

Title

**'Women', Welfare Textual Politics and Critique**

Different categories of 'women', the making of welfare states and emancipation in a Nordic welfare state context

**ABSTRACT**

The overall purpose of this thesis is to analyse and interpret the relationship between the social construction of different categories of 'women' and the making of welfare states in specific moments of textual politics in a Nordic welfare state context. Furthermore, the aim is to develop a methodology for critical self-reflection in the process of producing academic knowledge. The intention is to invite the reader to engage in critical reconsideration on these issues.

This thesis is based on Four Articles and consists of Four Parts. The First Part (I) introduces the reader to the process of producing academic knowledge from the perspective of an 'outsider within' and describes the backgrounds from which this research interest has developed. Methodological approaches and methods in the form of social constructionism, discourse analysis and memory work are presented and the research process as well as the conditions under which academic writing takes place are discussed.

The Second Part (II) consists of the Four Articles in the thesis. Article One (I) is an invitation to critically reflect upon the construction of and the relationship between academic social work and marginalisation/the marginalised. It is argued that academic social work, to a large extent, builds on the construction of Othering and that this must be analysed in a critical way. Article Two (II) analyses and interprets how solo mothers are constructed as a social category in a selection of textual political documents (research documents and government surveys) in a Swedish welfare state context during the 1980s and the 1990s. As a result of these interpretations, welfare takes its particular form through two images - *the welfare dilemma* and *risk motherhood*. The effects of using solo mothers as a subcategory of women are conceptualised in accordance with two principles - *the principle of problem orientation* and *the principle of division*. Article Three (III) analyses the category of 'women' in academic writings on the Nordic "women-friendly" welfare states. By using discourse analysis in the form of interpretative repertoires, this study reconstruct 'women' into different 'clusters' and also makes some references to 'men'. The article discusses overlaps, contradictions and conflicts related to women and emancipatory social change. Article Four (IV) examine and interpret the foundations of Nordic "women-friendliness" by a feminist genealogical discursive analysis designed as a set of interrelated and overlapping stories, with two possible suggested endings: Nordic "women-friendliness" as *invention* and as *vision*.

The Third Part (III) focus on the production of academic knowledge and academic writing as a process by using memory work as a form for critical self-reflection and relates this back to specific sub-themes in each article. Examples of sub-themes are *fears*, *social problems* and *female strangers*.

In Part Four (IV) the concept of untimeliness is used as a way of discussing the relationship between human relationships and the process of social change. By focusing on form and the construction of Othering as a way of creating Self, three possible endings are presented: *enter the theatre*, *negotiating the problem of Othering* and *an untimely letter*.

Key words: Academic social work, social categorisation, marginalisation, different categories of women, feminism, the Nordic "women-friendly" welfare states, emancipation, social constructionism, discourse analysis, individual memory work, academic writing, forms of knowledge, critique, social change.

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