

**ORDER IN THE (MIDDLE) CLASS!
CULTURE, CLASS, AND GENDER
IN THE SWEDISH STATE GRAMMAR SCHOOL
1850-1914**

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Many people have shuddered at the memories of this period and future generations will probably be horrified to hear that in the middle of the last century our school system took the form that it did.¹

Gustav Retzius, a prospective professor and scientist, obviously had no pleasant memories of the Swedish grammar school in the 1850s. Judging from the descriptions of everyday school life in his and others' memoirs, the Swedish secondary school was characterized by a "black pedagogy" whereby swotting grammar, catechismal cramming, and plodding through Euclidean geometry alternated with teacher violence and student bullying. In other memoirs, however, we get a more favourable picture of the grammar school. There were also teachers who transmitted *joie de vivre*, humour, energy, and knowledge, and such teachers were popular with the boys. The influence of the nine-year period at school on the boys certainly cut both ways during a formative period in their lives.

In Sweden, as in most western countries, education and formal knowledge became more and more important in the nineteenth century. A large number of schools were established, and an increasing number of people spent more time at school. A state educational system was built up, in which grammar schools played a crucial part.² Grammar school studies were crowned by a final upper secondary-level examination, *studentexamen*, which was a necessary step toward universities, colleges, and careers in prestigious professions. It should also be

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1. Gustaf Retzius, *Biografiska anteckningar och minnen. Del 1* (Uppsala, 1933), 87.
 2. Thus the Swedish grammar school was as important as a German *Gymnasium*, a French *Lycée*, an English public school, or an American or Canadian high school. Cf., e.g., *The Rise of the Modern Educational System: Structural Change and Social Reproduction 1870-1920*, ed. Detlef K. Müller, Fritz Ringer, and Brian Simon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); R.D. Gidney & W.P.J. Millar, *Inventing Secondary Education: The Rise of the High School in Nineteenth-Century Ontario* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1990).

pointed out that grammar school was an entirely male world, since women were not admitted either as teachers or pupils.

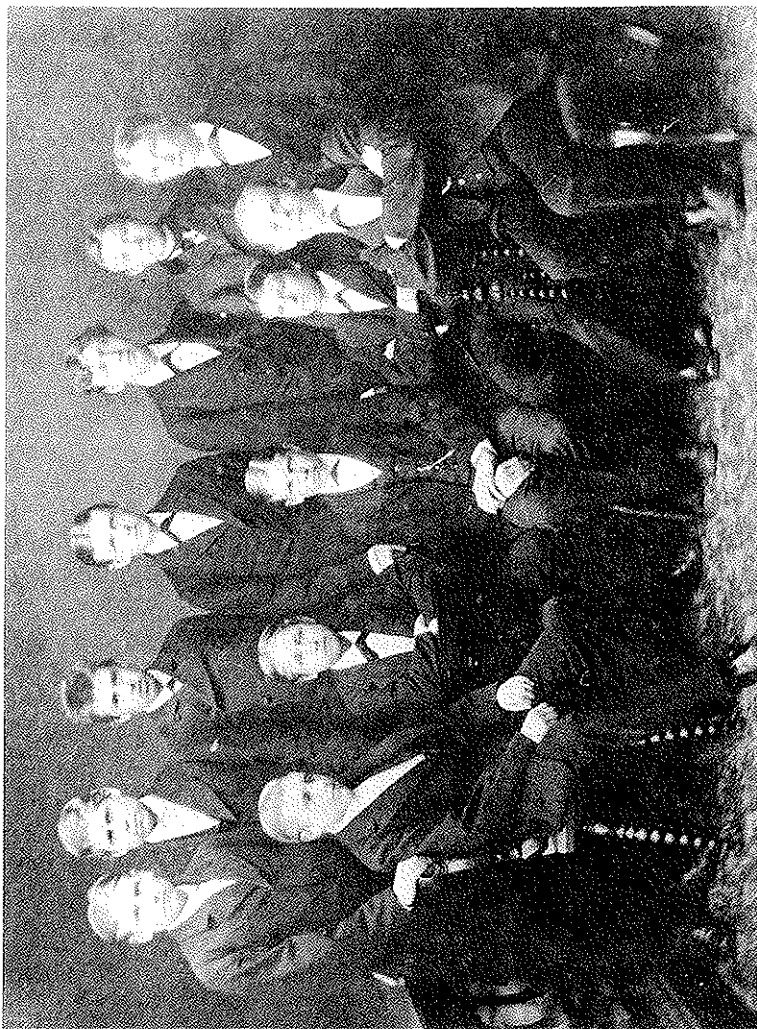
Most grammar school pupils were middle-class boys.³ The Swedish middle class, however, was not a homogenous grouping. It consisted of the economic bourgeoisie, different professional groups, the petite bourgeoisie, and white-collar workers of lower or intermediate status. A smaller number of sons of landowners, peasants, and workers also attended the grammar schools.

How was this socially varied body of pupils influenced by their years together at school? How significant was the formal school culture and the students' own spontaneously developed culture in the formation of the middle class? To what extent was grammar school education an adequate preparation for powerful positions in society? And why was it that only boys were admitted to these schools at a time when higher education was regarded as an important matter even for middle-class girls? This article will discuss such questions, using notions of class and gender in the analysis. We will thus focus on grammar school education as a means of the social construction of masculinity which formed a part of the bourgeoisie project.⁴

Our findings are based on a variety of sources such as school regulations, public reports, minutes from Västerås Grammar School,⁵ education journals, reports from teachers' meetings, memoirs, and diaries.

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3. The Public Statistics of Sweden (BiSOS and SOS) provide information about the social origins of all grammar school pupils in 1877, 1897, and 1915. In 1877 middle-class boys made up 73 percent of all Swedish grammar school boys, and in 1915 this proportion was larger still (85 percent). Cf. BiSOS 1897, series P1: SOS 1914/15, series U4. The counterparts to the Swedish grammar school in other countries were also solidly middle class. Cf., e.g., Fritz Ringer, *Education and Society in Modern Europe* (London: Indiana University Press, 1979). There are several studies of local American high schools indicating that the majority of the pupils were middle class. Cf., e.g., David F. Labaree, *The Making of an American High School: The Credentials Market and the Central High School of Philadelphia, 1838-1939* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1988); Reed Ueda, *Avenues to Adulthood: The Origins of the High School and Social Mobility in an American Suburb* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987). Cf. also, Gidney & Millar, *Inventing Secondary Education*, 115-49.
 4. Cf. Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class 1780-1850* (London: Hutchinson, 1988). According to Davidoff and Hall the formation of the English middle class was gendered. The same seems to be true for the Swedish middle class.
 5. Västerås is a medium-sized town in Central Sweden.

Class 6 at Västerås Grammar School, 1880.



Photograph courtesy of the authors.

The Difficult Art of Discipline

The years spent at grammar school were aimed above all at a discipline which was intended to make the pupils subordinate themselves to adults, follow the impersonal rules which governed everyday life at the school, and in the long run, respect the prevailing social order. Many scholars have studied this disciplinary process in the elementary school, where it aimed at creating a bourgeois hegemony. Bengt Sandin has documented the struggles and conflicts surrounding this process in the reconstruction of popular education in Sweden, and a similar study has been carried out by Bruce Curtis in Canada.⁶ But in fact, a process of that kind was in progress in Sweden even in the schools for middle-class boys—that is, in the state grammar schools. However, this latter process had a different significance.

The principal persons in the disciplinary process were, on the one hand, the teachers as representatives of the state, adult society, and the social order, and, on the other hand, the boys themselves both as individuals and as members of a male youth collective whose own rules were sometimes in harmony with the adult world, and sometimes in conflict with it. Active forces in this process were the explicit rules in the central statutes and in the school's local regulations together with the available rewards and sanctions of school. More or less tacit cultural codes developed within the pupil collective were also added to all the written rules. Furthermore, school practice and the routines of daily life at school also fulfilled a disciplinary function.

Our investigation commences in 1850, when the Grammar School Act of 1820 was still in force. This act contained more than eight pages of highly detailed decrees, bans, and instructions for the maintaining of discipline.⁷ In subsequent regulations, questions of order were not given as much "literal" space, but the contents were generally the same.⁸ Many explicit norms governing pupil behaviour were thus unchanged and methods of punishment remained the same for a period of a hundred years.

The difference between the Grammar School Act of 1820 and its predecessor, the Act of 1807, was significant. The issue of order and discipline was not given the same attention in the older statutes. The decrees and bans were often formulated in general terms, and regulations on the methods of maintaining order were also very vague. In comparison, many paragraphs were required in the 1820

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6. Bengt Sandin, *Hemmet, gatan, fabriken eller skolan. Folkundervisning och barnuppfostran i svenska städer 1600-1850* (Lund: Arkiv förlag, 1986); Bruce Curtis, *Building the Educational State: Canada West, 1836-1871* (London, Ont: The Athlouse Press, 1988).
 7. *Svensk Författningssamling [SFS]*, 16th Sept. 1820, chap. 10.
 8. Further grammar school acts were passed in 1856, 1859, 1878, and 1905.

statutes to clarify who was entitled to impose different punishments, which punishments should be used in different situations, and who was entitled to execute them.

Thus, a bureaucratic process with an elaborate system of rules for order and discipline had left its mark on the 1820 statutes. This is an indication that the new form of penal and disciplinary system which Michel Foucault describes also had a foothold in Sweden. According to Foucault, control over individuals in the nineteenth century was strengthened by a more anonymous and fine-meshed machinery of authority.⁹ The laws were made clear and unequivocal in order to show clearly what was and was not permissible. They were thus made public and drawn up in writing. Customs and verbal tradition were not compatible with the new system of discipline.¹⁰ Obviously, this is a pertinent description of the changes to the rule system of the Swedish grammar school.

The Classroom Struggle Over Time and Space

The decreed rules were supposed to be realized in the classroom. The teacher had both the right and responsibility to put them into effect. The methods resorted to by the teacher varied, but the ultimate aim was to put control of the pupils in the teacher's hands with the help of discipline in time and space. Thus the symbolic organization of the school and everyday work structured itself around the dimensions of time and space. The process of discipline was therefore, in a sense, a struggle for control over time and space in which the teacher, by virtue of his office, and with his colleagues, the headmaster and bishop,¹¹ in support, nevertheless often stood alone before a multitude of unruly fellows.

The grammar school boy had many timetables to follow. A rough framework was drawn up by the year's division into different terms. Daily life was governed by the study timetable which placed great stress on being present at lessons at the

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9. We are partly relying on Foucault's analysis of the technology of power. His theory provides a means of understanding how power works through the routines of school. Foucault has inspired many post-structuralist and feminist scholars, but there is also a feminist critique of his work for being too deterministic. Foucault seems to offer no systematic normative basis for political interventions. See Linda Alcoff, "Feminism and Foucault: The Limits to a Collaboration," in *Crises in Continental Philosophy*, ed. Arlene Delery and Charles Scott (New York: New York State University Press, 1990), 69-86. For an outline of the discussion on the relation between Foucault and feminism see Jana Sawicki, *Disciplining Foucault: Feminism, Power, and the Body* (New York: Routledge, 1991).
 10. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Penguin Books, 1982), 135-228.
 11. As a representative of the state, the bishop was the supervisor of the grammar school.

appointed hour. Non-lesson time was also divided up into formal timetables: a writing timetable, an examination timetable, a homework timetable, timetabled penal work, and detention.¹² Occasionally, corporal punishment was also scheduled to take place during a special "punishment-hour." All these timetables were means by which the pupil was subordinated to the dominant influence of time, but at the same time they defined how the time should be used. One can thus talk here about a double form of time discipline.

Not all pupil time was timetabled, of course; the schoolboy had a certain amount of leisure time. But this was also placed under the control of the school through specifying in the school statutes the ways in which free time could *not* be spent. Many things were forbidden, and conformity to the various bans was monitored by the form principal, a predecessor to the class teacher of later years, who had the duty to visit the pupils to make sure that they kept their quarters "spic and span." The pupils also had to be prepared for the occasions when the headmaster turned up:

From time to time he made visits to the pupils, especially those living together in quarters with an old warden. And, strangely enough, he always came at the wrong time. If you were doing your homework...he did not make his appearance, but when friends came on visits by chance and we held in-house punch parties with smoke whirling like a cloud, who unexpectedly wandered in if it wasn't the dreaded "Pater."¹³

Thus the pupils tried to exercise control over their leisure time, but they also tried to stake out a claim for spatial preserves at school, out of reach of the teacher's control. As a countermove, the teacher could adopt the following strategy:

Don't walk about the class room, but choose a fixed place from which all pupils can see you and you them—even their hands....But neither must you be permanently affixed to your place. Every pupil must know that you, at whatever moment, can and if so needed will, stand at their side. And on many occasions this will indeed be necessary.¹⁴

The idea of a panopticon was thus represented in the pedagogy of the Swedish grammar school as a means of controlling space in a very concrete sense,¹⁵ but

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12. Västerås Stadsarkiv, Rudbeckianska skolans arkiv [RSA], kollegieprotokoll 1850-1910.
 13. *När jag gick i skola. Skol- och ungdomsminnen från 1800-talets senare hälft, berättade av 34 svenska män och kvinnor* (Uppsala: J.A. Lindblads förlag, 1934), 77.
 14. *Pedagogisk Tidskrift* (1893), 97.
 15. Cf. Curtis, *Building the Educational State*, 165.

space also played a symbolic role in the disciplinary process. The school became an image of social space. The division into different classes gave basic positions on which a spatial hierarchy was built up. Special obligations and rights were present at each stage in a class-bound progression. Becoming a sixth-former entailed being taught by subject teachers and senior masters instead of class teachers. The student no longer needed to put up his hand or stand up when replying to questions; he was addressed by surname and not by “you”; the more humble school cap was exchanged for the attractive cap of the sixth-former, on which the number of gold rings indicated his form.

Spatial hierarchies were also established within the framework of the class. Position in the classroom indicated each pupil’s rank since students sat in order of achievement according to the principle of the best in the class sitting nearest the front, and the worst farthest back. This form of spatial tyranny also prevailed in the school catalogue—the best in the class first and the worst last. This system seems rather discriminatory to today’s observers; however, what appears to be the most ruthless feature was the so-called *strykklass*. To be put in the *strykklass* was a disciplinary punishment implying that the pupil was placed farthest back in the classroom and declared to be subject to immediate caning if the offence was repeated.

Metaphors for movements in space were very common in collegiate language. Moving up, moving down, examinations on moving, entry tests, and school-leaving examinations were all part of everyday language. Spatial positions were made visible during the whole time. All this impressed a hierarchical order on the pupils which was related partly to academic achievement (at least formally), and partly to age in that one assumed more noteworthy positions with increasing years.

The internal life of the grammar school can therefore be seen as a reflection of a hierarchical society, of a social space. But at the same time, it was also a part of the social space of the town. In smaller towns in particular, the grammar school building was a central place and served an important function as a meeting-hall for concerts, theatre shows, charity bazaars, and youth balls. Its cathedral-like stone architecture often contrasted with the more humble wooden structure of the elementary school. The assembly hall was a church in miniature where the whole school gathered for roll-call, morning prayers, end-of-term ceremonies, etc. The pupils had their own pre-determined seats there:

Everyone walked in orderly fashion according to a schedule strictly worked out in advance. In the assembly hall we would be placed according to rank and position, the lowest first. We marched into the hall in four long rows alongside each other, two along the centre gangway and one along each of the side gangways and assumed our seats which had been strictly determined and allocated in advance. It was an engaging and impressive sight to see at times over 700 schoolboys, each

quietly and steadily taking his seat and later departing, just as quietly and steadily, boy after boy, to start the day's work.¹⁶

The assembly hall as symbol of the social order was further reinforced by the podium where the headmaster, teachers, and sometimes the bishop presided. At the start of every autumn term, the headmaster read out loud to the gathered pupils from this elevated position a statement of what was forbidden according to the school's rules. The temporal figure of authority was sometimes also represented by a portrait of the king which looked down upon the assembled ranks.

Spatial discipline was also expressed in other ways. The principle of "each in its own place" came with the onset of the subject room. The pupils were disciplined to respect scientific discipline in the specific atmosphere of *abracadabra*, chemical formulae, and the laws of physics associated with chemistry or physics laboratories. Separate rooms for separate subjects sharpened further the boundaries that science drew between the study of different natural phenomena. Another form of mental discipline also adhered to grammar school studies: knowledge was built up, systematized, and transmitted with the hope of being instilled into the minds of the pupils. Natural history's placing of thousands of plants in the reproductive system; history's counting up of monarchs, dates, battles, and the conclusions of peace; geography's pointing out towns, rivers, and borders on the map; all of Latin's endless rules with as many exceptions—the different subjects, through such teaching methods, contributed to the structuring of space and the world, and "one was so afraid of breaking these norms and rules, that one was for ever locked up inside those barriers."¹⁷

So far, we have regarded the disciplinary process from the perspective of the school and the teacher. But as hinted at earlier, a "classroom struggle" for time and space was fought between teachers and pupils. The pupils tried on their part to assert their supremacy over time. Through late arrivals and truancy, they were able to manipulate the time schedules supported by the rule system of school. The pupils' own folklore contains expressions of tacit protests against the time drills. One teacher was called "The Second Hand" because the bells of the cathedral always struck when he took his first step into the school playground. An air of ridicule surrounded him, at the same time as he was perceived as pedantic and boring. And other teachers, who were not always punctual themselves, could count on a certain degree of understanding from the pupils: occasionally pupils fetched teachers who had overslept instead of reporting their non-attendance to the headmaster.

16. Carl Svedelius, *Norra Real 1876-1926* (Stockholm: P.A. Norstedt & Söners förlag, 1927), 85.

17. *När jag gick i skola*, 26.

The pupils also had their own tricks to enable time to be used for other purposes:

When we hadn't done our maths homework we asked him to talk about Hannibal or encouraged him to talk about astronomy. For hours on end he described to a devoutly attentive group of youths the wonder of the vault of heaven, the paths of the stars and course of the planets.¹⁸

During non-lesson time pupils engaged intensively in forbidden or improper occupations. Västerås pupil Johan Iverus spent most of his leisure time smoking cigars and pipes, offering cigars or pipes to girls, drinking punch, beer, and wine and getting somewhat tipsy, feeding small birds with oatmeal soaked with schnapps, engaging in snowball fights, going skating and setting fire to the reeds, playing cards and backgammon, and so on. Playing games and reading adventure books seem to have had priority over doing one's homework.¹⁹

In the struggle for space, the pupils actually had the best of it over the teacher because they, in the literal sense, filled the classroom. Moreover, the techniques that the teacher used to master space could easily be disposed of; for example, mice and swarms of bees were let out of boxes, or powder was put in the wick trimmers, in order to destroy the teacher's control over the classroom.

Spatial hierarchies formed, in a sense, the design of the teacher and the school. But pupil culture and relations between the pupils were also structured according to spatial principles, often related to class and age. The "pavement rights" of the sixth-formers in Skara were a form of institutionalized privilege.²⁰ These gave them the right to walk back and forth along the pavement outside the school, which caused a certain amount of obstruction and annoyance to other inhabitants of the town. The fifth form could walk on other, more distant pavements, while the fourth form had to wait a further year for the privilege.

The state of affairs at *Krabbelund*, the chestnut grove east of the cathedral, was most peculiar. It was taboo for all except the sixth-formers. If a little chap was out walking with his mother and dashed off through "Krabbelund," this would spark off a little discussion since parents do not always realise that societal authority must stand above parental authority.²¹

18. Fredrik Ström, *Min ungdoms strider. Memoarer* (Stockholm: P.A. Norstedt & Söner, 1940), 54.

19. Uppsala Universitetsbibliotek, Johan Iverus dagbok, 1863-1964.

20. Skara is a rather small town in Central Sweden.

21. Natanael Beckman, *Vår skolas historia, del II* (Göteborg: Wettergran & Kerbers Förlag, 1931), 206-7.

These spatial hierarchies which the pupils established were tacitly sanctioned by adult society. The same can be said about the free zones which they created in groups and societies of different types, often in mysterious seclusion. The headmaster had some insight and control over what took place there and intervened if matters that were altogether too political and religious were brought up. Secret clubs, orders, and brotherly associations were kept hidden from the headmaster. The students used rites, codes, and assumed names for members, and signs of order in different degrees were handed out according to all the recognized rules.²²

This space which the pupils constructed out of direct view of the adults was nevertheless usually kept within the limits set by adult society. But visits to inns, billiard halls, and other questionable public areas constituted a more pronounced transgression entailing the fear of discovery and reprisals. The minutes of the collegiate body from Västerås grammar school contain many pages of investigations, interrogations, and decisions about measures taken against the pupils who got caught whilst engaged in such offences. Literary memoirs abound with stories of the pupils who were sometimes caught at various drinking establishments or managed to get away from the misadventure with but a fright.²³

The routines of the school were organized in order to keep the game of time and space going, but the teachers also had to be disciplined for the routine to work smoothly. There were many occasions, however, when things did not go as planned. The headmaster at Västerås, like his counterparts in other grammar schools, consistently had to draw the collegiate body's attention to the duty of the teacher to start lessons punctually, and to visit and keep a watch on the pupils in their lodgings.

From Punishment of the Body to Punishment of Honour—From Bullying to Pupil Societies

In many respects, order was upheld through work routines, but there are numerous indications that order sometimes became less stable. At such times it was necessary to deploy the school's punishment and sanctions system instead. The purpose of punishments was to stress further the importance of the distinction between what was allowed and what was not. Successively harsher punishment also had a deterrent effect. The message "Don't do this again, because next time the punishment will be worse!" was communicated very clearly. But the punishments were also aimed at enabling other pupils to learn from the offender's

22. Västerås stadsbibliotek, Axel Erikssons dagbok 1879-1884.

23. RSA, kollegieprotokoll 1850-1910.

misdeed, since they were administered in public. For example, those placed in the *strykklass* were subject to punishment in a highly visible way. Decisions concerning disciplinary sanctions were announced and the punishments were put into effect in front of the entire class or the assembled pupils of the whole school. In order to emphasize the seriousness of the punishment and to give a visible face to authority, the collegiate body and bishop would be in attendance when the verdicts of the collegiate body were read out.

The pupils also developed a system of self-control: bullying. It was visible, as well, since the punishment of schoolmates was regulated by age. Bullying was outlawed in the 1820 school statutes, but it was communicated and continued to survive through the cultural practices of the pupils. These old traditions were sometimes sincere attempts to create justice, but they also gave scope for arbitrariness, pettiness, personal desire for revenge, and raw violence. The younger pupils had no choice but to endure the treatment as best they could in the assurance that "next year it will be my turn." Bullying was very often administered with the tacit consent of the teachers, but they were opposed to certain varieties. For example, this is how one headmaster at the end of the century looked at it:

The good and useful bullying was allowed because it served the upbringing of the pupils and brought about a spiritual "polishing" which was of use and benefit to the young....The boys kept a check on each other, an upper class on a lower, investigations were conducted,...verdicts delivered and so on. Young people have a deeper sense of justice than older people.²⁴

This open system of pupil self-discipline lost ground, however, during the course of the century. The same could be said of the school's right to punish errant pupils publicly and physically. The *strykklass* was abolished and expulsion verdicts were no longer announced to the public. The minutes of the collegiate body of the grammar school of Västerås indicate that the system of punishment also became less visible in practice.

How is this lesser degree of visibility and openness to be explained? According to Foucault, more refined disciplinary techniques were developed, where exceptions to the rule were made visible without public and physical punishments.²⁵ Furthermore, order was maintained by means of a new form of socialization based more on a sense of guilt than of shame and dedicated more to the encouragement of self-discipline. The older system of public punishment made clear to both the offender and onlooker that it was as well to avoid such behaviour.

24. Julius Juhlin, *Minnen* (Stockholm: Åhlén & Åkerlunds Förlag, 1928), 71-72.

25. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 170-94.

The rules of behaviour which could be learned from such a visible pedagogy of punishment were linked to specific situations. The message was thus given further emphasis that it was important not to get caught breaking the written rules, and the offender or his classmates had no need to internalize the norms of the moral message. The result of such a socialization process was probably not functional in Swedish society by the end of the nineteenth century when rapid changes in society continually thrust people into new situations and when, due to increasing differentiation, these situations also appeared as essentially different from different people's perspectives.

The toning down of the openness of the punishments indicates that the socialization process assumed other forms instead which were more adaptable to the conditions of a new era. The punishment of honour—to appeal to the “court of honour within the pupil”—was far more effective here. Self-discipline by its very nature is not a situation-specific but a general virtue. As such, it can function as an all-embracing behavioural norm in many different contexts.²⁶

In a corresponding way, the raw violence of bullying decreased and more refined forms of self-control emerged, where distances and hierarchies were constructed and the pupils themselves defined the norms of the “good pupil.” The rich plethora of pupil-initiated literary, scientific, musical, and, latterly, sports societies became important cogs in the process. Pupils used the school newspapers, farces, and carnival processions to attack not only the teachers, school life, and the adult world, but also each other. Leadership figures emerged within the student body, and these assumed a fostering role, becoming idols for the younger pupils at the same time. Many of Sweden's famous writers, politicians, and scientists started their careers in pupil societies. Norms of pupil behaviour were communicated in the organizational forms of boy-culture in a more sophisticated way than physical violence. High culture could be used for disciplinary purposes!

Class Discipline

We have written so far about discipline in the school and class, but one can write at the same time about discipline of “the class” as exercised by the middle class. The more or less explicit ideal of upbringing inculcated by the school was thereby, as shall be seen, in harmony with bourgeois ideology. But first we want to reflect on the notions of bourgeois ideology and bourgeois culture.

26. Several social scientists have treated the issue of maintaining order and discipline in a capitalistic society with a highly advanced division of labour. See e.g., Emile Durkheim, *The Division of Labor in Society* (New York: The Free Press, 1933); Basil Bernstein, *Class, Codes and Control. Vol.3. Towards a Theory of Educational Transmission* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975).

The notions are far from clear-cut despite often being used as if there were unanimity about their meaning. But which groups can really be said to have supported a bourgeois ideology? Should one think exclusively about the upper bourgeoisie, or should petit-bourgeois virtues also be included?²⁷ According to Weber, for example, the Protestant ethic connected with the origins of capitalism was consistent with the everyday life of the petite bourgeoisie: for this group, the essential virtues were diligence, economy, and trustworthiness. Or is it, as Marx says, that bourgeois ideology was formulated by the intellectuals of bourgeois society? And how do bourgeois and aristocratic ideals relate to each other? Was the Swedish nobility pre-bourgeois or did the bourgeois class take over aristocratic ideals?²⁸ And working-class culture—how bourgeois or petit-bourgeois was it? And why was it so important for white-collar workers in lower positions to establish boundaries to separate themselves from the manual working class? The matter is further complicated by the fact that bourgeois culture was not static but in a state of ongoing change and characterized by contradictions. What was it that distinguished, for example, the early bourgeois class from the class that by the end of the nineteenth century had consolidated its economic, political, and ideological hegemony in Sweden?

There are many questions, but we have yet to find any clear-cut answers. This is not to say that there is no research into the different sections of the Swedish bourgeoisie, but it is difficult to form an overall picture of cultural similarities and differences between the different strata.²⁹ Most researchers seem to be in agreement that there was a core of bourgeois virtues. It consisted of a methodical and rational way of life based on individual achievement, self-discipline, control of emotions and instincts, and respect for education. Other key notions were the taking of responsibility, decisiveness, and drive. And as we have seen, a great deal of this was built into the organization and daily life of the school. The

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27. See e.g., Maria Ossowska, *Bourgeois Morality* (London and New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986).
 28. There are different opinions about whether the English bourgeoisie was gentrified or not. See e.g., Martin J. Wiener, *English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit 1850-1980* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981); Janet Wolff and John Seed, eds., *The Culture of Capital: Art, Power and the Nineteenth-Century Middle Class* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988).
 29. For different studies treating the culture of different parts of the middle class, see e.g., Tom Söderberg, *Två sekel svensk medelklass. Från gustaviansk tid till nutid* (Stockholm: Bonniers, 1972); Jonas Frykman and Orvar Löfgren, *Den kultiverade människan* (Lund: Etnologiska Sällskapet, 1979); Tom Ericsson, *Mellan kapital och arbete. Småborgerligheten i Sverige 1850-1914* (Umeå: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1988); Göran Therborn, *Borgarklass och byråkrati i Sverige. Anteckningar om en solskenshistoria* (Lund: Arkiv, 1989); Martin Åberg, *En fråga om klass? Borgarklass och industriellt företagande i Göteborg 1850-1914* (Göteborg: Göteborgs universitet, historiska institutionen, 1991).

meticulously drawn up timetable promoted a methodical way of life where time was seen as a limited resource that one had to be economical with. The ideology of "each thing in its own place"—the spatial discipline—also fitted well into the rational ways of bourgeois life.

The ideology of the significance of individual merit—a central bourgeois concept—has, by tradition, deep roots in everyday school life, which has always been formally governed by pure meritocratic principles. The pupil's progression through the grammar school was also marked by continual tests to assess and measure his performance.³⁰ Verbal entry tests, daily homework interrogations, written tests, mid-term reports, public examinations at the end of the term, progression examinations at the start of the autumn term, tests for leaving certificates: a long list of tests can be drawn up. Like the highly visible punishment system, these assessments and evaluations invited a high degree of public scrutiny. The examinations were conducted publicly in the presence of the bishop, inspector, and laymen, "known to be wise and impartial," as witnesses. The time of the examination was announced in the newspapers. On the day of the examination, the pupil's written paper was made available for public scrutiny and one could gain access to the examination register in the teachers' staffroom. The term report was announced to the pupils, parents, and other interested parties present at the end-of-term ceremony. The marks manifested themselves in the classroom, where the pupils were seated in order of merit. The ideology of the significance of individual achievement was thereby expressed in concrete form.

However, the assessment system was marked by the same development as the punishment system: the considerable degree of visibility gradually decreased. The number of tests was reduced, and the public nature of the examinations was lessened as the results of the tests were no longer announced in the public domain nor read out to the assembled ranks of the pupils. Positioning in the order of merit was also abolished in most places, which was also an expression of reduced openness. This, of course, did not fit in well with the ideology of individual achievement but was all the better suited to bourgeois rationality—as a whole, the old examination system was naturally very unwieldy. The permanent process of moving pupils up and down within the classroom according to their changing merits was not especially practical either. There are also pedagogic and psychological explanations for the commencement in the 1890s of an alternative system of placing students in alphabetical order. The stigmatization of always ending up at the back of the class had to be avoided. The fact that the pupil nevertheless knew his place is another matter.

30. Cf. also David Hogan, "Examinations, Merit, and Morals: The Market Revolution and Disciplinary Power in Philadelphia's Public Schools, 1838-1868," *Historical Studies in Education* 4, 1 (Spring 1992): 31-78.

Another explanation for the abolition of the order of merit could be that the hierarchies of achievement, given concrete form in the pupils' positioning in the classroom, did not correspond well with the social hierarchies outside the school walls. In that case, the meritocratic ideology of bourgeois society which was used to legitimize the demand for power of the upper-middle classes could be used against its own interests. We have tested this hypothesis by looking at the ordering of pupils in the Västerås school catalogue in relation to their fathers' professions. Our investigation shows that in time the sons of academics among the leading group had to make way for sons of lower-status white-collar workers. Perhaps it is no coincidence that the Västerås Collegiate Body abolished the order of merit just at the time when two sons of senior masters had finished at the bottom of the class.³¹

The abolition of publicly convened examinations and of laymen as witnesses of the examinations also meant that the school was closed to outside scrutiny; the general public was no longer granted the opportunity of calling teachers' assessments into question. It can be seen as a stage in a professional strategy whereby the teachers reserved the right to control themselves.

Within the school's system of norms, the petit-bourgeois virtues of diligence, perseverance, and reliability were also rewarded. Hard-working but "unintelligent" pupils sat in front of those who were more "intelligent" but lazy. There was little point in aspiring for scholarships and prizes unless one had the highest marks for diligence. Reliability was a norm which forbade, for example, theft, and the Västerås Collegiate Body did not turn a blind eye to those who broke the seventh commandment. Severe punishments were always handed out for such offences. But there were also other forms of dishonesty which were not tolerated either: for example, cheating and lying. Those who offended were also expected to admit honestly and sincerely to their misdeeds. Those who tried to wriggle their way out of such accusations to the very last often faced a more severe punishment than those who confessed to their sins immediately. But, of course, it was not sufficient just to confess to one's crime—the sinner also had to go through tests of repentance and the will to improve.

In many respects, therefore, bourgeois ideology was in accordance with the official message of the school, but this does not imply that the years at school resulted in a body of pupils streamlined by bourgeois characteristics. The cultural differences between children from many different social backgrounds were not completely wiped out. Neither were the teachers a homogenous group with respect to their social origin.³² It is probably the case, therefore, that the message

31. RSA, Skolkataloger 1860-1883.

32. The great majority came from middle-class families although there were also a considerable number of farmers' sons, particularly towards the end of the period. Many teachers were sons of lower middle-class families.

from the teacher's desk was not unambiguous. The outcome of the process of socialization was thus not predetermined, and the pupils' own culture was, in many respects, a counter-culture—a disorderly culture. Late arrivals, truancy, scorn for rules of order, smoking on the quiet, visits to drinking dens, cheating, and all sorts of mischief were, at the very least, protests against a methodical way of life, of diligence, perseverance, and reliability. These activities were a youthful protest against school drills and discipline. They were stages in the experimentation with, and formation of, an individual identity and a way of experimenting with the delights of adult male culture. This brings us to the issue of the grammar school and the male project of bourgeois society.

Manhood, Courage, and Mature Man—The Development of Manliness in the Grammar School

The part of the nineteenth-century power struggle enacted in the public arena was a fight between *men*—between noblemen and newly emerging male entrepreneurs; between gentlemen and farmers; between traditional civil servants and new professional men; between the men of the bourgeois class and the male section of the working class. This meant that relations were redefined between men from different classes and strata, but at the same time a new gender system emerged where women played an active role. By the end of the century women had become involved in the struggle for educational rights, the right to work, the right to organize, and the right to vote. In this way, the class struggle and the battle of the sexes was plaited together in a structural process whereby bourgeois men simultaneously aimed at reinforcing their class hegemony and at defending themselves against the advance of women.

Moreover, women advanced on many fronts. Employers in both the private and public sectors were tempted to engage women rather than men because women attracted lower wages. The Post Office, the Telegraph Corporation, public administration, primary school, the health-care system, and the office are examples of workplaces where work became feminized. In the private sphere, the self-evident authority of bourgeois man was undermined to the same extent as control over the upbringing of children was taken over by the woman-mother during the child's first years and thereafter by the school. He also bore increasing responsibility as the breadwinner as a single-income family became more of a norm. The burden of responsibility grew, moreover, with the growing importance of education: more and more investment was required for the child's education.³³ Manliness—this was to hold down a job, to be able to make a living

33. Ida Blom, "Changing Gender Identities in an Industrializing Society: The Case of

for the family and be in control of the family's fate, and to make the necessary calculations for the family's future. Drive became an important masculine attribute.³⁴

But in the grammar school, the female attack was warded off. The grammar school remained something of a male bastion. Here it was especially important to retain positions because the grammar school led to the scientific world, the ideological power centre of the new age: the *men* of science succeeded the priests as ideological wielders of power. So far women had been refused the right to teach and be taught within the bounds of the secondary school. Here, boys would be brought up by men to become men.

How can we define the ideal of manliness that flourished in the grammar school? This question has no clear-cut answer. As gender relations were transformed, new definitions of masculinity also emerged. And at the turn of the century, there were different opinions about what it meant to be a real man. Alternative, even competing, behaviours and attitudes could constitute being a man.³⁵ This uncertainty also characterized the grammar school. Here, boys were prepared for white-collar jobs, which, as a matter of fact, were associated with femininity. But the boys were supposed to grow up to be real men, and therefore such ambiguities in their gender identities had to be dealt with.³⁶

On the other hand, the bourgeois virtues promoted by the grammar school were mainly associated with manliness. In most definitions of male and female, woman represented disorder, irrationality, nature, sexuality, and emotion. Women were considered to be incapable of thinking logically or in abstract terms; they had a tendency to get bogged down in detail and lacked the ability to take a broad view of things. Men represented everything in contrast to these qualities,

Norway c.1870-c.1914," *Gender & History* 2, 2 (1990): 131-47. See also John Tosh, "Domesticity and Manliness in the Victorian Middle Class: The Family of Edward White Benson," in *Manful Assertions: Masculinities in Britain since 1800*, ed. Michael Roper and John Tosh (London: Routledge, 1991), 44-73.

34. Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes*, 299-315.

35. According to Michael Kimmel, masculinity was in a state of crisis throughout the industrial world at the end of the nineteenth century. See Kimmel, "The Contemporary 'Crisis' of Masculinity in Historical Perspective," in *The Making of Masculinities: The New Men's History*, ed. Harry Brod (Boston: Allen & Unwin), 121-53. See also J.A. Mangan and James Walvin, eds., *Manliness and Morality: Middle-class Masculinity in Britain and America 1800-1940* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987); Mark C. Carnes and Clyde Griffen, eds., *Meanings for Manhood: Constructions of Masculinity in Victorian America* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1990).

36. According to Norma Clarke, the authors in Victorian England faced the same problem. One solution was to declare the author a hero, a definition promoted by Thomas Carlyle. See Norma Clarke, "Strenuous Idleness: Thomas Carlyle and the Man of Letters as Hero," in *Manful Assertions*, 25-43.

an opposite which fitted in with the grammar school's words of honour: order and clarity, logic and reason, control and self-discipline. In such a way, the education system's division into state grammar schools for the boys and private schools for middle-class girls reinforced the distinction between the sexes in the division of labour, in laws and norms, and in the family. This meant that the educational system was crucial for the construction, reproduction, and reinforcement of gender relations in different spheres of society. The education system was therefore a means of the subordination of women, and the grammar school was an institution of authority for *men*.

What was it, then, that symbolized the male wielder of power? He probably had a drink sometimes. Undoubtedly a cigar in the corner of the mouth was a symbol of both manliness and power. And a real man was also prepared to resort to fisticuffs if necessary and stand up for king and country. Such attributes were freely exercised in the uncontrolled boy-culture. Smoking was a common activity in the pupils' quarters, and many bottles of Swedish punch, beer, and wine were emptied. Johan Iverus noted carefully in his diary how many pipes, cigars, and glasses of punch he got through each day—an indication of how important these rites were in the formation of a male identity. War games and snowball fights prepared for male, aggressive behaviour wherein physical strength was deemed to be of high value. Ebbe Lieberath, the founder of the Swedish boy scout movement, tells of how he was once struck by a snowball which caused his eye to bleed. He asked a teacher for permission to go home, but got a clip around the ears in reply and was ordered to sit down:

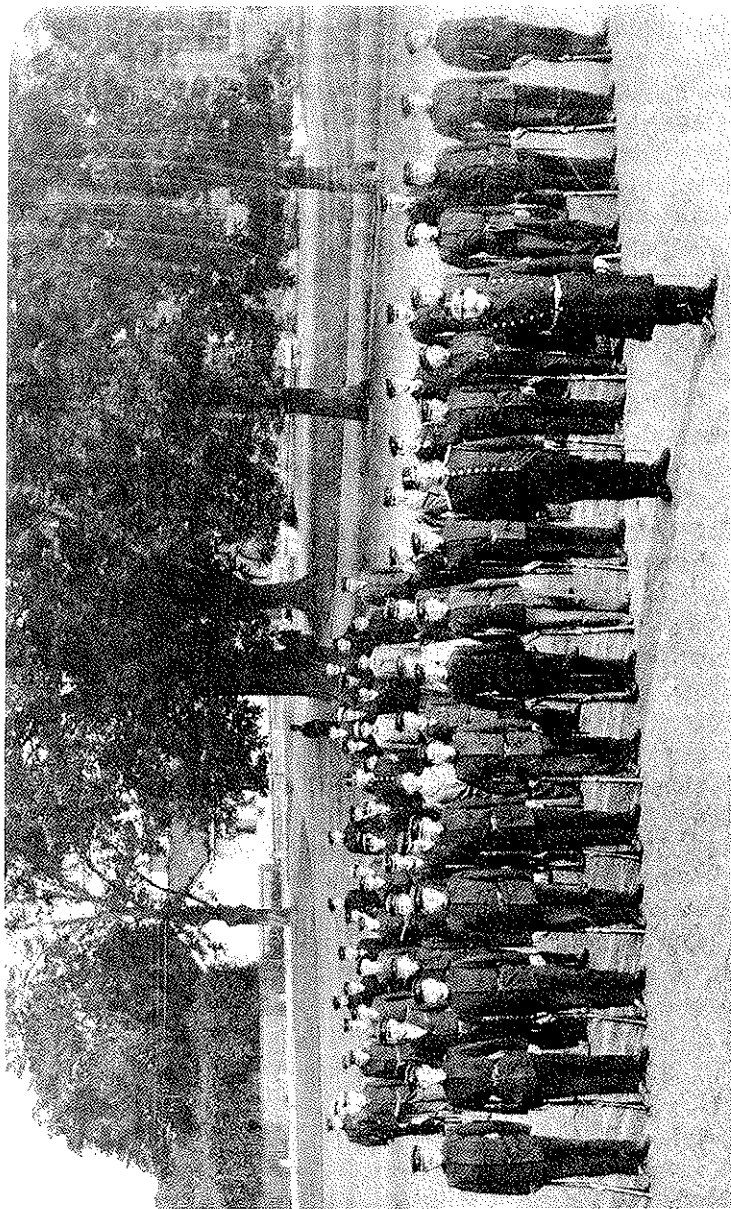
The investigation at the doctor's showed that the iris had broken. A large number of drops in the eye and a week in the darkroom would be a sufficient preparation for the next battle. No messing about, no complaints to the headmaster, no letters to the newspaper such as in our days, as soon as a young man gets a blow on the head....There was grit in both parents and boys in those days.³⁷

The rites connected with bullying were a means of hardening the young man's psyche. The degrading and violent treatment to which a first-former was exposed was a type of initiation rite, a test of manhood which he had to withstand in order to be accepted within the boy-collective. The tough lesson to learn was: "Do not show yourself to be weak! Do not cry! Stick it out!" Pupils could get off quite lightly by adopting such strategies, while those who could not take the bit between their teeth could expect further humiliation.

All the regular fights between-grammar school boys and elementary school boys were a part of this male culture of violence. The youths organized these

37. Ebbe Lieberath, *Mina första femton år* (Stockholm, 1935), 159.

Military training in Västerås Grammar School, 1895.



Photograph courtesy of the authors.

battles themselves with the tacit approval of the adults, but a preparation for war was also explicitly prescribed by the state. During the 1860s with its pro-Scandinavian currents, military and weaponry exercises were introduced in order to promote “physical education to a powerful, strong and hardened generation” of youths and to accustom them to an “undivided attention to given instructions, to order and vigour”³⁸—all in the national interest. This was not just an empty statement. To the great delight of the lads, there were drills throughout the Swedish grammar school system. But there were also boys with pronounced pacifist inclinations; they risked beatings from their comrades, and they were urged by the teachers to keep their “nihilistic and treasonable” opinions to themselves.³⁹

Military exercises were thus aimed at strengthening the physical status of the pupil-collective—a crucial aspect of masculinity. However, the grammar school’s intellectual teaching was sometimes supposed to run counter to that. The schoolboy was depicted as a pale, stooping, and short-sighted swot who sat leaning over his books instead of being out in the fresh air. Such a narrow training of the mental faculties led to a lack of lust for life and enterprise, listlessness and apathy, a spiritual anaemia which prematurely aged the young men. And according to a state report, the Swedish grammar school boy was in a really bad way: 45 percent of grammar school boys were recorded as suffering from some form of physical disease.⁴⁰ Around the turn of the century, 10 to 16 percent of the pupils were excused from gymnastics for medical reasons.⁴¹

Such alarming reports of the physical degeneration of the grammar school pupil caused a great deal of debate. This was not only due to a sincere concern for the pupil’s state of physical health, but also related to the grammar school’s task of bringing up the next generation of male wielders of power. Masculinity, strength, courage, and energy are attributes which by the yardsticks of the time (and later times also) strengthened the legitimacy of those in power. Moreover, those in power should radiate good health: a pale, short-sighted, and stooping person could hardly maintain any personal authority. In free competition, one no longer asserted oneself solely with the help of words and dates. Other weapons such as “an unbendable will, cheerful enterprise, and a fit, hardened body” were also needed.⁴² Remedies for physical degeneration included less homework, an improved working environment with good lighting, easy-to-read styles of print, properly designed desks, etc. In the spirit of Per Henrik Ling, gymnastics now

38. SFS, 9 jan 1863, No. 3.

39. Kungliga biblioteket, Hugo Lindberg, Dagbok nr 1, 1906-1907.

40. *Läroverkskomiténs underdåniga utlåtande och förslag angående organisationen af rikets allmänna läroverk afgifvet den 25 aug. 1884, del II* (Stockholm, 1884).

41. BISOS 1870-1911, series P1; SOS 1911-1914/15, series U4.

42. *Berättelse om det sjuttonde allmänna svenska läraremötet i Malmö 1903* (Malmö: Knut Wintzell, 1904), 143.

assumed an important role, but free games were also recommended. These would promote energy, bravery, and determination, and the boy who did not act properly as a child was considered unlikely to act properly later as a man.⁴³

Moreover, a bourgeois man was polite and well-mannered, well-dressed in a high hat, dark suit, and walking stick. He was able to defend himself in argument, he saw himself as the spokesman of the underdog in public discourse, he gave one the impression of being genuinely unselfish. All these characteristics were more or less consistent with those inculcated by the grammar school. For example, in the teaching situation, with a teacher often performing as a lecturer, there were many occasions for reflecting on outward appearance. The clarity of recollections in later years obviously suggests that the physical appearance and dress of the teacher was of singular significance. The very symbol of the bourgeois man—the walking stick—was usually obtained on the very last day at school. The pupils' ceremony at the final examination was a kind of *rite de passage* into the adult male world:

Self-important, shouting, naive, pale from considerable swotting, wearing school caps and fumbling with leopard sticks, we self-consciously and self-assuredly discussed with the waiter about the price of the supper and punch....And it was all very impressive when we toasted each other and stated: "Damn you, you son of a bitch!" and such remarks of unquestionable masculinity.⁴⁴

The art of argument was developed in the pupil literary societies. Capacities for rhetoric were trained at discussion evenings and competitions in recitals and essays. Everything was discussed there, from "Was King Karl XII a great hero?" to "How should we respond to the emancipation of women?" These clubs were a youthful microcosm of the public life of adult bourgeois society and a practice ground for a forthcoming role in it. Language, the major weapon of the professional in the struggle for power and influence, was polished here. Bourgeois male hegemony rested on linguistic as well as economic and other cultural resources.

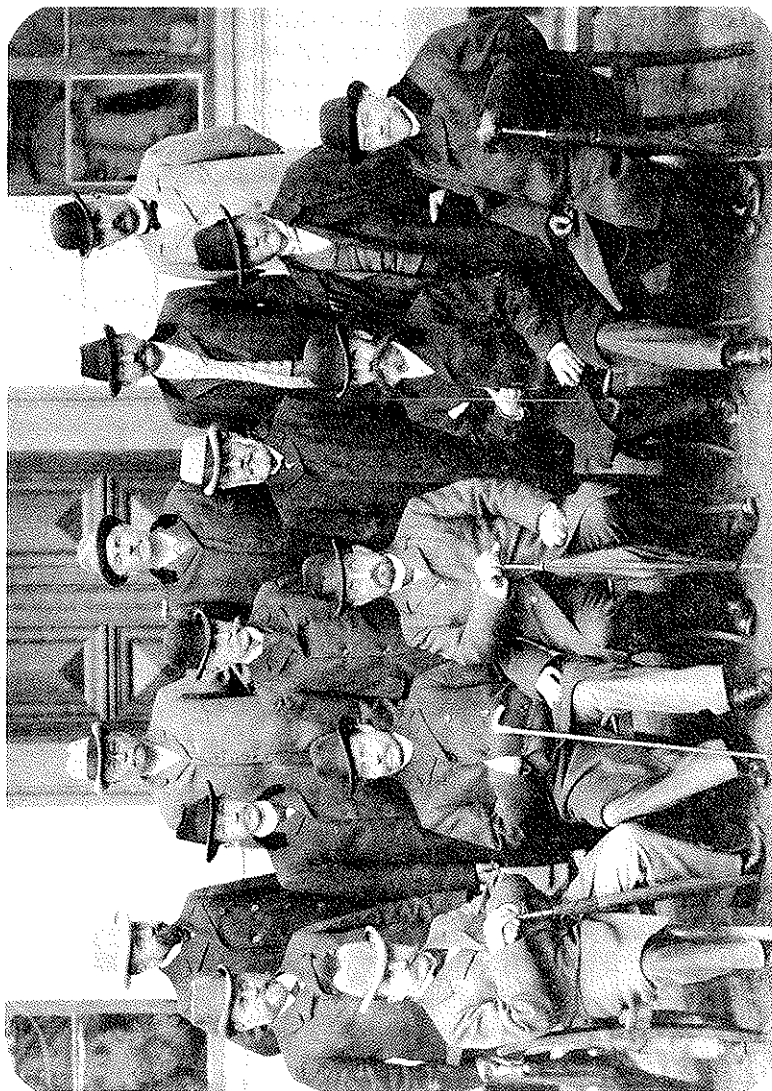
The Grammar School and the Formation of the Middle Class

Our definition of the middle class is very broad and encompasses between 10 and 15 percent of the employed male population during the nineteenth century.

43. *Berättelse om det nionde allmänna svenska läraremötet i Gefle 1878* (Stockholm: V Knös, 1879), 62.

44. Carl Laurin, *Minnen. Del I: 1868-1888* (Stockholm: P.A. Norstedt & Söner, 1928), 381-82.

Teachers at Västerås Grammar School, 1895.



Photograph courtesy of the authors.

But the different parts of the middle class were, in themselves, very heterogeneous. They found themselves in different market positions and had different relationships to the state. They lived off different earnings, had different financial circumstances, exerted different degrees of power and influence, and belonged to different lines of business in ongoing competition with each other.⁴⁵ The position of power enjoyed by the upper bourgeoisie was founded on material ownership. The market position of the professional classes was based on their exclusive possession of cultural capital. The petite bourgeoisie stood between capital and labour, and the boundary between lower-status white-collar workers and manual workers was often blurred. Cultural differences were also considerable, but middle-class parents who sent their sons to grammar school nevertheless had one thing in common: respect for education and belief in its importance as well as that of science. It was a cornerstone of bourgeois ideology.

As pointed out above, grammar school pupils came mainly from the bourgeois strata and later on themselves became members of the various parts of the bourgeoisie.⁴⁶ The years at grammar school contributed in many ways to the formation of a common cultural identity—a “togetherness.” Those who completed their studies and passed the final examination had been welded together by the drill and discipline process over a period of many years. But often they were also united in youthful defiance towards the ruling order.

The time spent at school gave them a common core of education. They studied the same history courses, wrestled together with Euclidean geometry, declined the same German verbs, and recited the same poems. They participated in the same ceremonies marking the glory of the fatherland and they established secret forms of brotherhood. They developed a wealth of inventive methods of “helping” less-gifted or poorly read comrades through the needle’s eye of the school test. According to the adults, it was, of course, an expression of dishonesty and cheating, but from the perspective of the pupil it was a matter of solidarity.

The feeling of kinship was strengthened by their belonging to a selected group of Swedish youths. By definition, half of these—the girls—were excluded, but the grammar school boys were also an exclusive group in relation to other male youths.⁴⁷ Those few who passed the final examination and carried the white cap, the symbol of success, were even more select and indeed felt as much.⁴⁸ The

45. Cf. Jyrgen Kocka, hg., *Bürger und Bürgerlichkeit im 19. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen: Sammlung Vandenhoeck, 1987), 7-63.

46. Our data on the careers of pupils from Karlstad and Växjö grammar schools indicate that 90 percent of the pupils belonged to the middle class later in life, and if the analysis is restricted to those who passed the final examination the proportion is even larger (95 percent).

47. The grammar school boys made up 3-5 percent of all Swedish boys aged 10-18, 1877-1915.

48. About 75 percent left the grammar school after only a few years, and did not pass

grammar school years functioned in many respects as a form of social and ideological cement between pupils from different social classes and strata. One had a sense of solidarity not only with one's classmates, but also with one's school. That is demonstrated by all the societies of brotherhood formed by ex-pupils from the different grammar schools. They still publish memorial and jubilee publications to hold sacred the memory of their time spent at school.

The grammar school also performed an integrating function on a national plane. A uniform national curriculum provided a national cultural capital, of which the educated man was a joint owner. Local pupil associations exhibited a remarkable degree of uniformity across the entire country. The value symbols of education were shared with grammar school pupils around the country, and the importance of education meant that one belonged to a select group, with the school cap serving as a symbol of that selectivity.

In grammar schools, many of these students were trained for the execution of power. In the pupils' societies they learnt to speak and perform while they gradually obtained the right to speak in public. The severe discipline, with corporal punishment and bullying, aimed both at subordination to a societal order and at preparation for a future career as wielders of power. In this respect the disciplinary process of the grammar school differed from that of the elementary school. For the grammar school boy the socialization was a catharsis leading to glory and power. As he grew older, the hard discipline was relaxed. And in the system of bullying, the student obtained the right to punish his inferiors. This might have influenced his self-image and convinced him of his superiority. The elementary school boy probably learnt a lesson of powerlessness. However, it should also be pointed out that there might have been a contradiction between grammar school as a socialization for social and political leadership on the one hand, and the experiences of the grammar school boys on the other. Far from being empowered by the bullying system, some of them were victims.⁴⁹

The grammar school was also a part of the gender formation of the middle class. Middle-class girls were excluded from grammar schools and restricted to private girls' schools with a totally different curriculum. These two systems were constructed according to social distinctions between male and female. The contrasts between the gender-segregated schools were significant transmitters of meaning. Thus, private girls' schools and state grammar schools were representations of the Janus-faced bourgeois gender culture. The grammar schools were characterized by logic and cold rationality and attuned to the market and public life, whereas the girls' schools represented the cosy emotional atmosphere of the home. Thus the grammar school played an active part in the gender formation of the middle class.

the final examination.

49. Cf. Peter M. Lewis, "Mummy, Matron and the Maids," in *Manful Assertions*, 168-89.