

Abstract

Tid till eftertanke. Kvinnligt pensionärliv i ett klass- och livsloppsperspektiv (Time for reflection. Female pensioners-life in a class- and life-course perspective) (Written in Swedish with an English summary) by Ninni Trossholmen. (Skrifter från Etnologiska föreningen i Västsverige nr 32, 2000)

Despite the fact that old people of today live longer and are much healthier than in the beginning of the 20th century, there is a misconception of them as being decrepit and needing much more care in their old age. The misconception is often polarized and represents our pensioners as being decrepit versus active, a burden versus a resource, or as old and wise versus conservative and rigid. In addition, the spectra between these dichotomies are usually not illuminated.

The study is based on interviews with, and narratives written by, twelve elderly women. They are all pensioners and have all been gainfully employed during the greater part of their lives. At the time of the interviews, they all were, or had been, married and had at least one child. They were healthy and were still living in their own homes. Six of the women were born in Middle-class homes and six in working-class families. These women told about their life-course and their lives as old-age-pensioners, with all of the advantages and disadvantages.

Even if it is necessary to anchor the material to a relevant theoretical discussion, ethnological research is qualitative and built up from material based on in-depth data rather than quantity. The concept of macro- and micro-levels in relation to each other is useful both as a tool and method. With this in mind, it is hoped that the analyses of the research material will result in a data on a mezzo-level, where the normative and overlying explanations confront the practical actions of people.

In reconstructing the life of a person, it is important to attempt to ascertain the meaning for why that person has been living and working in this world and in this particular place in the world. In gerontological research there is a theory that peoples own narratives of life-course is useful in order to analyse different forms of old age. Being flexible has always been of considerable importance for the women in coping with their different situations. Therefore, it is appreciate to refer to their specific way of life, that these women and their following generation live, as a flexible way of life.

All these female pensioners, in many ways, have lived the same way that many younger and middle-age mothers live today. For them, however, the difficulties were more obvious. They had to fight against lack of child-care, fixed structures in the society and a husband unwilling for changes. It is unbelievable these women, together or individually, have helped to clear a path for following generations of women. Sometimes, it was been done in accordance with women's liberation, but as other times, as their own projects depending on their particular circumstances.

Keywords: pensioners-life, ageing, gender, class, narratives, life-course, flexible way of life.

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