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## Feminism and the Academy

### Exploring the Politics of Institutionalization in Gender Studies in Sweden

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LUND UNIVERSITY

PO Box 117  
221 00 Lund  
+46 46-222 00 00



# Feminism and the Academy

## *Exploring the Politics of Institutionalization in Gender Studies in Sweden*

Mia Liinason



LUND UNIVERSITY

Centre for Gender Studies

Lund University 2011

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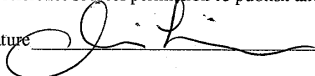
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<b>Abstract</b> The main aim of this thesis is to analyze the process of institutionalization and neo-/interdisciplinary in Women's/Gender/Feminist Studies (WGFS) in Sweden, and the construction of feminist knowledge within this process. Furthermore, this thesis aims to contribute to the feminist debates on academic feminism as a transformative project. Three questions have guided the research process: 1) How has feminist knowledge been organized and institutionalized into the academy? 2) What are the effects of feminist knowledge production? 3) How does the location influence and shape feminist knowledge production? An introduction and seven separate articles investigate these areas of inquiry from different, but linked, angles. The key point in this study is that a realization of the potentials of institutionalizing an oppositional subject area - such as WGFS - in the academy, is dependent on the performance of a continuous critical reflection over feminist teaching and research as critical, radical, and transformative. Articles nos. I, II and III investigate the process of institutionalization and the organization of feminist knowledge into the academy. These studies show that the successful institutionalization of WGFS has created an oppositional space for critical interventions of dominant cultural, social, political, historical, economical orders. However, as discussed in articles nos. IV, V, VI and VII, feminist knowledge production also in parts feeds into the production of dominant discourses. These articles study the construction of notions of feminism, proper objects, and historical narratives in academic feminism, and show that institutionalized practices of feminist knowledge production contributes to the construction of dominant discourses through a stabilization of notions of feminism and feminist analytic tools, and through a marginalization or de-legitimization of alternative, or critical voices. In addition, fractions in this feminist discourse are also analyzed, in a study of alternative feminist notions, points of departure and modes of working in feminism. Here, it is displayed that alternatives to the dominant versions of feminism are constructed through oppositional acts, by which a transformative feminist knowledge production is put into practice.			
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# Feminism and the Academy

Exploring the Politics of  
Institutionalization in Gender Studies  
in Sweden

Mia Liinason



LUND UNIVERSITY

Centre for Gender Studies

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# Abstract

The main aim of this thesis is to analyze the process of institutionalization and neo-/interdisciplinarization in Women's/Gender/Feminist Studies (WGFS) in Sweden, and the construction of feminist knowledge within this process. Furthermore, this thesis aims to contribute to the feminist debates on academic feminism as a transformative project. Three questions have guided the research process: 1) How has feminist knowledge been organized and institutionalized into the academy? 2) What are the effects of feminist knowledge production? 3) How does the location influence and shape feminist knowledge production?

An introduction and seven separate articles investigate these areas of inquiry from different, but linked, angles. The key point in this study is that a realization of the potentials of institutionalizing an oppositional subject area - such as WGFS - in the academy, is dependent on the performance of a continuous critical reflection over feminist teaching and research as critical, radical, and transformative. Articles nos. I, II and III investigate the process of institutionalization and the organization of feminist knowledge into the academy. These studies show that the successful institutionalization of WGFS has created an oppositional space for critical interventions of dominant cultural, social, political, historical, economical orders.

However, as discussed in articles nos. IV, V, VI and VII, feminist knowledge production also in parts feeds into the production of dominant discourses. These articles study the construction of notions of feminism, proper objects, and historical narratives in academic feminism, and show that institutionalized practices of feminist knowledge production contributes to the construction of dominant discourses through a

stabilization of notions of feminism and feminist analytic tools, and through a marginalization or de-legitimization of alternative, or critical voices.

In addition, fractions in this feminist discourse are also analyzed, in a study of alternative feminist notions, points of departure and modes of working in feminism. Here, it is displayed that alternatives to the dominant versions of feminism are constructed through oppositional acts, by which a transformative feminist knowledge production is put into practice.



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**Article VI: "'This Is Not Therapy!' Un/Expected Encounters in Memory Work. Notes from the Field of Feminist Teaching".**

**Article VII: "Problems with differences in feminism, anyone? An exploration of power struggles and feminism in Sweden"**

**Epilogue**

# List of publications included in this dissertation

This dissertation consists of an introductory framework and seven articles. The articles are referenced in the dissertation by the numbers below.

**Article I** Liinason, Mia (manuscript) "Mapping Women's/Gender/Feminist Studies in Sweden 1975-2010".

**Article II** Liinason, Mia and Ulla M Holm (2005) "PhDs, Women's/Gender Studies and Interdisciplinarity." *NORA, Nordic Journal of Women's Studies*, 14:2, 2005, pp. 115 -130.

**Article III** Liinason, Mia (2009) "Why interdisciplinarity? Interdisciplinarity and Women's/Gender *Studies in Europe*." *The Making of Women's Studies*, vol. IX, Athena publications, Utrecht University, Utrecht, pp. 50-66.

- Article IV** Liinason, Mia (2010) "Institutionalized Knowledge - Notes on the Processes of Inclusion and Exclusion in Gender Studies in Sweden." *NORA – Nordic Journal of Feminist and Gender Research*, 18: 1, pp. 38-47.
- Article V** Liinason, Mia (submitted to *SQS Journal of Queer Studies in Finland*) "A Success Story: Explorations of the Disciplinization of Gender Studies in Sweden."
- Article VI** Liinason, Mia (2009) "This Is Not Therapy!" Un/Expected Encounters in Memory Work. Notes from the Field of Feminist Teaching." *Teaching with the Third Wave. New Feminists' Explorations of Teaching and Institutional Contexts*, eds. Brigitte Hipfl, Daniela Gronold and Linda Lund Pedersen, Utrecht University and Stockholm University, Utrecht, pp. 75-95.
- Article VII** Liinason, Mia (submitted to *European Journal of Women's Studies*) "Problems with differences in feminism, anyone? An exploration of power struggles and feminism in Sweden."

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two *GJSS* special issues on Queer Methodologies in 2008 and 2009, Cissi Åsberg, Malin Rönnblom and Redi Koobak from the *NORA* team for such a great collaboration, and also for your understanding during the final stage of writing this dissertation.

I have also been engaged as a board member in different Swedish, Nordic and international boards related to feminist and gender research: the Nordic Research School in Interdisciplinary Gender Studies, the Swedish Association for Gender Research, and ATGENDER are all contexts where I have learnt a lot of importance for the pragmatics and politics in processes around feminist scholarly work. Through my responsibilities as a board member in these different organizations I have also been given the benefit of meeting a lot of exciting scholars, and have had the opportunity to engage in discussions that have sometimes resulted in new collaborative projects. I especially want to acknowledge Nina Lykke, who in the role of the Director of the Nordic Research School in Interdisciplinary Gender Studies created an exciting feminist scholarly environment for PhD-students in gender studies, a context that has had crucial importance for this dissertation. Thanks to Nina also for the many inspiring discussions we have had around my research, both in the context of the Nordic Research School and at other occasions.

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*Mia Liinason*

*31/12 2010*



# Introduction

## Part I: Aims and the context of the research

Reading, writing and learning about Women's/Gender/Feminist Studies (WGFS) in Sweden, a range of paradoxes around feminism in Sweden have come to mind. In these opening words, however, I would like to focus on two issues: obligations and rights. Feminists in Sweden realise that Sweden's international reputation of its policies for gender equality are an effect of a successful collaboration between the feminist movement and the state, and feminists are often proud of this progress. I – belonging to the so called Third Wave generation of feminists who were never part of the feminist movement that struggled for these changes – am one of those privileged young feminists who can take an MA-degree in gender studies, not to mention a PhD. I have the right to belong in academic feminism. At the same time, this position troubles me because it locates me in a generational dynamic in relation to the feminists before me. Often, for instance, when I raise critical points towards feminism in Sweden I am confronted with the question: “But don't you think that feminism in Sweden is a success (compared to other contexts, compared to other times)?” – as if my critique implies that the former feminist achievements are worthless. However, acknowledging feminists before me does not necessarily mean agreeing with them. I concede that feminism in Sweden has been a successful endeavour, but I do not want to continue this success story without interrupting. As such I have come to realise that this right to

belong is also an issue of accountability: the right to belong also involves obligations.

As an heir apparent to this success, I notice that I am often expected to be grateful, to focus on the advantages and background the negative effects. That, however, is a procedure that not only would involve a reproduction of the success story, but, in line with the generational dynamic, also would be a confirmation of the greatness of the feminists before me. Such a sequence of consequences presents some challenges, because my understanding of feminism is not identical to the successes, or failures, of any feminist. Such a trend may render feminism less radical, transformatory, emancipatory, as I suggest in this dissertation. Resisting this generational logic is difficult, though, because criticisms of feminism can be misread as making claims to the effect that earlier feminist assertions may have been insufficient, which would not really involve any break with the generational logic. Such a procedure may instead confirm the heroic narrative that is inherent in this very generational logic. This has also been described as creating Oedipal relationships in feminism (van der Tuin 2009; Henry 2004).

My ambition in this dissertation, is not to offer correctives, neither is it based on an ambition of presenting solutions to these dilemmas. I offer instead an explorative analysis, foregrounding the potentials of an oppositional space in the academy as dependent on the performance of a *continuous* critical reflection over feminist teaching and research as oppositional, radical, and transformative.

The institutionalization of feminist knowledge production into the academy has not been an easy process and feminists have met strong resistance from the academic community during this process. This study does not focus on that resistance, but on the internal processes within feminist knowledge production. My study differs from the academic studies of feminist knowledge production in Sweden where inquiries are made from a location outside of the subject area (e.g. Hallberg 2001). In this dissertation, I study these processes from a location within the subject area.

I identify strongly with feminist contributions and acknowledge the centrality of feminist knowledge production. In relation to academic feminism, though, the work with this study has placed me as an outsider within (Hill Collins 1998b: 279). This is a contradictory position that has generated accessibility and permittance but it has also located me on the outside, which I have experienced through suspending and diminishing practices during the research process. I understand this as boundary work, and the result of power struggles over the right to define feminist knowledge production.

The moment I realised that my right to belong also renders obligations, I was transformed from a happy heiress of earlier feminist successes to an unpleasant critic. This study, consequently, is a critique of my own theoretical home. More specifically, I inquire into the hegemonic practices that take shape within the construction of WGFS, through a study of the interplay between feminist knowledge production, the state and the academy. It is a project that focuses on tensions and fractions that occur in feminist knowledge production and the paradoxes that follow from a successful institutionalization and a close collaboration with the state, against the background of feminist visions for transformation. It is my hope that this dissertation will contribute to the debates on the politics of institutionalization and of feminist knowledge production as transformative.

## *Outline of the dissertation, aims and the research questions*

This dissertation consists of seven separate articles. Three of these (no. I, II and III) engage with discussions on the organization of feminist knowledge in academia through analyses of processes of institutionalization<sup>1</sup> and neo-/interdisciplinary in gender studies in Sweden. The four ensuing articles (no. IV, V, VI and VII) scrutinize the knowledge that is produced, through analyses of the construction of historical narratives, proper objects and notions of feminism. The common denominator in all seven articles is the examination of the pedagogic and performative effects of the construction of feminist knowledge and processes of institutionalization and neo-/interdisciplinary. The dissertation starts with an introductory chapter in which the reader is provided with the contextual framework for the seven articles. The introduction is divided into five parts. In this first part, I describe the aims and the research questions that have guided the work in this dissertation. In this part, I also present the immediate context of the research by giving a brief presentation of the structure of higher education in Sweden and an in-depth description of the research tradition wherein this study is located. In the second part, I outline the time and scope of the study, present the empirical material and clarify the key terms used in the dissertation. The third part presents the theoretic frame in which this research is situated. The fourth part introduces the methods used and the methodological approaches. The fifth and final part of this introductory chapter offers a summary of the articles and key points made. This part also describes the main contribution in this study to feminist knowledge production and gives suggestions for further research. Finally, an epilogue is located after the articles.

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<sup>1</sup> I will explain this and other key terms in the dissertation in a separate section, see *Key terms*.

An overarching argument in this dissertation is that there is an interplay between on the one hand, the knowledge that is produced in gender studies and, on the other hand, the institutional and the neo-/interdisciplinary processes that take shape. This interplay is understood as an ongoing political struggle over what constitutes academic work and feminist knowledge. As will be displayed in the section *Research context*, it is currently possible to find several feminist analyses of the relationship between knowledge production, power and politics. Yet, there is to date no in-depth study examining the relationship in Sweden between politics, power and knowledge in the production of feminist knowledge, which singles out the originality of this study.

Rather than conceiving the processes of institutionalization and disciplinization as separate orders, detached from our academic practices of teaching and research, I look upon these as interactive processes. Therefore, the analytic perspective that has guided me throughout the work with this dissertation has not been informed by questions like “what is gender studies knowledge, what does it mean?” which are questions that treat knowledge as an already constructed object or as an already stable event integrated into an established institutional structure. Taking inspiration from Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (1991), I ask: “how does the knowledge that becomes institutionalized in gender studies work? What relations are created through this knowledge, and what does it enable?”<sup>2</sup> This has provided possibilities for analysing the interactive processes of feminist knowledge production, institutionalization and neo-/interdisciplinarization.

The main aim of this dissertation is to analyse the process of institutionalization and neo-/interdisciplinarization and the construction of feminist knowledge within this process. I focus on practices of inclusion

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<sup>2</sup> Sedgwick proposes that the task for queer epistemology is to “ask how certain categorizations work, what enactments they are performing and what relations they are creating, rather than what they essentially *mean*” (1991: 27).

and exclusion within WGFS and have made a strategic selection of the material studied to be able to adequately scrutinise this. Furthermore, this thesis aims to contribute to the feminist debates on academic feminism as a project aiming at producing transformative knowledge. In both of these aims, three areas have emerged as significant spheres that require close attention. These areas involve different but related analytical perspectives and are, to different degrees and in varying combinations, important for the analysis in all seven articles. Consequently, following three questions have guided me through the research process:

1. *How has feminist knowledge been organized and institutionalized into the academy?* The organizational/institutional location of WGFS into the academy has been described as a result of the inspiration from the women's liberation movement in the early and mid-1970s. Furthermore, the influence from governmental policies is also acknowledged as an important factor for the development of WGFS in all geo-political contexts, and, as will be described in the section *Research context*, the relationship between the state and the academic feminists in Sweden is often presented as a case in point in this discussion. Accordingly, these circumstances sketches a difficult and complex situation for the enterprise of integrating feminist knowledge into the academy: while the feminist knowledge project is described as aiming at producing emancipatory knowledge and developing working models with an explicit aim to move across and often also beyond disciplinary and institutional borders, the academy has been understood as a site governed by a hierarchical structure where knowledge often is described as organized along a monodisciplinary model.<sup>3</sup> Feminists have also raised concerns

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<sup>3</sup> The monodisciplinary organization of knowledge in higher education has, inspired change in higher education policies during the latest two decades, where the importance of initiating possibilities for cross-disciplinary collaborations and working models have been a major impulse in higher education policies in the of whole Europe. I discuss these changes and some crucial implications of them in articles no. I, II and III.



about whether the support from the government also risks de-radicalizing feminist ideas. Consequently, I have found it apt to investigate the how of this process: How has feminist knowledge been institutionalized and organized into the academia, and how has the relationship between state policies and academic feminism interacted with the production of feminist knowledge?

2. Against the background of feminist debates around academic knowledge production (where feminists have raised questions like: “*Whose truth? Whose nature? Whose version of reason? Whose history? Whose tradition?*” Bordo 1993: 219) and the relationship between academic feminism and feminism as an emancipatory movement, i.e. the political mission in feminism, this dissertation also engages in inquiring into the political, epistemological and methodological effects of the ideas that circulate in academic feminism. The second question that has guided the exploration in this dissertation is thus: *What are the effects of feminist knowledge production?* Even though academic feminists agree upon the critiques raised against universalist claims, indeed, feminists have themselves taken part in articulating this critique, they nonetheless continue to engage in the struggle against patriarchy. The paradox embedded here, continues to produce intellectual debates in academic feminism, where modernity’s “real” cannot easily be translated into the linguistic figures of postmodernity. Also, the call for taking differences into account raised by, among others, anti-racist, gay and lesbian, Third World, queer and postcolonial feminists, has awakened a debate in feminism around how to conceptualize feminism’s transformative aim, when feminism’s subject is deconstructed and the unitary base for feminism is dissolved. This gives implications for how feminists conceptualize the past, present and future of feminism, and for feminism as a transformative endeavour. I have therefore taken an interest in inquiring into the political, epistemological and methodological effects of the knowledge that becomes institutionalized in gender studies in Sweden.

3. The production and reproduction of knowledge about gender in Sweden has emerged in a close relationship to state policies and strategies. Often, the results of this close relationship are described as successful where the institutionalization of gender studies in the academy is presented as one example of this success. In return, the production of feminist knowledge in the academy has itself formed the base for state initiated recommendations and regulations in order to enhance gender equality in the society. Hence, an inquiry into the politics of place is of interest in a study of these processes, which the third research question aims to shed further light upon: *How does the location influence and shape feminist knowledge production?* Based on ideas of women's common interests, the institutionalization of feminist ideas in Sweden has been shaped and promoted by an entwined relationship between state policies and feminist academic practices in what can be described as a national project. In order to understand the role of gender in the national project and of the national project in gender studies, I consequently explore how the location influence and shape feminist knowledge production.

### *Higher Education in Sweden*

In order to sketch the context in which WGFS in Sweden is located I give in the following a brief contextual description of the system of higher education in Sweden. Historically, two different university traditions have had an impact on the system of higher education in Sweden: the German and American tradition. The German Humboldt-tradition served as a model for higher education until the mid-1960s, when the research policy started to stress the importance of developing connections between the universities and public welfare, as well as with trade and industry. During the 1960s-, 70s-, and 80s, higher education in Sweden was extended through the

establishment of many new university colleges and the increased number of students. Regional university colleges were founded to meet the political goal that everybody should have the possibility to study at a university or a university college. The structure of higher education was reshaped by comprehensive reforms in 1977 and 1993.<sup>4</sup> The 1993 reform decentralized the decision-making process and the internal organization of the institutions of higher education which were from then onwards decided by the institutions themselves on the basis of central guidelines. Furthermore, in 2009, the government published a government bill, which will take effect as of January 2011, with the suggestion on more autonomy for the institutions of higher education (Prop. 2009/10: 149). This proposition suggests as best practices an increase in the self-government over the internal organization, and particularly in areas like the hiring of teachers and the organization and planning of education.

Education, research and PhD-training in Sweden are funded through state public funding. External grants are complementary to the state public funding, and in 1999 external grants surpassed the public funding. The structure of research funding is divided into a) public funding agency with three research councils, nine research foundations and 10 public authorities, b) local authorities and county councils, c) EU-grants, d) private funders such as Swedish and non-Swedish organizations and enterprises. The population in Sweden amounts to 9 million. There are 50 state-run and private educational institutions in the system of higher education, of which 13 have the right to award doctoral degrees. In 2006, the number of students at Swedish universities and university colleges totalled 389 100, and the number of PhD-students 18 000 (Utbildningsstatistisk årsbok, SCB

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<sup>4</sup> The reform in 1977: Regeringens proposition 1975:9, Stockholm, Ministry of Education. The reform in 1993: Swedish Higher Education Ordinance 1993. SFS No. 1993: 100. Reprint: SFS 1998: 1003, Stockholm, Ministry of Education. Swedish Higher Education Act, 1992. SFS no. 1992: 1434, Stockholm, Ministry of Education.

2007: 144, 185). Undergraduate-, Bachelors-, and Masters degree education in gender studies is offered at 10 institutions, of which 3 institutions also offer PhD-training.<sup>5</sup> In 2010, 21 PhD-students were enrolled for PhD-training in gender studies (Liinason 2010).<sup>6</sup> Higher education in Sweden is free of charge and undergraduate studies are funded by governmental grants based partly on the number of students, partly on their achievements.

These changes in higher education policies can be summarized as a change from a liberal university to a bureaucratically governed mass-university. As of today, critical scholars characterize the institutions for higher education as “teaching factories” striving to increase the efficiency against daily practices of teaching and research, among other issues through a stronger focus on examination and more frequent exams. Within this context, the space for conversations between students and teachers, for critical reflection, for research and for interdisciplinarity is described as severely diminished (Overrein 2000: 70). The background to this development is the explosion of students that took place during the 1960s and 1970s, as an effect of welfare-state policies that opened up the possibilities for education for the working class and for women. This restructuring of the universities was made against the background of changed social and political aims, but also against the need to adjust the universities to the needs from the labour market. However, these ambitions

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<sup>5</sup> Undergraduate-, Bachelors-, and/or Master degrees are offered at: Umeå University, Uppsala University, Stockholm University, Södertörn University College, Linköping University, Örebro University, Karlstad University, Göteborg University, Lund University and Malmö University. PhD-degree is offered at Örebro University, Göteborg University and Lund University. Umeå University has a national multidisciplinary graduate school for integrated gender research (Genusforskarskolan) and Linköping University as a national-international graduate school for interdisciplinary gender studies (InterGender). Linköping University also offers a transdisciplinary PhD-education at Tema: Genus. The PhD-students at Tema: Genus is included in the numbers of PhD-students mentioned above.

<sup>6</sup> In addition to this, 30 PhD-students are enrolled at the multidisciplinary graduate school Genusforskarskolan in Umeå. They have a dual affiliation and will receive their exam in another discipline than gender.

were combined with efforts to streamline and shorten the time of study, and through this the possibility to examine more students (Overrein 2000: 69-71). As of today, these policies continue to give implications for the daily research and teaching practices all around Europe, through an even stronger accentuation of efficiency. Describing this as a neo-liberalization of the academy, scholars critically examine the implications of a neo-liberal discourse on teaching and research practices. Here, the measuring of “teaching performance”, “research quality” and “institutional effectiveness” that is carried out at the universities is criticized as a “new form of coercive and authoritarian governmentality” (Shore and Wright 1999: 557).

### *Research context*

Scholarship that critically analyses the production of academic feminist knowledge has been a source of inspiration in this dissertation. This body of scholarly work spans over a range of theoretical perspectives (i.e. feminist, postcolonial, queer theoretical and poststructuralist) and analytical spheres (e.g. reflections on the institutionalization of feminist ideas; critical attention to the production and the effects of dominant narratives in academic feminism; inquiries into the implications of the relationship between state policies and feminist knowledge production). Although it is currently possible to find a wide range of scholarship focused on the process of institutionalizing WGFS in different geo-political contexts and in spite of the large production of knowledge around theoretical models and methodological frameworks in feminism, there is to date no extensive study of the interplay between processes of institutionalization and the production

of feminist knowledge in Sweden.<sup>7</sup> The combination of these perspectives, which is the focus of this dissertation, responds to the great demands for such a study (Mulinari 2002; Holm 2001) and offers a critical exploration of the implications of these processes for the possibilities of producing transformative knowledge.

Three areas of scholarship have had a significant impact on the work with this dissertation: a) the debate around the core construction of gender studies as a neo-/interdiscipline, where the organization of knowledge and the mode of working (mono-, multi-, inter-, or transdisciplinary) is analyzed; b) scholarship engaged in reflections on feminism as a transformative project, where the relationship between academic feminism and the political mission in feminism is discussed; c) investigations of the entwined relationship between the production of feminist ideas and of gender equality as a national project, where implications of the collaborations between the state and academic feminism are critically explored.

Below, I provide an overview over these three areas of thought. In addition to this, there also exists a large amount of scholarship aimed at the further institutionalization of WGFS as a discipline/interdiscipline, exploring its different forms and shapes in different geo-political contexts, and investigating the infra-structural situation of the subject area. Together with the three areas of research mentioned above, this scholarship on processes of institutionalization has served as a knowledge resource for my research process and I begin this presentation of the research context with a brief summary of this scholarship.

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<sup>7</sup> There is, at present, one ongoing PhD-project with a similar analytical perspective, focusing on the epistemic status of WGFS in Portugal, by Maria do Mar Pereira at the London School of Economics and Political Science.

## *Research on processes of institutionalization*

There is a large production of scholarship covering the process of institutionalizing gender studies into the academy in all its different endeavours, from structural perspectives and organizational strategies to local contexts, possibilities, dilemmas and challenges raised from state or higher education policies. Many contributions discuss issues that are valid for the situation of WGFS across several national contexts and give descriptive, explorative or prescriptive accounts of the institutional anchorage of the field in the academy through investigations of the infrastructural situation, the different educational degrees and the positions held by scholars in the field (Holm 2001; Lykke 2004a; Göransson 1989; Griffin and Braidotti 2002; Griffin, Medhurst and Green 2005; Bergman 2000). These contributions offer an account of the occurrence of departments, positions and level of education and have been important for the further institutionalization of the field in the academy, arguing for the importance of more institutional security within the academy, often described as a difficult enterprise (Lykke 2001; Braidotti 2000; Barazetti, Leccardi & Magaraggia 2001). Nina Lykke sketches the challenge to institutionalizing WGFS in the academy with following words:

On the one hand, it is important to stress that institutional autonomy (in the shape of separate budgets, the right to define and develop programmes, the right to award degrees on all levels (BA, MA and PhD-degrees), the right to define and appoint positions on all levels from full professors to teaching assistants etc.) is a prerequisite for the in-depth research and teaching activities that can lead to innovative multi-, inter-, and transdisciplinary approaches in Women's Studies. On the other hand, it should be underlined that these new approaches run counter to existing ways of organizing knowledge and that what we aim at is a post-disciplinary enterprise. (Lykke 2004b: 101)

However, contributions also state that the possibilities for an institutionalization of gender studies to a large extent are dependent on the higher education structures in each national context. Here it is found, on the one hand, that an autonomously governed university sector gives possibilities for local departments or subject fields to develop cross-departmental collaborations, which is beneficial for gender scholars who often and by various reasons collaborate across the disciplinary borders, compared to, on the other hand, a strictly state-controlled higher education system, where various interdisciplinary initiatives as well as the development of new subject areas are hampered (Griffin, Medhurs and Green 2005; Le Feuvre and Metso 2005). In these discussions, the Swedish higher education system is presented as beneficial for the development of WGFS, where it is described that organizing activities from the scholars since the mid-1970s has been met by a recognition from the government and the funding councils, through, for example, governmental grants, calls for funding of research projects and earmarked positions (Jordansson 2003; Alnebratt 2007). In addition, the combination of the close links between the government, grass-root feminists and academic feminists is mentioned as productive for the further development of WGFS in Sweden: "Sweden is an example of a country where there has been much grass-roots feminism as well as students' interest in Women's Studies ... but where state support and close links between Women's Studies and equal opportunities policies have been characteristic as well." (Lykke, Michel, Puig de la Bellacasa 2001: I, 10). In spite of the strong emphasis in research policies on interdisciplinary initiatives in the context of higher education in Sweden, research also describes how traditional disciplinary structures in the universities and funding councils in Sweden continue to create obstacles to collaborative practices across disciplinary boundaries, which is identified as a difficulty for WGFS scholars when they apply for positions and research projects (Holm and Liinason 2005).

Processes of institutionalization of WGFS are also dependent on the various historical and political developments in different national contexts



(Griffin & Braidotti 2002: 5; see also Hemmings 2006a; Liinason and van der Tuin 2007; Lykke 2004a; Braidotti 2002). In return, WGFS scholars have been interested in analysing the relations between broader academic policy and political factors and the pace and forms of the development of WGFS as a field, and this interest has generated a vibrant and rich body of work (Pereira 2008; Alnebratt 2009; Bergman 2000). In their analyses of these processes of institutionalization, WGFS scholars have identified a range of important issues, both at an institutional and a pedagogical level (Lykke 2004a, 2009; Griffin, Medurst and Green 2005). Investigations of the processes of institutionalization, its relationship to state policies, higher education and academic policy have themselves also shaped the institutionalization of WGFS in the academia. Even though these scholars enter the field from different inter/disciplinary backgrounds and from different ontological and epistemological departures, their work aims at further integrating gender studies in the academy. Through a mapping of the state of the art of WGFS, i.e. a presentation of the infra-structural situation of WGFS today and a historical review of the process of institutionalization of WGFS in Sweden, this dissertation continues this scholarly tradition arguing for the need of an increased institutional security for feminist scholarship. Simultaneously, this dissertation also connects to the scholarly attention given to processes of neo-/interdisciplinarization, through an examination of the implications of the organization of feminist knowledge, collaborative strategies in feminist knowledge production, and reflections that strive to resist homogenizing tendencies in the production of a canon in teaching and research.

## *Interdisciplinarity*

The large differences between the organization of gender studies in different European countries have been a topic of interest in a broad range of literature (Bird 1996; Lykke, Michel and Puig de la Bellacasa 2001, Michel 2001b). The debate about whether the subject field should be integrated in established disciplines or autonomously organized – or both – is further developed in a wide range of literature and related to the discussion on how feminist scholars imagine the relationship between mono-, multi-, inter- and transdisciplinarity and knowledge production. This also reflects a debate in the academy in general, about the need that was awakened in the 1980s of developing models for knowledge that could handle the complex societies of today which resulted in an increased promotion of interdisciplinary working models in higher education policies from the EU, the Swedish government and the funding councils. Simultaneously, the awareness of the negative effects in the development of another “successor science”, as stated by Nina Lykke, in WGFS further fuelled the feminist discussions on the importance of inter- or transdisciplinary working models (2001: I, 18, 2009; Hemmings 2006b, 2008). Nevertheless, as described in the literature, this was a development that could also easily go together with the way interdisciplinarity was promoted in higher education policies. As Sabine Hark describes, such a working mode would not necessarily change anything foundational but could as well result in “business as usual”:

For more than a decade ‘inter’- and ‘transdisciplinarity’ have operated as buzzwords in the abundant debates about the changing nature of knowledge, science, society, and their mutual relations. Both terms currently claim highly invested notions in today’s global knowledge economies such as dynamics, mobility, fluidity, flexibility, excellence, connectivity, and adaptiveness. Rhetorically they play an integral part in the restructuring of the modern western

university as they serve as criteria for excellence in research assessment and teaching evaluation and as a rhetorical resource in the global competition of universities for prestige and funding as well as students and faculty. --- Contrary to these phenomena, however, inter- and transdisciplinarity also figure as prominent emblems of knowledge formations that understand themselves as critical, transformative, and transgressive of modern science, knowledge, and the order of academic disciplines such as Women's Studies, Queer Studies, and Postcolonial Studies. Indeed, one could argue that it is Women's and Gender Studies that most strongly appreciate inter- and transdisciplinarity in the academic universe. For it is the interdisciplinary nature of Women's Studies and its positioning vis-à-vis universities and their supposedly problematic disciplinary order, many believe, that makes Women's Studies distinct within the academy. (Hark 2007: 11-13).

This is, furthermore, one major impetus in the literature, behind scholarship arguing for the potential in WGFS to challenge the traditional organization of knowledge, among other things debating multi-, inter- and transdisciplinarity but also discussing how intellectual tools are constructed (King 1994; Martin 1997; Haraway 1999, 2004; Trojer 2002; Lykke 2004b). Related to this is the relationship between interdisciplinarity, epistemology and research methods. The contributions to those scholarly discussions are characterized by a wide scope, where many agree on the impossibility of objectified knowledge (Alcoff and Potter 1993; Code 1993; Hankinson Nelson 1993; Grosz 1993), some perceive methods simply as tools for finding and analysing the empirical material (Scheman 2006), others want to transcend the division between method and methodology, arguing for a whole set of techniques and perspectives; containing an analytic approach, a theoretical frame and a range of different techniques for collecting the empirical material (i.e. interviews, questionnaires, collection of texts, pictures, videos etc.) (Smith 2005; De Vault and McCoy 2006). In addition, the question of method in WGFS is also influenced by a

transdisciplinary approach, aiming at a transgression of disciplinary departures (Lykke 2009).

Consequently, one important question raised in this body of literature is how, and in that case to what extent, these efforts of producing interdisciplinary or transdisciplinary models can result in transformative knowledge production within the academy as an institution with close connections to state and higher education policies, and particularly in today's sphere of global knowledge economies. Seeing that systems of higher education in many European countries are going through a process of restructuring due to, among other factors, the Bologna Process, interdisciplinarity is, as earlier discussed, a buzzword in higher education policies (Suárez and Suárez 2006) and identified as central to the development of a more flexible higher education system. Simultaneously, feminist scholars have started to develop models for translatability of the knowledge produced, through comparative strategies in various models, of which the latest initiative is a discussion on Tuning practices (Waldijk & Hemmings 2008; Hemmings 2008; Lykke, Michel and Puig de la Bellacasa 2001; Michel 2001). There is consequently a need for and an interest in examining if, and in that case how WGFS manages these processes without homogenizing the knowledge produced in the field across Europe (Waldijk and Hemmings 2008; Hemmings 2008). As this literature shows, there is a demand for further inquiries into the particular constituencies of feminist interdisciplinarity, of the translatability of feminist knowledge, and its relationship to the promotion of interdisciplinary working models as well as models for knowledge transfer in European and national higher education policies, a discussion the articles in this dissertation aim to contribute to.

## *Emancipation and institutionalization*

The relationship between the political mission in feminism and the process of institutionalization is the other central aspect raised in the literature that has functioned as a source of inspiration for this study. The discussion of academic feminism as a political project has been of significant importance along with the discussions arguing for a professionalization of academic feminism and the importance of more institutional security for WGFS. In this literature, WGFS is described as having developed out from a feminist project in the end of the 1970s, where politically aware (i.e. Marxist, leftist) feminist academics argued for an interruption of the oppression of women in society, in scholarship and in the academy (Holm 2001; Manns 2009; Göransson 1987; Norlander 1997). Here, Ulla Manns explains how this also was a unitary project, where sex was understood as the common denominator: “Women’s studies were built from a desire to address the oppression of women globally and in general terms. One wanted to protect all women and the discussions on the varying mechanisms behind the oppression were, like in the contemporary women’s movement, few” (Manns 2009: 301). In addition, this literature describes how the relationship between the women’s movement and women’s studies differ from context to context and that it has resulted in different implications for the institutionalization of WGFS in various national contexts. As discussed in this literature, academic feminism was initiated by the feminist movement in the 1970s, but the continued institutionalization of WGFS is described as dependent on the state-based structures and to what extent feminists want to collaborate with the state (Lykke, Michel and Puig de la Bellacasa 2001; Vaquinhas 2001; Sanz Rueda and San Martín 2001; Lada 2001; Plateau 2001; Michel 2001a; Holm 2001; Griffin & Hanmer 2001; Lykke and Lundberg 2005). Here, Italy is often presented as a case in point, where the feminist movement at first rejected the idea of an institutionalized academic feminism because of the risk of co-optation and

de-radicalization (Barazzetti, Leccardi and Magaraggia 2001; Braidotti 1997). Conatella Barazzetti, Carmen Leccardi and Sveva Magaraggia describe the situation for WGFS in Italy as emerging from primarily two obstacles for the institutionalization of academic feminism. On the one hand, WGFS scholars faced difficulties in "relating to a university structure dominated by ways of co-opting, controlling resources, organizing teaching and research that were highly unfair to women". On the other hand, these authors explain, WGFS scholarship as having been hampered by the contradictions within the feminist movement in- and outside of the academy: "These contradictions partly stemmed from difficulties in mediating between the 'political timetable' proper to feminism and the time needed to build up WS within the institution" (Barazzetti, Leccardi and Magaraggia 2001: I, 64). As such the Nordic countries are described as depicting the opposite, where feminists from the start have been involved in discussions with representatives from the government. The literature explains how academic feminists in Sweden by the end of the 1970s were inspired by the women's movement in their decision to use a dual strategy to institutionalize the subject field in the academy – both autonomously organized and integrated in established disciplines. The early founding of autonomous centres for women's studies and women's researchers is furthermore presented as unique in a European context and described as important because these centres, as the literature explains, created an interdisciplinary space in the academy to address the oppression of women in education and academic practices (Braidotti 1997; Griffin & Braidotti 2002; Holm 2001; Jordansson 2003; Alnebratt 2007, 2009; Manns 2009).

However, the tendencies from the Swedish state to incorporate social movements in state policies is also acknowledged as creating a paradox, not only because of the risk for co-optation and de-radicalization of the transformative agenda of the social movements (Göransson 1989, Norlander 1997), but also, as among others Chia-Ling Yang shows in her study of practices of feminist teaching in Sweden, because

[on the one hand,] Sweden is distinctive in its inclusiveness and equality in terms of gender, class and ethnicity. On the other hand, there are deepening structurally and institutionally grounded ethnic, gender and class divisions and social exclusion in Swedish society and elements of control and discrimination within this welfare state (Yang 2010: 56).

The successful institutionalization of WGFS in the academia in Sweden, the complex relationship between the creation of the so-called “women friendly” society (Hernes 1987) and the exclusionary practices in the Swedish society awakens the need for more analyses. To contribute to this discussion, is one of the aims of this dissertation. This will be performed through analyses located at the intersection of the interplay between the state, the institutionalization/organization of academic feminism and the production of feminist knowledge. The interaction between the state and the feminists in the re/production and circulation of feminist knowledge in Sweden has attracted increased attention during the latest decade and this scholarship will be given a closer presentation below.

### *Knowledge, politics and power*

The major production of investigations, reports and research documents on the institutionalization of gender studies have focused on the financial and infrastructural possibilities for scholars in the field. Still, however, there is also a vivid tradition of feminist thought that interrogates the production and distribution of feminist ideas in state policies and/or feminist academic practices from postcolonial and post-structural theoretical perspectives. In the following, I give a brief presentation of the scholarship from this tradition that has functioned as a source of inspiration in this study.

Epistemological and methodological discussions about geo-political, linguistic and cultural contexts in gender studies are significant in this literature, where questions like “What is Europe?” are posed and investigations of “the Nordic” in gender studies are carried out (Griffin and Braidotti 2002; Manns 2009). In addition, the interactions between the nation state and feminist work in Sweden have formed the base for a number of scholarly studies in the Nordic countries, focused on the production and reproduction of e.g. the notion of gender equality, with implications for the understanding of gender, ethnicity, nationality and sexuality.

In the recent history of the field, the story of how scholarly feminists are working in a close dialogue with the state is presented as a mutual success. In this narrative, gender studies is presented as occupied with investigating the possibilities for equal rights between the sexes. To give an illustration of how this narrative is presented, I quote a description by Bente Rosenbeck over the successes of Nordic women’s/gender studies:

we see a close interrelation between the fight for equal rights and women’s studies. --- There has been a general recognition of the fact that research and researchers within women’s studies can contribute substantially to the equal rights effort. Research in women’s studies provides the knowledge and facts needed ... The emphasis on the equal rights between the sexes has also meant political support in favour of research in women’s studies (Rosenbeck 1998: 354, my translation).

As indicated by the quote above, this narrative of gender studies is composed by references to the scholarly feminist’s and the state’s combined efforts to develop a society where women and men are on equal footing (Qvist 1978; Hernes 1987; Florin 2006). This research has developed successfully, ever since the study of sex roles and social structure in the 1930s (Rosenbeck 1998: 350; Bondestam 2003; Holter 1980) with a culmination towards the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when Carl



Tham, the then educational minister created a system for affirmative action in order to increase the number of female professors in the academy. The Swedish minister for gender equality called Sweden “a champion of gender equality” when the prime minister called himself “a feminist” (Carbin 2008: 26; Eduards 2007). To a large extent, this story is often parallelised with notions of the “Swedish model”, that is, the efforts to develop the welfare state, through the development of the Swedish Folkhem, a process that was initiated in 1928 (Yang 2010: 56 n43). The development of the Folkhem, in return, was connected to the ambition to “make Sweden Swedish”, as ethnologists Billy Ehn, Jonas Frykman and Orvar Löfgren emphasise: “The Folkhem was based on an apprehension of collective progress: a unified nation that resolutely marched into a common future” (1993:54). In effect, as explored by among others political scientist Maud Eduards in her analysis of the connections between discursive and material (female) bodies and the production of the nation in Sweden, the working model for Swedish feminists since the end of the 19th century was accomplished through an articulation of a complementarity between the sexes (Eduards 2007: 13-31, 243-294; Siim and Skjeie 2008; Hellgren and Hobson 2008; Borchost and Siim 2008).<sup>8</sup> Harmony between the sexes still expresses a core value in the Swedish context: “There is a strong and continuously vivid belief in the value of a natural body order, which is built upon a heterosexual and harmonizing logic, with the family in the centre. A

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<sup>8</sup> Notably, the idea of complementarity between the sexes is founded upon an assumption of compulsory heterosexuality – an assumption with problematic implications not only for non-heterosexual practises but also for locations at the very outside of those kinship structures, which become evident in the following comment by Haraway to Rubin’s sex/gender system: “Rubin’s 1975 theory of the sex/gender system explained the complementarity of the sexes (obligatory heterosexuality) and the oppression of women by men through the central premise of the exchange of women in the founding of culture through kinship ... But what happens to this approach when women are not positioned in similar ways in the institution of kinship?” (Haraway 1991: 144). Haraway aims at a discussion about the connections between gender and race, by scrutinizing the position of the slave woman in the kinship system.

proper woman is co-operative, both in the home and in politics” (Eduards 2007: 278).

In *Maktens (o)lika förklädnader* ([2002] 2006) Paulina de los Reyes, Irene Molina and Diana Mulinari highlight the problematic implications of this narrative in Swedish feminism, which they understand as a theoretical and political feminist discourse closely tied to the nation as a physical space and the nation as imagined culture. This feminist discourse defines,

which (women) are entrusted with the task of discharging the heritage of the women’s movement. This discourse marks both nationally (those who belong to the Swedish nation) and culturally (those who belong to the Swedish culture) the conditions for social belonging and identity. The inevitable result is that people with roots outside the Swedish borders become outsiders or strangers ([2002] 2006: 13, my translation).

Critical or cautionary feminist queries about whether the successes of a feminism founded upon an idea of complementarity between the sexes is really a story of a success, or not, have been expressed. Often, these interventions have been met with silence, and consequently not resulted in any change of the success story, as noted by Maria Carbin in her investigation of the Swedish integration debate (Carbin 2008: 26). This lack of response is also highlighted by Ulla Manns in her explorations of lesbian studies and women’s studies in Sweden, and by Paulina de los Reyes, Irene Molina and Diana Mulinari in their survey over the narration of feminism’s recent history in Sweden (Manns 2008: 5; de los Reyes, Molina and Mulinari [2002] 2006).

This body of literature, consequently, intervenes the production of a story of a feminist success in Sweden. In this regard feminism is described as shaped by a white, heterosexual middle-class construction of femininity, which re/inscribes a “welfare-state nationalism, composed by a we-pride towards the world outside” (Mulinari and Nergaard 2004: 210, 216). In this

vein, scholars investigate the production in Sweden of what is called “a hegemonic” discourse of gender equality, which, among other issues excludes immigrants and positions immigrants outside of the national consensus (Carbin 2008: 26, de los Reyes and Mulinari 2005). This literature points to dilemmas and challenges raised by diversity and multiculturalism in the production of women-friendliness. As argued in this literature, based on an underlying assumption of women’s common interests, ideas of modern working women are shaped in contrast to traditional women in the past and in third-world countries (Arora Jonsson 2009; Tuori 2004; Siim and Skjeje 2008; Borkhorst and Siim 2008).

### *Geo-politics and homogeneity*

In an ongoing research project "Translating and Constructing Gender Studies in the Nordic Region, 1975-2005", Ulla Manns, Ulrika Dahl and Marianne Liljeström analyze the construction of a feminist space in the academy in a Nordic context, taking a particular interest in investigating the assignment of geo-political belonging, the production of ideas, practices of citation and canon production in Nordic gender studies. In the frame of this research project, Ulla Manns writes that:

without really being aware of it, it seems as if a space for Nordic women’s studies has taken place, which has not been discussed since the latest years when voices from within [academic feminism] on the one hand point towards hidden norms and expectations, and on the other hand do not feel as comfortable [as other feminists did] in the Nordic context (Manns 2009: 306, my translation).

Notably, the conceptualization of “the Nordic” as something that unites academic feminists is also related to a tradition of feminist thought where the alleged “we” in academic feminism is scrutinized (Manns 2009;

Mulinari and Sandell 1999; Edenheim and Persson 2006). Here, Ulla Manns understands the homogenizing tendencies as motivated by a need to collaborate in the common struggle to interrupt the oppression of women, and describes such a strategy in the Nordic countries as having resulted from the exclusion of voices that wanted to take other, and plural, social orders aside of gender into account in the analysis:

Sometimes one is given the impression that the problematization of feminism's ethnocentrism, un-reflected norms of whiteness, heterosexual dominance and middle classism arrived in the late 1990s, with the discussions on intersectionality and the breakthrough of queer theory. A review of international publications shows that this was not the case. The discussions were already ongoing, although not in the Nordic countries (Manns 2009: 301, my translation).

This tradition of feminist thought is often arranged under the label feminist historiography (Hemmings 2005) and analyses the continuity in academic feminism and poses probing questions to the way feminist history has been told, and inquires about the implications of how the production of a teaching canon and the idea of homogeneity/heterogeneity in feminism is understood (Hemmings 2005; Wiegman 2000, 2002, 2004; Edenheim and Persson 2006).

### *Narratives of continuity and unity*

Within this context of feminist historiography, Clare Hemmings makes a critical reflection of how the story of western feminism has been told and traces a dominant narrative in the descriptions that move from unity and conformity in the 1970s to heterogeneity in the 1990s (Hemmings 2005: 118). Also Robyn Wiegman analyses the production of historical narratives in WGFS, and argues for an interruption of the continuation of historical

memory as accumulative. Taking an interest in analysing the responses to the call from postcolonial, anti-racist, queer and GLBT-feminists, Wiegman considers the responses to the refusal from postcolonial, anti-racist, queer and GLBT-feminists of 'woman' as the foundational referent, focused on the loss of a past unity in feminism, based on a fear of a failure in the future – because, as the respondents argue, a scattered feminist agenda would weaken the feminist struggle (2000). In addition, Wiegman has also investigated how the successful academic feminism operates through the idea of generational legacies in WGFS, and analysed the production of narratives about the relationship between experience and theory, of feminist activism and the academy and between the political mission and the institutionalization in WGFS (2004, 2002, 2000, 1999/2000). In those studies, Wiegman calls for critical frameworks that can question these teleological narratives in WGFS, and asks:

Why ... must feminism be defined within the critical limits of the subjectivities of historically present women, as if those subjectivities represent in their plurality both the total content and ultimate political horizon for either feminist political practice or academic knowledge production? (2000: 820).

Interventions from this tradition of feminist thought thus focus on the production of academic feminism itself. Reflecting on the difficulties with teaching the history of feminism at undergraduate level in gender studies with curricula based on a linear, progressive feminist history this scholarship questions the ideas of continuity and unity as a basis for feminist scholarship. Sara Edenheim and Cecilia Persson make a critical feminist analysis of their own teaching practices at a course on the history of academic feminism. The authors discuss the critique of woman as a universal category. Reacting to the pedagogic methodologies and the text books at hand, they note that:

This racism or heterosexism is of course never assumed to exist within ‘our’ academy and in our ways we silently colonize our classroom where the ‘others’ are made into exotic clichés in foreign realities which we visit quickly from our privileged positions (2006: 11, my translation).

Along with the ideas of homogeneity and unity among feminists, these practices of inclusion and exclusion in academic feminism in Sweden is also the topic of interventions from scholars who argue that there is an under-theorization of the links between knowledge and politics and the relationship between power, feminism, ethnocentrism and class in academic feminism in Sweden (de los Reyes, Molina and Mulinari [2002] 2006; de los Reyes and Mulinari 2005; Mulinari, Sandell and Schömer 2003). Thus, Paulina de los Reyes, Irene Molina and Diana Mulinari write: “One argument we often receive is how critical positions weaken feminist work” ([2002] 2006: 11). The authors explain how the construction of feminism in Sweden is based on a homogenous discourse about an (imagined) common past and a shared national culture:

To identify with the struggle of women’s emancipation is reserved for those women who can recognize themselves and feel legitimately proud over other women’s actions in the past. The discourse does not make the past into a universal heritage but anchors the heritage in the space of the Swedish nation state, which is also identical with an imagined national culture ([2002] 2006: 13, my translation).

This discussion takes academic feminism as its starting point, but involves a broad range of feminist practices in Sweden, connected to the academy as well as the social and political sphere, which, according to the argumentation by these scholars, makes the discourse even stronger. In their analysis of the construction of WGFS in Sweden, Paulina de los Reyes, Irene Molina and Diana Mulinari note:

Ethnocentrism, discriminating structures and mechanisms of exclusion within the academy have contributed to the production and reproduction of knowledge about femininity, gender equality and/or cultural borders. The conception of a homogenous, white and Swedish femininity has emerged in this light, in contrast to the ‘culturally distant’, ‘oppressed, and ‘inequal’ immigrant women ([2002] 2006: 20, my translation).

These discussions are concerned with the production of and the negotiations around the Swedish nation, where – through implicit or explicit statements about Sweden as No. 1 on gender equality – a division between “us” and “them” is constructed. In effect, as Maria Carbin writes:

[I]deas about Swedishness are closely connected with notions of the Western world as modern and the Others as stagnated, through links between these notions about modernity and ideas in which the different regions in the world are positioned in different stages of development where the Others are constructed as outside of the modern (Carbin 2010: 33, my translation).

These ideas are, consequently, also intermingled with notions of linear time where different geo-political contexts are positioned in different scales of time – more or less modern, i.e. more or less developed (Carbin 2010: 33). As discussed in this body of scholarship, under-reflected re/constructions of these notions of space (us/them) and time (linear progress) takes a significant role in the shaping of academic feminist knowledge, not least through its relationship with the construction of the Swedish nation – an interplay in which centres and peripheries are created (structural, political, economical, cultural, social and/or ideological). Consequently, seeing that the re/production of these notions are constituted in an interplay between the construction of feminist knowledge and the nation, this dissertation aims at making a critical examination of these complex processes and the practices of inclusion/exclusion in feminist knowledge production, among

other issues through analyses of the telling of feminism's recent history, the production of notions of feminism and in the construction of proper objects in WGFS.

Ranging from studies over financial, political, organizational and material conditions for the institutionalization of WGFS in a wide variety of national contexts, to epistemological and methodological investigations of the knowledge produced in WGFS, this research context has provided me with important inspiration, background information and theoretical insights for the work with this dissertation. However, as this overview also makes evident, an extensive study that combines these perspectives has not yet been pursued. Through its analytic focus on how feminist knowledge production contributes to dominant discourses, this dissertation consequently aims at shedding light upon the interplay between feminist knowledge production and processes of institutionalization.



## Part II: Time and scope of the study, the empirical material, and key terms

This research locates itself during the years 1975-2010. Related to my interest of making an examination of the complexities that take shape when gender studies become a successfully institutionalized<sup>9</sup> subject in its own right in Sweden, a closer scrutiny is devoted to the years 1995-2005. Higher education policies and feminist collaboration around knowledge production in Sweden are also influenced by European higher education policies and feminist collaborative impulses. Therefore, parts of the study expand the scope to a European context. I have limited my study to the processes of institutionalization that take shape within gender studies as a subject area in its own right. The aim is not to cover the production of academic feminist knowledge in its totality. Instead, I have made a strategic selection of the material to be able to make a close scrutiny of the complexities that take shape in the process of institutionalizing feminist knowledge production.

The choice of 1975 as the starting year for my study emerges from certain considerations, but it is not an attempt to mark this year as the first organisation of feminist knowledge production in an academic context. Indeed, one could argue that organised academic endeavours begun much earlier than 1975. For example the Nordic Summer University, some of the earlier critical feminist scholarship orienting from a Marxist perspective have been in from as early as 1973 (Overrein 2000: 65, Hermansen 2000:

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<sup>9</sup> There exists no official agreement in the field as to when gender studies became a successfully institutionalized subject in its own right. The processual character of institutionalization also makes it difficult to state an exact point in time when this happened. However, scholarship on the topic explains certain key points in processes of institutionalization. For pragmatic reasons, I have in this study chosen to follow these. I give a closer explanation of these key points further ahead in this section, see *Key terms*.

44).<sup>10</sup> Other examples include the development of feminist Marxist oriented study groups, where PhD-students met in autonomous groups in the early 1970s, groups that were especially active in Lund and Umeå (Holm 2001: I, 181). However, the mechanisms involved in the desire for origin stories, often feeds in to the production of dominant narratives. In feminist theory, origin stories have also been criticized for establishing a dominant narrative (Haraway 1991: 175, Hemmings 2005) and feminist scholars also argue for a destabilization of these kinds of narratives (van der Tuin 2008). Pointing at the complex power relations between different feminist endeavours located in different geo-political contexts, in different theoretical traditions, and different areas of engagement, feminist scholars consequently highlight the need for a replacement of such dominant, and often also linear, narratives (Haraway 1991: 175). Critiquing the idea of an origin, feminist scholars pay attention to the power mechanisms involved in the creation of historical categorizations, and insist instead on a sensitivity to how mechanisms of power intervene in practices of story telling (Haraway 1991: 109, 187).

My choice of 1975 as the starting year for my study is referred to the aim and context of this study, where I focus on the interplay between processes of institutionalization and feminist knowledge production in Sweden. In 1975, feminist undergraduate courses, mainly given within sociology, with teachers from literature, sociology and history, received funding for the first time (Holm 2001: I, 181), with the ambition to develop

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<sup>10</sup> The Nordic Summer University was founded in 1950 as an explicitly interdisciplinary academic space for critical conversations around knowledge production (Hermansen 2000: 31, 32). Feminists started organizing activities within the Nordic Summer University in 1973 in a circle called "The specific oppression of women in capitalism" ("Kvinneundertrykkelsens spesifikke karakter under kapitalismen"). In the first year, this circle attracted around 50 feminist scholars from 18 different Nordic cities (Overrein 2000: 65, Hermansen 2000: 44). During the following years, the feminist organization at the Nordic Summer University had a big impact on the further organization of feminist scholarship (Signe Arnfred, in Hermansen 2000: 44).

a safe institutional anchorage for WGFS. Here, readers could object against this, and suggest that I construct this starting point for my study out from a supposition that the process of institutionalizing WGFS cannot be acknowledged (as proper) before it receives support from the state. Indeed, as an un-reflected assumption this would imply a limited and limiting perspective on feminist endeavours. I would, however, argue that this is a suitable starting year, because a close collaboration with the state has since the beginning been an explicit strategy of WGFS scholars in Sweden. This strategy was characteristic for the further emergence of feminist knowledge production in Sweden and different from, for example, the strategies in Denmark, Finland and Norway, where feminists chose other routes in the early years, than the combination of a close collaboration between a feminist grassroot-movement and the state (Göransson 1989: 15; Holm 2001). Subsequently, the close collaboration with the state came to lead to critical reflections among feminists over the risks of co-optation and de-radicalization, as I discuss further in Article I.

The empirical material in this dissertation consists of textual documents, for two reasons. Through reading texts that circulate in the domain of WGFS, and analyzing the relationship between these, I want to establish the constructive function of textual accounts. Seeing that this function of texts is related to practices of authorization, it is particularly relevant, I would argue, to study the production of academic knowledge because here is where knowledge accounts – certain narratives, objects, notions – are constructed and presented as facts. Secondly, and connected to my belief that textual accounts does not mirror a truth, but are articulations of discourses, which are both produced by and also themselves producers of materialities, a study of the interplay between academic knowledge production, the academy and the state is, I would suggest, of great interest because it makes it possible to grasp the formative function of discourse, of the ‘doing’ in the discourse.

Through locating the success story of feminism in Sweden as the analytic cross road in this study, I pay attention to the connections between

power relations and the formation of scholarly knowledge (Foucault ([1977] 1980). Understanding the success story of feminism as a discourse that also produces its materialities (and vice versa) I take in this study an interest in inquiring into the hegemonic practices that take shape within the construction of WGFS and focus on how feminist knowledge production contributes to dominant discourses. I have consequently selected the material from this interest of inquiring into how certain notions, historical narratives and objectives are produced and reproduced as the key elements in this area of knowledge, indeed, how they are given and inhabit a dominant position in WGFS. Accordingly, the material that forms the base for the analyses is selected to shed light over significant dominant practices within WGFS. I also discuss the construction of alternative discourses, which I explore by analysing practices of inclusion/exclusion and the production of alternative notions of feminism. Importantly, despite the existence of alternative discourses – often regarded as radical and critical voices – I would argue, that they are positioned at the margins of WGFS. In Section III: *Theoretical perspectives*, I present the production of the success story of feminism in Sweden, and the relationship between dominant and alternative discourses in WGFS as a hegemonic struggle.

The texts that I read circulate in the public domain, in the form of policy material, governmental reports and national evaluations, but I also read texts that strictly belong in an academic context, such as textbooks, booklets, scholarly articles, and research reports. Governmental documents both govern institutional practices and result in materializations (such as funding for the establishment of courses, positions and departments). For the discussion in articles I, II and III, a limited number of governmental bills and state official investigations (SOU:er) have been used. Here, I focus on documents that raise issues of importance for the institutionalization and knowledge production in gender studies. I have also used documents, leaflets and reports from public authorities, such as the public funding councils, Vetenskapsrådet (VR), FAS, FORMAS and the largest private funding council for the humanities and social sciences, Riksbankens

Jubileumsfond (RJ). In 2006, the National Agency for Higher Education (Högskoleverket, HSV) made the first national evaluation of gender studies, in which gender studies was recognized as a regular discipline (HSV 2007: 17R). This evaluation has also been included in the empirical material. Furthermore, in 1996, the Swedish parliament decided that a national secretariat for gender research should be established and was inaugurated in 1998 by Carl Tham, the then minister for education and science (SOU 1995:110). The Swedish Secretariat for Gender Research is commissioned to enhance gender research through information and co-ordination of activities, conferences and networks etc. Over the years, the Swedish secretariat for gender research has published conference proceedings and a number of reports mapping and evaluating the development of the field, weaknesses and strengths. A selection of these conference proceedings, reports and evaluations have been included in the material for this dissertation. Other documents produced at the universities and the departments for gender studies have been of importance in this study, such as curricula and syllabuses. In addition, the Advanced Thematic Network for European Women's Studies, ATHENA, has since the 2000s produced a series of books on the making of WGFS in Europe, which have been included in the empirical material. Material collected in the frame of an earlier international research project I participated in has also been used. This material was gathered in 2004 and 2005, from Swedish universities, funding councils and gender studies departments' websites and consists of annual reports, historical documents and strategic plans. In addition, the national reports from eight European countries that were produced within the frames of this research project have been used as material for the analyses in Article II and III. Finally, apart from the material mentioned above, parts of the material appearing in Article I were collected through a

questionnaire distributed to the ten gender studies departments in Sweden in the spring 2010.<sup>11</sup>

The successful institutionalization of feminist ideas in policies, state regulations and academic practises in Sweden forms a powerful narrative, reiterating and articulating a version of the history of feminist knowledge, re/produces notions of feminism, and constructs proper objects in feminism. Through the process of institutionalization, moreover, these ideas also take shape as materialized practises, in the form of the production of documents (curricula, text books, journal articles etc.), and the establishment of positions (research centres, conferences, teaching modules etc). Against this background, I have selected material for close readings depending on the context of its workings and its effects of importance for the process of institutionalization and for feminist knowledge as transformative.<sup>12</sup>

In these analyses, I make a closer scrutiny of the ideas presented in a particular document, which is understood as having a key role and a certain impact in the construction of gender studies.<sup>13</sup> In selecting the material to the analyses in articles IV and V, I have paid attention to the *authorization* of certain texts, a status that is given to them out from the context of its production/use in different institutional settings of significance for the subject area. In these analyses, I have included a text that is incorporated as compulsory reading at undergraduate education at gender studies

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<sup>11</sup> The questionnaire is included in *Article I*, as appendix no. 1.

<sup>12</sup> While noticing the occurrence of alternative narrations of feminist histories and interpretations of concepts, or of the awareness of the constructed nature of an object of study, for example, I also understand the lack of those narratives in institutionalized practises such as the national evaluation of gender studies (HSV: 2007) or in the representation of gender research by the Swedish Research Council, as a regulatory effect with implications for the further institutionalization of, and hence knowledge production in, gender studies.

<sup>13</sup> Texts have different effects in different contexts. In the UK, for example, it would have been difficult to single out one textbook that has had a major impact on the subject area. However, here, there is a rather small production of text books and the text books that are popular are often around for a long time. The text book I analyze in article no. IV was for instance published in 2002 and was by the time of the investigation (2008) still used at 7 out of 10 departments for gender studies in Sweden.

departments (article IV) and a booklet that was produced and distributed by the Swedish Research Council (the VR) (article V). These contexts are not innocent, nor neutral distributors of ‘proper knowledge’, they also construct the objects that are distributed (the texts) so that they are heard and authorized as “proper” or as “originating the terms” (Ahmed 1998: 18). In other words, my study aspires to intervene into this process of authorization, by pointing at the constructed character of the knowledge displayed as authorized through the texts. In article VI, I explore dominant notions of feminism and the implications of this for feminist teaching and take departure from a teaching session where a classic text in feminist theory was discussed. The material to the analysis in this article is composed of both the text and of the discussions that emanated during the teaching session. In article VII, I inquire about power struggles in feminism by analysing notions of feminism displayed by voices that inhabit an alternative position in relation to the dominant discourse. Consequently, the material selected for this study does not emanate from an authorizing context such as a university course curriculum, or a research council. However, the material to this article is also selected from the context of its workings, that is, chosen because of its position as alternative – both in regards to its location in relation to an authorizing institution and in the discourse. In this article, I make a close reading of a booklet published by the anti-racist feminist think tank and resource centre Interfem. The material that forms the basis for the close readings is given a closer presentation in the respective article.

Continuously during the process of collecting, systematizing and analysing the material, I have also kept a journal with notes from texts I have read “off duty”, with reflections from discussions, events and seminars I have attended while working with this dissertation. As I further discuss in *Section IV: Method of inquiry and methodological approaches*, these notes have offered useful insights to my understanding of the processes I study in this dissertation. At times, I have included some of these notes in the analyses, and they serve three different, to varying

degrees and in varying combinations, purposes in the analyses: a) the notes can offer a contextualization of the topic of investigation; b) the notes can verbalize complexities that take shape in academic feminism and therefore display the richness in academic practices that are not always transferred through textual documents; c) the notes can also function as attempts to situate my own knowledge-in-process.

### *Key terms*

In the following, I give a presentation of the terms that are central to my analysis in this study: disciplinization, institutionalization and the subject area Women's/Gender/Feminist Studies.

### *Disciplinization*

I distinguish between processes of institutionalization and disciplinization. When I talk about the disciplinization of knowledge, I refer to issues related strictly to knowledge production such as the production of objects of study, canonization, key concepts, methods and methodologies. However, institutionalization and disciplinization often interact with each other: when a subject area exhibits the right to train and exam PhD-students – which are institutional conditions – this puts into motion a process of disciplinization because these PhD-students themselves often teach undergraduate students the same theories, methods and methodologies they were taught. In effect, the institutional system, in which the production of a teaching canon, the training of conceptual and methodical tools and the sharing of research strategies take place, may contribute to further disciplinizing of the subject area. Despite their interrelatedness, I distinguish between institutionalization and disciplinization because I understand their different,



but interrelated, effects as the result of a subjection to traditional academic demands, and thus not inherent in the process of knowledge production.

I give a definition of my understanding of mono-, multi-, inter-, trans-, and neodisciplinarity in Article II.

### *Institutionalization*

Institutionalization is a contested term in feminist, sociological and philosophical scholarship. In my use of the term, I want to focus on the process through which social institutions reproduce themselves.<sup>14</sup> My definition of institutionalization is inspired by the understanding of the term by Lisa Lowe (1996) in her study of Asian American Studies/Ethnic Studies in the context of the U.S-academy. Here, Lowe writes:

[I]nstitutionalization provides a material base within the university for a transformative critique of traditional disciplines and their traditional separations, and yet the institutionalization of any field or curriculum that establishes orthodox objects and methods submits in part to the demands of the university and its educative function of socializing subjects into the state. While institutionalizing interdisciplinary study risks integrating it into a system that

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<sup>14</sup> In my understanding of the term social institution, I depart from the definition as described in Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy: “contemporary sociologists use the term to refer to complex social forms that reproduce themselves such as governments, the family, human languages, universities, hospitals, business corporations, and legal systems. --- Anthony Giddens says (Giddens 1984: 24): ‘Institutions by definition are the more enduring features of social life.’ He (Giddens 1984: 31) goes on to list as institutional orders, modes of discourse, political institutions, economic institutions and legal institutions. The contemporary philosopher of social science, Rom Harre follows the theoretical sociologists in offering this kind of definition (Harre 1979: 98): ‘An institution was defined as an interlocking double-structure of persons-as-role-holders or office-bearers and the like, and of social practices involving both expressive and practical aims and outcomes.’” (<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/social-institutions/> accessed 101220).

threatens to appropriate what is most critical and oppositional about that study, the logic through which the university incorporates areas of interdisciplinarity provides for the possibility that these sites will remain oppositional forums, productively antagonistic to notions of autonomous culture and disciplinary regulation and to the interpellation of students as univocal subjects. (Lowe 1996: 41)

### *Politics of institutionalization*

My notion ‘the politics of institutionalization’ aspires to pay attention to the complex character of institutionalization, as described by Lowe above. With the notion, I want to focus on the potential risks for an institutionalized subject area to be co-opted and de-radicalized, and its simultaneous possibilities of performing an oppositional and transformative enterprise. Seeing that institutionalization is an ongoing process, these both dimensions exist in parallel and co-produce each other. The notion ‘the politics of institutionalization’ consequently aims to highlight that the process of institutionalizing practices of knowledge production emerges in an interplay between the educative institution and the knowledge produced. Here, I suggest that it is relevant to study both the ways in which the feminist academic practices of teaching and research are transformed through the process of institutionalization, but also how feminist knowledge production may transform the educative institution, through its practices of teaching and research.

### *Institutionalization: key points*

In this study, I refer to institutionalization as a process. Despite the processual character of institutionalization, however, I also make use of the description ‘successful institutionalization’. This refers to the achievement of particular key moments in the process of institutionalization. These key

moments have been analyzed and described by Gabriele Griffin, in her study of the emergence of WGFS in Europe. Griffin does not make a distinction between processes of institutionalization and processes of disciplinization. In line with the understanding in this dissertation, I distinguish between the two processes, and I have transformed Griffin's indicators from indicators of "successful disciplinization of Women's Studies" to indicators of successful institutionalization of WGFS.<sup>15</sup>

- The number of (endowed) named chairs/professors and lectureships in the field;
- The existence of autonomous or faculty based WGFS centres or departments;
- The academic standing of the staff involved;
- The existence and range of degree-awarding under- and post-graduate programmes;
- The amount and kind of funding (temporary or structural) available.

(Griffin 2004)

### *Women's/Gender/Feminist Studies*

Within the structure of higher education in Sweden, WGFS studies exist in different organizational varieties, even though integrated WGFS is most common. In the following study, I will distinguish between a) gender

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<sup>15</sup> For my purposes in this dissertation, I have from this list taken out the three indicators listed by Griffin that refer to what I understand as processes of disciplinization. These three are: I) The number of disciplines involved in WGFS; II) the research capacity of the discipline, and III) the recognition of the discipline by the various key decision-making bodies relevant to higher education in a given country such as education ministries, higher education funding authorities etc. (Griffin 2004).

research that is integrated into other subject areas; 2) gender studies as a subject in its own right; 3) Transdisciplinary gender research. When it comes to integrated gender research I follow the definitions supplied by Hillevi Ganetz a) gender research b) research with a gender perspective and c) research with a gender aspect (Ganetz 2005: 13). When I use the denomination gender studies, or gender studies as a subject in its own right, I refer to departments or centra/units where there is an undergraduate and/or PhD-training in gender studies. With transdisciplinary gender research, I refer to subject areas where the education is based on a feminist epistemological and methodological foundation, but where the forms of education and research transgress the disciplinary borders. Often, transdisciplinary gender studies aim at blurring the boundaries between the academy and other sectors in the society.

When it comes to the naming of the subject area, I have been inspired by Maria do Mar Pereira (2008) and chosen to use the widest possible denomination in this study: Women's/Gender/Feminist Studies (WGFS). As I discuss in my study, the denomination of the subject area has endured several debates among feminists and different arguments have motivated different suggestions and practices, among them authorization, neutralization and emancipation (Hemmings 2006a). However, seeing that this study analyzes processes of institutionalization, neo-/interdisciplinarization and knowledge production, I want to keep the definitions as open as possible. Depending on the context of my discussion, though, I will also speak about "gender studies", because it is the official name of the subject area in Sweden. In the articles, I also use different denominations, depending on the context of the publication. I explain my choice of terminology in these articles.

## Part III: Theoretical perspectives

The theoretical perspectives that have inspired the work in this dissertation are a composite of feminist, queer, postcolonial and poststructural theories. Through sketching a debate around notions of feminism, I provide a frame for the understanding of my theoretical position in this dissertation. In presenting my relationship to the issues outlined here, I think through the potential of feminism as transformative. I focus on a number of classical ‘splits’ among feminists that have made it difficult to theorize academic feminism, such as those around the relationship between theory-politics and academy-activism, which are splits that both construct and are constructed by ideas around feminism’s past, present and future. The following presentation is divided into two sections. The first section concerns reflections on feminist knowledge production, academic feminism and transformative knowledge practices, and the second section engages with the construction of academic feminism within the academy as an educative institution. In the first section, there are two significant perspectives: a) Feminist debates over the relationship between knowledge production and social change, and b) Michel Foucault’s concept episteme as he developed this through his writings about archaeology/genealogy (*Discipline and Punish* (1975), *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969), *The Order of Things* (1966)). The second section focuses on the relationships between academic institutions and the state, which forms the backdrop to a discussion of theoretical reflections over the relationships between academic institutions, community constructions and the state. In this second section, two perspectives take centre position: a) feminist, queer and postcolonial theorization over the relationship between the academic institutions, community building and the state, and b) Althusser’s theorization on ideology (*On Ideology*, 1971) which I combine with Foucault’s

understanding of governmentality (*Lectures at the College de France 1977/78*).

### *Feminist debates on feminism*

In a recent contribution to the feminist debate about the relationship between theory and politics in academic feminism, Elisabeth Grosz invites the reader to a reflection on the constitutive elements of feminism and the effects of its endeavour. Grosz characterizes contemporary feminist theory as directed to the question of change, which she describes as both a social change as well as a change in the conceptualization of feminism itself. Connecting the possibilities of change with the theoretical realm of feminism, which she separates from studies of everyday life, Grosz writes:

Given that theory is not dead, not dead yet, feminism must direct itself to change, to changing itself as much as to changing the world. It must direct itself to that most untimely and abstract of all domains – the future, and those forces which can bring it into existence. There are a series of central questions that have yet to be adequately asked, questions that do not have a clear-cut answer or solution but continue to be posed and require some feminist mode of address. These are not questions for all of feminism: for those concerned with solutions, with pressing empirical problems, these are no doubt an idle luxury. Nevertheless, they need to be posed somewhere, in some feminist conceptual space, if feminist theory is to develop into a discipline, a body of theory, a movement able to adequately address the real in all its surprising complexity (Grosz 2010: 49).

I have quoted Grosz at length here, because I want to pay attention to the key elements in this statement over feminism as a transformative enterprise, presented by Grosz in terms of bringing about change: the reproduction of a

division between the theoretical, the empirical and the real, the relationship in feminism to time – to the past, present and future of feminism – and, finally, the way in which these questions are related to the endeavour of developing academic feminism into a discipline. Outlining the feminist debate around those issues, I will in the following analyze these questions and explain my own position in relation to these debates.

Feminism as a perspective devoted to change is often provoked by the professionalization of WGFS, the ongoing generational shift in the field, and the organization of knowledge in the academy. These reflections engage in debates over the past, present and future possibilities of feminism, where discussions of the relationship between academic feminism and the political mission in feminism have entailed a rich body of work. These contributions offer a theoretical production over issues of the epistemological, ethical and political foundations in WGFS (Lykke 2009; Wiegman ed. 2002; Kennedy Lapovsky and Beins eds. 2005) as well as a critical examination of key concepts (Butler 1990; Scott 1992; Riley 1988; Wiegman 2002; Boyd 2005), objects of study (Butler 1997; Brown 1997; Scott ed. 1997), and pedagogic strategies in academic feminism (Essed, Goldberg and Kobayashi eds. 2005; Braithwaite et. al eds. 2004; Boxer 1998; Stanley ed. 1997; Ahmed et. al eds. 2000). These discussions have contributed to a debate among feminists, concerned with issues of power, transformative knowledge and social change, where the issue at stake is how to produce knowledge that can bring about social change. At the core of this debate are questions of feminism's origin, mission and aim, which I here would like to exemplify through quoting an excerpt from Susan Bordo's *Unbearable weight*, which offers an illustrative invocation of academic feminism's primary object (in the past), and the loss thereof (in the present). Bordo writes: "When once the prime objects of academic feminist critique were the phallogentric narratives of our male-dominated disciplines, now feminist criticism has turned to its own narratives, finding them reductionist, totalizing, inadequately nuanced, valorizing of gender difference, unconsciously racist, and elitist" (Bordo 1993: 216).

From these reflections, Bordo turns to discussing the possibilities in academic feminism of today to reach the feminist emancipatory aim. Here, she opens up a discussion on the relationship between theory (i.e. postmodernism) and embodied knowledge (i.e. feminism) and rhetorically asks if feminism's engagement with postmodernism's disembodied ideal of advocating heterogeneity and its "race for theory" (1993: 221) really can result in social change. Accordingly, Bordo suggests that "[w]e need to be pragmatic, not theoretically pure, if we are to struggle effectively against the inclination of institutions to preserve and defend themselves against deep change" (1993: 243). She continues to argue for the importance of unity among feminists, and explains that "fragmentation" among feminists and the "deconstruction of gender analytics" in contemporary feminism can lead to a situation where we "cut ourselves off from the source of feminism's transformative possibilities" (1993: 243).<sup>16</sup> Indeed, postmodernism's entry in feminism – or feminism's entry in postmodernism – implied a destabilization of the category woman.<sup>17</sup> And the references to postmodernism's displacement of modernism in contemporary feminist theory are frequent, to say the least. Modernism has also been described as "still around as ideological legacy, as habit, and as a familiar, even coherent, way of seeing" (Chow 1993: 57). Rey Chow suggests that even though feminists share postmodernism's "tendencies in dismantling universalist claims ... they do not see their struggle against patriarchy as quite over" (1993: 59). With feminism, the meaning of "the

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<sup>16</sup> In her response to these questions raised by Bordo, Jane Flax writes: "I have become increasingly dissatisfied with the focus on 'women', because it appears to require acceptance of a category – Woman – that is clearly a product of the very social relations that are so problematic. --- These categories are not present in 'nature' waiting for us to stumble upon them. --- Raced and gendered categories cannot be destabilized if we insist on their necessity as a foundation for 'emancipatory' knowledge. Thinking about feminist theorizing as discourses about gendering, and gendering as relations of domination, makes it is [sic!] easier to discuss differences among women" (Flax 1993: 24).

<sup>17</sup> A destabilization of the category woman was also, importantly, fuelled by black, Third World, gay & lesbian studies, postcolonial and queer theory.



real” and “linguistic tropes” cannot easily be reduced to one another. And even though feminists take part in the critique of universalism, postmodernism’s “destabilization of conceptual boundaries and concrete beliefs” challenge the emancipatory agenda in feminism (Chow 1993: 58). As such, this discussion also reflects the complex relationship in feminism to the question of change, where feminist scholars agree on the necessity of change, but are not in accordance over what this change means.

Accordingly, with a departure in questions about feminism’s past, through invocations of a primary object in academic feminism, this discussion turns to the relationship between theory and embodied knowledge, to finally arrive at reflections over the possibilities for feminism of bringing about social change. It is here that both Bordo and Chow refer to a division between theory and politics, explaining it as a split impossible to resolve within the frames of a feminist emancipatory agenda. At this point, readers might wonder how reflections over a lost primary object in feminism, discussions on the relationship between theory and politics and ideas about the emancipatory aim in feminism are connected to each other – and indeed, they might seem quite loosely connected. Here, though, Robyn Wiegman shows that they actually can be understood as related. Thus, in her theorization over feminism’s relation to its transformative agenda, Wiegman explains how the efforts among feminists to construct a primary object of study can be understood as an aspiration to stabilize feminism as a project occupied with “politics and justice to the real” (2002: 30). This results in two consequences: firstly, this means that it would be a too hasty conclusion to stage this debate as a debate between feminists who work along a postmodernist model (occupied with theory) and between feminists that identify with a modernist mode (occupied with the real). Instead of reconstructing theoretical splits as stable divisions – such as the split between postmodernism and modernism – this means that it is more fruitful to understand these as discourses feminism intervenes into. That is also what Sara Ahmed suggests in her analysis of the relationship between feminism and postmodernism, pointing at the

transformative potential that lies in the rejection of fixed discourses – which talks both to feminism itself and the discourses it intervenes into, such as postmodernism in this case. In her analyse Ahmed consequently shows how feminism can be a project where “its inability to simply inhabit other discourses which marginalise questions of gender” makes it transformative in effect, rather than essence (1998: 15). Secondly, this means that the division between theory (the “race for theory”, Bordo) and embodied knowledge (“the real”, Chow and “empirical problems”, Grosz) that takes shape in the debates around feminism as a transformative practice, are nothing but conceptual. Here, again, Sara Ahmed suggests a dismantling of this split, arguing against the perception of feminism as a practice that lacks theory. Indeed, as Ahmed describes, “[s]uch a construction refuses to recognize that feminism has always posed theoretical and critical challenges *in its very practicable demands*” (Ahmed 1998: 16, italics in original). In addition, this view on the relationship between theory and practice is developed from Ahmed’s understanding of theory as itself a form of praxis: “theory involves a way of ordering the world which has material effects, in the sense that it both constitutes and intervenes into that world” (1998: 17; Liinason 2007).

So far, I have briefly sketched the feminist debate around feminism as a transformative enterprise out from discussions around feminism’s origin and aim. With departure in Bordo’s invocation of a (lost) primary object in feminism, I have shown how this idea of a (lost) primary object is based upon the idea of a split between theory (i.e. postmodernism) and the real (i.e. feminism). Through pointing out that such divisions result from a desire to stabilize feminism in order to meet its political mission of bringing about social progress, I have also indicated that feminism’s transformative potential can only be reached through a destabilizing of both feminism and the various discourses it intervenes into (such as postmodernism-modernism, theory-politics, or even feminism itself). In the following, I aim to continue with presenting the debate about feminism as a transformative project, through returning to Elizabeth Grosz’ call for contemporary

feminism to maintain its endeavour to be devoted to change. Until now, I have described how the debate around feminism's origin and the loss of a primary object in feminism can be understood as connected to the discussion about theory versus the real world, and I have pointed at this division as a conceptual split. In the following, I focus on feminism's relationship to time/temporalities in order to finally sum up this theoretical dialogue through a discussion on the way in which the desires to identify and define a proper object in feminism takes part in a process of disciplining academic feminism, and outline some of the implications of this for feminism's transformative agenda.

### *Feminism and temporalities*

In "Telling Feminist Stories", Clare Hemmings takes interest in interrogating feminism's relationship to the past, present and future of feminism through analysing the "technology of Western feminist storytelling – its form, function and effects" (2005: 116). In this study, Hemmings traces a dominant story in Western feminist theory's telling about its own past and she explains how the narrative takes the form of "one of progress beyond falsely boundaried categories and identities" in a story where "we move from a preoccupation with unity and sameness through identity and diversity, and on to difference and fragmentation" (2005: 116, 117). To Hemmings, this is important to interrogate because such a narrative oversimplifies the different areas of feminist work and disregards the various debates over meaning that, as she writes, has marked feminist discussions "at all points of its history". It is also important to study because, it "fixes racial and sexual critique of feminism as decade-specific". Secondly she points out that the way feminist poststructuralist theorists are positioned in those stories as "the first to deconstruct 'woman' is problematic because deconstructive analyses always have been one

important feature in feminist theory” (2005: 116). Hemmings also underlines the Anglo-American pitch in this story, which positions “European or non-Western feminist theorists” as responsive to this Anglo-American story (2005: 116). Interestingly, Hemmings notes that – despite the fact that feminists explicitly state that it is important to give room for complexities – this is a narrative that is produced and reproduced in the context of feminist teaching and publishing. Hemmings however, is sceptical not only of linear accounts of the feminist past, but also of attempts to correct that history, and writes: “[t]o replace one truth with another suggests that the historical problem is simply one of omission, that once the error has been corrected the story will be ‘straight’” (2005: 119).

Through her rejection of the production of a corrective bibliography in debates of academic feminism, Hemmings expresses a foundational scepticism to presentism. Instead, she connects scholarly truths with power relations, arguing that an ambition to “put the story straight” itself would be an act of “epistemic violence”, concealing the “political investments that motivate the desire to know”. Her ultimate aim, in return, is to “open up future possibilities” (2005: 119) and she concludes that, in a feminist context, the question of inclusions and exclusions in the production of histories always is a question of “power and authority” which then, importantly, “foregrounds the location of the historian” in the production and distribution of histories (2005: 118).

In a similar vein, Robyn Wiegman explains how alternative conceptions of feminism’s political time as “non-linear, multidirectional, and simultaneous” can create a historicity that is “not captured by crafting for feminism an identity based on continuities of feminism’s political time” (2000: 2011). Here, she argues for a strategic disidentification of feminism’s knowledge production from subjective accounts and for a feminism that is not self-referential, teleological or reducible to the political agendas of individual feminists. In her work on feminist knowledge production, thus, Robyn Wiegman critically analyses the effects of the production of a temporal narrative in WGFS. Taking the feminist responses

to the critique of the category ‘woman’ as her starting point in the essay “Feminism’s Apocalyptic Futures” (2000), Wiegman suggests that this has been the origin for a creation of narratives about a current crisis in WGFS. Here, Wiegman explains how it is possible to understand these present expressions of a failure of academic feminism as a reaction to the critique of ‘woman’ as a unified category, raised by poststructuralist, queer and postcolonial feminists. This, Wiegman continues, because the critique created a fear that the dissolution of woman as a unified category would lead to political fragmentation and, by consequence, weaken the feminist struggle. However, Wiegman shows that this temporal narration in feminism is guided by a teleological impulse, in which the unruly and “unhistorical” political present is transformed into a coherent narrative where feminist movements is constructed through linear narrations and particular origins for feminism, motivated by a “fear about the failure of the future” (2000: 810).

As shown by Hemmings and Wiegman, the effects of these debates in feminism – the references to a particular origin, to the importance of unity and to the narration of a development characterized by linear progress – results in a stabilization of feminism. As Hemmings and Wiegman describe, the temporal and spatial narratives that are produced in these debates expose a teleological narrative in feminism, constructing linear narrations around a particular origin and future, based on the idea of progress. Explaining that such a teleological model captures feminism in an evolutionary, heroic, narrative, Hemmings and Wiegman finally argue for a displacement of feminist points of departure and a disidentification with subjective accounts in feminism.

In the sketching of these conversations, a desire to fix feminism’s primary object (i.e patriarchy, Bordo; woman, Wiegman) runs like a red thread through the debate around feminism as a transformative project, in which the loss of the primary object is understood as a failure in the sense that the loss will be counteractive to feminism’s future transformative aims. It is clear, however, that the identification with a primary object not only

controls the track that feminists are to follow, this attachment to a primary object also reconstructs a story of a certain origin that opens up for some modes of working and areas of study, but discloses others. Here, these ideas of a certain origin also take part in producing the primary object as a *proper* object in feminism (i.e. woman, or gender). As such, the ambitions to cling to a primary object in feminism also imply a disciplinarization of academic feminism. In effect, this gesture involves a domestication of the non-conformity that characterizes feminist knowledge production, through which it also has questioned conventional scholarship. In *Differences That Matter* (1998), Ahmed takes on the project of showing that feminism can make a difference precisely because it has the ability to destabilize the discourses it intervenes into. From this follows that she also acknowledges the different uses of key objects of study as an important difference in feminism related to the desire to construct a proper object in feminism. Ahmed takes the example ‘gender’ and writes: “Parts of the critical difference of feminism is its foregrounding of the social relation of gender. But ‘gender’ itself cannot be situated as a proper object which guarantees the feminist trajectory” (1998: 15). This, because the implications of such an enterprise would involve a stabilization of the way feminists perceive the world, in which other possible ways of understanding and performing gender would be marginalized. Hence, Ahmed understands gender as an “articulated rather than isolated category [which also] means giving up the assumption that feminism itself is inclusive, or simply speaks on behalf of all women” (1998: 15). Indeed, and ironically, it is also precisely through refusing a conceptualization of feminism as inclusive that feminism can continue to produce transformative knowledge, instead of it being disclosed by anyone’s desire to isolate primary objects and their constituencies, or by anyone’s ambition to speak on behalf of all women.

## *Destabilization, knowledge and power*

Above, I have briefly sketched the feminist debate around academic feminism as emancipatory, and concluded that a feminism guided by impulses to define the origins, aims and objects of study in feminism results in a stabilization of feminism, which in effect would curb its transformative potential. I have presented a criticism against these tendencies in contemporary feminism, and stressed alternatives to these, where it is argued that the transformative potentials in feminism can be put into practice through a destabilization of feminism and the discourses it intervenes into. This, thus, is the theoretical debate within which I frame my dissertation. In my analyse of the production of knowledge in academic feminism in Sweden I pay attention to the effects of the knowledge produced, through close readings of how feminism's history is narrated, of the construction of gender as a proper object and the understanding of notions of feminism. In line with Ahmed, Hemmings and Wiegman, I consequently argue in this dissertation for the necessity of a destabilization of feminism in order to keep its transformative potential open. In these analyses, I put a focus on the processes of inclusion/exclusion in the knowledge produced, suggesting an attitude to the production of knowledge that is both sensitive to past experiences and open to what we do not know (yet).

In addition, my study is also inspired by Foucault's theorization over the entwinement between power and knowledge, which he analysed through the concept episteme. To Foucault, conventional historical models are *presentist*. By saying this he means that these conventional models "rely on narratives of progression in which all social change contributes to the greater good and arrives at an almost utopian present in which things are always better than they always have been" (Halberstam 1998: 53). Accordingly, to Foucault, the writing of a history of the present involves a refusal of these historical models. Instead of writing a "presentist" history, Foucault undertakes a critical analysis of the objects that are explained as

necessary components of the reality (Halberstam 1998: 53; Foucault [1968]1991: 59, 60). He resists the perception of history as the unfolding of a continuous narrative, and argues for the existence of multiple histories of particular discourses at particular times. Foucault explains that these histories are interrelated in complex ways. A study of this complex interrelation thus takes a central role in Foucault's model, where he traces both the relationships and the discontinuities between the discourses (Foucault [1968] 1991: 61; Foucault 1972: 7; Ramazanoglu 1993: 20). With the notion archaeology, Foucault aspires to reach behind the diverse individual opinions and actions to be able to study more general modes of thinking. These general modes of thinking, Foucault continues, become discernible through a study of the relationships between the subject, knowledge and history. By introducing the concept episteme in *The Order of Things*, Foucault aims at exploring this formative level of scientific discourse. He put the focus on these larger historical and epistemic conditions because, as he explains, it is these conditions that make it possible for individuals to "think and perceive the world around them in certain ways and through certain concepts, and also how certain ways of thinking were simply impossible" (Oksala 2007: 29). As Johanna Oksala describes, this move towards a wider perspective to the study of the history of thought is today generally accepted, and was neither in the end of the 1960s one of Foucault's more controversial contributions to the study of the history of thought. More controversial, though, as Oksala describes, was his "way of describing fundamental breaks or discontinuities in the Western history of thought" (Oksala 2007:29). Indeed, arguing against the idea of a progressive development in European science and rational thought, Foucault explains that the problem in the modern sciences is the mode of thought that focuses on "man". This because, as he describes, a thinking in which the human being is both the source of knowledge and the outcome of knowledge is circular and ambiguous (Foucault [1966] 2001: 336; Oksala 2007: 30, 32). Instead, Foucault calls for a "systematic scepticism" against all forms of universal beliefs, which he describes as beliefs in "truths about



human beings that hold in all cultures and all historical times” since these create norms against which human behaviour can be evaluated and judged (Oksala 2007: 51). Showing that language is not only a tool to translate our experiences, Foucault also suggests a shift in the understanding of the relationship between experiences and language and explains that our experiences only can be understood by how they are conceptualized in language (Foucault [1966]2001: 336; Oksala 2007: 32; Scott 1992). In the 1970s, Foucault became influenced by Friedrich Nietzsche’s writings about genealogy (see Foucault’s essay “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History”) and shifted from the term archaeology to a use of the term genealogy instead. This shift, however, did not mean that he gave up the ideas that characterized archaeology. Instead, and as Johanna Oksala explains, it was a shift in how he questioned things: by using genealogy, Foucault wants to “radically challenge idle metaphysical speculation” and “radically question the timeless and inevitable character of practices and forms of thinking” (Oksala 2007: 48). His major interest, Oksala continues, is not anymore focused on investigations of the internal rules and the conditions of the emergence of discursive practices, but on the connections between power relations and the formation of scientific knowledge (2007: 48). Here, Foucault finds that the scientific practices always are related to the power relations in the society – a discovery that leads him to the conclusion that knowledge domains and relations of power are intrinsically knotted together, an interrelation that he describes through the notion power/knowledge. In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault suggest that power produce knowledge, it does not only support knowledge because it gains from it. Instead, Foucault underlines that power and knowledge presuppose each other. There is, to Foucault, no power relation without the construction of a coherent area of knowledge – and there is no knowledge that not also presupposes and constitutes a power relation (Foucault [1975] 1995: 27).

With genealogy, Foucault analysed discourses and studied what was possible to speak of at a given moment. Discourses, to Foucault, and particularly scientific discourse, functions as rules and produce truths, and

he put the focus on analysing the effects of this: “Now I believe that the problem does not consist in drawing the line between that in a discourse which falls under the category of scientificity of truth, and that which comes under some other category, but in seeing historically how effects of truth are produced within discourses which in themselves are neither true nor false” ([1977] 1980: 118). Questioning the primacy of a subject’s intentions or experience, Foucault wanted to focus on the “meaning, value and functioning of the discourses themselves”. (Oksala 2007: 39). Foucault explains, for example, how sexual and gendered identities are not natural, essential identities. Instead, he shows how these are culturally constructed identities, formed through normative discourses and power relations regulating “healthy and normal expressions of sexuality” (Oksala 2007: 78, Foucault 1978). Foucault took an interest in studying how language formed ontological orders that are implicit in scientific theories, and suggested that power mechanisms always are entwined with knowledge production. Through this, he aspired to change not only our understanding of the past but also of the present, aiming to liberate us from the belief in inevitable scientific truths (Oksala 2007: 54).<sup>18</sup> In *Part IV: Method of inquiry and methodological approaches*, I will return to this discussion and give a presentation of the methodological implications of this view on discourses and the relationship between truth effects, knowledge and power, through a description of how I understand and use discourse analysis in this study.

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<sup>18</sup> Foucault was interested also in inquiring how alternative ontological realms could be created through language. These alternative ontological realms take form as different ways of perceiving world. They not only transgress the limits of discourse, but also make the discourses visible and contestable. Foucault named these counter-discourses (Foucault [1966] 2001).

## *Theoretical perspectives on institutionalization*

In the following, I present the second aspect of theoretical production that has been important for this study. Firstly, I present theoretical interventions from feminist, queer and postcolonial scholars on the role of institutions, which they understand as co-producers in a further development of the nation state and the national history. Through this, I aim at providing a framework of ideas central to the focus of my study. Thereafter, I discuss Althusser's understanding of ideology and describe the function and form of governmentality, as developed by Foucault.

In the material to my study, the references to the successful institutionalization of academic feminism in Sweden are frequent, and the notion of Sweden as a feminist utopia is distributed among feminists both within and outside of Sweden. However, the process of institutionalizing academic feminism has not only been described as an easy or uncomplicated trajectory. Ever since its inception, feminists have debated the possible negative consequences of institutionalization, such as de-radicalization or co-optation (Eduards 1977; Göransson 1989; Norlander 1997). In addition, recent contributions to this debate also show that the descriptions of Sweden as a 'women friendly' society (Hernes 1987) needs to be revised against the background of the deep structural and institutional divisions as to ethnic, gender and class differences that exist in Sweden (Yang 2010: 56). Furthermore, the practices of inclusion and exclusion in Sweden have been the topic of investigation for a number of studies by postcolonial and feminist scholars in Sweden in which among other things the tensions between migrant women and the Swedish gender equality discourse have been analysed (Ålund 1995, 1991, 1997; Ålund and Schierup 1991). Of particular importance for this study are analyses displaying how the production of knowledge about femininity, gender equality and cultural borders that have led to the construction of femininity as white and homogenous (de los Reyes, Molina and Mulinari [2002] 2006:

20). In analysing the construction of feminism as a success in Sweden, these scholars show how this success is shaped by a white, heterosexual, middle class-construction of femininity (Mulinari and Nergaard 2004), and based on articulations of the complementarity between the sexes (Eduards 2007). This construction, it is furthermore described, is developed within the frames of a national project, in which it is difficult to include the voices of others. Inquiring the relationships between feminism, power, whiteness and the other, de los Reyes and Mulinari investigate the connections between feminism and hegemonic practises (2005). Here, they shed light upon the hierarchical relationship between different feminisms, which is a relationship that “makes some feminist interventions marginal, invisible or impossible” (2005: 82). Hegemonic feminism in Sweden, according to de los Reyes and Mulinari, is constituted by the interaction of feminist articulations in five different spheres:

- Legitimated scholarly practises (gender studies/research).
- Popular culture (media feminism, popular science).
- Welfare-state bureaucracies (gender equality state policies).
- Organizations that take as their point of departure a critique by male dominance (women’s shelters etc.).
- Social movements that work out from a feminist perspective (feminist NGO’s).

(2005: 82, my translation)

de los Reyes and Mulinari underline that the interaction between those spheres is not predestined, but that it develops from mutual influences from all these spheres. The label hegemonic feminism, according to de los Reyes and Mulinari, marks the practises of consent, an aspiration for consensus

that “defines what feminism is, who a feminist is, which problems shall be defined as feminist and the right, normal and possible within the frame of the feminist discourse” (2005: 82). This feminism, they continue, is established through the institutionalisation of feminist ideas in state regulations and policies, but also in the academy, controlling the distribution of material and symbolic resources, and excluding voices of collective experiences or scholarly and political perspectives that express alternative visions (2005: 83). Accordingly, and as I propose in the following, this story of a success of feminism in Sweden is developed out from a close connection between a state initiated gender equality project and gender studies scholarship in the academy.

In the construction and reconstruction of the success story, striving for consent is a core constituency. In describing the turn of events around the launching of the feminist party Feministiskt Initiativ (Fi, Feminist Initiative) in 2005, political scientist Maud Eduards gives one characteristic example of this: here, Eduards describes the request from a number of Fi-representatives to bring issues of differences between women and multi-culturality to the party’s agenda. Explaining how this resulted in a strong resistance – not only from other members of the party itself, but also from the media and in the public opinion – Eduards summarizes: “Fi can be regarded as a democratizing wedge into the national unity. Through their talk about differences and multi-culturality as values in their own right, the party goes across strong traditions of consensus and cooperation. The consequence is that Fi is made to disruption and conflict” (2007: 272).

This construction of the success story of feminism in Sweden has been interpreted as the result of a national project (Carbin 2008; Eduards 2007; de los Reyes, Molina and Molinari [2002] 2006), through analyses, which explain the creation of a national community. In “The Nation Form”, Etienne Balibar explains the development of national communities as the result of references to the temporal figures “project” and “destiny”. Pointing out a particular ideological form that allows “national formations” to be “constructed daily, by moving back from the present into the past”

(1991: 87), Balibar understands the formation of the nation as the “fulfilment of a ‘project’ stretching over centuries, in which there are different stages and moments of coming to self-awareness” (1991: 86). This project, he continues, “consists in believing that the process of development from which we select aspects retrospectively, so as to see ourselves as the culmination of that process, was the only one possible, that is, it represented a destiny” (1991: 86). Using the term “fictive ethnicity”, Balibar furthermore describes how the social formation of the nation ethnicize the population included in the nation, through representing them “in the past or in the future *as if* they formed a natural community, possessing of itself an identity of origins, culture and interests which transcends individuals and social conditions” (1991: 96). As it is explained in scholarship around the formation of the nation in Sweden, the success story of feminism in Sweden is one of the elements around which the Swedish nation forms itself, contrasting the Swedish modern and equal working woman against other, “traditional” cultures or past times (Arora Jonsson 2009; Carbin 2008, 2010; de los Reyes, Molina and Mulinari [2002] 2006; Yang 2010). In her study about gender discourses and grass roots activism in India and Sweden, Seema Arora-Jonsson describes the discourse on gender equality among grass root feminists in Sweden as follows: “The appreciation of being developed was echoed in how women in Drevdagen [the Swedish site where she made her study] formed their subject positions as modern working women in contrast to traditional women in the past and in third-world countries” (2009: 237).

The formation of the success story of feminism in Sweden as a national project is possible to understand through Balibar’s explanations of the formation of a “natural” community developed out from references to a common past and shared future. As such, the success story is explained as having its roots in the late 19th century and is described as a success story of how feminists demanded rights for women in the society (Eduards 2007). Furthermore, to reach prosperity, women were working in a close dialogue with the Swedish state, where the discourse about the relationship

between the sexes in Sweden became regulated by a national agenda. This was an agenda that influenced the feminist movement, but also was influenced by the feminist movement, as Maud Eduards discusses in her study of the feminist movement and the construction of the nation (2007: 243). As Maud Eduards further describes, the Swedish feminists argued for women to be allowed to take a degree from public higher education, woman's right to vote, a shared labour market and individual tax-system, a state-financed child-care system and parental allowance to both the father and mother of the child, etc. (Eduards 2007: 250, 260, 270). Here it is described how the development of the welfare-state was designed along the idea of complementarity and collaboration between the sexes. The existence and continued emergence of a narrative around the successful development in Sweden around issues like gender, gender equality, women, men, the labour market and the family in Sweden is, in short, creating a nation-building rhetoric, constructed through references to a shared culture and a common past, present and future. Homi Bhabha also has inquired the double movement in which "national life" is both "redeemed and iterated" as the result of a split between nationalism as a pedagogical tool, where the people are objects of nationalism, and nationalism as a performance, where the people on the other hand are subjects. Homi Bhabha explains with the following words:

the people are the historical 'objects' of a nationalist pedagogy, giving the discourse an authority that is based on the pre-given or constituted historical origin in the past; the people are also the 'subjects' of a process of signification that must erase any prior or originary presence of the nation-people to demonstrate the prodigious, living principles of the people as contemporaneity (Bhabha 1994: 4).

To perform the nation, with Bhabha's terminology, is thus a question of narrating a story which will attract listeners, and more concretely attract a collective of listeners who find the story compatible with their common culture, established through ideas of a common past and a common future,

myths through which the re/production of the nation is developed. Hence, the production of feminism as a story of success in Sweden further reinforces these nation-building forces of this narrative.<sup>19</sup>

### *Ideology and the state*

The narrative of feminism as a success is constructed in close interplay with the state. In his writing about the complex constitution of the modern state, Louis Althusser explains that the state is composed of two faculties, of which one serves to secure the continuous reproduction of the state: “The State Apparatus contains two bodies: the body of institutions which represent the Repressive State Apparatus on the one hand, and the body of institutions which represent the body of Ideological State Apparatuses on the other” ([1971] 2008: 22). Here, Althusser explains that the most central feature of the state apparatus is that it “secures by repression (from the most brutal physical force, via mere administrative commands and interdictions, to open and tacit censorship) the securing of the political conditions for the action of the Ideological State Apparatuses” ([1971] 2008: 24). The ideological apparatus functions as reproducer of the state apparatus. This ideological apparatus in the state, Althusser suggests further, is identical with the educative institutions:

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<sup>19</sup> Notably, though, there does not exist a completely uniform perception of gender studies in Sweden. Here, gender studies also experience a subordinated position in negotiations around the construction of the nation from other, and gender critical, actors, which results in tensions and a paradoxical position of feminism in Sweden (for a recent example, see for instance the debate article by Marcus Uvell, the managing director of Timbro, the leading right-wing think tank in Sweden, published in DN 2010-10-31; “Borgerligheten befinner sig i ett mycket utsatt läge”).



Hence I believe I have good reasons for thinking that behind the scenes of its political Ideological State Apparatus, which occupies the front of the stage, what the bourgeoisie has installed as its number-one, is the educational apparatus, which has in fact replaced in its functions the previously dominant ideological State apparatus, the Church. ([1971] 2008: 27, 28)

In this theorization on ideology, Althusser engages with, critiques, and further develops the understanding of ideology presented by Marx, explaining Marx's understanding of ideology as "an imaginary construction"<sup>20</sup> ([1971] 2008: 33, 37). Here, Althusser distinctly rejects what he formulates as a "plainly positivist" and "historicist" description of ideology in Marx's writings (ie. *The German Ideology*), and describes that it is not "their real conditions of existence, their real world, that 'men' [sic!] 'represent to themselves' in ideology, but above all it is their relation to those conditions of existence which is represented to them there" ([1971] 2008: 38). On this point, it might be helpful to remember the Foucauldian critique of Marx' view on ideology, which – shortly – is that ideology, to Marx, conceals the truth about our real existence. Foucault explains that subjects will not be liberated through an uncovering of this concealed truth. Instead, Foucault suggests that we need to analyze how "truth-effects are produced inside discourses which are neither true or false", where some discourses retain a higher value than others – as for instance the scientific discourse (Poster 1984: 84). And, to Foucault, importantly, they do not receive this higher value because they are more true but because of the "role discourse play in constituting practices" (Poster 1984: 85). However, for the analyses in this study, I want to underline the importance of paying

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<sup>20</sup> Here, Althusser writes: "This is how, in *The Jewish Question* and elsewhere, Marx defends the Feuerbachian idea that men make themselves an alienated (= imaginary) representation of their conditions of existence because these conditions of existence are themselves alienating" ([1971] 2008: 38).

attention both to a Foucauldian analysis of dominant discourses as producers of truth-effects, and to a Marxian-Althusserian structural analysis of power structures where, as explained above, ideologies takes material form through everyday practices – that is, practices which also guarantee the reproduction of the very same institutions. Here is where I believe that Althusser's understanding of ideology's material existence is a significant supplement to Foucault's analysis of discourses. This is important precisely because the relationship between exploitative/oppressive structures and material existence explained by Marx and further developed by Althusser in his conceptualization of a connection between institutions and materialized practices, explains the function of ideology as structural and reproductive of the very same institutions/structures. In addition, Althusser, importantly, suggests that ideology is material, because: "an ideology always exists in an apparatus, and its practice, or practices." (40), and he explains:

I shall talk of actions inserted into practices. And I shall point out that these practices are governed by the rituals in which these practices are inscribed, within the material existence of an ideological apparatus, be it only a small part of that apparatus: a small mass in a small church, a funeral, a minor match at a sports' club, a school day, a political party meeting, etc. (42)

In my interpretation of the relationship between the state, the institutions of the state and the population, I am also inspired by Foucault's theorization about governmentality, in which he describes the government as functioning through a complex apparatus of techniques. This, according to Foucault is the modern form of government that has population as its object, in comparison with earlier forms of government who managed a territory or the inhabitants in that territory. Now, the government manages its population through administrative institutions, forms of knowledge and diverse tactics and strategies (Foucault 1991: 102; Oksala 2007: 82, 83). Foucault explains that the modern governmental rationality has two major,

and interrelated features: Firstly, the development of the modern state with a centralization of political power – a state in which a highly organized administration and bureaucracy emerges. Secondly, it is also characterized by individualized power. With this, he refers to the development of power techniques oriented towards individuals, in order to govern their conduct in a continuous and permanent way (Oksala 2007: 83). The focus on the health of the people in the state, Foucault discusses further, involves an increasing control of the everyday lives of individuals, of their health, sexuality, body and diet - a form of power that Foucault described with the term bio-power (Gordon 1991: 4).

I have thus far sketched the second section of the theoretical context in which my study is located, and I have described this through references to the formation of the nation, through Balibar's descriptions of the nation form as the development of a natural community and Bhabha's discussions over the further construction of this nation which takes shape through both pedagogic and performative actions, that is, where people are both objects for the development of the nation and themselves agents in the performance of narratives of the national project. I have situated the production of a story of a feminist success in Sweden inside this theoretic frame. I understand the success story of feminism as one constituent part of the construction of the Swedish nation. This is through the development of a community which takes shape through references to a common history and a shared future which, as I have pointed out, is further developed through references to "us" as modern and developed, contrasted against under-developed traditional cultures or third-world countries. Furthermore, through Althusser's understanding of ideology and Foucault's notion of governmentality, I connect these processes with an understanding of how the government manages its population through control over forms of knowledge, processed through the different institutions in the society. At this juncture, I want to continue the discussion how these forms of control (the formation of the nation and the state) can affect academic institutions, and also briefly discuss what this might mean for a subject area like WGFS,

in its ambition of producing transformative knowledge. I also offer a presentation of Gramsci's notion hegemony, which I employ through a reading of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe and finally return to a discussion on the production of feminism as a success story and the implications of this for the transformative knowledge project.

### *The state and the educative institutions*

In conjunction with Althusser, feminist postcolonial scholar Lisa Lowe points at the reproductive function of institutions, describing the educational apparatus as an "instrument of social reproduction" (1996: 38).<sup>21</sup> Here, Lowe shows how the university plays an "important role in the formation of students as citizens for the nation" (1996: 38). In addition, as discussed by Lowe, the disciplinary division in these educational institutions functions as an upholder of "the abstract divisions of modern civil society into separate spheres: the political, the economic, and the cultural" (1996: 38). Consequently, in order to disrupt the "empiricist paradigms of science" and to challenge "the developmentalist historicism that requires the assimilation of 'primitive', nonmodern, and racialized knowledges to the terms of Western rationalism" (1996: 40), Lowe places her hopes in the emergence of interdisciplinary fields of study and research. She does this because, as she describes, interdisciplinary subjects both redefine "the traditional separations of the scholar-subject and the object of study" and "persistently argues for the inseparability of the non-equivalent determinations of race, class, and gender" (1996: 40). She underlines,

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<sup>21</sup> Indeed, Althusser suggests that the ideological state apparatus is identical with the educative institutions, and that this function in the ideological state apparatus guarantees the reproduction of the repressive state apparatus (Althusser [1971] 2008: 27).

institutionalizing interdisciplinary studies involves a paradox because it both provides a “material base within the university for a transformative critique of traditional disciplines” (1996: 40) and at the same time “submits in part to the demands of the university and its educative function of socializing subjects into the state” (1996: 41): institutionalization, to Lowe, carries the risk of appropriate the critical and oppositional stance in the interdisciplinary fields. Consequently, the potential difference that interdisciplinary subject fields can realize, as Lowe explains it, depend on the approach to activities such as reading texts, constituting objects of study, and teaching students. This, to Lowe, determine if critical interdisciplinary subject fields serve the traditional function of the university or if it provide a continuing and persistent site from which to educate students to be actively critical of that traditional function (Lowe 1996: 41).

Practices of institutionalization have also been interrogated by Robyn Wiegman, in an analysis of the production of academic feminism and its relationship to feminist activism. She takes her point of departure from the observation that many feminists find contemporary feminist scholars “more academic than feminist”<sup>22</sup>, more hierarchical, bureaucratic and careerist than ever before (2002: 19). Wiegman, however, scrutinizes the effects of the production of a separation between academic feminism and feminism as a social movement, and finds that the political mission – as described by feminists – in actual fact generates an “understanding of the political” (2002: 20) that feeds in to today’s transnational knowledge economy and the need for critical thinking in the U.S nation state and the university. Indeed, she writes:

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<sup>22</sup> Also this discussion takes place among Swedish academic feminists (see Norlander 1997; Rönnblom 2003).

My point here is to demonstrate how many of the coordinates of what some scholars call “feminist politics” are not anterior to the university, but have been taken up within it and are hence today constitutive of the order of the disciplines in which “politics” and “culture” are traditionally opposed in the epistemological distinctions between humanities and social sciences (2002: 23).

Hence, both Lowe and Wiegman in this instance pay attention to the functions of the modern state to govern its population through forms of knowledge, whose reproductive function Althusser analysed in terms of ideology and whose governing activities Foucault explained through governmentality. In this case, Wiegman and Lowe discuss the risky endeavour that interdisciplinary subject areas/academic feminism enters, where they may risk to become a significant feature in the intertwined relationship between educational institutions and the nation state. In order for academic feminism to interrupt these processes, Wiegman cites Norma Alarcón (1997) and suggests that academic feminism ought to turn its focus to the “uncritical acceptance of Western norms of consciousness and subjectivity with which the subject as a conceptual category has come to occupy the political project of academic feminism” (2002: 28).

### *Hegemony*

In the construction of the Swedish nation, the striving for consensus is often very explicit. Consensus, however, is a working tool of a hegemonic practise, since the ascendant group always struggle for its power to remain hegemonic, which means that a struggle will take place between hegemonic and alternative narratives. In that way, the dominating group seeks to retain its ascendancy and keep its command over the intellectual, moral and political sphere in a society. Hegemony, as it was described by Gramsci and later developed by Laclau and Mouffe, is a concept that captures not only

the dominance from institutions but also from social practices, i.e. discourses. Hegemony executes its power through a combination of dominance over the moral and intellectual order and a political dominance. Hence, hegemony is never fixed or stable but always reshaped in continuous processes of dominance and resistance (Laclau and Mouffe 1985; de los Reyes and Mulinari 2005: 79). A hegemonic order is developed out from ideological and political power struggles, where one group seeks to dominate others on the basis of their interests. Hegemony is constructed through consensus and is in that sense a condition of power where the interest from the dominating group coincides with the interests of those that it dominates (Gramsci 1967: 150; Laclau and Mouffe 1985; Larsson 2009: 42). Unlike Gramsci, however, Laclau and Mouffe describe that there can be no privileged subjects before history – the working class, for example, is not pre-destinated to occupy this position. According to Laclau and Mouffe, there are only different subject positions that are opened through different discourses. In addition, they also moved away from Gramsci's idea that all social formations are structured around a single hegemonic centre, and stressed the possibility of a variety of "hegemonic nodal points" (Laclau and Mouffe [1985] 1999: 137, 139; Larsson 2009: 157, n349). Instead, they described hegemony as a "political *type of relation*, a *form ... of politics*" (Laclau and Mouffe [1985] 1999: 139). There is, thus, no "single, unified or coherent 'dominant ideology'", but many systems and thoughts that co-exist. The object of study in a study of hegemony is consequently understood as a complex, discursive formation. In feminist scholarship, hegemony has been described as a concept "based in social conflicts capturing the struggle over how the world should be told" (Sandell and Mulinari 2006: 139). Furthermore, in neo-marxist studies, hegemony has been used in a combination with discourse, and particularly in order to "explore the historically contextualized alliances between groups needed to construct and re-construct social consensus" (Sandell & Mulinari 2006: 139, Mattsson 2005). In this dissertation, the hegemonic production of feminism as a success story is understood as processed through the

formation of the nation and the state. In this argumentation, the use and understanding of hegemonic discourse has been fruitful, because it allows not only for a focus on the multi-faceted, ideological struggles that take part between social alliances, but also because of its attention to the way this ideological control is generated, through consent rather than domination or violence.

### *Transformations*

Depicting the status of the success story of feminism in the political and intellectual discourse in Sweden as hegemonic, I have here sketched the production of a success story as a national project, in which I have located the relationship between the government and the educative institutions as an entwined relationship, reproduced through ideology. In addition, I have discussed the possibilities of interdisciplinary subject fields, where disciplinarity, which Lisa Lowe described as a reproductive and regulatory strategy aimed at forming students into the national project, is resisted through a rejection of ordering knowledge into the separate spheres of the modern civil society; the cultural, the economic and the political. Here, the potential of interdisciplinarity was described through the arguments for an intersection between race, class and gender. However, as I underlined, this potential also depends to a large extent on the attitude through which these issues are engaged because an institutionalization of transformative knowledge areas can as well result in a de-radicalization of their agenda. In the first section to this theoretical frame, I sketched the different positions in the debate around feminism's past, present and future, and particularly, on how academic feminism could be a transformative project. The refusal, by Foucault, of a presentist empirical historiography expresses a distancing from the narratives of progression in dominant modernist discourses, as pointed out by Wiegman and Hemmings, that are developed out from



narratives of historical continuity, social progress and human consciousness, discourses in which, as Foucault underlines, history is understood as the unfolding of a continuous narrative which creates the human subject as both the source of knowledge and the outcome of knowledge in a circular and ambiguous way. Seeing that the different narratives about the development in the field tells a certain story about the instantiation of the field, about the relationship between academic work and activism, theory and politics/the real, I have pointed at the formations and implications of the discourses that are created through these narratives in feminism. Consequently, through an analysis of the stabilizing effects on feminism by feminist attempts to fixate a proper object of study, or to invoke and define a particular past, present and future for feminism, I have argued for the necessity of keeping the agenda open, indeed, to destabilize feminism as well as the discourses it intervenes into, in order for feminism to be a transformative project. Sara Ahmed has eloquently described this potential, by paying attention to the meaning of the word “move” for feminism, which she explains as follows:

So it is when feminism is no longer directed towards a critique of patriarchy, or secured by the categories of ‘women’ or ‘gender’, that it is doing the most ‘moving’ work. *The loss of such an object is not the failure of feminist activism, but is indicative of its capacity to move, or to become a movement* (Ahmed 2004: 176, italics in original).

Having outlined a number of feminist, queer, postcolonial and poststructural positions in the debates around feminism’s relationship to itself, to the state and to the academic institution, I now want to close this theoretic frame by calling attention to an alternative way of conceptualizing academic feminism within these complex processes. In the essay “This other and other others” (2002), Sara Ahmed speaks about the temporalities of feminism through a reflection over the ethical relationship with others. Here, Ahmed writes that it is “through particular encounters with other, as

the one whom I am presented or faced with, that we open up the not yet --- [i]t is facing that ties the 'not yet' with a past that is living the present" (2002: 559). However, feminism, Ahmed writes, is always "future oriented, as a politics that not only calls into question the way in which the world is organized in the present, but also seeks to transform how the world is organized and engender new ways and forms of living" (2002: 559). Here, thus, Ahmed challenges all attempts in feminism to privilege the future as "the time of and for otherness... as the time in which we encounter that which we cannot anticipate, know or understand" (2002: 559). Instead, Ahmed argues, it is precisely through "attending the multiplicity of the pasts that are never simply behind us" and through "the traces they leave into the encounters we have in the present, that we can open up the promise of the 'not yet'" (2002: 559). This, then, becomes the basis for a feminist collective politics. Such a politics, Ahmed concludes, is not only based on the specific "engagement with others and with the other's culture[s]" but also involves the question of "keeping the agenda open" (2002: 559).

## Part IV: Methods of inquiry and methodological approaches

A field of knowledge can be studied in various ways – it can, for instance, be studied through maps or cartographies of the knowledge constructed in a particular field, or it can be based on a collection of narratives from central actors in the field (Lykke 2002; Niskanen and Florin 2010). The route I have chosen, however, locates the success story of feminism in Sweden as the *problematic*, the analytic cross road in this study. In my understanding of the problematic, I have been inspired by both Dorothy Smith and Edward Said, who in turn develop this notion from Louis Althusser which, in the words by Said, is explained as “a specific determinate unity of a text, or group of texts, which is something given rise to by analysis” (Said 1978: 16). Accordingly, I understand the success story of feminism in Sweden as such a problematic, as an analytical cross road where several paths – both discursive and material – of significance for academic feminism meet. In this study, thus, I inquire hegemonic practices within the construction of feminism in Sweden. I do this through analyses of how dominant ideas are produced and reproduced in the construction of WGFS, and how analytical tools are imposed as *the* tools of analysis in the knowledge area, indeed, how they are given and inhabit a dominant position in WGFS. Studies of hegemonies are always interpretations, and to grasp this construction of hegemony, I make a range of exemplary analyses, which serve as illustrations on the topic. With Sarah Franklin, Celia Lury and Jackie Stacey, I understand these as “*indicative* indices to the wider processes” I set out to explore (2000: 11). Using a variety of textual documents, policy reports, governmental documents, evaluative documents, text books, journal articles, and so forth. I focus my study around three themes: 1) the process of institutionalizing WGFS in Sweden; 2) the pedagogic and productive effects of the knowledge produced within gender studies; 3) the

relationship between feminist knowledge production and the politics of place, that is, the location of this enterprise. All themes in my study explore processes in contemporary WGFS, through inquiring into processes of organization, the production of narratives and conceptual and methodological debates. In alignment with Franklin, Lury and Stacey, I want to stress that the themes I have chosen for my analyses are not selected or viewed as representative, neither are they meant “to be read as the *only* or the *most* important examples” (2000: 11). Instead, these cases are used as indicators of this construction of hegemony, with the hope that these analyses will point the attention to significant dominant tendencies, strategies and aims within WGFS and through that produce what Franklin, Lury and Stacey call “hermeneutical vectors”, offering routes to further analyses (2000: 11). This viewpoint also moves close to the perspective Edward Said used in his study *Orientalism* (1978). Commenting upon the impossibilities of analysing the entire structure of Orientalism, Said explains that he makes descriptions, through textual analyses of selected parts of this structure, that can only briefly refer to a larger unity (Said 1978: 23).

Before I continue with presenting the mode of procedure in this dissertation, I want to mention that the format of this study, a collection of articles, involves some limitations. In a monograph, I would have been able to allot more space to the empirical descriptions and analyses than what has been possible here, where I have been restricted by the requirements from the publications through which a discussion of contradictions or alternative discourses have sometimes had to give way for the focus on dominant discourses. The strength of this structure, in return, is that it enables analyses from different angles of how this discursive construction is established and re-established through many different, co-existing and mutually reinforcing conversations and debates.

In this section, I present the *methods of inquiry* and the *methodological approaches* of this study. I believe that one main goal in interpretative, qualitative academic inquiries is to draw a map over a new

terrain of knowledge. A process that starts with the first questions asked and the first assumptions questioned, the techniques chosen, rejected and finally selected for collecting and analysing the material, the character, quality and context of the material, the macro- and micro-context of discovery and the various limitations of the study (such as time, genre, and scope of study). Therefore, I have created a framework constituted by contributions from different theorists and in the following, I give a presentation of how I understand and have used the methods selected to this study. After this, I describe the methodological approaches that have permeated the analyses and I round off this section with a reflection over my own position in relation to the point of departure, mode of procedure and aims of this study. Readers will notice that the methods and methodologies used interact and mutually influence each other, which also reflects the intertwined relationship between methods and methodologies, since the process of collecting and analyzing material always informs the methodological considerations, and vice versa. This, however, is valid also for the theoretical levels of the study. Hence, there is a close connection between the methods, methodologies and the theoretical perspectives deployed. In this understanding of the interplay between theories, methods, and methodologies, I align with Nina Lykke (2009, see also Fonow and Cook 1991), who stresses the interaction between theory, method and methodology, where the interplay between the different dimensions of the research process and the research product is acknowledged and the different dimensions – theory, methodology and method – are seen as mutually influential in the process of knowledge production.

### *Close reading*

In this study, I have been working closely with texts, and in the following, I present the ingredients in close reading as a method for textual analysis. In

*Orientalism*, Edward Said refers to Foucault's idea, about accounts of individual authors that do not make any important difference for the development of a discourse. Said, however, disagrees with Foucault on this point and explains that he has found that individual authors or individual texts are significant for the production of a particular discourse. Consequently, in his inquiry of the construction of Orientalism as a system of citation, Said makes close reading of selected textual documents in order to study the interrelatedness between the individual text or author and the complicated collective group that the singular text is a contribution to, and explains that "I do believe in the determining imprint of individual writers upon the otherwise anonymous collective body of texts constituting a discursive formation like Orientalism" (Said 1978: 23). The function of texts as produced by and producers of relations in the social world – displayed in the interconnectedness between texts at different levels in the context of study – that Said alludes to, have also influenced the analysis in my study. Unlike Said, though, I have not focused on individual *actors* in the discourse, i.e. authors. Instead, I focus on individual *texts* included in institutionalized practices, that is, practices in which certain textual accounts are given a certain position in the institution. Here, I foreground the regulative function of texts through an engagement with texts in a *system of authorization*, and inquire into the meanings displayed in individual textual accounts against the background of the position of the text in the institution. This is important, because texts do not *in themselves* have the power to regulate. Indeed, the textual account would not have the same regulatory function without an authority, a body organized under university rules for instance, that gives the text the "capacity to create and authorize" (Smith 2005: 81). Consequently, a textual product inserted into an institutional practice is not only reproductive but also a powerful producer of discourses and social relations.

My reading moves between proximity and distance in the textual analysis, where I uncover the social, cultural, historical and political relations that are expressed through the concept used or the object

constructed in texts and understand these as feeding into the production of the account which is displayed in the texts as a given fact. My analysis travels between different scales, where I move from closeness to distance, from a detailed study of singular texts to a more general study of other texts in the discourse, in order to describe the function of the factual account produced in the texts an agent, as productive instead of only descriptive (Ahmed 1998), to focus on the *doing* of the textual accounts in the discourse. Consequently, I do not understand textual accounts simply as “facts”, but as mediators in (both producers of and produced by) cultural, social, historical and political processes and am interested in studying how discourses produce their materialities. This is particularly valid for the analyses I undertake in the last four articles to this study, where I try to reach beyond the surface level of the knowledge presented in the texts studied, investigating the epistemological, ontological and methodological basis of the concepts, objects and historical narratives expressed in the textual accounts.

Close reading is a common method for textual analysis in literary studies, even though the techniques used in academic studies seldom are explained in detail.<sup>23</sup> With close reading, I refer to a careful reading of textual accounts. Here, I employ a depth to reading the singular text in order to trace the levels that forms the basis of the argument presented, inquiring notions of feminism, how objects are created and historical narratives constructed. Through this, I want to explore the connections between texts, material effects and social orders. My use of close reading enables me to travel beyond the facts produced in the texts studied, in order to trace the social, cultural, historical and political relations mediated through what is presented as a factual account (i.e. the notion, the object, or

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<sup>23</sup> Close reading was developed as a method for reading texts within new criticism in the USA and the UK during the 1940s and 1950s, as Hanna Hallgren describes in her dissertation about lesbian women in Sweden in the 1970s and 1980s (Hallgren 2008: 71).

the historical narrative in question). Similar inquiries into academic textual production has also been carried out by, among others, Nina Lykke, who in a close reading of academic texts analyses the discursive construction of standards and norms in academic writing (2009). Also Chandra Mohanty uses close reading of academic texts in her 1986 essay “Under Western Eyes”, in order to catch sight of the discursive production of the “Third World Woman as a singular, monolithic subject in some (Western) feminist texts” (2003: 17). In *Differences That Matter*, Sara Ahmed takes on the project of carrying out a close reading of academic texts that became key in the discursive production of postmodernism (Ahmed 1998). Even though the use of close reading in feminist scholarship is indeed very common, I mention these studies here, since they, together with Edward Said’s close reading in his analysis of the discursive construction of Orientalism (Said 1978), have functioned as sources of inspiration for me in the methodical design of this study, where I combine close reading with discourse analysis, as I describe further below.

### *Discourse analysis*

In *Part III: Theoretical perspectives*, I touched upon Foucault’s interest in studying discourses. There, I explained Foucault’s view on discourses as one in which he understood discourses as regulatory *producers* of truths, not true or false in themselves. I furthermore presented Foucault’s interest in analyzing the *effects* of the truths produced within diverse knowledge domains – the scientific discourse in particular – and I explained how Foucault through the notion power/knowledge underlined the continuous entwinement of knowledge production and relations of power (Foucault ([1977] 1980: 118). In *Hegemony and socialist strategy*, Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe refine and develop Foucault’s understanding of discourses. A discourse, Laclau and Mouffe describe, is a structuring



moment where meaning is produced. A discourse involves both linguistic and social practices and its meaning can never be fixed because it is always related to other discourses that conceive the world differently (Larsson 2009: 35). Laclau and Mouffe argue that a discursive structure is not merely cognitive or contemplative. Instead, they point out, that it is an “*articulatory practice* which constitutes and organizes social relations” (Laclau and Mouffe [1985] 1999: 96, 106).<sup>24</sup> It is through the relation to each other that these articulations are filled with meaning and constitutes a figuration that, under certain conditions, can be “*signified* as a totality” (Laclau and Mouffe [1985] 1999: 106). Understanding the objective world as structured in relational sequences, they focus on discursive formations as linguistic, material and social practices. Of particular importance for the analysis in my study, is the understanding by Laclau and Mouffe of the discursive character of institutions, techniques and productive organizations, which they found undertheorized by Foucault. Laclau and Mouffe explain that through analyzing institutions “we will only find more or less complex forms of differential positions among objects, which do not arise from a necessity external to the system structuring them and which can only therefore be conceived as discursive articulations” ([1985] 1999: 107). The practice of articulation is, following Laclau and Mouffe, consequently structured through institutions, rituals and practices, where systems of ideas are embodied ([1985] 1999: 109). Accordingly, instead of understanding discourses as representations (which would mean that a textual account represents, mirrors, or stands for, something in the real world), I follow the perspective from Foucault and further developed by Laclau and Mouffe, where discursive practices are understood as

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<sup>24</sup> Laclau and Mouffe differentiate between moments and elements in the discourse, where moments are articulated within the discourse while elements are not discursively articulated differences ([1985] 1999: 105). However, in my analysis, I have not made use of this differentiation, which means when I use the term element, I refer to discursively articulated events.

*articulations* in the discourse, and consequently understand textual accounts as discursive articulations. While a representation is something that contains and transmits a meaning that already existed before the representation of it, an articulatory practice is itself a producer of meaning.

In my study, I focus particularly on the construction of the success story of feminism in Sweden, which in *Part III: Theoretical perspectives* was described as a hegemonic construct compounded by a wide range of discursive elements. Furthermore, I presented this success story of feminism as one constituent part in the construction of the Swedish nation, formed through the development of a community that takes shape by references to a common history and a shared future which, as I pointed out in the previous section, is fuelled by references to “us” as modern and developed in contrast to under-developed traditional cultures or third-world countries. In the *Theoretical perspectives*, I also pointed out how this discourse is processed through the different institutions in the society, and particularly the educative institutions, in which the state controls forms of knowledge and secures the reproduction of itself. Through an emphasis on analysing discourses, this study consequently explores these processes as ideological struggles between particular alliances that are often also contradictory formations.

### *Feminist methodological reflections over power, knowledge and experience in academic scholarship*

My methodological approach is anchored in a tradition of feminist scholarship, where feminists have taken issue with analysing “the power relations embedded in the social organization of research” (Sprague and Zimmerman 2004: 41). Here, the reproduction of research as value neutral, both in its techniques and in its relationship to the society has been critiqued by feminists who have showed that traditional research

“reproduces domination both in power inequities in the research process, and in the way it contributes to the reproduction of broader social inequality” (2004: 43). In this tradition of thought, feminist scholars have also focused on the lack of sensitivity to issues of subjectivity – both the subjectivity of the researcher as well as of the researched (Sprague and Zimmerman 2004; Mies 1991; Fonow and Cook 1991; Acker, Barry and Esseveld 1991). Indeed, there is a large bulk of feminist scholarship that has engaged in formulating alternatives to male-biased research methodologies (Harding and Hintikka 1983; Harding 1986, 1991, 2004; Smith 1987, 1990, 2004; Haraway 1999, 2004, Reinhartz 1992; Ramazanoglu and Holland [2002] 2004).

Over the decades, feminist scholars have also engaged in a critical conversation with *feminist* methodologies, and highlighted that, feminists – despite explicit emancipatory aims – themselves have reproduced relations of dominance and exclusionary practices (Mohanty 1986; Riley 1988; Lorde 1984; Moraga and Anzaldúa 1981, Combahee River Collective 1977; Wittig 1992). The criticism against universalism, ethnocentrism and heterosexism in feminist scholarship have entailed a rich body of scholarly work, and developed models for producing knowledge with an ethical accountability, imbued with a profound criticism against dominant orders and power structures (Hill Collins 1998a, 2004; Sandoval 2004; Crenshaw 1994; Lugones 1987; Trinh Minh-Ha 1987; Grewal 2005). The implications of this for the feminist scholarly process and for women’s emancipation brought questions of the complex connection between power asymmetries and dominant orders and its relationship to social experience, history and geo-politics to a centre stage of the discussion. In 1984, Adrienne Rich eloquently reflected over these complexities and its implications for feminist knowledge production, in her essay “Notes toward a Politics of Location”:

My difficulties, too, are not out there – except in the social conditions that make all this necessary. I do not any longer *believe* – my feelings do not allow me to believe – that the

white eye sees from the center. Yet I often find myself thinking as if I still believed that were true. Or, rather, my thinking stands still. I feel in a state of arrest, as if my brain and heart were refusing to speak to each other. My brain, a woman's brain, has exulted in breaking the taboo against women thinking, has taken off on the wind, saying, *I am the woman who asks the questions*. My heart has been learning in a much more humble and laborious way, learning that feelings are useless without facts, that all privilege is ignorant at the core ([1984] 1994: 226).

The power relations that also feminists are inscribed into – historical, political, economical, social, material, cultural – consequently led to a focus in feminist scholarship on the complex production and reproduction of dominance, oppression and marginalization. In her writings about “pedagogies of dissent” (2003: 190), Chandra Mohanty argues for the necessity of a scholarly practice that focuses on the relationship between subjectivity, power and domination (2003: 195). Mohanty suggests that “who we are, how we act, what we think, and what stories we tell become more intelligible within an epistemological framework that begins by recognizing existing hegemonic histories” (2003: 195). She continues:

The issue of subjectivity and voice thus concerns the effort to understand our specific locations in the educational process and in the institutions through which we are constituted. Resistance lies in self-conscious engagement with dominant, normative discourses and representations and in the active creation of oppositional analytic and cultural spaces. --- Uncovering and reclaiming subjugated knowledges is one way to lay claim to alternative histories. But these knowledges need to be understood and defined “pedagogically”, as questions of strategy and practice as well as of scholarship, in order to transform educational institutions radically. And this, in turn, requires taking the questions of experiences seriously (2003: 195, 196).

In order to uncover and reclaim subjugated knowledges, consequently, Mohanty argues for the importance of a theorization of “questions of knowledge, power and experience in the academy”, where the struggle to transform these institutional practices involves analyses of “exploitation and oppression in accurate history and theory”, an analysis in which Mohanty suggests that feminists shall see themselves as “activists in the academy”. Through this, feminists will be able to establish links between “movements for social justice and our pedagogical and scholarly endeavours expecting and demanding action from ourselves, our colleagues, and our students at numerous levels” (Mohanty 2003: 216).

Similar to what Rich and Mohanty describe above, I do in this study an analysis of feminist knowledge production, which also is the academic site where I myself am intellectually, materially, and socially located. Indeed, I have myself described this project as a critical study of my own intellectual home – which raises certain methodological dilemmas that I describe in detail below. In my analyses of the construction of the success story of feminism, I pay attention to the relationship between knowledge production, power and domination through analyses of constructions of hegemony. I uncover practices of privilege and inquire into how knowledge takes part in the further production of dominant orders and processes of marginalization. Exploring this hegemonic construction from different angles, this study acknowledges the interplay between knowledge production and institutional processes and sheds light on different dimensions in the production and reproduction of hegemony. Importantly, though, which furthermore aligns with what Rich and Mohanty describe, in a study like this, it would have been difficult not engaging in reflections over the different situations and debates I myself have encountered and interacted in. During the research process, consequently, I have kept a journal with notes from events, discussions, and seminars I have attended, or texts that I have read “off duty”. My personal notes have been helpful in the analytic process as a way to move closer to the topic, or to reach a deeper level of understanding. I have therefore also included some of these

reflections in my analyses. The inclusion of the notes from my journal serve, in varying degrees and in varying combinations, three purposes in this study. Firstly, the notes from the journal sets the scene for the investigation I carry out, which means that they both contextualize my own route into the question that has guided the research process, and offer a description of the event that triggered the research question. Secondly, the notes from my journal also have the capacity to verbalize complexities, power asymmetries or insecurities that take shape in academic life. At those occasions, the notes have functioned as attempts to engage with the difficulties of grasping the richness of “how cultural and social practices are brought into being and sustained”, as explained by sociologist Carol Smart (2007: 3) in a study where she used her own personal experiences in a research project. And thirdly, the notes from my journal also functions as attempts to situate myself in the study. Donna Haraway’s idea of situated knowledges contains a methodology bringing attention to the entanglement between the researcher, the research object and the collective context that the researcher and the object of study share and she points our attention to the co-construction of the material and the semiotic (matter and sign) (Haraway 1999). Consequently, when I use notes from my journal in the following articles, I reflect over ways in which my experiences have come to affect my reasoning, indeed, readers could say that the notes from my journal situate my own knowledge-in-process.

### *Researcher’s positions*

I believe that writing about WGFS has distanced me from the field. At the same time, it has moved me closer to the field, even very close to it. I suggest, though, that the closeness has created a distance. I notice that I often focus on the practices that take shape and forget my own participation in constructing them. I become absorbed by an analytic distance and do not

notice how I interact in these processes myself. This is particularly evident when I teach students. At those occasions, I can switch positions from describing feminist debates over, say, the object of study in gender studies, to asking the students questions like: “would you say that there is anything that constitutes the core of gender studies?” When listening to their responses, I start analysing their suggestions: “Gender studies has a critical attitude to science, to the society, to cultural representations”; “It involves analysis of power”. And it takes a while before I realize that I am secretly using the students as research participants instead of teaching them feminism. I ask questions of pure<sup>25</sup> curiosity, when what I should do is to explain that the many different suggestions to the issue of what constitutes the core of the subject area are expressions for the many shapes and forms that feminist knowledge take, and that this also is what makes feminism open-ended, transformative, critical. Indeed, by the time I realize that, it is also clear to me that what I did some minutes ago – in the role of such an authorizing figure as a teacher – was to put an action into motion where I lead the students to believe that such a thing as a “core” in gender studies is desirable.

During my work with this dissertation, I have developed a love-hate relationship with such analytical moments, where I throw out a question to an audience – at a teacher’s meeting, at a seminar, when teaching – only to *hear* the responses, not because *I* want to find an answer to it. On the one hand, I love those moments, because they have really been important in my research process. Those discussions have helped me in the meaning to reach a more complex but also more distinct understanding of my research material. On the other hand, and in a stubborn, petulant way, I am

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<sup>25</sup> Here, I would like to underline that, my curiosity is of course not pure, it is inflected with my own investments in the field and in my research project. However, I also want to keep the ‘pure’ in the sentence, maintain that curiosity is never innocent, despite its open and explorative connotations.

challenged by those moments, because they illuminate the paradoxical position of *myself* in relationship to my study: that I also, also in *this* very moment, produce a particular meaning in the discourse about academic feminism. In early stages in the research process, this paradoxical relationship gave me a difficult form of writer's block: I wrote a number of pages about, for example, how the history of WGFS was constructed. But every time I read through what I had written I had to erase it again because I could not handle the narrative I constructed in my text about how the history of how WGFS was constructed. I was torn between the desire to 'put the story straight' and the similarly strong desire not to contribute to what Foucault describes as the truth effects in the complex construction power-knowledge ([1977]1980: 118). And at the farthest end of my anxieties rung Judith Halberstam's words in my ears, when she quoted Foucault at one PhD-course I joined: "we tell stories that construct us as the heroes of the story" (Halberstam 2007). There was no way around it; what ever I did, a piece of knowledge would be constructed that, through its methodology and theoretical reasoning in its analyses would be a co-constructor of the very same debates I wanted to analyse, whose effects would be prescriptive, delimiting, or stabilizing of the debates in the field. It would not make any difference if I explicitly said in the introduction to a text, that "I don't aspire to construct myself as a hero, writing about those things" because that very moment would still make me a hero. I was stuck. Some days I tried to convince myself that what I was doing was a very sophisticated form of procrastination while other times I tried to tell myself that the writer's block was an act of superstition: my research would not make any impact on the debates on the field anyway, so I could just go on writing about them.

These considerations over my relationship to my study gave me a possibility to reflect over my relationship to my object of study. And, indeed, as a PhD-student enrolled at a department for gender studies in Sweden, working on a research project about the processes of institutionalization and knowledge production in gender studies in Sweden,



I am often confronted with overlaps between my object of study and the context in which I am working. Accordingly, I sometimes find myself surrounded by the very debates that are my objects, and also contribute to these debates myself. However, still, I would say that these challenges are not radically different from those in anthropological, sociological or historical studies; they manifest more in my project. Every scholar, myself included, is situated in specific theoretical and methodological frames. As also Donna Haraway has pointed out, though, there is a promise in the reflections over these issues. In Nina Lykke's presentation of Haraway's play with words in "The Promises of Monsters", Haraway connects the concept "site" with "sight" and underlines that scholars need to reflect over their "siting" and "sighting" (Lykke 2009). Lykke explains the first aspect, siting, as the scholarly reflection over her situatedness in time and space and how the different relations of power she is entangled in define and position the research subject. The second aspect, "sighting", relates to the material and discursive dimensions of the research design. In this aspect, technological apparatuses as well as thinking technologies (concepts, analytical tools etc.) are understood as both material and discursive, which means that they do not neutrally transmit meaning, but are also performative, that is, producers of meaning (Lykke 2009). I understand both of these issues as related to the site of the research as well as to the scholarly attitude. In my case, they have been closely related. Indeed, one, often trying, insight that has followed me since my initial bewilderment and throughout the research process has been the importance to endure not understanding things immediately. As an attitude to the research process, to remain calm over things I do not immediately understand, is a question about trust, in feminist theory and in my research associates, in them who believes in my abilities as a scholar. Such a trusting attitude also follows from a conviction of knowledge production as a process of learning – even though such an attitude indeed can be hard to maintain in such a competitive and hierarchical environment as the academy. To endure not understanding things immediately involves an open attitude to the

knowledge producing process, to one's own conceptual tools, methods and methodologies, which also is potentially transformative.

As with many research projects, this research process has not been an easy endeavour. Still, I believe that this particular project has been especially difficult precisely because of the consensus culture around feminism in Sweden, through which hegemony seeks to reach a secure a stable position. The reactions I have received when I present parts of my research have made me aware of the depth and width of this culture, as well as its evasiveness, where ideas that articulate a different meaning than the hegemonic, or even talk about the hegemony, gets rejected, neglected, de-authorized or delegitimized. In addition, the effects of this on feminist intellectual conversations are yet more distressing. I imagine I am not the only one that has reflected upon the strikingly low amount of theoretical disagreements between feminists on conferences or in Swedish feminist scholarly journals. Indeed, until today, examples of feminist intellectual disagreements in Sweden during the latest years are very rare: apart from the discussions about the benefits with the gender system in *Kvinnovetenskaplig tidskrift* (*Kvt, Journal of women's studies*) in the end of the 1980s, and a short conversation about intersectionality in the same journal in the early 2000s, the feminist intellectual disagreements have been very few. Even more distressing, in return, are the effects of this on knowledge production. When the value of an intellectual contribution is judged on the level of comfort or agreement (that is: 'it's a good contribution because I agree'), the conditions under which new perspectives, ideas, theories can emerge are severely circumscribed. Indeed, I do believe that intellectual disagreements and theoretical contentions are fruitful for the production of new ideas. To be engaged in a critical conversation is not the same as a dismissal or a refusal. Instead, a critical reflection often arises from a serious engagement, a strong affection or even a caring for the object under scrutiny. As also Wendy Brown underlines:

... critique is not equivalent to rejection or denunciation... the call to rethink something is not inherently treasonous but can actually be a way of caring for and even renewing the object in question, and that the experience of being riled by a theoretical utterance, and especially of being provoked to anger or defensiveness, can sometimes spark a line of rich reflection (Brown 2005: x)

Liz Stanley describes this as the paradox of “contested feminism” and writes: “in the very ‘moment’ upon which feminisms appear most to disagree they are also the most intimately involved, with their gaze settled firmly upon each other” (1997: 11).<sup>26</sup> Feminism, thus, can be seen as propelled – not by the desire to reach an agreement – but by the potential of further problematizing. This dissociation from compromising models have also been discussed by Chantal Mouffe, who critiques the aspiration to reach consensus and argues for the importance of diversity in all societal spheres:

We have to accept that every consensus exists as a temporary result of a provisional hegemony, as a stabilization of power, and that it always entails some form of exclusion. The ideas that power could be dissolved through a rational debate and that legitimacy could be based on pure rationality are illusions, which can endanger democratic institutions. (Mouffe 2000: 27)

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<sup>26</sup> This, then, is something different from what Kathy Davis has described in her essay “What’s a Nice Girl Like You Doing in a Place Like This?” (1997), in which she discusses WGFS’ institutionalized settings as sites of competitiveness, envy and animosity. Davis’ essay focuses on institutional conditions and personal relationships between staff and students in WGFS settings. Even though these are displayed also on the knowledge produced and interacts in complex ways with authority and hierarchy, I understand what Davis is talking about as something different from the intellectually constructive or challenging critique that I describe above, which can have the capacity to fuel a creative intellectual process.

In an attempt to construct "them" not as an enemy but as somebody whose right to express herself we defend, Mouffe introduces her notion of 'agonistic pluralism'. Here, she explains that a legitimate enemy can be constructed as an adversary instead of an enemy (2000: 15, 17). In that sense, Mouffe argues that we need to increase the encounters that create democratic values, which involves a multiplication of the institutions, discourses and forms of life that take part in the creation of democracy:

This question, pace the rationalists, is not how to arrive at a consensus without exclusion, since this would imply the eradication of the political. Politics aims at the creation of unity in a context of conflict and diversity; it is always concerned with the creation of an "us" by the determination of a "them". The novelty of democratic politics is not the overcoming of this us/them opposition – which is an impossibility – but the different way in which it is established. (Mouffe 2000: 25).

Mouffe bases her rejection of consensus on the idea that consensus work through exclusions of all other expressions than the hegemonic, and the possibility that is created through her critique of a rational consensus is the possibility of change. In the case of my own research process, it is not the silent responses or the lack of critique that have pushed my own conceptualizations, but the intellectual disagreements and the theoretical conversations in which I have been forced to reflect over the genealogies, effects and limits of my research.

These reflexive moments have also drawn me closer to my object of study, made me more entwined with the process of knowledge production, and pulled me closer to the point where I must provide an answer. The answer, then, is not a check-list over how to handle these complex processes. Paradoxically, though, the answer still marks the boundaries of a preferred position in relation to the research process, and bears some resemblance with a statement over do's and don'ts in feminist theory. However, I want to underline that the openness of this attitude is significant

and I align with Donna Haraway when she say that “there are always more things going on than you thought” (2004: 335). Here, Haraway refers to the complexities involved when the feminist epistemological and political commitment to avoid fixations is translated into research methodologies, and explains:

You can turn up the volume on some categories, and down on others. There are foregrounding and backgrounding operations. You can make categories interrupt each other. All these operations are based on skills, on technologies, on material technologies. They are not merely ideas, but thinking technologies that have materiality and effectivity. There are ways of stabilizing meanings in some forms rather than others, and stabilizing meanings is a very material practice. - - - I do not want to throw away the category formation skills I have inherited, but I want to see how we an all do a little re-tooling. This is a kind of modest project, an act of modest witnessing (2004: 335).

Consequently, I want to direct the attention to a core element in WGFS, which is sometimes hidden or weakened in debates around certain understandings of notions of feminism’s past, present and future, lost and found proper objects and of the naming of the field. This element is the vulnerable but valuable *transformative* potential of WGFS, which is a potential that, as I argue in this study, can be realized through a *destabilization* of feminism and the discourses feminism intervenes into, in institutionalized settings, as well as in the organization of knowledge and the production of feminist knowledge. Against this backdrop, the spirit of this dissertation is therefore not to give answers, but to explore, indeed, to ask questions and to carry these questions further in order to provide readers with an exploration of the processes of institutionalization and feminist knowledge production in WGFS in Sweden. This is therefore also an open text, which invites all kinds of readers – also resistant readers who I hope will be able to find something fruitful in the analyses that are offered

in this study.<sup>27</sup> I do not aspire to find the authentic story behind the narrative of gender studies in Sweden – as if there existed feminist voices that could speak more true, or whose speech was understood as more valid, than others. Instead, in this exploration of hegemonic practices in the construction of WGFS in Sweden, I want to show that there does not exist any prime mover or primary actors behind this story, but a range of power structures, practices and relations that form dominant and alternative narratives, and result in implications of importance for the transformative potential of WGFS.

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<sup>27</sup> When writing about this, Donna Haraway's comment on the reception of the *Cyborg Manifesto* springs to mind. Here, Haraway explains that many found the manifesto very controversial where on the one hand, some scholars disapproved of it politically, found it anti-feminist and argued against a publication of the manifesto, whereas others were enthusiastic, found it exciting, indeed, brilliant. She also comments the unexpected, but to her very welcome, reception from young feminists who "embrace and use the cyborg of the manifesto to do what they want for their own purposes" (2004: 324, 325, 326). Such an open attitude to the reception of one's work is indeed inspiring.

## Part V: Summary and discussion of the articles

As mentioned earlier, the first aim of this dissertation is to analyse the process of institutionalization and neo-/interdisciplinary of WGFS and the construction of feminist knowledge within this process. The second aim, is to contribute to the feminist debates on feminist knowledge as transformative. The research process, furthermore, has been guided by three questions. Consequently, by focusing on the interplay between feminist knowledge production, the academy and the government, I interrogate how WGFS has been institutionalized and organized into the academy and how the relationship between state policies and academic feminism have interacted with the institutionalization of WGFS. Secondly, I explore the effects of feminist knowledge production by focusing on how feminist knowledge production contributes to dominant discourses. Thirdly, I analyze the relationship between feminist knowledge production and the location of this endeavour, through investigations of the interplay between the construction of a national project and the production of feminist knowledge. I explore these questions in seven articles which all focus on the construction of WGFS in Sweden from various angles. In all, the articles display different, but also linked, dimensions of the processes of institutionalization and knowledge production. If read together, the articles offer an analysis of the discursive, institutional, epistemological, methodological and political processes that take shape in WGFS in Sweden.

Importantly, though, these articles have been written over a period of five years and each article has been written with a particular publication, a certain journal or book project, in mind. This procedure has involved particular limitations – such as the length of the articles, for instance, or conditions – such as a specific time or a particular geo-political context, in which it was regarded as important to comment upon a certain debate.

Therefore, in the following discussion of the articles I also offer a presentation of the context of the publications. This presentation is provided against the background of three more general reflections around publishing practices: Firstly I want to highlight the collaborative element in the process of researching and publishing. A scholarly article is always the result of collaboration between the author, and the editors of the publication, but also, equally important, the peer review readers and colleagues (through discussions that take place at a seminar, for instance). Secondly, I want to mention the entwinement between temporal as well as geo-political conditions and the research product, an issue that is often particularly significant for articles published in academic journals, compared to books. Here, for instance, it has become strikingly evident that feminist debates in Sweden by international editors are understood as peripheral in a feminist academic conversation, implying that Swedish feminist debates are difficult to analyse without comparisons to U.K.-U.S. debates. Obviously, these debates are also important in a Swedish academic feminist community, but such a procedure implies a problematic reiteration and reproduction of the U.K.-U.S debates as the centre of feminist knowledge production. And thirdly, when analysing feminism in the contemporary academy, the publishing of these studies in academic contexts also means that these studies become products in the system, process or structure that is the very object of analysis. In my case, this circumstance was also extended to the government, when one of my articles was written on commission from a national agency for gender research. Both of these situations illuminate a general challenge implied in a project like this, displaying the illusory character of the discourse around academic freedom. Here, and as feminist scholars have argued, there are always pragmatic and political choices around what to include and not include in an analysis (such as in the



politics of citation, for instance).<sup>28</sup> However, seeing that all these dimensions are more or less common constraints or circumstances which feminist academic knowledge production has to manage, I have thus found it fruitful to give a presentation of the different contexts of publication, which I do in the subsequently.

### *Mapping Women's/Gender/Feminist Studies in Sweden (Article I)*

The first article in this dissertation is titled “Mapping Women's/Gender/Feminist Studies in Sweden” and offers an analysis of the emergence of WGFS between the years 1975-2010. The article is an extended version of a publication written for the Swedish Secretariat of Gender Research (2010). In the original publication, this situation involved some limitations for the process of writing, where the most significant contribution was that this was an official text, which meant that the text was intended to reflect the opinion of the Swedish Secretariat of Gender Research. Because of this, I was also asked to background the explorative and analytic approach and more straightforwardly ‘state’ things. Therefore, I decided to revise this text before including it in the thesis. In the revised version, I incorporated theorizations, debates and complexities but also took out some sections of the text. Secondly, the commissioner of this text is a national body which also means that by publishing the text, I become an

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<sup>28</sup> I am aware that the discourse on academic freedom is directed towards a situation where sponsors of research, such as private companies for instance, can have an impact on the results of the research. There are, however, also other currents in this discourse, which implies that academic research is free from any entanglements – social, political, cultural, economical, which is a discourse that has not been divorced from the desire for truth and objectivity in research, at the expense of a focus on how power and knowledge co-operates in scientific discourse (see Foucault ([1977]1980)).

active agent in the context of my own research project. For feminists in Sweden, it is not unusual to collaborate with government or other official bodies, which I also describe in this very article, academic feminists have written many reports about women's conditions, gendered relations, structures and orders in the society on commission from such instances. However, for me, it became paradoxical because in this dissertation I explore that very relationship and argue that it has involved a reproduction and further production of the national project in Sweden where feminism is described as a success story. Nevertheless, these are also the terms under which feminists in Sweden produce knowledge, and illuminate the paradoxical effects of the successful institutionalization of gender research on various levels in the Swedish society, as sites from which feminists can critique or support dominant discourses.

This article, maps two significant debates around the material contexts of institutionalization. Firstly a sketch of the debates and developments concerning financial and infra-structural conditions for the emerging of the subject area are addressed. Through a presentation of the occurrence and kind of positions, financial status and level of education, the article also discusses the current (2010) infra-structural situation of gender studies. The article examines the infra-structural situation of the subject area from 1975 until 2010. Secondly, this article also maps the different debates around key terms and the naming of the field, through an analysis of key terms used from the mid-1970s onwards, and offers a comparative analysis of terms like 'women's aspect', 'sex system', and 'gender'.

Understanding the integration of feminist knowledge production into the academy as an emancipatory endeavour, this article explores the relationship between the feminist political agenda, the academia and the state and argues that the successful institutionalization of WGFS has generated many paradoxes, where the financial support from the state is acknowledged as important, but simultaneously dangerous for its risks of instrumentalizing and de-radicalizing the feminist agenda. This article discusses, the struggle for institutional anchorage and sustainability that has

been and still is identified as a crucial issue for academic feminism. Thus, this article argues that academic feminists are attentive to forms of co-optation of their radical agenda, visible through, for instance, the debates around institutionalization and the naming of the field where, as suggested in this article, academic feminism also resists a stabilization of the feminist agenda and with that, offers hope for the furthering WGFS as an oppositional forum in the academy.

### *PhDs, Women's/Gender Studies and Interdisciplinarity (Article II)*

The second article is concerned with WGFS as interdisciplinary and was written within the frame of a three-year EU-funded research project on possibilities and obstacles for interdisciplinarity. In this project, I was working together with a group of sixteen scholars from eight European countries, and the article was written to a special issue of NORA on interdisciplinarity and WGFS in the context of European Higher Education (2005). I worked together with professor Ulla M Holm and PhD-student Kerstin Alnebratt, with whom I also wrote a number of reports (<http://www.hull.ac.uk/researchintegration>). The article offers an analysis of the results from the first and second years of data collection and is written together with Ulla M Holm. Seeing that scholarship is a collective activity, the act of co-writing is a creative, challenging and inspiring form of knowledge production, which also involves careful attention to one's own thinking and writing.

The article takes departure from the debate around WGFS and processes of disciplinization. In this debate, the successful institutionalization and the emergent neo-/interdisciplinization of WGFS has awakened the paradoxical question whether this subject area – which has been depicted as inherently interdisciplinary – should suddenly be regarded as a discipline. A range of comments have been expressed on this

topic, but they all have in common a scepticism against the idea of WGFS as a discipline. On the one hand, the idea of WGFS as a subject in its own right has been criticized by scholars who have questioned the difficulties associated with identifying the proper object, and the depth of knowledge in an interdisciplinary subject field (Rosenbeck 1999; Brown 1997). On the other hand, other scholars have articulated the risks at stake with gender studies 'going discipline', raising concerns about the expectations on a firm core and canon in gender studies as a proper discipline (Lykke 2004; Norlander 1997). Against this background and other external and internal barriers to mono- respectively interdisciplinarity in general and in WGFS in particular, this article opens up a research political discussion around the meaning or meanings of the budding neo-/interdisciplinary PhD-training in gender studies. It begins with the various ways in which interdisciplinarity has been understood and then accounts for some of the barriers to interdisciplinary cooperation between the humanities and social sciences. The article further offers a conceptual analysis of the related concepts multi-, inter-, trans-, and neodisciplinarity and describes the various models of organizing WGFS in the academy. Furthermore, the different implications of the institutionalization and neo-/interdisciplinarization of gender studies in the academic structure are discussed. This article shows that even though interdisciplinarity is much embraced in the rhetoric by governmental and funding councils, it might be difficult to carry out in practice. As stated in this article, these difficulties take shape on different levels and areas of HE. In this regard, the most significant obstacle to interdisciplinarity is understood as the assumption of a strong disciplinary base in academic practices, which is an assumption that continues to shape a system structured along disciplinary lines, with an impact on institutional administrative routines, the organization of funding councils and the distribution of governmental resources.

*Why Interdisciplinarity? Interdisciplinarity and Women's/Gender Studies in Europe (Article III)*

The third article inquires about the various uses and understandings of interdisciplinarity in European Higher Education policies, and the implications of this for WGFS. This article is published in a volume as a part of a book series produced by the Advanced Thematic Network for European Women's Studies, ATHENA<sup>29</sup> (2009). This book series focuses on the emergence of WGFS in different European geo-political contexts and engages in increasing the knowledge around the various uses and understandings of key concepts in the different European languages, it also offers analyses of the different forms of institutionalizing WGFS into the academy and explorations of various epistemological, methodological and political dilemmas in WGFS related to this. Initially, this article was written to the Routledge volume *Theories and Methodologies in Postgraduate Feminist Research* (2010), which focuses on various forms of interdisciplinary practices in feminist research and offers an introduction to theories and methodologies for postgraduate feminist researchers. A slightly revised version of this article appears also in that volume.

Juxtaposing the promotion of interdisciplinarity as the favored working method in the research policies by the European Union, with the motives behind feminist uses of interdisciplinarity, this article reflects on the different implications of different ways to conceptualize and practice interdisciplinarity. As discussed in this article, both a wide spread promotion of interdisciplinarity and a criticism of interdisciplinarity results in a reproduction of the division between interdisciplinarity and disciplinarity. Consequently, this article argues for a careful use of interdisciplinarity in feminist scholarship, despite the use of

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<sup>29</sup> An ERASMUS project subsidized by the European Commission.

interdisciplinarity as an accomplice of the neo-liberal ideologies of the present system of higher education. The same article also offers an analysis of important elements of interdisciplinarity in practice and reflects on ways to further institutionalize WGFS as an interdisciplinary subject area, without homogenizing the field.

*Institutionalized Knowledge - Notes on the Processes of Inclusion and Exclusion in Gender Studies in Sweden (Article IV)*

Article four is engaged with the function and effects of a success story of feminism in Sweden and was published in *NORA* (2010). Knowing that this publication has a wide circle of readers in the Nordic countries, *NORA* was the primary choice for an article of this kind, seeing that the article engages with issues closely related to feminist practices of knowledge production in countries where the state has had a significant impact on the pace and form of institutionalizing WGFS. In addition, the fact that *NORA* also has an international readership further contributed to the choice of this publication because of the lack of critical analyses on the international arena of the famous success story of feminism in Sweden.

Against the background of this success story, article four analyses the strategies of inclusions/exclusions in the production of feminist knowledge. The implications of the closeness between academic feminists in Sweden and the production of the Swedish (welfare) state are highlighted, and the marginal voices that create an alternative space for gender studies are identified.

The article engages with the construction of the success story out of the perspective of the production of gender studies as an academic area of education and research. Here, the article argues that the success story produces a certain narrative and is the result of practices of exclusions and inclusions. This article furthermore discusses the performative function of

this success story, in the sense that it not only represents past events, but functions as an agent, too.

The article offers a close reading of a text book which is popular at undergraduate education in gender studies and examines the re/production of gender studies knowledge through an analysis of how the story of feminism is told. Furthermore, the article explores the possible connections between a state-initiated gender equality project and gender studies scholarship in the academy and inquires into the role of gender in the national project and of the national project in gender studies.

### *A Success Story: Explorations of the Disciplinization of Gender Studies in Sweden (Article V)*

Article five continues the exploration of the success story of feminism in Sweden and is submitted to *SQS Journal of Queer Studies*. The choice of this publication was made because of the journal's location in a Nordic geopolitical context, but also because of its international outlook and the queer scope of the journal, seeing that the article discusses the relationships between sex, gender, sexuality and ethnicity and critically engages with attempts to establish borders between these.

With reference to the well-known identity crisis in WGFS, this article takes departure from the parallel creation and mediation of a story of feminist scholarship in Sweden in terms of it being a success. Presenting how the further disciplinization of WGFS in Sweden has been used as a perpetuator for this success story, this article suggests that WGFS functions as a component in the production and reproduction of a Swedish national project. Inquiring into the moment when the notion gender and the sex-gender system were introduced in Swedish feminism, this article shows how this notion – despite heavy criticisms from scholars in the field – became an official term. Furthermore, this article analyses the basic

constituencies of this notion, as it is understood, and shows how these are developed out of a dual-sex model. In addition, it is described how this notion is transferred into gender studies and presented as the core object of study for the field. Here, the article illuminates that the construction of gender as a proper object of study is founded upon a dual sex model, in which the most basic difference between women and men is said to be reproduction. Not only is the meaning of gender fixed and stabilized, there is also, as discussed in this article, a basic disregard towards several connections between gender and e.g. 'race'/ethnicity. Finally, this article describes how the stabilization of a proper object in the field marks out disciplinary borders between sex, gender, ethnicity, and sexuality. The article concludes with pointing at the connections between this understanding of gender and of an understanding of gender in a national project, working along the lines of complementarity between the sexes, and how this further reinforces the success story of feminism in Sweden.

*"This is not therapy!" Un/expected encounters in memory work.*

*Notes from the field of feminist teaching (Article VI)*

Article six explores the possibilities of traversing or even transcending implicit assumptions of feminism in the context of feminist teaching. This article was written for the book "Teaching with the Third Wave", aimed at offering young feminist scholarly perspectives on the conditions and histories of academic feminism in the context of teaching (2009). By inquiring into notions of feminism that were displayed during a teaching session at a WGFS course for Masters students, this article analyses the links between the theories that are presented in class and the students' expectations. With the aim of exploring how the expectations from the students influence the learning process when teaching feminism, this article



analyses the endurance of dominant notions of feminism and reflects on the resistance that students articulated in the classroom against dismantling these. Understood as expressions of a more general narrative in feminism around assumptions of the past, the location and aim of feminist work, this article discusses how this resistance can be understood as a split between theory (i.e. academy) and experience-based work (i.e. activism) in feminism. Furthermore, this article suggests that an un-reflected inheritance of second-wave feminism still guides feminist work in its aim to develop a critical consciousness. Moreover, this article also shows how the attachment to consciousness-raising as a method aimed at liberating the subject from oppressive functions as a capturing trope in feminism, which constructs women as innocent victims in the need of empowerment through consciousness-raising. Finally, this article underlines the importance of making classroom assumptions explicit in teaching, as well as critically evaluating the history of the theories used in the context of teaching.

*Problems with differences in feminism, anyone? An exploration of power struggles and feminism in Sweden (Article VII)*

The seventh, and final, article to this study, is titled “Problems with differences in feminism, anyone? An exploration of power struggles and feminism in Sweden” and takes departure in the debate about difference in feminism. The article is submitted to *European Journal of Women’s Studies*. Against the background of the internationally known success story of feminism in Sweden, the choice of this publication was made with the aim of increasing the knowledge about how the politics of place and the geo-political location impact feminist scholarship. Inquiring about how feminists conceptualize their aims in feminism with bringing about change after the call for taking differences into account, this article contrasts analyses of two different feminist discourses. Here, the article shows that

there exists a feminist discourse in Sweden where the call for difference is met with silence, refusal, or disavowal. Understood as discriminatory practices, this article illuminates how such practices in effect marginalize or silence alternative, critical voices and produce a dominant discourse of feminism in Sweden. Furthermore this article shows how feminists who inhabit this dominant discourse describe feminism's transformative aim as weakened or threatened by the call for difference, and that the dissolution of a feminist "we" among these feminists are seen as harmful for the political mission in feminism. This discussion is contrasted by an analysis of responses to the call for difference from feminists that inhabit an alternative position in this discourse. Hence the article displays an understanding of feminism that is able to take difference into account without running the risk for dissolution or a weakening of feminism's transformative aim. Analysing the different strategies deployed in these two variants of feminism, the article finds that a power struggle is going on among feminists in Sweden, and highlights the strategies deployed in the struggle. Here, the strategies from the dominant feminist discourse are understood as hegemonic, working through consent and refusal, while the alternative feminist discourse uses strategies of discomfort, such as anger, in the struggle against marginalization. By way of an understanding of feminism that is not built upon individual characteristics, such as sex, ethnicity or sexuality, this article finally shows how the transformative aim in feminism can be combined with an inclusive and open feminism, in an understanding of feminism as an orientation to the possibility of change, through oppositional acts against discrimination and injustice.

## *Discussion*

The theme in this dissertation is to study the interplay between feminist knowledge production, the state and the academy. Through analyses of how

feminist knowledge production contributes to dominant discourses, I explore the political, material, discursive, epistemological and methodological effects of this and inquire into the implications for feminism as a transformative enterprise. Three questions have guided me in the research process. Even though these run through all the articles published in this study, I focus on different aspects of these in the different articles. This has made it possible to study the construction of WGFS from different angles. In the following, I discuss these questions in relation to the analyses made.

*How has feminist knowledge been organized and institutionalized into the academy?*

The analyses of the organization and institutionalization of feminist knowledge takes departure in academic feminism's complex relationship to on the one hand the academy, understood as a hierarchical and disciplinary structured site, and, on the other hand the state, which has been described as a crucial, but risky, relationship for the emergence of WGFS. I understand these relationships as mutually interactive, that is, that academic feminism influences the policies, practices and discourses of the state, and that the state influences the institutional and discursive effects of academic feminism. In addition, when incorporated into the academy, feminism also influences this site, both as regards knowledge production, through the production of theories and methodologies and the introduction of objects of study, but also in the mode of working, as for instance within interdisciplinary arenas. The academy influences feminism, via institutional structures, such as hierarchies, or bureaucracy, and the organization of knowledge, but also through practices of resistance to the feminist project, for instance visible through a distrustfulness against the professionalization of gender studies where many departments face difficulties in securing

access to professorships or to be accepted for giving PhD-exams, which reflects a resistance to feminist knowledge production in the academy. The relationship between academic feminism, the state and the academy thus offers many paradoxes.

The close relationship with the state that was initiated during the 1970s, implied that academic feminists received funding for giving undergraduate courses. The precautions over the close relationship to the state that could result in a de-radicalization of the feminist agenda were met with a confidence by the feminists who could separate the money (the state) and the struggle (feminism). However, this relationship also involved compromises, which meant, that the state intervened into the subject area by deciding the name of the field, for instance. Even though critical voices were raised, feminists' attitude towards these compromises were mainly pragmatic. While the funding from the state by feminists has been described as decisive for the emergence of the subject area, feminists also explained that this did not have an impact on the knowledge produced. Still, the close relationship between the feminists and the state was not restricted to financial matters or pragmatic issues such as the name of the subject area or the naming of positions. Feminists also provided the state with knowledge about gendered experiences, relations and structures, knowledge that was used by different, both left-and right wing, governments to develop policies for increasing a form of gender equality that was built upon a dual-sex notion and a complementary relationship between the sexes. The introduction of the notion of 'gender' and the sex-gender system is an example of this. Here, the interplay between the feminists and the state is particularly interesting since, even though the notion 'gender' and the sex-gender system in Sweden was introduced by a feminist, many feminists were hesitant about the need for the notion. It still became the official term of the subject area and so also in state policies. This illuminates a context for academic feminism where feminists take part in different discourses. A dominant feminist discourse in Sweden has an impact on the effects of the further institutionalization of the field. This is a discourse where certain

articulations of feminist knowledge gain impact with an effect on different levels in the institutionalized subject area. Notably, it not only has an impact on the institutional conditions, such as the name of the subject, but also on teaching. The teaching material present a form of knowledge that may feed into this discourse or express a criticism against it. An educative institution, such as the academy, is not an innocent context or a neutral distributor of proper knowledge. These contexts also authorize and construct the knowledge displayed so that it is legitimised as proper.

The close relationship between feminists and the state, has moreover offered repercussions towards the attitude to gender research in the academy in general, where feminism was met with suspicion, and the knowledge produced de-legitimized. The turn of events around the Tham-professorships is an example of this. Academic feminism, however, continued its process of institutionalization, from single undergraduate courses in the early and mid-1970s, to units in the late 1970s and early 1980s, and to departments in the 1990s. As of today, there exists 10 departments/units for gender studies in Sweden, and positions at all levels in the academic system. On a national level, thus, the institutionalization of gender studies has been successful. However, there are large differences between individual departments. At present, the higher education policies have changed from an earlier semi-autonomous system to more and more autonomy for the different universities. This involves a situation where the attitude to gender at every single university will determine the further institutionalization of WGFS. This can, thus, give both positive and negative consequences.

In the process of professionalizing gender studies, where the interdisciplinary Centra/Fora units were transformed into departments, with an increase of positions and students, a debate about the interdisciplinary status of the subject took place. In 2007, gender studies became recognized as a discipline by the National Agency for Higher Education and attempts to frame a core in the subject as well as a canon were made. So, the disciplinary structure of the academy also regulates the way a subject area

like gender studies is conceptualized and structured, even though the scholars, who inhabit gender studies, still have a range of different disciplinary backgrounds and are engaged in research projects with vastly different themes. However, the disciplinary structure of the system of higher education also involves obstacles for gender studies scholars. One example of this is that gender studies are yet to be recognized by the research councils in Sweden.

WGFS is still understood as an interdisciplinary project by feminist scholars, and it is performed in different forms, as I have illuminated in this study. However, the current challenges to interdisciplinarity in WGFS are the de-radicalization of interdisciplinarity that follows from higher education policies in the EU and on the level of various national contexts. In these policies and contexts, interdisciplinarity is understood in different ways, but often without the critical and transformative capacity that is involved in feminist uses of interdisciplinarity. In these policies and contexts, then, interdisciplinarity can often be an empty rhetoric, without any changes on the actual system of higher education.

The mutual interplay between the state, the academy and feminist knowledge production thus involves particular challenges, but also promises. The institutionalization of WGFS into the academy has created an oppositional space in the academy and continues to challenge firm foundations and fixed borders in practices of knowledge production. However, whether or not WGFS succeeds in producing teaching and research that critiques dominant orders, is a question that falls back to the teaching and writing practices carried out in the field, that is, how concepts and objects are interpreted, how histories are told and how the subject area is conceptualized methodologically, epistemologically and politically, which brings me to my second question.

### *What are the effects of feminist knowledge production?*

Seeing as there is an interplay between the processes of institutionalization and neo-/interdisciplinization and knowledge production, I have inquired into the implications of this for feminist knowledge production. This interplay has discursive effects, where the knowledge produced articulates particular notions of feminist knowledge, of objects and historical narratives. These ideas also take shape as materialized practices, in the form of the production of documents such as books, teaching material, and the establishment of positions etc. In light of the process of institutionalization, I have explored the knowledge produced through an engagement with a system of authorization. The knowledge displayed through an academic institution, is distributed so that it gets heard as proper, which involves a dominant function of the discourse. Through analysing certain knowledge accounts such as historical narratives, objects or notions of feminism, I have studied the function of textual accounts by analysing the political, epistemological and methodological effects of the historical narrative, object or notion of feminism. Seeing that the institutionalization of gender studies is described as a success, and often referred to as one of the elements in the discourse of feminism in Sweden as a success story, I have focused my analyses in this study around the ways in which feminist knowledge production takes part in the production of this discourse. In this discourse, notions of Sweden as an equal, just and good society is distributed and voices that raise critiques or alternatives to this notion are silenced or rejected and marginalized. Showing that these are practices of domination, I have taken an interest in studying the ways through which feminist knowledge production contributes to the production of dominant discourses. Therefore, I have explored the practices of inclusion and exclusion in feminist knowledge production, through analysing the

production of certain historical narratives, objects and notions of feminism. I show that a construction of feminist knowledge takes place, where notions of a dual-sex model, of compulsory heterosexuality, of ethnocentrism and of sex/gender as a more foundational social relation than race/ethnicity, or sexuality, are articulated.

In the textual accounts I have studied, an ambition to take differences into account is often presented, but, when exploring the epistemological, methodological and political foundations of these knowledge accounts, the expressed wish to take difference into account has not been put into practice. The history of feminism is narrated, objects of study are constructed, or notions of feminism are articulated, where issues of sexuality, or ethnicity are backgrounded or silenced, while a western and heterosexual feminism is foregrounded and made into the norm. As practices of inclusion and exclusion, this shapes a centre and a periphery in feminist knowledge production, marginalizing alternative or critical voices. Ambitions to traverse these notions of feminism can be difficult, seeing that these notions stand in the way for an alternative understanding of feminism. Here, notions of feminism's aim, feminism's location and of feminism's past obstruct alternative conceptualizations of feminism. These ideas, then, imply a stabilization of ideas in feminism's past, present and future. The proper objects of study, such as gender, become constructed out of particular ideas of the world, and built upon notions of heterosexuality and a dual-sex model. The ambitions to develop a proper object in feminism furthermore imply a disciplinization of academic feminism, curbing the unrulyness that characterizes feminist knowledge production. Instead, as I argue in this study, the transformative potential in feminism can be put into practice through a destabilization of notions of feminism's subject and feminism's past, present and future, because of feminism's capacity to change the discourses it intervenes into – so also feminist discourses. However, though, an understanding of practices of stabilization as practices of domination in feminism, marginalizing alternative or critical voices, also highlights the urgency in studying the relationships between feminist



knowledge production and the geo-political location where the knowledge is carried out. This, because the interplay between feminist knowledge production and the context in which it is performed imply that feminism can have a transformative effect in the context – but it also means that this context can influence feminist knowledge production. Through using the success story of feminism in Sweden as the analytic cross road in this study, I have, consequently, analyzed the effects of the interplay between feminist knowledge production and the production of a story of a feminist success in Sweden, which the third, and final, question to this study illuminates.

*How does the location influence and shape feminist knowledge production?*

Internationally, Sweden has the reputation of being a good and equal society, where the successes of the feminist movement is often described as utopian in reference to other national contexts (Mulinari and Nergaard 2004; Carbin 2008; Yang 2010). The success story of feminism in Sweden is boosted by the Swedish government, and used as a way to market Sweden internationally, but it is also reinforced by parts of the feminist movement, where the discourse on Sweden as a just, gender equal and ethnically homogenous country is reified. As such the idea of Swedishness takes form, through the production of a discourse where an “us” is created out from narrations of a shared identity and destiny. Sweden is articulated as a gender equal country, where a modern, welfare state is contrasted with traditional cultures or past times. This is a powerful discourse, because it is understood as consensual and, thus, hegemonic. Functioning through inclusion and exclusion, this hegemonic discourse retains its dominance through a dismissal or silencing of critique and alternative voices. This does not mean that there do not exist alternatives, or fractions but that these

alternative voices are marginalized in the discourse. In this study, I have analysed the constructions of notions of feminism, narrations of histories and of objects of study in feminism, aiming to explore how feminist knowledge production contributes to dominant discourses. As described above, I have found that a construction of feminist knowledge takes place that further reinforces dominant discourses, through a knowledge production based upon e.g. ideas of a dual-sex model, where sex/gender is understood as a more foundational social relation than race/ethnicity or sexuality, for example.

After the call for taking differences into account in feminist theory, a debate around what this would mean for feminism begun to take place in feminist knowledge production. At its core, the debate has focused on feminism's potential as a transformative endeavour, through asking questions around how feminism's aim to bring about change can be accomplished when the subject of feminism is deconstructed, or when feminists (implicitly western, heterosexual, women) cannot be united in the struggle against injustice and oppression. In the analyses of this debate, different discourses in feminism take shape, where one discourse actively rejects, dismisses or ignores the call for taking difference into account through silencing the critique raised against exclusionary practices in WGFS in Sweden. These strategies, in effect marginalize critical or alternative voices and I understand these as practices of domination in feminist knowledge production. Another feminist discourse articulates alternatives to this, or criticises this silencing and dismissal. Hence strategies are developed to counteract the marginalization carried out by feminists in the dominant discourse. I show how these different discourses of feminism use different strategies in their call for difference and interpret these as mechanisms in a power struggle between feminists around the right to define what feminism is, what it has been and what it can be. While the dominant discourse uses strategies of consent, through a rejection or a dismissal of alternatives, the alternative discourse uses strategies of discomfort such as anger, for instance, in the ambition to establish change.

Here, the dominant feminist discourse resists the call for taking difference into account by, among other things, referring to a weakening of feminism that a dissolution of the united feminist we would involve, or by describing a deconstruction of the feminist subject in terms of an exploitation of feminism. In addition, feminists in this discourse have difficulties with conceptualizing feminism as transformative, after the call for differences. Feminists who inhabit an alternative discourse, in return, conceptualize a version of feminism that is not developed out of individual characteristics, such as sex, sexuality or ethnicity, but out from the direction of its work. In the notion of feminism as an orientation, directed towards change, which will be put into practice through the struggle against injustice and discrimination, the notion of feminism in the alternative feminist discourse is both open and inclusive and, thus, transformative.

### *Key points in the study*

In this section I highlight the three key points in the study undertaken and discuss the central contribution of this dissertation to feminist knowledge production.

#### *The institutionalization of WGFS into the academy has created an oppositional space in the academy.*

In the process of institutionalizing and neo-/interdisciplining gender studies, WGFS scholars articulate a critical and persistent attitude towards attempts to weaken the transformative potential of feminism. The strong impact from the government has in academic feminism been met with a critical and reflective attitude to the understanding of historical narratives, conceptual tools, objects of study and modes of working. Suggestions to stabilize WGFS, both from the government and from within feminism, have been met with hesitance to the fixation of proper names, proper objects or notions of feminism, as well as attempts to disciplinarize feminist knowledge production. As this study illuminates, feminism has created a transformative and oppositional space in the academy, through the establishment of a safe material base for a critique of disciplinary regulation and for the production of knowledge that can be critical of dominant, discriminatory and oppressive structures and discourses, but also a site which can be continuously and actively critical against the demands of the university. However, whether or not a critical knowledge production is performed within this space, depends on the practices of teaching and research within the institution in question.

*Feminist knowledge production takes part in and feeds into the production of dominant discourses.*

Articulations of Sweden as an equal, just, modern and ethnically homogenous country, takes part in the production of a hegemonic discourse in Sweden in which the close connection between feminists and the state is described as a success. In this context, different feminist discourses take shape. Through practices of inclusion and exclusion, a dominant feminist discourse is produced where the construction of historical narratives, objects and notions of feminism contribute to furthering the production of this hegemonic discourse. These, dominant notions of feminism are constructed where alternative, or critical voices are muffled, ignored or dismissed, through a conceptualization of feminism as identical with particular subjects (white, heterosexual, western) and through the stabilization of proper objects (gender). This dominant feminist discourse is also integrated into feminist practices of teaching and research in the academic institution, through the production of text books, teaching material and practices of learning. Hereby, feminist scholarship in Sweden submits in part to the demands of the university of socializing subjects into the state.

*The transformative potential of feminism can be put into practice through a destabilization of notions of feminism.*

In feminist knowledge production in Sweden, a power struggle around the right to define what feminism is, has been and can be, takes place. Through different strategies, this power struggle is performed through on the one hand, strategies of consent, where a dominant feminist discourse aspires to retaining its ascendancy, and on the other hand strategies of discomfort, where alternative feminist discourses aim to destabilize notions of feminism

performed by the dominant feminist discourse. Articulations of feminism where feminism is identified with a primary subject (i.e. woman, heterosexual, western), feeds into notions of feminism's past, present and future and opens up for some modes of working, but discloses others. Through giving up the idea that feminism is identical with isolated individual capacities is a performance of feminism where feminism's transformative potential is put into practice.

### *The central contribution of this study*

Critical examinations of feminist knowledge production have, from different theoretical perspectives, argued for the importance of a safe institutional base for WGFS in the academy. Here, the process of institutionalizing feminism into the academy has been described as a difficult enterprise, dependent on specific conditions in different national contexts. These studies often present the process of institutionalizing WGFS in Sweden as successful, referring to the pace and form of institutionalization in Sweden. However, as I illuminate in this dissertation, even though a safe institutional space is a significant and important condition for feminist knowledge production, the creation of a safe institutional space for WGFS in the academy does not guarantee that the knowledge that is produced adequately contributes to the critique of dominant discourses. Whether or not such critical knowledge is performed in this space, that is, whether or not the space established for WGFS in the academy is oppositional or not is dependent upon the practice of teaching and research that is carried out by these institutions. My dissertation contributes to the debate around the politics of institutionalization through its focus on the interplay between feminist knowledge production, the state and the academy. I show how feminists can take part in the construction of dominant discourses and therewith submit to the demands of the university

of socializing subjects into the state. Through practices of inclusion and exclusion in feminism, feminist knowledge production takes part in the production of a hegemonic feminist discourse in Sweden. Among other things, this hegemonic discourse is developed from notions of feminism in terms of being successful. Actively marginalizing critical or alternative voices, this discourse takes shape through a dismissal or ignorance of critical voices or through a backgrounding of alternative notions of feminism. Through illuminating how feminist knowledge production feeds into the production of dominant discourses in a particular national context, this dissertation therefore also contributes with knowledge to the connections between feminist knowledge production and the politics of place, that is, how the geo-political location shape and influence feminist knowledge production.

Against the background to the call for taking difference into account, this dissertation also engages in an exploration of feminist debates on feminism's transformative potential. Here, feminists have discussed the possibilities for feminism to bring about change when feminism's subject is deconstructed and when feminists cannot unify in their struggle against oppression and discrimination. Through analysing different responses to the call for taking difference into account, this dissertation engages in a further exploration of these challenges to feminism's transformative potential. This study illuminates the construction of two different feminist discourses. One seeks to stabilize notions of feminism, through a resistance to alternative narratives, by rejection, disavowal, or backgrounding operations. Another aspires to intervene into these notions of feminism, aiming at a re-thinking of feminism through strategies of discomfort. Understanding these debates as power struggles over the right to define what feminism is, what it has been and can be, this dissertation engages in a discussion on the possibilities in feminism to bring about change. The desires to identify feminism with certain individual capacities (i.e. woman, heterosexuality, western), proper objects of study (i.e. gender) or fixed notions of feminism's past, present and future, are presented as practices that stabilize

feminism and curb its transformative potential. Efforts to open up the meanings and limits of feminism, in return, are seen as practices that put feminism's transformative potential into practice. Through exploring the material and discursive effects of these different ambitions this dissertation hopefully contributes to the debates around feminism as a transformative project.

### *Suggestions for further research*

During my research process, participating at conferences, seminars, and other academic events, I have come into contact with several feminist scholars who are interested in hearing about my project. Often, I get to the point where I mention writing about the institutionalization of gender studies into the academy as a way of introducing my topic, before my audience starts to express an implicit or explicit scepticism towards gender studies as a subject in its own right. These responses have had different kinds of impact on me during different stages in the process. At this stage I understand these responses as articulating a polarized relationship between integrated gender research and gender studies as a subject in its own right. These responses display some central paradoxes about the process of institutionalizing gender research into the academy which is part of the historical baggage that prevails in gender studies in Sweden. During my work with this dissertation, these issues have emerged as areas in need of further analysis, and are particularly perceptible through inquiries into the relationship between integrated gender research and gender studies as a subject in its own right. This double organization of feminist knowledge has historically been presented as a very successful strategy for the integration of gender into the academy (e.g. Göransson 1989). Today, though, this relationship is diagnosed as being in bad shape. Significant issues positioned at the core of this relationship are, among others: the



implications for feminist knowledge production within the frames of an increasing neo-liberalization of the academy; the professionalization of academic feminism; and the segregation of the feminist community in the academy.

Against the background of the discussions in this dissertation, I reflect in the following upon these issues, with the aim of providing a presentation of these areas that I, through the work with this dissertation, have found to be in the need of further analysis.

### *There is no radical safe space*

When gender studies has become a successfully institutionalized subject in the academy, it seems as if a polarization between integrated gender research and gender studies as a subject in its own right is taking place. This is a polarization that I often meet when I listen to discussions on gender studies in the academy, both from feminists located in other disciplinary spaces and from feminists within gender studies itself. It seems as if feminist scholars that are located at gender studies departments bring to life feelings of betrayal from other feminists in the academy. This, because the idea behind the autonomous organization of gender studies was that this could be a site from which feminists could collaborate in the fight against the oppression of women in the academy, against the hierarchical structure of the academy, a site from where a struggle for the possibilities of combining a life and an academic career could take place. Now, gender studies departments have emerged into something different than this – they are not only successfully incorporated in the regular academic structure, but they also represent a knowledge production that often is presented as the cutting edge of the academy, and, as the result of the paradoxical dependence all minorities have to instances of power; gender studies

scholars have to work twice as hard and have to perform twice as well to be accepted.

The implications of a successful institutionalization of gender studies within the frames of a neo-liberal shift in the academy makes this situation even more complex. Understood as developed through increased forms of bureaucratization, standardization and quantification of learning, Cris Shore and Susan Wright explain the neoliberal shift in the U.K. academy as generating a “responsibility without power” (1999: 564, 567), within which the “logic of audit’s coercive accountability” among other things implies that no one dares suggest that their standards have declined, because that would be to sign of their own failure (1999: 569). They write:

“The rationale behind current audit thinking stems from neo-liberal experiments of the Conservative government in the 1980s. The assumption was that market forces provide the best model of accountability, and, where they are absent, it is the duty of government agencies to introduce them through pseudo-market mechanisms. However, there is a vast sector of public services whose performance cannot be measured by these financial yardsticks of ‘value for money’, or ‘economy, efficiency and effectiveness’. The key flaw in the current model is that it is reductionist and punitive and therefore counterproductive” (1999: 571).

Understanding these as new forms of governmentality, Shore and Wright encourage critical scholars to start practicing “political reflexivity”, which is understood, among other things, as the re-appropriation of key terms, and the development of new forms of self-organization (1999: 572). These paradoxes, though, are valid for all academic branches of teaching and research. However, as a subject in its own right, gender studies faces particular paradoxes within this neo-liberal shift. Thinking through the effects of the neoliberal shift for women’s studies in the UK in the 1990s Beverly Skeggs describes how the expansion of student numbers in gender studies has involved a lot more teaching and administrative work for the

departments that has not been met by a similar expansion of the departmental resources. This involves, as Skeggs notes, a higher burden on the staff and often results in a reluctance of staff to work in "conditions of inadequate provisioning" (1995: 479). Also, the number of meetings increases since the survival of the institution also depends on an active engagement in diverse decision-making committees at the university. Still, as Skeggs underlines, a great amount of the staff that populates gender studies departments do this out of a sense of political commitment, which often means "doubling their responsibility, their administration, and their teaching" (1995: 479). It's also difficult to explain this to the students without making them feel grateful for this. Accordingly, the successful institutionalization of gender studies within the frames of a neoliberal shift in the academy, is a situation that creates particular challenges. Skeggs concludes: "We all want more, we all want it to be better. We don't want to be the physical embodiment of institutional politics and un-met student demands but we do want to do Women's Studies. We'd like to stick around and talk but we've got the next deadline to meet, the next budget to organise, the next book to write" (1995: 482).

It is possible to hazard a guess that the negative reaction to the successful institutionalization of gender studies is expressed because the process of institutionalization transformed the project into something different than what was envisioned in the early stages of the process. But, if there was a high awareness that the risks with a close cooperation with the state could involve forms of co-optation and de-radicalization, there was less readiness to forms of neo-liberalisation in the higher education policies, where academic staff are forced to control and monitor their own activities. At this point these challenges are increasing, and academic feminists also need to continue reflecting over the implications of this for feminist knowledge production and for the daily life at a feminist department. These challenges are particularly relevant for feminist scholars enrolled at a gender studies department, who are often driven by a political commitment and a critical attitude to the academic site. At the same time they must

submit to the rules of the university, and often have to perform more brilliantly than other departments, in order for the gender studies department to convict the distrust against feminist knowledge production in the academy. It is in adhering to this kind of pressure that the department is allotted more institutional resources and, is thus, offered increased stability for feminist knowledge production.

In return, along the professionalization of gender studies, debates among differently positioned feminists has taken place, around for example, the terminological transition from woman to gender or around the much referred split between academic feminism and activist feminism. These debates can be understood as forms of resistance against the development of gender studies as a subject in its own right, as expressing a fear over a development of, among other things, a narrow feminist canon. These debates, furthermore, are examples of debates that followed from the professionalization of gender studies. Both the terminological change and the, as it is described, split between academy and activism, goes smoothly together with a neutral higher education rhetoric and an academy where divisions between the political, the social and the cultural are incorporated as different disciplinary areas of proper forms of knowledge. However, in feminism, the debates around the terminological transition and around the temporal-spatial divisions in feminism's academic organization of knowledge have created tensions and a wide range of feminist responses. In effect, thus, the debates that arise between feminists as a result of these tensions can also be understood as expressions of fractions in feminism, where a critical reflexion takes shape around feminism's own relationship to the academic site, to the increasing marketization and competitiveness of teaching and research. Consequently, there is a need for a further exploration of feminist teaching methodologies, through which a critical reflection can be understood as itself potentially transformative, by offering training in forms of analytical complexity and critical thinking, teaching students that there is no such thing as a radically safe place – not even in feminism.

### *Presence in the periphery*

Secondly, within this polarization between integrated gender research and gender studies as a subject area in its own right, gender studies is often described as attracting all the feminist students and feminist teachers, which involves a decrease of feminist students and teachers in the departments that offer integrated gender research. However, even though this might be the case, I would suggest that it is not primarily the result of a successful institutionalization of gender studies, but instead the result of a continued resistance towards feminism in the academy. There are examples of brilliant scholars, who have not been awarded stable positions in their discipline: this is how the disciplines continue to resist feminism – they simply don't give feminist scholars stable positions in the disciplines. Rather they offer an endless row of part-time and/or short term contracts. Thus, many scholars that inhabit gender studies departments are there not only because this was something they wanted, but also because they did not have any other choice. The same scholars are in pursuit for decent working conditions and job security. However, the resistance against feminism should not only be understood as a rejection of the theoretical perspectives gender studies scholars represent (many of these theoretical perspectives are often actually already incorporated in the disciplines, through more or less marginalized forms of critical, or radical thinking), but it must also be understood as a rejection of the feminist life form. With experiences from the social movements, feminists question organizations discuss politics and want to establish an anti-hierarchical culture. The resistance against the feminist life form consequently does not only, or primarily, take place in the seminar rooms but in the department's coffee room. These paradoxes that take shape within the frames of a successful institutionalization, is not only a theoretical issue, but also one about politics. Against this

background, the successful institutionalization of gender studies also involves a forced segregation of the feminist community, where gender studies scholars are pushed away from the centre areas of the academy and located at gender studies departments, a development which not only locates gender studies in the academic periphery, but also creates a situation where the traditional departments become more and more normal, white – and boring. Hence, understood as strategies of resistance to oppositional knowledge production and alternative life forms, a study of these processes in the academy is timely and very relevant.

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# Article I

## “Mapping Women’s/Gender/Feminist Studies in Sweden 1975-2010”.

*Manuscript*

*Mia Liinason*



# Mapping Women's/Gender/Feminist Studies in Sweden 1975-2010

## *Introduction*

The institutionalization of academic feminism has been the topic of debate in many academic feminist circles. The issues raise concern of the relationship between academic feminism and the academy as a hierarchical site, or the relationship between academic feminism and governmental policies which, particularly in Sweden, have been described as generating various paradoxes. Taking up the request from Clare Hemmings, on the importance of making further investigations around the institutionalization and organization of WGFS into the academy situated in “particular institutional, national and international frames” (Hemmings 2006: 21), I offer in this article a mapping over the process of institutionalization of WGFS in Sweden during the period from 1975 to 2010. I want to underline that such attempts are always partial, and my attention in this article places emphasis on the arguments around different forms of organization of the subject field into the academy, and the infra-structural situation for the subject area (occurrence of positions, structures of funding, level of education). While I understand the process of institutionalizing the subject area as an issue closely related to different theoretical positions on the feminist endeavour in the academy as a transformative project, I also offer an analysis of the various theoretical positions on the debate around the key terms and the naming of the field in Sweden.

During the 1970s, early generations of WGFS scholars demanded a rethinking within all spheres of knowledge production – empirically,

theoretically, methodically and methodologically – to interrupt the oppression of women in the academy and the production of academic knowledge from strict male premises. In the introduction to first issue of *Kvinnovetenskaplig tidskrift* (Kvt, *Journal of Women's Studies*) in 1980, the editors describe the points of departure for women's studies<sup>30</sup> as transformative, i.e. explicitly emancipatory, and socialist. They explain that women's studies belong "to the socialist line of the women's movement and aims at transgressing the boundaries of the present society" (Davies, Göransson and Lindberg 1980: 5; Manns 2009). Since then, WGFS scholars have struggled to establish a space in the academy and a secure institutional platform. An institutional platform, WGFS scholars argue, offers stability to the feminist knowledge and equality project (Lykke 2004a; Göransson 1989; Witt-Brattström 1995). Further, the institutional platform, offers security in the development of a new generation of gender studies scholars, not only because of the availability of financial resources, but also, because institutionalization offers a sustainability for WGFS scholars' knowledge and experiences (Thurén 2003; Holm 2001). Consequently, WGFS scholars claim that an institutionalization of the subject preserves, manages and further develops the knowledge that is produced, and that an institutional security makes long-term projects possible (*Kvinnoforskningen i Sverige* 1992).

Further descriptions indicate the importance for a knowledge- and educational area to have an institutional belonging in the hierarchic university system (Holm 2001). That is, because it is not until the different intellectual environments have been acknowledged as institutions that they can consolidate and expand their activities, through, for example, the approval of professorships and other positions, which is a requirement for

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<sup>30</sup> By then, the scholars were using the term women's studies to denominate the field, while the area at a policy level (and thus also in positions etc.) described the subject area as "equal opportunities research". I give a more in-depth description of this further ahead in this article.



the establishment of e.g. PhD-exams. Nevertheless, the ambitions to reach a secure institutional anchorage in the academy among WGFS scholars have also been associated with scepticism against the hierarchical university structures and the close relationship to the government, which I will describe more further ahead (Norlander 1997).

Inspired by the organization of the women's movement, WGFS scholars chose to use a double strategy in their efforts, and worked for the subject to become integrated in established disciplines and organized in autonomous units – through the establishment of so called Centra/Fora for women's research and women's researchers (Davies, Göransson and Lindberg 1980: 5; Göransson 1989; Manns 2009). From the 1983 conference proceedings *Rapport från Kvinnouniversitetet [Report from Women's University]* the editors describe the working method with following words:

Women's studies need a double strategy to reach the goals – integrating both separation and integration. Separation refers to the development of a competence, a knowledge base. A suitable form for this is, among other things, women's studies seminars of a different kind. At the same time, the new knowledge must be transferred and integrated into the regular university, within all research areas and on all levels, for example through course literature and interdisciplinary modes of procedure (1983: 14, my translation).

The metaphor used by the WGFS scholars for this strategy was “the two legs” (“de två benen”) (Manns 2009: 111; Göransson 1989: 4). As described by among others Nina Lykke, the question of which of the two modes that are to be preferred, has also given rise to heated discussions. Closely entwined with the process of institutionalizing WGFS, part-takers in these discussions have claimed that, on the one hand, a development of autonomous units/departments of WGFS would risk leading to an increasing disciplinarization of WGFS and a marginalization in the academy, while on the other hand, an integration into already existing

disciplines would risk weakening, or even subordinating, the feminist perspective (Lykke 2004b, 2009: chapter 2; Göransson 1989: 13). Hence, Lykke suggests, that we need “new theoretical ways of framing the debate”, and sets out to further explore how to challenge the discipline/interdiscipline divide through analyses of multi-, inter- and transdisciplinary modes of working, and a postdisciplinary organization of WGFS (Lykke 2004b, Lykke forthcoming 2011).

### *The organization of the subject*

A safe institutional anchorage in the academy has consequently been an important goal for WGFS scholars ever since the first organization of undergraduate classes in the mid-1970s. By then, the courses were denominated sex roles courses (könsrollskurser) and were mainly given within the frames of sociology, with participating teachers from sociology, literature and history. In 1975, these courses received funding for the first time (Holm 2001: I)<sup>31</sup>. Three years later, 1978, UHÄ (Universitets- och Högskoleämbetet, the National Agency for Universities and University Colleges) allotted funding for five Centra/Fora-units for women’s researchers and women’s studies, with the double aim of supporting women’s studies and developing an organization to support gender equality in the academy. With this, a space in the academy was established for scholars engaged in the efforts to transform academic research and study,

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<sup>31</sup> In a report published in the frame of the European WGFS network Athena, Ulla Holm describes the impressive supply of courses in the late 1970s: “A national mapping of courses in *Sex Role Issues, Gender Equality Research or Women’s Studies* in different disciplines in 1979 counts 37 courses (5-40 points), many of them in history, literature or sociology. The history department in Göteborg lists an impressive amount (13) of (interdisciplinary oriented) reading courses in Women’s history on both under- and postgraduate level” (Holm 2001 I, 181, n244).

where WGFS scholars from all disciplines could meet and hold discussions (Holm 2001: I, 182; Göransson 1989:5; Manns 2009).<sup>32</sup> These initiatives in the mid- and late 1970s were the first steps towards institutionalization of the subject field.

Through the early sex roles courses, sociology, literature and history are often described as the subjects with the longest tradition of integrating WGFS studies, while the first steps towards an autonomous organization were taken through the establishment of the Centra/Fora-units in the end of the 1970s. The positions in these units were organized by the scholars themselves, and funded through different forms of state subsidies (Göransson 1989: 7). During the 1980s, the Centra/Fora-units were given a more secure position within the structure of the university, and became from the mid-1980s independent working units, organizationally located directly under the vice-chancellor and directed by an interdisciplinary board. Depending on what kind of positions and research that was prioritized, the different working units developed different profiles at different universities (Göransson 1989: 5). Today most of these units are now regular departments. As mentioned earlier, to have the status of a department, is a requirement in order to be allowed to have professorships and to exam PhD-students. This is why the first Centra/Fora-units decided to abandon the double commission of the units, that is, to work for women's studies *and* women researchers. Instead, these working groups decided to concentrate on WGFS studies only, but it was a change that did not take place without tensions (Holm 2001; I, 183).<sup>33</sup> The earmarked state grant to the Centra/Fora-units that was distributed over the years has today

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<sup>32</sup> Lund, Göteborg, Stockholm, Umeå, Uppsala. The year after Linköping and Örebro were allotted a grant (Holm 2001: I, 181).

<sup>33</sup> This was a long process, and the first working unit that received the status of a department was gender studies at Göteborg University, in 1993 (then under the name women's studies) (Holm 2001: I, 183). In 1998 the first professor in gender studies was appointed, at Umeå university (Holm 2001: I: 184).

discontinued, and most of the units are now funded like other departments, through faculty grants and external research funds. Compared to the more or less occasional supply of courses among the integrated WGFS research, the Centra/Fora-units have offered on-going educational programmes over the years (Göransson 1989: 5).

### *Policies and positions*

Through different kinds of ministerial delegations especially focused on the promotion of gender equality in state policies and the funding of research, Sweden has been known as a “women friendly” country (Hernes 1987; Eduards 1995; Alnebratt 2009). Alongside of the great efforts from individual scholars and students, the incorporation of gender research in the academy has to a large extent depended on subsidies from the Swedish state, motivated by the urge to increase gender equality. In her dissertation on the regulation of gender research in educational politics and the interaction between gender research and educational politics, Kerstin Alnebratt shows that the “general feature in the ... propositions by the ministry of education is [to increase] gender equality in and outside of the academy. Gender research ... shall generate knowledge which shall form the basis for the change of state policies” (Alnebratt 2009: 139, my translation).

Towards the end of 1972, the “Delegation of equality between men and women” was appointed by the social democratic party and the prime minister Olof Palme (Eduards 1977: 19, Jordansson 2003, 2005).<sup>34</sup> With

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<sup>34</sup> The Delegation was primarily a service organ to the government in issues of equal opportunities between the sexes and should give suggestions for measures, guard the reform work and do more extensive investigations. The largest concentration was put into issues in the

that, strivings for equal opportunities were given official status. From 1972, equal opportunities research, thus, managed from a delegation located direct under the government. Instead of allocating the responsibility for the research on equal opportunities to the research councils and the National Board of Higher Education (UHÄ), the government continued to organise equal opportunities research during the 1970s and 1980s. Even though this indicated the importance of the issue, this move was also criticised for risking the instrumentalization of research. As per the name, equal opportunities research aimed at equality between the sexes. One advocator for equal opportunities research was historian Gunnar Qvist<sup>35</sup>, who explained the aim of equal opportunities research as “the general policy purpose: to reach actual equality between the sexes in the social apparatus of labour and power” (Qvist 1978: 9). Equal opportunities research was a complementary branch of research, which is to say, that the presence of women in research was understood as, not only a matter of equality, but of quality in research. Here, equal opportunities scholars maintained the idea that women and men pose different research questions, and the results from the formerly unnoticed perspectives of women should enrich the knowledge in the academy, knowledge that would be of use for the society at large (Qvist 1978: 10).

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sphere of the labour market (Eduards 1977: 19). Since 1976, the Ministry of Labour has been responsible for the work on equal opportunities between the sexes. During the spring of 1976, the act of sex discrimination was launched by the Liberal party where “state authorities should work for increased equality between men and women (SFS 1976:686)” (Eduards 1977: 19). As an organizational support for the supervision of the observance of the law an Equal Opportunities Ombudsman (JämO) was appointed July 1<sup>st</sup>, 1980 (Jordansson 2005).

<sup>35</sup> Arguments for the importance of equal opportunities research can also be understood expressions for a compromising attitude among the scholars, who agreed on some compromises in order for the subject area to develop and grow. Gunnar Qvist is furthermore known as the author of the first dissertation in the field of women’s studies in Sweden: *Kvinnofrågan i Sverige 1809-1846* [*The women’s question in Sweden 1809-1846*] (1960).

Others were less enthusiastic about the term, though, as for instance evidenced by the description of equal opportunities research from the editors to the first issue of the *Journal of Women's Studies* [*Kvinnovetenskaplig tidskrift, Kvt*] in 1980:

Equal opportunities research could be said to be the liberal democratic line of women's movement. It is mainly quantitative and aspires toward the same amount of women and men at every level in the hierarchies in the society. Through the allocation of quotas, this branch of research wants to give women and men the same possibilities. - - - It is not occupied with basic research, but with applied research. Furthermore, it is often concentrated upon issues in the sphere of production - in working life and the organisation of working life: trader's union, political representation etc. This kind of research could be developed out from traditional conditions for research (Davies, Göransson and Lindberg 1980: 5, 6, my translation).

Equal opportunities research was the governmental reply to the critical inquiries made by sex roles researchers. Reports were written and conferences was organised by the UKÄ/UHÄ, and the National Board of Higher Education, where present and future conditions for equal opportunities research were discussed.<sup>36</sup> The critique against both the concept of equal opportunities and the contents of equal opportunities

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<sup>36</sup> See for instance, the booklets *Jämställdhet i högskolan* [Equal opportunities in higher education], UKÄ-rapport 1975:10; *Förändring för jämställdhet. Synpunkter och förslag kring jämställdhet i högskolan* [Change for equal opportunities. Ideas and suggestions around equality in higher education], UHÄ-rapport 1977:4; the conference report *Forskning om jämställdhet. Rapport från UHÄ-konferens i Uppsala den 8 och 9 maj 1978* [Research on equal opportunities. Report from UHÄ-conference in Uppsala may 8<sup>th</sup> -9<sup>th</sup> 1978] UHÄ-rapport 1978:22. Consistently through these reports, there is a lack of references to their aim with equal opportunities research, and an absence of definitions of how they understand the concept *equal opportunities*.

research grew strong from a major part of the scholars. Psychologist and women's studies scholar Margot Bengtsson made a comparison with the situation for women's studies scholars in Norway and asked the question: "In Sweden we have equal opportunities research, while in Norway you do women's studies – does that make any difference?" (1980: 16).

However, a complete unity among academic feminists on the official women policies in Sweden has never existed and the situation has been described as both complex and complicated. In the 1970s, Maud Eduards explained that

[c]ritique has been directed against the work from the Delegation of equal opportunities, that gave the social democratic government possibilities to disarm the opinion from radical women, and against the act of sex discrimination from the Liberal party [in 1976], because this would only favour a smaller amount of women, women that already knew how to look after their interests (Eduards 1977: 21, my translation).

On the one hand, the relation between the state and gender research has been described as a mutually profitable relation, aptly illustrated by the phrase: "The funding comes from above but the power comes from below" (Eduards 2007: 213, my translation). On the other hand, a serious critique on the relation between feminist scholars and the state was raised from other directions (Norlander 1994, 1997; Rönnblom 2003). In the mid-1990s, feminist scholar Kerstin Norlander brought to the fore the "unholy alliance" between the state institutions and feminist scholars in two articles (1994, 1997). Here, she criticizes academic feminism for mixing claims on equal opportunities in the universities with the content and organisation of gender studies. She shows how the intensified work of state feminists did coincide with the professionalization of women's studies, which closely tied feminist scholars to the state-feminist project where, as she writes, academic feminists became stuck in the hierarchical structures of the university and the politics for equal opportunities:

...both of the groups ... – the women's studies scholars and the social democrats – have also been mutually dependent on each other. The women's studies scholars have supplied the politicians with the tools they needed to realize their goals /.../. The politicians were on the other hand crucial to the women's studies scholars. They supplied resources that were necessary for the construction of women's studies as a scientific area .... The implications of this close relationship between women's studies and state feminism have nevertheless undermined the field's critical and reflective potential both from the outside and the inside (1997: 40, my translation).

In her article "Fältet, strategierna och framtiden" (1989), Anita Göransson describes the institutional development and the occurrence of positions in WGFS studies from the starting point in the mid-1970s until the end of the 1980s. Here, Göransson explains that, alongside the support from UHÄ in the end of the 1970s, also the research councils financially contributed to the development of the field. In parallel with the support that was given to seminars and conferences, Göransson writes, there was in the end of the 1970s and in the early 1980s an area group (områdesgrupp) for gender equality research at the Riksbankens Jubileumsfond (RJ), commissioned to watch the process and guarantee that the area was prioritized in the distribution of research funds. Also HSFR (Humanistiska och Samhällsvetenskapliga Forskningsrådet), had a program committee for the promotion of women's studies with the same aim, that among other things suggested an establishment of earmarked positions - positions that were advertised in the mid-1980s: 5 positions in gender equality research, 1 research position in economic history and 1 PhD-position for Chinese women's literature (Göransson 1989:7).

Göransson also mentions the support by the sector organ Jämfo (the Delegation for gender equality research, Delegationen för jämställdhetsforskning) as important. Jämfo was a political organ that



functioned as a preparatory committee for research applications, it was connected with the government office and located under the Civil department. They did not have the right to distribute research funds, but, as Göransson writes, had the commission to “promote contacts between researchers and receivers and to promote gender equality research”, through the publication of a series of reports and the organization of conferences and seminars (Göransson 1989:7). Göransson describes further that in 1989 there existed research positions at all Centra/Fora-units at the large universities, except for Lund university (1989:7). Apart from 6 persons with wage subsidies, in total 31 persons shared the positions funded by the council at the Centra/Fora-units, which on average was one half position per person. In addition to this, there existed 6 research positions in 1989, of which 1 was a senior lectureship and 1 a professorship either at the Centra/Fora-units, or integrated in established disciplines, according to Göransson.

Also Birgitta Jordansson describes the financial support to the field during the 1980s and 1990s. The positions were funded from the research council (HSFR), and limited to 6 years, but were re-occupied several times during the 1990s and also enlarged with PhD-positions. These positions, Jordansson explains, were given in gender equality research, and the emphasis on gender equality was central. This was regarded as unique for Sweden, because, as Jordansson writes, it was not “women’s/gender perspective as a theoretical field that was in the centre but the political ambition to promote gender equality between the sexes” (Jordansson 2003: 4). This connection continued to be strong during the 1990s, but the theoretical debates in the field also expanded the focus during the 1980s and 1990s, according to Jordansson (2003: 4). During the 1990s, FRN (Forskningsrådsnämnden) was given the responsibility for support to and information about women’s and gender equality research, and distributed particular research funds for this aim from 1991. Along with the change of the research funding structure, the earlier smaller research councils merged into three larger research councils (FAS, FORMAS and Vetenskapsrådet,

Prop. 1998/99: 94). The Vetenskapsrådet (VR) was given the responsibility for WGFS studies and they commissioned a group of experts for gender research (Expertgruppen för genus) which during the initial years evaluated research applications and distributed research funds for WGFS research, but functions today only as an advisory committee (<http://www.vr.se/omvetenskapsradet/organisation/radgivandeorgan/expertgruppfor genus>).

After strong pressure from WGFS studies scholars about the continued need for positions in WGFS studies, a process with preparing for more positions in WGFS studies was initiated in 1995, and in 1996, the government suggested the initiation of 18 new positions in WGFS studies (Jordansson 2003: 5; Prop. 1996/96: 5). There was a strong connection similar to the earlier stages between gender studies and gender equality. It was decided that 6 professorships in combination with 6 associate senior lectureships<sup>37</sup> and 6 PhD-positions would be set up. In 2001, all the professorships were appointed, and the positions were given to literature at Göteborg university, information technology at the university college in Karlskrona/Ronneby (Blekinge Tekniska Högskola), sociology at Stockholm university, human-machine at Luleå Technical University College (Luleå Technical University), public health at Umeå university, and the didactics of physical education at Uppsala university (Jordansson 2003: 27, 28).<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> I use the English term 'associate senior lectureships' for the position 'forskarassistent', in accordance with the translation recommended by the Swedish National Agency for Higher Education, [www.hsv.se](http://www.hsv.se).

<sup>38</sup> The result of those investments has been evaluated in two reports from the National Secretariat for Gender Research, see Jordansson 2003 and Alnebratt 2007.

### *At present*

The institutionalization of WGFS studies in Sweden is often described as a success (HSV 2007). Today, undergraduate education in gender studies is offered at 10 institutions of higher education, and many institutions also offer PhD-education in the area of gender studies. At the same time, it is emphasized that the research and education produced at these departments for gender studies, in the form of seminar series, theoretic development, international networks, and knowledge transfer, is important for the integrated WGFS research and study (HSV 2007: 29). Also, the research and education that is produced within the integrated gender research, is similarly acknowledged as important for the subject gender studies. It is often described how the development of integrated gender research has been explosive since its initiation (Olsson 2007; HSV 2007): almost 1100 dissertations with a gender perspective have been written, and mainly at different departments with integrated gender research (Niskanen & Florin 2010: 16). The exchange of knowledge between “the two legs” is, consequently, understood as mutual. However, scholars also ask if not the successful institutionalization of gender studies as a subject in its own right has also led to a gap between “the two legs”. In recent contributions to this discussion, WGFS scholars explain that this gap has created a competitive relationship between integrated WGFS and gender studies as a subject in its own right, particularly when it comes to theoretical perspectives, but also in the form of the need for qualified competence (Göransson 2010: 211). Gender studies as a subject in its own right is here described as an area that attracts many students and gender competent teachers *from* integrated WGFS *to* the autonomous gender studies units. At the same time, though, it is clear from these descriptions that a gender perspective seldom is counted as a merit when positions are appointed in established disciplines (Niskanen & Florin 2010: 21). This, I would argue, leads to difficulties for gender researchers to compete around positions, which may give as a result no

alternative option for scholars than to apply for positions at a gender studies department. When the gender competence among researchers and teachers in a subject area decreases, also the occurrence of a gender perspective in education decreases – which may have the effect that gender interested students apply for courses at a gender studies department, to receive the education they are interested in. I would, thus, suggest that the increasing gap between the two legs is not an effect by the successful institutionalization, but should rather be understood as an implication of the resistance against gender that exists within established disciplines, and about a continued suspicion against gender among certain representatives within established disciplines.

At present,<sup>39</sup> the different positions at the 10 departments for gender studies in Sweden together amount to 10 professorships, of which 4 are promoted professors. Accordingly, that when they leave their position, the position will cease to be a professorship and return to a senior lectureship. There are 20 senior lectureships, 23 young scholars (post docs and associate senior lectureships), and 21 PhD-students. 2 professorships and 3, 75% senior lectureships are under appointment during spring 2010. This means, that gender studies is fully integrated in the academic structure, with positions on all levels, even though, as the numbers show, it is a small amount of positions at every department. The differences between the departments are quite large – if one department has three professors another department has none, and if one department has three senior lectureships, another department has only one etc. Only three departments have the right to examine PhD-students.<sup>40</sup> Indeed, this also confirms the description given

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<sup>39</sup> This discussion is based on the responses to a questionnaire that I distributed to all departments/units for gender studies in the spring 2010, inquiring into the occurrence of positions, the amount of external funds and the status of PhD-training. The questionnaire is included in Appendix 1.

<sup>40</sup> A detailed summary of the occurrence of positions at different departments/units is included in Appendix 2.

in the national evaluation of gender studies in 2006, in which the undergraduate education in gender studies at all departments were according to the evaluation committee very well conducted, with an increasing number of students but a too small number of employed staff (HSV 2007).

In addition, and as Beverly Skeggs points out in a paper on the changing conditions for WGFS in the UK in the 1990s, the neo-liberal shift in the academy has conveyed a range of paradoxes for this field of research and education. Despite the geo-political differences between the UK and Sweden – where the explicitly market-led higher education in the UK is the largest discrepancy between the two (notably, though, higher education policies in Sweden have also adopted forms of market-led higher education visible through the closing down of subject areas with few students, as for example the closing down of the education in German, French, Spanish, Russian and Polish at Södertörn University College in 2006, <http://www.sulf.se/templates/CopyrightPage.aspx?id=2602>) – Skegg's focus on the issues of importance for the material and intellectual life in WGFS are relevant also for a Swedish context. Here, Skeggs notices that the changes in the politics during the last two decades have generated a range of complexities for WGFS among which the "traditional feminist demands for access to education have been deployed in right-wing consumerist rhetoric to expand places but to also implement cutbacks and competition within higher education" (Skeggs 1995:475). Through recent changes in higher education-policies in Sweden, this rhetoric is at present also a fact in Sweden, where the government's aim at increased competition between the institutions for higher education are presented in, for example, new policies for the allocation of state subsidies to the universities, which to a large extent involves the assessment of achieved results (measured through number and quality of publications and the amount of external research funds) (Prop. 2008/09: 50) and the most recent bill on research policies, which aims at increasing the autonomy of institutions for higher education, where the institutions are given more autonomy in the

recruitment of staff, education, internal organization and economy (Prop. 2009/10: 149). These changes generate, with Skegg's words, "many paradoxes" for WGFS (Skeggs 1995: 475), where the successful institutionalization of WGFS (in terms of the establishment of departments/units, the number of students, level of education and the occurrence of positions at all levels) has not been accompanied by a similarly successful growth in the number of positions. This leads to a situation where the permanent staff at WGFS departments is keeping up a popular, top-rated education (HSV 2007) with far too few staff members. My survey over the infra-structural situation for gender studies shows that five of ten departments for gender studies in Sweden only have one or two persons permanently employed, who are responsible for the planning and organization of the whole undergraduate education, in which a large amount of short-term hired people carry out the teaching and examination. This suggests that, among other things, any long-term planning is impossible, not to mention the challenge of engaging in any activities not directly related to the education, such as the significantly feminist and interdisciplinary aim at the autonomous departments/units offering research seminars on gender across the disciplinary boundaries at the university/university college. In return, the lack of a shared forum at the universities/university colleges, results in negative implications for the conditions of gender research over the whole line, and the activities carried out from the autonomous departments/units are pushed to the margins in the university policies (they have few or no representatives on crucial decision-making posts in the university structure, the subject area has a low academic legitimacy, and they are not given the right to exam PhD-students despite a highly qualified undergraduate education and a continuously growing student number interested in taking a PhD-level, for example). On

the other hand, the other half of the departments/units for gender studies has a good amount of permanent staff at all levels, under- and postgraduate education, and have the funds and resources needed to engage in many international and national networks.<sup>41</sup> However the undergraduate education is a pressing issue, and representatives from these departments/units describe in their responses to the questionnaire that the situation is acute, and that they need a larger body of permanent staff in order to continue to manage the continuously expanding and highly qualified education. The differences between the various departments can be referred back to differences in the amount of externally funded projects, the presence of a research leader who has the ambition and possibility to develop a strong environment, and a supportive university. However, it is the local support that taken together is the single most important condition for the possibilities of developing a strong institutional anchorage: if the institution (the faculty and/or the central organization at the university or university college) has a positive attitude to gender, this is reflected in infrastructural stability and an increase of positions at gender studies departments – a situation in which it is important to note the tendency that younger universities/university colleges have a more positive attitude to gender research, while older universities are more negative.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> It also needs to be stressed that three centres for gender research received a large grant from the Swedish Research Council to develop excellent environments in gender research, with a particular focus on international and national collaboration (no funding was allocated to the management or planning of education) <http://www.vr.se/forskningvistodjer/forskningsmiljoer/centersofgenderexcellence.4.5d7d40fd1154283906d80005451.html>.

<sup>42</sup> It is not a clear picture, though: the good conditions at the Centre for gender studies at Lund university (which is the second oldest university in Sweden) and the less successful situation for the Centre for Gender Studies at Karlstad University (which was established in 1999) speaks against this picture, which nonetheless points at a possible conclusion that part of the problem is connected with the more rigid structures and conservative policies at older institutions.

The feminist project to integrate WGFS in the academy can be described as a success. However, it is a success that generates paradoxes. Among other things, there exists a close relationship to the government that has resulted in financial support, without which the subject area would not have had the same institutional anchorage. This relationship has at the same time, been described as a risk for an instrumentalization of research, and a de-radicalization of the transformative project. Particularly in the light of the most recent changes in HE-policies, with the increased competition through assessments based on “quality”, critical interventions and creative solutions around the organization of knowledge and feminist strategies for enhancing quality in the subject area, are crucial for the continuation of a critical knowledge project, through which the WGFS-scholars can continue to be attentive to forms of co-optation. The relationship between WGFS and the academy as an institution also offers a paradoxical picture. Here, the organization of autonomous departments has given a more sustainable solution for WGFS while the integration of gender into already established disciplines is growing weaker, which results in a widening gap between “the two legs”. Even though this is not the focus of my study, this also points to the importance of an improvement to the conditions for integrated gender research. In the wake of the neo-liberal higher education-policies, this turns out to be even more difficult to carry out the project of transformative knowledge production through, among other things, a too high pressure on the low number of permanent staff. There are, at present, a small number of departments that are expanding. How they manage to negotiate the neo-liberal pressures from the HE-policies (receiving its advantages without being assimilated by the ideology) is an urgent issue for further investigations.



### *Key terms and the name debate*

The subject field today mostly called ‘gender studies’ in Sweden has a number of different designations in the academy around the world: women’s studies, feminist studies, feminist studies, gender studies. Furthermore, the terminology often varies within national contexts and has also frequently shifted over the years. In Sweden, gender studies have had several different and at times overlapping names: *sex roles research*, *equal opportunities research*, *women’s studies*, *gender studies* and in the following, I describe the different suggestions presented in this debate, touching upon issues of the relationship between academic feminism and the governmental policies, the relationship in academic feminism to its proper name and object of study, with the aim of identifying the various suggestions and strategies that have given its imprint to this debate.

When WGFS studies started to be established within the academy, there was the explicit ambition to change research, through what was called a “corrective” approach (KvT 1980/1; Rapport från Kvinnouniversitetet 1983: 8; Göransson 1989). It was, consequently, not a question of adding women to conventional research. As the editors to the first issue of *Kvinnovetenskaplig tidskrift* (Journal of Women’s studies) write: “Women’s studies is not a complement, it is a corrective approach, that aims to correct already existing results and theories. It has to be a part of every research area – for the sake of research” (KvT 1980/1: 5). What in the end of the 1960s was called the “women’s question” (“kvinnofrågan”, Dahlström 1968: 29), and towards the end of the 1970s more often was denominated “women’s aspect” (“kvinnoaspekt”, Westman Berg 1978: 94), evolved during the early 1980s to be called “research with women’s perspective” (“forskning med kvinnoperspektiv”, Rapport från Kvinnouniversitetet 1983: 8). The prefix “women’s” (“kvinno-”) marked the connection to the women’s movement (Manns 2009: 285) and with these terms, the scholars argued for the need of a thorough change of the

content and form of research. In the introduction to the report from the first conference that was held in the field, in Umeå 1982, research upholding women's perspectives was described as a) subject critical, b) problem oriented and interdisciplinary, and, c) more holistic than conventional research because it embraces all aspects of life ((Rapport från Kvinnouniversitetet 1983: 8).

From the end of 1972, however, the term 'jämställdhet' meaning equal opportunities between the sexes, came to accompany the term sex roles and the different constructions with the prefix "women-", on a policy and research level. The official English translation of 'jämställdhet' today is 'gender equality'. There was nevertheless, no distinction at this point of time between the terms when translated from Swedish to English. 'Equal opportunities' was thus the official translation for both 'jämställdhet' ('gender equality') and 'jämlikhet' ('equal opportunities'). 'Jämlikhet' ('equal opportunities') which refers to the equal rights of all, irrespective of ethnicity, religion, sexuality, sex, age, ability etc. and is thus a wider concept than 'jämställdhet' ('gender equality') that specifically refers to equal opportunities between women and men (Holm 2001: I, 179). Equal opportunities research was the official term of the field, which implied that it also became the name of positions that were initiated – even though the scholars themselves did not use that term (SOU 1983: 4, 11; Holm 2001).

The term 'feministisk forskning', 'feminist research', emerged during the 1970s. 'Feminism' was, however, negatively marked by Marxism as an "unhistorical, bourgeois and ugly word belonging to the ideological superstructure and nothing for history-materialist science" (Holm 1993: 33, Göransson 1983: 26). This resulted in a general dissociation from the term. Later on more and more Swedish women's studies scholars begun to identify themselves as feminist scholars (Holm 1993: 33). Feminist research was given explicitly normative aims, where a political commitment constitutes the base for the liberation of women from various kinds of oppression or discrimination. Feminist research was emancipatory and due to this, feminist scholars had a high ideological and

theoretical awareness (Holm 1993: 34). One of the critical points raised against equal opportunities research, was nonetheless also raised against feminist research: that it was too political. In addition, it was also criticized for being too idealist. The theoretical reflection, however, was explicitly developed out from the political commitment and the theorization was perceived as a necessary link in the work for liberation, but theory should not be theory for its own sake (Eduards 2005: 62). The goal was that theory and political practise should be in constant collaboration. 'Feminist theory' is not a united theory, but connected through common central terms like women's oppression, power, patriarchy, emancipation (Eduards 2005: 62).

Towards the mid-1980s, the Marxist terminology that had been used within women's studies was abandoned, among other reasons due to a criticism against universalism in Marxism. With that the earlier rather strong focus on class issues disappeared from the agenda, and was abandoned until it resurfaced in the late 1990s, when it was reactivated together with the strong emphasis on the entwinement of different social structures and social orders, such as sexuality, ethnicity – and class. However, in the mid-1980s, the scholars started to focus on the relations between women and men, between femininity and masculinity, and between the social and biological sex (Åsberg 1998: 30). This was also one of the reasons why the prefix "women" was abandoned in preference for terms that focused on sex as a relation, and "sex system", "social sex system" or "sexual power system" which were terms used by scholars in the field (Göransson 1989: 8). In 1988, the gender system was introduced ("genussystemet", Hirdman 1988), which came to have great impact among both scholars and politicians. This understanding of the gender system was also the basis for the concept 'gender' (genus) that came to be an important key term in the field. In Anglo-American feminist theory, gender had already been used for several years when the debate around 'genus' was deployed in Sweden. Ann Oakley's *Sex, Gender and Society* from 1972 is often described as "a pathbreaking text", depicting new areas of

interpretation for feminist theory, and more specifically explorations of the construction of gender (Pilcher and Whelehan 2004: 56, Oakley 1972). However, the understanding of the gender system when it was introduced in Sweden in the late 1980s, drew on (a selection of) the writings from J W Scott and Gayle Rubin. Consequently, in her presentation of the gender system, Yvonne Hirdman wrote that the sex-gender system was based on two logics: the logic of separation, where male and female spheres were kept apart; and the primacy of the male norm, where men were superior to women (Hirdman 1988). In that way, Hirdman conceptualised the sex-gender system as a stable system, founded on the idea of hierarchies between men and women.<sup>43</sup> Through her stable dual model, nevertheless, Hirdman also excludes the central characteristics in Rubin's theoretical framework: a) sexuality b) the creation of categories of people c) the relationship between the sex-gender system and other systems d) the historical contextuality of the sex-gender system that changes within different modes of production. Unlike several successors, Rubin emphasized that the sex-gender system not only denotes how biological sex is social sex or gender, but also how the human sexuality is formed along certain tracks – how heterosexuality is given the status of the

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<sup>43</sup> Hirdman's conceptualisation of the sex-gender system had many similarities with the definition of gender that had been introduced by Joan Wallace Scott a few years earlier. Scott's definition of gender were constituted by two interconnected parts that should be kept analytically apart. As a constitutive element in social relations, Scott argued, gender is based on perceived differences between the sexes. In addition, she meant that gender and power mutually constitute each other (*cf* Scott 1986). Hirdman also shared similarities with some ideas in Gayle Rubin's influential essay from 1975. There are large discrepancies between Hirdman and Rubin, though. One thing is the conceptualisation of hierarchies, which I explain below. Another is the lack of attentiveness to different social systems in Hirdman's model, also explored subsequently. Rubin wanted to exchange the concept 'patriarchy' with the 'sex-gender system' (*cf* Rubin 1975). For Rubin, patriarchy was a male dominated form of sex system and thus hierarchical per definition. She wanted to give room for the possibility of egalitarian sex-gender systems, and reserved patriarchy for a particular form of male dominance, described as older men's power over younger men, women and children (*cf* Rubin 1975) whereas gender, as it was introduced by Hirdman, came to be tied to her idea of the gender system, interpreted as stable hierarchies between the sexes.

institutionalized norm. Rubin refers to the double meaning of “sex”, i.e. both as sex and sexuality. To her, gender was a product of the social relations of sexuality and reproduction, supplemented by the idea that the sexual division of labour creates male and female heterosexual (Rubin 1975). Consequently, Hirdman’s model lacked the complex dimensions that the attention to the interrelatedness between different social systems and different modes of production in Rubin’s sex-gender system took into account. Instead, Hirdman’s model conceptualised a reification of the hierarchies between men and women, as well as a reification of gender differences. Nevertheless, since the mid 1990s, “equal opportunities” evolved to “gender” as the official term within the subject field, and also in national policies in Sweden – even though this terminological change did not happen without debates among the scholars. The debates started before the term gender was introduced for a wider group of researchers (in *KvT* 1988: 3), and those who were sceptical towards gender expressed worries that it could result in a separation between natural sex and socially constructed gender, in which the natural could be seen as more primary than the socially constructed. Keeping in mind that the Swedish word for “sex” involves an understanding of sex as both socially and biologically constructed, these were highly relevant questions.<sup>44</sup> Among others, Karin Widerberg cautioned that a division between sex and gender could make the social construction of (biological) sex invisible (1992: 28). Furthermore, Maud Eduards and Ulla Manns showed that the understanding that was presented in the gender system developed by Hirdman was based upon a presumed connection between a biological and social sex (1987: 63). Many also meant that a term like gender was unnecessary in Swedish, which is a

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<sup>44</sup> That the double meaning of ‘sex’ in the English language (sex and sexuality) disappeared through the translation to the Swedish ‘sex’ was not discussed to any extent, neither that the reflection around compulsory heterosexuality that from Gayle Rubin’s sex-gender system had been left out in Hirdman’s version of her sex/gender-system (Rubin 1975).

language where terms like social sex and sex perspective had been used, that is to say, terms that did not make any difference between biological, social, cultural or symbolical orders. Social sex, these critics argued, could embrace different social relations/orders like for example sex, class and ethnicity (Åsberg 1998: 31). Those who argued for gender, on the other hand, found that the advantages with the term was its (sex)neutrality, the emphasis on the relationship between women and men, and its international usability (Åsberg 1998: 34).

During the 1990s, the term gender came to dominate the field as a whole. In one of the chapters to the State Official Investigation (SOU) on power and democracy in Sweden, Hirdman presented her theory on the gender-system that she had introduced in the *Journal for Women's Studies* two years earlier. In the State Official Investigation, she reached a different audience, among them members of the parliament, from the one encountered in the *Journal of Women's Studies*. Her introduction of the gender-system and the gender concept in particular, gave a certain impact on gender equality policies, in the academy and the public debate. In governmental policies, earlier terms like 'oppression of women', 'male norm' and 'male supremacy' were exchanged for a more neutral terminology, the 'gender system'. This gave focus to gendered power as a system, and specific attention to the interplay between men and women in this system, which was one of the basic ideas in Hirdman's gender-system. This, in turn, led to gender mainstreaming in all policy decisions (SOU 1995: 48, Prop. 1990/91: 113, Prop. 1993/94). It led to changes also in the academy. During the mid-1990s, the greater part of the departments changed their names from constructions with 'women's studies' to 'gender studies'. At the turn of the century, there existed 16 WGFS units in Sweden, eleven of which used the term 'gender', five used 'women's studies' and one made use of the term 'equal opportunities' (Rönblom 2003: 33). As of today, 22 of 23 listed units at the National Secretariat for gender research use combinations with 'gender', only one uses the denomination 'feminist research' (Örebro university). The official scholarly

journal in the field, *Kvinnovetenskaplig tidskrift*, KvT [Journal of Women's Studies] changed its name to *Tidskrift för genusvetenskap*, TGV [Journal for Gender Studies] in the autumn of 2006.

When the government implemented gender as the official term in policy documents and reports, they filled it with another meanings than what the gender scholars had in mind. Their aim was expressed in terms of quality and democracy (Prop. 1994/95: 164, p.7). In the mid-1990s, the government wrote a bill focused on gender equality within the area of higher education. Here, they take their point of departure in the assumption that women pose other questions, focus on other issues and are interested in other areas of work than men. The fact that this issue had been ignored, or, at least marginalised, in the area of higher education was identified as a problem the government wanted to solve. Together with the idea of a distribution of quotas – both women and men should have the same right to take part in the same areas – this constituted the basic idea of the government's gender equality policy (Jordansson 1999: 6, 7, Prop. 1994/95:164). Gender was thus interpreted in terms of differences between the sexes:

Gender is here interpreted as sex and sex roles not as biological, but as basic conceptions in the cultural, social or historical. - - - Women can, for instance, take interest in other areas of research, introduce other questions, or take departure from other, perhaps interdisciplinary, methods and perspectives. Through the presence of women in different areas of research, their perspectives and preferences will have a stronger possibility to have an influence on the aims and shape of the work (Prop. 1994/95: 164, p. 27, my translation).

In the governmental understanding any deeper and more complex understandings of power relations and of the power structure are absent. In addition, it refers back to a dual-sex model, which is a fixation of the conceptual tool that not only de-radicalizes the work with gender equality,

but also results in a conceptual confusion between gender research and gender equality.

In spite of the different opinions about the benefits with gender, there were also considerable similarities between the different terms that circulated in the field towards the end of the 1980s and early 1990s. Terms like social sex and gender system both locate the relations between the sexes in the centre, which become evident with a comparison with terms like “women’s aspect” and “women’s perspective” where the focus is on a holistic perspective in the analyses of women’s material conditions – often with a structural understanding of power (Gornitzka 1978: 26, Brekke & Haukaa 1980: 31; Göransson et. al. 1984: 76). Through terms like social sex system or gender system, an emphasis on a perception of power as relational was developed towards the end of the 1980s. Here, it was the relationship between women and men that was the focus (Göransson 1989: 8). In addition, when gender was accepted as the official term in the field, it furthermore turned out to affect the understanding of “sex”, which was subsequently perceived as more reserved for biological sex than before (Rönblom 2003: 35). And even though gender a few years in to the 1990s, gained popularity among the researchers, the scepticism against gender also continued to give its imprint to the discussions. Particularly when gender was presented as a popular political term, gender studies scholars expressed caution that gender research could loose its radicality (Rönblom 2003). Today, the label ‘gender studies’ can be understood as an illustration of the precarious situation of establishing a radical movement simultaneously taken up by the government and the policy making bodies (Holm 2001). This is also described as characteristic for the Swedish “state-friendliness” where social critical tendencies are solved by interferences from the social reformist state (Göransson 1983:26). Kari Jegerstedt argues, consequently,



that the popularity of gender reflects the prioritization of equal opportunities in academic settings (2000).

Researchers also questioned the idea in the gender system about a universal subordination of women.<sup>45</sup> Gender, as it had been introduced and interpreted in the Swedish context, was often developed with an understanding of a universal subordination of women. Hence, ‘woman’ was understood as a universal category, and positioned in opposition to men as a likewise universal category. However, with ambition to take into account the interrelatedness between different power orders, scholars also argued for analyses where the complex interaction between different social orders and investigations of how gender and power are “embodied through class, ethnicity, age and geopolitics” – to mention some of the social orders that gender studies scholars have appointed as important to study (Mulinari & Goodman 1999).

### *Reflections on the shifts in terminology*

The change from women’s studies to gender studies transformed the political dimensions of the name – in various and contradictory ways. From an explicit focus on women as the object of study with a focus on materiality, experience and social relations, the focus on gender opened up for the inclusion of wider investigations of various kinds of gender-related practises and phenomena, such as ethnicity, sexuality and masculinity. At

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<sup>45</sup> As earlier explained, Hirdman was influenced by Gayle Rubin’s essay “The Traffic in Women” (1975). Though with one significant difference – apart from the absence of an analysis of the connections between sexuality-sex-gender – was that Rubin did not include hierarchies between the sexes in her system, something that Hirdman introduced through what she called one of the two logics of the gender system: the primate of the male norm (Hirdman 1988).

the same time, the abandoning of “women” as the primary object of study for the benefit of the neutral term ‘gender’ can result in a disarming of the possibilities for critical achievements in the field – which is also what Clare Hemmings notes in her survey of the debates over the name in the field. Here, she writes that even though

governmental or NGO support of Gender Studies may provide opportunities for feminist research not otherwise available, there are both practical and theoretical problems with an unqualified endorsement of this direction. Such support can signal a potential loss of intellectual self-determination or the watering down of academic feminists’ transformative agenda (Hemmings 2006: 24, 25).

In an essay on the gesture of inclusion that follows the choice of the term ‘gender’, American women’s studies scholar Robyn Wiegman rhetorically asks if gender will be immune to the kinds of exclusions and omissions that were found attached to women and asserts that “I would even argue that women’s theoretical inadequacy is, in fact, an important critical achievement: Rather than rushing to do away with it, in a replacement fantasy of categorical completeness, we might consider the intellectual uses to which its inadequacy can be put” (Wiegman 2002: 132).

There are also positive achievements with “neutral” terms like gender, though. As an inclusive term, it is able to accommodate a wide range of objects. It is tempting, therefore, to interpret the terminological shift from women’s studies to gender studies as a reaction to the critique of “woman” as a universal category. Indeed, this idea, that the notion “new” agents and a more developed theoretical discussion have caused these terminological changes, is in fact the dominant narrative in writings of the name and the name changes of the subject field in Sweden. ([www.genus.se](http://www.genus.se), accessed 071010, Thurén 2003: 12, 73). Notably, when studying the descriptions of the terminological shifts, the transformations from sex roles research, equal opportunities research and women’s studies in the 1960s, -70s and -80s to gender studies in the late 1980s appear through a narrative

telling a story about a development from “unity” in the early years to “heterogeneity” in the late 1980s – which was also what Clare Hemmings noted in her analysis on feminist’s narration of its own history (Hemmings 2005; Mulinari and Sandell 1999). Hemmings shows that this not only fixes “racial and sexual critique as decade-specific” but also is implicitly progressive through positioning feminist poststructuralists as the first to “deconstruct ‘woman’”, despite the fact, as she stress, that “deconstructive analyses always have been one important feature in feminist theory” (Hemmings 2005: 116).

Reading through the texts and debates surrounding the terminology shifts, however, I would suggest an understanding of the choice of ‘gender’ as the result of a conjunction between the feminist hopes for an inclusive, anti-essentialist term, and the state political search for an inclusive, pragmatic term. However, through the distinction between the biological and the social/cultural, gender became developed in an understanding where ‘women’ were opposed to ‘men’. The differences within the group of women were not addressed in the conceptual framework. The distinction between social/cultural constructions of sex and biological constructions of sex also resulted in a confirmation of the border between the social sex, understood as changeable, and the biological sex, understood as static. Under-theorized uses of the term gender might thus risk developing further ideas of ‘kōn’, ‘sex’ as biology, and of biology as stable and prior to social/cultural constructions of sex.

The strong impact from the government on the key terms and the naming of the field has alerted strong reactions from the scholars in the field, through, among other issues, an explicit rejection of the term ‘equal opportunities research’ in the early 1980s and a growing suspicion against the term ‘gender’ after the governmental support of the term. This also makes clear the critical and persistent attitude among WGFS scholars against a weakening of the transformative potential of WGFS. In addition, the debate around key terms and the naming of the field also reflects a reflective attitude among WGFS scholars to their conceptual tools. The

debate sketched here, traces a range of issues, among others, arguments pro- or against professionalization of the field, pro- or against a firm definition of the key terms, pro- or against neutral terms or more politically laden terms, and I would suggest that the picture sketched through the debate on the one hand alerts to efforts of stabilizing the terms, where some contributions to the debate offers normative or descriptive arguments for their case. On the other hand, the multiple responses to these efforts in the debate and the hesitance against a fixation of a proper name or a proper object can be understood as a transformative practice in itself, keeping up a resistance to a stabilization of the feminist agenda, which also offers a hope for the possibilities of the project of institutionalizing WGFS as an oppositional forum in the academy.

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# Appendix 1

## *Questionnaire to the Departments for Gender Studies*

Göteborg 12/3 2010

### *Questions*

The name of the department:

1. How many researchers/teachers/subject teachers are employed at the department?
2. What kind of positions do these occupy?
3.
  - a) How many have research projects/project funding?
  - b) What amount are these?
  - c) From where are these funded?
4. Do the department have PhD-training?
5. If yes, how many PhD-students are enrolled to PhD-training?
  - a) How many PhD-students is funded by the faculty?
  - b) How many are externally funded/funded by own means (source of funding)?
6. How does the flow of PhD-students at the department work:

- a) How much time do the enrolled PhD-students have before their exam?
  - b) Are there any inflow of new PhD-positions/PhD-grants?
7. What are the changes in the positions at the department during the latest 2-3 years (recruitments and retirements)?
  8. How is the future situation for positions (planned recruitments or retirements during the nearest year/years)?
  9. Which is the attitude from the faculty on recruitment of new professors/PhD-students when the earlier retire/take exam?
  10. Do the university/faculty recruit professors, or are they only practicing promotion to professor?
  11. Which is the attitude from the university/faculty for the establishment of new lectureships?
  12. Are there organizational changes at the university, such as merging of departments, or similar? How does this affect gender studies?
  13. Do the department function as a centre for gender research at the university, through, for example the arrangement of open seminar series or other open events?
  14. Any other comments.

## Appendix 2

### *Permanent positions in Gender Studies, May 2010*

#### *Göteborg University, Gender Studies*

- 1 promoted professor, (retirement planned for June 2010).
- 2 senior lectureships (50% lecturer/50% research funding).
- 2 supply senior lectureships on 50-70% (depending on the need).
- 3 PhD-students.

#### *Karlstad University, Centre for gender research (CGF)*

- 1 deputy head on a short-term appointment (20%).
- 3 researchers (15%, 20% respectively 10%).
- Recruitment of a professor.

#### *Karlstad University, gender studies*

- 2 researchers/teachers (80%, funded partly from the faculty and partly through external funds).

#### *Linköping University: Tema Genus*

- 4 professors, of which one currently is under appointment.
- 1 guest professor.

4 senior lectureships, of which one is a supply lectureship and one is a short term lectureship and one is currently under appointment.

3 associate senior lecturers, of which one is currently under appointment.

4 post doc-researchers of which one is currently under appointment.

12 PhD-students.

*Linköping University, Forum for Gender Studies and Gender Equality*

1 head of the unit (35%).

1 co-ordinator, administration (50%).

1 chair of the board (10%).

1 library assistant (ca 5%) and 1 librarian (10%).

*Lund University, Centre for Gender Studies*

2 professors, of which one promoted.

3 senior lectureships.

1 subject teacher.

1 senior lectureship.

1 post doc/researcher until the end of 2012.

4 PhD-students, 3 funded from the faculty, one externally funded).

*Malmö University, Gender Studies*

1 promoted professor.

2 senior lectureships (50% resp. 100%).

1 subject teacher (50%).



*Stockholm University, Centre for Gender Studies*

2 ½ senior lectureships distributed on three persons (of which two are on leave, corresponds to 1 ½ position).

*Södertörn University College, Gender, culture and history*

- 1 professor.
- 1 promoted professor (on leave).
- 1 senior lectureship.
- 2 senior lectureships under appointment.
- PhD-training under development.

*Umeå University, Umeå Centre for Gender Studies (UCGS)*

Stable positions:

- 2 senior lectureships.
- 2 researchers.

Short term positions, or staff at another department at Umeå University, but active parts or the hole time at the UCGS:

- 1 supply senior lectureship (under 2010).
- 10 2-year post doc-researchers.
- 4 senior lectureships on 80%, 60%, 50% respectively 15% on UCGS.
- 6 associate senior lecturers (4 år) 12-15% on UCGS.
- 1 national guest senior lecturer, 25% on UCGS.
- 3 international guest professors, 20%, 40% respectively 40% on UCGS.
- 1 professor, 25% on UCGS.
- 1 associate senior lecturer under appointment.

30 PhD-students at the Gender research school, which most likely will be granted to enroll 2 PhD-students from the subject gender studies during fall 2010.

*Uppsala University, Centre for Gender Studies*

- 3 senior lectureships.
- 1 promoted professor (in literature) on 50%.
- 1 senior lectureship on 75% under appointment.

*Örebro University, Gender Studies*

- 1 professor under appointment, one guest professor on 50% during vacancy.
- 1 professor on 30% (GEXcel-funds).
- 2 senior lectureships divided on three persons.
- 3 PhD-students.

## Article II: “PhDs, Women’s/Gender Studies and Interdisciplinarity”.

*NORA, Nordic Journal of Women’s Studies, 14:2, 2005, pp. 115-130.*

*Liinason, Mia and Ulla M Holm (2005)*



# PhDs, Women's/Gender Studies and Interdisciplinarity

MIA LIINASON & ULLA M. HOLM

*Department of Gender Studies, Göteborg University, Göteborg, Sweden*

**ABSTRACT** *This article is concerned with Women's Studies as interdisciplinary. It begins with the various ways in which interdisciplinarity has been understood and then accounts for some of the barriers to interdisciplinary cooperation between the humanities and social sciences as we have identified them in an EU-funded project on interdisciplinarity ([www.hull.ac.uk/researchintegration](http://www.hull.ac.uk/researchintegration)). Against the background of existing external and internal barriers to interdisciplinarity in general it is our intention in this article to open up a research political discussion in the Nordic context around the meaning or meanings of the budding (inter)disciplinary PhD training in gender studies.*

*Women's studies, gender studies and interdisciplinarity* all represent so-called “contested concepts”.<sup>1</sup> Add the notion of *PhDs* to this conceptual cluster and you will not avoid contestation or paradox! Despite all sorts of differences in higher education systems within the Nordic countries; between the Nordic countries and other European countries; and between Europe and e.g. the US, there seems to be a few striking similarities in material and structural conditions, when facing different forms of barriers against PhD training in (inter)disciplinary women's/gender studies. Different forms of interdisciplinarity intersect with different ways of institutionalizing and/or disciplining women's/gender studies in respective higher education systems.

In the EU project *Changing Knowledge and Disciplinary Boundaries Through Integrative Research Methods in the Social Sciences and Humanities*, we have produced national as well as comparative reports, focusing on disciplinary boundaries between the Social Sciences and Humanities. In a comparative report written from the project, on the topic “interdisciplinarity”, we give an account of several barriers to interdisciplinary cooperation between the humanities and social sciences.<sup>2</sup> Notably though, the barriers were often discovered to be contradictory to the political rhetoric and research policy rhetoric in the national contexts. At the same time as the national government expressed a positive attitude to

interdisciplinary cooperation, the disciplinary structure could be maintained through assessment procedures structured along disciplinary lines, for example.

In this article we shall first stipulate a terminology on interdisciplinarity. Then we account for some of the barriers to interdisciplinary cooperation between the humanities and social sciences as we have identified them in the EU project. Against the background of existing external and internal barriers to interdisciplinarity in general we want to open a research political discussion also in the Nordic context around the budding (inter)disciplinary PhD training in gender studies.<sup>3</sup> We cannot address the issue satisfactorily here. Our motivation to state it is to bring gender studies and interdisciplinarity into a creative interaction for the further development of both.

This article is written out of material collected and analysed in the realm of the EU project mentioned above, where certain issues of importance for interdisciplinary collaboration have been brought into focus. The empirical material for the study is based on historical and contextual circumstances from within the systems of higher education in these eight different national contexts, focusing on the relationship between state and education, the funding of education and research, issues of disciplinization and, finally, the effects on interdisciplinary collaboration from the Bologna process in the different national contexts.<sup>4</sup>

During the work with the comparative analyses, we expected to find large discrepancies between how different systems of higher education and research managed interdisciplinary cooperation. Notably though, through descriptive, conceptual and comparative analyses of the data material, we discovered on the contrary significant similarities between the actual possibilities for interdisciplinarity in the different national contexts. We found, thus, that even though interdisciplinarity is possible in theory—as in Sweden, Norway and Finland, for instance—it may be difficult in practice. Consequently, concerning the establishment of women's/gender studies as an interdisciplinary subject field at PhD level, the following three questions are central for the discussion in the article: 1) What kind of barriers against interdisciplinary collaboration exist between the humanities and the social sciences, and how are they expressed in the system of higher education? 2) How is women's/gender studies established as an under- and post-graduate interdisciplinary programme in the Nordic countries in general, and in Sweden in particular? 3) What are the outlooks for women's/gender studies to develop as an (inter)discipline of its own, with respect to the relative autonomy of the higher education system in the Nordic countries?

## Terminology

We will start by providing some explanations regarding how we understand the terms “gender studies” and “interdisciplinarity”.

*Gender studies:* Several centres/departments in Sweden, previously using the labels “kvinnoforskning” or “kvinnovetenskap” have changed their name to “genusvetenskap”.<sup>5</sup> This does not mean that active researchers have betrayed the women's movement background of the field to accept the Swedish research policy understandings of *gender*, other than for pragmatic, theoretical or feminist reasons.

The term “genus” was introduced in Sweden in the mid-1980s. The feminist historian Yvonne Hirdman imported Gayle Rubin’s and Joan Scott’s conceptualizations of *gender* and combined them into a structuralist concept into which she built power asymmetries (Hirdman 1988). The national governmental and funding levels were quick to adopt the new term after having used first “sex roles research” and from the late 1970s “jämställdhetsforskning” (“equal opportunities research”). There was thus at the end of the 1980s a change of terms at this level to “genusforskning”. This approach did not focus only on women and their conditions, but more on relationships between women and men. Some researchers came to use gender as a scientific, descriptive concept and emptied it of normative connotations. Other researchers reacted to this putative objectivity and proclaimed themselves *feminist* researchers. “Feminism” had for a long time been a “dirty” word, not only among conservatives, but among radicals, who, due to a strong leftist movement saw feminism as a bourgeois, a-historical concept. Interestingly, today, several Swedish politicians, including the ex-prime minister, call themselves “feminists” and have almost emptied this concept of its critical potential (cf. Holm 1993: chapter 1).

In Göteborg we use *gender studies* both pragmatically and critically as an umbrella concept for an intersectional, dynamic, multi- and interdisciplinary field of research and education in transit. Educationally, we include approaches mirrored in the history of the field: women’s studies, gender equality studies, critical studies on men, feminist (cultural) studies, homo/queer studies, post-colonial feminist studies.

From here onwards we shall include *women’s studies* in the umbrella concept *gender studies*, except when the context calls for using the term “women’s studies”. This umbrella covers interdisciplinary research, undergraduate education at BA and MA level and/or PhD training practised within 1) older disciplines as a sub-field; 2) separate educational units or research centres at the intersection of and for the benefit of different disciplines; and 3) fully institutionalized departments of their own as an (inter)discipline in the making.

*Interdisciplinarity and some of its conceptual relatives*<sup>6</sup>: The term “interdisciplinarity” is of course derived from the term “discipline”, the latter referring to cognitive divisions in research and university communities, even though in practice a discipline is often based on both cognitive and institutional factors. The naturalized distinction between disciplinarity and interdisciplinarity is often criticized as being a historical construction, developed out of material, cultural and historical processes. Disciplinary borders and the fragmentation into specialized areas of knowledge are arbitrary and represent relations of power as much as any rational cuts in the body of knowledge (Lykke 2004a: 94). Many disciplines emerged as interdisciplinary, with an openness to other disciplines, while others have built strong borders around a core of knowledge, a canon, a certain form of epistemology, methodology, and favoured research methods and/or skills. The disciplines have been characterized as atomic or essentialist entities in a hierarchical organization of knowledge, and disciplination has been compared with nation-building (Boxer 2000: 122).

Today critiques of rigid disciplinarity arise from several quarters within the system of higher education, e.g. from interdisciplinary researchers as well as from ministries and some public and private funding bodies. Generally disciplinarity is criticized for

leading to extreme specialization or lack of utilitarian accountability to social and other pressing issues in the complex societies of today.

Apart from distinctions between disciplinarity and interdisciplinarity there are several ways to conceptualize interdisciplinary research and education. *Interdisciplinarity* can be said to instantiate an “essentially contested concept”, which means that each contesting party knows that others saturate it with different forms of evaluative and normative force, that it is open to new, unforeseen understandings, and that several views therefore exist on how to draw distinctions between different forms of interdisciplinarity (Gallie 1956: 121).

We prefer, with Julie Thompson Klein (1996), the expression “crossing disciplinary borders” as the umbrella instead of “interdisciplinarity” for a conceptual field containing *interdisciplinarity* proper as well as *multi-* and *transdisciplinarity*. In this article, we furthermore make use of the expression “critical interdisciplinarity”, by which we refer to interdisciplinarity as a critical position, striving to challenge the borders of disciplines—a view that pushes e.g. “interdisciplinarity” closer to the level of transdisciplinarity. The expression also sheds light upon the division between “instrumental” and “cognitive” interdisciplinarity, signifying different kinds of knowledge-seeking strategies. Instrumental interdisciplinarity aims at problem-solving (often under the denominations of “applied science” or “multidisciplinarity”) while cognitive interdisciplinarity handles questions of fundamental understanding (often talked about as forms of “inter-” or “transdisciplinarity”). In the empirical material collected for the study, we identified a tendency, especially from ministerial policies, to focus on instrumental interdisciplinarity while leaving forms of “cognitive interdisciplinarity” behind—a mode of procedure that we find problematic because it establishes a simplistic view of knowledge and knowledge-seeking strategies. We discuss this more thoroughly later on in the article. We reserve “multidisciplinarity” as a term for collaboration between disciplinary approaches, without exceeding the disciplinary borders, their theoretical or methodological frames. As an additive process, multidisciplinarity reinforces the distinction between disciplines and leaves traditional disciplines unchallenged.

“Interdisciplinarity” (proper) is reserved as a term for theoretical and methodological cross-fertilization and a crossing of disciplinary borders in a way that suggests that neither or none of the disciplines involved is a satisfactory theoretical edifice in itself. Such cross-fertilization may create new synergetic, holistic, or hybrid fields of thematic research.

“Transdisciplinarity” is reserved for a going beyond disciplines and existing canons, and focuses on ontological and epistemological issues in the search for a unified theory of all forms of specialized knowledge (cf. Lykke 2004a: 97). “Leading exemplars include ..., Marxism, policy sciences, feminism. ... This level of integration has a strong theoretical orientation model” (Bruun et al. 2005: 30).

All these three varieties of crossing disciplinary borders challenge the specialization of, as well as the arbitrariness of, established disciplines. There are, however, other terms in use that may be relevant to the issue of PhD training in Gender Studies.

“Neo-disciplinarity”, may be reserved as a term for disciplinary border-crossing that takes “a different cut at social practice”. Neo-disciplines are according to David



Long "... new and emerging configurations that are being constituted as academic programs" and units "apart from traditional disciplines". They are, according to him "... disciplines in so far as they involve or can involve systematic training in a coherent body of knowledge. Each involves a core of studies around which there are a variety of other disciplinary contributions". He takes gender studies as an example. While conceptions of gender can readily be explored in other departments, Long suggests that "... gender arguably requires more than disciplinary fragments in order to be understood comprehensively ..." (Long 2002, 13f).

Feminist uses of the term "post-disciplinarity" may include or equal transdisciplinarity or critical interdisciplinarity and are concerned with critiques of academic structures in general and with complexities and exclusions in gender studies. *Post-disciplinary* challenges to disciplinarity may also be inspired by pre-disciplinary research approaches, without sharp demarcations between areas of research now split between social sciences and humanities (Jessop and Sum 2003: 89).

### **Barriers against Interdisciplinary Cooperation in Research and Education between the Humanities and Social Sciences**

In general, interdisciplinary collaboration is requested in the systems of higher education in Europe. Nevertheless, when it comes to practice, there are still several major difficulties for teaching and research that cross disciplinary borders to emerge. In the comparative report on interdisciplinarity, produced within the framework of the EU project mentioned above, we found a number of barriers against collaboration that transgress the disciplinary borders, as well as integrative collaborations. On the whole, we indicate three levels at which interdisciplinarity is contested in the national reports. At the *political level*, we identify the possibilities for and obstacles to the crossing of disciplinary borders, as they are observed in ministerial policies, structural and organizational details, and the implementation of the Bologna process. The *strategic level* relates to funding bodies and evaluation agencies, and the ways in which these bodies enable or disable interdisciplinarity to materialize within higher education and research. At the *operational level of higher education institutions*, the internal organization of these institutions and their effect on the crossing of disciplinary borders are discussed. That is, the occurrences of and possibilities for interdisciplinarity within different levels of education and research where these higher education institutions are identified. Moreover, we discuss the *epistemological perspectives on the construction of interdisciplinarity*, depicting some disparate views on different forms of interdisciplinarity and their relationship to different understandings of knowledge (Liinason and Holm 2005: 4).

Commissioned by the Academy of Finland, Bruun et al. (2005; 60f) have recently published a report on the promotion of interdisciplinary research. They too identify major barriers against interdisciplinarity, some of which emerge, although under other labels, in the national and comparative reports in the EU project.<sup>7</sup> Especially their *structural*, *epistemological* and *reception* barriers are important for the type of external resistance faced by critical interdisciplinary gender studies research. *Cultural*, *methodological* and *psychological* barriers may be more relevant to resistance *within* gender studies communities to interdisciplinary PhD training in

gender studies, where among other things the constructions of disciplines have had problematic effects on researchers within Women's/Gender Studies, illustrated by a tendency to stick to their disciplinary socializations and methodologies, rather than opening up for new ones (Pryse 2000: 106).

These forms of barriers intersect with the ones identified as obstacles to interdisciplinary cooperation between humanities and social sciences in higher education and research within the education systems in the eight countries involved in our EU project. As a PhD student, you can never be disengaged from the rest of the university system—if the system for higher education and research is structured along disciplinary lines, you might get difficulties with publications, research funding, employment, etc., if you take a degree in an interdisciplinary field of study. In the following, we discuss the structuring of higher education and research in eight European countries by way of a description of 1) the administrative organization within institutions of higher education; 2) the organization of funding councils and assessment agencies; and finally 3) the actual occurrence of interdisciplinary subject fields within undergraduate education of today.

### *The Political Level: The Relationship between State and Education*

Ministerial policies in all the countries observed are more or less positively disposed to interdisciplinarity and to the breaking of disciplinary barriers. However, this is seldom followed by changes in the system of higher education, and that is why we see this positive ministerial attitude as “lip service” and often empty rhetoric. In many national contexts funding procedures and assessment exercises are still carried out along disciplinary lines, central decision-making bodies are still structured along disciplinary lines, and many institutions of higher education have non-flexible administrative organizations. This causes difficulties for interdisciplinary bottom-up initiatives, among other things because of the difficulties of solving ordinary practical matters, such as distribution of resources, teachers, and students from one faculty to another, for example, in order to establish interdisciplinary courses or programmes. In Sweden, for instance, there is a large discrepancy between old and new higher education institutions. Despite a ministerial policy that stresses the importance of interdisciplinary cooperation, the administrative organization in many autonomously governed higher education institutions in Sweden preserves a conventional division between the disciplines and the administrative units they belong to. The case is a bit similar to the situation in Norway, where the Quality Reform involved a complete remodelling of the educational system, in line with the Bologna process and with a strong emphasis on possibilities for interdisciplinarity, although the internal organization of higher education institutions remained unchanged. Consequently, the conventional internal organization produces hindrances for interdisciplinarity, not only on account of funding issues, but also on account of practical day-to-day issues, such as the location of students, teachers, administrative staff and so on, with the result that the concrete physical space continues to define the limits of knowledge (Liinason and Holm 2005: 17).

There is, moreover, a lack of distinctness in the national government's different attitudes to various kinds of interdisciplinarity. Some forms of interdisciplinarity are

disqualified, while others are supported, e.g. problem-oriented interdisciplinarity may be funded by the government, while other forms of interdisciplinarity are not given any allocation (Liinason and Holm 2005: 14). Bearing in mind the importance of governmental recognition for a subject field in the making, this contradictory attitude points our attention to some severe obstacles in practice against the establishment of interdisciplinary gender studies.

*The Strategic Level: Research Funding and Evaluation Procedures and Their Impact on Interdisciplinarity*

In many of the national contexts observed in the EU project, the funding bodies had an intention to cover a range of both disciplinary and interdisciplinary research. Nevertheless, we discovered that the application procedure and preparatory work often were organized along disciplinary lines. Considering the importance of funding issues, this is a major disadvantage for the establishment of interdisciplinary research. The Swedish funding system constitutes a clear example of the difficulties of integrating interdisciplinarity within the ordinary funding council. In 2001, the Swedish funding system was restructured, explicitly intended to facilitate interdisciplinary research among other things. Nevertheless, the whole application procedure, from filling in the application form to the constitution of evaluation panels, follows disciplinary lines. The lack of a qualified assessment procedure is only one of the severe difficulties that arise for researchers with interdisciplinary research projects (Liinason and Holm 2005: 23).

Moreover, funding councils covering only one type of discipline, as for instance the social sciences, had established a kind of disciplinary territorial practice where the risk of falling "between" respective councils' specific domain were seen as an obstacle to interdisciplinary research (Liinason and Holm 2005: 23). In the wake of the implementation of the Bologna process and similar educational reforms, emphasis has been laid on the introduction of assessment exercises. These are often tied to both the government and the funding bodies and affect the possibilities for individual researchers, as well as institutions, to receive research funding or governmental grants. The assessment exercises are often carried out by discipline, which is another major obstacle to all kinds of interdisciplinary teaching and research. Furthermore, it preserves a non-flexible and conservative system, squeezing researchers and students into a disciplinary track (Liinason and Holm 2005: 24).

*The Operational Level: Interdisciplinarity at the Level of Higher Education Institutions*

Interdisciplinarity in education does not receive as much attention as interdisciplinarity in research. There is a common attitude in many of the national contexts observed, that undergraduate education should be given along disciplinary lines. The willingness to facilitate interdisciplinary work is mostly tied to Masters and PhDs (Liinason and Holm 2005: 14–26). Nevertheless, the emphasis on early specialization in pre-university education creates obstacles for the establishment of interdisciplinary fields of study in higher education. Within several of the systems of higher

education throughout Europe, funding is, among other things, based on the number of students taking exams. In countries driven by market demand, this becomes even more important. When pre-university education is bound to disciplinary subjects, as in the UK, interdisciplinary subject fields in the area of higher education may have severe problems to become established (Griffin et al. 2005). Moreover, the lack of interdisciplinary courses or programmes at undergraduate level further constrains the establishment of interdisciplinarity at under- as well as post-graduate level. The administrative organization within individual higher education institutions, as mentioned earlier, creates a lack of flexibility and produces hindrances to the establishment of interdisciplinarity. Consequently, there are few examples of true interdisciplinarity at undergraduate level in the university contexts studied. When it occurs, it is mainly interpreted as a result of the efforts of individual academics (Liinason and Holm 2005: 28).

### *Epistemological barriers against critical forms of interdisciplinarity*

At present, there is a strong emphasis on education for the needs of civil society and the labour-market. This, however, produces a view of interdisciplinarity in education as similar to vocational training, which is a fact that may both constrain and support interdisciplinary fields of education and research. Furthermore, there is a widely spread epistemological indistinctness in policy documents, which promotes some forms of interdisciplinarity, i.e. instrumental or utilitarian interdisciplinarity as applied science, while constraining other forms, i.e. cognitive or critical interdisciplinarity. This indistinctness may create a resistance against political demands for reorganization within the higher education and funding systems, affecting both interdisciplinary teaching initiatives and critical forms of interdisciplinary research projects. Simultaneously, a conceptual indistinctness exists that does not distinguish between different forms of crossing disciplinary boundaries, where multidisciplinary is treated on a par with interdisciplinarity proper. Without really challenging any naturalized views of disciplinarity as such, this may lead to a reinforcement of a crossing of disciplinary borders justified by instrumental or utilitarian reasons and a neglectful attitude to trans- or post-disciplinarity motivated by cognitive and/or critical reasons (Liinason and Holm 2005: 32–3; cf. Bruun et al. 2005: 5).

As an effect of the Bologna process, the under- and post-graduate education is often adapted to civil society and the labour-market. Before the establishment of a new discipline in Hungary, for instance, there is an explicit demand to identify a recognized career structure, i.e. job opportunities or possibilities for an academic career. In this context, interdisciplinarity within undergraduate education is, consequently, viewed as a way to adapt the higher education institutions and their training programmes to the current demands of the labour-market. The public debates surrounding interdisciplinarity in higher education thus often refer to the creation of new vocational degrees.

There is, furthermore, a wide-spread governmental mistrust in the advantages of interdisciplinarity at undergraduate level. By today, funding councils, governments and the EU put a large emphasis on applied science and education for the labour-market. Here, specialization is viewed as a necessary condition for different forms of

interdisciplinary collaboration. This will in our understanding, however, strengthen instrumental interdisciplinarity, at the expense of cognitive forms of interdisciplinarity (Liinason and Holm 2005: 31).

The different views of interdisciplinarity may be illustrated by two conflicting views of interdisciplinarity, as we write in the comparative report:

The first view claims that interdisciplinarity within undergraduate education only gives the student a superficial competence, and the other suggests that interdisciplinarity at that level gives the student a critical consciousness and a methodological flexibility (Rothstein 2004; Pryse 1998: 17; Pryse 2000: 114). The gap between these views is wide. Both are held by radicals as well as conservatives and are thus quite difficult to bridge. The lack of definition of interdisciplinarity in ministerial policies may be one reason why this gap continues to grow. Another is the governmental push for an instrumental interdisciplinarity within the framework of applied science. This emphasis constitutes a main obstacle for the establishment of interdisciplinarity within undergraduate education as a critical and reflexive scientific inquiry with high claims to deep theoretical and methodological skills (Liinason and Holm 2005: 32).

Consequently, in spite of the wide-spread proclamation of interdisciplinarity in ministerial policies, a number of major obstacles still exist to the establishment of new interdisciplinary fields of study in education and research. The difficulties take different shape in relation to the executive level, i.e. undergraduate, post-graduate or research level. Yet, the notion of a strong disciplinary base seems to be a fundamental assumption in all national contexts, creating a system structured along disciplinary lines—from institutional administrative routines, over the organization of funding councils, to the distribution of governmental resources to, and within, the higher education institutions (Liinason and Holm 2005: 28–32). Thus, in order for interdisciplinary PhD training in gender studies to continue to emerge successfully, a number of barriers need to be overcome—equally important when it comes to the establishment of under- and post-graduate education, as well as funding of research projects.

### **Gender Studies and PhD Training**

The institutionalization of gender studies in the academy in the Nordic countries, as well as in the rest of Europe, has not only resulted in a lot of empirical research and many centres offering basic education in gender studies, but also in extensive theoretical research and in departments with a core faculty of their own, including full professors in gender studies. Gender Studies in the UK, the Netherlands, and some Nordic countries, among them Finland and Sweden, are much more institutionalized, although in different ways and to different degrees than in some other European countries such as France and Spain. Karin Widerberg provides a fuller account of this discrepancy in her article in this issue of *Nora*.<sup>8</sup>

Rather often, interdisciplinary subjects break with the predominant knowledge structure through a mixture of different methods, research strategies and

explanatory models (Kalman 1996: 26). For researchers within women's/gender studies, the position outside the traditional disciplines has created a possibility to criticize traditional disciplines—a critique that not seldom has been both creative and developing for women's/gender studies as well as for the established disciplines (Pryse 1998: 7). On account of this, it is easy to grasp one of the advantages with women's/gender studies as an interdisciplinary subject, where the critical potential contributes to a flexibility within the system of higher education. By now, an increased number of departments of women's/gender studies in Sweden are acknowledged as autonomous subject fields, in great part due to the institutional anchorage via professorships and the right to give PhD degrees. However, the risk at stake is that women's/gender studies is going to be all too successfully involved in the established system for research and education, and that the subject field will “go discipline”, i.e. lose its critical perspective and perhaps even its interdisciplinarity, through the establishment of a core body of knowledge. This would be a great defeat, not only on account of the awareness that innovative and important research is developed at the margins of the disciplines, but also on account of the risk of developing yet another successor discipline. Consequently, a discussion regarding the future development of the subject field's substantial direction, i.e. epistemological, ideological, and ethical issues, is of great importance (Liinason 2004: 6).

Nevertheless, the establishment of platforms for the making of feminist theories, methodologies and epistemologies cannot be brought into reality without the recognition from several key decision-making bodies, such as the government, funding councils, assessment agencies, etc. In the context of the organizing of PhD training in gender studies, the Nordic countries in general, and Sweden in particular, are often depicted as a success story. There are, yet, as we shall expose, some interesting inconsistencies in the establishment of gender studies as an under- and post-graduate interdisciplinary programme.

In the Nordic region, three different forms exist of organizing PhD training in gender studies, as outlined by Nina Lykke (2004b: 20):

- a. *Disciplinary PhDs*: The PhD student is enrolled exclusively within the framework of a traditional discipline, and it is the disciplinary department and/or the faculty that awards the degree. ... The student can follow PhD courses on gender research issues as part of her/his training, for example those offered by interdisciplinary Gender Studies units.
- b. *Double affiliation PhDs*: The PhD student is enrolled within the framework of an interdisciplinary Gender Studies programme plus a traditional discipline; the disciplinary department and/or the faculty awards the degree, but the student follows the interdisciplinary Gender Studies programme as part of her/his research training.
- c. *Inter- or transdisciplinary Gender Studies PhDs*: The PhD student is enrolled exclusively within the framework of an inter- or transdisciplinary Gender Studies programme; the department and/or faculty responsible for the programme awards the degree.

Lykke does not explicitly elaborate on the difference *within* model c, which contains both the Department of Gender Studies at Linköping University, founded

and "... supported by a grant from the Swedish state" as "... the first Nordic institution to establish an inter- and transdisciplinary PhD degree-awarding Gender Studies programme", and other "... Programmes based on model c, with funds for, on average, between one and five PhD students" (Lykke 2004b: 21f).

The PhD training in Linköping is, however, not tied to an undergraduate Gender Studies programme in the way the other budding PhD programmes in e.g. Örebro, Lund, and Göteborg are. This fact somewhat brings the Swedish situation a bit closer to the one in Norway and Finland, where interdisciplinary research cooperation and PhD training occur, but where undergraduate education up to advanced level in interdisciplinary women's/gender studies has been or still may be hard to achieve.<sup>9</sup> In terms of the low levels of undergraduate interdisciplinary teaching, and in terms of interdisciplinarity being most often found in post-graduate education and research, Sweden also comes a bit closer to Spain and France, where PhD training may occur as interdisciplinary women's studies, but not at all at undergraduate level,<sup>10</sup> due to the wide-spread conviction of the importance of early specialization. In the Swedish system, the four nationally accredited scientific areas in general create barriers to interdisciplinarity between these four areas.<sup>11</sup> In the systems of higher education in Spain and France, uniformity with few local variations is observed in the location of disciplines in faculties. In spite of the large differences between the systems in Sweden, Spain and France in general, all three systems suffer from a lack of flexibility in practice, which causes difficulties for the establishment of interdisciplinary courses or programmes at undergraduate level. Consequently, it also produces hindrances to the establishment of interdisciplinarity at post-graduate level.

During the last years, the Swedish government has brought about several structural changes within the system of higher education in a wish to, among other things, facilitate the crossing of disciplinary borders. This has been the case with—giving two important examples—the changed structure of research funding in 2001, and the decentralization of the policy-making process within the educational reform of 1993. The striving to facilitate interdisciplinarity is still of current interest—not least with respect to the implementation of the Bologna process. The recognition of gender studies has furthermore involved important reinforcements of women's/gender studies as a subject field. As mentioned earlier, however, several universities maintain a conservative division of subjects and/or faculties, and the application and evaluation procedure at the most significant research council in Sweden is still structured along disciplinary lines. Consequently, this involves a number of organizational and epistemological difficulties to the making of interdisciplinarity within all levels in the system of higher education, and certainly within undergraduate education (Liinason 2004: 12).

### **An (Inter)Discipline Of Its Own? The Method Problem**

Mostly, teachers in women's/gender studies of today are trained in quite stable and, in the university system, relatively established disciplines, such as literature, philosophy, sociology. These teachers bring to women's/gender studies a knowledge of certain methods and skills, united by a critical approach to traditional disciplines

(Alnebratt 2006: 1). It is quite recent that gender or women's studies units (centres and departments) in Sweden, and now also Finland, have been granted the right to award exams and run training at PhD level in gender studies, some of us on top of an undergraduate education up to advanced level. Thus we belong to the club that has achieved the paradoxical condition of neo-disciplining a field of research and education that we have proudly dubbed as inherently interdisciplinary (cf. Kalman 1996). Was such dubbing mere rhetoric used as self-praise in celebratory settings (Rosenbeck 1999: 27)? In centres/departments with few core faculty appointed, the critical mass for interdisciplinarity proper to emerge in teaching is often low. Despite thematic planning and construction of courses, and despite diverse disciplinary backgrounds among core faculty and researchers in residence, the education delivered is more often multidisciplinary than interdisciplinary. As mentioned earlier, lack of time and resources are two important obstacles to achieving the cherished ideal of interdisciplinary co-teaching (Liinason and Holm 2005: 33; Vasterling et al. 2006). What route(s) will neo- or interdisciplining take with a growing faculty and responsibility for PhD students that are not always trained in other disciplines? Will we opt for a closure around the gender studies canon and a set of methods transferred from the disciplines within which the old faculty was trained (cf. Wiegman 2002)? Will we strive to actualize critical inter-, trans- or post-disciplinarity and paradigm-shifting potentials in sub-fields of gender studies, such as women's, feminist, queer, critical masculinity studies? Will we work in alliance with disciplinary gender studies or with other interdisciplinary fields such as cultural, post-colonial, ethnicity, global, etc., studies? We know that we need a critical, intellectual mass to be achieved, not just temporary meeting places. We know that we need the safety of a shared budget and allocation of regular resources that successful institutionalizing offers an undergraduate, inter- or neo-disciplinary education in close contact with PhD training and active researchers (Hark 2005: 22; Klein 1996: 35–36).

To conclude, we see at least three forms of interdisciplinarity as relevant to gender studies in relation to undergraduate teaching, PhD training and research:

1. In the first form, one is firmly rooted in a traditional discipline and is involved occasionally in multi- or interdisciplinary cooperation with researchers/teachers from other disciplines.
2. The second involves research and teaching in a multi- and/or interdisciplinary *field of knowledge*, and one "borrows" or transforms methods from older disciplines and may even create new methods due to new challenges of the field in such a way that it constitutes a *neo-discipline*.
3. The third model transgresses not only Humboldtian disciplines, but also barriers between the academy and other institutions, movements, cultures, nations, post- or transdisciplinarily.

We prefer a combination of the second and third form and call it an "interdiscipline". While this may be accurate as a way of describing what autonomous gender studies currently strives towards in Sweden, whether it will be actualized depends not only on what we want in the interdiscipline in the making, but also on the resistances we face.<sup>12</sup> This normative combination endorses critical



inter- and transdisciplinarity, not, however, in the utilitarian form that celebrates a globalized market. What differently situated gender studies teachers and researchers want, however, constitutes a contested debate in itself. So it should, if we want to keep the debate open and alive (Boxer 1998). Here some arguments from the US context on PhDs in gender studies blend with European arguments. Wendy Brown challenges the assumption that there is an integration of knowledge in women's studies and suggests its impossibility as a (neo)discipline. She finds "nothing there": no core, no coherence, no methods of its own (Brown 1997). Other feminist scholars, trained in gender studies, defend its possibility while striving to maintain interdisciplinary openness (Wiegman 1999/2000). Marilyn Boxer argues that we should put to rest the question of whether women's studies is a discipline. It is a discipline, an interdiscipline and an area of research in other disciplines. We are everywhere (Boxer 2000: 124). Gabriele Griffin takes a similar stand (2004: 125). Nina Lykke calls it a "post-disciplinary discipline" on one occasion and "interdisciplinary discipline" on another.<sup>13</sup> Marjorie Pryse outlines in two articles (1998; 2000) the normative conditions for critical interdisciplinarity in gender studies. It must take seriously the cross-cultural insights gained in women's studies. On the one hand she suggests that "... feminist scholars may hold even more tenaciously to their disciplinary socializations and methodologies than they do to their cultural attitudes and biases" (Pryse 2000: 110). On the other hand she finds something there, i.e. mediating skills and transversal attitudes that we unconsciously train our students in, due to considerable differences in teachers' expertise and training, and to a curriculum that through constant internal critique of excluding tendencies expands and demands empirical work and theoretical insights on intersecting differences (cf. Liljeström 1999; Crenshaw 1996).

Can such a training be the hallmark of a trans/feminist methodology, an interdisciplining in gender studies that is continuously critical and cross-cultural (Pryse 1998; 2000)? Can such potential methodologies strengthen the interdiscipline when taking feminist theories of diversity and intersectionality seriously (May 2002)? Do we really need methods of our own? Why (not)? Do we transform mono-disciplined skills through transport and creative translation? How can we raise our awareness about what we actually do? We ask these questions more readily than we can answer them. May they be food for continued discussions and contestations for the benefit of an open interdiscipline!

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> When referring to terms, words and expressions we use quotation marks: "word". When referring to the concepts we use italics: *word*. One may use different words but have quite similar concepts, e.g. Swedish "genus" and Norwegian "kjønn" are both translations of "gender". And vice versa the same word may connote different concepts. Or a concept may be vague, broad, imprecise and therefore often contested.

<sup>2</sup> Linason and Holm take part from Sweden in the same specific targeted research project (STREP) funded under the European Commission's Framework 6, Priority 7: Citizens and Governance in a Knowledge Based Society. The reports listed under *references* can be downloaded at: [www.hull.ac.uk/researchintegration](http://www.hull.ac.uk/researchintegration). Holm also takes part in, and refers to, material from the ATHENA II <http://www.athena2.org/> activity *Travelling Concepts in Feminist Pedagogy*, <http://www.travellingconcepts.net/> i.e. the subgroup *Practising Interdisciplinarity*.

- <sup>3</sup> Such a discussion emerged some years ago as special issues of Anglo-American journals: *Differences* 1997: 3; *Feminist Studies* 1998, 2000, 2003; *Women's Studies Quarterly* 2002; *NWSA* 2002.
- <sup>4</sup> The eight countries studied are: Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Norway, Spain, Sweden and the UK.
- <sup>5</sup> "Kvinnoforskning" is literally translated as "women's research" and the concept includes research on women/research from women's perspectives/feminist research. "Kvinnovetenskap" is literally "women's science" and "genusvetenskap" is "gender science". A more adequate translation would be "gender studies".
- <sup>6</sup> This section builds, if nothing else is mentioned, on Holm and Liinason 2005 including references given there to Long 2002, Salter and Hearn 1996; Jessop and Sum 2003, but also a lot on a report from Academy of Finland (Bruun et al. 2005, 22ff) to which we were alerted after our comparative report was written.
- <sup>7</sup> <http://www.hull.ac.uk/researchintegration>
- <sup>8</sup> Especially as they play out in Norway, Sweden and Finland, compared to France, Germany, Hungary, Spain and the UK (cf. Widerberg and Hirsch, 2005).
- <sup>9</sup> Keskinen and Silius 2005: 25f; Widerberg et al. 2005: 38f; Vasterling et al. 2006.
- <sup>10</sup> Carrera Suarez et al. 2005; Le Feuvre and Metso 2005.
- <sup>11</sup> The four nationally accredited scientific areas in Sweden are: humanities-social sciences, medicine, technology and natural sciences.
- <sup>12</sup> Combine for instance cultural, methodological or other forms of barriers against as well as within gender studies as an (inter)discipline in its own right! Then it is reasonable to ask: "What kind of (inter)disciplinarity will be counted as excellent when, in a near future, extra resources will be allocated to a few 'Centres of gender excellence'" according to a proclamation announced in May 2006 by the Swedish Research Council <http://www.vr.se>. Compare with the success rate in Sweden for, mostly disciplinary, gender studies research applications (Ganetz 2005).
- <sup>13</sup> In Lykke 2004 and as a speaker on a Nordic seminar in Stockholm in October 2005 arranged by the Swedish Research Council: *Reaching for scientific excellence in gender studies*.

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**Professor Ulla M. Holm** (PhD, BA) wrote a feminist philosophy thesis in Sweden in 1993 at the Department of Philosophy, University of Göteborg. She holds a professorship in Gender Studies at the Department for Gender Studies, Göteborg University.

**Mia Liinason** is currently doing a PhD at the Department for Gender Studies, Göteborg University, Sweden. She is writing a thesis about gender studies as a critical and interdisciplinary field of study, with a focus on professional identities, methodological and ethical issues within the field of gender studies. Recent publication: *Interdisciplinarity, research policies and practices: Two case studies in Sweden*, 2006, with Kerstin Alnebratt and Ulla M Holm, <http://www.hull.ac.uk/researchintegration>.

### Article III: "Why interdisciplinarity? Interdisciplinarity and Women's/Gender Studies in Europe".

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# **Why Interdisciplinarity? Interdisciplinarity and Women's/ Gender Studies<sup>1</sup> in Europe**

*Mia Liinason*

## **Introduction**

Some years ago, I was asked to be a junior researcher in a European research project about interdisciplinarity. I was delighted, of course, and excited to be given the opportunity to explore the problematics and possibilities of interdisciplinarity, and the relationship between interdisciplinarity and women's/ gender studies. I went to a meeting with the professor who was going to be my closest collaborative partner in the project. In the evening of the same day I met two relatives who also are experienced academics (a philosopher and a scholar in international studies in peace and conflict resolution respectively). I told them that I had been asked to take part in a research project and both congratulated me on my luck. They were eager to know about my collaborators and after that, they wanted to know the research topic. When I told them that I was supposed to investigate the possibilities and obstacles for interdisciplinarity, they both sighed. "It's a dead end", one of them said (the peace and conflict resolution scholar). The philosopher fell silent. At the time, I thought their reactions reflected their personalities, but now I am not so certain any more. Of course the former is true but there is also more at stake in this story. One important aspect of the story is their enthusiasm that I was given a research project - independent from the contents of the project. Another one is the order of their questions: obviously, it was more important to know whom I was supposed to work with than to know the topic of the project. Then, their reactions to the topic are important: they were slightly puzzling and gave me food for thought. Today I realise that their first reactions are an expression of the every day life in the academy all scholars have to relate to. Time and money are basic and necessary conditions for research and their

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<sup>1</sup> The uses of the expressions 'women's studies', 'feminist studies', and 'gender studies' have changed over time and are differently used in different national contexts. Although they are often used interchangeably, the terms are far from synonymous. There are often intellectual and political reasons for the use of a term at a certain point in time or in a certain context (cf Hemmings 2006). In this chapter, I will use 'women's/ gender studies' as a comprehensive term referring to the field in all its different formations and/ or institutional settings.

lack is a problem for many academics. It is even difficult to imagine the opposite picture of a scholar who has a surplus of time and money. When it comes to interdisciplinary research in particular, the lack of time and money is described as a real drag. Not only because it is more difficult to publish interdisciplinary articles, or have one's applications for funding approved, but also because evaluations and assessments of interdisciplinary research are always carried out by two, or more, academics with expertise from one particular, and other, disciplines. The collaborative partners, then, are another crucial aspect of the every day academic life, both for emotional and intellectual reasons. We academics influence each other intellectually when we have to decide what to develop further and what to avoid, in a collaborative project. The resigned reaction to interdisciplinarity, finally, is interesting and thought provoking. Of course, it would be easy to read it as just boredom or plain ignorance, but I find it more intriguing to see it as an attempt to interrupt the current wide spread promotion of interdisciplinarity - or, as an attempt to interrupt the equally wide spread criticism of interdisciplinarity. Irrespective of which, both a promotion and a criticism of interdisciplinarity results in a re/production of either one or the other line of argumentation, which really does not make any difference - other than excavating the "dead end" a little bit further.

At a time when interdisciplinarity has become both widely embraced and criticised by European research policies in general, and in women's/ gender studies in particular, this laconic comment made me think about the importance of deconstructing the binary effects of the disciplinary/ interdisciplinary divide. Just mentioning interdisciplinarity put into effect the re/ production of a stereotypical figure of disciplinarity as a 'rigid entity' with 'policed boundaries' and a 'firm core'. Likewise, simple justifications of disciplinarity re/ produce a stereotypical image of disciplinarity as 'superficial' and 'eclectic'. Thus, I find it helpful to keep in mind that the division between disciplinarity and interdisciplinarity is a historical construction. In women's/ gender studies, for instance, interdisciplinarity was promoted as a reaction against the construction of disciplinary knowledge as universal and rational, against the regulatory strategies that domesticated inappropriate or unruly forms of reasoning and against the power structures that held up the academic system. It was a different way of conceptualising knowledge production in the academy.

Thus, before I present interdisciplinarity in women's/ gender studies - which is the aim of this chapter - I want to emphasise that all varieties of crossing disciplinary boundaries have challenged the extreme specialisation of the established disciplines as well as the arbitrariness of disciplinarity in itself (Holm & Liinason 2005b:7, cf Moran 2002). It is the action of 'challenging what would otherwise be taken for granted as the proper organisation, content, methodology, or purpose of research that creates and defines interdisciplinarity', as aptly formulated by Liora Salter and Alison Hearn (1996:43) - irrespective of the character of border crossing, whether it is more or less theoretically driven, more or less hard bound to some specific body of knowledge. In addition, Joe Moran identifies two "major impulses" behind interdisciplinarity. In his view, one is the search for a wide-ranging, total knowledge à la the Enlightenment, while



the other is an epistemological query of the nature of knowledge itself and the organisation and communication of knowledge. This epistemological query, Moran writes, is occupied with problems that cannot be solved within the borders of existing disciplines (Moran, 2002:15).

Still, the division between disciplinarity and interdisciplinarity is a historical construction, developed as a result of material, cultural and historical processes. Even though a discipline in the practical academic life always is both intellectual and institutional, the term 'discipline' refers to cognitive divisions in research and university communities (Salter and Hearn 1996: 38, cf Klein 1996, cf Moran 2002). Some disciplines emerged as interdisciplinary, with an openness to other disciplines, while others have built stronger borders around a core of knowledge, a canon, certain forms of epistemology, methodology, and more favoured research methods and/ or skills (Liinason & Holm 2006:117). It is important to note that several disciplines that are seen as quite stable in our time are actually rather new and perhaps not that static after all. Take for instance political science, statistics and geography in Sweden which escaped from history, their 'original discipline', as late as the early twentieth century. And in Uppsala sociology came forth from practical philosophy round about 1947 (Svensson 1980:112, 119). Today, individual interdisciplinary scholars, ministries and funding bodies criticise rigid disciplinarity which has led to its isolation and its lack of importance to social and other pressing issues in today's complex societies (cf Latour, Bruno 1993:8). Furthermore, disciplinary borders and the fragmentation of knowledge into specialised areas has been compared with nation-building, criticised for representing relations of power as much as any rational cuts in the body of knowledge (Boxer 2000: 122, Lykke 2004:94).

### **A buzz word? Interdisciplinarity, Europe and women's/ gender studies**

Obviously, interdisciplinarity is a buzz-word in the current higher education policies of the European Union. The Bologna Declaration with its decentralisation of the decision-making process and the harmonisation of higher education is only one expression of the ambition to produce a more flexible system of higher education in the union as a whole and in the different European national contexts. As described by the European Commission, the increasing demand for intellectual exchanges and theoretical collaborations is, among other things, a reaction to a disciplinary fragmentation that has produced research results which nobody but the research team itself can use. Thus, interdisciplinarity is promoted because of the need for knowledge that can deal with the disparate questions of today's complex societies (cf Holm & Liinason 2005b; cf *Green Paper on Innovation* 1995, Latour, 1993:8). Moreover, according to the European Commission the 'severe lack of flexibility' of higher education and research training is one of the four handicaps Europe has to face when competing with the USA and Japan in particular (*Green Paper on Innovation*, 1995: 25, 27). In effect, interdisciplinarity is promoted as applied or problem-oriented research in order to develop international competitiveness (between European countries, or between Europe and other parts of the world). Clearly, the European

Union wants to meet the needs of societies by counteracting disciplinary fragmentation and the lack of flexibility through an increasing amount of externally-funded research. Funding bodies in various European national contexts, as well as the European Union itself have made this clear (cf Holm & Liinason 2005b; Keskinen & Silius 2006).

When interdisciplinarity, flexibility and harmonisation are accentuated in order to increase competitiveness, prestige and financial resources, and when the lack of those goals leads to a closer relationship between private enterprises and universities, alert intellectuals criticise the commodification of knowledge and invent labels such as ‘academic supermarkets’ (Bellacasa 2001: 106). The marketisation of higher education and research is already an established fact. In the UK, for instance, market demands are described as the ‘over-riding criterion for establishing new courses’, which means, that new courses can be established if they are attractive to the students, while others are closed down, all depending on the interest from students (Griffin et. al. 2005: 62; cf Duchen and Zmroczek 2001). In today’s neo-liberal European university system which sees economic profit and the benefit of society as the main aims for scholars and students, interdisciplinarity is deployed as the primary mode of working, to be enacted through the flexibility of scholars, teachers and students and their mobility across various kinds of borders: not only disciplinary, but also national, regional, cultural and linguistic borders. As noticed by Sabine Hark, ministries and educational policies treat interdisciplinarity as a means to deliver goods to the student and labour market and the social sector. This poses a particular challenge to scholars who wish to employ interdisciplinarity as a critical concept:

Inter- and transdisciplinarity thus seem to be able to both fit into models of neoliberal market- and management-oriented reforms of Higher Education and at the same time figure as foundations of the radical and transformative potential of women’s studies, gender studies, queer studies, gay and lesbian studies or postcolonial studies. Hence, one could indeed argue that inter- and transdisciplinarity function like magical signs (Katie King 1994), that is, as empty signifiers meaning whatever their users want them to mean. Maybe more than any other feature to describe knowledge formations they are enormously flexible and elastic concepts that have the capacity to emblematised even contradictory ideas (Hark 2007: 12, 13).

In addition, defenders of a firm disciplinary base (represented by both radical and more conservative actors) criticise recent changes towards more flexible structures in educational policies, such as modularisation, for a ‘simplification of education through less demanding, less

scientifically rigorous, and less intellectually challenging degrees' (Griffin et. al. 2005: 49, Holm & Liinason 2005a: 32).<sup>2</sup> At this point, some of you might ask why feminist scholars still stick to interdisciplinarity. Indeed, neither interdisciplinarity as a market commodity nor interdisciplinarity as a flexor of education appeals to the notion of interdisciplinarity in feminist scholarship.<sup>3</sup> Feminist scholars still favour interdisciplinarity as a tool and critical concept for a range of different epistemological, political, institutional and practical reasons among which the ambition to challenge disciplinary boundaries and extend possible meanings and knowledge practises (Practising Interdisciplinarity in gender studies 2006:63). As familiar, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, the lack of research on women awakened the need for an extension of the empirical knowledge of women's lives. Women's studies scholars thus identified the social, material, political lives and experiences of women as the primary object of research (cf Göransson 1983; cf Griffin & Braidotti 2002; cf Borderias, 2002; cf Birrel Salcedo 2002).

The explicit wish for a holistic perspective on research objects, and the ambition to integrate 'women's perspective' in every disciplinary branch of study, led to a thematic mode of working. The critique of objectivity - a key issue in feminist scholarly work - was and still is expressed in terms of a critique of mainstream scholarly language, methods, attitudes and values as androcentric, ethnocentric and biased (Westman-Berg 1979: 187, cf Grosz 1993; cf Berg and Christiansen 2005; Lykke and Lundberg 2005: 186, 190). This critique of mainstream research led to a thematic mode of working which emphasised the research question as the starting point for the scholarly investigation, on the basis of which theoretical framework and methods were chosen (Esseveld and Davies 1989:17). Focusing on an objective beyond the academy, a wish to change or a desire to transform, feminist work in the academy has also been described as object driven instead of motivated by 'disciplinary' aims, such as knowledge accumulation, for instance (Hemmings 2008). In effect, feminists in the academy choose interdisciplinarity for epistemological and political reasons.

In addition, the institutional status of women's/ gender studies is another element in the discussions about the interdisciplinary character of the subject field. The problematics of its organisation within the academy - i.e. the autonomy versus integration issue - has often been

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- 2 Advocates of an institutionalisation of autonomous women's studies were also critical of the system of modularisation as explained by Griffin and Hanmer: "In fact, one might argue that whilst modular structures facilitated the establishment of women's studies courses, they actively undermined the establishment of women's studies departments. In consequence, the number of staff designated as women's studies lectures or Professors remained small, and from the mid-1990s, decreased (2001:225).
  - 3 Obviously, it is not interdisciplinarity as such that creates the difficulties - the problem is constituted by the neo-liberal system of higher education. But, in effect, and as Hark points out, interdisciplinarity may run the risk of losing its meaning when it is predominantly promoted and supported as forms of applied, or problem oriented research as is the case today. I would therefore like to advocate in this chapter a careful use of interdisciplinarity in feminist scholarship through focusing on why feminist scholars still tend to stick to interdisciplinarity as a mode of working, in spite of the use of interdisciplinarity as an accomplice of the neo-liberal ideologies of the present system of higher education.

described as a significant feature of the politics of women's/ gender studies. Both varieties have been promoted in European countries such as the UK, the Netherlands, Sweden and Finland with explicit attention to the concomitant risks of autonomy - i.e. isolation - and integration into the established disciplines - i.e. ignorance (Duchen and Zmroczek 2001: 189; Saarikangas 2005: 198, Griffin & Braidotti 2002; cf Hemmings 2006; cf Göransson 1983). The subject field has developed differently in different European national contexts, often depending on financial support and organisational structures in the academy, demands from students and the engagement from individual teachers. In the Mediterranean or Eastern parts of Europe, there has been a focus on activities outside the academic institutions, due to the political situation, intellectual traditions and structures of higher education. In countries like Italy, for instance, there has been a strong and influential feminist critical positioning vis-à-vis the institution as such (Griffin & Braidotti 2002:5).<sup>4</sup> In Eastern Europe, however, no feminist texts were translated into the local languages before the 1990s, because of the Iron Curtain (Petö [2000] 2003:50). Petö says about the Hungarian intellectuals interested in women's/gender studies: "Some intellectuals interested in a gender approach were trained outside the country, bringing home the ideas, methodology and terminology. The main question here was of assimilation or adaptation. Adaptation of the most current gender debates, translating it to Hungarian was not successful as far as a wider impact on intellectual isolation of experts using terminology of gender in Hungary is concerned" (Petö [2000] 2003:50). In addition, due to the strict disciplinary structure in countries such as France, Spain and Hungary, interdisciplinary gender studies have developed slowly in those national contexts. In Spain and France, for instance, the development of the field took place inside the established disciplines (Borderias 2002: 209; cf Viennot 2000). Eliane Viennot writes that "as a result of academic rigidity and in spite of the implicitly recognised need for its integration into existing institutions the fundamental calls for interdisciplinarity [in women's studies scholarship in France] appear to have been ignored in favour of the traditional division by subject" (2000:177). With a weak institutional anchorage in the form of lectureships and courses, the growth of the subject field was restricted. As of today, there are no full professorships in women's studies in France (Widerberg 2006: 133, Le Feuvre 2000). In Sweden, the field has experienced a dual development since the mid-1970s as part of the established disciplines and as autonomous departments. Gender studies have been successfully institutionalised into the academy with full professors, and BA, MA and PhD-education (cf Lykke 2004b). Despite a

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4 A critique of an institutionalisation of women's studies was throughout the 1970s visible in various national contexts, where feminists in the UK, for instance, feared a deradicalisation and a "depolitisation of the feminist movement through its incorporation into state-sanctioned institutional structures" (Griffin and Hanmer 2001:221). In Spain, this discussion was taken up again towards the end of the 1980s (Birriel Salcedo 2002:219). In the 1990s Swedish scholars debated the effects of institutionalisation of the subject into the academia on feminist scholarship, and whether the effects of relationship between feminist scholars and the Swedish state have been beneficial for feminism (cf Norlander 1994, 1997, cf Witt-Brattström 1995, cf Holm 2001).

slow start women's studies undergraduate and PhD- courses are today offered at several Finnish universities. According to Kirsi Saarikangas, the field has "risen to an international level and has caught up with the other Nordic countries" (cf Saarinkangas 2005:197). In Norway, scholars received funding for research positions relatively early and the subject field was integrated in the established disciplines but was only recently approved as an autonomous field. Women's studies education in Denmark started in the 1970s, and grew strong in the 1980s. Nevertheless, because of a lack of political and academical support, the courses declined in the 1990s (Gomard 2000: 172, Lykke 2000: 188; Lykke and Lundberg 2005). Many courses disappeared while some were integrated in the established disciplines. Currently Denmark has only one MA and PhD programme in Women's Studies (HSV 2007:33). Nevertheless, a well-developed collaboration between the Nordic countries has facilitated the development of women's/ gender studies in the Nordic national context, due to possibilities of collaboration and transnational funding councils, courses and networking activities, but also because the countries compared themselves and competed with each other: "What one country achieves, the others can also demand" (Widerberg 2006:137; cf Bergman 2000).

In today's Europe the successful institutionalisation of several autonomous organisations of women's/ gender studies in the academy - with full time professors, BA and MA programmes, PhD training etc. - raises the paradoxical question whether this interdisciplinary field ought to be regarded as an actual discipline. Accordingly, women's/ gender studies as a subject field in its own right has also been criticised by scholars who have found it difficult to identify the proper object, or the depth of knowledge in this interdisciplinary field. The feminist scholar Wendy Brown wrote about the impossibility of women's studies in the American journal *differences* (1997), arguing against separate women's studies programmes and departments by referring to the intellectual and theoretical limitations of the field. After the poststructuralist critique of the category women, Brown argues, women's studies lost its object, core and aim of investigation. She describes the development of autonomous women's/ gender studies as an impossible project (Brown 1997:84). Here, Brown assumes that women's/ gender studies scholars struggle for unified categories or primary causes. Interestingly, Brown's argumentation takes the conventional academic discipline as the norm and thus re/constructs conventional notions of an objective world that is valid in itself and can be cut into suitable pieces, to be scrutinised and disciplinarised. In a similar vein, the Danish gender studies scholar Bente Rosenbeck argues that the interdisciplinary character of women's/ gender studies is inevitably condemned to "light-versions" of "ordinary disciplines": philosophy light, literature light, sociology light etc. (Rosenbeck 1999). Brown and Rosenbeck raise important questions that have a certain relevance to scholars working in the field of women's/ gender studies as a subject of its own. However, their arguments provocatively relate gender studies to the notion of the disciplinary either/ or, creating boundaries for the preservation of particular entities, such as certain pieces of knowledge, objects, methods and theoretical frameworks etc. They also

assume that training and research which do not travel along formerly approved routes cannot reach the same depths as canonised forms of knowledge.

Invocations of the boundaries around knowledge have been criticised by feminist theorists who understand the divisions between particular disciplines as effects of historically concrete and dynamic relations of power (Grosz 1993:192). At the same time, university policies and practises in many European countries still prevent the production of knowledge that follows other tracks than the conventional, disciplinary ones. In Germany, just to mention one example, it is still difficult to gain employment in the academy if your research is not acknowledged as representative of one established discipline (Practising interdisciplinarity in gender studies: 67). Despite international recognition of academic excellency, such as publications in highly ranked international academic journals, scholars who extend disciplinary borders find it difficult to get tenure in the academy. Obviously this is especially troublesome in countries where women's/ gender studies is not established as an autonomous field, because the alternative option for scholars in those countries is to find a position in any of the recognised and established disciplines such as sociology, literature, history, where they often do not have the same excellent merits for obvious reasons.

Finally, the interdisciplinary working mode is also preferred by women's/ gender studies scholars for practical reasons. Due to the fact that women's/ gender studies scholars were few in number in the early years, the need to find collaborative partners and establish networks was basically a question of finding partners in conversation (cf Griffin & Braidotti 2002). Changes in society, globalisation and the transformation of higher education policies in Europe, the more developed inter or crossnational collaboration in academic work also established a wider space for conversations among feminist scholars. This was significant for the establishment of meeting points for the exchange of knowledge as well as a further institutionalisation of women's/ gender studies centres in various national contexts (Saarikangas 2005; 204; Calloni: 50,58; Casado Aparicio 2002:237).<sup>5</sup> This is visible in today's vivid transnational collaborations between women's studies scholars across Europe. The ATHENA network serves as a case in point: it is a collaborative network across different disciplines, institutions and national borders.

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5 One example is the SIGMA European Subject Area Evaluation of women's studies: scholars from nineteen countries produced national reports on the status of women's/ gender studies in their own countries. SIGMA was conducted by the European Commission in 1994-95 and two final SIGMA reports were produced: an evaluation of sixteen Erasmus programs in women's studies, and a report on recommendations for the improvement of European co-operation within women's/ gender studies. As coordinated by the Department of Women's Studies in the Arts at Utrecht University, the outcomes of the SIGMA project also became the basis for the ATHENA network (see [http://www.let.uu.nl/womens\\_studies/athena/what.html](http://www.let.uu.nl/womens_studies/athena/what.html), accessed 090114, and SIGMA Report on Women's Studies (1995), published by Utrecht University as part of the SIGMA project).

It has succeeded in establishing a collaborative platform for feminist work in Europe, with the aim to develop new ways of thinking (Griffin & Braidotti 2002:2).<sup>6</sup> The network serves a range of purposes, from offering a common platform for women's/ gender studies in Europe, to creating meeting-points for women's/ gender studies scholars and providing infrastructural possibilities for education and research in women's/ gender studies. Structured in different working groups, the ATHENA network is particularly well suited to scholars who wish to find partners from different national and academic contexts to collaborate with around important issues. The development of different forms of joint graduate and postgraduate training within the field can be mentioned as only one of many results from the activities in the ATHENA network. In this context, the inter-university and interdisciplinary postdisciplinary programme GEMMA has had a pioneering role as the first Erasmus Mundus Master in Women's and Gender Studies in Europe. As a result of the tuning of diverse educational structures across Europe, the eight partner universities involved have succeeded in establishing common curricula in interdisciplinary women's/ gender studies.<sup>7</sup>

## Practising interdisciplinary

Interdisciplinarity is, thus, promoted on different levels of higher education in Europe; from the European Union as a whole to the different European national contexts.<sup>8</sup> It is remarkable, though, that in spite of this strong promotion of interdisciplinarity, there are hardly any possibilities for interdisciplinarity in education preceding the Masters or PhD levels. Pre-university and undergraduate education is first and foremost characterised by disciplinary (Liinason &

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6 ATHENA was founded in 1999. The network "...brings together 80 institutes in the interdisciplinary field of women's and gender studies. Our aim is to unite scholars, teachers and stakeholders from civil society and public institutions in the field of gender and diversity" (presentation text on the ATHENA web-page, <http://www.athena3.org/> accessed 2007/1/20).

7 GEMMA was acknowledged as a master of excellence by the European Commission out of 160 project proposals in 2006. For more information, see GEMMA's website: <http://www.ugres/~gemma/>.

8 Here, I also want to mention the observations made in the research project Research Integration, a joint European project that investigated the possibilities and obstacles for interdisciplinarity in a European context. The project examines the rhetorics and practices in the system of higher education in Europe, and focuses among other things on the contradictions between the wide spread promotion of interdisciplinarity and the disciplinary structures of the system of higher education, understood as resulting in a row of emblematic difficulties for interdisciplinary research. The disciplinary profile of many scientific journals and the decreased academic value attached to interdisciplinary publications compared to publications in journals with clear disciplinary profiles is identified as one difficulty for interdisciplinary scholars (Le Feuvre & Metso 2006: 49). Another major obstacle to interdisciplinarity that is visible in many European national contexts is the application procedure for funding and research assessments which are structured along disciplinary lines (Holm & Liinason 2005b: 23; Griffin et al 2005: 22. See [www.hull.ac.uk/researchintegration](http://www.hull.ac.uk/researchintegration)).

Holm 2005b:26).<sup>9</sup> To a large extent, this is the result of the conceptualisation of interdisciplinarity as an instrumental and not a cognitive activity by policy makers at transnational, national and local levels. As applied science, instrumental interdisciplinarity is perceived as one way of developing international competitiveness in the institutions for higher education in the European Union in toto, and in countries like France, Norway, Spain and Sweden for instance (cf Le Feuvre and Metso 2005, cf Widerberg et al 2005; cf Carrera Suárez and Vinuela Suárez 2006; cf Holm and Liinason 2005a).

Disciplinary specialisation becomes a necessary condition for different forms of interdisciplinary collaboration when interdisciplinarity is perceived as a problem-solving activity and not as a way to push our conceptions a bit further. Nevertheless, transgressive knowledge seeking as a form of critical interdisciplinarity rests on the ability to have openness to the perspective and reasoning of other team members. Indeed, the interdisciplinary perspective of women's/gender studies has also been described as a mental flexibility and intellectual space, where scholars and students with different disciplinary orientations learn each other's language(s). One of those scholars is Marjorie Pryse, who suggests that the "cross cultural and critical interdisciplinary" knowledge seeking in women's/gender studies can constitute a methodology of the field (Pryse 1998:17; Pryse, 2000:109). When working along other lines than those traditionally apprehended as 'disciplinary', scholars depart from a particular research question and focus on the problematics of an issue that can be investigated from a wide range of perspectives. Nevertheless, this point of departure does not necessarily mean that a research project really is 'interdisciplinary'. Often, it is difficult to reach such a level of integration of epistemologies, methodologies and ontologies, so that the research project really results in synergetical effects on methods, interpretative and/or theoretical frameworks. In addition, descriptions of interdisciplinarity as projects that put into focus the research question instead of the disciplinary specialisation do not instruct scholars how to reach interdisciplinarity in the actual working process. Therefore, in what follows I will focus on three important elements of interdisciplinarity in practice.

Firstly, the possibilities for developing interdisciplinary and not only multidisciplinary collaborations are largely the result of the researchers' willingness to challenge their own intellectual habits. Studies describing these interdisciplinary research projects found that its members had an openness and willingness to re-think aspects of their work throughout the entire working process. Research projects in which the research process as such was not discussed

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9 This is one obstacle to the establishment of new interdisciplinary subjects within higher education, because students have a tendency not to choose subject fields that they are unacquainted with from their earlier education. When successful recruitment is seen as one indicator of viability, and as such decisive for funding, this is an obstacle to the establishment of interdisciplinary subject fields (cf Griffin et al 2005).



but taken for granted resulted in “partners withdrawing into their disciplinary shells, and working in parallel rather than together” (Griffin et al 2006: 39, Le Feuvre & Metso 2006:50). The transformation of one’s own conceptual habits and intellectual routes is a difficult and often neglected consequence of the embrace of interdisciplinary research projects. Intellectual openness and curiosity are key aspects of interdisciplinary work. Therefore, the *attitudes* to interdisciplinarity or transdisciplinarity have been described as one of the ‘ideal qualities of an interdisciplinary researcher’, that is to say, the ability to question one’s own assumptions and develop one’s own ontological and epistemological reasoning (Griffin et al 2006:43). Secondly, given the fact that the discussions about concepts, methods and working processes are time consuming, time and money are key to the development of synergies and transformative intellectual work. Complaints about a lack of time and money among interdisciplinary scholars are not only about poor conditions in the academy in general. These complaints are also an important clue as to the reasons why interdisciplinary scholars resign and revert to more individual work than originally planned (cf Liinason, Alnebratt & Holm 2006; Carrera Suárez & Vinuela Suárez 2006:17; Keskinen & Silius 2006:59). In effect, scholars who live in different cities or different countries can only meet regularly if they have funding for travel and accommodation. Finally, the inter- or transdisciplinary researcher often has a multi-institutional affiliation, i.e. connections with several departments/ institutions, which highlights the social aspect in research. Notably, investigations into interdisciplinary collaboration have also emphasised the importance of collaborative research networks where both ‘intellectual and emotional affinities’ are described as ‘critical in long-term research networks’ (Griffin et al 2006:36). The lack of a ‘safe’ institutional base often characterises academic work for instance when younger scholars receive scholarships to work at a certain department for a year or two. This kind of institutional and intellectual independence has its advantages and disadvantages, as for instance the risk of getting isolated. This puts a pressure on the scholar to find a social and intellectual community as a base from which to establish networks and produce collaborative research.

### **Institutionalising interdisciplinary women’s/ gender studies in Europe**

For a further institutionalisation of interdisciplinary women’s/ gender studies in a European context, it is important to acknowledge both the diversity of the systems of higher education in Europe and the different local languages that make it difficult to ‘devise teaching materials that do justice to the local perspectives’ in women’s/ gender studies, as pointed out by Gabriele Griffin and Rosi Braidotti (2002:3). The challenge, then, is to find ways to collaborate around and with this diversification - and the European Commission may be a useful instance through its own ambitions to handle the fragmentation and lack of flexibility in the European system of higher education (Green Paper on Innovation 1995:25). One recent strategy, presented within the framework of the Bologna Declaration, is ‘Tuning’. The advantages and difficulties attached to the European Tuning of women’s/ gender studies have been carefully described by Berteke Waaldijk and Clare Hemmings, who write that Tuning might be useful for teachers

and students in women's/ gender studies, making collaboration easier through, for example, a facilitation of personal mobility, a recognition of the field by international and national funding bodies and an establishment of common curricula or shared courses (Waalwijk and Hemmings 2008:128, Hemmings 2008:121). In addition, Clare Hemmings also highlights some of the risks attached to Tuning and writes that 'Tuning might ... represent the fashioning of a canon of text and methods for the field, heralding its emergence as a discipline in its own right. - There is a distinct danger that Tuning may prioritise those national or regional contexts with greater autonomous institutionalisation of women's and gender studies to date - In this sense, Tuning risks reinforcing models of the field that prioritise certain material and geographical, as well as intellectual, histories over others'. (Hemmings 2008:123).

As the most recent innovative strategy to overcome the fragmentation of higher education in Europe, Tuning might nevertheless be a useful tool for cross-university, interdisciplinary and transnational collaborations in women's/ gender studies in Europe and beyond. Still, the problems seem to remain the same; there is a risk that Tuning can reinforce power asymmetries in the field and that it may 'reproduce the exclusions a tuning template purports to have transcended', as aptly pointed out by Hemmings (2008: 124).

It is interesting to note, though, that women's/ gender studies scholars already have been working along many of the lines that are presented in the practise of European Tuning - visible for instance in the ATHENA network and its ambitions to collaborate 'across similarities and differences' (Waalwijk and Hemmings 2008:128). Consequently, and as a result from the long lasting inter- and transdisciplinary work in women's/ gender studies, where a common understanding of disciplinarity is challenged as well as the division between disciplinarity and interdisciplinarity, women's/ gender studies scholars may be well prepared to engage in European Tuning from a critical perspective. In effect, focusing on the political and inherent compound character of practices of knowledge seeking, women's/ gender scholars may conceptualise women's/ gender studies education and scholarship as a transgressive and political activity, aware that a transformative enterprise of this kind is a practice and a consequence of continual training in paying attention to the various exercises of conglomerates of power.

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## **Article IV: "Institutionalized Knowledge – Notes on the Processes of Inclusion and Exclusion in Gender Studies in Sweden".**

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## POSITION PAPER

# Institutionalized Knowledge: Notes on the Processes of Inclusion and Exclusion in Gender Studies in Sweden

MIA LIINASON

*Centre for Gender Studies, Lund University, Lund, Sweden*

I was an undergraduate student in gender studies in Sweden in the early 2000s. During the first year of my degree I, together with my fellow students, was dutifully instructed in women's studies scholarship of the labour market, state policies, women's history, feminist literature, and received a significant amount of important knowledge about women's lives, the oppression of women, and women's studies. Through a series of lectures on the changes in Swedish law during the twentieth century, we were empowered by the successes of feminist movements. With the exception of the literature course, where we read Gilbert and Gubar and their famous analysis of *Jane Eyre* (1979/1984), the lectures focused on the progress of women's issues in Sweden. I felt proud of the feminists before me, the reform-friendly Swedish state, and myself, because I found the material so easy to follow. At the end of the first semester, a teacher we had not met before gave a course on globalization. She provided us with what I then experienced as very difficult texts, such as Cynthia Enloe's *Bananas, Beaches and Bases* (1989), Grewal and Kaplan's *Scattered Hegemonies* (1994), and a very long list of optional readings. In the middle of the course, she asked whether we thought hegemonic feminism existed. I was astonished. Was it even possible to *ask* such a question? This took me some weeks to digest.

After the Christmas holidays, the "ordinary" lectures continued. We read classics: Mary Wollstonecraft, Ellen Key, and Simone de Beauvoir. We studied methods, theories, and wrote essays. In some of the lectures, though, a splendid teacher introduced Spivak, Haraway, and Butler. I agreed on the importance of these theorists, found them exciting and theoretically brilliant, but it took me a while to realize that their critique was directed at feminists and not restricted to the "collective

of discriminatory men". When I realized this, I became upset with Gilligan, Chodorow, and MacKinnon and absorbed into the writings of bell hooks, Spivak, and Anzaldúa. However, I never reflected on the fact that this critique was actually talking directly to the one year of training in gender studies which I just had gone through: the glorification of the Swedish welfare state, reinforcing the image of the nation through a strict focus on white, heterosexual women; the success story of feminism where power was presented as something that we, feminists/women, did not produce ourselves, but were exposed to. What troubles me most now when I reflect on those times is the fact that even though the critique was expressed in the lectures and the class-room, it was not expressed in reference to ourselves, our own practices, our own constructions and narrations of feminism. And this, I realize, is something that we do not talk about.

Inquiries into the various effects of the relationship between feminist practice and feminist critique are important, not least for feminism's future prospects.<sup>1</sup> In this paper, I explore the connections between feminist scholarship and nation-building practices in Sweden. Perceiving the institutionalization of feminist knowledge in academia both as an effect and a cause of a national project, I suggest in the course of this paper that the production of a particular understanding of gender in gender studies supports the idea of gender as it is re/produced in the national discourse in Sweden.

In order to understand these processes of inclusion and exclusion in the re/production of gender studies knowledge, I begin this analysis with a reading of a text-book that is used in gender studies undergraduate courses in Sweden, focusing particularly on the way in which gender and feminism are presented in the book. In the following section of the paper, I explore processes of institutionalization and discuss the choice of reading material for a syllabus as a result of epistemic negotiations around the content, aim, and foundations of gender studies. After this, and through an examination of possible connections between a state-initiated gender equality project and gender studies scholarship in the academy, I continue to inquire into the role of gender in the national project and the role of the national project in the institutionalization of gender studies. I conclude with a reflection on the implications of this for feminist scholars.

### Course Readings

In the following, I analyse a publication which is widely disseminated in undergraduate courses in gender studies in Sweden. Here, I am curious to explore the way in which feminism is presented in the book, described as an introduction to the histories of feminism. Thus, I am not interested in discussing the possible strengths or weaknesses of the author as a scholar, but want to scrutinize the histories of feminism displayed in this standard text-book for gender studies in Sweden. I also believe that there are other examples of books introducing feminism and feminist theory where feminism is constructed in a similar way. I put a particular focus on how gender is presented in order to study the knowledge that becomes institutionalized in gender studies.

Lena Gemzöe's book *Feminism* was published in 2002 and is used in the first semester of undergraduate level courses at seven out of ten departments for gender

studies in Sweden.<sup>2</sup> In the book, Gemzöe explicitly acknowledges the importance of taking into account the theoretical and practical implications of the issues raised by black and third-world feminists and the intertwinement between sexism and racism; however, this is mentioned first only towards the second half of the book (p. 154). In addition, she explains that “the feminist project does not want to make the traditional, heterosexist femininity the norm for society” (Gemzöe 2002: 165).<sup>3</sup> I would still argue that large parts of the book reproduce ideas of that kind of feminism, articulating notions of a dual-sex model, compulsory heterosexuality, and of sex/gender as a more foundational social relation than race/ethnicity, class or sexuality, for example.

My first example of Gemzöe’s presentation of feminism concerns how queer theory is presented in the book. In the pages where it is discussed (pp. 141–143), Gemzöe gives a brief description of queer activism and theory and introduces the central concept of the heterosexual matrix. She also provides a critique of queer theory’s conceptualization of sexuality as “endlessly elastic” (p. 142). Instead of giving an account of the complex controversies between anti-porn feminists and feminist sex radicals, Gemzöe writes: “Gradually in the feminist struggle, it has become a more and more central insight that women’s sexuality is subordinated and distorted” (p. 98). In Gemzöe’s presentation of feminism, the significant contributions of lesbian feminists in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, where heterosexuality came to be described as a compulsory and invisible frame of reference, are omitted. References to important interventions, such as those by Adrienne Rich (1981/1993, 1986), Gayle Rubin (1984/1993), Monique Wittig (1992), and Judith Butler (1990, 1997) among others, are conspicuous by their absence.<sup>4</sup>

At the same time, Gemzöe devotes around ten pages to mothering and the ethics of care, introducing, among others, Chodorow and her psychoanalytical/sociological studies of children’s acquisition of sexual identity (pp. 99–109). In her studies, Gemzöe explains, Chodorow develops a model of how general differences in the personalities and roles of men and women are reproduced in every generation and culture. Gemzöe mentions that Chodorow’s model has been criticized for being ahistorical and ethnocentric, but concludes that “[i]n spite of those criticisms, Chodorow’s theories have had great influence on feminist studies and debate” (p. 105). Through the explicitly appreciative presentation of Chodorow’s work and the negative description of queer theory, Gemzöe’s narrative stages women as a homogeneous group, across cultures and sexual desires, fantasies, experiences, and identities, unified in the struggle against patriarchal oppression. However, as noted by Biddy Martin, such a homogenization of women as a group imposes an identification “with and as women, over against men and masculinity”, and constructs “hegemonic assumptions about the continuities between anatomical sex, social gender, gender identity, sexual identity, sexual object choice and sexual practise” (Martin 1994: 105). Accordingly, Gemzöe’s presentation of “feminism” paves the way for a heteronormative understanding of gender, reinforcing differences between the sexes, while other social relations like race/ethnicity, sexuality, and class are treated as additive to an already gendered and hetero/sexed body.

In the chapter entitled “Ethnicity and cultural difference”, Gemzöe touches on important points of departure for anti-racist or post-colonial feminism, but does not

mention or introduce those branches of study.<sup>5</sup> Processes of racialization are explained in parallel with the workings of patriarchy. In so doing, Gemzöe detaches the ontological relation from constructions of sex, gender, sexuality, race/ethnicity, and treats patriarchy and culture as two separate spheres/structures. This makes way for a conceptualization of power in which the interplay between various mechanisms of power is made invisible. In addition, Gemzöe underlines that feminism is specialized in theories of sex, which she understands as detached from issues of culture/ethnicity. She writes that “[f]eminist theories about sex [*kōn*] show how ‘female’ and ‘male’ is defined in relationship to each other”. Furthermore, she claims that “[t]he parallels between the anthropological understanding of ethnicity and the feminist understanding of gender are as clear as daylight” (p. 150). Through creating a symmetrical analogy between sex and ethnicity, both epistemologically and ontologically, Gemzöe naturalizes the construction of binary pairs (i.e. woman–man, nature–culture). Indeed, the reason why Gemzöe discusses ethnicity and cultural difference at all is because she wants to bridge the large gap between “a Western feminism and the living conditions for the majority of women in the world”, as she writes in the introduction to the chapter (p. 148). Still, to take this point of departure in the introduction to a chapter on feminist discussions of ethnicity is problematic because this urge for “Western feminism” to investigate the living conditions of women in the “third world” in itself re-establishes a binary relationship between “us” and “them”. As a mode of thinking that has been used throughout the whole of Western intellectual history, binary thinking has been criticized for constituting a frame of explanation supportive of nationalism, racism, and imperialism (Chow 1993; Halberstam 2007). Or, to put it another way, it has been described as legitimizing colonialism, slavery, and oppression (Motturi 2007: 23, 24). But instead of critically inquiring into the supporting structures of those binaries, Gemzöe embraces them and does not acknowledge the ontological connection between power, representation, and materiality.

In the last chapter of the book, Gemzöe critiques theoretical efforts to focus on “differences” in feminism, asserting that such a focus would weaken the feminist collective struggle. Here she presents her own conceptualization of feminism and “reveals” what I understand to be a gynocentric perspective. She writes that “starting from women’s experiences as a group, feminism can critique the foundational values of the patriarchal order of society” (pp. 160, 161).

In effect, when constructing the world from the existence of two groups—patriarchy and women—like Gemzöe does, all investigation of “historically specific differences” will be made impossible, as Chandra Mohanty notes in her well known essay “Under Western Eyes” (1986/2003: 33–58). Yet, in Gemzöe’s feminist vision, women are infallible and cannot oppress each other. To her, differences between women are not significant, because the most important feminist struggle is the struggle against patriarchy. Accordingly, Gemzöe constructs women as a universal category, subordinated under a similarly universal oppression, enacted towards “women as mothers and sexual beings” (Gemzöe 2002: 172). By way of this, Gemzöe reiterates a problematic slide of the national equality project “in which sex is now gender is now sex is now woman’s reproductive potential and the political battles over its control”, as aptly phrased by Biddy Martin (1994: 107).

It is worth emphasizing that this book, for many other reasons, is very popular in undergraduate courses in gender studies and that this presentation of feminism also can be found in a number of similar books, as mentioned earlier. Still, the popularity of this particular book illustrates that the book's focus on the relationship between women and men as the central task and target in theoretical as well as political feminism is understood as a satisfactory representation of the contemporary history of feminism. In addition, as a compulsory course reading, this book has effects on how the future history of feminism can be told and on the further institutionalization of feminism in academia.

### **Institutionalization**

As noted by several scholars, the institutionalization of gender studies in the Swedish higher education system proceeds successfully (Göransson 1983, 1987, 1989; Holm 2001; Thurén 2003; Lykke 2004; Edwards 2007). The PhD programmes, full professorships, and undergraduate education are often mentioned as examples of significant dimensions of the successful anchorage in academia. Over time, scholars representing the field have expressed a wide range of different opinions over what the academic institutionalization of gender studies as a subject in its own right means for feminist scholarship (Norlander 1994; Witt-Brattström 1995; Norlander 1997; Holm 2001; Rönnblom 2003). Notably, aside from great efforts by individual scholars and students, the incorporation of gender research in academia has to a large extent been dependent on grants from the Swedish state—a relationship between the state and feminist scholars that has been described as, among other things, “paradoxical” (Holm 2001), an “unholy alliance” (Norlander 1997), and a “relationship with tensions” (Rönnblom 2003).

In the report “Paradoxical Conditions for Women's Studies in Sweden” (2001), Ulla M. Holm frames the institutionalization of gender studies as a subject in its own right as a development in four steps:

1. The state-funding of the associations Centra/Fora for women's research and women researchers at the end of 1970s.
2. The establishment of undergraduate courses at the so-called women's studies working units in the 1980s.
3. The establishment of the first department of women's studies in 1993 (Gothenburg).
4. The hiring of the first full professor in 1988 (Umeå) (Holm 2001: 182–184).

However, the incorporation of gender studies into academia is also characterized by vast differences—a case that can be illustrated by the three main models of PhD training in the field:

1. *Disciplinary PhDs*: The student is enrolled exclusively within the framework of a traditional discipline.
2. *Double affiliation PhDs*: The PhD student is enrolled within the framework of a gender studies programme, but with an exam within a traditional discipline.
3. *Interdisciplinary gender studies*: The PhD student is enrolled exclusively within the framework of a gender studies programme (Lykke 2004: 20).

Inquiries into the institutionalization of gender studies have until now mostly involved discussions of monetary relationships, exams, and rank of positions. Clearly, though, processes of institutionalization are also intertwined with epistemic negotiations (Pereira 2008). Maria do Mar Pereira writes:

Institutional change and epistemic status may sometimes work in the same direction and feed into each other: an increase in publications about gender issues may contribute to place them more centrally on the academic agenda and bolster the status of the field (Pereira 2008: 151).<sup>6</sup>

In addition, and more concretely, the course readings in gender studies programmes materialize this intertwined relationship between processes of institutionalization and epistemic negotiations. The reading material in the syllabus of an undergraduate course is, consequently, one example of the results of those negotiations. From this it can be concluded that the readings in the syllabus represent a form of feminism that is acknowledged as “proper” (Pereira 2008).

Gender studies is often described as a field characterized by its openness to alternative perspectives, different scientific models, and a mixture of disciplinary departures. Nevertheless, and in parallel with this characterization, references to a common core in gender studies are also made, implicitly pointing to the fact that gender studies has reached a certain stage in the process of disciplinization—both an effect and a cause of a successful institutionalization. In order to understand the processes of inclusion and exclusion in the production of feminist knowledge, it is interesting to inquire into the content of the “core” in gender studies. As discussed above, a particular understanding of gender is re/produced through the reading material selected and distributed to students. In relation to this, it is interesting to ask how the construction of a “core” in gender studies corresponds to such a re/production of gender. It is also interesting to explore how it relates to the role of gender in the national project in Sweden, a discussion I turn to in the final section of this paper.

In the 2006 national evaluation of gender studies conducted by the National Agency for Higher Education (HSV), the overall curricula in gender studies in Sweden were described as being characterized by a wide scope and an open attitude to new theoretical perspectives and disciplinary traditions. Yet, despite the references to the openness of the subject, the evaluators also highlight the existence of “a common core, a common object of study”, explaining that the practitioners in the field share the understanding that

gender is socially determined, that the differences between men and women are not hereditary characteristics ... Added to this is the awareness [among the practitioners] that the categories women and men are not universal abstractions, but appear in a social context in which an interplay with other relations of dominance like class, race, ethnicity, or generation is common (HSV 2007: 28, 29, my translation).

In this quote, various issues are at stake: the conflation of gender with a dual-sex model positions women and men not only in an oppositional/binary relation with



each other, but also constructs this as prior to other social relations, like class, race, ethnicity, or generation—which, in turn, are not presented as intrinsic characteristics of a male/female identity/body, but as relations that could be added on to the already gendered identity/body. As a description of the common core of gender studies in Sweden, this conflation articulates a correspondence between gender and a two-sex model, constructing sex as the most foundational and important social relation (de los Reyes & Mulinari 2005; Honkanen 2008; Arora-Jonsson 2009). Recalling the conceptualization of gender from the text-book, which is not only hetero- and gendernormative but also ethnocentric, it is clear that Gemzöe treats other social relations as secondary as well. Thus, there are clear similarities between the discourse of the text-book and the national evaluation of gender studies in adding to a heteronormative and bipolar understanding of the gendered body.

### **The National Project**

Several years have passed since I was asked the question about hegemonic feminism by a teacher during the first year of my undergraduate degree. However, I am still working on what it means. The question about hegemonic feminism does not concern the lack of knowledge about “other cultures/sexualities”—on the contrary. Even though empirical studies about “other cultures/sexualities” are of course necessary, the mere formulation of the sentence is problematic. Indeed, I would say that such a sentence—that is, that we need empirical studies about “other cultures/sexualities”—is in itself part of the problem, as it further reinstates an implicit referent, that is an implicit “us” in contrast to “the other”. Here, the Swedish/Western/heterosexual point of departure and frame of reference is made invisible. As such, it reconstructs a dualist conception of the world, both discursively and structurally.

As Etienne Balibar has analysed together with Immanuel Wallerstein, the production of the nation relies on the reference to a myth of a common origin and continuity, in which the populations included are “represented . . . *as if* they formed a natural community, possessing of itself an identity of origins, culture and interests which transcends individuals and social conditions” (Balibar & Wallerstein 1991: 96). In Benedict Anderson’s well known theorization, the nation has also been described as an “imagined political community”, that is, we carry an image of a community—“a deep, horizontal comradeship”—between ourselves and the other members of our nation, despite the fact that we will never be able to know most of the other members of the nation we inhabit (Anderson 1991: 6, 7).

In inquiries into the production of the nation in Sweden,<sup>7</sup> several scholars have noted the discursive construction of gender equality as a core characteristic (see Mulinari & Neergaard 2004; de los Reyes & Mulinari 2005; Edwards 2007; Tuori 2007; Carbin 2008; Honkanen 2008; Arora-Jonsson 2009). They show how the feminist success story in Sweden is understood as one of the basic constituencies of a Swedish “we-pride” produced in contrast to the outside world—in turn characterized by chaos, irrationality, and conflicts—and brought out from a close connection between a state-initiated gender equality project and gender studies scholarship in the academy (Mulinari & Neergaard 2004; de los Reyes & Mulinari 2005: 87; Arora-

Jonsson 2009: 218). Kattis Honkanen investigates the implications of this connection for the understanding of sex and gender, and writes:

Although there is a lot of variation in *how* or *what kind of* sexual difference gets produced, it is through this very variation that sexual difference is articulated as a “primary difference” ... The two-sex model is inscribed into different conceptualizations of equality (Honkanen 2008: 213).

In effect, the national project is also based on the idea of sex as the most foundational and important social relation—even though it is not *explicitly* recognized as such (de los Reyes & Mulinari 2005; Tuori 2007; Honkanen 2008). Indeed, Seema Arora-Jonsson notes: “Yet sexual difference is implicit in political discourse, not least in the framing of *jämställdhet* (gender equality) which in contrast to *jämlikhet* (equality) is a term used specifically for equality between men and women” (2009: 218). In addition, a certain form of feminism is established through the institutionalization of feminist ideas in state policies and regulations and in the academy, as discussed by Paulina de los Reyes and Diana Mulinari in their study of the connections between feminism and hegemonic practices (de los Reyes & Mulinari 2005: 82, 87).<sup>8</sup> Exploring how the production of this political and theoretical feminist discourse is closely tied to the nation both as a physical space and an imagined community, los Reyes and Mulinari note the ways in which this form of feminism controls the distribution of material and symbolic resources by an exclusion of alternative feminist visions and histories (de los Reyes & Mulinari 2005: 83; de los Reyes et al. 2002/2006).

In effect, the understanding of gender as the most foundational social relation is present both in the national and academic project. As such, this results in a construction of feminism in which women and men are produced as opposite/binary categories, not only resulting in compulsory heterosexuality but also reinforcing the differences between the sexes. Consequently, in order to interrupt the production of the national project and to carry out a decentring of the white, Western, heterosexual woman, my analysis suggests the necessity of a change at the epistemological and ontological levels of study, that is: an awareness of the constant intertwining of discourses, materiality, and relations of power. Here is where the production of counter-stories becomes necessary. Breaking with the teleology that is constructed through references to a common past and a shared future, the production of counter-stories is an interruption of the references through which the image/imaginary of a national community is produced.

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> This and other related issues are discussed in depth in my forthcoming dissertation on the institutionalization of gender studies in Sweden.
- <sup>2</sup> <http://www.genus.se/Genusresurser/Genusstudier+i+Sverige>, accessed 10 October 2008.
- <sup>3</sup> My translation. All quotations from Gemzöe in this paper are translated by me.
- <sup>4</sup> For Swedish references, see among others Hallgren (2008); Rosenberg (2006); *Kvinnovetenskaplig Tidskrift* 1985: 4; *Kvinnovetenskaplig Tidskrift* 1990: 4; *Kvinnovetenskaplig Tidskrift* 1998: 1.
- <sup>5</sup> Post-colonial feminism is mentioned once, but not explained or further expanded—see Gemzöe (2002: 156).
- <sup>6</sup> Pereira defines “epistemic status” as “the degree to which knowledge produced within the field is recognized as valid, relevant, and authoritative in academic communities” (Pereira 2008: 146).
- <sup>7</sup> Often, Finland and Norway are by association included in the production of this discourse, see for example Tuori 2007.
- <sup>8</sup> For further investigations on the same topic, see also Eduards 2007: 13–31, 243–294; Siim & Skjeie 2008; Hellgren & Hobson 2008; Borchorst & Siim 2008.

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Article V:

”A Success Story: Explorations of the  
Disciplinization of Gender Studies in  
Sweden”.

*Submitted to SQS Journal of Queer Studies in Finland*

*Mia Liinason*



# A Success Story: Explorations of the Disciplinization of Gender Studies in Sweden

Contributions to the 1997 fall issue of the American-based feminist cultural studies journal *differences* (1997, 9:3) provided strong repercussions towards discussions among scholars based in women's/gender studies. Asking uncomfortable questions about the history, future and location of women's studies, the contributions to this special issue address issues that would later be referred to as the 'identity crisis' in women's studies.<sup>46</sup> In this issue, some of the contributions explicitly connect the preceding success of women's studies with the said identity crisis, a connection furthermore underlined in the title to the final article of the issue: Biddy Martin's "Success and Its Failures" (Martin 1997: 102). Here, Martin explains that there is a problematic bluntness accompanying the successful institutionalization and disciplinization of women's studies. Having "carved out" not only a "proper object", but also "specific analytic practices" and "key political problems", she writes, "Women's Studies has lost much of its critical and intellectual vigor". The area of women's studies has been safeguarded from challenges or changes by "the piety with which they are

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<sup>46</sup> This was not the first expression to the identity crisis in women's studies, which had been growing in internal discussions at departments, seminars and conferences during the 1980s and 1990s, aspiring from the critique of ethnocentrism in white, western feminism from black, Third World, anti-racist and postcolonial feminists, and from poststructuralism's critique of universalism.

repeatedly invoked and the familiarity they have come to enjoy“ (Martin 1997: 102, 103). Guest editor J W Scott explains that: “‘Women’s Studies on the Edge’ [the title of the issue] ... connotes identity in crisis, a loss of certainty, of bearings – an indeterminate sense of the future” (Scott 1997: ii). Consequently, bringing up questions of the content, object and aim of women’s studies, this issue of *differences* assembles many aspects of the discussion about the identity crisis in women’s/gender studies. The most widely disseminated contribution from the issue, though, was Wendy Brown’s “The Impossibility of Women’s Studies”. Here, Brown points to the intellectual and theoretical limitations of women’s studies and explains, that she finds “no there there” (Brown 1997: 82). After the poststructuralist critique of the category women, she writes, women’s studies lost its object, core and aim, while postcolonial theory, queer theory and critical race theory went somewhere else.

I find it interesting to note that a major share of the criticism expressed in the debate on feminism’s identity crisis came to result in a discussion on ‘proper objects’ in feminist work. The piece by Brown, which refers to the connections between an object of study and a particular disciplinary locus, conceptualising an object of study as if it was not a construction but already on beforehand a delimited and clearly defined part of the reality (Brown 1997: 83; Rubin 1984, Abelove et. al 1993). Giving rise to many important responses, the contributions from Brown and others came to provoke a vivid discussion around conceptions of proper objects of study (Butler 1994, Wiegman 2000, 2001). However, seen from a Swedish perspective, I find it even more curious to note that, at the same time as the identity crisis in women’s/gender studies was brought up for discussion in a wide range of scholarly contexts, Swedish gender researchers created and mediated a story of feminist scholarship in Sweden in terms of a *success*.

In contemporary Sweden, a successful institutionalization of feminist ideas in policies, state regulations and academic practices has taken place. This development has generated, but is also itself generated by, a discourse where notions of the Swedish nation are produced through



projections of Sweden as an equal, just and good country. As scholars have shown, this is a discourse in which Sweden is marketed as a “champion of human rights and gender equality” (Hellgren and Hobson 2008: 400; Carbin 2010). Notions of gender equality are positioned in the core of this discourse, produced within the frames of a national project and developed out from a notion of a “we” created from a narration of a shared history and future (Bhabha 1993) where ideas of modernity and equality is contrasted against a “them”, situated in past times or other cultures (Tuori 2007; Arora Jonsson 2009). The extent to which feminist knowledge production has contributed to the production of this discourse has begun to be analysed, through critical feminist explorations of the relationships between feminist scholarship and the construction of the Swedish nation (de los Reyes and Gröndal 2007; de los Reyes, Molina and Mulinari 2002; Carbin 2010; Yang 2010). These studies show that despite a wide production of feminist scholarship of, for instance, women’s conditions in the society, it has not resulted in any challenge to this discourse where gender equality is a “marker of the Swedish state identity, which is used to distinguish Sweden/Swedes from the rest of the world as well as migrant populations in Swedish society” (Yang 2010: 60; de los Reyes and Gröndal 2007; Hellgren and Hobson 2008). Exploring the construction of a story of a feminist success in Sweden, scholars show how this is a success shaped by a white, heterosexual, middle-class construction of femininity (Mulinari and Nergaard 2004), based on articulations of complementarity between the sexes (Eduards 2007).

In the following, I aim to study how notions of gender further contribute to the construction of dominant discourses and to the construction of a national project in Sweden. I focus in this article on how the construction of gender as a proper object takes part in the production of this success story, through analysing the meanings and social relations that are presented as core in the understanding of gender. I also focus on how the distribution of particular meanings to certain key objects in the field, such as gender in this case, takes part in a process of authorizing the status

of gender studies as a discipline. In analysing the content of the knowledge disciplined, I am influenced by Maria do Mar Pereira's explorations of the 'epistemic status' of women's/gender studies, which she present as: "the degree to which knowledge produced within the field is recognised as valid, relevant and authoritative in academic communities" (Pereira 2008: 146). Understanding these as practices in a process of disciplinization, I am in this article interested in how the objects of study are constructed, what meanings and relationships that are ascribed to them and what institutional location they are given to inhabit.

### *Proper objects*

The narrative that is produced through the successful institutionalization of feminist ideas in policies, state regulations and academic practices articulates a version of feminist history, notions of feminism and constructions of proper objects in feminism that holds a dominant position in the field. Along with the process of institutionalizing gender studies in Sweden, these ideas take shape as materialized practices, through the production of documents (text books, curricula etc.), the naming of departments and the establishment of positions (departments, research centres, conferences etc.). The selection of the material for this article is made against the background of its effects of importance for the further process of institutionalization. Here, I have paid attention to the authoritative function of texts, which I understand as a function that is given to texts out from the context of their production and use in different institutional environments. In this article, I read a booklet that is produced and distributed by the Swedish Research Council, the largest public research council in Sweden. This is a context of production which is not innocent, nor is it a neutral distributor of proper knowledge but a context which also construct the object that is distributed (the text) so that it is

heard as proper (Ahmed 1998: 18). In this analysis, I understand the account presented in the text as an agent, which means that I understand the account displayed as productive instead of only descriptive (Ahmed 2000: 9), and want to focus on the doing of the textual account in the discourse.

In this article, I argue that gender has been separated from the study of sexual practises, which is taken care of by queer studies, and I discuss how this is an example of a re/inscription into a Swedish national project, in which gender is connected to sex and sex is understood in terms of a dual sex model (i.e. difference understood on the basis of reproduction), and I suggest, finally, that various non-reproductive sexual practises are kept apart from the national project of collaboration between the sexes, as well as from the core of gender studies. The relationship between institutionalization and disciplinization is complex, where the process of disciplining the subject is both a prerequisite and a consequence of the process of institutionalization. This means, that disciplining practises – such as the division into proper objects, the production of a canon or a core curriculum for instance - functions in a double temporality, that is both prescriptive and descriptive. One important effect of an institutionalization of gender studies is the establishment of secure platforms for feminist knowledge production, that is, material resources and a location (Lykke 2004: 99). With an awareness of the positivism that governs much policy work and knowledge production in the academy, Lykke suggests a denomination “post-disciplinary discipline” in order to “go on with the critique of the positivist disciplining process” (Lykke 2004: 99). Because, as also Maria do Mar Pereira writes in her work on the epistemic status of Women’s/Gender/Feminist Studies (WGFS), the “institutionalisation of WGFS must be explicitly problematised as involving not only the negotiation of the field’s access to material resources, but also struggles over its epistemic status” (2008: 147). That is, a request on investigations of the ongoing conversations and practices developed from those who have any kind of impact on what kind of knowledge is recognized as valid, relevant or proper in gender studies (Pereira 2008: 147).

In addition, for the continued endeavour of institutionalizing feminist knowledge production, it is relevant to take into account the function of educative institutions as reproducers of the institutions of the state, as pointed out by Louis Althusser ([1971] 2008: 22). This is further explored by Lisa Lowe in a description of the university as an “instrument of social reproduction”, where the university is understood as playing an “important role in the formation of students as citizens for the nation” (1996: 38). An institutionalization of oppositional subjects, such as gender studies, for example, locates these subjects in a particularly difficult position in relationship to the educative institution because the difference these oppositional subjects can bring about is dependent on a critical attitude both to the academic site, and to the own activities of teaching and research, such as reading texts and constituting objects of study (Lowe 1996: 41).

The distribution of ‘proper’ objects rests upon a particular, but not necessarily uncontested, understanding of the ‘object/s’ in question. Therefore, I find it fruitful to pose the question “what is an object?” like Katie King also asked herself, in the introduction to her investigation on conversations in U.S feminism (1994: xv, Smith 1990: 215). Inspired by Donna Haraway, Bruno Latour and Steve Woolgar, King discusses how the construction of an “object of nature” begins with “an idea”, and how the object understood as a piece of ‘reality’ is created through a process of “splitting and inversion” where “the statement about nature splits apart into both a statement and an object of nature”. Quoting Latour and Woolgar, King continues: “Before long, more and more reality is attributed to the object and less and less to the statement about the object. Consequently, an inversion takes place: the object becomes the reason why the statement was formulated in the first place” (King 1994:xv). By referring to the production of the object ‘woman’ in feminist theory over time, King points at the tactical priorities and the drawing of boundaries that always follow the creation of a certain object of study:

‘Woman’ was solidified and produced as a new unitary object ... first, in contrast with ‘Man.’ Remember the controversies of the early seventies drawing and privileging this contrast in which Black women ... pointedly said (in a strategy to insist on the importance of Woman) that they had been more discriminated against as women than as Black people? (King 1994: xvi).

In the following, I analyse the consolidation of the objects of study through the distribution of objects into ‘proper’ objects of study in gender studies, taking my point of departure from the booklet *Gender Research – questions, conditions, challenges* by Britt Marie Thurén. In 1998, she became the first professor in gender studies in Sweden located at Umeå University. In 2003, she wrote this booklet on commission from the Swedish Research Council, where she was appointed the position of chair in the gender committee, a committee with a particular responsibility for gender research in Sweden. When this booklet was published, this presentation of gender research was displayed as an authorized version officially recognized as valid and proper, supported by strategically and structurally influential actors for the further institutionalization of gender studies (i.e. the largest public research council, and, by extension, the Swedish government). In the short preface to the booklet, the assistant director for the Swedish Research Council and the chair in the Gender Committee at the Swedish Research Council writes:

The Swedish Research Council is commissioned [by the government] to support gender research and to influence the impact of the gender perspective in research. An interdisciplinary committee, placed under the board of the Swedish Research Council has been appointed to accomplish this. Already at an early point of time, the board and the gender committee considered the need for a booklet targeting those who wish or in their work need an orientation about the field, i.e. a booklet that could give an easy survey over the scope, development, research questions and conditions in gender research. --- The Swedish Research Council and the

gender committee expects this booklet to increase the understanding of what gender research is and what gender studies and a gender perspective means and in this way contribute to its breakthrough in research (Leijonhufvud and Antonsson 2003:3).<sup>47</sup>

Still, the above quote also shows the dual process in which these influential persons – judging by their titles and the status of the public funding council they represent – make use of their authority to certify that gender research/studies/perspective in research is valid: the booklet, according to the authors, is expected both to increase the understanding of gender research and in effect contribute to its breakthrough. Interestingly, this very foreword performatively supports the statement about the scientific validity of gender research, and becomes one of the instances through which gender research is recognized as proper, when the authors use their own authority to distribute, and simultaneously construct, the status of the field (Pereira 2008; Smith 1990: 6, 11). In this way, the foreword strengthens and legitimises the status of gender research/studies/perspective.

The point of departure in the text by Thurén, is an idea of complementarity between the sexes and a collaboration between women and men, which results in a gap between what is said and what is done: even though Thurén explicitly points out “identity”, “multi-culturality”, “experience” and “hybridity” as key words in gender research – terms that are indebted to postcolonialist and anti-racist feminism, among others – the only “new” research areas that she acknowledges (in relation to the non-named, assumed traditional area for gender research: a focus on “women”) are research on men and masculinities and queer studies (84). Here, Thurén neglects to refer to the significant contributions to feminist theoretical conversations from anti-racist, black and postcolonial feminists.

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<sup>47</sup> My translation. All quotations from this booklet in this article are translated by me.

Consequently, the two "new" research areas stand out as remarkably lonely, aside the lack of acknowledgement of the important work by anti-racist and black feminists, who in the US were already analyzing and theorizing issues like experience, identity and culture during the 1960s and 1970s. There is a lack of references to the connections between race/ethnicity, sex/gender and class that was investigated in Sweden by anti-racist and postcolonial feminists from the mid-1980s. There is a missing acknowledgement of postcolonial theory as one (the?) significant source of knowledge for the theorization around notions like hybridity and various discussions of multiculturalism, identities and experiences.<sup>48</sup>

In the booklet, the relationship between sex and gender<sup>49</sup> is afforded quite a lot of space, in which Thurén discusses possible connections between biological sex and social/cultural gender. Thurén rests upon the idea of a sex/gender system as it was introduced in Sweden in 1988.<sup>50</sup> In 1988, historian Yvonne Hirdman introduced her version of the sex/gender-system in the *Kvinnovetenskaplig tidskrift* [*Journal of Women's Studies*]. To Hirdman, the sex-gender system was based on two logics: the logic of separation, where male and female spheres were kept apart; and the primacy of the male norm, where men were superior to women (Hirdman

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<sup>48</sup> See, for instance, *The Black Woman: An Anthology* (1970), *Third World Woman and the Politics of Feminism* (1991), a publication from a conference held in 1983, Knokke (1986, 1991); *Swedish gender research in the world. Conference report Örebro 3.11- 1.12 2000*, (2001); de los Reyes, Molina and Mulinari 2006 [2002]; Gröndal (2003), Ålund (1991, 1999).

<sup>49</sup> Translated to Swedish, 'sex' and 'gender' is 'kön' and 'genus'. The translations have a slight lexical difference, and both the singular and relational meanings between the terms differ in different scholarly contexts, depending on the theoretical departure etc. For the purposes of this article, I will contextualise the meanings associated with the terms in the Swedish debate, but I use the English version of the terms.

<sup>50</sup> It is interesting to note that Thurén together with a group of Swedish anthropologists in 1989 wrote an article in *Kvinnovetenskaplig tidskrift*, arguing for gender as a useful concept signifying "the social and cultural aspects of the biological division of the human race in two sexes" (Gemzöe et. al. 1989:1), but arguing against Hirdman's structuralist conception of the male norm, i.e. against the idea of a hierarchical sex/gender system (Gemzöe et. al. 1989:1).

1988).<sup>51</sup> Notably, during the 1990s the terminology in the field changed from women's studies to gender studies, at departments, positions and courses – in spite of the fact that many feminist scholars in the field expressed some hesitation towards the usefulness of a term like gender (genus) in Sweden. That turn of events highlights the hegemonic status of this very interpretation of sex and gender, largely emphasized by the broad similarities between Hirdman's sex-gender system and the way relations between women and men were organized in the Swedish society during the whole 20th century, and were structured along ideas of complementarity between the sexes, where (compulsory) heterosexuality is both a product and a reproduction of the norm at the same time.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Compare with Gayle Rubin, who refers to the double meaning of "sex" i.e. both as sex and sexuality in her "Traffic in Women". Unlike several successors, she emphasized that the sex-gender system not only denotes how biological sex is social sex or gender, but also how the human sexuality is formed in certain lines – how heterosexuality is given the status of the institutionalized norm. To Rubin, gender was a product of the social relations of sexuality and reproduction, supplemented by the idea that the sexual division of labour creates heterosexual male and female, a thread that was later taken up by Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble* 1990 (Rubin 1975, Butler 1990). Compare also with Donna Haraway's discussion about a race/gender system in "'Gender for a Marxist Dictionary" (1991).

<sup>52</sup> Hirdman was influenced by Rubin's essay from 1975, but if Hirdman assumed hierarchies between the sexes in the gender system, Rubin refused the idea of hierarchies built into the system of gender in general. Rubin wanted to give room for the possibility of egalitarian sex-gender systems, and reserved patriarchy for a particular form of male dominance (i.e. older men's power over younger men, women and children). This was a conceptualisation of asymmetrical sex-gender relationships, which Britt-Marie Thurén was also influenced by (Rubin 1975; Thurén 1996: 74). In addition, Hirdman excluded the double meaning of sex from Rubin's model, and consequently developed her system out of an unreflected compulsory heterosexuality.



## *Objects of study*

Early in the booklet, Thurén clearly states that the term ‘gender’ is very useful, and that the negative publicity that was expressed around the term (that is, critique was expressed against, among other issues, the un-reflected heterosexism, the uni-dimensional conceptualization of power and the universalized understanding of categories men/women) really could be understood as a result of the deep and important usefulness of the term. She writes:

On the contrary, I believe that people tend to react against the concept gender because it is everything but harmless. ... In the term ‘gender’ [genus] lies a radical questioning of ideas around ‘sex’ [køn] that dominates in our culture. It might not be that turned to actual, policy debates like the terms ‘woman’ and ‘sex’ is. It rather changes the conditions for those debates. /---/ The term gender points at the fact that it is the whole society and the whole human life that is under scrutiny. Not just the labour market or policy (that equal opportunity research often did). Not only sexuality or love (that queer scholarship mainly does and like older feminist sexuality research did). Not only the production of children or the relationships within the nuclear family (that sex roles research often did). Not only the human feeling of identification with one category of gender rather than the other one (like much gender research within psychology and humanities has done and does). But all this and much more. (Thurén, 2003: 50, 51)

While Thurén in this quote explains how other disciplinary fields ‘take care’ to acknowledge the different areas of study, such as sexuality and love (queer/sexuality studies), relationships within the nuclear family (sex roles research), labour market (equal opportunities research), etc. she manages to both distribute different proper objects to the different branches of research, and to present gender studies as an inclusive subject field – and gender as

the term that is able to accommodate it all. Nevertheless, what first seems to be an inclusive gesture, turns out to be a highly exclusive practise, where she presents one contested understanding of gender in a univocal, indeed, hegemonic way. In the merely staging of gender as inclusive (“but all this and much more”), denotes an ignorance towards the explicit as well as implicit disagreements between gender researchers and the often critical voices from the neighbouring branches of research. Here, again, the continued marginalization in gender research of knowledge produced by anti-racist and postcolonial feminism is the most obvious example in the Swedish context. Thurén’s assumed inclusiveness of gender thus goes on to disregard and repeatedly ignore significant contributions from anti-racist and postcolonial feminists, who ever since the mid-1980s in Sweden have urged the importance of an intertwinedness of race/ethnicity, class and gender, but without recognizing constructions of historiographies in gender studies (Gemzöe 2002; de los Reyes, Molina and Mulinari 2002).

In addition, through the division of proper objects, the connections between race/ethnicity and gender are ignored, with the advantage of a close connection between primarily sex (*kön*) and gender (*genus*). Thurén’s distribution echoes the conversations that were held during the introduction of *genus* in Sweden in the end of the 1980s. Scholars maintained that they preferred using constructions with sex (*kön*), like ‘social sex’ and ‘sex perspective’, instead of ‘*genus*’ (Åsberg 1998: 31; Eduards and Manns 1987: 63; Göransson, 1987: 58). When *genus* became the official term in the field (both by scholars and politicians, visible for instance through the titles given to new positions in the field, changed denominations of departments and new names on courses) in Sweden during the early 1990s, it was presented as a term with a focus on the relations between the sexes. In line with the earlier term ‘sex roles’, ‘*genus*’ became popular among scholars who wanted to focus on the relationship between women and men and the social constructedness of sex. The successive change from the ‘women’s aspect’ and ‘women’s perspective’ of the 1970s and early 1980s, to terms like ‘social sex’ in the mid-1980s and ‘gender’ in the late 1990s,

indicates the departure from a focus on women's material conditions, to a renewed emphasis of investigating the relationship between women and men. Consequently, this is the context in which Thurén presents her view on the potentials of gender. Notably, though, Thurén fails to give an account of the broad disagreements that followed the introduction of gender in the Swedish context, where many criticized the dual division of the world that was included in *kön/genus* (sex/gender), that was further understood as a distinction between social/cultural constructions of sex and biological constructions of sex. In addition, scholars also expressed caution towards the division that would confirm the border between the social understood as changeable, and the biological understood as static and as having been in existence prior to the social (Widerberg 1992; Rönnblom 2003). Moreover, by presenting *genus* as having the capacity to focus on the "whole society" or "whole human life" as if it was something distinctly new from earlier approaches, Thurén favours the production of gender in an evolutionary sense and disregards the important scholarship from women's studies scholars in the 1970s and 1980s, already argued for the need for a "holistic" perspective on "woman"<sup>53</sup> (Göransson et. al. 1984: 76; *Kvinnouniversitetet – vetenskap, patriarkat, makt* 1983).

Most blatantly, Thurén's distribution of proper objects results in a division between sex/uality and gender into different disciplinary branches, i.e. gender studies and queer studies (cf Holm 1993: 70). In effect, this desexualizes the project of gender studies, and appoints the study of sexuality as proper in queer studies (Butler 1994). The Swedish word '*kön*' (sex) is a word with another denotation than the English '*sex*' and signifies both the biological and social sex. It does not refer to sexual practises, as does the English word '*sex*'. In Swedish, other words are reserved for sex

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<sup>53</sup> Even though those contributions most often perceived "woman" as a unitary category, i.e. they also gave some attention to the various and intersecting power asymmetries within women as a group.

and sexual practises, namely the words 'sex' (used in the meaning 'sexual intercourse' and for constructions with 'sex', such as 'sexual partner'), 'sexualitet' ('sexuality') and 'sexuella praktiker' ('sexual practises). Before the introduction of the term 'genus', Swedish gender studies scholars used constructions with 'kön', such as 'socialt kön', (social sex) and 'köns teori', (sex theory) or 'könsperspektiv', (sex perspective) (Göransson 1987; Eduards and Manns 1987; Eduards, Gustafsson and Jónasdóttir 1989). Consequently, in the Swedish context, there was already a linguistic separation between 'sex' ('kön') understood as "identity and attribute" and 'sexuality' ('sexualitet') understood as "identity, attribute, sensation, pleasures, acts, and practices". Similarly Butler detects an implicit understanding of the terms in an American context, in her 1994 analysis "Against Proper Objects", where she analyses the understandings of sexuality, sex and gender (Butler 1994: 2). When 'genus' was introduced in the Swedish context, the use of 'kön' came to be understood as an expression of an unproblematised biology, as a manifestation of male and female, hormones and genital attributes, while genus in return was used as an instrument to analyse the relational aspects of (social) sex in explanations of asymmetrical relations of power (Åsberg 1998: 38). In effect, it was noticed that the meaning of the term sex (kön) came to be more restricted to biology alongside the habituation of the use of gender (genus) (Rönblom 2003: 35). Through pointing at the division between sexuality and gender into different areas of study, Thurén's distribution of proper objects makes this contested separation even deeper.

## *On gender*

How does Thurén conceptualise ‘gender’, then? Early in the booklet, she explains that:

As a principle, gender (genus) makes us in our culture, here and now, think that there are two kinds of human beings, we call them women and men and we ascribe them certain characteristics, which we call female and male, characteristics which we can metaphorically transfer on other things, like colours or professions (2003:11).

In addition, even though this is not taken up for discussion by Thurén, it is not at all obvious why gender should not be connected also to issues of ethnicity and race. As Haraway writes in “‘Gender’ for a Marxist Dictionary”, there are a lot of shared “racial and sexual meanings of gender” which “point to the interwoven modern histories of colonial, racist, and sexual oppressions in systems of bodily production and inscription and their consequent liberatory and oppositional discourses” (Haraway 1994: 130). Later on in the booklet, Thurén develops her perception of the relationships between the sexes further. At this point it becomes clear that she connects sex and gender in a particular way, and that the dual sex system, following Thurén, is produced through reproduction. Thurén starts her discussion on sex/gender differences by questioning any idea of a strict symmetry between our concepts and the “real world”. She argues for constructive overlaps and gaps between what we describe as “nature” and what we can know about it (80). She ends her chapter, titled “Does it exist something universal, in spite of all?” with the conclusion that

Anthropologists belong to a group of scholars who have put a strong emphasis on the argument that gender orders look different in different societies. ... But anthropologists would also be able to point at the fact that the majority of all

societies do discern exactly two gender categories, even if more can occur and even if the criteria for the division varies. And there are usually terms which group the individuals in a fairly durable way along the lines of those two categories. And the divisions usually have something to do with reproduction, so usually, it works well to translate the terms with 'woman' and 'man'. Accordingly, we have something universal here (Thuren 2003: 81).<sup>54</sup>

Even though she takes very careful steps, Thuren finally reaches the point where she agrees on the existence of "(exactly) two gender categories", and that those are separated from each other through "reproduction". In spite of the precautionary measures, Thuren invokes the heterosexual matrix, which is, as familiar, constituted by references to a dual sex system and compulsory heterosexuality.

In "Against Proper Objects", Judith Butler writes about the division between women's studies and gay/lesbian studies made by the editors to the *Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader* (1994). In this editorial Butler shows how the initiatives to mark out a disciplinary territory between women's studies and gay and lesbian studies through the use of gender respectively sexuality, is putting a mundane sort of violence into motion. Butler refers to the reduction of sexuality to gender (which Gayle Rubin wrote about in her "Thinking Sex" (1984)), and writes: "Where and when a feminist analysis accepts this cultural presumption [whereby to be a sex implies having sex in a given way] feminism actively recapitulates heterosexist hegemony" (Butler 1994: 9).

Consequently, the correspondence between gender and sex, and the conflation of (hetero)sexuality and reproduction in the quote by Thuren, are thus once again repeating a complementary relationship between the sexes. This understanding of gender as a proper object takes part in a process of

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<sup>54</sup> Thuren herself is an anthropologist.

disciplining gender studies through which the construction of boundaries between gender, sex, ethnicity etc. carves out a particular space for the use and understanding of gender. It also serves as an articulation and a reinforcement of a national project, working along the lines of gender equality and complementarity between the sexes. Here, the mere construction of gender as a proper object, its disciplining and stabilizing effects, become tools for the further perpetuation of a national story of a feminist success in Sweden – a story that is developed out from an exclusion of alternatives and a de-legitimization of voices that are critical against this very production of feminism in Sweden as a success.

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## Article VI: “‘This Is Not Therapy!’ Un/Expected Encounters in Memory Work. Notes from the Field of Feminist Teaching”.

*Teaching with the Third Wave. New Feminists' Explorations of Teaching and Institutional Contexts*, eds. Brigitte Hipfl, Daniela Gronold and Linda Lund Pedersen, Utrecht University and Stockholm University, Utrecht, pp. 75-95.

*Liinason, Mia (2009)*



**“This Is Not Therapy!”  
Un/Expected Encounters in Memory Work.  
Notes from the Field of Feminist Teaching<sup>1</sup>**

*Mia Liinason*

***Abstract***

Taking its departure in the experience of conducting memory work together with students, this chapter reflects over the (missing) links in the classroom between the theories that are presented in class and the students' expectations. With the aim of exploring how the expectations from the students influence the learning process when teaching feminism, this chapter focuses particularly on the resistance that was articulated in the classroom, understood as an expression of a more general narrative in feminism that revolved around the past, the location and aim of feminist work. This chapter also discloses how the split between theory (academy) and experience-based work (activism) functions as a restraint on the use of experience-based work in an academic context and how an un-reflected inheritance of second-wave feminist consciousness still guides feminist work in its aim to develop a critical consciousness. Moreover, this chapter suggests that the attainment of consciousness as a method to liberate the subject from oppression functions as a capturing trope in feminism which in and of itself constructs women as innocent victims of oppression who are in the need of empowerment through consciousness-raising. Finally, this chapter underlines the importance of making classroom assumptions explicit in teaching, as well as critically evaluating the history of the theories used in the context of teaching.

***Introduction***

Last summer, I co-conducted a workshop together with students in memory work as an auto-biographical method that enables critical reflection over social experience. Things that occurred during this workshop kept me thinking about how memory work can/cannot be used in the context of teaching. The experiences from this workshop also kept me pondering over conceptions of 'femi-

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to give my warmest acknowledgements to the members of the Interdisciplinities-group in Travelling Concepts, a working group in the Advanced Thematic Network of Women's Studies in Europe, see <http://www.athena3.org>.

nism' in the classroom. Thus, while I decided to continue to critically evaluate and try out the use of the method in the context of teaching, I also decided to make myself more familiar with feminist pedagogy and the implicit assumptions that exist among feminist teachers and students. How do we position ourselves? How do we understand and relate to each other? And, above all, how this is related to the theories deployed in the classroom?

Clearly, the implicit assumptions that are made in a classroom which is understood as feminist both connect with the location of the subject field in the academic space and also with feminism's past. But those tacit agreements also connect with ideas about the aim of feminism. What possibilities/impossibilities are created through the ideas of feminism in the classroom? What are the expectations from the students and teachers? What kind of knowledge can or cannot, be developed out from those assumptions? Is it possible to traverse, and even transcend notions of feminism in the classroom?

As pointed out by Iris van der Tuin in the first chapter to this volume, the categorisations first-, second- and third-wave feminism, indeed, the mere idea of 'generations' in feminism, have been much criticized by feminists. Interestingly, van der Tuin identifies precisely *this criticism* – generationality as dualist and teleological – as an Oedipal gesture belonging to the second-wave.<sup>2</sup> In her conceptualisation of the third-wave, she presents a generation of feminists who are capable of *thinking through* second-wave feminism, that is, working with rather than against second-wave feminism (an an-Oedipal relationality).<sup>3</sup> As van der Tuin claims, this gesture singles out a cartographical methodology of third-wave feminism that, instead of using a dualist model, works through dis-identification, in which the second-wave generation is both affirmed and traversed.<sup>4</sup> In this chapter, I focus on how pedagogy has been affected by this generation of feminism, and particularly the difficulties that can arise because of implicit assumptions among feminist teachers and students about the past, location and aim of feminism. Through paying attention to the resistance from students to particular exercises in class, in this chapter I analyse a more general narrative within feminism that can function as a constraint to the theories that are deployed in class. I also suggest that it is important to ex-

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<sup>2</sup> Iris van der Tuin, "Third-wave feminist theory's generational logic: affirmation and anti-representationalism" (2009), see this volume 22.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 27.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, 28.

plicitly address this narrative in order to be able to traverse through and beyond notions of feminism in the classroom. Since the argument in this chapter takes its departure in a workshop where we used memory work, I will start with a short introduction to the methodology of memory work.

***Introducing memory work: a method aimed at studying how we become the persons we are***

Memory work is a feminist method and methodology introduced by a group of academic feminists in Germany, in the end of the 1970s.<sup>5</sup> The first published volume in English on memory work is entitled *Female Sexualization*, and was the second volume on memory work published by the collective of authors.<sup>6</sup> Memory work, as it is explained by Haug et al., is a visualization of how experience interacts with social context and how it is always embedded in particular situations, relations and structures. The method is based on autobiographical stories, where the research collective's own personal memories constitute the material to be collectively analysed.

While the poststructuralist critique asserts that there is no experience that is not already discursively constructed, the memory work collective also acknowledges a similar kind of anti-essentialism. This however is not at all focused on the fractions that are characteristic for poststructuralists, but on matter and materiality and is engaged in a study of the effects on women's socialization of colonized discourses, structures and relations.<sup>7</sup> To this group of scholars, any attempt to fix femininity – irrespective if the aim was to lock femininity in, or if it was to rescue femininity – was problematic. Indeed, every “naturalistic and ahistorical conception in which the body appears as the guardian of femininity's ultimate truths” was rejected by this collective of scholars.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Frigga Haug et al. *Female sexualization. A Collective Work of Memory*, (London: Verso, 1987), 33-72.

<sup>6</sup> The German title of the book is *Frauenformen. Alltagsgeschichten und Entwurf einer Theorie weiblicher Sozialisation*, ed. Frigga Haug 1980, and it is published at AS 45, Berlin/W. Recently, Frigga Haug has published a short article titled “Memory work”, see *Australian Feminist Studies* (2008), 23:58, 537-541, and published the chapter “Memory work: A detailed rendering of the method for social science research,” in the volume *Dissecting the mundane: International perspectives on memory-work*, ed. Adrienne E. Hyle et al., (MD: University Press of America 2008).

<sup>7</sup> Frigga Haug, “Memory Work”, in *Female sexualization. A Collective Work of Memory*, ed. Frigga Haug et al. (London: Verso, 1987), 54.

<sup>8</sup> Erica Carter, “Translators foreword”, in *Female sexualization. A Collective Work of Memory* ed. Haug et. al (London: Verso, 1987), 13.

As a method, memory work focuses on the processes of the social world, and the aim of the method is “to make the process itself the object of discussion, how we work our way through and into ideology.”<sup>9</sup> Through this process, individuals are formed but the social structures are reconstructed as well.

Experience, they write, “may be seen as the lived practice in the memory of a self-constructed identity. It is structured by expectations, norms and values, in short by the dominant culture”.<sup>10</sup> Still, the authors did not regard individuals as being completely the victims of a structure, instead, they emphasized an element of resistance in people’s experiences, in “the human capacity for action [which] leads individuals to attempt to live along their own meanings and find self-fulfilment”.<sup>11</sup>

In memory work, theory is mixed with and becomes a part of the everyday narrative. In this way, the collective of authors was able to define the context – structurally, relationally, practically – within which their selves became meaningful. In this way, Haug et. al explain, memory work functions as a bridge to span the gap between theory and experience. Here, experiences as such are not understood as foundational for the forming of the self, but experiences are seen as produced in and through a social world.<sup>12</sup> Haug writes:

Since it is as individuals that we interpret and suffer our lives, our experiences appear unique and thus of no value for scientific analysis. The mass character of social processes is obliterated within the concept of individuality. Yet we believe that the notion of the uniqueness of experience and of the various ways in which it is consciously assessed is a fiction. The number of possibilities for action open to us is radically limited. We live according to a whole series of imperatives: social pressures, natural limitations, the imperative of economic survival, the given conditions of history and culture. Human beings produce their lives collectively.<sup>13</sup>

The memory work collective wanted to avoid the uni-dimensional perception of power and the homogenizing view of women as victims which was present in second-wave feminism at large and, for instance, visible in early standpoint theory. Building on ideas put forward by Marx, Freud and Foucault,

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<sup>9</sup> Haug, 33, 41.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. 42.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. 35, 42.

<sup>12</sup> Carter, 16, Haug, 52.

<sup>13</sup> Haug: 43, 44.

the memory work collective understood women as active “co-producers in the relations and organisations of oppression”.<sup>14</sup>

This collective of authors understand autobiographical story telling as representations of the social judgements and prejudices we carry. In that way, these stories also serve as models for an interpretation of the world. Through autobiographical stories, the authors attempt to denaturalize existing value judgements – around femininity, the body, sexualization, etc. – and to study the processes by which we become the persons we are. Through the emphasis on the collective, the distinction between the subject and the object of research is questioned, but the collective enterprise also affects the analysis of the memories.<sup>15</sup> Thus instead of developing a discourse of individualism, the memory-work authors stressed the collective in our experiences and in the forming of ourselves.

### *Clashes in feminist teaching: Memory work in pedagogic practice*

I had recently started to use memory work myself, and had only held one workshop when I decided to use it in class. Yet, before that, I had had the opportunity to be tutored in the method by Joke Esveld, one of those who introduced it in the Nordic countries and who also had done memory work together with Frigga Haug. I conducted the workshop together with two experienced teachers, even though none of them had done memory work before. We regarded the use of the method as an experimental way to critically reflect over how experiences (or rather, the interpretations of them) are connected with social context. The workshop was given at an international and interdisciplinary intensive program for master students in gender studies. With scheduled sessions from 9-17 every day in ten days, the intensive program really lived up to its name. The memory work workshop took place on day 7 of the course, which meant that we knew each other quite well at that point of time. But the time factor also involved an element of exhaustion in both students and teachers. The interdisciplinary teaching and discussions demanded a high level of attention from students and teachers. However, the language question was an issue too, which increased the feeling of exhaustion during the middle-days of the course. Besides this, the social aspect also had an influ-

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<sup>14</sup> Carter, 17.

<sup>15</sup> Haug, 36, 48, 49.

ence on the teaching. This was because various kinds of emotions were present during the ten days of the course – from the early days of the course when people were eager to get to know each other, over some days of closer friendship, to a certain level of tiredness in the social relations that occurred on day 7 and 8 of the course.

Partly because of the different levels of knowledge between the students, and partly because of our view of knowledge not as accumulated mass, but as understanding arising through experience and thinking, we wanted the students to reflect on various perspectives of knowledge already at their disposal, to highlight complexities and introduce different theoretical frameworks in order to increase the level of understanding. This meant that the teaching process during the course could be regarded as experimental, and students who were used to lectures on books or theories probably perceived these sessions as a bit confusing at the start.

As a group of co-teachers, we had scheduled the days of the course around different concepts, that in our view are key to gender studies, such as ‘politics’, ‘knowledge’, ‘interdisciplinarity’ and ‘sex/gender’. Day 7 of the course was dedicated to ‘experience’, and during that day we wanted to discuss why experience has been important for feminist theory. The ambition was to show that experiences, are always already interpretations, and as such cultural and historical, but that – despite this – it is necessary to take experiences into account and reflect on them. With the ambition to have the students think critically about experience, ontology and epistemology, we decided that we should start the day with a hands-on exercise in memory work before we gave our lecture.

After a brief introduction to the method, we asked everyone to write a few pages on a concrete memory they had from a particular situation. As one important feature of the method is that everyone shall have a personal memory of the situation, we first tried to find a situation about which every participant would have a concrete memory. We had prepared different suggestions to the group, such as “Going with public transport”, “Getting dressed”, “Cooking for someone else” and “Entering the university for the first time”, but the whole group – all in all we were 26 persons – both teachers and students took part in the exercise – couldn’t agree on a common situation. Thus, we decided to split the group into three smaller groups, in order to find a suitable situation to write about. Later on, it turned out that two of the groups had decided to



choose the theme “Cooking for someone else” while the third group chose “Entering the university for the first time”. Nevertheless, already during the first phase of the method – when everyone writes down a memory from a concrete situation – some students reacted very strongly against the method. One student started to cry, and left the room. She described her reaction to the teacher who accompanied their group as a mixture of different things. Taking part in the group who wrote about “Cooking for someone else”, her feeling of homesickness became too strong. But she was also angry over the method, because, as she said, “This is not therapy!” and at the same time, she explained that she did not have enough trust in this group to be able to take part in this kind of exercise. Another student explained that she became angry because she felt forced to take part in this method, but that she had realized too late that she did not want to participate (so she had stayed in class). During the closing slot, when we discussed the analysis and reflected over the day, a third student felt a need to leave the classroom. During the closing session of the workshop, the classroom was filled with emotions of different kinds – anger, sadness, surprise, curiosity – with the result that many of the students and some of the other teachers in the group, too, felt somewhat sceptical about the method.

At different stages during the day, the students returned to the comparison with therapy. Some were surprised that we wanted to work with this kind of method on an academic course. One student said: “I have been to feminist therapy, and I liked it, but that was in a group outside of the academy”. Why did they return to this notion of therapy? And why was it difficult for the students to grasp the difference between a therapeutic method and this research method? On the one hand, it is not difficult to see the similarities between memory work and feminist therapy – both methods work with the same material, that is, our memories and experiences. On the other hand, that is also the only thing that the two modes of procedure have in common. If feminist therapy has a curative function, where the aim is to heal and strengthen the individual against oppressive structures and relations, memory work has other aims: to understand how we work ourselves into the structures. Indeed, memory work is built upon a profound scepticism against the idea of “individuality”. The uniqueness of experience – as well as the aspiration for consciousness – is stated as a fiction by the memory work collective who wants to investigate how we construct meaning about our selves in and through a social world. So, why did some of the students return to the notion of therapy

when we wanted them to do memory work? Maybe they didn't listen carefully enough; maybe we didn't explain this as clearly as it could have been explained. But the comparison remains, and I pay it some attention here because I think that it pinpoints an unresolved issue in feminism. Indeed, the misconception of memory work, the spontaneous associations to therapy, and the resistance to working with a therapeutic method, reveals some links to the feminism of the second-wave that can stand in the way for the theories that are deployed in the classroom today and of the ways feminism can be generated.

### ***Why therapy? Feminism's past and locations of feminism***

In feminist theory and activism, consciousness has been a central concept, and indeed so during the second-wave feminism. Nevertheless, and as Norma Alarcón writes, the idea of consciousness still shapes the form and content of much feminist work.<sup>16</sup> In the 1970s, Catherine MacKinnon argued that consciousness-raising was “*the* feminist method” through which women are “led to know the world in a different way”.<sup>17</sup> And standpoint theorists, like many feminists of the second-wave, deployed the idea of consciousness without any closer investigation of its history. Theoretically, the base for the idea of consciousness that was developed among feminists was the Marxist idea about class consciousness, a form of consciousness that Erica Sherover-Marcuse smoothly translates into an ‘emancipatory consciousness’. She further defines the Marxist emancipatory consciousness as “the forms of subjectivity that tend towards a rupture with the historical system of domination”. More specifically, she explains this as “those attitudes, character traits, beliefs and dispositions that are both conducive to and supportive of the sort of radical social transformation that the young Marx characterizes as ‘universal human emancipation’”.<sup>18</sup> Still, ideas of emancipatory, or class, consciousness are not only restricted to Marx and Marxism, but can also be understood as a more general narrative in the imaginary of modernism. In a reading of Lukács's idea on proletarian consciousness, Rey Chow shows how the move from oppression to self-awakening and liberation that appear in Lukács's writings on consciousness constructs

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<sup>16</sup> Norma Alarcón, “The Theoretical Subject(s) of This Bridge Called My Back and Anglo-American Feminism”, in *The Second Wave. A Reader in Feminist Theory*, ed. Linda Nicholson (London: Routledge, 1997), 289.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. 293.

<sup>18</sup> Erica Sherover-Marcuse, *Emancipation and Consciousness. Dogmatic and Dialectical Perspectives in the Early Marx*, (London: Basil Blackwell, 1986), 1.

a particular narrative of captivity that Chow describes as a historical and discursive construct characteristic of a post-Enlightenment era. Understood as a metaphor of a general narrative in a “modernist imaginary”, Chow thus suggests that the narratives about captivity and liberation need to be “rehistorized as a modernist invention”.<sup>19</sup>

However, the feminist critique of the Marxist ignorance of women’s conditions led feminists to produce a notion of a particular ‘feminist consciousness’. The feminist consciousness is described as an “anguished consciousness”, and, as explained by Sandra Bartky, characterized by victimization. The feminist consciousness involves a divided consciousness which means, according to Bartky, that it involves the knowledge “that I have already sustained injury, that I live exposed to injury, that I have been at worst mutilated, at best diminished in my being”. But, Bartky adds, it also contains a “joyous consciousness of one’s own power, of the possibility of unprecedented personal growth and the release of energy long suppressed”.<sup>20</sup> Those elements – victimization and empowerment – were also the basic constituents in the various consciousness-raising groups, the bitch sessions and rap groups of the second-wave. And even though there is a great variety in the forms and methods used in the different groups, they were all characterized by the idea that all women share a common oppression and that men are the oppressors.<sup>21</sup>

In Chicago in 1968, Kathie Sarachild presented a model for consciousness-raising divided into seven steps: 1) Individual confession (which was explicitly stated as therapeutic); 2) Generalizations out from the individual stories (to gain political insight); 3) Awareness of oppression; 4) Treatment of personal experiences together with the group; 5) Understanding and development of a radical feminist theory; 6) Training in organising other groups; 7) Organisation.<sup>22</sup> As many know, though, the consciousness-raising groups often got stuck in the therapeutic phase, which meant that the discussions

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<sup>19</sup> Rey Chow, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (Princeton: Columbia University Press, 2002), 39.

<sup>20</sup> Sandra Lee Bartky, *Femininity and Domination. Studies in the phenomenology of oppression* (New York & London: Routledge, 1990), 14-5.

<sup>21</sup> Jo Freeman, “The Tyranny of Structurelessness” (paper presentation at the Southern Female Rights Union conference, in Beulah, Mississippi, May, 1970), 2, accessed at 090220.

<http://www.uic.edu/orgs/cwluherstory/jofreeman/joreen/tyranny.htm>; Göran Ivarsson et al., “Basgrupper inom kvinnorörelsen” unpublished essay Dept of Gender Studies, Göteborg: Göteborg university, 1980, 12; “We are the feminists that (Wo)men have warned us about”, (introductory paper prepared for the Radical Feminist Day Workshop at White Lion Free School, April 8th, 1979).

<sup>22</sup> Göran Ivarsson et al, “Basgrupper inom kvinnorörelsen” (paper at the Department for Gender Studies, Göteborg: Göteborg university, 1980), 15.

in the consciousness-raising groups did not lead to organisation and political action. Besides, the therapeutic element in the groups could function in such a way as to directly hamper political action. Nevertheless, in April 1979, a radical feminist workshop was held at the White Lion Free School. Here, as in many other feminist spaces during this epoch, the notion of consciousness-raising was brought up for discussion. On this occasion, the speakers commented upon the problem that consciousness-raising so easily resulted in what was a merely “confidence-raising exercise”.<sup>23</sup> Still the agreement was, nonetheless, that consciousness-raising should continue to be the base for the movement and the speakers emphasized the importance of consciousness-raising groups. They urged that “all members of Women’s Liberation should be in an initial CR [consciousness-raising] group and should continue with it as long as they continue to identify with the Women’s Liberation Movement.”<sup>24</sup> Already during its hey-day, consciousness-raising was thus strongly connected with its therapeutical function, and this was a function that was difficult to exceed.

Indeed, I do believe that the (mis)conceptions that occurred during our intensive program, where the memory work exercise was taken for a therapeutic session, reveals the deep embeddedness of the idea that experience-based work has a therapeutic function that can liberate us from oppression. But even though this might be valid for the way experiences were handled in the consciousness-raising sessions, this must not be true for all experience-based work. The resistance to the method (“This is not therapy!”) was a complex resistance, however, as first of all it can be seen, by way of association, as a reconstruction of a connection between experience-based work and therapy.

The division between theory and experience-based work, in return, is a well-known division among academic feminists, in which theoretical work is seen as “abstract and rational and male” and experience is represented as “practical and emotional and female”.<sup>25</sup> Here, experience-based work is identified with the working methods of the women’s movement in the 1960s and 1970s, i.e. to consciousness-raising. Defenders of this division often mourn the loss of those working methods, and, in a nostalgic vein, express

<sup>23</sup> Amanda Sebastien, “Tendencies in the movement. Then and now. (Paper prepared for the Radical Feminist Day Workshop at White Lion Free School, April 8, 1979).

<sup>24</sup> Gail Chester, “I Call Myself a Radical Feminist”, (paper prepared for the Radical Feminist Day Workshop at White Lion Free School, April 8, 1979).

<sup>25</sup> Diana Mulinari, “Learning to teach feminism(s)”, in *Undervisning i kvinno- och könsforskning i Norden*. (rapport från symposium i Stockholm, Forum för kvinnoforskning, Stockholms universitet, 28-29 September 1998, Stockholm), 42, 46.

their distress over the successful institutionalisation of women's/gender studies into the academy. Detached from activism's political practices and squeezed into academy's abstract theory, as it is described, the institutionalisation of feminism into the academy is said to have shaped the subject field into the form of a proper academic subject. Nancy A. Naples writes that

the institutionalization of Women's Studies in the academy constrains the development of collective political action that characterized the CR [consciousness raising] groups of the 1970s. With power differentials between teachers and students and among students, and the surveillance of Women's Studies curriculum by bureaucratic bodies within the academy, feminist faculty often find it difficult to incorporate the 'commitment to praxis' in their classrooms.<sup>26</sup>

These accounts of pedagogy in women's/gender studies represent the practice of "academic teaching" as one that builds up hierarchies between the students and the teacher, constructing the teacher as an Expert through mechanisms of authority. On the other hand, feminist pedagogy is understood as an enterprise whose goal it is to develop "a critical consciousness", to empower the students and provide them with "the ability to call into question taken-for-granted ways of understanding their social, political, economic and academic life".<sup>27</sup> Nevertheless, even if described as apocalyptic by Robyn Wiegman, these accounts of feminist pedagogy are really a form of address that equates feminism with the feminist struggle of the 1960s and 1970s, and which results in a re/production of divisions between activism, theory and politics. Wiegman writes:

Indeed, I want to go so far as to claim [...] that any attempt to write movement subjectivity as the field's origin and reproductive goal is not simply wrong headed but counterproductive precisely because it generates *as a disciplinary imperative* a certain understanding of the political (and with it the relation between theory and activism).<sup>28</sup>

The idea of a split between academy and activism does indeed rest upon a dualist understanding of experience-based work versus theory. Accordingly, when the students resisted using memory work, which they apprehended

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<sup>26</sup> Nancy A. Naples, "Negotiating the Politics of Experiential Learning in Women's Studies: Lessons from the Community Action Project", in *Women's Studies on Its Own*, ed. Robyn Wiegman, (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2002), 387.

<sup>27</sup> Wiegman, 383.

<sup>28</sup> Robyn Wiegman, "Academic Feminist Against Itself", *NWSA Journal* 14: 2 (2002), 26.

as a therapeutic method, they not only reaffirmed a particular notion of *feminism's past* through associating experience-based work with therapy, they also reacted against the *location* of this exercise. Through their referral of “feminist therapy”/“experience-based work” to a space outside of the academy, the students expressed their expectations that academic feminism would work with theory (which was understood as different from experience-based work). Consequently, since it was conceived as a kind of work that “belongs” to an arena outside of the academy, some of the students refused to take part in an exercise that worked with our own stories as the material.

In effect, when efforts to transgress and travel beyond certain notions of feminism are not explicitly commented upon, it may very well be that, they are mistaken for precisely that which they wish to overcome. In a teaching context, the implications of those implicit notions of feminism's past and of feminism's location, can result not only in missing links but also in problematic misconceptions about the theories that are deployed in class – which also was the case when the students (mis)conceived memory work as a therapeutic method seeking a reconstruction of the subject as the origin, aiming to strengthen the subject against oppressive structures and relations.

### ***Dislocations: the investment in human consciousness***

Nevertheless, our efforts to have our students to reflect over their own intertwinedness in the dominant structures – instead of having them reach consciousness and be liberated from those pressing structures – resulted in resistance from our students. In addition to the student's ideas of feminism's past and location, that became disrupted through the introduction of this exercise, I would argue, as also Robyn Wiegman has argued, that this resistance also is connected to notions of a more general investment in human consciousness. But this investment, expressed through a search for the subject-of-consciousness, is not only present in academic feminism – it is also the meaning of the humanities at large and other interpretative sciences.<sup>29</sup> Students and teachers in women's/gender studies have been trained in and themselves taken part in the re/production of this meaning of consciousness at different locations in the academy. In effect, they have been trained to give the achievement of consciousness a value, but they have not been asked to critically historicize the notion of conscious-

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<sup>29</sup> Wiegman, 22, 28.

ness as built upon Western, individualist norms. In addition, the widespread belief that women's/gender studies will provide students with knowledge about how to liberate the subject from oppressive structures, relations and norms, feed the very idea that it is through the aspiration for consciousness that the journey can start. Nevertheless, there is an implicit agreement between students and teachers to seldom explicitly mention the reaching of consciousness as a goal. On the other hand it is mirrored in the learning practises, through students' personal testimonies of experiences of oppression and teachers' assignments where students are asked to reflect over their own experiences. Consequently, situated in a larger discourse – politically, socially and geographically – where individuation and consciousness is proclaimed as *the* liberating strategy – the students in our intensive program had difficulties with the aim of memory work. Instead of giving them support in working towards a larger individual independence from experiences of oppression, from dominant structures and social pressure, we actually asked them to do the opposite – to investigate and understand the hegemonies at work, and their involvement in them.

Interestingly, Susan Heald, a Canadian feminist scholar, who has been doing memory work in her classes, realized that her students – who were mainly white, middle-class and heterosexual – did not need to be empowered through consciousness-raising. What they needed was “an analysis, a decentering of the ‘self’ and a recognition of how that ‘self’ has been formed in opposition to and through the exclusion of an imagined Other.”<sup>30</sup> In her apprehension of consciousness-raising as one of the working methods *prima facie* of the second-wave feminism, Heald marks a distance to the focus on consciousness in Western feminism, and urges her students to investigate their own experiences, not to find the sublime figure of Western feminism, the “real” woman, but to explore dominant structures and their own participation in the re/construction of them.

Notably, because of an inability, or unwillingness even, to examine one's own involvement in power structures, social processes and its material effects, the efforts to (re)create woman as a conscious subject has supported a silencing or exclusion of non-Western, lesbian or working class women Susan Heald explains as follows:

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<sup>30</sup> Susan Heald, “‘Just My Opinion’” Women's Studies, Autobiographies and the University”, in *Troubling Women's Studies. Pasts, Presents, and Possibilities* ed. Susan Heald et. al (Toronto, Ontario: Sumach Press, 2004), 48, cf Haug, 41, 48, 49.

“Empowerment has, however, sometimes, been taken to mean the promotion of equality of opportunity and participation. Similarly, empowerment has been used in other contexts to imply the development of individualism and the skills required for self-assertion and advancement rather than any analysis of the roots of powerlessness and the structures of systemic oppression.”<sup>31</sup>

In effect, the articulation of women and men as opposites in the consciousness-raising working groups implies a binary between women and men, which also is upheld and strengthened through this mere articulation. The notion of women as innocent victims of patriarchal structures also homogenizes women and treats them as infallible. But the mere aim of consciousness-raising, to reach liberation from oppression or captivity, takes its departure in the idea of the subject as “Origin, Essence and Cause”, like Althusser formulates it<sup>32</sup>. As such, the autonomous, self-conscious subject at the core of the ideals of the Enlightenment was the privilege of men for many years and they also were the subjects of knowledge. Subsequently, although, feminist work made women the subject of knowledge, they only scantily questioned the “inherited view of consciousness”.<sup>33</sup>

Curiously, the idea of consciousness-raising was initially also used by memory workers. As described by the memory work collective, they start off from the idea of making the process of socialization conscious, because “this makes clear the process whereby we have absorbed existing social scientific theories, ideologies and everyday opinions”.<sup>34</sup> Nevertheless, having done this, they start to question the usefulness of consciousness-raising and decide to distance themselves from the idea of consciousness. Through the explicit urge to find a “less predetermined way of seeing” they describe how they try to combine both the knowledge from everyday life and scholarly, theoretical knowledge, aiming to a “displacement of the problem”.<sup>35</sup> Thus, even though they depart from in the idea of consciousness, they do not find any solution to the problem in raising the individual’s consciousness. Instead, they turn to the Foucauldian idea of discourses, to investigations into the colonizing effects from “theories, explanations, value judgements” and in explorations of “colonized forms” of perception<sup>36</sup> in order to investigate how individuals work themselves into

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<sup>31</sup> Heald, 47.

<sup>32</sup> Althusser quoted in Alarcón , 290, Alarcón., 295.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, 289.

<sup>34</sup> Haug, 54.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, 54.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid, 55.



social, cultural and economical structures. Placed within a Marxist framework, the collective of authors points out how the individual is tied up in these structures. Simultaneously, and inspired by Althusser's theorizations of ideology, they emphasize the fact that the individual is not only a victim of the social relations, but an active agent in the forming of these social relations. Haug explains that this results in a situation where women, for instance, can defend the idea of life-long monogamous marriages even though the marriage is loveless and very boring. If one does not want to reject the belief in love and if life-long monogamous marriages are the only accepted form of love in the society in question, the decision to defend the idea of life-long monogamous marriages is understood by Haug et al. as one way to find self-fulfilment.<sup>37</sup> The view of women as victims, which was predominant during second-wave feminism, is criticized by the collective of authors, who instead emphasize a focus on "beings who desire and have a capacity to become something they are not as yet".<sup>38</sup> Herewith, they distance themselves from structuralism's fixation with class, gender and race as different but immutable social and cultural positions and focus instead on the multiple sites that are involved in the production of positions/relations such as class, gender and race.<sup>39</sup> Seeing that a number of dualisms, such as the division of labour between head/hand, the division of mind/body, and the division between theoretical/practical, leads to an incapacity to explain the world, the collective of authors breaks with those dualisms, hoping to "produce articulations of the relations between human beings and the world that overcome the present relations of class, race and sexual domination".<sup>40</sup> In effect, Haug writes, the method results in a "displacement of the problem"<sup>41</sup> and a decentering of the (Westernized) self.

### *Feminism and the trope of consciousness*

During the day of the workshop, we were divided into three small groups when we wrote and analysed our memories. In the group who decided to write about "Entering the university for the first time", the writing phase and analysis developed without any unexpected reactions. In the group, there was a slight

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid, 35, 42.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, 25.

<sup>39</sup> On this point, the collective of authors were inspired by Angela McRobbie's work on girl culture, which was understood as a culture of femininity which the girls help to reproduce, Carter, 16, 17.

<sup>40</sup> Haug, 28.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid, 55.

fascination with the strong commonalities between the different memories – even though this was the most heterogeneous group of them all, considered in terms of age, ethnicity, sex and sexuality. Curiously, we noted that no one had mentioned anything about knowledge in their memories of entering the university for the first time, but that all the memories were centred on inclusion/exclusion in a social context. The two groups who wrote about “Cooking for someone else” found that the topic brought about strong emotions, both in the form of spontaneous emotional attachment to the memory itself, and in the form of a curious resistance to the stereotypically gendered actions that the memories/analysis exposed (after all, many of the participants had a deep investment in gender equality). The discussion in one of those groups – the group where one student started to cry – came to focus on how to handle issues of ethics in teaching/research. The participators in all the groups, were fascinated, nonetheless, by the possibility to treat the memories – also their own memories – as objects, and not as personal testimonies of an experience to which anyone ‘owned’ the ‘right’ interpretation. Even though some of the students also found this painful, it gave them an insight into the vulnerability of research subjects when collecting and analysing narratives from interviews, for example. When the three small groups reassembled into one large group after a short break, all the groups commented upon the process. Some were fascinated by the exercise because they had learnt a lot, theoretically, methodologically and ethically, while others were critical and found the method too experimental for this kind of group. This was because of the lack of trust between members of the group, because the workshop was mandatory, and because of the expectations attached to an academic course in gender studies. Afterwards, some students reported that they had found the closing session very problematic and that they had problems with listening to the conversation, much less contributing to it.

At the end of the day, the mix of emotions, confusion, anger, surprise and curiosity in the group was thought-provoking – especially considering that the theoretical point of departure of the method (that we work ourselves into social structures) really is everyday-knowledge for most of the students (that is, Master students in gender studies). This is particularly curious when thinking of how much emotions and personal narratives ‘regular’ lectures about gender usually raise. On such occasions, students are often very keen to share their own narratives of gendered experiences, to support or challenge the teacher’s argument.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Mulinari, 43.

In this workshop, though, the students reacted with resistance to the sharing of personal experiences. Why did this happen? In the short introduction to the method before we divided into groups and started to write, we described how memory work marks a distance from the subject's aspiration for consciousness of oppression. Instead of aspiring to liberate the subject from subordination, we underlined, this method give us an opportunity to investigate how we create ourselves through social structures, but also to understand our participation in the creation of those social structures.

Considering how some of the reactions against the method, as described in earlier sections of this chapter, did construct a particular relation to feminism's past (theory versus experience-based work), where ideas of the "right" location of a certain kind of feminism were developed (the academy or outside of the academy), it is clear that some of the students found it difficult to accept the way this method wanted to blur the boundaries between experience-based work, theory, academy and the world outside the academy. In addition, when the mere *aim with feminism* is understood as a liberation of women from oppression, I can imagine that the ideas of memory work are even more difficult to grasp. In that case, the reaching of self-consciousness – or, more correctly, to learn its methods – will be understood as the aim with the feminism that is deployed in the classroom. In effect, such a perspective gives the reaching of consciousness in feminism status as a safe trajectory, even if it is not the "right" one. But if this trajectory is mistaken for feminism, a deviation from the beaten track would involve a fear that feminism will loose track of its aim.

While much of the theorizing on the reaching of consciousness in feminist theory refers back to Catharine MacKinnon, who stated that consciousness raising was *the* feminist method, as earlier mentioned, I here want to address two more recent readings of MacKinnon's theory of consciousness. Through this, I aim to give the debate around the notion of consciousness in feminist theory a contextual frame but also to inquire how consciousness has been understood in those two rejoinders to MacKinnon's theory, and also in what ways those understandings can contribute to an understanding of the reactions from the students at the course.

In "Eccentric Subjects: Feminist Theory and Historical Consciousness", Teresa de Lauretis comments upon MacKinnon's version of radical feminism. Here she understands "consciousness as product and the form of feminist

practice”.<sup>43</sup> She explains MacKinnon’s thoughts about consciousness raising in the following words: “MacKinnon’s suggestion that feminist consciousness can grasp the personal, subjective effects of class or race relations, as it knows the personal yet collective effects of gender relations, is one I find more hopeful [than Althusser’s understanding of the link between ideology and consciousness] as well as more accurate and consonant with my own view of the position of the feminist subject vis-a-vis the ideology of gender”.<sup>44</sup> Still, she argues, MacKinnon’s emphasis on heterosexuality and its connections to male power locks the theory of consciousness inside this very structure. Thus, de Lauretis suggests: “I propose that a point of view, or an eccentric discursive position outside the male (hetero)sexual monopoly of gender/knowledge ... is necessary to feminism at this point in history”.<sup>45</sup> Consequently, she suggests that we turn to the idea of “political consciousness” which she understands as a much less pure position and as such ideologically intertwined with the oppressive orders and actions. This form of consciousness, de Lauretis continues, “is neither unified nor singly divided between positions of masculinity and femininity, but multiply organized across positions on several axes of difference and across discourses and practices that may be, and often are, mutually contradictory”.<sup>46</sup> de Lauretis concludes with the argument that consciousness can only exist historically “in the here and now, as the consciousness of a ‘something else’” – as an excessive critical position that travels across boundaries between “sociosexual identities and communities, between bodies and discourses”.<sup>47</sup>

While critiquing MacKinnon for locking the theory of consciousness within a heterosexual framework, de Lauretis chooses to retain the idea of the subject as the origin, through a creation of an eccentric subject. Here, de Lauretis further develops her ideas that are built upon assumptions of a subject that is “conscious about something else” and thus understood as existing before the encounter with the boundaries that the same subject is travelling between or across. Even though she acknowledges a certain element of “impurity” in this form of consciousness (through the intermingledness between consciousness and oppressive orders) the eccentric subject who is expected to reach this consciousness is nonetheless conceived as something that

<sup>43</sup> Teresa de Lauretis, “Eccentric Subjects: Feminist Theory and Historical Consciousness”, in *Feminist Studies*, vol. 16, issue 1 (1990), 120.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid*, 121.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid*, 123.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid*, 130.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid*, 133, 134.

precedes the encounter, and not as constituted through the encounters with the "identities", communities", "bodies" and "discourses" that she is referring to. Logically, it is this non-normative subject that de Lauretis urges me to reach consciousness about.

In her *Cyborg manifesto*, also Donna Haraway presents a reading of MacKinnon's theory of consciousness. Here, Haraway describes MacKinnon's feminism as an authoritarian version of radical feminism. Indeed, she explains it as "a caricature of the appropriating, incorporating, totalizing tendencies of Western theories of identity grounding action".<sup>48</sup> To Haraway, MacKinnon understands men's sexual exploitation of women as the cause for the structure of sex and sexuality. But the implications of this, Haraway continues, is that MacKinnon builds her ontology upon a non-being, where someone else's desire – not the self's labour – forms the origin of "woman". This "teleological logic" in MacKinnon's theory, Haraway adds, results in an apocalyptic theory of experience, where difference is erased or policed.<sup>49</sup>

Through a construction of a subject that is not categorized as masculine or feminine, homosexual or heterosexual on beforehand, de Lauretis as well wanted to avoid this ignorance of difference in MacKinnon's theory. But while de Lauretis kept hold of the (eccentric) subject as origin in her idea of the "political consciousness", Haraway understands the subject as constituted through the labour of the self. Instead of understanding the reaching for consciousness as a search for the discovery of a subject's "true" history aside, beyond or in opposition to, the propaganda from the ruling regime, Haraway further develops the Marxist view of *praxis*, in which the subject is understood as constituted through its encounters with the social world and where consciousness is described as "an achievement".<sup>50</sup>

While Haraway then is critiquing all possible ideas of origin and innocence in her *Cyborg Manifesto*, where she understands the attainment of consciousness as a painful realization of one's own participation in oppressive structures and practices, both MacKinnon and de Lauretis re/construct a narrative of consciousness which functions as a capturing trope in feminism. This is a trope that in itself reproduces a fiction of the innocent subject, who

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48 Donna Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century," in *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (Routledge: New York, 1991), 159, <http://www.stanford.edu/dept/HPS/Haraway/CyborgManifesto.html> (accessed February 20, 2009 )

49 Ibid, 150.

50 Ibid.

has been exposed to subjection by oppressive structures in the production of which she herself has not taken part. In MacKinnon's version, this narrative offers a spirit of unity among women, through the establishment of a common ground in feminism and activated by an awareness of (internalized) oppression. This could also be phrased as: women are subordinated by heteropatriarchy. In de Lauretis' engagement with MacKinnon's theory, the idea of political consciousness offers a common goal in feminism, in which the aspiration for knowledge of a subject, travelling across a range of possible oppressive relations, can be reached through consciousness. Both versions thus reproduce the same trope, where subjects – culturally, historically and socially – are constructed as victims of injustice and oppression. In effect, this trope creates a narrative of an original (partially) innocent subject, who encounters oppression and needs to attain consciousness of those oppressive structures/relations/practices, in order to be liberated. Thinking through the deep embeddedness in feminist theory of consciousness as a method for liberating the (innocent) subject from oppression, makes it thus possible to understand the resistance towards memory work as an expression of an apocalyptic anxiety over a fear that a deviation from the well-worn path of Western, heterosexual feminism would result in a loss of those constituencies that makes feminism feminist.

### ***Concluding note: teaching through feminism***

In this chapter, while thinking through these experiences from a workshop with students on memory work, I have also shown how implicit assumptions about feminism's past, location and aim may stand in the way for the theories that are deployed in class. In order for feminism to regenerate itself, it is thus important to establish possibilities to deploy new theories in the classroom, theories that can work through and traverse the ideas of feminism that the students are more familiar with. Thus, I want underline the importance of making assumptions, like these I have outlined in this chapter, explicitly in the context of teaching. In addition, it is also important to be careful with how exercises, lectures and theories are presented and developed, and to critically evaluate the context and history of the concepts used.

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# Epilogue

In the very beginning of this research process, when it was nothing more than a five pages description, I applied for a PhD-position in gender studies. I was invited to an interview for the job, and the two professors – both feminist academics – who interviewed me asked me to describe the project I wanted to work with. “I want to study practices of knowledge production in gender studies”, I replied. I was further asked to provide a more detailed description and the focus of my interest, as well as an indication of how I planned to carry out the prospective study. I tried to respond, in a polite and moderated manner – it was a job interview, after all. Finally, one of the professors asked why I wanted to do this project. Up until that point, the conversation had been easy going, but this question threw me a bit off balance. I quickly calculated my possibilities: I could either make something up and maintain my possibilities of getting the job, or I could describe my real motives, which could see my chances at the job becoming dim. Concealing my real motives, however, would not only be tantamount to lying, it would present future challenges for me to carry out such a project should I actually get the job, and it would also be far away from the radical political feminist practice I wanted to carry out, so I supplied: “I want to do this project because I think that academic feminists in Sweden sometimes are too self-righteous”, I said, blushing.

The experience of self-righteousness among feminists in Sweden was, to put it bluntly, the very first impulse that led me in to this project. This realisation continued to intrigue me, and revived my interest in studying feminist knowledge production. In this thesis, I have argued that the institutionalization of gender studies has succeeded in establishing an oppositional space for radical knowledge production in the academy. I

have, however, also discussed the institutionalization of feminist knowledge production as an ongoing process and a paradoxical project. This is a process, where co-optation and de-radicalization exist in parallel with the performance of an oppositional and transformative enterprise. I have thus suggested in this study, that it depends on the practices carried out, if this space is to be visualised as radical and oppositional or if it submits to the demands of the university, risking to subordinate feminist radical aims to narrow definitions of science or to the need of state institutions of creating and regulating submissive gender citizens. I have shown that a reflexive attitude has characterized the feminist debates around the efforts to fix proper objects, proper names etc. and I have explained this from the point of view of feminist knowledge production as oppositional. Nonetheless, I have also illuminated that feminist knowledge production takes part in different discourses – both alternative and dominant discourses – and I have argued that feminist knowledge production also feeds into dominant discourses. Through exclusionary practices, such as consent, ignorance or marginalization, alternative voices have been silenced or pushed to the margins of feminist knowledge production. I have shown that these are practices that take place in the subject area as institutionalized into the academy, through analyses of notions of feminism, the construction of objects of study and narratives of feminism's history. While I also understand feminist practices that feed into dominant discourses as motivated by an urge to realise feminism's transformative aim, I have underlined the importance of a critical self-reflexive approach in feminist knowledge production – seeing that also feminist practices can be exclusionary, marginalizing and silencing, so also under the appearance of being transformative. In effect, this study is not a tribute to those branches of feminism that are positioned as alternative or radical, such as queer or postcolonial feminism. Instead, I advocate that the same critical approach should also be used in these branches of feminist knowledge production. Related to this, is the discussion on the important function of critical intellectual conversations, which I understand –

particularly against the background of the lack of those and of the striving for consensus in a Swedish feminist intellectual environment – as important tools that have the potential both to combat dominant practices and to regenerate feminist knowledge production. I have understood the role of critique as an act of caring for feminism. Finally, I have argued that feminism's transformative potential can be realised through a destabilization of feminism. As I have discussed, the success story of feminism in Sweden results in problematic paradoxes for the feminist endeavour of bringing about change. Still, though, and particularly because feminism in Sweden really is a success, it is not at all preposterous to ask – like the professor at the job interview did – about the motive behind a critical exploration of feminist knowledge production in this context, at this point in time: things are going fine, why not just be happy over this progress? However, as a hegemonic discourse, the success story does not only contribute to dominant discourses which itself de-legitimize critique, but it is also a producer of certain norms and normative identities – such as happiness, for example (we shall be happy because the feminist project develops successfully). In this dissertation, I have illuminated the production of a feminist success story in Sweden as a heroic narrative, based upon certain limitations and fixations of feminism in time and space. Feminism's subject is here constructed as a white, western, heterosexual woman, as the working mother, who is collaborative to the state on the labour market and to her husband in the household. Here, complementarity between the sexes is produced as one of the core constituencies, which is an idea based upon a dual sex model where sex is understood as a more basic social relation than, for example, class, sexuality or ethnicity. In this understanding, gender is produced as a proper object and is given a particular, fixed content. Also, certain notions of feminism's past, present and future are established, which opens up some modes of working but discloses others. Accordingly, I have suggested that feminism's transformative potential can be put into practice through a destabilization of feminism itself.

In the most profound understanding, such a destabilization means to actively perform a critical reflection over one's own intellectual comfort zones. Therefore, it is also related to the personal motivation behind the feminist project. Hence, destabilization does not seek the boosting moments, but continues to critically inquire into the boundaries established and the silences produced by one's own knowledge producing practices. It's ironic, because the very moment I feel happy and content, is also the moment when I fail to critically attend to the boundaries that take form in my own knowledge production. In "Toward a More Feminist Criticism", Adrienne Rich writes about this as the paradoxical effects of power relations: "Essential for the feminist critic who believes that her work is 'a pursuit with social meanings rooted in the "real world"' is a clear understanding of power: of how culture, as meted out in the university, works to empower some and disempower others" ([1981] 1994: 94). Now, at a time and in a context where feminist knowledge production is successfully institutionalized in the academy, I would suggest that this is particularly relevant to take into account. Among other things through reflecting over the moments when the desire to practice feminism begins to overpower the feminist hopes that things can be different, when the fear of being rejected disempowers feminist stakes. Rich closes her essay with the following words: "I hope that feminist criticism can renounce the temptation to be graceful, pleasing, and respectable and strive instead to be strong-minded, rash, and dangerous. I hope that feminist critics in the universities can take their own work seriously as a political force, as part of the network of communications for the survival of our movement." (99). These are classical feminist words, but, particularly against the background of the successful institutionalization of feminist knowledge production in Sweden, no less significant in the here and now. And – despite my awareness of the dangers involved in the feeling of happiness – I now dare to admit that I am happy that I ventured to tell the truth behind my motivation for this project, on the job interview four years ago. Because, as I have also learned during this project, we have to endure, and engage with,

the presence of paradoxes in our feminist hopes for political radicality, for accountability and for change.

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