

Abstract

Title:	Relations in school. A study of femininities and masculinities in the 9 th grade.
Language:	Swedish with an English summary
Keywords:	Femininities, masculinities, gender order, gender regime, peer cultures, positioning
ISBN:	978-91-7346-610-3

This thesis aims to explore the range of femininities and masculinities that emerge among pupils in school. It also aims to examine local variations in gender pattern in two secondary school classes. For the project, gender is seen as a social construction and humans as actively doing gender. R.W. Connell's theoretical framework, which argues that school is both an institutional agent of the formation processes and the setting where they take place, is used. The theory implies that there are multiple definitions of masculinities and femininities that are constructed in relation to each other in a hierarchical order. Connell identifies the positions as hegemonic/emphasized, participating and subordinated, arguing that they emerge as more or less dominant in different contexts and indicate the simultaneous existence of various local gender regimes.

The empirical data presented are derived from classroom observations and interviews with 42 pupils in two 9th grade classes in two different schools in Sweden. One school is located in a rural community, the other in a town. The classroom observations focused on the daily teacher-pupil and pupil-pupil interactions. The interviews focused on the participants' general conceptions of boys and girls as well as the individuals' experiences of daily life in school. In addition, questions about popularity norms were asked.

The results show that gender construction processes are fluid and flexible. Depending on contexts, situations and persons involved, boys and girls adopt different positions of masculinity and femininity in the gender hierarchy. These positions also vary between discourses and practices related to the various gender regimes. The regime in the rural class is supported by a sporty agenda, while the regime in the other class is related to intersections between gender and ethnicity. Whereas previous research often shows pupils' positions in school to be closely related to their informal homosocial networks, this study shows that girls and boys also gain from associating in cross gender-networks. The thesis discusses how these relationships can be seen as both challenging the gender order and establishing it. The results also show how teachers in various ways might be seen as co-constructors of pupil gender identities in school. The analysis of the pupils' definitions of popular and valued forms of femininity and masculinity implicates a strong and confident individual, successful in both social relations and study attainment. This indicates that there is pressure on both boys and girls to broaden their gender repertoires. At the same time, pupils of both genders tend to glorify domains considered male and belittle those connected with females. This indicates a masculinising tendency in school. The thesis also shows that success stories told by structurally subordinated groups come at a cost. To succeed and gain a high position in school seem to imply that you need to adapt to the norms of the dominating group and, at the same time, distance yourself from your "own" group. What might appear to challenge traditional gender and ethnic stereotypes, however, is connected to a glorification of Swedish, male, middleclass activities and relations.