

# Women and work in Swedish historical research

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## Introduction

The aim of this paper is to give an outline of the development of gender history as a field for academic research in Sweden and to discuss the development in relation to questions of époques and subjects. We would also like to focus on what role the question of work and gender division of labour have played in Swedish historical writing. A hypothesis is that there is an intertwinement between gender history, labour history and the women's movement. In the Swedish women's movement the idea of economic independence accomplished by paid work as a determining factor for women's liberation and equality have historically been a central issue, making it likely that studies of paid work is central in research on gender history.

## *Questions in this paper*

Our survey is based on dissertations written in the departments of history and economic history in Sweden in the period 1975–2003.<sup>1</sup> The dissertations give a good picture of the academic development. In Sweden a large amount of basic research is presented in dissertations. Furthermore these are published in advance of the public defence of a one's dissertation, and they are also reviewed in the Swedish Journal of History (Historisk Tidskrift) or in other relevant journals. It can therefore be assumed that knowledge about the dissertations become quite widely spread in the country. The selection has also allowed us to work with a manageable sample. Against the choice of dissertations can be argued that they seldom represent the newest theoretical approach, as they are the result of many years research. Even though the newest research may not be published in dissertations we believe

that the long time period that we study will give us a good overview of the position of gender studies among historical research.

First we will address questions concerning the quantitative importance of gender studies in Swedish dissertations in history and economic history. Questions like: How many studies using a gender perspective have been written; has the number grown over time and, if so, to what extent in comparison to other perspectives, will be answered. We will also study at which university historical gender research is performed in order to demonstrate the influence of the subject: A wide spread subject is believed to be more important for historical research at large, than a subject concentrated only to one university. We will also turn to geographical conclusions in order to discuss the existence of clusters and networks of researchers. Other questions that will be looked into concern which periods and geographical areas that have been studied and whether the studies have been written by women or by men. In this part of the paper previous research and a bibliometric study based on the digitilised national bibliographic databases “LIBRIS” and “GENA” is presented.

Secondly, we will question to what respect work – paid or unpaid – is an important theme in Swedish women’s history, and what kind of problems that have been put forward as the most urgent for researchers to tackle as presented in dissertations. As we have already mentioned we assume that in Sweden there is a clear parallel between research and equality policy emphasising women’s paid work as a way to emancipation – it is even possible that the importance of paid work in equality policy has influenced research to focus on paid, rather than unpaid work. Is there a difference depending on which period the research is focusing on, and is it possible to discern changes over the period? Furthermore, what are the connections between labour history and gender history, and what influence has post-colonialist theories and a discursive approach had on how women’s historians have theorised

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<sup>1</sup> Lists of these will be presented as an appendix to the paper, but are not included so far.

about gender and work? This second part of the paper is explorative as the actual research of all dissertations on gender subjects in history have not been studied yet. Here we will only give a short presentation of gender dissertations in economic history.

### The development of women's history as a field in Swedish research Women have been portrayed in historical scholarship in Sweden since early 20th century.<sup>2</sup>

Before the 1960's there are only a few women to be found in dissertations in history and economic history; a couple of queens and women married to men holding prominent positions in society. This can be seen as a consequence of political history dominating historical research almost entirely. There were, however, historians who already in the 1940's began to observe and comment upon the fact that women in history had faced other obstacles than men. These historians wrote their dissertations within the new field that was gradually developing during this time – social history.

In relation to the aim of this paper it is interesting to note that it was above all in the sphere of production that women's special position was noticed. Although the analysis was not so profound, the social historians nevertheless emphasized how women were excluded from the guilds and thereby had no right to practise a trade. They also described how women worked as spinners in the early manufactures and how many women had to struggle as working mothers.

The field of social history and history "from below" grow over time. In Sweden, like in many any other countries, the increasing number of academic studies concerning the living conditions of women in the 1970's and onwards, is connected to the growth of these fields. This trend in the 1970's to, to an increasing extent, focus on groups and phenomenon that hitherto had been ignored in historical research led to a marked interest for labour history

and labour movement history and thereby also primarily an interest in paid work in the industrialised society. In these years we can see a breaking point between a first and second period of Swedish gender studies.<sup>3</sup>

However, the connection between gender history and social history has to be problematised. Joan Scott has recently called into question this prevailing historiographical analysis of the relationship between women's history and social history. Rather than women's history being an inevitable outcome arising from social history, she claims that women's history developed in opposition to this research field by criticising the absence of women in labour history, and voicing the need to theoretically consider not only the class perspective but also gender.<sup>4</sup> A closer study of the Swedish experiences would maybe confirm this understanding of the development. That the relationship between women's history and labour history has a far from harmonious story also in Sweden can be verified by those who took part in academic discussions at conferences and other forums in the 1980s and 1990s. This is also evident from the minor role women's history played in many of the larger research projects that were going on during that period. One example is the Braverman inspired *A History of Swedish Labour* that occupied five senior researchers at the department of economic History in Uppsala and resulted in several books of which only one explicitly dealt with the gender division of labour.<sup>5</sup>

From the 1970's women's history developed together with the feminist discussions and movements in the 1970's and followed a similar development as international

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<sup>2</sup> The following outline of the development is primarily based on Agneta Ljungh, *Sedd, eller osedd?. Kvinnoskildringar i svensk historieforskning, mellan åren 1890 till 1995*, Lund 1999.

<sup>3</sup> For this periodisation and for examples of texts from the different periods, see Christina Carlsson Wetterberg & Anna Jansdotter, red, "Inledning" i *Genushistoria en historegrafisk exposé*, Studentlitteratur: Lund 2004, pp 5–13. In this paper we will not make a strict division between gender history and women's history. We will see the fields as overlapping each other. However, it is interesting to note that the concept of "gender" was not used as a "Swedish key word" in the national database until after year 2000.

<sup>4</sup> Joan Scott, "Feminism's History", in *Journal of Women's History*, 2004 Vol. 16 No. 2, p.20.

<sup>5</sup> See for example Sten O. Karlsson, *När industriarbetaren blev historia. Studier i svensk arbetarhistoria 1965–1995*. Lund: Studentlitteratur 1998.

research in women's history or gender history.<sup>6</sup> The early studies were based on modern and radical thoughts, implying that absolute truth and objectivity were reachable goals and that society could be changed. Patriarchy was a common concept and Heidi Hartman's article from *Women and revolution* was a popular starting point for discussions.

In the 1980's, the third period, the modern theories were replaced by post-modern theories. *Gender* became an established concept and the strict theoretical difference between the biological sex and the social sex (gender) was introduced. Gender history was to become a new history – not a complement. Old theories were to be deconstructed and gender was to be seen as an important element to create legitimacy to power relations. In Sweden the historian Yvonne Hirdman developed a concept of *the gender system* explaining the relationship between femininity and masculinity including two important principles. According to the first principle femininity and masculinity are held apart. The second principle includes that femininity and masculinity are hierarchically organised with masculinity as the norm. Hirdman's theoretical approach has exerted a strong influence on Swedish historical research, an influence that can be traced both in dissertations and in other historical writings from the mid 1980's and onwards. At the same time it has also been the subject of much discussion and criticism – especially on account of the “system approach”.<sup>7</sup>

In the fourth period, beginning in the 1990's postcolonial criticism influenced gender history. The white heterosexual woman had become a new “norm” and research had up until then disregarded ethnicity and sexuality. Immigrant women's (and men's) experiences in the Swedish society were then studied, as well as how sexuality was formed. Swedish historians have demonstrated that homosexual behaviour was not unheard of in the

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<sup>6</sup> For this periodisation and for examples of texts from the different periods, see Christina Carlsson Wetterberg & Anna Jansdotter, red, ”Inledning” i *Genushistoria en historegrafisk exposé*, Studentlitteratur: Lund, 2004, pp 5–13.

18th and 19th centuries – both among men and women. There were not only sexual behaviour, there was also cross-dressing: women dressed as men joined the army. Another important trend in the fourth period is the development of masculinity research. In a recent research project in Sweden historians study masculinity within the Swedish church – what happened to the masculine ideals when religion was effeminate (a process starting already in the 18th century). According to some critical researchers the development of new perspectives influenced by post-colonial theories have been relatively slow in Sweden and one reason is declared to be a hegemonic discourse in Swedish feminist research.<sup>8</sup> Although we do not intend to discuss this in any detail in our paper it is important to bear this criticism in mind.

## Gender in dissertations of History and Economic History

### *The number of dissertations with a gender perspective*

In order to map out the importance of gender theory in Swedish historical dissertations we will now turn to a bibliometric study. This study is based on two bibliographic databases: GENA and LIBRS. The first database is a database created by the center for women's/gender studies in Gothenburg. This database has been used in order to trace academic literature concerning gender. It is possible to search for these dissertations using keywords like “history” or “economic history” and “gender” and you will get a list of these dissertations including authors, name of the book, university and printing year. The second database is the national bibliographic database created by the Royal library (national library). This database has been used in order to study how the dissertations have been classified according to “keywords”, in order to see whether work and labour have been important subjects in historical dissertations.

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<sup>7</sup> Yvonne Hirdman, ”Genussystemet – reflexioner kring kvinnors sociala underordning”, in *Genushistoria: en historiografisk exposé*, 113-133 For the critique there are articles in several journals it is also collected in the same book where Hirdman is published anew..

<sup>8</sup> Paulina de los Reyes, ”Det problematiska systemskapet: om svenskhet och invandrarskap inom svensk genushistorisk forskning, i *Maktens (o)lika förklådnader: kön, klass & etnicitet i det postkoloniala Sverige: en festskrift till Wuokko Knocke*, 2002.

Unfortunately it is not possible to use this database to trace all historical dissertations or dissertations using a gender perspective as “dissertation” is not a searchable alternative.

If GENA is used as a starting point it is possible to conclude that the number of dissertations using a gender perspective in history and economic history have increased over time (table 1).

Table 1: Number of dissertations in History and Economic history with a gender analysis 1960–2004\*

Year	History	Economic history
–1975	3	0
1976–1980	2	1
1981–1985	3	0
1986–1990	6	2
1991–1995	15	4
1996–2000	21	5
2001–2004	30	4
1960–2004	80	16

\*Keywords: history/economic history/dissertation/gender.

Source: GENA

According to table 1, it is obvious that gender studies in dissertations had their starting point in the 1970’s. Before 1973 only three dissertations in history can be classified as “women’s history”. In the next 10 years five dissertations in history and one in economic history used a gender perspective. Towards the end of the 1980’s the number grow. In the last five years of the 1980’s eight dissertations in the two disciplines were presented. However, the large increase did not take place before the 1990’s.<sup>9</sup> In the first five years 15 dissertations in history and 4 dissertations in economic history were presented. The numbers grow even more in the next five years to 26. The interest continued to grow – 34 dissertations using a gender analysis were presented in the period 2001 to 2004.

Before establishing a growing importance of gender analysis in dissertations it is important to remember that the total amount of dissertations have grown as well. In the

1960's and 1970's only a few students continued after their first three years. This has changed. A political goal in the first decade of 2000 is to make 50 percent of the students from graduate level continue to master and doctorate levels.

It is difficult to compare the total number of dissertations and the number of dissertations using a gender perspective, as the former can't be traced in the national database as we've already mentioned. However, there are other possibilities. In order to make the comparison within economic history other sources have been used, like presentations from the different departments. According to table 2, where dissertations from the economic history departments are included, a great change is found in the beginning of the 1990's. Then 16 percent of the dissertations used a gender analysis and in the coming five years 12 percent of the dissertations used a gender analysis. An alarming fact is that the number of gender related dissertations in economic history decreased to 9 percent in the period 2001–2003. However, it is important to remember that the total number of dissertations written in economic history is not that large – implying that a small change of numbers make great differences in shares.

Table 2: Total number of dissertations in Economic history and number of dissertations with a gender analysis, and share of these in percentage, 1961–2003.

Year	Total	Gender	Share of gender %
-75	32	0	0
1976–80	32	1	3
1981–85	20	0	0
1986–90	28	2	7
1991–95	25	4	16
1996–2000	43	5	12
2001–03	44	2	5
1960–2003	224	14	6

Source: For the total number of dissertations in economic history homepages for the different sources have been used. Departments demonstrate the number of dissertations in different ways which might imply that there are some faults in the numbers. Source: GENA and LIBRIS, last page of published Dissertations and [www.ekhi.lu.se/publ/avhandlingar.asp](http://www.ekhi.lu.se/publ/avhandlingar.asp); [www.handelsgu.webhotel.tripnet.se/item.aspx?id=5452](http://www.handelsgu.webhotel.tripnet.se/item.aspx?id=5452); [www.ekhist.uu.se/Forskning/acta.htm](http://www.ekhist.uu.se/Forskning/acta.htm); [www.ekhist.umu.se/forskning/umustudies.shtml](http://www.ekhist.umu.se/forskning/umustudies.shtml) 2004-05-10 (printed versions are stored with the authors)

<sup>9</sup> Se also Peter Aronsson, "Svenska avhandlingar i historia 1997–2001", [www.aronsson.st](http://www.aronsson.st) 2005-01-18, p 11

In history a comparison between the total number of dissertations and the ones using a gender perspective is more complicated as the number of dissertations in history is great. However, for the period 1991–2003 a comparison is possible using a bibliographical study by Peter Aronsson where the total number of dissertations in this period is presented. A comparison for these years demonstrate that there is a growth of gender analysis in dissertations in the whole period 1991–2003 (table 3). Furthermore, comparing table 2 and 3, it is possible to conclude that the share of gender studies is greater in history than in economic history. In the last period, almost a third of all dissertations use a gender analysis.

Table 3: Total number of dissertations in History and number of Dissertations with a gender analysis, and share of these in percentage, 1991–2003.

Year	History	Gender	Share of gender
1991-1995	83	15	18
1996-2000	98	21	21
2001-2003	81	22	27

Source: Peter Aronsson ” Historisk forskning på väg – vart?, Bilaga 1 and ”Svenska avhandlingar i historia 1997–2001”, Bilaga 1, [www.aronsson.st](http://www.aronsson.st) 2005-01-18; GENA.

### *Women’s history as history written by women*

In Swedish universities there has been a striving for an increased equality between the sexes since the 1970’s. Political decisions have been taken in order to open up doors for women in the academic world. An increasing number of women continue their university studies.<sup>10</sup> Even so, men dominate at the top positions and more men than women write dissertations in history and economic history. However, in gender studies women dominate and so far more women than men have been interested in writing historical dissertations with a gender perspective. In the period 1961–2003 19 percent of the Economic History authors were women and in the

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<sup>10</sup> Ljung, p 167.

1990's 30 percent of the history dissertations' authors were women.<sup>11</sup> In dissertations with a gender perspective 90 percent of the authors were women.

Table 3: Numbers of dissertations in History and Economic history with a gender analysis according to the sex of the author

Year	Total	Number of male authors	Share of male authors
1960–2004	96	10	10

Source: GENA

The increasing number of historical dissertations with a gender perspective point to the importance of letting new groups in to academic studies. Not until women got in on a wide scale, women's studies became important. It is likely that subjects like ethnicity will be treated in the same way. Maybe it is not until a great variation of ethnic groups enters the academic world their problems and questions will be taken seriously.

### *Geography and gender*

In order to discuss the importance of historical gender studies in Sweden, we will now turn to the question of at which university historical gender research is performed. According to table 4 historical gender research is found at every university, however the largest universities (Lund, Stockholm, and Uppsala) produce more historical dissertations with a gender perspective than the others. In comparison to the total number of dissertations in economic history, Uppsala and Stockholm produce more dissertations with a gender analysis than the other universities. Almost 10 percent of all studies produced 1961–2003 are gender studies in these departments. The largest production of dissertations in economic history with a gender perspective is concentrated to Uppsala, however not in comparison to the total amount of dissertations. In history the pattern is somewhat different. In the period 1990–2003 17 percent of the dissertations in History used a gender analysis in Uppsala (Gothenburg had the same

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<sup>11</sup> Susanna Hedenborg & Börje Bergfeldt, "Den ekonomisk-historiska forskarutbildningen 1961–2003, in *Historisk Tidskrift* 2004: 4, pp 619–630; Peter Aronsson, "Historisk forskning på väg", p 27, [www.aronsson.st](http://www.aronsson.st)

share). In Umeå the share was much greater (28 percent) followed by Lund 22 percent and Stockholm 20 percent.

Table 4: Numbers of studies in History and Economic history with a gender analysis according to university

University	History	Economic history
Lund	22	3
Stockholm	18	3
Uppsala	13	6
Gothenburg	13	3
Umeå	11	1
Örebro	3	-
Total	80	16

Source: GENA

As it is likely that professors and other tutors play an important role in making it possible for doctorate students to present gender studies this paper will now turn to a presentation of how the concept of gender was met in different Swedish academic milieus.

It is obvious that the history department at the university in Gothenburg played an important role in the initial stage of establishing women's history as a research field in Sweden.<sup>12</sup> In 1960 a dissertation was presented by a historian from Gothenburg – Gunnar Qvist – that on one hand was a reflection of the growing importance of social history, but on the other also represented a new and more consciously interest in women's history. In his study of how regulations concerning how freedom of trade were replacing an older order of restrictive legislation in mid 19th century Sweden, Qvist analysed the consequences this had for women's possibilities to practice different trades and support themselves. Qvist's interest in women's history was both genuine and long lasting and he played an important role in establishing women's history as a research field in Sweden. From his position at the history department at Gothenburg university (in 1979 he got an individual professorship), Qvist set

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2005-01-18; For a special study of Uppsala see Jan Lindegren, "Längre och längre år från år. Doktorsavhandlingar i historia 1960–2004, in *Historisk Tidskrift* 2004: 4, pp 631–640.

going a women's history seminar and continued with research in this field. There were also other factors that had a favourable influence on the development in Gothenburg. Already in 1958 three female scholars established what they called an archive for women's history. Their ambition was to collect literature and historical material about women. In 1971 this collection became a part of the university library in Gothenburg.

Although the university in Gothenburg held and in some sense continued to hold a special position – for example by the first professorship in women's history 1982 – the development from the 1970's was not unique for this university. Like in many other countries the second wave of women's movement in Sweden led to an increased demand for more research about women's situation in both contemporary society and in historical times. This growing interest in women studies can be read in the institutional changes that took place, as for example the already mentioned professorship in women's history, the centres for women's studies that were set up at many of the universities, and the conferences, workshops and seminars that were arranged. The entry of women's studies into the academic world is also reflected in the records from the research councils. Not only the conferences but also research projects concerning women's studies and women's history are beginning to appear as receivers of grants from the 1970's.

From the mid 1970's a growing number of senior researchers and PhD students were directing their studies towards women's history. It would be interesting to carry out a network analysis based on interviews to study how influence have worked, but even without a more thorough analysis of networks it is possible to identify central characters and lively research milieus that have flourished under different periods. Our intention is not to give a complete outline of all networks that might have existed in the history of Swedish gender history but merely to give some examples. In the history department of Uppsala university

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<sup>12</sup> If nothing else is mentioned the following outline of the development is based on Agneta Ljungh, *Sedd, eller*

Ann-Sofie Ohlander organised a women's history seminar where, for example, the situation of single mothers and the welfare policy was much discussed.<sup>13</sup> One of the members of this seminar became later on professor of history in Lund. Eva Österberg, employed in Uppsala 1983–1987. Österberg brought the perspective to her new university in 1987.<sup>14</sup> Another prominent figure is the already mentioned Yvonne Hirdman, professor in Stockholm since 1992 (before that professor in Gothenburg since 1988). She became interested in women's history towards the end of the 1970's, but it was not until 1984 when she established herself at the university again after working as a freelance for a few years that we can assume that her interest also had influence on for example the choice of subject for PhD studies.<sup>15</sup> Another important person who has been tutoring PhD students at the Stockholm University is Christina Florin. Her own research has both been focused on female teachers and their struggles for equal rights, education and citizenship.<sup>16</sup>

The presentation has so far been primarily concerned with the development of gender studies in history. Economic history is a much younger academic discipline. If we consider the departments of economic history it is obvious that for a long time the department in Uppsala held a special position among gender historians both concerning this field of research – a broader social history approach rather than strict economic history – and concerning the number of female PhD students and senior researchers.<sup>17</sup> Women's history was introduced at the department already in the 1970's and in 1977 a symposium was organised by a researcher at the department in order to exchange experiences among researchers from different disciplines and to discuss the definition and implications of women's studies. The symposium also addressed the question if women's studies would

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*osedd?. Kvinnskildringar i svensk historieforskning, mellan åren 1890 till 1995*, Lund 1999.

<sup>13</sup> Described by one of the participants.

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.hist.lu.se/hist/personal/hemsidor/EvaOsterberg.htm> 2005-06-17

<sup>15</sup> [http://www.historia.su.se/personal/yvonne\\_hirdman/](http://www.historia.su.se/personal/yvonne_hirdman/) 2005-01-18

<sup>16</sup> [http://www.historia.su.se/personal/christina\\_florin/](http://www.historia.su.se/personal/christina_florin/) 2005-06-17

benefit most from developing separate institutional organisations within the universities or if the best strategy was to work within the traditional disciplines. The discussion concerning separation versus integration continued for a long time, and in Sweden the solution has been a little of both. After the 1970's gender history became a more established and acknowledged part of the department with a seminar that attracted several PhD students. In this context the senior researcher Ulla Wikander, now professor in economic history in Stockholm, played an important role. During the late 1980s and early 1990s she introduced new theoretical approaches to the gender history seminar and also contributed to the internationalisation by encouraging the PhD students to participate in international conferences etc. In 1991 she published a booklet on gender and work inspiring other researchers.<sup>18</sup> Another economic historian that has influenced the direction of gender studies in economic history is Anita Göransson, who was active at Umeå University in the 1980's and wrote one of the early dissertations in women's history in 1988.<sup>19</sup> Today she is professor at the university in Gothenburgh.

Here we have pointed to some of pioneers in the development of women's history and gender history in Sweden, and judging from their positions today one could say that this research field has had successful story in Sweden. Now and then there have been, however, problems with the succession and continuity, and it would therefore be interesting to further look into the careers of the following generations of gender historians.

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<sup>17</sup> The following outline of the development is primarily based on Humlesjö&Åkerblom (1996). "Ekonomisk historia, akademiska miljöer och kvinnliga forskare", in *Kvinnovetenskaplig tidskrift*, Nr 2 1996.

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.ekhist.uu.se/Forskning/papers.htm> 2005-01-18

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.umu.se/samfak/aktuellt/artiklar/pionjar%20hyllas.html> 2005-01-18

The categorisation of dissertations with respect to choice of period, geographical area and subject

### *Period*

Previous studies of which are the prevalent époques studied in dissertations in history demonstrate that since the 1950's there has been an increasing amount of studies of the 20th century. The increase is connected to the general increase of dissertations. The number of studies of other époques has not changed, however their share is much smaller than previously.<sup>20</sup> The interest for the 20th century is seen also in the gender studies to an even greater extent. Almost 60 percent of the dissertations in economic history and 40 percent of the dissertations in history focus on the 20th century. About 25 percent of the dissertations in economic history and history respectively focus both 19th and 20th century; 13 percent focus 19th century. Only one of the dissertations in economic history study the period before 19th century, whereas 9 percent of the studies in history focus 18th century and 17th century respectively study this time. There is also one study from 12th to 15th century and a couple of studies that span over a longer period.

### *Place*

Sweden is the most common field to study in all historical dissertations.<sup>21</sup> The global framework hasn't been a part of the Swedish dissertations in economic history or history with a gender perspective. Only one of the 16 dissertations in economic history is focusing on countries other than Sweden. This is a dissertation on China from 1980. Among the dissertations in history 7 focus on another country, three make comparisons between Sweden and another country. However, Sweden dominates as the studied area.

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<sup>20</sup> Peter Aronsson, "Historieforskningen på väg – vart?", pp. 32–33 samt "Svenska avhandlingar i historia 1997–2001", p 12, [www.aronsson.st](http://www.aronsson.st) 2005-01-18.

<sup>21</sup> Peter Aronsson, "Historieforskningen på väg – vart?", pp. 34–36 samt "Svenska avhandlingar i historia 1997–2001", pp. 13–14, [www.aronsson.st](http://www.aronsson.st) 2005-01-18.

There has even been blindness towards subjects connected to ethnicity in gender studies. Problems of ethnicity is clearly an underrepresented area of Swedish gender research at large as well – not only in dissertations.<sup>22</sup>

### *Subjects*

A categorisation of subjects studied in dissertations is difficult.<sup>23</sup> As this is an explorative paper – and not a final analysis – we have so far used keywords in Libris (introduced above) and tiels in order to categorise the dissertations. Similar methods have been used in other bibliographical studies mapping out historical research at large. However, categories used to describe historical research in previous Swedish historiographical research include gender studies in social history, making it difficult to analyse trends within this field. This is a consequence of the intertwined development between women's history, labour history and social history that was mentioned before. In general, studies of administration and education is a common field in historical dissertations. Political history is another. Both of these decreased somewhat during the late 1990's.<sup>24</sup>

If “keywords” are used for a classification of the dissertations it is clear that work or words connected to work play a much more important role in economic history than in History. 25 (31 percent) of the dissertations in History concern wide span of work and provision (paid work or labour market, gender division of work, female academics, household work, midwives, nurses, priests, prostitution). The second most common area of the studies is politics – 17 studies. Here the study of the right of vote is an important subject. If social politics studies are counted there are 6 more studies. All in all 23 studies on politics! Another

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<sup>22</sup> Paulina de los Reyes, ”Det problematiska systerskapet: om svenskhet och invandrarskap inom svensk genushistorisk forskning, i *Maktens (o)lika förklådnader: kön, klass & etnicitet i det postkoloniala Sverige: en festskrift till Wuokko Knocke*, 2002.

<sup>23</sup> Compare Lerner, Gerda (2004) „U.S. Women's History. Past, Present and Future”, In *Journal of Women's History* Vol. 16, No. 4, and Kern, Kathi (2004) “Productive Collaborations: The Benefits of Cultural Analysis to the Past, Present, and Future of Women's History”, in *Journal of Women's History* Vol. 16, No. 4, pp. 35-37.

important strand in gender history is social work and philanthropy – 6 studies. Another large group is "family history" with 10 studies (categorised as social history, single mothers, motherhood and illegitimate sexuality). A new strand is masculinity – 5 studies. There are also studies on law, sexuality, medicine, and education.

If gender dissertations in economic history are classified in a similar way it is obvious women's work (social history) has played a much greater role. All of the 16 studies are categorised as including studies of work and labour market. Not all of them analyse women's work but subjects close to it. Two include labour market regulations and trade unions respectively, three are categorised as including wages, trade and technique respectively and two concern prostitution and midwives.

Our hypothesis, presented in the beginning concerning the importance of the study of work in historical gender studies, is in other words true when we consider studies in economic history. In dissertations in history the importance of work has been strong, but many other subjects are considered as well. In order to continue the discussion we would like to get back to the question of what kind of work that has been in focus.

### *Women, work and historical research*

In an outline of women's history in USA Gerda Lerner identifies some trends in the development of the field since the late 1980's. First of all, she argues, it is evident that the literary turn has influenced women's history and today the focus is much more on representation and culture than on material conditions. Secondly, the class perspective seems more or less to have disappeared from women's history in spite of the growing awareness of the importance of differences and the interest of notions like race, ethnicity and gender.

Lerner also maintains that subjects like women's movement, women's rights etc seem to have

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<sup>24</sup> Peter Aronsson, "Historieforskningen på väg – vart?", pp. 29–32 samt "Svenska avhandlingar i historia 1997–2001", pp. 9–12, [www.aronsson.se](http://www.aronsson.se) 2005-01-18.

lost its attraction among historians today if one compare with women's history of the 1970's and 1980s.<sup>25</sup> Several researchers commented Lerner's analysis of the development women's history in USA, when it was published in a special number of *Journal of Women's History*. Kathi Kern for example called into question Lerner's interpretation of how the linguistic turn have come to dominate women's history, and she argues that studies of culture and representation have not replaced an earlier preoccupation with material conditions. Rather than being neglected traditional themes are recast in new forms.<sup>26</sup>

The subjects of dissertations in economic history in Sweden during the period 1980-2004 seem to support this last point of view. Irrespective of which decade one chose to consider, a great number of the dissertations are addressing questions concerning the gender division of labour, how women (and men) are supporting themselves in different ways and how women and men are facing different conditions especially in the labour market. It is therefore not possible to distinguish a trend in line with Lerner's findings. But this can of course be a consequence of gender research in economic history being an integral part of the discipline and above all dealing with what is considered to be main themes in this discipline – economic conditions, supply problems, labour and divisions of labour, the industrialisation process, etc – but from a gender perspective. The fact that economic history not primarily is about political matters might also explain that the low interest for women's movement per se that according to Gerda Lerner characterises the late period seems to be a prevalent phenomenon in women's economic history. The interest for women's organisations are not totally absent, however, as several studies refer to different forms of women's organisation such as trade unions in relation to analysis of the labour market. An ongoing project run by two senior researchers at the economic history department in Uppsala concerning the financial

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<sup>25</sup> Gerda Lerner, "U.S. Women's History. Past, Present and Future", in *Journal of Women's History* 2004, Vol. 16, No. 4.

strategies of different women's organisations also proves that the interest for the women's movement is far from dead.

It is evident, however, that economic historians above all are concerned with paid labour. Women's unpaid labour is only dealt with indirectly as a crucial part of the gender division of labour in the household that are influencing the gender division in the labour market, resulting in women and men ending up in different types of jobs and being paid differently. It is interesting to note that even the studies concerning pre-industrial society are primarily focused on women's paid work outside the household, as in one dissertation concerning proto-industrial production. The long lasting interest in Swedish economic historical research in the industrial revolution and in the consequences for women as well as women's role in the process have been influenced by, above all, British research.<sup>27</sup> And it is possible to trace the debate concerning what impact the industrialisation had – did women's conditions improve or worsen – also in some of the dissertations. The focus on the industrialisation process, can also be attributed to senior researchers like the before mentioned Göransson and Wikander. Their interest in different aspects of the gender division of labour, and especially in the industrial society, has clearly influenced the work of PhD students during the 1990s. In this respect the analysis in Wikander's study of a porcelain factory have been of particularly importance.<sup>28</sup>

The continuity concerning the focus of interest holds true also when it comes to the notion of class. In dissertations in economic history published in the late 1980's as well as in the 1990's or even in the last couple of years the analysis take into account not only gender but also a class perspective, either by paying attention to differences between different groups

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<sup>26</sup> Kathi Kern, "Productive Collaborations: The Benefits of Cultural Analysis to the Past, Present, and Future of Women's History", in *Journal of Women's History* 2004, Vol. 16, No. 4, pp. 35-37.

<sup>27</sup> For an outline of British research see for example Pamela Sharpe, "Continuity and Change: Women's History and Economic History in Britain", in *The Economic History Review* 1995, Vol. 48, No. 2, 353-369.

of women or by focusing on the conditions experienced by women from a certain (often working) social class. As was stated before the question of ethnicity and race on the other hand seems to have only slowly entered into Swedish historical research and in the gender dissertations in economic history these notions seem still to be absent. In articles and other publications it is, however, possible to trace a growing awareness of the challenge post-colonial theories imply also for gender studies in economic history.

Lastly, what can be said about the linguistic turn? Maybe the character of economic history offer an explanation to why studies of culture and representations are less common in the dissertations classified as gender studies in this discipline? That traditional themes can be recast in new forms, as Kathi Kern argues, is evident in a dissertation published in 2004, however. By looking at constructions of work identities in one of the larger department stores in Sweden in the period 1918-1975, Karin Åmossa, focus on identity, culture and representations, but without letting go of a discussion concerning the economic conditions for shop-assistants and the class perspective. Several ongoing PhD projects seem to confirm this trend of using new theoretical tools in order to approach traditional problems.

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<sup>28</sup> Ulla Wikander, *Kvinnors och mäns arbeten. Gustavsberg 1880-1980. Genusarbetsdelning och arbetets degradering vid en porslinsfabrik*, Lund: Arkiv i samarbete med Arbetsmiljöfonden och Ekonomisk-historiska institutionen vid Uppsala univ., 1988.