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A Group of One's Own

The Politics of Minority Women and Groups' Organising Practices

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Abstract

Hegemonic feminism have often been criticised for organising from a white, heterosexual, able-bodied, middle-class perspective. As a counteracting of this many minority groups have chosen to organise separately, based on common interests or experiences. This thesis explores the politics of minority women and groups' organising practices. It also discusses the compatibility of civil society and feminist theory, as well as whether those engaging in separate collective organising can be seen as performing acts of resistance. The theoretical framework is grounded in feminist critiques of hegemonic feminism. It starts off from an intersectional perspective which is the recognition that power relations and structures of inequality influence and enhance each other, and that they operate simultaneously. I have carried out a qualitative study and the method used for this thesis is semi-structured interviews, conducted with representatives from five minority group organisations. In addition to the interviews, the material also consists of documents from the organisations, which I have analysed. The results show that separate collective organising is important for self-identification and for getting ones experiences validated. It also shows that it challenges the current order and as such can be perceived as threatening.

Key words: minority groups, civil society, organising, resistance, feminist theory.
Words: 19 796.

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1 Introduction

Being active within a civil society organisation is about more than statues and annual meetings. The Swedish civil society consist of a plethora of organisations that organise in diverse ways and around a multitude of issues. A fair share of these organisations are minority group organisations who organise on the basis of for example language, sexuality, ethnicity or disability. Women's collective organising also has a long legacy, but organisations that claim to speak for women do not always speak for all women and many times obliterates the lived experiences of women who are not part of the majority, as well as of persons who do not conform to the gender binary system. The second wave of feminism, considered to have occurred in the 1960's and 1970's, drew heavily on the supposed collective experiences of being a woman (Visweswaran 1997). But claiming that all women are equal in their subordination ignores the lived realities of women who also has to combat racism, homophobia and ableism in their daily lives, and cannot or will not, agree on the premise that gender is the single most important category for feminist analysis (Mohanty 2003; Mulinari & Sandell 1999). There are today many minority group organisations challenging the hegemonic feminism that has set the standard for which issues feminists should be concerned with, and for who gets to count as a feminist. Out of critiques to this universalising feminism, as well as to the universalising anti-racist movement, the concept intersectionality was developed. Intersectionality took into account neglected experiences of living in different and multiple intersections of gender, race and class (McCall 2005). Hegemonic feminist claims that do acknowledge the existence of various oppressive structures, but sort them into a hierarchy and places sexism on the top, marginalises feminist claims that focuses on other forms of power relations and structural inequalities (hooks 1984/2000). As a response to

the neglecting and marginalising of certain experiences, some minority groups have chosen to organise separately that is, their organising is open only to those who share the common interests or experiences that they organise around. As a minority feminist who have been active within civil society and minority group organisations for nearly a decade, I am interested in the politics and the organising practices of minority group organisations, and in particular, minority women's organisations. Experience is a central concept to analyses of discrimination (de los Reyes & Kamali 2005), and so this thesis is about the politics and experiences of those minority groups. It is also about claiming space as a minority feminist.

1.1 Aim of Study

The aim of this study is to give an account of what it is like to organise as someone who identify as part of a minority. One way of organising is separate organising on the basis of collective interests or experiences. I am interested in whether this sort of organising can be seen as an act of resistance. This thesis also targets the relationship between civil society and feminism. Traditionally within political science, organising is considered to occur mainly within civil society. But since some feminists have been critical of civil society as a concept, I aim to explore wherein the contradiction lies, and whether it is possible to converge feminist theory and civil society. I have chosen to focus on Sweden and Swedish organisations, since Sweden has a vibrant civil society with strong civil society organisations. To conclude this section, my research questions are thus:

- *What are the experiences of minority group women, and other minority groups, in Sweden who organise in order to challenge both the patriarchal society as well as hegemonic feminism?*

- To what extent can minority groups that organise themselves on the basis of separate interests be viewed as performing acts of resistance?
- How can civil society be reconceptualised in order to better conform with feminist theory and feminist practices?

In order to answer these questions I have collected empirical data through interviews conducted with five persons who are active within minority group organisations. I have also analysed documents from the organisations.

1.2 Disposition

After this introductory chapter I will in chapter two describe how the study was conducted. The methods I have used for this qualitative study are semi-structured interviews and document analysis. In analysing the material I have used an interpretative approach. I have also dedicated a fairly large section of the method chapter to a discussion about positionality as well as a critical discussion about my usage of language. Chapter three outlines the theoretical framework where I present intersectionality and critical disability theory which will serve as the overall theoretical frameworks. This is followed up by a discussion of Deafhood theory in the same chapter. I will also discuss civil society and resistance as theoretical concepts. The chapter ends with a brief discussion of what constitutes a minority, as well as the implication of collective separate organising. Chapter four consist of a short description of the five organisations included in this thesis; FQ - *Forum kvinnor och funktionshinder, Dövas kvinnoförening i Stockholm*, Interfem, RFSL and *Sverigefinskt kvinnoforum*. In chapter five I present the results of my analysis. Chapter six is the final chapter which consists of some concluding remarks as well as suggestions for further research.

2 Method, Methodology and Material

My thesis is based on a qualitative approach, and as method I have used semi-structured interviews. In addition to the interviews I have mapped a selection of written material from the organisations, such as statues, policy documents, and other publications. In this section I will present the research method in more detail. I will also discuss the problematics of categorisation as well as the ethical considerations that I have faced along the way. Lastly I will address my own position as a researcher, and discuss some issues regarding wording, terminology and language.

2.1 Feminist Methodology

Since I identify as a feminist, I also consider my study to be a feminist one (Reinharz 1992). Basing one's study in a feminist methodology means to consistently ask questions about how power relations influence processes of knowledge production, as well as about who has the power to know what, and by which authority. Feminist methodology acknowledge that there is not one single truth when it comes to ideas, experiences and realities (Ramazanoglu & Holland 2002), and that there are better and worse ways in accounting for these (Haraway 1988). Traditional alleged gender-neutral science fails to explain how the lives of

women, trans* persons[1] and non-binary identified people[2] differ from the lives of cis-men[3], because in ignoring the issue of gender altogether, the experiences of the dominant sex are considered universal (Ramazanoglu & Holland 2002). Feminist methodology then, is considered to give a better account of those lived experiences. My view of knowledge production is grounded in Donna Haraway's definition of feminist objectivity, which means that perfect objectivity is an unattainable, and even unwanted, illusion. No one can completely detach oneself from one's science, and attempting to do so will conceal structures of power that are inherent in all research. In Haraway's words feminist objectivity "means quite simply *situated knowledges*" (Haraway 1988: 581 [italics in original]), and it is because of this understanding that I allocate the next section to positioning myself in relation to my thesis.

2.1.1 Positionality

Situated and embodied knowledges makes us answerable and accountable for what we see and perceive - as a contrast to the unlocatable knowledge claims of traditional science. Seeing requires translation, which in turn always is "interpretive, critical and partial" (Haraway 1988: 589). Still, it is the researcher who turn translations into definitions, and defining reality is fundamentally about power and politics (Eduards 2002). That is why it must be possible to hold scientists and researchers who have the power to define other people's realities, accountable for their definitions. Positioning myself in relation to my research and

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[1] Trans*: "Umbrella term, originated from Transgender [...] Used to denote the increasingly wide spectrum of identities within the gender variant spectrum. The asterisk is representative of the widest notation of possible trans* identities. Aimed at promoting unification among gender variant communities by placing focus on gender transgression over specific identity labels, genders, or bodies" (University of Wisconsin-Madison LGBT Campus Center <lgbt.wisc.edu>).

[2] Gender binary: "The idea that there are only two genders: male and female. May include a sensed requirement that a person must be strictly gendered as either/or" (ibid.)

[3] Cisgender: "A person whose gender identity is aligned to what they were designated at birth, based on their physical sex [...] A non-trans* person (ibid.).

the participants, is my way to take responsibility and claim accountability for my words and my definitions. My situated knowledge is rooted in my position as a Deaf lesbian woman, who is also middle class and conform to the whiteness norm. Based on my identification as Deaf and lesbian, I categorise myself as a minority feminist. Just as Mulinari and Sandell (1999) consider their identities of immigrant and lesbian, respectively, to be political identities, so do I consider my identity a political one.

In this context it is worth noting that researchers are not the only ones with a position; the position of the interviewees also influence the outcome (Haritaworn 2007). Still, as claimed above, the power to interpret and analyse the interviews lies with me as a researcher. I want to conclude this section with the point made by de los Reyes and Mulinari (2005), namely that recognising that knowledge is situated is not the same as saying that individuals have no choice in how they carry out analysis and interpretation; and so, what follows are the results of my choices, as well as a presentation of my partial knowledge.

2.2 Method

My method for this qualitative study is, as stated, semi-structured interviews. I consider interviewing a suitable method for a thesis that focuses on experience, since interviewing "offers researchers access to people's ideas, thoughts, and memories in their own words rather than in the words of the researcher" (Reinharz 1992: 19). Making the interviews semi-structured allowed me to cover a specific set of questions that I had prepared on beforehand (see Appendix A), while at the same time giving the participants flexibility in their answers, as well as in the interviews as a whole (Bryman 2012). I conducted five interviews, three in person and two via e-mail. Each of the interviews conducted in person was approximately 60 minutes, and they were also filmed with the consent of the

participants, so that I could transcribe them later. The interviews were carried out in Swedish sign language, with a sign language interpreter, except for the interview with the representative from Deaf Women's Association in Stockholm, which was conducted without interpreter, and for the two e-mail interviews that were conducted in written Swedish.

The participants represent their organisations, but they also represent their personal views. As Haritaworn states: "[P]articipants are not merely raw, pre-theoretical sources of 'experience', but active producers of their own interpretations" (2007: para 2.4). This approach acknowledges the agency of the participants, and that experience is something that is produced through interpretation. I have not attempted to present the opinions of the participants as *the* truth, but rather *a* truth, in line with Haraway's claim that knowledge is always situated and partial.

2.2.1 Material

My data derives from the five interviews that I conducted with representatives from five different minority women or minority group organisations. In total I collected 174 minutes of recorded material, in addition to the e-mail interviews. My data also consist of documents from the organisations themselves such as statues, policy documents and other publications.

I have transcribed the filmed recordings of the interviews and subsequently analysed the transcriptions. My transcriptions are based on the sign language interpreter's translation and due to this I recognise that there is a risk that some meanings or intentions have gone lost in translation. One possible solution to this problem would have been to let a hearing person transcribe the interviews for me. Unfortunately that option was not practically viable for me in this study, but it is something that I will take into consideration for the future, and

I would also recommend other Deaf students who are doing interviews with a non-signing population to consider this approach.

2.3 Language

I have used the words interviewees and participants interchangeably, instead of informants or subjects, which I feel recognises the agency of the participants in a more accurate way (Reinharz 1992). Further, I use the concept "people with disabilities" interchangeably with "people with differing abilities". While people with disabilities is the generic term, it builds on the premise that some bodies are unfit and unable. The term "differing abilities" recognises human variation without categorising it as flawed. This aligns better with critical disability theory which is part of my theoretical framework for this thesis, and will be discussed further in chapter 3. Even so, I am not wholly convinced of the adequacy of the term since it still raises the question of what exactly these abilities are differing from, and it seems to presume a position of normalcy to differ from. I find the Swedish word *funktionsvariation* more adequate, but in lack of a better translation of this word I will use the two concepts discussed above interchangeably.

Many Deaf people and Deaf scholars make a distinction between deaf and Deaf. The difference in the capitalised letter lies in that Deaf denotes a cultural and social affiliation, referring to "a member of a linguistic and cultural minority" (Lane 2008: 284), while deaf is the general usage in the English language connoting merely a sensory deficit (ibid.). I will mainly use the word in capitalised form, although it depends on the context.

The organisation Interfem uses the word "racialised" to describe "persons who may be subjected to racism, or in other ways discriminated against due to their skin colour, ethnicity, religion or language" (interfem.se). I will mainly use this concept as well.

In an initial stage of the thesis writing I was guilty of mis-labelling and misgendering one of the participants, and in so doing I inadvertently sustained the societal power structures that I wish to deconstruct (Predelli et al. 2012). After that I have been more cautious and aware of which labels and genders I put on people, and why. This is also why I in several places use the wording "women, trans* persons and non-binary identified people"[4].

2.4 Delimitation

I considered a vast number of organisations for this thesis, but had to limit the number I included. Initially I only planned to include organisations who organise for minority group women, but after my faux pas when I mis-labelled one of the participants I decided to change the selection criterion to include persons who do not identify within a gender binary as well, in order to avoid reproducing the gender binary system and the exclusion that follows with it.

I tried to get an even distribution between different minority organisations. However, there will likely be readers who feel that I have omitted some important organisation. I take full responsibility for that.

2.5 Ethical Considerations and Critical Reflections

Sometimes when doing research in minority groups the researcher assert the aim to "give voice" to previously marginalised or silenced voices (Visweswaran 1997; see also Gorelick 1991). Making such a statement runs the risk of being paternalistic (who is it that has the power to give voice to whom?) and denying the participants agency. It is also a way of exercising power, in that when the researcher attempts to speak for them, they deprive the participants of the right to

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[4] See footnote 1-3 on page 5.

speak for themselves (de los Reyes & Mulinari 2005). For the Deaf community, "giving voice" is "a metaphorical incongruity", and many Deaf political activists challenges the hegemony of the voice (Bauman 2008: 3). Thus, my aim is in no way an attempt to give anyone voice. With that said, this thesis include words of people who represent groups that are less often given subject positions in majority society and within hegemonic discourses. In this thesis, they are given interpretative prerogative. For this reason I hope that this thesis will make a meaningful contribution to the scholarly debate, both in terms of which perspectives are included as well as taking into account my own position as a minority feminist.

For the purpose of this thesis I have chosen not to anonymise the organisations included, because it is my belief that being able to compare as well as discuss specificities of the different minority organisations is valuable. Nor have I anonymised the participants, because they participate in this study in the capacity of their role within their organisations. I use the participants first names, and in two cases the initial of the surname as well, to be able to differentiate between two participants with the same first name. The non-anonymisation is done with the consent of all participants.

Interviews was not the only possible method for this study. Another method that I considered was ethnography. That would have enabled me to complement the interviews with participant observation in the activities and meetings of each organisation (O'Reilly 2009). It remains a suggestion for further research on the topic. Another viable option would have been to do multiple interviews, or in-depth interviews, instead of only one semi-structured interview with each participant. It would have given me an opportunity to ask additional questions that might have arisen during the analysis of the transcripts, as well as double-checking facts with the participants (Reinharz 1992).

2.5.1 Categorisation

Judith Butler questions the idea of woman as a category. She states that there is no true essence of what it means to be a woman, and a woman is never just a woman (1990). It is therefor reasonable to criticise my own use of categories in this thesis. To discuss "women" as a fixed category might consolidate the gender binary system, rather than questioning it (Eduards 2002). Is there a danger in speaking of women as a collective group based on their sex? After all, men seldom organise solely on basis of their sex. Because of this, and because men are the norm, they are seldom thought of as actually having a sex (ibid.). Engaging in the kind of categorisation and labelling that I have both deliberately tried to do, and not to do, is fraught with risks. My labelling and categorisation is a result of power relations and power differentials that exist between me and the participants (Predelli et al. 2012). I have strived to constantly be aware of this and reflect over the consequences of my wordings since categorisation easily steers over to essentialism and may sustain the very power relations that I in fact wish to challenge. I have also been mindful of that identities are indeed both constructed and political (Butler 1990) and for these reasons I have avoided discussing identities in essentialistic terms, since gender, class, and ethnicity denotes social positions rather than fixed categories (de los Reyes 2005). However, I also believe that we are treated differently due to our social positions and the constructed identities that are ascribed to us, and for this reason they are relevant to analyse. There are instances when categorising can serve a useful purpose, for example, using political categories strategically can serve as a tool to make inequalities and oppressive structures visible (Predelli et al. 2012). Further I do not believe that gender can be categorised into two neat categories, rather I question the gender binary system and agree with RFSL who state that "concepts like 'man' and 'woman' are too narrow to capture the varied experiences of gender identity that constitute our realities" (RFSL 2005: 8). As mentioned, I

therefore include women, trans* persons and non-binary identified people in this thesis.

2.6 Analysis

My method of analysis is a combination of categorisation and interpretative analysis. During the transcription I identified themes that I categorised into an index (see Appendix B), which I sorted interview segments into. The index categories were not set on beforehand but were developed during transcription following what the participants talked about. The index has helped me gain an overview of topics discussed, and how recurrent they were, which facilitated the analysis. I carried out the theoretical analysis by reading the transcribed interviews several times in order to acquaint myself with the material, while at the same time making interpretative reflections grounded in my theoretical framework (Kvale & Brinkmann 2009). The risk with this kind of analysis is that I might be looking for things that may not actually be there. However, as discussed earlier, I have consistently taken a reflexive and critical stance towards my own material and analysis, which is also what is recommended by Kvale and Brinkmann when doing theoretical analysis (ibid.). For this reason I consider the risk for biases minimised as much as possible. The interpretative analysis of the transcripts was done in close relation to my theoretical framework, which I consistently returned to, reflecting over the transcripts and the theoretical framework alternately, to clearly maintain my line of argument.

When using interviewing as a method it is easy to treat the transcripts as reified static data. In so doing one loses the verbal and very much alive meaning that still exists in the interview (ibid.). In order to avoid this flap trap I have treated the written transcripts as an perpetually ongoing dialogue with the

participants, constantly finding new angles and perspectives that yields yet another piece of analysis.

3 Theoretical Framework

Under the following headlines I will present the theoretical framework for this thesis. It is grounded in feminist critiques of hegemonic feminist theory. Feminism questions knowledge that is taken for granted and challenges notions of what constitutes the reality (Mulinari 2001). The theories included here share that basic standpoint, as well as "a commitment of theorising oppression" (ibid.: 9). Intersectionality arose as a critique against the universalising tendencies within feminist movements and anti-racist movements respectively. It has since its introduction been developed to include a number of social dimensions in addition to gender and race, such as class, sexuality and ability (de los Reyes & Mulinari 2005; McCall 2005). For that reason it constitutes the backbone of my theoretical framework. Critical Disability Theory will serve as a norm-critical tool, questioning our perceptions of "normalcy" and what is desirable and not. In addition I will briefly discuss Deafhood Theory which disavows the pathological perspectives inherent in the term "deafness", and instead denotes a process of recognising Deaf people's distinct identity, culture and experiences (Ladd 2003). Further I will discuss civil society and resistance as theoretical concepts, and lastly I will also briefly discuss what constitutes a minority, and the precepts for separate collective organising.

3.1 Intersectionality

After the surge of second wave feminism during the 1960's and 1970's (Visweswaran 1997; hooks 1984/2000: x-ix) critical voices emerged, questioning whose's feminism it was, anyway? The critique came mainly from women of

colour, Third World women, and lesbian women, who criticised the dominant feminist movement for claiming to speak for all women, while in practice, it was speaking from a white, middle-class, heterosexual perspective. In so doing they obliterated the lived experiences of everyone who did not hold such a position (Mulinari & Sandell 1999). The women who brought forth the critique also questioned the claim of hegemonic feminism that gender was the single most important dimension in feminist analysis (hooks 1984/2000). Following this, discussing the racism and imperialism of white women's feminism, Valerie Amos and Prathiba Parmar wrote: "We cannot simply prioritise one aspect of our oppression to the exclusion of others" (1984/2005: 61). According to hooks (1984/2000], our society rests on a cultural basis of group oppression, which means that struggling to end sexist oppression without simultaneously struggling to end other forms of oppression such as racism or classism, is pointless since it will counteract the first effort. Likewise, men waging revolutionary or liberationist struggles without tending to sexist oppression undermine their own struggle (ibid). Thus, the feminist critiques of the 1960's and 1970's that criticised power relations, was a critique formulated within "the hegemony of whiteness" (de los Reyes & Mulinari 2005: 37 [my translation]). De los Reyes and Mulinari use the concept hegemony in a Gramscian sense which means that they consider dominance and power not only created and sustained by violence, but also by socially sanctioned agreements of how things are. Those agreements may be tacit and unstated, which means that social practices, common sense, and ethics are a sort of exercising of power (ibid.). I will use the concept hegemony in the same way, which means that when I speak of hegemonic feminism, I refer to "mainstream" feminism that dictate, sometimes tacitly through social practices and the like, which questions are considered relevant for feminisms today, and which are not.

As a response to the critique put forth by minority women and as a reaction to the call for an extended feminist theory, the concept intersectionality

was introduced by Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw. She is considered to have been the first to formulate the concept, although an intersectional perspective was discussed prior to her formulation of it, by a number of scholars, such as Angela Davis, Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldua (de los Reyes & Mulinari 2005). Crenshaw discussed intersectionality in relation to women of colour's experience of employment (1989) and violence (1994), and criticised both the hegemonic feminist movement as well as the anti-racist movement for being single-tracked and exclusionary:

> Al-though racism and sexism readily intersect in the lives of real people, they seldom do in feminist and antiracist practices. And so, when the practices expound identity as 'woman' or 'person of color' as an either/or proposition, they relegate the identity of women of color to a location that resists telling (Crenshaw 1994: 94).

Crenshaw's analysis includes explanations of how structures of oppression not only work together but also might amplify oppression, as well as of how certain politics might marginalise issues relevant to minority groups. This means for example, that a woman of colour may not experience racism the same way as a man of colour, nor might she experience sexism the same way as a white woman does (Crenshaw 1994). This means that anti-racist movements and feminist movements that are not grounded in an intersectional base, are irrelevant to large parts of the population. Crenshaw focused on the intersections of gender and race, but she did recognise that there are other factors shaping the experiences of women of colour, and she highlighted "the need to account for multiple grounds of identity when considering how the social world is constructed" (ibid.: 94). Several scholars have further discussed the concept after Crenshaw's introduction of it (such as: Lewis 2000; Mohanty 2003; de los Reyes & Mulinari 2005) and also discussed it in relation to other social dimensions such as class, sexuality and

ability, to name a few (see for example Acker 2006, 2012; Garland-Thomson 2002; Hirschmann 2012). Intersectionality can be used to explore how power relations and inequality is created and sustained in social and historical contexts, through categorisation. It also analyses the norms that leads to exclusion and stigmatising. Complexity is another central concept, as intersectionality focuses on the effects of power relations and structures of inequality that operates simultaneously, rather than one power relation or one structural inequality at a time (de los Reyes 2005). While intersectionality can be seen as a critique of mainstream feminism's tendency to universalise and generalise across women's experiences (McCall 2005), intersectionality have also been criticised for it's demand of knowing and naming which runs the risk of having a stabilising effect on identities (Puar 2005). Jasbir K. Puar sees in intersectionality an extension of liberal multiculturalism and "the disciplinary apparatus of the state-census, demography, racial profiling, surveillance [...] that simply wishes the messiness of identity into a formulaic grid" (2005: 128). She claims that intersectionality treats identities as the sum of a number of components - "race, class, gender, sexuality, nation, age, religion"- that can be disassembled and analysed separately (ibid.: 127*f*). While I agree with Puar that it is possible to discern an essentialising undercurrent in the concept, I am more inclined to de los Reyes and Mulinari's argument that the strength of intersectionality is that it explains power relations without grading inequalities internally (2005). Intersectionality also acknowledges that these power relations have very real effects on our possibilities to act within a society and its structures. Simply stating that women hold different subject positions is not enough for an intersectional analysis, rather, intersectionality provide an analytical tool to enable a "critical understanding of the complex constructions of power and mechanisms of inequality" (ibid.: 87). To reflect over

the use of the concept is essential, otherwise it will become devoid of its critical content (de los Reyes & Mulinari 2005).

My reason for using intersectionality for this thesis is based on my conviction that it is not enough to simply add one more social dimension to critical theories in an "add gender and stir"-manner (Quay Hutchison 2003) while nothing else in the theory changes, but rather that a theory that provide a complex understanding of how structures of oppression work together, in both structural and political ways is more useful.

3.2 Critical Disability Theory

Research and theories on disability tend to start from one of two perspectives; the medical model or the social model. The medical model views disability as an abnormality that should be fixed or cured; or at least mitigated as far as possible. It is based on "a system of exclusions that stigmatises human differences", marking bodies that supposedly have something wrong with them as subordinate (Garland Thomson 2005: 1558). The social model on the other hand, pose a critical alternative to the medical model. In this view disability is a social construction and it is the society and the environment that is disabling, and disability is not something that is inherent in bodies or minds themselves (Hirschmann 2012). Critical disability theory is based on the social model of disability. The theory argues that:

> [D]isability is not fundamentally a question of medicine or health, nor is it just an issue of sensitivity and compassion; rather, it is a question of politics and power(lessness), power over, and power to. (Devlin & Pothier 2006: 2).

Critical disability theory thus recognises that disability is a socially constructed category that has to do with power relations. From this perspective, what we call a disability is nothing but a designation that some human variations are impaired, while other human variations are perfectly normal. This designation is rooted in a certain time and a certain place (Lane 2008). Critical disability theory challenges the perceptions of normalcy and abnormality as well as the practices that privileges bodies, behaviour and language that are deemed "normal" over that deemed "abnormal". As such, there are no fixed categories of what constitutes a disability in critical disability theory. Instead, certain people "are *manufactured* as disabled" in a society where certain personal characteristics or functions are seen as defects (Devlin & Pothier 2006: 5 [italics in original]). What this accounts to is that "today's disability may be tomorrow's normal variation and vice versa" (Lane 2008: 279). Although here it is apt to interject that some of these human variations have very real bodily consequences, and even from a social model perspective we must be able to recognise these, as well as the discomfort and pain they can cause (Reiser 2006). Although Devlin and Pothier states, that even with this in mind, "the biggest challenge comes from mainstream society's unwillingness to adapt, transform, and even abandon its 'normal' way of doing things" (2006: 13). Another relevant point to meet Reiser's objection is that even if we argue that disability is a social construction, that "does not imply that the characteristics are not real or do not have desirable effects on physiological or cognitive functions that persist in many environments" (Asch 2001: 6).

Marking some bodies as "able" and others as "disabled" legitimates the way power and resources are organised and distributed in society, down to the architectural environment   and the perceived naturalness about it (Garland-Thomson 2002). Stairs and ramps are both objects that are constructed in order to move people from one place to another in places where there exists a level difference. But since stairs tend to be privileged over ramps this privileges some bodies over others (Knoll 2009) which causes oppression:

When buildings, technology, and media are designed for certain types
of people but not others, when communication is carried out in ways
accessible to certain types of people but not to others, or when school
curricula are designed for certain types of learning but not others,
disability results. Disability, in short, is a product of oppression
(Baynton 2008: 296).

From a medical perspective it is the deviant bodies that should be cured, not the
barriers that exist in society, attitudes, environments and economics (Garland-
Thomson 2002). Social practices that normalises exclusion builds on the notion
that disability should be treated and cured, and in lack thereof rehabilitated and
mitigated with the aim of "passing" (as able-bodied) (Devlin and Pothier 2006).
The responsibility for correcting and curing this condition is placed on the
individual, which also downplays the needs for social change, and so the
technologies of normalisation can continue (Lane 2008). The most preferable
measure, from a medical perspective, is to prevent the disability coming into
existence altogether, which has led us as a society to "develop and utilize prenatal
testing techniques because we have determined that certain kinds of lives are not
worth living" (Devlin & Pothier 2006: 10). Due to the emphasis that is placed on
cure, and on reducing of human variations and flaws, reproductive practices such
as prenatal testing techniques, are culturally mandated (Garland-Thomson 2002).
As Devlin and Pothier points out: "Such an appreciation of disability sends a very
powerful message to persons with disabilities who are already born" (2006: 10).
Although from a medical perspective, this is an irrelevant objection since from
their perspective, people with disabilities have flaws that they should not want,
and should already be doing their best to mitigate these flaws and compensating
for whatever deficiency they are ascribed. Indeed, "the burden of proof is high for
anyone with a disability who claims that it is not a tragedy to live with an

impairment" (Silvers 1998, quoted in Asch 2001: 2). It is simply not fathomable that a person with a disability could not want to change anything about oneself.

3.2.1 Language

Language is politics too, and plays a large role in constructing common notions of disability and people with differing abilities. Critical Disability Theory holds that language is partial and value-laden (Devlin & Pothier 2006). Even if the social model is widely acknowledged today, the medical perspective is still consistent in our wording and usage of language (Hickey 2006). To exemplify with the word disability; *dis* has Latin roots and in that meaning *disable* means "to deprive of capability or effectiveness [...] [d]isability is the 'not' condition, the repudiation of ability" (Linton 2006: 171). In the Swedish language the current recommendation is to use the word *funktionsnedsättning* (socialstyrelsen.se). Even if it is an improvement from *handikappad* or *funktionshindrad*, that still implies that it is the individual person that is reduced (*nedsatt)* in some way. Some scholars and social activists now advocates the use of alternative concepts such as "human variations" (Asch 2001: 3) and differing abilities in the English language, or *funktionsuppsättning* and *funktionsvariation* in the Swedish language (see for example utopias.se; Unga rörelsehindrade 2014). Other examples can be seen in the way we use language; a person with disability may be considered 'unfit' for work which places the problem in the individual, not in the condition of work itself (Hickey 2006: 36). A child that is born deaf is pronounced to have a hearing loss, despite the fact that the baby who was born deaf never actually lost anything (Lane 2008). Language thus perpetuates the medical model as well as stereotypes and stigmas of disability (Hickey 2006). Being conscious of ones' choice of words makes hidden norms that are inherent in language visible, and in extent, our understandings of disability (Garland-Thomson 2005). With that said, to reflect on one's wording also requires being observant of the risk of invisiblising disability.

If one simply says that all bodies have different functions, that may conceal the fact that there is a norm in society regarding functionality, and that people who deviate from that norm often face discrimination.

3.3 Deafhood Theory

The word "deaf" implies "a socially constructed set of meanings" (Lane 2008: 282). These socially constructed set of meanings vary in different settings and times. The commonly held idea is that being deaf is to lack a vital sense. Another one is that the choices deaf people have are restricted, but that deaf people's choices are restricted "is largely the result of the social construction of what it means to be *deaf* - the result of audism - rather than of any sensory limitation that deaf people have" (ibid. [italics in original]). Audism is the oppression of Deaf individuals, as paralleled to racism, sexism and other forms of oppression, and which just like racism and sexism "insists that inherent biological factors determine individual traits and capacity" (ibid.). Deafhood theory then, offers a positive perspective on Deaf people, their culture and language, as contrasted to the pathological and dominant perspective by society at large (Ladd 2003). It is a deaf-constructed and experience-oriented view, emphasising possibilities and positive features rather than medicalisation and deficits (Kusters & De Meulder 2013). Further, Deafhood theory is a constantly ongoing process that is about acknowledging Deaf people's language and culture (Nordell & Kold Erlandsen 2011). The processual nature of the concept means that it stands in contrast to the medicalised and static concept of "deafness". Deafhood is "the struggle [by Deaf people] [...] to explain to themselves and each other their own existence in the world" and as such it is "a process of *becoming* and maintaining 'Deaf'" (Ladd 2003: 3 [italics in original]). Deafhood is Deaf people's own self-concept, as contrasted to "deafness" that entails hearing people's ideas of Deaf people (ibid.).

It can be used as a tool to deconstruct the internalised oppression that many Deaf people have experienced, as a consequence of audism and oralism (Kusters & De Meulder 2013); oralism being an ideology that "seeks to remove all things Deaf from the Deaf educational system, from society and, to the extent possible, from the world'" (Ladd & Lane 2013: 569). One of many negative consequences of audism is the belief that hearing people are superior over deaf people because of their dominant position in society. This is a phenomenon that has been coined dysconscious audism by Genie Gertz, based on Joyce King's theory of dysconscious racism. Dysconscious audism describes how some deaf people accept and value hegemonic hearing norms and privileges over deaf norms and deaf culture (Gertz 2008). "Deafhood is thus a very broad concept, entailing ontology as well as a liberating, empowering philosophy and a counternarrative in response to hegemonic oralist and colonizing discourses" (Kusters & De Meulder 2013: 431).

3.4 Civil Society

Civil society as a concept gained widespread popularity in Sweden in the 1990's when it was introduced by both the political left and the political right at different occasions, and it was also attacked from both sides, albeit for different reasons (Trädgårdh 2007). There is a lack of general consensus on what constitutes civil society, but generally it centres around voluntary participation (Grassman & Svedberg 2007). Mikiko Eto establishes that civil society is constituted by citizens who voluntarily gather in collectivities, often in order to cooperate around, or towards, a common purpose (2012). Civil society is also closely linked to the citizenship concept, and is considered a sphere where it is practiced (Grassman & Svedberg 2007; see also Predelli et al. 2012). As already stated, one of the reasons for focusing on Sweden in this thesis is that Sweden has a large and vital civil

society, and there is also a long legacy of organising in popular movements and voluntary associations - even if this kind of organising was not actually called civil society until the 1990's. It is sometimes considered paradoxical that Sweden with its strong welfare state also has a strong civil society, because there is a perception that a strong welfare state discourage people from organising and from civic participation on a whole (Trädgårdh 2007). However, as shown by Grassman & Svedberg there is no truth to that claim in the Swedish case where the strong state exists alongside civil society (2007). Women's underrepresentation and exclusion from political arenas is generally a democracy problem (Siim 1999: 82*f*), but in Sweden women do organise to a high degree, even if the way they organise have changed in the last decades. Membership in political women's associations has declined, while membership in other forms of associations have increased. Women also tend to be more broadly organised than men, across ideologies and organisations, and many women choose to organise outside of party politics, which tend to be dominated by men (Eduards 2002). For this reason, and because this thesis does not focus on party politics, none of the organisations included are a party political organisation.

Feminists have criticised the civil society concept and much of the research done on the subject for its gender-blindness (Howell 2005), and for presenting it "in terms that make it seem a place where women are not" (Phillips 2002: 72). Carole Pateman even states that "[c]ivil society (as a whole) is patriarchal" (1988: 113). Where civil society theorists traditionally have placed emphasis on the dichotomy state-civil society, feminists focus more on the socially constructed division between the public and the private spheres. Most civil society theorists ignore the family, but when addressed it is to discuss whether it is included in civil society or not (Howell 2005). It is evident that a civil society concept that neglects the family, which plays a crucial role in gender relations, is of little importance to feminists. In an articled named *Civilsamhälle - en utopi för medelklassens män?* (Civil society - a utopia for men of the middle

class?) Lena Sommestad (1995) argues that civil society research is based on patriarchal and normative values and argues that the research proceed from the authors' own normative perspective and in so doing ignores the lived realities of those who do not share their normative position regarding gender or class. Further she argues that in their research the home often serves merely as coulisse which maintains, rather than questions, the public-private dichotomy, relegating men to the first sphere and women to the second, which is exactly what feminist theory criticises. Sommestad argues that a centralised and democratic state is more important than civil society, since the former ensures a fair (re)distribution of resources, while family-based civil societies deprives women of autonomy and visibility (Sommestad 1995). Another problem with civil society, from a feminist perspective, is that civil society also include associations that work against gender equality, such as "churches that require segregation between women and men; cultural associations that promote sexist cultures; campaign groups working to overturn what have been seen as advances for sexual equality" (Phillips 2002: 84).

3.4.1 Resistance

Civil society can be seen as a "site of resistance and emancipation" (Chambers 2002: 96). The word resistance is usually used to describe "activities that marginalised and oppressed groups take on in order to defend themselves against the current order" (Eduards 2002: 13 [my translation]). Maud Eduards focuses on women's collective organising, but I argue that much of her arguments are applicable to minority groups as well. Eduards claims that organising itself has an empowering effect on women, and that it also contributes to increasing their acting space. However, she prefers the terms *motmakt* (counter-power) over resistance, to describe women's collective organising. In her view, resistance denotes non-changing activities, activities that are designated to merely hold up a wall against the opposition that demands change. From her perspective resistance

is what the political establishment performs when they try to fend off the demands and challenging acts directed at them by women's collective organising. This kind of resistance can take various shapes, including "silence and dismissal without reasons" (Eduards 2002: 13 [my translation]). Therefore, to Eduards, resistance is a word badly suited to describe women's collective organising, which definitely is active and fights for change. The reason why women (and minority groups) may face resistance by the establishment is that women's organising makes not only their own demands and standpoints clear, but it also make the current (societal) order's limits and (un)willingness to change clear. Women's collective organising then becomes a site for exercising of counter-power against the current order. Some groups of women or minority groups who organise collectively face more resistance than others (Eduards 2002). The perception of which acts that are acts of resistance varies. Experience is a central concept when one analyses discrimination (de los Reyes & Kamali 2005) and sharing of experiences has long been seen as a form of resistance for minority group women (Mulinari & Sandell 1999). LGBTQ persons also have a legacy of making resistance (Cohen 1997).

3.5 What Constitutes a Minority?

There is a danger in viewing everyone who identify with a minority group as "marginalised and invisible" (Cohen 1997: 440), and this is also why I for the most part in the thesis talk of minority groups instead of marginalised groups. As Predelli et al. (2012) notes, there is no consensus on what is implicated by the term "minority". In "Majority-Minority Relations in Contemporary Women's Movements" they discuss the term "majority" which they define as:

> [I]ndividuals and groups who form a numerical majority, inhabit structural and discursive positions of power, are considered members of the dominant group and are in a privileged position with respect to

the general absence of racism and ethnic discrimination directed towards them as either a group or as individuals (Predelli et al. 2012: 107).

Using and paraphrasing their definition for the purpose of this thesis, I define the term minority as:

Individuals and groups who form a numerical minority, lack structural and discursive positions of power, are not considered members of the dominant group and are in a non-privileged position with respect to sexism, racism, ethnic discrimination, audism, ableism, homo- or transphobia, or other forms of discrimination or oppression that are directed towards them as either a group or as individuals.

It could be argued that "minority" should be written with quotation marks, but for readability I have written without quotation marks, just as Predelli et al. (2002).

3.6 Collective Separate Organising

Maud Eduards states that women's collective organising (Eduards focus on women's collective organising, but I believe that much of it is applicable on minority groups in general) has taken a wider and broader shape since the 1990's. The fact that there are networks and organisations for a broad range of interests is a strength which lends women's collective organising durability (Eduards 2002), which means that the vast number of minority group organisations that exist today should not be considered disrupting. The power asymmetry inherent in women's and minority groups' collective organising are manifested in that most of the time it is only those who are excluded from power who are seen as a collective group with collective attributes, while those who holds the power are not seen as a collective group, but rather are seen as representing something universal that does

not need to be defined. Collective organising generates acting power. Coming together collectively enables a critical analysis of the gender-power order and society at large, which reveals the way power is exercised, and the mechanisms for control that exists. The fact that women's collective organising makes the gender-power order visible, and questions the perceived naturalness about it, makes it harder to deny, which is why collective organising is so threatening (Eduards 2002). Separatism, that is, organising that only is open to those who share some common interests or experiences, has long been a recognised method for minority groups (Rosenberg 2002, Predelli et al. 2012). Separate organising is more challenging than other demands such as demands of equal representation, because separate organising is harder to control (Eduards 2002). While separate organising generally is strengthening for those who organise separately, it may also hinder dialogue and alliances between different women's and minority groups organisations, because there are no places where they can meet (Predelli et al. 2012).

Organising as a minority group can also be a way of claiming the speaking position for oneself. The development of minority groups studies and departments at universities and within academia is one such act. The introducing of Deaf Studies on an academic level is an example, and as such it have claimed control "over the politics of representation by 'speaking for itself' instead of being spoken for" (Bauman 2008: 3).

4 Organisations Included

Women's and minority groups' organising is diverse, representing a broad range of ideologies and interests (Howell 2005; Eduards 2002). This width is to some degree reflected in the organisations included in this thesis. Five organisations that organise for minority women or minority groups were included in this thesis. Only one organisation is a mixed-genders organisation, while the other four organise for persons who identify as women. Interfem explicitly includes transgender persons as well, while there is no such mention in the organisational documents of DVKF, FQ or *Sverigefinskt kvinnoforum*. RFSL is a mixed-genders organisations, which I have chosen to include because its members often are considered norm-breaking, and as such they belong to a minority. Before moving on to the analysis in the next chapter, I will briefly discuss each of the five organisations. My discussion of these organisations should not be interpreted as an attempt to lump them together, nor as a suggestion that their members all experience oppression the same way. In defining the organisations there is also the risk that I make "organisational distinctions appear more unambiguous than they in fact are, concerning gender as well as race and ethnic diversity" (Predelli et al. 2012: 113). It is by no means my intention to portray the organisations as surrounded by clear cut boundaries of who is in and who is out. Neither do I want to portray identities as single-tracked and clear cut. For example, of course there are women with disabilities who also may be lesbian or not conforming to the gender-binary system; and of course there are women who may be racialised who also may be Deaf. By applying an intersectional perspective I hope to make it clear that identities do not exclude each other.

4.1 FQ - *Forum kvinnor och funktionshinder*

FQ - Forum women and disability in Sweden, is a non-profit feminist association for women with disabilities. As of December 2014 it had 95 individual members with voting rights, 11 supportive members and 19 supporting organisations or committees. Only women with disabilities, who also are members, have the right to vote and are electable to the board. Persons who do not identify as women, or do not have disabilities can be support members, but they do not have the right to vote and can not be elected to the board (*Forum - Kvinnor och Funktionshinder* 2015*b*). The association was formed in 1997, but it existed already from 1989 as a project. FQ has five purposes; actively strengthen girls and women with disabilities; improve the situation for girls and women with disabilities in the society; improve the possibilities for girls and women with disabilities to have influence in society at all levels; work against all kinds of discrimination and violence against women and girls with disabilities; and work for that girls and women with disabilities will have increased influence within their own organisations (*Forum - Kvinnor och Funktionshinder* 2015*a*).

4.2 Interfem

Interfem was established in 2006 and is a non-profit organisation, think tank, and resource centre. It was established to counter the lack of spaces that start off from the experiences of women who may be racialised, in Sweden. The founders experienced that racism was not seriously targeted within many feminist and women's organisations, while anti-racist organisations lacked feminist analysis and was dominated by men (Lundin & Aarnivara 2013). Its target group are women and transgender persons who may be racialised. The goal of the organisation is to raise awareness of racism and sexism and how these forms of

oppression interact with other forms of oppressions (interfem.se). One way that they do this is by working out strategies and methods to counter racism and sexism (Lundin & Aarnivara 2013). They also educate labour union organizations (Ganem-Cuenca et al. 2013) and educate organisations about non-discriminating recruiting processes (Lundin & Aarnivara 2013).

Interfem accepts everyone who support their basic principles as support members, but their meetings and activities are separatistic in order to create safe spaces and enable conversations that otherwise might be stunted (interview with Birgitta V. L).

4.3 DVKF - *Dövas kvinnoförening i Stockholm*

Deaf Women's Association in Stockholm was established in 1896 by Maria Forsell, a deaf woman. Emma Anstrin became the association's first chairperson, a hearing woman who was a teacher for Deaf children (Rooth 2009). Its original purpose was to help women without capital by giving them the opportunity to a reviving residence on the countryside during the summer. Persons who identify as women, know Swedish sign language and is registered in Stockholm are welcome as members (Dövas kvinnoförening i Stockholm <dvkf.se/medlemskap/>). Hearing women may thus become members and are electable to the board as long as they fulfil the above requirements. The first chairperson, and at least the three following her, were hearing women (Rooth 2009). Today only Deaf women are allowed as chairpersons, but hearing women are still allowed in the board, as long as they are in numerical minority (Dövas kvinnoförening i Stockholm 2013). From the beginning until today any one who wish to become a member must first submit an application to the board for approval before being accepted a full member (Rooth 2009). As of 2011 the association had 403 members (Dövas kvinnoförening i Stockholm 2011).

4.4 RFSL - *Riksförbundet för homosexuellas, bisexuellas, transpersoners och queeras rättigheter*

RFSL - The national association for the rights of homosexuals, bisexuals, transgender persons and queers was established in 1950 and as of May 2014 it had about 6000 members and 33 local chapters. Their work consist of political lobbying, providing and disseminating information, as well as providing and organising social activities and support groups. They also have several counselling centres and produces a member magazine (rfsl.se). Membership in RFSL is open for everyone, and anyone who support their basic values are electable for the board.

4.5 *Sverigefinskt kvinnoforum*

Sweden Finnish' Women's Forum was established in 2000. The forum is a sub-association of *Sverigefinska Riksförbundet* (The National Association of Finns in Sweden), but have their own statues and independent activities (Romppanen & Ehrnebo 2013). The forum organise for Sweden Finnish women and their associations. Its members constitute of member organisations, which as of 2013 was 35 to the number (*Sverigefinskt kvinnoforum* <word.rskl.se>). The forum works for Sweden Finnish women's improved possibilities to education, improved position in the work life, as well as equal opportunities for participation in the society. They also work for equality within the Sweden Finnish minority (Romppanen & Ehrnebo 2013). Persons who do not belong to the Swedish Finnish group may be members as long as they are women and accept the statues. They also have to be members in any Sweden Finnish association belonging to

The National Association of Finns in Sweden. As long as one fulfils these requirements, one has the right to vote and is electable to the board.

5 Analysis

In the following chapter I will discuss the interviews in more detail, as well as present the results from my analysis of them. After transcribing the interviews I read and reread them in order to identify themes and topics, which I then categorised in an index. The index consists of 57 words (see Appendix B) and it helped me gain an overview over which themes the participants discussed, as well as making the analysis more systematic, by analysing topic by topic. I have chosen a number of those identified themes that I will discuss in depth in the following section, but first I will discuss minority groups' organising. In the end of the chapter I will discuss the relationship between feminist theory and civil society.

Contextual factors are important if one aim to understand women's movements activism (Predelli et al. 2012) and I extend this importance to the understanding of all minority groups. For that reason I have tried to ensure that each quote is presented clearly in its context.

5.1 Separate Collective Organising

People in minority groups organise separately because of their common experiences, interests and choices, not because of some perceived natural difference (Predelli et al. 2012). RFSL state that sometimes it is the exclusion itself that creates unity (RFSL 2005). All the organisations included in this thesis organise separately, albeit to varying degrees. Some organisations are only open to the specific target group while others welcome people who do not belong to the

target group, although there may be varying degrees of restrictions on the influencing power. Separate and collective organising challenges the general perception of how people from minority groups ought to behave. It also forces everyone outside of the group to relate to their privileged position that comes with not belonging to the social category in question (Eduards 2002), a position which very likely was invisible to them before, due to their privilege. As discussed in the theoretical section women's collective organising makes the gender-power order visible, which in turn makes it harder to deny. For this reason women's collective organising is perceived as provocative and threatening (ibid.).

> FQ is... well, something of a threat for some, a somewhat unnecessary
> organisation. And threatening. *Birgitta A. - FQ.*

It is also related to "the privilege of problem formulation" (de los Reyes 2005: 246). When minority groups claim the power to define what the problems are, they challenge hegemonic groups who often use their power and privilege of problem formulation to dismiss or question minority group's demands (ibid.). The organisations that Birgitta A. claims perceive of FQ as threatening are mainly mixed-genders minority groups organisations. It is possible that they feel comfortable in their role as a minority, perhaps having first-hand experiences of oppressive structures themselves, and that this make them less inclined to reflect over privileges or structures of inequality within their own minority group organisation. That FQ makes both the gender-power order visible and point to other oppressive structures, may be experienced as distracting and provocative. Society tend to be more responsive to the demands that are perceived as less threatening (hooks 1984/2000), which implies that Birgitta A.'s experience that some organisations perceive of them as a threat indicates that the demands they make indeed has the power to challenge the current order. Paulina de los Reyes state that even though facing resistance is though, it is also proof that one's actions can lead to change (Nordling Blanco 2011). Birgitta A.'s experience is that

other women's organisations such as *Sveriges Kvinnolobby* (The Swedish Women's Lobby) are mainly supportive of FQ. The fact that women's organisations generally are more favourable towards FQ than mixed-genders organisations are, I believe is because they organise separately, based on gender, themselves. Mixed-genders organisations may also organise separately, but not based on gender, and as such their organising is not a threat to the gender-power order. What some people find provocative may not be the actual demands the organisations make, but rather the very choice to organise separately, and the lack of insight for everyone else, that follows with it.

> Some people think that we should be active in the Swedish associations that exist. But it's important that we can do things in our way. The language is important too, to be able to speak Finnish. *Anneli - Sverigefinskt kvinnoforum.*

To Anneli, giving up separate organising is not a choice, nor is it to Birgitta A. who specifically advocates separate organising for minority group women:

> If you want to get somewhere in pursuing women's issues, then we have to talk to each other! [...] It is obvious somehow, that it doesn't matter if you have a visual impairment, or if you're deaf, or hard of hearing, or have reduced mobility; the methods for keeping women in their place, so to speak, are the same. *Birgitta A. - FQ.*

Separate collective organising makes the oppressive systems, as well as the systemic nature of them, visible. When women or minority groups come together and act collectively, that generates a critical analysis of the gender-power order and the society at large, which reveals the way power is exercised, and the mechanisms for control, that Birgitta A. is talking about. It also generates acting power, which is needed to change the current order (Eduards 2002). Interfem argues for separatism as a way through which one's experiences of oppression and

discrimination, and the pain it cause, may be validated instead of dismissed (Nordling Blanco et al. 2011). Birgitta V. L. says:

> Safe spaces are really important to us. A separatist space creates safety and enables conversations that otherwise might be inhibited. *Birgitta V. L. - Interfem.*

It is the separatism in itself that make the spaces safe, and Birgitta V. L. also state that by organising separatistic they highlight that there is a power aspect that they need to relate to. The physical meeting places of the organisations become safe spaces where the members do not have to face discrimination or ignorance from majority society. For women with differing abilities, who often share experiences of indignities, as well as being belittled (Asch 2001) their organisational safe spaces mainly provide places where they may escape people's stereotypical assumptions about themselves. Stereotypical assumptions are often ascribed to people who deviate from the norm (Garland-Thomson 2005). For example, I have numerous times been asked if I can read, write, drive a car and travel by myself, all of which are things that in the exercising do not have any relation to the fact that I cannot hear.

Interfem places emphasis on power structures. Because of existing power structures some groups of people are privileged over others, but these power structures are never static; on the contrary they are context dependent and constantly changing (Nordling Blanco et al 2011). Even though the focus of Interfem is clearly internal, that is, to be strengthening for their members, Birgitta V. L.'s experience is that their separatism still can be extremely provocative for people who are left outside their separatist space. It is possible that it is this unapologetic stance that people find provocative, especially if they have not had to reflect on their hegemonic position before. One reason to why separate organising can be strengthening, is that by organising in minority groups, people who identify with at least two minority groups escape the need to split one's

political energies between these two groups (Crenshaw 1994). Nevertheless, several of the participants emphasise that despite sharing one or more common experiences, their members are not part of a homogenous group, and they stress the diverseness within the organisations. Interfem recognise that people always belong to more than one group, and that people have more or less power and resources depending on this belonging, since belonging to certain groups yield more power than others (Ganem-Cuenca et al. 2013). It is thus likely that many of the participants, while belonging to a minority group in one aspect, belong to a hegemonic group in other aspects.

5.2 Allies and Cooperations

Moving away from reductive categories and single-issue struggles, an intersectional perspective enables new views on who and what might potentially become allies (Cohen 1997). Several of the participants speak of the importance of having allies. Only Anneli from *Sverigefinskt kvinnoforum* oppose any need for allies. However, in a report published by the organisation (Romppanen & Ehrnebo 2013) the importance of cooperation with other minority groups and women's organisations, both in Sweden and in other countries, is emphasised. This contradiction might be possible to explain with different understandings of what allyship entails, although clearly it is also so that what some people within an organisation value, others might not find as important at all. Lena from DVKF also places little emphasis on the importance of allies, even though she explains that they do search collaborations with other organisations, but which organisations and in which shape depends on the current need. When DVKF was established, men were allowed in the organisation as members, although they have never been electable to the board (Rooth 2009). In *Döva kvinnors historia* (2009) it is clear that August Forsell, the husband of the founder Maria Forsell and

also deaf, had a large role in the organisation, recruiting members, writing appeals and contributing financially. The accountant was also a man in the beginning (Rooth 2009).

> In the beginning it was necessary to have men in the front for credibility reasons. Without men in the lead [the Deaf women's] credibility would have been nil, I mean, they were not only women, but they were deaf too! No one would have listened to them. *Lena - DVKF.*

Lena relates this to the current situation in which women who are not Deaf are electable to the board, and explains this too with credibility:

> It is the same thing today, hearing people face greater credibility than Deaf people do, and we stand a bigger chance at achieving our goals if we let hearing people speak for us, at least in the beginning. *Lena - DVKF.*

Geertz explains the fact that hearing persons are considered superior, even by Deaf people themselves, with the concept dysconscious audism (2008), which was discussed in the theoretical section. However, as Gertz also point out, this is not to say that hearing people cannot be allies to Deaf people, but rather that a critical awareness of which values and which norms are valued among Deaf people is required (ibid.).

As stated in the previous chapter, anyone is welcome to be a support member in FQ, but only women with disabilities have the right to vote and are electable to the board. Birgitta A. asserts that the support of other people, in the form of support membership, is important but that it is imperative that only women with disabilities have influence over the running of the organisation. When it comes to putting gender equality on the agenda in mixed-genders organisations, she emphasise the significance of having allies within the

organisation that can take the lead on this issue. She claims it is particularly useful to have allies in the board or the management who can proclaim the significance of addressing women's issues and gender equality. In a way her reasoning resembles Lena's, in that both of them consider allies necessary in order to make progress, at least regarding certain issues. Making these claims that Lena and Birgitta A. do, that sometimes it is necessary that individuals from hegemonic groups take the lead in order for the organisations to develop and accomplish their goals, may seem like a counteracting of their agency. However, to Lena it is simply about strategy:

> I believe it is strategic, everything is about strategy, and what must be done in order to achieve the goals. Then, when the goals are achieved, then we can remove the other things, and change it to how we want it. *Lena - DVKF.*

According to Emelie Mire, RFSL have had allies in the board, which means that they have not identified themselves as homosexual, bisexual, transgender or queer, but still support the basic principles of RFSL. Emelie Mire also explains that they do not really ask about sexual orientation and gender identification:

> It's not always that relevant. Although in RFSL some people consider the identification very important. RFSL Youth on the other hand talk more about queerness, and floating identities. So then categorisation in terms of "okay you're like that, you're welcome, or, no you're not" becomes less important. [...] [B]oth the movement and the society are more queer now. *Emelie Mire - RFSL.*

The queer perspective is present in RFSL's statement of principles as well, which state that from a queer perspective sexuality is something that one do and

constantly re-do. It also states that everyone has the right to define themselves in relation to their sexualities (RFSL 2012).

Minority women may be more prone to seeking support or alliances among minority men, than majority women are among majority men. Mulinari and Sandell show how minority group feminists have criticised hegemonic (Western) feminism for distancing itself from alliance politics, which means that they distanced themselves from men, including those "bearing subordinated forms of masculinities" (1999: 290). For women who share everyday experiences of oppressive structures with men, maintaining alliances with them may not only be important, but even an issue of survival. To then have the possibility to reject certain alliances is a form of privilege (ibid.). This stance is reflected in a comment by Birgitta V. L:

> We consider ourselves as allies to other groups who not necessarily are comprised in our target group. We believe in the importance of solidarity with groups who are subjected to racism, sexism and other forms of oppressions. *Birgitta V. L. - Interfem.*

Being open for that potential allies can be found in individuals or groups who do not belong to the specific target group opens for a shared resistance with these individuals or groups (Cohen 1997). Paulina de los Reyes argues that allyship and collective organising is important, because when people who work for change act collectively, that makes them less vulnerable (Nordling Blanco 2011). The Sweden Finnish Women's Forum also believe in cooperation with other minority groups (who not necessarily have to be women's organisations), both in Sweden and in other countries. This is a part in preserving the Finnish language as well as the Finnish cultural heritage, but they also argue that this kind of cooperation is a way to counteract racism and xenophobia (Romppanen & Ehrnebo 2013). While Birgitta V. L. believes in allyship, she also emphasises that it is not the main focus of their organisation:

> Allies are important in order to reach substantial changes, but our focus is on strengthening our target group and "claim power in white rooms". *Birgitta V. L. - Interfem.*

Interfem do not consider whiteness as a biological trait, but rather a position that is related to power (Ganem-Cuenca et al. 2013).

Birgitta V. L. also states that support, whether in the form of allyship or else, sometimes needs to be problematised:

> We are often invited to places, but the reason for the invitation can be questioned; it might just be that they need *blattar*[5], that is, an alibi, but it can also be that they actually want our perspective and our experiences. *Birgitta V. L. - Interfem.*

Diana Mulinari discusses the same kind of tokenism within academia, claiming that minority feminists often are given "a dubious speaking position in the margins, as advocacy or mediators of minorities or as the Native Other" (2001: 16) and Crenshaw states that tokenistic inclusion might be "as dis-empowering as complete exclusion" (1994: 99). Birgitta V. L.'s comment reflects a critical stance towards allyship, both seeing the potentials for allyship and solidary, while also critically questioning the reasons for the support.

Predelli et al. (2012) argues that separate organising indeed is empowering but that it is still important that there are both separate and mixed organisations. Especially they argue for cooperations and alliance building regarding specific issues, since it would make the political arguments more compelling. They state that the responsibility to establish cooperations and alliances lies with both minority and majority group organisations, but that it would definitely facilitate

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[5] *Blatte*: Swedish word for person who may be racialised. Either new immigrant or Swedish person who are not seen as legitimately Swedish. Originally a pejorative term, today it is used to denote identity and belonging.

the process if majority group organisations applied an intersectional perspective to a greater degree (Predelli et al. 2012). While it is likely that separate organising may hinder cooperation and alliances between minority groups, the primary focus of all the organisations in this thesis is to be strengthening to its members. As such, that objective probably triumphs the possible difficulties to establish cooperations, especially as none of the participants expresses any kind of concern regarding this. In addition, all the organisations do claim that they engage in collaborations of different kinds with other organisations, so there clearly are ways to bypass the problem.

5.3 Feminism and Organisational Work

DVKF do not have an outspoken feminist base, and have never had (Rooth 2009), nor do *Sverigefinskt kvinnoforum* have a feminist base. Anneli from *Sverigefinskt kvinnoforum* says that it is not something that they emphasise. The fact that they are women's organisations is alone not enough to automatically consider them feminist organisations, since being a woman does not automatically make one a feminist (just as a feminist is not always a woman) (Ramazanoglu & Holland 2002; de los Reyes & Mulinari 2005). Equally, which Interfem points out, an organisation is not automatically free from racism simply because there are people who may be racialised active within it (Nordling Blanco et al. 2011). In order for an organisation to be considered feminist, it should "seek to actively contest patriarchy and women's subordination" (Predelli et al. 2012: 112). Despite this, in assuming a broad understanding of what deems an organisation feminist, it is possible for researchers to classify women's organisations as feminist, even if their stance is not outspokenly feminist, as long as their goal is to empower women (ibid.). With this understanding it is possible to identify activities or projects carried out by these associations as decidedly feminist ones. For example

the Sweden Finnish women's forum works for the equality of Sweden Finnish women, both within the community as well as in society at large. They also work for that Sweden Finnish women will have equal conditions in the work life and in the society (*Sverigefinskt kvinnoforum* <media.rskl.se/>). This reflects an understanding that women may hold a subordinated position because of their gender as well as their minority group status, and it also reflects a will to change the current order. Another example is the women's shelter for Deaf women that DVKF were involved in setting up (it is no longer in place today), an action that can be considered feminist. In the case of DVKF, the reasons for setting up a women's shelter were mainly because, according to Lena, Deaf women who are targets of abuse often do not want to contact a "mainstream" women's shelter for fear of not being understood, both in linguistic and cultural terms. The fact that it was DVKF and not for example, the Stockholm Deaf Association that were the driving force behind the project is an indication of that women's issues largely are seen as special interests, not applicable to the larger group (Eduards 2002). It could also be perceived that men's violence against women are considered mainly a women's issue, not a general issue. FQ and RFSL clearly state in their statues and Statement of Principles respectively, that they are feminist organisations (*Forum - Kvinnor och Funktionshinder* 2015; RFSL 2012), and according to Emelie Mire, RFSL Youth in addition define themselves as a queerfeminist organisation. While stating that they are feminist today, RFSL acknowledge that their adoption of a feminist agenda came fairly late, in 2004. They explain this with that the interests of homosexuals as a group for a long time were given primacy over those of women and transgendered people (RFSL 2005). RFSL's statement of principles state that "feminism is about an awareness about that there are a large number of factors that interact, which leads to that men and perceived masculinity generally benefit at the expense of women and perceived femininity" (RFSL 2012: section 2.5 [my translation]). This is also discussed by Emelie Mire:

A man who is read as masculine, will have a higher position than a man who is read as feminine, but also higher than a woman who is read as masculine. So between trans persons there's kind of a spectrum depending on their expressions and whether they pass or don't pass, which means they get different amounts of power and different amounts of crap by the gender-power order. *Emelie Mire - RFSL.*

RFSL (2005) further acknowledges that norms affect the LGBT world as well, for example, the status of masculine men and feminine women are higher than that of gender-benders. Of the organisations included in this thesis, only RFSL and Interfem expressively state that they are trans inclusive. Interfem target women and trans persons, and define women as anyone who identify as a woman. (Interfem <interfem.se>). They state that feminist tools may be used to show which persons have the power to define which issues that are important in a social movement (Nordling Blanco et al. 2011), which resembles the criticism of hegemonic feminism put forth by a number of scholars as discussed in the theoretical section (see for example hooks 1984/2000; de los Reyes & Mulinari 2005). Interfem also recognises that perceptions of masculinity and femininity are related to power and that most men benefit from the separation of people into groups of women and men, since masculinity generally is rewarded (Ganem-Cuenca et al. 2013).

Even if not all the organisations start off from a feminist base, all participants have a clear political standpoint, considering themselves activists and their organising a political one. Of the five organisations DVKF is the organisation who puts most emphasis on social activities, generally prioritising that over political activism. It is likely that this stems from the original purpose of the association, which primarily was to enable rest and recreation to deaf women during the summer. Over time this expanded to include cultural activities and social get-togethers, as well as activities with educational purposes (Rooth 2009).

Today the statues state that the primary purpose is to organise social activities in sign language, as well as cultural activities. If there is a need or request for it, they should also offer activities with educational purposes (Dövas kvinnoförening i Stockholm 2013*).* That DVKF prioritises social activities over political and educational, should not be devalued. As discussed in the theoretical section, many Deaf people have internalised oppression as a consequence of audism and oralism (Kusters & De Meulder 2013). Deafhood theory builds on the presumption that Deaf people share a common collective culture, history and art form (Ladd 2003), but the colonisation of Deaf culture has had detrimental effects on the Deaf world's culture, language, education and history (Bauman 2008). Regaining one's Deafhood is thus a process (Ladd 2003), which can be facilitated by socialising and speaking about it together, which the large number of workshops that have been held on Deafhood theory would seem to prove (Kusters & De Meulder 2013). According to Lena, the main importance of DVKF lies in that it offers a place where Deaf women can meet other Deaf women, socialise and revive themselves. In other words, it is possible to say that they are tending to their Deafhood process. Lena also states that younger members tend to have a more distinct feminist standpoint, and tend to be more interested in discussing politics and feminism, as well as gaining more knowledge about such issues. According to Eduards (2002), knowledge and insights about one's own situation is a driving force behind collective organising, which correspond with Lena's experience of the increasing number of younger women starting to organise within DVKF seeking to gain more knowledge, a desire which is often fuelled by a recently acquired feminist consciousness and insight about one's situation.

5.4 Resistance

To Birgitta V. L. it is obvious that organising can be seen as an act of resistance:

> Absolutely! The fact that a group who is being marginalised join together and organise separately is incredibly provocative for others, and strengthening for the group itself. *Birgitta V. L. - Interfem.*

To Interfem feminism channels feelings of anger and hopelessness into resistance, and as such it is a stance that leads to change. They also consider anti-racist feminism an act of resistance against the existing racism and sexism in society (Nordling Blanco 2011). Birgitta A. on the other hand, is more reluctant to call their organising an act of resistance:

> I'd rather not call it that. I believe that... If you say that, it makes the process harder. So I wouldn't say that it's an act of resistance, no. Because that enhances something that you... Well it enhances a notion that's of no good. [...] I'd like to say it's more an act of development than an act of resistance. *Birgitta A. - FQ.*

As discussed in the theoretical section, Eduards (2002) are also reluctant about calling women's collective organising resistance, and prefers the term *motmakt* (counter power). She views organising and resistance as co-existent in a reciprocal way where collective organising often leads to political resistance against the collective organising, but also reversely; that the resistance women who organise collectively face, leads to increased organising. As such, the demands put forth by women's collective organising "is both a consequence of and a protest against the current order" (ibid.: 64). That people who organise and speak up against discrimination face resistance is to Interfem evidence that these acts makes power relations visible, but also that it makes clear which groups in society have more power in relation to others. They state that any organising that questions established norms will face resistance, because as soon as power structures are made visible it becomes something that can be questioned, which is not the case with power structures that are invisible (Nordling Blanco 2011).

In discussing resistance as a reaction to oppression experienced by minority groups, it is relevant to pose the question whether a goal of the organisations is to be redundant. It is one of Interfem's goals, to not be needed anymore "one day in the future when racism and sexism have ceased" (interview with Birgitta V. L.). RFSL share a similar vision: "The vision and ultimate goal of RFSL is a society characterised by respect and acceptance before people's differences, so thoroughly, that RFSL and similar organisations no longer will be needed" (RFSL 2010). Emelie Mire is more hesitant:

> I mean, people who like soccer still want to meet each other. And it's not particularly hard to be a soccer fan in Sweden today. People who like to talk about similar things or previous experiences in life will still talk to each other. And that need is much much greater if you are subjected to something. But if one then wouldn't be that anymore, I think that the need would still be there [...] Some people in the movement look forward to a day when we will be redundant, but personally I still think that the social perspective will remain. And then, seriously, I think it's completely unrealistic to think... I mean, when would that happen?? *Emelie Mire - RFSL.*

Whether organising can be seen as an act of resistance or not, this shows that resistance is only one part of it. Tiina Rosenberg (2002) asserts that organising is important for all people, but particularly so for marginalised groups, which corresponds with Emelie Mire's quote. The importance of organising lies in that organising gives a sense of belonging as well as an opportunity for positive self-identification (Rosenberg 2002). Dirksen Bauman (2008) asserts the same thing in talking about identity and how the sense of belonging to a Deaf culture contributes to a positive self-identification and self-esteem. This approach is also reflected in RFSL's Principle of Statements which states that "[T]he creating of identities is dependent on positive role models, culture, and other people's company" (RFSL 2012: section 3.2). It then seems that even if Interfem and

RFSL's goals of being redundant would be achieved, the need for belonging and positive self-identification will still be there.

Minority groups' collective organising legitimises the interests of the group, which gives them power to define themselves (Eduards 2002). Redefinition of language is an important part of decolonisation as well as of any reconstruction process set out by minority groups (Ladd & Lane 2013). To Crenshaw, politics of naming is a site of resistance since reclaiming and redefining pejorative words is a way to exert agency. Retaking control over naming and self-identification is an act of resistance that has positive internal effects for subordinated groups because the identification is then imprinted as something positive and celebratory rather than derogatory (Crenshaw 1994). Several social movements have redefined derogatory words to instead denote belonging. Both the term Black, as well as the Swedish *svartskalle* are such words. De los Reyes and Mulinari writes: "Both categories aim to create a collective identity from a specific kind of exclusion, where common experiences of racism within the frame of the nation-state, rather than specific ethnic affiliations, is in focus" (2005: 61). Birgitta V. L. from Interfem uses the word *blattar*, which just as *svartskalle,* originally is a pejorative word but in the context that Birgitta V. L. use it, it is devoid of the negative connotations and rather denotes belonging and identification with other people who may be racialised (see also: *"Blatte betyder kompis"* Jonsson 2007). In Interfem's publication *"Makthandbok för unga feminister som (be)möter rasism och sexism i föreningslivet"* both *blatte* and racialised (as in, person who may be racialised) are used non-derogatory (Nordling Blanco et al 2011). The development of the words Black, *svartskalle* and *blatte* can be compared with that of queer. Queer was a derogatory word which was used about homosexuals for most of the 20th century, but around the 1990's part of the LGBTQ movement reclaimed the word and posed it as an inclusive concept which in itself avoided reifying identities (Rosenberg 2002). Today the word questions "the established truths of a

heteronormative society" (RFSL 2005: 9). RFSL also assert that LGBT is not an identity in itself, and emphasise that just because some people are covered by the same term it does not mean they necessarily have something in common. Instead, the use of categories is that they "help us understand different ways of being and experiencing" (ibid.: 8). This corresponds with Emelie Mire's comment regarding RFSL Youth, namely that they prefer queer as an overall term over other identification categories, because queer does not sort identities into fixed categories but instead recognises that identities are floating. To Cathy J. Cohen, the term queer is an acknowledging of the resistance that queer people embody through their existence and everyday survival (1997). There are also examples of how parts of the disability movement that have tried to reclaim the term "disability" and thus rid the term of its derogatory connotations, that mostly are related to the medicalisation of the word and the implication that there is something wrong with bodies with disabilities (Devlin & Pothier 2006). Some people with differing abilities have claimed the overall identity term "disabled people", and in so doing "name the oppression under which they live, declare solidarity with others similarly oppressed, and set themselves in opposition to it" (Baynton 2008: 296). However this reclaiming process has not been as successful as that of queer, Black or *blatte*. This may be because the view of disability is so imbued with negative images of flaws and sickness, that there exist very few non-oppressive ways to think about disability (Garland-Thomson 2002). The reclaiming process may simply be harder for those trying to claim an identity for which society and culture offers "profound disincentives and few rewards to identifying as" (ibid.: 22). Deaf people have also reconstructed the Deaf identity "from deaf to Deaf, that is, from a pathological state of hearing loss to the cultural identity of a linguistic minority" (Bauman 2008: 1). The difference lies not only in a capitalised letter, but rather that the former term denotes medicalisation while the latter denotes culture, community and an empowered identity (ibid.). Reclaiming of identities is not only about words, but also about demanding the

right to be perceived in a way that correspond with a group's own perception of themselves. Thus, the reconstructing of Deaf identity from deaf to Deaf is not just about upper case and lower case letters, but it is about the right to be perceived of as a "group of people with a distinct cultural identity, one that has its own language(s), its own beliefs and its own values" (Hickey 2006: 38).

This section has discussed collective organising and reclaiming of identities as resistance strategies. Next I will discuss marginalising acts and obstacles.

5.5 Marginalisation and Obstacles

As discussed in the theoretical section, questions of disability is not so much about bodily limitations as it is about norms, values, and power, as well as political will (or rather, lack of political will) (Devlin & Pothier 2006). Answering the question whether she believes that women with disabilities hold a marginalised position in society Birgitta A. says:

> I wish I could say it's not like that! But looking at reality, it really is...
> I mean, this whole accessibility debate, which affects both women and men in the society, where we see that the profits of companies are more important than extended accessibility for people with disabilities, then yes sure, that is marginalisation! Then you have marginalised both women and men with disabilities! *Birgitta A. - FQ.*

She refers to the current debate around the proposition that inaccessibility should be considered discrimination, which is something that large parts of the disability rights movement have fought for during several years (dhr.se/tisdagsaktionen), and which reinforces the statement above, that disability is more about (lack of) political will than bodily limitations. In June 2014 a proposition regarding that inaccessibility would be classified as discrimination was passed (Riksdagens

protokoll 2013). However the proposition has been heavily criticised for its exception that states that the law does not apply to companies with less than ten employees (see for example: Svenska Dagbladet 2014; see also Riksdagens protokoll 2013). Birgitta A. considers the weak law a marginalising act performed by politicians, because it in her view prioritises companies over people with disabilities. As noted earlier, Eduards argues that women's collective demands often are seen as special interests, and I suggest that it is equally true for the demands made by persons with differing abilities or other minority groups. Demands made by a non-normative group are easily categorised as special interests. Eduards also argues that women's demands are more likely to be met when the effects benefit everyone and not just women (2002). Equally, I argue that persons with differing abilities are more likely to have their demands met when its effects benefit other people as well. For example, arguments for a more physically accessible environment, such as lower curbs and ramps, often tend to be argued for by an ascertainment that it will benefit not only wheelchair users, but also baby strollers, bikes and walking frames. It is as if the argument of greater accessibility for people with differing abilities is not justifiable in its own right.

As discussed earlier, to Eduards resistance is a word that describes the response people who try to effect change face by those in power. It is also in this sense that Birgitta A. mostly use the word. She has experienced resistance in this sense in the form of people questioning the necessity of targeting women's issues, as well as people pretending that the problem she or anyone else tried to call attention to, did not exist. Eduards identify silence or "dismissal without reasons" as one kind of resistance people who struggle for change may face (2002: 13 [my translation]). Silence is indeed one of the most powerful ways to resist a new agenda (Mulinari 2001), and is also identified by Interfem as one form of passive resistance (Nordling Blanco et al. 2011). How does this kind of treatment affect those who try to problematise the current order but are met with the kind of

resistance described above? Since sexist oppression pervade social and institutional structures, women are taught to believe that women are each other's enemies (hooks 1984/2000).

> It is not only men in the direction who sets up those... well obstacles
> I'd say, no it's women too. Women who have come far, but don't care
> about their sisters. *Birgitta A. - FQ.*

Stories of backstabbing women are not uncommon. Nora Räthzel suggests that women thrust the oppression that they have experienced in various forms, onto other women in order to get rid of it. She asks: "How often do we use 'the master's tools' as Audre Lorde has called them, against each other?" (Räthzel 2001: 38). Further, some people who have indeed been subjected to discrimination may be reluctant to name it as discrimination, which often is due to that previous experiences of indignities have been ignored or belittled (de los Reyes & Kamali 2005). For Lena the resistance mainly manifest in that they are sometimes met with suspicion and at times become targets of slander:

> I feel that some people outside of the organisation mistrust us, think
> that we are strange, some people even call this a lesbian group. That's
> very strange to me. All our members are different - surely there might
> be some who are lesbian, and maybe there are some straight people
> too, I don't know. We are a diverse group and I don't know everything
> about everyone, but we are women. *Lena - DVKF.*

5.6 Intersectionality in Organisations

The feminisms that focuses only on sexist oppression obliterates other forms of oppressions that affects the lives of women and persons who do not identify within a gender binary. As already mentioned, the idea that one social dimension; in this case, gender, should be prioritised over others is implausible since

structures of oppressions are interlocked and inseparable (hooks 1984/2000), which Interfem also emphasise (Ganem-Cuenca et al. 2013). This is reflected in the answers of the participants as well, as several of them recognise that structures of oppression and power structures are about many social dimensions.

> It is so much else too, not just the disability and the sex. It's ethnicity, class and whether you have a job or not, your family, the status of your family, I mean it's so incredibly much else around that come into play too. [...] And class, I think, the class society. That which some people claim doesn't exist. But I believe it clearly exist. That has a tremendous influence as well. *Birgitta A. - FQ.*

All the participants except for one expressed knowledge about intersectionality as a theory, but state that they apply it to varying degrees within their organisational work. Birgitta A. considers the concept important but feels that FQ ought to implement it in their work more than they currently do. Interfem apply an intersectional perspective on their work to a high degree, which will be discussed shortly. They also places emphasis on class, just as Birgitta A., in the quote above, and state that the working class of today is mainly constituted by women who may be racialised, trans persons, as well as some men who may be racialised (Nordling Blanco 2011). The work of RFSL is based on an outspoken intersectional perspective, even though, as Emelie Mire explains, there are people within the organisations who think that RFSL and RFSL Youth should focus exclusively on LGBTQ-issues. But Emelie Mire explains that according to their view that would be impossible, since excluding parts of ones identity is neither feasible nor desirable. RFSL's statement of principles states that:

> RFSL should be an inclusive organisation that actively work against norms within the organisation that may have an excluding effect on people who belong to the target group [...] Perspectives about gender, whiteness privileges, and sexuality, must be highlighted and the

connection between them made visible (RFSL 2012: section 1 & 2.5 [my translation]).

This implies an understanding that most people have intersecting identities. Recognising that there are norms who may have an excluding effect on people even if they belong to their target group, resists that either/or proposition which Crenshaw claimed relegates identities of marginalised people "to a location that resists telling" (Crenshaw 1994: 94). Emelie Mire recognises that from an intersectional perspective, the whiteness of the organisation, as well as of civil society at large, is problematic. RFSL's statement of principles also recognises that whiteness is a strong norm in the society which privileges people who are perceived of as Swedish and Western, over people who are not (RFSL 2012: section 2.5). The statement of principles, along with Emelie Mire's recognition of the problematics of the whiteness within the organisation, reflects an awareness and understanding of the intersectional base, but it also illustrates that gaining a critical awareness may be easier than to practically implementing it. Interfem also base their organising in an intersectional perspective which is evident in their statues:

> The purpose of the association is to raise awareness and knowledge, both among its members as well as in the society, about racism and sexism and how these interact with each other as well as with other forms of discrimination, oppression, and power relations in society (2§ *Ändamål* [my translation]*).

It is also reflected in Birgitta V. L.'s answer to a question about privilege:

> Just as within society at large, we have members with varying class background, functionality and sexuality, as well as other things that influences when we think about power and privileges. *Birgitta V. L. - Interfem.*

She asserts that they talk about privileges within the organisation, as well as of the importance of making these aspects visible. RFSL also acknowledge that they as an organisation are not unaffected by norms and power structures that exist in society at large, for example, the racism that is displayed there is just as likely to be displayed in the LGBT community as well (RFSL 2005). They, as an organisation, are equally affected by power structures and assigned privileges (RFSL 2012).

All the participants have a leader position in some way within their organisation. This means that even if they are active within and/or identify with a minority group that has a subordinated position in society as a whole, within their minority group they have a privileged position. By pointing this out I want to make it clear that identities as well as structures of discrimination and oppression are not fixed entities, but rather dynamic and constant processes that may differ from situation to situation. This is why an intersectional analysis must be contextual as well as situated in a historical context (de los Reyes & Mulinari 2005). An intersectional perspective recognises that social categories do not exist in isolation from each other, and structures of oppression are interwoven in each other (Mohanty 2003), which is reflected in several of the interviewees' answers. This awareness is not always as great in other organisations, as Birgitta A. explains:

> When I'm talking about these issues [gender equality issues] within DHR, which is an organisations for persons with reduced mobility, and people say: but those aren't special issues? Then I say: I understand that you think so, and that's why there are no accessible gynaecology chairs! But there are accessible dental chairs! [...] Then they get something to think about. That that's how it is, and it's so substantial. A man doesn't need a gynaecology chair. *Birgitta A. - FQ.*

This illustrates not only how the social organisation of society is structured around able-bodied norms, which excludes people who do not fit into these norms, as discussed by Devlin and Pothier (2006) but also that the universal, generic perception of a person with a disability, is a man with a disability. It is accepted that some people who visit a dentist may need different kinds of dental chairs, but it is not as apprehensible that people who visit a gynaecologist may need different kinds of gynaecology chairs. This reflects both that women's and minority groups' demands are seen as special interests, and also that women with disabilities often are stereotyped as asexual and unfit to reproduce (Garland-Thomson 2002). Birigitta A.'s quote exemplifies how interests of persons with intersectional identities are marginalised within majority discourses (Crenshaw 1994). Even if DHR as a disability organisation generally would not be considered as holders of the majority discourse, they can be considered as such in this context, in relation to women with disabilities. And as such, they fail to see how gender issues are as much accessibility issues as anything else. Why then do accessible gynaecology chairs not seem to be something that have generated attention from majority women's organisations? Why do feminists not recognise disability "in their litanies of identities that inflect the category of woman" (Garland-Thomson 2002: 2)? Probably, I would argue, because disability is seen as a special interests, just as gender are seen as a special interest in mixed-genders organisations. From a medical model on disability the above quote would be explained and discussed with reference to that the problem lies in the bodies who cannot utilise the gynaecology chairs, thus becoming in the medical gaze simply "'interesting conditions'" (Devlin & Pothier 2006: 7). Critical Disability Theory, on the other hand, would situate the quote in a "context of rights and exclusions" (Garland-Thomson 2005: 1558), which is also what Birgitta A. does. Placing it in such a context relates the issue to that of citizenship as "a *practice that locates individuals in the larger community*" (Devlin & Pothier 2006: 1*f*

[italics in original]). As such it poses questions of who belongs to the community and who is marginalised (ibid.: 2).

5.7 Belonging on the Organisational Spectrum

As discussed earlier, minority groups can reclaim identities, but identities also can claim people. Identities are "ascribed, achieved, and acquired" (Garland-Thomson 2002: 3). I have discussed the three in different forms throughout the thesis, but will now discuss what happens when an achieved or acquired identity do not coincide with an ascribed identity. I believe this is what happens with the identity of many Deaf people; many of them have achieved and acquired an identity as Deaf and with this they mean a linguistic and cultural belonging. Society, on the other hand, as a whole, generally ascribe the label disabled to Deaf people, and with this they mean that they have a sensory impairment which makes them flawed and lacking (Baynton 2008). It is also on these grounds that Deaf people reject the label, since they strongly oppose the idea that they are lacking, and would be in need of fixing (Geertz 2008, see also Lane 2008). This tension and ambivalence is evident in Lena's comment regarding DVKF's membership in FQ (DVKF is a member organisation of FQ):

> Yes, we are members in FQ. But sometimes I feel that that is somewhat different, because for us it is just about language... It is not about wheelchairs, ramps or... For us it is about language. So I feel that's different... *Lena - DVKF.*

Harlan Lane is also opposed to that Deaf people should assume the disability label. However, as shown by Douglas Baynton, when Deaf people reject the disability label, it is generally the medical model that they reject (Baynton 2008). The rejection of the medical model is wholly reasonable, since it is medical

science and the dominant hearing society that have deprived Deaf people of their language and culture, both historically and contemporary (Geertz 2008; Lane 2008). But when Deaf people reject the disability label, they miss that they are rejecting the medical model, which is exactly what disability studies scholars as well as disability rights activists reject as well (Baynton 2008). Lane argues that because there are people within the disability rights movement who embrace the disability-label, Deaf people should reject it because they do not consider themselves impaired (Lane 2008). But the fact that there are people who claim the disability label do not mean that they claim an impairment, rather it is a way to reclaim an identity, and a way to "name the oppression under which they live" (Baynton 2008: 298), much as the Deaf world did with the word deaf, as well as queer and *blatte*, as discussed under section 5.4. Further Lane argues that people within the disability rights movement are are ambivalent regarding their disability, valuing it both positively and negatively (2008), while the Deaf world are not ambivalent regarding their being Deaf, rather they "think it is a fine thing to be Deaf and favor more of it" (Lane 2008: 285). But again, critical disability theory is not ambivalent, its standpoint is clear: It is not bodies labeled as disabled that are in need of fixing, rather it is society, attitudes and stereotypes that need to change (Rieser 2006). When Deaf people reject the disability label with the argument that *they* are not in need of fixing, they also perpetuate the medicalised idea that *some* bodies are in need of fixing. Lane claims that if Deaf people embrace the disability label, that legitimises that they become targets of normalising processes which aim to reduce human variation. It is indeed important to make visible how normalising processes, legitimised by the medical perspective, aim to reduce human variation, including reducing the births of Deaf children as well as changing Deaf children through surgery "so that the child is, to whatever extent possible, a little more like a hearing child" (Lane 2008: 288). But opposing the disability label on these grounds, obscures that technologies of normalisation is not something that has been imposed only on Deaf people, but on

a majority of people with differing abilities, and that the disability rights movement oppose this just as much as Deaf people do, since many of them, just as Deaf people, value their existence precisely as they are and have no desire to change (Baynton 2008). Opting out of, and rejecting technologies of normalisation only for Deaf people but not for others, has the effect of legitimising the existence of these technologies for other people, such as people with differing abilities, instead of questioning them and the oppressive system they are built on, as a whole.

5.8 Civil Society and Feminism

I will now turn to the question of compatibility between feminism and civil society. The theoretical body on civil society tend to focus on organisations, not on the individuals that make up civil society. Within the literature, civil society is often portrayed as a single actor, or at least a monolith of actors, that are united and speaks with one voice (Howell 2005). Within feminist theory, on the other hand, intersectional feminists have criticised hegemonic feminists' attempts to speak for an undefined entity of "women". They emphasise that there is not merely one way to be women, or feminists (Ramazanoglu & Holland 2002). This means that any attempt to state what an undefined entity of 'civil society' wants, runs the risk of ignoring minority groups. Treating all women-identified persons as a monolith, expecting all women's organisations to organise similarly and around the same issues, obliterates the many and diverse ways in which women organise (Howell 2005). Hooks states that "white women who dominate feminist discourse today rarely question whether or not their perspective on women's reality is true to the lived experiences of women as a collective group" (1984/2000: 3). And in addition I would like to suggest that mainstream feminists seldom consider minority women's experiences generalizable to a larger majority group. Hegemonic feminism is thus not only about what issues are considered relevant for feminists, as discussed in the introduction of this thesis,

but it is also about which feminists should be concerned with which issues, and how (Eduards 2002; de los Reyes & Mulinari 2005). As discussed in the theoretical section, there has been a perception, verging on demand, within hegemonic feminism that gender should be the prioritised dimension for feminist analysis over all other dimensions (hooks 1984/2000). This results in that majority feminists sometimes fail to take into account the demands coming from feminists who diverge from the norm of who should and can be a "real" feminist. In the following quote Birgitta A. describes a situation in which she attended a meeting arranged by *Sveriges kvinnolobby* (The Swedish Women's Lobby), which is an umbrella organisation for women's organisations in Sweden. During the meeting it was agreed that they would write a joint statement targeting the issue of equal pay for women and men. Birgitta was appointed to the group who would write the statement, due to her acknowledged writing proficiency.

> But then one woman said: Although, this isn't really about disability.
> "You don't say?" I answered. Everyone else started laughing and so
> that conversation fell off . *Birgitta A. - FQ.*

Because of Birgitta A.'s status as "person with disability", the woman at the meeting doubted her feminist priorities, perhaps fearing that she would prioritise disability over gender in the joint statement, thus diverging from hegemonic feminism's implicit demand that gender always should be posited as the most significant category of analysis, as discussed earlier. Interfem discuss this scenario as well in one of their publications, but in relation to ethnicity (Nordling Blanco 2011). They state that when a context that previously has been completely white, are supplemented with a non-white anti-racist person, there may be outspoken concerns about a perceived risk that the "ethnicity-perspective" will become dominant (ibid.: 58 [my translation]). What this actually shows is that the whiteness position previously have been thought of as objective and neutral (ibid.), just as civil society research tend to assume an ostensibly objective and

neutral position in relation to gender. Civil society research (or other research) that employ a gender perspective thus runs the risk of being categorised as subjective research, because it deviates from the assumed unmarked and neutral positions (see also: Haraway 1988). Applying the same analysis as Interfem did, to the situation experienced by Birgitta A., as described in the quote above, it is possible to draw the conclusion that the objecting woman feared a similar dominance of a "disability-perspective", which indicates that ablebodiedness have held the objective and unmarked position, and that this have not been problematised. An unmarked position is also a hegemonic position, and it is this which creates and recreates positions and relations of power, as well as social markers of belonging in terms of "us" and "them" (de los Reyes & Mulinari 2005).

> Yes that was about other issues [than disability]. But of course we [women with disabilities] should be represented, after all we want higher pay too! *Birgitta A. - FQ.*

This is an example of how power relations are not the result of static structures, but rather they are actively created and sustained, in interactions and relations between people (de los Reyes & Mulinari 2005). By linking the notion of "woman" to the notion of "ablebodiedness" the woman at the meeting reproduced the social markers of belonging that categorised her as "us" and Birgitta A. as "them". Interfem states that sorting people into groups of "us" and "them" is essentially about power, where the "us" are the ones who have the power to define who belongs to "us" and who belongs to "them" (Ganem-Cuenca et al. 2013). Applying an intersectional perspective instead enables a critical questioning of which practices of exclusion versus inclusion that are at work (de los Reyes & Kamali 2005). Such an understanding would thus have the effect of relocating Birgitta A's lived experiences from the margins of feminist analysis into the centre of a power analysis.

As discussed in the theoretical section, much civil society research confine women to the private sphere, and then go on to focus solely on the public sphere, where the state-civil society dichotomy is found. But as Howell states, leaving the private sphere, where the family is found, out of analysis is incompatible with feminist theory (2005). Much feminist theory maintain that this division is flawed in itself, and that the two spheres cannot be divided (Eto 2012). Women who are active within civil society usually do not separate the public from the private sphere, but rather interweave the two spheres (Howell 2005), which is also evident in several of the participants answers:

> I do nothing that's not politics! Even when I cook I'm political!
> *Birgitta A. - FQ.*

It is clear from the quote that the very thought that the private sphere should be located outside of politics is unthinkable for her. The other participants expressed a similar sense of inseparability between the personal self and the political self. Such a theoretical division becomes absurd when there exists no such division in their own lives. A feminist analysis of civil society is thus much more likely to include the family, simply because from this perspective the family, and the private sphere, is interconnected with the public sphere, so excluding it from the analysis simply makes no sense (Phillips 2002). This approach can be traced back to the 1970's feminist slogan "the personal is political" (Eduards 2002; see also hooks 1984/2000). Even if the private sphere would be included in civil society, there is still a risk that the private-public dichotomy would remain which may result in that local and everyday issues are considered "little" democracy while national and global issues are considered "large" democracy (Siim 1999: 85 [my translation]). Another problem with gender-blind neutrality is that issues such as women's organising and "the gendered structure of civil society" (Howell 2005: 242) has not been addressed, probably because in a "universal" perspective gender becomes a special interest and as such, un-universal.

The organisations represented in this thesis is only some of the many minority groups that exists. That civil society should be "a place where women are not" (Phillips 2002: 72) is thus not correct. Perhaps it is more true to say that civil society research is a place where women are not.

6 Conclusion

The starting point of this thesis was that minority women and other minority groups organise in order to challenge both patriarchy as well as hegemonic feminism. I have examined how belonging to a group where sharing and confirming of experiences takes place, creates opportunities to retake the power to construct one's identity. The organising by the organisations analysed in this thesis are based on collective separate interests. Separatism as an organising strategy creates safe spaces for the members, even if it can be provocative for non-members. Separate organising also highlights questions of power and power relations. Organising separately enable the organisations to claim the power to define what is deemed as relevant issues for the organisations, because as shown in this thesis, experiences of minority groups are seldom considered relevant or generalizable to a larger group. I conclude that collective organising in minority groups, sometimes based on separatism as organising strategy, is a way to own the feminist movement, or at least a part of it, as well as create a space for oneself within the civil society sphere. When minority groups who generally are underrepresented in majority society take control over the agenda setting, and claim a space for themselves within civil society, that visiblises, questions, and challenges the hegemonic power positions. Therefor collective organising in minority groups may be provocative and perceived of as a threat, especially if the organising is based on separatism. The very fact that many of these women face resistance from other people or groups, is also a proof that their demands and activities actually have capacity to lead to societal change, else it would not be perceived of as threatening. The participants spoke of experiences of being met with silence, dismissal, ridiculing and opposition. That their organising evokes such reactions is to me a sign that they are performing acts of resistance; they are

resisting power relations and structures of inequality. However, some participants were reluctant to call their organising as acts of resistance, for fear of being caught in an oppositional position, when what they wished for was development and cooperation. It is possible that Maud Eduards' term *motmakt* (counterpower) (2002) would resonate better with them.

Some of the participants spoke of being questioned for organising the way they do, that is, in minority groups based on separate interests. I believe this is in part because collective separate organising makes power relations visible, power relations that hitherto may have been invisible and thus unquestioned. I also believe it has to do with a notion that some oppressions are more important than others and need to be tended to first. Such an un-intersectional approach causes organisations to focus exclusively on one oppression, and thus claims for attention to other oppressive structures are perceived as demands that threatens to shift the focus away. Applying an intersectional perspective would enable the understanding that identities are not excluding each other but rather mutually constitutive of power relations and structures of inequality. It would enable them to focus on more than one structural inequality at a time, more than one power relation at a time. It would also relocate some lived experiences from the margins of feminist analysis to the centre of an analysis of power and privilege. It is also important to emphasise that discussions of power and privilege is as important in minority groups as within society at large, since minority groups are not unaffected by societal norms.

I have also discussed how civil society research in many instances can be problematic from a feminist perspective, especially if it ignores the private sphere and with it, the family. As such, civil society research that focuses exclusively on the public sphere is flawed. To the participants in this thesis there are no clear cut borders between the public and the private spheres, and their activism and political standpoints are unseparable from the rest of their lived realities: "I do nothing that's not politics" Birgitta A. said. The criticisms directed

toward civil society for being built on patriarchal values have relevance, but as shown in this thesis, women, trans* persons and non-binary identified people constitute a growing and active part of civil society. Even if civil society research have been slow to accommodate these groups, their existence and presence are real. Since civil society is constituted by the people who are active within it, any civil society research of relevance need to include all parts of civil society. In addition to that, any analysis that do not take into account the effects of power relations and structures of inequalities will have missed out on important and highly relevant parts. There are many possibilities for further research that wish to focus on civil society from an intersectional perspective. Another suggestion for further research is to analyse internal relations and activities in depth, of the organisations included in this thesis (or other organisations), perhaps in the form of an ethnography.

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8 Appendix A: Interview Guide

• What kind of activities do your organisation have?

• Is your focus on cultural, social or political activities?

• Are you a feminist organisation?

• Who may become a member?

• May people who are not part of your target group become members? Why/Why not?

• Who is electable to the board?

• What are the benefits with organising the way you do?

• Which role do allies have for your organisation?

• Which organisations do you prefer to seek cooperation or alliances with?

• How do you experience the attitudes from other civil society organisations? Support or opposition?

• Do you think that organising can be seen as an act of resistance?

• How do you view the future for your organisation - both on short and long term?

• Do you see the dissolution of your organisation as a goal in itself?

• Do you consider yourself as part of a minority?

• Do you think that you and other members in your organisation are part of a marginalised group in society?

• Do you reflect around privileges, for example in relation to other members in the organisation?

• Do you consider yourself an activist?

• Can you think of a specific event that has been specifically favourable or to a disadvantage to you as an organisation, both within the organisation or in society at large?

• Are you familiar with the concept intersectionality? Is it something that you apply within you organisation?

• Is there anything you would like to add?

9 Appendix B: Index

Accessibility	Ethnicity	Minority
Activism	Family & parenthood	Norms
Allies	FQ - Forum Women and disability in Sweden	Obstacles
Anti-racism	Hegemonic feminism	Organising
Attitudes	Identity	Patriarchy
Awareness	Intersectionality	People who may be racialised
Class	Language	Prejudices
Cooperation	Leadership	Privilege
Deaf association	LGBTQ	Power
Deaf schools	Local groups	Politics
Disability and LGBTQ	Marginalisation	Queer
Disability organisations	Master suppression techniques	Racism
DVKF - Deaf Women's Association in Stockholm	Members	Resistance
Economy	Men	RFSL - The national association for the rights of homosexuals, bisexuals, transgender persons and queers

The Sweden Finnish Women's Forum
Trailblazers
Transpersons
Self esteem
Separatism
Sexism
Sisterhood
Social/Medical model of disability
Strategies
Structures
Support
Violence against women
Women with disabilities
Women's associations
Women's shelter