**Att göra vänskap**

En kultursociologisk analys av högstadieselevers sociala relationer

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Akademisk avhandling för avläggande av filosofi doktorsexamen i barn- och ungdomsvetenskap vid Stockholms universitet som offentligen kommer att försvaras fredagen den 29 maj 2020 kl. 10.00 i Nordensiöldsalen, Geovetenskapens hus, Svante Arrhenius väg 12.

**Abstract**

*Performing friendship. A cultural sociological analysis of social relations among upper secondary school students*

This doctoral thesis explores how secondary school students perform friendship in a Swedish school. The thesis aims to describe and explain how cultural elements, such as an audience of peers, stages for friendship performances (e.g. classrooms), time, cultural norms and ideals, interact in the production of meaning that are part in the drawing of social boundaries. Processes that make certain performances of friendship possible and others challenging. Video recordings, interviews and field observations are utilised in order to analyse how friendships are performed in an educational setting where the cultural ideal is to have (many) friends. The thesis applies a cultural sociological perspective—spanning from Alexander’s theory on cultural pragmatics, Lamont and Molnár’s work on boundaries in social life, to Goffman’s micro analysis of social interaction. The results illuminate the importance of understanding friendship as cultural performances and that these performances often require hard work. Such performances are affected by the way students ascribe meaning to the cultural elements. This means that the outcome of a performance is not decided beforehand but is dependent on when, where, with and in front of whom, friendship is performed. The performances of friendship are a process, and therefore it possible to study which cultural elements that come into play, how they affect and are affected by the performances and how dimensions of social power, for instance, inclusion and exclusion processes, are part of the performances of friendship. The thesis identifies two main empirical results. *Firstly*, it shows how students’ performances of friendship are dependent on the school as a physical, organisational and cultural stage. The cultural ideal is that friends should be freely chosen. However, school is not voluntary, which creates a duality that challenges the ideal of voluntary friendship. Students spend the majority of their time together on the same stage where they form memories of friendship and expectations of future relational work, such as how an authentic friendship ought to be performed. Time and stage are thus cultural elements that intertwine in the deciding where social boundaries for friendship are drawn, namely, which students that can be friends. The social boundaries can also be strengthened by referring to a collective background representation containing e.g. gender norms and ideals for friendship. Ideals that are reproduced as far back as Aristotle. Yet, since cultural elements and their ascribed meaning also are apt for change, unexpected friendship performances become possible. *Secondly*, cultural ideals of friendship, such as loyalty and generosity, work to draw boundaries within and around friendship constellations, working in inclusionary and exclusionary ways. There is a strong cultural force in the relational dynamics of the doings of friendship. The self-worth and cultural value of being part of a specific “us” comes through in the students’ relational work. Further, when an established way of performing friendship is threatened due to minor changes, such as new unexpected friendships, the students use disloyalty and stinginess. Thus, they use the opposite of the friendship ideals to draw boundaries. In this sense, the thesis illuminates how a constructed cultural ideal can have real consequences and influence the doing of friendship, through both inclusion and exclusion.

**Keywords:** Upper secondary school students, doing friendship, peer relations, children's perspectives, childhood, inclusion/exclusion, social power, popularity, cultural sociology, meaning making, social boundaries, cultural elements, video ethnography.

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