Problematising Conceptualisations of Gender in Feminist Studies

The Place of Age and Children in the Concept of Gender

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Abstract

Using a feminist poststructuralist approach as a guide, I begin this thesis with the working hypothesis that gender may be an adult-centred concept in feminist studies. This leads me to ask: *If the concept of gender in feminist studies is adult-centred, how is this centring formed and maintained?* To answer this question, I begin by splitting my analysis into three analytical sections: age, children, and gender. Although I include age, children, and gender into each sectional analysis, my main priority in the first two sections is to look at how feminist scholars discuss and use the terms age and child(ren). In the gender section, I use three canonical gender theory texts as the basis of my analysis, where I see how gender is discussed and conceptualised and how both children and age figure in these conceptualisations.

One of the main concerns of feminist poststructuralist theory is tackling binaries. However, with the category of age having been often taken for granted in feminist studies, and therefore under-theorised, the adult/child binary in the category of age remains largely unchallenged. Instead, where age has been investigated in terms of tackling binaries, the young/old binary has dominated but has remained centred around the adult; leaving children underacknowledged and under-theorised in feminist studies age discourse. This under-theorisation of children means that “child” remains a master status with seemingly unshakeable connotations of innocence, vulnerability, and incompetence. Children are those who are not adults and not-yet subjects. They are understood as being in constant need of care from the competent and complete adult. In this thesis, I show how these points, among others, contribute to both the formation and maintenance of the concept of gender as adult-centred.

*Keywords: adult-centred, feminist studies, gender, age, children, subjectivity, power/knowledge, socio-discursive construction of age, adult/child binary, postmodern feminist (anti-)epistemology, feminist poststructuralism.*
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Introduction

The idea for this research project began when I noticed that most of the literature that myself and my fellow students were asked to read during my studies included very little mention of children and very little mention of age. I began thinking about where children might fit into the literature we were reading and the theories we were learning. It seemed to me that their rare appearance was mostly due to the overwhelming focus on “Woman” – both the “celebration” of Woman (Braidotti 2003; Irigaray 1993) and critiques of the notion of Woman (Mohanty 1988; Butler [1990] 2002), which became “women” (Horsford and Tillman 2012; Lépinard 2013; Johansson and Śliwa 2014) and only ever got older, never younger (Calasanti, Slevin and King 2006). When gender was included in the literature but women alone were not the focal point, the discussion usually turned to women and men together (often in relation to gender equality) (Webb 1997; Acker 2012) or occasionally to men (without women) and masculinities (Näre 2010). However, the focus remained on women and included men – often as a relational notion; but children remained largely absent from gender theories, as well as from analyses and discussions on gender. According to Joan Scott (1986), the term gender itself was introduced into women’s studies in order to broaden the focus of study to include men (1054). Thus, women’s studies became gender studies, which can be more broadly termed feminist studies (Lykke 2010) and men were brought into the feminist definition of gender. Here, it is already possible to see a relationship between the adult and gender forming. This then led me to question: Is the concept of gender in feminist studies adult-centred? and this has shaped my main question for this thesis.

I begin with an understanding of “adult” as a part of the age binary of adult/child. Although this entanglement of gender and age within my main question prioritises gender by making it the subject of the question, age is central to my analysis as adult and child are concerns of the

1 I use the term “children” to refer to those who are younger than eighteen years old (as laid out in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989) in this thesis, unless specified otherwise. Therefore, I use adult to refer to those who are eighteen years old and above. This is a legal definition (in many, but not all legal systems) rather than a biological definition. I have chosen to use this definition in order to include teenagers/adolescents as they do not come under the term adult but do come under the term child when using a legal definition.

2 As it is difficult to pinpoint exactly what fits into the framework of women’s studies or gender studies and the sample that I have used in this thesis has been drawn from women’s/gender/feminist studies journals, for the sake of clarity, I use the broader term of feminist studies in this thesis to include all three disciplines.

3 My analysis of gender in this thesis remains within the binary because these are the most commonly used gender terms within my sample. Further research that includes non-binary gender terms would be interesting to undertake at a later date as they may not have the temporal notions that the binary gender terms have. Therefore, this could incorporate a different angle to this research.
category of age and therefore age is where my analysis begins. In feminist studies, when age (often as an intersection) is included in a text as a point of discussion alongside gender, this does not necessarily allow for the inclusion of children (see for example Lorde 1984; Calasanti, Slevin and King 2006; Woodward 2006). In other words, even when a feminist studies text includes the category of age, the focus usually remains on the privileged adult. This stands in contrast to the category of race for example, where once race is brought into an analysis or discussion in feminist studies, it is usually the non-privileged (Black) dimension of the binary that is prioritised, analysed and discussed, rather than the privileged (White) dimension. In feminist poststructuralist theory, a priority is placed on tackling binaries (Davies 1997: 275). However, the deconstruction of the privileged adult in the age binary adult/child has not been prioritised in feminist studies and remains largely unchallenged. This might be because of a greater focus on the young/old binary within age discourses, which itself remains mostly attached to the adult subject.

Feminist studies (or more specifically, women’s studies) emerged as an academic discipline around the 1960s when it “was born out of the politics of the women’s movement” (Oakley 2002: 19). Although women’s studies began as a discipline which placed women’s lives and experiences at the centre of study, its development into the more broadly termed disciplines of gender studies and feminist studies (Scott 1986: 1054) challenged not only the humanist subject (Braidotti 2013: 28) but also worked, in areas such as poststructuralism, to destabilise the feminist subject women as a useful category (see for example Butler [1990] 2002). As identity politics is at the centre of feminist studies, calls for the inclusion of various social identities into feminist theory and feminist concepts have become a continuing theme. Feminist scholars began by calling into question the humanist subject, symbolised by the Vitruvian Man – White, male, Western, middle-class, heterosexual and able bodied. They called into question the absence of “woman” and gradually worked their way through various social identities from there, with calls for the inclusion of Blacks and Latinos (hooks 1981; Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1983; Lorde 1984; Collins 1986; Anzaldúa 1987); lesbians, gays and queers (Rich 1980; Rubin 1993); the disabled (Garland-Thomson 2002); and the “non-Western”

4 The exception of Critical Whiteness Studies should be noted here. However, in the category of race in feminist studies, the emphasis is placed on, and began with, the non-privileged in the White/Black binary.

5 There are still to this day, however, academic courses that are referred to as Women’s Studies. Although some differences might be found between women’s studies, gender studies and feminist studies, they are all closely related and can, in many cases, be used interchangeably. Furthermore, gender is a central concept in each discipline (Lykke 2010).
But they did not hear the children call. There are four main reasons for this: Firstly, I would argue that children are not in a position to call for their own inclusion in feminist studies as, for example, Black and Latino women are because academia is only accessible in adulthood or via an adult as a research participant. Secondly, a complicated theoretical relationship between women and children has emerged, in part, from feminist scholars’ attempts to denounce essentialist theories (where they are largely associated with the role of mother) and from their attempts to distance themselves from discourses of infantilisation (Oakley 2002: 21-22). This has led to, in many cases, children being neglected in feminist theories in order not to reinforce essentialist understandings of women (Oakley 2002: 22). There is an important difference that must be noted here between theoretical and empirical work in feminist studies. Thirdly, the intersection of age – which might allow for the inclusion of children in feminist theory or, at the very least, for a critique of the adult as the main focal point – largely remains in the background as an “add-on” at the end of a line of etceteras (Dolan and Tincknell 2012; Calasanti, Slevin and King 2006). Moreover, due to an unwavering focus on women, research on age in feminist studies is more likely to focus its attention on the absence of old age (see for instance Calasanti, Slevin and King 2006; Woodward 2006; Calasanti and Slevin 2006). Barrie Thorne’s (2004) work, however, is a notable exception as she discusses the importance of incorporating all age groups, from children to the elderly, into theorisations of age. Fourthly, it might be argued that feminist studies/women’s studies/gender studies is the study of women and, therefore, the inclusion of children would decentre women as the subject of feminism and should be left to the discipline of childhood studies. However, if a poststructuralist approach is advocated where the category of women is brought into question, then this point loses traction. Although one might argue that the discipline of childhood studies is sufficient in the sociological study of children, the separation of children from feminist studies in this way creates a large gap in feminist knowledge production.

6 Clearly, each of the groups I have mentioned here can include children. However, I refer to these groups as singular entities in this instance in order to make my point. Furthermore, in these examples, it is adults and not children who are calling for inclusion (i.e. the inclusion of Black women, lesbian women, disabled women, and “non-Western” women).

7 My research in this thesis shows that there is a strong relationship between women and children, especially in regard to women in the role of mother. However, this relationship is found in empirical research in feminist studies. A different relationship between women and children (one where women tend to either distance themselves from children or ignore the matter of children entirely) can be found in feminist theoretical research.

8 Monique Wittig (1993) points out that the term “[f]eminist is formed with the word “femme”, “woman”, and means: someone who fights for women” (105). Furthermore, women’s studies refers directly to women and as Scott (1986) has pointed out, “gender” has sometimes been used as a synonym for “women” (1056). Moreover, in my opinion, the extraordinarily strong focus upon women in feminist studies/women’s studies/gender studies, might have the effect of (mis)leading some to understand feminist studies to be the study of women alone.
Oakley points to this when she asks: “Why are we studying children as a separate social group?” (2002: 13). Various studies have evolved into their own “separate” discipline, often as an offshoot from gender studies – for example, critical race studies, disability studies, lesbian and gay studies, and queer studies. The creation of each of these disciplines is incredibly useful in allowing the discipline to grow in depth and knowledge. However, each of these points of study can also be found (often to a great extent) in feminist studies and their inclusion in feminist studies is important because without it, the focus of feminist studies would remain on the White, middle-class, able-bodied, heterosexual Woman.

**Aims and Research Questions**

My main aim in this thesis is to query the relationship between the concept of gender, age and children. I do this for three reasons: 1) to bring attention to the gap in feminist knowledge around the matter of age and gender, particularly in regard to the adult/child binary and the transition from gendered child to gendered adult; 2) to understand the place of children in, and complex relationship to, feminist studies knowledge production and; 3) to problematise the feminist concept of gender as adult-centred. To do this, I begin with the working hypothesis that gender is an adult-centred concept. Therefore, my main research question is:

- If the concept of gender in feminist studies is adult-centred, how is this centring formed and maintained?

In order to answer this question and accomplish the three main aims of this research, I have split my analysis into three parts: age, children, and gender. Therefore, I have also included three sub-questions to help me with these analyses:

- How is age understood and discussed in feminist studies (journal articles)?
- How are children understood and discussed in feminist studies (journal articles)?
- If the concept of gender in feminist studies includes children, how are they included? Does this inclusion allow for the concept of gender to not be adult-centred or does the adult remain centred even when children are included?

**Thesis Outline**

If I want to know if gender is an adult-centred concept in feminist studies and how this centring might be formed and maintained, I need first to build a picture of what age and children mean

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9 I have used inverted commas here in order to point to the interdisciplinarity of each of these studies.
to feminist scholars. As critical analyses of age are vastly under-theorised in comparison to gender in feminist studies (Dolan and Tincknell 2012: viii), I begin by looking at the term age within feminist studies journal articles in the two databases JSTOR and Project Muse\(^\text{10}\) to see how feminist scholars understand age. I analyse this term in order to see how it is used and discussed and to see who is included within it. This allows me to understand firstly, what the term age represents to feminist scholars; and secondly, when and how children are included within this term or topic if they are included at all. Furthermore, I look at the relationship between age and gender in these journal articles.

Next, I look at the term child(ren) within feminist studies journal articles in the two databases JSTOR and Project Muse in order to see: firstly, how prominent child(ren) are within feminist studies journal articles; secondly, how they are positioned within these articles; thirdly, which characteristics of theirs are acknowledged within these articles (i.e. do they remain under their master status of child or are other identifying features given such as gender, race, class, or sexuality?); fourthly, which topics and discourses they are attached to within these articles; and finally, which other terms they are associated with and attached to (e.g. mother – mother and child). These points allow me to see how feminist scholars understand and position children.

In the third analytical section of my thesis, I look at conceptualisations of gender. I use three canonical gender theory texts as the basis of my analysis, where I see how they discuss and conceptualise gender and how they place children within their conceptualisations. I am particularly interested in how language is used to include or exclude children in these texts and how this affects the concept of gender. The three gender theory texts I examine are: Judith Butler’s ([1990] 2002) *Gender Trouble* (the first chapter: *Subjects of Sex/Gender/Desire*); Connell and Messerschmidt’s (2005) *Hegemonic Masculinities*; and West and Zimmerman’s (1987) *Doing Gender*.

**Situating Myself**

In feminist studies’ discourse on objectivity, knowledge is understood as being embodied. Donna Haraway (1988) refers to this as *situated knowledges*. Therefore, it is common practice for feminist studies’ students and academics alike to situate themselves in their work. Feminist situating in terms of a politics of location has notably gained much attention, particularly in relation to race/ethnicity (Rich 1986). However, the need to incorporate age-temporality into

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\(^{10}\) JSTOR and Project Muse are popular digital libraries of academic journals, books, and primary sources which allow me access to around 57 feminist studies’ journals across the two libraries (JSTOR 2018; Project Muse 2017).
this politics of location has not been prioritised. Instead, dynamics of age tend to be largely taken for granted in feminist studies knowledge production (Thorne 2004: 403).

When situating myself in this thesis, I begin with the body (Rich 1986: 212); my body, the embodiment of “I”. I am one body but yet many, borrowing identities or identifying categories from bodies that precede mine and bodies that will come after my time – but mostly, I am the embodiment of my time, of my today, my “here and now” that creates meanings specific to this historical context and to whatever geographical context that I find myself to be born within and to be privileged to move between. Therefore, I “am”, in the most simplified terms, as I currently understand both the terms and myself, a White lesbian woman from a working-class background. Although, these terms are not simple terms and therefore I both embrace and reject the identity of woman\textsuperscript{11}, not only according to my own understanding of the category but more often according to other people’s. But with the greatest of certainty, I do identify with the category of lesbian – a category I have found myself somewhat sure to be named by since my early teenage years – a category that Monique Wittig (1993) states to be a third gender that breaks the heterosexual rigid two-gender system. However, within these words and categories are hidden terms. One such term being adult; an identity I perform on a daily basis but rarely think to situate myself under explicitly. As I have only come to learn to situate myself once already an adult, this context has often escaped my attention. I have not always been an adult. I have not been an adult as long as I remember. And although I may well fight daily battles to be recognised and respected under this term and as this term alongside others, they are not battles that are necessarily brought to my attention through the use of the term adult.

It was not until I investigated the place of children and the subject matter of age in feminist studies that I marked myself specifically as adult and observed the privilege of the adult that I had not perceived before. A politics of location (Rich 1986) and situated knowledges (Haraway 1988) are about accountability but they begin with recognition; the ability to recognise ourselves as not one identity but many with interweaving privilege and oppression. Therefore, it is especially important for me to mark myself as adult in this thesis and to deliberate and understand the privilege of the adult in relation to children.

\textsuperscript{11} This could be construed as the disidentification that Butler (1993) refers to as “…this experience of misrecognition, this uneasy sense of standing under a sign to which one does and does not belong…” (219).
Method

In this thesis I have chosen to use text analysis as a guideline method as it includes central aspects of feminist thinking such as accountability, and it corresponds with the poststructuralist approach that I have used; for instance, following the premise that there are multiple truths and that knowledge is discursive and narrative (Bauer, Bicquelet and Suerdem 2014). According to the method of text analysis, the act of analysing a particular text also produces that text (Bauer, Bicquelet and Suerdem 2014). Therefore, the relationship between the reader and the text, including the embodiment of the reader, are essential features. In other words, according to this method, the act of reading is not passive; it is a process of knowledge making (Derrida 1997) and in feminist theory, this process is always understood as being embodied – situated knowledges (Haraway 1988). Haraway places great importance on the accountability of the knowledge producer in her understanding of situated knowledges (ibid). In this thesis, there is a focus upon knowledge production as not only do I produce knowledge, I produce it through an analysis of feminist knowledge production around the concept of gender in relation to age and children. My intention, however, is not to take up the role of judge here but, instead, to use the method of text analysis to interpret how knowledge produced in feminist studies affects and itself produces conceptualisations of gender. As I do this, it is important to be aware of my role as interpreter in knowledge production itself and how my embodied self affects this process. From here, I can analyse further if the concept of gender in feminist studies is adult-centred and how this centring is formed and maintained.

I began my data collection process for age and children with the online databases JSTOR and Project Muse. This involved collecting a sample of texts that use the terms age and child(ren) in their titles and/or keywords/topics from JSTOR’s feminist and women’s studies journals (of which there are 37 at the time of writing this thesis), as well as Project Muse’s women’s studies, gender, and sexuality journals (of which there are 30 at the time of writing this thesis). I chose texts that use these terms in their title and/or topics/keywords as this indicated to me that these terms were considered important in these texts. Although I included all 67 journals across the two databases in my searches, articles from only fourteen journals appeared in the results in

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12 I have combined my analyses of the terms child and children together and refer to this as “child(ren)”, as throughout most articles both of these terms are used to mean “child” as singular and “children” as plural.
13 As it is obviously not possible to research the entire discipline of feminist studies, I have chosen to focus my analysis upon articles in “feminist and women’s studies” journals in the JSTOR database and “women’s studies, gender, and sexuality” journals in the Project Muse database. This allows me to create a sample representative of feminist studies.
14 Bridges; Clio (English Edition); Estudos Feministas; NWSA Journal; Feminist Studies; Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies; International Journal of Feminist Approaches in Bioethics; Journal of Feminist Studies in
JSTOR and five¹⁵ in the results in Project Muse. Furthermore, two of these journals (NWSA Journal; WSQ: Women’s Studies Quarterly) were duplicated across the JSTOR and Project Muse datasets, resulting in only seventeen journals appearing in the results overall. I decided to select all journals in these two databases in my search in order to allow for a wide ranging and diverse sample to be found as different journals may focus upon different topics.

I chose to centre this analysis around the JSTOR and Project Muse databases as they are popular digital libraries of academic journals, books, and primary sources which have a “decent” amount of feminist studies’ journals (JSTOR 2018a; Project Muse 2017), thus, giving me an adequate starting point that can be built upon. I have limited my search for this project to JSTOR and Project Muse, but this project could be done on a larger scale in future, using more databases and/or articles from these databases, in order to develop this research further. I wanted to use more than one database in order to increase the reliability of my findings. For instance, I noticed that the term child(ren) appeared a lot in the title and/or topics of my JSTOR search and very rarely in my Project Muse search. Thus, the inclusion of more than one database allows for any anomaly that might be related to the database itself to be noticed. I limited my search to only two databases, however, as I felt that the inclusion of more databases would have been beyond the scope of this project. I also chose to focus on journal articles for this analysis as I am using a coding software that works better with texts that include OCR (optical character recognition). Moreover, journal articles are shorter than books and, thus, manageable within the time frame of this project. This allowed me to analyse a larger sample than if I had included books, which should give me a broader and more diverse picture of how the terms age and child(ren) are used in feminist studies.

I began my JSTOR search on 21-02-2018 and finished on the 24-02-2018, where I searched “age”, selected “advanced search”, and sorted by “relevance”, “all fields”, “all content”, “English language”, “journal articles”, “feminist and women’s studies journals”. I began my Project Muse database search on the 30-03-2018 and completed this on the 01-04-2018. This involved searching the term “age” with the criteria of “advanced search: content – for all”, “journal articles”, “women’s studies, gender, and sexuality (research area)”, “English language”, sorted by “relevance”. I chose to only search “age” rather than “age and child(ren)” in order to see if children are included in the term age without specifically including them

myself. Beginning the process with JSTOR, I scanned the title and topics of the first fifteen pages (the equivalent of 375 articles) of my search results for the terms age and child(ren)\(^\text{16}\). The marker of fifteen pages was chosen as a compromise that would allow me to make my search manageable in my given time frame whilst still collecting a “decent” sample amount. Furthermore, around this mark, relevant articles with the terms age and child(ren) could only be found every few pages. From these fifteen pages (375 articles), I found 50 articles to be relevant to my project. In the Project Muse search, I mirrored the process of data collection by looking again through the first fifteen pages in order to find articles with the terms age and child(ren) in their title and/or keywords. However, there were some parts of this process which could not be mirrored such as the exact advanced search criteria that I followed in JSTOR, as the two databases are set up slightly differently. My Project Muse search produced a far smaller sample with only ten articles relevant to my research. However, three articles\(^\text{17}\) are duplicated across the two databases. This means that what first appears to be a sample of 60 articles is actually 57 articles.

As gender theory is an extensive area of study in feminist studies, there is already an abundance of critical literature on the concept of gender to examine. Therefore, instead of conducting a similar search and analysis to the one I have undertaken for age and child(ren), here I analysed three canonical gender theory texts and used this analysis as a basis to understand the concept of gender in relation to children in more depth. I chose these texts due to their huge influence on not only the way we understand the concept of gender but on the construction of this concept itself. Both West and Zimmerman’s (1987) *Doing Gender* and Connell and Messerschmidt’s (2005) *Hegemonic Masculinities* are stated, at the time of writing this, to be two of the three most cited articles in the last year in the Gender & Society journal on SAGE Journals (SAGE Journals 2018). And Butler’s ([1990] 2002) *Gender Trouble* is one of the most highly influential and much-cited books in Gender Studies (Lloyd 2007).

**Previous Research**

Although there is an abundance of research on gender, I have not found any literature that is specifically concerned with gender as an adult-centred concept in feminist studies. However, there are some key texts that look at the adult-centred nature of feminist studies in general and

\(^{16}\) When I undertook this search on age, articles appeared that used the term age to mean “age of feminism” and “in the global age”, for example. I have not included these uses of age in this thesis. I am only interested in the term age when it refers to human age.

\(^{17}\) Norris 2006; Woodward 2006; Zaborskis 2015.
the place of children within feminist theory. Three particularly prominent essays related to this point are those by Ann Oakley (2002), Barrie Thorne (1987), and Claudia Castañeda (2001). Each of these texts investigates the place of children in feminist studies from a slightly different angle. Oakley (2002) examines *parallels and differences between women's studies and children's studies*, where she asks why we are studying children as a separate social group (13). Thorne (1987) looks at *feminist knowledge* as adult-centred and Castañeda (2001) is interested in the *feminist subject* as adult. Based upon topics that each of these articles touch upon, I have split this previous research into three sections where I will embellish upon each of these points: separating knowledge production and the construction of an adult/child binary in feminist studies; the construction of feminist knowledge around adult experience; and the construction of the (adult) feminist subject against the (child) not-yet subject.

**Separating Knowledge Production: Constructing an Adult/Child Binary**

In her comparison between women’s studies and children’s studies, Oakley (2002) discusses the four stages that Sylvia Walby outlines in the development of academic knowledge relating to the position of women: 1) “virtually total neglect of women's position” 2) “much criticism of traditional approaches, particularly of the determinist nature of sex differences” 3) “women are added in, or on, as a special case, in order to compensate for the previous omission” 4) “integrate the position of women fully into the central questions and concerns of different academic disciplines” (20). Simplified, these four stages are neglect, criticism, additive, and integration. I would also like to include a fifth stage: deconstruction (see Butler [1990] 2002 for an example of the deconstruction of the categorisation of women). Oakley goes on to replace women here with children to show how academic knowledge has begun a process of production in the same way in childhood studies. She points out, however, that childhood studies currently remains at stages 1 and 2, where academics ask: “where are the children?” (2002: 21). Although Walby’s four stages refer to the development of academic knowledge in relation to women, the same model can be used to look at the position of children in feminist studies knowledge specifically. I would argue that sixteen years on from this article, the bulk of the production of knowledge on children in feminist studies also remains at stages 1 and 2 where it has remained since the early 2000s. Most significant previous research on this matter, such as the three articles I discuss here, was written between the 1980s and the early 2000s. The emergence of childhood studies as a discipline in its own right in the 1990s has not necessarily aided in the integration of children in feminist studies knowledge. Instead, in my
opinion, the two disciplines have grown further apart and feminist studies shows itself time and again to be representative of the adult.

**Constructing Feminist Knowledge Around Adult Experience**

The production of knowledge is a central area of study in feminist studies as feminist theorists are concerned with power discrepancies that arise in how knowledge is produced; who it is produced by; and who it is produced for (Lykke 2010). It has been argued by some feminist theorists that traditional knowledge is phallogocentric and women’s position has been neglected (Irigaray 1980). A similar argument has been taken up by a few key feminist theorists in regard to children’s position. Thorne (1987), in her article *Re-Visioning Women and Social Change: Where are the Children?*, acknowledges that both feminist and traditional knowledge are deeply adult-centred. She explains that the way children are understood in feminist studies tends to be filtered through adult perspectives and interests (86) and that their position in traditional and feminist knowledge is similar to the position that women have previously found themselves in in traditional knowledge; that is, on the peripheral (89). This is perhaps partly due to children being thought of specifically as “learners” of adult culture (ibid), whilst adults are thought of as active participants; experiencing, “doing”.

Feminist philosopher Sandra Harding draws a distinction between three different stances in feminist epistemology: *feminist empiricism*, *feminist standpoint theory*, and *postmodern feminism* (1986). With feminist standpoint theory becoming increasingly popular around the 1970s (Harding 1986: 26), *experience* took its place for many feminist theorists as a central principle of feminist knowledge production. It allowed for the inclusion of women into knowledge and discourse. With much of the production of knowledge in feminist studies at that time firmly rooted in the importance of experience, feminist scholars advocated, and in many cases continue to advocate, the inclusion of their own (adult) stories and their own (adult) experiences into various discourses (see for example Irigaray 1993; Braidotti 2003); therefore, constructing feminist knowledge around adult experience. This affects what many might argue to be the central concept of feminist studies – gender. As the concept of gender is central in the production of knowledge in feminist studies, it becomes entangled with feminist theories that begin from the standpoints of adult women. This means that the development of discourses that are integral in the (re)construction of the concept of gender are effectively adult-centred. This is not to say that children are entirely excluded from feminist studies knowledge. They are not. But when they are included, knowledge is produced, almost exclusively, around the notion that
children are pre-social (Oakley 2002: 22); a notion that has been emphasised in psychoanalytical approaches to human development.

**To Be or Not-Yet to Be (Subject)**

Castañeda (2001) explains that psychoanalysis emerges as a technology of childhood where the child is always posited as the adult’s ontological origin (29). She points out that although children are theorised in contemporary feminism, they are usually positioned as the Other to the presumed adult subject. Due to the influence that psychoanalysis has upon feminist studies, attempts to theorise the child in its own right (see for example James and Prout 1997; James, Jenks and Prout 1998; Walkerdine 1997) remain relatively uninfluential in dominant feminist discourses which repeatedly theorise the child as not-yet subject (Wallace in Castañeda 2001: 33). This not-yet subject, according to Jo-Ann Wallace (1995), is in many ways related to the notion of not-yet adult – i.e. “not yet literate, not yet capable of reason, not yet fully agential” (298) – or adult-in-the-making as Thorne (1987) refers to it. (Adult) feminist scholars, on the other hand, claim subjectivity in a variety of ways. Two common features that can be found in theories of subjectivity in feminist studies (as well as in other disciplines) are communication and experience. For example, subjectivity has been claimed to be achieved through consciousness raising (National Women’s Liberation 2018) and through real-life women sharing experiences and writing their own stories (Braidotti 2003: 45). But, of course, not everybody has the privilege of holding the pen. Therefore, communication and experience, as central factors of feminist theories of subjectivity, have the unintentional effect of maintaining the discourse of children as not-yet subjects. I will come back to this point in *Theorising the Subject in Feminist Studies*.

**Theory and Methodology**

**Productions of Knowledge, Truth, Discourse, and Power**

According to Michel Foucault, “[e]ach society has its regime of truth, its ‘general politics’ of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true…” (1980: 131). Therefore, truth is not singular or universal. Truths differ between societies and, for that matter, between academic disciplines. Furthermore, they are within hierarchies where some are more dominant than others, with this dominance also subject to change depending on already existing power relations and so-called evidence or facts that are presented in the construction of these truths. Nonetheless, scientific knowledge production aims to convince us that each matter of analysis can be understood through a singular truth (i.e. “the truth of the matter is…”). A
poststructuralist or postmodern approach to knowledge production, or as Nina Lykke (2010) calls it, a postmodern feminist (anti-)epistemological approach, challenges this assertion. She states that this approach might be seen as “a self-reflexive project that aims at problematizing and deconstructing the apparently stable and secure foundations of scientific knowledge production” (131). The reason that she refers to it as (anti-)epistemological is because this approach goes against the grain of the dominant understanding of epistemology. It critiques and problematises the very foundation of epistemology as stable and secure and, instead, emphasises an understanding of science as discourse and narrative (210).

This approach allows me to acknowledge the concept of gender as part of an ongoing dialogue rather than as a stable concept or a fixed term. The concept of gender is in a process of constant transformation (Lykke 2010: xi). Therefore, it is important to acknowledge that the question of what gender is will not be “resolved” and that it does not need to be “resolved”. My intention in this thesis is not to make a final statement on gender. Instead, I want to think about the concept of gender from an angle that has not, to my knowledge, garnered a great deal of attention in feminist studies. Although there have been some feminist theorists who have looked at the place of children in feminist studies (Thorne 1987; Castañeda 2001; Oakley 2002), I have not found any work that specifically looks at the concept of gender in feminist studies as adult-centred. Therefore, I want to expand the narrative on the concept of gender by analysing it under the working hypothesis that it is adult-centred.

It is my intention to include children into the problematisation of the category of women in order to tend to what I believe to be a gap in feminist research. It is also my intention to then allow for the discussion to move away from the problematisation of the category of women in order to consider the place of children in problematisations of gender. Although the conceptualisation of gender does not need to be resolved, in my opinion, a feminist problematisation of this concept must be more inclusive. As Lykke (2010) asserts, it is important to theorise gender in new ways – ways that allow for diversity, transformation and change (35). Therefore, I want to point to some concerns that I have in regard to the feminist production of knowledge surrounding age, children, and gender.

In feminist studies, interest in gender emerged from a necessity to assess and understand power relations between women and men in society. However, it has grown as a discipline in a multitude of directions with different knowledges forming different strands and sub-disciplines. Feminist theorists remain concerned with power relations between women and
men, as is important to do so. They also theorise “beyond” categories of women and men, to queer categories (Halberstam 1998; Stryker and Whittle 2006), the cyborg (Haraway 1990) and the posthuman (Braidotti 2013), for example, which is also important to do. In my opinion, children are somewhere “in-between” these two concerns – both “within” the categories of women and men in the child’s state of becoming, and “beyond” or “outside” of these categories as an embodied Other. The gendered child and the gendered adult interlink and overlap. They are relational terms of a special kind, where one always becomes the other; or to put it another way, where the Other always becomes One. Therefore, we cannot “know” women and men if we do not “know” children just as we cannot “know” women if we do not “know” men.

Furthermore, power relations between adult and child must be assessed. It is crucial that feminist productions of knowledge are themselves continuously reviewed in an attempt to understand power relations within feminist studies and address power imbalances (Lykke 2010). With this in mind, we must continue to (re-)assess conceptualisations from all angles; to look at who is dominant in the discourse-making processes and how these processes affect the formation of concepts. Moreover, as Black feminists have shown us in their assertions that the concept of gender is constructed around the lives, concerns, and experiences of White women (hooks 1981; Collins 1986), we must look at who or what is dominant within concepts themselves. What and who we do and do not include in our discussions on gender is an exercise of power that creates knowledge. This knowledge, conversely, goes on to produce effects of power (Foucault 1980: 52).

**Theorising the Subject in Feminist Studies**

From the humanist subject symbolised by the Vitruvian Man to the feminist subject women, gender is clearly an important aspect in the notion of the subject. Through theories of subjectivity, we begin with the adult in feminist studies as gendered and we begin discourse on gender through adult experience, where the adult is understood as “doing” and the child as “learning”. Therefore, a relationship between gender, the subject, and the adult is noticeably prominent. The inclusion of children and age into theorisations of subjectivity once further knowledge is produced on the possible adult-centred nature of the concept of gender would allow for new avenues to open in our understanding of children, age, subjectivity and gender in feminist studies. This would then allow for the development of further research that might create possibilities to lessen certain restrictions on conceptualisations of gender and the feminist subject; restrictions in the form of binaries, for example.
The matter of “the subject” is highly debated both in- and outside of feminist studies. Theories of subjectivity are especially prominent in postcolonial theory and poststructuralist theory in feminist studies. Therefore, I focus my attention here on these theories. Around the beginning of the 20th century, theories of subjectivity moved away from an understanding of the human subject as autonomous, free-willed and rational. According to Foucault (1972), “[t]he researchers of psychoanalysis, of linguistics, of anthropology have “decentred” the subject in relation to the laws of its desire, the forms of its language, the rules of its actions, or the play of its mythical and imaginative discourse” (22). This led to talk of the “death of the subject”, which angered some feminist theorists who saw it as a conspiracy against women that had transpired just at the time when women were beginning to assume the place of subject (Butler 1992: 14).

However, this only served to further enlighten and provoke the debate on the subject within feminist studies itself. Within poststructuralist thought especially, further questions of power, not only between men and women but also between women, arose. Criticism of the subject as White-Western-centred came from postcolonial theorists such as Gloria Anzaldúa (1987), Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1988), and Chandra Mohanty (1988). The politics of representation in feminist studies became more starkly split between two contrasting dialogues (Butler [1990] 2002): firstly, that of the importance of the category of women and, in particular, the importance of theorising differences between women and men (sexual difference theory, for instance) in order to make visible and legitimise women as political subjects and; secondly, a critical analysis of the category of women itself, which transpired in part from postcolonial and Black feminists who argue that Anglo-American feminism has appropriated the generic term women for itself, which has left many women having to refer to themselves in other ways (i.e. women of colour) (Alarcón 1998: 147). Therefore, the feminist subject as a multiplicity (Braidotti 1994: 4) gained increasing attention in order to tackle some of the problems related to the category of women. However, this has not aided in the visibility of children in the politics of representation or theories of subjectivity in feminist studies.

In this ongoing debate on the feminist subject, it is the category of women that has claimed centre ground, both in its embrace and in its critique. The matter of children in feminist studies is quite particular. The gender terms women and men are reserved for the adult. Therefore, children are not included in these terms and can only be included into feminist discourse as something separate from women and men. In this sense, theories of intersectionality that begin with women and go on to incorporate other characteristics of women, such as race, class, or
sexuality, cannot incorporate children. And if feminist studies is said to concern not only women (Braidotti 1994: 234), it seems necessary to move away from the matter of women in order to discuss children. Although, this move might be seen as too bold as it departs from the central matter of feminist studies: women. Yet, in my opinion, the inclusion of children is essential to the matter of gender in feminist studies because child and adult are relational in terms of that which is adult is not child and vice versa. Furthermore, the child and adult interlink and overlap as one transitions to the other, but this has not gained as much attention as one might imagine since Simone de Beauvoir’s ([1949] 1981) highly influential book *The Second Sex*, where she discusses the place of children in our understanding of the category of women and the feminist subject. More recently, perhaps especially since the emergence of childhood studies in the early 1990s, children have commonly been theorised separately from adults with feminist studies continuing to focus on women as their main concern and childhood studies centring their analyses around children. The matter of children as subjects is therefore somewhat lacking theorisation in feminist studies. Feminist theories of subjectivity tend to take the adult (woman) as their starting point but include little discussion on the specificities of their being adults. Dynamics of age and the “nature” of adulthood and childhood are mostly taken for granted (Thorne 2004: 403).

As already stated, Castañeda (2001) explains that the child is frequently constituted as not-yet subject (29). This constitution occurs in several ways. According to Castañeda (2001), it occurs, in part, from a psychoanalytical understanding of the child as the adult’s ontological origin, as well as through the adult theorists’ claim to “know” the child by way of psychoanalysis itself (ibid). However, this claim to knowledge often comes with little theorisation of children themselves, such as in the case of Butler (1997) who touches upon the matter but does not commit to it, and when children are included this tends to remain within the realms of psychoanalytical theory (Butler 1997; Walkerdine 1997; de Lauretis 1994a, 1994b). As knowledge is understood as being embodied and obtained through “vision” (Haraway 1988), children’s consciousness can only be brought into knowledge production when we (the adult) “see” or *experience* it – through our interaction with the child or through our own memory of being a child. Feminist theories of women’s subjectivity also inadvertently leave children in the position of not-yet subject as these theories are constituted around
gendered adults. But which subject are they not yet? With an array of subjects to consider\textsuperscript{18}, subjectivity is further complicated when looking at children’s place in this matter.

As stated in the \textit{Previous Research} section, experience and communication are both central factors of feminist theories of subjectivity. However, westernised discourses of innocence\textsuperscript{19} and socialisation are highly influential in representations of children and these discourses of innocence stand in opposition to discourses of experience (Burman and Stacey 2010). This reifies experience as an adult concern. This understanding of children continues to be prominent in sociological knowledge production even though, in sociology, they have been thought of as “…agents in, as well as products of, social processes…” (James and Prout 1997: viii) since at least the 1970s (Castañeda 2001). Furthermore, instead of looking at children’s present lives, children tend to be studied as adults-in-the-making (James and Prout 1997; Thorne 1987); always in a process of socialisation. Feminist studies are far from immune to these representations of children, as can be seen in my analysis on children in this thesis, as well as in my analysis on gender.

Then there is the matter of communication or “speaking subjects” (Spivak 1988). Communication is central to theories of subjectivity in feminist studies, where experience means very little if it is not or cannot be communicated. In my opinion, experience and communication work in combination with a third factor: being taken seriously. Feminist scholars work hard to “take seriously” those who may not have been taken seriously before; a position that women have found themselves in, and in many cases, continue to find themselves in. Nonetheless, in feminist studies, subjects continue to be largely theorised as being constituted in privilege. For example, Butler asserts that “the constituted character of the subject is the very precondition of its agency” (1995: 45-46) and that agency can be achieved through linguistic performances where the subject “resists” the social order by “articulating words in contexts that invest them with new meaning” (Magnus 2006: 83). Therefore, following this understanding, a pre-condition of the subject is privilege – the privilege of communication and of being “taken seriously”. It is only then that new meaning can be acknowledged. In other words, they must already be part-constituted subject before subjectivity can be acknowledged. These acts of “resistance” are acts of privilege (also in academia)

\textsuperscript{18} The political subject (Butler [1990] 2002; Braidotti 1994); knowing subject (Alarcón 1998: 146); theoretical subject (Alarcón 1998); speaking subjects (Spivak 1988); subjects-in-revolution (Spivak 1988); desiring subject (Spivak 1988; Deleuze and Guattari 1977) and so forth.

\textsuperscript{19} According to James and Prout (1997), these discourses were exported to the “Third World” and “had the effect of rendering deviant or criminal much of working-class life and many of children’s everyday activities” (4).
because they are more easily accorded to those with greater access to the means of resistance. This suggests that those who are not privileged in the first place with the means of resistance lack agency and cannot be subjects. Butler developed gender performativity as a theory of subjectivity around the notion of resistance in order to allow for agency and political action in subjectivity that male poststructuralist theorists had not included (Doncu 2017: 332). However, as Magnus (2006) shows, Butler’s theory of subjectivity is reliant on the individual and understands dependency as oppressive. In other words, “…to become an agent is to become separated; the one who acts is the one who is detached from others” (86). This understanding of subjectivity reinforces the notion of children (who are already understood as almost entirely dependent beings) as not-yet subjects who are only capable of becoming subjects once they have denied their attachment to their adult caregiver (Butler 1997: 9). Magnus (2006) explains that “this tendency to understand dependency as oppressive prevents Butler from conceiving of subjects who are empowered through intersubjective connections” (86). In postcolonial theory, this point of privilege is also discussed and problematised as Spivak (1988) asks, “Can the subaltern speak?” and other postcolonial theorists such as Norma Alarcón (1998) critique the construction of women in feminist studies as “knowing subjects” (146). They problematise the aspects of speaking and knowing that are still considered by many as integral to the feminist subject and point out that both of these features disregard the experiences and lives of many women; for example, those who do not have access to education or those who are not in the position to be heard or to be taken seriously. Therefore, if experience, communication and “being taken seriously” are central to feminist theories of subjectivity, westernised discursive representations of children as innocent and pre-social construct children in opposition to the feminist subject.

Foucault refers to the restrictive nature of discourses of subjectivity (1982). He states that agency is not created through practices of liberty, as it was previously thought to be in Ancient Greek or Roman times, for instance (Foucault 1990). Instead, it is believed that limits on agency are externally imposed (like in the case of “compulsory heterosexuality” or the incest taboo (Butler [1990] 2002)). With this in mind, I would assert that the very discourse that denies children as a subject in their own right – for example, the feminist subject discourse – is itself an externally imposed limit, a restriction. However, it is a restriction rather than a complete dismantling of agency. What I mean by this is that children should not be thought of as *entirely lacking* agency because of this discourse. Instead, this discourse acts to restrict children’s agency. Furthermore, I would argue that it is a restriction upon children’s *theoretical*
agency rather than necessarily on their embodied agency. Therefore, in order to allow for a deconstruction of this restrictive discourse, we must look for new ways of thinking subjectivity that allows for the acknowledgment of children’s subjectivity and inclusion in problematisations of the concept of gender and the category of women. If a person’s subjectivity is understood as being “constituted through […] discourses in which the person is being positioned at any one point in time, both through their own and others’ acts of speaking/writing” (Davies 1991: 43), then we must allow discourses to transform and develop and work towards strengthening them as a regime of truth. After all, feminist knowledge is based on the very premise that power is both found and created in new ways of thinking. Feminist studies itself works to transform discourses in ways that acknowledge power, subjectivity and value where it was not acknowledged before. Children as subjects in their own right should be “taken more seriously” in feminist studies theories of gender in order to allow for the possibility of children to take up a new position in feminist thought and to create new ways to theorise gender – ways that allow for diversity, transformation and change.

The Socio-Discursive Construction of Age and the Adult/Child Binary

Social constructionism is a central tenet of feminist studies. Many areas of study are theorised as social constructs, from gender (Scott 1986; West and Zimmerman 1987; Butler [1990] 2002), to race/ethnicity (Frankenburg 1993; Anthias and Yuval-Davis 2005), to sexuality (Butler [1990] 2002; Foucault 1990). Dynamics of age, however, are often taken for granted (Thorne 2004: 403) and age continues, in many cases, to be thought of as a biological reality (Wyn and White 2013: 9). In feminist studies, explicit discussions on age as a social construct are rare, certainly in comparison to the enormous field of study on the social construction of gender. However, research within various other sociological disciplines shows that “the meaning and experience of age, and of the process of ageing, is subject to historical and cultural processes” and that “both youth and childhood have had and continue to have different meanings depending on young people’s social, cultural and political circumstances” (Wyn and White 2013: 9-10). Cheryl Laz (1998) states that there is a tendency to assume that age is an objective fact that is defined chronologically by the number of years a person has lived. Therefore, it is chronology in particular that is taken for granted. Laz argues that it is important to note that although chronological age clearly exists, the meanings assigned to chronological ages are constructed in interaction and in accordance with particular social and historical contexts (92).
Examples of this can be seen in notions such as the “age of consent” which differs according to historical and cultural context. It is only fairly recently that age of consent has become a matter of law. Different societal and cultural aspects are necessary for the construction of a notion such as age of consent. For example, a person’s age and, therefore, their birth must be documented otherwise it would be impossible to argue that they are too young to consent to sex. The documentation of birth did not begin until around the 16th and 17th centuries in places such as the UK, France, and the US (Brumberg, Dozor and Golombek 2012; Bozon and Rennes 2015). It was around this time that laws came into practice that made it illegal to engage in sexual activity with children of a certain age. At this point, these laws were gendered and it was specifically female children that they referred to (Robertson 2018). It was not until towards the end of the 18th century when the notion of childhood as a stage of growth and development emerged that these laws were made to apply to boys as well as girls (ibid). Then, previous to the emergence of the 18th century notion of childhood, children will have been thought of more in terms of their gender rather than their status as children. From this period on, the belief that persons under a specific age are not capable of consenting to sexual activity and that all persons above that age are capable of consent gained prominence. However, the age of consent is not a fixed age. It varies according to historical, cultural, and legal context. This not only shows age itself to be a social construct, it also shows how the adult/child binary is socio-legally constructed through laws which state that persons below a certain age are incapable of consent because they, as children, do not yet know their own minds as competent adults do. Therefore, these laws work towards the formation of the adult/child binary. Other examples, such as crime, labour, marriage, and military enrolment are also legally associated with specific ages, although these ages are also subject to change and vary according to historical, cultural, and legal context. For example, there is a legal age of criminal responsibility in many legal systems. In the UK, this age is ten years old which means that anyone under the age of ten cannot be found legally responsible of committing a crime (Crime, justice, and the law 2018). This can, however, be adjusted but when certain areas within social life are legally attached to specific ages for long periods of time, these associations shape discourses that become regimes of truth which we take for granted and gradually relate to biological realities. The examples of labour, marriage, military enrolment and age of consent contribute towards the construction of the adult/child binary as they are all markers of an entry into adulthood from childhood. Age is

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20 Exceptions were made, however, between husband and wife as the act of marriage itself was considered consent enough. The idea of rape in marriage did not exist in many jurisdictions until the late 1900s (Robertson 2018).
largely constructed in the form of binaries in feminist studies. As I show in my analysis on age, articles discussing sexuality, particularly in an historical context, largely follow the binaries of adult/child and old/young and articles on old age refer largely to what Kathleen Woodward (2006) refers to as an age/youth (old/young) binary. Within the articles on old age, the focus is, however, strongly attached to old age, and youth is mostly glossed over as a period of privilege that is valued above age (oldness) where it lacks any depth of analysis as it remains largely untouched in the analyses themselves (Woodward 2006; Barbosa 2017; Norris 2006). In other sociological disciplines, such as age studies, childhood studies, or youth studies, it is the adult/child binary that is focused upon as markers of adulthood are analysed (Arnett 2000, Côté 2000, Arnett 2004, Furstenberg 2006, Macmillan 2007, Blatterer 2007, King 2012). These markers are tied up with the understanding that once an individual is a certain age, they are competent and capable of consent and of understanding the consequences of their actions. Children are then reified in their status as incompetent and vulnerable, which, in turn, reifies the adult as the child’s fully competent opposite who is in complete control of their mind and body (Uprichard 2008: 305).

Returning to the example of age of consent, it shows age, in the binary form of adult/child, as a hierarchical system of power similar to that of gender and at the same time deeply intertwined with gender. In many cases, age works in an entanglement with gender as they (re)produce each other in systems of power. The relationship between gender and age in terms of correlations between the adult/child and masculine/feminine binaries has been noted both in- and outside of feminist studies. For example, in feminist studies, the infantilisation of adult women is noted (Oakley 2002) and in other areas of sociology, the “standard model” of adulthood (Blatterer 2007: 774) has been understood as being largely constructed around the male with the stable paid job in the workplace (Lee 2001: 18). The adult/child binary and masculine/feminine binary, therefore, follow a similar pattern as socio-discursively constructed systems of power where the fully-capable, competent adult (masculine) is positioned in contrast to the vulnerable, incapable and incompetent child (feminine) (Uprichard 2008: 305). This power relation between adult and child can also be seen in theories of subjectivity where the competent, active (“doing”), independent adult is positioned in contrast to the unresisting, passive, dependent child that remains understood in their capacity of learner rather than doer, and is therefore seen as not-yet subject compared to the adult subject. Feminist theories of subjectivity then allow for the adult/child, masculine/feminine binaries to break from one another as the feminist subject does not correlate with the unresisting, passive, dependent child.
She is, instead, active (“doing”) and resisting. This can be seen in both Butler ([1990] 2002) and West and Zimmerman’s (1987) theories of subjectivity, for instance.

Analysis

Age

Using a feminist poststructuralist lens, I analyse the use of the term age in feminist studies journal articles in order to gain a general overview of how age is discussed by feminist scholars and to see who is included in discussions involving age. This helps me understand how prevalent the topic of age is in feminist studies and where children fit into discussions on age. The term age is found in the title and/or keywords/topics of nineteen out of 57 articles across the JSTOR and Project Muse datasets where it is included in numerous ways. This relatively small amount already leads us to conclude that the topic of age is both rarely discussed and vastly under-theorised in feminist studies. In the articles, age is often split into age groups or periods: old people (Barbosa 2017; Kittay 2013; Meagher 2014; Meyer 2005; Norris 2006; Siegel and Spiegel 2011; Woodward 2006); middle-aged women (Dillaway 2006); and children (Zaborskis 2015). Boehringer and Caciagli (2015), Bozon and Rennes (2015), Christian (2005), Freedman (2011), and Janssen (2018) all discuss a wide range of aged people in their essays, which include both children and adults. Adam (2000), Bergström (2015), Monteil (2015), Oberoi, Balcazar, Suarez-Balcazar, Langi and Lukyanova (2015), and Utrata (2011), on the other hand, include a range of aged people in their essays, in the sense that they do not limit their discussion to one age group, but this range remains exclusively adult. Age is discussed, for example, as one of multiple identity characteristics (as a demographic variable) where the relationship between these characteristics is analysed. It is also included as part of a gendered system of power relations in the topic of sexual desire and as an element reviewed in the theory of gender performativity. Furthermore, it is used as a descriptive word for old age.

Drawing Lines: Gender, Sex and Age

Estelle Freedman (2011) discusses age as a variable alongside gender and race. She writes about how these variables affect the representation of both victims and perpetrators of sexual violence in the US in the late 1800s. Freedman explains that newspaper accounts of rape have played a critical role in establishing gender and racial norms (466). In Freedman’s article,

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gender and age are intertwined through the adult/child binary where women and girls are specifically regarded as the vulnerable victims of rape perpetrated by men. Age is only chronologically specified when child victims (girls) are discussed. Adult women are only given a sense of age through the term “young”, whereas female children’s ages are specifically stated. For example, Freedman tells us that “…in Bangor, Wisconsin, a (presumably white) railroad agent, arrested for seduction and adultery with a twelve-year-old girl, claimed he was being blackmailed after a long intimacy with her…” (472) and that “…a recently widowed shoemaker in Springfield, Ohio, admitted taking “improper liberties” with the eleven-year-old daughter of a “respectable, hard-working man,”…” (ibid). This perhaps comes from the information that is or is not revealed in the newspaper articles that Freedman is analysing as opposed to being the information that Freedman herself deems necessary. Then, in this context it could be surmised that age is considered important in relation to children because the younger the child, the more monstrous the crime is deemed to be. The gendered group “men” is split, showing the central role that racism and classism played in the positionality of the male rapist. Nonetheless, “men” as a gendered whole remain powerful as the protectors of vulnerable women and children (namely girls) from “transient and marginal men” (467) such as the “primitive black male rapist” (ibid) or the “tramps, desperados, or ex-convicts” (474). These men are considered to be “exceptional characters who defied masculine norms” (473). Throughout the article, Freedman groups together both “women and girls” and “women and children”. Both of these groupings are positioned as vulnerable within a patriarchal system and in need of protection from the un-masculine male rapist. A dependence on men (men who do not defy masculine norms) is ironically created and a system of patriarchy is enforced. The term children itself is implicitly gendered feminine as it is often used to refer only to female children. The gender of the child victims remains unstated in statistics given about the average age of child victims, but it is implied that these children are female as no mention of male victims is given until the last two pages of the article where Freedman states that it is not until after the 1920s that discourse on rape included children of both sexes as victims (496). The term children, in this context, then becomes a master status that is specifically associated with vulnerability. Vulnerability becomes a dominant notion in the concept of childhood and children are labelled feminine through their association with the notion of vulnerability. An adult/child binary is, therefore, constructed with vulnerable children (including women in these instances) contrasted against the protective or dangerous adult (in this instance, claimed to be men). However, the socio-discursive construction of the adult/child binary that genders child feminine and adult masculine is somewhat ruptured here. Although women and children are placed together under
the rubric of vulnerability, this does not necessarily amount to the infantilisation of women. However, it does place both women and children under the term “child” in the adult/child binary where “child” is representative of vulnerability and therefore gendered feminine and, in this sense specifically, encompasses both women and children within the term. But as Freedman expresses, the adult male rapist is seen as a defiance of masculinity. Therefore, the adult predator here is not masculine but the “good” protective adult male is. Furthermore, the term adult itself is not used in this article to refer to men. It is instead used, on only a handful of occasions, to refer to (adult) women in order for Freedman to make the point that a change in discourse can be found in the newspapers she analysed where, as victims of sexual violence became younger, “rape appeared to be a crime against girls, not adult women” (483). Therefore, the term child itself represents vulnerability but the term adult remains largely unspoken. However, when it is used here, it is used to differentiate women from girls – adults from children – no longer vulnerable (childlike) but instead, culpable (adultlike). Women are no longer considered to be “innocent” bystanders in a crime committed against them. They are, instead, considered partly responsible for this crime, by way of their actions. This can be seen for example in this statement:

“Whether measured by the number of stories, the language within them, or levels of community outrage, the sexual assault of girls unsettled the public more than the rape of adult women. In court proceedings, adult women who brought rape charges could expect to be interrogated about their complicity and portrayed as seductresses. Young girls might remain more believable accusers because they were more likely to be presumed sexually innocent.” (Freedman 2011: 492).

Sena Christian (2005), in her article Differences in Age Can be a Strength, discusses people of varying ages as she talks about the relationship between age and gender/sex and the different effects this can have upon interactions and discrimination; asking, “At what age is it best to be a female?”. Her choice of the term “female” when asking this question allows for the question to include all age groups (although not necessarily all genders. For example, one might argue that many transgender women are not represented by the term female). Christian specifically states her interest in the relationship between age and gender/sex which allows her the freedom to include a variety of terms to discuss a range of ages and age groups in interaction with gender. For instance, a “middle-aged white man”, “young women”, a “middle-aged woman”, “two college-age guys”, “old people” (25), “young girls”, “young males”, “young females”, and “teenage girls” (26). Christian also gives chronological ages as markers for some but not
all of the terms she uses here, such as her own age of 24 which is used in combination with the term “young woman”. She states at one point that “more than 50 percent of all rape and sexual assault victims are females younger than 25” (26). The use of the word females here allows for this statistic to include children and adolescents who cannot be described as women. Christian’s use of gender/sex rather than gender (as women and men) or sex (as female and male) seems to allow for the inclusion of a wider range of age groups into her discussion; as does her inclusion of age details such as middle-aged or teenage. This highlights a complicated relationship between age and the concept of gender in relation to language. Furthermore, it highlights a lack of clarity in regard to the boundary between the binary aged gender terms of girl and woman or boy and man.

**Constructing Gender and Age in Systems of Sexuality**

Five articles in my search discuss sexuality with the inclusion of age and gender in their analyses (Adam 2000; Boehringer and Caciagli 2015; Bozon and Rennes 2015; Monteil 2015; Janssen 2018). The latter four of these articles are focused more on an historical perspective, whilst Adam’s (2000) article looks at the more recent present. Boehringer and Caciagli (2015) discuss “the age of love” in Ancient Greece, whilst also including gender in their essay. They show how perceptions of sexual norms in archaic Greece differ from “modern” Western societies in relation to age through their discussion on “Greek pederasty”. They state that this “practice was recognized and accepted at certain points in history” (24). Referring to Foucault’s (1990) *History of Sexuality* which discusses “the fundamental difference in structures […] between ancient societies and present-day Western societies” (Boehringer and Caciagli 2015: 24), Boehringer and Caciagli show an example of a regime of truth related to gender, sexuality, and age. Here, the social construction of age shows itself in its entanglement with sexuality and gender. In other words, the meaning of age is socially constructed in accordance with the social construction of sexuality and gender at specific points in history, within specific cultures. Identity characteristics are dependent upon one another in their social construction.

Bozon and Rennes (2015) look at the social construction of sexuality by analysing it in combination with age and gender from the Middle Ages to Modernity, with a particular focus on French society. They begin their essay by looking at the “invention of age” (7) in order to show how the construction of age affects our understanding of sexual norms. Bozon and Rennes explain that gender is constructed, in part, through age – through laws indicating age differences in legal status for males and females, such as marriage or age of consent. They express that the marker of marriage for girls and of military service for boys was the marker of
adulthood in France in the late 1800s, where girls became women and boys became men (10). The law at this time meant that girls could marry aged fifteen and boys aged eighteen (9). They explain that “gender as a system of hierarchy and differentiation became structurally embedded and reproduced, through the inequalities of access to certain socially-defined ages” (10). This shows, firstly, a construction of gender based upon sexed bodies, where a so-called “natural difference” between the sexes is used to “justify the establishment of gendered age norms” (9). Secondly, it shows an entanglement between law and discourse. Particular discourses are dominant and accepted as “truth” in social systems at specific times (Foucault 1980: 131); these discourses might then become embedded in law which goes on to strengthen the initial discourse. In this case, laws that posit different gendered age norms for different acts (such as marriage or age of consent) strengthen, what Butler refers to as, the naturalisation of gender ([1990] 2002: xv) in our consciousness. In the same way, markers of adulthood such as marriage strengthen this naturalisation of gender as something that comes “after” childhood, as the concept of gender becomes embedded in discourses that we associate with the adult. Therefore, the conceptualisation of gender is understood here as being intertwined with legal statuses that are associated with markers of adulthood. Even though conceptual markers of adulthood such as marriage are legally attached to (some) children in many societies22, they are discursively attached to the adult as markers of adulthood and this creates a strong relationship between gender and the adult which follows through into feminist studies knowledge production.

Diederik Janssen (2018) uses an analysis of 1800s and early 1900s European psychiatric discourses on attraction to build a picture of ongoing shifts of homosexual preference in terms of gender and age. He discusses a “shift of preference”, noted by a Berlin psychiatrist in the late 1800s, where Western European homosexuals shifted their sexual/intimate preference from youth to mature men (101). The terms “youth” and “boys” are used throughout this essay but no specific chronological ages are given for these terms. Instead, age is thought of in terms of life periods. Janssen refers to empirical research undertaken in 1882 that was based on a study of 50 male homosexuals where two types of male homosexuals were noted – the masculine youth-loving and the feminine man-loving (102). Here, gender is constructed through desire but is not based specifically on sexed bodies. This gendered desire is based on

22 At 16 years of age (and sometimes younger), persons can legally marry in many countries across Europe with parental consent (The Guardian 2015) and in Scotland, as another example, persons can marry at the age of 16 without parental consent (National Records of Scotland 2018). Furthermore, in many religious societies, such as Muslim or Hindu societies, children can marry as young as nine years old in some places (Mortimer 2015).
age and on characteristics associated with certain age groups as well as gendered bodies (for example, vulnerability, susceptibility, submissiveness as being associated with children and femininity). Age takes up the role of gender as a system of hierarchy and differentiation (Bozon and Rennes 2015). Age, here, mirrors this gender system in order to fulfil the requirements of normative heterosexuality that imposes the rule of so-called opposites (Butler [1990] 2002). Thus, age and gender become inseparable in this context. In this instance, one might argue that “youth” is understood as a gender in contrast to the gender “man”. These identifications, however, coincide with binary genders that are already discursively in place – which can be seen when the term “girlishness” is used to describe the male youths in comparison to the “manly” male homosexuals, for example (Janssen 2018: 103-104). Thus, although other categorisations (such as age) are brought into our understanding of gender here, it also continues to be constructed around a sexed binary. Furthermore, according to Janssen, male homosexuals who had a preference for youths or boys were, in the early 1900s, considered to have “nearest to normal sexuality” (104) as “youth” (in its gendered form) was considered adequately similar to the gender “woman” (feminine/submissive). Therefore, in this discussion on sexuality and power relations, age and gender mirror each other in certain ways. “Youth” and “boys” are the feminine/submissive, which, in turn, constructs the masculine as their sexual opposite. Youths are at one point in this article described as those between the ages of fourteen and twenty-one years old (111). Therefore, this term incorporates both boys and men in the legal sense but is discursively associated with “youngness” and with boys who are labelled feminine due to their submissiveness and due to their being “childlike”. Therefore, the socio-discursive construction of the adult/child binary following the pattern of masculine/feminine (in accordance with dominant/submissive) can be found here.

This construction is transferred on to the old/young binary in Lucas Monteil’s (2015) essay which examines emerging representations of male homosexuality in post-Maoist China (mid-late 1900s), where he includes the dimensions of age and class into his analysis as he focuses on the phenomenon of “old-young love”. In this essay, the term “young”, however, is used specifically for young adults (nineteen as the youngest age) rather than children and therefore does not run parallel to the adult/child binary, and the term “old” is largely used for men who are around 40 years old or more. As Monteil expresses, in these cases, the men’s “oldness”, their “maturity”, becomes their masculinity (154). The “old” and “young” in this analysis, like in Janssen’s analysis, mirror the gender binary system of opposites in the context of sexuality.
Barry Adam’s (2000) essay *Age Preferences Among Gay and Bisexual Men* looks at sexuality in modern Western societies with a focus upon “the meanings of age to men who have sex with men today” (414). Adam expresses that “gender is not the sole or even overriding source of erotic difference” (413) in many societies across history. This is a theme that is made apparent throughout other articles I have analysed that focus upon sexuality, age and gender. Nonetheless, men continue to be centred as exercising control and assuming sexual rights over others, be it females or males who are differentiated from these men through age or other hierarchical systems. Thus, the term men continues to be put forward as a term of dominance (or power) within relationships of gender as well as age. In this sense, it is always considered the most dominant gender.

In these articles, the term age is mostly used as a noun and refers to age groups. There is one instance in Adam’s (2000) essay where “age” is used to mean the opposite of “youth” (429), referring to “oldness” rather than an age group. Boehringer and Caciagli (2015), Bozon and Rennes (2015), and Janssen’s (2018) articles discuss age as an over-arching category which stretches from childhood to old age. However, Monteil (2015) and Adam (2000) include only those who are aged nineteen and older in their essays. Therefore, as we creep towards our present, children’s gradual exclusion from the term age, in discussions on sexuality, can be seen in both Monteil’s (2015) and Adam’s (2000) essays. According to these five essays, children are more likely to be included in the term age, when discussing the topic of sexuality, the further back in history we go. This may be due to children, in Western thought, previously being understood as sexual beings where they are now mostly seen (by adults) as asexual (Thorne 1987: 93). This shows the importance of discourse in the social construction of age and childhood. This presumed asexuality translates into a loss of presence or visibility for children. Hence, both the topic and the temporal context of the topic make a difference to children’s inclusion in the term age as dominant discourses accepted as “truths” differ across and between societies.

**The Kids Should be at School**

Other articles in my search (Bergström 2015; Oberoi, Balcazar, Suarez-Balcazar, Langi and Lukyanova 2015; Utrata 2011) discuss what seems to be a wide range of ages. However, these remain between the markers of 18 and 67 years old – all falling under the category of adult. Heather Dillaway (2006) also focuses upon adults in her essay but with a smaller age-range. She discusses age as both biological and chronological, using interviews with 61 women aged between 38 and 60 in her research. Her essay on menopause and reproductive ageing is
specifically concerned with the lack of knowledge and understanding about chronological age, menopause, women’s midlife experiences, and ageing processes in feminist research. In this essay, gender is related to the topic of menopause. In this case, the subject matter is specific to the adult as children cannot experience menopause in their own bodies. However, in other cases, the subject matter is not actually specific to the adult, but it appears specific to the adult through discourse.

For example, Oberoi et al. (2015) talk about employment outcomes among African American and White women with disabilities, using a dataset that includes women aged from 18-65. They use the term age to refer to age groups and as a personal characteristic or demographic variable (i.e. age, race, gender, marital status) (152). Oberoi et al. use a report from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2013) in their essay, where they state that according to this report “only 20.7 percent of all individuals with disabilities aged 18 to 64 are employed […] These inequalities are even more pronounced among minorities with disabilities and women” (emphasis mine Oberoi et al. 2015: 144-145). In the report itself, however, the statistics include those who are 16 years old and over. One possibility for Oberoi et al.’s choice to exclude these sixteen and seventeen year olds in their essay might be due to their decision to use the term women, which they may have felt could not be used for sixteen and seventeen year olds but may have been considered somehow important to their essay. However, in the Bureau of Labor Statistics report itself, the terms men and women are used to refer to everybody in the bracket of 16 to 64 years old (2013). Therefore, it is not clear why Oberoi et al. (2015) chose to exclude those aged sixteen and seventeen from their essay.

Even though adolescent children legally participate in employment in most, if not all, societies, most feminist studies’ articles discussing the topic of employment fail to explicitly include these children alongside adults (see for example Cockburn 1989; Acker 1990; Webb 1997; Näre 2010). Instead, children and adults tend to be kept separate in discourses of employment that are not discussing exploitation, as is the case in Oberoi et al.’s (2015) article. A current dominant discourse, advocated by organisations such as the United Nations (UNICEF 2018), is that children, including adolescent children, should be in education rather than in full-time employment. Evidence of this can be found in changes of law such as the raising of school-leaving age to eighteen in the UK in the Education and Skills Act 2008. This preference for all

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23 However, there is a rare condition called primary ovarian insufficiency (POI) that affects teenagers and women under the age of 40 and is sometimes referred to as premature menopause (Cincinnati Children’s 2018).

24 It is not, however, made clear why it might be considered important to use the term women specifically in their essay.
children to remain in education is likely to have an impact on the production of knowledge in regard to employment, in- and outside of feminist studies, where scholars might wish to avoid the normalisation of children in employment if they believe this to be exploitative or negative.

It is also possible that children are simply overlooked in a discourse that most people relate to adults. In other words, it could be a matter of representation or, in this case, a lack of representation of children who are employed. A current dominant Western discourse of childhood is an “idealized world of innocence and joy” (James and Prout 1997: 3). This means that the term children connotes such things as innocence and a lack of responsibility, as well as incompetence25 and vulnerability26. Although these connotations may have some value, feminist knowledge production, as well as the knowledge production of other sociological disciplines, would benefit from a critical feminist analysis of these representational terms in relation to childhood (including adolescence) and adulthood (including old age and deep old age). Otherwise, adolescents who are old enough to legally work, marry, and have sex27, for example are left in a state of “betweenness” (Weller 2006) which seems to result in them being left out of discussions that they should rightfully be included in, such as employment. Then even when children show subjectivity in the form of independence (or agency) in relation to employment or in other ways that are discursively attached to adults (as can be seen in the example of Oberoi et al.’s work), these acts are not only ignored, they are epistemologically erased. Oberoi et al.’s (2015) decision to exclude sixteen and seventeen year olds from their article – even though they were included in the statistics that they referred to – already suggests a bias towards the adult in discussions on employment. When gender is included in these discussions, this also has an effect on the representation of gender as a concept in feminist studies. Gender is associated with the adult through discourse that groups everyone younger than eighteen years old under the bracket of children. These children are then understood as being in a process of socialisation, rather than as those who “do” and their subjectivity is denied as child becomes their only status. Adults and children are then separated into an adult/child

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25 Children are seen as incompetent through their innocence. This is “reiterated in the Enlightenment binary between innocence and experience, which is heavily traversed by the signifier ‘sexuality’” (Burman and Stacey 2010: 234).

26 As they are expected to be contained in a state of innocence and joy, they are vulnerable to anything that might take away that innocence.

27 All of these things are legal by the age of sixteen in the UK. It is, furthermore, legal for a child to work part-time from the age of thirteen in the UK or at a younger age in television, theatre or modelling (Births, deaths, marriages and care 2018).
binary when they don’t necessarily need to be, and the concept of gender becomes entangled in representations of the adult separate from the child.

Marie Bergström (2015) discusses the topic of online dating in her essay. She explains that her sample only includes those who are aged 18+ because many of the sites she used within her research prohibited those under the age of eighteen from using the site. Bergström examines the role of age in partner selection where she states that numerical age (chronological age) is given priority over social age when using the medium of “user profiles” in comparison to face-to-face interactions where social age takes precedence (124). Thus, she compares the significance of age in dating both online and offline and merges this analysis with the inclusion of gendered attitudes. Although Bergström’s reason for focusing upon people aged eighteen and over is understandable, it brings to our attention the point that restrictions of admission which are placed upon those under the age of eighteen in the social world (both online and offline) mean that they are then excluded, or at least separated, from research based on activities that they actually participate in – such as dating. This separates children from what is seen as an adult social world and contributes towards the construction of concepts such as gender in feminist studies as adult-centred, as many areas within social life that children participate in are seen as “adult” by right – dating, sexual and intimate relationships, marriage, work, consumption of alcohol and drugs, pregnancy, giving birth, motherhood and so on. In feminist studies, these areas within social life are directly related to our understanding of the construction of gender as gender is discursively constructed around these very “activities”. In this way, age itself, as discussed in feminist studies articles, contributes towards both forming and maintaining gender as an adult-centred concept as age restrictions and boundaries are not necessarily tackled in research including age but are, instead, accepted. Therefore, a line is drawn between the child and the adult, creating the adult/child binary that upholds the adult as the “doer” and the child as either the “learner” or as simply not there.

Jennifer Utrata’s (2011) essay on differences between how grandmothers and adult daughters “do” age and gender in Russia’s single-mother families emphasises this point. She draws on ethnographic data and interviews with mothers and grandmothers aged between 23-67 and although children are mentioned, their only identity is that they are children of the mothers or grandchildren of the grandmothers who are the subjects of this article. Utrata does not

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28 Social age refers to “the meanings that a society accords to different categories of age, with the instruments of social policy providing clear-cut measures” (Woodward 2006: 183).
29 I discuss further what I have referred to here as children of in my upcoming analysis of the term child(ren).
include the children in the family in the notion of “doing” age or gender. Thus, the “doing” is the domain of the adult and children prop up the identity of the adult. Therefore, children are subsequently excluded from the term age and the concept of gender, leaving them “ageless” and “genderless” and only identifiable through their master status: child. According to Kathy Dow Magnus (2006), Butler’s theory of agency implies that “the one who acts is the one who is detached from others” (86). Therefore, it seems to logically follow that it is the adult (who is assumed to be independent by nature) who is mostly associated with “doing”. Children suffer another blow in Utrata’s article as it is titled “youth privilege” which refers to the adult mothers and firmly removes children from any further description of their self in relation to age. If the term old and youth both refer to adults, it begs the question: how do we understand children in relation to age terms? Where do they fit into discussions of privilege in relation to age or in relation to old and young? When privilege is discussed in relation to age, children are erased from this discussion without a second thought as exclamations of youth privilege ring out even though it is plainly clear that children are not the privileged youth that are referred to here. This is supported by Ruth Benedict’s (1938) observation that adults go to great lengths to define themselves as different from children. They do this not because children are privileged, but because children are what adults work hard not to be.

In these four articles, discussions on age do not include children – leaving age and children largely detached from one another. In both Oberoi et al. (2015) and Bergström’s (2015) articles, the age of eighteen draws a line between the child and the adult and their interest in only those above the age of eighteen upholds a narrative of association between age and the adult in feminist studies. The same interest in the adult can also be seen in Dillaway’s (2006) and Utrata’s (2011) essays. Although the topics being discussed – menopause, employment, dating and motherhood – might more strongly evoke images of adults in our minds than they do children, many children (those below the age of eighteen) could realistically be brought into each of these subject matters; except for menopause – which is associated with adult women who have previously experienced menstruation that has then permanently stopped (MedlinePlus 2018). Therefore, it is through our own lack of recognition of children’s involvement in these subject matters, as well as our unexplained need to separate children from adults in many of our discussions (resulting in children more often than adults being entirely excluded from articles) that creates this adult/child split. Furthermore, the concept of gender is theorised and constructed in accordance with this adult/child split where it is maintained as adult-centred in its discursive association with the adult.
Doing Gender, Doing Adult

Mary Zaborskis (2015) is one of few exceptions in my sample who includes children as the focal point in her discussion on “doing gender” in her article Age Drag. Zaborskis breaks away from the adult-centred discourse of “doing” as she includes children in her analysis as those who are “doing”. Age Drag looks at the television show Toddlers & Tiaras – which is based on children performing in beauty pageants – to discuss the sexualisation of young girls, as she notes that critics of the show exclaim that Toddlers & Tiaras encourages the sexualisation of young girls. Zaborskis examines interview snippets from the show with Alana “Honey Boo Boo” Thompson, a child who performs on the show, in order to understand the importance of age in gender performativity. Stating her determination to give Alana a platform in this essay to share her voice, she acknowledges Alana’s subjectivity (124). Zaborskis does this by examining footage from episodes of Toddlers & Tiaras and, in her own words, “taking seriously” what Alana has to say about why she chooses to do the beauty pageants (ibid). It is this act of “taking seriously” that allows at least the possibility of the child as subject in her own right. However, this act of “taking seriously” is not a simple matter. For example, here, it is Alana’s speech that is taken seriously but other acts by Alana, such as the clothes and make-up she wears in the beauty pageant, are not necessarily taken seriously. This is related to Butler’s ([1990] 2002) discussion on authenticity. Furthermore, seriousness is always already associated with the adult in Western representation as children are assumed to be living in an “idealized world of innocence and joy” (James and Prout 1997: 3) whilst adults have responsibilities. Seriousness, as well as communication and experience is then also an important aspect of subjectivity which must be more thoroughly investigated in this context.

Zaborskis explains that “when children perform gender in a mode not in accordance with the gender ascribed to their age, they cause “age trouble,” similar to how drag generates “gender trouble”” (119). Alana, in this context, is not only performing gender. She is performing an entwinement of age and gender – both of which are related to an adult here. Therefore, she is performing a gendered adult. Zaborskis’ statement shows how intricately intertwined age and gender are in a theory of performativity. Yet, although Butler ([1990] 2002) refers, at moments, to temporality in her theory of performativity, she never fully takes up age as a critical point. Zaborskis’ (2015) statement here points to an age-temporality of gender within specific bodies. Butler shows us that when a person is “doing gender” they are performing a “stylized repetition of acts” (Butler 1988: 519) which come to be seen as natural in accordance with specific sexed bodies. In the same way, when a person is “perform[ing] gender in a mode not in accordance
with the gender ascribed to their age” (Zaborskis 2015: 119) they are performing a gender that is associated with specific (social) aged bodies. This supports the theory of age as a social construct. In Zaborskis’ article, the gender that Alana is performing might be associated with the body of a young adult woman. Therefore, although children are the focal point of this essay on “doing gender”, gender itself remains attached to the adult as Alana is said to be “doing” an “adult” gender. This does not mean that “age trouble” cannot necessarily be “caused” the other way around – an adult performing gender that is usually ascribed to a child – but I am yet to find examples of this in feminist research.

(Old) Age: Searching for the Right Words

The most common age group in this sample associated with the term age is “old”. Seven articles out of nineteen, with the term age in their title and/or keywords/topics, focus upon old people as an age group within their essays (Barbosa 2017; Kittay 2013; Meagher 2014; Meyer 2005; Norris 2006; Siegel and Spiegel 2011; Woodward 2006). Eva Feder Kittay (2013) discusses societal failure to acknowledge long-term care needs and Mina Meyer (2005) discusses retirement needs and desires for old lesbians and gays. They both use the term age more often alongside the term old (old age) than by itself as their essays focus upon the period of old age and processes or socio-temporal markers (e.g. retirement) that come with old age. Kittay (2013) also uses the term age occasionally as a verb: “As we ourselves age, as we watch our family members and friends age…” (75). Siegel and Spiegel (2011) use the term age as a chronological marker as they talk about how it feels to be “older”. They only use the term a handful of times throughout the whole essay, each time referring to their own age. For example, Siegel states that, “…I thought that age 60 was the beginning of old age. Now at 86 – called old old – I know that “old age,” which can last thirty years or more, can hardly be compared to the beginning of this final stage of life” (113). Spiegel responds by saying “I know that I did some of my best work after the age of 60 and at 83 I continue to address issues that I had begun to work on earlier” (ibid). These comments show how age is socially constructed as meanings of our own age, as well as how others perceive us in our age, transform as we age through life ourselves. It also highlights a lack of adjectives in the English language when it comes to matters of age, where we are left with terms such as “old old” for lack of a better description of the differences within our understandings of age and age periods.

Michelle Meagher’s (2014) article Against the Invisibility of Old Age: Cindy Sherman, Suzy Lake, and Martha Wilson uses the term “old age” in the title and age is given as a topic for this article on the JSTOR database. Meagher begins her essay by expressing that the matter of
invisibility is highly important in discussions on age and ageing. She states that the matter of age is lacking in feminist studies, and old women’s issues are ignored (102). When Meagher talks about age being missing in feminist studies discourse, she uses the term implicitly to refer to old age. For example, she states: “…viewers find themselves faced with the signs of age that are generally rendered invisible, especially in the realm of advertising’s visual culture: wrinkles, stained teeth, and facial hair” (137). Elaine Norris (2006) also discusses, in her essay *Age Matters in a Feminist Classroom*, the need for age to be included more in feminist discussions. She is particularly interested in its inclusion alongside gender. But again, it is the inclusion of “old people” that is being advocated here. Norris states at one point in the essay that “Age, here, refers both to the effects of life length on subjectivity and to people of great age” (64). The same can be found in Karina Gomes Barbosa’s (2017) essay where the title includes the term age as a noun without the adjective of old being used (*Affects and Female Age in Grace and Frankie*), but in the essay itself the age which is discussed is specifically “old age”. The association between the topic of age and the adult is strengthened through this use.

Kathleen Woodward (2006) uses the term age in her essay *Performing Age, Performing Gender* in different ways: for instance, to refer to a demographic variable, “…age and gender structure each other in complex sets of reverberating feedback loops…” (163); to refer to social age, “The film [*About Schmidt*] thus heavily underscores the fact that Schmidt has reached the social age of old age in America – the age of retirement” (ibid); to refer to chronological age, “Schmidt thus casts himself as younger although he and Helen are the same chronological age…” (164); and in combination with the term old (i.e. old age). She also uses the term age as a synonym for old age, particularly when she enters the term “youth” into her discussion as an oppositional term to old age. For example, Woodward states that “Youth triumphs over age” (163) and expresses that “…youth is valued at virtually all costs over age…” (164). This does not only have the effect of strengthening the topic of age and the adult through this use as previously stated, it also creates a youth/age binary where both age and youth are linked to the adult: youth refers to the young adult and age to the old adult. This assumption that youth refers to a young adult or young adulthood once again arises through the assertion of value being placed upon youth, which I have argued is not placed upon children, therefore indicating that the term youth in these circumstances does not refer to children.
Finding Children in the Category of Age

Each of the articles on old age promotes the importance of including old people in feminist studies which is a necessary and just point. However, they use the term age in a way that allows it to become synonymous with old age. The use of the term age in this way to mean “people of great age” (in other words, people who are very old) is not an incorrect use in the English language. However, whilst children remain under-represented in feminist studies discourses on age, this use within feminist studies solidifies the relationship between the term age and the adult. It therefore, reinforces a relationship between the topic of age and the adult. Because of this, children are likely to remain under-represented in these discourses as the term and topic of age steer us towards the under-representation of old people. In other words, when people think of the topic of age in feminist studies, they think of old age and ageing. Although this may help to further the inclusion of old people and old women in feminist studies discourses – which is important in itself – it hinders the inclusion of children. This way, the topic of age does not dislodge the adult from our minds and centre the child in the same way that the topic of race dislodges White women from our minds and centres Black women, for example. This is an important point to consider when looking at who or what is dominant in the production of feminist knowledge in regard to conceptualisations.

Furthermore, when Woodward (2006) uses the binary youth/age, she uses both terms to refer to adults. She makes this clear in statements such as “…the youthful structure of the look, which exhorts us to pass for younger once we are a “certain” age” (163). If “we” are expected to look younger once we reach a “certain” age, it suggests that this youthfulness that we are expected to exude is the youthfulness from our not so distant past – the youthfulness of an adult. Otherwise we would have been expected to pass for younger as soon as we reached adulthood rather than when we reached a “certain” age. If both youth and age refer to the adult, this creates a distance between children and both the term and topic of age in feminist studies as language which could be used to include children becomes associated specifically with the adult. In turn, this has an effect on the concept of gender. Where the inclusion of age could help direct the focus towards the inclusion of children (as the non-privileged in the binary adult/child) in feminist studies discourses and conceptualisations, age is associated with the adult. Therefore, the possibility of bringing children into conceptualisations of gender lessens. As gender is discursively conceptualised in feminist studies, children are rarely, if at all, present in these discourses as the non-privileged other to the privileged adult through the intersection of age because the topic of age has not allowed room for children through the processes I have
described. If children are not present then they cannot influence the conceptualisation of gender. If the term age and topic of age remain strongly associated with the adult in feminist studies, gender does not get the push it needs from the inclusion of age into its discursive conceptualisation.

**Summarising Age: Adults (That) Age and the Ageless Child**

To briefly summarise, I asked as my main question for my analysis on age: *How is age understood and discussed in feminist studies (journal articles)*? According to my analysis on age, the use of the term age in feminist studies journal articles is versatile. In these articles, it has been used to refer to chronological, sociological, and biological age. It has been used as a verb and as a noun. It has been used as a synonym for old in opposition to youth. It has included children within it (mostly alongside adults) and excluded children entirely. It has just once been used to refer only to children. Therefore, both the term age and the topic age are far more commonly associated with the adult than with children. Adults are always present in relation to the term age, but children are not necessarily. Adults are the default representation of this word; with the consequence being that children are further removed from this term – on a road to “agelessness”. For me, the question arises of whether it is problematic to state that one is interested in age when one specifically centres their discussion around adults – especially if one does not declare this specificity. A comparison with gender or race may be useful here. It might be asked if it is problematic if one only concerns themselves with women when discussing gender or if one only concerns themselves with blackness when discussing race. I believe it is; because the chosen category (women or blackness) then becomes the default category when discussing gender or race. It comes to be the category itself (i.e. women=gender and blackness=race and vice versa). Therefore, the concepts of gender and race remain unnuanced, creating knowledge that serves the interests of only one group of people.

Although the emphasis on the categories women and blackness in these cases comes from a position of oppression or neglect, the result of using these terms in this way remains the same. For me, an important aspect of a postmodern (anti-)epistemological feminist approach (Lykke 2010: 131) is the continuous (re-)assessment of power relations in knowledge production, both in- and outside of feminist studies. Therefore, in my opinion, the same applies for age. That being said, there is nothing wrong in itself with many of these articles choosing to focus upon

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30 I have chosen both women and blackness here for my examples as they are the dominant categories discussed in relation to gender and race in feminist studies itself.

31 This is a similar argument to that which intersectionality theory has followed.
adults when discussing age, especially when the matter at hand, such as menopause, cannot include children. I do not wish to suggest that all topics and all essays in feminist studies must include children or are able to include “everyone”. Instead, I want to draw attention to the privileged adult, who goes unchallenged. They lurk not in the shadows but in plain sight, pushing children further from our view through the simple use of everyday language. It is the unmarked adult that I dispute; who claims every space for themselves as rightfully theirs without mention or thought of the Other that they leave behind. It is, in part, the adult’s ability to “blend in” unobserved and yet to remain at the very centre of concepts such as age that must be challenged. The dominant “who” within all concepts must be observed and declared in order to understand and consider power relations in feminist epistemology. As Adrienne Rich (1986) asserts, we must “[b]egin […], not with a continent or a country or a house, but with the geography closest in – the body” (212).

On the matter of subjectivity in relation to experience and communication, the importance of acts being experienced (“seen”) by another is highlighted by these articles (perhaps particularly those that discuss “doing”). Not only is experience shown to be an important aspect of feminist theories of subjectivity in the sense of what women experience but experience must also be understood as that which is communicated and then “taken seriously”, perhaps especially by those who are in positions of power in terms of knowledge production (academics, scientists, philosophers). It is not enough to suggest that “the one who acts is the one who is detached from others” (Magnus 2006: 86). Instead, the one who is seen to act is the one who is understood as being detached from others. This “seeing” is both a matter of taking what one “sees” seriously and of interpretation. In other words, if children’s experiences are not included in feminist knowledge because feminist scholars (academics, scientists, philosophers – “knowing subjects”) have not experienced them (“seen” them) or taken them seriously, then children cannot and do not become a part of feminist theories of subjectivity. This understanding of subjectivity is, therefore, always a matter of interaction (or intra-action if following Karen Barad’s (2003) theory of agential realism32).

**Children**

I have argued that an unspoken association between age and the adult has been constructed in feminist studies. In this section, I analyse the term child(ren). I have combined my analyses of the terms child and children together and refer to this as child(ren). The term child(ren) is

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32 Barad (2003) uses the term *intra*-action to show the observer and observed, knower and known, subject and object to be ontologically inseparable (815).
particularly important to analyse in this research project as this will help me see: how children are positioned within feminist studies journal articles; what characteristics are deemed important in discussions including children; and whether or not they are aged or gendered. In my JSTOR and Project Muse searches, the term child(ren) features more prominently than age – in 38 articles out of 57. It features more often in the topics on JSTOR than in the keywords or titles of articles on both databases. However, it does feature in ten titles across both databases (Blum 2011; Jarrett, McPherson and Sensoy Bahar 2013; Jonas 2015; Lee 2015; Meiners 2015; Miller 2005; Nichols, Gringle, and Pulliam 2015; Raleigh 2016; Stith 2015; Toulalan 2014), with all three articles from the Project Muse dataset using the term in their title.

As 38 out of 57 articles including the term child(ren) in the title and/or topics/keywords are found when searching “age”, this suggests a fairly strong link between age and child(ren). Even the term age itself is only found in the title and/or keywords/topics of nineteen out of 57 articles when searching “age”. However, once the results from the two database searches are separated, a discrepancy between the datasets is found. In the JSTOR search, the term child(ren) features in 35 articles compared to only three articles in the Project Muse search (Meiners 2015; Miller 2005; Toulalan 2014). This shows the strong link between age and child(ren) to be constructed specifically through the JSTOR dataset. This then perhaps says more about JSTOR’s algorithms than it does about this link being made specifically in the articles themselves. For example, JSTOR organises articles into a system of topics where the topic of children can be found (JSTOR 2018b). Project Muse does not have this topic system and, instead, works on a basis of keywords (which, however, are not included with every article – thus, most words have been found in the title of the Project Muse articles). As I have already stated, the term child(ren) is mostly found in the JSTOR topics of the 38 articles, rather than in the titles or keywords. Thus, this link between children and age is constructed by JSTOR rather than necessarily by the authors of the articles. However, as the term child(ren) and topic of children are the most commonly found age-related terms and topics in my “age” search, this nonetheless indicates a connection between the terms or topics of children and age. Therefore, it is important to delve further into the articles through a qualitative text analysis to examine this point. In order to do

this, I analyse which other terms are associated with, and attached to, the term child(ren). In other words, I look at which other terms are most commonly found in the same sentence or paragraph as child(ren) and that, moreover, have an impact on our understanding of the child’s identity in that sentence or paragraph. This helps me build a picture of how children are situated in feminist studies journal articles that are included in a search for age.

**I am No-body Without You**

In Jenifer Barclay’s (2014) essay _Mothering the “Useless”: Black Motherhood, Disability, and Slavery_, the identifying characteristic of “disabled” is given to the child in order to discuss the mother as the carer of a disabled child. Children themselves are not the focus of the article or, indeed, included as subjects in any way. Another example of this can be seen in Nadieszda Kizenko’s (2013) essay on feminised patriarchy, where she states: “But the next article, “All Kinds of Mothers Are Important,” in the same issue suggested that after an infant reaches the age of three months it is beneficial for both mother and child to have some time apart, that it is good for all women to keep up their professions, and that each family needs to resolve work-life issues individually” (603). Here, the age of the infant is given in order to discuss the mother, not the infant. This is further emphasised in the title of the article being discussed: “All Kinds of Mothers Are Important”. Although it is stated that it is beneficial for the child as well as the mother to have some time apart, the child is not the focus of this article. Kizenko’s focus remains on adult women throughout the article. Sarah Toulalan’s (2014) article is about the construction of the child rapist. When the term child(ren) is included in this essay, it is included mostly as the object of abuse or potential abuse. Identifying characteristics of the child, such as age, are only included in this article in order to give further information about the subject of the article – the adult man; for example, as the reason the man gained acquittal for rape: “Men therefore could, and did, use the defense of consent when a child over the age of ten and the men’s acquittal could be secured by presenting sufficient evidence of the child’s acquiescence, even if it had been obtained through threats or bribery, however iniquitous juries may have found this behavior” (emphasis mine 31). Children’s ages are given in several places in this essay, but each time they are given in order to explain more about the adult man’s situation.

**Children of Women**

Child(ren) are used in various ways to construct the identity of another. Although it is not always in relation to women, this is most common. Hence, I refer to this positioning of children as _children of women_. In the JSTOR dataset, the terms “mother” and “women” are the most
commonly found terms attached to child(ren). This is largely due to the majority of essays in this dataset being about motherhood and mothering. Nonetheless, the point that most articles including the term child(ren) in this sample are about the topics of motherhood, mothering, reproduction, and women (in the JSTOR dataset) is itself telling. Furthermore, none of these articles are about children who are mothers or who are pregnant themselves. Instead, the child is always the child of the adult mother or woman. Therefore, it is clear that discourses of motherhood, mothering, and reproduction in feminist studies are largely centred around adult women.

An example of the connection between the terms women and children can be found in Tina Lee’s (2015) article Child Welfare Practice in Domestic Violence Cases in New York City: Problems for Poor Women of Color: “Domestic violence is arguably taken more seriously today than at almost any time in the past by the child welfare system, and this is largely the result of the work of feminist activists and researchers who pushed for the state to intervene to protect women and children” (emphasis mine 59). In this example, women are positioned alongside children as, what Erica Burman (2008) calls, “WomenandChildren”. Burman explains in her essay that women and children in feminist studies are either thought of as “Women vs. Children” or “WomenandChildren”. In my opinion, a third category should be considered: “children of Women”. According to the results of this research project, this third category is highly prominent in feminist studies empirical journal articles. In many cases where women and children are included together, I would suggest that it should not be understood as “WomenandChildren” (emphasis mine) as the woman is in a far greater position of privilege and power through the acknowledgment of her subjectivity. I would argue, instead, that a third category of “children of Women” points to this discrepancy in power between children and women. Another example of this can be found in Jarrett, McPherson, and Sensoy Bahar’s (2013) article, where they state: “They noted mothers’ role-modeling efforts to encourage children’s fruit and vegetable consumption” (4); or in Linda Blum’s (2011) article on mothering children of colour with invisible disabilities where Blum states that, “An increasing number of mothers today are raising children diagnosed with disorders from among the burgeoning categories of social, emotional, and behavioral disability” (941). Here, children are situated as children of the mother or woman who is the subject of the article and of the example

sentence. Therefore, the power relation between children and mothers here, in terms of subjectivity, is clearly unequal. Women’s subjectivity is not only acknowledged when children’s is not, but it is the very inclusion of children as the children of these women that aids in the accomplishment of the women’s own subjectivity.

The terms “parent(s)”35 and “family/families”36 are also commonly found alongside the term child(ren). Although these terms are found less often in the same sentence or paragraph as child(ren) than “mother” and “women” are, they are still found a significant amount. In the case of parent(s) and family/families, not only is the child’s identity created only in their attachment to the parent or family, “children” is their only identity. For example: “The commodification of the goods and services in the reproductive health market has brought healthy *children to parents* who may not have otherwise been able to achieve biologically related children” *(emphasis mine* Daoud, Ghent and Sherron 2015: 130). Children in this sentence are something to be achieved by the parents and something to be brought to parents. They are again included here in order to mark the parent’s subjectivity. When the term child(ren) is included *alongside* the terms family/families, children become exactly that – an addition to the family rather than a main component: “In addition to family socioeconomic status, the neighborhood food environment influences the nutritional health of *families with children*” *(emphases mine* Jarrett, McPherson, and Sensoy Bahar 2013: 2). This can be seen through use of the term *with*.

Children are also included in these articles as something that women have, want to have (as an object of their desire), or wish they hadn’t had37. Here, they become a commodity; an object. This can be seen in examples such as: “Many women must also consider how they will afford to have children…” (Cattapan, Hammond, Haw, and Tarasoff 2014: 241) or “I regret having had children and becoming a mother, but I love the children that I’ve got” (Donath 2015: 355). This theme continues through to discussions on childlessness (not having or not wanting to have): “That women without children emerge as inappropriate candidates for sterilization is

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significant since rates of childlessness, and presumably childless women seeking sterilization, have been growing since the 1970s” (Denbow 2014: 112).

Each of these examples have a running theme throughout: women. As the terms parents and family/families in each of these articles also involve and include women, children are consistently associated with women. This point is further emphasised through the term child(ren) being commonly attached to women through the terms childbearing/giving birth\(^ {38}\) and adoption\(^ {39}\). For instance, a quote found in Cattapan, Hammond, Haw, and Tarasoff’s (2014) article on egg-freezing states: “What does it mean to pay to extend my childbearing capacity? Is it worth paying more than I can afford to ensure that if I want my “own” children, I can have them?” (242). Although it is not stated exactly who says this in the article, it is expressed in the sentence before this statement that the authors of the article want to “include the voice of sexual minority women, single women, and low-income women in the egg freezing debate” (ibid) and it is clear that it is not a male talking as they say, “my childbearing”. In Jennifer Denbow’s (2014) article on sterilisation as a cyborg performance, the term child(ren) continues to be related to the term women in the topic of childbearing: “Because those who have studied the characteristics of women who get sterilized tend to assume that it is a procedure undergone when a woman has completed her childbearing, there are no accurate assessments of the numbers and characteristics of women without children who seek sterilization” (107-8).

The theme of women continues. The topic of children being raised by women or cared for by women is another common topic throughout these articles. It is mentioned in the majority of articles, with 26 out of 38 articles including these matters\(^ {40}\). This discourse is most commonly included via the terms child care, childrearing, and child raising. For example, Barclay (2014) says: “And for all mothers, whether their children were disabled or nondisabled, they leaned on close-knit community networks for assistance with childcare” (117). Three key words can be found in this sentence – mothers, children, and childcare. A common link is found between

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\(^ {39}\) Leinaweaver 2013; Raleigh 2016; Segal 2010; Tabbush and Gentile 2013; Trembanis 2017.

all three words throughout many of the articles that include the term child(ren) in the title and/or topics/keywords. Another example of this can be found in Talia Esnard’s (2016) essay on mothering and entrepreneurship where she states that: “At the heart of these considerations are expectations of sacrifice, centrality of children to their person and business-related engagement and decision-making processes, care for the child’s psychological and moral well-being, and the security of their children” (120). This sentence is written under the subtitle “Women and Mothers-in-Business”. Therefore, although the terms mother and women are not found in the sentence, it is clear whose children are being referred to here. This brings me to my next point.

The word most commonly found alongside child(ren) in these articles is “their” – as in, “their child(ren)”. There are also variations of this with “her child(ren)”, “one’s child(ren)”, “my child(ren)”, “his child(ren)”, “your child(ren)”, and “our child(ren)” – each positioning the child as the attachment of an adult. “Their child(ren)” is used in 28 articles out of 38. In many articles this clause element is used continuously throughout the article. The vast majority of times that this term is used, “their” refers to a mother or a woman. “Her children” is also dominant throughout the 38 articles, with 22 articles using this clause element, often multiple times within an article. There are only five articles (Cattapan, Hammond, Haw, and Tarasoff 2014; Denbow 2014; Meiners 2015; Ott 2011; Swetnam 2016) in which “their child(ren)” or “her child(ren)” are not used at all. Both Cattapan, Hammond, Haw, and Tarasoff (2014) and Denbow’s (2014) articles focus upon the topic of reproduction: having/not having or bearing children. Thus, the terms “their child(ren)” and “her child(ren)” are not likely to be used as the children are not yet born; they are not yet “anybody’s”. Kate Ott (2011) discusses mothers and sons, with the term “parent” or more specifically “parenting” being more commonly used throughout her essay in association with the term child(ren). In Erica Meiners’ (2015) essay about sexual violence, adults are not the main subject of the essay. And Susan Swetnam (2016) discusses the gendered child “girl” throughout the essay with the term child(ren) being used very few times. Thus, “their child(ren)” is not used. Furthermore, the clause element “his child(ren)” only appears in five articles (Johnson 2007; Kizenko 2013; Lightweis-Goff 2015;
Trembanis 2017; Yousef 2011); one time in each of these fives article. This further supports the finding that the term child(ren), in feminist studies, is not only attached to adults but more specifically, to women.

The Health and Well-Being of Children: It’s in Their Best Interest

Specific topics and discourses, as well as specific terms, are commonly attached to the term child(ren) in these articles. Topics predominantly include: the medicalisation of children; children’s health and welfare; and child abuse and neglect43. Each of these topics is related to an overall topic of the health and well-being of children. This is included in a multitude of ways. For example, Teresa Segal (2010) talks about the value placed on healthy children when adults seek IVF: “…potential mothers (or parents) value only “healthy,” genetically “normal” and nondisabled children, which is a contractually necessary condition for access to IVF procedures…” (92). Hong Zhang (2007) asks, in her article about young women (daughters) in rural China coming of age and having a family: “Does a low fertility rate affect parental care for and investment in the well-being of their children on the basis of gender?” (674). In Lee’s (2015) article on child welfare practice, she states that, “It is not unreasonable for child welfare officials to be concerned that children could be harmed if a mother’s attempts to stop violence within the relationship are not successful” (76). Therefore, as can be seen in the last example, not only are specific topics attached to the term child(ren) in these articles, some of the articles themselves are concerned specifically with topics of the health and well-being of children. In this topical area, children are situated specifically as persons in need of care from an adult. Their health and well-being is the concern of somebody else – the adult. A common discourse surrounding this point is that children are innocent and vulnerable, and things must be done in their best interests (Oakley 2002: 16). As Oakley explains, the language of “in their best interests” has been used for women as well as children. Children’s welfare (and previously women’s44) tends to be judged upon what other people think they want or need, rather than on what the children themselves express that they want or need (ibid); if they are even asked of their wants or needs. This understanding of children is central in creating them as not-yet subjects, as children are not “taken seriously”. They are, instead, assumed to be incapable of making competent decisions to such a degree that they are often not even consulted in decisions

44 I use the term “previously” here loosely as the language of “in their best interests” continues to be used for women in many circumstances and contexts.
regarding their welfare or needs. This understanding of children coincides with the representation of children as vulnerable and easy targets to become victims, which Thorne (1987) states that they have been understood as in more recent history; whereas at other points in history they have been understood as threats to adult society (89-91). In Western societies, representations of children have yoyoed between these two discourses. For example, on the one hand, children, “especially from working-class households, were seen as potential threats to social order” (90). And on the other hand, children have been represented as innocent and vulnerable victims who are in need of protection from adults (particularly parents) who abuse and neglect them (ibid). The articles I have analysed in this thesis, on the whole, show children to be currently situated as vulnerable and in need of care and protection by adults. These articles then contribute towards the construction of the adult/child binary which follows a similar hierarchical system of power as the socio-discursively constructed masculine (strength/competency)/feminine(vulnerability/incompetency) binary, as already discussed; situating the competent adult against the vulnerable, innocent and incompetent child. However, in these articles, the adults are almost always women – although the term adult itself is not used. Nonetheless, “women” (in the context of these articles, usually mothers) are largely discussed as competent and capable – as mothers caring for and raising their children (often amongst other things). In these cases, women’s subjectivity is shown through their competency and capability of looking after children (and in some cases looking after other people or things). It is shown through their experience and “doing”, which, as expressed previously, breaks the correlation between the adult/child and masculine/feminine binaries, leaving the adult/child binary of competent/in need of care clearly intact, but blurring the binary of masculine(competent)/feminine(incompetent). In this context, the term child(ren) connotes a group of people who are the object of care. As care is one of the central debates of gender and gender relations in feminist studies, children here become objects in the construction of gender rather than gendered beings themselves. The same could be said to apply for other topics that are central to conceptualisations of gender, such as work and the division of labour.

**Education and Child Development**

The term child(ren) is also attached to the topic of education that fits with the discourse of socialisation, with sixteen out of 38 articles including a discussion on children and education

or mentioning children in relation to education or school. For example, Blum (2011) states that, “While the medical system, especially neuroscience, may hold renewed authority over children’s troubles, the organization of their daily lives and gateway to future opportunities remain in schools” (942). Sophia Pandya (2014) states that, “According to Boyle (2004, 31), Qur’anic schooling for children provides a way in which both male and female parents in Yemen, many of whom are illiterate, can still feel authoritative over their young children’s schooling because it is a subject in which they have some knowledge through general exposure to Islam” (70). In this sentence, the term young is included before children, giving at least some indication of age. However, on the whole, very little detail about the children themselves is given in these articles, making it difficult to discern who the term child(ren) refers to. As can be seen in the Blum example, children are thought of in terms of their future selves and their present selves are of seemingly little interest (James and Prout 1997: 4). This discourse of children as adults-in-the-making has become prominent in many disciplines, including feminist studies, through the prominence of developmental psychology (for example, psychoanalysis). This discourse is also related to child development which is prominent in these articles46. For example, in Tabbush and Gentile’s (2013) essay on women in prison, child development is explained to be the reason why children are allowed to remain with women in prison under the age of four:

“The state envisions women whose children are under four years of age as essential to biological reproduction, and the prison regime emphasizes a form of mothering concentrated on bodily exchanges, most notably breast-feeding. The reproductive work of the body is constructed as a priority for the child’s development, irrespective of the social and material conditions of incarceration in which it takes place” (emphasis mine 137).

Furthermore, this is another example of a detail (although vague) of the child’s identity being given in order to share more information about the adult the child is attached to. It does not itself tell us anything more about the child. Another example of the relationship between the terms child(ren) and child development can be taken from Jessaca Leinaweaver’s (2013) essay on practice mothers that discusses women students practicing motherhood on “practice babies”. Leinaweaver states that, “The theory that a “College-Bred Baby at H. E. House Thrive on Mothering by Relays” (Winnipeg Free Press 1937, 11), offered here by a newspaper headline, posited that multiple mothers with high-caliber training would not only maintain the child’s

developmental course but improve it” (*emphasis mine* 420-1). Each of these examples shows how children are thought of in terms of their future selves, with children’s identity characteristics again being included only when it is needed as further description for the adult’s situation. With sixteen out of 38 articles discussing children in relation to education, a clear connection between children and education, as well as development, can be seen. This supports the point that Thorne (1987) makes that children are largely thought of as “learners” in both traditional sociology and in feminist studies (91) and it shows that this discourse remains prominent thirty-one years on from Thorne’s essay.

**Summarising Children: Constructing Children in the Name of the Adult**

To briefly summarise, I asked as my main question for my analysis on children: *How are children understood and discussed in feminist studies (journal articles)?* In order to answer this question, as discussed in my thesis outline, I have first analysed: how prominent the term child(ren) is in feminist studies journal articles; how child(ren) are positioned within these articles; whether child becomes a master status or if other characteristics of theirs are acknowledged; as well as which topics, discourses, and terms are associated with children in these articles. According to my analysis on children, there is a particularly strong focus upon adult mothers and women in the feminist studies articles that include children. Even though it is the term child(ren) that is found in the title and/or keywords/topics of these articles, children are somewhat secondary to adults in these articles; in particular, to adult mothers and women. The vast majority of these articles are not really concerned with children. Instead, they are interested in the (usually female) adults in the articles. Children are included in order to discuss these adults. They become identity builders of other people; with their own identity constructed simply as *children*. Therefore, in these articles they have very little identity of their own. Almost everything about their identity is reliant upon the adult they are attached to.

They are usually not raced or classed, or labelled with a sexuality. If their race/ethnicity, skin colour, class or sexuality might be considered identifiable, this is only indicated through suggestive identifying markers of the adult that they are attached to. These markers are given indirectly and can only really be constructed through presumption on the reader’s part. An example of this can be shown in Garrett-Peters and Burton’s (2016) article which focuses upon a discussion of kin support among low-income rural Black mothers where the race/ethnicity of the children of these mothers might be assumed to be identifiable in the blackness of their mothers. The race/ethnicity or skin colour of the child is, however, never stated. The identity marker of sexuality is only discussed in two articles in relation to children (Toulalan 2014;
Meiners 2015) and in both of these articles, although children are understood as “having” a sexuality, this sexuality is never named.

Gender is a slightly different matter. Children are gendered in 21 articles47. This occurs between one and nine times in eighteen of the articles, and a considerable amount of times in Jennifer Stith’s (2015), Susan Swetnam’s (2016), and Sarah Toulalan’s (2014) articles. The term child(ren) itself is rarely associated with gender as the gender terms “girl” and “boy” already imply that they are children. However, Stith’s (2015) article on child brides does use the clause element “girl child” several times to state that the “girl child” is missing from religious doctrines. The lack of identity markers afforded to these children is a strong indicator of their not being understood as subjects in feminist studies. This assumption is further supported by children being attached to the topics of education and development. They remain situated in their becoming, rather than in their being, where the focus is drawn to their future selves rather than their present selves (James and Prout 1997). Their positioning as children of women further emphasises children as subjects in waiting; not-yet subjects. These constructed attachments allow for children’s subjectivity to be ignored, as children of women are always seen in relation to their adult carer; objects of adult care. The vulnerable and incompetent child is both constructed and reified through this persistent attachment.

Furthermore, the connection between age and children is somewhat lost in these articles. Age is mostly found in the form of the adult/child binary. Age is therefore constructed into two age groups: adult and child – where adults (who are gendered) tend to be carers (usually women) or abusers (usually men) of children and children (who remain mostly ungendered) tend to be children of women. It becomes clear that the main connection found between children and age is that “children” is an age group. Children themselves are rarely associated with the term age and never associated with the topic of age in these articles. They are often not aged themselves and when they are, this information is usually only given in order to tell us something more about the adult that is the centre of discussion. Therefore, children remain under the master status of children with all the connotations that come with that master status being continuously reified. These connotations are tied up with a Western conceptualisation of childhood where a joyful, care-free childhood is discursively advocated. This joy and freedom is intertwined with an unachievable notion of “complete innocence” that not only means restricting children’s

experiences, but it also means denying experiences they might have that do not fit into this notion of childhood – in order to maintain the sanctity of childhood. Lee Edelman (2004) discusses this in his book *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*. He suggests that the image of what he calls “the Child” is used in political debate as a tool to fight for a “better” future. This image involves containing children and the concept of childhood in a discursive state of innocence; incapable, and in need of care from adults. In the articles that I have analysed here, this image is dominant in the concept of childhood and the term children.

Children of most, if not all, ages have life experiences separate from their mothers and separate from adults in general (Jans 2004), but these experiences have not been shown in the vast majority of these articles. In Stith’s (2015) article on *Child Brides*, however, she talks about the experiences of girls as child brides in patriarchal societies and of girls’ first communions in Catholic societies. Furthermore, Stith includes some dialogue with girl child brides she has spoken to in Yemen, for example (93). Therefore, the persistent inclusion of the gender term girl in this article seems to allow a degree of subjectivity to be acknowledged, in terms of children’s experiences. Nonetheless, this does not follow through in Toulalan’s (2014) article where the terms girls and boys are used similarly to the term child(ren) throughout the other articles in this sample and the term girl in Swetnam’s (2016) article mostly refers to the Girl Scout organisation. Interestingly, in Swetnam’s article, like in the case of Walkerdine’s *Daddy’s Girls* (1997) that Castañeda (2001) refers to, Swetnam discusses her own childhood memories of being a Girl Scout, as well as her adulthood memories of taking her friend’s daughter on girl scouting trips. She does not, however, include any input from the friend’s daughter that she went with. This means that the inclusion of gender terms (i.e. girl or boy) can, but does not necessarily, allow for the acknowledgment of the subjectivity of children.

**Gender**

In my analysis of children, I have argued that although children are sometimes gendered in some of these texts, “child” remains their master status and their subjectivity remains largely unacknowledged because of this. Furthermore, the matters of age and children are somewhat distant from each other even though this research began with both age and child(ren) as keywords in a search of feminist studies’ journal articles. In this section, I use three canonical texts that theorise gender as a basis in my analysis of the concept of gender. In each text, a different approach is taken in the theorisation of gender. Butler’s ([1990] 2002) first chapter in *Gender Trouble* problematises the category of women by analysing “the subject” (especially the subject of sex, desire, and gender), as well as the politics of representation in feminist
studies. Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) focus on hegemonic masculinity, evaluating the criticisms it has gained since it was first introduced as a concept. They review which aspects are important to retain in the concept and which should be discarded. Finally, West and Zimmerman (1987) theorise gender as an interactional practice, which they refer to as *doing gender*. With this in mind, I look at the place of children within these texts and outline four points of query that contribute towards the formation and maintenance of gender as an adult-centred concept: the feminist subject and politics of representation; the use of the terms women and men in feminist studies; adding-in children in constructions of gender; and theories of socialisation in an adult society.

**Gender, the Feminist Subject, and a Politics of Representation**

“Feminist is formed with the word “femme”, “woman”, and means: someone who fights for women” (Wittig 1993: 105).

Women are “the subject” of feminism (Butler [1990] 2002: 4). Therefore, as expressed previously, one might argue that if feminism is concerned with women, it is unnecessary to concern one’s self with the place of children in the feminist concept of gender. However, in a feminist poststructuralist approach, feminism is also concerned with problematising the category of women and deconstructing “the subject” of feminism. Furthermore, as Braidotti (1994: 234) states, women’s studies does not concern women alone but has come to stand for a set of values and a system of representation that affects the community as a whole. Although Butler ([1990] 2002) states that women are “the subject” of feminism, she goes on to critique this point in the first chapter of her book *Gender Trouble* by problematising the category women. Nonetheless, her focus remains on the term women as she does this. This might sound like an obvious point of analysis. However, I mention it here in order to bring attention to the absence of an explicit analysis of the category of age in this problematisation of the category women, specifically in regard to children and to our understanding of the relationship between the gendered child and the gendered adult. What I mean here is that Butler’s problematisation of the category of women does not question the boundary between the gendered child and gendered adult and it does not include an explicit analysis of the category of women in relation to age. Instead, dynamics of age are somewhat taken for granted and the social construction of age is ignored. The inclusion of age or children and their place in the adult/child binary is rarely, if at all, found in the deconstruction of “the subject” in feminist studies or in the

48 Or a feminist postmodern (anti-)epistemological approach.
problematisation of the category of women. Instead, this point has been somewhat overlooked. In order to problematise or deconstruct the concept of gender, we need to consider it from multiple angles. In my opinion, this involves including children and the matter of age as a social construction into our conceptualisations.

Butler ([1990] 2002) only mentions age once in her first chapter on “the subject” of feminism, where she states: “It would be wrong to assume in advance that there is a category of “women” that simply needs to be filled in with various components of race, class, age, ethnicity, and sexuality in order to become complete” (20-21). But even here, the inclusion of age does not allow for the inclusion of children because of the term women. Furthermore, Butler does not turn to the category of age when she discusses axes of power relations that constitute “identity” (7). Moreover, she does not explicitly include children in her theorisations of ontology and language, where their inclusion might seem most aptly placed. The place of children is not touched upon in her discussion on taken-for-granted truths in the category of women or in her discussion on a feminist politics of representation. Indeed, children are nowhere to be found in the first chapter, leading the reader to conclude that, in Butler’s opinion, children are not subjects of sex, gender, or desire. However, as she does not explicitly state her opinion on the matter of children as subjects in this chapter, this assumption is mostly inferred through the lack of mention of children and through brief encounters with the matter of children in her later work. In Kathy Dow Magnus’ (2006) work on the unaccountable subject, she discusses Butler’s understanding of children and subjectivity in *The Psychic Life of Power* (1997). Magnus explains that, in Butler’s opinion, one becomes a subject once they have denied their passionate attachment. Women become subjects through resistance that allows for independence from their “caretakers” – men – those who had, in particular, access to financial stability and rights in decision making (such as suffrage) in regard to society. Therefore, children, must deny their dependence upon their caretakers – adults – in order to become subjects. As many children are considered not yet developed enough to deny this dependence on adult caretakers, they are not-yet subjects. Butler’s theory of subjectivity allows for the separation of women and children because the binaries of adult/child, masculine/feminine are broken apart as women gain (financial, amongst other things) independence and begin to be “taken more seriously”. They claim their status as adults. However, as Magnus (2006) points out, this theory of subjectivity ignores the interdependency of relationships. It is related to the notion of “doing” where “the

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Although I focus upon the adult/child binary and children in this thesis, I believe that the matter of age in general must be more seriously brought into theories of gender.
one who acts is the one who is detached from others” (Magnus 2006: 86). “Doing” is separated from “learning” as one is independent in their “doing”, whereas one’s “learning” relies upon others.

Butler’s ([1990] 2002) statement that the very notion of the subject is intelligible only through its appearance as gendered (44) draws us towards the assumption that children are not subjects when they are referred to as “children” or “child” but that they could be when they are gendered “girl” or “boy”. This suggests that it is the term child(ren) itself that creates the child as without subjectivity. However, as can be seen in the three articles in my analysis on children that use the terms girl and/or boy consistently (Stith 2015; Swetnam 2016; Toulalan 2014), it is not necessarily the case that children’s subjectivity becomes intelligible through their appearance as gendered. Furthermore, as I have previously mentioned, Butler ([1990] 2002) states that in some social theories of gender, gender can be understood as “a relation among socially constituted subjects in specifiable contexts” (15). In both of these statements, “the subject” and the concept of gender are linked. Therefore, this suggests that the construction of children as not-yet subjects and the acknowledgment of both women and men as subjects in feminist studies works towards the formation of the concept of gender as adult-centred.

In feminist studies, according to Butler ([1990] 2002), representation serves two purposes: 1) “[it] serves as the operative term within a political process that seeks to extend visibility and legitimacy to women as political subjects…” (3); and 2) it is the “normative function of a language which is said either to reveal or to distort what is assumed to be true about the category of women” (3-4). Both of these points end up having the effect of maintaining a strong relationship between the concept of gender and the adult. In the first point, the focus is on maintaining the category of women – extending visibility and legitimacy to women as political subjects. This strand of feminist theories differs to that of postmodern/poststructuralist theories that aim to deconstruct the category of women. Feminist theories that might be labelled as materialist feminism or theories of sexual difference, for example, look to develop a language that represents embodied women and encourages their political visibility. This language works to exclude anyone who does not fit into representations of the term women (Butler [1990] 2002: 4) as, in these theories, it is considered of vital importance to centre “real-life” women and their experiences in feminist theory in order to move past masculinist notions of the world (Braidotti 1994: 174). Therefore, children are excluded in representation as the term women is placed above everything else in an attempt to put an end to masculine-centred knowledge. However, in the second point, there is the possibility to remove the focus from the term women. This
could be achieved by looking “outside” of the term women, or at the peripheral of the term, by including age into the problematisation of the category of women, specifically in regard to children and the transitional period between child and adult.

Let us think about this point for a moment. It seems clear that the terms women and men refer to gendered adults; therefore, they exclude children who have their own gender terms (in a binary gender system, girl and boy). However, because the child is not specific\(^{50}\), they are always on the border of the gendered adult term (women or men), waiting to take their place “within” the respective term. This suggests that there is a border or boundary that, at some point, the child is expected to cross in order to become an adult. However, in reality, this border is not set in a specific temporal location even though, within society, we claim it to be by placing a legal age upon the transition from childhood to adulthood\(^ {51}\). Instead, there is a period (or perhaps various smaller periods) of transition which we refer to by different names (Arnett 2000; Côté 2000; Galland 2003) and which is highly debated in terms of its markers and so forth in various sociological disciplines (Baker 1984; Côté 2000; Arnett 2000; Galland 2003; Arnett 2004; Benson and Furstenberg 2006; Blatterer 2007; Macmillan 2007; King 2012). It might seem obvious to refer to this transitional period as adolescence and assume that it begins with puberty and ends at the age of eighteen when we are ready to make our way in the world as competent, complete adults. However, the much debated markers of adulthood (or for that matter, perhaps, markers of childhood) show us that this period of transition is messy and somewhat unresolved. Therefore, this already instils in us the understanding that the terms women and men have a whole host of complexities related to their “becoming”. To further complicate this matter, gender terms that are specific to the adolescent (or those deemed in a period of transition between child and adult) do not exist in the English language. Although there is a variety of terms used for the period that has been labelled as a period “in-between” childhood and adulthood (Weller 2006), there is no such variety of gender terms. Instead, the adolescent remains gendered under the same terms as the gendered child (girl/boy). In my opinion, this lack of gender terms for the so-called “in-between” (ibid) period of transition means that, in gender studies, the visibility of this period suffers and its inclusion into gender theories becomes virtually non-existent. In other words, although it might seem clear that the terms women and men exclude children because they refer to gendered adults, it is not actually

\(^{50}\) What I mean by this is that “child” becomes a master status that seems to refer only to their becoming adult. The child is understood as that which comes before the adult and only as that which comes before the adult. In other words, they are situated in a permanent state of becoming.

\(^{51}\) This legal age is commonly placed at 18 years old.
clear where the gendered child ends and the gendered adult begins. This contributes towards the ambiguity of these terms and, therefore, towards the ambiguity of gender as a concept. However, this lack of clarity around the matter of age and gender has found little space within gender studies and when age is included in gender theories, because the very term women remains the focus, the transitional period between child and adult is largely ignored. It is, therefore, in my opinion, necessary to look “outside” of (or on the peripheral of) the term women when problematising gender and also when problematising the category of women itself.

**Language in Feminist Studies: Women and Men**

Although the term women is particularly prominent in feminist studies, the term men is also widely used, usually as a relational term to women (Scott 1986) and in men and masculinity studies. In all three of the texts that I have analysed here, the terms women and men are more prominent than the terms girls and boys (West and Zimmerman 1987; Butler [1990] 2002; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005); in Butler’s text especially. Although children are included (as girls and boys) in both Connell and Messerschmidt’s and West and Zimmerman’s theorisations of gender, they are not included in vital points of the text that discuss the formation of gender. In Connell and Messerschmidt’s article, children (particularly boys) are included extensively in this text – certainly in comparison to many other texts in feminist studies. However, Connell and Messerschmidt’s statement that “…‘masculinity’ represents not a certain type of man but, rather, a way that men position themselves through discursive practices” (emphases mine 841), puts men front and centre of the gender concept of masculinity. In West and Zimmerman’s text the same occurs as they include girls and boys but then make statements such as: “We contend that the “doing” of gender is undertaken by women and men whose competence as members of society is hostage to its production” (emphasis mine 126). It is the use of the terms women and men in these statements that exclude children.

Language used in feminist studies, particularly the consistent use of the term women and men, maintains the concept of gender in the image of the adult. Not only are women “the subject” of feminism, the concept of gender begins with the adult; or as Thorne puts it: “…children become shaped by and inducted into the (adult) sex/gender system” (1987: 92). Therefore, in feminist studies, gender begins with women and men. Beauvoir’s statement that “[o]ne is not

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52 Although it is clearly important to acknowledge other gender identities in feminist studies besides from the binary adult genders of women and men, I would still argue that the concept of gender, in current dominant conceptualisations in feminist studies, begins with women and men.
born, but rather becomes, woman” ([1949] 1981: 295) shows the significance and centrality of woman (an adult gender) in theorisations of gender, particularly as this statement has become one of the most well-known statements in feminist history. The importance of the term women to theorisations of gender is further supported by Scott’s assertion that “gender” has sometimes been used as a synonym for “women” (1056) and that the inclusion of men in this term occurred around the 1970s when it was included in the feminist concept of gender as a relational term to women (1054). Therefore, the association between gender and the terms men and, in particular, women is clear. In feminist studies’ discussions on gender, the terms women and men are used to such a great extent that an immediate and unwavering image of the adult is installed in our imaginations at the centre of the concept of gender. This representation proceeds to grow stronger as this point remains largely unchallenged.

Furthermore, due to restrictive language and the consistent use of the term women (and to a lesser degree, men) in feminist studies, prominent gender discourses end up representing adults even when there is a capacity for them to represent children. For example, West and Zimmerman explain that in Western societies, “the accepted cultural perspective on gender views women and men as naturally and unequivocally defined categories of being […] with distinctive psychological and behavioural propensities that can be predicted from their reproductive functions” (128). Here, gender is immediately associated with the adult, largely through the use of the terms women and men. In these instances, when specific discourses are used alongside the terms women and men in gender theories (or in critiques of gender theories), both the concept of gender and the discourse used as an explanation for gender become adult-centred. The discourse of predicting psychological and behavioural propensities from reproductive functions of women and men, which is related to biological essentialist understandings of gender, is commonly problematised in feminist studies (see for example Wittig 1976; West and Zimmerman 1987; Scott 2001; Butler [1990] 2002). However, in these cases, the relationship between reproductive functions and the adult is not critiqued and the terms women and men continue to be used in the majority of texts that discuss the relationship between gender and reproductive functions. Therefore, the language of “women and men” works to restrict our imaginations in gender discourses. It might be argued that when reproductive functionality is discussed in relation to women and men, children who have the capacity for reproductive functions might then be considered under the terms women or men. However, I would argue that we would not in any real seriousness refer to them this way and the terms women or men would not, in any real seriousness, be used to include them in these
discussions. This means that the terms women and men are rather associated with adulthood (which begins, in legal terms, at the age of 18 in most cases) than with reproductive functionality.

Referring back to what I have discussed in the *Gender, “the Subject”, and a Politics of Representation* section, confusion arises here through a lack of theorisation on age and through the constructed adult/child binary that ignores the period of adolescence which exists in this “in-between” space where one is physiologically no longer a child but not yet an adult. As stated previously, adolescence has no gender terms of its own, which leaves it in a state of difference with no gender language to differentiate it. Therefore, it often remains attached to childhood rendering it largely invisible in gender discourse. However, in my opinion, the inclusion of children (as a term including adolescents) alongside the adult in theorisations of gender would be greatly beneficial to our understanding of gender. It is particularly in relation to adolescents (or more specifically post-pubescent) that the consistent use of the terms women and men become particularly problematic in feminist studies, especially when discourses that can be related to adults and children are centred in gender theories. However, it should also be noted that, as some children (pre-pubescent) are automatically excluded from certain discourses due to the very nature of the topic being discussed (in this example, reproductive functionality), these children are not excluded from conceptualisations of gender through gender nouns, but instead, through the discursive construction of gender. Therefore, when the terms women and men are used to relate gender to specific discourses children are inadvertently excluded from the concept of gender through a restrictive use of language and the discourses that we use to theorise and problematise gender constructions.

**Including Children in the Construction of Gender**

As already expressed, Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) include children in their discussion on hegemonic masculinity. However, the age of these children remains largely unspecified. Connell and Messerschmidt are not specifically concerned with age. They refer to the age group of teenage boys on one occasion and use the term young alongside men and women a handful of times. Otherwise, indications of age are only given through the aged gender terms women, girls, men, and boys or through research settings such as high schools or secondary schools that give some indication of the age groups of the children discussed. Nonetheless, children as girls and boys are included in the concept of gender by acknowledging their subjectivity

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53 Furthermore, the relationship between adults and reproductive functionality is not simplistic and should not be taken for granted, as our reproductive functions change as we age.
through acknowledging them as persons who are capable of constructing masculinities: “Similar processes of incorporation and oppression may occur among girls and women who construct masculinities […]” (emphasis mine Connell and Messerschmidt 2005: 848). Furthermore, the girl child is acknowledged here alongside adult women. Therefore, although they are treated as separate social groups – which is useful to do here as power relations between the two groups can then be theorised – the possibility of difference between adult and child is also taken into account. In another example, Connell and Messerschmidt state that: “Clearly, specific masculine practices may be appropriated into other masculinities, creating a hybrid (such as the hip-hop style and language adopted by some working-class White teenage boys and the unique composite style of gay “clones”)” (2005: 845); and “Also well supported is the original idea that hegemonic masculinity need not be the commonest pattern in the everyday lives of boys and men. Rather, hegemony works in part through the production of exemplars of masculinity (e.g., professional sports stars), symbols that have authority despite the fact that most men and boys do not fully live up to them” (2005: 846). However, although there are several points in Connell and Messerschmidt’s essay where children are included in the conceptualisation of hegemonic masculinity (and therefore, gender), the foundation of the essay continues to remain loyal to the gendered adult, namely men. When topics such as homosexuality are introduced in discussions about how the hierarchy of masculinities is constructed the focus remains on men and children are nowhere to be found: “The idea of a hierarchy of masculinities grew directly out of homosexual men’s experience with violence and prejudice from straight men” (831). The same applies when Connell and Messerschmidt discuss hegemonic masculinity as a pattern of practice (in other words, doing gender) that “allowed men’s dominance over women to continue” (832). When power relations are theorised in gender, it is the power relations between men and women that are most prominently discussed, and power relations between adults and children or between gendered children are given less importance. Therefore, although there is clearly an intention to include children’s identities and experiences in the construction of hegemonic masculinities in Connell and Messerschmidt’s work, it is not enough to allow for the concept of gender to not be adult-centred.

**Theories of Socialisation in an Adult Society**

If gender is understood as “a relation among socially constituted subjects in specifiable contexts” (Butler [1990] 2002: 15), then it is important to understand the relationship between children and society, as well as children and “the subject”. As I have already discussed, this
way of understanding gender implies that one must be a subject in order to be acknowledged in the concept of gender. It is also implied here that one must be understood as already being “within” society in order to be considered a subject, and therewith, to be acknowledged in the concept of gender. As I have also stated previously in this thesis, children are discursively associated with learning and education. This can be seen in Connell and Messerschmidt’s article where children are often included within institutional settings such as schools when they are included in the concept of masculinity. For example, Connell and Messerschmidt talk about the necessity of policing men to reproduce hegemonic masculinity. They include boys into this discussion by pointing to Kimmel and Mahler’s (2003) and James Messerschmidt’s (2000) work on the teasing of boys in school for “sissiness” (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005: 844). Other examples of this are the inclusion of Simon Warren’s (1997) observations in a British elementary school which looks at different constructions of masculinity in classroom life (Connell and Messerschmidt’s 2005: 837) and Wayne Martino’s (1995) work that explores the construction of hegemonic masculinities in the English classroom (Connell and Messerschmidt’s 2005: 833). This persistent association between children and learning (particularly when few other associations to children are made in gender theories) emphasises children in their role as learners (of adult culture) (Thorne 1987: 89), solidifying them in their status as becoming – not-yet subjects. With children firmly grounded in theories of socialisation as not-yet subjects across feminist studies, the implication that children (in their status as not-yet subjects) are somehow “outside” of an adult society, waiting to gain entry, begins to take shape. Thorne (1987) lends support to this analysis in her assertion that “new members internalize culture and learn the rules of adult society” (emphasis mine 91).

Although some theorisations of society and subjectivity that look at the transition to adulthood can be found in sociology (see for example Galland 2003; Macmillan 2007; Blatterer 2007), few of these theorisations take a distinctively feminist approach. This is because feminist studies remains largely concerned with the adult (Thorne 1987)\(^5\). Furthermore, the transitional period of young people between childhood, adolescence, youth, and adulthood in general has been relatively neglected (Weller 2006) due to children and adults being mostly studied as separate social groups (Oakley 2002: 13). Therefore, the discipline of feminist studies remains unequipped with its own depth of knowledge on this matter. This leaves the matter of children and their relationship to society somewhat confused from a feminist perspective. This confusion can be seen in West and Zimmerman’s (1987) text on *Doing Gender*, where they

\(^5\) Although this is a reference from over thirty years ago, the point remains.
state that “[t]he categorization of members of society into indigenous categories such as “girl” or “boy,” or “woman” or “man,” operates in a distinctively social way” (emphases mine 133), thus creating a space for the gendered child “within” society – as members of society. However, even though their membership in society is acknowledged here, it is mostly observed in the capacity of learner throughout the article. For example, West and Zimmerman express that “[b]eing a "girl" or a "boy" […] is not only being more competent than a "baby," but also being competently female or male, that is, learning to produce behavioral displays of one's "essential" female or male identity” (emphasis mine 142). Children are never fully situated in feminist studies, perhaps due to the constant use of the terms women and men. Instead, they are included sporadically, often in the shape of what feels like a gesture of acknowledgment or in relation to school (or the family), for example, where it is their capacity to learn gender that is discussed and highlighted.

If Thorne’s (1987) statement that “new members internalize culture and learn the rules of adult society” (91) is taken seriously this would suggest that the act of learning for children leaves them unstable in their relationship to society; somehow teetering on the edge of adulthood and thus on the edge of society, waiting to gain entry once they have learned the rules of society. In reality, however, this learning never ends. We do not cease to learn once we are adults. We continue to internalise culture and adapt our identities accordingly. However, this point becomes muted by prominent discourses of developmental psychology which understand adulthood as the end-point of our psychosocial development (Blatterer 2007: 774). In West and Zimmerman’s (1987) theory of doing gender and Butler’s ([1990] 2002) theory of gender performativity, however, this point is taken up and developed upon. It is important to note here, nonetheless, the use of language in making this point. In both theories, children continue to be situated as learners of gender and adults as doers55 of gender. Although different verbs (learn and do) are used for children and adults, I would argue that “learning” and “doing” here are considerably similar acts56. This is supported by West and Zimmerman’s acknowledgment that the task of four to five-year-old children learning to produce behavioural displays of their “essential” female or male identity is very similar to Agnes’57 task in doing gender (142). The

55 In Butler’s ([1990] 2002) theory of performativity, she rather refers to this act as performance of gender.
56 A difference that could, however, be ascertained from Butler’s understanding of subjectivity in the Psychic Life of Power (1997) is that “doing” requires independence or separation (one to deny their passionate attachment). Therefore, “learning” could be considered rather more intersubjective.
57 Agnes is Harold Garfinkel’s (1967) case study who is a trans woman who was raised as a boy but adopted a female identity at the age of seventeen and underwent a sex reassignment operation several years later (West and Zimmerman 1987: 131). She is used as an example is West and Zimmerman’s (1987) essay to show how gender is created through interaction whilst at the same time structuring interaction itself.
use of the words “learning” for children and “doing” for adults, however, has an enormous impact on our understanding of children and adults as subjects in society. This gives the impression that children are somehow “outside” of society, learning in order to gain entry, whereas adults are “within” society, constituting society and structuring interaction by doing. Therefore, the specific use of the term “learner” for children, in contrast to “doer” for adult, not only constructs children as not-yet subjects who are yet to be taken seriously; it aids in the construction of the adult subject – those who are not children. It is this “being taken seriously” that allows for the adult to take their place at the centre of the concept of gender, constructing it in their image, according to their valued experiences.

**Summarising Gender: Including Children and Age into Theories of Gender**

To briefly summarise, in my analysis on gender, I asked: *If the concept of gender in feminist studies includes children, how are they included? Does this inclusion allow for the concept of gender to not be adult-centred or does the adult remain centred even when children are included?* According to my analysis on gender, a relationship between the concept of gender and the adult is maintained and strengthened through a politics of representation and, in particular, through a focus on the terms women and men when discussing gender. Although children are included at points in both Connell and Messerschmidt’s and West and Zimmerman’s conceptualisations of gender, this inclusion seems more of a gesture of acknowledgment of (some) children than a critical inclusion. It is not enough to allow for the removal of the adult from the centre of the concept of gender.

Age is not explicitly discussed as a critical category in any of the three texts. A lack of critical analysis on age in general in feminist studies means that the matter of age is also nowhere to be found as a discussion point alongside conceptualisations of gender and discussions involving children. Of course, age is already implied to some degree within the term children and within the gendered terms girls, boys, women, and men. However, age is not only a matter of *age categories* such as child or adult and it is not only a matter of *age periods* such as childhood, youth, adolescence, or adulthood. Age includes chronological, biological (functional), social, psychological and statistical age (Woodward 2006: 183). In feminist studies, the surface has barely been scratched when it comes to these matters, especially in relation to children and the concept of gender. Therefore, not only is it necessary to include discussions on age related transition periods – perhaps especially that of child to adult – in theorisations of gender, it is also necessary to include the matter of age in all of its nuances into
these theorisations and to critically analyse age in relation to gender with the adult/child binary in mind.

The notion of the adult – competent, capable, responsible, independent and so forth – is dominant in the terms women and men. It has long been related to men and masculinity (Thorne 1987: 95) but women and femininity have more commonly been related to the notion of child-likeness – incompetent, incapable, irresponsible, dependent and submissive. However, feminism has worked hard in many areas to eradicate this as an understanding of women – with women distancing themselves from children in many instances (Oakley 2002: 19-20) in order to assert their own subjectivity – the subjectivity that comes with being an adult. This production of knowledge and exercise of power by feminist scholars and activists alike has aided adult women in many ways but it has also, I would argue, reified children in a state of child-likeness. Furthermore, it has left adolescents on the cusp of a child-adult boundary in a state of betweenness that leans more towards a state of child-like than adult-like and allows for an adult/child binary to form around the concept of gender. This area of gender theory is, in my opinion, a crucial area to investigate.

**Conclusion**

I began this thesis with the working hypothesis that gender is an adult-centred concept in feminist studies. My main aim was then to understand how this centring might be formed and maintained. To do this, I queried the relationship between the concept of gender, age and children with three aims in mind: 1) to bring attention to a gap in feminist knowledge around the matter of age and gender; 2) to understand the place of children in, and complex relationship to, feminist studies knowledge production; and 3) to problematise the concept of gender in feminist studies as adult-centred.

Feminist knowledge production was a particularly prominent point of discussion in the previous research I have mentioned in this thesis. Although I did not find any research that dealt directly with the possibility of gender as an adult-centred concept, the research that I found in relation to this query explored the separation of knowledge production between women’s studies (or feminist studies) and children’s studies; feminist studies knowledge production in general being largely adult-centred; and the place of the child as Other to the presumed adult subject in feminist theories of the subject. In this thesis, I have attempted to work alongside these points of research by showing how one of the central concepts of feminist studies – gender – is itself adult-centred and how the concept of gender’s relationship to the
adult is deeply intertwined with a largely adult-centred production of knowledge in feminist studies in general.

I analysed the terms age and child(ren) in feminist studies in order to understand the place of children within this discipline. Beginning with my analysis of age, it became quickly apparent that age is not only included very little as a topic in feminist studies. It is also thoroughly under-theorised and largely evades critical analysis. The few brief theorisations that I found in my research are vague and more likely to focus on old age and the lack of research on old age in feminist studies. Furthermore, age in relation to children and gender both separately and in combination is unquestionably lacking. Language related to the category of age is limited, especially gender terms where the many nuances of gender/age are expected to fit into four terms – women, men, girl, boy. These limitations lead feminist scholars to use language in a way that: 1) often leaves children out of discussions on age entirely; 2) sometimes results in children being constructed as ageless and; 3) ignores varied realities of children’s, including adolescents, lives and instead constructs an adult/child binary that creates children as a homogenous group represented by seemingly unshakable connotations of innocence, incompetence, submissiveness, and vulnerability – the Other to the experienced, competent, dominant and capable adult. These connotations are not necessarily removed once the gender age terms girl and boy are used as there are no gender terms for adolescents (or for that matter, for a variety of age periods) and therefore there are no gender terms that acknowledge variations within the lifespan in the English language. This means that adolescents often remain marked by connotations placed upon young children in gender discourse as they are more likely to be referred to as girls and boys rather than women and men. Therefore, the use of the terms women and men, as well as the use of the terms girls and boys overlook the many nuances of age and allow for the concept of gender to be formed around the notion of the adult. However, in my opinion, although language is restrictive in these terms, it is certainly possible for feminist scholars to use language in a different way or to include further explanation of their use in order to avoid or at least lessen these issues.

Adults are always present in the term and topic of age, but children are not necessarily. However, the articles on old age included in my analysis draw particular attention to the point that this “adult” I speak of is a notion itself that lacks any great clarity. It too must be understood not as a fixed term but as a conceptualisation that has received very little attention – perhaps
even less than the term child(ren) – in feminist studies. This is perhaps especially due to the unmarked presence of the term adult where it is always implied but rarely stated through the explicit use of the term adult itself. Therefore, it is not only the notion of the child, the transitional period between childhood and adulthood, and the relationship between child and adult that need to be further theorised in feminist studies in regard to age and gender. It is important also to understand who or what the notion of “the adult” is in relation to other age periods; who it incorporates; how it is represented; and what it means in terms of gender, subjectivity, and society.

The use of the term age in particular to refer to old people reinforces an already strong relationship between the topic of age and the adult. This, alongside the point that age is greatly under-theorised in feminist studies, leaves the category of age firmly attached to the privileged term adult of the binary adult/child, where it remains unnuanced and the production of knowledge largely focuses upon one group: the adult – which is afforded heterogeneity precisely because adults are almost never referred to as adults and are instead acknowledged through multiple identity characteristics. This itself is related to gender as adults usually begin as gendered beings in feminist studies – usually women and men – and children often begin as children, ungndergendered. This has an effect on the construction of the concept of gender. Where the inclusion of age into theories of gender could help direct the focus towards the inclusion of children, age, instead, remains associated with the adult. Therefore, bringing children into conceptualisations of gender becomes less possible because if children are not present (because they are not present in age) they cannot influence conceptualisations of gender. This suggests that the matter of age in feminist studies needs to be thoroughly re-thought in order to understand these contradictions further. In my opinion, age needs to be theorised from new angles; angles that incorporate childhood, adolescence, youth, adulthood, and old age (including deep old age) in relation to gender, whilst thinking about the transitions between each period, as well as how this affects and what this means for conceptualisations of gender.

According to Oakley, in feminist theory, many scholars work to construct women as subjects separate from motherhood. However, the texts from my analysis that include the term child(ren) in the title and/or keywords/topics, which were mostly empirical research, are largely concerned with women as mothers. Therefore, when the terms women and child(ren) are both included in (empirical) feminist texts, women are often situated as mothers and children are

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58 There are some exceptions. See for example, Hearn (2018).
situated as *children of women*. They are then positioned as secondary to those women and are used as a tool to build the identities of the women discussed. The term child or children becomes a master status and acts as a silhouette, transparent of all other identity characteristics; to be constructed only from assumptions that may be garnered from the adult’s identity (such as race or class) to whom they are attached to. Therefore, the term child(ren) itself is used in such a way that creates them as *passive objects of care* without subjectivity. This status is reified through their attachment to topics of health and well-being, as well as through the discourses of *in their best interests* and *children as learners who are always in a process of socialisation*. As I have shown, these discourses are constructed and reproduced through the term child(ren) being consistently attached to the topic of education and through research on children often referring to them in the institutional setting of the school. According to my analysis, children are always constructed in relation to the adult, especially the adult carer. In terms of subjectivity, Butler suggests that the notion of the subject is intelligible only through an appearance as gendered. Therefore, according to this understanding, children discussed under the term child(ren) – therefore not appearing gendered – are not intelligible as subjects. However, according to my analysis, the use of the gender terms girl and boy only allows for a slight increase in the acknowledgment of subjectivity. The subjectivity of children remains largely unacknowledged even when gender terms are used instead of the term child(ren). Further research on this matter is important to undertake in order to understand the relationship between children and gender and the acknowledgment of subjectivity.

In feminist studies, subjectivity and the subject of feminism is highly debated, but one thing that remains fairly consistent in these debates is the use of the term women. The term women is both embraced and critiqued in feminist studies but the term itself remains a constant in both these cases. However, it remains under-theorised and unnuanced in regard to age and especially in regard to children. I have argued then that it is important to look “outside” of (or on the peripheral of) this term, particularly in critiques of the category of women, in order to gain a more nuanced and deeper understanding of conceptualisations of gender and the notion of the subject. The use of the term women (and men) works to omit children from topical areas that could include them; topical areas that also concern them, or at least concern some children – areas such as reproductive functionality, employment, dating and so on. In these circumstances, children are inadvertently excluded from conceptualisations of gender through this restrictive use of language. This results in discourses and topics (such as reproductive functionality) that become a part of the foundation of conceptualisations of gender remaining attached to the adult.
This ties back into what I have previously discussed about a lack of nuanced gender terms in the category of age. Then, both the embrace and critique of the category of women maintains gender as an adult-centred concept through the consistent use of the term women in its current state of under-theorisation in regard to age and in regard to the transitional period between childhood and adulthood. As I have shown in my analysis, theorisations of the boundary between the child and the adult must be prioritised in order to understand both the (gendered) child and the (gendered) adult further as we cannot “know” the (gendered) adult without “knowing” the (gendered) child.

The constructed binary of the child and the adult allows for the possibility of an “adult society” which children are separated from and socialised to “join”. Moreover, a persistent situating of children in their role as “learners” and adults in their role as “doers” further emphasises this split in society. It solidifies children in their status of becoming – not-yet subjects, which leads to the assumption that children are somehow “outside” of adult society. Their position in society or in relation to society is clearly confused and would greatly benefit from further research in feminist studies in order to learn more about the child’s relationship to the concept of gender through their relationship to society. This understanding of children as “learners” and adults as “doers” follows a similar pattern to that of the masculine/feminine binary that privileges Man in all its representation. For me, there is little difference between learning and doing. Learning is a process. Therefore, it does not end once we have “reached” adulthood and, in many ways, children are no more in a state of socialisation than adults are. We all continue to “learn” as we “do”. Society is in a constant state of transformation and our way of understanding it transforms with us as we go. Therefore, the separation of the adult and the child, which manifests itself in an adult/child binary and allows for the notion of society to be constructed as something “belonging” to the adult, contributes towards both the formation and maintenance of gender as an adult-centred concept because gender is conceptually constructed in accordance with societal norms, values, and expectations that are understood as being inherently “adult”. Gender is “taken seriously” when it is attached to the adult because the adult is taken seriously “within” society. This being “taken seriously” is then seen to be a vital component of subjectivity along with communication and experience. This component of subjectivity must be further researched in feminist studies in combination with communication and experience in order to understand further how children figure into conceptualisations of gender and subjectivity.
However, I do not mean to suggest that children currently have *no* place in the concept of gender. Children are discussed in relation to gender and as gendered beings. As I have shown, they are also, at times, included in gender theory as capable of constructing their own genders. However, they are yet to be *consistently included* in conceptualisations of gender and are often omitted from concluding statements of gender. Instead, they are included sporadically throughout texts that continue to centre the adult (women or men) as the focal point of their conceptualisation. This maintains the concept of gender in the image of the adult, where the adult remains central to the concept and the inclusion of children seems more of a gesture than a necessity to the conceptualisation. My point is that conceptualisations of gender are riddled with representations of the adult and that even when children are included in discussions on gender, already existing conceptualisations of gender within those discussions have been constructed largely in accordance with what is deemed important in the lives of adults. This is a similar point to the argument that has been put forward by Black feminists who assert that the term *women* is already embedded with connotations of whiteness and is therefore white-centric. Then, as I have shown, children, in terms of their experiences, are at times included in the construction of the concept of gender but these gestures of inclusion are not enough to allow for the concept of gender to not be adult-centred. The very foundations of this concept are constructed around the adult – or more specifically, around a *notion* of the adult (i.e. independent, responsible, competent, capable) as the adult itself is nuanced, intricate and heterogenous. Therefore, it should not only be women who are the concern of feminist studies. It is clearly important to look at the notion of the adult and the child in feminist studies in order to gain a deeper understanding of current conceptualisations of gender and to allow for new ways to theorise gender; ways that allow for diversity, transformation and change for the whole community.
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Problematising Conceptualisations of Gender in Feminist Studies: The Place of Age and Children in the Concept of Gender

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Abstract
Using a feminist poststructuralist approach as a guide, I begin this thesis with the working hypothesis that gender may be an adult-centred concept in feminist studies. This leads me to ask: If the concept of gender in feminist studies is adult-centred, how is this centring formed and maintained? To answer this question, I begin by splitting my analysis into three analytical sections: age, children, and gender. Although I include age, children, and gender into each section analysis, my main priority in the first two sections is to look at how feminist scholars discuss and use the terms age and child(ren). In the gender section, I use three canonical gender theory texts as the basis of my analysis, where I see how gender is discussed and conceptualised and how both children and age figure in these conceptualisations.

One of the main concerns of feminist poststructuralist theory is tackling binaries. However, with the category of age having been often taken for granted in feminist studies, and therefore under-theorised, the adult/child binary in the category of age remains largely unchallenged. Instead, where age has been investigated in terms of tackling binaries, the young/old binary has dominated but has remained centred around the adult; leaving children underacknowledged and under-theorised in feminist studies age discourse. This under-theorisation of children means that “child” remains a master status with seemingly unshakeable connotations of innocence, vulnerability, and incompetence. Children are those who are not adults and not-yet subjects. They are understood as being in constant need of care from the competent and complete adult. In this thesis, I show how these points, among others, contribute to both the formation and maintenance of the concept of gender as adult-centred.

Keywords
adult-centred, feminist studies, gender, age, children, subjectivity, power/knowledge, socio-discursive construction of age, adult/child binary, postmodern feminist (anti-)epistemology, feminist poststructuralism.