

Culture and Society Division

Gender Research: Knowledge, Boundaries, Change

Policy Document



**The Research Council
of Norway**

© **The Research Council of Norway 2001**

The Research Council of Norway
PO Box 2700 St. Hanshaugen
NO-0131 Oslo, Norway
Telephone: +47 22 03 70 00
Telefax: +47 22 03 70 01

E-mail: bibliotek@forskningsradet.no
Home page: <http://www.forskningsradet.no/>

Cover design and illustration: Birgitte Kolbeinsen, Melkeveien Designkontor

Printed by GCS
Circulation: 300

Oslo, September 2001

ISBN 82-12-01646-3

Contents

1 BACKGROUND, PREMISES AND OBJECTIVES	4
1.1 Background	4
1.2 The objectives of the programme	5
2 GENDER RESEARCH AS A SEPARATE FIELD OF KNOWLEDGE: PERSPECTIVES, CHALLENGES AND PRIORITIES	6
2.1 Introductory remarks: thematic openness and breadth	6
2.2 Perspectives, challenges and priorities	8
2.2.1 Knowledge dialogues	8
2.2.2 Boundaries and categories	10
2.2.3 Knowledge about politics and engendering change	13
3 INSTRUMENTS AND METHODS	15
3.1 Forms of support	15
3.2 Internationalisation	16
3.3 Publication, communication of knowledge and contact with the users	18
3.4 Scientific quality	19

1 Background, premises and objectives

1.1 Background

In the course of the last couple of decades, gender research has established itself as a broad and active field of research, on both the national and the international level. Awareness of the significance of gender has helped add depth and nuance to our understanding of a number of fundamental phenomena and processes. This field of research has also been one of the most important arenas for the study of problems related to the relationship between subject and object in research and between knowledge and society.

Gender research constitutes a separate field of knowledge in which there is a need to develop new theories and new insights, at the same time as there is a continued need to integrate gender perspectives into other research topics and into discipline research in general. The importance of a dedicated investment in gender research is underlined by the fact that so far the goal of integrating gender perspectives into other research fields and subjects has not led to a satisfactory growth in expertise and accumulation of knowledge. One of the preconditions for successful integration is that gender research continues to be ensured good possibilities for development and that research on gender issues within and across disciplines is strengthened.

In November 2000, against this background, the Research Board of the Culture and Society Division decided to continue the work

from the research programme *Gender in transition: institutions, norms, identities* in a new programme. The new research programme is intended to be pivotal in the development of gender research as an independent field of knowledge. It shall ensure that fundamental gender research within the humanities and the social sciences receives the necessary support and revitalisation, and it shall promote further collaboration across the boundaries between conventional subject areas. Basic research, long-term building up of expertise and internationalisation of Norwegian gender research are key objectives.

1.2 The objectives of the programme

The programme is intended to:

- contribute to the further development of gender research as a separate field of knowledge
- strengthen and renew fundamental gender research
- improve knowledge and critical reflection about gender
- encourage and strengthen interdisciplinary and multi-disciplinary gender research
- contribute to the long-term creation of expertise through recruitment and through the establishment and development of good research communities
- promote internationalisation of Norwegian gender research

2 Gender research as a separate field of knowledge: perspectives, challenges and priorities

2.1 Introductory remarks: thematic openness and breadth

This research programme is intended to represent a continuation of the *Gender in transition* programme and aims to stimulate research communities to continue to build on the foundation that was laid under this programme. In Norway, research on women and gender encompasses a number of different research traditions, which in turn are associated with a wide spectrum of disciplines and subjects. It also covers a wide span in terms of topics and is characterised by a diversity of methodological and gender-theoretical perspectives, within and across conventional subject areas and disciplines. This breadth is important in the work to develop innovative research – in terms of both academic quality and social relevance. In order to ensure the best possible development of general knowledge in the field, the Programme Committee believes it is appropriate to encourage research that attaches importance to and develops central perspectives, but it does *not* want to suggest specific topics or concrete research questions. This emphasis on openness and breadth as far as research topics are concerned is founded on the Committee's assessment that the field's current weight and breadth will best be preserved and nurtured by

giving researchers and research communities the opportunity to work on their own ideas and commitments. In other words, the Programme Committee wishes to remain open to ideas from researchers and be able to respond to good project proposals submitted by research communities. The Programme Committee hopes that this open form in the first call for applications will stimulate the centres for research on women and gender and other new and established communities and networks that perform research in this field to participate in a dialogue regarding the academic profile of the programme.

The Programme Committee wishes to encourage projects that develop and challenge existing concepts, perspectives and theories. Similarly, the Programme Committee is interested in projects that develop new empirical materials or use existing materials in new ways. On a more general level, we also wish to motivate research that challenges traditional approaches within and across different subject areas and disciplines. The Programme Committee would like to underline that it is calling for projects that not only follow up but also explicitly problematises perspectives that are expressed in this policy document.

Initially, then, the Programme Committee is inviting the research communities to help define the concrete agenda for the programme in terms of subjects. Below we present some perspectives that will govern the work under this programme. In keeping with this, the main delimitation in the programme in connection with the first call for proposals will be through the use of instruments. In connection with subsequent rounds of application, we will consider use of special instruments or special investments in particular subject areas, disciplines or perspectives in the light of our experiences from the first round of applications.

2.2 Perspectives, challenges and priorities

2.2.1 Knowledge dialogues

A tradition of scientific and social criticism: Research on women and gender is characterised by a long tradition of criticising science and society. Today, there is a wave of renewal in the research with regard to its academic potential as well as the potential for social criticism. On the international level, there is currently a development within epistemology and general theory that is having effects far beyond research on women and gender. Nationally as well as internationally, the role of research as a producer of knowledge and the very category gender are being made the subject of debate. This new research programme aims to reflect these kinds of trends.

In keeping with the heavy bias towards fundamental gender research, the programme will give priority to research that explicitly reflects basic issues within epistemology, theory, methodology and communication of information, where feminist epistemological practice is in focus. It is important to underline that this includes the potential afforded by gender research in terms of criticism of culture and society as well as of science. This focus represents a continuation of the field «feminism as critique» from the *Gender in transition* programme – a field in which there are strong traditions that can be used as a starting point, but in which there is also a great need for renewal and internationalisation.

Gender research as a field of knowledge: The programme shall contribute to the further development of gender research as an independent field of knowledge. In line with established practice from the *Gender in transition* programme, gender research shall

be understood as a field that is based on traditions within research on women and feminist research as well as on ideas from culturally based gender research, critical research on men and research on different sexualities.

Research on women will continue to be important within the field. At the same time, we are particularly keen to address the challenge of how to develop gender perspectives in research in which men are the centre of focus. A great deal of Norwegian research in the humanities and social sciences deals with men, but without applying gender perspectives. In Norway, gender research about men and masculinities is relatively poorly developed, at the same time as the need for knowledge is substantial. Changes in the significance of gender allow both men and women greater freedom to construct new roles and identities. Although new practices, arenas and meanings are constantly being established, men's traditional positions are nevertheless easily reproduced or developed further along the same lines. At the same time, many men are experiencing a loss of power and authority that they used to possess by virtue of their gender. We need knowledge about the cultural and social processes and contexts involved in changes of this nature.

Slettet: both

Research into different types of sexualities, including homosexuality and heterosexuality, has a great innovative potential in gender research. Here, traditional understandings of gender categories and of sexuality are questioned. A broader academic orientation towards sexuality in relation to gender paves the way for a new focus on such different phenomena as the sexualisation of public spaces, the diversity of sexual practices and heterosexuality as an organising principle.

The Programme Committee wishes to promote research that includes all the different parts of gender research as delineated above, and to exploit the opportunities inherent in the fields of tension between them as well as between different disciplines and

theoretical positions. Gender research has been established as a field with good traditions for academic collaboration across and between disciplines and subject areas. One objective of the new programme is to promote interdisciplinarity and multidisciplinary.

2.2.2 Boundaries and categories

Critiquing the categories: Previously, research on women has been criticised for its conceptualisation of «women» as a category. Internationally, the critics have called for a more nuanced understanding of differences and similarities between women and men and of differences and similarities among men and among women respectively. Norwegian research on women has been concerned with both similarities and differences, for instance, as exemplified through studies of differences in the division of labour based on class and gender, but it cannot really be said to have produced theories about perceptions of women as a category on the basis of studies of similarities and differences.

The critique of established categories in the field also encompasses categories of subjectivity in general, be they related to gender, ethnicity or sexuality. It has developed as a result of research on women, feminist theories of knowledge, research on homosexuality, queer research (i.e. research that aims to challenge the normative position held by heterosexuality) and research on men – traditions that in different ways have challenged the conventional perceptions of reality. This criticism is also rooted in multicultural research on women, where questions related to ethnicity, race, immigration and the North–South divide are pivotal. Internationally, the questioning of conventional ideas about «women» as a white, Western category has been important, but in Norway, this has been a less prominent focus of attention. In light of the increasing awareness of Norway as a multicultural society, there is a great need for knowledge concerning the connection between gender and multiculturalism. Similarly, there are major challenges linked to the role that can be played by a tradition of

gender research that is firmly anchored in Western values in relation to gender-based injustice and offences – both here in Norway and in other parts of the world.

The problematisation of categories of gender and sexuality also constitutes an important justification for investing resources in gender research in its broadest, multidisciplinary sense. This field juxtaposes questions about identity and rights, differences and similarities, and language and materiality. We are therefore interested in supporting projects that are founded on or position themselves in a dialogue with debates concerning the basic categories of gender research.

New and old boundaries: All human relations, identities and understandings have boundaries. Language creates and maintains boundaries. The Programme Committee wants to stimulate research about whatever moves across such boundaries, that is counter to dualistic thought, and that queries accepted truths about gender. There are a number of examples of boundary-crossing processes, forms of expression, phenomena and understandings. Gender research itself encompasses a problematisation of dualistic distinctions such as culture vs. nature, language vs. materiality, knowledge vs. politics, subject vs. object, etc. In research about the diversity of sexualities and within queer theory, traditional perceptions of gender and the categories of sexuality are developed and challenged. Multiculturalist perspectives also challenge established understandings of gender, and perhaps new and old transnational processes demand a transnational gender research. There are major challenges linked to the development of gender perspectives on globalisation and other processes that run across national boundaries connected to employment and business, conflicts, exploitation, culture and technology, etc. New discourses and new forms of social relationships, everyday life and work challenge the existing boundaries between different areas of life. Economic, political and aesthetic processes and different knowledge processes are often interwoven in ways where technology

Slettet: are

Slettet: y

and the development of technology play important roles. Many people claim that new technologies render possible major changes with regard to our understanding of culture, our perception of time and the significance of space. They lay the foundation for new ways of organising employment, they break down the conventional boundaries of aesthetic forms of expression and they create arenas in which we can play with identities that destroy the old categories. Or do they? We are interested in promoting research that attacks the cultural, linguistic and social boundaries of gender, at the same time as the reality and significance of such boundaries are taken seriously. Where did the boundaries use to be? Where are they now? If desired, how can they be changed?

Continuity and change: Gender is a basic mechanism of social, cultural and linguistic differentiation. It is claimed that gender is a category that is both constant and changeable. Gender can manifest itself as fluid and changeable, at the same time as we live in a society that locally, nationally and internationally is still very much marked by gendered organisation. The development of new forms of family life and partnerships, new forms of work, new arenas for social encounters and communication, new understandings of our bodies and new aesthetic expressions can afford possibilities for changes in the significance and meaning of gender. At the same time, there are no guarantees that this will help change or break down gendered patterns or structures. Gender-based offences and injustices, which are often far more widespread than we would like to believe, can conceal themselves in new disguises. Things that change quickly can overshadow in the short term deeper and more taken-for-granted continuities in a society. Differences can be the cause of injustice and oppression. At the same time, difference is also a sought-after value. Diversity is not possible without difference. It is important to investigate how differences are reproduced, as well as new distinctions and new possibilities. The Programme Committee wants to support research that attaches special importance to the tensions between change and continuity in relation to gender-based differences. In this context, we are looking for historicising projects that deal

with issues that may seem obvious and neutral in this day and age. We are interested in projects that apply a historical approach to social, cultural and aesthetic phenomena of current interest, where they are understood on the basis of their specific, historical context.

2.2.3 Knowledge about politics and engendering change

Contributions to social and cultural change: Research on women and gender has explicitly set out to bring about change on many levels, and this new programme is intended to be part of this tradition. It is important to further develop understandings of gender-based inequalities that can help engender more fairness. In Norway, questions connected to gender have a relatively high degree of visibility and attention in politics, public administration and in society at large. However, within research, knowledge about gender has not enjoyed the same degree of attention, and there is therefore a major need for fundamental, critical gender research with a view to policy design and social and cultural development, both locally and nationally. This applies not least to the central and critical role gender research may play with regard to issues of current interest. Much of this kind of research is more naturally financed by other bodies, but the Programme Committee wants to support research that helps bolster and revitalise the potential of research for social criticism and that continues the ambitions for change in gender research.

Ambitions for change: Research on women and gender incorporates an inherent ambition to bring about change as an explicit perspective. It aims to promote change in the development of knowledge within various subject areas and disciplines and change in relation to relevant social questions. Research related to women and gender has contributed to a great deal of social and cultural change, by critically putting issues on the public agenda, by developing the knowledge basis for political reforms, by

working to promote liberation and equality, and not least by expanding the boundaries for how we can think about gender and increasingly also sexuality. The poststructuralist shift within the field has been criticised for having abandoned the goal of changing fundamental gender-based injustice and oppression and thus for having abandoned the perspective of liberation. This critique entails interesting challenges with regard to clarification of the critical potential of research in this field and also with regard to handling and combining different approaches. At the same time, the current debate has made it easier than before for us to reflect critically and in a historicising perspective on how even the most straightforwardly acceptable and positive goals and ideals for change – within the field of gender as within any other field – are created through social and cultural processes and how in this way it becomes problematic to hold them up as universally applicable or timeless. The Programme Committee wants to encourage projects that deal with change, but would in addition like to emphasise that projects may also include change as an inherent perspective.

A number of strategies for liberation and equal-opportunities policy have played an important role since the struggle for suffrage at the beginning of the last century. On the basis of an acknowledgement that there are still major differences between women's and men's social positions, the concept of «gender mainstreaming» has become widespread as a term associated with work to effect change. Gender mainstreaming is used in politics, social planning and business, and entails that gender shall be employed as a continuous perspective in all the fields of politics and in public budgets, in business planning and technological innovation, in employment and management issues. But what does it mean in practice? How does it relate to previous and alternative strategies of change? There is a general need for critical elucidation of how strategies of change have been legitimised and what short-term and long-term significance they can have for social change.

3 Instruments and methods

3.1 Forms of support

The use of instruments under the auspices of this programme will be important – both on the basis of the desire for openness and breadth with regard to topics and in order to promote the development of knowledge within gender research. In the first round, we are interested in three main types of application. They have been chosen as it is believed they are best suited to realise the objectives of the programme, i.e. strengthening and renewal of gender research as a separate field of knowledge, improvement of knowledge and critical reflection about gender, long-term building up of expertise and research communities within the field and internationalisation.

Research projects: Of course, research projects constitute the most important activity in any research programme. We are particularly interested in encouraging researchers to take part in joint projects that have the long-term building up of expertise and research communities as their goal. The collaboration in joint projects may be organised in a number of different ways. We want to promote multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary research. Applications may be submitted for project funding for researchers and post-doctoral fellowships. Applications for doctoral fellowships should mainly be integrated as an element of larger projects. It may be relevant to part-finance larger projects, if this will serve to enhance the unity and scope of the research initiative.

Development of research communities, networks and collaboration: The building up of research communities and networks

must be included as part of larger research projects, but research communities or networks that are not applying for support for larger projects may still apply for support for work that will promote the development of research communities or networks. Both established and new research communities and networks are encouraged to apply for support. It is important to note that the requirements concerning academic quality also apply to applications for this kind of support. Support will not be granted for preliminary studies, unless they constitute part of the work to build up research communities and networks. Applications for funding for preliminary studies must specify who it is hoped will finance the main project. Priority will be given to preliminary studies that incorporate international research collaboration and international financing.

Conferences: Experience from the *Gender in transition* programme indicates that conferences are a good means of promoting academic exchange, debate and generation of ideas, at the same time as they serve to render visible important topics in gender research in relation to the general debate. We would like work on conferences of this nature to be more firmly anchored in the research communities. For this reason, we are calling for applications for support for conferences that complement the activities under this programme.

3.2 Internationalisation

Norwegian gender research has traditionally collaborated with research communities in other countries. Currently, Norway is involved in collaboration with other Nordic and European countries, with the USA and with some countries in other parts of the world. The debates in Norwegian gender-research communities are influenced by international debates, and especially by those in Anglo-American feminist research. At the same time, Nordic gender research arouses international attention, not least on the

basis of the relatively high degree of formal equality in the Nordic countries. Despite this, however, Norwegian gender research seems to receive little attention in overseas research communities. We would like to see an increase in the amount of international publication and international research collaboration.

In a small country like Norway with limited research resources and relatively small research communities, international collaboration can be decisive for the quality of the research. Also, processes of globalisation imply that many research questions are related to transnational phenomena. The understanding of such phenomena can often be promoted by multinational co-operation and multinational research. These globalisation tendencies entail that the processes of knowledge are also becoming more international. Against the backdrop of these factors and with a view to promoting the quality, visibility and relevance of Norwegian gender research, the Programme Committee wants to stimulate greater internationalisation of Norwegian gender research.

In its assessment of applications, the Programme Committee will give priority to projects that include research collaboration with other countries and projects that have concrete plans for international publication. This also applies to support for preliminary studies the aim of which is to submit applications for international research funding. In addition, funding may be granted for other internationalisation measures, such as research visits to other countries and multinational seminars and conferences. We would also like to stress the importance of internationalisation in relation to research and research communities outside the Anglo-American tradition and collaboration across the divide between economically rich and poor countries. Applications for funding for internationalisation measures must be submitted within the constraints of the programme's priority forms of support. It is a condition the internationalisation measures are closely linked to ongoing research. In addition, a strategy will be developed for the

programme as a whole to promote internationalisation of the research performed under the auspices of the programme.

3.3 Publication, communication of knowledge and contact with the users

Gender research is based among other things on a desire to initiate change – in the kind of research done and in the society and culture we live in. There is a great need for knowledge about gender in a variety of contexts – within and outside academia, in areas where this kind of knowledge is in explicit demand and in areas where it is not. For a long time now, research on women and gender has seen the relationship between science and society as something other and more than a question of straightforward dissemination of knowledge from researchers to users. For example, researchers in this field have been central in the development of research practices where dissemination and communication is integrated into the actual research work. In this way, such communication can generate understandings that can then be included in the subsequent research work, creating a better and broader basis for action for the users of the research. The Programme Committee wishes to stimulate communication of results to other researchers, the users and the general public.

All the projects that apply for support under this programme are requested to specify how they intend to communicate their findings in a dedicated plan, describing concrete measures and target groups. In this context, communication of findings includes communication to researchers, users and/or the general public. In addition to scholarly publication in Norway and internationally, measures in the plan may include other relevant forms of publication, seminars and conferences for researchers and users, devel-

opment of teaching materials, research-based teaching, development and dissemination of summaries of findings to relevant user communities, communication through local and national media, publication on the Internet or participation in research-based public debate. The research under this programme encompasses a broad range of subjects and areas, and the publication strategy for each individual project may give priority to reaching different target groups and use different channels. However, all the projects must justify their choices in the plan for communication of findings and the plan must be realistic. Funding for communication measures must be applied for within the framework of the programme's defined priority forms of support.

The Programme Committee will develop a dedicated communication strategy for all the activities encompassed by the programme.

3.4 Scientific quality

In its assessment of applications, the Programme Committee will attach primary importance to the scientific quality of the outlined project. The following elements will be given priority in our assessment:

- a considered, theoretical approach to gender issues
- a well-founded potential for innovation
- project organisation: realistic plans for completion in the stipulated time
- connections with research community and collaborative relationships
- internationalisation and/or basis in international project
- plans for publication

Slettet: [?]

Applications for support from the programme must relate to these issues actively.