**4.1**

The research I am proposing to undertake, studies the extent to which women lacked or enjoyed legal capacity between the High Middle Ages and the early modern period, and how that is represented textually in the legal/administrative and narrative sources. Particular attention is paid to customary law texts (studies of the *Très Ancien Coutumier de Normandie* and the *Sachsenspiegel* will be published in forthcoming papers in 2020 and 2021), to working women in towns and urban areas (trades, crafts, businesses), to female regency and to women in religious orders. The study is comparative where possible, both in time and in geographical terms.

The underlying proposition is that a lack of legal capacity embodies the quintessential expression of women’s position and dependency in society and in the eyes of the law. To study such textual representations of legal capacity in real, rhetorical and linguistic terms by applying diachronic linguistics and terminological methodologies is to go beyond content analysis and take an approach that is akin to the *Begriffsgeschichte* of the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe* project. It bridges the gap between law-on-paper and law-in-action. It shows the extent of women’s capacity to inherit, hold and pass on land, to run a business, be involved in trade and craft, and represent themselves in a court of law (content analysis). In parallel it also reveals the discourse about female participation in such activities usually earmarked for men (linguistic/discourse analysis). This allows for a better understanding of the actual social experience of women’s legal capacity by compounding information and data from analysis of content, meanings, terminology and discourse and, hence, providing a contextualized understanding of the legal (in)dependencies in which women existed in their daily lives.

This kind of interdisciplinary approach provides broader context to individual disciplines and is being used increasingly in both legal and historical studies. It is pitched at scholars of legal history, law and languages, and linguistics.