

Abstract

Title: A gender perspective on motivation and learning: A study of students in theoretical programs in upper secondary school.

Language: Swedish, with a summary in English

Keywords: Gender differences, gender system, gendered learning contexts, upper secondary school, motivation, goal orientation, task value beliefs, academic self-evaluation, attribution, learning strategies

ISBN: 91-7346-383-3

Working from a gender theory perspective the major purposes of this thesis have been a) to review research on gender differences in motivation and learning and b) to study gender differences in motivation and learning among students in upper secondary school. The gender theory point of departure is one that sees gender as socially constructed, where a distinctive separation of the two sexes and hegemonic masculinity are central constructs. Motivation has been studied in terms of task value beliefs, goal orientation, academic self-evaluation and attribution.

The empirical data comes from two separate investigations: i) interviews with 24 students (15 female, 9 male) in a class taking a social science program and ii) a survey-study of students (135 female, 115 male) in social science, natural science and economic programs.

The literature review indicates that gender differences in most cases can be understood in terms of gender related approaches/attitudes and/or learning contexts which include a variety of gender influences.

The general results of the empirical study are consistent with the theoretical reasoning about how the gender system works in terms of motivation and learning. With regards to students' motivation and learning, it appears that girls tend to engage more deeply in their schoolwork than boys. Girls have more clearly expressed intentions to understand what they are learning. They stress hard work and use a wider variety of learning strategies. In addition girls talk about schoolwork and examinations when they meet outside the class, which may give them a clearer picture of what the teacher is after. The results are interpreted in terms of rational behavior within the framework generated by the gender system.