

# Doing Gender Mainstreaming in the Light of Intersectionality

An intersectional discourse analysis of gender mainstreaming strategy work and  
policy in Linköping and Norrköping municipalities

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## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis examines gender mainstreaming work in Linköping and Norrköping municipality. Linköping and Norrköping are twin cities and municipalities in Östergötland, Sweden. Like all other municipalities in Sweden, both are obliged to integrate gender mainstreaming in all their municipality work. Gender mainstreaming has become a routine exercise of revision regularly at the local level; in fact, the image of Sweden as one of the world's most gender-equal countries derives from the gender mainstreaming work at the local level of municipalities. This makes municipal gender mainstreaming work important to study up-close. In my research, I use these twin cities' gender mainstreaming work as my case for exploring how the Swedish goal of gender equality fairs in local practice today. Deploying intersectional discourse analysis, and more precisely, Carol Bacchi's 'What's the Problem Represented to Be-approach,' I have even immersed myself in the field for a year (working as a student co-worker at the sustainability unit at Linköping municipality focusing on gender mainstreaming).

Moreover, I have analyzed policy documents and done a group interview with three of the bureaucrats of the municipalities tasked with the work of gender mainstreaming. Results indicate that gender mainstreaming is hard to put into practice and that doing it with an intersectional perspective is even more difficult. Another finding is that other social justice questions intersect with the gender equality imperative, so-called *clashing perspectives*. Is it time to revitalize gender mainstreaming work at the municipality level with intersectional gender perspectives? My study suggests so and provides some suggestions for future gender mainstreaming work put into municipality practice and how to make this strategy more likely to help us come closer to the goal of a gender-equal society.

**Keywords:** gender equality work, gender mainstreaming, gender equality policy, local government, intersectionality, discourse analysis, WPR

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*“Gender equality” is not a state of affairs nor a list of entitlements; rather it is a discourse, a framework of meaning, filled with complexities and ambiguities*

Carol Bacchi (2009)

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Sweden has for decades had the reputation of being one of the world’s most gender-equal countries, and gender equality is closely connected to Sweden’s national self-image. According to the Swedish government, Sweden is "a pioneer in the gender equality field" (The Swedish Parliament, 2007, p. 4) and has the world’s first-ever feminist government (The Swedish Government, n.d). Furthermore, gender equality policy is often considered institutionalized in Swedish politics and society at large. Despite this, gender equality is not a reality in any aspect of Swedish society. In general, “men” have a lower level of education, are over-represented in accident statistics, such as traffic and workplace accidents, and more often than “women”<sup>1</sup> commit suicide (see, for example, Ericson, 2021). Also, the Swedish labor market is gender-segregated, vertically, horizontally, and internally. “Women” more often than “men” work part-time and are overrepresented in lower-paid occupations in the public sector. “Men,” to a greater extent than “women,” work in the private sector; they also, to a higher degree, advance in their careers and reach higher positions at their workplaces (SCB, 2021a). During the COVID-19 pandemic, this employment gap has widened (SCB, 2021b). On average,” women” still earn less than “men,” use a majority of the parental leave (SCB, 2021a), and are subjected to gender-based violence to a significantly greater extent (see, for example, NCK, 2021).

Since the mid-1990s, *gender mainstreaming*<sup>2</sup> has been the primary strategy for achieving gender equality within the public sector (see Prop. 1993/94: 147). Gender mainstreaming (GM) (*jämställdhetsintegrering* in Swedish) can be explained as “a strategy that integrates a gender equality perspective into all areas of policy and activity and all stages of decision-making, planning, and implementation of activities in these areas" (JämStöd, 2007, p. 68). GM thus aims to mainstream the political goal of gender equality (Rönblom, 2008, p. 115). However, gender mainstreaming as a strategy and gender equality policies as a means are debated subjects within gender equality research. As a result, issues with how to implement GM have

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<sup>1</sup> The quotation marks around “women” and “men” are used to emphasize that those are “‘sites of political debate’ rather than natural categories” (see Bacchi, 2017, p. 20).

<sup>2</sup> In line with Åsa-Karin Engstrand (2019), I would like to reflect on the fact that the Swedish term “*jämställdhetsintegrering*” does not agree exactly with the term ‘gender mainstreaming’. A more precise translation would be ‘gender equality mainstreaming’.

been raised by researchers; simultaneously, the transformative potential of the strategy has been questioned time after another (see, for example, Norrbin & Olsson, 2010; Swedish state investigation 2007a).

To implement gender mainstreaming, concretize and even actualize gender equality work, various organizations and institutions develop *gender equality policies*. A gender equality policy (*jämställdhetspolicy* in Swedish) is defined as a policy document that outlines an organization's or an institution's stated gender equality intent, priorities, and practices, i.e., a document for governmentality. Local government entities, such as municipalities, are essential for implementing the national gender equality policy and overall gender equality work in Swedish society. Municipal politics and policies can hence be understood as a result of national politics meeting local politics. In "Makt, mål och myndighet – en feministisk politik för ett jämställt samhälle" [Power, Goals, and Authority- Feminist Policies for an Equal Future] (Skr. 2016/17:10) it is stated that "the opportunities to create an equal society are to a large extent depending on the local levels conditions and power of change." In January 2020, respectively May 2020, Norrköping and Linköping municipality adopted their current gender equality policy, setting the municipalities' forthcoming gender equality work agenda.

My interest in the existing gender inequality in society, both globally and locally, combined with feminist consciousness, made me apply for a position as a student co-worker focusing on gender mainstreaming at Linköping municipality. I got the job, and since September 2020, I have had the privilege of working with gender equality work in practice! This year has made me think of the incitements for gender equality work on a municipal level and the prerequisites for succeeding with this development work. How is gender mainstreaming understood and implemented? What (if any) are the effects of gender equality work? What *is* the problem represented to be in gender equality policies? For whom is the municipality creating gender equality? Despite that gender equality policy and initiatives on both national and local levels have been in place for decades, and even though progress has been made within some (policy) areas; I am, for example, thinking of 'samtyckeslagen' ('The Consent Act')(SFS 2018:618) which came into force in 2018, fundamental inequalities between men and women continue to exist in society. How come few exciting steps towards progressive change seem to happen? Or do they happen, and we are just not paying attention? What can be done to improve this situation? Yet, perhaps most crucially from my perspective to this thesis, there is also the intersectional issue of integrating gender and women-friendly perspectives while juggling all

the seven legal grounds of discrimination.<sup>3</sup> Those thoughts led me to write my master thesis on GM as a strategy and gender equality policies as a means to achieve gender equality drawing on Linköping and Norrköping municipality as examples.

## **1.5 TERMINOLOGY**

### *1.5.1 Gender and sex*

In daily speech, gender and sex are often confused. Gender as an analytical concept has been widely debated within a feminist context and elsewhere (see, for example, Hirdman, 1988; Åsberg, 1998). Even though gender has a broad definition - and is somewhat difficult to pinpoint, I argue that it can be understood as the discursively constructed social and cultural differences between men and women, defining their social roles (Yuval-Davis, 2006, p. 201). Drawing on gender theorist Judith Butler (1993), I understand gender as performative, i.e., that gender is not something you *have* as much as something you *do*, which gives that I understand gender as a social construction rather than a social category.

Sex as a concept is closely linked to physical and biological factors. According to Butler (1993), sex, like gender, is a social construction, a norm that shapes people's embodied reality in multiple ways. Gender Studies scholar Nina Lykke (2010, p. 32), drawing on Butler (1997), writes in *Feminist Studies* that gender and sex are constructed as a binary pair, creating a dichotomy between the two concepts. Feminist theorists within the poststructuralist tradition of ideas, most famously Butler (1993), reject this binary, which resonates with me (see also Davidson, 2016). Poststructuralist feminist theorizing has, both in the dominant international and Anglo-American traditions, focused on embodied subjectivity, how gender gets performed, and how subjects are positioned (and called into existence as citizens of society) within discourse. Most importantly, intersectional approaches to this have been developed, which I will return to later on.

I argue that the categorizations of gender and sex must be understood as upholding "a problematic dichotomy between sociocultural and bodily material aspects" (Lykke, 2010, p.

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<sup>3</sup> In Sweden, there are seven grounds of discrimination covered by the law prohibiting discrimination: sex, transgender identity or expression, ethnicity, religion or other belief, disability, sexual orientation and age (The Equality Ombudsman (DO), 2021. "Protected grounds of discrimination". <https://www.do.se/other-languages/english/>. Accessed 21 May 2021).



43). Further, this categorization and division are discursive since gender and sex are given different meanings based on the context. In this study, I understand sex and gender as multi-faceted and intertwined and thus not binary; when referring to 'gender' or 'sex,' I do so beyond a normative understanding. With that said, I acknowledge that what in a general sense is referred to as 'biological' sex, respectively socially constructed gender, dramatically impacts the individual's embodied reality and perception of the world. Because biology too, and knowledge about genetics, skin color, genital formations, sexual orientation and reproductive capacities, age, and life course, is shaped by societal norms and ideas of "gender proper," or what, in that time and place gets to count as "female" and "male." Biology here refers to both science as a social practice and modern societal institution of authority on the body, as well as to the physical constitution/organic processes it purports to study, and both have been the conjoined realm of Feminist Science Studies that in turn has inflected much feminist theorizing (Åsberg, 2005; Åsberg & Lykke, 2010).

### *1.5.2 "Men" and "women"*

I argue that using "men" and "women" as two fixed and opposing categorizations risks, without further nuance and analysis, reproducing and maintaining the binary gender system. I understand the dichotomy between "men" and "women" as closely related to power. The power relation between "men" and "women" subordinates "women" and promotes "men," referring to what is "natural" (Lindemann, 2019, p. 10f). Further, this way of understanding gender reinforces the idea that "women" and "men" are homogenous and non-fragmented as groups. Butler (1993, p. 1) argues that "'sex' not only functions as the norm but is part of a regulatory practice that produces the body it governs." Thus, there is nothing essentialist or pre-given about sex, meaning that "men" and "women" cannot be seen as natural and essential categories. Butler (1993, p. 2) explains that "'sex' is, thus, not simply what one has, or a static description of what one is." Drawing on this, I find it problematic to talk about "men" and "women" as (the only) two fixed categories of individuals (see also Lykke, 2010, p. 148).

I resonate with renowned trans theorist, Susan Stryker (2006, p. 3), who explains that "'gender,' as it is lived, embodied, experienced, performed, and encountered, is more complex and varied than can be accounted for by the currently dominant binary sex/gender ideology of Eurocentric

modernity.” I argue that using the terms cisgender<sup>4</sup> men and women and transgender<sup>5</sup> men and women when referring to “men” and “women” is more accurate and inclusive. However, in large parts of the empirical material, “men” and “women” are used and understood in a binary way, which will impact my research and thus my results. For feasibility, I will continuously use the terms “men” and “women” when referring to previous research and other theorists. In the analysis, where relevant, I will problematize this narrow and limiting way of understanding gender and non-gender.

## **2. AIM, RESEARCH QUESTIONS, AND IMPORTANCE**

The following chapter will outline the aim and research questions to explain why this study is important. This will be followed by a reflection on this study’s limitations, my situated knowledge, and a discussion on research ethics.

This thesis aims to explore the ideals, explicit policy intentions, and more intangible visions underpinning the local work of gender mainstreaming in Norrköping and Linköping municipality from a backdrop of research and personal commitment. But also the struggles, frictions, contestations, and tricky philosophical issues that the municipality workers have to face and try to deal with to the best of their ability in their policy work. To engage with the lived realities of writing and implementing policy, I draw in part on my almost anthropological experience of working “in the field” (a municipality office) for ten months. This hopefully assists me in getting at a “thicker description,” as anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1973) termed it, of the researched case of policy and practice. However, my main focus in this study derives from the methodological approach of intersectional discourse analysis applied to, foremost, policy documents and complemented with a group interview performed over Zoom. More precisely, I aim to analyze Linköping and Norrköping municipality’s gender equality policies from the feminist poststructural perspective on intersectional policy analysis (Bacchi 2009; Dahl, 2004; Rönnblom 2011), focusing on the discourse of gender equality created in respective municipality’s policy. In this thesis, besides the discourse produced in the written policy, I also see the gender equality work carried out by the strategists as a discourse. Thus, the discourse analysis will draw on both the policies and the interview.

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<sup>4</sup> A cisgendered person is a person whose gender identity corresponds with the sex the person was identified as having at birth. (“Cisgender” <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/cisgender>. Accessed 10 April 2021).

<sup>5</sup> A transgender person has a gender identity that differs from the sex the person was identified as having at birth. (“Transgender” <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/transgender>. Accessed 10 April 2021).

Further, I seek to examine and use as my analytical engine the discursive understanding of concepts like “women” and “men” that are guiding the gender equality work at Linköping and Norrköping municipality. Issues around sex and gender have been the powerhouse of feminist theory development over the years and gained new momentum with society’s recent issue with trans-inclusion. Moreover, the actual implementation of the Swedish gender equality policy at a local level has proven complex and slow for many such and similar reasons (see, for example, Pincus, 2002). Those difficulties of conceptual usage and adjacent complexities motivate this study.

The study is designed as a qualitative, intersectional, feminist<sup>6</sup> case study. Using feminist intersectional theory (see Anthias 2013a; Hill Collins, 1990; Crenshaw 1989/1991), I aim to analyze the rhetoric used in the two gender equality policies to explore the impact this policy might have on different groups of people based on their embodied reality. Furthermore, by interviewing strategists working with gender equality at the chosen municipalities, I will further deepen my knowledge on gender mainstreaming work on a local level. In this study, social constructivism has functioned as my point of departure; my methodology builds on the WPR approach by Carol Bacchi (2009) and discourse analysis by Marianne Winther Jørgensen and Louise Phillips (2002). However, I have opted to recalibrate those approaches and integrate them into what I call *intersectional discourse analysis*.

The following questions guide my research;

1. *How does the discourse of gender equality in Linköping and Norrköping municipality construct the “problem” of gender inequality?*
2. *What gendered (or not) subject positions does Linköping, respectively Norrköping municipality’s gender equality policies and gender mainstreaming work create, and what impact(s) does this gendering have?*
3. *What intersectional subject positions and discourses are made available in Linköping and Norrköping’s gender equality work?*

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<sup>6</sup> I argue that this thesis is feminist as I myself am a feminist. As a researcher I cannot position myself outside my experience and lived reality, thus the knowledge I produce will be affected by my feminist beliefs (see for example Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002, p. 11f).

Research that has been conducted specifically on gender mainstreaming and the discursive role of gender equality policies on a *municipal level* is somewhat limited; nevertheless, research contributing to the field has been published in recent years (see, for example, Andersson, 2018; Callerstig, 2014; Pincus, 2002). Compared to the large body of gender equality research nationally and internationally and to some extent, regionally, I found this somewhat surprising. I view this study as a response to this research gap within existing research about gender mainstreaming and gender equality policies at a local level. What makes this study stand out is the methodological and theoretical framework and the immersive (if not anthropological) attitude vis-à-vis the daily business of shaping democratic policy at a local level.

## **2.1 LIMITATIONS**

With any choice of methodology, method(s), and theoretical framework come limitations. This study is concerned with political gender equality policies on a municipal level. With that, I refer to public policies that function as a programming statement concerning gender equality. Many organizations, institutions, and authorities (additionally) have an internal gender equality policy regarding their employees and the working environment; however, such policies will not be addressed in this study. Furthermore, I have delimited this study to the gender equality work in Linköping and Norrköping municipality, focusing on gender mainstreaming and gender equality policy (making). Therefore, the only documents researched are the official gender equality policies of each municipality. Further, an interview with three employees that are (or have been) working with gender equality has been carried out. The limited research material entails that this study needs to be understood as an overview or example of the two municipalities' gender equality work rather than a generalization.<sup>7</sup>

## **2.2 SITUATEDNESS**

As a gender studies scholar and a feminist, I argue that it is of great significance that I position myself vis-à-vis my research topic and that I am transparent in regards to why I chose this specific topic for my study. By doing this, I strive to create a process of reflexivity and self-scrutiny, which goes in line with a social-constructivist perspective and society's shared goal of democracy. Drawing on Donna Haraway (1988/1991), I have made an active choice to avoid carrying out my research using the positivist or relativist 'god-tricks,' i.e., *totalism* or 'seeing

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<sup>7</sup> Additionally, I would like to acknowledge that the material analyzed is written in Swedish and the interview conducted took place in Swedish, which means that I have manually translated the empirical material. English is not my first language; thus, I am to hold accountable for any mistranslation.

everything from nowhere' (Haraway, 1991, p. 191, see also Lykke, 2010, p. 5) and *relativism* as the other side of the coin.

For this thesis, feminist poststructuralism functions as a theoretical framework and a 'backdrop'; this is particularly obvious in my way of understanding sex and gender as something performatively and socially constructed. That this thesis, to some extent, is situated within a poststructural feminist discourse will undoubtedly influence the research process and the choices made by me as a researcher. I understand the research process as dynamic and shaped by me as a researcher since I am part of the 'reality' I explore (Lykke, 2010, p. 159). Sociologists Caroline Ramazanoglu and Janet Holland (2002, p. 142) write, "no social researcher starts from scratch in a state of social, intellectual or political isolation." I want to acknowledge that I, in multiple ways, am privileged in society. For example, I was privileged to get the job as a student co-worker at Linköping municipality. This privilege gives me the possibility to, as 'the knowing subject,' decide "what differences exist, what they mean, whether they matter, and how they should be represented in research findings" (Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002, p. 104).

Furthermore, I understand all research as political and me as a researcher as a political subject. As a subject, I have my ideas about what "women" and "men" are and also my understanding of the reasons behind gender inequality (see Lombardo et al., 2009, p. 8). Thus, in the analysis, I use the first-person perspective. Using a first-person perspective, i.e., "I," in research is an epistemological and ethical question. As a researcher, one can only say something about 'reality' if one is transparent with one's politics of location. The influential feminist poet and writer Adrienne Rich (1986, p. 219) argues for the importance of "[r]ecognizing our location, having to name the ground we're coming from, the conditions we have taken for granted," they are mainly concerned with stating their "whiteness as a point of location." As I am aiming to conduct my research from a *situated perspective* (Haraway, 1991), I would like to emphasize that my research and thus my results are shaped by my position (as a young, white Swedish ciswoman and student of gender studies, working in a mid-Swedish municipality on equality) and situatedness as a student of especially gender mainstreaming research) which has given me access to insider knowledge that will enrich this study.

### **2.3 RESEARCH ETHICS**

Ethical considerations play a crucial role in a study's trustworthiness, perhaps even more so in feminist research. This section will outline how I have navigated the research process by letting feminist ethical theory guide me.

For this study, feminist ethical theory, as conceptualized by feminist philosopher Alison Jaggar (2013) and philosopher and bio-ethicist Hilde Lindemann (2019), has been used. Drawing on Lindemann (2019, p. 7), I do not understand feminist ethics as an ethical stand, such as normative or practical ethics, but rather as a way of *doing* ethics. Feminist ethical theory can be explained as exploring “the ways in which cultural devaluation of women and the feminine may be reflected and rationalized in the central concepts and methods of moral philosophy” (Jaggar, 2013, p. 433). This kind of ethics aims to make visible that humans are not undifferentiated. Jaggar (2013, p. 435) argues that “[...] men and women are differently situated in all known societies; they are subjected to systematically different norms and expectations that govern virtually every aspect of their lives.”

This thesis is situated within a feminist poststructuralist theoretical discourse. According to Lykke (2010, p. 145), epistemologies and ethics are deeply intertwined; as ethics is to be understood as connected to your position as a researcher, my choice of applying feminist ethics to this study was easy. Separating feminist ethics from feminist politics is (close to) impossible; my intention to let feminist ethics be the foundation of this thesis can thus be seen as a political statement. Lykke (2010, p. 32) writes, “we cannot position ourselves ‘outside’ of the world we are analyzing and in which we act,” which resonates with me and motivates this transparency. Further, I argue that it is politically motivated to make this positioning as feminist research works to challenge gender inequality since decisions about methodology are compelling in the politics and practices of knowledge production (Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002, p. 9). The feminist methodology has been criticized with the motivation that gender is only *one* fraction of people's identities and how they perceive themselves (Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002, p. 11). Which, I argue, is a valid critique since I too understand people as multifaceted. With this in mind, I would like to emphasize that my methodology is intersectional, which means that I understand various social divisions, such as gender, ethnicity, religion, age, mother tongue, etc., as intersecting (see Crenshaw, 1989).

As a feminist researcher, one conducts research that risks being accused of being non-scientific and biased, and therefore, not valid (Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002, p. 10). However, I argue that this draws on a positivist understanding of knowledge production, one I do not support. Instead, drawing on poststructuralist thought, I believe that it is impossible to research ‘the outside world’ simply because a researcher creates his own ‘truth’ and thus *one* version of ‘reality’ (see, for example, Burr, 2015).

This study is partly a desk study and partly an interview study; therefore, I have considered various ethical issues. I have followed established research practice as described in the ethical guidelines from the Swedish Research Council and their report “Good Research Practice” (2017). When conducting interviews, it is essential to be transparent regarding the whole interviewing process, from searching for informants to the interviewing method and the transcription of the material and the interpretation and usage of the material. For transcription purposes, I did a vocal recording of the interview using my smartphone. After the interview, I transferred the recording to an external password-protected hard drive. When finishing this master thesis course, I will delete the recording.

In line with “Good Research Practice,” I emailed the questions to my informants before the interview.<sup>8</sup> In the email, I wrote that I would record the interview for transcription reasons. I emphasized that the informants were free to withdraw from the study at any point and that they would be anonymized in the finished thesis. The ethical treatment of my informants’ secrecy, professional secrecy, anonymity, and confidentiality was a priority (Swedish Research Council, 2017). However, as the interview was conducted as a focus group interview, the informants are aware of each other’s participation. As the informants know of each other’s involvement in the study, they can identify each other. Further, it might be possible to identify the informants in various ways, for example, via the municipality’s web pages, which jeopardizes their anonymity.

### **3. GENDER EQUALITY WORK IN SWEDEN - A BACKGROUND**

This chapter provides historical contextualization of gender equality work in Sweden on a national level, focusing on gender equality policy and gender mainstreaming. Which is

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<sup>8</sup> The information letter can be read at p. 66.

followed by an introduction to gender equality work on a local level. Moreover, a short introduction to the municipalities of Linköping and Norrköping is given.

During second-wave feminism, feminists questioned men's and women's different roles in society (Benschop & Verloo, 2011, p. 277), and ever since, gender equality has been high on the universal (political) agenda. There has been a growing concern with creating gender equality in recent decades, especially in Western democracies, and gender equality is today a policy objective for various entities globally (Squires, 2007, p. 48). However, it was not until the 1960s before gender equality became a more prioritized political question in Sweden. Since then, gender equality questions have been passed around between ministries and ministers. The interest for gender equality as a political subject has varied throughout the years, depending on the political majority and public and political debate (Rönblom, 2011, p. 35f).

In the 1970s, gender equality, *jämställdhet* in Swedish, became an established concept in a Swedish context (Swedish Gender Equality Agency, 2018b; Pincus, 2002, p. 16). In 1979, Sweden adopted its first act on equality between women and men, "Lag (SFS 1979:1118) om jämställdhet mellan kvinnor och män i arbetslivet" (Act on Equality between Women and Men at Work), also known as Jämställdhetslagen (the Equality Opportunities Act). Adopting the Act meant that men and women were formally given the same conditions in Swedish society. The Act centered the labor market, focusing on equal opportunities for men and women, equal pay, and prohibiting sex-based discrimination. In 1999 (SFS 1991:433), 1994 (SFS 1994:292) and 2000 (2000:773) the act was refined and concretised (Pincus, 2002, p. 187f). In 2009, Jämställdhetslagen was replaced by Diskrimineringslagen (the Discrimination Act) (SFS 2008:567), which is still in place today. The Act aims to "combat discrimination and in other ways promote equal rights and opportunities regardless of sex, transgender identity or expression, ethnicity, religion or other belief, disability, sexual orientation or age" (The Swedish Parliament, 2015).

Besides legislation, Sweden has adopted a gender equality policy. Briefly, a gender equality policy is supposed to map out the *doing* of gender equality. Sweden's general gender equality policy goal is that women and men have the same power to shape society and their own lives. This goal comes with six sub-goals;

1. *Gender equal division of power and influence,*
2. *Economic gender equality,*



3. *Gender equal education,*
4. *Gender equal distribution of unpaid housework and provision of care,*
5. *Gender equal health,*
6. *Men's violence against women must stop.*

(Swedish Gender Equality Agency, 2018a).

Within Swedish gender equality policy-making, the theory of the gender system is used as a model of explanation to why gender equality exists, to defeat the restricting gender system can thus be said to be the main aim of the national gender equality policy (Swedish state investigation, 2007b, p. 15f). In 2006, several gender equality objectives were set out in a government bill titled *Makt att forma samhället och sitt eget liv – nya mål i jämställdhetspolitiken* [The Power to Shape Society and Your Own Life: Towards New Gender Equality Policy Objectives] (2005/06:155). In 2016, Sweden's gender equality strategy was formulated in the document *Makt, mål och myndighet – en feministisk politik för en jämställd framtid* [Power, Aims and Authority – Feminist Policy for a Gender-Equal Future] (2016/17:10).

### **3.2 GENDER MAINSTREAMING AS A NATIONAL STRATEGY**

Sweden adopted gender mainstreaming as its national strategy for gender equality work in 1994, aiming to realize the Swedish gender equality policy. Ever since, all Swedish government agencies have been bound to work with gender mainstreaming as their primary strategy to reach gender equality (Callerstig et al., 2013, p. 34f). Still today, more than 25 years later, gender mainstreaming is the central strategy to achieve gender equality in Sweden. Gender mainstreaming came about as a way of shifting the “attention from equality of treatment to equality of impact” (Beveridge et al., 2000, p. 386). Since the EU adopted GM in 1996, gender mainstreaming has gained momentum. The strategy has been implemented in policy and state structures cross-nationally and adopted by various organizations and institutions, leading to gender mainstreaming becoming an accepted and well-established strategy for promoting gender equality (Swedish state investigation, 2007a, p 16; Sainsbury & Bergqvist, 2009, p. 216).

Over the last decades, gender mainstreaming as a strategy to reach gender equality has evolved; however, ‘gender mainstreaming’ can mean many different things depending on the context

and thus be framed and used differently based on when and why it is to be implemented (Hearn, 2012, p. 13; Swedish state investigation, 2007a, p. 20). According to Lombardo et al. (2009, p. 7), the tools developed to combat gender inequality build on fixations of the meaning(s) of gender inequality; thus, gender mainstreaming and other tools need to be understood as “specific ways of labeling in a particular moment.”

### **3.3 GENDER EQUALITY WORK ON A LOCAL LEVEL**

In the Swedish public sector, gender equality work in general, and gender mainstreaming, in particular, is to be prioritized nationally, regionally, and locally. Although municipalities are independent entities, they are obliged to implement the national gender equality objectives; however, how this implementation should be done is not regulated (Andersson, 2018, p. 22). Linköping and Norrköping municipality have both adopted gender mainstreaming as their primary strategy for the gender equality work they carry out internally and externally, as a political entity, a provider of welfare services, and an employer (Linköping municipality, 2020b; Norrköping municipality, 2020).

Moreover, both Linköping and Norrköping municipality supports the *European Charter For Equality of Women and Men in Local Life* (commonly referred to as the ‘CEMR Charter’)<sup>9</sup> produced by The Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR). Linköping municipality signed the charter in 2010, and Norrköping in 2016 (Linköping municipality, 2020b p. 7; Norrköping municipality, 2020, p. 2). By signing this charter, the municipalities “commit formally to the principle of equality of women and men in local life, and to draw up and implement equality action plans which set out priorities, actions, and resources to this end.” (CEMR, 2018, p. 3). Hence, both Linköping and Norrköping municipality has committed to producing a gender equality plan.

#### *3.3.1 Linköping municipality*

Linköping municipality is located in central Östergötland County in the southeast of Sweden. The municipality has approximately 165 000 citizens (2020). Linköping municipality is the

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<sup>9</sup> The *European Charter For Equality of Women and Men in Local Life* is a charter that advocates local and regional actors to take a further step in realizing gender equality by making it a political commitment. By signing the charter, the authorities make a public commitment to the principle of equality and are encouraged to implement policies and concrete actions in cooperation with local institutions and organisations (The Observatory European Charter for Equality of Women and Men in Local life. “The Charter in brief”. <https://charter-equality.eu/the-charter/la-presidence-en.html>. Accessed 3 May 2021).

local government entity for the city of Linköping and its immediate surroundings, and it is the fifth-largest municipality in Sweden (Linköping municipality, 2020a; Linköping municipality, 2021a; NE.se, n.d-a). During office, 2019-2022, the Alliance, consisting of the Moderates, the Center Party, the Liberals, and the Christian Democrats, have a majority in the Linköping municipality (Linköping municipality 2021c).

### *3.3.2 Norrköping municipality*

Norrköping municipality is situated in the north-eastern part of Östergötland County in the south-east of Sweden. The municipality is inhabited by around 144 000 citizens (2020). Norrköping municipality is the local government entity for Norrköping and its immediate surroundings; it is the ninth-largest municipality in Sweden (NE.se, n.d-b; Norrköping municipality, 2021). A coalition consisting of the Social Democrats, the Center Party, the Liberals, and the Christian Democrats has a majority in Norrköping municipality during the office, 2019-2022 (Norrköping municipality 2021b).

## **4. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The following section elaborates on this study's theoretical framework. I place this research study at the intersection of Feminist studies, intersectional gender studies, and critical policy analysis. As a way of theoretically grounding this work, social constructivism and poststructuralism will be used. To be able to analyze this study's empirics, intersectional discourse analysis will be applied.

### **4.1 SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIVISM**

For this thesis, a pragmatic form of social constructivism will serve as an 'analytical backdrop' and the ontological standpoint, i.e., how I understand social reality. For me, this means that I will let social constructivism govern my research process both methodologically and theoretically. Social constructivist ideas offer critical perspectives on various disciplines within social sciences and humanities (Burr, 2015, p. 1). Even though it is difficult (impossible?) to pinpoint social constructivism, social constructivist researchers have one common feature; they take "a critical stance toward taken-for-granted knowledge" (Burr, 2015, p. 2). Social constructivism is critical of how we understand both ourselves and the world since, according to social constructionist Vivien Burr (2015, p. 4), "all ways of understanding are historically and culturally relative." Drawing on those words, I understand 'reality' as a social construction and our knowledge of the world as constituted in our interaction with each other.

Further, drawing on (Burr, 2015, p. 4), I believe this social construction of reality and our knowledge of the world to be constituted and reproduced mainly through language. Drawing on poststructural ideas, language plays a significant role in shaping our understanding of ourselves and the world around us. In this research study, I will understand and approach gender equality policies as ‘interpretations of the world.’

#### **4.2 POSTSTRUCTURALISM**

In this research study, I will adopt a feminist poststructuralist perspective as my epistemological point of departure. Epistemology refers to “the setting up of criteria for the production of scientific knowledge and definitions of what science is” (Lykke, 2010, p. 125). Hence, poststructuralism functions as the ‘bigger background’ that guides my way of understanding and approaching knowledge. Poststructuralism is a multidisciplinary approach meaning that it is infeasible to try to reduce poststructuralist thought to one single theory or theorist. However, what poststructuralist strands have in common is that they critique structural binaries and build on interpretive theorizing and can be understood as the opposite of foundationalism, essentialism, and positivism. According to Bacchi (2009b, p. 277), poststructuralism aims to critically examine the production of knowledge and question prior assumptions of reality, truth, and knowledge.

Using poststructuralism as an outlet, as a researcher, one aims to identify and explore the discourse and its discursive effects; hence poststructuralism, or more specifically, feminist poststructuralism, is a deliberate epistemological choice for this study. According to Education scholars Bronwyn Davies and Susanne Gannon (2005, p. 313), feminist poststructuralism research aims at “moving beyond what is already known and understood.” Zooming in on Davies and Gannon (2005, p. 312f) and their feminist poststructuralist theorizing, one can argue that it focuses on the specific processes in which individuals are constructed as gendered subjects. They understand gender as performative and thus not fixed or static; therefore, how gender is interpreted and portrayed is, drawing on feminist poststructuralism, contextual. Davies and Gannon (2005, p. 314) write:

*Gendered subjects exist at the intersection of multiple discursive practices. The individual is not fixed at any one of these points or locations. Not only does the individual shift locations*

*or positions, but what each location or position might mean changes with shifts in relation to others (both human and non-human others), and over space and time.*

### **4.3 INTERSECTIONALITY**

For this thesis, intersectionality will be used as the basis of my analytical understanding of the world; intersectionality will thus inform this whole thesis. Intersectionality is a well-known concept within contemporary feminist research and debates. Therefore, one can use intersectionality as both a critical theory and a methodology to explore the complexities of social identity. To explain the idea behind intersectional framing, I turn to sociologist Floya Anthias (2013a, p. 126), who writes, “intersectionality posits that different social divisions interrelate in terms of the production of social relations and in terms of people’s lives and they are seen as ‘mutually constitutive’ in terms of experience and practice.”

Intersectionality has its roots in feminist theory, Black Feminism, and postcolonial theory (Lykke, 2005, p. 8). Lykke (2010, p. 75f) draws on sociologist Avtar Brah and psychologist Ann Phoenix (2004) when describing how intersectional thought can be traced back to the women’s movement during the 1800s where it emerged as a reaction to the exclusion of non-white women within the movement, addressing the oppression faced by Black women, forming the question; “who” is a Woman? However, it was not until the 1980s before the term intersectionality was used explicitly by feminist critical race theorist Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), who coined the term as a critique against the single-issue focus within white hegemonic feminism (Lykke, 2010, p. 75f).

According to Lykke (2005, p. 8 [my translation]), one can understand intersectionality as an analytical framework used “to analyze how sociocultural hierarchies and power orders interact and create inclusion/exclusion around discursive and institutional constructed categories such as gender, ethnicity, ‘race,’ class, sexuality, age/generation, nationality, etc.” This interaction produces power hierarchies and social inequalities. Anthias (2013b, p. 6) elaborates on social divisions using the term ‘hybrid position.’ For example, a hybrid position can be Black working-class and lesbian, alternatively young, poor, and rural. Drawing on sociologist Nira Yuval-Davis (2006, p. 200f), I argue that it is of great importance to understand social divisions as irreducible to each other, meaning that, even though those divisions are to be understood as deeply intertwined, they cannot be reduced to each other (see also Lykke, 2010, p. 73). Thus,

it is impossible to add those dimensions of social lives to each other or analyze and understand those as the sum of its parts (Anthias, 2013b, p. 8; Brah & Phoenix, 2004, p. 76). This reasoning very much resonates with my research design as well as my interpretation of social identity.

I want to emphasize that the intersectional framework is diverse, leading to a variation in its application. For this thesis, I have used intersectionality as a theoretical and methodological entrance point to challenge the belief that “women” and “men” are all-encapsulating groupings. Instead, I understand social divisions such as “men,” “women,” “trans,” and “non-binary” as *categorizations*. Individuals are assigned to a gendered group through this categorization. Based on which group one is assigned to, one is given more or less power in society since power structures give different groups different power (jamstall.nu, n.d). Further, I will use intersectional theorizing to analyze how gender equality is understood as well as who the political subjects of gender equality and gender policies are with a focus on who is included and who is not - and what consequences this inclusion/exclusion has (see Lykke, 2010, p. 51).

## **5. CHALLENGES AND POSSIBILITIES WITH GENDER MAINSTREAMING - PREVIOUS RESEARCH**

Research on gender equality in general and gender mainstreaming has explicitly been carried out within various scientific disciplines (Callerstig et al., 2013, p. 36). The following chapter will explore some of the existing literature on gender equality, gender mainstreaming (gender equality) policies, and gender equality work in municipalities.

### ***5.1 GENDER EQUALITY - A CONTESTED CONCEPT***

For many states and transnational institutions, gender equality has become well-established as a political goal during the last decades, leading to policies and legal documents being adopted worldwide. However, I want to begin this section by acknowledging that gender equality does not have an a priori meaning. Gender equality is a well-researched and well-debated subject; despite this, its meaning is still contested.<sup>10</sup> According to Hannes Frizén, political scientist and specialist in public administration, and Johanna Sjons, sociologist and gender equality consultant (2012, p. 153), gender equality can be described as “a political concept that deals

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<sup>10</sup> I argue that the Swedish Gender Equality Agency’s definition is valid and mirrors a general understanding of gender equality, “gender equality means that women and men have the same rights, responsibilities and opportunities in all areas of life.” (Swedish Gender Equality Agency. “What is Gender Equality?” <https://www.jamstalldhetsmyndigheten.se/en/about-gender-equality/what-is-gender-equality> (Accessed 17 May 2021))

with the relation between the group women and the group men.” However, how the concept of gender equality is defined varies in different (cultural) contexts and from time to another; as a political goal, the concept is also constantly reframed and filled with discursive meaning (Rönblom, 2008, p. 115). Nevertheless, a vast majority of people understand gender equality as rooted in an uneven dynamic between “men” and “women” where “men” have more power on all levels of society, which gives that gender equality (work) constantly focuses on the empowerment of “women” (see for example Edström & Brunila, 2016; Rönblom, 2008).

Depending on how gender equality is framed, the idea can be stretched and reduced to fit specific contexts. Gender scholars Emanuela Lombardo, Petra Meier, and Mieke Verloo. (2009, p. 1) write;

*In its journeys through times and places - from the twentieth to the twenty-first century - across different national borders, amidst different policy actors, at both institutional and non-institutional levels and across a variety of national and international organizations - the concept of gender equality is labeled different.*

Gender researchers Ann-Charlott Callerstig, Kristina Lindholm, Karin Sjöberg, and Lennart Svensson (2012, p. 35) argues that how we “perceive gender equality will have an impact on how we organize work on gender equality, the activities that are regarded as important for achieving the goals, which partners and activities are involved and so on” (see also Dahl, 2007). Historically, in gender equality work, men are framed as the standard against which women are measured. A focus within gender equality work has thus been to make women a part of the (male-dominated) public sphere on the same terms as men, i.e., to make women more like men, ultimately leading to a reinforcement of the male norm (Beveridge et al., 2000, p. 387). Commonly gender equality is reduced to women having equal opportunities (as men) in the labor market (see also Edström & Brunila, 2016). The focus on increasing women in the labor market risks blurring and fragmenting gender equality’s ultimate goal - the equal distribution of power and possibilities between “men” and “women.”

## **5.2 GENDER MAINSTREAMING**

*What is gender equality? And what is to be mainstreamed?*  
(Andersson & Hedlund, 2012, p. 206)

Gender mainstreaming as a strategy was put on the Swedish political agenda primarily by femocrats<sup>11</sup> and women's movement actors (Sainsbury & Bergqvist, 2009, p. 225). According to Callerstig (2012, p. 96), the strategy's focus on mainstream activities and policies can potentially lead to actual and long-lasting change, which is the strategy's advantage. Gender mainstreaming has, states political theorist Judith Squires (2007, p. 48), "also come to be associated with favored international norms such as modernization and good governance." However, various types of criticism towards gender mainstreaming have been heard both nationally and internationally. According to political scientists Diane Sainsbury and Christina Bergqvist (2009, p. 216f), this critique includes, but is not limited to, implementation issues. The idea is that gender mainstreaming is to be carried out by "the regular actors in this transformation process" (Benschop & Verloo, 2006, p. 19). This approach is identified as another weakness of the strategy. By having no specific body responsible for either implementing or continuously working with gender mainstreaming, gender mainstreaming tends to be "everybody's - and nobody's - responsibility" (Mazey 2002, p. 228 in Lombardo et al., 2017, p. 7). Thus, the voluntary basis of gender mainstreaming requires engagement, which might be lacking - especially when resources are scarce.

### ***5.3 (GENDER EQUALITY) POLICYMAKING***

One of the means to achieve gender equality is gender equality policies. Bacchi and Eveline (2010, p. 111f) argue that "how 'problems' are represented in policies – how they are discursively produced – affects the particular understanding given to those conditions at points in time and space, and that these understandings matter." In their research, Lombardo, Meier, and Verloo (2017, p. 1) define policy-making as "an ongoing process of preparing, executing, and evaluating interventions by state actors, at different levels of government, including the establishment of institutions, to define the rules steering society." Like Bacchi (2017), Lombardo et al. (2017) argue that policy-making is a meaning-making process with real-life effects on different groups of people.

In multiple texts, Bacchi (2009a, 2009b, 2012b, 2017) and Bacchi and Eveline (2010) discuss the effects of policies and how they are gendering. Bacchi (2017, p. 20) argues that 'gendering' is to be seen as a "practice of subordination, constituting 'women' and 'men' in a relation of

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<sup>11</sup> A 'femocrat' is a bureaucrat that is a woman and a feminist who acts as an agent of change by "facilitating the triangle of empowerment between women in elected office, women's movements and appointed officials within policy agencies" (Squires, 2007, p. 33).



inequality.” Studying policies as gendering practices thus enables one to make visible how norms associated with masculinity and femininity as well as the categories “men” and “women” are constituted and reproduced through policy-making (Bacchi & Eveline, 2010, p. 112). Bacchi (2017, p. 21f) writes that concepts and categories have no fixed meaning but should instead be understood as proposals. However, the fixation of categories in policies makes them appear as “‘real,’ natural, and unchallengeable,” while at the same time, the politics behind the conceptualizations and categorizations are made invisible. Bacchi (1999, p. 207) writes, “the logic here is that these proposals will reveal what is represented to be the problem because what we propose to do will suggest what we believe needs to change.” Hence, policy proposals are to be seen as productive and discursive processes constructing the policy problem.

Furthermore, gender equality policies can be understood as turning feminist politics into a political strategy for change (Andersson, 2018, p. 29). According to Bacchi and Eveline (2010, p. 8), policies create political subjects. As previously concluded, policies are discursive practices, meaning that they by no means are understood as objective or ‘true.’ Drawing on poststructuralism, one can argue that political subjects are never fixed. Policies are constructed by individuals acting within a discourse. The political subjects addressed within a policy depend on who has constructed the policy, based on what assumptions about society, and with what purpose. Lombardo et al. (2017, p. 1) view policy-making as “gender- but also class-, ethnicity-, and sexuality-biased.” Policies aimed to counteract gender equality thus risks to reproduce (gendered) norms and hence inequality and injustice.

#### ***5.4 GENDER MAINSTREAMING AND GENDER EQUALITY POLICY ON A LOCAL LEVEL***

Callerstig (2012, p. 93) argues that implementing a gender perspective in municipal work mirrors an ambition to modernize the public sector to improve the services and activities directed to citizens. According to Callerstig et al. (2012, p. 31f), activities carried out by the public sector, which includes municipalities, should, following the national gender mainstreaming policy, contribute to gender equality. To contribute to gender equality means that “care, service, and services offered should be equitable, evenly distributed and of the same quality for men and women” (Callerstig et al. 2012, p. 32). Municipalities, like regions and

counties, are supposed to implement the Swedish gender equality policy; one can thus understand the role of municipalities as the ‘implementation bodies at a local level.’

Research specifically addressing gender equality policy implementation on a local level has, in a Swedish context, been conducted by, for example, gender studies researcher Ingrid Pincus (2002). Their doctoral dissertation, *The Politics of Gender Equality Policy: A Study of Implementation and Non-Implementation in Three Swedish Municipalities*, examines gender equality policy in three municipalities. Pincus (2002, p. 60f) writes that hinders for realizing gender equality policies include, but are not limited to, “bureaucratic inertia as well as features in gender equality policy operations that rhyme poorly with the existing structures of bureaucratic organizations”. According to Pincus (2002, p. 61ff), feminist research shows that the hardships with implementing gender equality policies at local levels draw on a lack of interest and engagement on behalf of the political and administrative leadership. They primarily emphasize how men in power positions show resistance against gender equality work, ultimately preventing change (Pincus, 2002, p. 74).

## **6. RESEARCH DESIGN, METHODOLOGY, METHOD, AND EMPIRICAL MATERIAL**

The following chapter will describe and motivate the research design and methods used in this thesis. Furthermore, a description of the interview conducted will be provided.

### **6.1 RESEARCH DESIGN**

This research study was designed as a qualitative case study drawing on Martyn Denscombe (2007). Denscombe has written a research guide for qualitative research, *The Good Research Guide*. A qualitative research design works well with feminist methodology since it approves (and encourages) subjective knowledge, which resonates with my epistemological positioning. A case study concentrates on an instance of a phenomenon rather than a larger spectrum (Denscombe, 2007, p. 35). The case examined in this research study is the two chosen municipalities' gender equality policies and the experiences of three individuals working at those two municipalities. Using the case study approach, the researcher explores the general by looking at the particular, making a case study a good fit for small-scale studies (Denscombe, 2007, p. 36). As this study aims to, using an inductive approach, acquire in-depth knowledge, I argue that the case study approach is a valid and feasible choice (Denscombe, 2007, p. 43).

As a researcher, it is necessary to reflect upon the impact of one's chosen methodological research frame. Per their qualitative and inductive approach, case studies are subjected to criticism. The critique includes that case studies are non-scientific as there is a risk that the data collection and the analysis are biased. Another comment is that case studies produce subjective 'soft data' and fail to generate generalizable, valuable, and valid data. To counteract this, I have strived to be transparent with my research process and articulate my conclusions by putting them into context. Further, I aimed to transparently reflect on the implications of this study and the limitations of my research design.

## **6.2 DISCOURSE ANALYSIS**

Discourse is a crucial concept of social constructivism, and the framework of discourse analysis rests on social constructivist ground. In line with poststructuralist thinking, the foundation within the discourse analytical approach is the belief that we understand and shape our reality through language (Winther Jørgensen and Phillips, 2002, p. 15). Thus, one can explain a discourse as governing our knowledge of the world. Within a discourse, a version of events, a story, if one will, is constructed (Burr, 2015, p. 74ff).

Winther Jørgensen and Phillips (2002, p. 11) writes that any discourse analysis is not just a "method for data analysis, but a theoretical and methodological whole," thus, in discourse analysis, theory and method are interconnected. In this thesis, I argue that discourse analysis is helpful since it centers on how texts, including written policies, are powerful as they contribute to shaping our reality. Winther Jørgensen and Phillips (2002, p. 63) state that discourse analysis is functional when studying communication, "[...] it aims to contribute to social change along the lines of more equal power relations in communication processes and society in general". In my interpretation, Winther Jørgensen and Phillips (2002) thus mean that changes in 'universal' discourses occur due to linguistic changes. In a dialectical way, discourses form and are formed by the social world; thus, discourses and discursive practices are dynamic and change depending on, for example, time and place. How texts are produced, i.e., what language is used, how various concepts are given meaning, who is mentioned, are examples of discursive practices. Thus, the meaning of words and concepts varies depending on the discursive context (Burr, 2015, p. 78). Burr (2015, p. 73) writes that a "'discourse' refers to an instance of situated language use," which I interpret as if the language (use) creates discourses shaped by their specific time (even *Zeitgeist*) and place (their politics of location).

### 6.2.1 Discourse Theory

According to Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (1985/2001) and their form of discourse analysis (commonly referred to as discourse theory), gender equality is understood as a ‘nodal point.’ As a nodal point, gender equality is a privileged sign, in the sense that a Swedish national discourse has been constituted around gender equality. How something is described through language is highly relevant as language can be understood as “a site of construction” (Burr, 2015, p. 121). What kind of discursive meaning gender equality is given in the analyzed material is thus telling of the state of affairs concerning gender politics circulating at all levels from media culture to the local setting and staff (and their background) of the municipality. For this thesis, I am using discourse theory methodologically since discourse theory stands out in previous research as a valid, critical approach to taken-for-granted knowledge. For this thesis, I will primarily use tools from the sub-branch *critical policy analysis* (Bacchi, 2009b) to explore how gender equality is understood and given meaning and examine the effects of gender equality policies for specific groups and society at large.

### 6.2.2 Intersectional Discourse Analysis

My take on discourse analysis, intersectional discourse analysis, is a critical, pragmatic, and creative form of discourse analysis (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002). This version of intersectional discourse analysis builds on how society is constructed through language using intersectional theory as a means to analyze power relations and subject positions. Gender is framed as one identity marker amongst others through which social relations are shaped and power structures organized. Further, this way of doing discourse analysis centers on ‘overlapping identities,’ i.e., how one is never, for instance, just a “woman.” Instead, one needs to be acknowledged as one of several identity aspects. In the same way, “women” and “men” and transgender people and queer/non-binary individuals are understood as diverse and fragmented groups.

I, as a researcher, use intersectional discourse analysis as a methodological and theoretical point of departure, well aware that my prior knowledge and understanding of society affects how I perceive and make sense of the discourses I detect within my material. Relativist critique against discourse analysis includes that the methodology tends to be too subjective; underpinning my research results and conclusions with previous research and relevant theories, I argue that discourse analysis is a highly motivated framework for this study.

### **6.3 WHAT'S THE PROBLEM REPRESENTED TO BE?**

WPR, short for 'What's the Problem Represented to Be?', is a critical policy analysis drawing on social constructivism and poststructuralism. WPR, created by Bacchi (2012b), is widely recognized and used as a qualitative tool for discourse analysis. WPR is particularly useful when examining the concepts of gender, gender equality, and gender mainstreaming (Bacchi & Eveline, 2010, p. 117f), which motivates this choice of method. The foundation of WPR is the belief that problems and policies aimed at solving those problems are socially constructed (Bacchi, 2009). The common idea is that public policies are effectuated to solve problems already existing in the world. This belief is challenged within the WPR approach. Bacchi and Eveline (2010, p. 114) write that "the idea that policies are developed to 'solve' social and policy problems is a common-sense proposition in most thinking about public policy." It is this very proposition that a WPR approach to policy analysis seeks to overturn". Thus, WPR aims to explore how policy is shaped by discourse and make visible what is characterized as a 'problem' within a policy. Further, who is targeted as the subject of change and benefits from this proposed change is explored (Bacchi & Eveline, 2010, p. 166).

### **6.4 EMPIRICS AND APPROACHES**

#### *6.4.1 Critical Policy Analysis as a Form of Discourse Analysis*

For this study, I have analyzed two gender equality policies, *Riktlinjer för jämställdhet i Linköping municipality* [Guideline for gender equality in Linköping municipality] (KS 2018-111) adopted 19 May 2020 and Norrköping municipality's *Riktlinje för jämställdhetsintegrering i Norrköping municipality* [Guideline for gender mainstreaming in Norrköping municipality] (KS2018/0457) adopted 27 January 2020.<sup>12</sup> Based on this thesis aim and the chosen research questions, I have conducted a critical policy analysis using inspiration from the WPR approach. A set of six questions forms the basis of Bacchi's WPR approach, those are:

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<sup>12</sup> I would like to acknowledge that Linköping municipality's policy is called *Riktlinjer för jämställdhet i Linköpings kommun* [Guideline for **gender equality** in Linköping municipality], whilst Norrköpings municipality's policy is called *Riktlinje för jämställdhetsintegrering i Norrköpings kommun* [Guideline for **gender mainstreaming** in Norrköping municipality], only reading the names suggests that those policies addresses two different areas, however I argue that is not the case. In my understanding those two policies both address how the given municipality is to reach gender equality and the policy is further the only gender equality policy adopted in the given municipality.

- Q1. *What's the 'problem' represented to be in a specific policy?*
- Q2. *What presuppositions or assumptions underlie this representation of the 'problem'?*
- Q3. *How has this representation of the 'problem' come about?*
- Q4. *What is left unproblematic in this problem representation? Where are the silences? Can the 'problem' be thought about differently?*
- Q5. *What effects are produced by this representation of the 'problem'?*
- Q6. *How/where has this representation of the 'problem' been produced, disseminated, and defended? How could it be questioned, disrupted, and replaced?*

(Bacchi, 2009a, p. 2)

The general aim of those questions is to critically question the problem representation within a specific policy and thus identify the discourse in which this policy was constructed (Bacchi, 2009a). The WPR approach has inspired me in my research study as I have strived to question taken-for-granted truths and hegemonic assumptions. Thus, I have chosen to use questions Q1, Q2, Q4, and Q5 since those questions align with my research questions. Further, I have used WPR as an inspiration when I have explored what change gender equality policies might produce - and, if so, for whom this change comes about.

#### *6.4.2 Online Group Interview*

To collect as rich and nuanced material as possible and to be able to answer my research questions in a fulfilling way, I decided to conduct a qualitative group interview. An advantage of the group interview setting is that no individual is singled out. Further, you can get at the collectiveness and shared ownership of the gender mainstreaming discourse.

As a sampling technique, I used purposive sampling, a form of non-probability sampling. Therefore, only possible informants, i.e., the three strategists that I know have been working with gender equality (policymaking) recently, were contacted. Further, purposive sampling fits well with a small-scale study, where one does not aim to conduct research that is generalizable to a broader population (Bryman, 2011, p. 433ff). Thus, the interview was conducted with key personnel that is or has been working strategically with gender equality at Linköping, respectively Norrköping municipality, and more specifically, as part of the development of the gender equality policy at their respective municipality. As I have worked closely with the gender equality strategist at Linköping municipality as my mentor, I used them as a 'gate-keeper' (see Bryman, 2011, p. 387). All three strategists working with gender equality

(policies) at Linköping respectively Norrköping municipality in the last few years pass as white females of Swedish origin. In addition, they are all close in age.

The interview was carried out as a video conference via Microsoft Teams. My original plan was to use Google Meets since Meets is the digital platform used within Linköping municipality, where I am employed. However, as we started the interview, the informants from Norrköping municipality encountered technical difficulties with the sound, which made us switch to Microsoft Teams. I argue that this switch did not affect the rest of the interview. I chose an online interview setting due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the recommendations to avoid meeting people you do not usually interact with daily. Officials working at Linköping and Norrköping municipality have mainly used digital meeting platforms (such as Skype, Zoom, and Teams) for meetings this past year. Thus, I argue that this way of conducting the interview felt natural for the informants and me. Since I previously have participated in online meetings with my informants, I knew beforehand that they had the pre-required knowledge and both the hardware and software necessary to participate in an interview facilitated online.

Except for the initial difficulties with Google Meets, we did not encounter any technical problems, which is a risk when doing online interviews (see, for example, Hanna, 2012, p. 241). The participants, including myself, are accustomed to Internet-based modes of communication, which can explain that the meeting went easily. A critique against conducting online interviews is that it might be difficult to acquire more in-depth responses to personal questions (Lo Iacono et al., 2016, p. 6). However, as this interview was related to the informant's working life, I do not understand this as impacting the interview. Another critique of this mode of interaction is that the researcher risks missing non-verbal communication since one only sees the face of one another using digital platforms (Lo Iacono et al., 2016, p. 7); however, I do not believe that to have compromised my ability to interpret and understand the informants.

I understand the interviewing practice as an active process where the relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee(s) affects the knowledge produced, which is vital to note when reflecting on the interview results. Adhering to poststructuralism, I view the interview process and the knowledge produced as discursive, meaning that I understand the knowledge acquired as social, contextual, and narrative. I consider my interviewees as subjects in their own right even while they are part of society and contribute significantly to society's discourse on gender

mainstreaming, and have no intentions of generalizing their answers in the positivist sense of the term. Per the small sample, the interview results are not statistically representative. However, they are indexical samples of how gender mainstreaming work gets talked about by those designated to describe it, and thus the group interview complements the policy analysis. My intention in conducting this interview was not to produce quantifiable knowledge but rather to explore my interviewee's way of making sense of gender mainstreaming and gender equality policies. Therefore, the interview was semi-structured (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2014); I had an interview guide to which I remained flexible.

#### 6.4.3 "Office Fieldwork"

From September 2020, I have worked as a student co-worker at the sustainability unit at Linköping municipality. I have thus had the opportunity to both observe and participate in gender mainstreaming work at the municipality. This "fieldwork" is not a strict ethnographic method. Still, as a cultural researcher, I use my experiences from the municipality to support my policy analysis and the interview with observations and insights from working "in the field" and "following the actors." I call this an attempt at anthropological "office fieldwork" (see also Bryman, 2011). This "fieldwork" impacts the study subtly with insider insights of someone who has worked in the office, met the people and shared their daily struggles with producing and implementing gender mainstreaming documents.

## **7. ANALYSIS AND RESULTS- DOING GENDER MAINSTREAMING IN LOCAL PRACTICE**

The following chapter offers analysis and discussion of the findings from this study based on the empirical work and its resonances with the herein selected framework of theory and methodology. I have analyzed the empirical material through an intersectional lens, using a material-discursive approach drawing on social constructivism and post-structuralism.

Questions from the WPR approach will guide the analysis of the empirical data material, i.e., Linköping and Norrköping's gender equality policy and the interview material. Drawing on the WPR approach, I will focus on solutions to the presented problem(s) proposed to tackle gender inequality in the municipalities. As previously described, I have chosen to apply four out of the six WPR questions, Q1, Q2, Q4, and Q5. The analysis is divided into four sections or themes, each with one of the chosen four WPR questions as its headline. In the analysis, the intersectional policy analysis of the municipalities' gender equality policies and the empirics



from the group interview conducted with personnel at the municipalities will be mixed with my observations from working with gender mainstreaming at a municipal level.

To provide a bit of color and a brief insight into the daily life of gender equality strategists working in Östergötland county, I will start this section with a few descriptive words to provide a scenography and a setting for the “doing gender mainstreaming” that I analyze in policy, conversation, and discourse. Working as a strategist, one is to, as the ‘gender expert,’ be responsible for the gender equality function in the municipal organization. In implementing policy decisions throughout the organization, one as a strategist plays an important role. Further, one is expected to link gender equality as a field of knowledge and the elected officials and municipal officials (see also SALAR, 2021b). However, none of the strategists works solely with gender equality, but also has other areas, such as public health and civil society questions, of responsibility within social sustainability. As I have interpreted it during my time at the municipality, this causes a disparity for the strategists. They often need to prioritize what to put effort into on behalf of something else.

Furthermore, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the strategists have, during the last 14 months, been given other tasks that they have had to combine with their regular work tasks. They have also, to a large extent, been working from home due to the pandemic. As both municipalities' gender equality policies were adopted in 2020, the pandemic has dramatically influenced the policy work.

### ***7.1 WHAT'S THE PROBLEM REPRESENTED TO BE IN LINKÖPING AND NORRKÖPING'S GENDER EQUALITY POLICY?***

The first WPR question aims to identify a place to start the analysis. This starting point is determined by recognizing a problem representation, i.e., what the problem is represented to be in the policy (Bacchi, 2012a, p. 4). At a glance, one can imagine that the problem represented in the policies would be that the municipality is not equal in terms of gender. However, this is not explicitly written in Norrköping municipality's gender equality policy. In Linköping's gender equality policy, it is stated that inequality occurs in several areas within the municipality and Sweden (Linköping municipality, 2020b, p. 9). Yet, that is not explicitly written until one of the last pages. Neither of the municipalities' gender equality policies addresses any particular problem(s) or problem solutions. A possible interpretation is thus that “the problem” is that

both municipalities' gender equality work needs to be mapped out and defined for the municipality to be able to take action on the chosen gender equality strategy of gender mainstreaming.

### *7.1.1 Gender Equality Work and the Gender Binary*

As gender mainstreaming is both Linköping and Norrköping municipalities' strategy for gender equality work, their gender equality policies have come about as a result of the effort to realize and implement this strategy. Both policies are influenced by theories of gender mainstreaming and the national gender equality (work) discourse.

In general, Swedish gender equality policy is based on a heterosexual and binary understanding of gender where “women” and “men” are constructed as both opposites and the two only possible identities (Dahl, 2005, p. 56). In gender equality work overall, heteronormativity is uncritically implemented and thus naturalized in a way that ends up reproducing gendered norms (Edström & Brunila, 2016, p. 22f). This heteronormativity is something that the strategists are familiar with; when asked to what extent they think that gender mainstreaming as a method can contribute to changing norms about gender, one of the strategists concludes; “I think that we, unfortunately, reinforce the normative images of gender when we work with gender mainstreaming.” This comment resonates with findings from Benschop and Verloo (2006, p. 30f), they conclude that in working with gender mainstreaming, problem framings and theories are often gendered as problem framings are “translated” into gendered terms to make them accessible for the ‘regular actors’ tasked with gender mainstreaming work.

Gender mainstreaming is traditionally concerned with creating gender equality amongst men and women, girls and boys, which can be referred to as ‘heteronormative gender equality’ (see also Edström & Brunila, 2016). One of the reasons behind this heteronormative approach to gender equality is that to measure gender equality in Sweden, statistics based on gender as a sole social category, i.e., gender-disaggregated statistics<sup>13</sup>, are commonly used. The strategists agree that gender equality work on a municipal level largely is based on gender-disaggregated statistics, which they identify as tricky (see also The Swedish Government, 2019a). One of the informants states, “gender-disaggregated statistics are the basis of our work with gender

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<sup>13</sup> Gender-disaggregated statistics is statistics divided by sex (not gender), the produced data can, for example, concern the labour force, life expectancy and literacy rates (Squires, 2007, p. 68).

mainstreaming.” Gender-disaggregated statistics proceeds from legal gender, which in Sweden are two (male and female)<sup>14</sup>; thus, this method risks reinforcing the gender binary, which the informants agree on during our conversation.

One strategist reflects; “in a way, it could be that gender-disaggregated statistics reinforce norms about gender, in a way that when we see that girls do better in school... we see the results that we expect quite often, I think it is important that we do not stop at the statistics - what is the reason? It takes resources not to stop at ‘this is how it is.’” One of the problems with gender mainstreaming work thus seems to be that gendered norms and assumptions based on gender limit its transformative potential (see Norrbin & Olsson, 2010, 27ff). The strategists discuss how local gender equality work risks clashing with how people *feel* in terms of gender when legal gender is the basis of gender equality work. One strategist says, “it is very easy to produce statistics linked to legal gender, but that must not be the only basis on which we conduct gender equality work; we must think about how people live [...]” In equality work, only proceeding from legal gender marginalizes individuals who do not fit within this binary. One of the strategists explain how they think about gender(s);

*I see it as if there are several different types of gender; we have legal gender, biological gender, experienced gender, and social gender; there can certainly be a couple of more, but those are probably the four you usually mention, and I think it is important to know what we are talking about instead of automatically think ‘we are talking about legal gender.’*

I understand the strategist to be referring to the fact that only producing gender-disaggregated statistics is not enough; gender inequality cannot be measured by looking at statistics only but needs to be analyzed beyond numbers. Furthermore, gender-disaggregated statistics based solely on legal gender can be understood to hinder the implementation of an intersectional perspective in general and a trans perspective in particular into gender mainstreaming. One way of moving beyond gender-disaggregated statistics is to do gender impact assessments and make visible what effects gender inequality in society has on people’s lived reality based on their gender or non-gender.<sup>15</sup> My interpretation is that the strategists understand gender to go

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<sup>14</sup> In Swedish the term *juridiskt kön* is institutionalized and widely recognized, the English translation ‘legal gender’ however, might not be perfect. With legal gender I refer to a person's gender as it is recognized in legal documents contexts in Sweden, for example in one’s social security number and passport.

<sup>15</sup> Linköping municipality is currently (2021) working on constructing support structures for gender impact assessments.

beyond the gender binary and that they strive to broaden the understanding of gender within gender mainstreaming work. The strategists discuss the possibility of adding a third legal gender, a change to which they are positive since they all agree that it would make adding an intersectional perspective to gender mainstreaming easier.

## ***7.2 WHAT PRESUPPOSITIONS OR ASSUMPTIONS UNDERLIE THIS REPRESENTATION OF THE PROBLEM?***

Lombardo et al. (2017, p. 6) argue that there exists a “false gender neutrality of policy-making.” Traditionally, gender equality policies often target women and can thus be understood as gendered (see also Pincus, 2002, p. 16). Drawing on Lombardo et al. (2017, p. 10), one can argue that policy-making is based on “the male (heterosexual, white, or other) norm.” (see also Benschop & Verloo, 2006, p. 19). However, I would argue this is *not* the case in either Linköping or Norrköping’s policy. In neither policy, women, and girls are especially singled out or targeted as the only subjects of gender equality work. Instead, both men and women are addressed and can thus be understood as equally gendered or non-gendered, which indicates that policymakers, as well as strategists at the municipality, have an awareness of traditional gender equality problematizations and the (negative) effect of these. Thus, one can argue that both Linköping and Norrköping municipality is quite progressive as they acknowledge that not only (cis)women are the subjects of gender equality work.

### *7.2.1 Gender Mainstreaming as a Strategy for Change*

A presupposition of both Linköping and Norrköping municipalities' policies is that gender mainstreaming functions as a transformative strategy. However, both the conceptualization and operationalization of gender mainstreaming have been questioned (Squires, 2007, p. 68). To fit gender mainstreaming into the existing policy-making practice at a municipal level has proven difficult. Pincus (2002, p. 68f) argues that the implementation of national gender equality policy in local contexts has been both slow and challenging. One way of concretizing gender mainstreaming is to conduct and implement gender equality policies. During the interview, the informants discussed the importance of gender equality policy documents. One strategist states, “a municipality-wide governing document is crucial at the strategic level, to be able to work strategically with such a broad area as gender equality.” The strategists agree that gender equality policies play a significant role in gender equality work; one of the strategists says, “regulatory documents become the engine, without them, nothing would happen.” The

strategists further agree that the policy document can be used “to point at” when one needs to either motivate a decision or showcase that the municipality takes gender equality seriously. Thus, gender equality policies serve an important purpose for gender equality work at a local level, beyond its practical implementation.

Yet, turning policies and strategies into action is a struggle. The strategists all agree on the hardships of using gender mainstreaming as an operative strategy for gender equality. They seem to agree that gender mainstreaming is a complex method, hard to implement in everyday work at the municipality. One strategist has tried to find concrete guiding to gender mainstreaming as a method, but it has been far from easy; “there is a massive ignorance that surprises me a little, there is knowledge to be gained but no quick fix or a given way to go.” For example, the lack of practical guidance on gender mainstreaming is noted by Beveridge et al. (2000, p. 390). The same strategists continue, “it is a learning process, it feels like there is no one who knows how to do gender mainstreaming, not even at SKR (SALAR - The Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions [my note]).” Another strategist adds (laughing), “everyone works with gender mainstreaming, but no one knows what they are doing.” I recognize this as an expression of the challenges with operationalizing gender mainstreaming. Squires, 2007, p. 67 states, “[...] simplicity does not appear to be a common feature of mainstreaming, either conceptually or operationally.” Furthermore, gender mainstreaming has, by various researchers (see, for example, Lombardo et al., 2017, p. 11), been criticized for being too ‘technocratic,’ which further hinders the implementation process. I have experienced this myself, working to actualize gender mainstreaming at Linköping municipality.

Moreover, the prevailing confusion about the meaning of gender mainstreaming and its implementation in practice makes the implementation process ineffective and burdensome (Lombardo et al., 2017, p. 7). That the strategists struggle with implementing gender mainstreaming is thus not surprising. As previously concluded, the method is open for interpretation since it offers a theoretical rather than a practical framing, which risks complicating and hindering gender equality work.

### *7.2.2 Gendering and Gender-Blindness Within Gender Mainstreaming Work*

Every organization is gendered (Benschop & Verloo 2006), including municipalities. This genderedness is deeply embedded within organizations, often to the extent where it is naturalized and thus made invisible. Therefore, gendering can be thought to impact the

municipality's internal and external gender equality work. Changing gender blind attitudes is a well-known policy problem (Benschop & Verloo 2006, p. 30), which the informants discuss. One of the strategists emphasizes that it is essential that the municipality is not 'gender blind,' i.e., fails to acknowledge that people of different gender (or non-gender) have different roles and responsibilities ascribed to them depending on the context (see also Sainsbury & Bergqvist, 2009, p. 217). Benschop and Verloo (2006, p. 30), write "we argue that gender blind and gender-biased attitudes are essential manifestations of the genderedness of organizations and that any gender mainstreaming project has to deal with these attitudes and the accompanying escape tendencies." Drawing on Benschop and Verloo (2006), it is thus essential to acknowledge and address gender blindness and gender bias in gender mainstreaming to challenge organizations' genderedness.

The strategist continues by adding that when an organization is gender blind, the tendency is that the male norm is reproduced as cisgender men are privileged on behalf of cisgender women. Further, trans people become marginalized or oppressed through (un)conscious biases, which further agrees with Sainsbury and Bergqvist (2009, p. 217); they argue "incorporating a gender perspective reveals the male norm in structures and processes, disclosing the androcentric design of institutions, cultures, and organizations." (see also Lombardo et al., 2017, p. 1f).

Furthermore, gendering and non-gendering take place in the glossary in both Linköping and Norrköping's policy. This glossary explains terms connected with gender equality that can be understood as assumptions about gender (equality) that have formed the policy itself. For example, in Linköping's glossary, under biological sex, it is concluded that "[...] physically, there are not just two sexes, but a range of variations." (Linköping municipality, 2020b, p. 4). Further, it is concluded that even if, in gender-disaggregated statistics, only two sexes are included, the municipality can still have a third alternative when conducting their own surveys (Linköping municipality, 2020b, p. 5). This understanding of gender and sex goes in line with feminist post-structural theory. The feminist post-structural theory challenges how individuals become binary gendered subjects (Davies & Gannon, 2005, p. 36). Furthermore, the definitions resonate with Butler's (1993) rejection of the gender binary and their understanding of biological sex as nothing but constructed and their argument that there is nothing natural about categorizing "men" and "women" as two dichotomous and homogenous groups.

In the glossary within Norrköping's policy, the definition of sex is less elaborated. Instead of reflecting on the meaning and applicability of the term sex, it is stated that "sex is most often associated with the legal gender." (Norrköping municipality, 2020, p. 11). Drawing on this, I argue that Linköping municipality has taken one step further to acknowledge that gender goes beyond the gender binary and that the physical body is socially constructed.

Further, in Linköping's policy, gender inequality is explained by referring to the gender system.<sup>16</sup> The policy states that "knowledge and an understanding of how the gender system functions are thus essential parts of gender equality work" (Linköping municipality, 2020b, p. 9f). In Norrköping's municipality, no explanation model for gender inequality is presented. However, both municipalities state that their gender equality policy draws on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the CEMR Charter, and the Swedish gender equality policy goals. I argue that both Linköping and Norrköping's gender equality policies, to a great extent, are affected by the problem representations in those documents, especially in the CEMR Charter. For example, in the Swedish gender equality policy, similar to both the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the CEMR Charter, "men" and "women" are used as two dichotomous groups.

### ***7.3 WHAT IS LEFT UNPROBLEMATIC IN THIS PROBLEM REPRESENTATION? WHERE ARE THE SILENCES? CAN THE PROBLEM BE THOUGHT ABOUT DIFFERENTLY?***

#### *7.3.1 Gender Equality – But For Whom?*

From a feminist post-structuralist perspective, what is presented as a 'taken-for-granted truth' in a policy is relevant to analyze. I agree with Rönnblom (2008, p. 114), who states that gender equality is not "a self-evident feminist goal that we all can agree on." It is thus essential to define gender equality when conducting gender equality work. In Linköping's policy, the definition of gender equality is "gender equality means equality between women, men, girls,

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<sup>16</sup> The gender system is, according to Yvonne Hirdman (1988, p. 51) "the organizing principle behind other systems. It is a system that »arranges» the sexes into their respective genders and that seems to show a regularity based on two types of rules (or logic, or principle). One is the rule of distinctive separation, which can be seen in the division of virtually all areas and levels of life into male and female categories. The second rule is that of the male norm, i.e. the way that higher value is almost automatically accorded to things masculine (Hirdman, Y. (1988). "Genussystemet - reflexioner kring kvinnors sociala underordning". *Kvinnovetenskaplig tidskrift* 1988:3).

boys, and non-binaries.”<sup>17</sup> (Linköping municipality, 2020, p. 4); hence the term and how it is understood in the policy is articulated. In the policy, non-binaries are addressed as equal to men and women in gender equality work as they are included in the very definition of gender equality. However, trans people are not mentioned and can thus be understood as excluded from the policy.

In Norrköping’s policy, gender equality is not explained. During the interview, I double-checked with the strategist(s) from the municipality, who confirmed that they have no definition of gender equality within the municipality. As previously stated, gender equality is an open or floating signifier. Since gender equality is also a nodal point (see Chantal & Mouffe 1985/2001), the concept of gender equality shapes the discourse. Not defining gender equality as a concept gives that it is open for interpretation in Norrköping’s municipality’s policy. In turn, not defining the concept of gender equality leaves the discourse open for contestation. When conceptualizing gender mainstreaming, it is necessary to reflect on the meaning of *gender*, *equality*, and *mainstreaming* (Squires, 2007, p. 67f). That Norrköping municipality has not defined gender equality can thus hinder its gender mainstreaming work. It is pivotal to understand gender equality as something that is subjectively created in, and through discourse, since depending on the discourse, various forms of political change are understood as possible or not possible (Rönblom, 2011, p. 37).

In Norrköping’s gender equality policy, similar to Linköping’s policy, trans people are not addressed explicitly. Instead, it is stated that “the people who neither identify themselves as female or male nor are beyond the gender binary are often referred to as non-binaries.<sup>18</sup> The work with gender equality needs to include people with different gender identities<sup>19</sup>” (Norrköping municipality, 2020, p. 11). A risk with adding this formulation on one of the last pages is that non-binaries are understood as *another* group that the municipality also needs to

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<sup>17</sup> The Swedish term used in Linköping’s policy is *personer av annat kön*, which roughly translates to “individuals of another gender”, I argue that ‘non-binary people’, or ‘non-binaries,’ are more appropriate and useful translations.

<sup>18</sup> Hereafter I will interchangeably use non-binary people and non-binaries.

<sup>19</sup> The Swedish term used in Norrköping’s policy is *personer med annan könsidentitet*, which differs from the term in Linköping’s policy. With *personer med annan könsidentitet* one refers to not identifying with or not having an inner sense of oneself as belonging to the sex one was assigned at birth. I argue that it is possible to have a binary understanding of gender and still use this term. It can be interpreted as if the municipality acknowledges that one can feel as if one is outside of the margins of the gender binary, but that it is not actually possible to be outside of the same.



create gender equality for, besides women and men, who are the *primary* groups for which gender equality needs to be achieved.

Addressing non-binary people<sup>20</sup> to a limited extent (which is done in Norrköping's case) and not addressing transgender individuals (which is valid for both municipalities) reproduce the idea that there are two distinct genders between which gender equality needs to be realized. If non-binary and trans people are subjected as 'others' in the gender equality discourse, this group risks becoming marginalized in gender equality work. An individual is never simply a "man" or simply a "woman" (Callerstig, 2012, p. 100); this reasoning resonates with poststructuralist thought. To this reasoning, there are two dimensions: not everyone identifies as belonging to the group "men" or "women," but amongst those who do, not everyone identifies the same, meaning that neither "women" nor "men" are generic groups. For an individual who identifies as "man" or "woman," this identification is still a fragment of one's (self)identity. A person also has other attributes like, for example, religion, ethnicity, and class which together shape one's influence and power within society, which motivates the inclusion of an intersectional perspective (see Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002, p. 11). For example, one might also identify as Latinx, queer, and crip. Our identity as fragmented and never linked with only gender (or non-gender) is acknowledged in both Linköping and Norrköping's gender equality policy. Bacchi and Eveline (2010, p. 112) state that the categories "men" and "women" are constituted and reproduced through policy-making; I thus argue that the comprehensive understanding of "men" and "women" in both municipalities' policies are integral to challenge hegemonic assumptions of the subjects of gender equality.

Norrköping's policy states that "neither women nor men form any homogenous groups" (Norrköping municipality 2020, p. 11). In Linköping's ditto, it is written that "when discussing gender equality, it is crucial to keep in mind that women, men, and people with different gender identities are not homogeneous groups" (Linköping municipality, 2020, p. 10). I argue that this is positive regarding inclusion and demonstrates an intersectional understanding of citizens living in respective municipalities.

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<sup>20</sup> With non-binary people I refer to and include all individuals that identify beyond the gender binary man/woman and thus does not fit the "traditional" narrative of male or female. As non-binary one can identify as both male and female, or as sometimes male and sometimes female. Further, one can identify as, for example, trans(gender), gender diverse, gender fluid, queer, or Other. For the sake of feasibility I will further on use the term non-binary when referring to those beyond the gender binary in this thesis. Non-binary translates to *icke-binär* in Swedish, which I argue is at least semi-institutionalized in Swedish politics, academia and society.

### *7.3.2 Including an Intersectional, Trans, and Queer/Non-binary Perspective in Practice*

Reflecting on ‘how the problem can be thought about differently,’ I argue that the gender equality work conducted within the municipalities would benefit from a more evident focus on inclusion. Based on their social markers, individuals are categorized, gendered, and divided into groups. Those groups are affected differently by gender mainstreaming initiatives. An intersectional framework is useful to address the complexities of social identity (Crenshaw, 1998; Hill Collins, 1990). Various identity markers might be more or less critical and might or might not lead to (multiple) discrimination in different contexts. Discrimination and multiple discrimination have real-life effects on individuals, their agency, and their sense of belonging, which need to be acknowledged in gender equality policies. Lykke (2010, p. 36) writes, “the history of science is full of examples documenting how classifications based on gender, sex, race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, nationality, mother tongue, and so on have been used to legitimize social hierarchies, power differentials, and in/exclusions.” By applying an intersectional perspective, gender equality work is developed to include and reach more people (see also NCK, 2016, p. 14).

Using intersectional framing, one can see how social divisions, such as gender, race/ethnicity, and (dis)ability creates different embodied realities and thus power differentialities (see, for example, Anthias, 2013a & Lykke, 2010). For example, an intersectional perspective is present in Linköping municipality’s policy in the following sentence; “norms, laws, and other conditions affect people differently depending on factors such as gender, ethnicity, age, socio-economic status, level of education, and whether the person has a residence permit or citizenship. Therefore, in gender equality work, it is central to see how different power structures can interact” (Linköping municipality, 2020b, p. 10). Intersectionality is also defined in the policy as “different power structures and grounds for discrimination effect and sometimes reinforce each other and that an individual order of power does not can be understood independently of others.” (Linköping municipality, 2020b, p. 6). However, no concrete measures on implementing an intersectional perspective into the actual gender equality work are mentioned.

Also, in Norrköping’s gender equality policy, the intersectional perspective is present but to a minor degree. The intersectional perspective is recognized in the following sentence; “the municipality of Norrköping shall work with equality and gender equality by promoting equal

rights and opportunities to participate in society regardless of gender, background, and conditions (Norrköping municipality” (2020, p. 8). In the municipality’s glossary, it is also referred to ‘multiple discrimination’ (*flerfladig diskriminering* in Swedish), which is explained as;

*Awareness of multiple discrimination is required to achieve equality. Discrimination occurs on many grounds, and women or men can be subjected to discrimination based on several of these grounds simultaneously. In addition to gender, each individual has an age, a sexual orientation, and an ethnicity, for example. In gender equality work, we need to focus on gender - but not just gender* (Norrköping municipality, 2020, p. 11).

However, in Norrköping’s policy, multiple discrimination is not incorporated in the text; it is only mentioned in the glossary on the last page, suggesting that targeting multiple discrimination is a theoretical rather than a practical aspect of the municipality’s gender equality work.

In Sweden, partially in politics but first and foremost in some fractions of society (often picked up in mainstream media), there is an ongoing debate regarding Swedishness and who is or is not Swedish. According to Yuval-Davis (2006, p. 201), “ethnic and racial divisions relate to discourses of collectivities constructed around exclusionary/inclusionary boundaries.” Living in Sweden as a person of non-Nordic origin affects one’s self-identity and sense of belonging or not belonging to specific categories, such as the categories “women” and “men.” Not implementing an intersectional approach to gender equality work risks leading to the exclusion of individuals from the gender equality discourse. Furthermore, not applying intersectional theories and knowledge is a missed opportunity to challenge multiple and interconnected discrimination and inequalities (Lombardo et al., 2017). Besides, not acknowledging that multiple burdened individuals (see Talpade Mohanty, 1984) risk prolonging the fight against all kinds of equalities.

The strategists agree that including an intersectional perspective is a key to successful gender equality work; however, combining gender mainstreaming with an intersectional viewpoint does not seem particularly easy. When I asked the informants if they have an intersectional way of working with gender mainstreaming, one of the strategists answer, “we try, but I do not know if we reach all the way [...], it is difficult to work with gender mainstreaming from an

intersectional perspective, it easily becomes too difficult to grasp which leads to that equality between *men* and *women* becomes the focus”. Another informant answered; “I see it as an area of development.” Discussing integrating an intersectional perspective, one of the informants asks, semi-rhetorically, “but is it even possible to carry out gender mainstreaming with an intersectional perspective?” Another informant replies; “it requires a lot more resources, but I think it is the future.”

As previously concluded, the implementation of gender mainstreaming at a local level is complex, perhaps even more so when a successful implementation entails including an intersectional *and* an LGBTQIA\* perspective. One of the strategists says that the political will has been concentrated on equality between cismen and ciswomen in their municipality, which has led to the marginalization of the intersectional perspective and the LGBTQ<sup>21</sup> perspective. The strategists continue, “*Gender* equality is raised higher up (*in the organization* [my note]), and is thus given more space.” Thus, one interpretation is that the gender equality discourse created by the politicians in the municipality is rather heteronormative. The strategist does not understand this as a limitation but rather as a chosen (political) focus. They reflect on how the municipality’s social democratic majority traditionally has focused on empowering “women,” which can be thought to have shaped the discourse on equality. As the municipalities are politically governed entities, the elected officials decide on the municipal organization’s operations. The strategists will ultimately have to carry out their work according to the political will and political decisions. The politicians' chosen focus sets the framework for the strategists' work. It thus becomes the framework to which the strategists need to adjust, which, I argue, is vital to keep in mind when scrutinizing the strategists' work. Further, SALAR plays a crucial role in how Swedish municipalities and regions carry out their work. SALAR has not included either a trans perspective or a queer/non-binary perspective into its material on gender mainstreaming and gender impact assessments (see, for example, SALAR, 2021b).

Asking the strategists about including a trans perspective in their policy, the same strategists say, “I would not say that our policy has a clear trans perspective, it is included in a sentence or so, but it is not evident.” They continue to reflect;

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<sup>21</sup> In the interview one of the strategists refers to ‘an LGBTQ perspective [*HBTQ-perspektiv* in Swedish]’. I would like to acknowledge that a more inclusive term for the queer community is LGBTQIA\*, which is the acronym for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transsexual/Transgender, Queer/Questioning, Intersexual and Asexual or Allied. The asterisk (\*) is added to show respect to, and include, everyone regardless of if their identification is included in the acronym or not.

*I do not really think it is the same thing, trans is about gender identity, and equality is about gender; a trans person can be a man and a trans person can be a woman, and a trans person can be... so I think it is like two different things, it is clear that you need to have an intersectional perspective and then you include all people in this work but gender identity I believe, not only goes into the gender equality work but it goes into the discrimination grounds and the work against discrimination.*

As previously described, power is exercised in and through discourses (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002), which means that this heteronormativity will exercise power over who understands themselves as included in the municipality's gender equality work or not. Not clearly including non-cis individuals in the policies have real-life effects. Dahl (2007, p. 112) explains, "[...] policy increasingly shapes people's livelihoods and understandings of themselves". Focusing on ciswomen and cismen and only to a limited extent, and perhaps even dutifully, adding transgender individuals and non-binaries in a gender equality policy will exclude individuals, creating a gender equality discourse with little, or no space, for non-cis individuals.

Furthermore, a heteronormative discursive construction of gender equality categorizes ciswomen and cismen as the "true" subjects in the municipality's gender equality discourse, a categorization that in turn is an exercise of power (Crenshaw, 1991). I recognize this as a struggle that the strategists are very aware of and work with continuously. The trans perspective is, one can argue, relatively "new" in gender equality contexts, and trans-including feminism is a constantly topical point. Uncertainty on a societal level on including a trans perspective is one reason why I believe that it is missing from both policies; this should hence not land on the gender strategists.

#### **7.4 WHAT EFFECTS ARE PRODUCED BY THIS REPRESENTATION OF THE PROBLEM?**

As previously mentioned, different bodies will be affected by gender equality policies differently. Based on how the policy is written, some individuals will be included, and some excluded. To a large extent, the discourse created in both policies leaves little, or no space, for those who do not understand themselves as part of the gender dichotomy. Gender-nonconforming bodies have historically been excluded from politics. According to Benschop

and Verloo (2011, p. 285), marginalized groups are often left out of change strategies as their voices are not heard. To marginalize gender-nonconforming bodies in such policies have real-life effects; for example, such marginalization risk adding to already widespread transphobia and further social exclusion of individuals not fitting societal norms such as whiteness and middle class-ness.

#### 7.4.1 “Clashing Perspectives” [“Perspektivträngsel”]

Gender equality tends to be intertwined with other political and policy goals (Lombardo et al. 2009, p. 2), which poses both possibilities and possible hinders for gender equality work.

In all three strategists' interview answers, it is evident that a part of gender equality work is dealing with multiple political questions, what I call *clashing perspectives*. Using the term clashing perspectives, I refer to how various equality perspectives risk clashing in the municipality's work with social sustainability. Clashing perspectives risks leading to that different social development questions “crowd each other out,” to avoid this, those questions must be targeted together. One strategist explained, “we also have a requirement to integrate a child rights perspective and a diversity perspective; all of them can somehow capture the intersectional perspective. Still, then we need to talk about those parts at the same time.”

According to Callerstig et al. (2012, p. 33), gender equality work requires an awareness of power, interests, and privileges. Not seldom, equality work is conflicted as multiple interests and traditions are balanced against each other. Further, this resonates with Lombardo et al. (2009, p. 5), who writes, “gender equality is a family member of other equality goals, and this can lead either to drawing borders between the different equality struggles or to stretching borders to readapt them in a more inclusive way.” Since power structures are interconnected, inequalities are most successfully managed together (see also jamstall.nu, n.d).

Another strategist says, “I believe that an intersectional approach would be a way to access these *clashing perspectives* which are an obstacle in working actively with, for example, gender impact assessments.” This resonates with my limited experiences of doing gender impact assessments; I argue that to vitalize statistics and numbers, it is crucial to include various social divisions into the analysis and thus not analyze gender separately from other categories. This reasoning is what SALAR (The Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions) refers to as “alltid kön - men inte bara kön!” [“always gender - but not just gender!”] (SALAR, 2021a). Further, gender mainstreaming work risks clashing with other equality perspectives

and other, sometimes contradictory, political goals, such as economic growth. As the goal of gender equality competes against other goals for prioritization, gender mainstreaming is “an inherently contested process that is never simply about adopting a new policy” (Benschop & Verloo, 2006, p. 22). Thus, carrying out gender equality work and being the ‘agents of change’ in a municipal context can be challenging, which the strategists touch on multiple times during the interview.

## **8. SUMMARY AND FINAL DISCUSSION**

This chapter is dedicated to a summary of the main findings of the analysis. Furthermore, a short reflection on the implications of these findings will be provided.

My analysis has been guided by poststructural feminism with critical discourse analysis as the chosen methodology; further, I have used the WPR approach when conducting the policy analysis. The results from this study are based on findings from research carried out with the chosen research questions as the point of departure. I have researched gender equality policies from an intersectional feminist post-structuralist perspective using the case study of Linköping and Norrköping municipalities' gender equality policy as an example. Moreover, I have conducted a semi-structured interview with strategists working with gender equality questions at both municipalities. As I currently work with gender mainstreaming at Linköping municipality, my observations and experiences have been part of this study to get a “thicker” material.

### ***8.1 A DISCURSIVE UNDERSTANDING OF GENDER EQUALITY (WORK)***

This thesis has sought to examine the discourses of gender equality (work) in Linköping and Norrköping municipality and the effects of these discourses. I have identified how gender (in)equality is discursively constructed, both in policies and in the strategists' work; those constructions significantly affect the municipalities' gender equality work. In line with Charlotta Edström and Kristiina Brunila (2016, p. 24), I understand equality work as sites of constant negotiations. I argue that the discursive constructions of gender equality within the respective municipality are to be understood as *one* way of making sense of how to carry out gender mainstreaming work. Based on the analysis, one of the overall findings in this study is the striking similarities between the gender equality work discourse in Linköping and Norrköping municipality, which was especially evident in the interview with gender equality

strategists. The gender equality policies, however, differ in some aspects, which I will get back to later on.

### *8.1.1 The Contemporary Municipal Context*

One of the main findings from this study is that gender equality strategists working at a local level faces multiple challenges. First, as previously concluded, municipalities are responsible for implementing the national gender equality objectives. Thus, the municipal setting offers both possibilities and hinders gender equality work in the form of gender mainstreaming.

Gender equality ultimately concerns human rights, which is a foundation in a democracy. Gender equality strategists, or the ‘femocrats,’ can thus be understood as *bearers of democracy*. Hence, the strategists play an essential role in advocating social justice and strengthening democracy in a local context. Their discursive understanding of gender equality, gender mainstreaming, and gender equality policy thus play a vital role in the locally governed gender equality work.

## ***8.2 THE DISCOURSE OF GENDER EQUALITY IN LINKÖPING AND NORRKÖPING MUNICIPALITY***

As previously described, discourses are powerful as they, in authentic ways, shape peoples’ lived reality depending on how you are positioned within the discourse. However, this study shows that the discourse created in Linköping and Norrköping’s risks reinforcing gendered norms since gender-disaggregated statistics are used as a basis for gender mainstreaming work, without any further analysis, i.e., gender impact assessments, being done. Further, the study shows that gender equality work in Linköping and Norrköping municipality is not particularly gendered, which is somewhat surprising based on previous research.

### *8.2.1 The Hardships of Putting Gender Mainstreaming into Practice*

This study has identified three main components of the discourse on gender mainstreaming work on a local level. The first is the practical implementation of gender mainstreaming, the second being clashing perspectives, and the third being the reinforcement of gendered differentialities.

The first finding is that gender mainstreaming is hard to realize (see also Norrbin and Olsson, 2010, 32ff), which is emphasized by the informants. Moreover, I would argue that in the



respective municipality's gender equality policy (that is supposed to outline the gender mainstreaming work), the uncertainty regarding gender mainstreaming can be noticed since both policies have more of a theoretical than a practical approach to gender mainstreaming. Lombardo (2017, p. 7) defines this difficulty as follows, "the coexistence of competing definitions and multiple meanings of gender mainstreaming make it difficult to assess its actual implementation and propose how it could better be put into practice." Furthermore, one of the strategists describes the implementation "as a learning process," which indicates that no all encapsulation guidelines or instructions can be used. I want to emphasize that the strategists should not be held accountable for this; the prevailing hardships of implementing gender mainstreaming are widely researched (see, for example, Andersson, 2018; Benschop & Verloo, 2006; Lombardo, 2017). This research further shows that still today, in 2021, 25 years after Sweden adopted gender mainstreaming on a national level, the strategy is still hard to operationalize, i.e., the strategy is too 'technocratic' (as opposed to transformative), which gives that much effort is put into figuring out *how* to carry out gender mainstreaming, rather than on actual gender equality work (see Sainsbury & Bergqvist 2009, p. 217). Perhaps this indicates a gap between researchers and those who are set out to realize gender mainstreaming; I think that gender mainstreaming perhaps has failed to bridge gender studies research and gender equality work at a municipal level.

### *8.2.2 Gendered Subjects in Local Gender Equality Work*

The second component of the discourse is that gender mainstreaming reproduces gendered differences. Although the informants discussed this as a challenge, they agree that gender mainstreaming risks being contra-productive, as gender stereotypes are reinforced when "men" and "women" are constantly focused. They especially mentioned how gender-disaggregated statistics uphold gendered norms (see also Norrbin & Olsson, 2010, p. 27f). In municipal gender equality work, legal gender is used as a basis since gender mainstreaming work builds on gender-disaggregated statistics, reinforcing the gender binary. This hinders an inclusion of trans and queer/non-binary perspectives and reproduces gendered norms. My study shows that both in the gender equality policies and the gender mainstreaming work carried out by the informants, a comprehensive understanding of gender is present. However, transgender people are missing from both policies – which the strategists are aware of. In both policies, non-binaries are mentioned (more explicitly in Linköping's policy), which is to be understood as progressive given how other documents concerning gender commonly address ciswomen and

cismen solely, which, since language is a form of doing gender (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002), strengthens the gender binary.

Further, I argue that the policy documents (2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, CEMR Charter, and the Swedish gender equality policy) on which both Linköping and Norrköping's gender equality policy is based stems from a heteronormative understanding of gender, where "men" and "women" are constructed as two binary and opposite identities. As gender in itself is a concept grounded in a separation of the sexes, gender equality work is further complicated. Since we live in a patriarchal society where men as a group are constantly valued higher than women as a group, changing the meaning of gender, which can be thought to be one of the policy objectives with gender equality, might be impossible as long as "women" and "men" are constructed as the two only identities. Moreover, the gender equality discourse is often focused on white, Swedish, urban middle-class cismen and ciswomen. Gender equality work is more effective if "women" and "men," instead of being recognized as static or homogeneous groups, are understood as having different living conditions based on other overlapping identities than gender, such as, for example, age and ethnicity (see also jamstall.nu, n.d). Moreover, non-binary and trans people are excluded and thus made invisible in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, CEMR Charter, and the Swedish gender equality policy, which, to some extent, can explain the non-focus on non-binary and trans people in Linköping and Norrköping's gender equality policies. My study shows that the strategists want to, and aims to, carry out intersectional gender mainstreaming work, but that it is a work in progress.

### 8.2.3 *From Clashing to Meeting Perspectives?*

The third discourse component identified in the study is the clashing perspectives in the context of local sustainability. As one of the informants pointed out during the interview, combining gender equality work with a child rights perspective and a diversity perspective is challenging, adding to that environmental sustainability and other social sustainability perspectives. These various perspectives risk "crowd each other out," i.e., *to clash*. I argue that a possible way of addressing the potential problem with *clashing perspectives* is to work with social sustainability, including gender equality, using an extended intersectional approach. Working as a gender strategist requires that one can be cross-functional. Besides having in-depth knowledge of gender, one, to be able to apply an intersectional perspective, also needs to have a broad understanding of how other axes of power intersect gender. However, even though I argue that the informants do have this knowledge, incorporating intersectionality in gender

mainstreaming is far from easy, which is concluded by the strategists during the interview. Drawing on this, I argue that strategists working with social sustainability (multiple at both municipalities but with different areas of responsibility) could benefit from teaming up. If the strategists working with sustainability, to a more considerable extent than is done today, would ‘hook arm’ with each other instead of working dedicatedly with one specific area of sustainability, much could be gained. I argue that it is possible to have a living gender equality work without perspectives clashing if we, instead of *clashing perspectives*, think of them as *meeting perspectives*.

### **8.3 THE FUTURE IS INTERSECTIONAL**

My analysis showcases that in both Linköping and Norrköping's gender equality discourse, an intersectional perspective is included; I would not, however, say that it permeates the gender equality work. My interpretation of the strategists' answers during the interview is that an intersectional perspective is challenging to integrate into gender mainstreaming as gender mainstreaming builds on gender-disaggregated statistics; as the informants emphasize, it is essential to not leave the gender-disaggregated statistics without conducting further analysis, which should be done with an intersectional understanding to vitalize gender equality work and make sure it can have positive outcomes for all citizens living in the municipality.

I suggest that the policies, and thus the overall gender equality work, should, to a more significant extent, be anchored in the local context of the municipality which the policy concerns (see also Callerstig et al., 2012, p. 45f). To acknowledge the importance of the place would help strengthen local democracy. Rich's (1986) concept ‘politics of location’ can enable a move away from an understanding of all citizens living under the same conditions to a more accurate understanding of how people's lived reality significantly differs, even if they live in the same municipality. Thus, for example, gender equality work and policy could primarily address citizens living in extra vulnerable areas within the municipality.

The strategists believe that intersectional gender mainstreaming is the future; however, they discussed how this could be done but did not conclude anything during the interview. I agree with their belief that intersectional gender mainstreaming is necessary. Based on my own experiences of working with gender mainstreaming, I argue that it is needed to, without losing sight of gender and gender bias, do gender impact assessments where multiple axes of power

are included, what Lombardo et al. (2017) refer to as ‘Gender+,’ and in that way evaluate the differential impact of policies on different groups (see also Beveridge et al., 2000, p. 391). As previously stated, discourses create meaning and discursive truth. Focusing the gender equality work on cismen and ciswomen and trans people and people identifying beyond the gender binary ensures that the municipality’s gender equality work targets *all* its citizens. To reach gender equality, gender non-conforming bodies must not be marginalized in favor of privileged cisgendered bodies. Instead, we need to re-learn gender equality beyond binarism and include individuals of all genders, or non-genders, in gender equality work.

#### ***8.4 THE REAL-LIFE EFFECTS OF GENDER EQUALITY POLICIES***

Based on the findings from this study, I argue that gender equality policies play an essential role in the gender equality work in the municipalities; they can even be seen as the core of the local gender equality work.

Drawing on poststructuralist thought, texts, including policy documents, have performative agency and create discourses that shape one’s gendered place in the world. Bacchi (2017, p. 21) writes, “clearly, it is common to refer to policies as having effects on people and their lives. However, it is a very different matter to consider how policies constitute who we are.” Drawing on this, I have in this study used four out of the six WPR questions to scrutinize the taken-for-granted fixed essences (see Bacchi, 2017, p. 1) in Linköping and Norrköping’s gender equality policies. One of my findings is that the trans perspective is missing from both policies, which I invited the informants to reflect upon during the interview. I conclude that they are aware of this but have different views on including the trans perspective in gender equality work. In my interpretation, in Norrköping municipality, one understands trans inclusion as a part of the anti-discrimination work while it in Linköping is more connected to gender equality work.

Furthermore, I believe that it is crucial to acknowledge that community-wide policies are adopted by the municipal board, i.e., the politicians, which also is a factor that needs to be recognized to understand the challenges faced by the strategists. To create policies that politicians of different party affiliations will support is, based on my own experiences, a struggle for officials working at the municipality, which can lead to policy documents being both synoptic and sweeping and thus, to some extent, harmless.

Moreover, if a gender equality policy is not adequately linked to an organization's operational work, Callerstig et al. (2012, p. 46) state that gender equality policies risk becoming nothing but “shelf-warmers.” Referring to gender equality policies as “shelf-warmers” implies that they never will lead to any practical change but instead are produced due to a political obligation or a legal requirement. However, I do not believe this to be the case in either municipality based on that work in line with the policy is either planned or currently carried out. The respective gender equality policies have come about due to the municipalities signing the CEMR Charter, which shows a commitment to creating gender equality. That both Linköping and Norrköping municipality has decided to prioritize gender equality work by adopting a gender equality policy is a significant step that I believe will lead to positive action that benefits citizens in the respective municipality, perhaps those policies will also function as an inspiration for other municipalities as they produce gender equality policies of their own.

Based on the interview, my interpretation is that regarding the practical implementation of the policy, Linköping municipality is a few steps ahead of Norrköping. However, I would like to, once again, acknowledge that both municipalities' gender equality policies are relatively new. With reference to the relatively slow implementation processes on a municipal level in general, one can say that both municipalities still are in a start-up phase when it comes to realizing their policies. Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic has further slowed this process down.

#### *8.4.1 Inclusion and Exclusion*

I will now reflect briefly on who is included and excluded from the gender equality discourse created in each municipality. As already concluded, trans people are excluded from both policies while non-binaries are included in both, however more extensively in Linköping's policy. Transgender individuals are multiple burdened in society; leaving this group out of the gender equality discourse equals excluding those who have the greatest need for support as they have little opportunity to influence the discourse themselves—leaving non-cis individuals out of the discourse further limits their capacity for action and their possibility of being citizens on equal terms as cis-individuals. Policy-making and policy implementation must be recognized as political (Lombardo et al., 2017, p. 9; Pincus, 2002, p. 67); this exclusion can hence be understood as excluding transgender and multiple burdened individuals participation in a larger political discourse.

## 9. CONCLUSION

In this thesis, I have opted to focus on, and acquire in-depth knowledge about, what it is like to do gender mainstreaming on a municipal level in the twin municipalities of Norrköping and Linköping. My research design of multifaceted methodological and theoretical frameworks has enabled me to shed light on gender mainstreaming work in Linköping and Norrköping municipality. Furthermore, by doing an intersectional discourse analysis using the WPR framework concepts as a tool for empirical inquiry, this study shows that gender mainstreaming and especially the difficulties with implementing and operationalize gender mainstreaming is given much space in the gender equality discourse created in both municipalities, perhaps at the expense of actual gender equality work.

The gender equality discourse created by the municipalities shows a will to, in their gender equality work, include an intersectional perspective, even if the practical dimension of this could be outlined in more detail. I further conclude that gender mainstreaming work in the municipalities of Linköping and Norrköping is progressive. It includes non-binaries, which goes in line with a larger societal discourse in which the gender binary is challenged - perhaps now more than ever before. However, the exclusion of trans individuals in both analyzed gender equality policies creates a gender equality discourse in which trans individuals are not part.

I argue that this study has contributed with interesting insights drawing on that gender equality politics, including gender mainstreaming and gender equality policy, have a performative agency, which means that this politics does something for us as collective members of culture and society. Further, I argue that the meaning-making and sense-making within gender equality policy as a policy area that goes to the heart of what should constitute a democratic and happy Swedish population is more conflicted than other policy areas because gender equality is a contested concept that, to a large extent, is subject to questioning and criticism. I am convinced that gender equality politics need to be viewed as a verb rather than a noun; by this, I mean that politics should be understood as constituting and giving meaning to gender and gender equality.

With this study, I have wished to contribute to the interesting field of discourse analysis and critical policy analysis of local governments' gender equality work. I hope that the findings from my thesis will contribute to an awareness of the discursive effects of gender mainstreaming work. For further research, I suggest focusing on how different political

majorities impact local gender equality work, which I argue is an exciting research aim, but one that I had to deselect for this thesis. I argue for more extensive research focusing on the inclusion of non-cis individuals, i.e., gender-nonconforming bodies, into gender mainstreaming work in both national and local contexts. I am optimistic that more elaborated knowledge on addressing and including *all* citizens in practical gender equality work could create a positive feedback loop that speeds up gender equality work in general.

Lastly, I want to conclude that gender equality is something done iteratively, what can be referred to as ‘Sisyphus work,’ and not a goal ever achieved. It is, of course, not only local gender equality strategists who are responsible for the gender equality work in the County – the fight for a gender-equal society requires all of our participation. “Men” must be allies to “women,” and cis-individuals need to be allied with transgender and non-binary people to create a more gender-equal Östergötland.

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## Appendix I

### Interview guide

1. Hur definierar ni jämställdhet i er organisation? [How do you define gender equality in your organization?]
2. Vilka tänker du att din organisation ska skapa jämställdhet för? [Who do you think your organization should create gender equality for?]
3. Hur skulle du beskriva/definiera jämställdhetsintegrering? [How would you describe/define gender mainstreaming?]
4. Hur använder ni jämställdhetsintegrering som strategi i ert jämställdhetsarbete? [How do you use gender mainstreaming as a strategy in your gender equality work?]
5. I vilken utsträckning/hur tycker du att jämställdhetsintegrering som metod bidrar till att förändra normer om kön? [To what extent /how do you think that gender mainstreaming as a method contributes to changing norms about gender?]
6. Har ni ett intersektionellt sätt att arbeta med jämställdhetsintegrering? Om ja, hur yttrar det sig? [Do you have an intersectional way of working with gender mainstreaming? If so, how does that come about?]
7. Vilken roll spelar jämställdhetspolicies, riktlinjer för jämställdhet eller andra dokument kring jämställdhet/jämställdhetsarbete för ert jämställdhetsarbete? Upplever du dem som användbara? [Do you have an intersectional way of working with gender mainstreaming? If so, how does that come about?]
8. Hur arbetar ni för att omsätta er jämställdhetspolicy till praktiskt jämställdhetsarbete? [How do you work to turn your gender equality policy into practical gender equality work?]
9. Finns det något perspektiv eller någon kunskap du saknar i er jämställdhetspolicy? [Is there any perspective(s) or knowledge(s) you believe to be lacking in your gender equality policy?]

## **Appendix II**

### **Information letter to informants**

Linköping 26 april 2021

**Information om studie kring jämställdhetsarbete på kommunal nivå med arbetsnamnet ”Gender mainstreaming as a strategy and gender equality policies as a means to achieve gender equality - a discursive analysis of gender equality work at Linköping and Norrköping municipality” (“Jämställdhetsintegrering som strategi och jämställdhetspolicies som medel för att uppnå jämställdhet – en diskursfokuserad analys av jämställdhetsarbetet på Linköpings och Norrköping municipality)”**

Du har ställt dig positiv till att, utifrån din profession, delta i en intervju om jämställdhetsarbete på kommunal nivå med särskilt fokus på hur jämställdhetsintegrering används som strategi och vilken roll jämställdhetspolicies spelar i jämställdhetsarbetet.

Intervjun kommer ligga till grund för min masteruppsats på programmet Gender, intersectionality and change vid Linköpings universitet.

Intervjun genomförs som en fokusgruppsintervju med personer som arbetar eller har arbetat med jämställdhetsfrågor på Linköpings eller Norrköping municipality de senaste åren samt varit med och tagit fram den jämställdhetspolicy som respektive kommun nu arbetar utefter. Intervjun kommer att vara semi-strukturerad och genomförs via Microsoft Teams, intervjun leds av mig som forskare men syftet med intervjun är att ni ska ges utrymme att i hög grad själva styra samtalet och diskussionerna. Intervjutiden är satt till en timme. Intervjun kommer att spelas in (ljudinspelning) för att sedan transkriberas. Det är endast jag som forskare som kommer ha tillgång till inspelningen och inspelningen kommer att raderas när arbetet med uppsatsen är avslutat. Intervjumaterialet kommer endast att användas till den aktuella uppsatsen, det kommer inte i något skede att delas med tredje part.

I uppsatsen kommer inte ditt namn eller din (nuvarande eller före detta) titel att skrivas ut, dock kan inte anonymitet garanteras då det kan antas att den som vill kan, med hjälp av sökningar online, ta reda på vem eller vilka som arbetat med jämställdhetsfrågor på Linköpings och Norrköpings kommun under de senaste åren.

Deltagande i intervjun och därmed denna studie är frivilligt. Du har rätt att när som helst, utan att ange något skäl, dra tillbaka ditt samtycke till att medverka i denna studie och begära att dina svar inte används.

Har du frågor är du varmt välkommen att höra av dig.

Stort tack för att du vill medverka!

Emelie Klinga

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