

# Are there any 'real' men and women in the Viking Age?

*An examination of gendered research  
contributions from 1980-2019 in Viking Age  
archaeology*

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# Abstract

This paper seeks to analyze how the archaeologist's research regarding sex, gender and social identity has changed since the beginning of gender archaeology in 1984 until 2019. The goal is to examine how the research trends have changed over time. This paper also seeks to examine how the archaeologists treat gender by highlighting feminist and stereotypical tendencies in the research contributions. The thesis is based on research contributions by different authors who are focusing on the inhabitants of the Viking Age, gender, gender roles and power. The contributions spans from approximately 1980 to 2019, and it has resulted in a total of 117 research contribution, which have been examined. Hopefully, this paper will provide a basis for further research on gender and Viking Age archaeology.

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# 1 Introduction

In archaeology today, many archaeologists would agree that there is no such thing as objective knowledge (e.g. Wylie 2007). The texts we read, the materials we interpret are all subject to multiple and conflicting interpretations. This is especially apparent when archaeologists are interpreting and depicting sex and gender, and especially sex and gender in the context of the Scandinavian Viking Age. Gender is an important aspect of any society (Sofaer and Sørensen 2013:528). It is fundamental in how it makes people identify with others and how they understand themselves. Therefore, gender is crucial in terms of how society is organized. Consequently, as gender ideology, gender identity, gender roles and the terms sex and gender are becoming increasingly important parts in the field of archaeology, it becomes even more relevant to discuss these topics.

In this thesis I intend to examine how archaeologists write about sex, gender and social identity in the Viking Age (c. 800 – 1050 AD). I have chosen to focus on the Viking Age because this is an era that is still dominated by ideas which could be interpreted as stereotypical. The Viking society, as it is most popularly portrayed, was a society of male seafarers, robbers, warriors, traders, farmers, craftsmen, kings and slaves, while the women are largely portrayed as housewives, at home, in the background (Dommasnes 1998:337). The men had fierce beards; they wore helmets and had axes, swords, or shields in hand. They were ruthless and maimed, murdered, pillaged, raped and enslaved (e.g. Lihammer 2012:9; Løkka 2014; Trotzig 1995).

Generally, the men and women of the Viking Age are portrayed as two opposite categories. While the men are portrayed as active contributors who participated in the public sphere of society, the women are depicted as static housewives who were confined to the private, domestic sphere of the longhouse. These gendered depictions can be found in almost any contribution regarding the Viking Age, and this in turn, might present the men and women of the Viking Age as unfortunate stereotypes. The issues regarding stereotypes, how men and women are depicted in the archaeological contributions, and how archaeologists use the terms sex, gender and social identity, will be discussed in this thesis in the shape of these research questions:

- In what way has our understanding of men and women in the Viking Age changed from the 1980s until today in archaeology?
- How are we using the terms gender, sex and social identity?
- Are we creating stereotypical interpretations of the people in the past, or are we making room for ‘real people’?

In order to investigate these questions, I will examine a total of 117 research contributions written by Viking Age archaeologists. My material does not present a complete overview of all research contributions regarding sex, gender and social identity in the Viking Age. Because of limited time and space, I had to limit myself to the research contributions that were easier to access and examine. The contributions I have chosen to assess are from approximately 1980 to 2019. Additionally, I wish to stress that my assessment of the research contributions should not be understood as critique of any of the scholars who have written the contributions. My only aim in this thesis is to identify any changes that might have occurred in the archaeological contributions and reflect upon these changes. This in turn might reveal important information about what has happened in the discipline, in addition to revealing if there are any challenges that we might benefit from addressing.

The thesis contains six chapters with varying numbers of subchapters. Chapter two consists of two parts; both are theoretical. The first part is about the history of feminist and gender archaeology, while the second part discusses the use of the terms sex, gender and social identity. In chapter three, the research contributions I have assessed are presented. This chapter also includes an explanation to my methodology of assessing the contributions, as well as presenting my findings in sector diagrams. Chapter four will provide a short introduction to the research contributions I have assessed and repeat the research questions. The rest of chapter four consists of an assessment of the research tendencies that are visible in the contributions. This will be examined one decade at a time in chronological order. In chapter five, I will discuss my assessment of the contributions and the research tendencies I have identified. Chapter six marks the end of my thesis with a short summary and a conclusion.

## 2 Research History and Paving the Way with Theory

In order to discuss the examination of gender in the academic literature, it is important to understand where it all began. When did gender become important in archaeology and why? For the benefit of the reader, as well as myself, this chapter will be divided into two parts. The first part will address the research history of feminist and gender archaeology. The aim of this part of the chapter is to introduce the reader to the topic, as well as establish *why* gender archaeology was needed in the field of archaeology. I will also include a section about masculinity, as this is also an important part of gender archaeology. Lastly, this chapter will contain a brief conclusion and summary.

The second part of this chapter will be very theoretical. I will discuss the one-sex/two-sex model, the sex/gender division, the poststructuralist view of gender, as well as some discussions about sexuality and social identity. Chapter two will also serve as a background for my own discussions of the material. This part of chapter two will begin with an introduction to the theory, where I among other things, discuss our own basis of understanding what was 'natural' in past societies. Next, I will present the one-sex/two-sex model, before moving on to the sex/gender division and discussion. After this follows a paragraph about the poststructuralist view of gender, social identity and sexuality, before chapter two will end with a summary.

However, before I begin with the research history, I think it is important to explain a few of the different terms I will use in this chapter. The first term I would like to clarify is 'gender archaeology'. In the context of this thesis, gender archaeology applies to the theoretical direction that sprung out from feminist archaeology. This archaeology is concerned with the entire society, and is about women, men, children and elderly. In my thesis, however, the focus will be on the interpretation of male and female, man and woman. In my thesis, I will be discussing men and women, and in order to do so, I will use terms like 'women', 'female' or 'female sex and gender'. Additionally, I will use the same terms when I am discussing men: 'men', 'male' or 'male sex and gender'. My aim is here to clarify that when I am

discussing men and women of the Viking Age, I intend to discuss them as whole individuals, including their sex and gender.

Regarding gender archaeology, it is also important to clarify the terms sex and gender. I will return to elaborate more about these terms in part two of this chapter. Thus, it is enough for the reader to know at this point, that when I am using the term sex, I refer to biological sex, and not the activity. Biological sex is a term used to determine female or male genitals, which is one way of interpreting if a person is male or female. Next is the term gender, which is, in this case, connected to cultural gender. Cultural gender can be understood as how a person might represent a gender, regardless of genitals, or how the person himself or herself identifies with another gender than he or she was born as. This division of biological sex and cultural gender means that a person can be born female, but still be gendered as a male; because either she interprets herself as male or the society interprets her as a male because she acts like a male. Moi (1999:26) provides a very basic distinction that is easy to remember when discussing sex and gender: “Gender is between the ears, sex is between the legs.”

In the context of this thesis, I think it is important to look at the term feminism before I move on to the research history. Engelstad (2004) has in her article *Another F-word? Feminist Gender Archaeology* questioned if the term feminism has become a new profanity that can be added to the list of curse words starting with F in West-European languages. Some critics of feminism in archaeology associate it with a narrow perspective and accuses it of creating a past as ‘wished for’ (Engelstad 2004:42; Fuglestvedt 2006:59). However, I think it is important to remember that feminism is simply a term used for people who agree with the idea of equality for all, regardless of gender; and in the case of archaeology, the feminist critique (e.g. Harding 1986) contributes to awareness of gender bias in general.

The last term I wish to explain is ‘real people’. This term is used in my headline as well as in the last of my research questions. I will use this as an analytical term and as a category of discussion. Additionally, my use of ‘real people’ should be perceived as the opposite of ‘stereotypical’. Thus, ‘real people’ is a term that might cause discussions regarding the strict division of males and females in the Viking Age, and could possibly also lead to depictions of masculine women and feminine men. The topic of ‘real people’ will be discussed further in chapter five.

## 2.1 Part 1: The Research History

The beginning of gender research in archaeology has its roots in the women's movement of the 1960s and 70s. It is now a well-established topic within archaeology as well as other disciplines. The need for feminism and gender research within archaeology was clear; many felt and argued that the past had consistently presented the women as passive bystanders (e.g. Gilchrist 1999; Løkka 2014; Nelson 2006). The common notion among archaeologists was that "History happened *to* her, while men *made* it happen" (Sørensen, 2000:17, own emphasis). Like in many other disciplines (e.g. history, social anthropology, paleontology, sociology, biology and psychology), archaeology was deeply colored by androcentric bias, where the discipline had naturalized the historical dominance of men over women to such a degree that it appeared to be the natural order of things (Arnold and Wicker 2001:vii). It was also clear that men and women, when depicted in a prehistoric setting, was made to fit the contemporary archaeologist's notions of femininity and masculinity. For instance, it was 'understood' that woman's and man's nature was different (Arwill-Nordbladh 1998:13); it was in the man's nature to possess characteristics like strength, courage, ambition, contentiousness and self-centeredness. It was also their responsibility to protect women and children. While on the other hand, it was in the woman's nature to be beautiful, motherly, mellow, pure of mind, unselfish and caring (Arwill-Nordbladh 1998:13; Laqueur 1990). The beginning of gender research contributed to the increased awareness of the androcentric bias within archaeology and revealed how women were depicted as stereotypes and were automatically downgraded in terms of her abilities, contributions and importance (e.g. Gilchrist 1999; Løkka 2014; Sørensen 2000).

The contributions of feminist thoughts and ideas are generally perceived as having advanced through society in four separate waves. The first wave occurred roughly between 1880 and 1920 with the suffrage movements where the goal was for women to achieve public emancipation and greater rights regarding employment, education and politics (Gilchrist 1999:2). The second wave emerged in the late 1960s, and now women became more focused on personal issues of equality (Gilchrist 1999:2; Sørensen 2000:17). Academia were also inspired by the second wave feminism, and many disciplines become aware of how women were treated in the profession and in history, and thus, it became a concern to find the root causes of women's oppression and making them visible (Meskell 2007:28; Trigger 1989:458). The third wave began in the early 1990s, and it is sometimes referred to as postmodernist

feminism (Gilchrist 1999:2-3). The focus of this feminist wave is the rejection of the idea of an essential character or experience that mirror men or women; they focus on the aspect of difference, and how different men and women are. In addition to this, it is also concerned with subjectivity: Consequently, every man and woman is subject to different experiences that make them unique, and this process continues throughout the person's lifetime and causes every single person to have an own unique subjectivity. The point is, thus, that one cannot treat everyone in prehistory the same way, as every single woman or man would have different life experiences. There has also been a fourth wave that washed over us in 2012; however, this wave of feminism has mostly been concerned with sexual harassment and violence against women and is perhaps most commonly associated with social media and the Me-Too movement. However, even though there have been many waves, it was the second that made the most impact and is regarded as the beginning of gender research and feminism in archaeology.

Even though the second wave feminism took place in the 1960s, it was not until the mid-1970s that gender and feminism emerged in the field of archaeology. The Norwegian archaeologists were the first to act; in 1979 the first public conference about women in that past took place and it was titled "Were They All Men?". However, even though the conference was held in 1979, the papers were not published until 1987 (Bertelsen et al. 1987). Norway was also the first to start a feminist archaeological journal, *KAN: Kvinner I arkeologi i Norge* (KAN: Women in Archaeology in Norway) in 1985. However, even though the Norwegians were the first to act, the root of gender archaeology is often associated with Conkey's and Spector's influential paper *Archaeology and the Study of Gender* from 1984.

### **2.1.1 The First Efforts of Engendering Archaeology**

The first glimpses of gender research in archaeology depended on theory created by the feminists and the feminist movement of the 1960s. They concerned themselves with challenging the patriarchy and the universal assertion that men were the actors in society, and the notions that "it's a man's world" and "women's place is in the home" (Nelson 2006:10; Janeway 1971). These depictions of the gendered past gained some of their power from allegations like "it has always been this way ..." or "already during the Stone Age ..." that contributed to the argument of unchangeability, which also contributed to a static depiction of men and women (Arwill-Nordbladh 2001:10). In archaeology, there also existed a contention

at this time, that women were hard to find in the past. However, Moore and Scott (1997:5) counters this contention with a simple question: “If we cannot locate women in the past, then how can we be sure that we have located men? And children?”. Therefore, a natural starting point for gender archaeology was simply to locate the women in the past and make them, their roles and activities more visible by challenging the static, essentialist assumptions about gender roles and relations (Bolger 2013:5; Meskell 2007:28).

During this initial phase, the researchers turned to the mortuary data to look for evidence. For a considerable amount of time, mortuary studies continued to be an area of gender analysis, as “graves often provide the least ambiguous evidence about gender roles and ideologies” (Sørensen 2006:111). Thus, long discussions followed regarding the interpretation of gendered grave goods, and if the grave goods depicted women or men. In retrospect, it is obvious that the archaeologists based this on their own, contemporary perceptions of womanly and manly behavior and activities (Arwill-Nordbladh 2001:17-18). Consequently, for instance, swords were depicted as typically male objects, while needles were associated with women. Gender awareness in archaeology has also been expressed by a desire to make women into men (Arwill-Nordbladh 1998:50), and, thus, some archaeologists set out to prove that women could have participated in ‘male’ activities, and thereby prove that women were not inferior to men. However, this model of sameness leaves no room for different social functions, which it is commonly criticized for. Moen (2010:20), for instance, states that it assumes that our modern value-judgements were the same for prehistoric people, has also criticized this. In addition to proving that women could have participated in ‘male’ activities, feminist archaeologists have also experimented by simply adding women to the past. This has resulted in the phrase “add women and stir” that is shunned by most feminists and used only by the most liberal ones who regard the problems of androcentrism fixable by simply adding women (Willemark 1999:9). The attention has since shifted and has gone towards understanding the great variety of gender roles and identities that should be expected in different social settings, instead of forcing men and women of the past into strict roles or promote equality at all costs (Hays-Gilpin and Whitley 1998:5).

It was the feminist critique that inspired archaeologists and other disciplines to take a second look at sex and gender stereotypes; and in many ways, this critique resulted in new ways of thinking about the world. In the 1970s, this resulted in biological sex being distinguished from the cultural construction of gender (Spencer-Wood 1992). The sex/gender distinction was

intended to help the archaeologists distinguish between the physical characteristics of men and women (which were regarded as static and biologically based) from their social, economic, and political roles (regarded as variable and culturally constructed) (Bolger 2013:6). According to Gilchrist (1999:xviii-xv), biological sex is a term that refers to “classification by means of observable biological differences between men, women and intersex individuals, based on appearance of genitalia, chromosomes and hormones”, while gender refers to “the cultural interpretation of sexual difference that results in the categorization of individuals, artefacts, spaces and bodies”. This distinction was perceived as a useful tool that could help archaeologists further explore instances where, for instance, a biologically sexed female was buried with grave goods considered to be typically male, or vice versa.

It is thus clear that ever since the early 1990s; gender prehistory has addressed a wide range of themes and issues through a variety of theoretical and methodological approaches (Bolger 2013:6). The feminist theory and gender archaeology has profoundly changed and reshaped archaeology as a discipline. And in addition to examining differences between women and men, it examines issues such as race, class and sexuality. The discussions about sex and gender paved the way for queer theory, which has gained momentum during the last two decades (Blackmore 2011:79). Queer theory is, as feminist and gender archaeology, grounded in politics outside of academia and is especially promoted by Judith Butler (Butler 1990, 1993; Dowson 2000:163). It is often interpreted as a challenge to heteronormative practice and it provides a framework for identifying and processing all aspects of identity formation (Blackmore 2011:76), and also explores the idea of a third gender (e.g. Dowson 1998, 2000; Herdt 1996; Voss 2000; Weismantel 2013) and what we today would call transgender. The idea of a third gender has emerged during the last couple of decades as a challenge to the binary notion of two genders. Moral (2016:789) argues that the existence of a third gender can be viewed as a means broaden the sex/gender systems of past societies and thus analyze topics such as intersexuality, transsexualism and transgenderism; however, is there really a need for more than two genders? I will return to this question in chapter four. As for now, feminism, gender and queer archaeology all provide means and theories to investigate the conceptual links between gender, sexuality, and other aspects of social identity in past societies (e.g. Dowson 2000; Voss 2000, 2008; Bolger 2013:7). There is no question that feminism, gender and queer archaeology are useful theories that have helped develop archaeology to what it is today.

## 2.1.2 Masculinity and Gender Archaeology

However, we must not forget men and masculinity when examining feminism and gender archaeology. Since the beginning of feminism and gender archaeology, androcentrism has been criticized and pointed out within the field. Men were assumed to hold the important positions in social and ritual life as well as being active regarding the development of society (Skogstrand 2011:57). However, by revealing how women were portrayed as stereotype images based on the 19th century ideals (e.g. Bertelsen et al. 1987; Conkey and Spector 1984; Gero and Conkey 1991), it also became clear that the traditional depictions of masculinity needed to be examined more closely (Kimmel 1987:9). Since the middle of the 20th century, the interest in masculinity and manliness has increased within gender research (Bandlien 2006:11). This increased interest in men sprung out as a reaction against the classical patriarchal theory and the androcentric archaeology, which is being argued by e.g. Bandlien (2006) and Skogstrand (2011), reproduces stereotype images of men and accuses men as a group of always having oppressed women.

Androcentric influences have been discussed and criticized since the beginning of feminism (e.g. Gross 1977; Harding 1986; Slocum 1975). In Skogstrand's (2011) paper, she mentions three levels or types of androcentrism in archaeology. The first type she mentions is the focus on presumed male roles like "(male) hunter, the (male) warrior, the (male) chief or the (male) farmer" (2011:59). The second type is processes or activities that receive quite a lot of interest, mainly because men are supposed to be the main actors. These processes or activities include, for instance, war, trade, religious rituals or sailing (Skogstrand 2011:59). This level of androcentrism is not criticized for putting men in the spotlight, but rather that they do not include women and their roles, tasks and objects, and thus emphasize the underlying notions that men is always in the center. The third and last type of androcentrism concerns the interpretations from a male standpoint; this has been criticized for examining society through the eyes of middle-age, middle-class, western white men (Skogstrand 2011:59; Haraway 1991; Harding 1986; Wylie 1991). However, androcentric scholarship is only *seemingly* about men; as Brod (1987:264) puts it: "In reality, it is (androcentric scholarship), at best, only negatively about men, that is, it is about men only by virtue of not being about women." The examination of the different types of androcentrism proves that men can be subjected to stereotypical presentations and interpretations. However, in most cases this is not considered a problem or even examined further (e.g. Conkey and Spector 1984; Gilchrist 1999).

'Men's studies' has emerged as a study, and even though it has not had – nor will it have – the same impact as women's studies, it is still regarded as an important field of study (Kimmel 1987:10; Brod 1987:263). However, the reader may question the need for a study of men when seemingly everything that is not explicitly about women, is focused on men? This is indeed very true: men tend to be the normative gender. However, as Kimmel (1987:11) states: "But rarely, if ever, do we study men as men; rarely do we make masculinity the object of inquiry as we examine men's lives." Very often, we encounter the stereotypical interpretation of men, which I mentioned above. Here, they are portrayed as masculine warriors, explorers, adventurers or influential tradesmen. Gender is by no means fixed and static, and if we are to have a full understanding of gender in the past, we must include men's studies to the equation. There must also be room for the history of homosexuality and queer theory if we wish to develop a full understanding of manliness and masculinity. Bandlien (2006:12) states that being a man does not represent a dominant culture or identity, and the history of homosexuality contributes to this by showing the complexities of masculinity. An example is Brit Solli's (2008) examination of Odin in the Old Norse mythology. He is in the sagas, depicted as the manliest of the gods, yet he is also the master of seidr (magic), which in Old Norse society is considered a female activity. Solli (2008) thus examines how the manliest of the gods also possess abilities that are predominantly considered as exclusively feminine; which results in her interpretation of Odin as a representation of a third gender.

As with women's studies, the study of men is a response to the wrongful depictions of men as stereotypes and as oppressors of women (Bandlien 2006; Kimmel 1987; Skogstrand 2011), and in the same way, it attempts to change the depictions we have of manliness and masculinity. Thus, men's studies and focus on men in gender archaeology is as necessary as women's studies and the focus on women (Brod 1987); we need both perspectives to complete the feminist project and bring equality and understanding to the field of archaeology as well as other disciplines.

### **2.1.3 Conclusion of Part 1**

In this chapter, I have explored gender archaeology's emergence, through the political beginning of the feminist movement in the 1960s and the various branches this research has contributed to, including the study of masculinity and queer theory. Because of gender-awareness we have evolved from the traditional interpretations where the subject is explicitly

male (Fahlander 2006), to a point where gender is now considered by most archaeologists in their interpretations (Moen 2010:21). However, even though gender archaeology has its roots in feminist thought, it does not mean that all gender archaeology is feminist or concerned with women. Gender archaeology explores men and women, femininity and masculinity, but in addition to this, it also explores differences and the lives of children and the elderly. The differences can for instance be cultural experiences, sexuality, and gender, and thus, they result in distinctive and unique men and women who differ from the essential, biological and stereotypical assumptions (Gilchrist 1999:8). However, gender archaeology still needs to challenge western views of gender roles and their projection on to interpretation of past societies (Fuglestedt 2006:59). The sole purpose of gender studies is no longer to study exclusively women, but rather study the complex social structures that form the basis of different sexes and genders (Moen 2010:20; Sørensen 2000:40). This also includes an archaeology of masculinity, childhood and old age. However, despite our increased awareness of gender and sex, there are still areas that could benefit from more research.

## **2.2 Part 2: Sex, Gender and Social Identity. Paving the Way with Theory**

As we can see, it took a while before gender, sex, sexuality and social identity became acceptable research areas in archaeology. Since archaeology is not only concerned with understanding the material remains of the past, but also understanding the past's societies, and thus, its people, it is important to have fields like feminist and gender archaeology, which focuses precisely on these different aspects. During the last couple of years, several 'fantastic' finds have been uncovered in the field of Viking Age archaeology; one of these discoveries concerns grave Bj 581 from the Viking town Birka in Sweden. The grave site at Birka was excavated during the 19th century by Hjalmar Stolpe and his team, and during the excavation they came across grave Bj 581, which is commonly known as the Birka-warrior because the individual was buried with weapons, a full set of gaming pieces and two horses (Hedenstierna-Jonson et al. 2017). As a result of the grave goods being identified as typically male, so was the skeleton. For over a hundred years, the individual was presumed male. However, through osteological analysis, the presumed male warrior was identified as biologically female (Hedenstierna-Jonson et al. 2017). This caused some problems; how could we possibly continue to call the individual the 'Birka-warrior' when he was in fact a

she? Up until the point of the individual being sexed as female, there was no contesting the fact that the person in the grave was a warrior, and probably a high-ranking officer at that because of the grave goods found in the grave. However, somehow the biological sex of the skeleton seems to have changed some archaeologists' perception of this grave as being a warrior, even though she was buried with items commonly assumed to belong to warriors and high-ranking officers. Is this a sign of our own contemporary narrow-mindedness by explaining away evidence that was enough to prove a male warrior but is not enough to prove a female warrior? Moreover, does our own projections of what is 'natural' cause depictions of the people in the past as either stereotypes or 'fantastic' interpretations, or is there room for 'real' people in the Viking Age?

Our history is important, and it is reassuring to know that we do have a history and traditions; that the things we do, things we say, and the things that surround us, are products of a distant past. In addition to connecting us to the past and our forefathers and -mothers, our history demonstrates that some of the things we consider 'natural' or 'eternal', have not always been this way. Some of these 'natural' things are created and constructed by people. From this, it follows that the things we consider as 'natural' are not natural at all; in fact, it is something 'cultural', where 'cultural' means that people construct it (Sandmo 1998). It is important to understand that the things we might think of as 'natural' might not be as natural as we think.

In this century and in connection with our own contemporary and Western thoughts, there are 'naturally' two different sexes; the biological male and female, and there are 'naturally' two different genders, at least. However, this 'natural' view of male and female may not be as natural as we think; we only think it is natural because this is how it has been the last couple of hundred years. Thus, there is room for many interpretations regarding variations and differences between men and women, masculinity and femininity, as our past may not be as 'natural' as we might think it is (Arwill-Nordbladh 2001:27-28). This emphasizes the assumption that there might have been different ideas regarding sex, gender, and social identity in the past than our own contemporary thoughts and ideas. This might also be the case when studying sex, gender, and social identity in the Scandinavian Viking Age.

These are topics I wish to discuss more closely by looking at archaeological texts about sex, gender, and social identity in the Scandinavian Viking Age. How are we depicting the people of the past? Through the lenses of our own reality, or through the lenses of some presumed 'natural' past? In order to examine this, I have chosen to focus on these research questions: *In*

*what way has our understanding of men and women in the Viking Age changed from the 1980s until today in archaeology? How are we using the terms gender, sex and social identity? And additionally: Are we creating stereotypical interpretations of the people in the past, or are we making room for 'real' people?* However, before I can attempt to answer these questions, I need to address some discussions about sex, gender and social identity. These discussions will be important as they shine some light on how our interpretations have changed over the course of several decades. This is the aim of part two of this chapter; to familiarize the reader with some discussions about gender, sex and social identity. In order to do this, I will begin by presenting the one-sex/two-sex model, to show how our thoughts have evolved regarding the concepts of sex/gender. After this, I will discuss the sex/gender division; what is sex and gender, and why do we need to distinguish between them? In addition, does this division help us approach the people of the past? In the last part of this chapter, I wish to introduce the reader to the concept of gender as performative, social identity and sexuality, and emphasize some of the discussions regarding these topics. I hope to use these topics and discussions as tools as well as lay the foundation of this essay and provide a platform for the theoretical discussions of the research questions in chapter four.

### **2.2.1 The One-Sex and Two-Sex Model: An Introduction to Different Thoughts about Sex and Gender**

Before the 'natural' order of two sexes (male and female), there existed another 'natural' order: the one-sex model. This model can be traced back to the ancient Greeks and, amongst others, the philosophers Aristotle and Galen (Laqueur 1990:28-29; Moi 1999:10). In his book, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud*, Laqueur (1990) describes how different notions about sex and gender have emerged over time, and also demonstrated why the one-sex model existed for such a long amount of time. The one-sex model is a model where everything is described as either male or non-male, and it therefore explains everything in relation to maleness. In this model, females were not seen as a separate gender, they were simply seen as inverted men. The men had penises and testicles, while females had vaginas and ovaries, which the one-sex model explained as being an inverted penis and testicle. It was emphasized that the only difference between men and women were that the reproductive organs of men were on the outside of the body, while the females had theirs on the inside of the body. Laqueur (1990:26) explains it like this: "Women, in other words, are inverted, and hence less perfect, men. They have exactly the same organs but in exactly the wrong places."

The one-sex model thus claims that women were less perfect versions of men; a point that is also used to explain several cases where women seem to have changed their sex and turned into men.

One example that is used when talking about the one-sex model and its view of gender and sex, is the story of Marie, which is written by the French surgeon Ambroise Paré approximately in 1570, and is retold in Sandmo's (1998) *Et Kjønnsskifte i Drøbak – om en kropp, intimitet og en datter som ble far* (own translation: A Sex-Change in Drøbak – about body, intimacy and a daughter who became a father). Paré writes about the young girl, Marie, who was chasing a runaway pig, and during the chase it jumped over a ditch. Marie jumped after it, and in the same instance, she developed male reproductive organs. Later, she changed her name from Marie to Germain and served as one of the king's men. Paré also states when he visited the village, the other young girls were observed signing a song where they warned others from stretching their legs too far apart, because this would turn them into men. This is a very interesting example of how gender and sex were perceived in the past. Did Marie magically change into a man, or did she always possess the reproductive organ of a male? Was it her sex that changed, her gender or both?

According to the one-sex model, women are less perfect versions of men, and thus it is possible for women to change their sex, because it is possible to develop from being 'less perfect' to 'perfect'. However, men cannot change into females, as they are already 'perfect', and one cannot go from being 'perfect' to 'less perfect', according to the one-sex model. In our contemporary, Western eyes, it seems strange that this model was considered 'natural' for so long. It was not until the eighteenth century, sex, as we know it today, was invented and resulted in the two-sex model (Laqueur 1990:149; Moi 1999:10). The two-sex model differs from the one-sex model, as it acknowledges that women and men are different human beings, and not different aspects of 'perfect' men. It was emphasized that women are women, and men are men; and this division of the two sexes was grounded on the natural differences of the reproductive organs. This is the model that we are most familiar with. However, there might have existed other models that we are currently not aware of. The development of the one-sex to the two-sex model shows two different versions of how people have thought about sex and gender in the past and present. My aim with including the one-sex and two-sex model, is to present it as a kind of background for further discussions about sex and gender in the Scandinavian Viking Age.

## 2.2.2 The Sex/Gender Discussion

As I have already mentioned in the previous part, it was the feminist critique that inspired archaeologists and other disciplines to separate sex and gender and to create two distinct categories. When Conkey and Spector (1984) introduced the concept of gender to archaeology, one of its main objectives was to prevent archaeology from approaching prehistoric people through essentialist and stereotypic lenses. With its theoretical link to sex, known as the sex-gender system, *gender* was perceived as a guarantee against essentialist approaches to the people of the past (Fuglestedt 2014:48). Robert Stoller, who was a medical scientist, first invented the conceptual pair of sex and gender. He suggested this terminology in the 1960s and later published the book *Sex and Gender* (Stoller 1984), where he distinguished between “sex as body” and “sex as self-experience”. The “self-experience sex”, he called gender, while the “sex as body”, he called sex (Stoller 1984; Fuglestedt 2014:52). However, not everyone was happy with this understanding of sex and gender, and the poststructuralists were especially unhappy. They criticized the early theories revolving around the sex/gender distinction of trying to make a particular group of women the standard-bearer of feminism, and by doing this, they excluded how different women are (Caldwell 2002:16-17; Valverde 1990); not all women are in the same situation. This is also true when discussing men, children and elderly; there is no universal, single category of ‘woman’ or ‘man’, we are all different. In addition to this, they argued that the 1960s understanding of sex/gender, easily turned sex into ahistorical and divorced it from concrete historical and social meanings (Moi 1999). According to Moi (1999:30-31), the poststructuralists’ two main objectives were (1) to avoid biological determinism, and (2) to develop a fully historical and non-essential understanding of sex or the body. So even though it has been criticized, the sex/gender distinction has become widely accepted in society at large and has also provided a basic framework for a great deal of feminist theory (Moi 1999:3); however, lately the distinction and its value has been questioned.

In order to have a foundation to discuss gender and sex in the Scandinavian Viking Age, it is important to understand this division and some of the discussions regarding the use of these terms. I have briefly touched upon this in the beginning of this chapter and will now elaborate. However, I will begin by repeating myself (and Moi 1999:26); “Gender is between the ears, sex is between the legs”. Sex is the term used to describe biological characteristics, such as reproductive capacities and external genitalia (Sørensen 2000:42). Therefore, sex is

used as a tool to decide whether a person is born with female or male genitals. However, as we know, men and women do not always perform as 'men' or 'women', and this is where the term 'gender' is relevant. Gender, in contrast to sex, is meant to emphasize that it is a social/cultural construction, and therefore gender is neither biological, natural, universal nor essential (Sørensen 2000:42). In other words, gender does not necessarily have any connection to the person's biological sex. With the sex/gender distinction in mind, it is easier to explain how a person born with male genitals can still identify himself, or society identifies him, as a female and vice versa.

We can thus state that sex is perceived as something non-cultural, static, measurable, scientifically and unproblematic (Nelson 2006; Sørensen 2000:43), while gender, on the other hand, is perceived as cultural, fluid, unmeasurable and basically always the opposite of what we think sex is (Moi 1999:33). This distinction between sex and gender has, allegedly, been one of the central premises to further understand past societies. Sørensen (2000:44) states that this is because it has influenced our understanding of the nature of sex, and therefore it has contributed to our understanding of the role of sex and gender in relation to social constructions. However, as Scott (1986) argues, while gender, on one hand, is a powerful analytical concept that could challenge taken-for-granted assumptions about sex and social behavior, it has, on the other hand, removed 'women' from the vocabulary and analysis by replacing it with the neutral term 'gender' (Sørensen 2000; Scott 1986).

Another problem with the sex/gender distinction appeared because of the poststructuralists' critique; they criticize the 1960s view of sex/gender, but do not have the theoretical machinery to solve the problem. Instead, the machinery they *do* have generates new theoretical problems that they want to solve first. However, these problems have now nothing to do with bodies, sex or gender (Moi 1999:31). Others find a more radical solution to the problems; they claim that sex is constructed by gender, or at least by the same regulatory discourses that produce gender (Strassburg 1999). Ultimately, this leads to the conclusion that there is no difference between sex and gender; sex turns out to have been gender all along (Moi 1999:42-43). If this is the case, then how does this bring us any closer to understanding people in the past? Do we even need the sex/gender distinction if we can argue that they are the same thing?

In addition to these issues, I want to highlight another one; in its current use, the sex/gender distinction is not capable of approaching past bodies because it does not provide us with the

relevant tools we need. An example of its limitations is seen in burial archaeology. Let's imagine a scenario with a grave where the skeleton is missing, but the grave goods are present and preserved and are indicators of our own feminine/masculine categories, like for instance beads or weapons. Since we consider beads as traditionally female equipment and weapons as traditionally male, our interpretation of graves like this are nothing but a reproduction of our own traditionalist notions of women and men (Arwill-Nordbladh 2001:17-18; Fuglestvedt 2014:56). Beads might not have been exclusively female equipment in the past; however, because of our own assumptions about what is traditionally male and female in our own contemporary world, we project this onto the past. Again, a parallel can be drawn to the Birka-warrior; a grave that is typically interpreted as a 'fantastic interpretation', like for example being a transvestite priest or a cross dresser, which has been preferred over that of a woman wielding masculine symbols of power. Moreover, because of this, we create an exotic 'gender type' instead of interpreting it as a woman who probably took part in war-like activities (Fuglestvedt 2014:58). Instead of acknowledging her as a rare find, as a woman with weapons, maybe even a Viking warrior, her cultural gender is questioned. In addition to this, since she was found with typically male equipment, her role and identity as a woman is being questioned. Therefore, in this instance, the sex/gender concept is not helpful; instead, it only creates stereotypical depictions of women and men, or 'fantastic interpretations' of exotic genders like transvestite priests, shamans, queers, cross dressers, etc. (Fuglestvedt 2014).

Because of this criticism of the gender concept, I wish to use this as a tool to examine how archaeologists write about gender in the past. Do they depict images of stereotypical women and men according to our own notion of what Viking Age society should look like, are they focusing on the queers and the 'fantastic interpretations', or are they depicting societies where men and women could remain men and women while performing actions typically connected to the other biological sex? Are we depicting the past more 'fantastical' than it really was because of our own society's interest in sex and sexuality? Are we too focused on sex, gender and sexuality?

### **2.2.3 Performativity, Sexuality and Social Identity**

In order to discuss gender/sex in the Scandinavian Viking Age, I also think it is important to go through the concepts of performativity, social identity and sexuality. I will begin with Judith Butler's theories about gender as performative, which she presented in her text *Gender*

*Trouble* (1990) and the book *Bodies That Matter* (1993). In addition to presenting the concept of performativity, she also challenges the distinction between sex/gender and the biological/cultural dualism of the sex/gender system (Voss 2006:369). However, as most of Butler's theories are complex and difficult to summarize, I will try to include the key points I think is relevant for this thesis. Therefore, I will begin with performativity.

#### **2.2.4 Performativity**

The writings of Judith Butler (1990, 1993) have had enormous impact on the way we think of gender and sex, which is something even her critics acknowledge (Assister 1996; Hughes and Witz 1997). She was inspired by the social anthropologist Victor Turner, who argued that gender is culturally constructed, which roughly can be translated to that gender is not something you are, it is something you do (Butler 1990, 1993). This idea was also inspired by Simone de Beauvoir, who stated that "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (de Beauvoir 1979 [1949]; Lloyd 2011:546). In Butler's case, she portrays gender as an 'act', an 'effect', a 'fabrication' and a 'style', and therefore, to demonstrate her idea, she uses drag as an example. In drag, we can see the key 'fabricating mechanisms' of gender itself, which is emphasized as drag is not a parody of real gender, but a parody of a parody (Butler 1990; Hood-Williams and Harrison 1998:74). I think Butler's use of drag as an example is very good. I have only limited experience with drag artists myself, as I have only watched a few episodes of the popular TV-show RuPaul's Drag Race. However, from what I have seen from this series, the men dress up as women; they put on wigs and do their hair in a certain style, put on their makeup, and put on their clothing. Everything they do is an exaggeration of a 'normal' woman; they wear fantastic looking dresses, insanely high heels, and do their hair and makeup to emphasize their femininity. So, in order to be interpreted as female, they exaggerate everything that we see as symbols of femininity, and by doing this, they highlight the fact that, at least in their case, gender is something you become.

This brings me to the second topic I wish to include: Butler's challenge of the distinction between sex/gender and the biological/cultural dualism of the sex/gender system. As the example with the drag artist's show, gender is not something that is necessarily natural and determined; gender is changeable by the actions of the person and is only an illusion that is maintained through activities (Butler 1988:527). She (Butler 1988) argues that the body and our understanding of it as a gender, is historic, not biological. Thus, there are no natural

connections between our biological sex and our gender; as already stated, gender is changeable, and so is our understanding of it.

This point brings me to the third topic I wish to include: Butler's claim that "perhaps this construct called 'sex' is as culturally constructed as gender; indeed, perhaps it was always already gender, with the consequence that the distinction between sex and gender turns out to be no distinction at all" (Butler 1999:10). If her claim is correct, then this could mean that there is ultimately no difference between sex and gender at all. Maybe sex does not really matter? However, for instance, Ingrid Fuglestedt (2014) and Toril Moi (1999) have criticized this train of thought. Fuglestedt (2014) criticized Butler's thought about sex being irrelevant by drawing a picture of one-sex model as a straight line. We are all located somewhere on this line, and not at the "gendered" extremes (male/female), which are present in the two-sex model. On this line, we also locate people who we categorize as third gender. According to this model, we are all somewhere on this line together with the people we categorize as third genders, and from this assumption, we are all queer; which again leads to the conclusion that only "queer" people can be normal people (Fuglestedt 2014:59). However, if this is the case, then we are all 'fantastic interpretations', which I personally do not think is correct. If we follow Butler's assumption that sex does not matter, the focus on the 'fantastic interpretations' this leads to, will not bring us any closer to understanding sex/gender, identity and society in the past. It will only lead us down a path of imaginary people.

### **2.2.5 Sexuality**

Sexuality in archaeology is a relatively new theme. Questions about sexual difference began in classical archaeology with Brendel (1970) who contrasted erotic representations from classical Rome and Greece with pre-Columbian Peru and medieval India (Voss 2008:319), which was followed by Dover's *Greek Homosexuality* (1978). In Dover's work, he analyzed painted ceramics and classical texts to argue that modern twentieth-century homosexuality was not equal to the male-male sexual relationships of ancient Greece. The focus on different sexualities was long awaited; for a long time, sexuality was simply ignored in archaeology because of the presumption that heterosexuality is the norm (Dowson 2000:164). The presumed heterosexual norm contributed, amongst other things, to identifying men as sexually dominant and women as passive (Dowson 2016; Voss 2006:366, 2007). The emergence of a feminist and gender archaeology, contributed to challenging these stereotypes,

and in doing so, they created the possibility of researching not only gender, but also sexuality in the past (Conkey and Spector 1984; Gilchrist 1999; Sørensen 2000; Voss 2006, 2007; Voss and Schmidt 2000).

However, since the feminist and gender archaeology focused so much on gender, it pushed sexuality aside and deemed it as something that was not as important as gender. When sexuality finally became the focus of the researchers in the early 1990s (Voss 2007:33), it was evident that the investigations of sexuality interpreted the past through their own contemporary worldviews regarding present-day sexual norms, politics, ideologies and identities. However, archaeology is still having a hard time when faced with identifying what is seen as “sexual”. On one hand, archaeologists have had a tendency to downplay the sexual content of the archaeological record, while on the other hand, there have also been times when they see sex and sexuality everywhere; interpreting every incised line as phallic and every triangle or oval as vulvaform (Voss 2008:321). How archaeologists perceive sexuality and how they interpret it, is still a work in progress; however, there has begun to emerge a consensus around a set of practices that might be best when it comes to analyzing bodily representations and sexual imagery (e.g. Bahn 1986; Bailey 2005; Clarke 1998; Hays-Gilpin 2004; Joyce 2005; Kampen 1996; Meskell 2007). This has affected the researchers’ understanding of the past and its sexuality (Voss 2006:367). Some of the terms we use today (heterosexual, homosexual, masochist or cross-dresser) are usually understood as universal terms, which ‘naturally’ have always been described this way; however, Voss (2006:367) makes it clear that these sexual identity categories are considered as relatively recent cultural phenomena. So, just as gender is historically and culturally situated, so is sexual identities (Voss and Schmidt 2000:3). This means that our understanding and the past’s understanding of what it means to be homosexual or heterosexual, most likely is different from one another. This is an important point, as this emphasizes the fact that sexuality and our understanding of it is something that evolves and develops over time and is most likely different from culture to culture.

With this in mind, it is obvious that an archaeology of sexuality is important precisely because it illuminates the limitations and assumptions of our own modern theories about sexuality. One of its biggest challenges is our own fixation on sex and sexuality; the thought that sexuality is a central component of social identity. However, this might just be the result of our own contemporary thoughts, which is grounded in, amongst other things, politics. So,

even though an archaeology of sex, provided with the conceptual tools from sexology, the sex/gender system and gender performance, can help us examine sexuality in the past, it is still important to remember that our own thoughts about sexuality may blind us as to how it was actually enacted in past cultures (Voss 2006:371). Therefore, we must be aware of our own limitations regarding the topic of sex, and maybe ask ourselves if we are too fixated on this topic.

### **2.2.6 Social Identity**

While archaeology is mostly about understanding and interpreting the material remains of the past, it is also about understanding the past's societies, and thus, its people. In addition to performativity and sexuality, the aspect of people's social identity is also of interest to the archaeologists (e.g. Clark and Wilkie 2006; Fowler 2004; Gillespie 2000; Joyce 2000, 2004, 2006; Knapp 1998; Meskell 1999, 2002; Meskell and Joyce 2003; Meskell and Preucel 2004). In order to examine social identity, it is important to recognize that people are different; that gender, rank, sex, sexuality, etc. are aspects that makes a person himself or herself, and these aspects also differs from culture to culture and place to place. Recognizing that so many different aspects of past people's lives are important, is one step closer to understanding our own past and how we came to be where we are today. Being a person, developing and growing into a social role, into one's own social identity, is a process that takes time; a whole lifetime. If we, as archaeologists, solely focuses on the aspects of the graves and that given context, we downgrade the people to only matter in the situation of their death and not the situation of their life. However, this is the difficult part about archaeology; how can we figure out how the people lived when we only can observe them in the situation of their death?

The people in the archaeological record lived whole lives before they ended up buried or cremated. Some lucky people have lived long enough to go through the phases of infancy, childhood, adolescence, adulthood and old age, while others were not as lucky. For our own understanding, it is just as important to address the social identity and life of a male chieftain as the social identity and the life of a young woman (or warrior woman, for argument's sake), or a child. An archaeology of personhood and social identity holds great potential according to Clark and Wilkie (2006), and they are probably right. Archaeology has the potential to not only focus on women and men, it can discuss people in the past as more fully realized social actors: They were mothers, fathers, siblings, lovers, and some of them were probably

grandparents. By focusing on these social actors and how they lived their lives, we might be reaching an archaeology that might give us a better understanding of the people in the past.

The last thing I wish to address in this chapter, is the topic of grave goods and social identity. As archaeologists, we are using grave goods in order to interpret who the deceased were and what he or she did in his or her lifetime. Burials are often thought of as being the archaeologists' best source of information (Fahlander 2012:137; Moen 2019:56). However, interpreting the grave goods is challenging. Since the 1980s and 1990s, the idea that the dead do not bury themselves became a key to mortuary analysis (Parker Pearson 1999). Consequently, archaeologists cannot assume that the grave goods in a burial is a direct relation to the deceased's status in life (Fahlander 2009:36; Moen 2019:58; Stylegar 1997:80). However, as is argued by, for instance, Moen (2019), archaeologists must assume that to some extent the dead *did* bury themselves. As is highlighted in her discussions, the Norwegian Viking Age was a society that seemed to take a great deal of care and consideration in the treatment of their dead (Moen 2019:59). This is also collaborated by the fact that even after more than a century of excavations, there exists no standard, orthodox Viking Age burial (Price 2008:257) Thus, it seems possible that in societies like this, the dead participated in their own burials because there would have been certain expectations about being buried in the right manner. Therefore, in accordance with Moen (2019) and her discussions about social identity and grave goods, I would base my arguments on the assumption that grave goods mirror social identity. The complicating relationship between grave goods and social identity will be discussed to a greater extent in chapter five.

## 2.3 Conclusion and Summary

A very good quote by Dorothy L. Sayers found in Laqueur's *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (1990:1) is very relevant in the context of discussing gender: "The first thing that strikes the careless observer is that women are unlike men. (...) But the fundamental thing is that women are more like men than anything else in the world." When I first read this, I was struck by how simple, and yet so enlightening this is. Why are we so focused on locating and explaining how women and men are different, when they are in fact the only two beings on the planet that are more alike? Why is it so important for our society to distinguish between 'male' and 'female', and their activities and spheres?

In part two of this chapter, I have dived deep into the theoretical world of gender, sex and social identity. I have explained how our view of gender has changed over time, from the one-sex to the two-sex model, the division of the terms sex and gender and the pros and cons of this division. I have also briefly touched the topics of performativity, sexuality and social identity. The aim of this chapter was to familiarize the reader with some discussions regarding sex and gender, which I think, is important in the context of this thesis and the discussions regarding sex and gender in the Scandinavian Viking Age. This is important as it highlights that the way we look at gender, sex, sexuality and social identity, is based on our own contemporary Western notions of what we see as 'normal', and not based on how it might have been in the past. This chapter presents the research history of feminism and gender archaeology in addition to discussing several theories regarding sex, gender and social identity in archaeology. It is intended to be a theoretical stepping-stone for the assessment of my material presented in chapter three and assessed in chapter four, in addition to providing important subjects of discussion regarding gender, sex, and social identity, which will be discussed in chapter five.

# 3 Presentation of Research Contributions

So far, I have presented the research history of feminism and gender studies in archaeology, as well as highlighted certain points and discussions regarding sex, gender and social identity. In this chapter I will present the material I will use in order to answer my research questions: *In what way has our understanding of men and women in the Viking Age changed from the 1980s until today in archaeology? How are we using the terms gender, sex and social identity? And last, but not least: Are we creating stereotypical interpretations of the people in the past, or are we making room for real people?*

## 3.1 Explaining the Assessment of the Research Contributions

In order to answer these questions, I have assessed research contributions by archaeologists who especially write about topics like gender, sex, and social identity. I have also included contributions that examine men and women in the Viking Age. Because of practical reasons, I have chosen to analyze the material one decade at a time in chronological order; the oldest material will be presented and discussed first, while the most recent texts will be presented and discussed last. I wish to stress that my interpretations of the texts, have nothing to do with the authors personally; my only aim is to examine what is written in the texts and track the changes that have occurred. In order to do so, I have chosen to label the research contributions in three different manners, which will help discussing how our understanding of men and women have changed over time. My findings will be presented in sector diagrams in order to display the changes from decade to decade, more clearly. I have chosen to divide the texts into three categories: (1) stereotypical depictions, (2) feminist depictions, and (3) contains both stereotypical and feminist depictions.

My reasons for choosing these three labels, is based on the research history of gender archaeology and the Viking Age. As I have already discussed in chapter two, the research on the Viking Age has been presented as a distorted mirror of Victorian ideals (Arwill-Nordbladh 1998; Moen 2019:11). This makes the research focus on stereotypical

interpretations of the archaeological material, which, for example, focus on male rather than female power, or arguing for a society that, like the Victorian, was strictly divided; where the men and women were restricted physically to fixed domains. The women were confined to the domestic sphere (*innanstokks*), while the men were in the public sphere (*utanstokks*), participating in outdoor activities, trading, travelling, attending the thing, and other public matters. I have also interpreted the research contributions as stereotypical if they focus on the stereotypical depictions of male warriors or chieftains, or female housewives that only had power within the threshold of the house. Furthermore, I have also interpreted the contributions as stereotypical if they only depict women as powerful when the men are away, either travelling or waring. In addition to this, some of the contributions are discussing graves from the Viking Age based on the material found in the graves. In this case, the normative way of gendering the skeletons is to assume that women were buried with jewellery, while men were buried with weapons. However, as we have already seen in the case with the Birka-warrior, grave Bj 581 in Sweden, there are instances where women are buried with weapons. There are also instances where male and female graves contain the same equipment or tools. However, in these instances, the interpretations of the materials differ from male to female, even though, in most of the cases, the only thing that is different in these instances is the biological sex or the cultural gender of the deceased. Therefore, I have also chosen to interpret these practices as stereotypical. Lastly, I have also chosen to interpret contributions as stereotypical if they paint pictures of the women being passive, without any agency or power of their own, while the men are depicted as active, powerful and, for example, the reason as to why the Viking Age started in the first place.

My reasons for interpreting the research contributions as feminist are mostly the opposite of the reasons as to why I have interpreted them as stereotypical. If the material is feminist, it, for example, argues for female agency and power without stressing that this only occurred when the men were away, or if the authors explore the possibilities of men participating in ‘traditionally’ female activities and vice versa. I have also chosen to interpret contribution as possibly feminist if they critique or discuss the ‘normative’ way of gendering skeletons based on grave goods; or if they critique or discuss how certain artefacts (e.g. weapons, keys, weights and scales) are interpreted as one thing in male graves and as another thing in female ones. I have also interpreted contributions as feminist if they discuss the social identity and roles of women and men; the fact that not all women were mothers (and not all men were fathers), and that women were valuable in society and more than just birthing machines.

The reason why I have ended up with some contributions assessed as possibly both feminist and stereotypical, is mostly because of one research tendency; “to make women visible”. This was the aim of early feminist and gender research, and therefore, I have interpreted it as feminist. I also wish to stress that I interpret the research tendency of “making women visible” as focusing on women in the archaeological record; not necessarily only as “add women and stir”, which is how Moen (2019:26-27) interprets this research tendency. However, even though the contribution makes women visible, it does not necessarily mean that the rest of the research is feminist as well. Therefore, there are contributions that display research tendencies that I have interpreted as belonging to both categories.

In addition to the sector diagrams displaying the changes in the contributions regarding stereotypical or feministic interpretations, I have also chosen to include three additional sector diagrams. The first one is regarding the use, definition and discussion of the terms sex, gender and social identity, which will display how the use of these terms have changed over time. In order to do this, I have chosen to divide the research material into four categories: (1) uses the terms, (2), uses and defines the terms, (3) uses, defines and discusses the terms, and (4) does not use the terms. In relation to this theme, I have also chosen to include a second diagram that depicts the percentage of how many of the research contributions uses the terms contra how many of the research contributions that do not use the terms. The third diagram is regarding the topic of queer theory, third gender, and transgender, and how the focus on these subjects have developed over time. In order to assess this, I have chosen to divide the contributions into two categories: (1) mentions or discusses queer theory, third gender, transgender or fantastic interpretations, and (2) does not mention queer theory, third gender, transgender or fantastic interpretations. This sector diagram will display how the percentage of contributions regarding queer theory has changed from the 1980s until 2019.

### **3.1.1 Research Contributions From 1980-1989**

The material from 1980-1989 consists of a total of 8 research contributions. The reason why there are so few contributions from this decade is consistent with the research history as the root of gender archaeology is often associated with the paper *Archaeology and the Study of Gender* by Conkey and Spector from 1984. Therefore, it is not strange that there are so few contributions from this decade.

The contributions I have assessed are from these authors: Dommasnes (1982), Arwidsson and Berg (1983), Solberg (1985), Gade (1986) Høgestøl (1986), Christensen (1987), Stalsberg (1987), Farbrege (1988), and Lillehammer (1988). I have assessed two of these contributions as possibly stereotypical, two might be feminist and four are possibly stereotypical and feminist. This is displayed in percentage in the sector diagram above and presents a division that seem to collaborate with the research history of feminism and gender in archaeology.

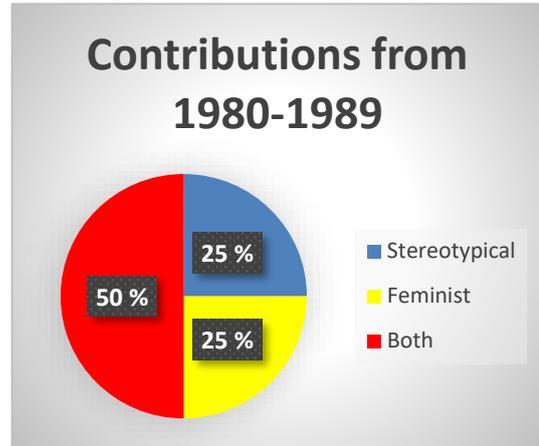


Figure 1

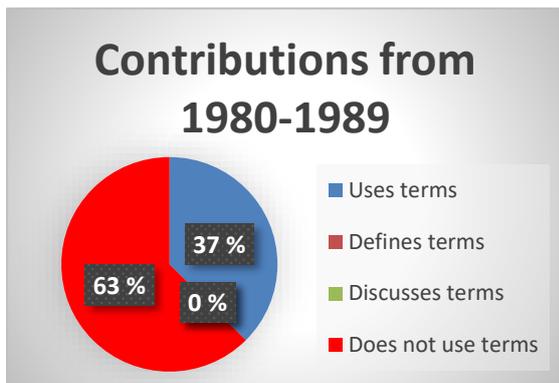


Figure 2

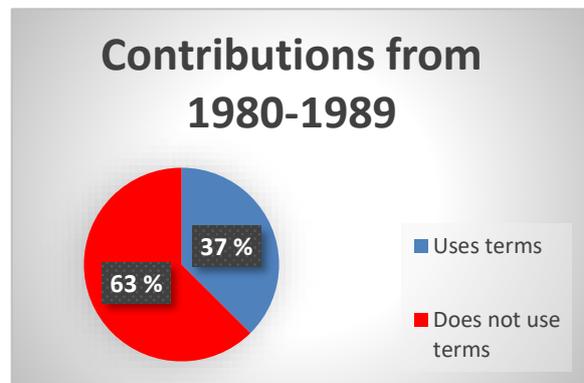


Figure 3

In the sector diagrams above, I have assessed the texts in relation to the use, definition and discussion of the terms sex, gender and/or social identity. My assessment revealed that three of the eight contributions use these terms, while five do not. None of the contributions assessed from this decade defines and/or discusses the use of these terms.

In this last sector diagram, I have assessed how many texts have mentioned or discussed subjects like queer theory, third genders or transgender. The assessment of the contributions has revealed that none of the texts from this decade mentions or discuss these subjects.

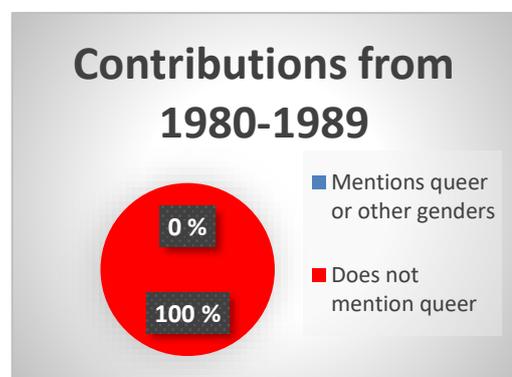


Figure 4

### 3.1.2 Research Contributions From 1990-1999

The material from 1990-1999 consists of a total of 28 research contributions. I have assessed these following authors: Hofseth (1990), Arwill-Nordbladh (1991), Dommasnes (1991), Hjørungdal (1991), Stalsberg (1991), Dommasnes (1992), Kristoffersen (1992), Gustafson (1993), Petré (1993), Prestvold (1993), Hjørungdal (1994), Gansum (1995), Hoftun (1995), Hovanta (1995), Linder (1995), Stylegar (1995), Lillehammer (1996), Lucy (1997), Arwill-Nordbladh (1998), Mundal (1998), Opedal (1998), Solli (1998), Tsigaridas (1998), Wicker (1998), Bøgh-Andersen (1999), Göransson (1999), Hofseth (1999), and Solli (1999). In my assessment, I have interpreted 16 of the contributions as possibly feminist, four might be stereotypical and eight as possibly both. In the sector diagram to the right one can see how this is portrayed in percentages. One can see an increase in contributions assessed to be feminist (from 25 % to 57 %) from the previous decade, while the contributions assessed to be stereotypical or both, have decreased from 25 to 14 % (stereotypical) and from 50 to 29 % (both stereotypical and feminist).

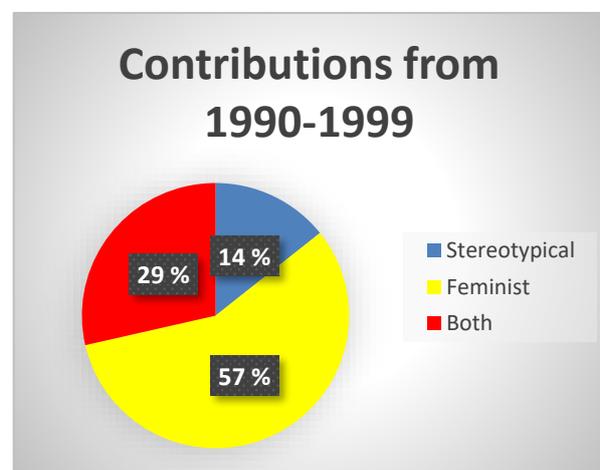


Figure 5

In the two following sector diagrams, I have assessed the texts in relation to the use, definition and discussion of the terms sex, gender and/or social identity. My assessment revealed that eight of the contributions used the terms sex, gender and/or social identity, while only three defined the terms and six discussed the use of the terms. A total of 11 of the assessed contributions did not use the terms at all. In these sector diagrams one can see clearly that changes have occurred regarding the use, definition and discussion of the terms sex, gender and/or social identity. The contributions display an increase in the number of texts using the terms; in 1980-1989, the percentage was 37, while in 1990-1999 it has increased to 61 %.

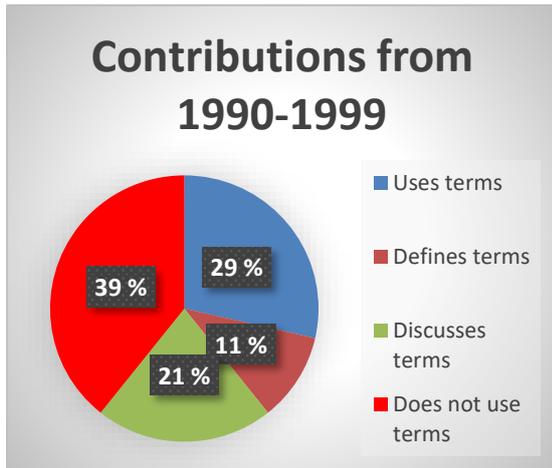


Figure 6

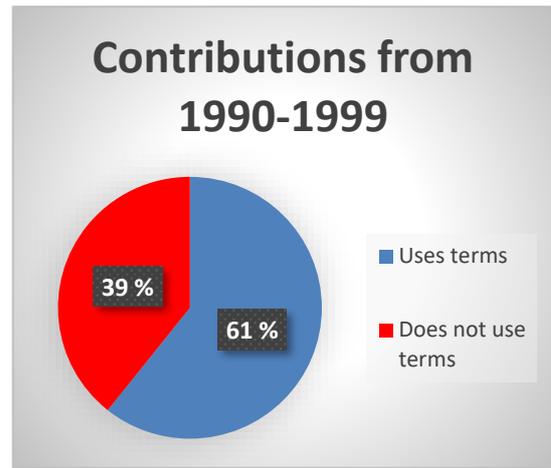


Figure 7

In the last sector diagram, I have assessed how many texts have mentioned or discussed subjects like queer theory, third genders or transgender. As one can see from the sector diagram, there has been an increase in the number of texts that mentions or discusses this since the previous decade. In 1980-1989, there were 0 % of the contributions that mentioned or discussed these subjects, while the assessment of the contributions from 1990-1999 showed how three of the 28 contributions mentioned or discussed this. This is an increase from 0 to 11 %.

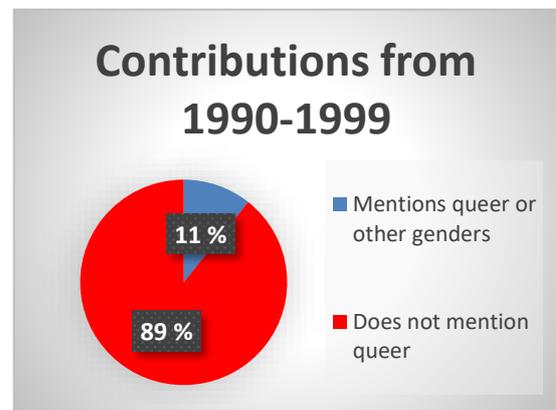


Figure 8

### 3.1.3 Research Contributions From 2000-2009

The material from 2000-2009 consists of a total of 32 research contributions. I have assessed the texts from these following authors: Price (2000a), Price (2000b), Ross (2000), Gräslund (2001), Price (2001), Stalsberg (2001), Christiansen (2002), Price (2002), Solli (2002), Aannestad (2004), Bye-Johansen (2004), Hadley (2004), Kristoffersen (2004), Mortensen (2004), Speed and Walton Rogers (2004), Simpson (2005), Brennand (2006), Callmer (2006), Gerds

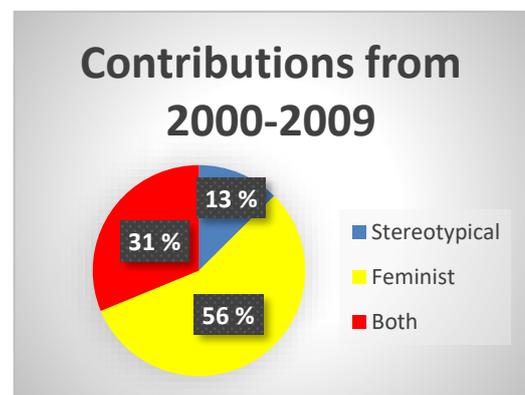


Figure 9

(2006), Nordström (2006), Øye (2006), Andersson (2007), Back-Danielsson (2007), Stylegar (2007), Barrett (2008), Brink and Price (2008), Gräslund (2008), Hadley (2008), Ljungkvist (2008), Solli (2008), Hillerdal (2009), and Sørensen (2009). In my assessment of the research contributions, I have interpreted 18 of the contributions as possibly feminist, four might be stereotypical and ten of the contributions are possibly both feminist and stereotypical. In the sector diagram, one can see there are slight changes from the contributions from 1990-1999. The percentage of feminist contributions have decreased from 57 to 56 %, and the stereotypical contributions have decreased as well, from 14 % in 1990-1999 to 13 %. There is a slight increase in the contributions I have assessed as both feminist and stereotypical: the percentage has increased from 29 to 31 %.

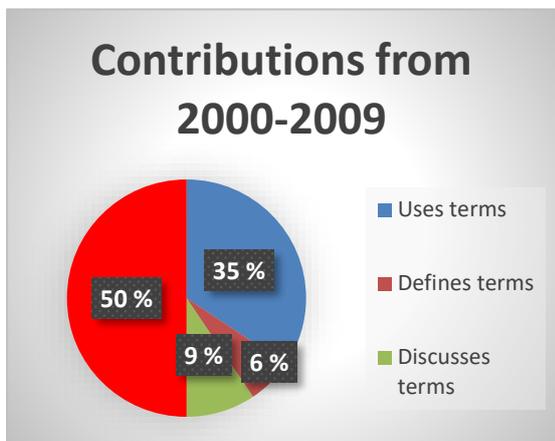


Figure 10

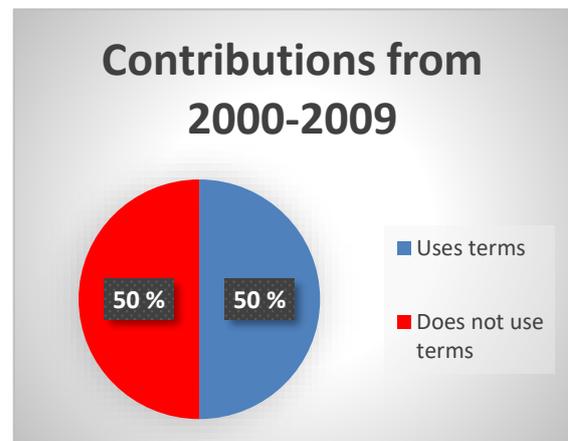


Figure 11

In these two sector diagrams, I have assessed the texts in relation to the use, definition and discussion of the terms sex, gender and/or social identity. My assessment revealed that 11 of the contributions used the terms sex, gender and/or social identity, while only two defined the terms, and only three discussed the use of the terms. A total of 16 did not use the terms at all.

As one can see from the diagrams, there is an increase in the percentage of contributions that use the terms sex, gender and/or social identity from the previous decade until now, from 29 to 35 %. One can also see that the percentage of texts that do not use the terms, have also increased from the previous decade, from 39 to 50 %. The assessment also shows how the percentage of contributions that defines the terms have decreased from 11 to 6 %, while the contributions that discusses the terms have decreased from 21 to 9 %. In total, there is a decrease in the number of contributions using, defining and discussing the terms; in 1990-1999 the percentage was 61 %, while the percentage is 50 % in the contributions from 2000-2009.

Regarding the subjects like queer theory, third genders and/or transgender, I have interpreted that a total of nine of the 32 contributions are mentioning and/or discussing the subject. This is a very noticeable increase in percentage from the previous decade; during the 1990-1999s, the percentage was 11, while here one can see it has increased to 28 %.

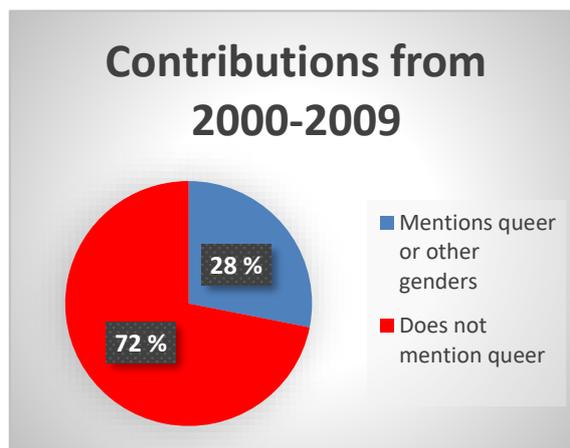


Figure 12

### 3.1.4 Research Contributions From 2010-2019

The material from 2010-2019 consists of a total of 49 research contributions. I have assessed the texts from these following authors: Barrett (2010), Gräslund (2010), Gustin (2010), Lewis-Simpson (2010), Stylegar (2010), Thedéen (2010), Øye (2010), Callow (2011), Gardela (2011), Hedeager (2011), Ljungkvist (2011), McLeod (2011), Abrams (2012), Thedéen (2012), Wicker (2012), Gardela (2013), Kershaw (2013), Berg (2014), Hedeager (2014), Hedenstierna-Jonson (2014), Hedenstierna-Jonson and Kjellström (2014), Kupiec and Milek (2014), Moen (2014), Pantmann (2014), Pedersen (2014), Price (2014a), Price (2014b), Price (2014c), Sanmark (2014), Sørheim (2014), Williams, Pentz and Wemhoff (2014), Ashby (2015), Croix (2015), Harrison (2015), O’sullivan (2015), Berglund (2016), Dommasnes (2016), Gardela (2016), Nilsson (2016), Nordström (2016), Raffield, Price and Collard (2016), Aannestad and Glørstad (2017), Gardela (2017), Hedenstierna-Jonson et al. (2017), Løkka (2017), Pedersen (2017), Moen (2019), Price (2019), and Price, Hedenstierna-Jonson, Zachrisson et al. (2019).

In my assessment of the research contributions, I have interpreted 33 of the contributions as possibly feminist, four might be stereotypical and 12 are possibly both feminist and stereotypical. As one can see when comparing this sector diagram to the one from the previous decade, there are some obvious changes. The percentage of feminist contributions have increased from 56 to 67 %, and the percentage

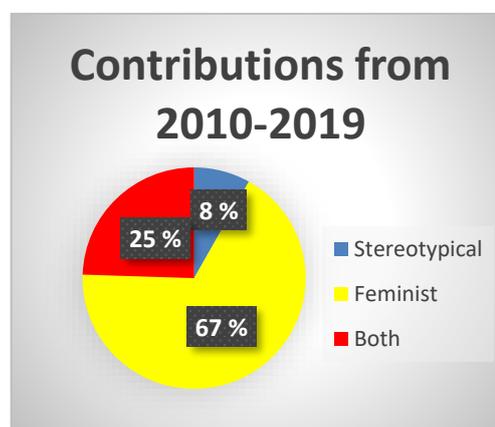


Figure 13

of stereotypical contributions have decreased from 13 to 8 %. The percentage of contributions that are both feminist and stereotypical have decreased from 31 to 25 %.

In the following sector diagrams, I have examined if the contributions use, define and/or discuss the terms sex, gender and/or social identity. My assessment revealed that 27 of the contributions used the terms, while 16 did not use them. Here, the analysis of the material gets a little difficult, as there are three contribution that defines the terms, and five contributions discuss the use of the terms. Two of these contributions overlap; they are both defining and discussing the use of the terms. Therefore, I needed to add a category to this sector diagram to make sure it would portray the information correctly. I added a fifth category: “defines and discusses terms”. To prevent the sector diagrams from portraying the percentages wrongly, I subtracted two contributions from the ones who defines the terms. Consequently, there is only one contribution in this category. Then I subtracted two contributions from the ones who discusses the terms, which, consequently, leads to three contributions in this category. The number of contributions that are both defining and discussing the terms are two.

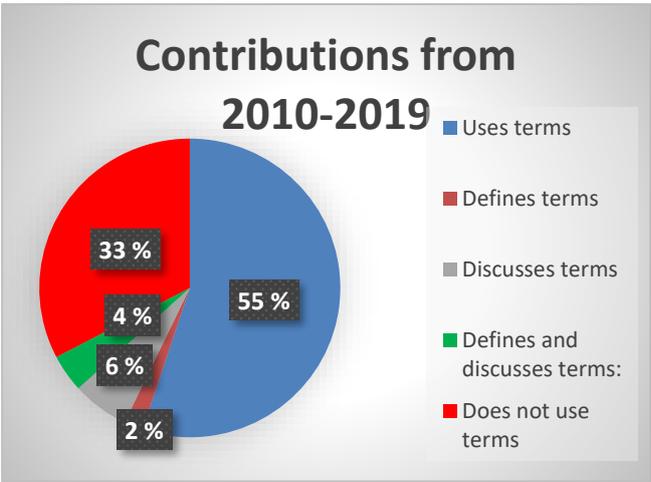


Figure 14

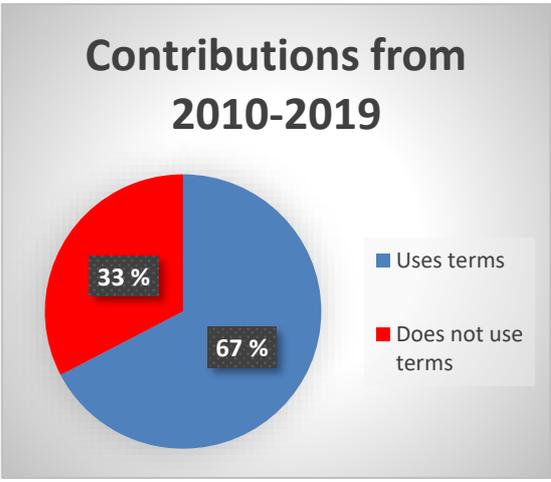


Figure 15

As one can see from comparing this sector diagram with the one from the previous decade, we can again see changes when it comes to the percentage of contributions that uses the terms, and the ones that do not use them. The percentage of contributions that do not use the terms, have decreased from 50 to 33 %, while the percentage of the contributions that do use the terms, have increased from 35 to 55 %. In total, we can see huge changes regarding the contributions from 2000-2009 to the contributions from 2010-2019. The percentage of contributions that are using the terms in total, have increased from 50 to 67 %, and the percentage of the contributions that do not use the terms, have decreased from 50 to 33 %.

Thus, I think that the contributions from 2010-2019 are showing some positive aspects regarding the topics of gender, sex and social identity in the Viking Age.

Regarding the subjects like queer theory, third genders and/or transgender, I have interpreted that a total of nine of the 49 contributions are mentioning and/or discussing the subject. Here, one can see a slight decrease in the percentage of contributions that mention or discuss queer theory or the concept of other genders. The percentage in 2000-2009 was 28, while now it has decreased to 18 %. One can also see a slight increase in the number of contributions that do not mention queer theory or other genders. This has increased from 72 % in the contributions from 2000-2009, to 82 % in the contributions from 2010-2019.

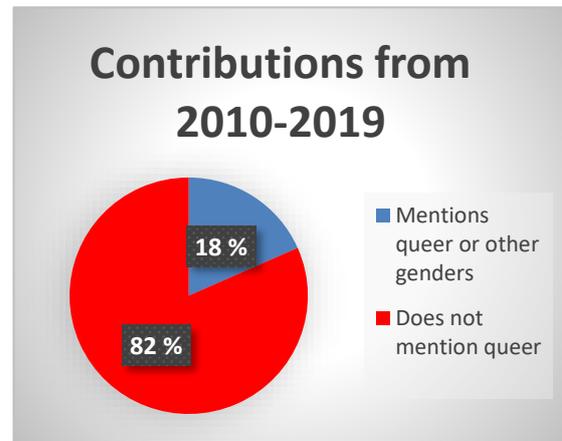


Figure 16

## 3.2 Conclusion

As one can see based on my assessments and the sector diagrams I have presented, there are changes occurring in the contributions from decade to decade. In the 1980s, the percentage of feminist contributions were only 25 %, while in the 2010s, the percentage has increased to 65 %. There is also a noticeable decrease in the percentage of stereotypical contributions: In the 1980s, the percentage was 37 %, while in the 2010s, the percentage has decreased to 14 %. There also seems to be clear changes in the way the contributions use, define and discuss the terms sex, gender and social identity. In the 1980s, only 37 % of the contributions used the terms, while the percentage has increased to 67 % during the decade of 2010-2019. In addition, the sector diagrams displaying the percentage of the contributions mentioning or discussing queer theory, third genders and/or transgender, also display evident changes during these four decades. In the 1980s, none of the contributions mentioned or discussed these subjects, while during the decade of 2000-2009 the percentage increased to 28. However, the decade of 2010-2019 has according to my assessment, decreased to 19 %. These changes that occur in the research contributions will be discussed in the following chapter. However, before I start discussing the changes occurring in the research contributions, I wish to highlight one important fact; because of the research history of feminism and gender in

archaeology, there are a lot more research done regarding the female gender than the male gender. Thus, even though I wish to include an equal number of research contributions regarding men and women, this has proven to be impossible as there are, as of now, more research about specifically the female gender in archaeology. In most of the cases where men are discussed, they are typically not mentioned specifically, which is problematic as this means that the male gender and gender roles are not being discussed as much as I think it should be. Therefore, the discussion in the next chapter will because of this, mostly discuss the female sex and gender in the Viking Age.

## 4 Assessing the Archaeological Literature

This chapter will assess the archaeological research contributions I have presented in the previous chapter. The aim of this chapter is to identify certain research trends that, based on the theoretical tools and terms in my possession, I have assessed to be possibly either feminist, stereotypical or both. These research trends will be identified and discuss to a certain degree in order to make them visible to the reader. Consequently, this chapter will hopefully make it easier to notice and track changes that have occurred in the field of archaeology. Additionally, it will function as a background to the discussions which will follow in chapter five.

In this chapter I will present the 117 research contributions spanning from 1980-2019. I will assess and discuss the contributions and the research tendencies I have identified in chronological order: I will begin with the oldest research contributions from 1980-1989, before assessing and discussing the contributions from 1990-1999, 2000-2009 and 2010-2019. The research contributions display a variety of different subjects and attitudes towards the archaeological material. In order to examine and assess what kind of research trends the contributions reflect; I have used the theoretical tools available to me based on the content of chapter two. Therefore, I have chosen to start by dividing the material into three distinct groups: feminist, stereotypical and both. This division of the material is based on some of the research tendencies discussed in chapter two, which highlights how the field of archaeological research has changed from presenting the past as ‘exclusively male’ to ‘finding women’ and discussing sex, gender, and social identity. I must stress that the division of the material is based on the tools available to me, and that some contributions were more difficult to place than others were. Thus, it is quite possible that not everyone reading my assessments will agree, however, I have done what I can based on the theoretical tools available to me. I also wish to stress that I am not assessing the authors themselves, only their research and the trends and tendencies visible in the research contributions.

As already stated, I have chosen to divide the material into three distinct groups: feminist, stereotypical and both. The research tendencies I have identified as possibly feminist are, for

example, focusing on making women visible, discussing gender, gender roles, or the gendering of grave goods. While other contributions I have identified as possibly more stereotypical, for instance, because they seemingly focus on the stereotypical depiction of the male warriors of the Viking Age, or by downgrading women in terms of their abilities or power. In the assessment that follows, I will amongst other things, highlight the different research trends visible in the contributions from the four decades.

## **4.1 The Contributions From 1980-1989**

The research contribution from 1980-1989 represent the beginning of feminism and gender archaeology. I have only been able to assess eight contributions that are relevant from this decade. The low number of contributions is not strange as the beginning of feminism and gender archaeology is generally associated with the year 1984 and Conkey's and Spector's paper *Archaeology and the Study of Gender*. Thus, in the 1980s, the archaeologists are still strongly influenced by the contemporary notions of femininity and masculinity: "it's a man's world" and "women's place is in the home" (Nelson 2006:10; Janeway 1971). Men were supposed to be strong, courageous and ambitious, while women were supposed to be beautiful, motherly, mellow, unselfish and caring (Arwill-Nordbladh 1998:13; Laqueur 1990). The natural starting point for gender archaeology was therefore to locate the women in the past and make them visible by discussing their roles and activities (Bolger 2013:5; Meskell 2007:28). This is a research trend that is visible in the research contribution from this decade. The feminism and gender archaeology began by revealing the stereotypes that are found in the archaeological material and has allowed us to challenge our notions of femininity and masculinity in the present as well as the past.

As one can see from the diagrams in chapter three, the research contributions from 1980-1989 is not focused on debating gender, sex and/or social identity, nor are they discussing queer theory or the possibility of multiple genders.

### **4.1.1 The Possibly Feminist Research Contributions**

As displayed by the diagrams in chapter three, based on the theoretical tools available to me, I have assessed that most likely two of the contributions from this decade are feminist. These contributions are written by Høgestøl (1986) and Lillehammer (1988). They are both focusing

on making women visible in the archaeological material as well as discussing the women's roles and ranks. Høgestøl (1986) stresses that it might be of bigger interest to examine *how* certain artifacts are used to express gender differences rather than *which* artifacts are used. Thus, she argues against the normative way of gendering the graves based on the assumption that men were buried with weapons and women with jewelry or textile equipment, and this is the reason why I have assessed it to be feminist as it challenges the 'normative' way of gendering and understanding the inhabitants of the Viking Age. Lillehammer's (1988) contribution is about female farmers. She argues that it is easier to identify female grave goods than male. Additionally, she highlights the point made by Høgestøl (1986); that combinations of grave goods might be a better way to determine sex in graves, rather than to assume that weapons are exclusively male, and jewelry are exclusively female. So, in addition to making the female farmers visible in the archaeological record, she also argues against the normative way of gendering the graves.

#### **4.1.2 The Possibly Stereotypical Research Contributions**

However, Høgestøl's (1986) and Lillehammer's (1988) articles are not the norm for the research contributions from this decade. In Arwidsson and Berg (1983) we see another depiction of the Viking Age. In this book we follow interpretations regarding a Viking Age tools chest that is assumed to belong to a man. No explanation as to why it is assumed male is provided, nor are any other alternatives or explanations discussed or mentioned. The other contribution, which I have assessed to most likely be stereotypical, is Christensen's (1987) contribution. The contribution is about the Oseberg queen and focus on stereotypical female activities like textile working and being housewives, while the men are depicted as warriors, hunters, smiths, etc. Therefore, even though the contribution is about the richest boat burial in Norway, the women in the burial seem to be downgraded to textile workers and housewives. However, the research attitudes seen in these contributions are to be expected based on the history of feminism and gender research in archaeology. As the impact of gender archaeology is yet to be seen, the men are in focus; they were the ones with agency and had political and social power, while the women are portrayed as textile workers and wives.

#### **4.1.3 The Possibly Stereotypical and Feminist Research Contributions**

From 1980-1989 I have assessed four of the eight contributions as displaying research tendencies that could be interpreted as stereotypical and feminist. This includes Dommasnes (1982), Solberg (1985), Stalsberg (1987), and Farbregd (1988). In her contribution, Dommasnes (1982) examines how ranks are divided between men and women, and if this can tell us anything about the structure of society in general. Based on how it suggests that women had rank, the same way as men, I have assessed that it could be a feminist article as it makes the women and their power visible. However, I have also assessed it to might be stereotypical, and this is because the author stresses that women with power are very rare and a deviation from the 'normal'. Thus, it seems like the contribution could give an impression that it is not acceptable to be discussing female power. This matches the research history discussed in chapter two.

In the contribution by Solberg (1985) I have also identified tendencies that might be labeled as stereotypical and feminist. The aim of the research is to examine the social structure of the Merovingian and Viking Age based primarily on grave goods, however, since the contribution excludes male graves with 'female' equipment and does not mention the possibility of female graves with 'male' equipment at all, it seems to me like the discussion might be incomplete. I have chosen to assess the exclusion of male graves with 'female' equipment and vice versa as a tendency that could be interpreted as stereotypical. On the other hand, it makes women visible by arguing that the women took over male responsibilities when they were away either trading, waring or travelling. In the light of this, I have assessed it as a possible feministic research tendency; this is because it corresponds with the research history of making women visible in the archaeological record. However, even though it argues for female power, it highlights that the men had to be away for the women to have this position of power.

Stalsberg is an author that is very commonly cited in research regarding feminism, gender, and the Viking Age as she has done valuable work by examining scales found in female graves. However, even though the contribution from 1987 displays research tendencies that could be perceived as feminist by making women visible, it also displays tendencies that could be perceived as stereotypical. In this contribution, the focus is on scales found in female graves, yet she does not discuss the importance of this, as it might be evidence of female traders. She does discuss this in later contributions, though (e.g. Stalsberg 1991, 2001). However, in this contribution, it is argued that the women were customers with their own weighing equipment. I have assessed this to be a possible stereotypical research tendency as

the interpretation of the women with scales differ from the interpretation of men found with scales who are often interpreted as active traders. In this research contribution, it seems like the women are possibly depicted in a way that fits the contemporary notion of the historic women: They were passive, contained to the domestic sphere and did not participate in the public sphere. As trading would have involved participating in the public sphere, this was possibly seen as an unlikely interpretation of the female graves to the archaeologists of the 1980s.

Farbregd (1988) writes the last contribution from this decade. The contribution highlights how the research about the Viking Age often focus on the men as main actors. They were the ones who sailed to war, plundered and traded, emigrated and settled down in foreign countries. However, the contribution also focus on how the women were far from hidden in the Viking Age and chooses to focus especially on them in this contribution. I have assessed this contribution as possibly feminist because of how it highlights the bias in the field of archaeology; however, it also depicts some research trends that could possibly be identified as stereotypical. This is mainly because of how the contribution depicts the men as the ones who travelled abroad and how it explains female power as a result of the men being gone. Thus, the research contribution seems to contain some stereotypical research tendencies as the men are depicted as the active part, while the women are depicted as usually passive, unless the men are gone.

#### **4.1.4 Conclusion**

In the research contributions from 1980-1989 there are certain research tendencies that should be highlighted. Most of the contributions from this decade, I have assessed to be possibly stereotypical and feminist. Even so, most of the contributions seem to be focused on making the women of the Viking Age visible in the archaeological record. It seems like the contributions focus on female power and discusses female ranks and roles; however, it is also stressed that the women only gained this power when the men were gone. Consequently, the women are depicted as being present in the Viking Age, even though they are not depicted as active contributors to society. In addition, the contributions from this decade also seem to begin to discuss the problems surrounding single artefacts being used to gender burials.

## 4.2 The Contributions From 1990-1999

During the decade of 1990-1999 I have assessed 28 research contributions. In contrast to the 1980s, the impact of Conkey's and Spector's (1984) paper should be more visible in the archaeological research contributions. Based on the sector diagrams from chapter three, the reader should take notice of the increase in the use of the terms sex, gender, and/or social identity; the percentage has increased from 37 to 61 %. In addition to this, it is worth noting that queer theory saw the light of day in the 1990s. This theory is often interpreted as a challenge to heteronormative practices (Blackmore 2011:76). Consequently, one can see an increase regarding the subject of queer theory and third genders from none in the 1980s to 11 % in the 1990s.

In accordance with the research history this decade should present an increased awareness of the gender bias in archaeology in addition to contributions that are still working on making women visible, discussing women's roles, ranks and power. Based on the history of gender archaeology, one should be able to see in the contributions that some argue how women should have been able to participate in 'male' activities, and thereby demonstrate how women were not inferior to men. There might be contributions that 'adds women and stirs'; the approach mentioned previously in chapter two, which is shunned by most feminists because it regards the problems of androcentrism fixable by simply adding women (Willemark 1999:9). While women are undoubtedly still in focus, there should also be a slight decrease in the number of contributions that might be perceived as depicting stereotypical images of men. This is because men's studies also had its appearance during the late 1980s (e.g. Brod 1987; Kimmel 1987).

### 4.2.1 The Possibly Feminist Research Contributions

From the total of 28 research contributions from the decade 1990-1999, I have assessed 16 of them to possess research tendencies that might be interpreted as feminist. Some of the contributions breach topics that are interesting and important to highlight as they demonstrate how the research is changing during this decade, while other contributions are still working on simply making the women visible and highlighting their roles as individuals with power of their own (e.g. Gustafson 1993; Hofseth 1999; Hoftun 1995; Hjørungdal 1991; Linder 1995; Mundal 1998; Stylegar 1995). Another important contribution is Hofseth's (1990)

contribution about female graves in southern Gudbrandsdalen, Norway. The contribution is not only making women visible and focusing on them as individual actors with rank of their own; it is also criticizing other contributions (e.g. Dommasnes 1982) by arguing how women most likely achieved their own honorable burials through their own status and hard work. The 1990s is also the decade archaeologists are becoming more aware of the stereotypical images of the Viking Age and the people in it. Arwill-Nordbladh's (1991) thesis is an excellent example of how the stereotypical image is highlighted, criticized and discussed.

In addition to the contributions that are focusing on making women visible as individuals and actors with power, there are also contributions that are highlighting the fact that women could participate in 'typically male' activities. Two examples of this research tendency are Stalsberg (1991) and Prestvold (1993). In the contribution by Stalsberg (1991), the focus is on weights and scales found in female graves and how this probably is an indication of female traders. The contribution reminds us that we must assume that the grave goods located in a burial most likely belonged to the deceased. If we stray from this assumption, then archaeology has almost no way of contributing to our knowledge of past genders, status, wealth, religion or occupation. In addition to suggesting female traders, the contribution by Stalsberg (1991) also highlight how not all women were mothers in the past, and even if they were mothers, children would not necessarily have kept the women from participating in the public sphere or have a professional occupation. Just like the contribution by Stalsberg (1991), the contribution by Prestvold (1993) also highlight the female presence in an activity usually interpreted as exclusively male: iron and iron production. The contribution highlights how there has not been found any archaeological evidence that suggests that women or children participated in iron production; however, there have not been found any archaeological evidence that suggests that men were present either. This is a very important point as it highlights how the assumption of 'masculinity' in iron production is taken for granted, even though there is no evidence of men, women or children participating in this activity.

In relation to contributions highlighting a female presence in typically 'male' spheres, I wish to stress the importance of Solli's (1998, 1999) contributions regarding Odin and queerness. Her research contributions are very interesting as this topic of research first appears in the 1990s. The contributions discuss the depiction of Odin as the manliest and most masculine of the Old Norse gods, yet he is also the master of *seidr*. Based on archaeological as well as literary sources like the sagas, *seidr* is commonly assumed to be female magic, which was

very shameful for men to practice. Thus, we are seeing a very interesting contradiction: the most powerful and masculine god could practice the shameful, female *seidr* without being shunned or rejected, while in the mortal realm, only the women could practice *seidr* without being shamed. This interesting transgression of the masculine Odin into the feminine realm of *seidr* is indeed very strange, and these contributions mark the beginning of discussions regarding queer theory, fluid, and third genders in Viking Age archaeology.

Lastly, there are also contributions from this decade that discuss the subject of sexing and gendering graves from the Viking Age. Traditionally the graves are usually interpreted as male if they contain weapons, hunting equipment, and/or other 'masculine' artefacts, while female graves usually contain jewelry, textile equipment, cooking utensils, keys, and/or other 'feminine' artefacts. However, as the research contributions by Hjørungdal (1994), Lucy (1997) and Arwill-Nordbladh (1998) discusses, this dichotomy of 'male' or 'female' does not fit all graves. Consequently, it is argued that many graves end up losing their identity and gender because they do not fit the 'normative' model of how male and female graves should be. The contribution by Lucy (1997) also highlights that the method used to interpret gender based on grave goods, is based on outdated stereotypes. A statement Arwill-Nordbladh (1998) also seems to agree with, as she also discusses sex and gender in addition to our own notions and interpretations regarding this subject.

#### **4.2.2 The Possibly Stereotypical Research Contributions**

While we see a lot of positive research trends in the discussion of the contributions that can be interpreted as feminist, there are also a few contributions from this decade that display research tendencies that could be interpreted as stereotypical. In these research contributions, there are generally two different research tendencies that are visible in the material from 1990-1999. The first is the traditional way of sexing and gendering graves based on grave goods, which is visible in the contributions from Petré (1993), Hovanta (1995) and Opedal (1998). Some of the feminist contributions above have criticized the traditional approach (e.g. Arwill-Nordbladh 1998; Hjørungdal 1994; Lucy 1997). The second tendency is visible in Gansum's (1995) contribution. In this case, the contribution might be perceived as an example of how graves or artefacts are interpreted differently solely based on the sex or gender of the individual in the grave. An example of this research tendency is, for example, how male graves with weighing equipment is perceived as successful merchants or traders,

while female graves with the same equipment is perceived as being a symbol of her husband's or her family's status.

In the contribution by Petré (1993), male and female grave goods in Iron Age graves are discussed. The contribution is very focused on methodology and the approach could be perceived as very traditional in its interpretations: weapons are interpreted as signs of masculinity and therefore males, while jewelry or brooches are interpreted as feminine and thus symbols of female identity. The same research tendency for gendering the grave goods also seems to be present in the contributions from Hovanta (1995) and Opedal (1998); they could also be perceived as very traditional in their approach to the archaeological record. I have chosen to assess these contributions as possibly stereotypical because they do not discuss the division and gendering of the grave goods.

In the contribution by Gansum (1995), grave finds and several grave mounds like Oseberg are discussed. The author makes a valid point when he states that the women of Oseberg was not necessarily royalty, however, it seems like this maybe was forgotten by the author later, as it is not repeated when the contribution discusses the burial mounds containing male individuals. In fact, it seems like he might be contradicting himself, because when the male mounds are discussed, they are described as petty kings. The contribution also seems to focus on the religious aspect of the Oseberg burial; however, this aspect is not discussed in relation to the male mounds. This might be interpreted as an indication of the bias still present in archaeology, as it seems like the women in the Oseberg mound are denied their probable status as wealthy, influential and powerful individuals who probably had responsibilities much like their male counterparts.

### **4.2.3 The Possibly Stereotypical and Feminist Research Contributions**

Finally, I will discuss the eight contributions from 1990-1999, which I have identified as might contain research tendencies that could be interpreted as both stereotypical and feminist. The research contributions assessed here share many similarities with the contributions I have mentioned in the previous paragraphs. The eight contributions could all be interpreted as feminist as they are all writing about or focusing on women and thereby makes women visible in the archaeological record. However, these contributions are also displaying certain research trends that could be interpreted as stereotypical. The contribution by Dommasnes (1991,

1992) might be interpreted as stereotypical as it states that we must assume that women did not have power over people, and because it is argued that male graves represent the man's status, while rich, female graves represent the *family's* status. Thus, Dommasnes' (1991; 1992) contributions might be interpreted as stereotypical as they limit the women's roles in society in addition to interpreting the graves differently based on the sex or gender of the deceased.

Some of the contributions might also be interpreted as stereotypical because of how they focus on the 'traditional' female roles, like for example, being housewives, taking care of children and cooking, in addition to focusing on the women's reproductive abilities (e.g. Bøgh-Andersen 1999; Göransson 1999; Kristoffersen 1992). However, women are not the only ones being depicted in their seemingly 'traditional' roles; men are also depicted as warriors, sailors, traders, kings or chieftains. These occupations might be perceived as the most 'masculine' of the occupations of the Viking Age. The depiction of these 'traditional' male roles is present in the contributions by, for example, Lillehammer (1996), Wicker (1998), and Göransson (1999). The focus on the 'traditional' female and male roles might be perceived as a stereotypical research tendency.

Lastly, one must consider the research contributions by Tsigaridas (1998) and Bøgh-Andersen (1999). In the contribution by Tsigaridas (1998), it is argued how the women's status is based on family and legacy, while the men had to work for their status. It seems like in this contribution, the women are depicted as static; they did not have to do anything to have status, while the men are depicted as active; they had to work for theirs. This depiction of men as active and women as static is a research tendency that might be perceived as stereotypical. Additionally, this research tendency is also present in the contribution by Bøgh-Andersen (1999). In this contribution, the focus is on iron rods found in male and female graves and the interpretation of these rods. Consequently, it is argued how iron rods should be interpreted as useful tools in male graves, while in female graves they should be interpreted as a symbol of the housewife.

#### **4.2.4 Conclusion**

We can see many different research tendencies in the contributions from 1990-1999. In the feminist contributions, it seems like the women are not merely made visible like in many of the previous contributions from 1980-1989, they are also portrayed as individual actors with

rank and status of their own. Additionally, the research contributions are also discussing the possible presence of women in typically 'male' activities, like trading or iron production. These identifiable research tendencies are matching the ones that have already been discussed in chapter two regarding the history of feminism and gender archaeology. Additionally, it is worth mentioning that it seems like the research contributions might be starting to criticize the 'normative' way of sexing and gendering the graves from the Viking Age.

However, even though we might notice some positive changes in the research contributions, there are also contributions that are assessed to contain research tendencies that might be perceived as stereotypical in their approach. These contributions have been assessed as possibly stereotypical because of how they are either sexing or gendering the graves based on traditional and outdated methods, or because they are interpreting graves or artefacts differently based on the sex or gender of the deceased. In addition to this, there are also contributions that seem to focus on the 'traditional' depiction of the male and female gender roles, which might also be perceived as a stereotypical research tendency. However, as one can see based on the sector diagrams in chapter three, there are noticeable changes in the contribution from the 1980s to the 1990s. The percentage of feminist contribution have increased from 25 % (two contributions) to 57 % (16 contributions), and one can see a decrease in the percentage of contributions that might be perceived as stereotypical: 25 % (two contributions) in the 1980s, to 14 % (four contributions) in the 1990s. So far, it seems like the research contributions are displaying a positive change regarding the subject of sex and gender in archaeology.

### **4.3 The Contributions From 2000-2009**

I have assessed a total of 32 research contributions from the decade of 2000-2009. As Conkey's and Spector's (1984) paper is still very relevant, one should probably see that feminist and gender archaeology are even more acknowledged in this decade than the previous ones. According to the research history, this decade should also present an increased awareness of gender bias in archaeology. Making women visible in the archaeological material should no longer rely on the "add women and stir" approach and the attention should now have shifted from forcing men and women of the past into strict gender roles or promote equality at all costs. Instead, one should see progress in the field of understanding the great variety of gender roles and identities that existed in the Viking Age. There should also be an

increase in the number of texts discussing queer theory as well as the use, definition and discussion of the terms sex, gender and social identity. However, as one can see based on the sector diagrams presented in chapter three, there is a noticeable decrease in the percentage of contributions that define or discuss the use of the term. In the 1990s, 11 % (three contributions) defined the terms, while it seems like only 6 % (two contributions) did so in the 2000s. Additionally, 21 % (six contributions) discusses the use of the terms, while in the 2000s, seemingly only 9 % (three contributions) focused on this. Overall, one can also see a noticeable decrease in the percentage of contributions that use the terms sex, gender and/or social identity. This has decreased from 61 % in the 1990s, to 50 % in the 2000s.

### **4.3.1 The Possibly Feminist Research Contributions**

Based on the research contributions from 2000-2009, I have assessed 18 out of a total of 32 contributions to display possible feminist research tendencies. As in the two previous decades, many of the contributions are still working on making women visible in the archaeological record and highlight how women could take part in previously ‘exclusive male’ activities (e.g. Andersson 2007; Hillerdal 2009; Mortensen 2004; Ross 2000; Stalsberg 2001). In this decade we can also see how several of the contributions are challenging the traditional gender roles by examining for example shamans or *seidr* (Price 2000a; Price 2000b; Price 2001; Price 2002; Solli 2002; Solli 2008 ), or by discussing how it might have been possible to cross gender boundaries in order to support the family (e.g. Ljungkvist 2008). One can also see contributions that have been assessed as possibly feminist because they highlight and criticize other research contributions where the male graves tend to represent themselves, while the female ones seldom do (e.g. Hillerdal 2009). Some contributions have also been assessed as possibly feminist because they criticize how the field of archaeology might still be biased when it comes to interpreting artefacts found in male and female graves (e.g. Brennand 2006; Bye-Johansen 2004), just like in the previous decades.

However, there are some new research trends that appear in this decade. Some contributions I wish to highlight are written by Hadley (2004, 2008) and Back-Danielsson (2007). In the contribution from 2004, it is argued that women could possess certain masculine traits or abilities and the same for men; they could possess feminine traits or abilities. This contribution stresses the importance of not confining people of the past into ‘feminine’ and ‘masculine’ boxes without the possibility of crossing these boundaries. If this research

tendency continues, it is argued that we will create stereotypical and normative people who are far from a credible depiction of the 'real' people of the past. Additionally, in the contribution from 2008, Hadley proposes other ways to interpret masculine weapons; they were not necessarily symbols or expressions of warrior or violence. It is also stressed that men are just as important to study as women, children and the elderly. In the contribution by Back-Danielsson (2007), it is also being stressed that as much as 70-80 % of the graves we find cannot be given a biological sex. Thus, it is only about 20-30 % of the graves, at best, which present biologically sexed individuals. This percentage is not particularly high and suggests that there are very few individuals in the archaeological record who actually represent the 'men' and 'women' of the Scandinavian Viking Age.

### **4.3.2 The Possibly Stereotypical Research Contributions**

However, as with the previous decades, there are still research contributions that display research tendencies that might be interpreted as possibly more stereotypical. In the contributions from 2000-2009, I have assessed that possibly four of the 32 contributions might be stereotypical. These contributions are Christiansen (2002), Simpson (2005), Gerds (2006) and Barrett (2008). As with the possible stereotypical research contributions from 1990-1999, the contributions from 2000-2009 are seemingly still displaying the second stereotypical tendency mentioned: the research contributions seem to still be interpreting graves or artifacts differently based on the sex or gender of the individual in the grave. During this decade, Christiansen (2002) and Gerds (2006) seem to be two possible examples of how this continues in the archaeological research. In the contribution by Christiansen (2002), there is especially one sentence that seems to identify this as possibly stereotypical: "Many women were buried with pairs of scales; not because they had been traders, as Stalsberg suggested (there is no evidence of any female traders), but as symbols of good housekeeping (...)" (Christiansen 2002:19). This is a very good example of how some archaeological contributions seems to be interpreting artefacts differently based on the sex or gender of the deceased. In this instance, it seems like weights in male graves are interpreted as symbols of trade, while the same artefacts in female graves are instead interpreted as symbols of good housekeeping. Thus, it seems like in this contribution, the women are being associated to the stereotypical role of housekeeping. Additionally, it seems like the contribution by Gerds (2006) might also be an example of how certain artefacts and burial circumstances might be interpreted differently depending on whether the deceased is male or female. In this

contribution the focus is on the Scandinavian boat burials. However, when discussing the burials, it seems like the male boat burials are interpreted as symbols of general and maritime power, while it seems like the female boat graves are interpreted as symbols of religious and cult leaders. This might also be interpreted as a sign of possible bias within the field of archaeology as it seems like the men are associated with direct, active power, while the women seem to be associated with indirect, passive power like religion and cult. Additionally, it is also stressed in the contribution that Oseberg should be interpreted as a symbol of the power of the women's families, rather than a symbol of the women's power as individual actors. This research tendency might also be interpreted as possibly stereotypical as it seems like the women are downgraded in terms of their power and abilities.

Lastly, it is worth taking a closer look at the contribution by Simpson (2005) and Barrett (2008). In the contribution by Simpson (2005) four graves that are assumed to be male, are examined and discussed. The assumed male graves are interpreted as warriors, even though some of the graves do not contain weapons. Thus, it seems like this contribution might possibly be stereotypical as it strongly focuses on the stereotypical depiction of the Viking Age men as warriors. There might be signs of another possible stereotypical research tendency in the contribution by Barrett (2008). In this contribution, the cause of the Viking Age is discussed, and the conclusion is that the Viking Age was a result of a surplus of young men (possibly a result of selective female infanticide) had to travel the world in order to provide valuable artefacts so they could get married. In this contribution, the men are also seemingly only depicted as warriors, while women are only seemingly mentioned in connection to marriage and selective female infanticide. This research contribution highlights the possible stereotypical tendency of depicting men as the active contributors of the society in the past; they are depicted as the ones who made changes and caused the end of eras and the beginning of others. In this contribution, it seems like the beginning of the Viking Age is credited solely to the men of the Viking Age, which is a research tendency that might be interpreted as stereotypical.

### **4.3.3 The Possibly Stereotypical and Feminist Research Contributions**

In the decade of 2000-2009 there are also contributions that might be interpreted as displaying stereotypical and feminist research tendencies. Some of these contributions might be

interpreted as feminist as some of them are seemingly still trying to make women visible in the archaeological record (e.g. Kristoffersen 2004). However, some of the contributions are also seemingly displaying possible stereotypical research tendencies. Some of the contributions might be interpreted as depicting women belonging in the private sphere, while the men are depicted as belonging in the public sphere (e.g. Gräslund 2001), while other contributions seem to argue against women having public or political power (e.g. Gräslund 2001; Nordström 2006), or seemingly argue that women could only have power when the men were gone (e.g. Gräslund 2008; Øye 2006). There are also contributions from this decade that seem to present a possible stereotypical depiction of the female role, namely presenting the women solely as wives, housewives or mothers, in addition to focus on how women seem to be associated with textile working while men could be metalworkers, make stone sculptures, etc. (e.g. Aannestad 2004; Callmer 2006; Kristoffersen 2004; Speed and Walton Rogers 2004). Lastly, there are the contributions that seem to be using the ‘traditional’ method of gendering grave goods to determine if the grave belong to a man or woman (e.g. Gräslund 2008; Stylegar 2007), which might also be interpreted as a possible stereotypical research tendency.

There are also some contributions that discuss important points or breaches some interesting topics. Examples of this is the contributions by Aannestad (2004), Øye (2006), and Brink and Price (2008). In the contribution by Aannestad (2004), the occurrence of keys in Viking Age graves are discussed. It is discussed how 44,2 % of the keys are located in male graves, however, why this might be or what this might mean, is not discussed. Yet, this discussion might be interpreted as possibly feminist as it highlights the occurrence of keys, a ‘traditional’ female artefact, in male graves.

In the contribution by Øye (2006) there are several topics that deserves to be highlighted. An important fact is that she criticizes the use of the sagas as sources as they were written by men for men, and because they contain social and gender distortions. She is also criticizing the dichotomy of *innanstokks* and *utanstokks*, which has often been used in the archaeological research of the past to explain the ‘traditional’ limits of the gender roles. So far, the research tendencies identified in Øye’s (2006) contribution might be interpreted as feminist; however, there is one element in the contribution I have assessed as possibly stereotypical. This is her discussion regarding male graves and textile equipment. The contribution suggests that the men buried with textile equipment were responsible for the weaving of sails, while the rest of

the textile production was left to the women. This might be identified as possibly stereotypical as one might argue that the weaving of sails might be the most masculine part of textile working as it is connected to the ‘masculine’ activities of sailing and boat-building.

Lastly, I wish to discuss the contribution by Brink and Price (2008). This contribution consists of multiple chapters that focus on different themes, ranging from technology and trade, to literature, art and people. However, it seems like this contribution might display some stereotypical tendencies as most of the book might be interpreted as discussing typically ‘male’ occupations and activities. Only one article seems to be about women and gender, and there are only two chapters (one regarding women and textile working and the second regarding women, religion and *volvas*) that seem to discuss ‘typically female’ occupations and activities. On the positive side, it could be argued that this contribution is depicting a nuanced picture of the Viking Age men, and thus is displaying research tendencies that might be interpreted as feminist. However, it could also be argued that the contribution is displaying research tendencies that might be interpreted as stereotypical, as it does not include a more nuanced view regarding the occupations and activities of women as well.

#### **4.3.4 Conclusion**

It seems like the contributions from 2000-2009 are still struggling to make women visible in the archaeological record. Many of the research contributions are still giving a lot of attention to the topics of women, gender roles, and power, although, one can notice a slight increase in the percentage of contributions that might be assessed as possibly feminist and stereotypical (from 29 % in 1990-1999 to 31 % in 2000-2009). Additionally, one can notice a slight decrease in the number of contributions that might display feminist or stereotypical research tendencies. The percentage of possible feminist contributions have decreased from 57 to 56 %, while the possible stereotypical contributions have decreased from 14 to 13 %. It thus seems like the research contributions are reflecting that almost nothing changed during the 2000s compared to the 1990s, which is in itself very interesting.

### **4.4 The Contributions From 2010-2019**

From the decade 2010-2019 I have been able to assess a total of 49 research contributions. As these contributions have been published three decades later since the beginning of feminist

and gender archaeology, one should expect the contributions to display an increased awareness of the gender bias present in Viking Age archaeology. In contrast to the other decades, I do not have any research history on gender to rely upon in relation to the 2010s. Therefore, I have chosen to instead include my own expectations in this paragraph. Ideally, I think the research contributions might not be as focused on making women visible in the archaeological record as this should have become an established fact in Viking Age studies. I also think there might be more contributions discussing the similarities between men and women of the Viking Age rather than the differences. Lastly, I would expect the contributions to discuss male gender roles to a greater degree as well as being more aware of the gender bias in Viking Age archaeology.

#### **4.4.1 The Possibly Feminist Research Contributions**

Based on a total of 49 research contributions from the decade 2010-2019, I have assessed that 33 of them might be displaying research tendencies that could be interpreted as feminist. Just like in the previous decades, some of the contributions are still focusing on making women visible in the archaeological record (e.g. Aannestad and Glørstad 2017; Abrams 2012; Gardela 2016; Gräslund 2010; Hedenstierna-Jonson 2014; Hedenstierna-Jonson et al. 2017; Lewis-Simpson 2010; Løkka 2017; McLeod 2011; Moen 2014; Moen 2019; Nilsson 2016; Pedersen 2017; Price 2014a; Price 2019; Price, Hedenstierna-Jonson, Zachrisson et al. 2019; Thedéen 2010). There are also other similarities between the contributions from this decade and the previous three decades assessed in this thesis. In addition to making women visible, some contributions still seem to be highlighting that women could participate in ‘typically male’ activities. In relation to this, there are contributions that discuss the possibility of warrior women (e.g. Gardela 2011; Hedenstierna-Jonson et al. 2017; Price 2014a; Price 2014b; Price 2014c; Price, Hedenstierna-Jonson, Zachrisson et al. 2019), the possibility of women who participated in migration or travelled with war parties (e.g. Abrams 2012; Kershaw 2013; McLeod 2011; Price 2014b), or the possibility of women who participated at the thing (Sanmark 2014). There are also contributions that seem to be highlighting how women could possess different roles and occupation and stresses that not all women were mothers or wives (e.g. Abrams 2012; Hedenstierna-Jonson et al. 2017; Løkka 2017; Moen 2014; Moen 2019; Pantmann 2014; Pedersen 2017; Price, Hedenstierna-Jonson, Zachrisson et al. 2019; Sanmark 2014; Sørheim 2014; Thedéen 2012). In addition to this, there are also some who discuss the possibility of how gender roles might have changed when people lived

at the shielings and how it seems like women could perform male work and vice versa in these instances (e.g. Kupiec and Milek 2014). Thus, like in the 2000s, it seems like many of the contributions are still trying to challenge the ‘traditional’ gender roles (e.g. Gardela 2011; Hedeager 2014; Hedenstierna-Jonson et al. 2017; Kupiec and Milek 2014; Moen 2014; Moen 2019; Pantmann 2014; Price 2014b; Price 2019; Price, Hedenstierna-Jonson, Zachrisson et al. 2019). This is being practiced by archaeologists who, for example, discuss the topics mentioned above, or by discussing the possible occurrence of ‘typically female’ equipment in male graves (e.g. Aannestad and Glørstad 2017; Moen 2019; Nordström 2016; O’sullivan 2015; Thedéen 2010).

The gendering of the artifacts is also a point being discussed more thoroughly than before (e.g. McLeod 2011; Moen 2019; O’sullivan 2015), and in this decade, it seems like the subjects of keys in Viking Age graves have received a lot of attention (e.g. Berg 2014; Nordström 2016; Pantmann 2014). In these contributions, the ‘traditional’ depiction of the keys is challenged, and alternative interpretations are being presented. It is also stressed that these ‘stereotypical female artefacts’, which have often been interpreted as symbols of the housewives, have also been located in several male graves. Whether or not this means that we will have to discard the notion of the housewife with her keys altogether, remains to be seen.

Regarding some new research tendencies, there are a few I wish to highlight. One of them is the positive tendency of discussing male gender roles (e.g. Berg 2014; Price 2014c) and how some contributions are examining possible male and female graves with new perspectives. In the contribution by Stylegar (2010) it is discussed why there are more male graves than female graves from the Norwegian Viking Age. Instead of explaining this by exploring possibilities of selective female infanticide or how women might have been treated differently compared to men, the contribution stresses other scientific reasons; it might just be a case of bad luck as the soil in Norway preserves skeletal remains very poorly compared to our Southern-Scandinavian neighbors (Stylegar 2010). Pedersen (2014) also highlights how it also might be a connection between professional excavations and a higher rate of female graves. These contributions might result in more research in the years to come regarding the ‘missing’ female graves from the Viking Age.

It also seems like more archaeologists are becoming aware of the bias and stereotypes present in Viking Age archaeology. Several of the contributions seem to either highlight or criticize the bias or stereotypes (e.g. Aannestad and Glørstad 2017; Croix 2015; Hedenstierna-Jonson

et al. 2017; McLeod 2011; Moen 2014; Moen 2019; Nilsson 2016; Pedersen 2014; Pedersen 2017; Price 2019), or they discuss how our contemporary notions and stereotypes might affect our interpretations of the past (e.g. Berg 2014; Gardela 2016; Hedenstierna-Jonson et al. 2017; Moen 2014; Moen 2019; Pedersen 2017; Stylegar 2010; Sørheim 2014; Thedéen 2012). In relation to this, I wish to discuss the contributions by Thedéen (2012), Moen (2014) and Pedersen (2017) more closely.

In Thedéen's (2012) contribution, the bias and stereotypes present in Viking Age archaeology is highlighted as it criticizes how research about women seemingly tend to focus on her belonging to either one of two categories: 1) she is interpreted as a housewife, an adult, married woman with power over the farm, or 2) she is a female ritual specialist. Gender research has tried to expand the debate regarding female gender roles, however, as of now, exceptions to these two interpretations are not yet generally accepted (Thedéen 2012). In relation to this, it is also interesting to have a closer look at contributions discussing Oseberg and the interpretations of this burial (e.g. Moen 2014; Pedersen 2017). These contributions stress how some archaeologist might be reluctant to interpret the Oseberg mound as an equal sign of power as a male burial mound. While the man in the Gokstad burial is interpreted as a figure of political power, often described as a chieftain, petty king or king, Oseberg is generally accepted as a queen; however, she is also very often interpreted as a wife or a mother (Pedersen 2017). The political and ruling power of the women in the Oseberg burial have been surprisingly little discussed, and the possibility of her being a ruling queen has been denied outright by some archaeologists (e.g. Gansum 1997; Røthe 1994; Skre 2007). Because of their criticisms, these contributions have been assessed as displaying possible feminist research tendencies.

#### **4.4.2 The Possibly Stereotypical Research Contributions**

From the decade of 2010-2019, I have assessed that four contributions might possess research tendencies that could be interpreted as stereotypical. These contributions are Barrett (2010), Gustin (2010), Ashby (2015) and Dommasnes (2016). The contribution by Barrett (2010) is mostly the same as his contribution from 2008. In much the same way, the contribution discusses what caused the Viking Age, and concludes that it was a result of a surplus of young men who had to travel and acquire valuable artefacts in order to get married. The contribution seems to focus on the possible stereotypical research tendency of explaining change as a male

activity, while it seemingly depicts women as static and passive. At best, they are depicted as motivators for male action. The contribution by Ashby (2015) also discusses what might have caused the Viking Age, and just like Barrett (2008, 2010) it seems to focus on the men being the active, initiators of the Viking Age while women are seemingly depicted as static and passive.

In addition to these contributions, which might be displaying stereotypical research tendencies, there are also archaeologists who seem to be against the notion of association women with more challenging gender roles. An example is the contribution by Gustin (2010). Here, it is argued against the possible interpretation of iron rods being *volva* staffs in female graves. Instead, it is argued that these rods were used in textile working, and thus it seems to be focusing on the possible stereotypical depiction of women and textiles. Possible stereotypical research tendencies are also visible in the contribution by Dommasnes (2016) where she writes about Viking Age graves and the farm as a social arena. The contribution highlights that certain tools found in graves indicate if the person is male or female and that the tools indicate male or female work. However, the contribution does not seem to be discussing or criticizing this possibly stereotypical approach to the graves and the interpretation of them. Therefore, even though the contribution mentions both men and women, it seems like it might contain some stereotypical research tendencies because of how it takes the gendering of the artefacts for granted by not discussing how this is based on outdated stereotypes from the 19th century.

#### **4.4.3 The Possibly Stereotypical and Feminist Research Contributions**

From the decade of 2010-2019, I have assessed that 12 of the 49 research contributions might contain research tendencies that could be interpreted as both stereotypical and feminist. Similarly to the contributions assessed to contain possible feminist research tendencies, many of these contributions are also focusing on making women visible (e.g. Berglund 2016; Callow 2011; Gardela 2013; Gardela 2017; Hedeager 2011; Hedenstierna-Jonson and Kjellström 2014; Ljungkvist 2011; Wicker 2012; Williams, Pentz and Wemhoff 2014; Øye 2010). One might also see some possible feminist research tendencies in the contributions by Harrison (2015) and Hedeager (2011). In the contribution by Harrison (2015), men and weapons are discussed and therefore it seemingly challenges the depiction of the stereotypical

Viking Age warrior, while in Hedeager's (2011) contribution, female roles and rank are discussed and how it might have been possible for women to perform male tasks. In addition to this, several of the contributions discuss women and weapons (e.g. Gardela 2013; Raffield, Price and Collard 2016). Because of how these contributions discuss gender and gender roles, they have been assessed as containing research tendencies that might be labeled as feminist.

However, even though all the contributions discussed in this section displays varying degrees of research tendencies that could be interpreted as feminist, they are also examples of research tendencies that might be interpreted as more stereotypical. In the contributions by Ljungkvist (2011), Wicker (2012) and Harrison (2015), they seem to be aware of the gender bias present in archaeology, however, they are still using the 'traditional' method of gendering graves based on artefacts. Since they do not discuss the problems surrounding the issue of gendering grave goods, these contributions have been assessed as displaying possible stereotypical research tendencies. Some of the contributions also seem to be focusing on 'traditional' female or male gender roles by, for example, highlighting women as wives or textile workers (e.g. Berglund 2016; Øye 2010), or by focusing on how men allegedly were the initiators of the Viking Age while the women are depicted as static, male motivators (e.g. Raffield, Price and Collard 2016). There are also contributions that seem to focus on how male dominance is 'natural and expected' (e.g. Callow 2011), or mostly seem to focus on the depiction of the stereotypical, Viking Age man (e.g. Williams, Pentz and Wemhoff 2014). Additionally, the contribution by Hedeager (2011) might also be interpreted as possibly stereotypical because of how it depicts the Norse society as a penetration metaphor; where the ones penetrating (by either sword, penis or tongue) were the ones with power, while the ones being penetrated were powerless. I have also seemed to locate some underlying possible stereotypical research tendencies regarding the contributions discussing women and weapons. In one of the contributions, it is argued that the only way to prove that a woman with weapons was a warrior is to examine the skeleton and find signs of combat injuries (Gardela 2017). This might be interpreted as a possible stereotypical research tendency, because they do mention if men with weapons also must display signs of combat injuries before being assigned a warrior identity. In addition to this, one should add that combat injuries are not necessarily evidence of warriors; "those without swords can still die upon them", as stated by the fictional character Éowyn in the movie adaptation of J.R.R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*. Thus, it seems like there might be a tendency in the archaeological contributions to ask for more evidence to prove that women participated in certain activities (when they seemingly go against the

‘traditional’, acknowledged female roles) while men might not need as much evidence in order to prove they participated in the same activities. This might also be visible in the contribution by Hedenstierna-Jonson and Kjellström (2014). In this contribution, it is stated that we cannot know for certain how big a role the women played in the activity of trading, which is a valid point. However, it would have been perceived as more valid if this was applied to the activities of men as well, as we do not know for certain how big a role the men played in the activity of trading as well. In these contributions one might notice what might be interpreted as a stereotypical research tendency, as it seems like in order to prove female participation in ‘typically male’ occupations or activities, it seems like there is required more evidence than what is necessary when discussing men and their participation in the same activities.

## **4.5 Assessment of Sex, Gender, Social Identity and Queer Theory**

As already mentioned, the diagrams in chapter three displays how the research contributions from the four decades deal with the topics of sex, gender, social identity and queer theory. During the 1980s, one can see how the contributions are not focusing on debating gender, sex and/or social identity, however, even though the contributions do not discuss or define the terms, a total of 37 % uses the terms. One can also see that the contributions from the 1980s do not discuss queer theory, possible multiple genders or transgendered identities in the past.

During the 1990s, one can see a noticeable increase in the percentage of contributions that discusses and defines the terms sex, gender and/or social identity. This has increased from none in the 1980s, to 21 % (discusses terms) and 11 % (defines terms). In total, one can see a large increase in the percentage of contributions using the terms. This has increased from 37 % to 61 %. It is also possible to see an increase in the contributions discussing queer theory, multiple genders or transgendered identities in the Viking Age; this has increased from zero contributions in the 1980s to three contributions (11 %) in the 1990s.

This increase in the percentage of contributions that seem to discuss queer theory is also visible in the material from the 2000s. Here, the number of contributions, which seem to discuss queerness, transgender or multiple genders, have increased to a total of nine contributions, resulting in an increase from 11 to 28 %. However, the percentage of the

contributions that defines and discusses the terms sex, gender and/or social identity has decreased slightly. The contributions defining the terms have decreased from 11 to 6 %, while the contributions discussing the terms have decreased from 21 to 9 %. In total, the percentage of contributions using the terms sex, gender and/or social identity has decreased from 61 to 50 %.

The material from the 2010s also contain nine contributions that seem to discuss queer theory. However, since the number of contributions has increased to a total of 49, the percentage of contributions discussing queerness, transgender or multiple genders seem to decrease slightly from 28 to 18 %. It is also worth noting that the contributions defining and discussing the terms sex, gender and/or social identity is also decreasing. The contributions that defines the terms have decreased from 6 to 2 %, while the contributions discussing the use of the terms have decreased from 9 to 6 %. However, in the contributions from this decade, one can see one possibly positive research tendency as I have been able to identify two contributions that are both defining and discussing the terms, resulting in an increase in this category from 0 % in the previous three decades, to 4 % in the 2010s. In total, there is an increase in the percentage of contributions that seem to use the terms sex, gender and/or social identity; from 50 to 67 %.

These possible research tendencies I have highlighted in the contributions from 1980-2019 seem to display an interesting development in the field of archaeology. According to the research history of feminist and gender archaeology, one should maybe expect a greater number of contributions discussing queerness, transgender and multiple genders; however, I do not see this in the contributions I have assessed. This seems to imply that the interest of queer theory is seemingly receiving more interest in the theoretical discussions regarding archaeological theory than the research contributions regarding gender and identity in Viking Age archaeology. It is also interesting to see how few of the research contributions are actually discussing or defining (or both) the use of the terms sex, gender and/or social identity. This percentage is also something I expected to be higher based on the theoretical discussion in chapter two. In short, it seems like the Viking Age contributions are perhaps not as focused on discussing sex, gender and/or social identity and queer theory as one might have expected.

## 4.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have assessed the archaeological literature I have presented in chapter three. The archaeological literature consists of a total of 117 research contributions spanning from 1980-2019. By using theoretical tools and terms in my possession, I have identified certain research tendencies that could be interpreted as feminist, stereotypical or both. In the material from 1980-1989, I was only able to analyze a total of eight contributions, while in the material from 2010-2019, I was able to analyze a total of 49 research contributions. In this chapter, it has been possible to see how the research tendencies have changed decade for decade. In the 1980s, the beginning of gender and feminist archaeology, the focus is on making women visible in the archaeological record. One would maybe expect this focus to dissolve after the presence of women in Viking Age archaeology was an established fact, however, according to my assessment, it seems like the contributions in the 2010s are still very focused on making women visible in the archaeological record. One might also see how the discussions regarding women, gender roles and men has changed over time; during the 1980s, some argue for women with power, while other focus on how the women could have gained power only if the men were away, to the discussions of the 2010s, where some are arguing for the possibility of female warriors. This chapter has highlighted the different research tendencies visible in the archaeological literature, which will be an important foundation for the discussion occurring in the next chapter.

# 5 Discussing the Research Contributions

All our knowledge about the past is created in the present with our own contemporary thoughts and notions. Consequently, it is not strange that we can see how the focus has shifted in the research contributions analyzed in this thesis. The beginning of gender and feminist archaeology began by making women visible in the archaeological record (Trigger 1989:458), and this is certainly visible in the research contributions from the 1980s and 1990s. According to my sector diagrams, the percentage of feminist contributions was 25 % (two contributions) in the 1980s, while it increased to 57 % (16 contributions) in the 1990s. During the decade of 2000-2009, however, the number decreased to 56 % (18 contributions). This could be interpreted as the research regarding gender and feminism in Viking Age archaeology stood still. During the decade of 2010-2019, one can see an increase in the possibly feminist contributions to 67 % (33 contributions). Thus, there are some obvious changes which is noticeable regarding the percentage of research contributions. In this chapter I will attempt to provide answers to my research questions:

- In what way has our understanding of men and women in the Viking Age changed from the 1980s until today in archaeology?
- How are we using the terms gender, sex and social identity?
- Are we creating stereotypical interpretations of the people in the past, or are we making room for real people?

## 5.1 In What Way Has Our Understanding of Men and Women in the Viking Age Changed From the 1980s Until Today in Archaeology?

Regarding the Viking Age, one can see how the past might be presented as a distorted mirror of Victorian ideals, rather than a reflection of what the archaeological material implies (Moen 2019:11). A point that needs to be stressed continuously, is how our contemporary

understandings of gender, status and social identity has been strongly influenced by these Victorian ideals. Additionally, we must acknowledge that the roots of the Victorian ideals are still very much present in the research contributions from the Viking Age. The Viking Age is commonly presented as an image of a society where high status men of good birth are the only clearly visible inhabitants. The other social groups of women, children and the elderly, are there to create a shadowy background (Dommasnes 1998:337; Moen 2019:66). By examining the research contributions from 1980-2019, my aim is to identify possible research tendencies that might highlight how our understanding of men and women in the Viking Age has changed over time.

### **5.1.1 The Depiction of Men and Women**

As already mentioned in chapter two, during the 1980s, the feminist movement gained general recognition in contemporary society. Consequently, they also gained influence over other fields of academia like archaeology. This resulted in a need for calling out androcentrism and sexism in the field of archaeology as well as rectifying bias (Gilchrist 1999:3). In archaeology, this explicitly translated into an agenda to ‘find women’ in the past (Brumfield 2006:32; Sørensen 2006:106), and highlight how traditional interpretations of the past were not ‘neutral’ or ‘un-gendered’, as previously assumed, but instead highly androcentric and sometimes even considered sexist (Conkey and Gero 1991:4; Gilchrist 1991:1; Nelson 2006:6; Villa 2011:173). The women had been assumed invisible in the past, and now, with the emergence of the feminist movement, it was time to change that in the field of archaeology.

Consequently, the research contributions from the 1980s saw the emergence of feminist and gender archaeology, which explicitly focused on making women visible in the field of archaeology in addition to highlighting the androcentric bias present in the discipline. The androcentric bias was a result of how the discipline had reached a point where the historical dominance of men over women had been naturalized to such a degree that it appeared to be the natural order of things (Arnold and Wicker 2001:vii). Thus, it seems like most of the contributions from the 1980s, which have been assessed as possibly feminist, are focusing on making women visible in the archaeological record (e.g. Høgestøl 1986; Lillehammer 1988). There are also seemingly contributions which argue for female status and power (e.g. Dommasnes 1982; Farbreugd 1988; Solberg 1985). However, in these instances, it is stressed

how this was only possible when the men were gone, either travelling, trading or waring, which were considered typically male activities. However, the more traditional depiction of the men and women in the Viking Age is also present in this decade. An example is the contribution by Christensen (1987). Here, the men are depicted as warriors, hunters, smiths, etc., while the women are depicted as housewives or textile workers. This depiction of the people of the Viking Age is also apparent in the contribution by Farbrege (1988), where it is emphasized that the men were the ones who sailed to war, plundered, traded and emigrated.

Thus, in the contributions from the 1980s, one can see how the men are perceived as masculine and active, and they are depicted as traders, warriors, travelers or kings. The women are certainly being made visible in the archaeological record; however, they are seemingly only depicted as housewives or textile workers whose power was only visible when the men were away or deceased.

During the 1990s, one should be able to see an increased awareness of the gender bias in the archaeological record, according to the theory of gender archaeology. According to the research contributions I have assessed, some of the authors are still busy working on making women visible in the Viking Age by discussing women's roles, ranks and power (e.g. Gustafson 1993; Hofseth 1999; Hoftun 1995; Hjørungdal 1991; Linder 1995; Mundal 1998; Stylegar 1995). It also seems like during the 1990s, several of the authors are arguing how women could participate in 'typically male' activities. This is especially argued by Prestvold (1993) and Stalsberg (1991) who discuss the possibility of female traders and of women participating in iron production. These research contributions wanted to prove that women were not inferior to men, and thus the model of sameness is introduced. When men and women are portrayed as exactly equal, it leaves no room for different social functions. However, can we even be certain that two genders operated in the Viking Age? As previously mentioned in chapter two, the two-sex model of male and female which is dominant in the modern West, is a relatively new phenomenon and by no means universal (Laqueur 1990; Moen 2019:35; Nordbladh and Yates 1990:227; Arwill-Nordbladh 1998:64; Wiesner-Hanks and Meade 2004:2-3). Thus, our own contemporary notions of 'typically male' and 'female' might not be corresponding with the people of the past, and they might have had different thoughts and notions regarding the terms we now think of as masculinity and femininity.

However, there are still some of the research contributions from the 1990s which display research tendencies which might be interpreted as stereotypical in their depiction of men and

women in the Viking Age. This is perhaps best illustrated in the contributions which argue that we must assume that women did not have power over people (e.g. Dommasnes 1991, 1992). There is also a research tendency which I wish to especially highlight from this decade; some of the authors seemingly argue that male graves should be interpreted as a direct sign of the man's status and power, however, when some of the authors discuss female graves, they are seemingly interpreted as a representation of her family's status (e.g. Dommasnes 1991, 1992; Gansum 1995; Tsigaridas 1998). Additionally, there are also contributions which seem to focus on depicting the women of the Viking Age in their 'traditional' roles as being housewives, taking care of children, cooking and focusing on the women's reproductive abilities (e.g. Bøgh-Andersen 1999; Göransson 1999; Kristoffersen 1992). However, as previously mentioned in chapter four, the women are not the only ones being depicted in this seemingly 'traditional' way; the men are also depicted as warriors, sailors, traders, kings or chieftains (e.g. Lillehammer 1996; Wicker 1998; Göransson 1999).

When assessing the overall picture of how the research contributions seem to be portraying men and women in the Viking Age during the 1990s, it is first worth noting that the number of contributions have increased from a total of eight in the 1980s to 28 in the 1990s, which might be interpreted as an increased interest in gender in the Viking Age. 16 of the 28 contributions have been assessed as possibly feminist because of, amongst other things, how they are challenging the 'traditional' gender roles by making the women visible and discuss the possibility of female power. However, there are also contributions from the 1990s which might be interpreted as stereotypical in their depiction of gender in the Viking Age. A total of four of the 28 contributions have been assessed as displaying research tendencies which might be interpreted as stereotypical, and additionally, there are also eight contributions which are interpreted as displaying research tendencies which might be interpreted as both feminist and stereotypical. Thus, one can see how some of the contributions from the 1990s are still working on making women visible in the archaeological record, while the other half of the contributions might be interpreted as focusing on the more 'traditional' gender roles, where the women are depicted as passive housewives, while the men are again depicted as the active initiators in the Viking Age society.

During the decade of 2000-2009, the total number of research contribution have increased to 32. There are still some of the contributions which seems to discuss how women could participate in 'exclusively male' activities, while other are still seemingly challenging the

‘traditional’ gender roles. However, there are still a total of four contributions that might be interpreted as stereotypical, because of how they portray the men and women of the Viking Age. There are, for example, still research contributions that seem to argue that women could not have public or political power (e.g. Gräslund 2001; Nordström 2006), or how women only could have power when the men were gone (e.g. Gräslund 2008; Øye 2006).

Thus, one can see, based on the contributions assessed from 2000-2009, that there are still much to be done. A total of 18 of the 32 research contributions have been assessed as possibly feminist because of how they are making women visible in the archaeological record, or because of how they argue against the stereotypical depictions of men and women by discussing how it is possible for men to possess certain feminine traits or abilities, and that women could possess certain masculine traits or abilities (e.g. Hadley 2004). However, the ‘traditional’ picture of women as passive housewives without power or influence, is still not eradicated from the research contributions. Additionally, the men are also seemingly only discussed as inhabiting their ‘traditional’ roles of being warriors, sailors, traders, kings or chieftains, which seems to indicate that next to nothing has happened regarding the depiction of men in the Scandinavian Viking Age. They are seemingly still portrayed as the stereotypical, masculine brutes; a picture that is also so commonly seen in the popular media.

Maybe one would think that in the 2010s, we would not need gender archaeology anymore. The people of the past would be portrayed in various gender roles without being confined to seemingly stereotypical depictions that are rooted in outdated Victorian attitudes. The total number of 49 research contributions I have assessed from this decade, however, might be painting a different picture. Of the 49 research contributions, 33 of them have been assessed as displaying research tendencies that could be identified as feminist. As we have seen in the previous decades, it seems like some of the possibly feminist contributions are still focusing on making women visible as well as discussing how women could participate in ‘male’ activities. A contrast from the other decades, however, is the seemingly great focus on female warriors (e.g. Gardela 2011; Hedenstierna-Jonson et al. 2017; Price 2014a; Price 2014b; Price 2014c; Price, Hedenstierna-Jonson, Zachrisson et al. 2019).

In the 2010s, there is also seemingly an increased awareness of how the men and women of the Viking Age have previously been confined to rather restricting roles. In the contribution by Thedéen (2012), it is revealed how women are seemingly depicted as belonging to either one of two categories: 1) either she is interpreted as a housewife, and adult, married woman

with power over the farm, or 2) she is a female ritual specialist. Women have often been interpreted as ‘naturally’ more sedentary than men because of their role in pregnancy and childbearing, however, as many of the research contributions during this decade stress, not all women were pregnant or had children (e.g. Abrams 2012; Hedenstierna-Jonson et al. 2017; Løkka 2017; Moen 2014; Moen 2019:33; Pantmann 2014; Pedersen 2017; Price, Hedenstierna-Jonson, Zachrisson et al. 2019; Sanmark 2014; Sørheim 2014; Thedéen 2012). Also, as Moen (2019:33) highlights, it is not a given that taking care of children was an immobilizing activity. Thus, the ‘traditional’ role of the women seems to be criticized to a greater degree than in the previous decades, and hopefully this might lead to a more nuanced picture of the gender roles in the Viking Age.

Up until now, most of the research contributions have been discussed in relation to their depiction and interpretation of the female sex and gender, but men can also be subjected to stereotypical presentation and interpretations. However, as previously mentioned in chapter two, in most cases this is not seen as problematic or deserving of further examination (Conkey and Spector 1984; Gilchrist 1999). In the research contributions from 2010-2019, it is possible to see a positive change regarding the discussion of male gender roles (e.g. Berg 2014; Price 2014c). This is a topic that has not been discussed in previous research contributions. Consequently, it might be argued that the archaeologists of the 2010s are increasingly more aware of the gender bias and stereotypes which have been presented in Viking Age archaeology in the previous decades. It might also be argued that the archaeologists are being more open regarding where our knowledge stems from. Archaeology is very much a discipline that bases its knowledge on interpretations of objects; and these interpretations are very much affected by contemporary thoughts, notions and stereotypes (e.g. Berg 2014; Gardela 2016; Hedenstierna-Jonson et al. 2017; Moen 2014; Moen 2019; Pedersen 2017; Stylegar 2010; Sørheim 2014; Thedéen 2012).

However, despite this increased awareness of how the people of the Viking Age are seemingly interpreted as stereotypes, they have not yet vanished completely from the archaeological record. In the contributions from the 2010s, only four of the contributions were assessed as possibly stereotypical, which is a very low number, however, there are 12 contribution which are displaying research tendencies that could be interpreted as possibly feminist and stereotypical. Therefore, it might be a possibility that 16 of the contributions from this decade is seemingly not aware of the gender bias or is unwilling to correct it. In the

contributions by Ashby (2015), Barrett (2010) and Raffield, Price and Collard (2016), it might be either of the two. In the contributions, the cause of the Viking Age is discussed, and they are all seemingly concluding that the Viking Age was a direct result of a surplus of young men who had to travel and acquire valuable artefacts in order to get married. The contributions focus on explaining change as a male activity, while the women are depicted as static, passive, and at best, motivators for male action. The traditional depiction of the gender roles is also very much present in some of the research contributions from this decade. For example, one might benefit from taking a closer look at the contributions by Berglund (2016), Gustin (2010) and Øye (2010). In Berglund (2016) and Øye (2010), they seem to be highlighting how women only be wives or textile workers, nothing else. Also, in the contribution by Gustin (2010), the traditional gender roles are highlighted when it argues against the possibility of iron rods in female graves being interpreted as volva staffs. Instead, it is argued that the rods were tools used in textile working, and thus, instead of acknowledging the possibility of women having power in some ritual aspect or domain, the staffs are seemingly explained as belonging to the category of textile equipment, as this is a category which might be interpreted as more 'pleasant' and 'acceptable' when discussing women of the Viking Age. Additionally, there are also contributions which seem to focus on how male dominance is 'natural and expected' (e.g. Callow 2011), even though it is impossible to state what might have been 'natural' or 'expected' in the past, when this conviction in archaeology is based on Victorian gender ideals and bias.

As an attempt to draw a conclusion from all the research contributions regarding how our understanding of men and women in the Viking Age has changed from the 1980s until today, I would argue that some things have changed, while others have not. As one can see from the sector diagrams, there are seemingly more research contributions which are displaying research tendencies that might be interpreted as feminist because of how they discuss the roles of men and women in the Viking Age. However, even though the percentage of possibly feminist contributions have increased from only 25 % in the 1980s to 67 % in the 2010s, the possibly stereotypical tendencies in the research material is still present, which can be seen in the discussions above. Even though most of the archaeologists are depicting the past as more than just 'Rambo'-like men and 'Snow-white'-like women (see discussion in Fuglestedt 2014), these stereotypical interpretations are still clearly visible in the material even from today.

### **5.1.2 Does the Sex or Gender of the Deceased Affect our Interpretations of the Graves?**

To us, it might be obvious what is considered ‘male’ or ‘female’ within our own cultural context. However, archaeologists need to be careful when we try to extend these categories onto past societies. Our cultural categories of ‘male’ and ‘female’ might not be corresponding with the past’s. We can for example see this based on the Victorian attitudes from the 19th century, which are still very much present in the field of archaeology today. Consequently, women have been understood as less important than men in the archaeological record. The emergence of feminist and gender archaeology sought to change this by making women visible; however, it might still be possible to examine how male and female graves are interpreted differently solely based on the sex or gender of the deceased.

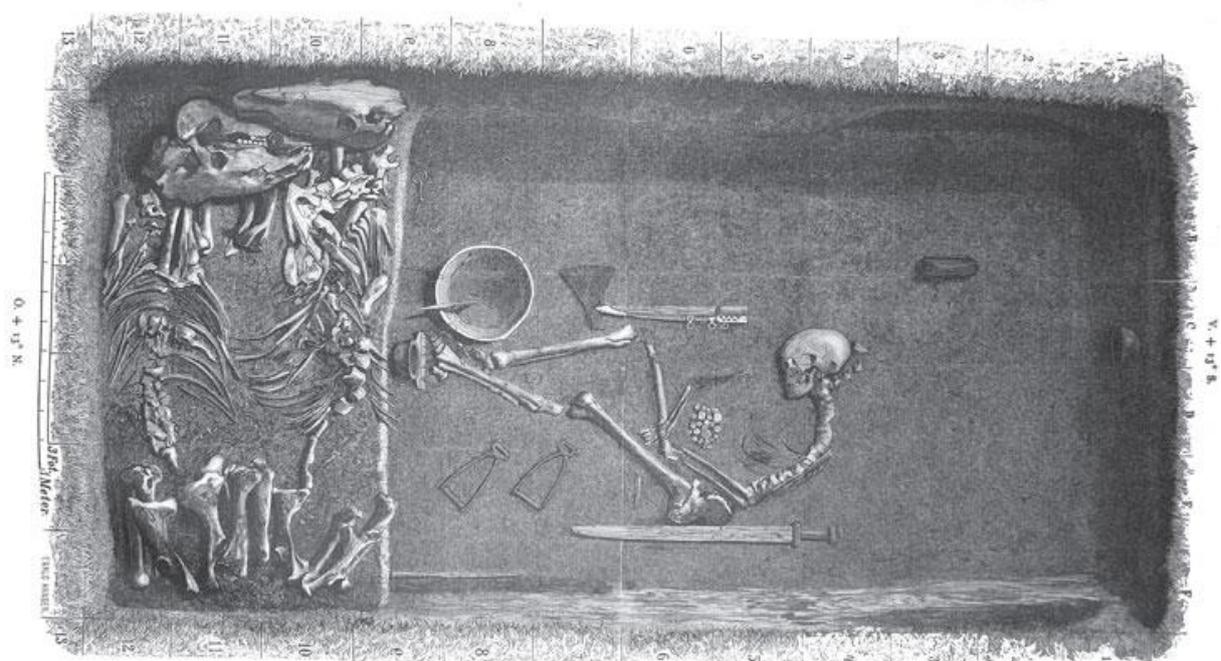
One of the most obvious starting points regarding how graves are interpreted differently based on the sex or gender of the deceased, is how male graves tend to represent themselves, while the female ones seldom do (Hillerdal 2009). This is for instance visible regarding the discussion the possibility of female traders. While Stalsberg (1991, 2001) discusses how weights and scales found in female graves should be interpreted as proof of female traders, Christiansen (2002:19) counters with this statement: “Many women were buried with pairs of scales; not because they had been traders, as Stalsberg suggested (there is no evidence of any female traders), but as symbols of good housekeeping (...)”. So, even though it is a valid point that we cannot know for certain how big a role women played in the activity of trading (Hedenstierna-Jonson and Kjellström 2014), we also have to stress that we cannot know for certain how big a role the men played either. If we are to play out the scenario of women inheriting their father’s or husband’s weights and scales, shouldn’t we also be playing out this scenario regarding the male graves as well? Isn’t it possible that they also could inherit their deceased father’s or maybe even brother’s trading equipment and wish to be buried with it? In the instances presented above, the interpretations of the artefacts are differently based on gender, which is a discussion point I will return to in the following part of this chapter. The women are seemingly first and foremost interpreted as being someone’s wife or belonging to someone’s family before they are even considered as individual people, while the men are depicted as individual actors.

This way of interpreting male and female graves differently, is also visible in discussions regarding the Oseberg boat burial. This is a very rich, female grave which has been examined

by several archaeologists (e.g. Christensen 1987; Gansum 1995, 1997; Gerds 2006; Moen 2010, 2014; Pedersen 2008, 2017; Røthe 1994; Skre 2007). However, not all archaeologists agree on how Oseberg should be interpreted. While there is no doubt that Oseberg is one of the richest boat burials excavated from the Viking Age, the grave is still subject for debate and study, and it is possible to identify a certain reluctance to acknowledge it as a symbol of power like its male counterparts (Moen 2014). This is for instance visible in the contribution by Christensen (1987); even though the contribution is supposed to be about the Oseberg queen, the author focuses on presenting the women as textile workers and housewives rather than portraying them as having political or social power. Also, the contribution by Gansum (1995) makes a point of stating explicitly how the women of Oseberg does not necessarily have to be royalty; however, he does not repeat this valid point when discussing the burial mounds containing male individuals. Quite contrary, it might seem like the contribution instead stresses how these men might have been petty kings or chieftains, or at least men with significant wealth, influence and power. The women of Oseberg is not discussed in the same manner. In addition to this, the women of Oseberg have also been subjected to a range of other interpretations. They have, for instance, been interpreted as religious sacrifices (Gansum 1995), a bride with a sizeable dowry (Skre 2007), and some even argue that the grave contained a third body, a male, which has later disappeared without a trace (Androschuk 2005).

It is also possible to see how Oseberg is seemingly interpreted differently than other boat burials when examining the contribution by Gerds (2006) as well. In this contribution, male boat burials are generally interpreted as symbols of general and maritime power, while the female boat graves are seemingly interpreted as symbols of cult and religious leaders. Thus, it seems like some of the contributions discussing the Oseberg mound is associating male mounds with direct and active power, while the female mounds are associated with indirect and passive power, and additionally, very often confined to the realms of religion and cult. There are also very different interpretations present in the academia when discussing the individuals. While men are generally accepted throughout archaeology as representing themselves in their graves (e.g. Gerds 2006), female graves have yet to receive this acknowledgement as individual people; instead, they are mostly interpreted (or argued that they should be interpreted) as symbols of their families' power (e.g. Gerds 2006:157, this research tendency highlighted in e.g. Moen 2014; Pedersen 2008, 2017).

The women of Oseberg, or any other female boat or mound burial, does not necessarily have to be royalty, as Gansum (1995) states. However, if this is relevant for rich, female burial mounds or graves, then it should also be relevant for the rich, male burials mounds or graves. They shouldn't either be assumed to necessarily represent kings, petty kings, or chieftains. The point I wish to stress here, is that archaeologists have to be consistent when discussing and interpreting the past. Also, I think we need to focus more on how men and women were alike in the archaeological record, and not continue to focus on how they were different from one another. As Moen (2014:129) highlights; Oseberg and other grave mounds or boat burials are symbols that must be read in order to make sense, and in order to make sense, they must have a context. She (Moen 2014:129) argues that this context would include other barrows similar to Oseberg. Thus, if one burial mound is perceived as a representation of power, it follows that other, similar mounds also carries the same meaning (Moen 2014:129). By acknowledging that male and female mounds symbolize the same representation of power, we might be taking a huge step forward in order to understand the gender roles of the Viking Age. It might also be the start of a process that could rid archaeology of the stereotypical depictions from the 19th century, which are still strongly rooted in some parts of archaeology.



*Figure 17* Illustration by Evald Hansen, based on the original plan of grave Bj 581 by excavator Hjalmar Stolpe; published in 1889.

In addition to the different interpretations of grave mounds, it is also relevant to highlight the interpretation of the warrior graves from the Scandinavian Viking Age. Especially relevant is

grave Bj. 581, commonly known as the Birka-warrior which was excavated at Birka in Sweden by Hjalmar Stolpe and his team. This grave is an excellent example of how graves are being interpreted differently based on the gender or sex of the deceased. As has been previously mentioned in chapter two, where I also highlight this grave and the problems surrounding it, Bj. 581 was first interpreted as a male warrior grave since the deceased was buried with weapons, a full set of gaming pieces and two horses (Hedenstierna-Jonson et al. 2017). Since the equipment in the grave was perceived by the contemporary archaeologists as typically male, the individual was also assumed to be male. This is understandable as the grave was excavated between 1875 and 1895, where in the mind of the contemporary archaeologists, it was ‘natural’ to interpret a grave containing ‘masculine’ equipment like horses and weapons, as male. For over a hundred years, grave Bj. 581 was assumed male; however, in 2017, through osteological analysis, it was confirmed that the male warrior was in fact biologically female (Hedenstierna-Jonson et al. 2017). This revelation has since shaken the field of archaeology; how could a *woman* in the *Viking Age* be a *warrior*?

The article confirming the biological sex of the Birka-warrior has since been criticized by several authors (e.g. Androshchuk 2017; Jesch 2017a, 2017b), who either refused the analysis completely or expressed doubts whether military equipment necessarily proves the burial of a warrior (Williams 2017). I will not discuss the criticisms surrounding this publication any further; instead, I will focus on how the interpretation of this grave has changed and the occurrence and interpretation of other female weapon burials. When grave Bj. 581 was interpreted, after its excavation by Stolpe, it was generally agreed that this was a male warrior based on the equipment found in the grave. The only thing that has changed since then, is the biological sex of the deceased. However, even though this individual has been perceived as a warrior for over a hundred years, some archaeologists are now stating that the evidence is now lacking (e.g. Androshchuk 2017; Jesch 2017a, 2017b). In their criticisms of the article from 2017, they criticize the assumption based on the set of gaming pieces and how the authors interpret the woman as ‘a high-ranking officer’ because of how the gaming pieces seemingly indicate knowledge of strategy and tactics (Hedenstierna-Jonson et al. 2017). However, in relation to assumed ‘warrior’ graves, I wish to highlight the contribution by Simpson (2005) where four suspected male graves are examined. These graves are all interpreted as warriors, even though some of the graves do not even contain weapons. Whether or not the skeletons display signs of weapon-related trauma, is not mentioned; however, it is worth noting that in this contribution, the warrior identity is seemingly

unproblematic, even though some of the graves do not even contain weapons and there are seemingly no proof of combat injuries.

I therefore find it kind of ironic when later archaeologists are discussing how women could not have been warriors due to the lack of weapon related wounds or injuries on the skeletal remains (e.g. Gardela 2017; Jesch 2017a). Previous contributions I have assessed, have not found it an issue to interpret male graves with weapons as warriors, even though they also might lack combat injuries. Regarding this line of argument, I also think it is necessary to remember that injuries or wounds, which might have resulted from sharp force or blunt force trauma, does not necessarily prove that the injured man or woman was a warrior. As previously mentioned in chapter four, it is quite possible for men and women who did not wield weapons to still die upon them. Thus, if one argues that one of the criteria for identifying male or female warriors is that they must display signs of combat related trauma, then we might instead locate the victims of the warriors rather than the warriors themselves.

In addition to this, I wish to explore a thought of my own. I do not have any expertise when it comes to osteology or medical science; however, maybe it would be beneficial to explore the possibility of combat injuries that might not leave traces on the skeletal remains? As the Viking Age was a time without modern medicine, a simple cut getting infected and thus resulting in blood poisoning and later sepsis, would have been lethal, even for a warrior. There might also have been other illnesses which could cause death at the time, and thus, even though the person might not have died in combat, he or she might still have been identified as a warrior.

There are numerous biological determinist theories which explains male dominance over women as natural due to their higher levels of aggression (Connell 1987:69). This model results in depictions of active men, while women are being rendered passive (Moen 2019:30). These outdated theories and models might be part of the reason why it seems like rich, female graves with obvious power and wealth are being explained as either the wives of someone powerful, or that their families were rich and powerful, not the women in their own right as individuals. In the examples above, I have provided illustrations that highlight how similar burial mounds and warrior graves are being interpreted differently solely based on the gender or sex of the deceased. If archaeology continues to do so, we will still be presenting what might be perceived as a wrongful picture of the past where women are perceived as little more

than passive housewives, while the men are left filling the role of the stereotypical warrior, king or active initiator of progress, developing and of the era itself.

### 5.1.3 The Method of Gendering Graves Based on Artefacts and Outdated Stereotypes

As has been previously mentioned in this thesis, objectivity in archaeology is an illusion. When archaeologists seek to examine objects of the past, these objects no longer remain purely artefacts. Instead, they become something else, imbued with contemporary ideas about the past and its use (Moen 2019:14). Additionally, artefacts are also commonly used to gender graves based on supposed 'male' or 'female' activities or gender roles. For example, when swords are found in graves from the Viking Age, there is a consensus within archaeology that swords are symbols of masculinity and male gender, while beads, cooking utensils, textile equipment or jewelry are artefacts which are symbols of femininity and thus the female gender. The first to use and publish this method was Sophus Müller in the 1870s (Hjørungdal 1991:23). However, this method of using artefacts as indicators of masculinity and femininity, has also been uncritically accepted as true indicators of biological sex, rather than an indication of cultural gender (Lucy 1997:150), which it is now most commonly acknowledged as. However, this dichotomy of male and female, which the artefacts are assumed to represent, does not fit all graves (Arwill-Nordbladh 1998; Hjørungdal 1991, 1994; Lucy 1997). Instead, we must acknowledge that society is not only masculine or feminine (Dommasnes 1987); these are just two parts of a much larger picture.

In the process of gendering graves based on artefacts, there are instances where male and female graves contain the same equipment, yet, the interpretations of the artefacts differ. This has also been demonstrated by other feminist or gender archaeologists who have revealed how pottery production, for example, is usually ascribed a domestic activity when associated with women, while it becomes a craft or industry if associated with men (Sørensen 2000:17). The problems surrounding the method of gendering grave goods based on artefacts are already being discussed in contributions from the 1980s. Høgestøl (1986) stresses how it might be of bigger interest to examine *how* certain artefacts are used to express gender differences rather than *which* artefacts are used. By changing the focus, one might stop the stereotypical interpretation of assuming swords in graves equal men, while beads, jewelry or textile equipment equal women. This is also highlighted in the 2000s in the contribution by

Back-Danielsson (2007). In this contribution, it is stated that as much as 70-80 % of the graves we discover cannot be given a biological sex. Thus, at best, we have only sexed about 20-30 % of the graves we have found, which implies that there are very few individuals in the archaeological record who represents the 'men' and 'women' of the Viking Age (Back-Danielsson 2007:27).

Moving on to the actual archaeological artefacts, let us begin with the interpretation of iron rods in male and female graves (e.g. Bøgh-Andersen 1999). Throughout the beginning of the contribution, the author mentions how iron spits and rods have been found in male Greek graves dated to the 8th century BC and in wealthy Celtic male and female graves in Northern Italy dated to the 4th century BC (Bøgh-Andersen 1999:35). Iron rods have also been found in both male and female graves from the Viking Age. When found in male graves, the author highlights how this is a useful tool which reflected the man's role as head of the family; thus, it is interpreted as a symbol of responsibility, status, power and authority (Bøgh-Andersen 1999:107). However, iron rods in female graves are interpreted quite differently. Instead of being a useful tool, it is now interpreted as a symbol of dignity and the housewife (Bøgh-Andersen 1999:107). The author also highlights that the beautiful iron rods are found in female graves, while the practical iron rods are found in male graves. However, why the author has decided that some iron rods are more 'beautiful' or 'practical' than others, is not explained.

Keys are also artefacts that occur in the archaeological record of the Viking Age. A key's primary function is to open or lock something, however, it is also traditionally interpreted as the symbols of feminine power and the housewife. However, according to Aannestad (2004:74-75), the occurrence of keys is quite even between the sexes; it has been estimated that about 55,8 % of the keys stems from female graves, while 44,2 % stems from male. I found this number very surprising as I, as many others would think, was somehow convinced that since keys are dominantly interpreted as symbols of femininity and the housewife, keys would not have occurred in such a large percent in male graves. Some archaeologists have acknowledged that keys were also related to men (e.g. Aannestad 2004; Kristoffersen 2000; Reinsnos 2006), however, this fact has seemingly not been included in their interpretations. Instead, have argued that keys in male graves have completely different meanings than the female keys (e.g. Berg 2014:130), while others have suggested that each warrior had a personal chest in which they could keep some personal equipment, and therefore explain the

presence of keys in male graves (e.g. Hedenstierna-Jonson 2006:54; Nordström 2016:70). Again, we can see how the female artefacts, the keys, are interpreted as symbolic, while the male keys are interpreted as predominantly having a technical function, which we can also see in the discussion regarding the interpretation of iron rods above.

There is also a pronounced tendency in archaeology to describe what men *could do* and what women *could not do* (Moen 2019:73). The male activities are perceived as positive; they are the ones depicted as active, masculine and important. Maybe this inherent belief and stereotypical attitudes is why it might be so hard to keep an open mind to the possibility of female warriors, or at least the possibility of women being able to use weapons? As we can see with the example of the Birka-warrior as I have already mentioned, when this burial was assumed male, it was no problem identifying it as a warrior. However, when the deceased was biologically sexed as female, the deceased is suddenly not a warrior anymore, even though the amount of evidence has not changed. The Birka-warrior is not the only female weapon grave from the Viking Age; already in 1901, the Norwegian archaeologist Gustav Mørck published an article about the discovery of a grave in Nordre Kjølén in Hedmark, Norway. In the grave, Mørck identified an individual accompanied by a full set of weapons, including a sword, a spearhead, an axe and several arrowheads (Gardela 2017; Mørck 1901). However, a noticeable difference between these two graves is that the grave from Nordre Kjølén has always been interpreted as a woman, despite the stereotypical ‘masculine’ artefacts found in the grave. There are also several other female graves found with weapons, for instance a female grave from Kvåle, Norway, which contained jewelry, weapons and horse equipment (Dommasnes 1982:77), however, I will not discuss every single female weapon grave. My point is; if an assumed male grave contains enough evidence to be identified as a warrior, then the same grave should still be interpreted as a warrior, even if the deceased has changed from being male to being female.

However, not everyone agrees with this line of thought. Androshchuk (2017), for example, thinks that all female graves with weapons are found under devious circumstances and argues that there does not exist any evidence that female warriors existed during the Viking Age. Gardela (2017:10) is also cautious; he discusses how weapons in a burial does not necessarily indicate a warrior identity, and that many people engaged in warlike activities on a professional basis, were not buried with weapons at all. Instead, he argues, the weapons would have been passed on to other members of the deceased’s family because of how

weapons were costly and difficult to manufacture. However, as one final punch regarding the occurrence of warrior women, I wish to quote a sentence from the follow-up article regarding grave Bj. 581; “To those who do take issue [with the grave being identified as a female warrior], however, we suggest that it is not supportable to react only now, when the individual has been shown to be female, without explaining why neither the warrior interpretations nor any supposed source-critical factors were a problem when the person in Bj. 581 was believed to be male” (Price, Hedenstierna-Jonson, Zachrisson, et al. 2019:192).

At last, I wish to highlight how the occurrence of scales, weights, balances and other trading equipment have been interpreted differently based on the sex or gender of the individual in the grave. For a long time in archaeology, it has been considered a ‘universal truth’ that trade was executed by men. However, already in the 1980s, archaeologists were aware of female graves that contained these ‘typically male’ artefacts (e.g. Mørck 1901; Blindheim 1982 Stalsberg 1987). Instead of acknowledging this as signs of female traders, some archaeologists tried to understand this by offering alternative explanations. For example, it was proposed that the weighing equipment represented a farewell gift from the women’s husbands, a token of high rank, or that the women just happened to die while she was in charge and her husband was away for one reason or another (Dommasnes 1982:83; Ellmers 1984:178; Stalsberg 1991:77). The women have also been interpreted as representing merchants’ wives, or that the weighing equipment indicates the presence of a man in a grave otherwise identified as female (Stalsberg 1991:77-78). Thus, the archaeological record was actively trying to explain the presence of the trading equipment and its impact by moving away from one of archaeologists’ most basic postulate for analyzing grave goods; namely, that there is a strong connection between the dead and the grave goods (Stalsberg 1991). If one distances oneself from this basic assumption, archaeology would end up being a discipline which could say close to nothing about the people we are examining.

Additionally, even though female tradespeople are to a greater extent acknowledged today, there are a few more contributions I wish to examine. I will begin with Jesch (1991) who writes about women and trading and how weights have also been located in children’s graves. She argues that even though the weights are present in the children’s graves, it does not necessarily mean that they engaged in trading activities. She continues by arguing how the trading equipment might have had a symbolic meaning in the women’s and children’s graves (Jesch 1991:21). If one examines this closely, it might be understood as if women and

children should be regarded as one and the same; since it is unlikely that children participated in trade, one should also think it unlikely that adult women participated in this activity, even though a child and an adult woman is nothing alike. If one is to follow this train of thought, then one should also argue that the occurrence of weapons in children's graves (because children could not possibly be warriors if they could not be traders), should also be interpreted as symbolic, and thus, too, the weapons in adult male graves.

At last, I also wish to include a quote from Christiansen's (2002) contribution: "Many women were buried with pairs of scales; not because they had been traders, as Stalsberg suggested (there is no evidence of any female traders), but as symbols of good housekeeping (...)" (Christiansen 2002:19). Again, one can see how this is an attempt at 'explaining away' the possibility of female traders by denying the validity of the evidence found in the female graves. If the evidence of trade in a female grave would have been enough to have proven that a man was a merchant if it had been found in a male grave, then the evidence *should* be enough to prove the existence, or at least the possibility, of female merchants.

In archaeology, it is a basic principle that the grave goods found in a grave once belonged to the deceased (Stalsberg 1991:78). We can assume that burying the dead was a serious matter, where great care and consideration went into the disposal of the body and the selection of which artefacts should accompany the deceased into the next life. Consequently, we should assume that people did not choose random collections of items to accompany their beloved ones. Additionally, we should not assume that predominantly technical objects should be interpreted as symbolically gendered. This seems to decrease the interest in technological and practical perspectives, because the symbolic meanings are perceived as more valuable and academically interesting (Berg 2014:125). However, it is interesting to note through the discussion regarding how graves and artefacts are interpreted differently depending on the sex or gender of the deceased, very little actual evidence is required to support a male dominated world, while when questions of female power arises, one must provide substantial amounts of evidence (Moen 2019:95).

#### **5.1.4 Understanding Men and Women; What Has Happened?**

As can be demonstrated by the discussion above, some things have changed regarding our understanding of men and women in the Viking Age, while some things have not. The archaeological research contributions have developed from making women visible to

discussing gender roles and criticizing the androcentric bias and stereotypes which are still present in some of the research contributions. Even though the depictions of the men are still predominantly based on stereotypes where they are depicted as masculine warriors, smiths, traders, kings or chieftains, there have also been attempts at studying the less masculine gender roles, for example, the role of the Shaman (e.g. Price 2000a, 2000b, 2001, 2002, 2019; Solli 1998, 1999, 2002, 2008). Regarding the women, the contributions have developed from making them visible and discussing the possibility of them having power when their husbands were gone, to discussing the very likely possibility of female merchants and the alluring possibility of female warriors. However, even though it seems like the archaeologists' understanding of men and women have broadened and are increasingly depicting a more nuanced society, there are still issues that needs to be dealt with; namely, the research tendencies of interpreting graves and artefacts differently based on the sex or gender of the deceased. Additionally, I do not think we will see any further progress in the field of understanding past gender roles, until archaeologists can agree upon what is 'enough' evidence. As of now, which is highlighted by Moen (2019:95) and was mentioned in the paragraph above as well; very little actual evidence is required to support a male dominated world, while when questions of female power arise, one must provide substantial amounts of evidence. In order to prevent stereotypical depictions of the people of the past, I think the archaeologists should sit down and agree that if the evidence is enough to prove that a man participated in warfare, trading, hunting smithing or any other 'typically male' activity, then it is also enough evidence to prove that a woman could have participated in these activities as well.

## **5.2 The Use of the Terms 'Sex', 'Gender' and 'Social Identity'**

As can be seen based on the sector diagrams in chapter three, it took several decades for the terms 'sex', 'gender' and 'social identity' to be established in the archaeological research contributions regarding the Viking Age. In the 1980s, only 37 % of the contributions used the terms, while now, in the 2010s, 67 % of the research contributions seem to use them. However, even though many contributions seem to be using the terms, there are seemingly only a few contributions from the 1990s (nine of 28 contributions), the 2000s (five of 32 contributions), and the 2010s (six of 49 contributions) that define, discuss, or define and

discuss the use of the terms. Thus, it seems, based on the assessment of the research contributions, as if the archaeologists studying the Viking Age is not as focused on the problems surrounding these definitions as the theoretical discussions in chapter two, might have suggested. When assessing the contributions, there are very few contributions that discuss whether the artefacts found in the graves of the Viking Age, represent the sex or the gender of the deceased. A consensus seems to be present in the archaeological record, where it is considered 'a universal truth' that men are associated with 'masculine' artefacts like weapons, riding equipment, or smithing tools; while women are associated with 'feminine' artefacts like jewelry, beads and textile equipment. Whether these 'masculine' artefacts represent a male gender or sex, is however not discussed in most of the older contributions. In the more recent contributions, though, it is generally accepted that the artefacts archaeologists find in graves, should be interpreted as representing the gender of the deceased, not the biological sex.

Consequently, based on the research contributions I have been able to assess from approximately 1980 to 2019, it seems like the archaeologists' approach to 'sex', 'gender' and 'social identity' are seemingly lacking. As the terms 'sex' and 'gender' generally contribute by creating normative feminine and masculine identities, it might have been beneficial for the field of Viking Age archaeology to discuss this fact and how the terms have been criticized because of how it depicts all women or men as alike. The terms 'sex' and 'gender' does not leave any room for different types of masculinity or femininity. Instead, Fuglestad (2014) argues that we perhaps should focus on an archaeology of 'sexe'. This would involve abandoning the sex-gender terminology and abandoning the term 'gender' completely. The abandonment of these terms and replacing them with an archaeology of 'sexe', would perhaps prevent archaeology from creating stereotypical depictions of the men and women. Additionally, it might also prevent the 'fantastic interpretations' of the instances where the grave goods indicate a masculine/feminine gender, while the biological sex of the deceased contradicts the grave goods, and thus archaeology ends up with 'fantastic interpretations' like, for instance, transvestite priests, shamans or cross dressers (Fuglestad 2014). Consequently, based on the research contributions I have been able to assess, it seems like the field of Viking Age archaeology have a few important theoretical discussions to consider in the future.

### **5.2.1 Queer Theory in the Archaeological Research Contributions**

In addition to discussing the use of the terms ‘sex’, ‘gender’ and ‘social identity’, it would also be of interest to examine how queer theory has been used in the archaeological research contributions regarding the Viking Age. Queer theory has done a great deal to highlight the problems inherent in the sex-gender division (e.g. Butler 1993, [1999] 2006). For instance, it serves to challenge the assumption that bodies have inherent meanings; that there exists such a thing as predominantly male or female bodies (Moen 2019:36). According to the research history, one should be able to see that queer theory gained momentum during the last couple of decades (e.g. Blackmore 2011:79). Consequently, there should be several contributions touching upon this subject from the 1990s and 2000s. However, is this visible based on the contributions I have been able to assess?

During the 1980s, none of the contributions discuss or mention queer theory, transgenders, or third or fluid genders. Thus, it seems like the contributions correspond with the research history. Queer theory in Viking Age archaeology seems to begin in the 1990s. According to my sector diagrams from chapter three, one can see that 11 %, which consists of three of 28 contributions, were about or mentioned subjects related to queer theory. Consequently, it seems like it all began with the contribution by Solli in 1998 and 1999. In these contributions she discusses the depiction of Odin as the manliest and most masculine of the Old Norse gods, yet he is also the master of *seidr*; an activity assumed to be exclusively female and is considered shameful when associated with the male gender. This makes for a very interesting paradox; the fascinating transgression of the masculine Odin into the feminine realm of *seidr*. These contributions by Solli marks the beginning of discussions regarding queer theory, fluid and third genders in Viking Age archaeology.

In the 2000s, the percentage of contributions about queer theory has increased to 28 %, which consists of nine of 32 contributions. Thus, one can clearly see that there is an increased interest in queer theory during the 1990s and 2000s. It is also worth noticing that the amount of contributions discussing or mentioning queer theory, is the same for the 2000s as the 2010s. However, since the total number of contributions have increased in the 2010s, the percentage of contributions about queer theory has decreased to 18 %.

Consequently, based on the research contributions I have been able to assess, it seems like there was a sudden interest in the topic during the 1990s and 2000s, which corresponds with the research history. However, this interest has since decreased and has resulted in a lowered percentage of research contributions regarding queer theory from the decade 2010-2019.

Since the number of contributions are relatively low, I think it is too soon to say anything about the impact this might have had on Viking Age archaeology. It would be compelling to see if the interest in queer theory increases or decreases in the decades to come.

### **5.3 Are We Creating Stereotypical Interpretations of the People in the Past?**

There seems to exist an idea that suggests that our reproductive roles somehow determine our personalities (e.g. Laqueur 1990:6; Wylie 1991:34). This idea is very simplistic, yet, it is still a cornerstone of much western culture and thus found in the general perception of gender roles in the Viking Age, too (Moen 2019:13). However, even though the idea in general is simplistic, when it is applied in a science like archaeology, it is suddenly not as simple anymore. Suddenly, this idea is used to determine not only our own contemporary gender roles, it is also used on the people of the past. Whether or not they even had a two-sex model (which is a relatively new invention, as has been highlighted in chapter two), is not thought relevant. Instead, one has assumed that the categories of masculinity and femininity are universal and ‘true’.

This assumption of masculinity and femininity has resulted in a contention which is still used in burial archaeology; the presence of masculine artefacts, like weapons, represents a masculine identity, and thus the individual is gendered male. The same is true if a grave contains feminine artefacts, like beads, jewelry or cooking utensils; these items are considered to represent a feminine identity, and thus this individual is gendered female. This strict division of what we consider ‘masculine’ or ‘feminine’ artefacts and actions, have resulted in a Viking Age of people we might describe as stereotypes. The men are depicted as the most masculine, warlike and brutal, while the women are depicted as calm, stoic and powerful in the absence of their husbands. However, are these depictions of real people who might have lived and died during the Viking Age?

As my assessment and discussion has revealed, there are still contributions that consider the Viking Age to be an era of strict division between the men and women, just as it was in the Victorian era during the 19th century, which marked the beginning of archaeology as a discipline. Some claim we must be careful when applying our own contemporary thoughts and ideas on to the past; however, haven’t we already fallen into this trap? Isn’t it the

contemporary thoughts and ideas of the 19th century we can still see in the archaeological depictions of the Viking Age? Instead of clinging desperately to the Viking Age stereotypes, archaeologists should be able to accept the possibility of feminine men and masculine women; the possibility of more fluid gender roles. I want to argue the point that it is possible to find masculine women and feminine men, and this should not be perceived as something unusual. We can find these types of people in our contemporary society, so it should not be unusual to find them in the past. However, in relation to this point, I must highlight that the use of the terms 'feminine' and 'masculine' are problematic. This is because they are in themselves also expressions of stereotypical attitudes and thoughts. If one thinks of something masculine, one is likely to think of something stereotypically male, like for instance war. The same is true when one is thinking about something feminine; then one is likely to think of something stereotypically female, like for instance cooking. Thus, it might not be fruitful to try to find masculine women and feminine men, because this might just continue to strengthen the stereotypes which are already present in archaeology. Maybe it would be more fruitful to step away from sex and gender and just focus on people in general. By focusing on people as a unit instead of dividing them into categories of male and female, one might be able to see how they could perform all sorts of different actions, and how they could be associated with all kinds of different professions. Thus, by focusing more on the people and less on dividing them into males and females, maybe archaeology could take a step closer to finding the 'real' people of the Viking Age.

Viking Age archaeologists should also reconsider the seemingly straight-forward gender identification based on grave goods. As is mentioned by Crass (in Arnold and Wicker 2001:105), can we even be sure that gender roles were signaled in mortuary context? Even though gender archaeology has come a long way in research past genders and gender roles, the work is not done. Archaeologists should continue to examine past gender roles and especially focus on different types of masculinity, in addition to discussing more openly the possibility of direct female power. Based on the research contributions I have been able to assess; I would conclude that the field of Viking Age archaeology today does not leave very much room for real people in their depictions of past genders and gender roles.

## 6 Concluding Remarks

In this thesis I have assessed 117 research contributions about gender and the Viking Age, in order to attempt to answer these questions: In what way has our understanding of men and women in the Viking Age changed from the 1980s until today in archaeology? How are we using the terms gender, sex and social identity? And: Are we creating stereotypical interpretations of the people in the past, or are we making room for real people? However, these questions have not been easy to answer.

I began the thesis by introducing the reader to relevant topics concerning the theory of gender and feminist archaeology. The presentation of the research contributions and the assessment of them, were outlined in chapter three and four, while in chapter five, the research contributions were discussed in order to answer my research questions. This chapter will serve as a summary of what has been discussed in the previous chapters. Additionally, it will include some final notes regarding the conclusion to my research questions.

The archaeologists' understanding of men and women in the Viking Age has, indeed, changed from the 1980s until 2019. However, based on the research contributions I have been able to assess, it seems like these changes are smaller than one would initially think. In the 1980s, the women were presented as stay-at-home housewives who were confined to the private sphere of the long houses. If they were depicted as powerful, it was only because of necessity: when the men were away either travelling, trading or waring. The possibility of female warriors would, perhaps, have seemed impossible during the 1980s; however, there are also archaeologists from the 2010s who are reluctant to accept this possibility. Generally, the perception of the Viking Age women has changed. She has changed from being confined to the private sphere to being able to participate in the public one. Additionally, in the 1980s, her seemingly only important contribution to society was to produce children, while now, the women of the Viking Age are to a larger extent acknowledged as individual women. This means it is acknowledged that not all women could be mothers or wanted to be mothers, in addition to acknowledging that not all women were pregnant all of the time. Maybe this seems like a small step in the right direction, but it is still progress.

Regarding the men of the Viking Age, there does not seem to be any progress in how they are depicted in the research contributions. Already in the 1980s, the Viking Age men were depicted as masculine stereotypes; they were warriors, traders, sailors, kings or chieftains (e.g. Christensen 1987; Farbregd 1988). They have been depicted as the initiators of the Viking era (e.g. Ashby 2015; Barrett 2010; Raffield, Price and Collard 2016), while the same contributions have downgraded women to being merely motivators for male action. Thus, based on the research contributions I have been able to assess, it seems like the picture of the Viking Age men is still dominated by strong, masculine men, even though there has been some efforts to consider other types of men, for instance Shamans (e.g. Price 2000a, 2000b, 2001, 2002, 2019; Solli 1998, 1999, 2002, 2008). In conclusion, as was argued in chapter five, even though it seems like the understanding of men and women of the Viking Age has broadened to a certain extent, there are still a lot of issues that needs to be dealt with. These issues include the interpretation of graves and artefacts, understanding past gender roles, and agree upon what should be considered 'enough' evidence.

Moving on to the second research question: How are we using the terms gender, sex and social identity? In this thesis, I have assessed the archaeologists' use of these terms, and the contributions are displaying some obvious variations. In the 1980s, only 37 % of the contributions used the terms, while in the 2010s, this has increased to 67 %. However, as highlighted in chapter five, even though many contributions seem to be using the terms, there are only a few of them that define, discuss, or define and discuss the use of the terms. Therefore, it seems like the Viking Age archaeologists are maybe not as focused or aware of the problems and discussions regarding these theoretical terms as one might have expected. It will be interesting to see whether this research tendency changes in the decades to come.

At last, I asked if the Viking Age archaeologists are creating stereotypical interpretations of the people in the past. The short answer is yes. The Victorian ideals of the 19th century and the stereotypic interpretations that follows, is very much present in the archaeological record today. This has resulted in depictions of the 'traditional' housewife who is seemingly confined to the private sphere, and the masculine warriors, traders, sailors, kings and chieftains who rule and dominate the public sphere. There are research contributions that discuss how women could have performed male activities and vice versa. However, even though the studies about women and men in the Viking Age have shown some signs of improvement, there are still contributions that seemingly argue that women had a lesser role

compared to men. If Viking Age archaeology is to move forward as a discipline, I think it is about time we try to step away from these stereotypical depictions of the men and women. It should be possible for archaeology today to acknowledge the existence of people with more complex personalities. Let us for a second consider the fictional universe of the popular book series and TV show *Game of Thrones* by George R.R. Martin. Those familiar with this universe might remember the female characters Brienne of Tarth or Arya Stark. Brienne of Tarth is depicted as unusually tall and muscular; she developed a taste for swordplay as a child, and in the series, she dreams of becoming a knight. Even though she is considered unusually tall and muscular for a woman, she is still a woman. Never in the series is she depicted or thought of as a man, even though she does ‘manly’ things. Her personality is more complex than the stereotypes that we commonly see in the depictions of the Viking Age. The same is true for Arya Stark. In contrast to Brienne, she is not depicted as unusually tall or muscular, in fact, in the TV show, she is short and thin. But just like Brienne, she has a talent for swordplay and ventures outside the ‘traditional’ female roles. Even though these female characters are different physically, their choice of taking up arms and weapons are similar.

Maybe archaeology could learn a thing or two from this popular TV show. Instead of portraying stereotypical men and women, the show manages to create people who are more complex. Brienne and Arya are women who are performing ‘masculine’ activities, yet, they are not losing their female identity or their femininity, they are still women and feminine in their own way. Acknowledging that the people of the Viking Age had complex social identities, more complex than the stereotypical Rambo or Snow White (Fuglestad 2014), might be the first step in order to escape the stereotypes. Additionally, archaeology might benefit from examining how men and women are alike, rather than how they are different from one another. However, on the other side, maybe I am wrong, and it is impossible to get rid of the stereotypical depictions; only time will tell.

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