad for me and my life« (-0.32; CB07) and »to be allowed to decide about the topics together with my fellow confirmands« (-0.47; CK04). So they are, as mentioned above, more interested in certain topics related to everyday life and mutual communication than the boys. The girls are obviously not as uncertain what to believe as the boys are (-0.38; CE05). Also at the end of the year, they have a more positive perception of what has happened during that time, probably due to the higher participation. The girls have attended the Sunday services more regularly (-0.34; KK09) and have a more positive attitude towards church services (-0.30; KN10) and prayers in the group (-0.39; KN13). Again, two questions that were only used in the Nordic countries, are also of interest here. The girls' self-description of being »a Lutheran« at the beginning (-0.30; CG10) and the end (-0.30; KG10) is not only higher than being »a Christian« (-0.23/-0.22; CG09/KG09) but also higher than the boys' self-description on that point. Only on a few items is the average mean of the boys significantly higher. They feel more »obliged to take part« (0.33; CA05), they state higher »to pray by myself« at the beginning (0.30; CH02) and the end (0.36; KH02) of the year and they could imagine more to turn to a minister in case of problems (0.59; KG06). Nevertheless the confirmation training has obviously been more stressful for the boys (0.34; KK10). At the end of the year, the tendency to call oneself an atheist is also significantly higher (0.32; CG14) amongst the male confirmands, although this mean value declines at the end of the year (0.27; KG14).

These tendencies in gender differences are very close to the results in *Norway*.

Here also the girls' attitudes and their interests in the contents of the confirmation year are obviously more positive. The boys' motives are more extrinsic like that they felt obliged to take part (0.45; CA05), for example, because of their grandparents' wishes (0.43; CA07) and they want to have »a lot of action« (0.31; CK05). For the girls it is more »important to belong to the Church« (-0.47; CG01), to »attend the group meetings of the confirmation training« (-0.56; CK08); they know more »what the Christian faith entails« (-0.31; CE10) and they are interested in topics like the Lord's Supper (-0.33; CL02) and their »own parish« (-0.35; CL04). At the end of the year they are more secure than the boys about »what I should believe« (-0.30), for example, that there is »life after death« (-0.34; KE02), they attended the Sunday services more regularly (-0.33; KK09) and felt in the parish »welcome and accepted« (-0.31; KK37). The girls call themselves at the beginning and at the end much more a Christian (-0.50/-0.37; CG09/KG09) and a »religious person« (-0.37/-0.35; CG11/KG11), whereas the boys rather choose the self-description »I am an atheist« (0.41/0.39; CG14/KG14). Nevertheless on the average, the male confirmands rather than the female confirmands say that they pray by themselves – at the end of the year even more than at the beginning (0.28/0.31; CH02/KH02).

Looking at the emotional and cognitive perception of confirmation work, the gender differences between female and male confirmands seem to be the highest in *Sweden*. Almost all positive attitudes are on the side of the girls. They not only expect fun to a higher extent (-0.69; KN02), »a lot of action« (-0.53; CK05), look forward much more than the boys to the group meetings (-1.05; CK08) and church services (-0.83; CK09). But they want to »learn more about God and faith« (-0.34; CB01), to »experience community in the confirmation group« (-0.65; CB02), »to come to my own decision about my faith« (-0.60; CB03), »to meet and get to know friends« (-0.73; CB06) and »to think about what is good and bad for me and my life« (-0.54; CB07). They not only want much more than the boys »to increase my knowledge about the Bible« (-0.37; CB13), »to talk about life after death« (-0.42; CB14) and »to experience the presence of God« (-0.36; CK14), they are also much more interested in themes like »other Christian denominations« (-0.32; CL15), »care of the Environment/Ecology« (-0.38; CL16), the Ten Commandments (-0.34; CL17) and the Holy Spirit (-0.34; CL19). It seems to be more »important for them to belong to the Church« (-0.33; KG01) and they are more convinced, »that the church does a lot of good things for the people« (-0.33; KG05). They are more interested in topics like the Lord's Supper (-0.36; CL02), course and meaning of Sunday services (-0.30; CL03), their own parish (-0.39; CL04) and the topic »Jesus Christ« (-0.33; CL05). These positive expectations of the Swedish confirmands are obviously fulfilled at the end of the year. Especially the girls say that they not only had a lot of action (-0.33; KK05) and experienced »good examples for respect

among people with different convictions (-0.39; KK33), but that »my questions concerning faith were addressed« (-0.35; KK11) and that they »have become (more) conscious of my responsibility for ecological problems« (-0.48; KK45). The girls are more secure that »there is life after death« (-0.62; KE02) and that »God loves all humans and cares about each of us« (-0.34; KE03). Therefore, it is still more important for the girls »to belong to the Church« (-0.34; KG01). The perception of prayers in the group is much higher than on the boys' side (-0.49; KN13). They not only appreciated the »contents/topics of the lessons« more (-0.47; KN03) but also the church services (-0.31; KN10).

4.6.3 Interpretation

Looking at the overall results, it seems to be clear that the classical contents and also the group-oriented methods of confirmation work are approved of and appreciated by the female more than by the male confirmands. It looks as if the intentions of confirmation work to contribute to faith- and life-orientation, to communicate about religion and to develop ways of group interaction and church participation fit much more with the general habits of girls during this time of adolescence. The girls are obviously more interested in speaking about faith-related questions and they seem to be more open to communicate, interact and express their feelings in the confirmation group, whereas the boys, for example, in Switzerland and Austria are more interested in getting information about their own and other religions.

But looking at the national results more closely, it has to be said that there are of course differences in the perception of the confirmation time amongst male and female confirmands that are especially connected with national traditions as well as the concrete models of and experiences with confirmation work in the different countries. In addition to the general gender difference and the clear gender specific phenomena in all of the countries, there seem to be gender related specific perceptions in the different countries also depending not only on the certain national traditions of confirmation work but also on the general religious situation. So, for example, the Austrian results might mirror the fact that the Protestant Church is a minority church. Maybe the idea of being a minority influences the boys more than the girls and therefore they are more positive towards church and faith questions.

Looking at the results it can also be suggested that where confirmation has become an individual choice rather than something everyone does, girls are more likely to participate – this is very much the case in Sweden.

Nevertheless, one has to be careful about clichés. First of all, it has to be noticed that the boys' appreciation of confirmation work and its contents are

not small at all. There are many items which show a clear interest on the part of the male confirmands, e. g., about faith and life orientation, community or group interaction. Throughout the examined countries it is obvious that boys appreciate their confirmation time, their group and also the ministers not much less than the girls. This is clearly seen on the item that they are more likely to contact a minister in case of personal problems than the girls, as well as their high affirmation of having their own children baptised some day. Above that, the boys' interest in issues like »justice and responsibility for others«, »friendship« or the »meaning of life« is also on a high level.

Secondly, by looking at the level of appreciation of the different items, there is obviously always a number of boys interested in making music, singing and expressing their thoughts and feelings. Vice versa, there are always some girls who rather prefer to express themselves by forms of outside activities rather than group discussions or singing, not to mention that they also do not mind getting money and presents at the end of the year.

Thirdly, due to the specific adolescent development, it seems as if the boys need some sort of inner space to think about questions which are important to them. This can be noticed especially where they prefer to pray for themselves instead of praying in the group and where they also show a clear desire to receive a blessing on the day of their confirmation.

The boys' attitudes can be interpreted as a gender specific form of keeping and hiding their important questions for themselves and trying to distance themselves from common conventions whereas more girls tend to accommodate to these conventions or make their emotions expressive. The Scandinavian results may be due to the fact that in most of these countries, church has begun to be mainly run by women.

From the results so far, it can not be seen clearly, whether certain models of confirmation work in the countries enlarge or reduce the gender gap. But it has to be noticed that especially in the Scandinavian countries, confirmation work seems to be more attractive for the girls which might be connected with the fact that participative forms are a main characteristic of the whole confirmation time.

4.6.4 Consequences and Impacts for Future Confirmation Work

The main problem, as far as it can be seen on the present basis, could be a didactical structure of confirmation work that does not fit well enough with boys' interests and competences. There could be a problematic connection between education, faith and feminization, as if confirmation time was only something »soft«. Especially certain communicative and creative approaches

to faith issues and church themes tend to involve girls more than boys. It should be clear that the educational goal of, from a gender perspective, better serving girls must not entail neglecting the boys. Rather the opposite might be the case, so that hopefully the pressure to adjust to traditional roles, behaviours, ways of thinking and modes of acting decreases for boys as well.

Looking at this, some points should be emphasised. For future confirmation work there is a need to develop more forms which rely not so much on the expression of personal views and feelings but on open space and time for individual reflection about life-, faith- and spirituality-related questions (cf. Lerner et al. 2006) so that boys can have the feeling to really be involved with their personal questions and answers (cf. Knauth et al. 2002; Ahrens/Pithan 2002; in general cf. Horne/Kiselica 1999).

If confirmation work wants to have a sustainable effect on the identification with the Church, it is necessary to develop attractive youth work opportunities especially for male young people. Here it looks as if the group activities as well as the Church services offered by the church workers are not open enough for the specific needs and perceptions of the male confirmands.

And looking at the general tendencies of the results, it is also a special task for confirmation work to enforce the dialogue between the girls and boys. By taking into consideration the boys' and girls' interest on an equal level, both sides could mutually benefit from their specific strengths, capabilities and possible contributions (cf. Burbach/Schlottau 2001). This might lead to a gender-balanced confirmation work that counteracts all sorts of stereotypes, so that the gender-gap does not, at least, enlarge during the confirmation year and time that they share as equals in their parishes and churches.

To achieve this, the main common perspective for all confirmands should be to encourage faith-reflection and spirituality in its fullest sense – mentally, relationally, and experientially in the sense of »not just learning about God, but also experiencing God and growing through a walk of faith« (Ratcliff 2002).

This would not only be a contribution of church work to the confirmands and the parishes, but also in a broader sense to society and its unsolved gender-problems as well. Even if the Church can not solve the problem of established gender differences alone, it is by no means operating by itself, but as a relevant institution in society. Therefore, the Church as a public actor and factor in society should understand itself not only as influenced by the cultural and social images and conceptions of gender, which are forming the confirmands' attitudes, values and approaches to religion, but also as a relevant factor to counteract gender-related conventions which prevent young people from developing their interests and participating equally in Church and society.