

## HARRIET SILIUS\*

### Women's Studies as a gateway to gender mainstreaming

This paper draws on experiences from European co-operation in feminist research, education and research policy, as well as on results from the project *Employment and Women's Studies: The Impact of Women's Studies Training on Women's Employment in Europe (EWSI)*. The project had 11 partners from 9 countries, among them Italy and Finland. It focussed on 1) women in the labour market, 2) equal opportunities and 3) the academic field of Women's Studies. Gender mainstreaming in the ERA could imply: 1) the participation of women, 2) gender sensitive research and 3) enhancement of the understanding of gender. The paper focuses on the impact of Women's Studies in European research and how this discipline promotes gender sensitive research and the understanding of gender.

The EWSI-project shows that Women's Studies graduates work in research and education, the equality/parity sector, civil society NGOs and in health, social work and policy. It also showed that Women's Studies graduates learned transferable skills needed in a knowledge-based society. They get specific gender expertise to be applied in fields of gender and its intersections with for example ethnicity and race. Thirdly they are highly professional concerning leadership, management, organisation, innovative working cultures, teamwork, and ICT and communication skills.

Gender sensitive research implies taking the needs of both women and men into account. It also means that feminist theoretical perspectives bring new aspects to research. By problematising traditional views, both in theories and practices, feminist research opens new questions and solutions. Thus innovative and creative approaches can be enhanced.

The understanding of gender as a qualitative aspect is not very widely spread. The quantitative participation of women is much easier to grasp. There is, however, a risk that a focus on the quantitative participation will dominate other aspects of equality and the understanding of gender. In such a case discrimination could diminish and women's rights be better met, but research itself would not be influenced. In order to be at the forefront, European research needs a profound understanding of how gender is reproduced challenged and changed. This requires research programmes on different aspects of gender at national, regional and European level. And there is a need for basic or fundamental research in Gender Studies to provide and disseminate the understanding of gender as well as to train graduates with a broad gender expertise. Therefore centres of Gender Studies are needed at university level.

#### *1. Understanding gender*

- Gender is more complicated than two categories, women and men
- Gender can be seen as a **social practice**, as constructed in interaction, as an element of social phenomena.

Gender includes:

- norms and beliefs
- symbols and (media)representations
- agency of individuals, groups, institutions
- power relations
- individual identity

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- intersections with differences between women/men such as
  - marital status
  - parental/non-parental
  - age
  - sexual orientation
  - race
  - ethnicity
  - access to resources (economic, social and educational capital, time).

Gender creates:

- «proper» behaviour
- gendered culture
- hierarchies and segregation
- inclusion and exclusion
- a wide range of masculinities and femininities
- differences between women/men.

Compared to what we know about other aspects of society and culture, we know only little about gender.

Basic research on gender is needed in order to

- know what kind of **gender sensitive research** is needed
- Which knowledge exists?

Where are the gaps?

How does basic feminist research influence theory?

How does basic feminist research influence methodology?

- how to judge what kind of research is high quality
- Where are the innovative elements in research?

How can traditional research be transformed?

How can the future be envisaged?

Gender equality research is often understood as follows:

Women's participation 

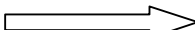
Gender sensitive research 

Understanding gender

This understanding does **not** guarantee gender equality or mainstreaming

Instead **gender equality or mainstreaming is better guaranteed by**

Understanding gender 

Gender sensitive research 

Participation of women in research, education and dissemination of results.

## 2. *Gender sensitive research*

What do we learn from a combination of an informed understanding of gender, gender sensitive research and the participation of women researchers? The EWSI project gives one answer.

Employment and Women's Studies: The Impact of Women's Studies Training on Women's Employment in Europe.

EU FP5 funded research project with 9 countries, 11 partner universities:

Finland

France

Germany

Hungary

Italy

the Netherlands

Slovenia

Spain

United Kingdom

Women's Employment, Women's Studies and Equal Opportunities 1945-2001

Publication on background data is available. All reports are available on website [www.hull.ac.uk/ewsi/](http://www.hull.ac.uk/ewsi/)

The project dealt with

1. Employment
2. Women's Studies
3. Equal Opportunities

In the field of employment the results of the EWSI project are a specific set of skills and employment in a broad field of jobs:

Skills of Women's Studies Graduates: Women's Studies Students learn:

- transferable skills
- critical thinking
- analytic abilities
- innovative working methods
- specific gender expertise for the fields of
- gender and equal opportunities
- diversity and differences
- leadership, organisation and management
- professionalism for the workplace
- new workplace culture
- anti-discrimination work
- team-work
- ICT and communication skills
- self-confidence
- enhances employability of women

Employment sectors of Women's Studies Graduates: Women's Studies graduates work in three main fields:

- Research and education
  - the academic profession
  - Equal Opportunities, Gender Mainstreaming
  - Civil society
  - Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs)
- The training also offers
- Occupational mobility for specialists,  
For example in the fields of:
  - social policy
  - health
  - social work
  - education.

*3. Conclusion: What can Gender Studies offer European research?*

- A more international orientation
- A well networked and integrated scientific community
- Ambitious, committed and hard-working female scholars
- Critical perspectives on traditional research
- Openness to innovative approaches
- Experience of interdisciplinary co-operation
- Expertise in European intersections of culture, society and gender