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Problematic Men and Restricted Women

A Discourse Analysis on Swedish Feminism

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Abstract

Feminism is everywhere: in all sorts of media, in fashion, in entertainment, and in politics. By focusing on social media, this thesis examines how self-identified feminists construct feminism in Sweden. The construction is found in a popular Swedish feminist podcast, a debate on the premises of sisterhood, a women's separatist Facebook group, and an interview with the second wave feminist Agnes Wold. Drawing on Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory and Carol Bacchi's policy analysis, *What's the Problem Represented to be*, this thesis examines how the hegemonic feminism is constructed across the identified discourses. These discourses, one of *problematic men* and one of *restricted women*, exist in relation to each other and contain the notion that men are a problem that affects women's living conditions. With regard to what it excludes, the hegemonic feminism is heteronormative and constructed from the perspectives of the self-identified feminists. The discourse analysis also shows that the feminists protect and care for other women solely because they are women.

Keywords: social construction, social media, feminism, discourse theory

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1. Introduction

During the last couple of years, feminism has become trendy; the big fashion houses and clothing retailers are churning out sweaters with feminist statements; (female) celebrities are hailing the *sisterhood*; people are publicly known solely for being feminists; more or less humorous acts of anti-feminism are increasingly popular (a trend is not a trend unless questioned and preferably ridiculed on YouTube). The feminism of the late 2010s is incomparable to anything we have witnessed so far, and the struggle for an equal society has never been as vivid as today – or is this simply narrowed by the perceptions and experiences of a 25-year-old feminist in an ideologically colored environment? Moving the events of my internet-generation back to the streets of the 1980s, today's feminist movement might just be mirroring the spirit of the second wave of feminism.

My feeling was somewhat worded by second wave feminist Margareta Garpe when a radio host asked her if they really did feel as though liberation was close. She answered, “I think liberation will always be, in a best case scenario, close”, describing that *feeling* as essential for liberation movements (Teaterprogrammet, 2015). As I found that people from other generations disagreed with me, arguing that today's feminism is not exceptional, I felt an urge to investigate the representation of feminism and find what kind of feminism that prevails the everyday discourse and social media.

Moreover, I have been told that I am not an ordinary feminist; I am a *good* one. This evokes a curiosity around what kind of feminism that actually is represented in today's society in general and social media in particular – a *bad* one? The way in which feminism is represented affects me; I want to understand how all of us everyday feminists are presented and represented, since the ones who construct feminism are our spokespeople. In line with the current mainstreaming of feminism, I am interested in how feminism is constructed. Setting out in a social constructivist perspective and guided by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, I rely on their discourse theory to investigate the construction of feminism.

Internationally, the construction of feminism has been widely researched¹, whereas the Swedish contributions seem to be few. The discourse within Sweden, with our flaunting equality-aura, is interesting since one might expect a broad representation and a wide participation in the feminist discourse. Meanwhile, the three first hits when googling *Swedish feminists* are YouTube videos of Swedish feminists "making fools of themselves", indicating that my worldview is not shared by a majority.

¹ Find a selection of the research in section 1.2

1.1 Research Question and Purpose

The represented feminism affects not only feminists, but everyone it encounters. By focusing on social media, the aim of the thesis is to gain an understanding of how feminism is constructed in Sweden. Through analyzing a popular feminist podcast, a feminist debate on sisterhood, and the conducted interview with second wave feminist Agnes Wold, the study serves to critically discuss how feminism is given meaning by different discourses. To achieve this, I have turned to Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory to scrutinize how the feminism discourse is organized. Accordingly, this thesis does not mirror an objective reality, but the results reflect my interpretations through the chosen perspectives, material, and methods.

Subsequently, I have tried to identify the underpinning values within the discourse. Here, in line with Laclau and Mouffe's post-constructivist perspective, I have relied on Carol Bacchi's policy analysis approach, *What's the problem represented to be?* Through a set of questions, Bacchi uses discourse analysis to study how problems are constructed within policy processes. Also, Bacchi argues that it is important to look at media as a "significant site of 'knowledge' production" and state that media affects the problem representation and "influence citizen subjectivities" (2009, p. 242). Accordingly, I have turned to the feminism that is represented within social media. To carry out this study, I direct my focus on self-identified feminists, and ask:

How is hegemonic feminism constructed by self-identified feminists in a Swedish context?

Following the concepts of discourse theory, *hegemonic feminism* is the notions and connotations that represent feminism in the chosen discourse (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 48). Since it is hard to define hegemonic feminism without first introducing Laclau and Mouffe's language, you may find a further discussion in section 2.3 *Strategy of Analysis*.

1.2 Previous Research

The construction of feminism is studied within various fields, some of which are presented below. Media research is a prominent field, probably due to its light digestibility and relatability, with analysis of movies (Haryantia & Suwanaa, 2014; Stache, 2013), magazines (Mitchell, 2007), and (Victorian Gothic romance) literature (Miquel-Baldellou, 2010). The topic has also contributed to heated discussions both within and outside academia, with the example of pop-artist Beyoncé, whose alleged feminism has been widely celebrated and criticized (Williams, 2017; Caddell, 2015; The Culture, 2016). bell hooks (2016) wrote a noted contribution to the debate, stating that Beyoncé's "construction of feminism cannot be trusted".

However, this thesis focuses on how self-identified feminists construct feminism in social media. The perspective of practiced construction among self-identified feminists seems overshadowed by interview-based studies. Below, I provide the previous research I find most relevant to the scope of my thesis.

In 2001, social psychologist Christine Griffin eyed the feminism discourse to map out the construction of feminism and young women by self-identified feminists in British popular media. Looking at a discussion, vivid at the time, the study found that women are presented to be “having a great time” and in no need of feminism (Griffin, 2001, p. 183). Further, feminism is portrayed as exclusively for white, rich, young women, and an unnecessary good for the none-privileged women. Although the examined statements are from two famous, privileged, middle-aged women, Griffin argues that they indicate how feminism is constructed (ibid., p. 185). As I clarify later, I agree to some extent, but more importantly, Griffin’s study shows that these women have a possibility to set the agenda. This privilege is somewhat articulated by Scharff (2011a), who examined young British and German women’s engagement with feminism. She found that they constructed themselves as empowered in relation to Muslim women, who they portrayed as oppressed and submissive. Drawing on Edley and Wetherell (2001), Scharff articulates the need for women in the west to identify themselves in relation with others, as a means of dismissing their own oppression.

After conducting small group interviews with, mainly white, men, Edley and Wetherell (2001) instead discussed men’s differentiation from women. The aim of their article was to understand how these men talk about feminism and feminists. As the title implies, they found that feminists were divided into reasonable Jekyll’s and monstrous Hyde’s, or more explicitly that feminism was Jekyll and feminists were Hyde. Although the interviewer consequently talked about *feminists*, the interviewees seemed to solely refer to women: alternately women who want equality and alternately ogres wanting to exterminate men (Ibid., p. 444). Similarly, Riley (2001, p. 66) concludes the following in her study on male constructions of feminism: “Thus, while feminism is ‘OK’, feminists and other ‘minority’ group activists are discredited as boring; saying something is wrong when it isn’t, ‘crying wolf’; hypocrites and extremists; ‘ramming [their opinions] down people’s throats’; distorting equal rights; having a ‘chip on their shoulder’; and being qualitatively different from ‘normal’ people”.

As a follow-up to the abovementioned study by Edley and Wetherell, Calder-Dawe and Gavey view the constructions of feminism in a new context of 2016. The empirical research was conducted in 2013, when feminism and feminists was becoming mainstream, but Calder-Dawe and Gavey stress the notable increase of feminist activism already since then. In the analytical process, the authors relied on discourse analysis to identify themes within the interview material. Unlike the previous edition, Calder-Dawe and Gavey focus on young feminists, but alike the previous edition, they found a binary construction of good and bad feminism: Jekyll and Hyde. The fair Jekyll-discourse consists of two elements, where the first one states that feminism is good for all. Here, the participants did not mention oppressed and suppressed groups, but constantly spoke of women and men, both, as the

winners of equality. This obsequious and heteronormative manner is a defense mechanism, used not to scare people off (Calder-Dawe & Gavey, 2016, p. 498). When studying how feminism was constructed by the participants, the authors found that self-identified feminists took the role as reasonable feminists (Ibid., p. 493). This act is not unfounded, as studies show that women who call themselves feminists or stand up for feminist values, risk being socially discriminated (Anastosopoulos & Desmarais, 2015). Furthermore, the liberal feminism was also found as one of three constructed feminisms in a study by Quinn and Radtke (2006), along with the negatively viewed radical feminism and a lifestyle feminism – acting in feminist manners, regardless of feminist identification.

The second element of fair feminism treats political injustices, and constructs feminism as a means to fight them. Awareness of sexism and inequalities justifies feminism, and the participants extend the *feminism for all*-discourse by challenging structural injustices and inherent features of gender inequality. This fair feminism was practiced by some participants, and articulated by others, and illuminates the high linguistic demands on feminists; the need to be knowledgeable before speaking; and to have well-founded arguments all times. Through discussing their families' absurd views of feminism ("women are going to rule the world and kill all men"), the participants delegitimized the claims of feminists being unreasonable (Calder-Dawe & Gavey, 2016, p. 501).

Furthermore, the study found that the participants with a bigger social capital – “a higher cool-factor” – had a notably wider spectrum within which they could practice their feminism. The boys reported very different experiences of how their feminism was received, depending on how they related to heterosexual normativity. Two female participants reported different experiences too, where one had strictly positive response and the other was perceived as unreasonable. The authors state that the latter is identified as a *killjoy* (Ibid., p. 502). This concept is quoted from Ahmed, who argues that awareness of injustices creates unhappiness and might kill other's joy when spreading awareness or criticizing un-woke behavior (Ahmed, 2010, p. 70).

Moreover, the study provided four Hyde-elements, where the first treats the *feminist vs. egalitarian*-debate. The participants described how people in their near surroundings had an understanding of feminists not striving for equality, but wanting women to surpass men's living standards, and critically viewed feminism as a political movement on the expense of men² (Calder-Dawe & Gavey, 2016, p. 494). Concerning the Hyde-feminist discourse, the participants described other people's bad perceptions of feminism, rather than speaking their own minds, and admitted that feminism was generally viewed negatively. Despite the current mainstreaming of feminism, the Hyde-elements tended to rule the discourse surrounding the participants, and being a feminist entailed answering to opinions from their friends and families (Ibid., p. 493).

² This is of course not untrue, since men have to give up for example the privilege of having higher wages than women, but I added "critically" to stress their negative connotations

Again, the perception of man-hating ogres is not uncommon. Garcia-Favaro (2016) provides an example in *'Emasculation nation has arrived': sexism rearticulated in online responses to Lose the Lads' Mags campaign*, showing that feminism was framed as being uninterested in gender equality, and rather focused on making life worse for men. After the campaign, which tried to remove sexist men's-magazines from the newspaper shelves, a major distributor of so-called *lads' mags* started delivering the magazines in solid bags. The study scanned the comment fields on articles about the solid bags, and found four themes:

1. 'gendered double standards' in the campaign, media and public life;
2. 'male sexuality under threat,' pertaining particularly to heterosexual desire;
3. 'the war on the normal bloke,' which constructs straight white British men and their way of life as hated and under siege; and
4. 'feminist tyranny,' where feminism is advanced as a looming menace both for men in particular, and the UK more broadly. (Garcia-Favaro, 2016, p. 384)

Furthermore, the second Hyde-element, named *feminist fossils*, relies on the assumption that feminism is no longer needed, since equality is already achieved in western societies (Calder-Dawe & Gavey, 2016, p. 494). On a more stereotypical note, the third element, *feminist fanatics*, treats the believed appearance and traits of feminists, describing them as aggressive or over-emotional. The feminist fanatics description comprised an obsession of trivial issues. One such issue, described by a participant, was the usage of the term "policepeople" instead of policemen (Ibid., p. 495), which is an active way of not gendering the police, hence avoiding cementation of gendered norms. A reoccurring theme in the interviews was also the (supposedly unfounded) man-hate of feminists (ibid.). Distancing themselves from that picture, Scharff (2011b) found that mainstream³ feminists constructed their feminism while repudiating the image of hairy, aggressive, and radical second wave feminists.

Last, and notably least, of the Hyde-discourse, the fourth element treats the dilemma of "feminism vs. femininity". The participants admitted to their presuppositions of feminists giving up parts of their femininity and caring less about their appearance (meaning: being less good-looking). The authors stress that this element is a small part of the discourse compared to what previous research has found: studies have shown that the conflicting constructions of feminism and femininity might prevent the identification with feminism among young women (Calder-Dawe & Gavey, 2016, p. 496). Scharff and Riley (2012) examine this ideological dilemma as they analyze discussions about appearance among seven women who identify themselves as feminists. Using interpretative and Foucauldian discourse analysis, they found that femininity was constructed as a bodily practice, striving towards normative beauty standards, and that any questioning of the social reproduction of ideals among the women was greeted with encouragement.

³ Scharff writes about mainstream versions of feminism as feminisms that "fail to critically interrogate the political implications of the claims they are making, thereby limiting their emancipatory potential" (2011b, p. 275).

The above studies by Scharff (2011), Calder-Dawe and Gavey (2016), Scharff and Riley (2012), and Edley and Wetherell (2001) all show the binary construction of feminism and feminists. This dichotomy is rarely recognized by the self-identified feminists, but more often by the none-feminists. When self-identified feminists confirm the Jekyll and Hyde-division, it is rather as a result of their perception in relation to their surrounding's view of feminism. Notably, these studies all rely somewhat on the discourse analysis developed by Potter and Wetherell (1987). This social psychological approach serves "to gain a better understanding of social life and social interaction" (Potter & Wetherell, 1987, p. 7) and refers to discourse as "interpretative repertoires" (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 106).

1.3 Limitations

This thesis is based in qualitative research, using both discourse analysis and an interview. Again, I have chosen to limit the thesis to the construction of feminism in social media by self-identified feminists within a Swedish context. Below, I discuss how feminism is defined, why Sweden is an interesting case, and why social media is chosen over traditional media.

Feminism & Sweden

What this thesis examines is the construction of the feminism in the limelight, meaning the feminism that is seen and heard in media. Drawing from Laclau and Mouffe's (1987) notions of hegemony, I refer to the feminism that I aim to study as hegemonic feminism. As previously stated, it is hard to define this feminism without first introducing the language of Laclau and Mouffe. Below, I instead intend to describe this feminism in general terms and discuss what I will not study. I have not turned to the academic discourse or the notions of a mainstream feminism, ascribed by Scharff in the previous research as feminisms that "fail to critically interrogate the political implications of the claims they are making, thereby limiting their emancipatory potential" (2011b, p. 275). Instead, I have analyzed how feminism is constructed by looking at what I call *practiced feminism*. This is what it sounds like, namely what people do and say in the name of feminism. I am, however, not as interested in the personal thoughts, opinions or worldviews found in the material, as I am in the ones found within the representation of feminism and its struggles. It is, of course, interesting to see how none-feminists construct feminism as well, which is a reoccurring theme in the previous research listed above.

Moreover, while Mouffe discusses a feminism that strives for a binary gender equality, she points out that a "one true feminism" is doomed and maintains that there are a lot of feminisms (Mouffe, 2005, p. 88). Hence, it makes more sense to talk about feminisms, with different understandings of oppressions and how to counter them. Although it is impossible to find a definition that incorporates all

feminisms, a general saying might be what the Media and Communication professor Kaitlynn Mendes (2015a) concludes as “a collection of movements which campaign for greater political, social, cultural, and legal rights and freedoms and the end of oppression for women and men”.

In the context of social media and politics, Sweden is an interesting study object. Notably, 95% of all Swedes have Internet access and 74% of the Internet users have Facebook, a number that is still increasing (Davidsson & Thoresson, 2017). The Media researcher Nils Gustafsson (2013, p. 58) holds Sweden as a unique case due to the “extreme degree of individualism” and high levels of social trust. As other good reasons to study Sweden, Gustafsson lists the high degree of social media participation, high voting turnout in political elections, and that the Swedish population is comparatively small and homogenous (Ibid.). Following the thoughts of Stuart Hall (2013), one might argue that this homogeneity enables similar culture, where citizens interpret things in similar ways and express themselves accordingly. In Gustafsson’s words this “ensures that information can travel fairly effectively through the social networks” (2013, p. 58).

Social Media

I acknowledge that the portrayal of feminism in established media might give a more accurate picture of the feminism that common people encounter. Why then, have I chosen to neglect traditional media and focus on social media? As mentioned above, Sweden is a good case, and the focus on social media in relation to feminism within a Swedish context has not been researched to a big extent. However, studies on traditional media do exist. The portrayal of feminism in traditional media has been studied internationally, where Mendes (2012) and Barker-Plummer (2000) are contributors. In a Swedish context, Karin Holmberg (1996) examined media representation of feminism, which is discussed in the genealogy. Maria Svedland has treated the portrayal of feminism in media and the hatred towards famous feminists as a consequence of the portrayal (Svedland, 2013). Maria-Pia Boëthius has written a criticism on media and where she mentions when the feminist group Stödstrumporna (meaning compression stocking – a humorous paraphrase of the Red stockings) was questioned in media for not improving the situation for nurses – despite that their one political agenda was gender equality in parliamentary representation (2001, p. 95).

There are a number of reasons why social media is of interest for researchers in general, and for this study in particular. To start, I am interested in the construction of feminism by self-identified feminists. Through traditional media one usually encounters other’s portrayal of feminism and feminists. At the very least, it is a restricted construction, and in line with Boëthius one might argue that patriarchal structures run media. She holds that once feminism moved into politics, patriarchal structures were able to control it (Boëthius, 2001, p. 91). Focusing on social media, then, might reduce the influence from powerful people that determines who can speak and about what. Instead, Mendes describes social media as a “coordinating tool” for political movements worldwide (2015b, p. 34), and the journalistic power

to set the agenda is now shared with social media influencers, who have gained a big audience.

Although debated, some people claim that we are experiencing a fourth wave of feminism, which is found in online activism on social media (Mendes, 2015, p. 30). Waves are ascribed *post factum*, and even though this entire trend of online activism might not be seen as the fourth wave, Witt-Brattström argues that the #metoo campaign is inherently a part of the fourth wave of feminism⁴. Mendes stresses the strong penetrating power of social media and argues that social media has not been studied enough. In recent times, she reports gladly, more people are researching social media and social activism, since it is getting bigger and more influential (Mendes, 2015b, p. 34). As Jan van Dijk, author of “Network Society”, concludes, “[w]ith little exaggeration, we can call the 21st century the age of networks” (2006, p. 2).

On social networks, users are often named (rather than anonymous), which is helpful when researching political activity. Our friends’ opinions and actions affect us, and people tend to be more political if their friends are. Also, studies have shown that people tend to be more political online than offline (Gustafsson, 2013, p. 48). Accordingly, social media is highly relevant to the purpose of this thesis, since opinions and political views are more likely to be found online. Notably, Gustafsson also state that although a person’s political activities on social networks do not increase political engagement in real life, it creates other forms of political activities and engagements (Ibid.).

Furthermore, social media is also interesting to examine since it gives the reader a possibility to react and interact with the writer. Van Dijk (2006, p. 12) states that as media currently is constructed interactively, it has developed from a monologue to a dialogue. Like Stuart Hall noted: “The *reader* is as important as the *writer* in the production of meaning” (2013, p. 18, [emphasis in original]). Hence, social media, where interaction and dialogue exist, provide not only the opinions of the famous feminists, but also a notion of how the messages are interpreted and how feminism is constructed together with their readers.

Aspects of the political effects with social media have been debated, and some research suggests that social media might have positive democratic effects, since everybody has the same chances to participate and a fairly equal chance to convey their message (van Dijk, 2006, p. 3; Gustafsson, 2010, p. 6). Gustafsson holds, however, that democracy might as well be threatened. He uses the term *viral politics* to describe the phenomenon of sharing political messages on social media. Also, he states that socioeconomic factors are highly contributing to who engages with viral politics, why he names them *temporal elites*, “a group of individuals: well-connected, well-educated, and motivated to take an active part”, to recognize that viral politics demands a high degree of social capital (2010, p. 32).

⁴ Ebba Witt-Brattström, personal communication in relation to her lecture *Det skrivande jaget at Månteatern* on December 4, 2017

Moreover, our internet use is highly individualized, where search engines show personal results; social media filters everything we see; streaming sites display titles we might like – our online lives are filter coated. Online campaigning pioneer Eli Pariser writes that we live in filter bubbles (Pariser, 2011). *Ergo*, the ones reading, listening and interacting with the material probably have positive attitudes in beforehand. The phenomenon of filter bubbles does not coincide with the purpose of this thesis, but rather enhances the chances of identifying an accurate construction.

1.4 Disposition

This chapter has introduced the thesis subject and its limitations, together with previous research on the construction of feminism. The second chapter, *Methodology and Model of Analysis*, presents the methodological framework. Some key concepts of Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory are presented and explained, followed by a presentation of Bacchi's policy analysis approach. Discourse theory is then operationalized together with Bacchi's approach in the strategy of analysis. The second chapter also shortly presents some notes on the interview and a discussion on the empirical material. Finally, the second chapter includes concluding remarks on reflexivity. Chapter three, *Genealogy of Feminism*, focuses on the second wave of feminism, but also discusses how the backlash of the 1980s and the third wave has contributed to the development of today's feminism. In chapter four, *The Feminist Discourses*, I present the analysis, which is divided into the two main discourses of *problematic men* and *restricted women*. The last chapter, *Discussion*, concludes how the hegemonic feminism is constructed. Also, it entails a short discussion on the effects of the methodological choices as well as suggestions for further research.

2. Methodology and Model of Analysis

The abovementioned previous research presents how feminism is constructed based on *descriptions* of feminism by people who identify themselves as feminists. What I want to examine is rather how feminism is constructed when it is *practiced*. In line with Griffin's (2001) research, I want to see how self-identified feminists construct feminism in their act and speech. Also, the previous research is based on discourse analysis, and, seemingly, mainly discursive psychology. Since I am interested in the hegemonic feminism I instead turn to Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory. Following Sara Carlbaum (2012), who used discourse theory to understand discursive changes in Swedish education-policies and their construction of citizenship, I turn to Carol Bacchi and her policy analysis approach *What's the problem represented to be?*

Bacchi's approach, henceforth referred to as WPR, depends on theories of Foucault, who contends that discourse is "knowledges" (Bacchi, 2009, p. 35) and distinguished discursive and non-discursive practices (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001, p. 107). In line with Laclau and Mouffe, I believe that it is crucial to examine interactions in order to understand the underpinning values and meanings (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 25). Also, whereas Bacchi argues that one must look at contradictions and conflicts within different discourses, Laclau and Mouffe refer to hegemony (Carlbaum, 2012, p. 38). Still, turning to Laclau and Mouffe is not a radical move since they have built their theories on Foucault's work. For instance, they share a view on the concept of power as being produced and as shaping our existence (Bacchi, 2009, p. 38; Laclau & Mouffe, 2001, p. 37). However, on a dissimilar and more significant note, Mouffe alone focuses on the construction of women, and its inevitable effect on feminist identity and the feminist struggle (Mouffe, 2005, p. 87), why also her separate work provides analytical tools for this thesis.

The presented previous research on construction of feminism shows how feminism, either positively or negatively, is constructed in relation to "the other" (Calder-Dawe & Gavey, 2016; Edley & Wetherell, 2001; Scharff, 2011a). As is shown below with Laclau and Mouffe, things acquire meaning through identification and dis-identification. Hence, analyzing "the other" gives meaning to the self, as it often describes opposites of the self-image (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 51). In line with this, Bacchi's approach helps to find how the struggle is represented to be within feminism. This, in turn, assists the understanding of how feminism is constructed since the struggle shows what feminism is trying to counter and what it is defined in opposition to.

Following, is a presentation of key concepts of Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory. Here, I have tried to compromise their theory, while still presenting it in a comprehensible way. Next, Bacchi's WPR-approach is presented in relation to research based on the approach. This chapter also entails an operationalization of the methodology, which is concluded with a short summary to assist the later reading of the analysis.

2.1 Discourse Theory

There is a range of different ways in which discourse is defined and discourse analysis is applied. First, one might distinguish between language discourse as strictly textual and discourse as communication and interaction (Bacchi & Rönnblom, 2014, p. 174). Gee concretizes this division by naming them discourse and Discourse, where the previous is linguistic and the latter is contextual and interactive (2014, p. 25). He does, however, maintain that "*language has meaning only in and through social practices*" (Ibid., p. 25, [italics in original]). In contrast to Gee, Fairclough insists on the necessity to include discursive and non-discursive practices, and acknowledges political and media structures as discursive. As a consequence, his critical discourse analysis relies on both discourse analysis and social theories (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 62).

As already clarified, I have not turned to the abovementioned scholars, but depend on Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory, which draws upon Marxist thoughts on the social, and structuralist theories of meaning (Ibid., p. 25). Laclau and Mouffe are non-essentialists and perceive the social as discursive, "as a web of processes in which meaning is created" (Ibid.). Hence, it is the *construction* of reality, rather than the perceived objective reality, that is the focus of analysis (Ibid., p. 33).

Key Concepts of Discourse Theory

Laclau and Mouffe define discourse as "[t]he structured totality resulting from the *articulatory practice*" (1987, p. 105, [emphasis in original]), where articulation is "any practice establishing a relation among elements such that their identity is modified as a result of the articulatory practice" (Ibid.). When the elements are articulated, they are named *moments*. Equating these moments with knots, Jørgensen and Phillips (2002, p. 26) describe language as a social phenomenon by comparing it to a fishing-net. An example would be the word "feminist", which has no meaning until combined with words like "gender equality", "women", "hairy", or "angry", on which the meaning of the word is dependent.

Moreover, according to Laclau and Mouffe, the articulatory practice entails the construction of *nodal points*. These are signs around which the discourse is shaped and they create meaning by not being entirely fixed. On the contrary, discourse appears through this partial openness of the social. Therefore, society, and all it entails, cannot be fixed or objective, but is instead constructed within every new

context (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001, p. 113). Again, it is in relation to the nodal points that elements are given meaning, and nodal points consequently exclude other possible meanings (Ibid., p. 26). Within a feminist discourse, “red stockings” refer to a faction within the second wave feminist movement. The discursive frames exclude the potential meanings created in relation to for example fashion or Christmas.

The possible, but not necessary, exclusion of other meanings is what Laclau and Mouffe refer to as *politics*. This negotiation of meanings stands in contrast to *power*, which is the process of establishing the social. As our worlds, relations, and identities acquire meaning through power, Laclau and Mouffe hence argue it also excludes other possible meanings. Meanwhile, a perceived fixation of meaning is referred to as *objectivity*. While overlooking the existence of power and politics, objectivity denotes the social world we have taken for granted (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, pp. 36-38). Laclau and Mouffe suggest that when discourses collide and different meanings struggle to reach objectivity, *antagonism* occurs. To explain how antagonism is solved, we must turn to their concept of *hegemony*, which is found in between politics and objectivity (Ibid., p. 48). A hegemonic construction is a temporary fixation of a meaning, and the longer it lasts, the more successful hegemony (Mouffe, 2005, p. 53). Mouffe argues that citizenship is a hegemonic construction, which has been constructed in a patriarchal society. A citizen is based on *male* attributes, why the only way to reach equality within the current society is for women to become like men. Mouffe rejects this essential sexual division, and argues that a redefined citizenship is the only way to achieve an equal society for all (Ibid., p. 80).

Identity

The nodal point of identity – a *master signifier* – is a *subject position* within a discursive structure, which acquires identity through identification with the subject position (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001, p. 115). The identity of a subject is always relational and only temporarily fixed in the given subject positions (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 43). This act of identification is an active investment, and one cannot refer to a social agent as a predetermined object, but one must acknowledge the discursive formations within which the subject positions are constructed (Ibid., p. 41). Laclau and Mouffe claim that the nodal point of *man* has been seen as essential and fixed in modern society, while in turn providing meaning to objects by association and context (2001, p. 117). Jørgensen and Phillips (2002, p. 50) describe master signifiers together with nodal points as *key signifiers*, which is a concept I henceforth use when referring to them both.

Furthermore, nodal points of identity are also given meaning in relation to social space (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, pp. 36-38). Jørgensen and Phillips (2002, p. 51) exemplify this with the social space of *the West*, which is created in relation to the non-west – the rest of the world. This construction relies on the differentiation from things associated with the non-west, such as (in the example of Jørgensen and

Phillips) barbarism. As a consequence, barbarism is excluded from the social space of the West.

For the same reason, feminist in the 19th century and feminist in a 2017 *Free the nipple*-protest gain different meanings. Laclau and Mouffe refer to this process, where discourse, identities, and social space are given meaning, as chains of equivalence (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 43). Jørgensen and Phillips also state that identities are given “behavioral instructions” through the chains of equivalence (Ibid.). Simply put, an identity is equaled with different traits, where feminist might be equated with “hairy”, which in turn might have people who identify as feminists debate removing excessive hair.

Moreover, discourses are not predetermined and might be unrelated to each other. Most importantly, and vital in understanding feminist struggles, these subject positions exist alternately. Mouffe argues that the partial fixation of *woman* has enabled a feminist identity: feminist struggles have emerged in a “private is political”-manner, as the different subject positions have contradicted each other and created antagonism (2005, p. 77). Political antagonism is found in the we/them-relation that emerges in group formations when “the other” questions our being (Ibid., p. 2). Social antagonism, instead, occurs when different identities clash and exclude one another. When only one subject position is visible, it is the result of a hegemonic intervention, such as a Christian feminist, who votes for a feminist party, while rejecting a Christian party, and attains the subject position of a feminist voter (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 41).

This exclusion is also essential within group formations, which is defined in relation to “the other”. Group identity is political in the sense that the construction of one label discursively excludes differences within the group, as well as other possible group formations (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 44). Again, Laclau and Mouffe hold that politics is contingent, and it is not predetermined what groups will be socially and politically relevant, and they exist in discourse only when talked about (Ibid., p. 45). Bacchi suggests that since categories, such as age and gender, give meaning to the construction of people, it is important to understand this process and enable an analysis of their effects (2009, p. 9). The fact that a group must be talked about, or on the behalf of, to exist in discourse, induces a need to critically examine representation. Once a group identity, in the case of this thesis – feminists – is represented, it is assigned certain meanings. Consequently, the discourse agenda-setters affect who is represented, how they are represented, and, maybe more importantly, how they are not represented.

Since things acquire meaning through representation, representations affect the way we interpret reality. A reader reacts to something based on their connotations (Hall, 2013, p. 23). “Feminist” to me is a positive word, whereas to many others, it might have bad connotations, which is exemplified in the previous research. Feminism acquires meaning through media representation. Alike how the social is constructed as objective, different media also struggle to construct the representation of something as “real”. The power of media hence lies in being able to affect our connotations and perceptions.

2.2 What's the Problem Represented to be?

Carol Bacchi's policy analysis approach serves to understand the effects of problematizations, and the straightforward outline makes it easy to adopt in different studies and contexts. WPR has no interest in creating ideal types or labels. By relying on discourse analysis, the goal is rather to identify binaries, key concepts, and categories (Bacchi, 2009, p. 7). WPR focuses on policy and policy process, but since I examine the general feminist discourse, I have turned to interviews, blogs, podcasts, and debates. In a similar way, Jönson approaches the debate on "scandalous nursing homes" (Jönson, 2016, p. page), finding how they are framed. Likewise, Ekholm (2016) distances himself from the strict policy analysis as he studies how sport, as a response to social problems, is constructed within social interventions and scientific discourse.

WPR sheds light on the indicated problems presented in a policy (Bacchi, 2009, p. 1). Although policies fall outside the scope of this thesis, the question of what the problem is represented to be is of interest. Similar to a policy process, the processes in which feminism is constructed might be viewed as a line of actions. Bacchi herself states that "the very idea of 'policy' becomes a subject of interrogation" (Ibid., p. ix) as she discusses the role of policies in government and she argues that it should be seen as a cultural product. The construction of feminism in social media is very much a cultural product, and it implies that there are problems that need to be solved.

However, instead of focusing on the problem, *the struggle* better serves the purpose of this thesis⁵. By analyzing the struggle representation within the feminist discourse, I want to understand what the struggles are, how feminist's intend to approach them, and to display effects of the assumptions and hidden meanings behind, and within, the struggle representations.

WPR provides useful tools in understanding the discursive frames within which feminism is being constructed and Bacchi proposes a critical analysis. She stresses that "critical" does not mean to point out what is wrong, and by drawing from Foucault, she argues that it is rather a way of understanding why things are the way they are (Bacchi, 2009, p. 39). Since the intentions of this thesis are not normative, and I do not intend to value the constructed feminism, I have handpicked some of Bacchi's questions to guide the analysis.

Furthermore, Bacchi states that the impossibility of talking about something without personal interpretations implies that a discussion consists of interpretations. This, she argues, shows how problems are created, rather than discovered (2010, p. 265). Consequently, she contends, as opposed to reacting to existing problems, policies create and define the problems. Similarly, the feminist discourse regarding how certain things might be achieved is constructing the struggles. Bacchi holds,

⁵ Find a further discussion on this under 2.3 *Strategy of Analysis*

however, this as a natural part of the policy process, and not the ill-will or bias of decision-makers. Rather, she states, these kinds of problem representations unite populations (2009, p. 30).

Instead of focusing on the surface of feminism, WPR enables a wider perspective and looks at knowledges, who influences the knowledges and how they influence others (Bacchi, 2009, p. 26). Also, Bacchi holds that since policies consist of problem representations, it is these problematizations that govern people, rather than the policies (Ibid., p. 31). Likewise, it is the representations of the struggle within feminism that govern how the movement functions.

Policies, or in the case of this thesis, the feminist discourse, are constrained by the representation of the problem (Bacchi, 2009, p. 13). The effects of a problem representation also affect people differently, depending on structural group belongings. Some are benefitted and helped, whereas others are harmed and maybe omitted. One of the purposes of the WPR approach is to identify those who are harmed by the problem representation in order to pinpoint the need for reconsideration (Ibid., p. 18). Also, as Calder-Dawe and Gavey (2016) reported, actions encounter different reactions depending on the social status of the person conveying the message, whereas Griffin's (2001) study exemplifies where the possibilities to affect lies. Bacchi notes that it is important to acknowledge that some groups have a bigger influence on whether the problem representation sticks or not (2009, p. 11). Below are the questions that Bacchi (2009, p. 2) proposes:

1. What's the 'problem' (e.g. of 'problem gamblers', 'drug use/abuse', 'gender inequality', 'domestic violence', 'global warming', 'sexual harassment', etc.) represented to be in a specific policy or policy proposal?
2. What presuppositions or assumptions underpin this representation of the 'problem'?
3. How has this representation of the 'problem' come about?
4. What is left unproblematic in this problem representation? Where are the silences? Can the 'problem' be thought about differently?
5. What effects are produced by this representation of the 'problem'?
6. How/where has this representation of the 'problem' been produced, disseminated and defended? How has it been (or could it be) questioned, disrupted and replaced?

The first question proposes that one's feeling about something affects the outcome of a suggestion, and that the thoughts behind the problem are revealed. WPR suggests working backwards from a policy to find this underlying meaning (Bacchi, 2009, p. 3). Bacchi states that by itself, the first question says little about the policy. Contrastingly, the second question calls for discourse analysis and might, by itself, give a good understanding of the underlying meaning of the problem representation. It is neither the ideas of specific influential people nor biases that are of interest, but rather the second question tries to identify the epistemological and ontological presuppositions of the problem representations (Ibid., p. 5). Payne (2015) examines reactions and actions of primary care organizations in England towards the legislated acts on gender discrimination and gender equality promotion. Following

the critical discourse analysis, Payne finds that the responding discourse is constructing a gendered body.

Although Bacchi presents six questions for the researcher to apply, the order and the number is optional. It is possible to use them all, or focus on just some of them. In conformity with WPR, one cannot only look at the present, but one has to reflect on the problem representation in dimensions of time and space, and the development and decisions behind the problem representation. Here, focus also lies on the effect of what Bacchi refers to as non-discursive matters⁶, such as legislative changes (2009, p. 10). Bjørnholt (2012) uses WPR in her analysis of a Norwegian gender equality project. Bjørnholt presents her understanding of why the gender equality discourse has gone from a wide debate on women's labor market participation, to the much more narrow debate regarding parental leave (2012, p. 53). Focusing on the third question of WPR, Bjørnholt (2012) creates a genealogy and then shortly answers the other question supported by the genealogy.

In the fifth question, Bacchi presents lived effects, discursive effects, and subjectification effects from the problem representation. The first one entails the effects on people's actual lives, whereas discursive effects create rules for what can be said. Subjectification effects govern "the ways in which subjects and subjectivities are constituted in discourse" (Bacchi, 2009, p. 15). The latter two of these are prevailing Calvo's (2013) study as she examines gender mainstreaming in the European Union. Scrutinizing categories such as gender and equality, Calvo aims to "understand hidden meanings in policy documents, to uncover the presuppositions and assumptions that underlie and constitute different discourses of gender equality, and to identify the implications of these" (Ibid., p. 20). Through textual analysis, discursive practice, and social practice, Calvo focuses on interviews and documentation surrounding the Gender Mainstreaming process in the EU (Ibid., p. 89).

Whereas Bjørnholt relied more on genealogy, Calvo, Payne, Ekholm, and Jönson focused on the very context of their respective problem representations. In this thesis, focus is on the discursive frames within which feminism is constructed and on the effects of the problem representation. I have, however, included a genealogy of feminism, partly based on the interview. Again, the WPR-approach is a policy analysis, and my work differs quite a lot from the studies I have presented above. Although none of the studies address such a popular subject as this thesis, the different ways in which they assess WPR are inspirational.

⁶ Laclau and Mouffe would not agree with this distinction. They would instead argue that it is discursive, yet not question its importance

2.3 Strategy of Analysis

In order to gain an understanding of how feminism is constructed by self-identified feminists, I have to distinguish the different discourses and how they are structured. I have considered how discourse theory operates accordingly and in what way the WPR-questions would assist. Bacchi stresses the need to adopt the questions to the prevailing circumstances and the given material (2009, p. 205). I have done this below, where the operationalization of discourse theory and WPR is presented in a way to suit the material and the context. Along the analysis, these questions were answered through discourse theory as I looked for articulations, key signifiers, and chains of equivalence.

In accordance with Laclau and Mouffe, the analysis should identify *the* nodal point of a discourse (2001, p. 113). I argue, however, that it can be difficult to identify only *one* sign around which the discourse is structured. In line with the Jekyll and Hyde-discourses, which are constructed around two and four elements (Calder-Dawe & Gavey, 2016), I have instead tried to identify several key signifiers within each discourse.

Before moving along, I have to explain the concept of hegemonic feminism. Since hegemony occurs when meaning is fixed across discourses (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 48), the feminism I am interested in is the one that is constructed across the different discourses within the examined material.

Bacchi argues that in order to explain a concept or occurrence, it is important to understand its background and how it fits “into wider debates” (Bacchi, 2009, p. 20). Accordingly, chapter three opens with a genealogy of modern feminism from the 1960s until today, mapping out how the representation and construction of feminism has come about. The Foucauldian genealogy suggested by Bacchi serves to critically examine the history of a problem representation and unveil the hidden power structures that have enabled the representation (Ibid., p. 43). The core question is *around what kind of struggles have feminism been constructed through history?* and I also examine how the different feminist waves might have contributed to the representations of the struggle. Again, the focus of this thesis disharmonizes with normative intentions, and the genealogy presented instead gives a background to the Swedish feminism and identifies discursive hegemonic constructions. Although inspired by Foucault’s idea of genealogy, it is not presented in the same extent or time perspective as he suggests (Ibid., p. 10).

Moreover, Bacchi’s first question, converted to how the struggle is represented to be within feminism, serves as a stepping-stone for further analysis. This question can be asked repeatedly, since multiple representations are possible. As previously mentioned, Bacchi holds that the word *problem* symbolizes the unstated need for change (2009, p. xi), but in feminism the need for change is rather explicit. Instead of problem, I have chosen to use *struggle* since it pinpoints a need for societal change rather than internal controversies. A problem within feminism is, according to interviewee Wold, the big amount of struggles, whereas one such struggle is

found in the traditional mother role (Wold, 2017). Again, alike a policy process, the processes of constructing feminism might be viewed as a line of actions. The way in which the struggle is represented dictates the direction of these actions, since their purpose is to improve society from a feminist perspective. Consequently, importance lies in identifying where the need for change is found, which was asked straightforward in the interview. As I listened to the podcast or analyzed the feminist debates, I tried to identify the struggle (such as “Gender Inequality”, “Racism”, “Sexism”, “Homophobia”), before proceeding with any other questions.

Next, by asking *what presuppositions or assumptions underpin the representation of the struggle?* I tried to identify the deep-seated values that underlie the discourse, and how they create hierarchies and articulate the understanding of the struggle (Bacchi, 2009, p. 5). Here, I found the key concepts suggested by Bacchi in her second question to be equivalent to nodal points, since both concepts describe words or elements that give meaning to the surrounding discourse. Thus, in line with my previous reasoning, nodal points, key concepts, and master signifiers are referred to as key signifiers. The identification of nodal points, together with the chains of equivalence, enables an understanding for how “discourses, identities, and the social space respectively are organized discursively” (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 50). Bacchi and Laclau and Mouffe both argue that it is important to question the perceived fixation of meaning (what Laclau and Mouffe refer to as objectivity) of concepts, like *equality* (Bacchi, 2009, p. 8). Accordingly, I have distinguished the elements that are ascribed a higher status in the given discourse, and I have tried to identify any occurring antagonism. An example comes in hand: equality is ascribed different meanings in different feminist discourses, where radical feminism might refer to equality for citizens within a society, and liberal feminism might refer to equality as equal opportunities for individuals.

Moreover, Mouffe says that there is no essential identity of for example “woman”, but it is more fruitful to look at what people identify with or what they engage with (2005, p. 87), which I tried to keep in mind as I also asked *what subject positions are detected, and how are they given meaning?* Since group identities are political and exclude other possible group formations and attributes (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 44), it is important to identify group formations and representations. As previously discussed, the represented group affects all people who are identified with it. Also, subject positions, signs and spaces might attain meaning through dis-identification with “the other”, why it is fruitful to examine the representation of “the other”.

The given subject positions within the discourse might exist alternately, and thereby have dissimilar effects, where some political subjects are encouraged and others are denounced (Mouffe, 2005, p. 77). If for example begging is problematized and the proposed solution is prohibition, attention might be drawn from economic injustice and capitalist structures, leaving focus on the individuals. Subject positions create frames that govern what can be said and done, creating discursive effects (Bacchi, 2009, p. 15). The chosen debate on sisterhood, presented in detail later, revolves around acceptable manners under the notion of sisterhood. Bacchi argues that

talking about a problem in a certain way might disable a constructive discussion on the actual causes (2009, p. 69).

Last, I looked at where the representation of the struggle has been produced and defended. To understand this, it was also important to examine what platforms are used to produce the construction of feminism (Bacchi, 2009, p. 19). In line with Laclau and Mouffe, it is important to examine the structures and interactions that give meaning to discourse (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 25), why social media platforms are highly discursive.

To summarize the strategy of analysis, which might come across as quite heavy:

- a **genealogy** has been conducted to trace the background and wider debate of the constructed feminism
- In the subsequent analysis, I have asked **what the struggle is represented to be** and thereby tried to identify what feminism is constructed in relation to
- The remaining questions posed above have been used to structure the material
- By using the analytical tool of **key signifiers** (nodal points and master signifiers) and identifying the **articulations** (the practice that changes the identity of the element) I have analyzed how the discourse is structured

Bacchi suggests that one should investigate what is left unsaid (2009, p. 40), the importance of which Laclau and Mouffe also stress when they discuss the excluding trait of discourse – a process they refer to as politics. Silences are the result of hegemonic constructions, where interpretations and contexts exclude other possible meanings (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002). I considered not including this question (exclude/leave it unsaid) because of the possible width of the silences. Hegemonic feminism does however exclude other potential feminisms, and I have tried to pinpoint some of the most explicit silences. Shedding light on the silences is not part of the purpose of this thesis and the analysis of exclusions has not been systematic. Instead, it is rather an effect of the general analysis, which I will discuss in the concluding chapter 5. *Discussion*.

Although all of the above questions were posed when analyzing the material, they are not all answered explicitly in the text. The analysis is instead presented thematically similar to *Jekyll and Hyde revisited* (2016), the WPR-work of Garcia-Favaro (2016), and Carlbaum (2012). The thematic division is an easily maneuvered way to go along the analytical process and for the reader to digest.

2.4 Interview

Yeo et al state that in-depth interviews are foundational in qualitative research and allows for a description of the interviewees' perspectives (2014, p. 178). As a complement to the read material that serves as a basis for the genealogy, I have conducted an in-depth interview. O'Reilly (2009, p. 126) suggests that if one wants

to hear the interviewee speak their mind, an unstructured interview is preferable. Here, I was able to guide Wold through a set of themes, while avoiding too much interference with her thoughts and opinions. The interview has given me a better understanding of the context within which the Swedish feminism emerged. From a social constructivist approach, the researcher creates knowledge together with the interviewee and the final results are my interpretations of the dialogue. Yeo et al (2014, p. 182) suggest that this approach might be criticized for being too narrow, merely presenting the researchers view of what is said (and thereby mirroring my opinions in the words of the interviewee). More than this though, they contend, it is an effective way of studying the experiences and thoughts of the interviewee (Ibid.).

Before meeting with Wold, I tested the questions in two separate occasions on people with different backgrounds. The conducted interview with a woman of the same age as Wold contributed to a further development of the questions. The woman argued that as a person from the countryside, she did not experience the feminist wave to any noticeable extent, why I added a question regarding the people who engaged in the activism of the second wave feminism.

2.5 Material

Apart from the interview, I have turned to a feminist debate on sisterhood, a feminist podcast, and asked a question in a closed, separatist Facebook group. In line with Bacchi's reasoning (2009, p. 54), the empirical material of this thesis is an attempt to cover the popular public feminist debate. Since all of the material is in Swedish, I have translated it. Translating is a highly discursive practice and when translating the material, one must be cautious with the chosen words and expressions, which are a result of the translator's interpretations (Sánchez, 2017).

In accordance with the research question, I tried to find people who identify as feminists, and who are given the chance to speak as feminists in public. By searching for "feminist debaters" and "Swedish feminists" on Google, I found lists of influential people who are associated with feminism. When scanning the results, I found that men are rarely mentioned as feminists. I hardly found any men, not even when I added "men" or "male" in the search. Instead, I found some people who were frequently mentioned. Among them were the self-identified feminists in focus of this thesis, namely Natashja Psomas Blomberg (Lady Dahmer), Cissi Wallin, Clara Lidström (Underbara Clara), and Agnes Wold. There are, of course, other people who identify as feminists, but a criterion for the purpose of this thesis is that they use their platforms to convey their feminism. It is also important to consider the line of action: Journalists would probably have the same results when they need someone to comment on a particular matter.

The interview with professor Agnes Wold is an attempt to contribute to the genealogy of feminism and gain a wider understanding of how an active participant

of the second wave feminist movement has experienced the development of feminism. I chose to contact her since she still has her fair share of time in the spotlight, where she is often invited as an expert or debater. Concerning the interview, it is long and includes content that is irrelevant to this thesis, which is why I have chosen to only include some of the quotes.

The podcast at choice, *Skäringer & Mannheimer*, is a feminist podcast that treats subjects such as the reality of being a woman and personal problems, but also current events and trivial issues. The podcast with the comedian and actress Mia Skäringer and the TV hostess, comedian and journalist Anna Mannheimer have about 700.000 downloads every week⁷ and is currently found in the top layers of podcast hit lists (Poddtoppen, 2017; TT, 2017; Podtail, 2017; SvD Kultur, 2017). The material consists of all episodes broadcasted until the end of October, and I have noted each time they talk about feminism or inequalities. According to themselves, their most downloaded and appreciated episode was the one called *Kvinnohimmelen* [*Heaven of Women*], an episode dedicated to women who are suffering in society. The episode was recorded just after the previous head of the conservative party Moderaterna resigned and it entails discussions on the downsides of being a woman (Skäringer Lazar & Mannheimer, 2017, Ep. 19).

Furthermore, when choosing a feminist debate I searched for one that negotiates what feminism is. In the beginning of fall, two different feminist debates gained public interest. The first was about beauty products and whether it is a feminist act to care about one's appearance (if you do it for yourself) or if it is rather an act of capitalistic and patriarchal pleasing (Kyeyune Backström, 2017). Although this beauty product-debate was vibrant, it did not reach as big of an audience as the second debate, which treated the capitalistic motives behind Sweden's biggest blogger, Isabella Löwengrip. The motives were questioned in a humorous satire-video (miaskäringerlazar, 2017a) by comedian and actress Mia Skäringer, as a response to a commercial video by Löwengrip (Isabella Löwengrip, 2017a). Löwengrip reacted by appealing to sisterly compassion and argued that "sisterhood needs to come first in public"⁸ (Isabella Löwengrip, 2017b). This spurred a vivid debate on what counts as sisterhood (Nord, 2017), and famous feminists with big platforms chose to discuss the matter (Underbara Clara, 2017a; cissiwallin, 2017; Underbara Clara, 2017b; Lady Dahmer / Postpatriarkatet, 2017; Lady Dahmer, 2017).

The sisterhood-debate serves as an indicator of what a woman can do in the name of feminism, *ergo* it dictates the frames within which the hegemonic feminism is accepted. The feminist debaters' contributions to the debate together with their comment fields serves as empirical material concerning the feminist debate online. Whereas some people argue that it is un-sisterly to make money off women's insecurities, others mean that it is un-sisterly to criticize a woman for being independent and entrepreneurial.

⁷ Skäringer & Mannheimer, Personal correspondence via their Facebook page on October 31st

⁸ Important note: the dispute is solved (Isabella Löwengrip, 2017c; miaskäringerlazar, 2017b)

Additionally, I asked a question in a separatist Facebook group for people who identify as women, called *Heja Livet*. The group has over 60 000 members, and although it is not an articulate feminist group, it is described as a group for “women, where we are *with* each other” (Heja Livet, 2017, [emphasis added]). The discussions brought forward concern supporting women, asking for help, discussing patriarchal issues et cetera. By asking “what is most important in your feminism?” I hoped to gain an understanding of what kind of feminism that prevails this very large Facebook group. The replies were quantified and sorted in accordance with themes to enable an idea of the most important questions. Giving the differing amount of comments on the question posed in *Heja Livet* as well as the sisterhood debate, I chose to include the most liked ten percent of the comments. I do realize that likes might come from friends, but seemingly every comment has one or two likes, whereas some have 40 likes⁹.

2.6 Reflexivity and Critique

Methodologies and paradigms affect how things are seen and interpreted; hence it affects the assessed reality (Bacchi & Rönnblom, 2014, p. 171). A post-structural perspective enables the identification of the politics and subjective matters that affect the creation of “the real” which is presented as an objective reality (Bacchi & Rönnblom, 2014, p. 173; Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 33). As a researcher, it is not possible to position oneself outside the discourse. On the contrary, the researcher affects the studied discourse. Being a feminist and finding myself in the forums of which this thesis sets out to investigate, I might face a problem. By describing subject positions, group formations and processes of articulations, I actively contribute to construction of meanings and struggles for hegemony. However, Jørgensen and Phillips contend that this always is a dilemma when applying a social constructivist perspective and refer to it as “a political intervention: a contingent articulation of elements which reproduces or challenges the given discourses in the never-ending struggle to define the world” (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 49).

To interpret and analyze the presuppositions of discourse is difficult, but I have strengthened the analysis, relying on Laclau and Mouffe, by supporting it with Bacchi’s framework and the previous research. Turning to discourse analysis and having an interpretative approach demands that I am transparent with my choices and interpretations. As Bacchi and Rönnblom (2014, p. 181) notes, one must be reflexive about the consequences for the presented reality that is produced by the methods that are used. I also acknowledge that my pre-understandings and own engagements in the feminist struggles affect my view of the feminist discourses.

⁹ No one has that many friends

Altogether, the material comes out quite homogenous. I am aware of this and understand that is a consequence of the choices I have made, such as turning to the sisterhood debate. Yet, socioeconomic status is a heavy factor in political participation. People with immigrant backgrounds engage in politics to a lesser degree compared with others citizens. Gustafsson argue this is because of integration problems and social resources, and that class is an overall affecting factor, since information and interest comes with the natural social capital (Gustafsson, 2013, p. 32).

Also, after having read Pariser (Pariser, 2011) on filter bubbles, I feel a need to criticize my material. Google filters my search result. The initial revolutionary anonymity provided by Internet has been converted to the exact opposite. Although I have changed computers, I have not been able to escape the personalized search results. One search affects the next etc. It is likely then, that someone else would not have gathered the same material to start with. I am aware of possible bias created by artificial intelligence, but one might also see the filter bubble as a contemporary phenomenon.

3. Genealogy of Feminism

The following genealogy is a historical retelling of the Swedish women's rights movement and modern feminism. It focuses mainly on the second wave, since the width of the activism is most similar to today and it was the birth of today's feminism. To sort out how the representation of the struggle has come about, I tried to identify what feminism has been constructed around and examine who has been involved in the movement. As previously mentioned, waves are ascribed post factum, and whether or not we are currently experiencing a new wave of feminism is yet to see. Although the second wave of feminism foundationally changed the living conditions for Swedish women, the activism has continued. A summary of how each wave has contributed to today's feminism follows below.

2nd Wave

Swedish feminism was born out of the women's rights movement in the 1960s and 1970s, generally referred to as the Second Wave of feminism (Mendes, 2012, p. 555). The great debate on gender roles started in the early 1960s, focusing on the improved situations for both women and men. Concurrently, economic growth caused a labor deficit and women were needed on the labor market while they also started studying to a higher degree than before (Wiorek, 1996, p. 10). As women got together, they found that academia did not mirror their experiences. Beverly Skeggs (1995, p. 15) argues that this "perceived disjunction" between real life and research was the engine of the early feminist movement. Some people questioned the gender role debate, arguing that women's oppression was neglected and that the debate lacked critical and analytical perspectives. They identified a need for a women separatist movement, and this is how Group 8 – the most prominent feminist organization – was founded (Wiorek, 1996, p. 13).

Starting as a study circle with educated women in 1968 (Elgán, 2015, p. 23), Group 8 wanted to increase knowledge among Swedish women about their rights and history (Wiorek, 1996, p. 20). The members, mainly young intellectuals, were often active in other political movements and/or parties, but the nonpartisan Group 8 was the biggest women's rights exclusive group (Elgán, 2015, p. 23). As a part of "the private is political"-message, the group kept a flat organization, trying to let all members' voices be heard. This showed how women's problems were all very similar and tied to structures (Wiorek, 1996, p. 15). However, compared to other organizations (such as the Danish red stockings), Group 8 grounded their work in read knowledge, rather than experiences, and the environment was sometimes perceived as cold and non-private (Elgán, 2015, p. 48). Their own magazine, *Kvinnobulletinen*, was criticized by members, who argued that people without interpretative prerogative wrote the articles, the language was too advanced, and

the politics did not always echo the members (Ibid., p. 86). The small groups were sometimes accused of being too elitist, which is why uneducated (or just not highly educated) members felt inferior and left the movement (Ibid., p. 47).

Theoretically, Group 8 relied on Marxism: their activism was grounded in the belief that the capitalistic structures were to blame, rather than patriarchy, and they wanted to fight side by side with men (Wiorek, 1996, p. 20). In 1971, a feminist group from Lund, Kvinnoligan, held a meeting with over a thousand representatives from the British Women's Liberation, the Danish Redsocks, and Group 8. Although their ideological convictions differed greatly, they were united in their rage against society. Within a couple of years from its founding, Group 8 started moving from strictly sociological ideology towards feminist theories, inspired by the before mentioned movements (Wiorek, 1996, p. 25; Elgán, 2015, p. 43). In the mid 1970s, Group 8 stated that women were oppressed because they were women, and not because of their life status (class or family et cetera). The movement went from women's liberation within a male society, which adapted to the male norm, to a women's revolution, which criticized the male norm of war, pollution, violence and capitalist societies (Wiorek, 1996, p. 50).

Wiorek notes that Group 8 was influenced by the American Women's Liberation Movement, as they had a more "militant, outgoing and humorous way of working than other Swedish women's rights organization" (1996, p. 15). They spread their opinions through their magazine, articles in other magazines, fliers and demonstrations (Elgán, 2015, p. 50). Inspired by the Women's Liberation, words like patriarchal, sisterhood, sexism, and gender oppression was adopted (Wiorek, 1996, p. 26). Wiorek (1996, p. 50) notes that as feminism grew within the movement, women's culture and sisterhood were hailed and women's experiences were reappraised.

Furthermore, the most important struggles of the second wave was equal wages, free childcare for all, and free abortion (Elgán, 2015, p. 24; Wiorek, 1996, p. 19). Others had already pursued these matters and Group 8 built on their work, while trying to do it their own way (Elgán, 2015, p. 26). Group 8 was accused by Marxist organizations for wanting free abortion in order to be able to work; be released from having children; and consequently fight for liberation within male standards (Wiorek, 1996, p. 42). This critique is also explained by the fact that many women of the left-wing movements wanted to preserve the nuclear family, and wanted the state to protect women and children to a higher degree than it did at the time (Ibid, p. 49).

Moreover, Group 8 regarded free daycare favorable for both women, who would be able to work, and children, who would be raised among other children rather than in isolation with the mother. They stated that a woman could not become equal with a man unless she was working and able to contribute to the income to the same extent as a man, seeing economic independence as the source of liberation (Elgán, 2015, p. 27; Wiorek, 1996, p. 46). For the same reason, they opposed a prolonged parental leave, since it would keep the mother away from the labor market (Wiorek, 1996, p. 48). This was disregarded as a will from bourgeois career women (Ibid, p.

44). The critique of traditional motherhood was controversial and assisted the perception that Group 8 was hostile towards both men and having children. These interpretations were often grounded in feminist theories, which state that reproduction is the source of oppression (Ibid.). My interpretation of the studied material is that although Group 8 faced opposition all along, things seem to have hardened in the mid 1970s. Witt-Brattström (2010, p. 53), for example, testified that a lot of women's rights activists experienced a threat from powerful people.

The concept of *feminism* was debated in Group 8 until 1977, when they adopted it (Elgán, 2015, p. 13), but Group 8 was criticized for not having a distinct definition of feminism, both from within and outside the group (Wiorek, 1996, p. 34). The word feminist had a bad connotation, which mainly came from American media flaunting out news¹⁰ about separatist feminist movements under the feminist label (Ibid.). Wiorek (1996, p. 26) noted that people were afraid to be called feminists. Group 8 kept proclaiming their reliance on socialism, but the shifted focus to women's experiences contributed to the notion that feminists tried to seal themselves from the male society. In the late 1970s the general debate had gone from discussing that feminism disregarded class inequalities to discussing man-hate (Ibid., p. 38). While the women's liberation movements were fighting for women's rights, the politicians were discussing and accepting equality reforms. This had the consequence that feminists were seen as radical and hysterical women, since *reasonable* politicians were actually doing something (Ibid., p. 35). Group 8 was dissolved in the early 1980s, and Wold (2017) states, "it was so radical, so it had to die" and that "more ordinary women could pursue these questions in trade-union and at work".

80s Backlash

Following the activist 1970s was the post-second wave era of the 1980s. Wold states that the activism died in the eighties, but that political parties continued some of the struggle: "The social democratic women were affected by this [the work of Group 8] and pursued it further in their organizations" (Wold, 2017). There were, notably, a lot of political actions on gender equality, such as *The Act respecting equality between women and men at work* (Hirdman, 2014, p. 53). As for how the feminist struggle kept on in the 1980s, Wold states, "one should participate in the labor market and become a citizen with the same rights [as men]" (Wold, 2017). This was seen, for example, in the broad opposition towards child-care allowance as a substitute for public childcare (Hirdman, 2014, p. 53).

Wold (2017) does, however, maintain that it was reactionary times. This notion is shared by many, and feminist theorists have argued that the second wave feminism was reconstructed in the 1980s (Faludi, 1992; Oakley & Mitchell, 1997; McRobbie, 2009). In *Det kallas manshat [It's called man-hate]*, Karin Holmberg (1996) examines different discourses regarding feminism. She studies how the feminist is

¹⁰ An action against the Miss World competition, where radical activists burned their bras, has come to be a negative public image of women's rights movements (Wiorek, 1996, p. 23)

constructed in media in the late 1980s and early 1990s, concluding that not only was it the ‘militant feminists’ who forced housewives out on the labor market in the 1960s, ‘the feminists’ have also been accused of stealing a male journalist’s male identity (he claims to have been mentally castrated by women who dis-appreciated compliments, etc.), and the “feminist tradition” of using men on the route to liberation is to blame for increased divorce rates (Holmberg, 1996, p. 96ff). Susan Faludi (1992) coined the term *Backlash* to describe this phenomenon, where men constructed women’s liberation movements as the origin to women’s problems. Faludi mentions philosophy professor Michael Levin who, in his book about feminism, stated that no philosophy or ism is as wrong about things as feminism (Faludi, 1992, p. 330). Yuval-Davis (1997, p. 122) treats this backlash in *Gender and Nation*, where she describes it as men’s response towards the fear of losing their women.

3rd Wave

The third wave of feminism is often considered to have been initiated in the 1990s by the daughters of the second wave feminists (Mendes, 2012). Influenced by postmodern theories, third wave feminism incorporated new, wider perspectives and struggles. Consequently, it was not as distinct as the first wave (suffragettes/the right to vote) or the second wave and has sometimes been described as not having a clear goal (Ibid., p. 556). Edenheim and Rönnblom (2014) report about a feminist society where the boundaries between academia and activism were not absolute. Identity politics was born and the somewhat anxious academic world tried to mirror the experiences of activists. In line with this, some feminists have rejected the need for a united feminism, since there are sometimes other more important struggles (Mendes, 2012, p. 557).

Wold’s experience of the feminist struggle in the 1990s was the acknowledgement that “there only was seven percent of professors” who were women, even though a majority of the students were women (Wold, 2017). Witt-Brattström presented an investigation that demanded more female professors, which resulted in significant increase within a ten-year period (Hirdman, 2014, p. 81). The academic feminism of the early 1990s also resulted in the launch of the feminist magazine *Bang*. By always being led by young feminists, the magazine has been able to follow (and set?) the trends within feminism (P1 kultur, 2016).

Moreover, a group of feminists (led by Witt-Brattström and Boëthius) demanded that 50 percent should be a woman in politics and threatened to create a feminist party (Hirdman, 2014, p. 80). This led to a historical increase of female representatives within the Swedish parliament, having 43% of the seats (Edenheim & Rönnblom, 2014, p. 69). The heteronormative division stood in contrast to the current feminist activism and research, which proclaimed variation and opposed the disregard of different experiences and lumping people together (Ibid.).

21st Century

Although the third wave continued into the 21st century, the 2000s has been described as yet another backlash for feminism. Faludi (2007) has covered the anti-feminist events in the early 21st century in *The Terror Dream*. In the aftermaths of 9/11, Faludi describes how American media and started portraying women as far more vulnerable and needy, while also accusing feminism for having feminized the American military, leaving them more vulnerable. Gender roles became more traditional – a woman needed a man to protect her – and the housewife became fashionable again (Faludi, 2007, p. 131). Faludi describes how a “not now, honey, we’re at war”-mentality allowed for a wide media coverage of feminism as irrelevant and “an unaffordable luxury” (Ibid., p. 21f). Meanwhile, the discursive construction of the man as a savior denoted women as inferior to men, which “proved” feminism as un-true. Now that there were *worse* men to hate, the “man-hate” towards Average Joes seemed unfounded (Ibid., p. 21). Although written within an American context, the backlash affected Sweden too and the feminist discourse was hijacked by war-proclaimers (Feministiskt Perspektiv, 2011).

Nevertheless, as a consequence of the “every other woman”-demand, the leaders among all the political parties proclaimed that they were feminists. Despite the critique from post-structuralist feminists, the public support for feminism rose, and in 2004 opinion poll’s showed that 22% of the respondents would vote for a feminist party (Micic, 2005). The identity-focused feminism resulted in the founding of Sweden’s first feminist party, *Feministiskt Initiativ*, which claimed to represent *all* women irrespective of background (Edenheim & Rönnblom, 2014, p. 69).

During the last couple of years, feminism has also reached the young population. Earlier this year, Ungdomsbarometern (2017) presented a study that displayed how Swedish youths view societal issues, politics in general, and their social engagements. In the survey, the adolescents had been asked to describe themselves. The result showed that the girls used words like *feminist* and *anti-racist*, and that young adults are increasingly interested in politics. The interest is, however, not mirrored in any increased memberships of political organization. On the contrary, the numbers are decreasing. In line with the third wave of feminism, Swedish adolescents are involved in identity politics rather than ideological politics (Ungdomsbarometern, 2017). Similarly, in 2016, the feminist magazine *Bang* had an articulate intersectional approach and redactor Sanna Samuelsson said, “the Swedish feminism is sometimes accused of being peevish”. However, she maintains that this is a misperception of the openness that allows for societal criticism, which is a motivation in *Bang*’s work (P1 kultur, 2016).

4. The Feminist Discourses

The following chapter is divided in accordance with the identified discourses. The very essence of discourse, where possible meanings are excluded, is evident in the material where things acquire different meanings in different discourses. The two discourses found within the material are *problematic men* and *restricted women*, both of which construct different key signifiers that are ascribed meanings in accordance with the discourses. *Problematic men* circulates around men as the problem within society, and entails the key signifiers of *men as a problem* and *men's latitude*. Whereas the first discusses men's structural violence and power, the latter treats the big latitude within which men are able to act. Meanwhile, the discourse of *restricted women* constructs the reactionary features of the "modern" *mother* role, the moral conditions for a *good feminism*, the tight *latitude* within which women can act, and the constant *negotiation of the meaning* of feminism. The discourses are often constructed in relation to each other – problematic men often affect the restriction of women – but they are still articulated differently along with the shifted focus. The discourse of restricted women dominates the material, but problematic men is always there as a contrast.

The most popular comment in the sisterhood debate entails four of the key signifiers within the material:

I think that minimum is to not slut-shame, put the blame on raped women or distrust them, be against abortion or shame those who do 'too many' or for 'wrong reasons', not to defend men when they attack women and spit out blaming buzzwords like 'when they go low, we go high' as well as protecting ones sisters from men insofar as one can and manages. If one only does that, then we have come pretty far. Then one neither has to like each other or agree with each other in other issues (ladydahmers, 2017)

The commentator here defines what sisterhood is not, and if it is not slut-shaming, it is rather to embrace other people's sexualities. Sisterhood is to protect and believe in rape victims. Sisterhood is to acknowledge and protect the right to abortion, and support those who have abortions. Sisterhood is to stand by women when men attack them, and to lower the demands on how women have to approach antagonists.

The call for not slut-shaming and trusting raped women articulates women's negative latitude. It reflects a reality where women's sexuality is frowned upon and where women who are raped is not always trusted, and instead told that it is their own fault. The commentator also articulates the negative latitude by stating that pro-abortion is not a given fact, why women's rights over their own bodies is threatened. The notion of a *good feminism* is articulated as the commentator tries to lower the moral expectations on women, which, as shown below, often comes from

women themselves. The concept of *men as a problem* is articulated both in the expressed need of “protecting sisters from men” and in the call to not “defend men when they attack women”. Also, the last statement, that one does not have to agree with fellow sisters in other issues, indicates that there is a *negotiation of meaning* of what feminism is to different people.

Moreover, the question of where the representation of the struggle has been produced and defended was answered already in the choice of material. When scanning through Internet (I limited my search to the World Wide Web, but again: 95% of *all* Swedes have online access) it almost immediately revealed what platforms were used. There were no articles about radio or TV shows, and no news articles or featured journalists in relation to feminism. Instead, the listed results were different social media: YouTube-videos where feminists are questioned and ridiculed together with features on why famous people are feminists and debate articles, which gain popularity through social media. Social media *is* the platform for today’s feminism, as argued by Mendes (2015). The podcasters, for example, are both active on social media, where their audience frequently discuss each episode. Although some of the feminist debaters included in the sisterhood debate occasionally write editorial pieces, they spread them through their social media, where discussions on the topics are vivid in the comment fields.

To avoid any confusion, I would like to clarify that the different comment fields are referenced in accordance with their source. A quote from a commentator in Lady Dahmer’s Instagram comment field and a quote from Lady Dahmer herself are hence both referenced to “ladydahmer”.

4.1 Problematic Men

Throughout the podcast and in the Facebook group-replies, men’s violence and violation of women’s human rights are ascribed great importance in the feminist struggle. Below I provide an analysis of how the key signifiers of *men as a problem* and *men’s latitude* give meaning to the discourse of *problematic men*. Within another discourse, men’s latitude might be spoken about in strictly positive meanings¹¹, but within the feminist discourse it is almost exclusively ascribed negative meanings.

Men as a problem

In the podcast, when feminism is mentioned, Skäringer and Mannheimer almost exclusively talk about men as the obstacle for female liberation. Whether it is the responsibilities associated with the mother role, the safety of women, or what a

¹¹ E.g. when Donald Trump swaggered about being able to grab women by the pussy, a.k.a. Pussygate (Wikipedia, 2017)

woman is allowed to do within certain social spaces, men are positioned as an obstacle. On a very serious note, Skäringer and Mannheimer discuss the dangers of being a woman and conclude, “the most dangerous thing a girl can do is being together with a self-absorbed, jealous guy” (2017, Ep. 19). The negative positioning of the “guy” articulates male partners as a safety-risk for girls. This is further amplified as they discuss how some men are offended by negative generalizations of men. Skäringer argue that generalizations are a necessity and that “we don’t have time to even take into consideration the little offendedness [sic!] that can arise from that fact” since the wrong man can be fatal to a woman. Mannheimer agrees and state, “I also think that, the older I get, the more it [being afraid] ruins my life” (2017, Ep. 19).

Furthermore, Lady Dahmer says that she dislikes and criticizes some women, but “when it comes to the fight against patriarchy, I always have their back” (ladydahmers, 2017). A commentator who seconds this opinion states: “I have seen what patriarchy has done to generations of women in my family, and it isn’t pretty” (Ibid., 2017). Sisterhood is articulated in relation to patriarchal structures, which is also seen in the several references to the sexual harassment of a female member of a Swedish nationalist party:

I hate her party and what they stand for, but [...] even more I stand with her as a woman (ladydahmers, 2017)

Irrespective of her political view, she is a woman in the patriarchy and she has been subjected to assault. That comes before everything (Lady Dahmer / Postpatriarkatet, 2017)

Everybody has the right to their own body, irrespective of political views (Ibid.)

By emphasizing the negative relation to the party, the first commentator articulates how strong the sisterly support is. No matter her political views, the commentators have her back against the common enemy: the patriarchy and men.

Moreover, the articulation of men as a problem might exclude their role as a solution, but contrastingly, men are seen as the solution too. Rejecting the notion that women should improve, Skäringer and Mannheimer (2017, Ep. 13) argue instead that men have to step up for women. The solution-aspect is articulated in an everyday life-situation when Skäringer and Mannheimer talk about how a man “makes sure to get his nice rest when he comes home” after working away (2017, Ep. 10). A woman, they argue, comes home to take care of the household. Here, they indicate that a woman can never rest unless the man changes. Notably, the subject positions of men as problem and solution are socially antagonistic since it presupposes that a “problematic” man cannot also be a part of the solution, but that he has to change.

Talking about men as a solution might be seen as contradictive to the notion of men as a problem. On the contrary, it *further* articulates their subject position as “bad guys”: their own behaviors are subject to change. Here, Skäringer and Mannheimer argue that “we need men to join us”, which they exemplify with the right to vote,

where women were dependent on male support. They also articulate the meaning of men as a solution by briefly comparing it with slavery and how the slaves were liberated only when enough white people fought alongside them. Skäringer and Mannheimer also contend that men probably are tired of their own behaviors, but also scared of being perceived as norm-breaking (2017, Ep. 13). This is also articulated when they discuss the how much the role of women has changed during the 20th century. Men, they argue, are still living in the 1950s (Ibid.), and they indicate that men cling on to traditional gender roles and behavioral norms. As they discuss the behavioral traits imposed on the identity of *man*, they suggest that it is unwanted, yet somewhat seen as objective since it constitutes the norm. This articulates the fact that women and men both need the world to change, which is amplified as they state, “it’s not a women’s issue, it’s a big damn problem that needs to be fixed and we have to help each other out” (Ibid, Ep. 19).

Although the general group formation of men are seen as a societal problem, the *problematic men*-discourse positions men as both good and bad. Comparing men in the 1970s and men of today, Wold creates a distinction between men who fought for themselves and today’s feminist men who “actually want to make a difference for women” (Wold 2017). Skäringer and Mannheimer also talk about good and bad men. They do, however, seem to distance both good and bad men from those who commit crime and sexual violence et cetera. They discuss that in general, when men as a group are mentioned as a problem, some men are offended and react by threatening the women who highlighted the issue. Skäringer and Mannheimer articulate men’s touchiness in relation to how they, themselves, understand that they are a part of the global warming. Even though they have a sustainable lifestyle and are not physically pillaging the rainforests, they would not be offended if someone would confront them with being a part of the problem (2017, Ep. 13). Notably, it is in relation to the offended men that the good men are ascribed meaning. Thus, it is not in relation to the men who actually commit heavy¹² crimes, but to those who are offended by the accusations. Through a chain of equivalence, the bad men are ascribed traits as *easily offended* and *offensive*, whereas the good men are equated with not doing something bad.

Men’s Latitude

The key signifier of *men’s latitude*, referred to repeatedly within the podcast, but also in the other material, describes the wide latitude within which men are able to act. Combining the *problem of men* and *men’s latitude*, a *Heja Livet*-commentator argues that “[m]en’s economic power structure” is the biggest concern. The commentator holds that this structure needs to be recognized and fought on “individual level, family level, working life, and business” (Heja Livet, 2017).

The essence of men’s latitude is articulated when it is discussed in relation to a woman’s. Skäringer and Mannheimer talk about a female assistant who served her male boss’ every need: “she even got birthday gifts to his children”. They continue

¹² Note: Depending on the level of threat, the offended men might of course commit crimes as well

by stating that “she described him as a troublesome child, but he was a genius” and when later working for a woman, the assistant stated, “I don’t understand that she can’t book tickets herself?” Ironically, the assistant also said, “she’s not a child” (2017, Ep. 5). The man was described as a child but since he was also considered a “genius”, his behaviors were accepted. This event of “separating the art from the artist” (Hess, 2017), where a man’s behaviors are excused in favor for his talent, is usually described as the myth of “the artistic genius” (Ibid.) – a phenomenon that could be subject to a thesis itself. Skäringer and Mannheimer articulate this when talking about men’s bad behaviors, stating, “there’s always an excuse for a man: he’s an artist, he’s brilliant” (2017, Ep. 5). They argue that “when it comes to a man” people “differentiate between behavior and how good he is at what he’s doing” (ibid). They provide the example of Ozzy Osborne who has had severe drug problems, who “bumbles around” and “slutters”, and conclude that a woman could never do that and still maintain her social status (2017, Ep. 6).

Despite the perceived ease with which men get away with things, Mannheimer state that even though she had the opportunities of a man, she would not act on it: “What if I could do that? No, I wouldn’t want to do that?” (Skäringer Lazar & Mannheimer, 2017, Ep. 5). The latitude of men is given a negative connotation in relation to how men enjoy it. Even more, though, as Mannheimer distances herself from the men who enjoy the wide latitude, the subject position of the men is articulated as non-desirable. *Men’s latitude* is thereby articulated in negative terms in line with the male norm, which was previously described as being non-desired by men.

Again, the context within which the key signifier of *men’s latitude* is constructed is varying. Within Skäringer and Mannheimer’s working context, they talk about men’s humor and how they, as women, have laughed at things that they cannot really relate to (“early ejaculation” and “oh no I had an erection”). Men, on the other side, argue that they cannot find women-specific jokes (“child-birth”) funny since they cannot relate (2017, Ep. 5). Similarly, the male latitude is articulated in the sisterhood debate when the commentators discuss how Skäringer faces heavy critique for her video. This is compared to men in the same position, stating, “[e]ntire TV-shows [...] has had similar setups, several (mostly male) comedians have made their entire career in doing caricatures” (cissiwallin, 2017).

Another latitude articulated in the podcast is men’s amorousness, which they argue set the sex-life agenda: “men do the helicopter, women don’t do anything” (2017, Ep. 27). This sexual latitude is also discussed in respect to women’s small latitude. Skäringer and Mannheimer talk about when bad behaviors of boys are excused because they “are in love” with the girl they harass and how men’s sexual abuse of women is excused because they “can’t contain themselves” (2017, Ep. 19). Unlike other we/them-relations, men’s structural violence literally questions the existence of women. This antagonism makes the relation inherently political and the group formation of men is articulated as a threat in relation to those who are not men.

4.2 Restricted Women

The discourse of restricted women entails the key signifiers of *negative latitude*, *good feminism*, *the holy mother*, and *negotiating the meaning*. Since the sisterhood debate is set within a feminist discourse, it presupposes the feminist values of the debaters and within their spoken opinions. However, the debate itself is one of restricted women: what are women allowed to do in the name of sisterhood? How are they allowed to act while enjoying sisterly support?

The themes found in the replies to the Facebook question differ a bit from the rest of the material. They are, however, still found within a discourse of restricted women. Most frequent was replies associated with equal rights; being able to be yourself; and the right to exist (Heja Livet, 2017). Although the Facebook replies in many cases are non-gendered (“Equality for everyone!”), it is often in relation to their own experiences. One commentator says that it is her most important question “[s]ince it has been such a big part of my entire life, and that I in turn have a little brother who has always liked ‘girly’ things as much as ‘boyish’ thing (and gotten into a lot of trouble for it)” (Heja Livet, 2017). Through a chain of equivalence, *possibility to be yourself* is connected with something desirable and hence, it constructs the reality as lacking this possibility.

The Holy Mother

When discussing the social expectations on mothers, Skäringer and Mannheimer refer to “the holy mother” (2017, Ep. 10). The key signifier of the *holy mother* circles around this discussion on the high demands on women as mothers. The subject position of mothers in the discourse is articulated in opposition to the feminists who speak of them. Skäringer and Mannheimer admit to compare themselves with the mothers that always asked, “is there a microwave?” This, they argue, indicates that someone is well prepared, whereas they themselves were “more interested in if there was a coffee machine”. Although they admit that the holy mother is socially constructed, they have “always felt a little bit inferior” in relation to her. The subject position of the *holy mother* is criticized, yet they speak of themselves as “bad mothers” in “the mother-competition”, leaving them with a bad conscience and an “inferiority complex” (2017, Ep. 10).

Moreover, Skäringer and Mannheimer state, “if I would have had children with a woman, I might have [...] been able to relax” (2017, Ep. 10), while articulating the mother as a better-suited parent. When they contend that a father relaxes in his parenting because he knows that the mother is in control, the mother is positioned in contrast to the father. Hence, despite their rejection of the mother role, gender is still constructed as a significant difference in the articulations of caring.

Wold is also concerned about women’s role as mothers, which she claims is “incredibly reactionary”, almost mirroring “50s rhetoric”. Wold articulates this mother role, giving it a bad connotation, as she expresses her worry regarding the

increasing popularity of being the perfect mother. This is, however, not a new occurrence or concern. Instead, it is in line with what Faludi (2007) described in the aftermaths of 9/11, with an extremely reactionary mother role and glorification of the housewife. Moreover, Wold admits her concern regarding the fact that “a lot of mothers do not want to split parental leave” and that “it is only about 12 percent of parents who split the parental leave even” (Wold, 2017). This occurrence results in high expectations on mothers, who stay away from the labor market during a long period of time, which often results in an economical restriction.

The key signifier is also found within the sisterhood debate, where Löwengrip’s parenting is discussed in terms of being questioned too much (Lady Dahmer, 2017). Löwengrip is consequently positioned as a mother in a perceived contrast to the holy mother. Additionally, a commentator recognizes herself in the satire video, and argues that the role of young mothers has to be questioned. She holds that the societal (and, perhaps more important, their own) demands are leaving mothers drained and burned out “in a pursuit of seeming successful in the eyes of someone else” (Underbara Clara, 2017b). With this exception, the role of the mother is constructed as “the other” and the *holy mother* as a subject position is articulated as unattainable and destructive.

Good Feminism

Somewhat found in between the lines in the comment fields, is the notion of a *good feminism*: feminists are positioned as moral guardians, facing high social demands. This is acknowledged by journalist Cissi Wallin, who states that “[t]rying to do the right thing is not easy in these occasionally anxious times” (cissiwallin, 2017). Skäringer and Mannheimer discuss the fact that although they “are no saints” they “have to be allowed to question behaviors they don’t agree with” (2017, Ep. 24), indicating that this is *not* the case today. Another commentator articulates this opinion in relation to women’s approach towards antagonists, as she states “women put too high demands on each other” (ladydahmers, 2017). Yet, despite the comments about high demands on women, the same people seem to have these high demands.

According to abovementioned Wallin, “whining about a sisterhood-fail [...] when substantially criticized” is unacceptable. A Lady Dahmer-commentator notes, “[w]e have to criticize each other’s opinions and we don’t have to like each other” (ladydahmers, 2017). Notably, within the sisterhood debate, criticism is articulated as *substantial*. Although the expectation that criticism should be substantial might be perfectly normal in relation to *any* human being, substantial is stressed in relation to woman-on-woman criticism, hence reconfirming the high expectations on women. To articulate criticism as substantial, while also maintaining that people develop from feedback, increases the already high demands on criticism. Whereas this was apprehended as constructed by others in the fair feminism debate of *Jekyll and Hyde revisited*, the high demands are here constructed by feminists themselves.

“Women are no fragile flowers”, stated the feminist blogger Clara Lidström in the sisterhood debate, which sparked an intense discussion (Underbara Clara, 2017b). Although a majority of the commentators agreed with the statement, it also engaged people’s compassion: what should one take into consideration when criticizing someone? Some people hold the opinion that one should consider the mental status or life situation of the person one criticizes. This is found among both the commentators who dismiss and those who support Löwengrip’s sisterhood-appeal. Saying things like “[i]f it might hurt someone, then maybe one could resist doing it?” (Underbara Clara, 2017a), “[s]he’s going through a tough time” (Ibid.), and that criticizing Löwengrip is “insensitive with regards to her life situation” (Ibid.), the commentators rearticulates the high moral expectations of women.

Moreover, a reoccurring theme in the material is the notion that some kind of *other* feminism is present. That is, a feminism in relation to which the good feminism is constructed. One person in the comment field states that Löwengrip needs to earn money to run “her kind of feminism” (Lady Dahmer / Postpatriarkatet, 2017), indicating that Löwengrip’s feminism is dismissed by the dominating position of the discourse.

In the podcast, Skäringer and Mannheimer repeatedly distance themselves from other feminists. For instance, they criticize the *young* feminism and state that young feminists “show a hairy armpit” while also “puffing out their bums in a short skirt”, and Skäringer and Mannheimer argue that the young feminists reproduce a “patriarchal image” of how a horny woman looks (2017, Ep. 2). Skäringer and Mannheimer are not comfortable with this kind of sexually provocative feminism, and they argue, “you’re not showing your boobs for yourself! Then you could just look in the mirror” (Ibid.). The feminism represented in the podcast stands in political antagonism with this young feminism, since it is equivalent with a feminism, which they do not want to identify with. While the good feminist is positioned as morally superior, “the other” feminist is positioned as patriarchally pleasing. Talking about the “young feminism” in this manner naturally excludes the meaning that the “young feminists” ascribe to their own feminism.

Interestingly, there is only one comment on the fact that the entire sisterhood debate backlashed on Skäringer: “if it isn’t sisterly to criticize, how come Mia Skäringer is hit by this shit storm now?” (cissiwallin, 2017). People’s criticism towards Skäringer, where they argue that women should not criticize other women, is hence a contradiction. Yet although the argumentation that women are not allowed to criticize women is undermined, the high demands on the argumentation and the substantial criticism still remains.

Negative Latitude

“Women have to be better”

This quote from Skäringer and Mannheimer (2017, Ep. 5) sums up parts of women’s negative latitude: the dominant discourse of the negative latitude is the notion that women have to act within strict limits. Women are constructed in

relation to high societal expectations and as targets of men's economic and structural violence. Whereas *men's latitude* describes the possibilities and non-existing limits for men, the *negative latitude* rather describes different situations and contexts within which women are restricted. The negative latitude is not always physical, but also an internalized mindset among the female population, that dictates their way of living.

The latitude is constructed in a wide range of contexts. One example is found when Skäringer and Mannheimer excuse the fact that the podcast will be sponsored, and then ask, "would our male colleagues even have mentioned this?" (2017, Ep. 5). Mannheimer admits that she feels as though "women should be better than men. They're supposed to be more kind, more thoughtful, and they should absolutely not *want* to earn money" and if a "woman is smart, makes good deals, or negotiates well" people perceive her as "greedy" (2017, Ep. 5). The subject position of a woman is here restricted by the articulations of how a woman should or should not be.

Moreover, the subject position of the *negative latitude* is a woman or a feminist, but she is rarely portrayed as a victim. Instead, she is seen unable to act, which is a consequence of external restrictions. The most liked *Heja Livet*-comment describes this in a need for a discussion about women's abilities in a positive way:

To speak up about how damn hard childbirth is, so that people stop comparing it to a man cold. And upraising women who work with physical professions, not exotifying them as 'victims in a green environment'

With experience from the Swedish military, the commentator states that women are always portrayed as victims within the military. Contrastingly, the commentator holds that women are very strong (Heja Livet, 2017). By discussing this representation of women in the military, the commentator articulates women's negative latitude in relation to the expectations on them. In the eyes of society, the commentator argues, they are seen as inferior to men and this, in turn, restricts their potential for development and general working latitude. This restriction is also somewhat articulated by a person in *Heja Livet* (2017), who stresses the major problem of "sexualizing the woman and the female body". Again, desires and dreams are constructed in relation to what it is not, why it denotes a contrasting reality.

The ultimate expression of women's negative latitude is found in the podcast, when Skäringer and Mannheimer pay tribute to women "who are beaten to death solely for being women" (2017, Ep. 19). They trace the line of action from middle school when "a guy pinched you pretty hard in a breast" to when "someone perhaps has sex with you while you're unconscious". Skäringer and Mannheimer are mad with the fact that men sexually harass and abuse women, but the woman have to take care of his family and thinking "what would this do to his wife if I told her?" While stating that some people criticize feminists of applying a broad brush approach, they argue that women "never know if this is just a guy who uses a hard jargon" or if the person is violent and might hurt them. Women's negative latitude is described in

physical terms in relation to the complaint that women lack a sense of humor or should have more fun. Skäringer and Mannheimer say:

Then they tell us to loosen up, but it is hard when you don't know if a man wants to kill you or if he is just hard handed. A woman is always afraid: when walking home, at the club and so on (2017, Ep. 27)

Moreover, and in line with the previous research on feminist constructions, Skäringer and Mannheimer conclude that female feminists have to choose their words carefully. "When women express feminist thoughts, people position them as being bitter", whereas a man is "met with a spontaneous applaud" (2017, Ep. 20). This anti-feminist buzzword dismantles women's societal critique, labeling it as cries of an unfortunate and unhappy person, which restricts female feminist's verbal latitude. This is also debated in relation to sisterhood, where a commentator states that "Löwengrip's touchiness" is "an example of how sisterhood should not be used, since women fight FOR a bigger latitude". She continues, "[i]t is extremely restrictive to always be afraid of having an opinion" (Lady Dahmer / Postpatriarkatet, 2017). The commentator articulates the sisterhood debate as an infringement of women's latitude, which is seconded by another commentator, who argues that it is crucial to criticize a behavior that holds on to patriarchal structures and might hurt women (cissiwallin, 2017): "But if someone (read woman) is acting in a stupid or destructive way [...] then WE HAVE TO BE ABLE TO GOOD DAMN CRITICIZE IT without being a bad sister??" (cissiwallin, 2017, [capitals in original]).

Within the debate on sisterhood, there seems to be a consensus regarding the higher demands on Löwengrip as an entrepreneur due to the fact that she is a woman. On the one hand, then, women are articulated as strong, independent entrepreneurs. On the other hand, women within the sisterhood debate are equated with being fragile and in need of compassion. Hence, the ones who support Löwengrip's appeal to sisterhood struggle with these antagonistic meanings of woman. The two identities of feminist and capitalist are antagonistic, showing that *yes*, she can be a capitalist, but it is *not* an act of feminism. Following the debate, however, the social antagonism seems to exclude the identity of Löwengrip as a "sister" within the given situation.

In relation to the sisterhood debate, Nord discusses the notion that no matter what, women have to support other women, and refers to the fact that Madeleine Albright's words "there is a special place in hell for women who don't help other women" is proclaimed every time "someone rejects a product that is marketed". This frustration is also expressed by Mannheimer, stating that there is a general opinion that "women have to support women", while maintaining that she does not always want to do that. Literally articulating women's latitude, she says that there is not enough space for women (2017, Ep. 2).

Negotiating the Meaning

The last theme within the discourse of restricted women is perhaps obvious, and goes hand-in-hand with *good feminism* and *negative latitude*. The feminist discourse is in a constant internal – yet out for public display – negotiation of the meanings of feminism. This negotiation is perhaps a result of high demands on women and the notion of the perfect feminist. Also, as Skäringer and Mannheimer complain about men's inability to change, they do it in relation to women's development (2017, Ep. 13). Maybe this development and the wide possibilities within the role of a woman contribute to the negotiation as well.

Either way, this is traceable through the genealogy, where Group 8 was highly questioned by other women's rights groups (along with the rest of society). Second wave feminists, in turn, questioned the academic-activist fusion of the third wave. In line with Mouffe's (2005, p. 18) reasoning, one might argue that it is because the articulatory practices of feminism have differed and constantly changed throughout history that a hegemonic construction is able to exist.

Wold, as a second wave feminist, distances herself from "today's feminists". She maintains that today's feminism is too kind, and gives the example of the Sweden Democrats, who she claims people rightfully call racists, but ignore their sexism. As she contends that "SD are exactly as much against immigrants as they are against women's equal rights", she also states that "if you're a feminist, it's important to be a feminist" – equating *a feminist* with caring for women's rights, excluding anti-racism from the subject position.

Wold is also critical towards the fact that today's feminism is prevailed by an intersectional perspective. Intersectionality, she argues, is contra productive (or, frankly, "the stupidest idea" she has ever heard) and prevents people from coming together to actually accomplish something. From the perspective of a second wave feminist, she contends that today's feminists are their own threat: "feminism is too divided and there are too many struggles" (Wold, 2017).

As Wold starts talking about today's feminism, she hesitates to say *movement*, and states that there is no actual movement today. She maintains that feminists should gather around a small amount of issues instead of the current situation (Wold, 2017). Contrastingly, in *Heja Livet*, a commentator holds that "all different angles in the work around Feminism is important, and that is how the new paradigm takes shape".

Wold argues that apart from the conflict with men, there are a lot of inner conflicts within the feminism of today (Wold, 2017). One such is found in the chosen sisterhood debate. The anxiety mentioned by Wallin, which makes it hard to do the right thing (cissiwallin, 2017), is a sign of the negotiation of meaning and, inherently, a current conflict within feminism. As many commentators hold, questioning women and feminist agendas "goes without saying" (ladydahmers, 2017) and "might even develop us and make us better" (Nord, 2017), whereas the opposite "is patronizing" (cissiwallin, 2017) and "trips up" (ladydahmers, 2017) women.

5. Discussion

How then, is hegemonic feminism constructed by self-identified feminists in a Swedish context?

The feminism that is hegemonic across the discourses is constructed in relation to the struggles of male structural power, which in turn restrict women's lives. In line with the previous research of Calder-Dawe and Gavey (2016), where feminism was constructed in a dually divided Jekyll and Hyde-manner, the feminism within the scope of this thesis is divided in two different discourses. Whether it is about living without restricting expectations (as a person, mother, feminist, women), or being physically and mentally safe, there are coexisting discourses to counter men and empower women. Also, by describing men's latitude as non-desirable and men as both a problem and solution, men are articulated as the most important struggle in relation to which the hegemonic feminism is constructed.

Glancing at the people who are represented within the material, and hence construct the hegemonic feminism, their backgrounds are quite homogeneous. This does not necessarily mean that they exclude perspectives to which they cannot relate, but I argue that they do. In the previous research I promised to recouple with Griffin and explain why privileged women indicate how feminism is constructed. Skäringer and Mannheimer, being hostesses of one of Sweden's biggest podcasts, are indeed agenda-setters. The sisterhood debate, which reached higher publicity than the feminist debate of appearance, started with Mia Skäringer and Isabella Löwengrip. Both of whom enjoy a considerable social capital. Also, both of the debates were made public by Lady Dahmer and Wallin. All coming from privileged circumstances, they express themselves from their own point of views. Consequently, the hegemonic feminism does not treat racist structures, cisgender¹³ privileges or any oppressions but the male. Sisterhood, for example, entails the protection of other sisters, but the only articulated threats are patriarchy and men – not racists, homophobes, or transphobes. I acknowledge that my choice of turning to the sisterhood debate further polarized the non-inclusiveness and since the sisterhood debate discusses women, its heteronormative expression might not come as a surprise. However, both of the identified discourses are based in this heteronormative gender binary.

Concerning the sisterhood debate, it is essentially antagonistic since the discourse circles around a struggle on the meaning of sisterhood. Despite the figurative nature, the word "sisterhood" is excluding *per se* and hence, inherently political. The

¹³ I did not want to footnote cis, since I think the definition should be common knowledge. However, I do take my role as a popular educator fairly seriously: cis is the opposite of trans (now google it)

possible identities within the sisterhood discourse are female siblings, sisters, why the discourse is limited to those who are able to identify as sisters¹⁴.

With the risk of coming out as too critical, I must discuss the fact the hegemonic feminism is inherently defined by the excluded possible meanings and interpretations. Not talking about racism makes it a white feminism; not talking about class makes it a feminism that does not acknowledge socio-economic oppression; not talking about ableism¹⁵ makes it a feminism that excludes disabilities; not talking about transphobia makes it a cis-normative feminism that lacks a non-binary perspective. Wold and Witt-Brattström argue that the feminism of today is too wide and shattered, but the feminism that is represented within the material seems to go hand-in-hand with the feminism they call for. Apart from a comment in the Facebook group, an intersectional perspective was neither mentioned nor articulated within the material.

In summary, the hegemonic feminism constructed by self-identified feminists in a Swedish context is heteronormative and does not take into account minorities. It is constructed by contrasting the problem of men and the restriction of women, and by negotiating its own meaning. The analysis has shown how self-identified feminists construct feminism from their own perspectives, yet how they, as women, fight and care for other women simply because they are women.

As previously stated, the longer a hegemony lasts, the more successful it is. Although the representation of feminism and its struggles have changed over time, it still constructs a normative movement. The level of success of the hegemonic feminism is none in which I intend to prophesy, but considering its relative cementation over time, I would be surprised to see any major disruptions.

This thesis contributes to the understanding of how feminism is constructed and thereby how feminists are represented. Turning to discourse theory has helped me identify the feminism that is hegemonic across the discourses. WPR gave me tools to structure the material, which I approached and systematized using the questions suggested in the strategy of analysis. Also, it helped deepen my understanding of the construction of feminism by suggesting the genealogy.

Unlike the methods prevailing the previous research on the construction of feminism, I chose not to focus on interviews. Alike the study of Calder-Dawe and Gavey, which I have referred to repeatedly throughout this study, I would suggest further research to focus on the construction of feminism in Sweden through conducting group interviews. This could, then provide an understanding of how self-identified feminists articulate their feminism. Also, if one chooses to build on the other previous research, where non-feminists constructed feminism, one might study the differences within a Swedish context.

¹⁴ As opposed to siblinghood, which serves to include trans and non-binary people (Scott Duane, 2014)

¹⁵ Ableism = “Discrimination in favour of able-bodied people” (Oxford Dictionaries, 2017)

Moreover, the feminism of today is perceived to be in opposition with second wave feminism. This clash between second wave feminists and feminists of today, would be interesting to examine further, especially considering the fact that this thesis did was not able to confirm this perceived disjunction.

Building on the construction of feminism, and in line with what Mendes (2015b) suggests, more research on social media in relation to activism is needed and one might also consider an ethnographic study on how feminist activists construct feminism through their activism. Also, the possibilities to study the #metoo campaign are seemingly endless, yet in relation to this thesis I wonder how the campaign might have affected the perception of feminism in Sweden and self-identified feminist's possibilities to construct their feminism.

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