

The Impact of Women's Studies



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1. Introduction

Developed in the 1970s, Women's Studies (WS) is an academic field in which students learn about the 'questions, analyses and theories' on women's experiences.¹ In this thesis I will study the experiences of Women's Studies students, graduates and staff to analyse the impact of Women's Studies on their personal lives. As a current WS master student I have experienced how during my training my ideas and understandings of gender, sexuality and ethnicity changed and with this thesis I want to learn more about the experiences of others who study, have studied or are teaching WS. I will study the impact of WS training from these three different perspectives so I can elaborate on the impact of WS over time. While theories on relationships, sexuality, ethnicity and career are studied during WS, it is interesting to analyse the way my interlocutors consider the degrees of the impact on these elements in their own lives. My research question is:

How do students, graduates and staff see the impact of Women's Studies training on their ideas and experiences in relation to career, ethnicity, sexuality and relationships?

To answer this question I will analyse the data I gathered based on the interviews with students, graduates and staff. The interviews are a rich source on the impact of WS training because the experiences and perspectives on relationships, sexuality, ethnicity and career could be directly addressed. The interviews provide me with an in-depth insight into the impact of WS training on a personal level.

Throughout this introductory chapter I will offer three introductions to this thesis. I will start with an introduction of my four specific points of focus: relationships, sexuality, ethnicity and career. I will define these themes and explain how I will address them in my interviews. The existing knowledge on the impact on these themes and their relevance to this research will be dealt with in the chapter *Theoretical Framework*. Then, I will introduce my methodology and will argue why my qualitative approach is the best method to answer my research question. In the third introduction I present my three different groups of interlocutors to explain why I want to study the impact of WS on students, graduates, and staff, and the composition of my sample. At the end of this chapter I offer a preview of the following chapters.

¹ Bates eds., 2005, 5.

Introducing the four themes

Women's Studies (WS) is situated within the Humanities and Social Sciences and therefore research focusses on human ideas and behaviour and society, this enables students to apply their knowledge to their lives. Relationships, sexuality, ethnicity and career are four topics that are often addressed in the curriculum of WS training to understand the lived experiences of different women.² I am interested in ideas and experiences of these four topics to see how participants in WS bridge the offered knowledge in feminist theory to their lives off campus. Previous research concluded that relations, sexuality, ethnicity and career are major pillars in the personal lives of WS participants that were affected by their training. This resembles my own experience and therefore I am interested in elaborating on the degrees of this impact. In the next paragraphs I will elaborate on my definition of the themes and the way I addressed those themes during the interviews.

Career

With the word career I refer to the participation of my interlocutors on the labour market. Although the word career is sometimes associated with the tempo in which people climb the hierarchical job ladder, I am interested in the way my interlocutors refer to pleasure, challenges and vigour in combination with their job positions. I will address their ambitions and motivation. With ambitions I refer to what people want to achieve in their careers, what they desire, and how this is influenced by WS. By motivation I address what causes people to want to join the labour market, what motivates them in their current jobs, and how they connect this to their WS training.

In the conversations with the students the stress will be on their ambitions, as they have little experience with working. With the graduates and staff I will address ambitions and motivations, also contrasting the differences between working within and outside WS. During the interviews I will ask my interlocutors to situate their WS training or job within their career. I will discuss the incentive to work and will elaborate on their choices for a part-time or full-time position. Furthermore, I will address the feminist ideal of working full-time in relation to their own choices.

Ethnicity

When I speak about ethnicity I do not want to divide the human population into biologically different groups because of their bodily appearance.³ Instead I see ethnicity as situational and context-dependent and it signals to me the process by which 'boundaries are created and maintained

2 Bates eds., 2005, 10.

3 Pilcher and Whelehan, 2004, 132.

between ethnic groups'.⁴ Ethnicity refers to your place and location in the world and can be related to various other concepts like 'community, region, language, religion and culture'.⁵ I need to be mindful of my own privileged position and that of my interlocutors as white middle-class feminists. While ethnicity has become an important element of feminist research, I want to study the impact of WS training in regard to ethnicity on the personal lives of my interlocutors.

In the conversations with my interlocutors we will discuss the impact of their training on their ideas and experiences in regard to ethnicity. I will inquire as to the role ethnicity has in their own research or job and the way they consider ethnicity part of an intersectional approach. Additionally I will ask if my interlocutors believe their relationships were impacted by their (possible) different ideas about ethnicity. When interlocutors have ambiguities in their answers I will address them to do right to the complexity of ethnicity as a theme.

Sexuality

In discussing sexuality I am not concerned with defining sexual identities, but I will study the impact on the ideas and experiences of my interlocutors concerning their sexual appetites and behaviors. By deconstructing the labels of sexuality, I want to escape from dichotomous structures and open up new spaces for a range of women's sexual behaviors and desires. I do not consider sexuality a stable part of an identity which can be labelled as homosexual/bisexual/ heterosexual etc. Neither do I want to draw conclusions of causality by connecting the changes in ideas on sexuality of students or graduates to the time line of their WS training. What is of concern to me in this chapter is how the students' views on sexuality in general and their own sexuality changed during and after their studies, and how they relate these to WS.

When I discuss sexuality with the interlocutors, I will first address the way they describe their own sexuality and the possible changes during or after their WS training. I will also speak with them about their general ideas on sexuality and how they deal with the societal structures concerning sexuality. I ask them about the role sexuality has within the discipline and how they deal with labels of sexuality. Finally, I do not want to make a claim on the sexual identities of my interlocutors, but I do want to research their way of dealing with sexual categories and determine whether this can be connected to their WS training.

Relationships

When I speak of relationships, or relations, I refer to the connection and contact between the

4 Pilcher and Whelehan, 2004, 133.

5 Wekker, 2002, 17.

students, graduates and staff to others in their direct surroundings. To study the relations of my interlocutors means to research the way my interlocutors feel and behave towards others and how they connect this to their WS training. I will study the relation of WS students, graduates and staff with people from within and outside the discipline. The relations with persons outside WS concern relations with partners, parents and friends. The relations within WS include the relations among students, between students and staff and among staff.

I will ask my interlocutors how they relate WS to their intimate relationships and the developments in these relationships. Concerning the relation with their parents I will discuss the changes or lack of changes as well as possible conflicts with their parents. In discussing friends with my interlocutors I will ask about the development of friendships during and after the WS training. Further, I will ask my interlocutors about the various responses they receive from people who are not familiar with WS. Finally, I will address the relations within WS and I will speak with the interlocutors about other students, teachers and colleagues.

Introducing my methodology

This research uses a qualitative approach because my research question aims at the studying how WS training has an impact on students, graduates and staff. A qualitative study offers me the opportunity to discuss the different themes into-depth with my interlocutors so that a co-construction will emerge. Since women's experiences are the starting point from which knowledge is built, I have chosen to conduct interviews. This way I can unfold the experiences of students, graduates and staff and my interlocutors can provide me with an 'accurate and authentic understanding' of their lives.⁶ The conversations invite my interlocutors to 'more intimate and private expressions', which are useful to answer my research question.⁷

For this thesis I have chosen a sample of fifteen interlocutors. The fifteen interviews will provide me with a solid ground to make claims about the impact of WS on the lives of students, graduates and staff. The sample of interlocutors is equally divided over the three groups and the interlocutors are randomly selected. From all the names of students, graduates and staff who are connected to the WS programme at the University of Utrecht I draw lots. Some of my interlocutors are familiar to me because of courses I participated in; others I have never met before. At the beginning of the interviews I guarantee my interlocutors anonymity so they could freely express themselves. In my analysis I have replaced their names by randomly selected initials.

6 Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2007, 56.

7 Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2007, 150.

To gain insight into the world of my interlocutors I will be doing semi-structured interviews with a specific interview guide.⁸ Although I have a research agenda, namely discovering the impact of WS on my interlocutors, I do not work with a fixed list of questions. The result is an interview that leaves room for spontaneity on both sides.⁹ However, I do have my list of four topics that I will address throughout the conversation. The way I address these topics is dealt with in the beginning of this chapter.

To analyse the findings from my interview I will use an ethnographical method, a kind of analysis based on coding and often used within qualitative research.¹⁰ In the transcripts I will label the quotes according to my four themes: ethnicity, career, relationships and sexuality. This way of coding is called *thematical analysis*.¹¹ Between the various individuals and the groups I will look for differences and similarities to be able to address the degrees of impact among my interlocutors.

For every theme I will make a word web with one of the themes in the core of the web. A word web is a graphic design I have borrowed from information and communication sciences, where it is used to structure the findings of a brainstorm. With, for example, 'relations' at the core of the web, I can connect the remarks of the different interlocutors as 'spider's threads'. The result is a graphic in which the large amount of data gained from the interviews is organized and the remarks on the four themes are systematically connected. Because of the design a word web creates the opportunity to associate and to think outside linear structures. New intersections in the web will emerge; for example, if 'partner' is often addressed it signals a sub-theme of the impact on relations.

My role as a researcher

In this research I do not want to become a 'modest witness', as Haraway explains the researcher who claims to be a 'legitimate and authorized ventriloquist for the object world'.¹² I want to be aware of my position as a white, Western and middle-class feminist researcher who is limited by her location. My position as an insider in WS offers me the opportunity to produce embodied knowledge and my intersectional approach will include the important intersections which structure power relations. Furthermore, the great variety in the interviews makes it possible to juxtapose and complicate my findings and leave room for ambiguities.

I need to be mindful in my role as researcher of 'power and authority in the interview

8 Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2007, 115.

9 Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2007, 115.

10 Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2007, 213.

11 Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2007, 213.

12 Haraway, 1997, 24.

setting'.¹³ On the one hand my interlocutors consider me an insider, because I am a master student who is participating in the WS programme. This provides me with easy access to my interlocutors, offers common interests and experiences and strengthens the informal character of my interviews. On the other hand I am a researcher who wants to understand their lived experience from an other perspective. Although my experience and knowledge of the academic field will provide me with background information, I will have to ask the right 'types of questions' and make my interlocutors aware of the interview setting.¹⁴

Introducing the three groups of interlocutors

I will focus on the three groups of students, graduates and staff to analyse the progress of the impact of Women's Studies (WS) training over time. As I will show in the next chapter, no previous research has focussed on past and current students as well as teachers; I believe this research to be relevant to make a claim on the impact of the WS training. For example: Do the changes students experience during their training last after graduation? And do teachers perceive the same impact or do they notice other changes?

I have included students in the middle of their study and therefore they can tell me about their recent experiences of the training. My sample of students consists of five students (R, S, W, N and Y) who have a great variety in experience and level of WS training. Some have been taking WS courses for years, while others are new to the field. I expect the students to provide me with more information on the direct impact on relations and sexuality, because these are vivid themes among students. Also, the effect on ideas about ethnicity could be interesting considering the sample of my students are all white, middle-class young Dutch women. My sample of students is representative of the overall WS population: the large majority of WS students is white (83%) and female (90%).¹⁵ The students hold various bachelor's degrees respectively in Dutch Language, Commercial Economy, Language and Culture Studies, and American Studies.

In the interviews with graduates I expect to hear more about the impact of WS on their careers because they already participate in the labour market. Furthermore, I want to see which of the changes reported by the students are still relevant and accurate some years later. J, L, D, P and C form my group of graduates; they have all finished a WS master programme between one and four years ago. Not surprisingly considering the statistics discussed earlier, they are again all white, middle-class women. When the graduates entered WS they held very different bachelor's degrees

13 Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2007, 117.

14 Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2007, 118.

15 Stake, 2006, 204-205.

including Film and Theatre Studies, Political Studies, and Theology. In their previous degrees the past and current students are also representative of the overall WS population, as Griffin concluded a large majority of WS participants holds degrees in the Humanities and Social Sciences.¹⁶

The last group of interlocutors consists of WS staff members. I believe the staff is a rich resource because they have been in the academic field of WS for a longer period. They can also offer insight in the developments of students because they work in close connection with students. How do they consider the impact on students and connect the WS training to their lives? My sample of staff members consists of O, E, T, V and H, again all white women. According to the research of Stake (2000), WS is primarily taught by white women who hold a doctorate in the Social Sciences or Humanities and this is indeed applicable to my interlocutors.¹⁷ Their degrees are in Literature, Anthropology, Political Sciences, and Sociology, and all these staff members are currently completing or have finished their PhD. Their positions within the university include junior teacher, assistant professor, and full professor. In contrast to the other interlocutors, not all teachers are Dutch: two out of the five teachers have another European nationality.

Preview of the next chapters

After having introduced my research question and corresponding themes, interlocutors and methodology in this chapter, I will now continue with a chapter on relevant literature. I will explain how previous studies on the impact of WS training have used quantitative methods and the findings that resulted. Furthermore, I will argue the relevance of my four research topics. This will be followed by four chapters with my analysis on the different fields: career, ethnicity, sexuality and relationships, in which I will analyse my findings based on the impact students, graduates and staff have described during the interviews. The structure of these chapters is the result of the interviews: the impact that my interlocutors experienced the strongest will be discussed in depth. Sometimes the three groups discuss the same elements; other times there is a variety in the topics discussed.

Finally, this thesis will end with my concluding remarks and reflections in the final chapter. In the conclusion I will summarize my main findings and this will be followed by a reflection on my role as a researcher, my method, and my findings. In the end I will make some suggestions for further research on the impact of WS training.

¹⁶ Griffin eds., 2003, 112.

¹⁷ Stake, 2006, 203.

2. Theoretical framework

In this chapter I will elaborate on the research studies that have been conducted on the impact of Women's Studies (WS) training. In the introduction I have provided my definitions of the four themes: relationships, ethnicity, career and sexuality, and an outline of the interviews. I will continue with the existing knowledge on the impact of WS studies and the relevance of these four topics. My aim with this chapter is to give a terse overview of how different researches on the impact of WS are conducted and in what findings they have resulted.

Previous studies

Since the 1970s research has dealt with the impact of WS training. Especially American scholars have been interested in the impact. Since the first research in 1975 not much is changed in the use of methods and the concerned research questions and topics. American professor of psychology Diane Ruble, together with colleagues, was the first to study the effectiveness of WS courses and more specifically the changes in the 'sex-role attitudes' of WS students.¹⁸ Ruble et al. show with a quantitative comparison between WS students and psychology students that the 'awareness of sex discrimination' among WS students increases and WS students' beliefs in gender roles are influenced by their WS training.¹⁹

Over time WS has become institutionalized as a discipline in more European and American universities and the number of studies on the impact of WS on the lives of students also increased. Scholars claim it is interesting to study the impact of WS because the discipline is an 'innovative addition to college curricula', with training that not only aims at 'the traditional academic goal of intellectual mastery of subject matter' but also at the 'less traditional goals of personal change'.²⁰ Additionally, WS training aims at the validation of personal experience together with a development of political understanding, critical thinking and open-mindedness.²¹ Research has confirmed that WS training is effective in reaching this goal and changes students' behaviour and attitude both in the classroom and off campus.²² In this thesis I will specifically study the changes in ideas and experiences in regard to ethnicity, career, sexuality and relationships, which are themes not regularly discussed by other scholars. I will elaborate in the following paragraphs.

Over the years, psychologist Jayne E. Stake has become the most well-known scholar studying the impact of WS because of the magnitude of her work: Her earliest publication on the

18 Ruble et al., 1975, 110.

19 Ruble et al., 1975, 110.

20 Brush et al., 1978, 870.

21 Stake and Hoffmann, 2001, 413.

22 Stake and Hoffmann, 2001, 430.

impact of WS training dates back to 1987, and her most recent article was published in 2008. Stake's work laid the groundwork for other studies on the influence of WS: American studies, often comparison studies conducted by psychologists, that are based on questionnaires with large samples. The topics the research address are most often the same: the changes on self-esteem or self-confidence of students, the way students deal with gender roles and stereotypes, the influence on feminist beliefs and activism and the attitude towards discrimination and the development of open-mindedness.

Research topics

The conclusions of previous research refer to changes in the personality of students and their dealing with gender roles. Stake and others conclude that WS graduates experienced an increase in 'self-esteem',²³ an 'enhanced self-confidence'²⁴ and more 'feelings of empowerment'.²⁵ I find these conclusions troublesome while they are presented as straightforward uncomplicated positive changes in the identities of students as a result of their training. Difficulties or ambiguities in the experiences of students are not addressed. Additionally, I do not find an explanation of how the content of study attributes to this change. In this research I will not look for a positive linear impact of WS, but will use the interviews to gain a more inclusive understanding of the impact. For example, if WS has a positive impact on the openness of graduates regarding their sexuality, what are the effects on their relationship with their partner?

Next to the changes in the self-esteem of students and graduates, previous research claims an impact on the way WS participants deal with gender roles and beliefs. For example, students report an 'increased awareness of sexism'²⁶, more 'flexibility in dealing with gender roles'²⁷ and 'fewer gender stereotyped attitudes'.²⁸ Again, I find this conclusion to simplistic: First of all, I find the conclusion that students change their ideas of gender roles to be self-evident, since the training originates from the women's movement, which aimed at changing gender role patterns. Second, I am interested in how students experience these changes and how they connect this to their studies. For example, do they experience difficulties when they relate their preferences for a part-time job to the stereotype of a Dutch woman working part-time?

The impact on my themes, ethnicity, career, sexuality and relationships, are not often addressed in the quantitative studies. Of these topics, career is the most popular topic and scholars

23 Stake, 2006, 207.

24 Stake, 2006, 207.

25 Stake et al., 2008, 189.

26 Stake and Hoffmann, 2001, 411.

27 Stake et al., 2008, 189.

28 Stake and Rose, 1994, 404.

agree that WS training has a positive impact on the career ideas of WS students. One study concludes that 'students have reported more positive changes in their lives, including greater clarity in their career goals'.²⁹ Another states that students have become 'more confident' in job searching and their 'career aspirations increased appreciably during [WS]'.³⁰ However, the focus in these studies is on what has changed and not on why these changes occurred or if they remained after graduation. Nor do the scholars relate their findings to the national or cultural location of their research. In my chapter on careers, the focus will be on how students, graduates and staff have experienced the impact on their careers and I will relate my findings to a national survey on the general attitude of Dutch women towards the labour market.

Some studies deal with the impact on relationships and they conclude WS training will result in 'struggles'³¹ with friends, partners or family because of the 'raised consciousness' among students'.³² For example, Griffin and Hanmer elaborate on the impact on these various relationships of students and graduates, and I will relate their findings to mine in the chapter on relationships. Their conclusion is that past and current students feel enabled 'to review their relationships and to articulate the inequalities' which will have an impact on the interaction with others.³³ Additionally I will look into the relation of staff, for example, in their relation with students because this can provide valuable information on the interaction during WS training.

While the labour market is of interest to some scholars, the impact on views of ethnicity, a major pillar of WS training, is hardly addressed. As explained in a WS handbook, one of the aims of WS training is to expand the individual consciousness of the context and meaning of ethnic labels.³⁴ The idea is that if feminists want to understand and analyse society, they have to study gender, ethnicity, class and sexuality at the same time because all of these elements constitute the personal, social and symbolic meanings in society.³⁵ So if research in WS address categories, structures, practices and processes, ethnicity is an essential element.³⁶

However, the specific impact on ideas of ethnicity is not addressed in previous research. Although there are some conclusions on the raised awareness of students of sexism and racism, none of the existing studies elaborates on this. The conclusions about discrimination are vague. For example, the students develop 'an awareness of social realities that adversely affect diverse groups in our society', or WS classes help to become more 'aware of sexism and other forms of

29 Stake et al., 2008, 190.

30 Monograph series, 1980, 73 and 95.

31 Bargad and Hyde, 1991, 193.

32 Bargad and Hyde, 1991, 195.

33 Griffin eds., 2005, 167.

34 Bates eds., 2005, 162.

35 Wekker, 2002, 7.

36 Wekker, 2002, 8.

discrimination and more tolerant to others'.³⁷ By addressing ethnicity in my research, I hope to study the relation between theories of ethnicity that are part of the WS curriculum and the lives of students, graduates and staff.

Then there are the findings on the impact on sexuality. Feminists have put sexuality 'on the academic agenda' to discuss how female sexuality has been repressed in patriarchal societies.³⁸ Since then, much has been written on heterosexuality as a normative concept and the need to rethink heteronormative practices. For example, Rich has been successful in deconstructing the way heterosexuality was imposed on women. However, in the one research study that does deal with sexuality, there is a simple use of sexual identity labels. Griffin and Hamner describe WS students and graduates with the following statistics: 10% are lesbian, 15% are bisexual and 75% are heterosexual³⁹ and 17% of the respondents indicate that their sexual identity had transformed during their studies.⁴⁰ I am not interested in making a claim about the sexual identities of WS participants, but in the experiences of the students, graduates and staff in regard to sexuality.

Other methodology, method and location

In contrast to previous research, I am not interested in quantitative statements on the impact of WS training, but instead in how my interlocutors experience that impact. Although with a quantitative study I would be able to provide numbers on how many students have changed their ideas about sexuality, for example, I would not be able to explain why and how these changes were made possible. For example, Griffin and Hamner (2005) claim that the actual impact of WS training is the highest in the Netherlands, showing that 90% of the Dutch students experienced an impact on their personal lives.⁴¹ I am interested in what this impact entails and how the influence of WS is experienced by the students, graduates and staff.

Therefore, I have chosen to do a qualitative study based on interviews. I believe the impact of WS is too complex to grasp in a questionnaire and that the stories of my interlocutors deserve a narrative structure. I want to include my interpretation, subjectivity and embodiment into the knowledge-building process to offer a stronger objectivity.⁴² Additionally, this will not be a comparison study because I am not interested in the differences between WS students and students from other disciplines. The conclusions of comparison research I find to be obvious: Of course there are differences in the impact of a training in WS compared to a training in psychology- the

37 Stake, 2006, 207.

38 Jackson and Scott, 2004, 2.

39 Griffin eds., 2005, 150.

40 Griffin eds., 2005, 149.

41 Griffin eds., 2005, 148.

42 Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2007, 13.

disciplines deal with different themes. I believe that as a feminist researcher who is situated within the field of WS, I can offer a unique understanding and in-depth analysis of this specific field. The benefits of my location are also useful because my interlocutors study and live in the Netherlands. Previous research studies have been conducted in America with samples of American students. I am Dutch myself and believe it is relevant to combine my findings on the experiences of my interlocutors with national surveys on the Netherlands to contextualise my findings.

3. Career

This first chapter of my findings is devoted to how students, graduates and staff see the impact of Women's Studies (WS) training on their careers. I will discuss how my interlocutors connect WS to their career plans, including what impact WS has had on their motivation to work and on their requirements for their job positions. I will contextualize my findings with a national survey on the working hours and job motivation of Dutch women.

WS and a career plan

Past and current students enter WS either by choice or by chance. Some students have a specific interest in a theme that lead them to WS training; others are introduced to WS by chance, trying out a WS course with no intentions to obtain a degree in WS. Over time their interest and enthusiasm increases, W: 'I found [WS] so immensely interesting, I understood the line of thought'.⁴³ Current and past students feel challenged by the courses and enthusiastically report of the time and energy they spend on their training: 'The high standards of WS really had a stimulating effect on me'.⁴⁴ None of the current students reports a career plan after graduation, for example, R remarks she has 'no idea'⁴⁵ how her career will look like and Y also 'doesn't know yet'⁴⁶.

Although the graduates speak with a similar enthusiasm about WS, none of them has pursued a career in WS. Some explain it is hard to find a job that is directly related to WS, others state they are not interested in, for example, a PhD position because they 'like to do many different things, instead of committing to one topic'.⁴⁷ Some graduates miss a connection between their current job position and WS and still try to use the knowledge they gained from their WS training. D expresses disappointment that her current university is not concerned with the way she discusses ethnicity in her PhD, however she tries to include her knowledge on ethnicity in her dissertation.

The staff members E, D and S who hold degrees in WS describe they were enthusiastic about the content and the atmosphere WS training offered them and they speak about their current positions with that same enthusiasm. T explains teaching WS is for her the combination of her personal interests with her political activities.⁴⁸ The staff tells me how their interest in WS made them consider an academic career in the field of WS. The teachers with a WS degree successfully applied for a PhD position and while their enthusiasm remained, their ambitions grew. E: 'I did the

43 Transcript 1.2, 2.

44 Transcript 2.4, 3.

45 Transcript 1.4, 6.

46 Transcript 1.1, 19.

47 Transcript 2.5, 15.

48 Transcript 3.1, 8.

introductory of WS and I loved it. Then I decided to write my thesis on it and then I really wanted to become a PhD'.⁴⁹ The teachers who hold degrees in other disciplines describe, in addition to their general interest in the field, interest in a specific position within the discipline. O: 'There was a position available as UD (university teacher) and I applied [...] and got the job'.⁵⁰

While I have explained that my interlocutors opted for WS training because of their interest in the field and that the staff opted for a career within the academic discipline because of their interest in combination with the job opportunities, the following paragraphs will deal with the impact students, graduates and staff have experienced from their WS training on their ambition and motivations to work. While the three groups are all in a different phase of their careers I will address them separately.

The ambitions of students

Students report two aspects of their ambition impacted by WS: A tendency to work hard and confidence in their job opportunities. As concluded in a previous paragraph the enthusiasm for the content of WS makes the students willing to invest much of their time and energy in their training. The same process is described by students when they speak about the experience of their internships. S explains it was 'the job of her dreams' and although the work was sometimes 'too much' she 'pushe[d] herself' to perform.⁵¹ W shares a similar experience and explains being too busy is 'the story of [her] life'.⁵² Students describe how by entering their WS training their attitude changed: Studying became 'hard work' but felt rewarding because it coincided with what students found important.⁵³ Students look for jobs that include a same commitment: working hard because of their involvement with the concerned issues.

Although the students do not have a clear idea on what their jobs in the next years will be like they all agree they want to participate on the labour market and look for work they are passionate about. Participating on the labour market is for Dutch women not self-evident: The potential working population of Dutch women is 5.5 million, but just 60% of these women work.⁵⁴ Of the 2.2 million unemployed women 82% does not want to work or cannot work.⁵⁵ Students refer to feminist theory when they explain why they want to work, for example, the importance of financial independence for women. S: 'I want to earn my own living, [...] I was raised with that idea

49 Transcript 3.1, 5.

50 Transcript 3.1, 3.

51 Transcript 1.3, 10.

52 Transcript 1.1, 10.

53 Transcript 2.4, 8.

54 Emancipatiemonitor, 2010, 73.

55 Emancipatiemonitor, 2010, 73.

and it was strengthened by [WS]'.⁵⁶

The students are confident their WS training will lead to career opportunities based on the experiences of their internship. W explains she was asked to become an intern at a large national museum because she was 'different' and 'trained to think out of the box'.⁵⁷ S tells me her studies made her more critical and more inclined to ask questions about existing structures. These are skills her employer appreciated and therefore she was offered a position after her internship.⁵⁸

The ambitions of graduates

Now that I have discussed the overall incentive of students to join the labour market, to work hard and to be passionate about their jobs, I will now focus on the graduates and look for parallels between the two groups. All of the graduates are keen on participating in the labour market, although not all the graduates are employed at the moment. J has a part-time position as project coordinator at an educational institute which she combines with her passion of making films and documentaries.⁵⁹ L has a part-time position as a teacher at an educational institute, next to her training as a secondary school teacher. C is in the last year of her PhD at a Dutch university. P and D are both looking for work and consider their unemployment a result of the economical crisis. P refers to the many 'cuts'⁶⁰ and D explains it is 'difficult to find a job'⁶¹ because of the economy.

In the various interviews, the graduates explain the result of their WS training is a feminist view on the labour market: they express that having a job is important for the independence of a woman and that the number of women in top positions needs to be increased. Furthermore graduates are critical about women who do not work. P, currently unemployed, tells me she is irritated by the fact that she can be content with household chores. 'My world is getting smaller every day. I look at the flowers and am happy when they sprout. Well, I would have never thought about such things when I was studying'.⁶² C explains to me that she finds it difficult to understand why her mother is not working.

I believe the determination of graduates to join the labour market is a result of their WS training. In contrast to other Dutch women, all the graduates want to work, while one in three Dutch women do not want or cannot work.⁶³ The active searching of the unemployed graduates is also not common. Of the Dutch women who are unemployed but want to work, one in three is actively

56 Transcript 1.3, 8.

57 Transcript 1.2, 8.

58 Transcript 1.2, 13.

59 Transcript 2.1, 6.

60 Transcript 2.3, 4.

61 Transcript 2.5, 15.

62 Transcript 2.3, 24.

63 Emancipatiemonitor 2010, 73.

looking for a job.⁶⁴ P's determination to join the labour market is rewarded: Two weeks after my interview, P's job search yielded her a part-time job at an organization that deals with environmental issues; P sounds relieved and enthusiastic.

The motivation of graduates

Now that I have dealt with the impact of WS training on the ambitions of students and graduates, I will turn to the motivation of graduates to work in connection to their WS training. I will relate my findings to the *Emancipatiemonitor 2010*, a national research study on the motives for Dutch women to work.⁶⁵

The *Emancipatiemonitor* concludes women work because they have fun in their work, it offers them financial stability for the family, and results in self-fulfilment.⁶⁶ The motivation of graduates to work also includes passion, fun and involvement with the issues they deal with. Self-fulfilment as a motivation to work is also experienced by the graduates. J explains that film making inspires her because of the self chosen content of her work; this work makes her happy.⁶⁷ Like the current students are confident about applying their learned skills in their job position, the graduates are also confident about their skills. L tells me she likes to take responsibility and believes she is good in what she does and receives enough recognition. I found this satisfaction with the job position and the self-confidence in speaking about one's capacities in all the interviews. According to the literature, this can be connected to WS training because different studies have shown a positive change in the self-esteem and job confidence of WS students.⁶⁸

Where the graduates differ from the average Dutch woman is that next to having fun in their work and being confident about their capacities, the graduates feel a strong urge to make a valuable contribution to society. WS increased the awareness of the graduates of social inequalities and discrimination and in their current jobs graduates aim at sharing or creating this awareness. For example, J aims at making a social contribution by offering new insights into social phenomena through her documentaries. She explains her study learned her the importance of thinking 'outside the box' and 'outside your comfort zone' and this is something she wants to offer others through her documentaries.⁶⁹ Or L who provokes discussions among her pupils to make them question their axioms and prejudices. This commitment to make a valuable contribution is typical for WS graduates compared to the findings of the national survey: Making a contribution to society is not in

64 *Emancipatiemonitor 2010*, 73.

65 The research study is conducted by the Centraal Bureau voor Statistiek and the Sociaal Cultureel Planbureau.

66 *Emancipatiemonitor*, 2010, 99.

67 Transcript 2.1, 4.

68 Stake and Gerner, 1987, 281.

69 Transcript 2.1, 9.

the top 5 of most mentioned reasons of women to participate in the labour market.⁷⁰

The motivation of the staff

Although the WS training of graduates did not result in a position within the field of WS, they share with the staff a continuing interest in feminist issues and a tendency to work hard. When I speak with the staff on the impact of teaching WS on their motivation to work, they refer to three different aspects: First of all they consider their feelings of responsibility for their privileged positions as a result of working with feminist theory. Secondly, they feel inspired by their work in the field of WS because of the theory and the students. Finally, they also refer to the impact working within WS has because there is no boundary between the case studies in theory and practice. I will elaborate on these aspects in the following paragraphs.

While students, graduates and staff share the idea that WS training leads to an incentive to work hard, the staff addresses the workload frequently. The teachers refer to the current work pressure as well as the pressure during their PhD, as O recalls: 'I can't remember when I had the time to work on my dissertation, no clue, perhaps between 12 and 4 at night'.⁷¹ To explain the high work load, the staff offers two explanations: First they refer to the variety in job requirements, like combining teaching with a PhD or meeting all the bureaucratic requirements that come with working for the university. E: 'The first year I taught many courses, about eight. The next year seven and I also finished my PhD'.⁷²

Secondly the staff refers to the impact of their jobs on a personal level. Being active within in the field of WS has increased feelings of responsibility. V explains: 'Not the feeling that you should work hard for you boss but for a certain moral good'.⁷³ The importance of being accountable for privileges lives strongly among the staff. 'You are responsible for the way you deal with your privileges. Or at least dedicate them to a cause or rather not seeing it as for granted'.⁷⁴ The weight of the responsibilities is heavy but is not considered a burden. H: 'I never liked it all to easy [...] and I always see theory as a practice that helps me through things I'm struggling with myself'.⁷⁵ Here I see a strong resemblance with the graduates who are motivated in their work because of the social aims they strive for.

While the staff stresses the workload, the many hours and the weight of the responsibilities, every staff member also speaks about the inspiration they experience in working with WS theories

70 Emancipatiemonitor 2010, 99.

71 Transcript 3.1, 6.

72 Transcript 3.1, 6.

73 Transcript 3.4, 3.

74 Transcript 3.4, 3.

75 Transcript 3.5, 4.

and students. Teaching students is described as 'exciting' and 'wonderful'⁷⁶ as well as 'inspiring when writing a PhD'⁷⁷. The theory offers new insight, support with struggles and overall support with 'daily practices'.⁷⁸ This impact of WS teaching and research on the personal lives of staff is confirmed by all the teachers. T: 'I can't imagine it doesn't touch you on a personal level'⁷⁹ and O continues that the theory comes 'really close'⁸⁰ to your lives and ideas and makes you see gender relations 'everywhere'⁸¹.

WS training and working hours

It is interesting to note that hard work is an idea and experience that past and current students share with the staff. Teachers offer the students an example of commitment to your job by working many hours. Although the students and graduates speak of a tendency to work hard, they prefer working part-time. Three out of five current students aspires to a part-time position and four out of five graduates has a part-time position. Here the students and graduates match the national statistics: Of the Dutch women who work, 75% works part-time and the average work week consists of 25 hours.⁸² The one current student who aspires working full-time explains: 'I wouldn't mind working 40 hours a week. I'd love to when I have found a nice job'.⁸³

However, the majority of the current students prefers a part-time position to have more free time to relax or pursue other interests. R connects her preference directly to her WS training: 'All other [ideals] I have deconstructed [...] Why would I want to work full-time?'.⁸⁴ The preference of the students for a part-time position is realized by the graduates; just one of the graduates currently works full-time. Graduates work part-time to combine their job position with other career interests. For example, J, who has a part-time position because she cannot make a living from her income as independent filmmaker or L, who works part-time and combines this with a study to obtain a teaching qualification. The graduates are trained interdisciplinary and continue this in their work.

The staff members all work full time and as explained in the previous paragraphs the teachers explain this by referring to the high workload and their responsibility. I would add to this the teachers put feminist theory into practice. As a WS handbook explains part-time work is not acceptable from a feminist perspective because it supposes women are the 'primary caretakers of

76 Transcript 3.3, 3.

77 Transcript 3.1, 7.

78 Transcript 3.5, 6.

79 Transcript 3.3, 2.

80 Transcript 3.1, 8.

81 Transcript 3.1, 7.

82 Emancipatiemonitor, 2010, 12.

83 Transcript 1.1, 18.

84 Transcript 1.4, 6.

their children' and opt for a 'compromise' with 'few benefits' and 'lower hourly wages'.⁸⁵ The teachers speak about how theory influences them on a personal level and I believe the full-time work week is a good example. While the ambitions of students and graduates are scattered among disciplines, they invest their time in various activities.

Concluding remarks

In this chapter I have studied how my interlocutors see the impact of WS training on their ideas and experiences concerning their career. Students do not develop a career plan during their WS training but their interest and enthusiasm for the field of WS does increase. Although graduates share this experience they have not pursued a career in WS and show a great variety in current job positions. The motivation for their jobs can be related to WS because they want to be challenged by the content of their work and they feel the need to make a valuable contribution with their work.

WS has taught my interlocutors about the importance of labour participation for women. While the past and current students opted for a part-time position to combine their various interests, the staff members have a full-time job and report a high work load because of the job requirements and their feelings of responsibility. Just like the past and current students report, the staff explains WS touches you on a personal level and the engagement with feminist theory continues also outside the classroom.

85 Bates eds., 2005, 381.

4. Ethnicity

This chapter addresses the way students, graduates and staff experience an impact of WS on their ideas about ethnicity. I will elaborate on the raised consciousness of past and current students that they explain as a result of their training. Further, I will analyse the way students, graduates and staff do or do not integrate ethnicity into their work or research. Finally, I will reflect on the difficulties students encounter when speaking about ethnicity and how their feelings of unease can be related to their WS training.

Raised awareness

To start with, all my interlocutors are white, middle-class women who are Dutch nationals and live in the Netherlands. I myself am a white Dutch woman who was raised in a Dutch middle-class family. The awareness of my own ethnicity is for me an experience I owe to my WS training. I am raised in 't Gooi which is known for the wealth of its inhabitants and I went to an entirely white primary and secondary school. Reading about ethnicity in the work of bell hooks and Patricia Hill Collins made me realize I have a privileged position in which my ethnicity has never influenced my life in a negative way.

As Wekker argues, WS training should include studying ethnicity to become aware of the structural benefits of whiteness, the differences in ethnical privileges and the existing blind spots for the effects of ethnicity.⁸⁶ When I discuss the impact of WS training on my interlocutors regarding their ideas and experiences with ethnicity, they refer to a raised awareness of their own ethnical position. L describes this experience as 'shocking' because she learned about her 'white privileges'. She remembers thinking 'I am white and therefore elite'.⁸⁷ W describes experiencing a similar awareness with the words: 'I am white, and white is also a colour'.⁸⁸ With the staff, the awareness of their skin colour differs: V explains she was raised with an awareness of racial discrimination, while E explains her consciousness was raised during 'the past years' when she worked in the WS department.⁸⁹

From this realization of their own skin colour, past and current students continue to question the way their ethnical position is intertwined with power relations. They refer to their own ethnicity

86 Wekker, 2002, 18.

87 Transcript 2.2, 20.

88 Transcript 1.2, 14.

89 Transcript 3.1, 28.

as the 'luxury position'⁹⁰ the 'privileged position'⁹¹ or the 'dominant position'⁹². The students realize the effect this has on their lives: R states she belongs to the 'white lucky group'⁹³ in society, P explains it hit her to see how the media always represents white people⁹⁴ and V says racism and prejudices do not exist against her race⁹⁵. These insights in regard to ethnicity are new for the majority of my interlocutors and they directly refer to this awareness in connection to their training. The past and current students make many references to feminist texts that have raised their awareness, especially the invisible knapsack of Peggy McIntosh.

Next to an awareness of their own ethnicity and the way ethnicity is intertwined in power relations, my interlocutors also refer to an awareness of the role of ethnicity in cultural traditions. The Dutch cultural traditions of Sinterklaas functions as the main example. Sinterklaas is a traditional Dutch holiday figure whose birthday is celebrated each year on the fifth of December. An old white man, Sinterklaas, uses hundreds of black helpers, all named Zwarte Piet, who deliver presents to children. Feminists consider the tradition of Sinterklaas with Zwarte Pieten politically incorrect because of the associations with the Dutch history of slavery. W explains she had never thought critically about Sinterklaas and definitely changed her opinion about the tradition since she was introduced to WS.⁹⁶ T explains that in her classes, debates emerge and tension is present when Dutch students are confronted with different perspectives on Sinterklaas.

In the previous paragraphs I have illustrated how past and current students identify awareness of ethnicity in their own position, power relations and cultural traditions as a result of their WS training. In the following paragraphs I will elaborate on how staff, students and graduates engage with issues of ethnicity in their research or job.

Addressing ethnicity in research and work

Although all teachers I interviewed acknowledge ethnicity is an important element of WS training, they differ strongly in their ideas about the role ethnicity should play in research. One group claims ethnicity is always present and therefore should always be taken into account in doing research. For example, V claims whiteness is 'one of the biggest' privileges which should be included in every research that deals with gender.⁹⁷ Another group of teachers claims ethnicity is just one section of intersectional research. For example, O claims class is the most important category within

90 Transcript 1.4, 6.

91 Transcript 1.1, 12.

92 Transcript 3.1, 28.

93 Transcript 1.4, 6.

94 Transcript 2.3, 22.

95 Transcript 3.4, 4.

96 Transcript 1.2, 12.

97 Transcript 3.4, 4.

intersectional research and ethnicity is not always 'the most meaningful category'.⁹⁸ This last group does not always address ethnicity in their own research. However, all staff members speak highly of a colleague whose research mainly deals with ethnicity. H remarks she 'really like[s]' the work that her colleague does on ethnicity and V claims she has 'an immense respect' for the work of that same colleague.⁹⁹ These compliments signal to me the fact that the staff considers ethnicity to be an important issue for feminist research, although it is not everyone's research focus. The same process appears among the students, as I will discuss in a next paragraph.

The graduates explain their awareness of the important role of ethnicity remained after graduation. Almost all graduates offer examples of the way they consciously address ethnicity in their work. For example, J wanted to discuss the prejudices Dutch people have towards different cultures and made a documentary about women who converted to Islam. C's PhD is also concerned with ethnicity as she deals with the differences between native and non-native Dutch people who need health care. She explains the university she works for is not interested in nuanced papers on the inclusionary or exclusionary mechanisms of categories, but she is conscious of her writing when she addresses different ethnical groups. A third example is L, who explains she is reminded of theories on ethnicity when she deals with pupils from different ethnical backgrounds in her classroom. She is actively searching for a way to deal with the cultural differences and wants to be 'supportive' and take the differences 'into account'.¹⁰⁰

Students also refer to the importance of including ethnicity in their research. For example, W states ethnicity always plays an 'enormously important role' and is 'interwoven' in her work.¹⁰¹ However many students explain they have difficulties with addressing ethnicity. Y is one of the students who does integrate ethnicity in her research because she believes ethnicity 'has to be discussed'¹⁰², but Y describes the difficulties she has with ethnicity terminology. R and N explain they never include ethnicity because they find it troublesome. In their stories there is a tension between their belief of ethnicity as an important theme in WS and the lack in their own research. N explains she sees this as her 'trap' and finds discussing ethnicity 'very difficult'.¹⁰³ R explains it is not 'her cup of tea' and she thinks this is 'gender incorrect' but has difficulties representing other ethnical positions.¹⁰⁴ In the next paragraphs I will elaborate on what students consider difficult when they address ethnicity and how this can be related to their WS training.

98 Transcript 3.1, 28.

99 Transcript 3.5, 9.

100 Transcript 2.2, 5.

101 Transcript 1.2, 13.

102 Transcript 1.1, 10.

103 Transcript 1.5, 7.

104 Transcript 1.4, 5,6.

Difficulties explained

The remarks of students on the difficulties they have in addressing ethnicity include two central concerns: dealing with their own prejudices and an unease with the vocabulary they use. R summarizes her difficulties the following way: 'I am confronted with my own narrow-mindedness on a daily basis [...] and have a hard time adjusting my prejudices'.¹⁰⁵ To me this signals WS has increased awareness of prejudices based on ethnicity and makes my interlocutors eager to fight against their prejudices. A similar experience is phrased by S: 'Much has changed through WS but you still have some prejudices'.¹⁰⁶ This difficulty with dealing with prejudices is addressed by many students, by none of the staff members, and by some of the graduates. P states she wants to be 'more open-minded' but her racial prejudices 'apparently are grounded very deep inside me'.¹⁰⁷ Although the awareness seems to be raised through WS, especially students have a hard time resolving their prejudices, regardless of the theories on ethnicity that are offered to them.

Additionally students have a hard time choosing their words to describe ethnical identities. For example, there is not one vocabulary used to refer to skin colours, some students speak of 'blank' (Dutch word) others of 'white', some speak of 'black' and others of 'marked'. Additionally students feel uncomfortable labeling ethnical groups, like the word 'allochtoon', the Dutch word for immigrants, or speaking about 'Moroccans'.¹⁰⁸ Students explain they try to avoid the speak about a group by its ethnicity, because for example 'allochtoon' has negative connotations.

When I ask my interlocutors why they find their prejudices and vocabulary so troublesome, many references are made to feelings of unease, guilt and fear to exclude, generalize or discriminate on the basis of someone's ethnicity. Especially among students, fear is often addressed: R states: 'I believe it is wrong that I don't do more work [on ethnicity]'.¹⁰⁹ And Y: 'I try to convince myself that [ethnicity] does not matter, but it does. I know that. I really should be doing more about it'.¹¹⁰ Or N: 'Apparently I am the most scared of being called a racist'.¹¹¹ Some interlocutors cannot explain but just label speaking about ethnical difference 'too painful', 'too complicated' or 'emotionally charged'.¹¹²

So while the consciousness of my interlocutors concerning ethnicity is raised, the difficulties to address ethnicity in their research are not solved. The agreement on the importance of studying ethnicity is shared, which I think is a result of the stress on ethnicity in the curriculum while

105Transcript 1.4, 6.

106Transcript 1.3, 11.

107Transcript 2.3, 21.

108Transcript 1.1, 11.

109Transcript 1.4, 6.

110Transcript 1.1, 12.

111Transcript 1.5, 8.

112Transcript 1.5, 8.

feminist theory has been under attack of excluding 'diverse national, ethnic, and racial backgrounds' during the second feminist wave.¹¹³ Since then, much has changed in the curriculum and 'integrating consideration of race [and] ethnicity' is one of the main concerns to understand women.¹¹⁴ Part of the study after ethnicity is the struggle to resist 'generalizations which can cause discrimination against individuals based on their group identity' as explained in an introductory book to WS.¹¹⁵ In trying to prevent this from happening, my interlocutors try to be as cautious as possible and therefore sometimes avoid researching ethnical constructs. The students have learned during their training about the extremes of discrimination, for example studying anti-Semitism and colonization, and are aware of the effect of exclusion, generalizations and discrimination. The result is that the majority of students has become very sensitive and uncertain about their own position to speak about ethnicity. Not addressing ethnicity is preferred over speaking about ethnicity, because this includes the risk of reducing someone to a 'skin colour or country of origin'¹¹⁶, or discussing ethnicity in a 'denigrating' or 'racist'¹¹⁷ way.

Resisting discrimination and generalization

In contrast to the uncertainty to address ethnicity in a right way is the certainty with which students and other interlocutors resist and address discriminatory practices. This resembles Griffin's finding of WS students who become intolerant of racism.¹¹⁸ J claims that one always needs to distance oneself openly from views that exclude others on the basis of their nationality or skin colour. C tells me about a fight with her siblings over a racist remark. The longer my interlocutors are connected to WS the stronger their belief is that discrimination needs to be addressed.

The teachers report of various conflicts on ethnicity because they find the remarks of family members or friends generalizing or discriminatory. They explain over time they find it more difficult to put these remarks into perspective. For example, E tells about the conflicts with family members that sometimes are 'rough' because she 'confronts' people with their prejudices or the way they deal with stereotypes and this can be experienced as an 'attack'.¹¹⁹ V has a similar experience with debates with her father on different ethnical groups: 'I'm no longer capable of thinking "oh that is just my dad, he thinks that way because he doesn't know any Moroccan people [...]" I want him to motivate his conduct'.¹²⁰

113Bates eds., 2005, 31.

114Bates eds., 2005, 10.

115Bates eds., 2005, 152.

116Transcript 1.4, 1.

117Transcript 1.5, 8.

118Griffin eds., 2005, 151.

119Transcript 3.1, 34.

120Transcript 3.4, 9.

An intolerance towards discrimination seems to come hand in hand with a dismissal of nationalism. And just like with discrimination, my interlocutors have difficulties understanding it. J: 'I believe that national identity is a way to exclude people and I find that horrible'.¹²¹ C explains she even experienced feelings of violence towards family members who vote for an extreme nationalist political party. S refers to this same political party and explains it frustrates her and if she listens to their ideas she gets 'very angry'.¹²² Political nationalism embodies everything my interlocutors resist since their WS training: an undifferentiated image of ethnicities based on stereotypes and generalizations.

Concluding remarks

In this chapter I have discussed the impact my interlocutors have experienced on their ideas on ethnicity. My interlocutors share the experience of an impact of WS on their awareness of their ethnicity and the role of ethnicity in power relations and society. The interlocutors want to take responsibility for their own privileged positions and this results in different strategies. The graduates address ethnicity on a regular basis in their work aiming at raising the awareness of others. However, students struggle with discussing ethnicity because their training made them aware of the risks of discrimination and generalization, they experience an unease or fear to contribute to this when they speak about ethnicity themselves. This unease seems to be solved over time, while the graduates have no similar experience. Additionally, my interlocutors share a resistance towards discrimination in their direct surroundings. Being active in the field of WS for a long time results in a stronger resistance of discrimination, because especially the staff regularly confronts people with their own privileged position and prejudices.

121 Transcript 2.1, 22.

122 Transcript 1.3, 4.

5. Sexuality

In this chapter I will analyse the impact WS training has on the ideas and experiences of sexuality. I will start with the impact described by past and current students, because these two groups describe similar experiences. They remark upon the impact WS had on the way they define sexuality and their own sexual identity and refer to feminist theory and contexts within the classroom. I will elaborate on how the staff speaks about sexuality in general and how they experience the impact on students. Finally I will also study the impact the changed ideas on sexual identity have on the relations of past and current students with their partner(s) and parents.

Defining sexuality and sexual identity

Current and past students explain that their training has changed their definition of sexuality and, more specifically, their definition of their own personal sexual identity. Although not all students focussed their research on sexuality, the majority of students indicate that their WS training exposed them to more ideas on different sexualities and the impact of sexuality on people's lives. Students argue they no longer think of sexuality in terms of categories, like S who states sexuality is 'more complicated' than 'black and white categories'.¹²³ Instead, their ideas on sexuality have become more 'nuanced' and 'broader'.¹²⁴ The idea that sexuality is no 'fixed identity' which comes with 'fixed partners' is described with enthusiasm by the students; it offers more freedom for 'sexual behaviour'.¹²⁵ R defines sexuality as a 'process' and 'variable' and 'fluid' and explains these insight resulted in new choices in her life that made her happier.¹²⁶

Next to a new definition of sexuality, my interlocutors use sexual identity labels in a different way as a result of their WS training. I will take a research report of the Rutgers Nisso Groep, the Dutch expert centre on sexuality, as an example of the regular use of sexual identity labels: The report defines sexual identities and speak about homosexuality, bisexuality and heterosexuality.¹²⁷ My interlocutors deal with these sexual identity labels in a different way. Some students refute to label their sexual identity. For example, W states that she is 'sexually more attracted to men than to women'.¹²⁸ Some students use labels simultaneously like N who states she is 'heterosexual and a lesbian'¹²⁹ or J who claims she is a 'lesbian with heterosexual tendency' or a

123Transcript 1.3, 7.

124Transcript 2.2, 10.

125Transcript 2.5, 9.

126Transcript 1.4, 1-2.

127RNG, 2009, 27.

128Transcript 1.2, 6.

129Transcript 1.5, 3.

'straight person with a lesbian tendency'.¹³⁰ According to Hanmer and Griffin (2005), WS training results in an altered understanding of sexual identities and I support this claim. Furthermore, there were students who choose a label to change the stereotypes, like P who hopes that because she uses the word it will get a 'more positive connotation'.¹³¹ To me, the different ways students engage with the labels for sexual identity signal how they have bridged the theory of sexuality offered during their training to the way they think about their own sexuality.

Developments in sexual identity

When I speak with students about changes in their ideas on their sexual identity due to their WS training, they refer to the impact of theories on sexuality and the impact of meeting fellow students and staff with different sexualities. For some students it is the first time they encounter people of different sexualities or speak with others about different sexualities. C remembers seeing her lesbian teachers as a role model; they were 'friendly, young and smart' and open about their sexuality, which supported her in her own coming out.¹³² Other students refer to the impact of the readings, such as P, who remembers reading an article about a lesbian community as a start for reading more books on homosexuality.

The majority of the students describes how their WS training made them question their own sexual identity. S: 'By studying [WS] you are starting to wonder [...] what [sexuality] am I?'.¹³³ This question results for some of the students in a 'turbulent phase' which is 'shocking' and 'identity confusing'.¹³⁴ Questioning one's sexual identity is situated by the students at the beginning of their training, and when they graduate they have a clearer understanding of their sexuality. D is the only student who does not remember questioning her sexual identity: 'I didn't start experimenting or discovering new things about myself. I did like to discuss and think of sexuality as no fixed identity'.¹³⁵ The other students and graduates report a phase of questioning followed by a return to their 'old' sexual identity or a change in their sexual identities.¹³⁶ To this last group C, P, J belong: C and P have their coming out as lesbians and J and R are open about their feelings and desires for men and women. In the next paragraphs I will look into the stories of C and P and J and R to see how they connect their changed ideas on their sexuality to their WS training.

P as well as C explain how WS was the first environment where they encountered reading

130Transcript 4.1, 14.

131Transcript 2.3, 16.

132Transcript 2.4, 15.

133Transcript 1.3, 6.

134Transcript 2.2, 8.

135Transcript 2.5, 9.

136Transcript 2.2, 8.

on homosexuality. C was trained as a theologian, and found little room in that context for different views on sexuality- other than the biblical interpretation. According to C, her WS training accelerated her ideas about her sexual orientation, 'the fire was fanned' and she felt supported.¹³⁷ She explained the homosexual teachers were here first role models and gave her the confidence that a life as a lesbian would turn out all right. P explains to me that at the beginning of her training she had never had a homosexual relation or sexual contact because she had 'resisted and repressed' those feelings.¹³⁸ She started reading more on homosexuality, combined with writing papers on lesbianism. Both women enjoyed the openness in the classroom to speak about different sexualities and studied homosexuality in social structures; they both reported that this helped them with their own coming out.

Just like C and P, J and R do not consider their sexual identity changed but claim their WS training resulted in an openness to speak about their sexuality. J explains she likes the atmosphere of WS because she did not need to talk about her sexuality nor had to explain or defend herself.¹³⁹ R explains she always knew she could be 'attracted to women' but through the reading and conversations about sexuality she decided to experiment with her homosexuality.¹⁴⁰ During her heterosexual relation, R falls in love with a woman and decides to start dating her. R explained: 'I thought, well, why not?'.¹⁴¹

Dealing with sexuality within WS

When I speak with the staff about the impact of WS on their views on sexuality they share their vocabulary with the past and current students. No one believes in 'one sexual identity'¹⁴², but instead that sexuality 'constantly changes'¹⁴³ and does not exist 'before you come to speak about it'¹⁴⁴, resulting in no claims in who is 'gay or straight'¹⁴⁵. When the teachers speak about their own WS training they also refer to how theory supported their ideas on their sexuality. H stated: 'theoretical ways of thinking' and 'teachers who openly discuss[ed] alternatives' [...] gave me a liberated [...] kind of mode of expressing myself in different ways, thinking [of] myself in different ways'.¹⁴⁶ V makes an even stronger claim: WS resulted for her in discoveries about her sexuality, including

137Transcript 2.4, 15.

138Transcript 2.3, 15.

139Transcript 2.1, 15.

140Transcript 1.4, 3.

141Transcript 1.4, 3.

142Transcript 3.1, 22.

143Transcript 3.1, 22.

144Transcript 3.4, 8.

145Transcript 3.1, 22.

146Transcript 3.5, 14.

some 'that I'm not sure if I would have discovered [...] otherwise'.¹⁴⁷ Just like the students, the staff refers to a feeling of 'freedom' to express their sexuality and describes how WS resulted in them not wanting 'to hide it or be ashamed' of their sexuality.¹⁴⁸

The staff acknowledges a comparable impact on the views and experiences of current students on sexuality, as T summarizes: 'at this [...] interpersonal sexuality level that is where it happens very strongly'.¹⁴⁹ Students become 'really confused' or 'troubled' and start asking 'questions of themselves' because of 'the stuff [they] read in class' and because they meet people with 'different sexual backgrounds'.¹⁵⁰ In harmony with the students expressing that this phase resulted in a clear idea about sexuality, the staff concludes that students at the end of their training are enabled to speak about their sexuality. And while their sexual identity does not change, they 'feel like they can put the name to whatever they were already experiencing before'.¹⁵¹

It is interesting to note that although the staff acknowledges this personal impact on students during their coursework, they will not directly address this in class. According to H, we live in 'a time where sexuality seems to be everywhere [...] we should not all get too focused on that' and the changes in ideas on sexuality is something the students can 'speak about among themselves'.¹⁵² As O explains, the training is about sexuality as a 'cultural phenomenon' and the training aims to break open the 'categories' and to learn more about 'sexual differentiation' and not about 'sexuality in practice'.¹⁵³ T claims she is a bit disappointed her colleagues 'don't really go there' while the 'students want to talk about it' and want to know what 'the teachers have to say about it'.¹⁵⁴

Dealing with sexuality outside WS

While students report an openness on their sexuality as the result of their WS training, this also influences their relationships with their partners and parents. While I will discuss the overall impact of WS on relations in the next chapter, I will address here the impact that the changes in sexuality ideas has on the relationships of students with their partners. J and R report many conversations with their male partners on their sexual desires for women. J said: 'I told him a lot; I really told him everything'.¹⁵⁵ The result of these conversations were, in both cases, a mutual decision with which they and their partners felt comfortable. J and her partner decided to keep their monogamous

147Transcript 3.4, 7.

148Transcript 3.4, 8.

149Transcript 3.3, 8.

150Transcript 3.3, 8, 10.

151Transcript 3.3, 8.

152Transcript 3.5, 14.

153Transcript 3.1, 12 and 22.

154Transcript 3.3, 9.

155Transcript 2.1, 20.

relationship. J explains: 'It perhaps sounds to good to be true, but we never have issues.'¹⁵⁶ R explains the talks with her partner on 'jealousy and separation anxiety' resulted in the freedom to engage in a very 'satisfactory' relationship with a woman next to her existing relationship.¹⁵⁷

Although none of the interlocutors refers to a negative impact on their relationship because of their openness about their sexuality, friends and family were not always supportive. For example R's parents do not understand her bisexuality and relationships. R: 'I tried to talk about it with my mother [...] The only thing she said was that I eventually had to choose, but I don't want to choose-everyone is happy this way'.¹⁵⁸ R explains she is happy now and hopes the attitude of her parents will change one day, but does not influence her current choices for her relationships. J reports a similar experience with friends who do not understand her bisexuality while she is in a relationship with a man: 'People ask me how do you know when you have never had a relationship with a woman? I reply I do not have to. [...] It does not make me less of a bisexual'.¹⁵⁹

The experiences of J and R can be contrasted with the support P received from her parents and friend when she was open about her homosexuality and her polyamorous relationship. P explains the reactions of her friend were 'good', and that while her friends 'did ask questions' she explains that she understands and that she herself would be 'curious as well'.¹⁶⁰ P describes the reaction of her parents as 'very good' while her mother responded with a neutral expression that polyamory is 'of all times'.¹⁶¹ However, C, who also had her coming out as a lesbian, does report resistance and hesitation in the reactions of those around her. C explained that in the surrounding of theology there was 'absolutely no room' for homosexual identities.¹⁶²

To conclude, J and R meet the most resistance in their relationship as a result of their openness on their bisexuality. However, none of the students have changed her ideas on her sexuality, regardless of the reactions. Instead they report feelings of happiness and relief that they can be open about it and are no longer bound to structures of heteronormativity. According to L, she experiences 'more freedom' [...] to talk and think about' sexualities since her training.¹⁶³ The need to offer others the freedom to express their sexualities lives very strongly among the current and past students, as does the wish for acceptance and tolerance towards the diversity of sexualities. As R summarizes: 'You do not have to feel it or approve it, but you can tolerate it, right? And accept it'.¹⁶⁴

156Transcript 2.1, 20.

157Transcript 1.4, 4.

158Transcript 1.4, 2.

159Transcript 2.1, 14.

160Transcript 2.3, 12.

161Transcript 2.3, 11.

162Transcript 2.4, 15.

163Transcript 2.2, 10.

164Transcript 1.4, 3.

Concluding remarks

In this chapter, I discussed the impact of WS on the ideas and experiences in regard to sexuality. As the past and current students explain, a result of their training was a new definition of sexuality and more specifically of their own sexuality. They address the theory and contact with fellow students as contributing to this change. My interlocutors refuse to think in structures or identify with fixed sexuality labels which offers them more freedom to act upon their feelings and desires. Students do not consider their identity changed but do experience more openness and ability to discuss their sexuality. The most prominent result is the openness about their sexuality towards their partner and family, sometimes resulting in new relationships. Accepting and tolerating different sexualities is also something past and current student expect of others since their WS training.

The staff has a same approach to sexuality and also stresses the strengthening effect their WS training has had on their ideas about sexuality. They notice the change among students during their training but do not consider it necessary to discuss these personal changes in class, while the theory and fellow students can support the students who struggle with their sexual identity.

6. Relationships

This chapter will focus on how students, graduates and staff experience the impact of WS training on their relationships. I will first elaborate on the reactions my interlocutors receive when they speak of WS. From there I will move on to the impact on the relationships between past and current students and their partners and parents, because the students stress the impact of WS on these relationships. I will continue with the impact the staff describes of WS training on students during their relation with the students. Furthermore, I will describe the relation between the staff and students.

Reactions to WS in general

Part of the impact my interlocutors experience is having to deal with the various responses to WS from people outside WS. Some people react in a neutral or general way by asking what gender means or what the study entails. When this happens, my interlocutors are all inclined to tell more about the field of WS. Some interlocutors are surprised about the lack of knowledge on WS, especially the staff refers to the ignorance of colleagues of other disciplines. H claims some colleagues 'don't even know what [she is] talking about'.¹⁶⁵ While some people react in a neutral way, my interlocutors mainly report experiencing more critical responses: their conversation partners question the importance or relevance of studying gender or dismiss feminism and ridicule feminist stereotypes. For example, people remark: '[I]sn't [feminism] something we did during the seventies?'.¹⁶⁶

Negative or critical reactions are an effect of WS training that my interlocutors have to deal with. Sometimes they want to start a debate to create awareness about gender differences and inequality, but they run the risk of ending up in a heated debate, E: 'You can really offend people who feel like they are very progressive [when] you speak with them about existing structures that they don't acknowledge. [Those] can be difficult talks sometimes'.¹⁶⁷ Other times my interlocutors avoid the debate by avoiding the subject of WS, even when directly asked about their field. This tactic is used by students and staff, such as by E: 'If I don't feel like it, I just say I'm working in Media and Culture Studies and I won't say WS'.¹⁶⁸ My interlocutors especially opt for this tactic if they believe their conversation partner is not receptive to new ideas. N: 'Sometimes when I have the

¹⁶⁵Transcript 3.1, 15.

¹⁶⁶Transcript 1.1, 3.

¹⁶⁷Transcript 3.1, 33.

¹⁶⁸Transcript 3.1, 17.

feeling the discussion will not lead to something, then I just say I study Dutch'.¹⁶⁹ I will elaborate in the following paragraphs on the receptiveness of partners to WS.

Impact on relationship with partner(s)

While I discuss the impact on the relationship with partners I will only refer to past and current students, as none of the staff reported an impact on their relationship with their partner. Let me start by introducing the relationships of students and graduates with their partner(s), because of the wide range of intimate relations that is discussed. Some students currently have no partner, some have one partner and others have two partners. The majority of the relationships I consider long term relationships, because the students and graduates have an average relation duration of three years. Of the seven students who are currently in a relationship, four live together with their partner.

The past and current students claim that WS has had no negative impact on their relationship. While their training did result in new ideas on sexuality and relations, their partners were supportive towards WS and accepted and respected their changed ideas. This contrasts the conclusion of the research of Griffin and Hamner (2005), who stress a negative impact of WS training on relationships. They emphasize that an increased awareness of sexism and gender inequality during WS training can make the students become dissatisfied with their own relationship. However, none of my interlocutors reports an inequality in their relationship. Instead students speak enthusiastically about their partners' support and understanding of feminist ideas. A few examples: N explains how she helps her partner with his exhibitions by analysing his work through a feminist lens. She concludes: 'I make a positive contribution to his work'.¹⁷⁰ Y explains her studies and her partner's studies show great resemblances: 'My boyfriend is open towards [WS]. He studies cultural analysis himself'.¹⁷¹

The importance of a partner's support of WS is proven by the story of W, who describes ending her previous relationship because of the differences in values and attitude. The number of fights with her former boyfriend increased during her WS training. W: 'My study showed me the things I found important, [but] he didn't understand what I was doing. I found things important which he didn't find relevant'.¹⁷² W names WS as one of the factors that caused the breakup. In her new relation W is satisfied; her current partner is 'intellectually challenged by the same things'.¹⁷³

As explained in the chapter on sexuality, the new ideas students have about their sexual identity as a result of their WS training is accepted and respected by their partners. But next to the

169Transcript 1.5, 14.

170Transcript 1.5, 15.

171Transcript 1.1, 4.

172Transcript 1.2, 3-4.

173Transcript 1.2, 4.

new ideas on sexuality, students also report a changed view on monogamy and polyamory as a result of their training. P and R explain how feminist readings offered them more information on polyamory and make them consider experimentation in their relationship. P explains how WS increased her open-mindedness on a triangular relationship: '[WS] offered me a theoretical basis for the possibility'.¹⁷⁴ R concludes the impact of her training on the choice for two partners: '[WS] offered me a way to deconstruct norms, to think of other possibilities, which made it easier for me'.¹⁷⁵ Both students chose a new kind of relationship and stress that their openness and their partners' support made the changes possible.

Impact on relationship with parent(s)

In previous chapters I already touched upon the impact of WS training on the relationship between my interlocutors and their parents. As discussed in the chapter on ethnicity, especially teachers report heated debates as a result of challenging their parents to acknowledge their prejudices. In the chapter on sexuality I have explained how parents of past and current students deal in different ways with the new ideas on sexuality of their children. In the following paragraphs I will elaborate on the impact students address in the relationship with their mothers. The students report how evaluating the role of their mothers in their upbringing is a result of their WS training. The reason mothers are more often addressed than fathers is probably because the emphasis within WS is on women's lives. The students' evaluation results either in an increased appreciation for the role of their mother during their upbringing or a critical stance towards their mothers' choices.

Students express their appreciation of their mothers for teaching them feminist values. For example, Y explains that she learned from her mother how satisfactory a job can be and how household chores should not become too important. Another example comes from S, who tells me her mother raised her with a focus on the importance of economic independence. S reports the belief in the importance of independence was 'strengthened' by her training.¹⁷⁶ Furthermore, students also appreciate mothers in law because of the upbringing of their partners. J states her partner understands her ambition to work because his mother was also ambitious and had a successful career.¹⁷⁷

The past and current students with a critical stance on their upbringing as a result of their training report an initial lack of understanding for their mothers' choices. For example, C explains that her mother was a housewife who did not work: 'The issues I dealt with during my studies I saw

174Transcript 2.3, 7.

175Transcript 1.4, 4.

176Transcript 1.3, 8.

177Transcript 2.1, 20.

in my own family. I didn't agree with it and I was very critical [of] it'.¹⁷⁸ The students who become critical start with a realization of the gender roles in their family, followed by a period of debates about their mother's role. Y even reports the difficulties she has with her mother in law, and according to Y the fights with her partner about household chores are a result of his upbringing. Her male partner was raised in a traditional family where his mother was the only one responsible for the household. From the beginning of her relationship, she refused an unequal division of chores: 'I knew this was a difference between us from the beginning. So I told him immediately, I will not do that'.¹⁷⁹

Although the students report vividly on their critique and resistance at the beginning of their training, when time passes this critique fades. D explains that she tried to change the roles at home but now has accepted her mother 'just likes doing these [household] chores'.¹⁸⁰ Y also explains she is now 'less fanatic' and although she remains conscious of the gender relations and still can become agitated, she is also able 'to let go'.¹⁸¹ While the students want an acceptance and respect for their views on gender relations, they also apply this to the gender relations they do not understand.

The staff on the impact on students

In the previous paragraphs I focused on the relation between students, graduates and staff with people outside WS. Now I will discuss how the staff, during their relation with the students, considers the impact of the WS training on the students.

When staff members compare WS students with non-WS students, they consider WS 'more open and active' than students from other disciplines.¹⁸² Teachers struggle with non-WS students who simply reproduce the offered theory or have a lack of interest in gender issues. E gives an example of students from other courses who claim the world is misogynist and hope for a high grade. The teachers prefer WS students because of the way their students deal with the theory: They do not stop thinking about gender relations when they leave the classroom, but instead ask more questions.

Because the students are open and active, the impact WS has on them, according to the staff, is a heightened awareness and that they develop a 'new way to see the world'.¹⁸³ Students connect their own experiences to the theories that are offered, which can result in feeling 'overwhelmed'¹⁸⁴ or

178Transcript 2.4, 18.

179Transcript 1.1, 17.

180Transcript 2.5, 6.

181Transcript 1.1, 8.

182Transcript 3.5, 11.

183Transcript 3.1, 13.

184Transcript 3.5, 9.

even 'messed up'.¹⁸⁵ This struggle is acknowledged by all staff members and is accepted as an element of the WS training that will be solved over time. 'It makes you feel like whuh this all too much, the one says theory, the other says ethnicity, the third says methodology, representation. How should I find my way around? You'll find your way around'.¹⁸⁶ T explains how students become 'willing and needing to talk about it' and how she is happy about the possibility she has to offer them 'a good experience'.¹⁸⁷

Relations with staff members

The staff also reflects on the impact of WS on the relation with colleagues of the same discipline. The teachers share their enthusiasm about their colleagues and the atmosphere in the department. The international character is often praised, because many teachers come from abroad the staff reports that it is easy to meet new people; the environment is international and travelling is encouraged. Additionally, the teachers speak highly of the diversity of research topics. T explains that the different kinds of approaches create a 'richness in different ways'.¹⁸⁸ But the staff stresses their enthusiasm especially is a result of sharing feminist values and knowledge among colleagues. For example, E states that she sometimes forgets how 'nice' it is to have solely female colleagues and to share the same interests in gender and power relations.¹⁸⁹

Overall, the students are enthusiastic about the staff, because 'they think with you'.¹⁹⁰ As explained in the chapter on sexuality, some students feel supported by their teachers while they struggle with personal issues. However, there are two students who explain their WS training made them critical of the support they have received because of a lack of understanding or acknowledgement of their illness. They expected WS to be about minorities and therefore to include people with a handicap, and they expected the staff to be open-minded in discussing chronic illnesses. These students feel disappointed because it is not addressed in theories or by their teachers. Staff 'reacts funny',¹⁹¹ 'does not show an understanding'¹⁹² or 'does not believe'¹⁹³ the limitations students experience because of their disease. Both students feel disappointed and even frustrated: 'This is who I am; I can't help it'.¹⁹⁴

185Transcript 3.3, 10.

186Transcript 3.5, 9.

187Transcript 3.3, 7.

188Transcript 3.3, 3.

189Transcript 3.1, 15.

190Transcript 1.2, 11.

191Transcript 1.5, 4.

192Transcript 1.5, 4.

193Transcript 1.2, 15.

194Transcript 1.2, 15.

Concluding remarks

In this chapter I have explained how my interlocutors see dealing with negative reactions to WS as a result of their WS training. While they sometimes appreciate the opportunity to discuss gender equality, they more often choose to avoid a debate because their conversation partner is not receptive to their ideas. In contrast to responses in general, my interlocutors report an openness and support of their partners towards WS. Although WS results in changes in ideas on sexuality and ethnicity, this has no negative impact on their relationship because of its equal character and the openness to discuss things with their partner.

Additionally past and current students report that WS has an impact on the way they evaluate their upbringing and especially the choices of their mothers; some with more feminists mothers come to appreciate their mothers more, while others with more traditional mothers learn to respect their mothers' choices despite the fact that they do not correspond to their feminist views. Furthermore the staff also experiences the impact on students based on their relation with the students. They conclude that students are open and active but do struggle when they apply WS theory to their personal lives. Teachers are enthusiastic about their direct colleagues, because they share knowledge and work in a diverse and international environment. In general students report a positive relation with their teachers during their training, the only exception is a disappointment in the exclusion of chronic diseases.

7. Conclusion and reflections

In this thesis I have answered the research question: How do WS students, graduates and staff see the impact of WS training on their ideas and experiences regarding career, ethnicity, sexuality and relationships? To answer this question I held interviews to address the living experiences of my interlocutors. The semi-structured interviews followed by a thematical analysis offered me in-depth insight into the world of my interlocutors, as well as the possibility to make some claims on the impact of WS on career, ethnicity, sexuality and relationships.

My research differed from previous research because I used a qualitative research method and aimed at the experiences of my interlocutors. Previous research was especially conducted in the United States on the basis of surveys among students. Additionally my topics were different because I was interested in the relation between topics dealt with in feminist theory and the way my interlocutors experienced the impact in their personal lives. In the following paragraphs I present my main findings, theme by theme.

The impact students report of their WS training on their ideas and experiences in regard to their careers is an incentive to work hard for a job they find interesting. This is the experience they had during their training and the example the staff provides them with. Additionally, they look forward to joining the labour market and feel comfortable about their career opportunities. They believe in the feminist values of the importance to make a career and they also map out their own route, for example by opting for a part-time job. Here the current students match the past students, who are also keen on participating in the labour market but at the same time make choices about how to best serve their diverse interest and ambitions. Together with the staff, they explain how WS increased their feelings of responsibility in their work and how they aim at making a valuable contribution to society through their work. The staff explains how they feel motivated in their work by feminist theories and their contacts with students.

In addition to the impact on their perspectives on career, students and graduates report a strong impact of WS on their ideas and experiences in regards to ethnicity. They report that their awareness of ethnicity and power relations is strengthened in the beginning of their training, and is something they remain conscious about and want to be accountable for. By studying discrimination and exclusion, the past and current students I spoke with report a determination to resist generalizations and discrimination. The graduates integrate their learned views on ethnicity in their work. Students and staff agree on the importance of research on ethnicity but apply this differently in their own research. The staff that does not deal with ethnicity finds other topics more important,

while students struggle with their prejudices and vocabulary. What all of my interlocutors address is as a result of their WS training is a resistance towards discrimination in their direct surroundings, where especially the staff confronts people on their own privileged position.

Perhaps even more personal, past and current students explain how their WS training inspired new definitions of sexuality and, more specifically, of their own sexuality. WS has taught them to think outside structures and fixed identities in combination with sexuality. They report an openness in speaking about their new ideas about sexuality with their partner and family, sometimes resulting in a change in their relationships. Accepting and tolerating different sexualities is also something they expect of others. The staff does not report an impact of teaching WS on their sexuality, however, they do explain they feel supported in their ideas on their sexuality by feminist theories. In defining sexuality, the staff resembles past and current students. The staff acknowledges the changes students experience developments in regard to their sexuality, which they consider to be a result of the training. However, they do not address students' personal changes in class because the staff want students to be supported in their ideas by feminist theory and fellow students.

The impact of WS training on relations is experienced differently by various interlocutors. All are familiar with negative perceptions and reactions to the content of their training by people outside WS. The result is my interlocutors start a debate to create more awareness or avoid the debate because it can be tiresome. None of the past or current students reports a negative impact on their relationship; all describe their relationships as equal from the start and say that openness is an important element. Overall, partners are supportive towards WS and accept the impact of WS on, for example, their partners' ideas on sexuality. Past and current students report a change in their relationships with their mothers; some come to appreciate their mothers more, while others learn to respect their mothers' choices although they do not correspond to their feminist views. The staff reports more conflicts on ethnicity with especially their fathers, because they want to raise awareness about privileged positions. Furthermore, the staff also experiences the impact on students based on their relation with the students. They conclude students are open and active but do struggle when they apply theory to their personal lives. This is solved in time and they trust the students to work out these issues themselves.

Overall, I can conclude that WS has an impact on the lives of students, staff and graduates as they openly and actively engage with the theories, and interact with other students and staff members. Especially with regards to ethnicity and sexuality, the past and current students claim their training has a strong impact that they experienced at the beginning of their training and still lasts. In the conversations with the staff, they do not emphasize a strong impact of teaching WS on their own lives, but they agree with the impact on the students' lives.

Reflections

The focus of this research was the experiences of the impact of my interlocutors and the result of the interviews was valuable insight into the lives of my interlocutors. Because I interviewed three groups, I was able to compare my findings. As explained in the conclusions, there were many resemblances between past and current students, while the discussed themes with the staff sometimes deviated. Because of the choice of semi-structured interviews, not exactly the same topics were addressed in each interview. The result is sometimes strong findings on one group, for example the changed ideas on sexuality by students, and not many references by the staff to the developments of their ideas on that subject. A benefit of the semi-structures interviews is the possibility it offers for my interlocutors to discuss topics that I did not think of, such as the comments on the impact of WS training on the relationship between students and their mothers.

My position as a student was supporting as well as restricting to this research. Thanks to my knowledge on the discipline and my experience with WS training, I was able to contextualize my findings and ask the right questions. Because I myself am a WS student, gaining insight into the lives of students and graduates came naturally to me, while with the staff there was a different relation. Teachers could have been less inclined to open up about more personal experiences because of my position as a student. During this research I had to shift between my role as a student and my role as a researcher. The benefits of the large number of interviews was my increased knowledge on the impact of WS which resulted in more confidence in my role as researcher to address the themes I wanted to discuss and not be limited by the possible hierarchical relation between student and teacher.

In my view, this research could be expanded upon with more research on the impact of WS training on the views on ethnicity. As I have argued in the chapter on ethnicity, many ambiguities can be found and very little past research has dealt with ethnicity. It would be interesting to extensively study the difficulties students deal with, to deconstruct where there feelings of fear, guilt and unease come from, and how these difficulties can be made productive. Additionally, future research that would deal with the impact on relationships would benefit from conversations with partners and parents to offer different perspectives to the impact of WS. And finally, because of the time restraints for this thesis, I was not able to conduct group interviews, which I believe can offer more knowledge. The ability to study the interaction in groups and between group would further clarify the resemblances and differences between students, graduates and staff.

Thanks

From this research I have learned so much. My interest in the topic started with my own experiences of the impact on my life and the research made it possible to relate many findings to my own experiences. The result has been a belief that the impact of WS on my own life has been stronger than I had thought before. The difficulties I sometimes have to address ethnicity are indeed related to my increased awareness on discrimination, and my openness about my sexual identity is a result of my training. During the past five months I have come to realize that WS is not the beginning nor the end of ideas and experiences on these matters, but rather an integrated part of the practices and relationships of those who were trained or work in WS.

This last paragraph will be contributed to the people who supported me writing this thesis. First of all I like to thank prof. dr. Gloria Wekker for her support. She encouraged me to study the impact of WS and to look at the many different facets of this impact. I admire her commitment to my supervision and am thankful for the opportunities to exchange my ideas with hers. Second, I would like to thank all my interlocutors who found the time for an interview and who so openly discussed their personal experiences with me. Finally, I want to thank my partner, who did not mind getting married while I wrote this thesis, who did not complain about postponing our holiday and who listened time and time again to my extensive accounts of this research process. To conclude, I share with my interlocutors the view that WS training, of which this thesis is an essential part, has had a positive impact on my life; I feel comfortable about my future plans and enthusiastic about continuing to apply and extend my feminist knowledge on career, ethnicity, relations and sexuality.

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