

HEQA - Sara Backman Prytz and Johannes Westberg

[00:00:00] **Jack Schneider:** Welcome to *HEQ&A*, the podcast of the *History of Education Quarterly*. I'm your host, *HEQ* co-editor Jack Schneider. Every few weeks, we'll dive into recent work from the journal, asking authors how their projects challenge or extend what we know about a topic, exploring what's interesting and surprising about it, and then taking a step back to consider broader implications. In the second half of the show, we turn our sights to teaching. So, if you're an educator, make sure to stick around until the end. And now let's hear from one of our authors.

[00:00:51] **Sarah Backman Prytz:** So I'm Sarah Backman Prytz and I'm an historian of education in Uppsala, Sweden. And I'm the author of this article titled "'Arm the Schoolmistress!': Loneliness, Male Violence, and the Work and Living Conditions of Early Twentieth Century Female Teachers in Sweden."

[00:01:09] **Johannes Westberg:** And I'm Johanna Westberg, a full professor of theory and history of education at University of Groningen in the Netherlands and also the author of "'Arm the Schoolmistress!': Loneliness, Male Violence and the Work and Living Conditions of Early Twentieth Century Female Teachers in Sweden."

[00:01:25] **Sarah Backman Prytz:** Our article is about female teachers in rural Sweden in the first decades of the twentieth century. and they were in a particular vulnerable position living in really isolated areas and often without neighbors. And this was a well-known problem being debated in newspapers and by politicians. During the same period, female teachers also struggled with their professional position in terms of salaries, status, education, and so on.

[00:01:58] **Sarah Backman Prytz:** In our article, we examine the work and living conditions of this female teachers in rural Sweden, focusing on their experiences of loneliness, harassment, and violence, that they suffered. So we analyzed the debate in newspapers and magazines, and also the political debate in the Swedish Parliament. By doing so we can see how the problem was defined and given public attention and how the actual problem was, of course, linked to their isolation.

[00:02:37] **Sarah Backman Prytz:** One of the real threats was violent men. Another problem was the fear these teachers had to live with. For many of them, of course, it got worse with the lack of social contacts in the countryside. We can also see how the debate revolved around really practical solutions for these teachers like getting tenants or providing telephones. Another solution was to provide them with the weapons actually, and this solution was actually realized in many parts of Sweden and we also have some people advocated guard dogs instead of weapons. In our article, we also have, uh, included a photo of a young female teacher with her guard dog. So we can see.

[00:03:24] **Sarah Backman Prytz:** Well, we didn't know much about it, despite the fact that it was a big part of the public debate on teachers. It's also interesting how almost all suggested solutions to the problem were really practical. It's really focused on the everyday life of these female teachers and how to improve their living conditions in their houses and how it was such a large part of the debate, eh, in newspapers.

[00:03:54] **Johannes Westberg:** We were surprised to find all this kind of information, all this kind of data on how female teachers really struggled to improve their conditions. And it felt like quite curious, how they really suggest to this very specific kinds of solutions using watchdogs, uh, using guns and so forth.

[00:04:19] **Sarah Backman Prytz:** I think it's quite interesting how the emotions of these teachers was used as an argument-- however, not by the teachers themselves. We can see how newspapers, how they described the conditions. So the rural teachers and their depression and anxiety were really strong in these debates, also persistent arguments. So we can see kind of see how emotions fueled public and political debate. So the arguments that legitimized the debates were reflections of the teachers' emotions, although the solutions were practical.

[00:05:01] **Johannes Westberg:** It is interesting to see this as a case of an international phenomenon on international structures and processes, because during the nineteenth century and early twentieth century, the teaching profession was feminized: more and more female teachers were employed in schools by local school districts and so forth. And I find it really interesting to see how this article really, really kind of explores what happens when a profession is feminized and we can then see it also what this process entailed for women who started to work in school in the Swedish rural countryside.

[00:05:41] **Johannes Westberg:** I think first and foremost, we contribute to this research that's dealt with the living and working conditions of female teachers and their kind of social position and status in rural areas. And I think it, it's interesting how we kind of contribute to the literature by showing that there was not only a gender gap in terms of wages, but also some kind of emotional gender gap between men and female teachers indicated by these female teachers' experiences of loneliness and fear and apart from this, I also find it interesting how female teachers then did not only have to kind of fight for raised wages, better living and working conditions, but those, uh, had to fight for their mental status for, for their mental and physical security. And I can also add that I think this is interesting also from a contemporary perspective because this study addresses issues, uh, that still sometimes is debated regarding the status of teachers and not the least the vulnerability of female teachers. So we can provide a historical perspective on them: some kind of current debates.

[00:07:01] **Jack Schneider:** The second half of the show is dedicated to thinking about teaching. We ask authors to put on their guest lecturer hats and take students into the weeds. What should they pay attention to, methodologically speaking? What else should they be reading if they want to take a deep dive into the historiography? And where are there opportunities for further research?

[00:07:20] **Sarah Backman Prytz:** I think students should pay attention to how we use different sources, both newspapers and political documents, protocols from the Swedish Parliament. And I think it's--it was really important for, for us to do so to get a broader understanding of how the public debate, uh, evolved during these decades.

[00:07:47] **Johannes Westberg:** I really think that this article indicates how you can use some kind of educational journal, teachers' journal, and this kind of parliamentary records, not only to study educational policy, but you can also use some to get certain insights into the everyday life of teachers. So I think in that sense, they [unclear] an example of broadening use of this categories of source materials.

[00:08:16] **Sarah Backman Prytz:** And we also had a bit of a luck during the pandemic now because since Sweden, it's all digitalized in many newspapers and the political records. So that was good for us, for our research.

[00:08:34] **Sarah Backman Prytz:** Well first, I would like to recommend James Albisetti's "The Feminization of Teaching in the Nineteenth Century." It's really crucial for this article.

[00:08:44] **Johannes Westberg:** Yes, apart from James Albisetti's work, uh, I think, uh, the edited volume by Patricia Schmuck on women educators, printed in 1987, is a great book to read and more recently Geraldine Clifford's *Those Good Gertrudes* which is a very extensive monograph that I think can inspire many readers.

[00:09:08] **Sarah Backman Prytz:** I would really encourage students to take a step in to the history of emotions when doing their research. I think it's could be a really interesting, and that particular perspective is not used to any great extent in the history of education. So I think it must be fruitful.

[00:09:28] **Johannes Westberg:** And I also think that, uh, there are still plenty of opportunities to deal with almost like classic topics, like changing status of teachers and changing wage structures, gender gaps in the wages and so forth, and not least using this kind of source materials, because as I think our article can indicate this use of educational journals is a very great source if you want to get to know all the twentieth-century teachers.

[00:10:03] **Jack Schneider:** Check out *History of Education Quarterly* online. The journal is published by Cambridge University Press and it's carried by most academic libraries. You should also be sure to follow *HEQ* Twitter handle: @histedquarterly, which regularly sends out free read-only versions of articles, and the show's Twitter handle @HEQandA. And don't forget, subscribe to the show so you don't miss forthcoming episodes. We're available on iTunes, Stitcher, and wherever you get your podcasts. HEQ&A is produced at the University of Massachusetts Lowell. Our producer is Jennifer Berkshire and our theme music is by Ryan Shaw. I'm Jack Schneider. Thanks for joining us.