



Book Reviews

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Dissertations

Sara Backman Prytz

Borgerlighetens döttrar och söner: Kvinnliga och manliga ideal bland läroverksungdomar, ca. 1880–1945
[Daughters and sons of the bourgeoisie: Femininity and Masculinity-ideals of upper secondary school youth, 1880–1945]

Uppsala universitet (PhD diss)

2014, 223 pp.

This dissertation sets out to study the views on gender and class among middle-class students at Swedish state grammar schools – the upper secondary level – and private schools for girls during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This was a period characterised by both economic growth and social change (with women successively gaining a more prominent role in work life and political life) as well as a by a restructuring of education. These changes were accompanied by the emergence of new ideals concerning gender and a challenging of established gender norms, as well as by new conceptualisations of childhood and youth. Against this background, the thesis aims to shed light on school-bound peer socialisation and its importance for the process of establishing collective identities along gender and class lines, and more specifically to study views about male and female gender roles. We know quite a lot about middle-class gender norms among adults during this period, but quite little about how issues of gender and class were perceived and processed among middle-class youth in the context of extra-curricular school life. In addition to this, the dissertation provides a comparative perspective between male and female students in different school forms. This is something novel in the field and distinguishes this thesis from previous research.

The data used in the study primarily consist of school magazines (including poems, short stories, illustrations, causeries, etc.) and essays produced by the students themselves. The first type of data were created quite free from adult involvement, while the latter were part of the formal schooling with topics set in advance. Against a common gender theoretical background, this thesis seeks to define gender stereotypes in the students' texts. These stereotypes are used as central analytical tools and are sorted into the five subthemes of *Youth and adolescence*, *Love and love relations*, *Body and physical activity*, *Parents and parenthood*, and *Work life and career*. These subthemes, forming five separate empirical chapters, are intended to cover central aspects of the students' lifeworld where issues of gender and class are represented. Within each subtheme, the explicit and implicit use of stereotypical descriptions in the form of ideals and anti-ideals for masculinity and femininity (for example, The Gentleman, The Athlete, The Fighter, The Seductress, The Working Woman, The Drunk, and so on) are discussed and compared among the female and male students.

The primary and most interesting result in this thesis is that the views on male and female differed noticeably between boys and girls. The boys expressed a conservative and reactionary view on female and male societal roles, a view that was stable over the whole period investigated, whereas the female students had a far more progressive and forward looking attitude, especially towards women's role in society. Both groups displayed rejecting attitudes towards other classes. All in all, the author claims that the study deepens our knowledge about middle-class gender norms also in a more general sense.

The overall impression after reading Backman Prytz's dissertation is that it is on the one hand a quite modest and traditional study of middle-class cultural expressions

executed along already well-known paths. On the other hand, the context and the sources that are used are innovative and motivating in the sense that far too little research has made use of this type of data previously. This adds an important explorative dimension to the reading. With regard to the empirical study, there are certainly a lot of different perspectives to keep track of as a reader, where the male and female student's uses of various stereotypes, their views on masculinity and femininity, and so on, are mixed within the same chapter and are subdued within the broader subthemes. However, the final chapter helps the reader to add it all up. The use of gender stereotypes as analytical tools are well elaborated upon in the dissertation, and they seem to fit well with the specific type of sources used in the study. This provides an interesting methodological contribution to researchers interested in working with similar data in the future. However, I will soon return to a downside with this approach. Furthermore, the author navigates quite well between what has already been shown in previous Swedish research and the contribution that this thesis makes to new knowledge. There are few reasons to challenge the dissertation's main result, at least not from the point of view of the data that were investigated. In student magazines and essays, middle-class schoolgirls do indeed seem more forward looking and progressive in their views about feminine characteristics and women's roles in society than boys of the same age and class.

As with all dissertations, at least if they are put in the context of reviews, there are questions to be raised and criticisms to be delivered. First of all, it is noticeable how restricted the dissertation is to a dialog solely with research from a Swedish national context. A discussion about how the results comply with international research in the area, for example, with various studies on girls' schooling during the nineteenth century – and the public debates surrounding this – or on representations of women and girls in fiction during the same period, would have strengthened the analysis and made the study more relevant to an international audience.

Secondly, the area of study and the choice of data are no doubt interesting. But to dig into the wealth of local school ar-

chives produced by and for pupils is as potentially rewarding as it is challenging. This also highlights the thesis's empirical weakness. The selection of sources is narrow, and an initiated reader might quickly ask him or herself if the analysis and the main results might have differed if a broader palette of empirical data had been taken into account. I am particularly thinking of minutes from student meetings, speeches held at assemblies within fraternities and/or sororities, and essays written outside of the topics already set by school authorities (these essays were commonly read out loud in student assemblies). Such sources are preserved in some archives and they quite often deal with contemporary societal issues – including matters of gender and class – in a less simplistic way than the school magazines that are strongly bound to a specific genre. The school magazines, with their juvenile poems, illustrations, and causeries might indeed be suitable for an analysis looking for stereotypes, but if they are used as the only way of understanding processes of gender construction among late nineteenth century and early twentieth century school youth they will undoubtedly lead to a shallow and stereotypical analysis. My belief is that the use of a broader set of data most certainly would have produced a more nuanced understanding of views on masculinity and femininity among the school youth, as well as about the general process of collective identity construction that was institutionalised in these settings. Such sources would probably also have highlighted differences in views within the male groups and within the female groups of school youth.

Thirdly, with the 'broad' social composition of the state grammar schools during the investigated period in mind, it would have been interesting to see what would have happened to the analysis if the author would not have locked the study into such a uniform view about the bourgeoisie. At the state grammar schools and in the schools' extracurricular life, the sons, and later also the daughters, of academics, priests, state officials, free professionals, and lower civil servants met with the sons and daughters of businessmen and/or groups from other parts of the middle-class economic strata. However, the analysis has no instrument to handle the possibilities of different views on gender and class connected to different

segments of middle-class culture. A perhaps more novel and interesting angle to a study that sets out to improve and deepen our knowledge of perceptions of manhood, womanhood, and class among middle-class youth would have been to try to better separate and define the discrepancies within the studied group itself. This would have been an important contribution to the field.

Finally, the sources presented in the dissertation show a lot of potential that reaches far beyond the scope of the actual study. This should not be seen as a criticism because one of the keys of finishing a thesis is undoubtedly to try to keep it focused. But as a reader you cannot avoid asking yourself what would have been the outcome of the study if the thesis would have been just a little more up to date with contemporary trends within the field. For example, it could have contributed significantly to our understanding of various emotional and bodily aspects connected to schooling during the investigated period and how certain sets of emotions became institutionalised in school life. However, this would have called for a different and more apt framing of the study.

With this said, Backman Prytz's dissertation is still an interesting read. It is a book that will likely work well as a basis for discussion when educational history is taught in teacher training programs, both to highlight the importance of gender and class in the history of schooling and to give female students a much needed voice in all this. It is also a dissertation that lays the foundation for further and more penetrating studies in the areas addressed above. It would be very interesting to see Backman Prytz taking a leading role in such research.

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Per Höjeberg
Utmaningarna mot demokratins skola: Den svenska lärarkåren, nazismen och kommunismen 1933–1945 [The Swedish teaching profession, Nazism and Soviet Communism from 1933 to 1945]
Lunds universitet (PhD diss)
2016, 230 pp.

In his doctoral dissertation, Per Höjeberg attempts to analyze how the Swedish teaching profession handled the challenges against the democratic school coming from German Nazism and Soviet Communism in 1933–1945. He wants to uncover the teachers' strategies of argumentation in facing these challenges, if the arguments and strategies changed over time, if there were any differences in how Nazism and Soviet communism were treated and how the challenges affected the identity and ideals of the teacher profession.

The dissertation is a development of Höjeberg's licentiate thesis from 2011, which dealt exclusively with the Swedish teaching profession's relationship to Nazism. The source material is periodicals published by four teacher unions, three for elementary school teachers and one for grammar school teachers.

Theoretically Höjeberg departs from a discussion about the role of actors and structures, using concepts such as collective conceptions, cultural identification, professional identity and cognitive dissonance. He wants to study the choices of actors in relationship to the framework of collective conceptions which he has identified mainly based upon earlier research. Höjeberg claims that the argumentation in the periodicals was limited by the teacher profession's ambition to remain neutral, but he does not discuss to which degree the periodicals were also affected by direct wartime censorship. That, in addition to personal choices and cultural conceptions, could very much influence what teachers were able to write at different points in time.

Methodologically, Höjeberg uses Stephen Toulmin's model of analysis, which aims at unveiling supportive arguments in the argumentation. Höjeberg also studies the discursive struggle in which the teachers used the vocabulary of the Nazis and Communists but with a changed meaning.