The preschool teacher, gender pedagogy and change.

Rethinking the Swedish preschool teacher and her work from the perspective of sexual difference theory.

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Introduction

When asked why she chose the preschool teacher occupations a friend of mine replied:

I saw the preschool teacher’s profession as a possibility, a platform, to actively work with ‘gender issues’ in a concrete and relevant way. I thought that: here I can make a contribution and be part of creating change, or help with the opening up of narrow norms, concerning for example sex and/or gender. [1]¹

This is a description that corresponds with why I ended up a preschool teacher as well. The desire to keep on learning about sex and/or gender, norms and possibilities for change through and in relation to my work is also what has driven me to go on studying gender and gender pedagogy.² It is also the reason why I started studying the master program Gender studies – Intersectionality and Change two years ago, that this thesis is the final result of. Far from delivering any “truths” about how to think about sex and/or gender in relation to preschool and pedagogical work, my studies have rather evoked more questions in relation to such work; what is change, and how to make it come about? What change is it that I am looking for? But also; how to understand the female pedagogue, just like me and my friend above, working in traditionally female workplace to provide change?

During my master studies I have encountered several different ways of thinking about sex and/or gender, equality and change. When studying gender equality in organisations a basic exercise for evaluating an organisation in terms of gender equality was presented (Wahl 2012). The exercise consisted in counting how many men and women there were in the particular organisation and to look at what tasks women and men as groups carried out, if they were separate and to what extent they were connected to traditionally female or male tasks. Being a preschool teacher I chose a preschool I had recently been working in for the exercise. As in most preschools in Sweden, all of those working in this particular preschool were female.³ Working in a preschool with small children furthermore contains several tasks that could be understood as traditionally female. In fact, to work as a preschool teacher could be considered traditionally female work in its entirety. In this small exercise, therefore, the workplace I had chosen failed to be considered gender equal. Actually it failed miserably. What is gender equality? Is the equal amount of men and women, doing approximately the same things the definition of gender equality? If so, is this enough of a vision for gender

¹ My translation. All quotes that are translated will be attached with a number and provided in their original form in Appendix 1, further on only indicated by their number in brackets.
² In short gender pedagogy could be described as pedagogical efforts for gender equality or equal possibilities for boys and girls in the preschool context.
³ In 2012 only 3% of those working in preschool in Sweden were men (Sverige Statistiska centralbyrån 2012: 41).
equality work? And could a workplace with mostly women, such as most Swedish preschools, ever be understood as gender equal?

For me, just like my friend above, to work in preschool has been a possible arena to work with change. That is, change in relation to how children are treated, what is expected of them and what is possible for them to become in relation to their sex and other axes of differentiation in the preschool setting. This type of work and these ambitions are often conceptualised as gender pedagogy or work for gender equality. What has been especially interesting and troubling for me is how those passionately working for such change, most often female preschool teachers, could, through their being female working with small children, be understood as gender equality failures from the perspective of gender equality as described above. In the same vein girls are often, in spite of the good intentions of gender pedagogy or efforts for gender equality in preschool, those that are seen as in need of intervention to become more “gender equal”. It was through these reflections upon gender equality, gender pedagogy, girls and preschool teachers that I started to look for other ways of thinking about gender equality and change in the preschool setting that would not reinforce images of girls and women as problematic. For this reason I eventually turned to sexual difference theory as a contrasting approach in relation to the theoretical and practical perspectives on sex and/or gender that are common in the Swedish preschool context. And this is also the theoretical perspective that I will employ throughout this thesis.

As is pointed out by Nordberg, writing on men in female dominated occupations, the Swedish gender equality discourse, with all of it’s good intentions, carries blind spots and exclusions just like other discourses that aims to better the society (Nordberg 2005: 340). In particular, I argue in line with other writers in the Swedish context, the gender equality discourse risks to produce a new set of norms for both children and adults to adapt to in order to be considered gender equal (Eideval & Lenz Taguchi 2011: 31, Lenz Taguchi 2011: 174; Nordberg 2005: 68). What is more, efforts for gender equality often in practice ends up in efforts for girls and women to change and become more “gender equal”, or in fact, more in line with a male norm (Ambjörnsson 2011: 35-36, 37, 39; Bodén 2011: 47; Delegationen för jämställdhet i förskolan 2006: 39, 69-70; Dolk 2013: 38; Lenz Taguchi 2011: 175; Nordberg 2005: 79, 327). Paradoxically gender equality thus often reinforces the male norm and that what is connected with girls or femininity is understood as “gender unequal”, especially so, when connected to actual girls or women. Thus girls wearing pink or taking an interest in “girly” things are sometimes read as problematic in the gender equality

*Gender pedagogy* as a pedagogical approach in Swedish preschools has developed during the last twenty years and should be seen as part of the ambitions for gender equality in preschools as required by the Swedish preschool curriculum (*Curriculum for preschool: Lpfö 98* 1998: 4). There are several pedagogical approaches to this kind of work with different underlying theoretical and practical assumptions but with the common aim to, with preschool researcher Dolk’s words; “create better conditions for children to live their lives without the restrictions that traditional and normative appreciation of the sexes could have” and to work for every child to “develop and reach their full potential regardless of their sex” (Dolk 2013: 16)[2]. The key book for me on different approaches and discussions on gender pedagogy has been the recent anthology *En rosa pedagogik* [A pink pedagogy] (Lenz Taguchi, Bodén, & Ohrlander, eds. 2011) produced through the research project named *Förskolan som jämställhetspolitisk arena* [Preschool as an arena for gender equality]. The different texts of this book give both an overview of different approaches to gender pedagogy as well as the ongoing critiques and developments throughout this field. It is also, to my appreciation, a book that is quite commonly read by practicing preschool teachers.

The relative success of gender pedagogy as a pedagogical field in preschools of Sweden is sometimes connected to a long history of both ambitions for social change and *normalisation* of children carried out through preschools (Lenz Taguchi & Eidevald 2011: 29). For me it has thus been of importance to think about the gender pedagogy in terms of normalisation and also the position of the preschool teacher as entangled in such processes. A key text in thinking about this has been Nordin-Hultman’s dissertation *Pedagogiska miljöer och barns subjektskapande* [Pedagogical environments and children’s subjectivity] (Nordin-Hultman 2004) where she discusses how certain views of children and normality materialises through the pedagogical environment in terms of materials, architecture, time and space.

Another important book in this field is *Emancipation och motstånd* [Emancipation and Resistance] (Lenz Taguchi 2000) where Lenz Taguchi does a genealogical reading and field work study concerning especially practices of documentation and observation as a practice in preschool. I take a special interest in Lenz Taguchi’s dissertation for two reasons; for one she discusses how normalising practices is part of the preschool legacy, and secondly, she also takes issue with the female history of the preschool and preschool work and its entanglement with appreciations of motherhood and femininity. Therefore her writing on preschool is close to my own interest in this thesis.
All of the sources referred to above and in general most writing on pedagogy and sex and/or gender in the Swedish context employ post-structuralist theory, most often drawing on Foucault and Butler.¹ I share this anchoring in a post-structuralist epistemology but differ in my interest for sexual difference theory. Since sexual difference theory is not a common approach in thinking about preschool and gender pedagogy it serves as a new lens to look upon the familiar scene for me. As noted by Braidotti, sexual difference theory and the Anglo-American gender theory, including Butler’s queer theory, represents, two conceptually different strands of thinking upon sexual difference (Braidotti 2002: 32). I do not see this thesis as the time or space for these differences to be carefully outlined, since this is quite a massive task and moreover not of particular interest for the aim of my thesis. However, one of the main points of divergence, that comes to matter in this thesis, lies in the importance granted of the feminine in the work to overcome the dichotomised understanding of the sexes. In gender theory the aim, in a simplified manner, could be described as to overcome the gender dichotomy altogether in favour of a gender free or post-gender position. Sexual difference theory on the other hand emphasises the need to invest in the feminine side of this binary as a strategy to “work through” and challenge the symbolic representation of women in particular, and difference in general, as of lack or lesser value (Braidotti 2002: 44; 2011: 140, 145). However, this is not to say that I do not take a great deal of inspiration from the scholars in the Swedish context writing from a different theoretical point of departure than my own. I would on the contrary like to underline the importance of not deciding upon any one specific theory, discarding all other perspectives, especially in pedagogical work. Therefore, instead of proposing sexual difference theory as a “new” perspective to take on in its entirety my main aim in this thesis has been to see how it might contrast some of the taken for granted understandings of the “gender issue” and gender equality in the Swedish context and what other readings of the preschool teacher and her work it can help me produce.

The gap I intend to fill through this thesis is thus to provide an example how thinking with sexual difference theory might function as an additional source of inspiration in critical thought upon the preschool context both in relation to gender pedagogical work and in relation to the female preschool teacher as such. But also to direct attention toward the women working in preschool, as stated by Nordberg:

   Whilst the male workers, their practices and masculinity formations both have been celebrated and critically examined, the female preschool teachers are not expected to be any kind of feminine role models. Analysis of and discussions on different femininity

¹As I will briefly discuss in chapter two, recent theoretical elaborations in the field has also included post-human and new materialist theory.
constructions and the variety of women working in child care, does not, up until this
day, exist. (Nordberg 2005: 333) [3]

My aim in this thesis is hence to, from the perspective of sexual difference theory, analyse
and discuss the female preschool teacher and her work for change through what has been
termed gender pedagogy, providing answers to the questions: How could sexual difference
theory contribute to the understanding of the preschool teacher and her work for change
conceptualised as gender pedagogy? How could one view this work for change and what it
produces in terms of gender equality, normalisation and power? And What is the feminist
potential of the preschool teacher and her work?

To help me think about these issues I have turned to preschool teachers currently
working in the field and their voices. I have first and foremost chosen to look upon my
respondents and their thoughts as a help and guidance for me to think further, to include their
experiences in my thinking to provide a more nuanced and rich discussion. I see them, in their
capacity of fellow pedagogues, fellow feminists and fellow women “like a data bank of
missing information” (Braidotti 2011: 102). In this thesis my main aim is not, thus, to
critically asses the statements, ideas or practices of my respondents. Even so, this has not in
anyway freed me from the power position that is connected to how I set the agenda of what is
interesting to talk about during the interviews, how I choose what quotes and what thoughts to
include, how I use those quotes and thoughts for my argument and in this specific case, also
how I have been translating their words from Swedish to English (Letherby 2003: 84, 117,
125; Ramazanoğlu & Holland 2002: 160). However, my aim has been to handle their
statements with care and consideration and I hope that those partaking in this study will see
their own and each others contributions to my thinking on the subject as clearly as I do in this
end product.

Ramazanoğlu and Holland stresses the importance of reflecting upon, and
allowing for complexity, concerning what one might have in common with one’s respondents
(Ramazanoğlu & Holland 2002: 155). In a way one could say that I am researching my “own
social location” but as Ramazanoğlu and Holland also states, there can never be any precise
match between researcher and respondent (2002: 158, 159). As I see it we share a partial
identification as women and preschool teachers interested in gender pedagogy and change
(Letherby 2003: 134). However neither the category “Woman” nor “preschool pedagogue”
should be understood as internally monolithic. Whilst I might share with my respondents
certain bits and pieces of our distinct but entangled subjectivities, I might or might not share
other bits and pieces. There might be differences or similarities included level and type of
education, social status, ethnicity, race, class background, common interests and so on. This is of course also true for the whole of the preschool teacher community. Specifically, and of most importance in this study, we certainly both share and differ regarding analysis of what the “gender issue” in preschool is and what would be the best way to go about achieving change. This is however, I believe, a strength that enriches my material. To provide for anonymity I have chosen not to describe the individual informants or connect their statements to them as individuals. This is not meant to combine all of their thinking into one and the same. Instead I encourage the reader to keep in mind that the quotes emanate from different pedagogues with different experiences and different ideas on the issues at hand.

In the Swedish preschool there are two different occupational groups working alongside each other as pedagogues; the preschool teachers (förskollärare) and the assistants (barnskötare). These two groups differ both in terms of educational background, salary and sometimes working tasks. Among my informants both preschool teachers and assistants are represented, but I will not distinguish them in relation to each other. I will instead use the terms preschool teacher and pedagogue interdependently to name all of my informants. I have made this choice for mainly two reasons: For one, since my group of respondents is quite small I would not like to risk the anonymity of my informants by linking their statements to their individual occupations. Secondly, even though I find current discussions on the different roles of these occupational groups interesting and important, in my interviews with the informants these differences has not come up as an issue in relation to their work for change, neither does the different views of my informants seem to relate to their different roles. Rather, and this is more than obvious in my material, in the work for change I am discussing here, both groups could serve as equally important.

Practically I have chosen my respondents in a casual way, approaching first those in my own circle of acquaintances who I thought fit the criteria of being preschool teachers interested in change. I also asked those I already knew if they in turn knew anyone who would be interested in participating. All in all I ended up with five respondents, some of them previously known to me and some of them not. They all define themselves as women, their age range between 25 and 40, all are currently working in preschools and has been so for between a half and 12 years of time and their educational background differ to some degree.

I have conducted semi structured interviews via email and in person. Originally I had chosen to do all the interviews via email as a form of correspondence research for

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5 The interview guide as well as a short initial survey of the informants are available both in its original Swedish form and translated in English in Appendix 2 and 3.
reasons of availability of my respondents but also to give them opportunity to think through and formulate their answers in their own pace (Letherby 2003: 92). On demand by some of my respondents I later decided to give them all the chance to choose whether they would like to write or meet in person. In this way I hope that all the respondents were able to feel comfortable in the situation and able to formulate their thoughts in their preferred manner.

The informants have had the opportunity to read their own and each others thoughts in anonymised and summarised form shortly after the interviews as well as the entire thesis before submission. They have had the opportunity to add further comments and questions throughout the process.

My own process of analysis has been a process of reading literature and theory through and with the statements of my respondents, and I feel as if their input in many ways has guided me towards this end result. The final thematic ordering of my material consists of three main themes; normalising practices, the actual gender pedagogical work and the preschool teacher occupation connected to issues of gender/sex. These themes corresponds both with the themes that were discussed during the interviews and the chapter division in this thesis as described below.

**Thesis outline**

For reasons of readability I have decided to divide this thesis into three subchapters, each containing a background and an analytic part. Instead of presenting the theoretical framework in the beginning of the thesis as a unified whole I will include it in the different chapters highlighting the specific issue for discussion.

The first chapter *Preschool as an arena of normalisation and change* will provide a background to the idea of the preschool as an institution of normalisation and how preschool for a long time has been entangled in efforts for different forms of social change. I will bring in the voices of my informants on the topic of normality in preschool and from there nuance my own discussion with the help of theoretical perspectives on power, normalisation and freedom.

In the second chapter *“To work for change” – what change and how?* I will give a description of the different strands of preschool practice usually connected to gender pedagogy. I will also give an account of what I think sexual difference theory could bring to the table as a source of inspiration for this kind of work. Importantly the statements of the pedagogues will inform the discussion in such a way that rigid boundaries between different
methods, strands of thought and theories are questioned and a process oriented approach to change is highlighted.

Finally in the last chapter The feminist preschool teacher I will turn to discuss the preschool teacher and her position in working for change in a traditionally female occupation. I will use the concept of “working through” or mimetic repetition to look closer at the position of the preschool teacher as entangled in notions of femininity and motherhood. I will moreover discuss the preschool teacher working for change as a feminist subject, potentially subverting rigid notions of knowledge, body and mind. I will end this chapter with a concluding discussion of the thesis as a whole.

Preschool as an arena of normalisation and change
In my endeavour to reflect upon the preschool teacher and her work for change one important issue has been to consider the preschool as an institution and the preschool teacher as involved in processes of normalisation. Eidevald and Lenz Taguchi write that “The preschool is ‘always ready’ to change the identities of children” (Eidevald & Lenz Taguchi 2011: 29) [4] connecting the pedagogical work being done in preschools for gender equality to a history of preschools closely entangled with ideas of normality. Is the work carried out in the name of gender pedagogy, just another normalising practice, and if so is the preschool teacher engaging in such work then guilty of first and foremost normalising children? How to think about change in a way not connected to normality? And what change is it that is at stake anyway?

I will carry these questions with me throughout the thesis. In this chapter, however, I will start to approach them by moving closer to the idea of normalisation as a process carried out in the preschool setting both historically and in the present. I will take my departure in the concept of normalisation and how it has been understood in relation to practices in preschool. I will also show how normality and the idea of the normal child in pedagogy are entangled with both class and appreciations of the sexes. Finally I will give a short background of the history of Swedish preschools in terms of ambitions for social change, before I turn to my informants and ask them about ideas and practices of normalisation in their own practice. With the help of both my informants and theoretical insights from Foucault, Braidotti, Irigaray and Grosz I then move on to problematise my understanding of processes of normalisation and those involved in such processes. In an effort to nuance the concept of normalisation and the preschool teacher entangled in such processes, I will touch upon issues
of power, normalisation and freedom. This will provide a background for the next chapter where I will discuss gender pedagogy as work fork for change in a more thorough way.

**Part 1 - A space for normalisation of children and transformation of society**

**Normalisation**

With Foucault it is possible to understand the normalising power produced in preschools as part of a modern form of discipline, where normality and normalisation are both purpose and mean (Foucault 1995/1977: 177-183). Foucault argues that power should not be understood as mainly what is outspoken in terms of for example the law, rather modern power is exerted through institutions such as schools, hospitals and prisons, through surveillance, examinations and the adaptation to normality (Foucault 1995/1977: 138, 170-193; Walkerdine 1998: 164).

Lenz-Taguchi, in her dissertation gives a thorough genealogical description of how children all through the 20th century and the history of Swedish child care have been closely observed and monitored. Building upon such documentation rigid theories of development were constructed, describing the “ideal child” and its development. Following these models it became possible to judge what could be considered normal and ideal, and with that what could be considered abnormal (Lenz Taguchi 2000: 84). These psychological theories later on made it possible to evaluate specific children to detect any “deficiencies” from the expected norm, and, should such deficiencies be found, to apply scientifically correct “development help” to correct them. The role of the preschool teacher in such a setup would be to document, evaluate and, if needed, provide the accurate help following the development theories of the time (Eidevald & Lenz Taguchi 2011: 30; Lenz Taguchi 2000: 82-86).

The idea behind this kind of pedagogy is, as Lenz Taguchi remarks, to free children from the limitations inherent to “abnormality”, and simultaneously help to better society through the provision of “normal”, “healthy” and “natural” children (Lenz Taguchi 2000: 73, 82). But this kind of “freedom” could also be understood in an altogether other way, as described in Walkerdine’s writing on child-centred pedagogy:

[I]t can, in fact, be viewed quite differently. It can be argued that the shifts has been not from authoritarianism to liberation, nor from power to no power, but from overt disciplining to covert disciplining, in which ‘scientific pedagogy’ plays a major role. It is science, particularly the science of psychology, which is to provide a description of the nature of the learner and of learning, and later of the idea of a natural sequence of development towards rationality. This mapping of the individual learner allowed disciplining to take a different turn. Now it was no longer a question of correct and incorrect answers, but of the monitoring of what were considered the characteristics of the ‘normal’ learner. Despite the hope that these methods would produce freedom, children were observed and monitored as never before. (Walkerdine 1998: 30)
The “freedom” produced through such practices could thus also be understood as part of a corrective instrument of control (Lenz Taguchi 2000: 82-83).

This history is still very much alive in the preschool setting, not the least through the continual influence from development psychology especially concerning dis/abilities (2000: 108). Nordin-Hultman also shows how the strong discourse of development psychology still carries influential and problematic ideas in the pedagogical practice. There is, writes Nordin-Hultman, an inherent assumption in the concept of development of a progressive and linear change following a before hand defined route (Nordin-Hultman 2004: 162). This perspective downplays the present in relation to the future. What the child does today is valued against what it will mean later on, and the child is seen as a project in constant need of improvement to eventually become a “real”, adult, human being (2004: 192-194). The view of the child as in constant need of improvement also brings what the child cannot do to the fore of pedagogical intervention, in spite of efforts to view the child as competent and resourceful (Ibid.). The attention is furthermore directed towards the child itself, making the surrounding structures and conditions seem of less importance. When problems or difficulties arise in the school and preschool settings, it is thus often the child that is seen as the actual problem (Lenz Taguchi 2000: 105, Nordin-Hultman 2004: 21-22, 164).

An example of this is how many municipalities in Sweden today have introduced “individual development plans” for the children attending preschool.6 In my experience such plans are often focusing on shortcomings even when there are no obvious problems connected to the child. This sometimes leads to children being forced in to situations where they for some reason do not do well, time and again, for practice and training, something that Nordin-Hultman believes would not be accepted if they were adults:

The strong focus on the future that surrounds childhood is one way of understanding why children, and not adults, are assumed to have to endure these kinds of situations. It makes it easy to become blind to the vulnerability that the children are in here and now, or at least to steel oneself for it. (Nordin-Hultman 2004: 192)

Even so, as Nordin-Hultman states, the demands for children to adapt to rigid norms within school and preschool are not all that often discussed. It might be, she writes, that these aspects of the pedagogical practice have come to be almost invisible (2004: 90).

This invisibility, I believe, could be connected to the shift in the way we speak about children that Lenz Taguchi notes has been in motion during recent decades. Discourse around children has, in some ways, during this time moved away from the rigid development

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6 This is not an obligatory but optional practice in Swedish preschools, that however has come to be an established tool of assessment of children in some municipalities and preschools (Alasuutari, Markström & Vallberg-Roth 2014: 33-34)
schemas towards an understanding of children as competent and free to develop and control their own learning processes. This view upon the child as competent carries an idea about introspection and adaptation to oneself rather than to an external corrective gaze (Lenz Taguchi 2000: 106, 114):

Control no longer occurs in a disciplining adaption to an external gaze, that is the scientific idea of normality, but control is instead the result of introspection and a appreciation of adapting to ‘one self’ and trying to understand who one ‘is’. (Lenz Taguchi 2000: 114) [6]

In such a framework the pedagogue still takes on the role of the expert, as in the documenting and evaluating practices described above, but it is more about helping the child to find her own identity (2000: 114). This shift is in line with a more overall change in society towards a focus on liberal freedom and a focus on the free individual responsible for her own choices and actions (Lenz Taguchi 2000: 105; Nordin-Hultman 2004: 102). This, as emphasised by Lenz Taguchi, does not mean that normalising processes and power are no longer part of the preschool practices, rather power is exerted in other ways than before (Lenz Taguchi 2000: 113-114, 194). The fact that some behaviours and ways of being are connected to normality and thus to a higher value is not altered in any radical way, rather the responsibility to live up to these norms, to make the “right” choices and adaptations is placed on each individual (Lenz Taguchi 2000: 96; 2011: 175). Nordin-Hultman even asserts that, despite this shift in language, children today are evaluated and followed up in a more thorough way than ever. She states that it is no longer only what the child “does” that is the object of evaluation but also what she “is”, that is, her “personality” (Nordin-Hultman 2004: 178).

**The ideal “gender neutral” child**

The idea of a (imaginary) normal average child, that all children are to be compared to, is at the heart of the influential discourse of development psychology, and this very idea, as stated by Nordin-Hultman, is built upon homogeneity and likeness. The ideal child, as the norm, constructs all those differing from that norm in negative terms (Nordin-Hultman 2004:162). Difference in itself thus becomes problematic or given a lesser value. This way of understanding difference as pejoration, writes Braidotti, is strong within the whole of western philosophy. Difference in such thinking is always understood as difference from something else (Braidotti 2011: 75, 96, 124, 138). In the case of the ideal child as conceptualised by the discourse of development as described above, those who differ from this image also fail to live up to the normal state and are therefore understood as lacking, as in need of intervention.
In western thought, argues Irigaray, he who above all has been understood as the norm, whom others are seen as differing from is also the masculine or male subject (Irigaray 2004/1993: 6-7). This is true even when the norm is stated in gender neutral terms; the gender neutral subject connected to ideas of rationality and agency as it has been constructed within western thought, is, argues Irigaray, masculine (2004/1993: 6-7). Women, and girls, are therefore not included in this vision of the subject and as such they are deprived of a subject position to speak from (Braidotti 2011: 143, 151). The ideal and normal “gender neutral” child is no exception from this logic. That the “gender neutral” object of pedagogy is in effect a boy could be seen explicitly in historically important texts on pedagogy but also in contemporary preschool settings (Delegationen för jämställdhet i förskolan 2006: 31). There are numerous reports of boys being overrepresented in books and songs that are used in preschool, but also in the amount of attention they are given by the pedagogues. Research has for example shown how initiatives from boys are more often followed up by the pedagogues with the consequence that the interests and ideas of boys comes off as of higher value than those of girls (2006: 33, 63, 66).

An interesting example of how the exclusion of girls as subjects functions in the pedagogical setting is provided by Walkerdine in her writing on girls and mathematics (Walkerdine 1998). In her book Walkerdine presents the work of her research group examining different explanatory models of the poor academic achievement of girls in mathematics in the 70’s in the UK. Following groups of children throughout their early school years, one of the things they discovered was that girls did not always do worse than boys in mathematics in their younger years. On the contrary they often did better than the boys in their grade. But whilst the success of girls was read as the product of hard work and rule-following, the relatively poor performance of boys was read as latent brilliance (1998: 33, 72). Even if the girls were not failing in mathematics, they were thus not seen as succeeding, since their hard work and rule-following was not consistent with theories on how children learn. No matter their achievements, girls were thus still seen as failing to behave in accordance with the idea of the normal child and were therefore read as lacking mathematical ability (1998: 98,168).

Since the very idea of the rational subject is built upon ideas of masculinity, writes Walkerdine, the understanding of girls as deviant is necessary to keep this fiction up (1998: 163-164). This is also why, as she states in the afterword to the new edition of the book, 20 years later when the achievements of girls in school in general have gone up, this is still not connected to intellectual ability but rather to rule-following and neatness, and
deduced to the all too feminine setting in schools, that simultaneously is understood as thwarting the success of boys (1998: 168).

The explanatory model for girls poor achievement that Walkerdine and her research group are trying to problematise is in part the understanding of girls as stereotyped, as unable to break out of roles that are handed over to them through socialisation and early childhood education (1998: 98, 163). The very idea of socialisation as the main culprit creating unequal conditions for boys and girls is targeted in its inherent “woman-blaming”; in such theories it is the mothers and the teachers/pedagogues fault that girls do not have the same opportunities in life that boys have (1998: 163). Instead they aim at locating the problem in a more broadly defined account of the oppression of women:

We seek to locate the story about girls’ failure within a set of scientific strategies for producing the modern order and the idea of the rational, unitary subject: the individual. That girls seem to lack and not measure up to this individual tells us less about girls and more about the form of government itself. In other words, we are attempting to locate the problem within an account of the social and psychological oppression of women. (Walkerdine 1998: 163)

It is not as simple as girls being, through faulty socialisation, forced into a helpless position deprived of power and possibilities for developing their abilities. Rather the very view of girls as stereotypes in itself, as in the mathematics example above, could be seen as one of the problems in pointing towards the behaviour and personalities of girls as the main issue (1998: 108).

I think it is interesting that an example highlighted by Walkerdine of a position open for young girls to be both powerful and clever is that of the “sub-teacher” (1998: 108). Interestingly this very position is often in Swedish gender pedagogical work targeted as problematic for girls because of the stereotype feminine connotations connected to it. With a broader problem description as the one above, however, it is possible to see how the idea of problematic and stereotyped roles, both of girls and pedagogues, contains a simplified understanding of gender equality where the goal is more about girls, and women, to live up to a masculine norm, than to be valued for their actual abilities and achievements. This is also an idea I will get back to throughout this thesis.

But for now, I will conclude this section by stating that the idea of a normal ideal child could also be connected to sex or gender, in the sense that what is understood as gender free and universal has for a long time also been connected to the male subject, creating exclusions and blind spots connected to girls and women. “Normal development” could, from this perspective, thus be seen as in fact highly sexed.
Transformations
In the history of Swedish preschool it is visible that normality and normalisation have not only focused on cognitive and physical abilities in children. Rather such aspects of pedagogy are highly intertwined with notions of sex, as seen above, but also class and the idea of a better future, as will bee seen below.

Already in the 30’s social democratic politicians and social engineers Alva and Gunnar Myrdal argued for society to take on a greater responsibility for the upbringing of children (Myrdal & Myrdal 1934/1996). To stay at home with their mothers was seen as a pathological environment for children and institutionalised and rationalised pedagogical upbringing overseen by doctors and psychologists was deemed necessary (Ibid.). Through the project of pedagogical child care for all, the Myrdals had several hopes for social change; to emancipate both women and children from the patriarchal family structure, to even out class differences through correct social fostering and to bring children under the monitoring gaze of doctors and psychologists (Ibid.).

The emphasis in their plea for what was to become the Swedish preschool was thus not first and foremost on educational aspects but rather on social transformation. The preschool were thought to be able to provide change towards a better society mainly by teaching middle class behaviour, speech and values to working class children and their parents, especially their mothers (Lenz Taguchi 2000: 87, Eidevald & Lenz Taguchi 2011: 30). The assumed shortage of the working class homes was to be remedied through the good example of the preschool serving as a model of the ideal home environment and the preschool teacher serving as a model of the ideal mother (Delegationen för jämställdhet i förskolan 2006: 21, 115-116; Lenz Taguchi 2000: 87-88). The idea of a normal and healthy child, and the ambition to create such a child through preschool could therefore also be understood as an ambition to change children, their families and society towards a middle class norm. Again the good intentions of such a project are not easy to miss, but it inevitably creates those differing from this highly specific norm as deviant and in need of intervention.

It would remain until the seventies before child care institutions started to develop towards, what was the ambition of the Myrdals; a preschool available for all children regardless of their background (Delegationen för jämställdhet i förskolan 2006: 20). The expansion of the preschool developed in dialogue with several ideological and economical interests. The women’s movement and its demands for equal opportunities on the labour market coincided with a lack of labour force and made the development of the child care facilities into a necessity (Nordberg 2005: 67). At the same time ideological ideas on
preschool were raised both in political reports and grass roots movements, including feminist and left wing organisation, in part coinciding with the early ideas on preschool formulated by the Myrdals (Gerdin & Ohrlander 2007: 10). The critique of the patriarchal family, and the oppression of both women and children within it, was a central aspect of the discussion (Ibid.). The preschool was moreover seen as a possible way to provide gender equality, reduce class inequalities and, by some, as a foundation for a socialist future (2007: 11-15, 46). The idea of the preschool as a site for societal change was thus continued and strengthened during this time.

It is against this background of preschool as entangled with, and an instrument of, processes of societal change that one should read Eidevald and Lenz Taguchi’s statement that “The preschool is ‘always ready’ to change the identities of children” (Eidevald & Lenz Taguchi 2011: 29) [7]. That the preschool should work for gender equality, not only in the actual preschool but in society at large is something that falls in line with the preschool as a space for transformation of society as described here. But it would not be until the late 1990’s, along with preschool getting its own curriculum that such work started to develop into what is today called gender pedagogy. I will get back to this kind of work in the next chapter, with the preschool history of normalisation and change in mind.

In this background I have described normalisation as a practice active in the preschool setting, both as inherent to the heritage of development psychology and in ambitions to change the society. I will now direct my attention towards my informants and how they spoke about normalisation and normality in their practice. I will reflect upon the preschool teacher and her entanglement in processes of normalisation and power and ask myself if her entanglement with processes of normalisation permits her to be part of any radical change, and if not, are such normalising practices possible to avoid altogether?

Part 2 – Power and normalisation in the preschool classroom

“There are demands on children to be able to go to preschool; they have to manage certain things”

When speaking with my informants about normalisation in the preschool context they were all affirming the view that such practices in many ways are part of the preschool legacy. There are clear expectations on what normal behaviour and normal development entails in the preschool setting. It seems such thinking is hard to get away from, and all of my informants are touching upon the problematic side of this. This is something you have to “mess with” as pointed out by one of my informants below.
There are still a lot of thoughts around what and in what way children are to know different things. And this you have to mess with! It is common to hear: ‘This is not normal’ about different children and that is just so incredibly subjective I believe. But there is a lot left, at least in the preschools I have been to, the thoughts about some kind of normal state of children. [8]

Even though, as mentioned in the previous part of this chapter the discourse around preschool children has changed during the last couple of decades, the idea of normal development, in line with my own experience, seems to be existing beneath and alongside other ideas of children as competent knowledge co-constructors. To fall outside the expected norm demands serious attention:

If one has these serious conversations with a parent, it is because one might feel that somebody is falling outside this expected… There are demands on children to be able to go to preschool; they have to manage certain things. [9]

To attend to the child’s normal development, I would argue, is part of the persistent heritage of preschool, and this might also be what is expected by for example parents. The preschool teachers I have spoken to seem to be aware that this is the case and they are also thinking about possible ways to disrupt such ideas about normality. At the same time the preschool in itself seems to demand certain adaptations of children, there are, as the informant above tells us, certain things that they have to manage to be able to attend preschool. This might seem harsh but if we listen to the pedagogues and their reasoning around these issues it is evident that there might be more to this approach than ideas of uniformity and adaptation, it is also, for example, a matter of time and resources:

We talk a lot about how limited we are by our external circumstances (too large children’s groups, too little time) and how these external circumstances force us into a normalising mode, as kind of a survival technique. All the children need to be able to blend in and function fairly well in the practice we carry through, otherwise it won’t work, neither for the child who breaks the preschool norm, nor for the rest of the children’s group or us as pedagogues. [10]

I believe that this statement reflects the demands of working in preschool under the current circumstances. It is not possible to be “however one wants” in preschool, because it is a place where several children, and adults, are going to work together under circumstances that are not always ideal. The lack of resources and time in preschool is an important part of both what interventions could be made into preschool practice as well as the working conditions for those working there.

But there are also other reasons for the preschool teachers to work in a way that promotes likeness rather than differences. Several of my informants discuss normalisation in relation to society at large.

In some ways we are working preparatory for a life where there are a lot of rules and norms. And I think we need to work with that. When the thoughts arise from the
children to confirm that; Yes, this is the normal way to do this, this is the way most people do this. Because I don’t think that it helps, how to put this… It usually is enough to turn from the preschool to the school and there is an altogether other… Here it is possible to have different ways of expressing oneself and here you can do things in different ways. And then you go off to school, that often, not always, but often, demands the same kind of expression from all. In some ways one might be favoured by an understanding for that; this is the way it is going to be in society, that you are expected to do certain things in a certain way. [11]

And sure, there is a lot of activity around normalising children in the preschool, this is something I recognise very well myself. And I think it is linked to how the whole of society is structured in such a strict way and that the preschool knows where the children are moving on to, how tough it is in school etc. So with good intentions we want to shape them to be a little bit ‘plainer’ so they can go through the system as painless as possible. [12]

And there is this thing that we say all the time: ‘You have to manage this because later on when you go to the older children’s department, they will demand this of you’ and then they say there that: ‘When you go to school they will demand this of you’ and then… It is like all the time you are going to be adapted to a later stage. “This will never work if you don’t…” And it belongs to this; everybody is going to go to school. You don’t have to go to preschool but you have to go to school. And that you should be shaped in a way that is functional in a society. [13]

In relation to school and society at large the preschool is by my informants understood almost as a refuge or safe haven for the children. They understand the preschool environment to be a little bit freer and a little bit less strict than the rest of society. At the same time, it cannot be too “free”, since the children need to be prepared for the reality to come. Inherent to this kind of reasoning is the echo of theories of development, where the present becomes of less value, and the child is expected to adapt to a later stage in life. But in my respondents replies it is not so much about normal development and progressive learning as an awareness of how life in general is structured around a strict set of norms, where the child inevitably will have to fit in. The ambition here might not be so much to “free” children from abnormality, but to save them from crashing in to a reality structured around rigid rules and regulations. To get by in a society one has to learn its rules. And as most directly expressed by one of the pedagogues, some norms are absolutely necessary:

There are some things that are not accepted in society, according to the law! One cannot hit others, for example, and then, you have to normalise children within that framework. We have to have a homogenous group in that respect, that we don’t hurt each other. So there is always some kind of normalising work. [14]

I think my informants’ thoughts on the issue of normalisation in the preschool setting are important since they provide a more contextualised understanding of normalising practices. Indeed they describe a context where normality, normalisation and likeness certainly do matter in the every day practice. At the same time they give an understanding of why and how such processes work and are formed. I believe that just as the child should not,
as she has been through theories of development, be understood as separate from her surroundings, preschool and its practices should not either. Preschool is neither an institution disconnected from the rest of society nor are its practices a sum of the ideas of those working there. Rather such an institution functions within the framework provided by, and to meet certain needs of, society at large. One of the more obvious of such needs being the need for child care for parents to be able to go to work, another being to prepare children to go to school and thus, a third, to prepare children for a life consisting of quite rigid expectations on how and what to be and do, where differences are not necessarily understood in positive terms. It is not necessarily that preschool is an instrument for normalisation of children as much as preschool is a part of and functions in and through a society built upon rigid norms. Therefore it might not be possible, to get rid of these ideas of normality through preschool alone. Rather, what might be at stake for those working in this environment is to, with one of my informant’s own words, “mess with” such norms to provide for some sort of change.

**Power, normalisation and freedom**

Before I engaged with the thoughts of my informants above I asked myself if the compliance of the preschool teacher with processes of normalisation permits her to be part of any more radical change and if not so, if it is possible to avoid such normalising practices altogether. Through the replies of my informants it is possible to see how my initial questions were based in a simplified and dichotomised understanding of normalisation and “freedom” from such practices.

Pedagogy has during the whole of the 20th century been understood as potentially emancipating for children. Freedom has been a central concept for all forms of education and ideas of what such freedom could entail in the preschool setting have been in circulation throughout (Nordin-Hultman 2004: 101; Lenz Taguchi 2000: 23). At the same time, and because of this very aim to be emancipatory, pedagogy is also always already normative and political (Lenz Taguchi 2000: 36-37). Dolk, in her dissertation on norms, power and influence in preschool, states that without norms education might not be possible at all, especially not when in different ways working to change the normative assumptions that are inherent to the current order (Dolk 2013:28-29). She also points out how when efforts for change in terms of gender pedagogy or gender equality are included in preschools this is often seen as a problematic steering of children, even though steering is really a part of all pedagogical practices (2013:109). Normativity, thus, is sometimes connected to specific ideas and not others, whilst ideas of normality really permeate the whole of the history of the Swedish
preschool. However, Dolk also states, if normative ambitions are too pronounced, it is hard to, at the same time, take the knowledge, ideas, thoughts and feelings of children seriously in any work for change (Dolk 2013:142).

Normative practices, thus, might not be possible to avoid in pedagogy, and any attempt to form pedagogical practices for change will in some ways be normative as well. Further some norms are absolutely necessary to keep up, exemplified above by the norm of not hitting each other. But at the same time norms can be all too narrow and limiting especially in reproducing deficiency in those understood as differing from such norms. The view of the normal, natural and healthy child is also entangled with notions of both sex and class. To be aware of what norms are reproduced through preschool and to try to “mess with them” seems therefore to be a promising way of thinking about norms in education. ⁷ However, in the replies of my informants there is also a kind of resignation in their feelings towards how normality is reproduced in their work. Some things seem rather hard to change.

Walkerdine interestingly writes about how the, commonly female, teacher is often filled with guilt in relation to her responsibility of the normal development of each child, in a system built upon a fiction of freedom and equality. The idea in such a system is that each child should be able to succeed had they the opportunity to develop properly, putting the blame on teachers when all of them inevitably do not succeed (Walkerdine 1998:72-73, 161,164). In media and politics the claim that “we have to start in the preschool” is often heard concerning gender equality, literacy, mathematics and so on. The idea is that if we get to the root of the problem, and start as early on as possible, there will be positive change towards a better future. I will get back to this aspect of the gender pedagogical work in the next chapter. Here I would just like to highlight what such an understanding of different “problems” creates in terms of responsibilities. It is as if everything was done “right” in the preschool years, there would be equality, and equal opportunities for all. And equal opportunities for all are, in the world as we know it today, just not possible.

When my informants in their statements affirms the view of normalisation as a continuing force in preschool, they also connect it to the rest of society; normalising practices exists in preschools for a reason and that reason is that the preschool is part of a system building upon rather rigid norms. I think this is a most important remark to keep in mind; some things just are not possible to change through preschool alone! What is more, Dolk, mainly focusing on the possibilities for influence for children in preschool, also came to see

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⁷ This is also one of the assumptions in what in Sweden has been termed Norm-critical pedagogy, a strand of thought I will get back to in next chapter.
how the possibilities of the preschool teachers for influence over their own work was rather limited in terms of time and resources to plan the pedagogic setting differently (Dolk 2013: 228). If the preschool teachers then, are limited in terms of resources, time and influence over their own work, it is easy to see how the idea of changing society for the better through preschool, apart from building on the problematic view of children as instruments for a better future, easily could become a burden for those working in preschool as well.

Power, for Foucault, should not be understood as something emanating from somewhere/someone in particular, but as a fluent and continuing force that circulates amongst us, meaning that we are always in the process of both power and powerlessness (Braidotti 2011: 133, Foucault 1980: 98). The preschool teacher’s relative power in any given situation is thus not in any sense absolute and she is herself subjugated to power at the same time that she might be in a relative power position in relation to the children. Nordin-Hultman in her discussion on sometimes harmful normalising practices in school and preschool directs attention away from only focusing on the individual relations between children and pedagogues to look at the material, spatial and temporal conditions that are produced through institutions such as schools and preschools. She states that routines, rules and time tables are “in power” in the preschool and school settings, even in relation to the pedagogues (Nordin-Hultman 2004: 91-93, 105, 186). Adding to this I think that policy documents, expectations from parents, principals and society, evaluating forms, materials, lack or presence of adequate resources, architecture, individual development plans, ideas concerning childhood, development and futures, and much more, could be included in what is happening and what power and normalisation is produced in any given moment in preschools.

With Deleuze and Guattari it is possible to view the preschool classroom as a constantly changing assemblage where different bodies of adults and children takes place, but also different material and temporal circumstances, objects and forces of power, including the powerful discourses of development psychology and pedagogy as well as those of sexed identities and what it means to be an adult or a child (Grosz 1994:167, Just 2012:172). In the “gender conscious” preschool assemblage, there are also specific ideas in motion with regards to what for example gender equality is and who could be considered gender equal. It is possible to see then, how the pedagogue, in such a perspective, in spite of the power invested in being an adult, is not the sole author of what happens in preschool. In fact the preschool assemblage and what it produces is not pre-given in any sense, since all of those participating in it are constantly changing, or in constant becoming, affecting each other along the way (Just 2012:172-173). Thinking about the preschool classroom as an assemblage, thus, in part
denounces a simplified understanding of normalisation and allows us to see a bigger picture of how power is produced in preschool, creating what seems like rigid boundaries but also possibilities for change.

As Foucault stresses, power is both productive and repressive and for the preschool teachers this means that they are both limited and empowered by it in their work (Braidotti 2002: 40; 2011: 84, 89; Foucault 1980: 98; Foucault 1995/1977: 194; Grosz 2010: 141). Thus the preschool teachers have the possibility to interfere with limiting appreciations of normality at work in the preschool setting, providing a less limiting environment for the children attending it. Such ambitions however, still run the risk of creating new norms and limitations in place of the old ones. Ambitions to free children from class oppression or limitations in their abilities has historically also inevitably reinforced a norm of what one has to be to be considered “free”. Still a to simplistic understanding of norms might end up in the idea, as formulated by myself above, to move away from norms altogether, something that, at least for the time being, is not possible.

A usual way to think about oppressive norms in preschools is that if we would only treat the child as an individual, instead of a girl or boy for example, they would be “free” to develop in a way that is true to their “inner self”. Grosz is, in her writing on freedom with inspiration from Bergson, trying to move away from the understanding of freedom as “freedom from” for example restrictive norms, patriarchy, and so on, towards a “freedom to” act (Grosz 2010: 140-141). Although she admits the understanding of freedom as “freedom from” has political relevance, she thinks it not enough as a vision of what freedom could entail. A “freedom from”, she argues, rests on exactly the idea that there is an inner individual self that would be free if it were left alone without negative influence from the outside (2010:141). But, if we are left to ourselves with no possibility to form connections with our surrounding world, this freedom in itself would be rather restrictive, if even possible. Instead she views the subject as never self-identical and in constant becoming and freedom as relational.

Freedom pertains to the realm of actions, processes, and events that are not contained within, or predictable from, the present; it is that which emerges, surprises, and cannot be entirely anticipated in advance. It is not a state one is in or a quality that one has, but it resides in the activities one undertakes that transform oneself and (a part of) the world. It is not a property or right bestowed on, or removed from, individuals by others but a capacity or potentiality to act both in accordance with one's past as well as "out of character:" in a manner that surprises. (Grosz 2010:152)

This understanding of freedom directs attention away from the idea of an inner self that pre-exists any connections with the surrounding world, towards a constantly changing subject that
needs connections for its *becomings*. In focusing the constant becoming of all of us it also opens up towards what we do not know about ourselves and each other. In the preschool context in general and in gender pedagogy in particular I think this could be a useful conception of freedom. It helps to look upon practices, power and norms in terms of what is produced through them. Sometimes what is produced might be limiting for what adults and children could become in a specific situation or moment, and sometimes what is produced could be a “freedom to act” in other than expected and surprising ways. For example Nordin-Hultman states that little variation in the preschool environment presupposes a form of likeness thus enforcing a limiting and normative understanding of what a child could and should be (Nordin-Hultman 2004:189). In thinking about freedom as conceptualised here it is easy to see that such a setting could limit the possibilities for action and becoming in ways not anticipated in advance. However, such a “small thing” as adding more variation in materials and activities might on the other hand enhance the possibilities for children, and adults, to become in ways not anticipated in advance. Importantly such a view on freedom presupposes change, since *becoming* really is change. Connecting to the replies of my informants, it might not be possible to be “however one wants” in the preschool setting. But it might be possible to work towards a preschool setting where difference and constant change instead of likeness is valued and where ideas of what children could become are not preconceived and closed down on before hand. This is something I will keep in mind in moving into the discussion more directly related to the work for change in preschools in the next chapter.

**Concluding thoughts**

In this chapter I have focused on the potentially normalising aspect of preschool work as to lay a ground for how I will further discuss the efforts for change in terms of gender pedagogical work. Taking off in Eidevald and Lenz Taguchi’s claim that “The preschool is ‘always ready’ to change the identities of children” (Eidevald & Lenz Taguchi 2011: 29) I have highlighted the ways in which normality and change are both significant concepts in thinking about preschool work and its history. Especially what is highlighted is how normality functions to produce likeness and construct that which is different as of less value.

However, through the replies of my informants it is possible to see how my initial questions and thoughts related to normalising work being carried out in preschools were based in a simplified and dichotomised understanding of normality and freedom, preschool and society. What is highlighted by the pedagogues is the impossibility to get away from norms altogether as well as the importance to keep up some norms, exemplified by the
norm of not hitting each other. At the same time the respondents are aware and emphasise the importance of thinking about what norms that one carries with oneself into the pedagogical work and how some norms, in their narrowness are indeed important to “mess with”. Instead of simplified understandings of either or they are therefore employing a more nuanced understanding of the practical reality of working for change with small children. They are also emphasising the interconnectedness and interdependence of preschools, schools and society at large, not the least when it comes to resources.

I argue that the preschool teacher is not in any simple way the power producer in the preschool classroom rather routines, timetables, resources, materiality, the bodies and ideas of both children and adults are all entangled in creating the preschool setting at any given moment, sometimes creating a quite fixed and firm order of what is possible to become in preschool. Although this might seem self evident I believe it highly important to keep in mind while talking about what change is possible to accomplish for the preschool teacher through the institution of preschool, to avoid putting the blame on the preschool teachers as individuals when any radical change is not achieved. Since power is not, however, only repressive but also productive the possibility for change is indeed already present in the preschool setting. I have also briefly discussed how freedom could be conceptualised as “freedom to” rather than freedom from repressive norms and proposed this as a possible way to think about preschool practices in terms of what possibilities for the unexpected that are created.

In the next chapter I will turn more directly to the strategies used by the preschool teachers in their endeavour for change. When doing so I will keep in mind the somewhat problematic side of preschool and its history of ambitions for change, but also the more nuanced understanding of normative practices as outlined by my informants and myself. I will also bring in and elaborate on the risk of new norms being created through the very ambitions for change, and that such new norms might, despite their good intentions, limit and exclude certain children or aspects of life. In specific I will reflect upon the idea of gender equality and what new norms might be produced in the name of it through the gender pedagogical work.

“To work for change” – what change, how and why?
Of specific interest for me in this thesis is the “work for change” conceptualised as gender pedagogy carried out in and through preschools and how the preschool teacher relates to such work. But what does this work entail? What change is asked for or might be produced through
such efforts? And considering the history of preschool as an institution entangled in processes of normalisation, how could we understand this kind of work?

The first part of this chapter will sketch out some of the strands of thought connected to gender pedagogy and some of the discussions carried out in relation to them including my own concerns regarding the going beyond gender in gender pedagogy. In the second part I will bring in the voices of my informants once again to let them describe their work and how they relate to the different strands of gender pedagogy. This will, just like in the first chapter, provide for a more nuanced understanding of what their work really entails. Finally I will propose sexual difference theory as a potential additional source of inspiration in gender pedagogy.

**Part 1 - Gender pedagogy in theory**

**A definition**

Efforts for gender equality have been carried out through the Swedish educational system since the 1960’s, often with the goal to promote non-traditional choices of education especially among girls (Eideval & Lenz Taguchi 2011: 21). Specific interest in small children and preschool pedagogy in gender equality, though, has only been in focus since the 1990’s. This is also the time when the preschool was integrated into the Swedish educational system and received its first curriculum. In the preschool curriculum there are clear formulations on equal opportunities for boys and girls that have been influential in the development of different strands of gender pedagogy:

> The ways in which adults respond to boys and girls, as well as the demands and requirements imposed on children contribute to their appreciation of gender differences. The pre-school should work to counteract traditional gender patterns and gender roles. Girls and boys in the pre-school should have the same opportunities to develop and explore their abilities and interest without having limitations imposed by stereotyped gender roles. *(Curriculum for pre-school: Lpfö 98 1998: 4)*

I have included this excerpt here, because I think it says something about how the “gender problem” in Swedish preschool, and in gender pedagogy, often has been perceived. It is the stereotyped roles of boys and girls, to some extent imposed by the adults surrounding them, which are targeted as the main problem. It is thus the stereotyped behavior of children that is made into the object for transformation. This is a problem formulation that I believe creates certain effects in terms of what is seen as important and what is possible to intervene with in terms of gender equality in the preschool setting. The focus could easily, following this formulation, be directed towards the behavior and identities of children, rather than structural inequalities or symbolic representation and this is also true for some of the directions gender
pedagogy has taken. The different strands of gender pedagogy described below should therefore be read in relation to this excerpt of the curriculum, since this very formulation is what calls for and legitimates this kind of pedagogy.

In the description and discussion provided below I will use the word “gender pedagogy” as an umbrella term concerning several approaches, including inspiration from norm-critical pedagogy, a pedagogical approach that in fact renounces the sole focus on sex or gender in favor for other axes of differentiation in gender pedagogy. This is because I believe that norm-critical perspectives, focusing on an intersectional approach towards differences and power relations, have been an important inspiration for gender pedagogical work in preschools during recent years. I still, however, perceive “gender pedagogy” to be the most viable term in preschools when referring to pedagogical work for change in relation to both sex or gender and other categorisations such as ethnicity and sexuality. In this thesis I focus on the work for change connected to norms, stereotypes and ideas around children as girls and boys, even though I do not think that this discussion should or could be radically separated from the discussion of other axes of differentiation. My wish is not to disregard differences between different approaches for change in the preschool setting; on the contrary my hope is to highlight differences and similarities, discussions and conflicting approaches in my description.

**Compensatory pedagogy**

One of the most famous and influential gender pedagogy projects in Sweden was carried out in two preschools named Björntomten and Tittmyran. The pedagogues of these preschools started to videotape their own interaction with boys and girls, and discovered, contrary to what they thought beforehand, that they were treating boys and girls different from each other. They also saw in their observations how girls and boys took on different sets of roles in the preschool setting, where boys among other things showed more independence, goal orientation, competitiveness and developed identities based on negative attention whilst girls were more dependent, passive, obedient and relationship oriented (Dolk 2009: 4, 8).

The preschool teachers started to look for methods to break the traditional patterns they had seen in both how boys and girls were treated and, what they saw as the effect of that, their behavior, abilities and identity formations. They turned to inspiration from both Denmark and Iceland where attempts to divide girls and boys into gender segregated groups had been carried out since the eighties. The pedagogues found it hard to break traditional gender patterns in mixed groups and saw the segregated groups as an opportunity
to train girls and boys to develop the abilities they otherwise missed out on. In short, for boys this would entail social and caring abilities and for girls autonomy and independence.

Typically girls would be trained in “being brave” and boys in showing emotions. According to the pedagogues this method made it easier to work with each sex since the children were not as compelled to position themselves as typical boys or girls when there were only girls or only boys present in the group. (Bodén 2011: 40; Delegationen för jämställdhet i förskolan 2006: 52, 74-75, 96-97; Dolk 2009: 5-6; 9-10)

This approach of trying to compensate for what each sex is understood to lack in terms of abilities is known as compensatory gender pedagogy and has since the early attempts spread throughout preschools and has also to some extent been taken as synonymous with gender pedagogy (Dolk 2009: 7). One of the reasons for this might be that the project was seen as highly successful; when the children of these preschools entered school teachers reported that both girls and boys seemed more self confident, the girls dared to take up more space and the boys were more verbal and humble than the teachers were used to (Delegationen för jämställdhet i förskolan 2006: 76).

The idea of gender segregated groups has since been criticised for assuming that, for one, gender is always the most important categorisation concerning what abilities different children develop and two, that all children identify themselves as either girls or boys (Dolk 2011a: 53). As a consequence, even though many preschools have tried this method, many also have left it behind (Delegationen för jämställdhet i förskolan 2006: 101). To my experience the actual practice of dividing girls and boys into different groups is therefore not as widespread today.

However, the idea behind compensatory gender pedagogy, that girls and boys need to be compensated for what they are not usually trained in, remains one of the most prominent ways of thinking about gender pedagogy. For example, the way pedagogues are talking to and responding to girls and boys is one area where a compensatory approach is common (Bodén 2011: 43). An example of this could be to act differently when girls and boys fall and hurt themselves; if it is a girl to tell her to get up again, and if it is a boy to make an effort to comfort him (2011: 44). Or if a girl is cleaning the table, to remain neutral and if a boy does the same to encourage him (Wiklund, Petrusson-Nahlin, Schönbäck 2011: 96). These examples might seem extreme even though they are taken from reality. I would not like to imply that everybody working with compensatory strategies would act in these ways or even agree with them. It is also important to put these specific practices in relation to what
they are trying to achieve; girls less reliant on adults and of performing the “good girl” and boys that feel that it is OK to be sad and that it is desirable to help and clean the table.

Nevertheless, as has been noticed by others before me, it is easy to see how the compensatory approach is built on a stereotyped appreciation of boys and girls and also in fact can reproduce those very stereotypes (Bodén 2011: 45). The core of the compensatory approach is that boys and girls are seen as different from each other and in need of different treatment to develop all their potential abilities and qualities (2011: 44). The compensatory approach is thus built upon ideas of rigid and highly stereotyped differences between boys and girls as opposites and a preconceived idea of what they need to develop to be more alike, or gender equal. The task of the preschool teacher is hence to help the children in a sort of corrective manner to become more alike, and gender equality is accordingly conceptualised as girls and boys being less stereotyped and more alike (Eidevald & Lenz Taguchi 2011: 22, Lenz Taguchi 2011: 174-175).

I would also like to underline how this approach is built upon an imagined symmetry between the sexes (Braidotti 2011: 127, 143, 151). That is, girls and boys are described as each others’ counter parts, albeit in need of different things to become more alike and thus more gender equal. Issues of power and the historically asymmetrical relation between men and women, boys and girls and what is considered feminine and what is considered masculine, are thus left out of the discussion.

**Gender neutrality**

In a study from 2011 the compensatory approach was only the second most prevalent strategy used in gender pedagogy. The most common strategy was different ways of working with what has been called *gender neutrality* (Eideval Lenz Taguchi 2011: 22-25). If compensatory pedagogy is based on different treatment of boys and girls in order for them to train different abilities, the gender neutral approach is based in *not* making any difference between boys and girls.

Bodén writes that the gender neutral approach could be seen as a form of resistance against the division of children into different categories according to their sex (Bodén 2011: 38). The idea is thus that children should be treated the same way regardless of their sex, have the same access to materials, the same possibilities to develop different interests and so on (2011: 38). They should be given the opportunity to be humans rather than representatives of their sex (Dolk 2013: 138).
In practice this could entail the ambition to disrupt gender stereotyped play or activities in both boys and girls through the avoidance of gendered playrooms and toys (Eidevald & Lenz Taguchi 2011: 31). Play rooms perceived as all too gendered, for example the “doll-corner”, could be given new more “neutral” names, as “the apartment” or the “home corner”. Another strategy is to alter the way one talks to children as to avoid talking to them in a stereotyped way, for example to avoid to emphasise the looks of a girl or how strong a boy is (Bodén 2011: 39).

The task of the pedagogue in such an approach is to make sure she treats boys and girls equally and to provide a gender neutral milieu and gender neutral activities, and the implicit understanding of gender equality is that gender or sex should be insignificant. However, this approach does, as Bodén notes, not give any tools to handle the fact that gender or sex is often given great significance in preschools (and elsewhere) (Bodén 2011:38). It might therefore be that actual inequalities between boys and girls are not, through this approach, given any attention and with that made invisible (Dolk 2013: 139). Furthermore, the gender neutral approach risks to become gender blind in an unconscious valorization of the male norm. For example, the practice of changing the name of the feminine doll corner is common, but the more masculine coded rooms such as construction rooms and carpentry rooms are seen as already neutral and therefore not in need of new names (Bodén 2011: 39).

This division of gender pedagogical strategies into either compensatory or gender neutral pedagogy is by necessity a construction, and it is common for both strategies to be mixed in one and the same preschool (Bodén 2011: 35; Eidevald & Lenz Taguchi 2011: 22-23). As will be even clearer when moving on to other and more complicating strategies, as well as my informants descriptions of their work; different strategies and different ways of conceptualising gender and gender equality exist alongside and influence each other.

**Feminist critique**

Both the compensatory and the gender neutral approach have been criticised for focusing on altering the children and their identities in some way (Bodén 2011: 46, Dolk 2011a: 58). It is the perceived gender stereotyped behaviors, identities and interests of children that are supposed to change towards a more gender equal or gender neutral middle ground. In such work, the children themselves are seen as passive objects of change while the adults are the active subjects providing that change (Bodén 2011: 47; Dolk 2013: 38; Dolk 2011b: 62; Eidevald & Lenz Taguchi 2011: 19-20; Rosén 2010: 63).
Implicit in this view upon gender equality and change is also the assumption that what is done in the early years of a child’s life will have a direct influence over what will happen in the future. The idea is thus that it is possible for children to learn gender equality or gender equal identity formations and carry it with them into their grown-up lives. This is also one of the reasons why efforts for gender equality in preschools have gained recognition through reports and policies; the idea is that it is necessary to start with small children if we are going to achieve a gender equal society in the future (Dolk 2013: 17, 114, 173 Eidevald & Lenz Taguchi 2011: 20, Lenz Taguchi 2011: 176). Children are as a result seen as “carriers of utopia” making the present conditions of their lives of secondary importance (Dolk 2013:114). It is possible to see how this kind of thinking corresponds well with a longer history in Swedish preschool of providing change in society at large through preschool and the children attending it (Dolk 2013:114, Eidevald &Lenz Taguchi 2011:20). But also with the inherent assumption in development psychology that children are in need of improvement and intervention to finally become adults and with that “real” human beings.

Gender pedagogy conceptualised in this way could therefore be considered a normalising force in relation to children, providing new “gender equal” norms for them to adapt to. However I would not like to fall back into a simplified understanding of normalisation and power. Such new norms should not be understood as new limitations where there previously were none; instead there are always already ideas and norms in relation to boys and girls in motion. In some ways new, less stereotyped, norms as provided by the gender pedagogical strategies presented above might widen the possibilities for girls and boys to, in line with Grosz’ concept of freedom to, act both in accordance with themselves and “out of character” (Grosz 2010: 52). In some ways, though, they lead in another direction; within these strategies, there is an idea of a preconceived goal, that is, we do not only already know what a boy or a girl is and does, we already know what she or he could and should be or do. Possibly giving room for children to act in ways different from themselves, this difference holds no element of surprise or open-endedness, since the change that is requested is change towards an already fixed idea of what a girl, boy or child should and could be. As already touched upon, this new norm is also both in compensatory and gender neutral pedagogy anchored in an idea of likeness.

Gender neutral ideas point towards how boys and girls should be treated neutrally and through that become more alike and the compensatory approach says that children should be treated differently to develop more abilities from both the feminine and masculine spectra, and thus become more alike. One could say that the aim is to repeal the most extreme
difference between girls and boys to create a common ground of likeness (Eideval & Lenz Taguchi 2011: 31, Lenz Taguchi 2011: 174). One implication of this could be that the work focuses on what children does in a corrective manner. Dolk writes that the gender pedagogical discourse has come to centre around “what clothes and attributes children choose (or do not choose), what they do and what games they play (or do not play)”(Dolk 2013: 69-70) [15]. This way of placing the problem of gender equality within each child and what it does or even “is” is consistent with how according to Nordin-Hultman children today are evaluated more than ever, especially in terms of “identity” (Nordin-Hultman 2004:178). The child has to be in a certain way to be considered “gender equal” or neutral enough. As such markers for gender difference like clothes, toys and play is seen as problematic in themselves, especially so, it seems the markers that are connected with girls.

Ambjörnsson in her study on the colour pink speaks to, amongst others, parents interested in gender equality. In the accounts of the parents she encounter how the colour pink appears to be highly problematic in relation to raising children in what is thought of as a gender equal way. The parents were not keen on dressing their girls in pink since they understood the colour pink as closely related to traditional ideas of femininity; however they did not dress their boys in pink either. Rather, they would dress both their boys and girls in clothes from the boys department, since such clothes were understood as neutral. Ambjörnsson views the colour pink as a strong marker for femininity, and thus the aversion in the parents’ accounts towards it as dismissive of that what is understood as all too feminine. At the same time to choose not to choose pink could also be regarded, writes Ambjörnsson, as an expression of good taste, marking parents as gender equal, heterosexual, middle class and modern Swedes (Ambjörnsson 2011: 16-29, 40-58). Importantly Ambjörnsson thus connects the ambition to “be” gender equal to hegemonic norms of class, sexuality and nationality active in the Swedish society. But she also shows how what is understood as gender equal is sometimes also exactly that which is not feminine.

I think this is a good example of the tendency that efforts for gender equality, despite good intentions, often get stuck in reinforcing the masculine norm. In the efforts to allow girls to be able to do and to be the same things as boys, they are at the same time defined as those that need to change. This is a tendency that has been documented both in efforts for gender equality in preschools as well as in other aspects of society (Ambjörnsson 2011: 35-36; Bodén 2011: 47; Delegationen för jämställdhet i förskolan 2006: 69-70; Dolk 2013: 38; Lenz Taguchi 2011: 175). The masculine norm thus could remain unquestioned through and in spite of the discourse of gender equality, and as seen until now there is not much in either
policy documents or gender pedagogical approaches to counter that. The likeness promoted through the new “gender equal norm” could paradoxically thus end up reinforcing the masculine norm instead of opposing it. Again this does not necessarily mean that it does not provide opportunities for girls to broaden their abilities and possibilities; however it does so at the expense of the reproduction of that considered feminine as of less value.

**Complicating gender pedagogy, norm-critical and post-human perspectives**

Apart from, and partly in critique of, the approaches to gender pedagogy presented above other strategies for working with inclusion and/or challenging norms in preschool have been developed in the Swedish context. Such strategies could be said to focus on multiplicity and complexity instead of likeness (Lenz Taguchi 2011:175). As Ohrlander writes the work of gender pedagogy in preschools has become more complex: “Feminist complexity rather than feminist obviousness” (Ohrlander 2011:14)[16]. She refers to the cultivation during recent times of critical perspectives in both research and practice with inspiration from deconstruction, queer and post-human theory.

Dolk, who coined the concept of complicating gender pedagogy similarly, asks for a gender pedagogy that asks more questions than it has ready made answers (Dolk 2009, 2011a). She wants to direct focus towards how power is negotiated between children and adults, and how categorisations as sex/gender, sexuality, ethnicity, religion, dis/ability, age and class matter in such negotiations (Dolk 2011a: 56). She is also concerned about how to avoid creating new and limiting norms through gender pedagogical work, and how to involve children more actively in this kind of work (Dolk 2009: 13; 2011: 58).

In her writing on complicating gender pedagogy Dolk draws inspiration from norm-critical pedagogy (Bromseth & Darj eds. 2010, Bromseth & Sörensdotter 2013). Norm-critical pedagogy developed in the Swedish context during the first decade of the 21st century and draws a great deal of inspiration from Kumashiro’s anti-oppressive pedagogy (Kumashiro 2000). Norm-critical pedagogy based in queer theory was developed in critique of a pedagogy focusing on tolerance of so called deviant groups, but also in critique of the sole focus on gender and hetero-normative tendencies in gender pedagogy (Bromseth 2010:31, 32; Bromseth & Darj 2010:14 in footnote; Bromseth & Sörensdotter 2013:25; Rosén 2010:61-62, 70). The aim of norm-critical pedagogy is to provide for an intersectional pedagogy with critical perspectives on power and a critical view on what is made into the norm in any given situation (Bromseth & Darj 2010: 14, Bromseth 2010: 33, 43). Instead of handing over a set
of values or new norms, the norm-critical perspective aims at providing students with opportunity to develop a norm-critical gaze of their own (Bromseth 2010: 42). Norm-critical pedagogy was not developed with the target group of small children in mind; however during recent years, scholars writing on preschool pedagogy have been influenced by these perspectives to a greater degree (Dolk 2011 b, 2013, Lenz Taguchi 2011).

The anthology *En rosa pedagogic* [A pink pedagogy] that I draw upon to here, also includes two articles where post-human and new materialist perspectives are highlighted in relation to gender pedagogical work (Hultman 2011, Lenz Taguchi, 2011). These are theoretical elaborations highlighting the interdependency of both human and non-human actors in the (gendered) *becomings* of the preschool setting. Such focus on materiality and interconnections questions the possibility for anything or anyone to act independently of its surrounding settings, as well as the subject as unitary or stabile (Hultman 2011: 163-170; Lenz Taguchi 2011: 183-184). These thoughts are compatible with how I talked about the classroom as an assemblage in the previous chapter and also the type of freedom that Grosz proposes, that is not based in independence but rather happens in and through connections with the surrounding world. Lenz Taguchi is also highlighting an understanding of difference and sex/gender with reference to among others Deleuze and Guattari that I will take a closer look at below.

Even though these theoretical elaborations might not have had the same impact on preschool practice as more method-oriented perspectives on preschool work, I would still like to lend Dolk’s concept of *complicating gender pedagogy* as an umbrella term for all of the perspectives briefly presented here. I believe that even the more theoretical elaborations on gender pedagogy have its relevance in practice especially being presented in books such as *A pink pedagogy* that are read by many preschool teachers. I regard all of the perspectives presented in this section as directing focus towards power dimensions, different axes of differentiation as well as complicating perspectives on sex and/or gender in general. Below I will discuss the tendency in complicating gender pedagogy to aim for a moving beyond gender altogether, and why I do not necessarily agree with this vision.

**Positive difference and the beyond gender in gender pedagogy**

In the more complicating elaborations of gender pedagogy as for example described by Dolk (2009) and Lenz Taguchi (2011) what is at stake is an ambition to go beyond the gender binary, or the division of humans into the categories of men and women or boys and girls, altogether. The idea, in a highly simplified manner, is that the “gender problem” is in fact the
very division of the sexes into two categories, and if such categorisations would cease to exist so would also the negative effects of the gender system as we know it today. This is what I here will call ambitions to go beyond gender. I find this, very common approach, problematic and I will use the example of Lenz Taguchi’s article (2011) in *En rosa pedagogik* [A pink pedagogy] to explain why. I have chosen this article since it is a part of a recent and popular book on gender pedagogy and also because I am to a great extent inspired by Lenz Taguchi’s writing. It is also a text that differs from most of what have been written on gender pedagogy with its focus on difference as a positive and ongoing force, an understanding of difference that is close to the way I aim for conceptualising difference in this thesis. However, I have some concerns regarding the tendency to disregard sexual difference altogether in favour of a post-gender position as I will explain in more detail below.

Lenz Taguchi in this article reflects upon how difference in the different strands of gender pedagogy, including the norm-critical strand, has been understood as *difference from* something, for example woman different from man or homosexual different from heterosexual. In contrast to this conceptualisation of difference she proposes the view of difference as a mutual and ongoing process produced among different but never really separate entities and forces (Lenz Taguchi 2011: 184). She moreover emphasises how no individual is stable or the same, but rather in constant becoming in relation to other humans and non-humans (2011: 185-186, 190). She thus wants to radically alter the view of difference in its entirety towards a view of it as a positive and ongoing force, rather than the negative or pejorative understanding of difference that has been predominant in western thought. Following from this she goes on to propose an understanding of sex/gender as a socio-material phenomena inspired by feminist post-humanism and Deleuze and Guattari’s concept *a thousand tiny sexes* as follows:

> The sex/gender of the body is here regarded as a transformative multiplicity and a socio-material phenomenon, that consists of a next to infinite amount of active actors – of cells, hormones, tissue, fluids, conceptions, clothing, body movements. (Lenz Taguchi 2011:189) [17]

I think this is a fruitful way of thinking about sex/gender as produced through and in connections and thus not as fixed or stable. This is not far from how sexual difference thinkers emphasise the body as a space of overlap between physical, social and symbolic forces (Braidotti 2011: 127). However further on Lenz Taguchi writes, and this is where I find myself reluctant to follow her lead:

> *Theoretically* all of this means that if we let go of the definition and naming of bodies in terms of woman and man, and decide upon viewing the sexes as a changeable multiplicity, this will have effects, not only for how we act towards eachother and how
we divide work and social responsibility, but in the long term also for how our bodies look and function. (Lenz Taguchi 2011:190) [18]

I read Lenz Taguchi in her thinking upon sex/gender as formulated here as highly inspired by Deleuze and Guattari and their view upon sexual difference:

> For us, on the other hand, there are as many sexes as there are terms in symbiosis, as many differences as elements contributing to a process of contagion. We know that many beings pass between a man and a woman; they come from different worlds, are borne on the wind, form rhizomes around roots; they cannot be understood in terms of production, only in terms of becoming. (Deleuze & Guattari 1987:242)

I find such elaborations on multiplicity and becoming in relation to sex/gender as inspiring, but at the same time, in relation to feminist practice, something is left unsaid. Braidotti in her theorising reads Irigaray and Deleuze through each other and highlights several touching points between their separate schemes of thought, especially concerning their perspective on difference (Braidotti 2002: 65-116; 2011: 245-262 ). However she highlights one crucial inconsistency between the two and this concerns exactly their view on sexual difference. Much like Lenz Taguchi in the above quote Deleuze’s rejection of the gender polarisation results in the claim for the dissolution of sexed identities in their entirety, to go “beyond gender” (Braidotti 2002: 89, 2011: 250, 252, 258). This is a strategy that Braidotti deems as historically “dangerous” for women (Braidotti 2011: 252, 258). She argues that the thinking with Deleuze on this matter proceeds as if there were no asymmetry between the sexes, and that they therefore could follow the same path of exit from the gender dualism (Braidotti 2002: 81, 82; 2011: 253, 254). This for Braidotti does not necessarily mean that there could never be any “beyond gender” or post-gender of the subject, just that, in present time, the struggle for a positive female subject position, is still of relevance and important (Braidotti 2011: 251)

In the quote of Lenz Taguchi, despite the disclaimer “theoretically” the message seems to be that if we were all to decide upon viewing sex/gender as a multiplicity, and gave up naming bodies as either male or female, such categories would automatically cease to exist or produce power. It is not that I do not accept this vision; this might very well be a possible future. My main concern is rather what this formulation might produce in the work of gender pedagogy in the present as of here and now. Here and now, such categorisations still produce power in relation to child and adult bodies. Here and now, there is no agreement to look upon sex/gender as a multiplicity. Here and now bodies are understood in terms of male and female and, what is more, what is considered female is repeatedly given less value. The theoretical idea of giving up categories like female and male might therefore in the given situation of today counter its purpose. This view might, contrary to Lenz Taguchi’s purpose of
highlighting difference, especially if one considers the strength of the gender neutral discourse in the Swedish context, indeed end up in the conception that if we do not name differences they will not be there. That is, to end up again in a gender neutral appreciation where that which is considered male risks remaining as that which is seen as neutral and normal.

Therefore; even if I am both challenged and inspired by the theoretical challenges proposed by Lenz Taguchi, I still think she misses out on something important when sexual difference is left as something that would potentially disappear if we just lay off naming it. Especially, I think such a view of the “gender problem” might produce several problems in relation to the actual practice of preschool work, where, whether we like it or not, sexual difference often comes to matter in both pedagogical practices, among children and among adults.

**Sexual difference theory as a contrasting approach**

The assertion of the positivity of sexual difference challenges a century-old identification of the thinking subject with the universal and of both of them with the masculine. It posits as radically other a female, sexed, thinking subject who stands in a asymmetrical relationship to the masculine. (Braidotti 2011: 256)

What sexual difference theory could contribute with in contrast to the post- or beyond gender approach is the firm insistence on sexual difference as a category, which at least in the here and now *does* matter. Sexual difference theory thus acknowledges the dissymmetry connected to the binary of masculine and feminine and aims as a strategy for the redefinition of the feminine (Braidotti 2011: 93, 127, 143, 151-152). As stated by Braidotti it is not possible for women to just cast off their sexed identities, but this is exactly what seems to be at stake in some efforts for gender equality (Braidotti 2001: 26).

To think differently about women, girls and the feminine is not an easy task in the current system since the masculine is still connected to a higher value. The alternative, to accept difference between men and women, often seems to be inevitably connected with accepting that women have a lesser value, or of adhering to stereotyped ideas of specific female competencies. To highlight difference instead of likeness in relation to sexual difference has thus often been understood as equivalent with regarding boys and girls, men and women as highly stereotyped (as for example in the compensatory approach), or worse biologically determined as two different entities fulfilling these very stereotypes. I find it important to disentangle from this very view of difference since it is stuck in the view of difference as of less value. As I have emphasised it is problematic to base efforts for equality in a strive for sameness. But how to draw on a perspective that affirms difference without
ending up in stereotyped views of this difference or in universalistic claims of what it means to be a woman or a girl?

Sexual difference theory has indeed been accused of proposing an essentialist and universalistic view on sexual difference, disregarding other differences such as those based in race, ethnicity, sexuality and so on (Felski 1997: 3, 8). In response to such critique Braidotti emphasise sexual difference theory as a strategy relying on the same paradox as feminism in general, that is, that it both produces and aims to deconstruct the category Woman (Braidotti 1997: 26; Braidotti 2011: 130). This strategy is not based in a new sameness of Woman, but rests on difference “between, among and within women” (Braidotti 1997: 28)

What is emphasised are thus several levels of difference. Following Braidotti there are embodied differences between men and women, viewing the body as not only a biological entity but as “a point of overlap between the physical, the symbolic, and the sociological” (Braidotti 2011: 127). But of more importance is the difference between how the Subject of discourse has been represented and how Woman has been represented as the Other of this Subject (2011:156). Importantly such representation of Woman as a monolithical category also fails to acknowledge the multiple differences among women (2011: 97, 98, 154). But difference for both Irigaray and Braidotti does not end there but is also found within each subject in the split and multiple nature of the self including both unconscious and conscious processes (2011: 98, 157). It is the recognition of all of these levels of multiple differences that is offered as an alternative to how the subject traditionally has been thought of as universal, unitary and rational.

Sexual difference should from this perspective thus not be understood as an unproblematic or self evident category, but as a category based in the historical situation of women. Following Irigaray, women have not historically in western thought been represented as subjects of discourse (Irigaray 1985: 69). That is, difference in general and female difference, that is women in all their diversity, has been misrepresented in the symbolic order. This representation of the feminine is therefore by necessity not exhausting for the abilities and possibilities of the feminine. As Irigaray states; the feminine is also the excess, the elsewhere, that which is not represented in our culture as we know it (1985: 76, 78). The ambition is thus to bring a more accurate feminine in to representation that is defined by actual woman and not some stereotype image of her (Braidotti 2011: 93, 127, 143, 151-152). Since we do not as of yet know this femininity it is impossible to state on beforehand what it would entail (Braidotti 1997: 27). It might very well be that this specificity will have served
its purpose when the feminine is no longer connected to lesser value. And in such a future there might not be any further need for sexual difference as a strategy. For the time being though the strategy proposed by Braidotti and Iriagaray is that of mimesis, strategic repetition or “working through” the images and representations of women as they have been coded in discourse (Braidotti 2002: 25, 28, 2011: 93-94, 100, 162, Iriagaray 1985: 76). In my own words this means that at least as a first step we need not to add to the oppression of girls and women but to focus on the feminine in positive terms, to empower girls and women in all their diversity, and to allow for what is connected to the feminine to be a potentially positive force.

**Part 2 - Gender pedagogy in practice**

Going through the descriptions of how my informants work with change there are traces of both compensatory and gender neutral approaches as well as more complicating strategies and ideas. All of my informants problematise several of the approaches to gender pedagogy presented above and what some of these strategies might produce in practice. To me it is obvious in their replies that they are well informed of the different discussions carried out between and amongst the different strands of thinking about gender pedagogy in academia, hence highlighting the entanglement between practice and theory in their work but also in gender pedagogy as a field. Compensatory gender pedagogy, gender neutrality and norm-critical pedagogy are all highlighted as inspiration for their work. However, there are no firm divisions between the different strands, and they seem to use them interdependently. Also, the ways they relate to different strategies are more as inspiration then a dogmatic following of certain methods. This also transforms the different strategies in terms of what they might produce in the actual pedagogical setting. What is emphasised most of all is the fluidity of relating to several strategies, perspectives and ideas at the same time. There is no one method or idea that would “solve” the “gender issue” once and for all.

**Compensatory thinking**

With the compensatory, the aim is to compensate towards some kind of middle ground. Boys have to much of this and girls have to little of this, then this is missing and you even it out for them to move closer to each other so that they will become very similar, and also; everything I have read about gender is pointing towards how that which is understood as neutral is also masculine. [19]

In this quote it is stated, in line with how the compensatory approach has been discussed above, that the compensatory approach aims at likeness and, with that, possibly also a masculine form of gender neutrality. The way my informant formulates this is that boys has
too much of something and girls too little of something, and that this is what is at stake in a compensatory approach. Even though this way of framing it might not be deliberately put by my informant in this particular quote, it describes the way neutrality as the masculine norm functions; if that which is considered neutral is simultaneously the masculine norm, albeit a bit downplayed, then girls are always going to be seen as those lacking something, those who has too little of something.

A critical view on compensatory gender pedagogy was common with my informants, but in describing their work, the informants also highlighted how they nevertheless used compensatory approaches to some extent. In part it is described as a perspective that is hard to let go of:

At the same time I might work to quite a large extent from a compensatory perspective, or at least, my colleagues sometimes describes it as hard to free oneself from gender stereotyped ways of thinking, and I have a hard time to free myself from a compensatory way of thinking. It is part of my consciousness around gender to know what is expected of girls and what is expected of boys, and if they do something that goes against this, to give them room for that and try not to correct them. But then one might go into it too much so that when a boy does something ‘un-boyish’ one is extra happy and when a girl does the same thing one is not as happy. [20]

One example, as described here, is to be aware when children do not behave in accordance with what might be expected of them due to their sex and to make an effort not to correct them. As the informant highlights, this approach might end up reinforcing stereotypes through the different treatments of boys and girls. An example of this was presented in the background, where a boy cleaning the table is met with happy cheers from the pedagogue and a girl doing the same thing is ignored. But still, the non-corrective stance in relation to norm-breaking behaviour described by the pedagogue, I believe, could also be seen as a possible way to make room for that which is not expected. Connecting to the discussion in the previous chapter of how Grosz conceptualises “freedom to” such efforts might provide a climate where children are freer to become in several ways, or in a more open-ended way. To be aware of how one potentially as a pedagogue limits certain behaviours in line with what one expects from different children due to their sex, and other axes of differentiation, might be considered compensatory, but it is not necessarily dependent on stereotyped understandings of boys and girls. Rather, what might be at stake is a critical gaze upon norms, limits and regulations in one’s own practice and thinking. Thus, “compensatory strategies”, as formulated here, can both be potentially problematic and productive at the same time depending on the situation and how they are used.
Another example of pedagogical practice inspired by compensatory thinking is described in the next quote. The informant is describing how they, at her preschool, have changed their way of writing about gender pedagogical work.

> Before we wrote: this is the way we do when the boys… and this is the way we do when the girls… And now we have taken up some points instead. For example emotional language. If before it was more like; we try to make it clear for all the boys that they have the right to all their emotions, it now says that all the children has the right to all their emotions. These kinds of issues we might point towards, but we don’t say boys or girls. But this is of course also a strong thing in the preschool; that everybody should do the same thing. [21]

In the effort to move away from potentially problematic aspects of dividing girls and boys into two rigid and stereotyped groups, one way could be to talk about all the children instead of what boys and girls as delimited groups might need. To affirm that all children should have the right to their emotional language could seem rather uncontroversial and is probably something most people would agree to. However emotions and feelings are aspects of life that often are deemed secondary to other abilities and activities. To place value in emotional language for everyone is in itself a way of valorising something that is usually connected to ideas of femininity and with that devalued.

At the same time I think that, even though there is a societal code for how one should be and what is of worth, that what is considered masculine is valued more, in the preschool context it could be that it is quite a lot of the feminine abilities that makes the preschool work or a children group work, for example to be considerate, kind and caring. Therefore a compensatory approach might miss out on the specificity of the preschool. [22]

In my informants replies there are thus both critique and traces of the legacy of compensatory gender pedagogy. Contrary from how I described this approach in the background with the help of textual sources; through these statements I can also see the productive use of it, albeit altered and fixed to fit the specific needs in specific pedagogical contexts. This way of taking on what one deems useful and leave behind other maybe more problematic dimensions of certain methods or strategies is a reoccurring tendency in the statements of my informants.

**Gender neutrality**

The gender neutral approach is also criticised by the informants in line with the critique spelled out in the background of this chapter.

> When I think about work for change/gender pedagogy in preschool at large I think that the focus is on neutrality, that is, when preschools are working with gender it often ends up in for example making the environment “gender neutral”, to take away the “doll-corner” and cars and to focus on construction play. And construction play is something that is connected to the masculine and then it becomes like that; that the neutral equals the male norm. I feel
that books and toys etc. is put away and then it is suddenly gender pedagogy and everything is well. [23]

The informant is critical of how a smaller selection of materials is thought to promote some kind of gender equality. It is easy to see how such equality is constructed upon likeness and connects to the discussion on normality in the last chapter. If there are fewer (gendered) ways of expressing oneself the expressions will be more alike, thus more equal is the logic behind such thinking. In contrast Nordin-Hultman stresses the importance of diverse materials in preschool for the children to *become with*, allowing multiple possibilities of becoming instead of one and the same norm for everybody (Nordin-Hultman 2004:189). Connected to gender and highlighted in the quote above is also the suspicion that such gender neutral equality is actually promoting a masculine norm more than anything else.

But the gender neutral approach could also be viewed as work of resistance towards the idea that children should be divided according to their sex at all. In my informants statements it is also visible that they explicitly use gender neutrality in their work in this manner. Specifically this approach manifests itself through the way they speak to and with the children.

I avoid talking about children by their sex. So that one does not say ‘Come on boys!’ or ‘Oh, what a big boy’ or ‘What a big girl’. I try not to be like; now we are the same since we are girls and now we are the same since we are boys, to not describe them or their relations in that way. [24]

The idea behind not using boys or girls when speaking about and to the children is here put in relation to the idea of not emphasising their sex as the most significant aspect of their personality and to try not to communicate the idea of uniformity based on their sex.

Another example in line with this thinking is to use the gender neutral pronoun hen (zhe). In the Swedish context the gender neutral pronoun hen (zhe) has been a topic for a heated media debate in recent times. The word could, to my understanding, be seen as a way to step away from gendered thinking but also, and maybe mainly, as a possible way for people to define themselves as something other than on either side of the gender binary. The use of the word has been picked up in some preschools, albeit not without controversy. One of my informants brings up the use of this pronoun as one part of the gender pedagogical work in her preschool.

We have introduced ‘zhe’ (hen) to the children (not in any way forced upon them, but presented it as an alternative in discussions), we also chose to rework the lucia-songs (and all other songs we sing) so that they are gender neutral. [25]

The use of the zhe as described here as an “alternative” in discussions, I think, is interesting in several ways. For one it is a way of including children in debates on sex and gender but also
in a broader societal debate about a word and how it is used. It could also be seen as a way of opening up norms on how to position oneself in relation to the binary of male and female for the children. Finally it could be viewed, when for example altering all songs to be gender neutral, as a way of communicating that sex or gender should not be of any significance.

I think these reflections upon how we use gendered language when speaking to, and with children, are important. To not constantly be called a girl or a boy might communicate something of value to the children, that is, when for example doing maths or playing with dolls, the most important thing might not be if you are a boy or a girl. The gender neutral pronoun can be used to enrich and develop ideas about how and what one can be. However, gender neutrality does not necessarily challenge a binary construction of the sexes. On the contrary I would say that sexual difference is there even though we refuse to name it. To avoid naming boys and girls at all times, should not, to my thinking be seen as the solution to problems of inequalities, it might even serve to conceal them. The neutral approach, even in the queer way of proposing a third and gender neutral pronoun, does not automatically challenge the masculine as the norm, or the affliction of the feminine with less value. But as one of my informants above states, to avoid naming children by their gender, could also be a way to avoid reinforcing likeness based on sex, and thus to highlight differences among girls and boys and children in general. Gender neutrality, as it is used in practice by my informants, should not be disregarded as contraproductive in the work for change; on the contrary I think it serves a purpose in gender pedagogy, not the least in guarding the equal treatment of boys and girls. However, it is not enough to challenge some of the assumption historically influential in how we view boys and girls, the masculine and the feminine.

In a way I think that the critique of compensatory gender pedagogy has created a desire to step away from compensatory practices in many pedagogues. As also highlighted in the background both compensatory and gender neutral approaches seems to be pointing towards likeness and sameness, and when trying to move away from the compensatory strand of pedagogy, one might just end up closer to the gender neutral way of thinking. It is as if the affliction of gender equality with neutrality, normality and thus the masculine norm is indeed hard to get rid of. At the same time it is also visible that some strategies that are here connected to gender neutrality or compensatory thinking might indeed make a difference towards a more open-ended understanding of children and what they could become in the preschool setting. The outcome of using specific strategies is thus not fixed on before hand, but depends on situation and context.
Intersectional attempts and norm-critical inspiration

To act for a democratic and including society demands that one makes oneself aware of all those that partake in it; qtbh, cis, ethnicity etc. (Like now for example, just by exemplifying I might be excluding.) To not do that at all (exclude, that is) might be impossible, but at least I want to make myself aware of the fact that people with other definitions of life, body, feelings, beliefs then my own could, and should partake in society.[26]

All of my informants are including, even emphasising other axes of differentiation than sexual difference when they discuss their work. At the same time several are also critical towards how the focus on sex and/or gender is often more explicit in preschool than focus on for example ethnicity, dis/ability or religion. With a certain precaution, most of them say to be inspired by norm-critical pedagogy when discussing these aspects of their work. As stated in the background not much has been written on norm-critical pedagogy in relation to preschool pedagogy as of yet, but it is a concept that has gained a lot of recognition quite fast in Swedish educational discussions. Therefore, to some extent, it might be perceived as the “right” way to work, while at the same time there are some insecurities on what such work should look like in practice.

What is mainly taken into consideration from the norm-critical approach seems to be an intersectional understanding of power-dimensions, and maybe most of all a widened perspective on what categorisations that come to matter in the preschool setting.

I think that it is important to add material, books and so on, that are representing all different sexes, ethnicities and abilities; that different family constellations are represented, that one knows what one is putting on the walls, what songs are sung, are there dolls with different colours of the skin? To be aware of who gets to speak. [27]

In contrast to the idea of taking away material as criticized in the gender neutral approach what is here emphasised is the need to bring in more, and diverse materials that are less monotone in terms of what and who is represented.

Importantly one of my informants stresses that a norm-critical approach is important not the least in areas where children are quite homogeneous in relation to their background, appearance, dis/abilities and so on.

I often think about how I work in an incredibly homogeneous area, in every aspect. ALL the children in my preschool have a mother and a father, only two even has parents that are divorced. On the whole: White, “healthy” children with white “healthy” mums and white “healthy” dads. It makes our work all the more important! We are trying to “trouble” a lot with the children around this.[28]

Norm-critical pedagogy is built on the idea of developing a norm-critical awareness in children/students, so that they themselves are able to think critically about the norm in different situations. I read the quote above as that this is what this preschool teacher wants to
help the children to develop, even when they are in some ways themselves reflecting the norm.

However, to be a child in itself is to be other than the norm and a crucial thought in norm critical pedagogy might, in line with Dolks writing, be to trouble the power relation between adults and children (Dolk 2013). One way of doing that is to step away from the traditional view of knowledge as something that is to be transmitted from adult to child. In the gender pedagogical work this might entail the inclusion of children in to the discussion of inequalities as above. This might not always, though, be easy when working with small children.

I think that much of what I have said up until now has been about how I as an adult can do things; it is this that gender equality is something to be done upon the children, not with them. But I would like to be better at working together with the children and I think that there is a need for tools to be able to, I just don’t believe in just feeding the kids with: this is how to do it, it only keeps up a rule and ‘gender’ could also become a rule. Like: You can’t laugh at a boy with a skirt, because one shouldn’t do that, but why is it funny? For there to be tools that questions why one thinks the way one do. Something to include the children more actively, this is something I don’t work with almost at all. [29]

The inspiration from norm-critical pedagogy and/or complicating gender pedagogy in practice seems to bring to some extent a new direction for the gender pedagogical work. Most directly it entails an interest for and emphasis of difference and diversity, which is not necessarily part of the compensatory and gender neutral strategies. But there are also further questions posed through this perspective on power dimensions and on who is active and who is passive in the work for change.

To treat each child as an “individual” or to go beyond gender

I think it fairly obvious fairly often that one treats boys and girls in different ways, they are treated in different ways and different things are expected of them only dependent on their sex, but also how there has been a very long discussion about gender in preschool and that it still often ends up in ‘No, we don’t do that, we treat every child as individuals, being blind for all the structures. [30]

The view that to treat each “child as an individual” would somehow be the antithesis of treating children differently according to their sex is an argument that is well known to me as well. Importantly it is very possible, and even probable that one treats people differently because of their sex even though one treats them as individuals. “The individual” is not necessarily in any opposition to sex as a category of differentiation; rather sexual difference often makes up a considerable part of how we understand others and ourselves as “individuals”.

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The argument that one is already treating each child as an individual is often used to reject the need for gender pedagogy, but could also be implicit to gender pedagogy, as expressed by my informant below.

But I feel that in any case, one has an opportunity to give more possibilities, for the children, so that they might choose to a greater extent who they can be and what they want to do. […] Not just to walk these ready-made trails that there is. [31]

There is a ground, more like a feminist conviction; I want it to be gender equal. It should be possible to be this individual independent from these structures, but for that to happen it is demanded, I believe the only way to sort it out, is to make visible these structures and try to question them to be able to, both from above as adult, but also raise when children catch sight of the structures so that they can act or to be able to choose who they are, whatever that means. [32]

The acknowledgement of norms and structures influencing the life of children leads towards the desire to “free” children from such norms and structures; for children to be able to choose what they want to do and who they want to be as individuals that are not defined by these structures and norms. This kind of conceptualisation of the “gender problem”, quite hesitantly formulated by the informants, rests on the belief that there is some inner and untouched core that would be able to flourish if it were left alone. But, as discussed in the last chapter, just to be freed from norms or oppressive structures, although sometimes of vital importance, does not necessarily entail freedom. Freedom is, following Grosz not an inherent quality, but something that happens in and through connections (Grosz 1994: 148). This does not mean that the aim to free children from oppressive structures is misguided, but it entails a certain awareness of how “the individual” is not untouched by its surrounding context, and that following Foucault, it is actually one of the very effects of power, rather than freed from influence from it (Foucault 1995/1977: 194).

Not necessarily reliant on any conception of the individual as independent, but also anchored in the wish to “free” children from oppressive norms is the ambition to go “beyond gender” as most directly expressed by one of my informants: “Let’s dissolve gender categories!” [33]. As I have outlined above I am somewhat wary about this ambition in gender pedagogical work, not because I would not like for children to be “free” to become in several ways not limited by their sex, but because it might be a simplified, albeit exhilarating, way to view the work ahead to fulfil such a vision.

**To always be in a process of change**

Above all what is emphasised by the pedagogues when speaking about their work for change is how they are not prepared to settle for any one method or strategy to work with these issues. As such they are challenging understandings of the different approaches as being
clearly separated from each other. Instead they are using different methods and approaches interdependently, arguing for a process oriented understanding of change.

If I am at a preschool where they work as such [in a compensatory way], I think; well good that you work with gender but it might be to make it all a bit too simple. Often, there is a strive in preschools, and not only in preschools I might add, to work with a method that is waterproof every time. There is a wish to have this one way to work with gender or to work with anything, really. To do in exactly the same way, every time. And that is the biggest risk, I think, to decide that every boy needs to work on talking about his feelings and all the girls need to exercise carpentry. [34]

This pedagogue is not, as I interpret her, only critical of the compensatory approach, but rather sees a risk in finding the method to work with, being blind for what this method might create in different situations, with different children at different times. To do so, might, as in the example provided, cement ideas about what boys and girls already are, but also of what they should and could become. Instead a process oriented appreciation of change is underlined, as the pedagogue below describes it; the focus cannot be on some kind of result, because what kind of result would that be? Rather what is at stake is a constant reflexive work upon what is created through the preschool activities and environments provided.

In a short term perspective it might feel good to work with for example a compensatory approach, and kind of have this result and to perform something that is measureable, but we see that we cannot meet it in that way. In practice it won’t be any good. We have to stay in this reflexive place all the time, to be able to reach eachother. And this can be difficult, but I am starting to turn towards that it feels good as well, there is no right or wrong, and it can be tiresome, but at the same time it is rewarding to be able to meet new thoughts and to meet eachothers thoughts. [35]

In such a reflexive process not to follow any one method is instead put forward as a kind of method or approach to pedagogical work on its own.

I don’t believe that one could work exclusively with any one method. I don’t think that one could work compensatory only, I don’t think that one could work norm-critical only and I don’t think that one could work gender neutral because what does that even mean? I don’t think that one could walk this one trail and think that now the whole of this gender question will sort itself out. Instead I think that one is always in all of those a little bit; in some situations its perfect to do something compensatory because that is what is needed, and in many other situations it is only norm-critical, and all of those questions, but sometimes that is not good at all because sometimes the children just need answers and not someone posing questions all the time. I don’t think we can put our practice under any of those theoretical strands. [36]

In a similar vein Dolk in her dissertation warns us that specific methods, albeit useful in a stressful and always changing preschool environment, might serve as easy answers to complex problems that would require more complex solutions (Dolk 2013: 232). There are no self evident methods or ways to work with the “gender issue” because it is not a simple question with a simple answer. On the contrary there is in fact no general agreement on what “the gender issue” is in the first place or what change that is needed to sort it out.
What is it all for? - The “here and now” and multiple differences of the preschool practice

My starting point when I started with this probably was […]; if one wants to change something, start in the preschool. [37]

The idea that it is of crucial importance to start with the youngest is, as I touched upon earlier, based in an understanding of children as carriers of utopia. It is through the younger generation that we have the possibility to change society for the better. Such thinking is implicit in the history of Swedish preschool, but it is also problematic in the sense that the present, the here and now, of children is downplayed in favour of an idea of the future to come.

…for it to be more equal, to be more equal for the children right now, but also, and most of all this was my starting point from the beginning […] I want a gender equal society, then one has to start from the beginning. And this I believe in as well […] but I believe the importance of it is exaggerated, or the view that it should be the most important gender equality work, like; in twenty years, we will be well off, hopefully, if we did it the right way. It is really hard, and a disturbingly long period to “fail” on, if one did it the wrong way… [Laughter] Makes it even more relevant that it is in the “here and now” that there will be change. [38]

Even though, no doubt, it is of importance what kind of pedagogical approaches one meets in the preschool years, and what kind of understanding of the sexes that inform the adults that surround children, the pedagogue above problematises the direct connection between gender pedagogy and gender equality in the future. Even if it was possible to work out some method to work with children today that would provide a gender equal society tomorrow, how would it ever be possible to know before hand if it was done in the right way? Instead, and importantly, what might be at stake in the gender pedagogical work is the present; the here and now of the preschool assemblage.

In such a perspective there are no given answers to what is the desired change, since every moment is different from the other and thus both children and adults are different from one moment to the next. Despite the strong tradition of likeness inherent both to pedagogy at large and specifically to some of the strands of gender pedagogy that have been presented here, the pedagogues are all in different ways highlighting difference as constitutive and vital for the work they do and in the goals they have for their work. One of my informants says that one possible goal with her work for change could be for there to be the possibility to “do gender” in many different ways:

If I have this goal that one should be able to do gender in many different ways, then that should also entail a difference that should be within a gender-doing, not just between different sexes/gender categories. [39]
The emphasis of differences within one and the same gender is both in line with a more intersectional view but also with sexual difference theory. What I find most important and interesting with this quote here is that it directs focus on sex and/or gender but at the same time deconstructs the idea of likeness based upon sex or gender; there might be girls and boys, but there is also a multitude of differences among them. Another of the informants further states how difference is not only active among adults and children but also within each child (and adult) in stating that nobody is the same all the time:

That every human I meet in my practice, every child but also adults, should feel as good as possible, that nobody should feel limited or shut out, not for any reason. That we can learn from each other, to develop together towards (hopefully) empathetic human beings that cherish each others differences and similarities, that it is ok to be both similar and different. That everybody should have the same preconditions to develop and thrive, but that doesn’t mean that everybody needs the same, at the same time. And that is probably the most important thing, I believe. To be able to recognise what every child needs right now, not to freeze ones opinion on any individual (since nobody is the same all the time), but to still be open and responsive towards that everybody does not need the same thing at the same time. It is challenging, fun, interesting and of vital importance! For the children, for us adults, for “society”. [40]

To disentangle oneself from the idea that children (and adults) are themselves alike in each given moment is a challenge, since it is much easier to build one’s practice on preconceived ideas of what a child, boy, girl or preschool teacher is and need, but it also means to disentangle from limiting conceptions of identity and to allow for there to be unexpected encounters and events in the preschool practice.

A proposal for sexual difference theory as an additional inspiration in gender pedagogy

As several scholars as well as my informants above notes; ambitions for gender equality are oftentimes caught up in a logic where it is the girls or women that need to change (Ambjörnsson 2011: 35-36; Bodén 2011: 47; Delegationen för jämställdhet i förskolan 2006: 69-70; Dolk 2013: 38; Lenz Taguchi 2011: 175). This tendency is built on the thought that “women and girls can be just the same as boys and men”, but even if this is true, it is based on a problem description where the masculine is understood as of more value then the feminine. I am wary that this problem description in itself does harm to actual women and girls, born into a system that defines them as such but at the same time marks off this difference as a negative difference, something that is to be transgressed. That is, the feminine, and through that, actual girls associating themselves with the feminine, thus risk to be marginalised and understood as problematic and stereotyped. The “solution” to this could not to my mind be to carry on as if there were no sexes or no historical devaluation attached to the feminine. Yet this is what is at
risk when aiming for the post- or beyond gender as described above both in relation to theoretical thought and to some extent in the replies of my informants. To avoid “gender blindness” and harmful practices where girls are defined as of lesser value I believe it important to handle the issue of sex and/or gender in the preschool setting with great care. This is why I think the additional perspective of sexual difference theory would contribute to the work carried out in the name of gender pedagogy.

What I believe sexual difference theory could contribute with is at least twofold. For one it would entail a focus on the feminine in other terms than it has been represented, that is an affirmative view on the feminine as in abilities, practices, behaviours and interests that are seen as feminine in all of us, girls, boys, men, women, and those not wanting to pick up any of these positions in the gender binary system. Secondly it would also entail a focus on actual girls, and an awareness of the looming risk to define them as of less worth once again. This includes being cautious not to devalue the interests, behaviours or play that is typically associated with girls. What might be at stake instead is another look at these stereotypes, to see all that we previously missed in such activities, all that is already there that denounces any stereotyped understanding of girls and of children. To take care not to disentangle feminine abilities, positions and behaviours from actual girls would also mean attentiveness to how actual girls and their interests are treated in the preschool setting. At it most basic level, as also described by my informants, it entails an awareness of who is represented in what way and who gets to speak, when and where, why and about what? Sexual difference theory in gender pedagogy would thus serve as a sort of guarantee that the actual material and social conditions for girls in preschool would not fall out of sight in the ambitions for gender equality.

But it is still not about forcing stereotypes on to children. Instead it is an imperative to avoid regarding girls and boys as embodied versions of what they symbolically have come to mean: that is to acknowledge the diversity already present among children. Neither boys nor girls are actually as stereotyped in their behaviours, abilities and expressions as they have sometimes come to be understood. Also of importance is of course the emphasis on difference as multiple and ongoing and present within and among each and every one of us much in line with the way Lenz Taguchi (2011) aims at redefining difference in the preschool setting. Gender pedagogy that is based on gender equality conceptualised as likeness is with this perspective no longer a desirable way to go. A certain open-endedness in relation to what a child is, and could become is thus favoured, stepping away from the production of a new norm concerning what a child, boy or girl, should “be” in order to be considered gender equal.
But also, as described by one of my informants above to avoid to freeze one’s opinion on any child, since nobody is the same all the time.

**Concluding thoughts**

In this chapter I have outlined what gender pedagogical work could mean in both practice and theory and how my informants relate to this kind of work. I have shown how efforts for change in the preschool setting conceptualised as gender pedagogy could produce new norms and rigid appreciations of what a child, girl or boy, is, could and should be. I have also presented how different approaches to this work produces different understandings of what the “gender issue” is and what the “solution” to it could entail. A *complicating gender pedagogy* could be seen as a way to try to include difference instead of likeness as a condition for gender equality. In line with this thought I have also proposed sexual difference theory as a possible additional perspective to draw inspiration from in gender pedagogy. This perspective, could, I believe, provide a critical gaze upon gender neutrality as inherent to some of the pedagogical practices within the field of gender pedagogy, but also inherent to theories that advocates for a post-gender appreciation of the sexes. I believe it important in preschool practice to problematise how what is considered feminine is connected to less worth and to try to engender a positive view of the feminine in order not to induce feelings of inferiority in those understanding themselves in these very terms.

The replies of my informants show that they are well informed of the different discussions carried out between and amongst the different strands of thinking about gender pedagogy in academia, highlighting the entanglement between practice and theory in their work but also in gender pedagogy as a field. Considering this proximity between gender pedagogical practice and academic reflections upon this very practice (as well as practical reflections upon that theoretical writing) makes it even more important to make an effort to widen the theoretical insights in this field, to make even more ways of thinking about sex and/or gender and gender pedagogy available to those practicing preschool pedagogy. Thus the perspectives used in literature within the field matters in the practical preschool work. No one theory or method, as stated by my informants, might be enough to understand and provide change in the ever changing reality of preschool work, but with the use of multiple perspectives different things becomes visible and with that available for intervention. This is why I find it important to include sexual difference theory as an additional source of inspiration for preschool work and gender pedagogy.
The replies of my informants showed, not only how different theories and strands of gender pedagogy could be used alongside each other but also how methods and strategies are transformed and filled with new meanings once they are used in preschool practice. There is thus not any need to exclude certain forms of gender pedagogy in favour for others as long as the strategies are put in relation to what they might produce in the specific contexts where they are used. The reflexive work of the preschool teachers is emphasised as important and no one method, theory or strategy is seen as “enough” in the process-oriented approach to change as conceptualised by the informants. There is also a certain focus and care for difference expressed by my informants. In this focus, along with their desire for both knowledge on, and change, in relation to prevailing norms and structures I see possibilities to challenge the logic that privilege likeness. The focus on difference in both theory and practice seems highly important in that it allows for a view of each child and adult as in constant becoming rather than in a static relation to a fixed identity.

Finally, as I formulated in the previous chapter, some things are not possible to change through preschool alone. To think along the line that we have to start in the preschool to provide change effectively puts the blame on preschool teachers when the desired change does not happen. Therefore I find it of most importance to state that gender equality could not be achieved through preschool alone. For such a change to come about a lot of things has to happen in a lot of different places. To disentangle from the idea of starting as early as possible to achieve any change also means to dodge the idea that it is the children that are the ones in need of change. Because, if we, as adults, do not as yet know how to achieve gender equality, could it really be feasible that we are the ones to teach children how to make it happen? But to discard the thought of preschool as the green house of a future and gender equal society does not mean that the work of gender pedagogy would lose its validity. Rather, the focus on here and now as put forward by my informants, might call for other ways to think about gender pedagogy, it does not make it of less importance.

Following a view of the preschool classroom as an assemblage it is possible to lift our gaze from the individual identities of children to consider all those involved in preschools and further, in the society at large. What is the “gender issue”? What is it that is in need of change? I argue that this means that we cannot just focus on inequalities, identity formations and the lives of children. In fact the inequalities, identity formations and lives of those working with children, that is the preschool teachers, are highly intertwined with and impossible to fully separate from those of the children. This is why I in the last chapter will
turn to discuss the preschool teacher and the way she is both part of and challenges the institutionalisation of femininity.

The feminist preschool teacher

**Pedagogue:** What do you want to be when you grow up?
**Child:** A daycare teacher.
**Pedagogue:** Ok. Anything else you want to be?
**Child:** Yes, a firefighter.
**Pedagogue:** OK!
**Child:** No, I was just joking, only boys can become firefighters.
**Pedagogue:** …
**Child:** …Just kidding, one can become whatever one wants! (Dolk 2011a: 57) [41]

I have borrowed this dialogue between a girl and a preschool teacher from Dolk’s writing on gender pedagogy. Dolk remarks on how the girl has seen through, and makes fun of what answers are the “right” ones within the “gender equal preschool”. But she also reflects upon how this dialogue poses important questions to the work of gender pedagogy in preschools: Is it more “gender equal” for a girl to want to be a firefighter than a preschool teacher (2011: 58)? Is the choice of working in preschool always problematic for girls and women from a perspective of gender equality?

I find this specific example interesting because it is quite telling of both what “gender equality” has come to center on in preschools, but also of the entanglement between children and adults in these issues. If it is problematic and somewhat disappointing to hear small girls say that they would like to work in the preschool, and if this is that obvious that small girls themselves knows this, then what does this mean for those, mostly women, that are working in the preschool and their self image? And in the longer run, for the girls and boys and their appreciation of whose work is of value?

Following the idea of the preschool as an *assemblage* I will in this concluding chapter take a closer look at the preschool teacher occupation. I argue that the view of women working in preschool and their work is not irrelevant for what gender equality and gender pedagogy in preschool entails. I will discuss how women in preschool have come to be understood through gender equality discourse and discuss this in relation to the experience of my informants. I argue that the misrepresentation of women in preschool and their work carries material and psychological consequences. The empowerment of women working in preschool is not besides the point of gender pedagogy. Rather the misrepresentation of the feminine is a common feature in the lives of both women and girls. Thus what is needed is a joint effort for a more affirmative view of the feminine, women and girls in all their diversity.
Part 1 - Gender equality, the female preschool teacher and the “feminine”

A professional room for women

In her genealogical readings Lenz Taguchi highlights the entanglement of the preschool teacher occupation with the appreciation of femininity during all of its history. The Swedish preschool was developed by (middle class) women at the beginning of the 20th century with the claim that such practice demanded abilities specific to “women” (Lenz Taguchi 2000: 77-81). Building upon scientific and biological appreciation of the sexes women were seen as inferior to men in their ability for theoretical and intellectual work, and such work was even seen as potentially harmful for them. At the same time they were seen as morally superior and therefore fit to take care of and foster small children (2000: 78). Women were also considered to be in possession of the ability of “maternal love” and with that the ability to provide a loving and supporting pedagogical setting for the child’s development. Motherhood was thus seen as the main feature of womanhood and the pedagogue was seen as above all a stand-in mother (Delegationen för jämställdhet 2006: 24-25, Lenz Taguchi 2000: 77-81).

The early pioneers of preschool were using these very ideas of differences between men and women to construct a professional room of their own, and legitimacy for their work, in a society where there were few opportunities for women to have a professional career. Thus one could say that the claim that women by nature were better suited to work with children than men opened up a possibility for the emancipation and professionalisation of women (Delegationen för jämställdhet 2006: 30, Lenz Taguchi 2000: 77, 79-80). Interestingly, the progressive pedagogical ideas that developed early on in the 20th century, still highly influential today, developed alongside these ideas of women. Femininity, motherhood and the progressive pedagogy of the time thus came to be understood as almost the same thing (Lenz Taguchi 2000: 78-81).

Even though the preschool as a professional room for women developed around ideas of feminine specificity connected to motherhood, Lenz Taguchi notes that throughout its history the women working in preschools have also struggled to disengage from the very idea of the preschool teacher as a stand-in mother (2000: 77). The scientific understanding of the child, discussed in the first chapter of this thesis, is an example of how the preschool teacher developed to be something more than “just” a mother figure. Instead she, through her work with observation and documentation of the individual child and its development, could take on an expert role in relation to psychological and pedagogical practices around the child (2000: 89). To work as a preschool teacher became a possible way to understand oneself as an
intellectual woman, during a time when such identification was not necessarily easily accessible for women. However, throughout history, it was still the “motherly” aspects of preschool work that gained recognition, and this is still to some extent true today (2000:77, 90, 97, 98). For the (female) preschool teacher this has meant, as pointed out by Lenz Taguchi, to gain recognition for her work, it has been necessary to create distance from connections between preschool work and the idea of both motherhood and femininity, in favour of a gender neutral appreciation of her work (Lenz Taguchi 2000: 98, 266).

The gender equality discourse
Ohrlander writes that the role of the preschool teacher went through important changes around the time for the expansion of the preschool during the sixties and seventies (Gerdi & Ohrlander 2007: 8-7). The preschool was strengthened both in its political and pedagogical commission and the preschool teacher and her role was in part altered in the same direction. The expansion of the preschool was also considered an important step towards a more gender equal society (2007: 7-8, 15). At the same time the emergent gender equality discourse that gained force during this time coincided with several different ideas and forces. The demand for women to be able to work coincided with demands for labour force, a stronger focus on consumption and growth and also more tax income for the state (Nordberg 2005: 67; Ohrlander & Gerdi 2007: 12, 46). Work that had been previously carried out for free in the home; caring for small children, elders and the sick was now moved to the public sphere. However, as pointed out by Nordberg, this did not, in any revolutionary way, challenge what tasks were considered male or female or who had the main responsibility for home and children, rather it was still women who carried the main responsibility for the care of children, sick and elderly, both inside and outside of the home (Nordberg 2005: 62).

Efforts to change inequalities in work has to a large degree come to centre around how to get women to choose education and occupation that are not connected to traditionally female sectors, but also to get more men to work in those same occupations (Ibid.). Nordberg points out how gender equality, both in the labour market as well as in other aspects of life, to a large extent has come to be associated with numerical equality, that is an equal number of men and women doing the same thing, with statistics as its main instrument of measurement (2005: 79). Despite the fact that the segregation of the labour market thus has been an important target for gender equality interventions throughout recent decades, not much has changed concerning the division of labour. To a large extent those occupations that were dominated by women in the 60’s and 70’s still are, Sweden has one of the most gender
segregated labour markets in all of Europe and the occupations with the highest percentage of women are also those with the lowest status and pay (Berntsson 2000: 114-115; Nordberg 2005: 12, 76). Differences in income between men and women are often connected to their “gendered” choice of occupation and value discrimination, that is “woman’s work” is less valued because of its status as woman’s work (Berntsson 2000: 115).

Compared to other female dominated workplaces, the lack of men in preschool has been targeted as especially problematic in relation to gender equality (Nordberg 2005: 66). Apart from potentially raising the status and pay of the occupation, men in preschool are often expected to function as role models for children, especially so for boys (2005: 64-65). This argument for the need of more men in preschool rests on different and somewhat contradictory ideas. For one it is the idea of men being able to show children that men can do care oriented work just as women. But it is also based in the view that children and especially boys need both female and male role models for their proper development (2005: 12, 60, 64-65). A space has thus been created for a discourse that renders women less desirable than men in preschool work, but also as problematic in their lack of “masculinity”. The “feminised” preschool environment has been targeted not only as problematic for the boys attending preschools but also as the reason for men not wanting to work there (2005: 12, 92, 334). It is thus the women and their “problematic femininity” that is sometimes seen as the very reason for the failure of gender equality interventions in preschool (2005: 12). Men and masculinity are hence, following the numerical understanding of gender equality, seen as marginalised and subordinated (Ibid.). At the same time, as showed by several researchers, men are often in reality privileged in female dominated workplaces, at least with regards to career opportunities and payment (Lenz Taguchi 2000: 100; Nordberg 2005: 12, 58)

Just like girls are often seen as those that need to change to become more “gender equal” in schools and preschools, women are those that are often expected to change to provide for gender equality in general (Ambjörnsson 2011: 37, 39; Delegationen för jämställdhet 2006: 39; Nordberg 2005: 79, 327). In the case of the preschool more men are called for, but the absence of men is at the same time connected to the women already working there. What is more, men are often thought of as bringing something to the preschool that women cannot contribute with themselves, be it status or masculine role models for the children. Writes Nordberg:

> This opens up for a marketing of men and masculinity. When male workers are linked to sex-stereotyped assumptions and masculinity is portrayed as a “scarce commodity”, male workers are constructed as more desirable than women in female dominated occupations. (Nordberg 2005: 336) [42]
The masculine norm thus functions, in spite of, and through the gender equality discourse in such a way that the work carried out in preschools as well as the women doing it are connected to a lesser value.

Nordberg states that the gender equality discourse deems out certain behaviours, places, occupations and persons as traditional, stereotyped and unequal, notably the working class and immigrants, but also, as is up for discussion here; women working in care oriented occupations (Nordberg 2005: 68). In such a logic to be a man doing the same kind of work, though, is considered both modern and gender equal, despite the fact that it has been shown that when men enter the preschool a traditional gendered division of work tasks is often reproduced (2005: 69, 327). Just like some of the gender pedagogical approaches discussed in the last chapter, gender equality discourse seems to be prone to set up a new set of norms for how to be “gender equal” that does not necessarily challenge the male as the norm or benefit women. Dolk writes that gender equality politics has come to be almost an apolitical question, where inequalities are seen as something that is malfunctioning within an otherwise well functioning system. The system in itself is thus not questioned or examined (Dolk 2013: 233-234, 236).

What sexual difference theory contribute with is exactly to put in to question the system in itself, the way the society is built upon gender neutrality as in sexual indifference, and the radical vision of changing this logic towards a future that necessarily is built on other premises (Braidotti 2011: 105; Irigaray 1985: 78). Sexual difference thinkers have sometimes been understood as investing in difference in opposition to equality (Felski 1997: 18). However as both Braidotti and Irigaray stresses, what is at stake is rather the interdependence between difference and equality (Braidotti 2011: 121). Irigaray accordingly asks: “How can the double demand - for both equality and difference - be articulated?” (Irigaray 1985: 81).

That is, neither does the focus on difference denounce the importance of equality nor does equality denounce the issue of difference. But as the focus in the Swedish context, at least, has been more on equality than difference, I find it important to reinsert the question of difference into gender equality discourse. Gender equality is not a fixed concept and it does not only have to be about numerical equality, nor does it have to entail a reinforcement of the (white, middle class, heterosexual) male subject as the norm. I see the value discrimination of the work of women, such as the preschool teacher’s work, as one of the effects of the devaluation of difference. Thus the devaluation of difference in itself is indeed a gender equality problem.
The feminine and the concept of “working through”

In the last chapter I wrote about how sexual difference theory as conceptualised by Irigaray and Braidotti aims at bringing the feminine into representation (Braidotti 2001: 26). The feminine as it has been represented through discourse is seen as a false feminine; a feminine defined not by women but from within a discourse caught in the logic of the Same, that is the patriarchal order (Braidotti 2011: 93-94). The aim of sexual difference theory is thus to bring another feminine into representation, a feminine defined by women as other than non-men (Braidotti 2002: 26, 2011: 132). These ideas can be interpreted as building upon some kind of true and inner essence of women. In my reading of Braidotti, however I have come to understand it in another way. Writes Braidotti:

If ‘essence’ means the historical sedimentation of many-layered discursive products, this stock of culturally coded definitions, requirements and expectations about women or female identity – this repertoire of regulatory fictions that are tattooed on our skins – then it would be false to deny that such an essence not only exists, but is also powerfully operational. History is everyone else’s and hence also women’s destiny. In other words, because of this history and because language is all we have, before we relinquish the signifier ‘woman’ we need to re-possess it, to revisit its multi-faceted complexities. (Braidotti 2002: 41)

It is not that there is some eternal and universal inner feminine that sexual difference feminists must seek out. Rather, in the present reality there are already multilayered ideas of women in circulation restricting what the feminine, or to be a woman, could entail. What is more, these ideas are connected to the embodied selves of women and as such not that easy to just throw away. Paraphrasing, but contrasting Beauvoir, Braidotti writes “One does not become a member of the dark continent, one is born into it” (Braidotti 2011: 266). That is, it is not as easy to avoid the negative connotations connected to one’s sex as to relinquish the idea of Woman altogether. Through discourse female bodies are inevitably connected to this idea and this is not an easy task to change. But Woman as she is represented is not the same as “real” women with their diverse experience (Braidotti 2002: 26; 2011: 105). This difference between representation and empirical women is the key both to a feminist subject position and for change to come about. Sexual difference theory thus both makes use of and problematises the category Woman (Braidotti 2002: 25, 28). The strategy for change, to create more adequate representations of women in all their diversity, proposed by Braidotti, following Irigaray, consists of “working through” the ideas and representation of women or “mimetic repetition” as a form of “inner erosion of the feminine by women who are aware of their own implication with that they attempt to deconstruct” (Braidotti 1997: 35) (Braidotti 2001:25, 28, 2011: 93-94, 100, 162, Irigaray 1985:76):
In my adaptation of Irigaray’s textual and political strategy of ‘mimesis’, I have argued that it is an affirmative form of deconstruction. That means that it amounts to a collective repossession of the images and representations of Woman as they have been coded in language, culture, science, knowledge and discourse and consequently internalized in the heart, mind, body and lived experience of women. Mimetic repetition of this imaginary and material institution of femininity is the active subversion of established modes of phallogocentric representation and expression of woman’s experience which tend to reduce it to unrepresentability. The mimetic reassertion of sexual difference challenges the century-old identifications of the thinking subject with the universal and of both of them with the masculine. (Braidotti 2002: 25-26)

The strategy of “working through” is thus based in the acknowledgement of women’s own implication with the “gender system”. It is not possible to just abandon the idea of womanhood or the feminine because it is at the same time a part of what structures women’s identities (Braidotti 2011: 104). In this exercise the point is not, however to find a new universal representation of women, on the contrary, for Braidotti, it is rather the trace of the journey and the spaces in-between that constitutes the feminine not some static or fixed end goal (Braidotti 2011: 93).

What is being empowered is women’s entitlement to speak, not the propositional content of their utterances. What I want to emphasize is women’s desire to become, not a specific model for their becoming. (Braidotti 2011: 133)

In the remaining part of this chapter I will employ the strategy of mimetic repetition, the way I understand it, to understand the preschool teacher and her work. Drawing on the experiences of my informants I hope to lay bare the difference between how the female preschool teacher has been understood in the patriarchal order and the experience of my informants. As I will show the misrepresentation of both women engaging in, and the actual work understood as, traditional “woman’s work” has both material and psychological effects. But also how the actual work carried out by my informants is subverting and problematising not only assumptions about “female work” but also notions of knowledge, body and mind.

**Part 2 - Intellectual work, “motherhood”, femininity and feminism**

I think there is an image in society of the preschool teacher, and that image is that it is a woman that is best “suited” to work in preschool because the only thing that she should do is to change diapers, dry snotty noses and play all day long. Something that in turn can be connected to the image of the woman’s role to stay at home with the kids and play with them and change their diapers etc. It is really belittling. Because if it was like that, that the preschool teacher “only” would change diapers, dry snotty noses and play all day long, why would that be valued any less? [43]

It is a complex question that of femininity, women and the preschool teacher occupation. As Lenz Taguchi points out, the conflicting issues of the preschool teacher occupation during the last century could be read as analogous to the conflicts and complexities involved in the modern woman’s role as a whole (Lenz Taguchi 2000: 77). When speaking to my informants
about their work from the perspective of their sex the conflicting issues that are contained within this discussion are highly visible. As is seen in the quote above it is hard to bear the stereotyped idea of the female preschool teacher as “just” a stand-in mother, performing typical woman’s work, but at the same time, why should such work, connected to, if one will, motherhood, be valued any less?

The “gendered” choice to work in preschool
The connection between their choice of work and their being female for my informants seems to be a topic that is made up of conflicting feelings. It might not only be considered “bad” to be able to work in a female dominated workplace, but still the whole of the discussion on their sex and their occupation nevertheless evokes negative feelings.

I also think that it is not only bad that this is a female dominated work. But I feel that it is tiresome and boring to discuss. It makes me feel like I didn’t choose this on my own. That I am in some way tricked into becoming a preschool teacher because I am a woman. As if one does not take my interest seriously and just: ‘Well, well, how typical that you chose to work with children.’ If I were a man I might had have to defend my choice, but it would at least be considered an active choice. [44]

In Lenz Taguchi’s work with preschool teachers she similarly encounters unwillingness in her informants to connect their choice of work with their sex. They do not see themselves as women in relation to their work and they do not connect their work to issues of femininity or masculinity but are instead highlighting a gender neutral appreciation of their occupation (Lenz Taguchi 2000: 188, 266-267, 285). Such a gender neutral appreciation of one’s choice of work, could, following Lenz Taguchi be understood as a way to distance oneself from notions of difference as of less worth in order to avoid taking on the position of the Other (Lenz Taguchi 2000:188)

Even though most of my informants admit that them being female might have something to do with their choice of work, it is not without a certain resignation. It is as if the mere highlighting of their sex in relation to the choice of the preschool teacher occupation induces feelings of inferiority or non-independence, of being nothing more than one’s sex and to first and foremost be a woman rather than anything else.

I guess that I would do something else had I been a man, which is quite a difficult insight since it makes me feel like a slave under my own sex when I think about it… Who am I really; a product of the norm or my own individual capable of making my own choices? [45]

Oh, surely my sex is connected to my choice of profession. Surely. And I don’t really know how I think about this or relate to it. […] Sometimes I think that if I was a man I would have done something different, dared to aim higher. But then I get angry with myself and think that when I think like that I am myself confirming the image of the preschool teacher occupation as a low status occupation. [46]
When relating their choice of profession to their sex, many of my informants say that they probably would not work in the preschool were they men, and this is in line with what the statistics say about the amount of women and men that work in preschool. But the idea is also that were they men, their choice to work with children would have seemed like more of an actual choice than something just connected to their sex.

Ambjörnsson writes on the topic “free choice” that not all choices are regarded as equally free but rather those choices that are understood as free are also those that are in line with existent power structures (Ambjörnsson 2011: 126-128). In this context, though, it seems like the choice of working in preschool for a woman is considered “un-free”, since this kind of work, connected to women, is of lower status than “men’s work”. However, should a man do this same choice he would be considered “free” in his choice, despite the lower value attached to this kind of female dominated work.

Following Irigaray and Braidotti, the idea of a rational and independent subject in charge of its own actions could be understood as connected to ideas of masculinity. To be a woman is in itself in opposition to this construction, and to choose something so closely entangled with notions of womanhood, femininity and motherhood for a woman thus comes off as less of a choice and more of a consequence of her being a woman. However, being a man making the same choice comes off as a conscious, rational and “free”, maybe not so much because of the choice of work but because of his status as a man, that is a rational subject. Importantly, what sexual difference theory reveals is that even if the masculine has been constructed as that which is neutral, it really is not. The masculine subject position is just as gendered as the female one, and a man choosing to work in preschool would have taken this decision dependent and in relation with several different discourses and forces, just like women, one of them being the gendered idea of a male preschool teacher.

To stand in the way of gender equality?
The idea of it being typical to work in a woman’s profession being a woman is also, I suspect, connected to the interest these particular preschool teachers take in gender equality and change. As is visible in this statement:

Sometimes I think that it is typical that I should perform this kind of woman’s work. Like why should I? Because if I had been a man that was conducting this kind of work for change then it would have made such a difference only to have a different sex. [47]

The idea that being a man would in itself make a big difference in preschool by showing children that both men and women can do such work is inherent to the gender equality discourse. However, albeit male pedagogues could potentially fill this purpose, it is
simultaneously built upon a complementary understanding of the sexes. That is, the presence of men in preschool is thought to provide something other than that of women, and thus to make a difference in itself. Maybe this very idea is the reason behind that when men enter the preschool the gendered order risks to be reinforced rather than challenged. One of my informants reflects on the claim for and importance of more men in preschool in the following manner:

It is seldom that anyone specifies what this Man is for or what abilities he is expected to bring. What is it that is needed from him? And the men that I have been working with, they just wish to be pedagogues, like everybody else. […] It might even be that there is a greater diversity if there are only women that are so diverse in themselves, working in a specific children group, or only men, than if there has to be exactly the same amount of women and men that ends up doing different things. [48]

It is not that the problem is the few men that are working in preschools; rather the pedagogue above is critical towards the way more men in preschool are often seen as needed to provide a gender equal practice. And, again, there are still mostly women working in preschools, and claims for the importance of, and efforts for employing more men, albeit that they might serve gender equality goals, might also reinforce ideas of men as more competent and more valued than women.

     Well it would be great if more men worked in preschool, but it is not my main focus. And anyhow there are no men to employ. What to do? It would be bizarre if men for example had a higher pay check for working in preschool, or, well, that is the way it is really…[49]

What more men in preschool would mean for efforts for gender equality is of course connected to what is meant by gender equality in the first place. If an equal amount of men and women in the same place equals gender equality, more men in preschool would serve this purpose. If on the contrary gender equality would mean an altogether other view on men and women, what is valued and what is not and a positive view on difference, more men working in preschool could not be seen as the solution.

**Care and pedagogy, body and mind**

The idea that the preschool teacher occupation is a woman’s occupation is not, however, only reliant on the amount of women and men working there. Rather, as one of my informants emphasises, it is also about the female connotations connected to this kind of work, and how this in turn is connected to low status.

     There is talk about how more men would help and raise the status, and I don’t know about that. I would probably not connect it [the low status of preschool work] to there being a lot of women, but rather that it contains elements with female connotations. And then it just happens to be that there are a lot of women doing it, I have no idea why! [Laughter] Or it is seen as, with small children, there is much emphasis on the caring parts of the preschool practice and that those are connected to a traditional
The focus on both small children and the “caring” aspects of the work is in line with traditional appreciations of femininity as connected to motherhood. Often paired up with this appreciation of preschool work are the pedagogical aspects of the work, as is seen in the following quote:

I believe that the connections to the traditional [woman’s] role might have to do with the individual and what pedagogy that is carried out in a particular preschool. And the view in society of course, on the occupation and the woman’s role and what value or maybe lack of value that this profession has. I think a lot about if a preschool has greater focus on the caring parts than the pedagogical practice. If the focus is on the preschool as a prolonged home environment or a place where children has the opportunity to explore and work on their own thoughts and ideas.

This statement is in some ways echoing that of the long struggle in the preschool teacher occupation to disentangle from notions of motherhood and preschool as a homelike environment. Following Irigaray the reduction of women to the role of mothers is one of the most significant aspects of the patriarchal order (Irigaray 1985: 83). Still motherhood is also traditionally an important site for female identity (Braidotti 2011: 129). This makes it specifically important to carefully disentangle the position of the preschool teacher from ideas of a stand-in mother. What is a bit problematic with the problem description above though is that it rests on a dichotomised understanding of care and pedagogy as it has been produced through the patriarchal order. Care is here connected to the traditional woman’s role and pedagogy is connected to an idea of the good preschool, where the connection to home and motherhood is not as pronounced. Historically pedagogy and the knowledge production around children has been a male sphere, whilst the everyday practice of caring for children has been a female task (Lenz Taguchi 2000: 77 ). The entanglement between care and pedagogy is often highlighted in relation to Swedish preschools. An example is this quote from the proceedings to the current preschool curriculum:

In the name daycare the presence of the female “care” shines through. This could make itself known through a too homelike setting, where the pedagogical professionalism is not as distinct. But with the fruitful encounter between “care” and “pedagogy” a pedagogical environment is created that in a nuanced way relates to the child as a subject. (Barnomsorg och skolakommittén 1997: 70) [52]

Even if both care and pedagogy is here deemed necessary elements in preschool, it shines through how “care” with its female connotations is simultaneously devalued and connected to an all too homelike setting and lack of pedagogical professionalism. To dissociate from the aspect of care in the preschool teacher’s occupation, could be a way of gaining recognition for ones work, but at the same time it adds on to the devaluation of that which is regarded as
feminine in preschool work. This view is also something that is problematised in the statements of my informants:

> When it comes to caring chores that are directly connected to the children (changing diapers, wiping noses etc.) it is not something that I would ever want to avoid, these chores are closely connected to the learning of and the relationship with the children, in this I am confident! [53]

This view is not necessarily building upon care and pedagogy as binaries. Rather than a view of care and pedagogy as separate, or even entangled, aspects of preschool work, care and pedagogy is here seen as part of the same process, and never really possible to separate. In such work pedagogy is not necessarily deemed as of more value than care, rather care and pedagogy builds upon each other in an interdependent sort of way.

Another pedagogue discusses her relation to the traditional female role in preschool work as follows.

> I have made a journey in this. I interpret a “traditional woman’s role” as caring and to have access to ones emotional language and so on. And I have made a journey in it. When I started to work in preschool as a substitute pedagogue, this was the only thing I was expecting, the only thing I knew: to care for, to comfort and to wipe noses. Later on along the way I rejected this traditional woman’s role a bit and started to think like I know many preschools are discussing this right now, for example: Should one as a pedagogue hug the children, or might it not be part of our role? And I have been a bit more distanced for some years, to assert my integrity; “You cannot just come here and throw yourself around my neck, I might not want a hug, this is my space”. And I think that this is connected to how one wants to distance oneself from the traditional caring and in some way valorise ones profession doing other things. “We work with projects, and we do not hug!” It seems a bit strange but I think this is what it is. And now I am back in thinking that it could be united, that there could be both. And I think that it might feel good if I felt that in my workplace there are people that like me and want to hug me, and exactly the same I think it could be for the children. [54]

The journey this preschool teacher has made is in some ways a journey from at first taking the traditional woman’s role in relation to children for granted, just to further on dismiss this role in its entirety, creating distance between herself and this role as it has been defined in the current order. Later on, however, she has come to terms with some of the things connected to this role and regards them as valuable aspects of both her work and her personal well-being. In this journey she has let go of both the either or of care and pedagogy in her work as well as the naturalised devaluation of that what is connected to femininity, emotions and body. This is also a journey towards defining the feminine in one’s own terms, not necessarily as lack but as of vital importance.

Similarly theory and practice, learning and relations, mind and body is connected and explicitly spelled out in all the replies of my informants. This way of conceptualising learning, knowledge, body and care could be considered radical in not
positioning body and mind as opposites. It is thus possible to see the potential in preschool work to question some of the binary constructions inherent to the order of the Same, where woman, child, body and emotion are all constructed as of less worth and other than man, adult, mind and intellect. Thus the “traditionally female tasks” of changing diapers, wiping noses and caring for children is the very foundation for intellectual work. However this interdependence is rarely highlighted in the current system of meaning making, and this is one of the things that prevent the work of the preschool teacher to gain recognition.

**Intellectual work**

However, to highlight the simultaneity of “care” and “pedagogy” and the value of what is traditionally deemed female and of less worth does not necessarily mean that one has to agree with the stereotyped idea of preschool work as being all about drying snotty noses and changing diapers. On the contrary the appreciation of preschool work as simple and non-qualified work is a stereotyped view that does not allow what is traditionally deemed female of its worth, but also provides for a simplified understanding of what such work entails. In my interviews with the informants taking part in this study it was visible to what extent they saw their work as based in reflection and constant learning processes. In their descriptions their work comes off as highly challenging, not just related to the tasks they do, or the workload they have, but also intellectually. This is something visible in how they spoke about their work for change in the previous chapter, but it is also framed like one of the foundations of their work in general.

My work on equality/gender consists of two parts (that are connected). In part it is the everyday work with the children, my attitude and approach. That I always in meeting the children reflect upon the way I express myself, what we do and with whom I do what and so on. […] To have an approach around meeting the children with respect, that they are as important everyone of them (and also to have an awareness about how this is not always the case in practice, that there are always those who are heard and seen more, that are prioritised by us adults and so on). Always to think about choice of literature and activities (and also to reflect afterwards if I didn’t have the time to think beforehand). In part it is how me and my colleague continuously think around these issues and always think about our work: if we choose like that, why do we do that? Now we thought like that about hir but not about hir, why is that? [55]

I have done this choice [to work in the preschool] several times. When I get tired of it and think that I don’t want to be here, I choose it anyway. And I think it is because this is the kind of environment where you continuously need to work with yourself. You are always working with yourself as a tool, and it demands that you reflect upon your own approach and perspective, and I think that it gives me so much to work in this way. And it is also a place to work with issues that interest me, like gender issues, not because one is working with children but because such issues are allowed space in preschool. [56]

As highlighted in the chapter “To work for change”, the work of my informants is not static or carried out in the same way from day to day. The reflexivity inherent to their work
demands a view of practices, strategies, methods, children and themselves as in a constant process of change where there are no on beforehand defined right or wrong answers or truths. This is a challenging way of working and handling knowledge and knowledge production.

This is the way it is today, and this is the way I think today. And tomorrow when I have met something else, then I might think in other ways. But I have gone some way in this journey from having a lot of answers to thinking that it is okay that there are no definite answers. Although I am constantly looking for answers like I see that many of the children do, looking for right or wrong. I recognise myself in that, I work the same way, but I am starting to accept that there might not be any. [57]

Female teachers in general and preschool teachers in particular have historically not been understood as knowledge producing subjects. Instead they have been seen as tools for transference of knowledge to children, while those trusted with the production of knowledge have been men (Lenz Taguchi 2000: 282). In their work the preschool teachers are not only opposing the imaginary idea of women as inferior intellectual subjects or the idea of femininity and traditionally female tasks as dissociated from intellectual work and knowledge production, but also the idea of children as mere receivers of knowledge. To be involved in learning processes together with the children also means to see them as co-constructors of knowledge:

Most of all I am so curious and happy to be able to share my days with a bunch of wise children that are complicating my expectations and thoughts about life everyday. [58]

**Material consequences**

The preschool teacher occupation thus problematises some of the binaries that have structured western thought, such as child/adult, mind/body, theory/practice and emotion/intellect. It exists somewhere in between stereotyped ideas of femininity and intellectual work. However, the stereotyped idea of preschool work as un-qualified and simple lingers. Simultaneously, the possibility for preschool to provide change in to society at large is to some extent exaggerated. The idea is that if we are to change something we will have to start in the preschool. I have problematised this idea throughout this thesis and stressed the fact that some things (most things) are not possible to change through preschool alone. The idea that correct fostering through preschool alone could provide for a better society inevitably is due to create guilt within those working there. As stated by Walkerdine:

Guilt is a constant and common feature of female teachers’ accounts, for are they not made to feel responsible for the normal development of each child in their class and for a liberal rhetoric implying that all children could succeed if they were allowed to develop properly? They are supposed to be responsible for making the fantasy of a system of equality work. (Walkerdine 1998: 72-73)
What is at stake, I argue, is a simultaneous under- and overvaluation of the preschool and preschool work. This also creates material consequences for those working in preschool. For one, preschool pedagogues are often expected to, besides their pedagogical work carry out several side tasks as described below:

There is still a strong culture of “pulling through” for each other in preschool. To cover up absence, be flexible and perform tasks that are not part of ones duty. To be a cook, caretaker, postman, psychologist, administrator, carpenter, work without substitute teachers, working late etc. etc. all to make the everyday function. [59]

I will admit that I, some days, curse upon the fact that I have studied for six years on university level to do the dishes or be forced to work in the kitchen when the cook is ill. [60]

I have high demands on myself and the practice I carry out. But all too often one ends up in a place where it is mostly about “putting out fires”, babysitting (due to lack of personnel) and practical tasks that are besides my actual duty – stand in for others, make orders, fault reporting, cleaning, do the dishes, conflict management, constantly new directives and focuses from “above” etc. [61]

Even though I have left this aspect of their work out of the discussion so far, the preconditions for carrying out their work were mentioned by all of my informants several times during the interviews. The many side tasks, as well as the lack of personnel, time and resources reportedly prevent my informants from carrying out the type of practice they aim for. Among multiple other duties, to work for a more gender equal and including preschool is part of the task of being a preschool teacher as stated in the preschool curriculum. Yet the informants state that they are not given enough time and resources to carry this work through.

There are difficulties and hindrances as always in the preschool: there is not enough time, there are not enough resources, politically there are hindrances connected to the preschool that forces one to use magic to make anything happen wherever one is. [62]

This is one of the reasons why I find it hard to answer your questions, there is a conflict between the practice I have the preconditions to carry out and the practice I want to carry out and I would really like to avoid this “whiny” discussion on bad preconditions, economy and large children’s groups […] But at the same time this is the reality we live in. [63]

We have so many tasks to do, administrative work that piles up coupled with the lack of personnel makes it hard to even prioritise to structure a norm-critical/equality work since it is abstract and not as important according to some. There are so many things that demand attention. We are required to carry out systematic quality evaluations, work with a variety of different subjects and to show documentation of that work, to have happy, content and healthy children in the group that are good friends and don’t fight. Simply put; an impossible task. [64]

Nordberg, in problematising the view that male preschool teachers leave the occupation because of the low status or an all to feminine milieu, states that women are also leaving this occupation, just that they are often replaced by other women so this is not as visible in the statistics. One of the reasons for both men and women to leave the occupation, in her opinion
is the downsizing of resources that has been underway during recent decades, something that has created a more stressful and intense working climate with larger children’s groups and fewer breaks. This distribution of resources in turn could, according to Nordberg, be derived to a male norm considering what is prioritised in society (Nordberg 2005: 339). As seen above this also influences what work tasks that end up on the preschool teacher’s table. This is not a side issue to what has been discussed in this thesis; it is one of the main issues. Simply put, the preschool as a workplace in fact is highly “gender unequal”, not because of the people working there, the female connotations inherent to the task of working with small children or the lack of men working in such occupations. The real issue is rather the devaluation of this kind of work, which makes it possible to demand a lot but not to give the resources required.

**To work for change**
The choice to work in the preschool for my informants is far from only based in them being female. Among other motives for their choice the informants highlight the possibility to work reflectively together with others, both adults and children, to be able to challenge taken for granted ideas of the sexes and other categorisations and to be in an ongoing process of change. All of my informants share a specific interest in working with gender pedagogy and change towards a less limiting, and more including preschool. Most of them have invested time and effort into extra university courses in gender pedagogy, norm critical pedagogy or gender studies to further their knowledge in this field. For some of them the very choice to work in preschool is directly connected to their interest in issues of equal treatment, gender equality and the challenging of norms surrounding the sexes. The choice of the preschool as an arena for this kind of work, for these pedagogues is not necessarily connected to the notion of “changing” children, as is sometimes highlighted as one of the reasons for the relative success of gender pedagogy in preschools, but that issues connected to sex and other forms of inequalities is given room in work within preschool.

I work in the preschool to be able to work with these questions, because I think that it is a possible arena for change and also a concrete way to be able to work with gender issues. I have been calling myself a feminist since I was fifteen, and it is my most important political standpoint in general. [65]

To work in preschool could thus be seen as a political choice. The preschool teacher occupation is by my informants seen as a possible arena for feminist work; a place to work through and with ones feminist conviction towards change. I think this specific aspect of preschool work is closely connected to the female domination in the occupation. Feminist
issues are given room in preschools because of the many women working there, and because of many women working in preschools take an interest in these issues. This is, as I see it, a heritage both implicit to, in dialogue with and in resistance to the historically strong connotations between preschool work, femininity and motherhood. The specific setting of the preschool seems to be, because of these very connotations, a promising arena for feminist thought and practice. Not to in any way propose that this work is unproblematic, self-evident or uncontroversial. On the contrary to take special interest in these issues are often met with different forms of resistance, from parents, colleagues and in media. Still, in spite of such hindrances, the “gender issue” remains an important drive for my informants. Not only in professional terms but also on a personal level.

Equal treatment and gender issues have always been central to me during the whole of my upbringing and an often raised topic for discussion in my family. Especially during my high school years the interest and search for knowledge grew with my interest for politics in general and solidarity versus inequalities in particular. In this feminism has always been self evident for me. [66]

For me it is absolutely essential to think about these issues, always, in life [67] …and it also means a lot to me on a personal level, because it is an important part of who I am. [68]

Braidotti, drawing on the split nature of the subject as both consisting of conscious and unconscious processes highlights the importance of desire in the feminist subject formation. She writes:

[I]t is also plausible to posit feminist subjectivity as an object of desire for women. A female feminist could consequently be seen as someone who longs for, tends toward, is driven to feminism. (Braidotti 2011: 159)

Thus feminism, for Braidotti, does not only entail a wilful positioning against inequalities in society but also concerns the identity formation of women, defining themselves as feminists, striving for a more adequate definition of them as women but also for change on a personal level (2011: 155). That is, feminism is not only about what one does, in this case in one’s work, but also about one’s own identity formation and who one is in the process of becoming.

In this process of becoming feminist, I think sexual difference theory could serve a purpose in its affirmative stance. Through the perspective of sexual difference it is possible to acknowledge the paradox of being a female feminist working with traditional “woman’s work” and to make this into ones feminist starting point rather than a problematic inconvenience. It is thus possible to see the “typical” nature of one’s choice of work as an advantage; the position of the preschool teacher could serve as a privileged position in the feminist struggle to disrupt and subvert the “gender system”. Not only because one has the possibility to engage with children and challenge some of the stereotyped ideas of children,
boys and girls. But also because one in the capacity of being a woman engaging in woman’s work has the possibility to bring attention to how such work, and therefore women themselves, are misrepresented. This I believe my informants already do when highlighting the intellectual nature of their work. Moreover they are challenging some of the binaries that structure western thought in the phallogocentric logic when they emphasise the interdependence of body and mind, practice and theory, emotion and knowledge in their work. The feminist potential of feminist women working for change in the preschool arena is thus not limited to their work with children, but is also inherent to their implicit reworking of what it means to be a woman working in such a setting. Included to this is necessarily the struggle for better working conditions and acknowledgement of their work.

Concluding thoughts

Rather than a feminist moralism that blames girls, teachers and mothers for failing to live up to some rarefied notion of a feminist consciousness, isn’t it about time we faced the complexities of that struggle – a struggle, though differently lived, for all of us, all the time? (Walkerdine 1998:98)

In this chapter I have concentrated on how the preschool teacher is understood in terms of her being female, motherhood and femininity in and through the gender equality discourse as well as in the statements of my informants. I have attempted to employ the strategy of mimesis or of “working through” the ideas that are connected to this specific position. I have showed how stereotyped appreciations of preschool teachers and preschool work are affecting the preschool teachers I have spoken to. At the same time, they are through their descriptions of their work troubling and challenging these stereotyped ideas of their work. In fact, their work could not only be regarded as intellectual work, but it is also challenging the very binaries that construct emotion as other of intellect, body as other of mind and child as other than adult. However, I argue that the stereotyped appreciation of preschool work is not only creating negative consequences in terms of negative feelings in the preschool teachers, it is also very visible in the material conditions of their work. Although preschool might be a place where several feminists have decided to invest their time and effort to provide some sort of change, this change is not as often connected to the position of the preschool teacher herself. I argue for an understanding of the preschool classroom as an assemblage where notions of sex are not only affecting children but also the preschool teachers working in this context. The identity formations of children and adults are thus entangled and this makes it highly important to consider not only how boys and girls are understood and empowered in their becoming but also how the preschool teachers are understood and what becomings are
available for them through their work. Through sexual difference theory I see a possibility for the preschool teacher to acknowledge and work through the paradoxes connected to her work as simultaneously confirming and subverting notions of femininity and “motherhood” as they have been understood in our culture. Through this the inherent gender inequality of the preschool is highlighted, not because of the numerical absence of men or the traditional female tasks inherent to work with small children but because of the very devaluation of such work that makes it possible to at the same time demand a lot whilst not giving enough resources for those working in preschool to carry it through.

This is a super important work! [...] It is super humans that work in preschool, it is the kind of people who manage to have fifteen different professional roles at the same time, and have a stress resilience that is not of this world. There are incredible people working in preschools. So I am proud to be working in this context, absolutely! [69]

**Conclusion**

Throughout this thesis I have attempted to take another look on the, for me, familiar scene of preschool and preschool work through the lens of sexual difference theory. Especially I have taken an interest in the preschool teacher interested in change and her work to provide such change through what has here been termed gender pedagogy. I have come to understand the preschool as a space deeply entangled with historical and contemporary processes of both change and normalisation, where the strive to emancipate children is not necessarily always a “good” thing. Freedom is in itself a deceiving word, and historically attempts to “free” children has been in compliance with oppressive practices of normalisation connected both to class and mental ability. Moreover, that which has been seen as normal could also be derived to that which is understood as male. Girls have thus, because and through their sex been constructed as deviant. Following from these insights my looming question was, could work for change as in what I have here termed gender pedagogy be considered only another oppressive and normative practice?

The answer to that is, yes, it *could*. Some strands of gender pedagogy, as well as the larger societal project of gender equality could be described as building upon new norms for boys and girls, men and women on how to be “gender equal”. Such norms in turn could be seen as connected to both class and nationality, but also paradoxically the masculine as the norm. However, there are attempts both in theory and practice, as described by my informants, to trouble such notions of gender equality and gender pedagogy. Normality and likeness are challenged as the ground for gender equality interventions and difference is highlighted as a positive and ongoing force in preschool practice. The work of my informants is not following any one method or theory but is relying on several sources of inspiration at
once. Change is not understood as change towards some fixed end goal but rather as an ongoing process where there are not necessarily any definite answers to what change is or what it is that is to be achieved on beforehand. Especially, as I have highlighted here, what “gender equality” entails or what the “gender problem” is, is not possible to state once and for all. These are fluid concepts that change depending on context and situation as well as with what theoretical and practical dimensions one takes into account.

This does not mean that normalising practices are absent from the preschools of my informants. Rather normalising practices seems to be ongoing practices as well. What is more, any attempts to challenge norms and structures always run the risk of creating new norms. Preschool is moreover not an institution detached from the rest of society and the ideas of normality and difference that are hegemonic in society at large are also functioning in preschool. This fact makes preschool teachers, whether they like it or not, highly entangled in processes of normalisation together with numerous other bodies and forces, documents and ideas, things and resources active in the preschool classroom. But their relative position of power makes it possible for them to at the same time question and alter such norms. Their entanglement with processes of normalisation thus is what makes it possible for them to have some influence over these processes.

Through the perspective of sexual difference theory I have emphasised how difference is commonly thought of as connected to less worth. Such an understanding of difference manifests itself for example in binary pairs such as woman/man, child/adult, body/mind. Efforts to think difference in positive terms are implicit to some challenges to gender pedagogical work as well as in some of the replies of my informants. However, I have in this thesis attempted to critique some of the more recent rethinkings of gender pedagogy based in an ambition to go beyond gender. Such a perspective in practice, I believe, runs the risk of ending up in a gender neutral or sexual indifferent appreciation of the sexes once again. A gender neutral understanding of the sexes is not necessarily radical from the perspective of sexual difference theory. In the analysis of sexual difference theory the current system is, on the contrary, built upon a gender neutral appreciation of the sexes where “gender neutral” in effect means masculine. Therefore I think the gender neutral approach in some instances can serve as an apolitical perspective in that it does not really challenge the current order.

Finally I have considered the view upon the (female) preschool teacher as necessarily entangled with efforts for gender equality in preschool. I believe it important to avoid viewing both girls and women as stereotypes defined by devaluing ideas of them.
Instead I think that to empower both girls and women we need to think the feminine in positive terms and moreover lay bare that which is not visible in a culture where women and girls are often understood as less than, or Other then, what is seen as normal, neutral and desirable. I also conclude that the work of the preschool teachers I interviewed both highlights and challenges notions of motherhood, femininity and woman’s work, as well as knowledge, knowledge production and binaries such as body/mind and child/adult. In this I hope to contribute to a more adequate representation of my informants and their work than what the stereotypes of preschool work would permit.

The positive work the additional perspective of sexual difference could entail in the context of the Swedish preschool and gender pedagogy is at it most crucial a firm interest for the feminine in positive terms to avoid loosing sight of girls and women in the process of efforts for gender equality. I think this is important in a setting where women, girls and the feminine are still misrepresented and attached to a lesser value. The preschool is a promising arena for such change considering its historically feminine connotations as well as the interest for change expressed by some of those working there. The ambition to think gender equality together with difference as positive difference I beleive would have positive effects both for children and adults working in this setting as well as society in general. Instead of a retracing of some traditional or stereotyped view upon femininity this would entail a view upon the feminine, what it means to be a girl, woman or a preschool teacher as an open-ended process that we cannot anticipate on beforehand.
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Appendix 1 – Original quotes


2. skapa bättre förutsättningar för barn att leva sina liv utan de begränsningar som traditionella och normativa föreställningar om kön kan ha […]utvecklas och nå sin fulla potential oavsett kön (Dolk 2013:16)

3. Och medan de manliga arbetstagnas praktiker och maskulinitetsformer ingår både bejublas och kritisk granskas, förväntas inte de kvinnliga förskollärerna vara några femininitetsförebilder. Någon analyser av och diskussion om olika feminini-tetskonstruktioner och den variation av kvinnor som finns i barnomsorgen saknas ännu. (Nordberg 2005:333)

4. Förskolan är ”alltid redo” att förändra barns identiteter (Eidevald & Lenz Taguchi 2011: 29)


6. Kontrollen sker inte längre i en disciplinerande anpassning till en utifrån kommande blick, det vill säga vetenskapens idé om det normala, utan kontrollen är istället ett resultat av en introspektion och en föreställning om att man anpassar sig till ”sig själv” och föröka förstå vem man ”är”. (Lenz Taguchi 2000:114)

7. Förskolan är ”alltid redo” att förändra barns identiteter (Eidevald & Lenz Taguchi 2011: 29)

8. Det finns fortfarande väldigt mycket tankar kring på vilket sätt barn ska kunna olika saker. Och det behöver man bräcka med! För man hör ganska ofta; det här är ju onormalt, eller det här är… kring olika barn, och det är ju så otroligt subjektivt, menar jag. Men det finns ju väldigt, väldigt mycket kvar i de förskolorna där jag har varit, att det finns mycket tankar kring något slags normalläge, vad det gäller barn. (Recorded interview)

9. Om man har alvarliga samtal med någon förälder så är ju det ofta för att man kanske känner att någon faller utanför det här förväntade… Det finns ju krav på barn för att de ska kunna vara på förskolan, man måste liksom fixa vissa grejer. (Recorded interview)

10. Vi pratar mycket kring hur begränsade vi blir av våra yttre omständigheter (för stora barngrupper, för lite pedagogtid) och hur dessa yttre omständigheter tvingar oss in i ett normaliseringsstänk. Som en överlevnadsstrategi, typ. Alla barnen måste klara att småälta in och fungera hyfsat bra i den verksamhet vi har, annars funkar det inte, vare sig vi för barnet som bryter mot förskolenормen, för resten av barngruppen, eller för oss pedagoger. (Written interview)

11. Vi jobbar ändå på något sätt förberedande för ett liv där det finns väldigt mycket regler och normer runt omkring. Och då tror jag att vi behöver jobba med. Att ta emot det när det kommer från barnen där han tankarna att bekräfta att: Ja, såhär är det normalt att man gör, såhär väljer de flesta. För jag tror inte att det hjälper… hur ska jag säga… Det räcker ju ofta att man går från förskolan och upp till skolan så är det en helt annan… Här kan man få ha olika uttryckssätt och här kan man få göra på olika sätt och sen så kommer man till skolan som ofta, inte alltid, kräver samma uttryckssätt av alla, så på något vis så kanske man må bra av, eller gynnas av att ha en förståelse med sig kring att så kommer det att vara i samhället, att man förväntas göra också på olika sätt. (Recorded interview)

12. Och visst tänker jag att det sker mycket aktivitet kring att normalisera barn i förskolan, det känner jag mycket väl igen själv. Och det hänger väl ihop med att hela samhället är så strikt uppbyggt och att vi i förskolan vet vart barnen ska vidare till, hur tuft det är i skolan etc. Så i all värme vill vi forma dem till att lite mer slätstruktura för att de helt enkelt ska klara sig så smartt unn som möjligt genom systemet. (Written interview)


14. Det finns visst beteende som inte är accepterat i samhället, enligt lag! Man får inte slåss och då blir det ett arbete mot att normalisera barn inom de ramarna, att vi måste se till att få en grupp som är homogen i det avseendet att vi inte skadar varandra. Så det finns ju alltid någon form av normaliserande arbete. (Recorded interview)

16. Feministisk komplexitet snarare än feministisk självklarhet (Ohrlander 2011:14)


18. Teoretiskt innebär allt detta att tom vi upphör att definiera och benämna kroppar i termer av kvinna respektive man, och kommer överens o matt betrakta kön som en föränderlig multiplicitet, kommer detta att få effekter, inte bara på hur vi beter oss mot varandra och hur vi fördelar arbete och samhällsansvar, utan på sikt också på hur våra kroppar kommer att se ut och fungera. (Lenz Taguchi 2011:190)

19. Men det känns väl också som, det här kompensatoriska, där har det ändå syftat till att det ska kompensereras mot någon sorts mitt. Pojkar har för mycket av det här och flickor har för lite av det här, då saknas det här. Och så ska man jämma ut och närma sig varandra så att det blir, väljligt likt. Och också att allt som jag har läst om genus pekar ju på att det som uppfattas som neutral är ett manligt sätt. (Recorded interview)

20. Samtidigt som jag kanske ganska mycket jobbar utifrån kompensatoriskt tänk, eller i alla fall, mina kollegor kan beskriva det som svårt att frigöra sig från könsstereotyp tänk jag har svårt att frigöra mig från ett kompensatorisk tänk. Det hör ju till min medvetenheter kring genus att veta vad som förväntas av pojkar och vad som förväntas av flickor och om de då gör någonting som bryter mot det, att man ger dem utrymme för det och försöker att inte korrigera. Men kanske man går in för mycket i att göra det så att när pojkar gör något opojktigt så blir man extra glad och när tjejer gör samma sak så kanske man inte blir exakt lika glad. (Recorded interview)


22. Samtidigt kan jag också tycka att förskolan som specifik plats, allstå även om det finns en samhällelig kod hur man ska vara och att det är något könsneutralt och känns som manligt och då blir det så att det neutrala är det som anses vara den manliga normen. Jag upplever att man tar bort böcker, leksaker osv. och så är det helt plötsligt genuspedagogik och nu är allt bra. (Written interview)

23. När jag tänker på förändringsarbeten/genuspedagogik i förskolan i stort tänker jag att mycket fokus ligger på neutralitet, alltås att när förskolans skulle jobba med genus så blir det så att man jobbar med att göra exempelvis miljön "könsneutral" man tar bort "dockvär" och bilar och fokusera på bygg. Och bygg är ju något som kopplas till manligt och då blir det så att det neutrala är det som anses vara den manliga normen. Jag upplever att man tar bort böcker, leksaker osv. och så är det helt plötsligt genuspedagogik och nu är allt bra. (Written interview)


25. Vi har introducerat "hen" för barnen (absolut inte påtvingat, men i lagt fram det som ett alternativ i diskussioner), att vi valde att göra om luciasångerna (och alla andra sånger vi sjunger) så de blev könsneutrala. (Written interview)

26. Att agera för ett demokratiskt och inkluderande samhälle kräver att en gör sig medveten om alla som ingår i det, qtbh, cis, etniskt ursprung etc. (Som t.ex. nu, bara genom att exemplifiera kan jag exkludera). Att inte göra det (exkludera) är nog en omöjlighet, men jag vill i alla fall vara medveten om det faktum att människor med andra definieringar av liv, kropp, kön, åsikt, åsikt, och ska ingå i samhälle och sammanhang. (Written interview)

27. Jag tänker att det är viktigt att lägga till exempelvis material böcker osv. som representerar alla olika kön, etniciteter och funktionsförmågor. Att olika familjekonstellationer finns representerade, att man har koll på vad man sätter upp på väggarna, vilka sånger man sjunger, finns det dock med olika hudfärg? Att man är medveten kring taluttrymme osv. (Written interview)


30. Jag tycker att det är ganska uppenbart ganska ofta att man ändå behandlar pojkar och flickor på olika sätt, de bemöts på olika sätt och man förväntar sig olika saker beroende på enbart vad de har för kön, men också att det har ju varit en väldigt lång diskussion om genus i förskola och att det ändå ganska ofta mynnar ut i 'Nej, så gör inte vi, vi behandlar alla barn som individer' och att man är väldigt blind inför strukturer. (Recorded interview)

31. Men jag känner att man i alla fall, man kanske har möjlighet att ge större, fler möjligheter om man tänker utifrån barnen, som gör att de kanske mer kan välja själva hur de kan bli och vad de vill göra. […] Inte bara gå i de här färdiga spären som finns. (Recorded interview)

32. Det finns en grund som mer är en feministisk grundövertygelse: jag vill ju att det ska vara jämställt, man ska få vara den här individen trots de här strukturerna, men då krävs det att, jag tror att ett sätt att lösa det på är att synliggöra de här strukturer och försona ifrågasätta dem för att kunna på olika sätt, både uppfri från som vuxen, men också lyfna när barn får syn på strukturererna så att de kan förhålla sig eller ja, att man kan få, i den mån det går ändå välja att vara "den man är" vad nu det innebär. (Recorded interview)

33. nu ska vi upplösa könskategori? (Recorded interview)

34. Om jag kommer till en förskola som jobbar så, tänker jag "men vad bra att ni jobbar med genus, men det kanske är att göra det lite för lätt för sig". Det finns en strävan ofta i förskolor, och inte bara i förskolor, att man gärna vill ha en metod om är vattenät alla ganger. 'Nu har vi ett sätt som vi jobbar med genus på!' Och så ska man göra på exakt samma sätt hela tiden, och det är ju den stora risken, tycker jag, med det kompensatoriska, att man bestämmer att alla pojkar behöver träna på att prata om sina känslor kanske och alla flickor behöver träna på att snickra. (Recorded interview)

35. För mig kortsiktigt hade det kanske känts bra om vi bara: 'nu jobbar vi kompensatoriskt!' och så får vi ett resultat och då har vi presterat någonting som man kan mäta, men så märker vi ju att så kan man ju inte möta det. Det kan inte vara så det praktiska arbetet… det blir inte bra utan vi måste vara i det här reflektander hela tiden för att man ska få, för att man ska nå fram till varandra. Så ja, det kan ju vara jobbigt, men jag börjar nog svånga mot att jag tycker att det är skönt att det är så också, det finns ju liksom inga rätt och fel inom något ämne i förskolan överhuvudtaget egentligen. Och det kan ju bli rätt trötsamt i längden men det ger en så mycket att hela tiden behöva, möta nya tankar och möta varandras tanker. (Recorded interview)


37. Återigen, min utgångspunkt när jag började med det här var nog, ja men jag såg nog det väldigt tydligt med det här sambandet, vill man förändra, börja i förskolan (Recorded interview)

38. …att det ska vara mer mindre; jag vill mer jämställt för barnen just nu men också, och framförallt var det nog min utgångspunkt från början […]; jag vill ha ett jämställt samhälle, då måste man börja från början. Och det tror jag jag på också […] men jag tycker att man överdriver vikten av att, eller att det är det viktigaste genusarbetet, att såhär om tjugo år är så kommer vi att ha det bra, förhoppningsvis, om vi görde rätt, det är ju väldigt svårt också och en väldigt jobbig lång period tänker jag att faila på, om man gjorde fel. [Skatt] Och då är det ju ännu mer relevant att det är "här och nu" det blir en förändring. (Recorded interview)

39. Om jag har det här målet att man ska få göra kön på många olika sätt då skulle ju det också kanske innebära en olikhet men som inte skulle vara inom ett könsgränsande, inte mellan olika könskategori. (Recorded interview)

40. Att alla människor jag möter i min verksamhet, alla barn men också vuxna, ska må så bra som möjligt, att ingen ska känna sig begränsad eller utanför, inte av någon anledning. Att vi kan lära av varandra, att utvecklas tillsammans till (förhoppningsvis) empatiska människor som värnar om varandras olikheter och likheter, att det
är okej att både vara lik och olik, liksom. Att alla ska få samma förutsättningar att utvecklas och trivas, men att det däremot inte betyder att alla behöver samma, samtidigt. Och det är kanske det viktigaste, tänker jag. Detta att kunna läsa av, känna, välja, vad varje barn behöver just nu, att inte frysas sin uppfattning om någon individ (eftersom ingen är densamma jämt, liksom) men att ändå vara öppen och lyhörd med att alla inte behöver samma sak samtidigt. Det är utmanande, roligt, intressant, och: livsviktigt! För barnen, för oss vuxna, för "samhället". (Written interview)

41. PEDAGOG: Vad vill du bli när du blir stor?
BARN: Dagisfröken
PEDAGOG: Jaha. Är det något mer du vill bli?
BARN: Ja, brandman
PEDAGOG: JAHAA!
BARN: Nej, jag skoja bara, bara pojkar kan bli brandmän…
PEDAGOG: …


43. Jag tänker att det finns en samhällsbild om förskolläraren, och den bilden är att det är en kvinna som är mest "lämpad" att jobba i förskolan för att det enda de ska göra är att byta blöjor, torka snoriga näsor och leka hela dagarna, något som kan kopplas till den bilden som finns av just kvinnorollen att vara hemma med barnen och leka med dem byta blöja osv. Det är verkligen förminskande. För om det nu skulle vara så att förskolläraren "bara" byter blöjor, torkar snoriga näsor och leker hela dagen varför skulle det värderas mindre? (Written interview)

44. Jag kan ju också tycka att det inte är enbart dåliga sidor, att det är kvinnodominera. Men jag kan ju tycka att det känns så tröttsamt och tråkigt och det gör att jag inte har valt det här själv. Att jag liksom är lurad att vara förskollärare för att jag är tjej. Om man inte tar mitt intresse på allvar utan: 'jaja det var väl himla typiskt att du skulle utbilda dig att jobba med barn'. Men om jag skulle vara en man så skulle jag väl i och för sig få försvara det jättemycket, men då, ändå, skulle det vara att jag faktiskt har valt det här. (Recorded interview)

45. Jag gissar också att jag skulle syssla med något annat om jag själv varit man, vilket är en ganska jobbig insikt då jag känner mig lite som slav under mitt eget kön när jag tänker på det … Vem är jag ens? En produkt av normerna eller egen individ med makt att välja mina egna val? (Written interview)

46. Det är sällan någon som specificerar vad de ska ha den här Mannen till eller vad det är för egenskaper som den här mannen förväntas komma med. Vad är det man vill ha, vad ska de med alla männen till? Och de män jag har jobbat med, det enda de har uttryckt är att de bara önskar att de skulle få vara pedagoger, som alla andra […] Då kanske man visar en större bredd eller variation av att vara bara kvinnor som ändå är så olika, det kanske blir mer varierat. Eller bara män. […] Än om man prompt ska ha in lika många killar som tjejer och så används de, gör de olika saker. (Recorded interview)

47. Jag skulle ju ha varit en jättestor förändring bara det. (Recorded interview)

48. Ä, säkert är mitt kön kopplat till mitt yrkesval. Säkert. Och jag vet inte riktigt hur jag tänker eller förhåller mig till det. […] Ibland tänker jag att om jag varit man gjort något annat, vågats satsa högre liksom. Men sen blir jag skitarg på mig själv och tänker att när jag tänker så bekräftar jag ju själv bilden av förskollärare som ett lågstatusyrke. (Written interview)

49. Jag skulle ju ha varit en jättestor förändring bara det. (Recorded interview)


förskoleverksamheten och att det ju hör till en traditionell kvinnoarena. Och att också, små barn, att barn i sig inte är så högt värderade och att små barn är ofta ett ansvar som kvinna har. (Recorded interview)


53. När det handlar om omsorgssysslorna som är direkt kopplade till barnen (byta blöjor, snyta näsor etc.) så är det inget jag någonsin skulle vilja slippa, dessa sysslorna är nära sammankopplade till lärandet och relationen till barnen, det är jag helt säker på! (Written interview)

54. Jag har gjort en resa i det, för jag tolkar "traditionell kvinnoroll" som omvåndande, tillgång till sitt känsloliv och känslorspråk och så. Jag har nog gjort en resa i det från att jag började vicka i förskolan så var ju det enda man förväntade sig. Det var det enda man på något sätt visste. man ska ta hand om, man ska trästa, man ska snyta och det var det enda man visste. Och sen på vägen gå till att förkasta den traditionella kvinnorollen lite och börja tänka kring… Jag vet många förskolor nu där de till exempel debatterar huruvida man som pedagog ska krama barnen, att det skulle vara något slags, det ligger inte i vår roll. Och jag kan känna igen mig lite i det att jag har varit lite mer avståndstaggande under några år, för att på något sätt hävda min integritet. 'Du kan inte bara komma här och kasta mig runt halsen på mig, det är inte säkert att jag vill ha en kram, det här är min space.' Och jag tror det är kopplat lite till det här att man vill ta avstånd från den traditionella morsors… och på något sätt uppvärdera sitt yrke genom att göra andra saker. 'Vi jobbar med projekt och här kramas vi inte'. Det blir ju jättekonstigt men jag tror att det är lite så. Och nu har jag kommit tillbaka till det att jag tror att det kan enas jag tror att det kan finnas både och. Jag tänker att jag skulle må bra av det av att känna att här på min arbetsplats finns det folk som tycker om mig när jag kommer hit och som vill krama mig, då tror jag att jag blir mer avslappnad och jag skulle jobba bättre, och precis på samma sätt tror jag att det kan vara för barnen som kommer hit. (Recorded interview)

55. Mitt arbete kring likabehandlingsfrågor/genusfrågor består, tänker jag, av två delar (som såklart hänger ihop). Delas handlar det om det vardagliga arbetet med barnen, mitt förhållningssätt. Att jag hela tiden i mina möten med barnen tänker kring hur jag uttrycker mig, vad vi gör, vem jag gör saker med etc. […] Att i grunden ha ett förhållningssätt kring att möta barnen i min verksamhet med respekt, att de är lika viktiga att möta (och en medvetenhets kring att det inte blir så i praktiken, att det alltid finns de som hör och syns mer, som prioriteras av oss vuxna etc.). Att alltid tänka kring val av litteratur och aktiviteter (och också ofta reflektera efteråt om jag inte hunnit tänka till ordentligt innan, vilket ju tyvärr är alltför ofta). Delas handlar det om att jag och min kollega fortlöpande funderar kring dessa frågor och alltid väger för och emot: om vi väljer så, varför gör vi det? Nu tänkte vi så om hen men inte om hen, hur kan det komma sig? (Written interview)

56. Har gjort valet flera gånger efter det, när man ledsnar och tänker att "här ska jag inte va", så väljer man det ändå, för att man hittar något i det och då tror jag att det är för att, det här är ändå en sån miljö där man hela tiden tvingas jobba med sig själv och utvärdera sig själv och försöka, man använder ju sig själv som redskap hela tiden och det kräver att man hela tiden på nåt sätt reflektera kring sitt eget förhållningssätt, och sitt eget bemötande och det tycker ju jag, det ger ju en rent personligt sätt så väljligt att jobba, sen så, är det ju ett bra arena för sådana frågor som jag är intresserad av, genusfrågor och, det är ju en tacksam arena att jobba i då, och inte så mycket för att man jobbar med barn utan mer då bara för att de frågorna får ett utrymme, i förskolan. (Recorded interview)

57. Det är ju bara lite såhär är det ju just nu, och såhär tänker jag just idag, och imorgen när jag har mött något annat så kanske jag tänker på nya sätt, men jag har ju gått i den reson från att att väldigt mycket svarar till att tycka att det är ok att det inte finns så mycket svar. Jag letar ju alltid efter svar, precis som jag ser att många utav barnen gör, som letar efter rätt och fel, och som letar efter svar på saker, och det känner jag jag igen mig år, så funkar ju jag också, jag vill veta vad som är rätt och så vill jag göra så, men jag börjar tycka att det är ok, att det kanske inte finns. (Recorded interview)

58. Sen också, såklart och framför allt, att jag är så himla nyfiken och glad i att få dela vardagen med en massa kloka barn som trubblar mina förväntningar och tankar om livet. (Written interview)

59. Förskolan lever fortfarande under en stark kultur av att "ställa upp" för varandra, täcka upp för frånvaro, vara "flexibel" och utföra arbetsuppgifter som inte ingår i uppdraget, vara kock, vaktmästare, brevbärare, psykolog,
administratör, snickare, arbeta utan vikarie, jobba över, slå knut på sig själv, "trolla med knäna" etc etc, allt för att vardagen ska fungera. (Written interview)

60. Jag är kluen! Jag ska erkänna att jag vissa dagar svär över att jag pluggat 6 år på högskolennivå och tagit studielån för att diska eller tvingas stå i köket när kocken är sjuk. (Written interview)

61. Jag har höga krav på mig själv och den verksamhet jag vill bedriva men alltför ofta hamnar en i det läge när det mest handlar om "att släcka bränder", barnpassning (pga personalbrist etc) och praktiska göromål som ligger utanför mitt egentliga uppdrag - vikarietäckning, göra beställningar, felanmälningar, städa, diska, konflikthantering (både i personalgrupp och barngrupp) ständigt nya direktiv och fokus "uppifrån", inköp, förlolders, möten etc. (Written interview)

62. Sen så är det ju svårigheter och hinder är ju som alltid inom förskolan att det finns ju inte tillräckligt med tid, det finns inte tillräckligt med resurser, det finns inte det är så som det ser ut, rent politiskt finns det ju svårigheter och hinder kopplade till förskolan som gör att man får trolla med knäna för att få till något slags förändringsarbete var man än är. (Recorded interview)

63. Det här är en av anledningarna till att jag tycker att det är svårt att svara på dina frågor, det uppstår en stor konflikt mellan den verksamhet jag kan och har förutsättningar för att bedriva och den verksamhet jag vill bedriva och jag vill så gärna undvika att hamna i det här "gnälliga" kring dåliga förutsättningar, ekonomi och stora barngrupper ... Men samtidigt är det också den verklighet vi lever i. (Written interview)

64. Det tillsammans med att vi har så oerhört mycket att göra, administrativa uppgifter som hopar sig samtidigt som det alltid är någon/några pedagoger borta gör att det är så svårt att ens prioritera att strukturera upp ett normkritiskt arbete/likaundersökande arbete eftersom det är ganska abstrakt och inte lika viktigt enligt många. Det är liksom så många frågor/ämnen som trängs och kräver uppmärksamhet. Vi förvånas bedriva systematisk kvalitetsutvädering, arbeta med en mängd olika "ämnen" och kunna visa upp dokumentation kring det arbetet, ha glada, nöjda, friska barn i gruppen som är goda vänner och inte slåss. Ja, du förstår. Det är ett helt oerhört arbete, helt enkelt. (Written interview)

65. Jag jobbar i förskolan för att jag vill jobba med de här frågorna, för att jag tänker att det är ett möjligt förändringsarena och också att det kan vara ett konkret sätt att få jobba med genusfrågor. Jag har väl kallat mig för feminist sedan jag var femton, nog alltid tyckt att det, nämn det såhär haft det som min viktigaste politiska utgångspunkt. (Recorded interview)

66. Likabehandling och genusfrågor har alltid varit mycket centrala för mig under hela min uppväxt och ett ofta aktuellt diskussionsämne hemma i min familj. I synnerhet under gymnasiatiden väkte sig intresset och kunskapssökandet större och med ett växande intresse för politik i allmänhet och solidaritet kontra orättvisor i synnerhet. I detta har feminismen alltid funnits med som en självklarhet för mig. (Written interview)

67. För mig är det en helt grundläggande att fundera kring dessa frågor, alltid, i livet (Written interview)

68. att det också betyder mycket för mig på ett personligt plan, eftersom det är ett viktig del av den jag är, för mig själv (Written interview)

69. Det är ett superbra och viktigt jobb! […] Så jag tycker nog egentligen att det här yrket är, det är ju supermänniskor som jobbar i förskolan! Det är ju sådana som klarar av att ha femton olika yrkesroller samtidigt, och har en stressnivå som är inte utav denna värld. Det är ju fantastiska människor som jobbar i förskolan. Så jag känner mig stolt att vara i det här sammanhanget, absolut. (Recorded interview)
Appendix 2 – Initial survey

Hej igen!

Här följer nu några kortare frågor att svara på innan studien drar igång. Som jag tidigare angett så ser jag svar på frågorna som ett tillfälligt medgivande till medverkan i studien. Självklart kan du närsomhelst avbryta din medverkan genom att meddela mig detta via mail eller telefon. All information du givit mig för denna studie raderas då. Möjlighet finns att även svara på dessa frågor vid ett fysiskt intervjuutfälle. Om du helst vill göra så, meddela mig detta så bokar vi in en tid för alla mina frågor som passar dig.

Hur gammal är du (ungefär)?

Hur definierar du dig själv utifrån kön? (T.ex. hon/han/hen)

Hur tror du att andra definierar dig utifrån kön? (T.ex. hon/han/hen)

Arbetar du idag i förskola? JA/NEJ

I sådant fall, vad är din roll?

Om inte; vad har tidigare varit din roll inom förskolan och vad är din huvudsakliga sysselsättning idag?

Hur länge har du arbetat i förskola?

Har du någon utbildning som ligger till grund för ditt arbete inom förskolan (kan både vara inom speciellt utbildningsprogram för arbete i förskola men även kurser och liknande i olika sammanhang)? I så fall vilken eller vad?

Eventuella andra erfarenheter/kunskaper som du anser viktiga för ditt arbete i förskola?

Vad anser du vara dina viktigaste kunskaper/egenskaper specialområden i ditt arbete i förskola?


Under vecka 8 kommer jag skicka ut ytterligare frågor/teman till dig att fundera över. Vill du ge dina svar på dessa via mail eller vid ett fysiskt eller virtuellt (via t.ex. skype) möte?

Tack för dina svar och din medverkan!

Vänliga hälsningar
Ylva Samuelsson
Hello again!

What follows are a few short questions to answer before the study begins. As I previously stated, I see the answers to the questions as a temporary consent for participation in the study. That said, you are at any time free to terminate your participation in this study by informing me of this by email or phone. All the information you have given me for this study will then be erased.

If you would rather answer even these initial questions at a physical meeting in person, this is also possible. If you would prefer to do so, let me know this and we will book a time for all of my questions for you.

How old are you (roughly)?

How do you define yourself based on gender? (For example, she / he / zhe)

How do you think that others define you based on gender? (For example, she / he / zhe)

Are you currently working in preschool? YES / NO

In that case, what is your occupational role?

If not; what has previously been your occupational role in preschool and what is your main occupation today?

How long have you worked in preschool?

Do you have any training as the basis for your work in preschool (can be both special education program for work in preschool but also other courses and similar in different contexts)?

Any other experience / knowledge that you consider important for your work in preschool?

What do you consider your most important skills, qualities or areas of expertise for your work in preschool?

The working title of this study is "The feminist preschool teacher." Do you have any spontaneous reactions to this? Is it a name that applies to you, do you think? Why / why not?

In week 8, I will send out further issues / themes for you to ponder. Do you want to give your answers to these by mail or at a physical or virtual (via Skype) meeting?

Thanks for your answers and your participation!

Sincerely

Ylva Samuelsson
Appendix 3 - The interview guide

Original

Hur kommer det sig att du valde att arbeta i förskolan?

Jag tror att du tänker kring och arbetar med förändringsarbete/likabehandlingsfrågor/genusfrågor i din praktik.

Hur kommer det sig?

Kan du beskriva vad som är viktigt för dig med dessa områden?

Hur ser ditt arbete på de här områdena ut?

Och; Finns det någon särskild fråga kopplad till de här områdena du tycker får för lite utrymme idag i din praktik eller förskolan i stort?

I så fall vilken/vilka?

En del forskare inom genuspedagogik- och förskolefältet i Sverige menar att en anledning varför genuspedagogiken fått så stort genomslag kan hänga ihop med hur förskolan historiskt sett fungerat som en arena för samhällsförändringar, där vi i viss mån kan tala om ett normaliserande förhållningssätt till barnen, dvs. fokus har legat på att förändra och normalisera barn.

Hur tänker du kring normalitet och olikhet i förhållande till förskolan som institution, förändringsarbete/genuspedagogik/likabehandlingsfrågor och din egen praktik?

Förskolan är, och har alltid varit, en mycket kvinnodominerad arbetsplats. I både media och statliga utredningar framhålls detta ibland som ett problem. I min uppsats kommer min utgångspunkt delvis vara en annan. Men jag är också intresserad av hur du som kvinna i förskolan tänker kring det här:

Hur ser du på kön kopplat till ditt yrkesval?

Hur tänker du kring förskolan och dess kopplingar till en traditionell kvinnoroll?

Finns det t.ex. några moment/arbetsuppgifter/sysslor i ditt arbete som du anser är särskilt kopplade till en sådan traditionell kvinnoroll och några som tvärtom INTE är det?

Och; Hur upplever du dessa olika moment/arbetsuppgifter/sysslor?
How come you chose to work in preschool?

I believe you are thinking about and working with change management / equality issues / gender issues in your practice.

Why is that?
Can you describe what is important to you with such issues?
What does your work in this area entail?
and; Is there any specific question related to this area, you think takes up to little space in your practice or preschool at large?
If so, what / which?

Some researchers in the gender pedagogy and preschool field in Sweden says that one reason why gender pedagogy had such an impact may be related to how the preschool historically has functioned as an arena of social change where the focus has been on changing and normalising children.

How do you think about normality and difference in relation to the preschool as an institution, in relation to change / gender pedagogy / equality issues and your own practice?

Pre-school is, and always has been, a female-dominated workplace. In both the media and public reports this is sometimes seen as a problem. In my thesis, my starting point will partly be another. But I am also interested in how you as a woman in preschool is thinking about this:

How do you think about your gender linked to your choice of career?
How do you think about preschool and its links to a traditional woman’s role?
Is there for example any elements / tasks / chores in your work that you think is particularly linked to a traditional female role or on the contrary not connected to this role?
and; How do you experience these different elements / tasks / chores?
Abstract
In this thesis I aim to investigate the Swedish preschool teacher interested in change and her work, here conceptualised as gender pedagogy. I will take my departure in sexual difference theory to contrast some of the assumptions behind preschool work, gender pedagogy and gender equality. I am also reflecting upon the concepts of normalisation, freedom and change and their relevance for preschool work. To help me with this endeavour I have interviewed five preschool teachers about their work and their interest for change. The thesis is divided into three chapters mirroring the themes of the interviews. In the first chapter I reflect upon normalisation as a process inherent to preschool work, both historically and in the present, connected to notions of class, cognitive ability and sexual difference. Through the statements of my informants and theoretical discussion the concept of normalisation is nuanced and understood as a process inherent to the whole of society as well as the preschool but also as a practice that might not be possible to abolish in its entirety. In the second chapter I move my focus towards gender pedagogy. An outline of different strands of, and discussions on, gender pedagogy is given as well as a critical discussion on the aim to go beyond gender in gender pedagogy and feminist theory. As an alternative and additional approach I suggest sexual difference theory as a possible source of inspiration for gender pedagogy. In the second part of this chapter the preschool teachers express their views on, and their work with gender pedagogy. This allows for a more entangled and process oriented understanding of gender pedagogy and its different strands. I conclude this chapter by stating that gender pedagogy could be understood in terms of normalisation and even as reinforcing the masculine norm, however the process oriented understanding of change as highlighted by my informants, as well as the use of multiple strategies, theories and methods, might allow for a practice where difference instead of likeness serves as a condition for the gender pedagogical work. In the last chapter I turn to the preschool teacher as such and her history entangled with notions of femininity, motherhood and gender equality. Employing the strategy of “working through” as described by Braidotti I lay bare how the position of the preschool teacher and her work has been represented as stereotyped woman’s work and thus connected to less worth, but simultaneously how the actual work of the preschool teachers strongly denounce this view of woman’s work, as well as motherhood and femininity. I also show how the work of preschool teachers put into question such prominent binary pairs as mind/body, emotion/intellect, practice/theory and adult/child. I conclude that the misrepresentation of woman’s work also has material consequences in terms of working conditions for preschool teachers. To conclude the whole thesis I emphasise how the view of the female preschool teacher and the view of the child cannot be radically separated and therefore the importance of considering both adults and children in the gender pedagogy work. I also conclude that what gender equality or gender pedagogy is, is not settled ones and for all, but rather the importance to fill these concepts with a positive view of difference.

Keywords
Change, Early Childhood Education, Femininity, Feminism , Gender Equality, Gender Pedagogy, Normalisation , Preschool, Preschool Teacher, Sexual Difference Theory