

Gender Advantages and Gender Normality in the Views of Estonian Secondary School Students

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Abstract

The aim of the study on Estonian secondary school students was to obtain an overview of the gender-related views and experiences of the everyday school life by students, and to analyse the school-related factors in the development of gender roles and gender-related expectations. We view gender equality as a central condition for social sustainability.

In the article, we focus on the perceptions and interpretations of the so-called normal boy and girl and the advantages of both genders at school. We analyse the experiences and the views of young people regarding their gender positioning in everyday school life vis-à-vis their views on gender equality.

The survey used in the study consisted of 50 questions, mainly open-ended. It was conducted in 10 basic and secondary schools in grades 7, 9, 10 and 12, with a total number of 649 respondents. The open answers were analysed by applying the method of thematic qualitative content analysis. The findings reveal that the perceived advantages of both genders at school and the behaviour considered as normal at school are strongly related to traditional gender stereotypes. At the same time, students claim that they are primarily people with equal opportunities. We conclude that the belief in the ideology of gender equality outweighs personal gender-related experiences.

Keywords: gender stereotypes, everyday school life, gender normality, gender equality

Introduction

Gender is one of the key social categories characterising all humans in the world. While sex refers to people's biological and physiological characteristics, gender is a "social construct that ascribes different qualities and rights to women and men regardless of individual competence or desires" (Johnsson-Latham, 200, p. 17). These different qualities and rights are meaningful and important to research also in the context of sustainable development, e.g. in relation to consumption patterns, welfare, decision-making power, the development of competences, and the responsibilities related to the next generation. Gender equality involves equal opportunities for men and women, equal consideration of men's and women's rights and interests (including those related to the allocation of resources). It also means the presence of a gender perspective in

decision-making processes. Gender equality both strengthens sustainable development and is a precondition for it. (Johnsson-Latham, 2007).

Sustainable development as development where the needs of the present are met without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987) involves the consideration of both the sex and gender of humans and the biological and social differences and similarities of men and women. Boys and girls learn at school how to be men and women in the society. Being men and women involves both the performance of their biological and social roles and the perceived value (social status) attached to these roles. Our study focuses primarily on the social aspects (gender and gender equality).

Although recently, discussions have emerged in Estonia about the gender aspects in education, these have focused on the clearly 'visible' problems, primarily on the academic underachievement of boys, e.g. gender differences in the PISA test scores, a high share of basic school dropouts, a low share of male students in higher education. Visible problems lead to superficial interpretations, e.g. to the view that the school is hostile towards boys, but it suits girls. Such views hide the deeper nature of gender-related problems. In order to solve the problems, we should investigate the gender stereotypes at school and in society more deeply. Otherwise, the general view remains that there are no problems regarding gender equality in Estonia (Kuurme, Kasemaa, & Roots, 2013), and the actual gender inequality will lead to even more inequality and unsustainability in the future. It is important to learn about gender-related assumptions, beliefs and norms in the society and at school in order to be able to raise people's awareness of their potentially limiting nature and to improve people's knowledge about the importance of gender equality (the problems deriving from inequality).

Our study addresses the views of young people regarding their own gender and the positioning of genders at school. Up to now, in Estonia very few studies (e.g. Ainsaar, Soo, & Laur, 2010; Soo & Kutsar, 2012) have dealt with the views of secondary school students about their own gender. Our aim is to enrich the empirical knowledge in the field of gender and education by analysing the views on gender normality and gender advantages by Estonian basic and secondary school students. This knowledge helps to shed light on the deep-rooted problems behind the declared gender equality.

Theoretical Background

Gender order (also called 'gender system' or 'gender regime') refers to a broad discourse of the relationships and positions of men and women in society (Connell, 2005). The gender system describes the usual practices of acting and thinking which produce, re-produce, normalise and justify the power relationships between men and women (Plicher & Whelehan, 2004). Traditionally, the gender system is characterised by the dominance of men and the lower social status of women. The durability and rigidity of such gender system is supported by traditional gender ideology with the respective ideas, opinions, attitudes and values regarding the roles, rights and responsibilities of men and women.

The socialisation process is the process of becoming an individual with one's views about the world and one's relationships with the surrounding world. The process of becoming a subject is a process where the available discourses both shape the individual,

but also create the space for the individual to actively participate in the development of these discourses. It is a paradoxical process of simultaneous mastery and submission (Davies, 2006). From the gender perspective, there are differences for men and women regarding the participation in the available discourses.

Paechter (2008) explains the availability of the expressions of one's femininity and/or masculinity in the context of communities of practice. She stresses the disciplinary nature of communities where, in order to remain part of a community, individuals have to adjust and regulate their gender performances so that these performances meet the norms of that particular community.

Roles are expected ways of behaviour based on values and norms (Antikainen, Rinne & Koski, 2009). Gender roles refer to the cultural expectations regarding the ways a man or a woman should behave in society and/or the ways of behaviour that are acceptable in various contexts (Lips, 1991; see also Härkönen, 2004). Being a girl in the school and being a boy in the school are specific roles, because the expectations towards male and female students differ (Papp, 2013).

In the process of constructing and performing one's gender within the available discourses, young people develop a certain habitus (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). Habitus refers to the structure that expresses the culture of a certain societal group in an individual, and it frames the activities of the individual in a rather consistent manner (Liljander, 2012). Habitus takes shape in discursive practices, which provide meanings as to what is true, what can be said, thought and done (Rehbein, 2006). The gender system becomes both a collective and individual habitus via identifications with one's gender in daily practices and relationships at school and in society. The patterns of such attitudes and views (gender stereotypes) are internalised by young people, and thus the gender order remains unchanged.

In critical educational theory, one of the principal themes is the question of why/how the school, for a variety of reasons, does not do what it has officially promised (Rajakaltio, 2011). Antikainen et al. (2009) discuss the paradox of education: on the one hand, the aim of education is to develop individual skills and qualities (e.g. critical thinking skills), while on the other hand, its aim is to teach children to live in a group and accept the norms of the group. According to Salminen (2012), we can talk about devilish dilemmas: the school has to fulfil both humanising and de-humanising tasks. According to Youdell (2011), the school has not been established for the benefit and development of individuals. The educational system and the school's organisational structures, curriculum and daily pedagogy reflect wider societal problems.

The invisible task of the school is to socialise students into the existing gender system which functions through habitual daily practices. Behind the declared equality in everyday school life, the persistent nature of the gender system keeps gender stereotypes alive and translates into different assumptions and expectations for male and female students. In the interests of future-oriented sustainability, the system that encourages students to be passive and follow orders should be replaced with a gender-sensitive approach to education and real, not declared, equal opportunities. Our research attempts to uncover the invisible influence of the school on understanding gender roles and the gender order by investigating the beliefs that people might not even be aware of, but which become everyday practice and thus viewed as normal and habitual.

The focus so far has been on the students. However, teachers are also part of the gender system. According to Ridell (1989), the gendered coping strategies of teachers are responsible for the reproduction of gender stereotypes at school. A number of teachers have traditional, gendered views about the roles of men and women in society, and they rely on these views in their daily teaching practices, thus reinforcing gender stereotypes. According to Holm (2010), both students and teachers have their specific expectations regarding how boys and girls should act in the classroom. The studies of everyday school life, which started in the 1970s, have revealed the school's reproductive nature regarding the dominant position of men. The studies revealed that the majority of teachers' attention and time as well as space belonged to boys and the explanations given to girls academic achievements often demeaned girls. Boys were valued higher in many respects. In the 1970s and 1980s, the studies focused on the suppressed position of girls. In the 1990s, the focus of research shifted to boys and their underachievement at school which sometimes turned into a moral panic (Holm, 2010; Skelton & Francis, 2001; Wiens, 2006). However, the question remains whether there has been a real shift in the positioning of genders.

In Estonia, the study by Praxis (2014) of the views of university students (2,875 respondents) about gender equality revealed that when asked about the perceived position of both genders in the society, 33% of male students thought that the positions are equal compared to 14% of female students. At the same time, 83% of female students thought that the position of men is better than that of women, while only 56% of male students think this way.

The study by Ainsaar et al. (2010) investigated gender roles among 16–19-year-old Estonians. It appeared that while 90% of men considered themselves masculine, women's positioning was more varied: although most (71.6%) considered themselves feminine, 18.2% belonged to the category 'androgynous' (with high femininity and high masculinity). The authors suggest that one of the reasons for the stronger preference of masculinity is related to the better position of men in society.

Methodology

This study was part of a larger on-going research project "Integrating gender into teacher education and training", 2014–2015, financed by the Norwegian financial mechanism. The study about students' views on gender was designed with two major aims. Firstly, the aim was to learn about the gender-related aspects of students' views on the role of the student, their attitudes towards the school and their teachers, their future plans, their views and experiences of school-based violence. Secondly, the overview of the gender-related views of today's Estonian students would enable us to develop more targeted strategies for integrating gender into teacher education.

The survey consisted of 50 questions, mainly open-ended. It was conducted in 10 basic and secondary schools in grades 7, 9, 10 and 12. There were 649 respondents in total: 312 male and 337 female. In this article, we will focus on the views of students as to what is viewed as normal for boys and girls and the advantages either gender is perceived to have at school. We attempt to answer the following question:

What do students notice at school and what do they consider self-evident regarding gender positioning?

We asked the students to finish the following sentences:

- It is better to be a boy at school because...
- It is better to be a girl at school because...
- It does not matter whether to be a boy or a girl at school because...
- It is entirely normal for a boy at school to...
- It is entirely normal for a girl at school to...

Boys and girls expressed opinions about both boys and girls. It has to be kept in mind that the views are expressions of attitudes/positions which might not translate directly into behaviour. However, knowing the views of boys and girls on gender-related roles and positions at school is helpful in designing education for equality and sustainability. Such knowledge enables educators to discuss common stereotypes and norms and show the impact of these stereotypes and norms on everyday behaviour as well to become aware of the connection of behavioural patterns with broader agendas (gender equality, sustainability).

The responses were analysed by using the method of thematic qualitative content analysis (Kuckartz, 2014). Not everybody responded to every question. Thus, we have noted the number of male and female respondents to particular statements. All responses were categorised by content into thematic groups and subgroups. Since the number of responses was rather large, we highlight in the article the key themes and recurrent statements which enable to develop an understanding of the students' views. These views help to understand the gender order in the society as well as the practices of schools regarding both genders, and the role of boys and girls in constructing gender roles and performing their gender.

Results

The Different School Reality of Boys and Girls

The themes that emerged in the responses of the examined boys and girls regarding the advantages of both genders and gender positions were rather similar, highlighting the students' relationship with the norm, external expectations, personal characteristics, appearances and, more broadly, the life at school. Differences appeared in the major themes describing boys and girls. For example, in the boys' descriptions of the advantages of boys, a central theme was *exciting and fun life at school*. The boys considered as the advantage of girls *a better attitude towards girls*, especially that of teachers. In the girls' descriptions of the advantages of boys, the key theme was *lower external expectations*. With regard to themselves, the girls described as their advantage *the good attitude of teachers* and the ability to do things as expected. Below we focus on the main themes.

It is better to be a boy at school

In total, 126 boys (N=126) finished the sentence. The main themes that emerged were *exciting and fun life* (n=42, 33.3%), *a more relaxed position regarding the norm and responsibilities* (n=15, 11.9%) and *lower external expectations* (n=14, 11.1%).

The exciting and fun life meant fooling around, making jokes and having fun. It also meant having more freedom and opportunities:

it's interesting; it's cooler; more fun and pleasure; can play basketball; can act freely, without being looked at; the feeling is more relaxed; you can be completely independent; boys have a somewhat more relaxed life at school; I have more opportunities as a boy.

We can summarise these statements with the response of a male student: *boys are those who make school life better*. It is also worth noting the answer of another male student: *then you can think with your own head*. Even this is seen as an advantage of the male gender.

A more relaxed position regarding the norm and responsibilities meant that boundaries are broader:

you can do almost anything and nobody minds; then you take things easier and you don't care about a lot of things; if you sometimes don't feel like studying, it's relatively ok; it's easier because boys don't care that much; you can leave your homework undone.

Lower external expectations concerned mainly studying and marks:

you're not expected to do that much; you're not expected to do as much as girls are; nothing is expected from you here; not much is demanded; you're not expected to be interested in you studies; if you don't feel like studying, then it's ok.

The reason for how it can be like this, is expressed by a male student: *Boys have been made smarter by nature*.

The advantages of boys were discussed by 108 girls (N=108). Four of them did not think it is better to be a boy. The others highlighted advantages with regard to the constraints of the norm, more relaxed ways of being and considerably lower expectations.

Boys may express their opinion; they are allowed more things; they can be who they are; they don't need to worry about marks so much; when they study well, people are surprised; girls are demanded to behave properly; you're allowed to be late, you can leave your homework undone; missed classes and bad marks are regular, while girls are reprimanded; boys can fool around, can fight.

Many girls emphasised that boys do not need to worry about their clothing and makeup, that their life is more carefree, and they do not have to take school seriously. Teachers are less demanding, and some teachers expect nothing from boys. Some girls noticed though that boys are nagged at more. It is worth noting that some girls think that it is the privilege of boys to express their opinions.

It is better to be a girl at school

The advantages of girls were discussed by 110 boys (N=110) and 98 girls (N=98). Six of the boys reconfirmed that it is not better to be a girl. While the advantages of boys were seen in the more relaxed life at school, the advantages of girls related to attitudes, both the attitudes towards girls and the attitudes of the girls themselves. These were mentioned by the male students 50 times (n=50, 45.5%).

The attitude towards girls is gentler and they are respected more.

Boys are not treated that well; nobody dares to hit a girl when the girl says something nasty to a boy; girls are opened doors at school; they're respected more;; they are not nagged at as much; they are praised for good behaviour; girls are not bullied.

Most often the better attitude of teachers towards girls was mentioned (n=26, 23.6%).

Teachers are less demanding when giving marks; teachers are kinder; teachers respect and trust girls more; they favour girls and are more understanding towards girls.

The school is friendlier towards girls, and the old-fashioned gentlemanly habits are still alive. The reason for it is probably that the attitudes of girls towards the school make them more acceptable for the institution. The attitudes concern primarily studying (n=17, 15.5%), but are also more general (n=12, 10.9%).

Studying suits girls better; girls are more diligent learners; they can remember what they learn better; girls take things seriously; they are more eager to go to school; they have a stronger interest in learning; they are hard-working and conscientious.

Three male students also noted that girls' toilets are cleaner. In summary one of the male respondents wrote: *They take things seriously, the future is waiting.*

The girls (N=98) also saw as their advantage a better attitude of others towards them as well as their own attitude toward life and studying.

The general attitude towards girls is better (n=23, 23.5%):

Boys are nagged at more; we are treated better; we are not punished straight away because people think, oh women, they don't understand; girls are trusted more; you are respected more; you get more praise; you get better marks; you get more attention.

The girls highlighted the better attitude of teachers towards girls (n=26, 26.5%) which gives them considerable advantages because teachers *trust, respect, are kinder, more indulgent, understand, praise, do not nag.*

It is worth paying attention to the statements by three female students: *boys are looked at in a strange way when they have too good marks; nobody throws a weird look at girls for getting too good grades; boys have it harder, because they are mocked more than girls because of studying well.* Here the silent social pressure is visible: the status of the boy and studying well do not go together.

Some girls also value their own attitudes towards life and responsibilities better than those of boys (n=11, 11.2%). The girls' better attitude towards studies is also emphasised (n=12, 12.2%).

Girls are more caring and they behave better; most girls are more diligent; girls care more about their marks than boys; girls are more motivated and interested in studying than boys; girls can actually prove that they are also good; studying fits girls better.

The fact that being a girl at school could be fun and a pleasant time with one's friends was mentioned only by six girls.

In summary, the advantages of boys at school involve more freedom, lower expectations and a more exciting life. Looking closer, the freedom and excitement mean mainly just joking, fooling around and having fun. When discussing the advantages of girls, both the boys and the girls emphasise the norm-based attitude which makes it easier for girls to be at school and also ensures them the better attitude of teachers.

It does not matter whether to be a boy or a girl

How do students perceive the situation at school from the perspective of equal treatment? The sentence was finished by 293 girls (N=293) and 191 boys (N=191). The majority of the girls (n=193, 65.9%) claimed that everybody is equal at school and genders are not treated differently. Only 10 girls (n=10, 3.4%) stated that differences exist. Out of the male respondents, 97 boys (n=97, 50.8%) claimed the same, while eight girls confirmed that there is a difference.

The general belief seems to be that *everybody is equal everywhere*. Arguments which were provided to support the belief can be grouped under two major themes (both for boys and girls).

Conditions, opportunities and requirements are equal to both.

Boys: *in front of the constitution all people are equal; we all must obey the system; both have to go to school; boys and girls are treated equally at school; at school gender is not really differentiated and so also elsewhere in the world.*

Girls: *at school everybody follows the same rules and the same curriculum; everybody has the same responsibilities and is expected the same; teachers treat everybody the same way; gender is not important at school; everybody has equal opportunities and everybody can be the way he or she wants.*

Everything depends on the person himself or herself

Boys: *in the end, everything depends on the person himself or herself, not his/her gender; at the end of the day, you yourself make your future; be whoever you are, as long as you are yourself.*

Girls: *the attitude depends on the character, not gender; we are all humans with the same task; what's the difference whether I'm a boy or a girl. I'm Me; we are who we want to be and our gender should not hinder us; what's important is how you look from the inside.*

It is worth noting that among all those who finished the sentence, 29 male students (n= 29, 15.2%) and 58 female students (n=58, 19.8%) had also described various manifestations of gender inequality. It seems that the gender equality ideology is more believable to young people than their own lived-through personal experiences, and gender inequality is not recognised. This is well expressed in the following responses:

In society we are all equal anyway, although we are not treated equally; both are equal, what differs is behaviour and the ability to learn; although one can see gender discrimination every day, in general, boys and girls are treated equally.

It is normal for a boy...

The statement was finished by 239 boys (N= 239) and 212 girls (N=212). A major theme in the responses of the boys was the violation of various norms (n=165, 69.0%), including *disturbing the class, missing classes, swearing, resisting teachers, running around, shouting, using physical violence, having various bad habits*. Forty-three respondents mentioned the use of loud voice (n=43, 18.0%), including 19 boys who thought it is normal for a boy to swear. Thirty male students (n=30, 12.6%) considered it normal for boys to fool around, and make stupid jokes. Breaking rules, doing forbidden things, being impolite were considered normal by 30 male students (n=30, 12.6%). Other things considered normal included leaving homework undone (n=12, 5.0%) and missing classes (n=9, 3.8%), having poor results in studying (n=8, 3.3%) (because *three is a good grade for a school boy*). Only 14 respondents (n=14, 5.9%) highlighted the positive sides of normality, such as *studying well, helping others, being polite, following the school's rules, being active and sportive*.

When summarising several themes, the typical description of 'normality' tends to include the following list: *does pranks; fools around; makes jokes about everything and everybody; does something that is forbidden; breaks the rules; gets into trouble; breaks the school's property; swears; shouts; talks in a loud voice; orders girls to keep silent; fights*.

It is worth noting that in describing the activities of the male gender, boys very often use the words *making stupid jokes, fooling around*. On the one hand, this is an assessment of one's own behaviour. On the other hand, this is an assessment of the school: the activities at school and the place itself seem not to be taken seriously, and being at school is turned into a carnival. Breaking the norm in a variety of ways has become for many a norm in itself, which enables to test one's superiority at school.

It is worth noting the view of a male student: *expresses his opinion, because it is not listened to when it comes from a girl*.

The girls (N=212) also describe that boys' normal behaviour include the breaking of norms, bad attitude towards studies, but they use varied vocabulary. Here are some of the things described as normal for boys:

does not focus; is restless in the class and disturbs others; walks out of the classroom and stays away for quite some time; does not understand the task given; does not work in the class; is sulky and talks very little in the class; argues with teachers; expresses his view when has not been asked to do so.

The considerably different choice of words by the girls should be noted here. Some expressions used by the examined girls remind us of typical stereotypical expressions for good behaviour of students as used by teachers. Surprisingly, a large number of the girls also describe good qualities of boys, because, after all, they describe normality.

Behaves politely; is friendly towards girls; talks to girls; studies well; is good-tempered and helpful; behaves like a student should; observes the moral norms, state laws and school rules; does not make fun of others; opens the door for girls; makes compliments to girls; asks a girl out; stands out for those weaker than himself or for girls.

It may be that young men do not wish to describe themselves like this. Or maybe that is the vision of what a normal young man should be like. While a number of

negative qualities are described, the internal wish for good qualities can be perceived. Why is it then that the destructive side takes dominance?

It is normal for a girl ...

Opinions about the normality of girls were expressed by 239 boys (N=239) and 236 girls (N=236). Both the boys (sometimes ironically) and the girls emphasise primarily conscientiousness, good marks, diligence, observance of school rules, studying well, being liked by teachers.

The boys' descriptions include the following: *acts like a blondie; behaves politely; behaves like a girl should behave; behaves like being a bit helpless; carries favours with the teachers; follows the school's rules; is like everybody else; is at the right place at the right time and studies; has good marks; crams.*

The girls consider as normal for girls the observation of the school's rules (n=84, 35.6%) and the words *polite, quiet, decent, diligent* appear often. Good grades and studying well were emphasised by 45 female respondents (n=45, 19.1%).

It is normal for girls to:

... study and be silent in lessons and work together; behave in a polite and decent manner; be perfect; manage everything; be caring and respectful towards others; learn better than her male classmates; be smart and get everything done; sit quietly and study all nights long.

The girls emphasise higher expectations towards themselves:

it is disapproving when a girl is lazy and disorganised, arrogant; she is expected to have straight 'A's because she's a girl after all; girls are watched carefully; she cannot hang around with different men.

The girls also mentioned the voice and talk of girls: talking too much, laughing in a loud voice, giggling, gossiping, talking on the phone, but also being silent.

A major theme for both genders was the appearance of girls, especially the use of makeup and the moodiness of girls. While girls wear makeup, *revealing clothes and clattering jewellery*, boys come to school in sweatpants. Thus, for girls, in general, school is a stage where they perform their appearances, while for boys it is a place taken in a very relaxed manner.

Although in general, positive aspects regarding the normality of girls are mentioned less often than the negative ones, several boys discussed also the positive qualities of girls:

is calm; is not arrogant; can communicate; talks to everybody; does good things; know how to be a friend; is modest, beautiful, polite and helpful; is respectable and intelligent, is modest and quiet.

A separate theme was asserting oneself:

resists the foolishness and the opinions of boys; imposes her views and behaves in an arrogant manner; expresses her opinion and stands for it; has a broad life outlook; she thinks she is equal to all other people in the school; tries to be different than others.

Discussion and Conclusions

Remarkable differences appear in the perceptions of being a boy or a girl at school. It is interesting that both genders share the views as to what is normal for a boy and for a girl. Both think that boys and girls have a different attitude towards school and the norms governing the life at school and different external expectations. The school in Estonia and the gender positions at school are similar to those described in international studies. However, the question remains how to make these differences visible, especially in the light of the gender equality discourse. It is important since these views influence the future of boys and girls, their position in the society, the responsibilities they take in the society. Girls are more oriented towards the norms that are based on the dominant discourse of what is suitable for girls. Studying well is one of these norms. The breaking of norms is more acceptable for boys, and sometimes it is even something boys are expected to do (studying well is associated with girls and femininity, and thus it is not something with which boys want to be associated). In general, there are lower expectations regarding the behaviour of boys. Such views of boys may lead to risk behaviour, make them value education less and thus drop out of school.

What do the differences tell us in the context of sustainable development? In the daily school practices, a strong *habitus* develops, both in attitudes and in behaviour. Male students, but also female students, do not see studying as a value for boys to strive for. Boys at school test their historical gender advantage – the right to freedom, to pleasures, broader boundaries. This serves as a good basis for taking such relaxed attitudes and experiences of masculinity to their later life. It seems that sometimes breaking the norms of the school is a norm in itself, which makes it hard to study for those male students who would like to study. Being authentic and having fun seem to be the privilege of boys, but this privilege is accompanied by the silent pressure to reassure one's masculinity by opposing to the feminine role of the student. The primarily female teachers in Estonian schools do not help boys to overcome this opposition, since the attitude to life of hegemonic masculinity (Kenway & Fitzclarence, 1997) is to ridicule everything associated with femininity.

The resistance to the school norms reflects also the dissatisfaction with the regime-like organisation of life at school. Since there are few opportunities to apply one's creative energy in a productive and motivating manner at school, the energy finds its way in *fooling around*. Fooling around and swearing can be interpreted as breaking the norms, but it can also be seen as destructive behaviour. This makes us worried about the future of young men's education, and it increases the probability of young men falling into risk groups in society.

The *habitus* of male students involves getting used to lower external expectations. In this way, it has become possible that routine duties related to keeping systems in function are mainly fulfilled by educated (underpaid) women, as argued by Huhta and Meriläinen (2008). The expectations for girls/women to be hard-working and conscientious are associated also with other meanings such as submission, adjustment, the abandonment of one's ambitions, hiding one's feelings, wanting to be liked (Huhta & Meriläinen, 2008). As can be seen in the views of the examined students, girls are trained for these roles at school.

Girls become visible through attitudes. Women are seen but not listened to (de Beauvoir, 1997). Girls earn a better attitude towards themselves through the attitudes

of other people (boys, teachers). It means that in self-actualisation, various borders are set to all kinds of freedoms. Different levels of freedom for boys and girls are accepted also by teachers. These attitudes are the reflection of the society's gender ideology, and they also serve to reinforce the ideology.

We claim that both young men who ridicule education and leave themselves without it, and young women who are obedient and follow the official norms are a major risk factor from the viewpoint of societal sustainability. Due to the gender stereotypes spread in the society, men become top managers and represent a variety of fields in public life. Women who, via education, have acquired the expert knowledge in the field, however, are subordinated to the orders of their managers and observe these exactly because of the education they have received.

What should be done? What can be done? Within the critical educational discourse and the feminist movement there has emerged *feminist pedagogy*. It comprises the ways of teaching and learning that rely on ethics, dialogue, interactivity and the societal perception. It involves experience-based knowledge, added self-consciousness, support for self-expression with the aim of making visible and deconstructing the hierarchical power relations and creating a learning environment which supports authentic equality (Saarinen, Ojala, & Palmu, 2014).

The recommendations for learning for ESD (Education for Sustainable Development) resonate with those of feminist pedagogy, e.g. learning to ask critical questions, learning to clarify one's values, learning to think systematically, learning to envision a more positive and sustainable future (cf. Tilbury, 2011).

Gender equality has often been discussed in the framework of power discourse. We suggest it should be addressed in the framework of sustainability as a factor that supports social coherence and balanced development. It is important to look behind what is considered normal and become aware of the assumptions and beliefs that underlie different norms for men and women, since these differences lead to imbalance and inequality.

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