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# Narrow Social Norms in an Inclusive School: Values, Practices, and Consequences of the Danish School

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This paper explores the values of the Danish public school—*Folkeskole*—and their consequences for the social norms which children meet in school. The Danish school aims at being socially inclusive, based on ideals of equality and positive relationships between classmates as well as pupils and teachers. It is argued that the ideals of school—such as the ideal class, the ideal pupil, and the ideal teacher mirror central cultural ideals of community, childhood, and power in Danish society, while the school, on the other hand, contributes to the reproduction of these cultural ideals due to its central role in the upbringing of new Danish citizens. However, these ideals produce a very narrow norm for children, as the ideals of equality, inclusive communities, and well-socialized children, require children to behave in very specific ways. The consequence is that many children are problematized by teachers, and their experience is that they do not fit in. A particular case of such an experience is that of ethnic minority boys, who are often seen as bad pupils who lack social competencies. Living in tough neighborhoods and feeling stigmatized in school, these boys have developed an oppositional demeanor based on tough masculinity and troublemaking in school, which merely adds to their exclusion from the inclusive school's ideal of the good pupil.

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## 1. Introduction

The public Danish comprehensive school—in Danish, the *Folkeskole*[1)], is known to be a school for *all children*, irrespective of social and ethnic background. Though private schools and free schools have increased their numbers of pupils within the last decades, the *Folkeskole* is still the main educational institution in Denmark, chosen by 80 percent of parents of all backgrounds in 2011. The Danish school prides itself on being an inclusive institution, with a child-friendly environment where children from different backgrounds aged 6–15 spend their daily lives together and make friends across social divides. Taking a closer look at the values and practices of the school, it becomes obvious that the school's ideals for the class, the pupil, and the teacher mirror central Danish ideals of society, community, childhood, and power. In this paper I will describe these cultural values and practices and argue that on the one hand, the school succeeds in realizing these ideals through their everyday practices, and on the other hand, it comes to exclude some children from fitting in because these ideals produce a rather narrow social norm for the children[2)]. The description of general values and practices is based on three different field studies, amounting to 18 months of fieldwork, conducted between 2002 and 2011 in four different Danish schools in and around the capital of Copenhagen, in which I conducted participant observation and interviews in six different classes. The final section of the paper is based on a seven-month field study conducted in one of these classes in Soenderskolen[3)]. This class had a majority of ethnic minority children, and the fieldwork was aimed at exploring these children's experiences of their ethnic identity within the Danish school (Photo 1).

Compared to previous studies of the values of the Danish school systems, this study

**Photo 1** Ethnic minority children talking about their experiences of their ethnic identity within the Danish school (Photo taken by Søren Kjær Jensen)

contributes another perspective, as it bases its analysis on first-hand observations of interactions and the values displayed and acted out in various Danish schools. Though much is written about the values of the *Folkeskole* from the perspective of politicians, public debaters, and school organizations, few academic studies have focused on these values, and these are typically based on analysis of historical sources, educational policies, and interviews with school personnel, and thus on discursive analysis (Korsgaard 2004, Hermann 2007, Pedersen 2011, Jenkins 2011). While valuable and insightful, these studies show us the ideals, but not how they are practiced in school or their various consequences. One of the field studies that I draw upon here was conducted as part of a larger project on civilizing ideals of Danish institutions for children, in collaboration with Associate Professor Eva Gulløv, Professor Karen Fog Olwig, Associate professor Sally Anderson and Assistant Professor Dil Bach. A specific intention of this study was to use anthropological methods to research in situ how values of the school are acted out in the everyday life of existing schools and their teachers, and what consequences these ideals have for children, acknowledging that they are active participants in and contributors to the everyday lives of schools. This approach showed us many differences between ideals and actual practices in schools, as well as quite a few unintended results, which more discursive analysis cannot capture in the same way.

## 2. The Integrative, Inclusive School

The Danish school is generally considered the primary integrative and socializing institution in Danish society by both politicians and the broader public (Photo 2). It is expected to ensure the education, cultural reproduction, and social integration of the young citizens of the Danish nation. This fundamental civilizing role is witnessed when the *Folkeskole* is called upon for action, whenever anxieties about the disintegration of society and moral breakdown are voiced in the public or political debate. Likewise, it is most often the school that is assigned the responsibility of integrating immigrants and ensuring the social mobility of socially disadvantaged groups. The school is allegedly neutral ground—here, children are not supposed to be judged by their social category, but to be treated as individuals and equals, supported by teachers to overcome conflicts in civilized and democratic ways.

The disciplines of the Danish school, as well as their content and learning goals, are described in national "reading plans." Yet the individual teachers decide the specific themes and methods of teaching, cooperating with fellow teachers without much interference from the school leadership. Children are organized into classes of 20–28 age-mates, and—as stressed in the law of the *Folkeskole*—these classes must not be divided into groups (such as by ability) for any length of time, as the class should preferably be taught as a unit. Instead, the teachers must adjust the way they teach to the individual needs and abilities of the children.

Due to Danish pupils' poor performance in OECD's international PISA tests and the perceived threat of global competition, there has been a firmer focus on academic outcomes and tests in Danish schools during the last 10 years. But since the 1960s it has

**Photo 2** A *Folkeskole* established 1910 (Photo taken by Søren Kjær Jensen)

been a broad consensus among Danish teachers that children should not compete or be pushed to perform, but should develop their skills as motivated by their own interests in learning and gain new skills in an environment of cooperation, social inclusion, and equality between pupils. These values of equality and inclusion are still so pervasive that teachers go far to avoid any marks of difference in academic ability between the pupils and to ensure social inclusion of all pupils in the class. In line with this, classes are taught as units, without tracking systems or other explicit demarcations of differences of ability between the individual pupils. The pupils do not receive grades until they are about 14 years old—that is, in the 8th grade—just as rewards and tests are kept to a minimum, and results for individual children, classes, and schools are not made public, if at all revealed to the pupils themselves[4)]. Such marks of difference are avoided because they are expected to demotivate the weaker pupils and threaten the social cohesion of the class. Instead, teachers should teach pupils in differentiated ways according to their individual abilities without making too much of a fuss about children who are either academically strong *or* weak. An exception is the group of pupils who are regularly taken out of class for special lessons, but even in these instances their academic problems are either treated with silence in class or spoken about as normal and unproblematic—the message of both strategies being to maintain the equality of the group and to avoid making the pupil feel different from, or inferior to, the group. In similar ways, there are not supposed to be hierarchical relations within the wider school community of pupils, and any signs of groups of pupils acting superior to other pupils, or of older pupils' use of power in relation to younger pupils, are negatively sanctioned.

As has been stressed by the prominent Norwegian anthropologist Marianne Gullestad, these values of social inclusion, equality, and avoidance of marking differences are fundamental Scandinavian cultural values (Gullestad 1992). While it should be

stressed that many societies have ideals of social inclusion and equality, it can be argued that these values are so dominant in the Scandinavian welfare societies and social institutions that they seem characteristic of a Scandinavian ethos. In the Danish case, an important aspect of this, which Gulløv and I have described (Gilliam and Gulløv 2012, 2014), is that these values have been nurtured and disseminated into society by welfare institutions since the middle of the last century, and that this has contributed to the fact that today these values seem to shape the kind of interactional style that is seen as civilized in the Danish society. As German sociologist Norbert Elias has argued, the tight-knit integration and interdependence of inhabitants in some societies demand a high level of social restraint from each inhabitant and an internalization of social rules of interaction (Elias 2000: 366–369, 429). These social rules of interaction seem very pervasive in the social democratic welfare states that have developed in Scandinavian societies since the Second World War, partly as a reaction to the kind of authoritarianism and barbarism citizens experienced during the two World Wars (Gilliam and Gulløv 2012, 2014). In Denmark at least, these historical developments and societal forces have resulted in strong cultural ideals that a good society is based on equality and solidarity and avoids demarcations of hierarchy and competition.

Meanwhile, as Gullestad, Elias himself, and the Eliasian scholar Cas Wouters have stressed, the existence of these values of equality does not mean that inequality and hierarchy do not exist. Instead, they are acted out in subtle ways, while signs of inequality and hierarchy are devalued (Elias 2000: 385, 424, 430; Wouters 2004; Gullestad 1992: 174). These ideals and the specific ways in which they are practiced influence norms of behavior and relations, and are transmitted through everyday social interactions between adults, as well as through the socializing of young children in the family and the neighborhood. Yet the Danish school is one of the prominent places where these values are acted out and disseminated into society. Being the main socializing institution for young citizens, the school seems to be functioning as a microcosm of the broader Danish society, and is thus molded on the ideal for the Danish society. This influences the kind of social environment that is promoted in the school and the kind of relations that children should engage in with each other and the teachers, just like it influences ideals for pupils. In the following I will describe this in further detail.

## 3. The Ideal Class

The mirror relationship between cultural values for society and the school is seen in the school's central structuring principle—that is, "the class." As mentioned previously, Danish children enter the Danish school the year they turn six. Here they are grouped in classes of 20–28 pupils, which will ideally stay together as a unit until they leave school after 10 years. This group is led by a main teacher—called the "class teacher"—who should preferably stay with the class through all 10 years. In reality, some pupils will leave the class and others will enter along the way, and most classes will have between two and four class teachers within the 10 years. The class teacher is most often in charge of teaching the subject of Danish, but is also regarded as the one who takes care of the

class as a group, seeing to the well-being of individual children and the class as a community. The class teacher, who is often a woman, is supposed to be a mother-like figure, whereas the math teacher, who is frequently male, is seen as a father for the group. In this way, the class is modeled on the family and is supposed to have a similarly familial relationship (Anderson 2000: 55). In addition to this resemblance to a family, the environment and relationships that are encouraged in class also mirror ideals of smaller communities within the Danish society. Even though close friendships between classmates are endorsed by teachers, and children are encouraged to find their friends within the class and not in other classes of the same grade—or grades above and below them (Anderson: 157–160)—the most important thing is not close relationships, but classmates treating each other with respect and benign attitudes. Mirroring norms of the larger Danish society and smaller communities within it, the class should ideally be an inclusive environment with a civilized and friendly atmosphere where children cooperate and get along without hostility, quarrels, or outward signs of inequality. The pupils should treat each other as equals and tolerate differences between them, and nobody should feel excluded or looked down upon. When teachers stress these values, they typically argue that this kind of environment benefits the well-being of the individual child, but they also point to a common conviction found in Danish schools that good social relations between the children are necessary for a good learning environment, while conflicts and uncertainty within the group will keep the children's minds occupied with things other than what the teachers try to inculcate. Yet it is also evident that beneath this ideal for the class lie pervasive ideas about what constitutes a good and civilized community and society. Thus, what is valued in a class resembles what is valued in the broader Danish society—that is, in all its social gatherings and broader communities, such as work settings, sports organizations, and the Danish society as a larger political community.

Just how fundamental and important these ideals for civilized communities are is seen in how much focus the social environment within the class is given—especially in the youngest classes—and how much effort teachers put into molding the class into a positive group for all the children. Teachers thus use a vast amount of time working with children's social behavior within the group. The children are told they should be *nice to everybody*, but *especially to their classmates*, and what this implies in situations occurring in school. The rules of behavior within the class are discussed and often formalized, and the teachers invite the children to have joint discussions to solve problems and conflicts between classmates. Often, the teachers engage the children in small role–playing situations to instruct them about proper ways to act in different situations. To help along the social integration of the class, the teachers encourage parents not to invite only a few friends to their children's birthday parties, but to invite the whole class, or at least the entire group of girls or boys. They encourage children to make appointments to play with each other in their leisure time, and "play groups" of four to five children of mixed gender are set up by the teachers to encourage the children to play with children outside school who they do not regularly play with within school. These play groups are also seen as a way to both ensure that no children are excluded from the group and to avoid bullying, which is treated as an uncivilized behavior and

thus with utmost seriousness. Parents are involved in this integrative project in various ways, and they generally support these efforts to make the class integrated and inclusive. Hence, many parents see it as partly their duty to help it along by inviting their children's classmates home and participating in the various activities and festivities which the school arranges for parents and children. This testifies to the public's general endorsement of the ideal of integrated and inclusive communities, and of the school's responsibility to create class communities in this image.

## 4. The Ideal Teacher

The teacher, and especially the class teacher, is an important figure within the class community, as she or he functions as the authority that explains the norms of the class, settles disputes, and determines and meters out positive and negative sanctions. I will argue that what constitutes an ideal teacher is an expression of ideals of power and authority not merely in the Danish school, but in Danish society as a whole. Just like signs of hierarchy are avoided in school, the kind of authority and power that is seen as legitimate in most contexts in Danish society is the benign authority, which is based on the possession of greater competences and skills, and not on the inherited or arbitrary privilege one gets from membership in specific categories or classes of people. While this is an ideal and not a one-to-one reflection of reality, it has consequences for how a good teacher is recognized in the Danish school and how teachers' abilities are generally assessed. A good teacher is ideally a friendly mentor, not a feared authority. This does not mean that the teacher should not exhibit power; rather, it means that this power should be based on natural authority and knowledge, not on his or her adulthood alone or on the threat of punishment or negative sanctions. The Danish teacher is thus dependent on what Bourdieu, and Bourdieu and Passeron described as "symbolic power" instead of concrete force (Bourdieu 1977: 117, Bourdieu and Passeron 1990: 7). Symbolic power is based partly on being seen as an authority in knowledge, and partly on having a personal relationship with the children, which affords teachers the possibility of sanctioning their behavior through acknowledgement or critique and the awarding or withdrawal of affection (Bourdieu and Passeron 1990: 17–18). In line with this ideal, a good teacher does not use physical force or strict discipline. She or he ought not scold too much, just as yelling at children is seen as embarrassing for most contemporary teachers. Instead, teachers should create an open, friendly, and informal environment, where children are comfortable seeking their help and guidance. Ideally, children have a say in decisions, but should also do as they are told, yet they should preferably do this not due to fear, but to the rationality of the teachers' demands. In a similar vein, the ideal method of teaching is to avoid the dictation of rote knowledge, and instead to facilitate children's own exploration of themes and interests. In practice, this means that a preferred teaching method is to instruct the pupils to choose projects within broader subjects, research these subjects, write project reports, make oral presentations to the class, facilitate discussions within the class, and afterwards, assess their own performance.

Not all teachers live up to or subscribe to these ideals, and it is common in most

teachers' staff rooms to have more or less explicit disagreements about what constitutes a good teacher. A common disagreement is how strict one should be, how one should deal with misbehavior, and how much to involve oneself in the personal problems of individual children and families. But for most teachers, it is a sign of success that one's class is functioning well *socially*—which is generally taken to mean that the children get along well and do not exclude other classmates—and that they as teachers have a friendly and informal relationship with their pupils. This kind of relationship is testified by pleasant tones of conversation, smiles, hugs, jokes, and confidentiality between the teacher and pupils.

## 5. The Ideal Pupil

What I will argue in the following sections is that these ideas about the ideal teacher, the ideal kind of authority, and the ideal class and school community have consequences for what is expected of children in Danish schools, and thus for ideas about the ideal pupil and the ideal child. Meanwhile, it can also be argued that it is the ideals of school which reflect cultural ideals for children and childhood in the Danish society. The point here is that it is not possible to distinguish and determine the causal relationship, and thus which way the influence goes. The *Folkeskole* is now a fundamental institution in the Danish society, and has socialized the vast majority of Danish citizens; as a consequence of this, ideals of school and society are influencing each other in a dialectic relationship. Hence, it is evident that the general ideals of a good teacher, a good class, and a good child are closely related. For a good teacher and a good class, a specific kind of child is needed: one who behaves and feels in specific ways, and who is involved in the relationship with teachers and the class in a specific manner. And when one looks closer at what kind of child and pupil is required, what one sees is some central Danish ideals of children and childhood.

Just like in all schools of the world, what is valued in a pupil of the Danish school is intelligence and knowledge of the subjects taught. But what is manifested in Danish schools is that these are not the central characteristics acquired of a good pupil. Instead, what is valued is the *social child*—the child that contributes to a good, civilized, inclusive environment in class (Gilliam and Gulløv 2012, forthcoming). When interviewing teachers about what kind of pupil they prefer, or why specific children are good pupils, they express that what they like is a child who adapts to the class and thus to the group of children which the class encompasses, and who contributes to the functioning of the class and the well-being of classmates. A good pupil is thus one who is socially aware, who has strong self-control, and who is thoughtful, friendly, and inclusive toward others, irrespective of their differences or shortcomings. An important characteristic is what can be termed "awareness of limits." Teachers often stress that a child ought to *know other children's limits, know one's own limits,* or merely *know the limits*. This attention on *limits* shows the teachers' focus on the child's adaptation to the intimate group of the school class, in which many children must stay together for long hours, get along, and get things done together, without conflict. In this context of what

we might term "social compression," good social behavior means engaging in social interaction and cooperation, and avoiding disturbance and conflict by knowing and keeping within one's own physical and psychological space, while not transgressing the boundaries of others. In the Danish schools as well as in Danish society, this is what constitutes socially acceptable and civilized behavior.

Yet a good pupil is not merely a child who will adapt to the group, but who will do this with respect for teachers' authority. This shows that children's communities are not considered good on all accounts, but must be adapted to the rules of the school. Meanwhile, although Danish teachers do prefer a polite child, it is important that the child's politeness is "natural"—that is, based on an innate positive attitude toward others, learned through benevolent socialization, and not forced by strict discipline and fear of sanctions. Being pressured to use force will make most Danish teachers feel uncomfortable, as an ideal teacher treats children with respect and does not need the use of concrete power. Meanwhile, this has consequences for what is valued in a child. For a teacher to be seen as a good teacher, children must neither be disobedient or too obedient in class. They should be active and joyful in a childlike way, while also being able to switch into a calm and well-behaved demeanor whenever the teacher asks them to focus their attention on the lesson or—at best—when they can sense themselves that the situation requires it.

Natural politeness and joy is not merely well-liked in children, because they make it possible for the teachers to be viewed as good teachers. There is a strong conviction amongst teachers that school should not impair childhood, and that the younger children especially should be allowed to *stay children*, that is, to play and enjoy themselves (Photos 3 and 4). The effect of this is that the school makes an effort to help children enjoy themselves, building in breaks for play and, until recently—where a new school reform introduced what is termed a "whole-day school"—maintained short school days (from 8 a.m. until 1 p.m. for children who are 6–9 years old, and until 2 or 3 p.m. for older children). A consequence of these ideals of childhood and schooling is that teachers take pleasure in pupils who show that they like school, that they are interested in the subjects taught, and who enjoy themselves. In this way, general ideals of childhood and school transform into ideas about the ideal pupil. Ideal pupils are interested, inspired and eager to learn. They are *competent children*, who *feel like learning* ("*har lyst til at lære*"), and who *take responsibility for their own learning* ("*tager ansvar for egen læring*"), as it is phrased in two frequently used expressions among teachers (see Kryger 2004, for a discussion of the same rhetorics in Nordic societies). The ideal pupil in the Danish school is a happy, socially adapted, inspired, independent, and self-governing child, who engages in a respectful, positive, and personal relationship with teachers. Yet, as I will now explain, an effect of this ideal is that it creates a narrow norm for children. It demands of them a fine-tuned sense of other people's boundaries and knowledge of when to be joyful and energetic and when to be quiet and calm. In addition, it makes characteristics and feelings that are regularly seen in most children—such as distress, disinterest in certain subjects, dislike of certain other children or of being part of a large group, as well as both explicit defiance or obedience toward teachers—problematic in the Danish school.

**Photos 3** and **4** The use of play and creative learning in a literacy class, taking place in a gymnastics hall (Photo taken by Søren Kjær Jensen)

## 6. Narrow Norms and Class Privileges

When they function well, these ideals and practices of the Danish school create a positive environment for children. Children feel included in the class, enjoy the lessons and the informal relationship with teachers, find their closest friends in school, and get to know children from different social and ethnic backgrounds. Moreover, it does seem plausible that the Danish school is considered one of the cornerstones of the Danish welfare society, as it socializes children and hence the new Danish citizens into solidarity across class differences and concern for the common good. Yet it has the problem that it creates

a narrow ideal for pupils and places high demands on children's behavior, feelings, and attitudes. One could say that it demands finely tuned social skills of the individual child and an awareness of subtle signs of other peoples' psychological boundaries—but more than that, it demands specific ways of being sociable, obedient, personally engaged, and interested in school. Children who possess these characteristics, or learn to perform them, do much better in school than those children who are found lacking in these traits. And more generally, this ideal privileges children of parents who share the values of the school, or have at least been pupils themselves in the Danish school, and thus know the codes and ideals through experience. I write this with reference to the well-known argument made by Bourdieu and Passeron that children of dominant classes are privileged in school, as the legitimate culture that school imposes on them resembles the one they have learned through the primary pedagogy in their homes (Bourdieu and Passeron 1990: 42–52). In today's Denmark, this legitimate culture is not merely made up of high-class ways of speaking and behaving combined with knowledge of high culture, as it was in the French schools Bourdieu and Passeron described. Instead, as I have described, the legitimized culture involves specific ways of behaving *socially* and *inclusively*, and engaging with authorities in *naturally* informal, but also respectful and flexible ways. In my fieldwork across different Danish schools, I have witnessed that this ideal gives a broader range of children a chance to adapt and get along in school. Meanwhile, one must not disregard that the kind of behavior children are expected to display in school is a behavior especially highly valued in the upbringing of children in middle- and upper-class families. Studies, such as Dil Bach's study on privileged parents' upbringing practices (2012), suggest, that especially Danish parents of middle- and upper-class families who use a vast amount of energy to optimize their children's potential in the educational system have grasped that the best way to do this, is to teach them the social skills and values of equality and inclusion requested in the school. The consequence is that even though the focus on social, inclusive, and natural behavior gives children of other social backgrounds seemingly equal potential to become good pupils in the Danish school, children of upper- and middle-class families are still favored by the ideals of the Danish people's school. This is especially so because they—in line with Bourdieu and Passeron's argument—also have the cultural capital that is appreciated in school. Through their socialization at home, they embody the kinds of knowledge and practice that are interpreted as intelligence, sociability, and cultural competence in school. They are accustomed to the kinds of knowledge, ways of expression, and discussion practices that are valued in school (Gilliam 2009). Compared to children of lower social classes or ethnic minority backgrounds, they thus have an advantage in school.

As pointed out previously, the ideal for a good pupil constitutes a narrow norm, which defines a great deal of children's behavior as problematic. Yet the norm is not only narrow; it is also highly invisible and implicit, and produces consequences unrecognized by teachers. The consequence is that parents and children who are not accustomed to the ideal through their own experiences at home and school may be kept ignorant of its existence. In the following sections, I will take a closer look at such a group of children in order to demonstrate how the social norms of the Danish school contribute to the

production of oppositional norms in groups of pupils.

## 7. The Ethnic Divide

Misbehaving children is not a new issue in the Danish school, yet for more than a decade, the focus of many Danish schools, teachers, politicians, and debaters have been ethnic minority boys—often called the "bilingual boys"—in Danish schools, along with their allegedly problematic behavior. These boys are most often second-generation immigrants, descendants of groups of immigrants and refugees from countries such as Turkey, Pakistan, Palestine, the former Yugoslavia, Morocco, Somalia, Iraq, and other countries, who have migrated to Denmark since the 1960s. From 2002 to 2003, I conducted seven months of fieldwork in a school in the Danish capital of Copenhagen. I spent five months following a fourth-grade class, followed by two more months of fieldwork when the class had progressed to the sixth grade. The class consisted of 60 percent ethnic minority pupils, who were between 10 and 13 years of age during the two periods of fieldwork. The children were of various ethnic backgrounds, and described themselves as Pakistani, Moroccan, Palestinian, Albanian, Peruvian, and other such geographically-oriented origins, or used the terms "Muslims" or "immigrants" to describe themselves as a group. In accordance with the ideal of equality, their class teacher and their other teachers made efforts to demonstrate blindness to these ethnic differences, as they preferred to treat the children in the class as individuals and not to acknowledge any differences between them. They also stressed the importance of tolerance of ethnic and religious differences, and of good social relationships within the class.

In spite of these intentions of inclusion and equality, and the proposed irrelevance of ethnic and religious differences, the children in the class thought there was a sharp divide between "Danes" and "immigrants" in the class, and regarded the individual ethnic Danish children of the class as "clever, well-behaved" pupils, who were "well-liked by teachers". While both the ethnic minority and ethnic Danish children thought the ethnic minority girls were well-behaved, but less liked and less clever, they saw the ethnic minority boys of the class as "stupid", "aggressive", and "troublesome" pupils, who were "disliked by teachers". Even though the teachers were distressed about this divide, they themselves expressed strong frustrations in relating to the ethnic minority boys, because they thought they "misbehaved", were "egoistic", "teased others", "did not contribute to the well-being of the class", "were not aware of how their behavior affected others", and "lacked social competencies and self-control". What we can see here is that the boys did not behave in accordance with the ideal for pupils, as they did not demonstrate the right inclusive behavior and awareness of other children's limits, and in addition, this made it impossible for the teachers to make the class fit the ideal of a good class. A further frustration for the teachers was that the boys were not merely seen as disrespectful, but made it impossible for them to act in accordance with the ideal for a good teacher, as the boys did not engage in personal and positive relationships with them—and, as the teachers put it, "forced" them to scold and discipline in ways which they did not want.

## 8. Oppositional Consequences

One consequence of the boys' behavior, and of the frustration and powerlessness it caused among their teachers, was that the ethnic minority boys were more often corrected, criticized, and scolded than the other children, while the ethnic minority girls and the ethnic Danish children were much more often praised and put forward as good examples to follow. The ethnic minority boys were seen as academically weak, and were criticized for not making an effort in school. They spoke an ethnolect of Danish—that is, a non-standard version of Danish often used among second-generation immigrants as a sign of community. Yet this ethnolect was generally seen as a sign of lower intelligence in school (see analyses of the same issue in relation to Black American children in Mitchell-Kernan 1972: 205 and Delpit 2002, and in relation to lower-class White American children in Purchell-Gates 2002). This contributed to the ethnic and gendered divide between "stupid and misbehaved" ethnic minority boys, "well-behaved" ethnic minority girls, and "clever and well-behaved" Danish pupils, as described by the children.

What is important to acknowledge is that this pattern is partly a result of culturally specific ideas of proper language and academic competencies, and of how a good pupil behaves in school. The ethnic minority children, both girls and boys, are disadvantaged, as they do not learn standard Danish—which is seen as the most important sign of intelligence in school—at home, just as they do not have the culturally specific knowledge that is valued in school (Gilliam 2009). Adding to this, the ethnic minority parents who have immigrated to Denmark as adults do not have knowledge of the importance of these social norms in school, as most have themselves attended schools in their countries of origin. In these schools, there were other norms for the ideal relationship between pupils, and between pupils and teachers. Thus these parents are not familiar with the intense focus on the social integration of the class, and the ideals of informal relationship with teachers, and display of interest, joy, and self-governance in children.

Most girls, however, including ethnic minority girls, have an easier time adapting to the social norms of the school and more easily fit the ideal for pupils, as this overlaps to a large degree with norms for femininity across cultures. Hence, what one needs to learn to be a *good girl* in most communities often resembles what is needed to be a *good pupil* in the Danish school. Yet a consequence of this is that the ideals for children in the Danish school often connote femininity in other communities. This leaves boys in general in a difficult situation, as the kind of behavior valued in school stands in sharp contrast to the kind of behavior required for one to be accepted as a proper boy in the local community—and when they come of age, as a man. For the ethnic minority boys in Danish schools, this is especially challenging as the local neighborhoods in which immigrants live are often rough areas, characterized by unemployment, poverty, and—based on bad experiences—a hostile relationship with state institutions. In order to get along in these neighborhoods, the boys need to acquire a tough kind of masculinity, which is characterized by and values a type of behavior that is more or less an inversion of the behavior seen as ideal in school (Willis 1977, Ferguson 2004). This cultural

inversion is not accidental, but stems from the fact that the tough masculine ideal has been created in opposition to the higher-class norms of behavior favored in school. As shown by many researchers of masculinity, the tough masculine norm is a kind of challenge to and cultural inversion of more academically successful men's norms for behavior and status, created by the socially and culturally marginal boys and men who have experienced failures in school and on the job market (Willis 1977, Mac an Ghail 1994, Connell 1996, Frosh et al. 2002). By rejecting more successful men's norms as feminine and thus less masculine, these boys and men can acquire an alternative status from being more masculine through rough behavior, aggressiveness, hard physical work, playing sports, and, often, access to "easy" wealth through criminality.

Looking closer at the way the ethnic minority boys in the class I followed behaved and described themselves and others, it was obvious that they were engaged in a similar kind of tough masculinity. This had developed into a kind of oppositional form, a kin to the one many minorities in other societies have created before them in response to stigmatization and disappointed expectations of inclusion in majority society (Ogbu 1987). As this has now become a cultural form—a type of cultural ideal that determines individual boys' membership in the community of immigrant boys–for many ethnic minority boys and young men, the tough masculinity is a pervasive norm that individual boys are subject to and rarely break out of. It ensures them status in the community of boys, and abandoning it to become better pupils can result in social degradation and exclusion (Gilliam 2009).

When trying to understand how children behave in school and whether they adapt to its norms, values, and ideals, it is thus important not to focus sole attention on their family background and personal characteristics, but to look at the other norms for behavior that they meet in local communities and in the communities of children they socialize with. These norms can put them in situations of social pressure and double binds that have more impact on them and their conduct than the norms of their families and schools do. Also, their experiences of not fitting to the ideal of a good pupil, as well as being scolded and seen as academically weak by teachers, can lead ethnic minority boys to look for alternative ways of obtaining status and acknowledgement, such as through tough masculinity. In the class I followed, the ethnic minority boys focused most of their attention on seeking the respect of the other boys (Gilliam 2009). As they described in interviews, they knew very well that what was valued in school was the kind and calm pupil who cooperated and was friendly and inclusive towards others, just as they showed me that they sympathized with these kinds of values. But their experience of failing to live up to these ideals, of doing it wrong all the time, and their urge to be acknowledged as "tough and cool boys" in their peer group, had made them give up on trying to become good pupils and adapting to school. Instead, they were engaged in troublemaking behavior, trying to be properly aggressive and tough in the eyes of the others. As two of the boys told me, "It's a kind of show we are making," and "When I see that I fall behind, and the others do not want to talk with me, I have to be quick and find something to do"—by which he was referring to rule-breaking acts (Gilliam 2009).

## 9. Conclusion: When Ideals for Inclusion Lead to Exclusion

What this analysis of ethnic minority boys' behavior and experiences in a Danish school attests to is that the Danish school's quest to be inclusive and tolerant has its limits. It cannot encompass oppositional behavior, and it tends to exclude the children that do not take it upon themselves to contribute to the intended positive social environment of the class. Moreover, when pushed toward this kind of exclusion of children, the teachers still rely on the kind of behavior that is disliked in teachers: namely, scolding, discipline, and withdrawal of acknowledgement. One can say that this is a perfectly natural consequence when children act troublesome and oppositional in school, but my point here is that the school itself, with its ideals for children, contributes to this outcome. The ethnic minority boys end up in the vicious cycle of oppositional and antisocial behavior partly because of their common experience of lacking the knowledge and language favored in school. But another important reason is that they cannot live up to the narrow social norm for good pupils and children in Danish schools. Looking at early research on first-generation ethnic minority children in the Danish schools, making trouble and antisocial behavior was not a characteristic problem in this group (Moldenhawer 1994, Kofoed 1994, Mørck 1994). This could suggest that the kind of behavior many ethnic minority boys in Danish schools practice has partly developed as a kind of reaction to the collective experience of not succeeding in school, of not fitting in in the supposedly inclusive Danish school. Like many boys before them in Danish schools as well as in schools of other societies, this has made the boys refuse adaptation to school and the kind of behavior valued therein. The result is that oppositional behavior and refusal of school norms has now become a marker of an immigrant identity and community for the boys, and even a marker of the Muslim identity, which most of the ethnic minority boys share across ethnicities (Gilliam 2009).

Despite real efforts, good intentions and a child-friendly, tolerant, and inclusive environment, the Danish school thus suffers from the same problems of privileging the privileged and excluding the marginalized, which social reproduction theory within educational research has shown is a characteristic trait of the school institution. While the school does succeed in integrating many children in this environment and socializing them into the ideals of Danish society, it has an inherent problem. As I have argued, Danish society's ideals of inclusion, equality, and integration influence the ideals for the class, the pupil, and the teacher, but these in turn produce a very narrow social norm for the children attending school. The consequence of this is that the supposedly inclusive school creates vast barriers for those pupils who do not fit into this norm. This is especially so for the pupils who are not familiar with the subtle, highly specific, and detailed ideals of the Danish school, or for the pupils who live in tough areas of the country, in which performance of a certain toughness is required, especially for boys, to get along. As these pupils do not display the right attitudes, behaviors, and characteristics in school, they will often have the experience that they cannot become good pupils, and as a reaction to this, create oppositional norms and find strength in oppositional communities, which will yet again contribute to their exclusion.

## Notes

1) *Folkeskole* translates into English as 'Folk School'—i.e., "The School for the People." Denmark has 5.5 million inhabitants and 1,500 *Folkeskole*.
2) This paper is an extended version of a paper presented at the international symposium "Future Society for Children: Scandinavian Thought and Practice," held March 6, 2010, at the National Museum of Ethnology (NME) in Osaka, Japan. I have conducted the research for this paper partly as a collaborative foreign researcher and member of the core research project of NME: "The Anthropology of Care and Education for Life," 2011–2013 (representative: Nanami Suzuki).
3) The name "Soenderskolen" is a pseudonym.
4) It is a matter of recurrent political debate whether the exam results from the schools should be made public.

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