

Gender trouble at the universities in late nineteenth-century Sweden

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At the start of 1893 there was an outcry in the women's Student Union in Uppsala. The reason was the attack directed at the newly organised women students by one of their male fellow students, who as far as one can judge found their presence in the University annoying. He had written a newspaper article claiming that the conduct of the women students at Uppsala left much to be desired. The Union's president strongly denied the allegation that the students were in any way guilty of improper behaviour.¹ In support she could point to 'close on twenty ordinary and pro tem professors from the law, medicine, and philosophy faculties', who at her request had sent a protest to the German newspaper that had published the offending article.² The signatories stated that 'for several years they had had the opportunity to observe the young ladies studying here and to observe their conduct both within and outside the university' and that at no time had they had any 'reason to censure' the women students.³ The protest quickly found its way into the Swedish women's-rights movement press when its leaders contacted the University's Rector asking for his response.⁴ Why?

To answer this question, I believe one must focus on the religious framework that prevailed at the time when women first entered Nordic academe. In this way one may lay bare the ideological motives that determined the stance taken by society's leaders for or against the entry of women into the university world.⁵

¹Long afterwards, the attack on the women students' morals continued to incense the president of the Uppsala female Students' Union, Lydia Wahlström. In an interview shortly before her death in 1954 she remarked: 'Naturally we women students were under the microscope, and we only needed to sit in Gillet drinking a glass of wine with our male contemporaries for it to be gossiped about all round Uppsala.' *Morgontidningen* 25 March 1954. See also Lydia Wahlström, *Trotsig och försagd. Mitt livs minnen*, (Stockholm: 1949), p. 88 ff.

²The president of the Uppsala Students' Union, Nathan Söderblom, also wrote to defend the women students in the journal *Fyris*. *Fyris* 1 and 8 February 1893,

³ For the correspondence about the article, see for example Nathan Söderblom to Lydia Wahlström 20 and 29 January 1893; and Lydia Wahlström to Nathan Söderblom 24 January 1893. Uppsala Universitets Bibliotek (hereafter UUB) Nathan Söderbloms brevsamling. See also Wahlström 1949, p. 90 f.

⁴ *Dagny. Tidskrift för sociala och litterära intressen. Utgifven af Fredrika-Bremer-Förbundet*, 1893, p. 64. The leading organisation of the women's movement, Fredrika-Bremer-förbundet, contacted Prof. P.A. Geijer on the matter, who in turn wrote to the Student Union's president, Nathan Söderblom. The letter shows the concern on the part of the university about the turn of events. P.A. Geijer to Nathan Söderblom 17 February 1893. UUB Nathan Söderbloms brevsamling.

⁵ For the Nordic states and churches in the nineteenth century, see for example Dag Thorkildsen, 'Religious identity and Nordic identity', and Henrik Stenius, 'The good life is a life of conformity: the impact of Lutheran tradition on Nordic political culture, both in Øystein Sørensen & Bo Stråth (eds), *The cultural construction of Norden*, (Oslo, Stockholm, Copenhagen, Oxford, Boston: Scandinavian University Press 1997). For the religious discourse within the Norwegian debate on public life see Tarald Rasmussen, 'Kristelig og borgerlig offentlighet i

The religious framework

Ever since the Reformation, the Lutheran established church - and this applies to all Nordic countries - played a leading role as the representative of the state's ideological views.⁶ Luther's construction of society must be seen as an expression of an agrarian world view, and naturally enough took its departure point in a static peasant society; in Luther's conceptualisation of the state, the terms *ecclesia* (church), *politia* (the state) and *oeconomia* (the household) were to be the fundamental principles.⁷ From cradle to grave, each individual was enfolded in a patriarchal structure, at the heart of which lay the household, the kernel of the state. The result was that both married and single women lived out their lives within households that, under ideal conditions, provided them with both employment and livelihood. Luther rejected celibacy, and considered marriage the necessary condition for existence of society. A woman's calling was to act within the household as spouse, mother, and housewife.

The Biblical passages that speak of God's punishment of mankind at the Fall were to serve as Luther's guiding principle in interpreting the mutual relationship between man and woman. Eve the matriarch, the mother of all women, had defied God's commandment by listening to the serpent; the chaos she created in so doing doomed her to subordination ever after.⁸ Eve's lack of understanding was for Luther the reason for her fall: 'But she did not suspect that the Devil could be there, and therein rested her weakness and short-sightedness. Eve was not wise, like Adam.'⁹ Therefore it followed that it was impossible for a woman to lay claim to wisdom: 'No gown or costume becomes a wife or maiden so ill as the desire to be wise', stated

Norge på 1800-tallet', in Tarald Rasmussen & Trygve Wyller (eds), *Kristelig og borgerlig offentlighet i Norge*, (Oslo: Norges forskningsråds program for Kultur- og tradisjonsformidlende forsknings skriftserie nr. 53, 1996).

⁶ As a result of the pressure of wider social change, religious legislation entered a phase that would lead ultimately to a secularised state. Gradually the Swedish Lutheran unitary state embodied in the Church Law of 1686 loosened its grip. 1858 saw the revocation of the Conventicle Act that since 1726 had forbidden individual gatherings in the absence of a priest. As a result of the Nonconformist Acts of 1860 and 1873, 'Swedish' and 'Lutheran' ceased to be synonymous. If they obtained specific permission from the king, Swedish citizens were allowed to form non-Lutheran congregations, and they were also allowed to join other denominations permitted by the state. It was only with the Religious Freedom Act of 1951 that Swedish citizens had the right to abstain from joining a Christian church. In 2000 the Church of Sweden was disestablished.

⁷ Gustaf Wingren, *Luthers lära om kallelsten*, (Lund: Gleerup, 1942), p. 34 f. In English, *The Christian's calling. Luther on vocation*, translated by Carl C. Rasmussen, (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1958).

⁸ Jane Dempsey Douglass, 'The image of God in women as seen by Luther and Calvin', in Kari Elisabeth Børresen (ed.), *The image of God. Gender models in Judaeo-Christian tradition*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), pp. 236-257. Dempsey Douglass stresses that for Luther, the Fall transformed 'the whole human situation'. Eve was severely punished, but Adam's existence was equally changed: 'He must contend with raging lust. His duty to support and govern his family as well as to rule over the world is a great burden' (p. 247).

⁹ Martin Luther, *Doctor Martin Luthers Beträktelser öfwer de Första Menniskornas Lefnad. (I Mos. 2-10 kap.) Till underwisning och uppbyggelse för Evangeliska Christna, utgifwen af Carl Georg Hermes, Evangelisk predikant i Kroppendorf wid Magdeburg*, (Falun: 1860), p. 23.

Luther.¹⁰ Women's intellectual weakness legitimised the ultimate authority of men, an authority that even extended to the household. Women may speak with authority - 'as mistresses' - when they express themselves on household matters, wrote Luther, but it was different when they express themselves on the condition of the state. Admittedly they do not lack the language, but their talk is 'overwhelmingly childish, muddleheaded, and confused', he wrote, concluding that 'woman is created for keep the household; the man for affairs of state, wordly rule, war, and the courtroom, to uphold and maintain them'.¹¹ For Luther, man and woman had been accorded different roles at the Creation, and it was the man, not the women, who should appear in the role of *persona publica*.¹²

Women's roles altered

Swedish society underwent a tremendous transformation during the nineteenth century. The structure of the household was shattered, and an increasingly industrial society left individuals to shift for themselves. Seen from a gender perspective, these changes meant that a significant number of women had difficulties supporting themselves, which in turn gave rise to ideological confusion amongst the leading members of society, perplexed as they were by the new economic circumstances. There was a rush to institute reforms that aimed to broaden the range of employment open to women.

¹⁰ Martin Luther, *Dokt. Martin Luthers Bordssamtal eller Colloquia i urval utgifna och öfversatta af O. A. Stridsberg*, (Stockholm: 1877), p. 117.

¹¹ Martin Luther, *Doctor Martin Luthers Råd till Föräldrar och Uppfostrare jemte ett Tillägg för Äkta Makar. En kostelig Gåfva för hwarje Hus. Af J. G. Kelber*, (Stockholm: 1852), p. 97.

¹² For the Reformation and gender construction see for example Lyndal Roper, *The holy household: women and morals in Reformation Augsburg*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), p. 2. Roper is one of those to argue that the Reformation if anything gave greater legitimacy to the idea of subordination. Compare Steven Ozment, *When fathers ruled: family life in Reformation Europe*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1983), where he suggests that the Reformation's focus on marriage provided the opportunity for women to adopt a strong role. The intermediate stance is taken by Merry E. Wiesner, *Women and gender in early modern Europe*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), in the chapter 'Religion'. See also Merry E. Wiesner, 'Spinning out capital: women's work in the early modern economy', and William Monter, 'Protestant wives, Catholic saints, and the Devil's handmaid: women in the age of Renaissance', both in Renate Bridenthal, Claudia Koonz & Susan Stuard (eds), *Becoming visible: women in European history*, (Boston: Cop., 1987). One scholar to argue that the Protestant tradition was favourable to the liberation process of the nineteenth century is the sociologist Olive Banks. In *Faces of feminism: a study of feminism as a social movement*, (Oxford: M. Robertson, 1981), she identifies the Evangelical Christian women's efforts as one of the three elements in the emancipation process; the second element was the set of ideas that emanated from the French Revolution, and the third was rooted in socialist ideology. Even if at the middle of the nineteenth century relations between the sexes were still marked by inequality - and the assumptions about what was fitting within the various spheres were still intact - Banks contends that it was at this point that the Protestant women intensified their call for emancipation. 'The doctrine of separate spheres', according to Banks, 'was challenged by feminists who claimed for women the right to break out of both their confinement to domesticity and their legal and political subordination to man.' See also Susan Hill Lindley, *'You have slept out of your place': a history of women and religion in America*, (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster Knox Press, 1996), p. 366. Like Banks, Hill Lindley only briefly touches on the Lutheran tradition. For an overview of the relationship between emancipation and theology see Susan A. Ross,

This was the debate into which the pioneers of the women's movement launched themselves. For the first generation of Swedish feminists, Christianity was the guarantee of women's liberation.¹³ However, down the ages a patriarchal interpretation of the Bible had obscured its liberating message.¹⁴ The conviction that Christianity bore within it the seed of the liberation of all women made it impossible for the pioneers to ignore the religious framework of the day; above all, they were intent on razing the theological construction of woman as seductress and temptress. In the first instance, women should not be seen as gendered beings, with sexual yet non-reproductive properties. An important element in the attack on this unsatisfactory gender role was the struggle to persuade society that women should be understood as intellectual beings, on an equal footing with men. This met with great resistance from the leading lights of society who maintained that the Biblical passages dealing with female subordination - including in an intellectual sense - must be interpreted literally. Counting in the women's favour, however, were a number of theologians who during the nineteenth century came to argue that the Bible, in common with all literature, should be studied using historical-critical methods.¹⁵ By arguing for an interpretation of the Bible that was less literal, it was possible to circle around those individual passages that gave legitimacy to a misogynist gender ordering.

When the issue of further education for women was taken up in the second half of the century, an intricate problem emerged that not merely derive from Luther's mistrust of woman's intellect, and thus his conviction of her inability to adopt the role of *persona publica*; a further obstacle existed in the shape of 'decency'. For nineteenth-century bourgeois society, 'the public man' appeared as a fully respectable person, the role of *persona publica* giving him the unlimited freedom to move in the public arena. The woman's sphere, on the other hand, was

'The women's movement and theology in the twentieth century' in Gregory Baum (ed.), *The twentieth century: a theological overview*, (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1999).

¹³ Inger Hammar, *Emancipation och religion. Den svenska kvinnorörelsens pionjärer i debatt om kvinnans kallelse ca 1860-1900*, (Stockholm: Carlssons förlag, 1999).

¹⁴ For a more detailed analysis of the patriarchal tradition's views on the human condition from Augustine to Luther, see principally Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-talk: towards a feminist theology*, (Boston Massachusetts: SCM Press Ltd, 1993), p. 93). For the views of Augustine and Thomas Aquinas in particular, see also Kari Elisabeth Børresen, *Subordination and equivalence: the nature and role of women in Augustine and Thomas Aquinas*, (Mainz: Matthias-Grünewald Verl., 1995). Even in the nineteenth century, the interpretation of specific Biblical passages and exegesis in general was of interest to the likes of Frances Willard and Elisabeth Cady Stanton; see Carol A. Newsom & Sharon H. Ringe, *The Women's Bible commentary*, (London: SPCK, 1992), and in particular 'Introduction'.

¹⁵ For the appearance of Bible criticism in Sweden, see for example Edvard Rodhe, *Den religiösa liberalismen. Nils Ignell - Viktor Rydberg - Pontus Wikner*, (Uppsala: Svenska kyrkans diakonistyrelsens förlag Stockholm, 1935), p. 230; Erik Petzäll, *Straussdebatten i Sverige. En kyrkohistorisk undersökning*, (Lund: Svenska kyrkans diakonistyrelsens bokförlag Stockholm, 1936); and Karl Gustav Hammar, *Liberalteologi och kyrkopolitik. Kretsen kring Kristendomen och vår tid 1906 - omkr. 1920*, (Lund: CWK Gleerup Bokförlag, 1972).

hedged about with restrictions, and for the majority of women it was still the case that they ran the risk of being suspected of sexual impropriety if they were seen out in the streets and squares under any but the most limited of circumstances.¹⁶ Thus 'the public woman' could be interpreted as equating to the prostitute or fallen woman. The fact that the idea of things 'public' was highly gendered in nineteenth-century Sweden was the greatest stumbling block to the further education of women.

The debate over women's entry into academe

In line with the Lutheran tradition, the Church of Sweden had for centuries taught the basic elements of knowledge to the whole population without differentiating between the sexes. Its aim was to prepare children for membership in the Church once they reached adulthood. Matters were different when it came to the learning that was diffused through the universities; as far as the Church of Sweden was concerned, academic study was intended for the state's future civil servants, and was therefore not open to women.

In their struggle for intellectual liberation, women were to be borne along on the liberal currents of the day. The key to liberalism was the idea of personality that lay at its core, and for those who embraced the liberal approach it struck them as contradictory not to recognise women's status as individuals. During Sweden's last Parliament of four Estates in 1865 to 1866, a heated debate raged over the motion that women be allowed entry to further education and new forms of employment. The discussion reveals that there were widely differing views on this point amongst Sweden's leaders. The favourable attitude towards progress that then prevailed found concrete expression in the report that the Statsutskott, or State Committee, put before Parliament in February 1866. The report opened with a declaration that 'the female half of the human race has not been equipped by the Creator with a lesser capacity for spiritual development and moral refinement than the male.' The Committee proposed amongst other things that women should be given the right to a university education.¹⁷

¹⁶ Lucy Bland, 'Purifying' the Public World: feminist vigilantes in late Victorian England', *Women's History Review* 1:3 (1992), p. 396. Bland argues that towards the end of the nineteenth century the term 'public woman' was 'interchangeable with the terms prostitute, streetwalker and actress' in England. See also Lucy Bland, *Banishing the Beast: English feminism and sexual morality 1885-1914*, (New York: Penguin, 1995), p. 118; Mary P. Ryan, *Women in public: between banners and ballots 1825-1880*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), p. 4 ff; Joan B. Landes, *Women and the public sphere in the age of the French Revolution*, (New York: Ithaca Cornell University Press, 1988), p. 3; and Judith R. Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight: narratives of sexual danger in late-Victorian London*, (London: Virago, 1992), p. 20 ff.

¹⁷ *Bihang till samtliga Riks-Ståndens Protokoll vid Lagtima Riksdagen i Stockholm åren 1865 och 1866. Sjunde Samlingen. Ista Afdelningen. Lag-Utskottets Memorial, Utlåtanden och Betänkanden. N:o 39, p. 8.*

Ranged against this proposal were the orthodox delegates of all four Estates. One MP, for example, stated that women in general were not 'equipped by the Creator with the physical vigour that is necessary to endure prolonged contemplative study, which requires prolonged effort of mind and mental strain'. Every attempt to set oneself above God's Creation was doomed to fail.¹⁸ To support this, he added that women had an innate inner sense that ascribed to men 'a certain superiority'.¹⁹ Another MP announced that he doubted whether society had anything to gain in terms of public decency by women occupying themselves with legal, medical, or philosophical studies instead of tending to the household, and he saw no advantage in 'a women holding charming lectures in philosophy for an entranced audience'.²⁰

Those who defended the proposal were equally convinced. One MP attacked his opponents' argument for being based not only on prudery but also on hypocrisy from the men's side: 'since we must surely be agreed on the matter, gentlemen', he said, 'that wherever there is danger to a woman's honesty, it comes from the man'.²¹ During the animated debate, a handful of MPs spoke enthusiastically in favour of the proposals. One of them brought up the current construction of male and female in intellectual respects: 'Touching the difference between the intelligence of the mind and that of the heart that has been spoken of, and of which the conclusion has been drawn that the instruction of men and women ought to have different ends in mind, I will merely remark that it strikes me as being more natural for human development, above all in youth, to be harmonious and not constituted so that it only educates the faculties of the one at the cost of the other'.²² A fair number of MPs sought the help of the Bible to give weight to their argument, be it for or against the report.²³ For the orthodox, the key question was whether one should forbid women entry to further education for theological reasons. Further, they were deeply concerned that women's appearance in public life would imperil decency.

¹⁸ *Protokoll hållna hos Högloflige Ridderskapet och Adeln, vid Lagtima Riksdagen i Stockholm år 1865-1866. Andra Häftet*, p. 286.

¹⁹ *Protokoll hållna hos Högloflige Ridderskapet och Adeln, vid Lagtima Riksdagen i Stockholm år 1865-1866. Andra Häftet*, p. 284 f.

²⁰ *Protokoll hållna hos Vållofliga Borgareståndet, vid Lagtima Riksdagen i Stockholm åren 1865 och 1866. Andra Bandet*, p. 133.

²¹ *Protokoll hållna hos Vållofliga Borgareståndet, vid Lagtima Riksdagen i Stockholm åren 1865 och 1866. Andra Bandet*, p. 154.

²² *Högvördiga Preste-Ståndets Protocoll vid Lagtima Riksdagen i Stockholm åren 1865 & 1866. Andra Bandet*, p. 206.

²³ *Protokoll hållna hos Högloflige Ridderskapet och Adeln, vid Lagtima Riksdagen i Stockholm år 1865-1866. Andra Häftet*. See for example pp. 295, 300, 305, 309, 310 f., and 321.

The pioneers of emancipation in Sweden protested against such statements; they argued that study would in no way undermine women's modesty or demean their value because, when compared with the ballroom, the lecture hall offered far fewer opportunities for indecent conduct.²⁴ The leaders of the women's movement instead proclaimed that education was part of the struggle for greater decency. If a woman was provided with an education and the means to make a livelihood, she would not be forced into a marriage to find support; herein they saw the chance of progress towards a better society. Once women had been given limited access to university education in 1870, the feminist's leaders considered it necessary to seek to prove that women's education stood to serve the cause of public decency. With their God-given decency, women would exert a good influence over academic life. The dilemma was that even before the first women entered the university world, caricatures of the *studentska* or 'studentess' had gained considerable currency. For the academic pioneers, it was a priority to avoid confirming this distortion.

The myth of the immoral “studentska”

It was Ellen Fries, later to be Sweden's first woman to hold a doctorate in history, who took it upon herself in the early 1880s to refute publicly the prevalent, distorted image of women students, writing an article published in the main mouthpiece of the women's movement, *Tidskrift för hemmet*.²⁵

'There is nothing new under the sun', she began with ill-concealed irony, 'not even women studying at university, although the majority of scoffers will probably see this as one of the many events that are peculiar to this benighted century.' She adduced historical examples, pointing to the fact that women both in classical antiquity and the Renaissance had followed higher studies. It was rumoured, she wrote, 'that the Arabs in Spain did not forbid their daughters access to university teaching.' She commended the present century that had seen the universities throw open their doors to women.²⁶

²⁴ *Tidskrift för hemmet* (hereafter *TfH*) 1866, p. 35 f.

²⁵ For the academic pioneers in Sweden, see Greta Wieselgren, *Den höga tröskeln. Kampen för kvinnans rätt till arbete*, (Lund: Gleerups 1969); Birgitta Odén, 'Forskande kvinnor inom svensk historievetenskap', *Historisk tidskrift* 3 (1980); Ann-Sofie Ohlander, 'En utomordentlig balansakt. Kvinnliga forskarpionjärer i Norden', *Historisk tidskrift* 1 (1987) [1987a]; 'Kvinnliga nordpolsfarare? De första kvinnliga forskarna i Sverige', in *Kvinnliga forskarpionjärer i Norden*, (Stockholm: 1987) [1987b]; 'Kvinnliga äventyrare? De första kvinnorna vid universiteten', *Tvärnitt* 3-4 (1994); Gunilla Strömholm, '1800-talets kvinnliga Uppsalastuderenter', in Bengt Erik Rydén (ed.), *Studenten, Staden och Sanningen. Bilder och essayer. Utgivna med anledning av Uplands Nations 350-årsjubileum*, (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wicksell, 1992); and Tord Rönnholm, *Kunskapens kvinnor. Sekelskiftets studentskor i mötet med den manliga universitetsvärlden*, (Umeå: Inst. för historiska studier, 1999).

²⁶ *TfH* 1881, p. 20 f.

Fries was only too well aware that at the time of writing women students scarcely enjoyed a good reputation: 'If we turn now to the lifestyle of the female students at university, then there is not much to say, and this should be the best judgement that one can make about the same. The female students make little fuss about themselves, and therefore no one makes much fuss of them'.²⁷ She added, however, that in the students' 'fertile imagination' and at fancy-dress balls and entertainments a particular type of woman student flourished who was of less respectable character: 'This type is a 'lively soul', who takes part in the students' pleasures without embarrassment, enjoys good cigars and a full bottle of liquor, who despises her own sex, dresses herself half like a man, and prefers flirtation to study'²⁸ Luckily in reality this *studentska* had never existed, declared Fries, who went on to argue that the scorn and derision evaporated the moment the university world was confronted by the reality of the hard-working woman student.

Fries fumed about the 'theory of overexertion', and denied the suggestion that academic studies could in any way affect the young women's health. On the contrary: 'That industry promotes health and prosperity is something you learn from your catechism', she wrote tartly, and assured her readers that there was not a shred of misdirected eagerness for emancipation behind the diligence one could observe in the women students. Least of all had they 'made themselves into advocates for immature, idle thoughts of emancipation - all they demand is peace and quiet, free from gossip or slander, to follow the studies that they have chosen, and they have succeeded, as we have already said', Fries declared.²⁹

She went on that it could be trying in the extreme to be at lectures surrounded by none but male colleagues. It was hardly surprising if a woman student experienced 'a keen wish to have Aladdin's lamp available', she wrote.³⁰ Even more troublesome was the isolation that was forced upon a woman student during her time at university: 'She does not have the wealth of opportunities that are open to her male comrades, to broaden her views, steady her judgement, and soak up enlightenment of all kinds in daily society with her fellow students. Student life may have its dark side, yet for those that wish it, it can be the most instructive form of intercourse as well as the most pleasant'.³¹ Integration into the male collective was attractive to Fries, but the fact that student life had 'its dark side' served to frustrate the development of

²⁷ *TjH* 1881, p. 27.

²⁸ *TjH* 1881, p. 27.

²⁹ *TjH* 1881, p. 28.

³⁰ *TjH* 1881, p. 28 f.

³¹ *TjH* 1881, p. 30.

a natural social life between the sexes. Despite this, she was very positive about the chances women had to follow academic studies, and she hoped that women would be integrated into the university community as the number of women there rose. As women gained education, their interest in 'the general' would increase, something that in turn would provide opportunities for a less forced intercourse 'between the two sexes', concluded Fries.³²

It would seem that in her article, Fries had set out to raise the standing of women students. For those women who wanted to attain liberation by conquering the academic world, there was every reason to observe the strictest proprieties. Remembering that many saw in higher education for women a threat not only to gender role patterns but also to decency, it was in the women student's interest to adopt the highest standards of morality.

However, as was discussed at the start of this paper, the women students at Uppsala at the start of the 1890s, despite all their precautions, were subject to the accusation of loose living. The issue of women's education and their entry into the academic world appears to have existed in a symbiotic relationship with the issue of public morality and decency. For the leaders of the emancipation movement, it became necessary to tone down the idea that women were gendered beings in the negative sense; it evolved into a struggle to position women as intellectual beings on a par with men. To obtain the learning that was taught by the universities - and that could raise women's status - they were called on partly to challenge the common idea that intelligent reasoning was principally a male characteristic, and partly to destroy the idea of gender roles that denied women the role of *persona publica*. Furthermore, they had to prove that entry into public life would not come at the cost of public decency. This was thus the reason that the women's movement in Sweden protested so quickly, and so forcefully, against the accusations of immoral conduct that at the beginning of the 1890s were levelled against the members of the Uppsala Student's Union.³³

³² *TJH* 1881, p. 31.

³³ In analysing the empirical material, I have found the cultural sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's analytical model useful. Bourdieu proposes that there is a continuous struggle for the right to represent the *doxa* (that which is taught, the indisputable), in a field of contenders that is continuously replenished with new individuals, each with capital and acquired *habitus*, who emerge as heterodox challengers to the established *doxa*. Since women did not have access to the academic 'field', and had no political means, they were forced to join the struggle for emancipation. Their chances of success were thus dependent on those men who held positions of power and were prepared to support them in their struggle. See Pierre Bourdieu, *Kultur och kritik*, (Göteborg: 1992); Donald Broady, 'Enligt konstens alla regler', *Kvinnovetenskaplig tidskrift* 1 (1994); and Toril Moi, 'Att erövra Bourdieu', *Kvinnovetenskaplig tidskrift* 1 (1994).

Conclusion

In examining the gender issues that framed women's first steps towards integration in the academic world, it is the religious discourse of the day that has informed my analysis. The purpose here has been to show that our understanding of history can only be broadened if attention is paid to contemporary theological arguments and debates, thus eliminating the risks inherent in 'religion blind' research.³⁴ Of course, this only applies while the period in question is one when the historical context includes a theological discourse that was a more or less self-evident element in the interpretative horizon of the day. This was still the case in the nineteenth century, when Swedish society was marked by a Lutheran world view, albeit one that had begun to dissolve by the end of the century.

From the Lutheran context came the idea that the role of women was linked to the household. From the sexual view of that same Lutheran context as well as the social debate of the day came the worry that female students could be led to indecent behaviour. Beside these views the medical discourse of the day launched the 'theory of overexertion', that suggested that academic studies could affect the young women's health – all gender trouble that the pioneers had to deal with when entering the academic world.

³⁴ See Inger Hammar, 'Några reflexioner kring 'religionsblind' kvinnoforskning', *Historisk tidskrift* 1 (1998); and Hammar 1999, p. 32 ff. For commentary on my reflections on 'religion blind' women's studies, see Ulla Manns, 'Den religionsblinda kvinnorörelseforskningen - en kommentar till Inger Hammars kritik', *Historisk tidskrift* 2 (1998), p. 197 f; and Hanne Rimmen Nielsen, 'Religionsblindhed. En debat i svensk og nordisk kvindehistorie', *Den jyske historiker* (December 1998), 'Historie Faget - et udsyn'.