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Abstract

The purpose of the present dissertation is to study the women attending Swedish universities during the period 1870-1914 and, culling information from their histories, to elucidate and analyze the gender order and gender construction which permeated the world of the university one hundred years ago. Despite the fact that conditions at our institutes of higher learning are very different now, there is a certain connection between the female students of today and those of the last century. The gendered hierarchies, cultural forms, mentalities and institutional obstacles placed in the way of academic women reaching the highest positions today have their roots in the gender structure created at the end of the 19th century, when women first gained access to academic studies.

At the core of this dissertation are the women themselves, but their stories have been related to the men in their immediate surroundings. Describing the encounters between women and men, feminine and masculine, male structures and female actors is the primary goal of this dissertation, which is divided into three sections. Part I is a study of the government's education policy on women and various groups' view of women and scholarship. Part II comprises the central section of the dissertation and consists of an investigation of mentalities, embracing the living conditions of the female students, their daily lives, mentalities and gender constructions. Part III accounts for the collective organizational activities undertaken by female academics, including a discussion of educational strategies which can be traced in a longer perspective. The universities opened their doors to women as part of the great restructuring and professionalization of the universities which occurred at the end of the 19th century, when the educational system came increasingly under the control of the state during the development of the market economy. Large-scale resistance to admitting women existed, which resistance became increasingly rancorous after the turn of the century, when women increased in numbers and began making demands for using their degrees in order to acquire higher positions. Despite the obstacles raised, some 1,100 women tore down the gender wall and enrolled at our universities and colleges during the period under investigation, over half of whom took their degrees. More than fifty percent studied at the faculty of the humanities, but surprisingly many chose medicine and the natural sciences. The majority of the female students belonged to the upper-middle class; after their studies, most of them pursued careers as teachers, physicians, journalists or cultural workers.

In order to deepen the study of what the academic gender structure looked like and how it was applied in daily use, the present author allows the main section of the dissertation to revolve around the gender perceptions that the actors absorbed and shaped in practise. This part of the study is based primarily on a qualitative material consisting of letters and memoirs. The results indicate that the women arrived at the universities in an age when the traditional gender patterns were in the process of breaking down and the modernization of society was having consequences for how gender was constructed and how men and women met. This transitional period and redefinition of gender relationships led to numerous cultural paradoxes, and a motley pattern of subcultures and gender identities emerged at the universities. If there existed a dominant normative order for how the sexes ought to conduct themselves toward one another, there were also many competing orders of how femininity and masculinity were constructed in practise. Women were subjected to hard control, but also afforded great freedom. They cultivated "sisterhood" and built up female networks and coteries, though conflicts also arose concerning religious matters, politics and the women's question. A predilection for the academic life is palpable as well as an admiration for the scholarship and traditions of men, but also a clear perception of the fact that they were structurally subordinate and thwarted by the men on the grounds of gender. This insight led to numerous boundary transgressions whereby the women conquered the men's cultural forms, but also to the creation of new ones. Their collective awakening can be traced step by step in the various organizations which took form.

Keywords: Universities, gender, gender identities, Women Studies, women academics, feminism, academia, student culture, mentalities, masculinity/femininity, knowledge.