

# Thinking with Beverley Skeggs

Editor Annika Olsson



Stockholm  
University



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## **Thinking with Beverley Skeggs**

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# Intro: Thinking with Beverley Skeggs

It's not every day one has the opportunity to really 'think with' in real life someone who is a great source of intellectual inspiration. It's a rare gift and should be honoured as such. During the spring of 2007 we were a number of people at the Centre for Gender Studies at Stockholm University who had this unique opportunity when Professor Beverley Skeggs was the Kerstin Hesselgren Professor at the Centre.

This collection of essays is the result of a workshop with Professor Beverley Skeggs: The Beverley Skeggs Workshop as it was called by us. We wanted to take the opportunity to continue the inspiring process that Professor Beverley Skeggs started in the workshop, and which was related to her generous and open attitude as a researcher. And what better way than to write about it? We also wanted to document this enriching experience. And, of course, we also wanted to take the opportunity to say thank you!

What does 'Thinking with Beverley Skeggs' mean? Beverley Skeggs herself often used the expression 'to think with', and what is more important: practised 'Thinking With' as a method. We were encouraged to think with her, and engage in a critical and open dialogue with each other and all the texts that we read and discussed. Ideally this should be part of our everyday praxis at the university, but as we all know this is not often the case. We therefore want to put forward 'Thinking With' as a model for seminars, workshops and literature reviews. To us, 'Thinking With' is a way of practising feminist methodology.

The Beverley Skeggs Workshop came to be a really vibrant and important place for the participants. 25 people from different departments at the faculties of social sciences and the humanities wanted to participate in the workshop. Rather than exclude

anybody Professor Beverley Skeggs graciously agreed to work with two groups. The two groups each met seven times between February and June 2007. All participants were invited to submit an essay which should relate to either the writings of Professor Beverley Skeggs or to some of the themes or scientific problems that we discussed during the workshop.

In the end, *Thinking with Beverley Skeggs* developed into a collection of nine short contributions, written by scholars/researchers from six different disciplines, all active in the field of Gender Studies. Dag Balkmar explores masculinity, shame and driving in his piece 'Drive-by Shaming: Reflections on the Emotions of (Dangerous) Car Driving'. Elias le Grand uses the concept of class in his article 'Renewing Class Theory? Exploitation, Individualization and Culture'. Carina Ljungvald analyses the Swedish Social Services Act in 'A Focus on Victims of Crime in Social Work: Why and for Whom?'. Thaïs Machado-Borges discusses cosmetic surgery in Brazil in her article entitled 'The Production of Bodies'. Ulrika Nilsson examines psychiatric narratives in 'Emotional Archives and Body Politics: Towards an Analysis of Early Lobotomy Praxis in Sweden (1944-45)'. Susanne Nylund Skog investigates Swedish Jewishness in her article "In Persia I was called 'The Blonde': Looks as a Way to Analyse How Jews in Sweden Practice Whiteness'. Annika Olsson reflects on the academy in her piece entitled 'Thoughts on Being a Respectable Homo Academicus'. Ann Runfors writes about life strategies in her essay 'In Dialogue with Devaluation: Young People's Life Choices as Social Positioning Practices'. Juan Velasquez discusses feminist politics in 'A Feminist Sustainable Development: In Between Politics of Emotion, Intersectionality and Feminist Alliances'.

*Annika Olsson*

*Stockholm University, February 2008*



# Drive-by Shaming: Reflections on the Emotions of (Dangerous) Car Driving

*Dag Balkmar*

It's the power [of American muscle cars] you know, even though my car is no bad boy, the guys in Stockholm, if you're waiting at a traffic light, they do not pull up alongside you. Even though they've got souped-up cars, they are insecure; they don't know...this car may wipe the floor with them, you know (Lars, owner of a Valiant V8, interviewed at the Power Big Meet 2007).

Peder Andersen will regret that night in May last year for the rest of his life. This was the night when his brother died. Driving with an alcohol level of 2.09 per thousand Peder tried to escape the police but went off the road at nearly 180 km/hour (The Swedish Road Administration, Vintergatan 2006).

Speeding and competing through street racing on public roads are a way of performing car driving on the 'edge', a motorised form of duelling for kicks and respect. To prove skilled enough to stay in control of highly risky and dangerous situations is a serious game for some men (and women) doing masculinity through car driving. Not only do such practices involve great threats to other road users and drivers, it may also encompass a whole range of emotions. The seminar sessions with Beverley Skeggs have inspired me to discover the complexity of emotions at the centre of my research on the co-constructions of masculinity and dangerous car driving. Emotions tend to occur when expectations and hopes are experienced to coincide or conflict with the experienced realities. Such hopes, realities, expectations and experiences thereof are gendered and socially constructed, rather than psychological or individual given states (Hearn

2007). Drawing on Hearn (2007), emotions may be conceived of as material-discursive processes that construct and contextualize heightened embodied experiences and emotions that occur and circulate in the social and material realm of traffic.

During two summer days in 2007 I interviewed male car enthusiasts at the Power Big Meet, an annually held car show in the Swedish medium-sized town of Västerås. Famous for being ‘the biggest American car show’ in the world, the event attracts approximately 20,000 people interested in car cruising, partying and older American cars. Below I explore emotions of shame in relation to the car enthusiasts’ stories of (dangerous) driving and material from the Swedish Road Administration.

Following Ahmed (2004: 103–105), to be ashamed is to be witnessed in one’s failure, putting the appearance in front of and to others at centre stage. Dangerous driving is a social phenomenon; speeding and racing are performed in the gaze of others, in relation to other drivers and audiences located inside or outside the car. Street racing encompasses mixed emotions related to the ‘honour of winning’ and the ‘shame of losing’, even though this may vary depending on the situation and the context. Despite experiences of shame, such emotions may also confirm the commitment to the ideals prevalent in a community of drivers ‘up for racing’. As a community between ‘racers’, the shared interests in traditional masculine activities, such as competition, risk taking and measuring, form a homosocial arena that structure hierarchies between men (and, to large extent, also exclude women). Failure to live up to such gendered ideals may be conceived of as confirming its necessity (Ahmed 2004: 106).

In the excerpts above two important aspects of masculinity are highlighted that link shame and racing in the streets – a ‘span of shame’ if you like. The first excerpt underscores the importance of knowledge about cars, a traditional masculine domain of knowledge. To know what kinds of cars you may challenge to stand a chance of ‘winning’ also involves predicting the risk of being shamed. Only the ignorant and foolish challenge a more

‘powerful’ car – shame on them! The second excerpt underlines the importance of skills to master a car at great speeds, also a traditional masculine realm of know-how. However, if you lose control (while driving intoxicated or taking too great a risk) and cause the deaths of others, the effect may be an ‘inescapable’ emotional burden of shame. Below I will move between these dimensions of shame discussing four examples of how shame may be relevant in the co-construction of masculinity and car driving. How may gendered shame work as something to escape, resist or impose on others in the realm of traffic?

### Escaping shame – engendering respect

If gender and technology are in a relation of co-construction, the car may affect the driver so as to feel excited, sensations, godlike and powerful, enabling competitions and street racing (Michael 2000). Such emotions are closely linked to masculinity as the car facilitates aspects of western culture based on ‘individualism and getting ahead’, an aggressive means of achieving mobility at the expense of others (Redshaw 2007). The relation between driver and car may challenge a Cartesian clear-cut distinction between subject and object. Rather, to emphasise the combination of driver and car as an ‘assemblage’ would address how a driver-car forms a social ‘being’ able to ‘shame’ as well as being ‘shamed’. Because none of these activities may be performed without the other, driver-cars may be conceived of as bringing about a whole range of social actions – driving, street racing, polluting, killing and, I would add, shaming (Dant 2004: 61f.). Affects of shame may occur when there are expectations and experiences of the driver-car conflict, for example frustration with the inability to measure up to social gendered ideals in the gaze of others.

Cars, as products of human design, manufacture and choice, may be shaped and re-shaped to better afford and perform in relation to imaginations and desires (see Dant 2004: 62–66). Now, in what ways may shame inform analyses of the co-construction

of masculinity, car design and technology? Robert, a 34-year-old car customer from Stockholm, depicts his next car project as more of a 'raw object' compared to his current pink, 1960 Cadillac. Armed with the knowledge of how to modify cars, his next car venture will need a more powerful engine, more bold paint and sound compared to his current one. What he wants is a 'sleeper' car.

Robert: [...] the car looks very tame and quiet but with the potential so much more than what it was from the beginning.

Dag: Then, why is this important?

Robert: Ah well, it is because it is sensational and dramatic. When the car doesn't look like anything much, then, it just lets rip ...just big-time.

Dag: So, does this have to do with, you see before you these traffic light scenes...

Robert: Yes, sure it is about that, you measure all the time. Wherever you turn in society you assess, so sure, it is clearly about measuring.

It is significant how the everyday 'measuring' forms a central theme in the narrative about the 'sleeper' car. If technologies work to articulate gendered subjectivities, technologies may also be re-made to encompass the intentions of the driver, for example competitive car driving. In the process of re-making the car 'act' better as a street racer car, both masculinity and technology are co-constructed. As a user, he is an active subject in the process of co-constructing a driver-car as an underdog, a position from which the ability to stand tall and strike back regarding the measuring on the streets is much stronger compared to showing any visible 'car muscles'. Viewed through the lens of shame, re-modelling a car into a 'sleeper' car makes it possible to avoid being shamed through ensuring the ability to impose shame. To awake the 'sleeper' car, and let it break loose into something 'huge', may ensure the driver-car proves masculinity through the ability to shame back. Following this, the effects of masculinity as performed through craftsmanship, technology and driving skills seem hard to separate from emotions of humiliation,

shame, honour and respect that circulate between driver subjects and objects in the realm of traffic.

## Resisting class through shaming back

Central to Beverley Skeggs' scholarship is the emphasis on the meaning of respectability in the formation of class and gender. Cars are, as Paul Gilroy (2001: 89) points out, 'integral to the privatization, individualisation and emotionalization of consumer society as a whole' and can in effect become active, dynamic social forces signifying class location, 'taste' and respectability. The 'Swedish aesthetics' of cars have been described as signified through not being as 'self-asserted' as the large, 'pretentious', chromed, American cars. Rather, in a Swedish context socio-economic status and 'good taste' are to be more subtly displayed through buying cars, such as a Mercedes (O'Dell 2001: 114). At the Power Big Meet, it is the American aesthetic vision of modernity that is celebrated as a lifestyle, based on the themes of speed, power and individuality represented in the design of the curvy cars of the 1950s and 1960s. However, as several interviewees touch upon, there is a difference between those 'truly' interested in cars and car culture and those who just 'own'.

[...] you must not do like many of the new Mercedes and Corvette owners, who do not manage to handle what they have bought.

Making a difference between those who do and do not make cars into a lifestyle encompasses how technical skills also mean to respect the power of the car when driving. In the excerpt below, this discourse is embedded in the way class experiences may be discursively resisted, drawing on discourses of idealized forms of masculinity embraced by the car enthusiast community.

60-year-old Lars tells me and his friend:

[...] I think it is a race everyday with regular cars, everybody has to get away first when the traffic lights change. If you happen to be in a

Skoda as I am, my company car, and happen to get away a bit at the start when the light changes then, against a BMW, he gets really pissed off. He can't let the Skoda pull away from him; instead he comes driving like a madman, this happens all the time. You just sit there and watch... Even though he was half asleep when the light turned green, that is not my fault... this happens all the time. We drive a lot [as part of work], the stress in the traffic, talk about masculinity, that's totally insane.

Just as the car often is regarded as a masculine technology and a male territory, the way Lars refers to 'everybody' would be interpreted as between men. Even though challenged in everyday life, the cultural links between men, masculinity and dangerous driving are still strong. However, this needs to be contrasted with the specificities of cars and their relations to masculinities over different class locations. Specific cars, signified as accessible only to the few, may display greater symbolic capital and status compared to others depending on the context.

In Lars' story, the specificity of cars and makes of car is emphasised, indicating not only the social position of the user, but also what specific makes afford in terms of ways of driving. The symbolic differences between the cars are part of the cultural resources signifying differentiation of class, status and limitations in terms of speed and road performance. Put simply, the expensive BMW signifies upper class and a wealthy owner, contrasted with the ordinary, cheaper and less speedy Skoda, a car not owned by Lars but the company he works for. As such, the car 'acts' as an extension of the driver's socio-economic identity, and may also contribute to the experience of shame if a subject is seeking to approximate a social ideal (see Ahmed 2004: 107).

The story of Lars driving a 'dull' company car needs to be related to the noisy powerful American car he drives at the 'Big Meet'. Within this context his car displays cultural and economic value due to the often plentiful hours and money spent on the artefact. Furthermore, drawing on debates on such cars and users in a Swedish context, the cultural value of older American cars may signify vulgarity, youth rebellion, danger, sexuality and

violence, posing a threat to middle- and upper-class respectability and choices of cars (see O'Dell 2001).

Several of the interviewees made a distinction between those embracing the car as a lifestyle – those who ‘know’ – in contrast to those who (simply) ‘own’. In order to ‘know’ your car you are to restore it; to simply own the car may within this car community be conceived of as a failure. Such discourses are made into a resource to position the BMW driver failing this ideal and simultaneously ‘keeping’ men within the community together (Ahmed 2004: 108).

The narrative can be interpreted as a strategy to reformulate what is ‘true’ and ‘proper’ masculinity compared to ideas of middle- and upper-class masculinity. This is done through emphasising driving skills as what (really) matters in the social hierarchy between men. Such embodied practical knowledge is part of a car lifestyle and something Lars describes himself as having (he ‘happens to get away a bit at the start’) but the BMW driver lacks. Rather, the BMW driver is being shamed for not being in control of the car and for reacting emotionally. He is positioned as ‘pissed off’ (too emotional) and as driving like a ‘madman’ (dangerous).

## Shamed by the car – failing to go all the way

Taking the viewpoint of gender and technology as in a relation of co-construction, the car may play ‘tricks’ on its user. In this excerpt Trond, a 44-year-old enthusiast from Norway, talks about his experiences of getting to know his newly bought car through seeing how fast ‘he’ could go. When I first asked if he had ever lost control of his mint condition, light blue Cadillac, I got the impression he found the question rather strange and awkward.

Trond: No, it is not a problem to keep it on the road; I have full control of that.

Dag: Can you describe an occasion when you lost control of the car?

Trond: No, I can't...

Dag: ... an occasion when speeding and you haven't been able to control the car?

Trond: No ... one time if I am totally honest, I have not tried with this car and I don't think I will do that either. It was the day when I bought it, we tried [inaudible] but we had to give up because it just kept accelerating, he didn't let go.

Dag: Ok, is this because of the strong motors or well built cars?

Trond: Yes, the motors are strong and there are good main features, no doubt... it just went on and on, I had to give up, I didn't dare to go on if I may say so.

Dag: Ok, has this happened to you with other cars?

Trond: No, it is just this one...

Men's greater willingness to expose themselves to risks is related to strengthening masculinity as it implies the opportunity to prove the ability to sort out a situation (Eldh 2001). Thinking about the car and driver as in a relation of co-construction, rather than easily separable entities, highlights the importance of understanding how emotions not only make this 'seamlessness' possible, but also enable specific ways of driving. In this case, the 'agency' of the car may be conceived of as affecting its user's emotions as well as ways of driving. Having to 'let go' when the car continued accelerating implies failing to 'dare' to go all the way and failing to have full control of the car.

On the one hand, being 'honest' about not having the courage to go all the way may be shameful in relation to a peer group, risking losing the respect and appreciation of the group. On the other hand, and maybe more accurately, such experiences may be well known in car communities where heroic stories of powerful cars may be part of everyday car talk 'keeping' users together. Talking to me about such highly emotional aspects of car driving may be awkward, or even shameful, due to my outsider position and lack of own experiences.



## The ashamed witness – state shaming

Due to the risk of inflicting injuries and endangering other road users, shame is embedded in the emotional landscape of traffic. The Swedish Road Administration uses shame as a theme in the pursuit of preventing dangerous driving. The 12–20 page-long *Vintergatan* magazine provides road users with a variety of information related to various traffic safety issues for the upcoming winter season. The article ‘To kill a brother’ is on the very last page, the framing consists of a picture of a younger man, ‘Peder’, sitting by himself by a window looking out. He may have physically recovered from the crash, but his ‘soul is far from healed’.

If hell exists I have definitely been there. I am starting to slowly get back on my feet again, but the loss of my brother and the knowledge that I have caused his death will always be there. I long to be able to rest and not to feel anxiety.

To use emotions of shame as a threat may be done for a ‘good cause’, making drivers imagine the shame the witness lives with. The state sends a clear message – you do not want to be in this guy’s shoes – think rationally and change your driving habits! In comparison to the examples above this articulation differs in its framing in all aspects discussed above. This shame is inescapable, you are unable to resist it and not able to impose it on someone else because it is imposed by you and no one else but you.

## Concluding words

Beverley Skeggs’ workshop has highlighted the importance for me to encompass emotions and the feeling body when researching men, masculinities and dangerous driving in several aspects. Most importantly, dangerous car driving may violate the safety of others’ bodily integrity. Therefore, it is interesting to ask in what ways gendered shame may ‘do’ dangerous drivers, in what ways it can be restorative and productive to dangerous

driving. When driving a car, emotions are brought into play, engaging gendered subjects and objects, through a process of co-construction.

The four examples I have provisionally analysed above indicate links between car driving, technology, masculinity and emotions of shame, honour, humiliation and respect in several ways. Gendered shame seems to form ambivalent relations in the discursive negotiations on how to perform masculinity in traffic. Discourses on how to successfully perform masculinity in the area of traffic draws on shame, both as an experience of a lack of masculinity and as a strategy in male rivalry. But as shame spreads as part of the ‘affective economies’ of traffic – if to prove masculinity through dangerous driving involves risking and negotiating shame in the pursuit of status – gendered shame may both reproduce and reduce dangerous driving, both strengthening and weakening homosocial bonds between men.

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# Renewing Class Theory? Exploitation, Individualization and Culture

*Elias le Grand*

Many scholars would agree that in the last decades the concept of class has lost its central place in the ‘sociological toolbox’. As a consequence, some even see class as a ‘zombie category’ (Beck and Rutherford 2002) – as an outdated, modernist concept that is inadequate for understanding contemporary Western societies. Within this context, Beverley Skeggs’ work has been seminal in putting class ‘back on the map’, not least within feminist theory. In this essay I will discuss her work in relation to two critical issues for class theory.

The first is the alleged weakening of class awareness or class identification among people (Bottero 2004; Grusky and Weeden 2001). Here the argument is that people today seldom relate to one another explicitly in class terms, or construct their identities, self-worth, and status around class. Some have claimed that this is due to class structures breaking down as part of a process of individualization and increased reflexivity where diverse forms of individualized lifestyles replace collective class identities (Beck 1992; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002; Giddens 1991).

The second problem for class theory is about explaining how and why class is fundamentally bound up with the notions of conflict, exploitation, struggle, and interest. Marx’s labour theory of value – the idea that the bourgeoisie exploit the proletariat by generating surplus value from the labour of the latter – has been refuted since long and alternative accounts of exploitation (Roemer 1982; Sørensen 2000; Wright 1985) have been subjected to both internal and external critique (Roemer 1982; Savage 2000; Savage et al. 2005; Skeggs 2004; Sørensen 2000). In what

follows I will first present Skeggs' approach to class, and then her analysis of class in relation to the issues of individualization and exploitation. The essay concludes with a discussion of Skeggs' contributions to these two issues, and it also offers a few critical remarks.

## Skeggs' Conception of Class

Skeggs has a Foucauldian approach to class in the sense that she focuses on 'how particular discourses and technologies make classed selves' through both 'productive constitution' and 'processes of exclusion' (2004: 6). Drawing on Butler and Bourdieu, she stresses the performative character of class, and like the latter, how class (and other) categorizations and their boundaries are the products of symbolic struggles.

Skeggs focuses on how four processes – inscription, evaluation, exchange, and perspective – construct classed selves. Inscription is a process where certain characteristics become 'marked' or 'fixed' upon bodies, and thus differently valued. It is 'about making through marking' (2004: 12). Classed inscriptions are intimately bound up with other forms of inscription, such as race, gender, and sexuality. For instance, in popular culture, 'cool' is inscribed on black, working-class, male bodies as a natural attribute, and which puts strict limitations on them, since cool also denotes danger and criminality. Conversely, white people can appropriate cool as a mobile resource to be 'played with' as it is not marked upon them as an inherent characteristic.

Evaluation is a process where certain value standards become institutionalized. Here Skeggs stresses the moral aspects of valuing – that it is about worth. Value attribution takes place within different systems of exchange (economic, moral, cultural, and symbolic). She argues that an analysis of class cannot be limited to economic exchange (production or labour market relations), one also needs to focus on the moral, cultural and symbolic systems of exchange within which it is constructed.

To do this, Skeggs critically appropriates Bourdieu's notion of the symbolic economy, including the four metaphors of capital – economic, cultural, social and symbolic. According to this model, what is valued becomes legitimated and part of the dominant categorizations. But Skeggs rightly criticises Bourdieu for focusing exclusively on exchange-value without making room for use-value, i.e. the way things may matter to and be a resource for people beyond a commodity logic (Skeggs 2004b, 2004c). Her argument is that Bourdieu fails to grasp the fact that some cultural resources may have local use-value for the person possessing them but might not be convertible and exchanged in a larger system of exchange. Yet, the same cultural resources may acquire exchange-value when appropriated by another group. Thus, the notion of 'cool' has far greater potential exchange-value for whites than for blacks.

Moreover, the construction of class is always bound up with what Skeggs calls perspective, that is, how class is known and how knowledge positions are formed, something which always works in the interests of powerful groups. This means that certain forms of knowledge, i.e. representations, are constructed while others are excluded. However, perspectives are seldom explicitly expressed in class terms but often articulated in highly mediated ways, e.g. through cultural and economic categories. As a consequence, Skeggs argues, perspectives/interests are continually being misrecognized.

## Individualization and the Disidentification of Class

Drawing on her own and others' research, Skeggs argues that the last decades have seen a restructuring of class relations: class is now principally constructed in the realm of culture rather than in the economic sphere. In this section I will discuss this argument in relation to processes and theories of individualization. Skeggs (2004) argues that the increasing importance of culture

in class formation (and in class struggle) can serve to explain the displacement of class and its marginalized position within academia. Theorists, such as Beck (1992) and Giddens (1991), argue that individualization processes are breaking down traditional class structures. This leads to increased reflexivity among people to choose and to construct their identities. While reflexivity is described by Beck and Giddens as a universal process, Skeggs argues that it only reflects their own middle-class experiences.

In this sense, reflexivity is a highly classed phenomenon since it is mainly middle-class people who have access to the cultural resources and thus the agency to construct reflexive selves (Skeggs 2002). For instance, reality television programmes, such as *Ibiza Uncovered*, *The Villa* and *Sex on the Beach*, do not display the kind of choosing, reflexive self as conceptualized by Beck and Giddens, but, on the contrary, very excessive and unreflected behaviour. Thus these programmes work to construct and identify classed and gendered differences (see Wood and Skeggs 2004).

Moreover, although individualization means that collective class identities have been eroded, this does not mean that class no longer informs people's life world. In her seminal ethnography of working-class women in the Midlands, Skeggs (1997) shows how the dis-identification of class itself is a classed process, which is also strongly gendered. The women in her study actively resisted being categorized as 'working-class women' since this was perceived to be a highly stigmatized position connoting bad taste and manners as well as social problems. Skeggs (2004) also argues that the displacement of class takes place in political discourses, such as those of social exclusion and the underclass. In sum, Skeggs argues that theories and processes of individualization and reflexivity are not part of the disintegration of class but rather classed processes in which cultural categorization and distinction have come to play the central role.



## Culture and Exploitation

The centrality of culture in constituting class is also shown in how exploitation and class struggle are expressed. One way of this is how the working class is represented in popular culture. There are two processes at work here. The first is that the middle class draws boundaries against the working class, resulting in a devaluation of the culture of the latter. Working-class culture is represented as, among other things, excessive, vulgar, hedonistic, unmodern, escapist, dangerous, unruly, and without shame (see Skeggs 2004: 96–118). The second process at work is that the middle class exploits working-class culture by creating exchange value (cultural and economic resources) from what is use-value for the latter. This involves, on the one hand, what Skeggs calls *propertizing*, namely the appropriation of working-class culture in the construction of middle-class selves. She argues that there has been a shift in so far as certain aspects of working-class culture have been revalued and are now perceived to be ‘worth plundering’. One such aspect is the hedonism associated with the working class: from connoting excess and irresponsibility it has become incorporated into middle-class lifestyles in the form of ‘calculated hedonism’ (Skeggs 2004: 104).

Moreover, there is also an exploitation of working-class culture through the generation of economic resources in capitalist markets. Signifying authenticity, working-class culture has been used to brand products through the marketing of experience and affect (e.g. ‘genuine experiences’). In a similar vein, fashion designers appropriate aspects of working-class culture. As she puts it, ‘Fashion designers have long been attached to a white trash aesthetic as it gives them a way of doing sexuality with femininity, extending the type and range of femininity to open out new markets, offering something “different”’ (2004: 96).

Skeggs (2004) claims that middle-class culture is very much based on *propertizing*, that is, ‘stealing’ the cultural elements of the working class (and others). In contrast, the latter is being

excluded from many exchange relationships, and its culture is therefore built more around use-values, such as loyalty, honour and fairness.

But the working class is not a passive recipient of middle-class exploitation. The former also adopts strategies, distinction and resistance against the latter, e.g. in the form of anti-pretentiousness and through ‘taking the piss’ (Skeggs 2004; see also 1997). Yet Skeggs is quick to point out that the working class seldom has the channels, influence, power, or symbolic capital to succeed in the resistance. As a consequence, resistance ultimately ‘works as a mechanism to keep the working-class in place’ (Skeggs 2004: 114).

We can see that Skeggs paints a picture where a central element in class formation is through exploitation of working-class culture and where class struggle takes place mainly in the cultural realm. As she writes: ‘class struggle becomes not just about the entitlement to the labour of others but the entitlement to their culture, feelings, affect and dispositions. This is a very intimate form of exploitation’ (Skeggs 2005: 63).

## Concluding Discussion

Evaluating Skeggs’ account, I would argue that she presents a sophisticated response to the two challenges to class theory – the dilemmas of individualization and exploitation – discussed in this essay. The disidentification of class is itself a highly classed process entailing exploitative social relations mainly through cultural means. And developing an understanding of class in the light of the cultural turn she brings in affect, values and the symbolic realm into class theory. Yet, there are a few tensions in her work.

One is, as Bottero (2004) notes, that, although she moves away from the traditional way of conceptualizing classes as antagonistic collectivities, sometimes her analysis slips into this kind of notion. The old Marxist image of society composed of two classes acting in their respective interests springs to mind.

Perhaps the increased differentiation and complexity within and among classes within contemporary Western societies could be emphasized more.

Furthermore, Skeggs' analysis of the middle class has a somewhat one-sided focus on exchange-value (although this may be a rhetorical point on her part). Like in Bourdieu's work, this implies a notion of human behaviour as governed by instrumental interests. Skeggs (2004: 187) herself denies this being the case, claiming that her analysis just happens to reflect how middle-class selves currently are formed.

But I would like a greater focus on the use-value in 'middle-class' culture, and more generally, on the creativity of action. For instance, while Skeggs claims that fashion designers appropriate white trash aesthetics in order to 'open up new markets', she also denigrates, I believe, how fashion and aesthetics have great use-value for many of them. It is clear from McRobbie's study (1998) of British high-fashion designers that most of her interviewees showed great passion and non-instrumental motives in their work, seeing fashion design as art rather than simply business. Many of them put in an enormous amount of work while experiencing severe financial pressures. In sum, Skeggs' work on class is a rich resource, which future research would do well to draw on, develop, and critically engage with.

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# A Focus on Victims of Crime in Social Work: Why and for Whom?

*Carina Ljungvald*

## Introduction

‘Do not focus on the painting, but on who bought the paint, who painted and who put up the piece of cloth’.

These words, spoken by Beverley Skeggs during one of her Stockholm seminars, will provide the starting point for this paper. They serve as an excellent metaphor for my doctoral thesis. I am examining a legal reform from 2001, when a separate section concerning victims of crime was introduced in the Swedish Social Services Act (SoL) (SFS 2001:453 SoL). Using Skeggs’ metaphor, one could say that I initially focused on the painting, which in this case is the particular section in the Act. The first paper for my thesis describes the Swedish welfare statute and its application to victims of crime (Ljungvald & Hollander 2007). The study shows that the reform was adopted mainly to clarify the responsibility of the social services, especially since they previously had not been involved in matters concerning victims of crime (Govt. Bill 2000/01:79).

From a legal perspective, it is important to clarify the law’s tangible content. If I wish to examine why this reform was enacted, however, then this is not enough. Beverley Skeggs has influenced me to see that the main focus cannot be on the ‘painting’ since it does not provide either the history or the context. Incorporating a victim of crime perspective, as described in section 5:11 of the Social Services Act, does present an ideological perspective. Law reflects conflicts between

different actors and interests, and the results can be seen as a manifestation or institutionalization of power. Legal concepts, like victims of crime or solidarity, are thus containers of value and mediators of ideology (Skeggs 2007). A study that only describes apparent purposes of a legal reform therefore runs the risk of reproducing various ideological positions. I must, therefore, not only rely on the visible categories, but also on the latent process that made them (Skeggs 2007). In other words, what interests are being responded to and created by the law? Who characterizes the cause of victims of crime? What sources of legal rationality does the law draw on?

In this paper, I will present a hypothesis that can be used as an explanation as to why victims of crime were introduced in the Social Services Act. I will argue that the reform only vaguely concerns the problem it describes. Rather, it can be seen as a symbol of a broader political trend, where the fundamental values of the Act, such as solidarity and equality, are losing their role as ideological influences.

## The Social Services Act – A Touchstone for Solidarity

The Social Services Act was adopted in 1982. Many politicians and researchers would agree that the Act reflects the ideals of the Swedish welfare state. It has been portrayed as ‘a marriage between social democratic welfare policy and the discipline of social work’ (Högskoleverket 2003). Even though individual responsibility is evidently expressed in the Act and has become more obvious during the last decade (1:1 SoL), it is primarily based on theories that attribute social problems to structural causes (cf. Friis 2005). Solidarity together with equality, democracy and social security are the fundamental principles of the Act (1:1 SoL).

When the Act was reformed in 2002 the preparatory material used the language of the Swedish welfare state, with an emphasis

on social rights, public responsibility, a holistic view, a minimum standard of living and the use of preventive measures (Govt. Bill 2000/01:80). To date, the right to assistance (4:1 SoL) is also based on needs, rather than on cause and fault. The Act conflicts with the logic of liberalism, since it is built on structural theories that clash with a system of ideas based on individual responsibility. The distribution of welfare according to need is also a profoundly anti-capitalist concept (McGregor 1999).

## The Victim of Crime as a Trojan Horse

But now the fundamental values of the Social Services Act might be in danger. In 2001, a new provision of support to victims of crime was incorporated in the Social Service Act. Alongside special provisions concerning other groups in the 5th Chapter of the Act, such as children, youths, elderly persons, persons with functional impairments, substance abusers and relative carers, the provisions concerning support to victims of crime can be found in a separate section of the Act (5:11 SoL). The provisions of section 5:11 in the Social Services Act did not change the legal responsibility of the social services or lead to any strengthening of the rights of victims of crime. It is primarily a recommendation to the social services to ensure that this group is supported (Ljungwald & Hollander 2007).

Even the preparatory materials indicate that the reform does not effect any legal changes (Govt. Bill 2000/01:79). Support to victims of crime was already a responsibility falling within the ambit of the social services under other provisions of the Act (cf. 2:2 and 3:1 SoL). Just as before section 5:11 was introduced, any victim of crime had the right to apply for assistance within the limits of section 4:1 of the Act. Under these provisions it does not matter, however, whether the person in need is a victim of crime or not. The right to assistance is not linked to any specific situation of an individual person or a group of persons (Govt. Bill 2000/01:80).

In Sweden, reforms aiming to enhance the position of victims of crime, like section 5:11, are often linked to the efforts of the feminist movement to visualize men's violence against women. However, there are other theories which place the victim of crime as a key concept in the current ideological shift in social policy, from solidarity to safety (Ewald 2002). The main point is that reform taken in the name of this group is simply a way of blocking solidarity, enhancing neo-liberal policy and justifying measures of penal repression (cf. Garland 2001; Waquant 2004).

As Hacking (1999) points out, the past 30 years of increasing fascination with victims of crime do necessitate some difficult questions. For example, when poverty has been intensified and welfare programmes discontinued, why are we diverted to other issues, such as sexual and other abuse? Additionally, even though the majority of people affected by crime are poor and deprived, the victim of crime has been constructed as far away from welfare and structural explanations as can be (cf. Hacking 1999). The conventional image of the victim of crime is a respectable citizen, normally a middle-class woman and her children (cf. Garland 2001).

The suggestion that the idea of the victim of crime has been constructed as a part of liberalism (or now neo-liberalism) is not new. Already at the first symposium of victimology, Reiman (1973) noted that a definition of the victim of crime requires a view where liberal ideas, such as individual responsibility and freedom, are incorporated. Otherwise, there are no assignable victims of crime. Hence, as Reiman points out, if we believe that crime is a social phenomenon instead of an individual act by an offender we will find ourselves with a meaningless distinction on our hands. Then there is no boundary between victims of crime and victims of disease or accidents, nor between offenders and victims (cf. Reiman 1973).

From this perspective the provisions about victims of crime can be seen as part of an ideological makeover, where the Act



is embracing the core values of neo-liberalism. A victim of crime focus appears to do good, but the latent process serves to delegitimize the Act's value system. The aim is to tear down collective structures, such as social programmes, which may impede a pure market logic (cf. Bourdieu 1998).

## The Rationale of a Victim of Crime Perspective

It is important to resist the temptation to see the introduction of victims of crime in the Social Service Act simply as the extension of neo-liberal logic, at least until the more distinctively Swedish national trends are accounted for. After all, neo-liberalism does not create the same effects and values everywhere. However, there is much to suggest that the particular section about victims of crime in the Social Services Act is an ideological contradiction. Hence, if the Act is rooted in values based on solidarity, it is irrational to discern victims of crime from others who need support (Fattah 1992). From a solidarity perspective, causality is separated from attribution (Ewald 2002). The right to assistance is tied to needs, irrespective of prior fault (cf. 4:1 SoL). Society is a totality and the good and bad of each individual depend on everyone else (Ewald 2002). The logic of the Act therefore assumes that victimization arises from structural causes.

To displace solidarity with neo-liberalism, the idea of the victim of crime is however both rational and needed. The justification of this shift requires a reconstruction of the victim and what (or now, who) is to blame for 'social problems'. The idea of the victim of crime disconnects the notion of the 'victim' from structural explanations, and connects it to individual responsibility. The victim of crime also offers scapegoats (evil offenders) to explain unfortunate conditions in society (cf. Hacking 1999). This construction of demons is an essential strategy for avoiding an analysis of the structural foundation of victimization (cf. Edelman 2001). Thus, the definition of the victim of crime relies on a distinction of those who are innocent and guilty (cf. Christie

1986). An introduction of the former in the Social Services Act thus inevitably introduces the latter. This reasoning shows how the ideas of the victim of crime and neo-liberal policy complement and interact with each other.

The attempted reconstruction of the victim in the Social Service Act is not the only example of how structural explanations tend to disappear in favour of individualized explanations (Fooks & Pantazis 1999; Tham 1995). This is also the case for other categories, such as juvenile offenders and homeless people, which are now portrayed, for instance, in the media as problems as opposed to as having problems (Estrada 2001; Fooks & Pantazis 1999). These descriptions reflect neo-liberal values; thus, juvenile offenders and homeless people are free actors in a market who can choose between legal and illegal behaviours (Tham 1995).

## The Seductive Power of the Victim of Crime Metaphor

As pointed out by Beverley Skeggs, a concept, like, for instance, a victim of crime, is not only coloured by ideology, it is also performative in the sense that it has real material and economic impacts (Skeggs 2004). Altered images of social problems will change their solutions. Section 5:11 might not only be a sign of declining support for the fundamental values of the Social Services Act. It may also be clever propaganda for the same. Hence, a victim of crime perspective can be a prominent force in reshaping not only the Act, but also the mission of social work.

Emphasising the victim of crime is a way to individualize and ‘agentify’ social problems (cf. Garland 2001). It transfers all responsibility onto the individual rather than promoting a system of exchange, and produces a model of the market as a neutral system and the individual as a self, responsible for its own value (Skeggs 2004). In other words, the responsibility is delegated from the public to the individual and structural analysis

is replaced with moralism. This approach can easily transform into a punitive attitude towards those who do not follow the rules for a proper way of living (Wacquant 2004). The victim of crime perspective also serves to reconnect the link between contribution and benefits; hence, from this point of view, innocent, law-abiding and respectable citizens should be singled out and receive special treatment. This conflicts with and challenges the right to assistance as it stands today in the Social Services Act, which is tied to needs regardless of cause and fault (4:1 SoL). Although the provisions of section 5:11 do not create a new right for victims, it can encourage the adoption of a new identity. This can pave the way for more merit-oriented values and be a modest step towards a change in the eligibility requirements for assistance, where the distribution of welfare will reflect prior performance. It establishes a potential development where, not only solidarity, public responsibility and structural analysis are undermined, but also equality.

A focus on victims of crime also emphasizes that it is not enough to be afflicted and in need to receive assistance; you must have been afflicted by someone. As argued by Ewald (2002), individual responsibility orientation converts every transgression into a fault, which is the philosophical principle for apportioning liability. By this logic, the response is to provide compensation only to innocent victims, while leaving losses to those at fault (Simon 2004). Groups like women, the disabled and the elderly, therefore, struggle to present themselves not only as marginalized, but also as victims of crime. If there is no one to blame for their problems, they do not have a right to anything (cf. Ewald 2002). Thereby, the classical boundary the Social Services Act was introduced to eliminate, namely between the deserving and undeserving, is again more evidently reinforced. You will have to prove yourself worthy to access welfare benefits; hence, it will be denied to a person who does not follow the demands of the social services about acceptable responsible behaviour.

## A Structural and Holistic Approach

In this paper, I have argued that, following the rationale of the Social Services Act, the idea of the victim of crime is an alien or contradictory element. The reason for the social services' lack of giving 'adequate' support to victims of crime (cf. Govt. Bill 2000/01:79) might therefore be because their values are still based on mainly solidarity. Targeting victims of crime also inevitably involves the establishment of a question of blame. As a trained social worker I have been taught to assess needs, not to determine guilt and innocence. Nor was I trained to distinguish victims of crime from offenders, or to confront or condemn the latter. I have also learned to focus on social relations rather than individual categories. From this perspective, the Swedish social services score low on their work with victims of crime, not in spite of, but rather because they score high in the welfare league. By placing the victims of crime in the context of social work, however, a more complex understanding of issues regarding this category can be reached. A structural and holistic perspective can be one contribution. To the question of whether a victim of crime perspective should be integrated in social work or not, there is no right or wrong answer. It all comes down to values.

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# The Production of Bodies

*Thais Machado-Borges*

Being in the middle of a research project that aims to compare conceptions and practices involving the body, physical appearance and interventions (such as diets, beauty treatments and surgeries) as they are discussed and carried out by lower-income and middle-class Brazilian women, aged between 18 and 55, the process of thinking with Beverley Skeggs (through her texts and seminars) has developed my interests regarding the production of bodies and the processes through which value (moral, economic and affective) is inscribed on them. In this paper I aim to discuss how this consolidated emphasis on production and value has inspired my readings of the ethnographic material gathered so far and has led me to further reflect about my research questions and redesign some of my methodological approaches.

## The Production of Bodies

I was lying in a bed in an all white room. The place was a facial clinic. A woman stood by my side. She calmly peeled off pieces of skin from her face and applied them on to mine. After a while she asked me if I could help her and gave me a big kitchen knife while she explained that I would have to make a slight cut in her forehead (without letting it bleed) so that I could peel a very thin layer of her skin and apply it onto my own. She looked at me with a challenging smile and asked whether I would really dare to help her. I hesitated for a while until I realized the procedure was not as difficult as I thought. The skin was easily removed as if it had dried out from sunlight.

In a monotonous tone, the woman who worked at the clinic explained all the steps in the procedure. I was lying in bed again. As she went through her explanation I began to feel more

and more insecure about the whole thing – the procedure, the techniques, the results. I decided to get up and look at my face in the mirror. It was all oily and covered by an uneven patchwork of tiny pieces of skin that somehow were becoming my own. In the background I could hear the voice of the woman who was treating me. She was once again explaining that if I stuck with that mask for a few days my skin would become fabulous. I asked her if it was not going to be all stained and she guaranteed – without convincing me – that the treatment was very efficacious. I started to rub my face (in circular movements) and realized, to my great relief, that I easily and painlessly managed to take the skin mask away. The woman who conducted the procedure saw what I was doing and became furious. Then I heard bells ringing. It was my alarm clock. Time to wake up and start a new day of fieldwork (excerpt from field notes, June 2006).

In 2006, I started a research project entitled “‘Beneath the Surface, We’re All Alike’ – Social Inequality, Bodies, and Physical Interventions among Lower-Income and Middle-Class Women in Brazil’. The project aims to examine how women who daily experience the conflicts and threats of an unequal society relate to their own bodies. The study compares conceptions and practices involving the body, physical appearance and interventions (such as diets, beauty treatments and surgeries) as they are discussed and carried out by lower-income and middle-class Brazilian women, aged between 18 and 55. It investigates the ways through which the body intersects with social hierarchies of gender, class and race: do these women share the same body ideals? Are bodily interventions a way to circumvent or, on the contrary, enhance social inequalities?

Informants are being recruited among women living in middle-class neighbourhoods and in shantytowns (favelas/agglomerados) in the city of Belo Horizonte, south-eastern Brazil.

As will be shown in this paper, the process of thinking with Beverley Skeggs (through her texts and seminars in Stockholm, Spring 2007) has developed my interests regarding the



production of bodies and physical appearance. Skeggs' emphasis on the mechanisms through which value (moral, economic and affective) is inscribed on bodies has inspired my readings of the ethnographic material gathered so far. Moreover, I will discuss how this consolidated emphasis on production and value led me to further reflect about my research questions (and about my odd dream) and to redesign, during a second period of fieldwork, some of my methodological approaches.

## Background

'Beneath the surface, we're all alike' is a currently used expression in Brazil, uttered by a person who experiences that their rights as a human being have been denied, generally because of their (supposedly) inferior social status. This expression emphasizes a shared biological and physical nature, a modicum of human equality (Barbosa 1992). Through its constitution, Brazil claims to be a modern, democratic country, where all citizens should be treated equally. In practice, the democratic rule of law does not equally apply to all members of society. The body and its appearance are, as Bourdieu (1989), DaMatta (1978: 155) and Skeggs (1997, 2004, 2005) have suggested, the ultimate arena for the establishing of social hierarchies – beauty, cleanliness, and other easily naturalized aspects, such as tastes, preferences and feelings – work as markers that differentiate those who by law are declared to be equal.

Brazilians' preoccupation with the body and physical appearance is remarkably palpable and present in contemporary everyday life (Berger 2006; Goldenberg 2005; Kulick and Machado-Borges 2005). This preoccupation is not simply the reflection, at a local level, of transnational trends and a global fixation with bodies and beauty. In fact, interventions to modify the body are not a recently established practice in Brazil. Brazilian cosmetic surgery has a history of more than 150 years (Gilman 1999: 215). Nowadays the country occupies a leading position in the development of

certain cosmetic surgical techniques. In 2003, 621,342 people underwent some kind of plastic surgery in the country. 80 per cent of these people were women (Folha de São Paulo 2004). Brazil was, at the end of the 1990s, the fourth largest consumer of cosmetic products in the world. The percentage of women who underwent caesarean sections in Brazil amounted to 36.4 per cent in 1996 – one of the highest rates in the world. Brazil also ranks high in the number of female sterilizations – 40.1 per cent in 1996 (according to Daalsgard 2004).

In what kind of social context are these practices taking place?

Brazil is among the ten largest economies on Earth. But it is also one of the countries with the most unequal income distribution in the world (Valle Silva 2003). It is a nation where 60 per cent of the economically active population earns less than US\$150 a month (Bethell 2000).

In Brazil, the richest 20 per cent of the population earns approximately 29 times as much as the poorest 20 per cent (Barros et al. 2001; World Bank 2001). The country has an upper class that consists of about 10 per cent of the population. The middle class accounts for only about 20 per cent, and roughly 30 per cent of Brazilians live in abject poverty. According to the World Bank (2005), in Brazil, about 40 million people live on less than US\$2 a day and 14.6 million people live on less than US\$1 a day.

These economic inequalities are linked to racial inequalities. Of the richest 10 per cent, 83 per cent are white. In education, non-whites complete fewer years of study than whites. In 2001, 16.4 per cent of whites had completed 12 years of education in comparison to 4.5 per cent of non-whites. The average income for non-whites is a little less than half that of whites. Non-whites have a life expectancy 14 years shorter than that for whites, they have an infant mortality rate 30 per cent higher, and more than double the number of illiterates (IBGE 2002; PNUD 2005; Schneider 1996). Yet, in spite of this numerical evidence that points to the existence of racism in Brazil, the myth of racial democracy (i.e.,

the harmonious mixture of Africans, Amerindians and Europeans) is still alive and often functions as a hallmark of Brazilianness (Fry 2000: 97; Nogueira 1985; Sansone 2003).

What characterizes Brazilian society, according to many who have attempted to portray it (Barbosa 1992; DaMatta 1978; Da Matta and Hess 1995; Velho and Alvito 1996; Vianna 1995), is the co-existence of and continual tension between fundamentally opposing principles and practices: wealth and poverty, egalitarian values and hierarchical traditions, racism and racial democracy.

How do different women experience, embody and enact the gap, manifested in Brazilian society, between hierarchical norms (where you can acquire favours, rights and privileges because of who you are and who you know) and individualistic, egalitarian ideals? There is an ongoing cultural and political debate in Brazil regarding the issues of citizenship and individual rights: how should social inequality be confronted? Is the application of the democratic rule of law an impossible project? To what extent are women from different social classes able or willing to renegotiate their positions and see equality 'beneath the surface'?

## Produced Bodies – some field observations

In Belo Horizonte, and in many parts of south-eastern Brazil, consumption focused on the body is sometimes referred to in terms of production. In fact, there is an idiomatic expression used in everyday conversations to indicate that a person is well-dressed and beautiful – one can say that a person is 'produzida' (produced) meaning dressed-up, styled, and nice. The expression 'se produzir' (to produce oneself), to get oneself ready to go out, or to make oneself beautiful, because it so crudely describes a process of making and marking, a process of inscription of value onto bodies (Skeggs 2004: 13), deserves special attention.

Production, as, for instance, in the expression 'produção da noiva' literally translated to 'bride production' (as in a sign I saw at the entrance of a fashionable beauty parlour in Belo

Horizonte), or in the expression ‘*toda produzida*’ (‘completely produced’) used to acknowledge and compliment a person’s efforts in improving their appearance for a special occasion, almost unwittingly brings to the fore the processes through which social hierarchies of gender, class and race are constructed and embodied.

Moreover, production, in the particular context I am studying, suggests that beauty is not necessarily something that is inherent in the individual. Rather, beauty can be achieved and produced through proper consumption. Skeggs’ discussions (2004: 136–7) on the aestheticization of the self (2004:136–7) and her suggestion that ‘the imperative to produce oneself through resourcing dilemmas relies not just on access to and control of symbolic resources, but also on knowing how to display one’s subjectivity properly’ (2005: 973) appear to me as interesting points of view through which I could look at my material. In the particular context I am studying, the production and modification of bodies seem to be closely connected to power struggles and to attempts to create and maintain social distance.

Furthermore, by ‘producing oneself’ one is using modern, maybe even scientific technologies, tricks and techniques from the fashion- and beauty industries. Production, as it is used in my material, creates associations with industrialization and modernity, which are, in the Brazilian context, positively valued. Skeggs (2004: 111) points to a similar (though inverted) process of attribution of value in her UK material. Her discussions on how white working-class people were associated with the unmodern show how value is inscribed onto certain groups and certain kinds of practice.

Besides that, her discussion on the binary between nature/artifice in the production of appearance and the hidden/apparent labour invested in that production (2004: 101) is also relevant to the analysis of my material. Skeggs suggests that ‘a classed difference can be seen in the value given to labor in the production of appearance’ (2004: 101). While working-class women tend to

show the time and effort put into the production of appearances, middle-class women seem to conceal the labour invested in the production of their bodies. A 'natural' look is thus produced, naturalized, and fetishized.

I have the impression that the equation between natural appearance and higher cultural value and the subsequent association between artifice, excess and lower cultural value (as in the case of the UK) are not always that straightforward in the Brazilian case. In that particular context, the use of artifice and excess is not necessarily devalued. For instance, when asking a 30-year-old middle-class administrative secretary whether her breast implants were not questioned by other people as being fake, she vehemently answered: 'If someone tells me that they are fake, that they are not mine, or not natural, I say: "I've bought them, I've paid for them and – naturally – they're mine!"' Almost the same argument was given by a young black low-income student who had hair extensions. 'If people ask me whether this is my hair, I say, "Of course it's mine. I bought it! So what?!"' (Gomes 2006: 124, my translation).

A last example to illustrate how production and the use of artifice can be discussed in Brazil: former top model and media celebrity Luiza Brunet received a lot of coverage during the 2008 carnival parade. In an interview, she explains in detail how she prepared herself for the carnival: 'I do physical exercises everyday, during the whole year. Besides that, I watch my mouth and try to avoid eating unhealthy things. And one month before the carnival I took samba lessons in order to get the right swing in my hips' (my translation. See <http://video.msn.com/?mkt=pt-br&vid=ea8407e4-1ed4-46af-bb1f-8dd4a1f0fae9> for the interview).

Is it so that artifice and excess (when positively valued) are used under controlled and sanctioned forms by certain groups of women?

Skeggs' analysis of contemporary forms of class struggle is definitely a perspective through which I can approach my own

material. Nevertheless, I still have to investigate the extent to which an analysis based on a specific European context can be applied to ethnographic material on Brazil. By that I mean that I see the necessity of rooting classification struggles within a particular history and within the complex and controversial realities of Brazilian society. Such a perspective might make the multidimensionality of classification struggles more prominent, in terms of both life trajectories and outcomes.

### Looking for those who produce – an insight into struggles concerning authorization

The way Skeggs charts the mechanisms by which value ‘is retained, accumulated, lost or appropriated’ (Skeggs 2004: 13, 2005) and most of all her firm emphasis on the pervasiveness, ubiquity and dynamic character of class – class as a process – enabled me to reflect about some of my research questions and methodological approaches.

Looking back at the ethnographical material I had gathered so far, I noticed that I could tell a great deal about ‘produced bodies’, i.e. bodies that went through treatments that supposedly lead to improved modification. What I came to realize through Skeggs’ texts and seminars was that I also should pay more attention to a network of agents (hidden and apparent labourers) involved in these processes of bodily modification.

Looking back at my dream (an unintended parody of participant observation where I am an observer and a patient, a researcher and an object of research), I can also see that it includes a woman who is producing a body (my body), that it depicts some of her work conditions, and that it even shows a glimpse of a struggle concerning authorization between her and myself. But what was in my dream was not yet processed in my awoken thoughts.

Besides making me aware of my own positioning in the field both in class and gender terms (questions that would, per se, be the topic of an entire paper), Skeggs’ texts and seminars have

inspired me to extend my sample of informants in order to include in it some of the people who work with the production of bodies and appearance in middle-class and poorer neighbourhoods in the city of Belo Horizonte. Bodies are being produced, maintained and cared for not only by plastic surgeons – in Brazil considered as *la crème de la crème* of all doctors – but also and mainly by the work of nurses, facial- and body-therapists, hairdressers, manicurists, pedicurists, maids, sellers of beauty products and of an enormous variety of treatments that combine grooming with caring.

As I came to notice during the second phase of fieldwork (conducted between June and August 2007), most of these people who work with the production of bodies and physical appearance are women; most of them (because of their occupations and social positioning) are somewhat stigmatized and devalued. These are people who earn their living producing bodies that are sometimes inscribed with values that they themselves might not have or might not be recognized as having. Seen in this light, the production of bodies and physical appearance can no longer be considered as simply being an activity entirely superfluous to survival. It is a way for many women to earn money, at the same time that it reveals the dynamics of power and status existing among women.

This rethinking of the research questions and the consequent redefinition of my ethnographic sample might hopefully lead me to a more nuanced understanding of how social inequalities are acknowledged, examined, produced, and challenged in daily struggles concerning the production and reading of bodies that, under a very thick social skin, keep the promise of being alike.

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Interview with Luiza Brunet (2008), 'Ex-modelo conta como foi sua preparação para o Carnaval 2008', in <: <http://video.msn.com/?mkt=pt-br&vid=ea8407e4-1ed4-46af-bb1f-8dd4a1f0fae9>>, accessed on 5 February 2008.



# Emotional Archives and Body Politics: Towards an Analysis of Early Lobotomy Praxis in Sweden (1944-45)

*Ulrika Nilsson*

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The first lobotomies in Sweden were performed in 1944-1945. 65 people – 58 women and 7 men – had a total of 67 lobotomies. Two women were operated upon twice; a few had more neurosurgery later. The vast majority of these early lobotomy patients came from the poorer working class. Four had spent their childhood in foster care, three at various kinds of institutions. As many as 15 of the women had been working as maids; others had been factory workers, seamstresses, typists, cooks, and nursing assistants.<sup>1</sup>

In contrast, there were also a handful of patients, two men and three or four women, who in accordance with their level of education and family background can be said to belong to the middle or upper middle classes. They and their families

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<sup>1</sup> *This study is based on the annual reports from the Swedish mental hospitals to the Board of Health (Medicinalstyrelsen) from 1940 to 1960; in 65 medical records from the Neurosurgical Department of the Serafimer Hospital in Stockholm; and in 54 psychiatric medical records from mainly the Beckomberga Psychiatric Hospital. The archives used are Medicinalstyrelsens arkiv, Sinnessjukhusbyrån, E II a: 26–52, The National Archives at Marieberg; Serafimerlasarettets arkiv, Neurokirurgiska kliniken, Patient Register D1: 9 (1944), 10 (1945), and medical records, The National Archives at Arninge; and medical records from the Stockholm County Council Archives at Huddinge.*

and friends were familiar with the latest development within psychiatry and specially demanded lobotomies. They were used to having access to the latest and supposedly best of everything. Another interpretation is that the limits for socially acceptable behaviours were particularly narrow in certain social circles; the price to pay for deviance was high, and lobotomy might provide possible ways out of difficult situations.<sup>2</sup>

13 of the women selected for lobotomy are described as sexually problematic in some way: one as a sometime prostitute, others as promiscuous, venereal diseased, hypersexual, unfaithful, having children out of wedlock, or divorced. Four women had had abortions, another four had been sterilised, one had been castrated. Four women were said to be completely or partly homosexual (cf., Braslow 1997). Homosexuality was given considerable attention. The focus on sexuality, and especially on potential homosexuality, is made quiet clear both in the medical records and in the pre-printed lobotomy forms, which were sent to the Department of Neurosurgery. The one-page form contains a question concerning sexuality, with the accompanying explanatory examples of '(masturbation, impotency, homosexuality, bisexuality, et cetera)', providing some noteworthy deviances.

Apart from gender, sexuality is one of the most evident and frequent patterns when looking at the patients singled out for lobotomies. Deviant behaviour was linked to the body, especially to the wrong kind of feminine body and sexuality. Psychosurgery

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<sup>2</sup> cf. Pressman 1997, 199–208, 220–35, on lobotomy in the U.S., Vaczy Kragh, 2007. In his study of Denmark, Vaczy Kragh finds no variation due to socio-economic class in the selection of patients for lobotomy. According to Kenneth Ögren, more men were eventually operated on, the average gender composition finally totalling approximately a good 60% women, and barely 40% men. See Ögren, 2005, 66f.; and Ögren, 2007.

gave hope that it would be possible to change erratic or deviant behaviour by means of physically correcting the body (cf., Braslow 1997:165).

Although few, the men's medical records also contain notes on sexuality. One man is said to have once sodomized a cow, but this was not related to his sexuality; neither that he had lived with two women without ever being married. Another man was married and had children with his wife while he also was engaged to and lived with another woman – the circumstances are described, but his sexuality does not seem to have been an issue. A third man had violent fits and sexually harassed women but, in his case, sterilisation or castration was not an option.

In contrast to the women patients, those surgical procedures were never mentioned as a possibility. The men's sexual behaviour seems to have been understood as specific acts, not as anything that would shape and define their identity. Neither does it seem to have been considered equally problematic as that of the women. Thus it can be argued that (i) men's norm breaking (hetero)sexual behaviour was not thought of as defining their very identities; (ii) men's behaviour was not thought of as being incarnated, or as closely connected to their bodies as was the case for women; and (iii) this can provide a partial explanation for the fact that it was far less common to sterilise and lobotomize men than women.

## II

As archive material psychiatric medical records are very emotional. To a present-day archive visitor the emotional charge of a 20th century patient's records seems to be transmitted while reading. After the process of having been granted access to these classified files, I spent days in an otherwise empty room supervised from behind a glass wall by the archives staff. Given special permission to take digital photos without a flash, I made records of the lives of 49 women and 4 men, the very first people to have lobotomies in Sweden.

To work with medical records is very interesting, emotionally draining and exhausting. The records amass specific aspects of life stories that are gripping and impregnated with despair, anxiety, shame, guilt, rage, protest, rebelliousness, pride, contempt, and empathy. Long afterwards it felt like I was accompanied by these once institutionalized people, having them under my skin – restless, bumping and kicking. Some of them affected me more than others.

By studying diagnosis and treatment of the patients who had one or more lobotomies, I aim at a more careful examination of how the concepts of normality and deviance relate to categories, such as gender, class, sexuality, ethnicity, race and (dis)ability, as well as to the intra-action of these categories. The concept of normality is normative, and can as such be understood both as a level of aspiration, and as a cluster of actions and practices. The selection of patients for the operation shows how social and cultural concepts of normality and deviation are integrated in medical science and praxis, and how medicine is (re)producing them. I would argue that psychiatry and psychosurgery via the intersectional praxis of lobotomy attempted to (i) (re)create normality; and (ii) control deviation – but not necessarily in that order.

As is often the case when delving into empirics, it forced me to reconsider the focus of my research, including its theoretical framing. Although the main analytical interests of the study remain, I have chosen to go about it in a different way in order to do the material and the people who it concerns more justice, and hopefully to take the analysis further.

Early on it occurred to me that the standard form of academic text might be contradictive and contraproductive if I would want to provide space for or try to (re)create the voices/noises/positions/actions of the patients from the multi-vocal psychiatry records. Since such an aspiration also might be methodologically suspect, I thought of emphasizing the constructedness of these parts by trying a different style of writing. My first attempt was

to sample words, wordings and phrases from the records, and to juxtapose them with phrases taken from the announcement of the first Miss Sweden beauty contest in 1949. By making these two categories of more or less contemporary cut-ups interfoliate, I aimed at an interaction that would be able to illuminate the strong Swedish nationalist and ethnic element at the very core of normativity (Nilsson 2007). While that core is more obvious in the Miss Sweden Beauty Contest (as shown in essays by Katarina Mattsson and Katarina Pettersson), it is ever present in the patient records too, although quieter. By making the glamorous ideals for young, nubile and hegemonic nationalistic femininity of the Miss Sweden Contest communicate with the various failures of femininity, embodied by the women patients in long-term psychiatric care, the normative ordering of femininity is made quite clear (Mattsson & Pettersson 2007).

Later on the series of workshops that Beverley Skeggs gave as a guest professor provided inspiration and new tools, particularly the one on affects and intimacy, concerning the social structures of emotions and feeling. In her overview of this field of research, Skeggs distinguished differences in emphasis between scholars' theoretical approach to affect/intimacy. She summed up some main points, of which I focus on the ones that are the most use to my empirics and enquiries. These imply that (i) emotions/affects make things happen at all levels of social life; (ii) emotions/affects are required performances; (iii) emotions/affects are being made in the encounter (relational and constantly in process); and (iv) emotions/affects are being put to use (e.g. by the nation and/or privileged groups).

### III

The case of the patient 'Anna' can be tied in with the most central issues of this lobotomy study in progress: the relations or intersectionality of power structures. A brief version of Anna's medical history leading up to the lobotomy can be put in the

following chronological order: 1933 abortion and sterilization; 1936 castration; 1941 legally incompetent; 1942 shock treatment with insulin and electricity; 1944 lobotomy. (When discussing Anna's and the other patients' cases I have chosen to use the medical vocabulary of the time. In the 1970s she was diagnosed with Cerebral Palsy.)

Anna grew up in an asylum for the imbecile; later on she lived with her mother. The parents were separated; the mother supported the two of them with needlework. At the age of 22 Anna became pregnant. In order to have an abortion she had to consent to sterilization. She did. The following year, in 1934, Anna was admitted to the Beckomberga Psychiatric Hospital on the outskirts of Stockholm. The first entries in her record describe her as slightly imbecile. Somewhat later her intelligence tests gave unexpectedly high scores. Some doctors suggested that her intelligence might have been misjudged because of her crippledness, being spastic and having a speech disorder.

Along with the impairment, Anna's erotic interest was understood as her most serious problem – the social and the health aspects of her state of mind and behaviour seamlessly interwoven and inseparable. In 1935, her ground privileges were revoked for some time as a punishment for her 'eager socializing with men patients in the street'. A physician noted that Anna was tormented by her impairment. Anna had told him that '[s]he had such a strong need to love, but could never find a release for those emotions. They were so strong; either the patient had to love a man or a woman. She was often in love with women'.

Awaiting a trial discharge in 1936, Anna was castrated. As a consequence of the operation where her ovaries and uterus were surgically removed, Anna reached menopause shortly before her 25th birthday. Before the castration Anna had been deemed as varyingly undisciplined, sexually acting out, quiet and compliant. At times she was 'lazy and uncommitted in the workroom, not having sat quiet by her weave', at other times she was seen as 'being undiscerningly optimistic and unable to assess

her abilities'. Her doctors had hoped to change her behaviour by way of castration, but the operation did not have the desired effect. According to my interpretation, Anna was understood as a woman who did not understand her proper place, and who was engaged in various forms of improper and undesirable behaviour. In short, she overstepped the mark and did not demonstrate the proper kind of femininity for a woman in her position, i.e. unmarried, crippled, and poor.

Awaiting another trial discharge in 1941, Anna was declared legally incompetent. In 1942, she was readmitted to Beckomberga at her own request, as she, according to the record, 'can't stand it without help anymore'. That which she could not stand was 'the sexual'. Anna fancied and fantasized about women, while she also suffered severely from harbouring such unnatural feelings. Because it was as such that she and the major part of medicine and society understood same sex sexual desire and homosexuality. This was also in line with the Swedish legislation of the time.

In the record Anna was quoted as feeling that she had nothing to live for since she 'neither could work, nor love'. Her constant crying and despair caused a disturbance on the ward, and she was treated with higher and higher dosages of insulin. Despite the insulin therapy, Anna's putative homosexual 'trouble' persisted. In 1944, she fell in love with a ward sister. In the autumn, at the age of 33, Anna had a lobotomy.

## IV

### Psychogenic factors

Military service	Unemployment
Financial troubles	Unhappy love
Stress at work	Unwanted pregnancy
Marital conflicts	Religious contemplation
Inheritance dispute	Escape from occupied nation
War-related psychosis and neurosis	Misfit
	Fear

General election	Rape
Somatic disease	Fear of pregnancy
Social failure	Sexual act
Worry	Bomb attack
Overstrain	Abortion
Divorce	Scare
Husband's unemployment	Loneliness
Sexual conflict	Broken engagement
Only child's death	Hard work and night watch
Child out of wedlock	Homosexual abuse
Feeling of isolation	Grief over a brother's death in the war
Husband conscripted	Grief over having been given notice
Fiancée's previous record	Harassment by former fiancée
Fright	Suicide in the family
The war	Relative's insanity
Fire	
Changed life circumstances	

The definitions in the above listing are collected from the Swedish mental hospitals' annual reports to the Board of Health for the years 1940 to 1954. The seemingly randomness of the compilation is typical of the category of 'psychogenic factors'.

Up until 1954, the printed forms of the annual reports contained a box with the heading psychogenic factors, i.e. various factors with an affective influence, that were considered to either lead up to or to be linked to the outbreak of psychiatric disorder in an individual. Whether they originated within the patient's body, psyche or close environment, or rather in society or the world at large, does not seem to matter. I find this apparent lack of boundaries between society, outer events and the individual quite remarkable.

What the concept of psychogenic factors does is to provide diagnostic room for something which I, for the time being, term the trans-individual. This room or space may seem to be in conflict with the modernistic concept of the body and the human



individual, but it also seems that medicine – or at least some aspects of medicine, such as psychiatry – has not been able to operate without a concept for it.

Interestingly enough, the underlying thought structure of psychiatry's concepts for the trans-individual seems to have parallels with the theoretical framing of social structures of emotion within theories of the emotional turn. What they have in common is that they both provide modes for relating, understanding, and examining (i) individuals/the body/actors, to (ii) outer events/society/culture/structures. Beverley Skeggs has commented on this as a trans-individual, processual, and sub-representational dimension of social life.

## V

Anna was the eighth person to have a lobotomy in Sweden. A neurosurgeon drilled holes in her temples, inserted a long, thin, sharp instrument, and moved it around twice on both sides in order to sever certain nerves connecting the frontal lobes to the thalamus.

The referral from the psychiatrist at Beckomberga to the Neurosurgical Clinic at the Serafimer Hospital says that Anna at an early age had showed 'signs of hypersexuality'. The stated purpose of the lobotomy was 'to free the patient of her inner tension and anxiety-linked sexual problems, which at times makes her residence at home impossible'. The hope was for Anna to become calmer and quieter and be able to live with her mother – basically the same hope that earlier had led to her castration.

The fact that lobotomy was a new operation made it highly interesting from a scientific point of view, both for psychiatry and neurosurgery. The neurosurgeons wanted to know how the patients were affected in the aftermath of a lobotomy. Thus they asked the patients, their legal guardians or physicians, to submit a short report on their (the patients') health annually.

In 1945, one year after the lobotomy, Anna's psychiatrist gave an account of a positive development. Anna had become calmer and was released into her mother's care. He wrote: 'The sexual thoughts are still disturbing her, but nowadays she is heterosexually inclined. She occupies herself with knitting, and the like, but any more substantial capacity for work is naturally not to be expected, since she is crippled'. He describes Anna as better corresponding to a desired form of femininity, which is constructed in interaction with her age, marital status, and social class – as unmarried and relatively young, she resides in her mother's home; she is heterosexual but sexually abstinent; and her work and duties are suitably inclined.

The following year Anna's condition is more in doubt. For a period of time she was readmitted and once again treated with insulin due to her sexual obsession. The psychiatrist reports that Anna still lives with her mother and that she 'feels rather calm, but disturbed by a certain fixation that she has towards a lady among her acquaintances. Altogether, the patient is satisfied with her operation'.

In the last report in 1948, the psychiatrist writes that Anna has been admitted a few more times and has been given insulin for her anxiety and depression. Compared to her pre-lobotomy, Anna's condition has not ameliorated. He sums up her status:

Still has passive homosexual feelings for various women in her surroundings, and is pained by these. On the other hand no feelings for men. Objectively, the patient seems to be considerably calmer than before surgery, but is periodically anxious and goes back to the hospital. As earlier, rather roundabout, fastidious, and dull.

Thus, he once again describes Anna as less adequate compared to the norm, as yet again further from the basic requirements of normalcy.

Anna's life- and patient history coincides with the overriding changes that took place concerning (homo)sexuality, and

with the changes that eventually came about after the decriminalization of homosexuality in Swedish law in 1944. To be homosexual or bisexual as well as crippled, uneducated and with little financial means, like Anna, meant being in a very vulnerable position, more so than many other psychiatric patients. The deviation from normalcy by way of several normative orders was something that Anna shared with other early lobotomy patients.

From 1948 on Anna was transferred between Beckomberga, her mother's home and nursing homes. In the 1950s more psychiatric and neuroleptic medication was available and prescribed to Anna, while the insulin treatment continued. In the late 1950s her mother died. In the 1960s and '70s, the entries in her and other patients' records became briefer and less moralizing.

Despite that none of the treatments aimed at her same-sex desire from the 1930s and on were considered to have had any effect, they nonetheless did result in a pronounced self-hatred directed at that desire. As Elspeth Probyn argues, the body is the place of emotion, and it generates and carries meaning (Probyn 2004). Anna somatically carried the effects of past treatments into the present and the future. Her self-hatred, which somewhat simplistically may be understood as internalized homophobia, also resulted in a profound aversion to women. According to the record, Anna preferred to deal solely with men physicians and staff; she was deeply troubled by women who were kind to her since they stirred up unwanted emotions. Her feelings for women were connected to the knowledge of them being wrong, unnatural and shameful. That knowledge had been invoked as a repeated shaming by the means of punishments and of medical treatments, such as electroshocks, insulin comas, and the invasive and irrevocable surgical procedures of castration and lobotomy. Shame was basically a required emotional response – it had also been required in order to deem Anna as ameliorated.

Responding to one's own shame by self-regulation may be an appropriate and practical reaction, but is not always an available option. Anna opted for avoiding women as far as possible. While shame is experienced as a deeply intimate feeling, it is nonetheless brought into being by closeness to others; it is simultaneously intimate, social and impersonal (Probyn 2004). It is this very simultaneousness or interweaving of individual and social space which makes shame and shaming so very powerful – and why they are constantly and repetitively being put to use in various normative structures by dominant groups.

As Anna's patient record tells a personal life history it also amasses the daily practices of psychiatry, including a rationalisation of these practices. The intersectional praxis of lobotomy and shaming is all part of professionalism and the ongoing professionalization of psychiatry. The medicalization of bodies and behaviours is a form of body politics that produces and reproduces power and power structures. Shame and shaming are imbued in these processes. Examining the social structures of emotions may provide means to further develop notions of the personal and the social.

## VI

Patients like Anna usually spent most of their lives in institutions. Anna was among those who put up the most resistance to the life limits imposed upon her. She constantly struggled to make space, but her own actions never proved to be enough. Towards the end of her life, coinciding with more general social change, Anna was able to influence her life to a larger degree and to change her life situation.

During the autumn of 1968 Anna expressed discomfort with her housing both at Beckomberga and at the nursing home, but since she neither had the financial means nor relatives, she had no options. From the spring of 1969 entries mention

regular leave to visit a ‘male friend’, a friend who a year later was mentioned as her fiancé (‘Gustav’). In 1970, she told the chief resident psychiatrist that she once again was suffering from sexual thoughts about women. In 1971, Anna obtained a doctor’s note to move in with her fiancé, although the couple had trouble finding a flat. In 1972, the patient record describes Anna as ‘a well-kept and proper 60-year-old, who looks considerably older’. It is pointed out that she ‘receives lots of help from her fiancé with her clothing and things in general. She really appreciates him, “he is so kind”’.

While Gustav kept dealing with the authorities concerning finding a flat, Anna’s physicians were actively involved in helping the couple. Calls to the housing authorities on their behalf proved to be successful – the couple were to move into a home of their own. Thus, after having spent most of her life at various institutions, of which nearly 40 years of admittances and releases from Beckomberga, Anna finally managed to have a life that resembled the one that she had expressed a longing for in record entries dating as far back as the 1930s: with a life partner and a home of her own. This resulted in something that sets her patient record apart from most other lobotomy patients’ – it does not end with an autopsy protocol as the final institutional marker.

## VII

Anna’s relationship and her subsequent release enable the plotting of her medical and/or life history with a happy ending of sorts. I must emphasize that it is highly unusual and most unlikely to find any happy endings in the case histories of the lobotomized. Neither do I know anything – besides what has been written above – about the character of Anna and Gustav’s relationship. Due to late entries in her record I do know that Anna’s traumatic combination of attraction to women and her repulsion by anything remotely lesbian persisted.

While the happy ending thus has complications and uncertainties, I nonetheless have a strong desire for it. Be it sentimental, or be it a need to focus Anna's agency, her efforts and struggle to make her own life, and to convey some of the incredible courage that her record also conveys: whatever, I need it. I need that ending to what otherwise would be unbearably tragic; I need that glimmer of hope in what seems to be the very dark pain and struggle of psychiatric patients and of the mentally ill. Perhaps it is this pain and looming darkness that for so long have prevented the history of lobotomy from being written.

One flew over the cuckoo's nest, then no more.

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# 'In Persia I was called "The Blonde"' : An Attempt to Analyse how a Jewess Practices Whiteness

*Susanne Nylund Skog*

'In Persia I was called "The Blonde"'.

The words are Rachel's. She is a grey-haired and blue-eyed Jewess in her eighties, a widow with five children and eleven grandchildren living in Stockholm. Rachel was born in Austria, fled the Nazis to England and Palestine, lived for some time in Iraq and Iran (Persia), and came to Sweden in the 1950s.

In this article I want to contextualize Rachel's words. I argue that these words, and other comments made by her about appearances are ways of practicing whiteness. Furthermore, inspired by the Skeggs seminars, I would like to problematize and discuss the notion of whiteness as a theoretical tool, and its implications in the study of identity-making amongst Jews in Sweden. I conclude that, although the concept of whiteness is illustrative of how racism is inscribed in daily practices in the seemingly non-racist Swedish society, it lacks methodological precision and also tends to simplify the complex practices of passing as white.

Since the end of the 1700s Jews have lived in Sweden without the government demands of converting to Christianity, and today approximately 20,000 people in the country call themselves Jews. In the middle of the 1990s the Government ordered all public institutions to consider that Sweden had become a multicultural society. Prior to this date, and despite the fact that the country is home to minorities with a long history, Sweden has always claimed to be homogeneous (Svanberg and Tydén 1992). Consequently, during the 1990s the Swedish national minorities were rediscovered and 'etnified' (Klein 2002: 47).

Despite this new and growing interest in the Swedish Jews, their heritage is not immediately recognizable. Most Jews appear highly integrated into Swedish society and a vital part of the cultural and academic landscape. This seemingly harmonious picture produces the notion that discrimination of Swedish Jews does not exist. At the same time it is blurred by growing anti-Semitism and the fact that many Jews feel discriminated (Nylund Skog 2006). That integration is the safest way to avoid discrimination is by no means sure, considering that the German Jews prior to Hitler probably were even more integrated than the Swedish Jews of today. The fact that the old images of 'The Jew' still circulate (Feiler and Sauter 2006) and that many of the Swedish Jews do not want to expose their Jewishness is telling, and further destroys the harmonious picture of a non-anti-Semitic Swedish society.

## Jewish whiteness

Within the field of Critical Whiteness Studies (see, for example, Frankenberg 1999) it is claimed that whiteness is a norm that is taken for granted in racist societies. Whiteness is only partly about skin colour; it includes a range of other aspects and is to be understood as a changing historical construction. In this sense, whiteness does not correspond to an essence or a given set of characteristics. Instead it is understood as a position of power and a practiced relation.

It is important that in this perspective there is no direct natural and indisputable connection between identity and skin, eye and/or hair colour. Rather Critical Whiteness Studies and my analysis point to the contrary; such connections are constantly and arbitrarily established, disputed and denied in ongoing processes of identity-making.

The fact that most Swedish Jews can pass as ordinary white Swedes poses both an opportunity for investigation and a theoretical dilemma in relation to the field of Critical Whiteness

Studies. Are Swedish Jews to be considered as white, and if not, can they be analysed as practicing whiteness?

Sara Ahmed (2004) finds fault with Critical Whiteness Studies. She argues that Critical Whiteness Studies is a project of making whiteness visible that only makes sense from the point of view of those for whom it is invisible (2004:§1). If one is studying whiteness as Whiteness there is always a risk, she writes, of essentializing whiteness, of making it yet another racialized other. 'Calling for whiteness to be seen', she continues, 'can exercise rather than challenge white privilege, as the power to transform one's vision into a property or attribute of something or somebody' (2004:§15). This means that the transformation of whiteness into a colour can work to conceal the power and privilege of Whiteness, and as such it can exercise that privilege (2004:§42).

American Rabbi Lynn Gottlieb writes that within the North American construct of racism she is Jewish and she is white, but she also claims that her whiteness is different from that of other white Americans. She is often tempted to deny whiteness all along since it makes her alert to the flaws and non-white aspects of her Jewishness, not least expressed in her Jewish appearance (Gottlieb 2005). The same seems to be the case with Rachel. She is considered by me and others to be white, while at the same time she herself is, I argue, practicing Whiteness in such a way that it is obvious that she is not sure of always being considered white or of always wanting to be white.

'Whiteness studies makes that which is invisible visible', Ahmed writes, 'though for non-whites the project has to be described differently, it would be about making what can already be seen, visibly in a different way', she concludes (2004:§2). Inspired by Sara Ahmed I will try to avoid reproducing the power of Whiteness and show that Rachel in telling her life story makes whiteness visible in a different way.

## Rachel's life story

When considering Rachel's life story one finds that appearances are often mentioned and my interpretation is that they have a direct connection to shifting norms of whiteness. The first time that the connection is actualized is when Rachel tells about when Hitler in 1939 occupied Austria and made the country a part of the Nazi Empire. Rachel tells me that until that day she had been a happy and cheerful teenager. Almost straight after the Nazi takeover she was forbidden to skate, use a bicycle, sit on public benches, shop in certain shops and use the same spaces as those considered Aryans by the Nazis. It did not take long before Rachel's father was arrested.

Rachel said that after a period of constantly searching for him she and her mother found out that her father had been taken to Dachau concentration camp. With the help of a lawyer Rachel's mother did everything to get her father out of there, while Rachel explored the possibilities of leaving the country and found an opportunity in England. She told me that all the while her mother prepared a 'big bluff' with the help of the lawyer, pretending to convert back to Christianity, divorcing Rachel's father and taking over the family factory, sending photos of Rachel and her sister to Goebbels to prove that they did not look Jewish.

Rachel's mother had converted to Judaism when marrying her father. Now in sheer desperation she was prepared to convert back, and in the process save her children from the destiny of being Jewish. This could only be possible if someone in power (here Goebbels) agreed that Rachel and her sister did not look Jewish but Aryan, that they would pass as white. 'The bluff' never succeeded. The father returned miraculously from Dachau, and the family were temporarily scattered around the world until they were reunited in Palestine three years later.

Rachel tells me that it was in Palestine (later Israel), Iraq and Iran (former Persia), where Rachel later came to live, that she was considered 'The Blonde'. When first listening to the

interview with Rachel I presumed that ‘The Blonde’ had positive connotations. But when analysing the interview, and others I later made with her, I became aware of the ambivalence captured in the name ‘The Blonde’.

## Rachel’s marriage

Rachel tells me that her marriage to David was against the will of his parents. Like David she was of Jewish heritage, but at the time she was a divorced European Jewess and mother of a daughter, while David was an Oriental Jew. Rachel tells me that the situation was impossible and that after their first meeting she returned to Israel and tried to forget about David. But they could not forget one another and got married in secret. Rachel said that it was not until she and David had their second child that Rachel first met David’s parents.

When I asked Rachel if David being Jewish was of any relevance to her marrying him, her answer was without hesitation: ‘What attracted me was that he came from a very religious Jewish family from Baghdad. Really it is them who are, one can say, Jewish aristocrats. They have never been mixed, from Mesopotamia. And they are much more Arabic than anything, their whole manner.’

I cannot help but wonder if Rachel’s bloneness had something to do with David’s family’s aversion to her. It is as if her bloneness manifested her European heritage. In considering this part of Rachel’s life story being ‘The Blonde’ does not seem to have been a privileged position.

In Rachel’s description of why she fell in love with David she explicitly makes a close connection between Jewishness and Arabness, a connection that collapses the dichotomy of black and white, where the Arabic in a Western perspective most often is seen as representing the dark. Seen in that perspective her statement is a powerful claim and an answer to Westernized notions of how to consider and handle what is claimed as dark.

## In Palestine and Sweden

After the Second World War many of the surviving Jews came to live in The British Mandate Palestine, later Israel. Rachel was one of them. During the interviews she describes her first years in Palestine as almost the best years she can remember.

One Jewish woman writes about her surprise at all the blonde people in Palestine, when she arrived there in 1946 (Frey 2006: 69). In telling her life story she reflects upon the Nazi propaganda that depicted Jews as dark and dangerous. It seems, she writes, that not only Germans were indoctrinated by the propaganda; also she herself had obviously been affected by it since she could not imagine Jews as blonde and blue-eyed (*ibid.*).

Although Rachel did not talk about if it was problematic for her to be considered blonde in Palestine during her time there, blonde seems to have been a loaded term. And considering that Rachel had been exposed to the same propaganda as the woman cited above, it at least must have been an ambivalent position for her.

Other instances in the interviews when talk about appearances actualized norms of whiteness were when Rachel talked and worried a great deal about those of her grandchildren who she considered dark. She was concerned that their curly dark hair and dark skin colour would let them be mistaken for immigrants and/or Muslims and because of that they would be subjected to racism. Rachel also worried about growing anti-Semitism as a consequence of the growing Muslim population in Sweden. By that logic, Rachel's dark grandchildren are placed in an inevitable dilemma; on the one hand, their darkness makes them targets of racism, on the other hand, if claiming their identity as Jews, they will be exposed to the perceived threat of anti-Semitic Muslims. In Rachel's view there is really no way out if you are considered a dark Jew in Sweden in the beginning of the 21st century (cf. Goldstein 2006:224).

In Rachel's opinion Muslims represent a threat and a danger to Jews, and to the Western world, as she knows it. Her attitude

might be explained by the current situation in the Arab world and especially the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. For Rachel it is important to tell me that she is not part of the conflict in the region. When she lived there it was peaceful and people were tolerant and accepting of each other.

Sara Ahmed argues against the logic that says that if whiteness is defined as unseen then if I see whiteness, then I am not white, as whites don't see their whiteness. And if I am not white I am not a racist (Ahmed 2004:§16; cf. Alcoff 2006). Although in Sweden Rachel is considered white, she herself is aware of and reflects upon the norm of whiteness. Maybe Rachel by reflecting upon her appearance claims herself as being non-white and therefore being an innocent and powerless non-racist, despite her critical attitude towards Muslims.

## Conclusion

To conclude, although Rachel in her life story argues against a division between Arabs and Jews, she still establishes a similar one in her understanding of Muslims as being a threat. She also talks about the West and the Orient, immigrants and Swedes, Muslims and Jews, dichotomies that at first glance seem to fit the Westernized hierarchical dichotomy of black and white, but after some consideration do not fit at all, but rather, in her life story they are turned upside down and even at times destroyed.

Therefore, in my analysis appearances seem to be the term that connects empirical observations with structural conditions. It allows me to analyse practices of whiteness and offers an opportunity to explore the complexity involved in such practices. To simply regard the Swedish Jews as a natural part of the ruling class or as wanting to be white is a mistake. They might use strategies to portray themselves as ordinary Swedes, but in passing they are also acutely aware of the cost it entails and many of them work hard at keeping their Jewishness intact and alive (cf. Goldstein 2006:208).

It is often explained that it is only in relation to black that white becomes white, meaning that whiteness cannot see itself except through the reflection of what it sees itself as not (see, for example, Morrison 1993). No matter how true this claim is, it risks simplifying the complexity involved in naming, claiming and relating black, white, blonde, dark, light, grey, beige and all the other nuances important to Jews and others who need to be skilled in the art of passing (see, for example, Frankenberg 1999: 23).

Hence, in order to avoid the trap of the rigid dichotomy of black and white I claim that analysing how appearances are talked about and handled will lead to an understanding of how whiteness is practiced amongst Swedish Jews, and at the same time questioned and argued against.

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# Thoughts on Being a Respectable Homo Academicus

*Annika Olsson*

There is something profoundly thought provoking by the fact that the academy is made of people, real people of flesh and blood. Universities are not only arenas for intellectual activity, knowledge production and excellence. But places filled with bodies marked by gender, class, race/ethnicity, sexuality, functionality and overflowing with desires and dreams fighting for recognition and positions. The *homo academicus* is but a human being with a history of his/her own.

Although this is something of a truism at the same time this important knowledge has not really been put to use in the academy. Not in the way I long for when comparing my vision of what the academy could be and my experience of what the academy is. As Diane Reay puts it: 'I do not claim to be noncompetitive or without ambition. However, the longer I spend in the academia the more and more I yearn for more feminist and egalitarian ways of being' (Reay 2004:2).

Where do these feelings come from? What do they mean? And how should I act upon them? Of course there is not a single answer to these questions, but as a feminist in academia I do what feminists have always done: I write about it in order to be able to transform these personal experiences and feelings of discomfort in my everyday practice as a professional into an object of investigation to be analysed, reflected upon and put to use. In order to do this I will try and 'think with' Beverley Skeggs and to use the concept of respectability as a primary focus in the essay.

According to Skeggs, respectability is one of the most ubiquitous signifiers of class. It informs how we speak, who we speak to, how we classify others, what we study and how

we know who we are (or are not)’ (Skeggs 1997:1). She also states that respectability ‘is usually the concern of those who are not seen to have it’ (Skeggs 1997:2). I would like to argue that respectability is also one of the main concerns of those who are seen to have it, although, of course, this is not *comme il faut* to talk about. (Publicly sharing these kinds of thoughts is not something a respectable person does.)

Not least does this apply to the *homo academicus*. And this has implications not only for my personal well being, but also for our everyday praxis in academia as well as for society as a whole. Knowledge is not something to be taken lightly. (At the same time, my writing – talking – is a confirmation of Skeggs’ conclusion on which people are concerned with respectability, since being a woman with a working-class background makes me part of the category ‘those who are not seen to have it’.)

So let’s talk about respectability. And let’s talk about what it means to be a respectable *homo academicus*. What does the word or concept of respectability mean? What will a number of different dictionaries tell us about respectability and respectable people? According to the *Oxford English Dictionary Online* (a highly respectable source), respectability is (1.a.) ‘The state, quality, or condition of being respectable in point of character or social standing. Also with a somewhat derogatory implication of affectation or spuriousness’; (1.b.) ‘Those who are respectable’; (1.c.) ‘Of things’.

What becomes clear is that respectability is directly related to being respectable, and that being respectable is explicitly connected to character or social standing. The dictionary’s description points the reader in the same direction as Skeggs and other studies using the concept: underlining that respectability has everything to do with morality and class – at the same time – and that the definition of what it is to be respectable is up to those being respectable to decide. As Skeggs puts it: ‘Respectability embodies moral authority: those who are respectable have it, those who are not do not’ (Skeggs 1997: 3).

This is also stressed in the OED's description of the word respectable: (1) 'Worthy of notice, observation, or consideration. Obs. Rare'; (2.a.) 'Worthy of deserving of respect by reason of some inherent quality or qualities'; (3.a.) 'Of persons: Worthy of respect, deserving to be respected, by reason of moral excellence'; and (4.a.) 'Of persons: Of good or fair social standing, and having the moral qualities regarded as naturally appropriate to this. Hence in later use, honest and decent in character or conduct, without references to social position, or in spite of being in humble circumstances'. Even though the dictionary directly states that the word can be used as describing something or someone worthy of attention regardless of reason, it is also perfectly clear that the word respectable is related to a moral sphere and to a distinctive position.

However, what I find most interesting is that the OED makes it clear that respectability, this 'state, quality, or condition' is also, or can be, something one can pretend to be the owner of, since it carries implications that the behaviour (which is being respectable in this case) is assumed rather than natural; that respectability (according to the OED and the word affectation) can be interpreted as a particular habit, including speech or clothes, that is adopted to give a (false) impression.

This not only points in the direction of understanding respectability or being respectable in the manner of passing as a respectable individual – performing the (p)art of being a respectable individual so that you are perceived as someone respectable in order to be accepted as a (full) member of a community. It also suggests that performing respectability is or can be an important strategy (in the sense that Michel de Certeau talks about it) used by individuals as well as groups in order to maintain power to exclude/include individuals as well as groups from/in full community membership. (What effect does this have on peer-reviewing?) The question is, if it also can be thought of as a useful strategy used by individuals or groups in order to come into a more powerful position and thereby change

things a bit – or if it only can be thought of as a tactic, not really working.

But the dictionary also tells us that respectability can be perceived as a negative quality, something false that only manipulative people are interested in. Respectability can in this way be interpreted as something to see through and to distance yourself from; a laughable quality invoking connotations of pretentious and pompous characters like Reverend Edward Casaubon in George Eliot's *Middlemarch*. It is something very Victorian and middlebrow. Stressing this view on respectability means that the act of consciously and actively distancing yourself from what is perceived as respectability in a certain context can be seen as part of a successful deconstructive strategy in a Bakhtinian way aiming at disarming or mockery.

In this way the OED confirms what Skeggs' study tells us about how respectability works.

If you look at the Swedish equivalent of the OED, *Svenska Akademiens Ordbok* [The Swedish Academy Dictionary] (SAOB), the general picture is the same: respectability is related to being a respectable person, to moral issues and to 'gott l. stadgat (borger-ligt) anseende'. But there are important and interesting differences: the OED is much more elaborate and gives a more complex and paradoxical view of the concepts of respectability and respectable. In the SAOB there is no mention of respectability as a quality that you can pretend to be the owner of, and there is also really no focusing on it as something negative, false.

What then does the respectable *homo academicus* look like? What are the habits that make up the habitus of the respectable *homo academicus*? As stated by Skeggs and Bourdieu, the body is where social class is materialized. And if you sum it up: 'A Respectable body is White, desexualized, hetero-feminine and usually middle-class' (Skeggs 1997: 82). Of course, it is old news; we all know that the *homo academicus* is this white, middle-class, heterosexual man working at a university in the West. (The whole concept of *homo academicus* is a western one,

and what the latest European statistics tell us is that the gender gap is not closing in academia.)

But what becomes almost painfully clear when you read a study like *Maktens kön* (which is a Swedish study on the Swedish elite in the 20th century), based on rather large empirical material, is the definite relationship between top academic positions and respectability – even if the study does not use the concept. In order to succeed you have to come from a respectable background; you have to live a respectable life, that is, be married to a spouse who has a respectable career (preferably holding a top academic position – if you are a woman), etc. It makes you wonder if performing respectability is the ultimate expression of having (and accepting) the ‘feel for the game’, as Pierre Bourdieu calls one of the most important qualities of the ‘proper’ academic.

If we accept that this is what respectability is about and how it works and if we accept that respectability is an essential part of being a homo academicus – what then does it mean? I would like to suggest the following:

For individuals like me who belong to (this is not a position that you have chosen yourself, it is a position that you are ascribed to) the ‘non respectables’ you have to learn to deal with feelings of almost constant failure, and you are behaving in the wrong way – making the wrong choices, wearing the wrong clothes, having the wrong haircut, etc. Since your habitus – which is the wrong one for the ideal academic – makes you act in ways that are not considered to be respectable and truly academic. What are you doing there? It’s like having Tourette syndrome. As a friend of mine (a woman with a working-class background) and I agreed upon: there are occasions when you sit there with all these well-behaved people discussing serious issues using serious language and you just can’t control yourself; you have to say or do something that is perceived as not appropriate for that moment: laugh out loud when you should have smiled silently, use a ‘common’ word instead of a complex term. You just can’t stand the situation.

There is nothing comfortable with being this non-respectable individual acting as you are not supposed to act most of the time. And many times you are inclined to give it all up. Then you have the opportunity to partake in a uniquely inspiring seminar with Beverley Skeggs, or you spend some time with your friends, read a fantastic book and you get back on track again: focusing on your work.

Because this is not just personal; on the contrary, on days like these when concepts, like excellence and quality, are used in every other sentence in newsletters from universities, national and international funding foundations, departments and researchers, it is even more important for us to talk about what kind of people universities are made of. I believe that there is an important link between respectability and meritocracy, and also between respectability and excellence that can be useful in our daily practice. According to Elizabeth Kamarch Minnich, excellence is a 'prime example of a misused and mystifying concept' (Minnich 2005: 170), which is also made quite clear in the report *Gender and Excellence in the Making* (European Commission 2004).

Universities are made of people. Knowledge is produced by somebody. This is also why I believe in a politics of presence (Philips 1995) and that we need to analyse the academy with the approach that Nancy Fraser calls perspectival dualism, where the perspectives of recognition and redistribution are linked together and put to work. Fraser's concept parity of participation enables us to view the academy and concepts, like meritocracy and excellence, from a slightly different perspective (Fraser 2003). Since there is no theory of academic justice why not use the political-philosophical theories of justice?

According to Diane Reay, the UK academy is a particularly difficult place for women with a working-class background, who have to have a double perception of self: 'She is positioned in an untenable space on the boundaries of two irreconcilable ways of being and has to produce an enormous body of psychic, intellectual and interactive work in order to maintain



her contradictory ways of being, her dual perception of self' (Reay 2004: 7). I cannot say anything about the UK but I would argue that this double perception is an experience that is shared by many different 'categories' of people excluded from the community of respectable homo academici, and if, for example, you read some of the Chicana feminists' wonderfully inspiring and thought provoking texts this is quite clear (Moraga 2000; Anzaldúa 1999).

However, I would like to suggest that if we use the concept of respectability and Skeggs' findings on how respectability works these somewhat schizophrenic positions become more understandable. But what is even more important is that, using Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's description of a similar position, being outside in the teaching machine must from a scientific and humanistic perspective be considered a favourable and most desirable position – not least for a feminist. It works as a constant *verfremdungseffect*, reminding you of the history of higher education and knowledge, and that power and knowledge are closely related to each other.

Viewed in this way, questioning, undermining, destroying respectability should or could be a powerful way of deconstructing power structures in the academy. This, I believe, would be to practice what Nancy Fraser calls deconstructive recognition – a transformative strategy that destabilizes 'existing status differentiations and changes everyone's self-identity' (Fraser 2003: 63). I do not want to pass as a respectable *homo academicus*; on the contrary, I think it is high time to eliminate the *homo academicus* altogether and replace him with human beings with histories of their own.

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# In Dialogue with Devaluation: Young People's Life Choices as Social Positioning Practices

*Ann Runfors*

How do young people in stigmatized urban spaces in Sweden respond when addressed by various dominant discourses and when ascribed different social positions? This is a main question in an ongoing study where I interviewed eighteen twenty-one-year-old women and men. One of them was Abraham. When we meet he is taking a year off from his Natural Sciences programme at Stockholm University. Meanwhile he is working at a relative's restaurant. During the interview he is eager to convey to me his experience of being a son of Christian Orthodox immigrants from Turkey in Swedish society, of identifying as an Assyrian and of constantly being positioned as an immigrant. He also reflects a lot on different possible life choices. When I, for example, ask him about his future plans he talks about different alternatives: should he continue with Microbiology at Stockholm University and pursue a career within stem cell research, should he change courses and take a programme to become an economist or should he try to develop his own small business within the Stockholm restaurant trade.

As Abraham continues his reasoning he sort of draws up a list of the advantages and disadvantages of, on the one hand, going to university and, on the other hand, having a restaurant of his own. Even though the business course gains most points on his list Abraham says that he, in any case, wants an education to fall back on. Because as he concludes: "Despite everything, it is somehow considered as low status to not have an education in today's Europe".

Abraham and the others I have interviewed are all former classmates from one of the schools where I conducted field studies for my thesis in the mid-nineties. When I tell people about these interviews I am always asked about how the young people are getting on. It is the same question posed in almost exactly the same way: ‘how have they succeeded’. This was also a question the young people themselves wrestled with in the interviews with me – women and men alike. In this article I reflect on this phenomenon and discuss the question as to how the young people have succeeded as a certain kind of address. Inspired by the sociologist Beverley Skeggs’ discussions on class (2000, 2004, 2007) I analyse it as linked to a scale of judgement. With Abraham’s reasoning as an example I discuss how the interview statements on life choices and future plans can be read as answers to conditions expressed in and shaped by this address. Abraham’s somewhat puzzling claim that he wants an education to fall back on ‘any way’, i.e. even if he does not pursue a career as a researcher or economist, even if he opts for self-employment where he will not need a degree, is one of those things that I will contextualize with the aim to make it understandable.

## What do you want to be and how have you succeeded?

The question on how the young people have succeeded is related to another one – a question pupils constantly have to face during their time in school – namely ‘what do you want to be?’. These two questions can be seen as instruments for measuring movements – movements from perceived social starting points to futures revealing achieved social positions. But to measure social movements there must be a social hierarchy and ideas about how success is constituted. There must also be criteria for measuring success and ranking people according to this hierarchy.

The ethnologist René Leon Rosales (2007) has in an article discussed how the question on ‘what do you want to be?’ is ever-

present in schools. As he shows, the constant presence of this matter teaches children things about society. It, for example, teaches them how to rate different futures and occupations. In other words, it teaches them criteria for appraising and grading social success.

As we will see, Abraham's account above shows that he has learnt a lot about how social success is to be measured and valued. This awareness of a social status hierarchy was not unique for Abraham. On the contrary, all the young people I interviewed – both female and male – showed an awareness of dominating ideas on success and status. They furthermore displayed responsiveness to such ideas.

As mentioned Abraham's statements on his future plans could be interpreted as a kind of response to the question on how he has succeeded – or is about to succeed. For even if I did not explicitly pose this question it was present in the interview situation. It was an implicit query flowing into our conversation from surrounding discourses. It was materialised in myself, or rather in Abraham's ideas about whom I was, which stereotypes I had and what the research was all about. It was brought to the fore, among other things, by the meeting between me, a white, middle-class person from a educational institution, and Abraham, an ex-pupil, who I had met ten years earlier, an ex-pupil from a stigmatized urban area.

## Class as a scale of judgement

Class is often regarded as an objective fact. Yet, there is today no consensus on which resources give access to different class positions. Nor is there any consensus on which criteria are the most suitable for defining social class. Simultaneously as there are big gaps between different groups in today's Swedish society, there are growing difficulties in drawing class boundaries and in deciding who belongs where. But rather than regarding the concept of class as something

impartial that can be used to decide people's class affiliation I want to analyse class as a part of a system of classification. As Skeggs (2000, 2004, 2007) calls attention to, class is a system of classification in which people are positioned as well as ascribed various characteristics and patterns of behaviour. This means that class is not only a system of classification, but also simultaneously a scale of judgement in which occupations, life choices and so on are graded. This furthermore means that people with different occupations and aspirations, et cetera, are ranked in a social class hierarchy.

Using Skeggs' vocabulary (2004) one could say that people are classed. One of Skeggs' main points (2000, 2004, 2007), to which I adhere, is that class therefore is performative. Being a system of classification and a scale of judgement, class does something with the reality it seeks to capture and describe. As a system of classification it, for example, is aimed at making assumptions about social status. It is furthermore aimed at ranking based on these assumptions – irrespective of how the classification system is designed. So, besides classifying occupations, life choices and future plans it also ascribes different values to these and thereby grades them.

Class as a system of classification and as a scale of judgement is explicitly used in the public area, for example in statistics. But it is also used implicitly in people's interaction. It is a classification system and a scale of judgement all citizens are exposed to. Some categories are more exposed than others though. Because, as Skeggs (2000, 2004, 2007) points out, existing systems of classification and scales of judgement stem from positions that have gained dominance. This means they seem natural even though they represent certain perspectives and interests. This in turn means that individuals and groups that do not have access to dominant positions have to handle systems of classifications and scales of judgement deriving from these positions. Class should, according to Skeggs (2000, 2004, 2007), therefore be analysed as a social relation.

Returning then to the often-posed questions on what the young people want to be, how they are getting on and have succeeded, these can be seen as linked to ideas of class as an objective fact. They are aiming at defining social positions and estimating any climbing up the social ladder. In other words, these questions are instruments for determining and measuring class. They are manifestations of class as a system of classification and as a scale of judgement. They thereby form a 'classing address'. So, these seemingly innocent questions – posed out of curiosity about the current social positions of the young people – contain elements of positioning. And as mentioned, many of the young people – male as well as female – during the interviews also answered these classing questions even though I did not pose them.

## Place as space for class inscription

A category that is often exposed to classing questions is people living in so-called socially deprived areas. This was prominent when I studied schools in such an area for my thesis. The future of the pupils and the matter of how they would succeed were in constant focus (Runfors 2003). This is also evident in my ongoing project and manifested in the repeated questions on how the ex-pupils nowadays are getting on.

The future of these kids seemed to draw extra attention due to the teachers' assumptions that they were under- or working-class children – an assumption based on their residence in a stigmatized urban area. Place in today's Sweden is actually an often-used criterion for deciding people's social starting points and defining their class affiliation. And living in places regarded as socially-deprived therefore does not only prompt classing questions, but also means that you are at risk of being classed as belonging to lower social strata (Runfors 2007; cf., e.g. Andersson 2003).

When Abraham tells me about his time at Stockholm University he talks a lot about feeling socially odd, uncertain and uncomfortable. When I ask him why he feels this way he

states: “You think they will look down on you because you are an immigrant, and because you are from the [deprived] suburb. They might assume that means you are from the lower classes and presume you like hip hop, are involved in criminality and speak bad Swedish”. Abraham here expresses attentiveness to positioning practices that could class him as underclass or working class. Among other things he articulates awareness of places as spaces of class inscription. And many of the other young people – both among the women and men – also displayed this kind of consciousness.

## Education as classing criterion

People who ask me about my ongoing study and how the young people have succeeded tend to link success with higher education in a self-evident manner. This was also the case with the teachers in the schools I studied for my thesis. As mentioned the future of these assumed under- or working-class children was additionally highlighted and the future hoped for was one containing higher education after the compulsory nine years of schooling. Among the teachers one fear was that the pupils, rather than taking higher degrees, would head for work in small family businesses, like many of the parents (Runfors 2003).

Promoting education, viewing it as something good for individuals and associating it with success and valued social positions, is not something unusual. Rather the blessing of schooling is a dominant value today. The benefit of education could actually be described as a global notion, closely associated with development and modernity (Boli 1989). And, as the anthropologist Annika Rabo (1992) points out, this notion has become so dominant that it also seems indisputable (see also Runfors 2003). It has become objectified and as such made invisible as an idea and value.

Even though the benefits of education per se are a global notion, the underlining of non-compulsory higher education can be



discussed as a socially positioned idea. Beverley Skeggs (2000, 2004, 2007) describes the strong linking of higher education and success as a middle-class perspective on the individual and society that has gained hegemony and become objectified. She depicts this perspective as characterized by ideas on cultural accumulation. The future, the self and the offspring are looked upon as sites for investment – and the main form of capital is education. In this discussion Skeggs draws inspiration from the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, who, among other things, points out that higher education is a common social marker which people use to position themselves as middle class and to distinguish themselves from working- and underclass positions (Bourdieu 1967).

Here I do not want to debate the pros and cons of schooling, nor dispute education as something useful for individuals. What I want to put forward here is rather the global as well as local dominance and strength of the notion of education as something good per se for all and as an equivalent to upward mobility and success. The power of this notion makes higher education something everybody must relate to – whether they go for, or succeed with, it or not. As discussed the questions on how the young people had succeeded can be seen as linked to ideas of class as an objective fact. As instruments for determining and measuring class the questions are also linked to criteria for classing individuals. Higher education is such a classing criterion. And used as a criterion in classification practices it constitutes a social condition people have to handle.

So, while place seems to set classing questions on how people have succeeded in motion in the Swedish context discussed here, the amount of accumulated educational capital seems to form one answer to this question. This was very evident in the interviews. Many of the young people – male as well as female – positioned themselves with the help of and in relation to higher education, regardless of their own plans and amount of educational capital. When Abraham, for example, ponders his future he seems to be comparing two types of investments – on the one hand, investments

in himself via the symbolic capital of university education and, on the other hand, investments in economic capital in the form of a small business of his own. I understand Abraham's talk about both these types of investments as expressions of his ambition to be upwardly mobile. But, it is the investment in higher education that in the interview with Abraham, as well as in the interviews with several others, stands out as a must if one is striving for social esteem in Swedish society – which is the geographical space in which all of them place their future.

## Place and face

As stressed by Skeggs (2000, 2004, 2007) the category of class has effects on those who are categorised because classing practices construct subject positions that are valued or less valued. And defining someone as working class (or underclass) has the effect that this someone will be constructed as insufficient in different ways. In other words, designating somebody as working class or underclass is not only a question of classification, but also of devaluation. This means people living in stigmatized neighbourhoods are not only at risk of being classed as belonging to lower strata, but also of being devalued. When Abraham says that the other students at the university might position him as lower class – with all the degrading characteristics that go with this classification – he consequently also concludes that he thinks they will look down on him.

So, Abraham and the other young people are at risk of being classed by their place of residence – as do the other inhabitants of this neighbourhood. But being defined as lower class is, in Abraham's answer above, not only connected to his place of residence, but also to him being positioned as an immigrant, i.e. as non-Swedish. The prerequisite for classifying him as non-Swedish (and as living in the deprived suburb and therefore as lower class) is not spelled out by Abraham above, but it

concerns his looks. His looks becomes a sign that makes the working-/underclass label ‘stick’ (cf. Tyler 2006) although he changes place, goes to the high-ranked Stockholm University and is a graduate student.

The awareness of the risks of being classed and thereby devalued also proved to be especially evident among those interviewees who, like Abraham, have looks which tend to associate them with the Orient situated outside Sweden and beyond the West or with those Swedish urban peripheries represented not only as socially-deprived, but also as ‘Orients’ within the nation (Runfors 2006, 2007; Molina 2005).

As mentioned places can be seen as spaces for class inscription. But one could add that faces also seem to help inscribe class. Classing addresses are not only present in relation to people in stigmatized urban spaces, but especially present in relation to those who have difficulties in passing as white and therefore as Swedish. This means that class ascriptions are set in motion by place, while looks and colour in turn seem to activate place attribution – and thereby also class attribution.

## Combating classing practices

In the opening statement Abraham says that he wants an education to fall back on “any way”, i.e. even if he opts for a small restaurant of his own which does not require a degree. Actually, similar remarks were made by a couple of the other interviewed young men who were part of the Assyrian diaspora in Sweden where self-employment is very common, especially among the males (Pripp 2001). Abraham’s argument is that it “despite everything is considered somehow low status to not have an education in today’s Europe”. In this statement he locates the devaluation of people who do not have an education in a European context.

As discussed, higher education is a widespread social marker to communicate middle-class affiliation. But what Abraham points to here is an absence of higher education as a marker of

lower class affiliation. That Abraham locates this evaluation (i.e. of people based on lack of higher education) in Europe indicates that he knows that an absence of higher education is not being equally interpreted and devalued everywhere. For example, in the Middle East, where his parents grew up, it is possible to reach valued social positions without education through, for example, small entrepreneurship.

When Abraham talks about taking a degree even if he will not need it for his future business it can then be seen as an awareness that being in charge of a small restaurant will not give him a position of status in Swedish society. Nor will it hinder working-/underclass inscriptions. Rather his statement shows an awareness that higher education is somewhat an imperative if he wants to avoid 'lower strata ascriptions' in the Swedish context, which is the nation where he places his future.

So, Abraham's considerations can be read as narrative about experienced social classification practices related to place, looks and education, as well as experienced difficulties in escaping these practices. When he simultaneously supports the idea of an education and the company he is not only telling me about aspirations and (potential) life choices, but also trying to position himself on the scale of judgement we call class. When he says that he "in any case", irrespective of future occupation, "wants an education to fall back on", it can be understood as a kind of response to devaluating class inscriptions. Putting forward the accumulation of educational capital can be understood as an attempt to communicate a valued social position. It can thereby be understood as an attempt to combat the examined classification practices and to defeat the discussed 'sticky' signs – or at least compensate for the devaluation that comes with them.

This intersection between place, looks and education in ascribing people class positions calls for more attention to how these ascriptions affect life choices and social identifications.

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# A Feminist Sustainable Development: In Between Politics of Emotion, Intersectionality and Feminist Alliances

*Juan Velasquez*

For more than 10 years I have been studying urban initiatives conducted in Swedish multicultural suburbs to cope with stigmatization, discrimination, segregation and racism. During these years I have followed how urban policies in Sweden lack success pertaining to the integration between different social and ethnic groups. This is not only a Swedish, but also a European dilemma.

Parallel to these evolutions in our cities I have followed how discriminatory practices are contested by underrepresented groups making claims and becoming mobilised in ways that, in fact, strengthen the democratic system (see Ålund & Reichel 2005). But there is also a risk that the understanding of power and that the capacity to build social alliances would not be enough for a sustainable democratic development. A politics of emotion needs to be incorporated to prevent us from reproducing oppression. The workshops held at our centre with Beverly Skeggs during the spring of 2007 helped me to grasp this aspect. Since then I have begun to focus my work on research fields that have substantially enriched my work.

In this article I give some examples to illustrate this point from two research projects. One is about the participation of women in both the local planning and local democracy in a Swedish multicultural suburb; the other is the study of politics of emotion among members of the Chilean diaspora in Spain. These both spheres of research are at the core of my perception of the role

that politics of emotion can play for a feminist approach to a sustainable development. This point is interesting to explore now in relation to new directions in urban planning and research. But before that I will, in the next section, relate to some reflections on what, in my view, is beyond the theoretic landscape of intersectionality and transversal politics.

## A landscape of intersectionality, transversality and beyond

Feminist scholars have been studying women's perspectives within an ongoing discussion on women's situated knowledge for making clear the contextual and locational character of power and knowledge (Alcoff 1991; Haraway 1991; Narayan & Harding 2000). This discussion has continued in relation to the intersectionality debate that takes into account how different forms of subordinations along the lines of, for example, class, ethnicity, place, age, sexuality and disability are interrelated to each other constituting contexts of subordination specific for different situations and locations (Bhavnani 1994; Collins 2000; Anthias 2004; de los Reyes & Mulinari 2005; Yuval-Davis 2005).

Aware of the importance of situated knowledge and intersectionality scholars have advanced different analyses on the intercultural dialogues that make possible an understanding of both individual and collective subjugation. This has been seen as a first step to create the conditions of common strategies to change reality (Collins 2000). Related to strategies feminist scholars have studied women's own efforts to permeate power institutions by coalition-building through dialogue. At the core of this research is how participants recognise the historically specific nature of their own identities, acknowledge the partiality of their perspectives and attempt to be open to exchanges with others. These types of coalition building to create feminist alliances have been called transversal politics (Yuval-Davis 1997; Cockburn 1998; Collins 2000; Eschle 2001, 2002).



The intersectionality approach to power and the experience of organising structures to mobilise social constellations often become mediated by different kinds of emotions (Brah 1996; Collins 2000; Ahmed 2004; Wise and Velayuthan 2006). As Sara Ahmed shows, for example members of Nazi organisations become united in love with what they perceive as the White Nation (Ahmed 2004). This kind of love relies upon hate against no whites and creates even more disharmony in society when it succeeds in mobilising a racist counterpart from immigrated constellations. Though it is a politics of emotion it is not emancipatory for anybody.

Paulo Freire (Araujo Freire 1998) tells us that we need a methodology for the oppressed to prevent us from reproducing oppression. This methodology would be interesting to match with gender mainstreaming when people are building social alliances based on an emancipatory politics of emotion (Ahmed 2004), and as part of what Freire called A pedagogy of the City and a pedagogy of the Heart (Araujo Freire 1998). A central question in this line is to elucidate whether the potential success of social alliances remains in terms of the edification of raw power or in terms of introducing real transformations beyond reproducing oppression.

My interest has been focused on elucidating whether the understanding of power can be used to mainstream itself in the ruling power structures by reproducing its tactics oppressing others; or if understanding power can lead to it being used in an emancipatory way. To advance an understanding of power developed in intersectionality approaches is, as Ahmed (2004) shows, not a guarantee for real emancipation. Although inspired in feminist alliances, like transversal politics, not even building a social alliance per se can guarantee that goal either, if the approach lacks a politics of emotion committed to contest modes of oppression and hate related to discrimination, segregation and racism.

## Discovering politics of emotion in suburban feminism

In recognizing the difficulties that frame the work against discrimination, segregation and racism in Sweden gender mainstreaming and anti-discrimination work usually take different paths. This, in spite of growing racism, homophobia and anti-feminism, requires civil society, administrators and the scientific community to be more unified. To articulate these actors I have proposed some form of transversal politics studied within the frame of a research project conducted in the multicultural community of Fittja (Botkyrka municipality in the metropolitan region of Stockholm). To advance this work I have developed a perspective based on participatory research that turned into transversal research (Velasquez 2005b, 2007a).

From the interaction among municipal officials, women's networks and researchers, I realised two fundamental aspects in the discussion on transversal politics. The first one was to become involved in the local community. Transversal politics has been highlighted as a perspective to build feminist alliances to overcome global patriarchal structures, but case studies on micropolitics related to that discourse are still few. Both the way in which women performed diversity as well as the search for community among them are subject to a series of conditions that frame what I will call suburban feminism.

The second contribution was about how women in Fittja tried to overcome the conditions that frame their political underrepresentation in the context of a multicultural suburb in the Swedish welfare state. I tried to show how women practice what feminist scholars, like Cynthia Cockburn, Nira Yuval Davis and Patricia Hill Collins, call 'rooting' to analyse their subordinate condition, advancing dialogues where the use of affections and feelings is fundamental. These affections have been important for the women in Fittja to make what these feminist scholars call

‘shiftings’, i.e. to go from the understanding of subordination to the construction of a local alliance to face the patriarchal outline that concerns them.

Understanding of the conditions that frame the construction of local feminist alliances is also analysed in relation to the problems that urban governance can create when a transversal frame between women’s networks, the public administration and researchers is established in order to empower underrepresented women’s groups.

## Politics of emotion in the construction of identity

In the other field of research I have been addressing two aspects of the situation facing members of the Chilean diaspora in Spain. The first is to understand the role that emotions, feelings and sentiments play in order to become involved in different activities that members prepare to cultivate a sense of a diaspora. The second aspect has been devoted to discussing whether these diasporic activities indicate the creation of an ethnic identity towards a mainstreaming in hegemonic gender and class formations within the frame of a capitalist global order.

To deal with these aims I have been exploring some central topics that the interviewees said about emotions when some of them work to facilitate a public space for the members of the diaspora. They explained the different emotions attached to, for example, September, a month that they said means different things in terms of emotions. This month is special in the mythology and the collective drama of Chilean society. 18th September is celebrated as the day of the declaration of independence from Spain (1810). This marked a break with the colonial legacy. 4th September was the date when Salvador Allende won the Chilean elections in 1970, an occasion to remember the establishment of a socialist legacy. And 11th September was the day when Pinochet carried out the coup d’état in 1973 to establish the military dictatorship. In addition,

September is also related to feelings, like ‘awakening’ from some hibernation, that, in some ways, seemed to affect all these historic events (Velasquez 2007b).

In order to organize the celebrations and the commemorations related to all these events in September, as well as to advance other ways of becoming organized these members of the Chilean diaspora relate to different types of networks based on friendship, trustworthiness and other means of confidentiality. In another way, they are also talking about how these emotions can work to make class and gender distinctions when they try to relate to, for example being a Chilean in Spain. Facing these distinctions is something that also relates to both Chileans and other social groups striving for a commonality against discrimination and racism. Building this commonality had required some kind of transversal politics and politics of emotion to construct successful structures within the Chilean diaspora. In that way emotions may be crucial to how performing different events help both to mainstream towards reproducing hegemonic gender and class formations in Chile or Spain and construct trans-diasporal alliances against racism and beyond.

## Politics of emotion for a sustainable development

The micro-level of local politics in a multicultural suburb and the global reach of diaspora organisations established in one of the former European colonial powers are two possible fields where emotions can be observed as determinant for social organisation. A third field can be related to the debate on sustainable development. During the last few years I have been actively involved in exploring how feminist alliances and gender mainstreaming relate to each other in Latin America where over 250 cities have adopted models of participatory democracy and participatory planning (Cabanes 2004).

With the help of politics of emotion in the formulation and implementation of participatory models these cities seem to have accomplished a more sustainable social and urban development. I have been exploring how the convergence of feminist approaches works in the city of Medellin, Colombia, that during the last few decades was ranked as the most unsafe and violent city on Earth.

Nevertheless, in the last few years the city's administration has been working with a model for sustainable development called Social Urbanism for turning 'from fear to hope'. The model of Social Urbanism encourages feminist alliances, gender and social mainstreaming as well as politics of emotion to empower and 'to pay the social debt' to stigmatized groups and suburbs. This model can be interesting to learn more about in order to begin to overcome the neo-liberal governance that during the last few years has been introduced in Sweden to cope with discrimination and class divisions (Velasquez 2005a, 2005b). A model that, on the other hand, seems to have laid the foundation for new forms of discrimination, segregation and racism that, in fact, affects immigrants, underrepresented women's groups, LGBT people and the disabled.

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