

# **Dunkla vanor**

## **Om teori och referenspraktik i samhällsvetenskaplig forskning**

av

**Daniel Uhnoo**

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### **Akademisk avhandling**

som med tillstånd av samhällsvetenskapliga fakulteten vid Göteborgs universitet för avläggande av filosofie doktorsexamen framläggs till offentlig granskning fredagen den 7 december, 2012, kl. 10:15 i hörsal Sappören, Sprängkullsgatan 25, Göteborg.

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## **Abstract**

**Title:** Obscure Habits. On Theory and Citation Practice in Social Science Research  
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The purpose of this thesis is to study how social scientists use theoretical citations in scientific publications in research about organizations and the social services sector. This thesis can be characterized as being theory driven where examples from the research practice within the social sciences are used as departure points for discussion.

The empirical material comprises 94 scientific publications about the social services organization published between 2000 and 2007. Based on bibliometric analyses of the 94 publications, a list of the most common international and national citations was compiled. The four most common international citations were chosen as a criterion for selecting a subsample comprising 48 publications. Finally, from the subsample six publications were selected with the purpose of studying the use of citations in practice. To identify the authors' use of the four most common citations, the six texts were analyzed by means of close readings and qualitative content analyses. The analyses can be summarized as categorizing the placement of the citations, analyses of the authors' argumentation and rhetoric as well as presence and character of reflections made by the authors.

The results show a strong American influence. Out of the eleven most common citations, nine refers to texts written by American authors. This is regarded as an example of a theoretical monoculture. The results from the qualitative analyses of citing behavior identify cognitive as well as symbolic functions. Three are exemplified and discussed: translation, theorizing, and distancing. There are several symbolic functions identified. Citations may be used to legitimize interpretations and arguments or to indicate supporting statements in theory or prior research. They can also be seen as arguments in their own right.

Two examples of critical approaches to citations and theoretical perspectives have emerged in this study. One builds on a deductive approach where a citation is made, more or less, as a representative for a hypothesis. When not supported by empirical evidence, it becomes a ground for a problematizing discussion. The other example has a theoretical discursive approach, evident by putting perspectives up against each other. A conclusion drawn from this is that an author who shifts perspectives will discover problems – similarities and differences between perspectives. By cross-tabulating interest with two ways of using citations; active and passive, four ideal types of researcher styles emerge: the problematizing, the explaining, the investigating, and the describing.

Three theoretical questions are discussed in the concluding chapter. The first regards the implications of a theoretical monoculture which is labeled aspect blindness. The second question regards examples of factors that may be related to the expansion of a monoculture, labeled origins of aspect blindness. In a third question circumstances that may contribute to maintaining a monoculture, labeled force of habit are considered.

Finally an argument is developed that this dissertation not only underlines the importance of epistemic reflection in several ways but also that it illustrates how it actually comes about in research texts.