

## *Interdisciplinary perspective within Women/Gender studies enhanced by European Thematic Networks\**

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**Summary.** *One goal of the Conference is to share and implement best-practices on the cutting-edge of contemporary gender studies perspective, research and the developing field of psychodramatic techniques. The need is to identify areas of collaborative action research frameworks and methodologies that could enhance Women's Studies perspective into new applicative fields. Interdisciplinarity is defined as 'research and teaching activities that transgress borders between disciplinary canons and approaches, in a theoretical and methodological bricolage that allows for new synergies to emerge' (Lykke, Michel, De la Bellacasa, 2001). conventional disciplinary approaches are challenged, thus, moving beyond disciplinary boundaries towards an integration of different forms of knowledges. EMPoWER network has the potential to raise awareness and to educate wide range of social subjects, both University and community-based actors as its interdisciplinary approach highlight the need of new research questions.*

**Key words:** *interdisciplinarity, psychodramatic techniques, European thematic network.*

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## **Interdisciplinarity**

Interdisciplinarity aims at creating something new by crossing boundaries, and thinking across them in order to create new approaches and new research questions. Through increased interdisciplinarity, it will be possible diversifying knowledge and methodological strategies especially, as part of the international exchange strategy this enable different actors and diverse reality to communicate to each other .

At the same time, it strengthens the interaction between research, education and the sphere of activist movements.

Susan Stanford Friedman (2001) offers an interesting perspective about the term ‘interdisciplinarity’ in relation to the field of feminist studies. Friedman intends interdisciplinarity as the strategy that makes different research and theoretical areas ‘speaking together’. That strategy is based upon a shared dialogue among different fields – which, ‘exploring their own limits and combining their own potentialities, can reach creative breakthroughs’ (Friedman, 2001)

The contextual framework of space and time lead the options for different research tools and methodologies (Friedman, 2001). Friedman considers ‘interdisciplinarity’ as an ‘umbrella term’ (Friedman, 2001) under which the depth of disciplines and the multifaceted goal of different perspectives can be conjoined.

Interdisciplinarity has been described as a ‘travelling concept’ (Friedman, 2001) that allows academics/researchers to move from a home-based knowledge to different areas of expertise. Transgressing borders adds meanings to the knowledge that has been formed so far, highlighting new concepts and new applicative fields.

In this framework, the EMPoWER Project (European Daphne Program) investigates social justice themes through transversal contributions from European academics and professionals, shedding new light in the field of violence against women.

Especially:

- through active techniques such as psychodrama (Moreno, 1946) and Playback Theatre (Fox, 1986) social justice themes are explored making evidence of interconnections between psychological well being and economic resources that women can get access to;
- active techniques become part of the educational practices studied at an academic level both for students and professional trainings;

- what is highlighted is the strong link among psychodrama, playback theatre techniques and their 'plasticity' as efficacious tools to employ in international environments and so, among different cultures;
- psychodrama is developing itself as a new, applicative research field, whose intersections involve gender, ethnicity, sexuality, and nationality, which will be explored from here onwards;
- psychodrama has been applied in women shelters at national and international levels, playing an important role in the transmission of the data concerning women's security to the Government agencies and academic departments;
- new questions and investigative research fields are problematized: i.e. the legal family concept, national/international legislation concerning victims of violence, genealogy of women's oppression.
- As future applicative study fields are highlight here, I refer in particular to the need to integrate gender studies perspectives in academic courses and within active techniques methodologies

### **European Thematic Networks**

Empower Project aims at strengthening cooperation between academic and social/civil organisations addressing gender/women questions through the use of different research tools within the project itself, and the further dissemination of results through conferences and meetings, websites and publications.

One of the main aspects emerged from the research project results, is the awareness of a gendered perspective which the academic and social spheres lack.

The term 'gender' is usually used in its broader meaning referring to the social, cultural and psychological attribution of being male and/or female'. The distinction is made between the biological concept of sex and the cultural, psychological and social connotations in which gender characteristics are expressed according to the culture and/or the historical timewithin which one individual is situated.

The term has its intrinsic complexity and that is why research and debates are open to questioning the meaning itself and the social/political consequences related to it. Moreover it is not part of the mainstream research issues, consequently it is very often underestimated the deep

connection with educational strategies, law enforcement and the implementation of national/international social welfare programmes.

For these reasons, European Thematic Networks encourage the growth of educational and political programmes that set the agenda on the gender perspective.

Specifically, the European academia research pursues women's/gender research (Liinason & van Der Tuin, 2007) across different areas of investigation, as follows:

a) gender studies : autonomously organised as a discipline in its own right.

b) gender research : research with issues of gender at its core, research that has gender as its primary focus, integrated in other disciplines.

c) gender perspective : research that analyses and problematizes issues of gender, positioning gender as a perspective alongside of other equally important perspectives.

d) gender aspects: research in which gender is not particularly visible in the analyses, although still present as a dimension of the study<sup>17</sup>

The questioning of how carrying out gender perspective is already highly interdisciplinary: in which way disciplines/ methodologies can be affected by the gender perspective? And also, how 'gender' can be integrated in a new researching field?

## **Conclusion**

Interdisciplinarity approaches need to be set in order to develop a different knowledge production. The final goal of the Empower conference is sharing experiences and material that contributes to take further steps towards innovative practices and new research questions.

<sup>17</sup>This division is developed on the basis of a distinction made by Hillevi Ganetz (2005) Gender research applications within the field of Humanities-Social Sciences (Genusvetenskapliga projektansökningar inom humaniora-samhällsvetenskap) Stockholm: The Swedish Research Council (p. 13). In this inquiry, Ganetz distinguishes between three kinds of gender research, i.e. a) gender research, b) gender perspective, c) gender aspect, thus not giving an account of gender studies as a subject field of its own.

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