

Rapporter från Forskningsgruppen för utbildnings- och kultursociologi

Sociology of Education and Culture Research Reports

Nr 58

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Literary taste. An empirical study of literature scholars,  
secondary school teachers and students

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Sept. 2019



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SEC Forskningsgruppen för utbildnings- och kultursociologi, Uppsala universitet  
(Sociology of Education and Culture)

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Redaktörer för serien Rapporter från Forskningsgruppen för utbildnings- och kultursociologi /SEC Research Reports:  
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## ABSTRACT

This paper explores differences within reading practices and literary taste by studying unique survey data from a sample of literary scholars, upper secondary school teachers and upper secondary school students in Sweden. Responses to questions about familiarity with and interest in authors, literary genre preferences, statements on reading expectations and statements on reading preferences are analyzed using Multiple Correspondence Analysis. The analysis reveals distinct taste profiles that give empirical proof to theoretical analyses of differences in literary taste. The taste profiles can be clearly associated with the institutional role the respondents hold. Interestingly, also gender can be associated with these taste profiles, but gender effects become only notable when the power of specific cultural capital becomes weaker.

## KEY TERMS

Literary taste; reading; literature; sociology of literature; Multiple Correspondence Analysis (MCA); literary education; literature and gender

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Rapporter från Forskningsgruppen för utbildnings- och kultursociologi / SEC Research Reports, 58

Sept. 2019

ISSN 1103-1115

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# INTRODUCTION

In their review article over sociological research on reading Griswold et al. (2005) observe that “reading [is returning] to its former social base: a self-perpetuating minority that we shall call the reading class” and pose the “open question (...) whether the reading class will be just another taste culture pursuing an increasingly arcane hobby”. (Griswold et al, 2005: 138) One could downplay this as yet another manifestation of the rhetorical trope “literature in crisis” so popular in the debating culture of the humanities or examine these claims empirically and qualify them by pointing out that heavy readers indeed comprise a smaller group with a certain dominant social profile, but without supporting a claim that societies with advanced reading cultures are characterized by a diminishing minority of committed enthusiasts that constitute a distinct reading class. (Southerton et al., 2012)

However, this article is not concerned with the existing or imagined reading class in general, but rather with a specific population of readers, who, within the institutional conditions that define them, naturally engage in reading – not so much reading in its broader sense, but specifically reading of fiction, literature in its more restricted sense. In particular, the article is concerned with reading within an educational setting; more precisely, it studies a triple perspective on literary reading and examines how Swedish adolescents who come into contact with literature as secondary school students relate to reading, as well as how their L1-teachers (of Swedish) and the teachers of the teachers do, i.e. literary scholars employed at departments of literary studies within higher education.

For several reasons it is of interest to study these particular populations. Literature, and especially its canonized expressions, may have lost the admitted position it had within the traditional secondary educational systems, the humanities, offering a kind of common *Bildung* to the elites throughout Europe, it no doubt still plays an important part in the curricula of (native-)language education, even within the democratized systems of secondary education (see e.g. Sapiro, 2007 and Sawyer & Van de Ven, 2006). Within these democratized systems the approach to literary education has undoubtedly changed, and has become more student-centered and less dependent on the contribution of literary experts, even if this evolution is gradual and far from unambiguous (see Verboord & Van Rees, 2008 and 2009). As Witte and Sâmihăian (2013) show in their analysis of school curricula throughout Europe the approach to literature is quite diverse indeed, and within this diversity the cultural paradigm continues to be valid. Also Daenekindt and Roose (2015) have recently demonstrated that the educational system still functions as a conduit for high culture. (Secondary) school, thus, has not become just a manufactory of literacy, but it persists in socializing students, albeit in different degrees, into literary culture.

Unlike what is more common when it comes to the study of literature in an educational context, I will not engage here in analyses of curricula or actual teaching practices, but instead focus on the mostly tacit and unthematized points of departure of both the suppliers and receivers of literary education, viz. their tastes for literature.

The first research question this paper tries to answer, then, is whether empirical evidence can be found for the existence of systematic and interpretable differences in literary taste and if so, to what extent these differences are associated with different institutional roles; in other words whether, and if so, how students, teachers and scholars systematically differ in what they expect of and appreciate in literature.

Inspired by literature on the link between cultural capital and gender I will try to answer a second research question, related to the first one: are these possible differences also gendered, and if so, to what extent and in which way?

The answers to these questions are based on survey data that allow for a detailed and fine-grained mapping of literary taste. In order to respect the multilayeredness of these data I choose a relational data-analysis technique that is extraordinarily appropriate to analyze both individuals and variables, i.e. Multiple Correspondence Analysis (MCA).

Data and method are presented in more detail further on. First I discuss some theoretical perspectives, examining literature on varieties of reading related to my first research question on the one hand and on culture and gender related to my second research question on the other hand. The empirical analysis, then, follows a double strategy: under Results I present the mapping of literary taste based on an MCA of the survey data, under Discussion I introduce institutional roles and gender as supplementary variables in order to answer my research questions.

## THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

### *Varieties of reading*

Obviously, studying students, teachers and scholars together is studying heterogeneity. Besides clearly different institutional roles – students as receivers of the expertise offered by teachers, whose expertise partly depends on the expertise offered by scholars – age is an evident factor of difference, setting apart students on the one hand and teachers and scholars on the other. With difference in age, distinguishing adolescents and adults, difference in experience comes along, of course also with regard to literature – and definitely also with regard to the type of literature, however broad, inclusive or student-oriented it is defined, that preferably is discussed within educational contexts. It comes as no surprise, then, “that mismatches between teachers’ and students’ literary repertoires are common in upper secondary school literary teaching”. (Olin-Scheller, 2006: 4). But also teachers and scholars, though both, unlike students, professionals of literature, deal with literature under different conditions. Literature, though still a substantial part of the curriculum, is not the only (professional) concern for teachers of Swedish, while for scholars it is their exclusive concern so to speak. Moreover, teachers do still engage with literature in their own training pathway as L1-teacher, though clearly not to the same extent and in the same way as literary scholars do in their preparatory studies. In his introduction to a special issue of the *Tidskrift för litteraturvetenskap* on literary studies and didactics Öhman (2010) points at the tension between literary scholars and teachers, the ones loathing teachers for reducing the complexity that scholars – as if by nature – associate with literature, the others questioning the relevance of scholarly practice for their own teaching reality.

In order to find a meaningful perspective to study this heterogeneous group that nonetheless in a way is institutionally unified around the same object – literature – I will concentrate on the reading preferences and literary tastes students, teachers and scholars exhibit. In reflections on reading practices in educational contexts often a distinction is made between scholarly and non-scholarly reading practices of fiction. Guillory (2006) distinguishes academic reading as critical reflection from lay reading as pleasure reading governed by its own conventions of interpretation. Felski, discussing different ways of critical academic reading practices, argues that despite their differences these are all “propelled by a deep-seated discomfort with everyday language and thought, a conviction that commonsense beliefs exist only to be unmasked and found wanting”, a ‘discomfort’ that is conspicuous with its absence in ‘ordinary’ reading practices. (Felski, 2008: 13) In “Uncritical Reading” Warner starts his reflections ironically by observing that his students “read in all the ways they aren’t supposed to” – according to the academic doxa of critical reading that discards “rival modes of reading (...) as pretheoretically uncritical”. (Warner, 2004: 13-16). There seems thus to be agreement on the existence of a scholarly reading practice that focuses on complexity, distance and critical reflection, a taste for reading that distinguishes itself from other, so called ‘worldly’, ‘naïve’, ‘direct’ forms of reading and consuming literature.

Also Mauger and Poliak (1998, 2010) discuss this distinction and examine in detail the manifestations of and conditions for these differing reading practices. Inspired by

Bourdieu and his concept of the aesthetic disposition Mauger and Poliak distinguish between aesthetic reading on the one hand and pleasure reading, didactic reading and salutary reading on the other hand. As such these reading practices should be regarded as *idealtypisch*, models, reading practices that rather than separately in its pure form manifest oneself as hybrids, with certain emphases and biases. In the following I will concentrate on aesthetic reading and pleasure reading, as these two reading practices are mostly associated with the consumption of fiction, the focus of this paper.

Aesthetic reading, according to Mauger and Poliak, can be equated with reading for the sake of reading, *lecture lettrée* that treats literature as an object of contemplation and analysis and discards any practical intention or the satisfaction of external interests. Whether in its most orthodox manifestation as an encounter with “great books” and “great souls” or in a more contemporary tapping focusing on formal analysis of the text conceived of as a linguistic and semiotic machinery, central to the practice of aesthetic reading is the pleasure of erudition, distantiation, decipherment. Mauger and Poliak stress the rarity of this practice, that is closely associated with an academic context, and that considers exegesis, commentary and interpretation as the goal of reading. (Mauger & Poliak, 1998: 23-24)

In contrast to the practice of aesthetic reading, withdrawn within itself, valuing the pure pleasure of form (Barthes’ *le plaisir du texte*) and reflexive distance, pleasure reading is a practice that is not in the service of reading itself, but in the satisfaction of an "external" goal, that of escape, recreation, *divertissement*. The aim of this reading is not analysis, but evasion into another world, the success of which depends on how frictionless the encounter between text and reader goes. Central to this reading practice is identification and immediate, spontaneous understanding. The reason why this reading practice favors texts that offer an easy reading, attaches importance to storyline and plot, prefers realism as a condition for belief in the world of the text, reduces “the things of art to the things of life, putting ‘form’ between brackets for the benefit of ‘human content’, barbarism *par excellence* from the perspective of pure aesthetics”. (Mauger & Poliak, 1998: 6, *my transl.*)

## *Gender*

As Molly (2002) points out, within an educational context Swedish can be considered to be a ‘female subject’ with its emphasis on reading and writing, traditionally regarded as female activities. More in general, participation and interest into culture, and especially so-called highbrow culture, to which literature, sometimes somewhat imprecisely is counted (see Purhonen et al., 2010 for a more nuanced analysis of the position of literature within the strata of culture), has been associated with gender in numerous sociological studies. An example of these studies within the Swedish context is Bihagen and Katz-Gerro (2000), who find considerable gender differences in culture consumption, women preferring what in the study is defined as highbrow leisure activities, men, on the contrary, indulging in the lowbrow.

Also with regard to the consumption of literature gender differences have been found time and again. Tepper discusses at length what he calls the fiction reading gap between men and women, observing, however, that this gap is almost non-existent if one looks at the reading activities of men “who cross traditional gender boundaries in terms of their leisure activities”. (Tepper, 2000: 272) Gender differences in literary consumption are also found in more recent studies. Studying cohort data on reading preferences, both of fiction and non-fiction, Atkinson (2006) finds that reading practices are structured by



volume and structure of capital, as well as by gender, women overall being more avid readers and men and women having clearly differing genre preferences. Atkinson concludes that “gender is fundamental in differentiating preferred genres along binaries of affect/instrumental reason, inner/outer and private/public” but he stresses also that there is a “tendency for the most clearly gendered genres (...) to decrease in popularity with a rising capital volume and, particularly, possession of cultural capital”. (Atkinson, 2016: 261).

Of interest for the specific population discussed here is also the study of Lagaert et al. (2017), examining to what extent female and male adolescents show interest in a wide range of cultural activities. In line with other research they find that young women have a stronger interest in highbrow cultural activities, including reading, than young men have. An explanation for these differences is found in the uneven effects gender typicality and gender pressure have on girls and boys. Young women who strongly identify as a typical female and who feel high pressure to conform to stereotypes of femininity show only slightly more interest for highbrow culture than young women who do neither, while young men who identify as a typical male and experience high conformity pressure lack far more highbrow interest than young men who do not identify as typical men, nor do have the urge to do so.

Thus, the relation between gender and culture appears to be complex. On the one hand, measured in several ways and in differing populations a marked disparity is noted between men and women with regard to cultural preferences and degree of participation. On the other hand, these differences are not stable and fractional or nearly non-existing in domains of cultural consumption attracted by high volumes of cultural capital, the possession of which seems to be a condition sine qua non in order to be possibly experienced as a meaningful consumption at all.

## DATA AND METHOD

Data for this study come from a web survey conducted among a purposive sample of literary scholars, teachers of Swedish and upper secondary school students in Sweden in 2008. All scholars listed on the websites of the departments of literature all over the country were contacted. Of the 301 active scholars 113 – or 37,5% of the population – responded to the survey. Due to pragmatic reasons also teachers and upper secondary school students were contacted by e-mail. As there obviously was no direct access to the e-mail addresses of teachers and students, teachers and students were approached indirectly through the head of the school. A sample of 178 upper secondary schools, spread over the country, was contacted. This resulted in a final response of 279 students and 92 Swedish teachers. Responses all come from upper secondary programs preparing for higher education, which still have a specific focus on literature, unlike vocational programs. (See Graeske, 2015)

For the analysis at hand the following questions from the self-administered questionnaire were used: familiarity with and interest in authors, literary genre preferences, statements on reading expectations and statements on reading preferences.

Respondents were asked to indicate whether or not they were familiar with a number of authors, and if they were, to indicate how interesting or uninteresting they found a particular author on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from not at all interesting to very interesting. Answers were coded in four categories: unknown, not interesting, neutral and interesting. Authors included in the analysis are Carl Jonas Love Almqvist, Erik Beckman, Marianne Fredriksson, Jonas Gardell, Jonas Khemiri, Stieg Larsson, Liza Marklund and Sara Stridsberg. These authors are further presented in the section Results.

On a five-point Likert scale, ranging from not at all interesting to very interesting, respondents had to indicate how (un)interesting they found a number of both fiction and non-fiction genres. Answers were coded in three categories: not interesting, neutral and interesting. Genres included in the analysis are (auto)biographies of media celebrities, crime fiction, spy novel, fantasy, horror, literary novels after 1920, literary novels before 1920 (date chosen with respect to the history of Swedish literature), philosophy, poetry, romance and science fiction.

Respondents had to indicate on a five-point Likert scale to which degree they agreed or not with a number of statements about different aspects that one might find important in reading literature. Answers were coded in three categories: not agree, neutral and agree. Statements were formulated as “For me it is very important that ...” or “The most important literature can offer me is ...”. The following reading expectations were used in the analysis: it is important that a novel’s plot is clear; that a novel is suspenseful; that a novel first and foremost affects me; that a novel discusses social problems; that a novel discusses ethical questions; that a novel is truthful, realistic; how a novel is written is much more important than what it is about; the most important literature can offer is entertainment, intellectual challenge or aesthetic experience.

Finally, the respondents had to indicate on a five-point Likert scale to which degree they agreed or not with a number of statements on different types of literature one likes to read. Answers were coded in three categories: not agree, neutral and agree. Statements were formulated as “I am very fond of...”. The following reading preferences were used in

the analysis: literature that is philosophically profound; literature that is psychologically profound; novels characterized by a complex narrative structure; literature that is socially committed and that takes position; literature that focuses on human experience and existential problems; literature that challenges conventions; literature that experiments with form.

Appendix A presents an overview of the absolute and relative frequencies for all variables.

To analyze these data Multiple Correspondence Analysis is applied. This method discloses underlying structures in categorical data by representing both individuals and categories of the variables – in MCA terminology often referred to as *modalities* – as points in a multidimensional Euclidean space. (See Le Roux and Rouanet 2004, 2010) The distances between points express differences between respondents and modalities – the more respondents differ in the answers they have given to the survey questions, the farther away from each other they are projected (and correspondingly, the same applies to the modalities).

MCA, thus, represents respondents and modalities as a cloud of points in a multidimensional space. The space consists of several principal axes that determine the position of a point in the cloud, the first axis providing the best one-dimensional representation of the cloud, the first and second axes providing the best representation of the cloud in a plane, etc. In order to understand the structure in the data one interprets the axes in the cloud of categories, as Benzécri describes: “Interpreting an axis amounts to finding out what is similar, on the one hand, between all the elements figuring on the right or the origin and, on the other hand, between all that is written on the left; and expressing with conciseness and precision the contrast (or opposition) between the two extremes.” (Quoted in Le Roux & Rouanet, 2010: 10).

In order to deal with missing data (and infrequent modalities) I use Specific Multiple Correspondence Analysis, treating thus these modalities as passive categories, which do not determine the distances between individuals. (See Le Roux & Rouanet, 2010: 61-64).

## RESULTS

In discussing the results I focus on the first two axes, which account for 81,8 % of the cumulated modified rates. (See Le Roux & Rouanet, 2010: 39 for comments on modified rates) As appears from table 1 the first axis clearly stands out, while axes 2 adds to our understanding of the structure in the data.

A first examination of the contribution of the headings to the variance of the first two axes shows that all four headings contribute fairly equally to axis 1. Contributions to axis 2 are highest for Reading expectations (41%), followed by Authors (25%).

Table 1: Variances and contributions of the headings (%) to axes 1-2				
Variances: axes 1-2				
Axes	Variances	% of explained variance	Modified rates	Cumulated modified rates
1	0,271	12,2	70,4%	
2	0,120	5,4	11,4%	81,8%
contributions of the headings (%) to axes 1-2				
HEADING	AXIS 1	AXIS 2		
Authors	24,9	24,7		
Genres	21,6	15,8		
Reading expectations	23,8	40,7		
Reading preferences	29,7	18,8		

To interpret each axis, I select all modalities that contribute to the axis more than average ( $100/118 = 0.85$ )

Table 2 shows that the first axis is well balanced. 22 and 23 modalities contribute more than average on each side of the axis respectively, together these modalities account for 86,4% of the variance of axis 1.

Table 2: The space of literary preferences. Modalities contributing over average to axis 1

Axis 1 modalities with contribution above average				
Heading	Left		Right	
Authors	Almqvist-pos	3,0	Almqvist-unknown	2,1
	Stridsberg-pos	1,6	Stridsberg-unknown	1,5
	Stridsberg-neu	1,1		
	Frederiksson-neg	1,4	Frederiksson-unknown	2,4
	Beckman-pos	1,8	Beckman-unknown	1,2
	Khemiri-pos	1,1	Khemiri-unknown	1,7
			Stieg Larsson-unknown	1,4
Genre	novel before 1920-pos	2,9	novel before 1920-neg	3,2
	philos-pos	2,4	philos-neg	1,9
	poetry-pos	2,1	poetry-neg	2,1
	novel after 1920-pos	1,8	novel after 1920-neg	2,4
Reading expectations	intell-Agree	2,2	intell-NAgree	2,1
	suspense-NAgree	2,1	suspense-Agree	1,9
	aesth-Agree	1,8	aesth-NAgree	1,5
	form-Agree	1,4	form-NAgree	1,3
	plot-NAgree	1,5	plot-Agree	1,2
			easy-Agree	1,1
Reading preferences	provoke-Agree	2,5	provoke-NAgree	2,7
	philosophical-Agree	2,3	philosophical-NAgree	2,4
	exist-Agree	2,1	exist-NAgree	2,5
	complex-Agree	2,3	complex-NAgree	2,1
	exper-Agree	2,3	exper-NAgree	2,1
	psychol-Agree	1,3	psychol-NAgree	2,1
	engag-Agree	1,1	engag-NAgree	1,5
sum		42,3		44,2

Examining table 2 and the modalities that contribute most to the opposition along the first axis allows for a coherent interpretation of the distinctions expressed in all headings, a distinction that can be summarized as one between two mutually exclusive attitudes towards literature as a serious art form (cf figure 1).

As far as reading preferences and reading expectations are concerned an opposition is apparent between an affirmation and a negation of an attitude towards reading that Mauger and Poliak (1998, 2010) describe as *lire pour lire*, i.e. the aesthetic reading of the erudite *lettré* to whom exegesis and hermeneutics are the ultimate goal of reading.

On the left-hand side of the axis modalities cluster that indicate support for such a reading attitude. Here one agrees with the statement that the most important literature can offer is aesthetic experience, an experience that is linked to an appreciation of complexity and experiment. Philosophical and psychological profundity is valued in literature, literature should be intellectually challenging as well. That literature is associated with seriousness is corroborated by the expressed approval of literature that focuses on human experience and existential problems or of literature that is socially committed and that takes position. Aesthetic experience is also associated with form. How a novel is written is deemed to be far more important than what it is about, novels are favored that are characterized by a complex narrative structure and formal experiments in literature are supported. Unsurprisingly, at this side of the axis disagreement is expressed with

statements that point at other ways of consuming literature. That a novel should have a clear-cut plot and should be suspenseful are all reading expectations that are refuted.

On the opposite site of the first axis modalities cluster that express that the ultimate goal of reading is not the search for intellectual satisfaction through the appropriation of complexity. Rather, it is distraction and divertissement through reading for the plot and experiencing suspense. Hence, as Mauger and Poliak argue in their comment on *lire pour s'évader*, one expects a novel to be very readable, while experiment and complexity, both formal and with respect to content, are not searched for at all. Here also disagreement is indicated with statements that all in one way or another refer to the concept of complexity as constitutive for valuing literature.

In a similar way one can understand the opposition along the first axis with regard to (dis)like of certain authors. This opposition is one between a lack of familiarity with the mentioned authors and a valuation of these authors, albeit positive or negative. On the right-hand side of the axis modalities gather that indicate unfamiliarity with the authors presented. This holds both for a highly canonized author as Almqvist and an author who belongs to the avant-garde and artistic innovation of literature in the 1960s (Erik Beckman), as well as for, by the time of the survey, young voices on their way to the consecrated positions they have today (Jonas Hassen Khemiri and Sara Stridsberg). But unfamiliarity is also indicated with a bestseller author of what could be called mainstream fiction (Marianne Fredriksson), or even with a by the time of the survey upcoming bestseller author of crime fiction (Stieg Larsson, author of Sweden's most sold hardcover title both in 2006 and 2007, see Berglund, 2012: 80).

On the left-hand side of the axis modalities cluster that articulate a clear opinion on these authors. Here in particular a marked interest is visible for authors who are all, although to different degrees, of importance to Swedish literary history, as it takes form in academic research, literary history books and text books. Notable is the interest for Almqvist, but also for authors who appear to be unfamiliar to nearly two third of the respondents. This is the case with Erik Beckman, as a 1960's debutant literary active long enough to have had the opportunity of passing through the threefold selection process described by van Rees, even if he by the time of the survey no longer was contributing with new work to the literary topicality as he had deceased in 1995. It is also the case with Sara Stridsberg, by the time of the survey a newcomer in the literary field, but notorious within avant-garde cultural circles as member of the editorial board of the feminist magazine *Bang* and translator of Valerie Solanas' *Scum Manifesto*, published by the small publishing house Modernista and provided with a sharp preface by Stridsberg, author as well of a debut novel in 2004 that did not pass unnoticed by the critics and that was followed by a second novel two years later that gained huge critical esteem and for which Stridsberg received the prestigious Nordic Council Literature prize. By the time of the survey Stridsberg was still very much a young promising author, the interest in her expressed at this pole of the first axis can thus easily be seen as an early recognition of the author's importance, an importance that was fully recognized later when Stridsberg was elected into the Swedish Academy in May 2016, one of the highest possible forms of consecration a Swedish author can gain. At this side of the pole, however, not only positive interest is expressed, but also disapproval. Strikingly, but obviously in line with the approval of complexity discussed above, an author like Marianne Fredriksson, who is associated with emotional straightforwardness and lack of sophistication, is disliked here.

Finally, the distinction between an acknowledgment and a rejection or misrecognition of literature as a serious art form is also reflected in opposing attitudes with regard to genres. It comes as no surprise that the most distinctive opposition in this respect is one between an expressed interest and a ditto lack of interest for the pre-modern literary novel and for philosophy, a non-fiction genre easily associated with the abstract, the

difficult, the complex. The opposition takes also form in an interest or disinterest for two other genres that are an obvious part of well-established *artistic* literary forms, i.e. poetry and the modern literary novel.

Figure 1 offers a visual summary of the most salient distinctions along the first axis.

Figure 1: The space of literary preferences. Cloud of categories in plane1&2. Categories contributing over average to axis 1

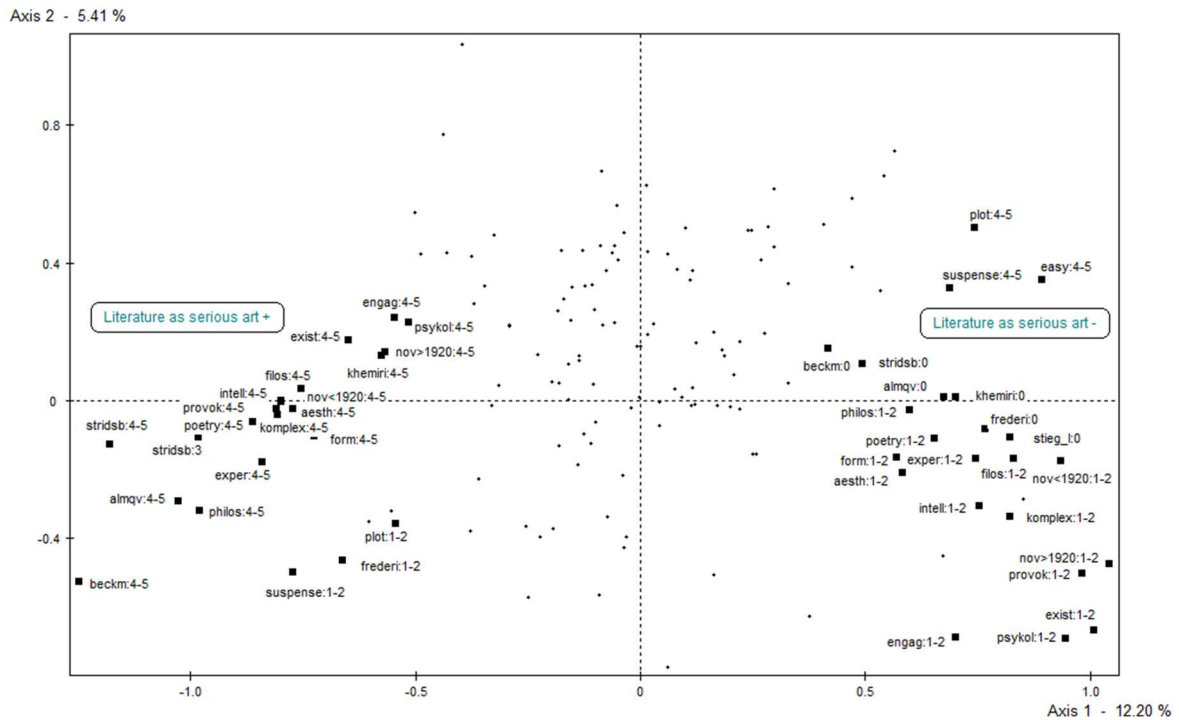


Table 3 shows that also the second axis is fairly balanced. 79,2% of the variance of axis 2 is accounted for by the modalities that contribute more than average, 18 modalities are oriented towards the lower half of the axis, 25 to the upper half, while in total both sides contribute equally to the variance.

Table 3: The space of literary preferences. Modalities contributing over average to axis 2

Axis 2 modalities with contribution above average				
Heading	Lower		Upper	
Authors	Gardell-neg	2,8	Gardell-pos	2,4
	Stieg Larsson-neg	2,4	Stieg Larsson-pos	2,5
	Marklund-neg	1,8	Marklund-pos	2,3
			Marklund-neu	1,1
	Frederiksson-neg	1,6	Frederiksson-pos	3,1
Genres	crime-neg	1,1	crime-pos	1,5
	romance-neg	2,0	romance-pos	1,4
			bio_med-pos	1,2
			philosophy-neu	1,0
	novel after 1920-neg	1,1		
Reading expectations	social-NAgree	3,1	social-Agree	2,1
			social-neu	1,9
	moral-NAgree	3,7	moral-Agree	1,8
			moral-neu	1,2
	emo-NAgree	3,3	emo-Agree	2,2
	real-NAgree	1,8	real-Agree	2,0
			real-neu	0,9
	relax-NAgree	1,9	relax-Agree	1,6
	suspense-NAgree	1,9	suspense-Agree	0,9
	plot-NAgree	1,5	plot-Agree	1,2
		intell-neu	1,1	
		aesth-neu	1,0	
Reading preferences	engag-NAgree	3,2	engag-neu	1,1
	provoke-NAgree	1,6	provoke-neu	1,6
	psychol-NAgree	2,5		
	exist-NAgree	2,4		
			exper-neu	1,3
		komplex-neu	1,2	
sum		39,7		39,5

The opposition along the second axis is most explicitly articulated by the headings Reading Expectations and Authors (see table 1). This opposition can be summarized as a distinction between approval and rejection of reading as worldly interest and divertissement, an interpretation that is corroborated by the modalities under the headings Genre and Reading Preferences. (cf figure 2)

The opposition along the first axis between different attitudes towards literature as a serious art form could in a way also be understood as one distinguishing readers from non-readers, setting apart those who *überhaupt* are acquainted with literature from those who are not (yet). The opposition along the second axis, then, could be interpreted as one especially distinguishing *types of reading/readers*, marking out modalities in support of what could be characterized as a *mainstream* reading attitude on the one hand and modalities that reject such an attitude on the other hand.



On the upper side of axis 2 a number of modalities with regard to Reading Expectations cluster that express an affirmation of what both Felski (2008) and Mauger and Poliak (1998, 2010) call “ordinary reading”, a reading, thus, that searches for an immediate, non-reflexive understanding, assuming that the world of the text and the world of the reader share a common sense. Hence here one agrees with the statement that it is very important that a novel is true to life. Great importance is also attached to the fact that a novel deals with social problems as well as discusses ethical questions – collective or individual aspects thus that can be related to one’s own world. Similarly, here one finds it very important to be affected by a novel, yet another way of linking the world of fiction to the real world. Ordinary reading is generally associated with entertainment and it comes as no surprise that on this side of the second axis the importance of suspense is emphasized and that *divertissement* is seen as the most important outcome of reading, while the importance of intellectual challenge or aesthetic experience – goals *par excellence* for adherents of the *lire-pour-lire* praxis – is regarded neutrally here.

On the lower side of axis 2 modalities cluster that all express a negative appreciation of features that are characteristic for ordinary reading. Here one does not find it important that novels discuss social or ethical problems, to be emotionally affected by a novel is not deemed to be important. The importance of realism and of suspense are denied, and neither a clear-cut plot is regarded to be essential for a successful reading experience, while on the upper side of the axis this feature is said to be of great importance, a well-written, clear plot being a prerequisite for a reading experience without resistance, thus offering an opportunity to *divertissement*.

The contribution to axis 2 of modalities under the heading Reading Preferences is as such rather small (see table 1), but the opposition within this heading may well be interpreted as one that is line with differences in reading expectations discussed above. On the upper side of the axis modalities cluster that express a neutral attitude towards preferences associated with aesthetic reading, e.g. preference for literature that experiments with form or that builds on a complex narrative structure. On the lower side of the axis modalities are plotted that express a negative attitude towards preferences for literature that entices to link the world of fiction to one’s own life, e.g. disagreement with statements that praise literature for its psychological profundity or social engagement.

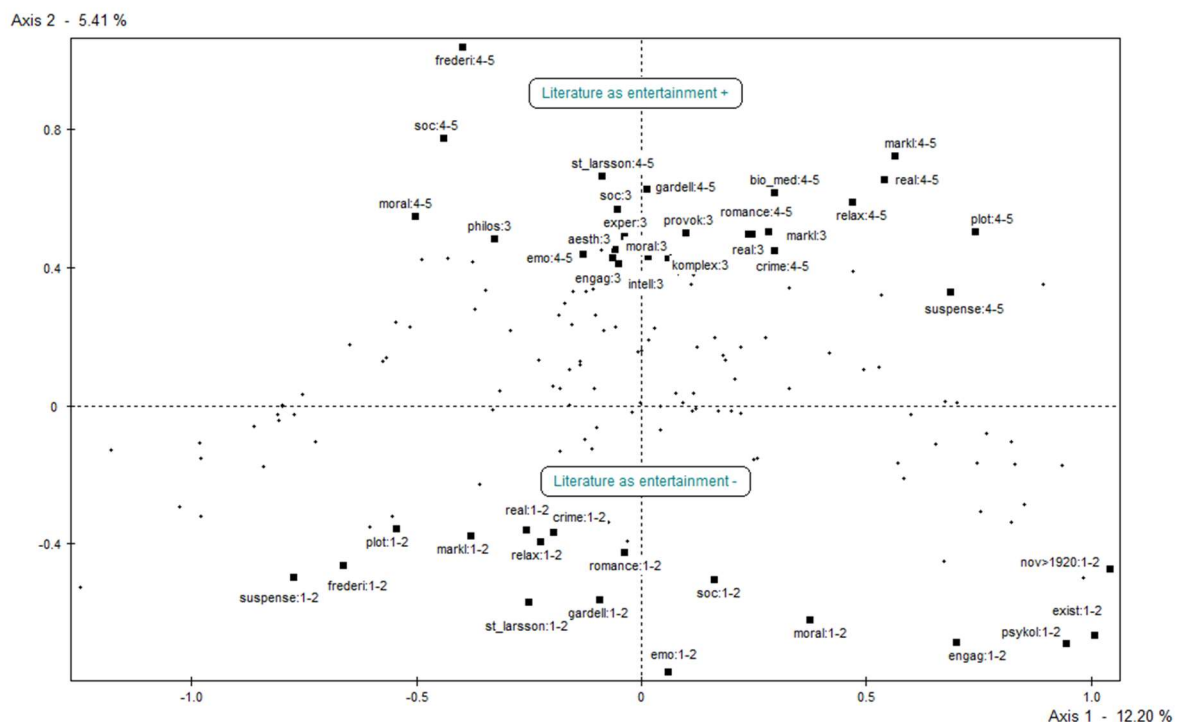
The distinction in reading expectations that takes shape along the second axis is also mirrored in the opposition with regard to author preferences. On the upper side of the axis interest is expressed in authors like Jonas Gardell and Marianne Fredriksson, while they are categorized as uninteresting on the lower side of axis 2. Gardell is a well-known personality in Sweden, as TV celebrity and stand-up comedian, but also as best-seller author, of screenplays, stage plays and novels, in which he avails himself of “quite glaring emotional effects, taking the little man’s perspective”. (Olsson & Algulin, 2013: 561; *my transl.*) Also Fredriksson is a bestselling author, reaching an audience even outside Sweden, arousing interest with her epic novels in which she discusses fundamental existential questions within recognizable settings. (Olsson & Algulin, 2013: 562). Authors, thus, who produce a kind of literature that is liable to satisfy reading needs associated with recognition and emotional experience. In the same way, the interest respectively disinterest for crime-fiction authors Stieg Larsson and Liza Marklund – and thus for reading offering entertainment through suspense – can be understood.

Finally, the distribution of modalities under the heading Genre corroborates my interpretation of the distinction along the second axis. On the upper side of the axis an interest is expressed for genres that might be said to be prototypical for reading expectations highly associated with an ordinary reading attitude, i.e. reading offering a moment of escape, of relaxation, of recognition and emotional immersion, reading experiences that genres as crime fiction and romance precisely are meant to offer.

Unsurprisingly, these genres are categorized as uninteresting on the lower side of the second axis. Moreover, the marked mainstream preferences revealed on the upper half of the second axis are also expressed in the interest shown in non-fiction genres. Here, philosophy, a genre that obviously is linked with difficult literature, with reading as contemplation, is judged neutrally, while an outspoken commercial genre – the biography of celebrities – is labeled as interesting.

Figure 2 offers a visual summary of the most salient distinctions along the second axis.

Figure 2: The space of literary preferences. Cloud of categories in plane1&2. Categories contributing over average to axis 2



## DISCUSSION

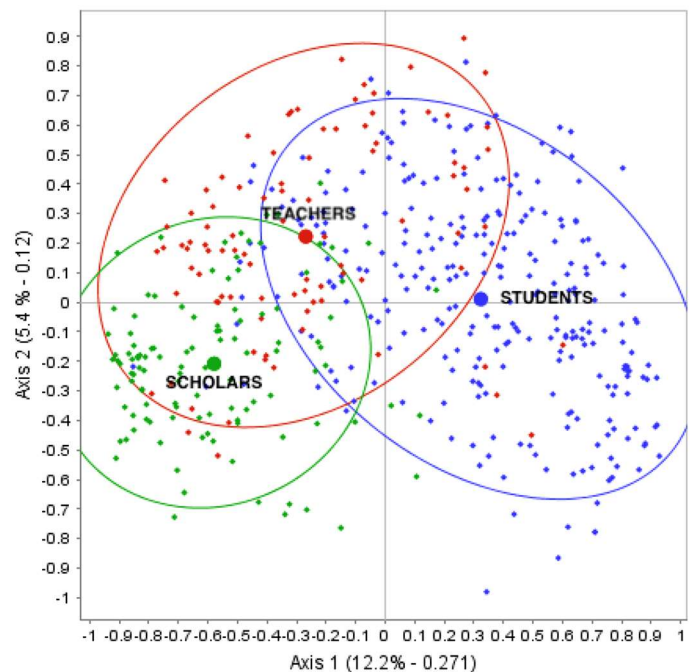
As the analysis above has shown empirical evidence is amply found for the assumption of systematic differences in matters of literary taste. Analyzing the answers to questions on several aspects of literature the MCA has revealed differences that can be related to more or less coherent and mutually exclusive taste patterns. The first and foremost distinction is one setting apart those who acknowledge the importance of literature from those who do not share this belief. Along the first axis familiarity with literature is opposed to ignorance, while also a predilection for seriousness and complexity contrasts with a preference for lightness and straightforwardness.

The second axis distinguishes among the respondents according to taste as well. The opposition along this axis can be summarized as an approval of versus an aversion to what can be called ordinary reading expectations, endorsing or not views on reading as *divertissement* and/or direct response to one's own world, a distinction that is also manifested in the liking or disliking of specific authors and genres prone to such a way of reading.

To what extent, then, are these differences associated with the respondents' institutional belonging? Do students, teachers and scholars differ systematically in matters of literary taste? To answer this question the institutional belonging of the respondents is introduced in the MCA as a supplementary variable, thus not contributing to the construction of the space. (See Le Roux & Rouanet, 2010: 58-60.) To interpret the supplementary modalities I use the test-value, a value that expresses the distance between the position of the modality and the origin on a given axis. The farther away from the origin on a given axis a modality is positioned, the more interesting it is along that axis. Following Lebart et al. a modality occupies a 'significant' position on an axis when the test-value is greater than 2. (See Lebart et al., 2000: 123-25) Table 4 presents an overview of the test-values of variable institutional belonging for the first two axes, with values greater than 2 in bold. Figure 3 represents the concentration ellipses of the subclouds of students, teachers and scholars, showing the dispersion of the respondents around the mean point of each modality. (See Le Roux & Rouanet, 2010: 69-70; a concentration ellipse contains 86.5% of the points of the subcloud)

Table 4 Institutional belonging: test-values supplementary modalities –  
 Figure 3 Institutional belonging: concentration ellipses of subclouds of individuals in plane 1  
 & 2

Test-value supplementary variable values > 2 in bold			
	n	axis 1	axis 2
students	279	<b>15,92</b>	0,79
teachers	92	<b>-5,50</b>	<b>6,85</b>
scholars	113	<b>-13,50</b>	<b>-7,27</b>



As appears an affirmative answer can be given to the question whether students, teachers and scholars have differing literary tastes. The midpoints of the modalities are positioned in the space clearly apart from each other, even if the test-values indicate that not all modalities are equally well determined by each axis.

Axis 1 distinguishes clearly between students on one side of the axis, directed towards the pole of unfamiliarity, lightness and straightforwardness and teachers and scholars on the other side, positioned on the pole of a belief in literature as serious art. Closer investigation of table 4 shows that the opposition along the first axis is principally one between students and scholars. Certainly, the teachers are located at the same side of the axis as the scholars, but the distance between teachers and scholars, whose position is clearest determined by the first axis, is substantial (see Le Roux & Rouanet 2010, 59 – a deviation greater than 0.5 is to be considered as notable, here the deviation between scholars and teachers is 0.6)

Axis 2 distinguishes between teachers at the upper side of the axis and scholars at the lower side, while the position of the students is not affected by the second axis. While one could interpret the distinction along axis 1 as one setting apart readers from non-readers, the second axis distinguishes between types of readers, setting apart ordinary readers at the upper side from those on the lower side who resist views on reading as divertissement and direct involvement with one's own world.

Examination of the concentration ellipses (fig. 3) refines this analysis further. As appears, the dispersion of the students around the mean point is quite large, reminding us of the fact that the analysis inevitably offers a static image of a dynamics that perhaps holds all the more for adolescents in full development. It might, thus, not be too farfetched to interpret this dispersion as a sign of students moving into different directions, eventually ending up in the position of non-reader, ordinary reader or aesthetic reader.

Scholars, on the contrary, all are positioned relatively close to the mean point. As opposed to the non-readers who the students can be characterized to be in general, one could see the scholars as the guardians of literature as serious art. However much they may differ among each other in opinions they hold in other matters, judging by the field specific, academic struggles around methods etc. – see Ekelund (2016) for an interesting analysis of these struggles within literary studies in Sweden – here it appears that the analysis reveals a kind of fundamental belief all scholars share more or less, a doxa that can be summarized by the concept of aesthetic reading, a belief that “espouses *vigilance*, standing back from the pleasure of reading to encourage critical reflection”. (Felski, 2008: 12)

The dispersion of the teachers is also remarkable, rather widely spread as they are positioned around the modality mean point, indicating that the unity within this group is far weaker than what is the case with the scholars, some of them holding views close to the scholars’ opinions, others having a profile quite similar to that of students. But overall, strikingly, the teachers take up a middle position, as they differ both from the students and the scholars. As figure 3 shows, teachers and students seem to be living in different universes. A conclusion that corroborates findings of others; e.g. Olin-Scheller (2006), studying contemporary Swedish upper secondary literary education by means of participant observation and interviews with students and teachers finds that the literary repertoires of teachers and students often mismatch. Teachers are not only distinguished from students, though, but also from scholars, as they go along far less with the doxa of literature as serious art (axis 1) as scholars do and moreover express reading expectations that substantially differ from views of aesthetic reading as the preferred, and only righteous, way of consuming literature (axis 2).

To summarize, as an answer to the first research question empirical evidence is found for clearly differing, internally coherent, views and beliefs in literature, different tastes that set apart students as well as teachers and scholars. To what extent, then, are these differences gendered? To answer this question gender is introduced in the MCA as a supplementary variable. An overview of test-values and projection in the space of individuals is given in table 5 and figure 4 and 5.

Table 5: Test-values supplementary modalities: gender; gender and institutional role – figure 4: cloud of individuals, gender in plane 1 & 2

	n	axis 1	axis 2
female	293	1,06	<b>7,56</b>
male	191	-1,06	<b>-7,56</b>

	n	axis 1	axis 2
female student	174	<b>9,71</b>	<b>4,79</b>
male student	105	<b>7,79</b>	<b>-4,63</b>
female teacher	65	<b>-4,16</b>	<b>7,24</b>
male teacher	27	<b>-3,21</b>	0,95
female scholar	54	<b>-8,64</b>	<b>-3,41</b>
male scholar	59	<b>-9,14</b>	<b>-6,13</b>

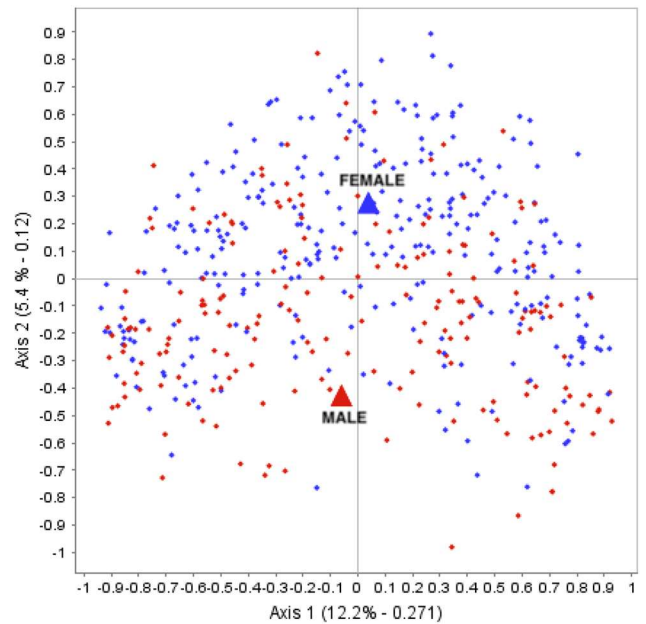


Figure 5: cloud of individuals, gender and institutional role in plane 1 & 2

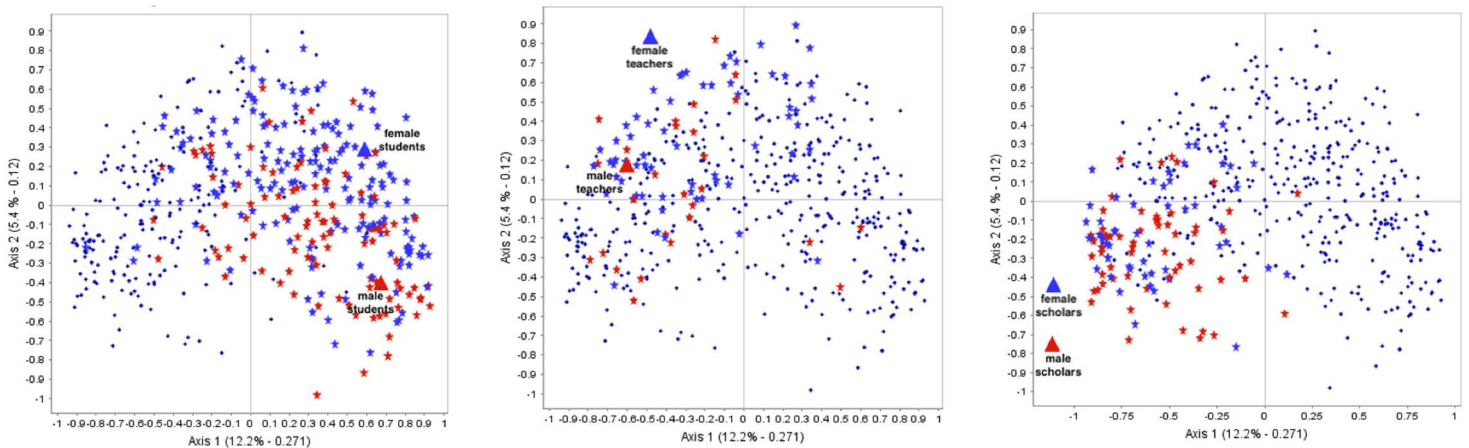


Fig 5a cloud of individuals, female and male students Fig 5b cloud of individuals, female and male teachers Fig 5c cloud of individuals, female and male scholars

As the test-values indicate gender is not associated with the opposition along the first axis. With regard to the second axis, though, gender is clearly a structuring factor; women are oriented to the pole of worldly reading, men are oriented in the opposite direction. Interestingly enough, gender effects are not equally effective for all respondents. Linking gender to the respondents’ institutional role results in a nuanced picture of how gender relates to literary taste. As observed above scholars are remarkably concentrated in the space. Even when introducing gender as a modifying factor only small differences in opinion can be observed between female and male scholars, especially, when compared to

the effect gender has on teachers and students. Female teachers are most clearly oriented along the second axis, while male teachers, yet still positioned on same side of the axis, are barely affected by this axis. When introducing gender, also the position of students is structured along the second axis, showing differences not observed in the previous analysis. In particular, female students are oriented to the pole of worldly readers, while male students are positioned on the opposite side of the axis.

Also with regard to gender, thus, this analysis gives us a number of empirical findings that are in line with other studies of the relation between gender and culture. At first glance one could interpret the distinction between men and women here as an expression of the well observed difference of the larger interest in certain forms of culture by women than by men. Such an interpretation, however, is hardly meaningful. In the first place, gender is not relevant for the first axis, which, unnecessarily to remind, distinguishes most clearly between belief and non-belief in literature as a serious art form. But also along the second axis gender has no univocal effect. Here, the data rather confirm that gender effects become less notable the more the importance of cultural capital increases. Indeed, within the group who possesses most to this context specific cultural capital – i.e. scholars – gender makes no difference.

These effects do play a role the less prominent the possession of specific cultural capital is. As observed earlier teachers position along the first axis to the side of scholars, but they are clearly less strong and convinced in the belief of aesthetic reading. Interestingly enough, female teachers are furthestmost away from the scholars, the distance with male scholars being largest. It is tempting to see support or disapproval of emotional, immersive reading, preference or aversion to ‘typical female’ authors like Fredriksson as manifestation of feminine vs male libido (Atkison, 2016), but this interpretation neglects of course the fact that female and male scholars are quite united in their taste for literature (and distaste of worldly reading). Along the second axis also female students are more oriented towards the female teachers, in contrast to the male students, an affirmation of the idea of school as a female universe. We can interpret the opposition between male and female students also in the light of the findings by Lagaert et al. (2017). Obviously, here a far less sophisticated operationalization of the concept of gender is used, but the oppositions of male and female students confirm Lagaert’s observation of the difference between girls having stronger interest for highbrow culture, including reading (even if it might be a type of reading that is discarded as non-reading by the defenders of *lecture lettrée*), and boys who rather resist this kind of cultural practices. Lagaert stresses that these differences are far less prominent between girls and boys who are atypically socialized in their gender role, also Tepper (2000) makes similar observations. Closer analysis of the differences between male and female students results in comparable findings: looking at the number of students who along the first axis are oriented towards the pole of scholarly reading, one observes that this proportion is nearly the same for both male and female students, in each case a minority of approximately 20% of the students. The earlier observation that the students are dispersed over the plane, which could be understood as an indication of their differing future orientations, can thus be nuanced: a minority of both female and male students might end up in a world where men and women equally share the belief in treating literature in an explicit, distinct way, a group of predominantly female students might continue their worldly interest in literature while for the most part male students likewise might persist in their abdication, in this way confirming the gender bias in the broader population, fiction readers being women.

As an answer to my second research question, the main conclusion with regard to gender, then, is that also in matters of literary taste gender effects can be seen, but these effects become only notable when the power of specific cultural capital becomes weaker.

This empirical study of the views and opinions on literature held by students, teachers and literary scholars shows that these different institutional roles are positioned in different taste worlds. Not only adolescents are separated from adults, also between literary scholars and teachers there is a clear distance. In critical reflections on literature and education it is often pointed out that theorists hold a cultural control on literature, misrecognizing other readings of and approaches to literature. Here, indeed, it appears that these theorists, how much they may disagree mutually in other matters, share a number of basic views on what to expect from and how to deal with literature. But this belief is mainly shared among the scholars themselves; it appears that teachers hold views that aim more at approaching literature as a confrontation of a text with one's own (social) world. A view that brings them in a sense closer to the students, to the extent they have an interest and belief in literature at all.



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## APPENDIX

Table overview modalities relative frequencies (n=484)

AUTHORS		unknown	negative	neutral	positive	missing	unknown	negative	neutral	positive	missing	
A1	Almqvist	223	61	55	139	6	46,1%	12,6%	11,4%	28,7%	1,2%	100,0%
A2	Beckman	330	56	35	55	8	68,2%	11,6%	7,2%	11,4%	1,7%	100,0%
A3	Fredriksson	195	157	59	62	11	40,3%	32,4%	12,2%	12,8%	2,3%	100,0%
A4	Gardell	30	189	125	135	5	6,2%	39,0%	25,8%	27,9%	1,0%	100,0%
A5	Khemiri	172	71	74	157	10	35,5%	14,7%	15,3%	32,4%	2,1%	100,0%
A6	Stieg Larsson	97	157	102	121	7	20,0%	32,4%	21,1%	25,0%	1,4%	100,0%
A7	Marklund	28	264	91	94	7	5,8%	54,5%	18,8%	19,4%	1,4%	100,0%
A8	Stridsberg	302	61	53	55	13	62,4%	12,6%	11,0%	11,4%	2,7%	100,0%
GENRES			negative	neutral	positive	missing		negative	neutral	positive	missing	
G1	biography celebs		334	71	67	12		69,0%	14,7%	13,8%	2,5%	100,0%
G2	spy novel/thriller		330	91	50	13		68,2%	18,8%	10,3%	2,7%	100,0%
G3	crime		177	133	161	13		36,6%	27,5%	33,3%	2,7%	100,0%
G4	fantasy		269	79	125	11		55,6%	16,3%	25,8%	2,3%	100,0%
G5	romance		238	102	127	17		49,2%	21,1%	26,2%	3,5%	100,0%
G6	poetry		237	95	140	12		49,0%	19,6%	28,9%	2,5%	100,0%
G9	novel after 1920		108	85	276	15		22,3%	17,6%	57,0%	3,1%	100,0%
G10	novel before 1920		180	66	222	16		37,2%	13,6%	45,9%	3,3%	100,0%
G11	philosophy		254	92	123	15		52,5%	19,0%	25,4%	3,1%	100,0%
G12	SF		317	74	77	16		65,5%	15,3%	15,9%	3,3%	100,0%
G13	horror		288	99	83	14		59,5%	20,5%	17,1%	2,9%	100,0%
READING EXPECTATIONS			not agree	neutral	agree	missing		not agree	neutral	agree	missing	
RE1	easy		296	110	65	13		61,2%	22,7%	13,4%	2,7%	100,0%
RE2	plot		250	116	103	15		51,7%	24,0%	21,3%	3,1%	100,0%
RE3	suspense		168	107	191	18		34,7%	22,1%	39,5%	3,7%	100,0%
RE4	emotion		119	106	244	15		24,6%	21,9%	50,4%	3,1%	100,0%
RE5	society/social		266	125	76	17		55,0%	25,8%	15,7%	3,5%	100,0%
RE6	moral		207	132	128	17		42,8%	27,3%	26,4%	3,5%	100,0%
RE7	realism		288	79	100	17		59,5%	16,3%	20,7%	3,5%	100,0%
RE8	form		199	139	133	13		41,1%	28,7%	27,5%	2,7%	100,0%
RE9	relax/divert		254	118	98	14		52,5%	24,4%	20,2%	2,9%	100,0%
RE10	intellect		177	125	168	14		36,6%	25,8%	34,7%	2,9%	100,0%
RE11	aesthet		208	113	149	14		43,0%	23,3%	30,8%	2,9%	100,0%
READING PREFERENCES			not agree	neutral	agree	missing		not agree	neutral	agree	missing	
RP1	philosophical		171	95	200	18		35,3%	19,6%	41,3%	3,7%	100,0%
RP2	psychological		112	106	247	19		23,1%	21,9%	51,0%	3,9%	100,0%
RP3	complex		153	139	172	20		31,6%	28,7%	35,5%	4,1%	100,0%
RP4	engagem		145	140	178	21		30,0%	28,9%	36,8%	4,3%	100,0%
RP5	existent		118	105	240	21		24,4%	21,7%	49,6%	4,3%	100,0%
RP6	provoke		135	138	187	24		27,9%	28,5%	38,6%	5,0%	100,0%
RP7	experim		182	121	160	21		37,6%	25,0%	33,1%	4,3%	100,0%



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