



INSTITUTIONEN FÖR SOCIALT ARBETE

POLITISERING AV OMSORG

En kvalitativ studie om kollektivt motstånd bland feminiserade välfärdsprofessionella yrkesgrupper i Sverige

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av

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Akademisk avhandling

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- I. Ryan Bengtsson, A. (2018). Collective mobilization among welfare professionals in Sweden - the politicisation of caring. I Sowa, F., Staples, R., & Zapfel, S. (Eds.) *The transformation of work in welfare state organizations New Public Management and the institutional diffusion of ideas*. London: Routledge
- II. Ryan Bengtsson, A. (forthcoming). Rethinking Voice in the crisis of care - Collective repertoires among welfare workers in Sweden. I Conley, H. & Koskinen Sandberg, P. (Eds.) *Handbook on Gender and Public sector employment*. Edward Elgar Publishing. Accepterad men under revidering.
- III. Ryan Bengtsson, A. (2021). Kollektiva uppror som medlemsaktivism och facklig förnyelse? *Arbetsmarknad & Arbetsliv, 2021, Vol. 27*
- IV. Ryan Bengtsson, A. (2020). Motståndets motstånd - reaktioner på socionomer och barnmorskors mobilisering. *Socialvetenskaplig tidskrift 2020(3-4): 309-328*

ABSTRACT

Title: The politicisation of caring - a qualitative study about collective resistance among feminised welfare professional groups in Sweden.

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Key words: collective mobilisation, welfare professionals, politicisation of caring, resistance, NPM, human service organisations, midwives, social workers, gender

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This thesis is about collective mobilisation and new forms of resistance among feminised welfare professional groups in contemporary Sweden. The research focus is placed on what these struggles are about, the different practices or repertoires used, and how the activists describe the response from trade unions, managers and political leaders.

The key concept that is explored and developed in this thesis is *the politicisation of caring*. This concept stems from feminist research on nurse's militancy, which shows that untraditional methods such as mass resignations and sick outs are reoccurring in the nursing profession both historically and in different geographical locations. Furthermore, the argument of previous research is that these unorthodox tactics are inherently linked to gendered relations of power and the specific position created for nurses in health care organisations undergoing neoliberal change. This thesis explores how this theory is also relevant to explore and comprehend the collective mobilisation among *other feminised welfare professional groups* in contemporary Sweden.

The thesis is based on two qualitative case studies and four publications. One study maps the different collective resistance practices or *repertoires* used by staff in the Swedish health care sector between 2013-2015. Based on empirical data from one strategically chosen page on Facebook "*Stöd våra Sjuksköterskor*", an ideal-type model on *how* caring is politicised in Sweden is presented. Based on a qualitative comparative case study of two collective revolts *Nu bryter vi tystnaden bland socialarbetare* and *Barnmorskor för trygg och säker vård* the concept a politicisation of caring is explored and developed from a feminist epistemological position and the notion of situated knowledges.

This thesis shows that the collective mobilisation and new forms of resistance in contemporary Sweden can be understood as a *politicisation of caring*. In terms of why the mobilisation takes place, the study shows that it is the working conditions rather than salaries that is the main reason to mobilise. Thus, highlighting how it is the professional knowledge base that is at stake, and that this collective mobilisation serves to gain a professional jurisdiction that involves empathy and a caring commitment for patients and clients. Drawing on previous research on union renewal and the concept of members' activism, the two revolts' descriptions of their relationship to the trade unions are explored. Even if the trade unions support the revolts, this support is limited and the relationship tense, illustrating the complexities and difficulties of union renewal, especially in the public sector. Based on a resistance theoretical framework and concepts from previous research on equality the practices of power used by politicians and managers are also shown. The results show how fear and distance is created and upheld through different techniques of power. Techniques of power that serve to prevent both collective mobilisation and avoid that the issues of deteriorated working conditions and care are interpreted and politicised as unequal relations of power.