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### **Authority and Agency**

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### **Agency and authority in the historiography of the youth**

If we accept a definition of agency as autonomous entities or agents acting or capable of acting by themselves, it poses a challenge to historians of young people in any period and possibly especially the Renaissance era. The young of the Renaissance period were generally under the authority of adults. Both in ideological descriptions such as catechisms and other educational literature, and in practical life they were under the guidance of parents, or as servants, apprentices and journeymen under their masters and pupils in their schools. However, young people also managed to escape this authority and could have agency even under it. This chapter asks what kind of agency young people could have and in what situations. Could they also, at times, have authority and if so, what kind of authority?

The first well known studies by Philippe Ariés and Keith Thomas on the history of the young thought that childhood and youth were stages of life that were invented with modernity, during the Enlightenment in the eighteenth century. According to this view, therefore, “young” people in the preceding centuries did not form a social or cultural age group that could have agency, nor were individual young persons often in a position to hold power over themselves. As individuals they belonged to the social class of apprentices or journeymen, servants or in the more wealthy groups, to students or sons and daughters – all groups that were under someone else’s supervision or authority. Irrespective of whether that meant protection or submission, it diminished their opportunities for independent action and agency considerably (Ariés 1960; Stone 1977; Thomas 1976).

Another set of historians decided to study youth agency through various forms of delinquency and popular culture (Macfarlane 1970; Pollock 1983). For the next few decades, historians searched for and discovered young people's social, economic and emotional (but less political) importance in various historical societies, essentially proving Ariés and Thomas wrong. Identifying the ways small and powerless people used agency has been useful in histories of minorities and the powerless. Recently, however, historians have again come to ask what agency is, and what it means for different people and whether emphasising agency past its limits gives a useful overall picture of historical power relations. (Gleeson 2016)

Authority and agency have been central concepts in the history of young people and youth but the way they have been understood has changed both in history and historiography. This chapter will look at the young and their relationship to agency and authority, not only within the context of historiography but also by taking into account differences caused by things such as class or status, gender, wealth and family structures as well as the type of source material that historians may have been able to use in different cases. All this will influence what historians can say about the agency that the young could claim and the kinds of authority they were under – or could use. Youth were legally and ideologically under the authority of adults, and more specifically adult males – fathers, masters of households and workshops and teachers, as well as communal or state authorities above them. Legal minority diminished the formal agency of the young. In most countries minority lasted until the age of 25, until marriage, or until the completion of an apprenticeship or journeymanhood and the approval of a master's status. Nevertheless, many young people gained gradually more agency as they gained more experience in their schooling, training and life and as they reached a certain age, often around 12 or 14. At this point, they were usually legally expected to earn their keep, and in many countries they became a taxable workforce around 13 or 15 years of age. Criminal responsibility often also increased gradually with age, starting around this point, and was normally accompanied with an assessment of the young persons' ability to understand the

consequences of their actions. Sometimes this led to a dismissal of a legal punishment, sometimes to applying to the same person both the legal punishment meant for adults and the more unofficial punishment reserved for children. (Mispelaere; Cohen & Reece 2018; Rahikainen 2001; Underwood 2014: 150)

Nevertheless, as Pauls Griffiths says, youth was thought of as the “choosing time”: a time when the young made choices that would later mould their lives and the societies they lived in. This granted them agency in the eyes of their elders, but it also made it crucial that they used such agency in the right way – therefore their agency had to be controlled. In the eyes of their parents, teachers, masters and other authorities, the problem of early modern youth was one of authority and socialization. (Griffits 1996: 13)

The chapter will look critically at young people’s agency and its limits, as well as their relationship to authority, taking into account that action may not always equal agency. Nevertheless, this chapter will show through various examples that, at times, the young both took action and had agency despite cultural expectations of obedience and deference to others’ authority. Yet the agency of “the young” was always on the move, changing in character and extent according to situation, sphere of life, social status and age, cultural or biological. Discipline, for example, was a different type of restraint for craftspeople and peasant youth than it was for the nobility. The chapter will also show that many expectations about youth were themselves of the kind that allowed for certain kinds of agency, resistance and individuality, such as excusing disturbing or even criminal actions due to the culprits’ age and lack of wisdom or experience. However, this was considerably more common with apprentices or journeymen and peasant youth than among the nobility or the clergy.

### **Education, class and ideals of agency under authority: growing up to fill your place**

A series of letters to young Per Baner from his mother, father and great-aunt show the nobility's ideals of how young people should be and behave. Per was in his early teens (11-14) when the letters were written between 1551-1554 and in the process of receiving a traditional training for a young nobleman in a relative's house in Odense, Denmark. The letters represent ideals shown also in various catechisms, devotional literature and household manuals of the time: they emphasise obedience and submission to the teachers and masters of the household as something for the boy's own good. Per was expected to obey authorities, not seize action or pursue his own adventures. (Lahtinen 2014; Lahtinen 2013)

Philippe Ariès' and Lawrence Stone's claims in the 1970's that societies before the nineteenth (or eighteenth for Stone) centuries were ignorant of childhood and youth was based on this type of materials. (Stone 1977; Ariés 1960) But the letters to Per Baner show that youth as well as childhood were understood as periods of life on their own right and with conditions that were different from adulthood. A lot of care and education was invested in bringing children up, in most corners of the world. However, all this was oriented towards the future: as with children, the young were thought of in terms of potential rather than a present asset and one that needed the attention and direction of adults in the present. Their subjectivity and agency were therefore subjected to that of the adults. The current, personal, aims and wants of the young people were not encouraged and they were expected to concentrate on growing up to fulfil their future roles. (Crawford 2010; Bailey 2012; Newton 2012; Grace 2015; Coolidge 2014: 223; Lipsett-Rivera 2002.)

This is evident in the letters to Per: his mother saw all kinds of temptations and conflicting interests looming around her son and she asked him to resist them:

“Dear Son, you must also fear and honour the good man who is your schoolmaster, be obedient and amenable to him and mark and mind what he teaches you, and when you are punished by him for if you do not learn or do wrong, you must not grumble, talk back, nor go away and talk ill of him with the servants or other people who gladly gossip...”<sup>1</sup> (Margareta Baner to Per Baner 25. April 1557, in *Pedagogiska källskrifter* 1936: 3–7).

This shows an understanding of what temptations her son might face but not much sympathy for his situation. In the same letter, the mother even makes a personal appeal that the son should be as meek towards the people he lives with “*as if I was there myself always with you to hold them in honour.*”<sup>2</sup>

Noble honour and duty are remarkably prominent in the letter to Per, not just in an abstract manner but in very detailed advice about how to treat his superiors with obedience and reverence and his inferiors with fairness and friendliness. The letters directed him how to say his morning prayers, how to eat and drink and how to take his hat off when entering a holy place. A great deal of emphasis was placed on not lying and not swearing. This was not merely for the sake of being good but also because, as his mother wrote, “*when you come home again, you will not be vain and useless, but it will be your task to write and display and count*”<sup>3</sup>. His present concerns were to be subordinated to those of his future adult self, a nobleman of a noble family. Per was a future heir whose actions must by default be directed towards that future as the adults saw fit. A letter from Per’s father to him in 1554 clearly shows this when he wrote that he had understood from Per’s mother

“that you thought it would have been better to come home and that you could have learned and done as much at home as where you are now, but if that had been so, I would have gladly summoned for you. But you do not yet know what is best for you

and cannot sense your own good nor what will make you useful and successful in the future”.<sup>4</sup> (Axel Nilsson Baner to Per Baner 19. February 1554, in *Pedagogiska källskrifter* 1936: 8–9.)

The expectation of growing up to fulfil a role was common for young people but the roles to be fulfilled and the things that one needed to learn to fulfil them with were different for young people in different social groups, classes and genders. Early modern adults also attributed agency to other adults as they discussed the young: when the son of Hans Suurpää, a burgher from Tallinn, eloped from his father and his already agreed upon apprenticeship to Turku, his father wrote an angry letter blaming not his son but a Turku burgher Pål Scheel of luring and stealing his son away. However, the idea of youthful ignorance and irresponsibility and the resulting attribution of agency to adults was used to allow young people to break the rules and even to have more agency in directing their lives. Pål suggests Hans should practice only moderate discipline “*because you cannot always make the young as wise as soon as you’d wish*” (Diplomatarium Fennicum: Pål Scheel to Hans Suurpää 8/1510. <http://df.narc.fi/document/5471>; also Hanska and Lahtinen 2010, 34; Klockars 1979). Similarly, it was not uncommon in court records to reduce young people’s criminal sentences because they “*were young and easily misled,*” as the court commented on their decision to give a servant girl a minimal fine as she had been duped into stealing ale from her master. (Court district records of Kokemäki, Finland: 11 November 1625. Ala-Satakunta and Vehmaa I, KO a2:212v.) The early modern young were thus allowed to take action by means of taking away their agency and attributing it to others.

For a historian, these kind of narratives tell three stories at once: on one hand, there was a clear expectation of obedience to parents and parent-like authority figures that limited the agency of early modern youth. On the other hand, the same youth quite frequently found ways – and were allowed – to escape that demand of obedience. This often took place through mentally separating rash and innocent action from intentional and purposeful action – the former could be allowed for the young

people, the latter was reserved for those in power. It is clear that these different types of action would represent very different types of agency, if indeed they represented any. Thirdly, a historian's opportunities of finding those occasions is still dependent on source materials that were mostly created not by the young themselves but those in authority over them, providing the narrative from the point of view of the authorities and revealing, at best, haphazard and sporadic incidences that somehow reached adult discourse. Though this is not perhaps a greater problem than with most areas of history where those in power meet those under it, it does pose some real and true challenges in determining whether the young had agency in a given situation or relationship and what kind of agency that could be.

Agency in education and rebellion against its ideals is easiest to find in the male sphere. Girls spent more of their life in the domestic sphere, learning the skills needed for housewifery. Some were sent to court as ladies-in-waiting to be trained in the important skills and to gain the important contacts of noblewomen. During the sixteenth century some female members of the elite acquired enough literacy skills in Latin to garner public admiration and fame in the emerging societies of letters. (Cohen & Reeves 2018; Ross, 2009: 30–47)

Students also rebelled directly and were sometimes even expected to do so. In Sweden and Finland, for example, students of the Royal Academy wandered around the streets at night, claiming and marking them their own by making noise (*grassatim*), by dragging sticks and swords along stone pavements, house walls, windows and closed gates. In Turku, Finland, they also attacked houses of their "enemy" groups – such as German soldiers – to draw the inhabitants out for a fight. The Academy tried to discipline the students but the town people could do little about it. (Geschwind 2001; Svenfelt 1990: 28–36; Laitinen, 2019) Word choices like *grassatim* in the court records imply a certain ritualization of student racket-making, and the townspeople were used to and even expected some of it. Nevertheless, too much was too much even with groups that were expected to cause some disruption.

There was also a class aspect to these rebellions as is clearly shown by a description of the adventures of students in Rostock. Rostock consistorium protocols tell of university students, especially of Swedish ones, who were in conflict with the burghers of the town. In 1574 they gathered at the town centre “*cum instrumentis et armis*” and amused themselves by throwing stones and attacking the night guard. Students from noble backgrounds were said to be especially riotous. One of them, young Klaus Hermansson Fleming, also got into a fistfight with a fellow student. The immediate triggers for the fight remain unclear. Klaus lost his temper because a younger student from a non-noble background moaned about the deposition ceremony with regular mocking and bullying as new students had to show deference to elder students “*regardless of the fact that they might well be more learned than their older fellows*”, implicating that Klaus was not among the most advanced older students. Alternatively, it might have been the same younger student’s derisive comments on Klaus’ German pronunciation skills that caused Klaus to fly off the roof. The young men were able to settle their differences but soon enough new troubles emerged. Klaus had repeatedly refused to give up his sword and the plume on his hat – a mark of nobility forbidden to students. Klaus himself said he would rather resign from a university that treated him like a schoolboy than give up his insignia.

Tension between class or status groups was obviously an important part of the matter and Klaus’ aggression. He saw himself as a member of the aristocracy, as a nobleman who should be respected and obeyed due to his birthright and rank, not as a student who had to obey rules set by university teachers or town burghers, or someone who had to compete in knowledge with someone non-noble. Klaus was considerably older than Per Baner, around his twenties, and had already adopted the airs of a grown up nobleman. His attitude did not surprise the University consistory and his exploits were tolerated at first but, in the end, he had to leave the University by the next summer, though his studies were not complete. (Carlsson 1961; Nuorteva 1997; Hanska & Lahtinen 2010)

Per Baner and Klaus Fleming were sons of Swedish nobility and were expected to grow up to be adult noblemen. We read of the wishes and expectations they faced from letters written by their families. It is usually in this kind of material that historians find both the clearest constraints to the agency of youth in the form of set expectations, affection and care for the young as individuals. It is their very dependence on others that makes it possible for the young to gain a degree of independence and agency, but there was also a constant conflict between ideals of purposeful agency concentrating on growing up to fulfil their future adult roles, and what was, by adults, considered mistaken or delinquent personal action. The ideals of growing up to fulfil the adult roles varied according to interpersonal and intercultural factors such as gender, social class and skills and abilities, or religion, ethnicity and geographical place. Yet, at least in New Mexico, similar action was understood breaking both Christian or the Aztec ideals (Lipsett-Rivera 2002: 67). Although the ground of the ideals themselves, as well as the practical manifestations thereof, were different, breaking the rules could be understood transculturally.

### Religion as agency

One platform for identity construction for most early modern people, youth included, was religion. In the case of the young, religious action (whether holding on to childhood beliefs, conversion, or renouncing religion altogether) involved both growing up to fulfil the values of authorities in society, and conflict against them. It was complicated. Religion, as such, is both a sphere of creating performative spaces for personal action and identity, a sphere of subjecting one's will to a higher power and a sphere of judgement and control by others in the same community, both one's peers and those above oneself. (Katajala-Peltomaa & Toivo 2017, 1–18) In the case of young people, religious discourses emphasise autonomy at the same time as proscription: Prayer is individual, and learning is personal, yet the descriptions of children's and young people's religious experience are formulated by others, even when dressed in what appears to be their own voices. (Berner &

Underwood 2020) It was often as Lucy Underwood states: “*the rejection of one authority often consisted in accepting another*” (Underwood 2014: 48).

Religion was one of the most important things to be taught to the young. Most young people embraced their parents’ and family’s religious identity, and some undertook to display that identity by going far further in their devotion than their parents – as evidenced by Judith Pollock on Netherlandish Catholic girls’ choirs. Others rebelled more clearly by refusing their family’s religious convictions and taking up competing ones, as shown by Lucy Underwood’s work on young English seventeenth-century converts to Catholicism. Young people were often in the front line for pushing things and often also the hard line, extremist versions. (Underwood 2014: 145–161)

Sometimes the idealizing narratives of agency in conversion or religious experiences were overturned in narratives of demonic possession or witchcraft, in Europe and in Christian overseas. These stories can, to an extent, be read as struggles for agency and against the confines of parental authority and among the Catholic world or the Protestant gentry, female enclosure, constraint and obedience. (Sharpe 2001; Holler 2018).

Sometimes these conversions required – or allowed dreams of – great effort and adventure. At the end of the sixteenth century, seven Finnish students entered Jesuit colleges in Europe, mostly in Poland and Rome (Nuorteva 1997: 191–246), acting against the culture, expectations and laws of a professedly Lutheran Swedish state. Quite like the zealous Jesuit missionaries who sought either sainthood and power or the glories of martyrdom overseas, these young men courted risk nearer home. The best-known story is that of Johannes Jussoila and his four brothers, sons of the mayor of Rauma. When they started their careers, they did so under circumstances that may have looked even favourable. Johannes had most likely begun his studies under the tutelage of a local clergyman who was officially Lutheran but had originally been ordained as a Catholic priest and appointed to his office in Rauma by Duke John in 1558 when the Duke lived in Finland. Duke John’s wife,

Catherine Jagiellon, was a Catholic and John himself at least irenic. The Jussoila brothers moved, one by one, first to Turku and then to Stockholm to study in the collegium Regium, established by John, after he had become King John III, to educate secretly a generation of Catholic-minded clergy in Sweden. One by one they also left the School for further study either in Rome or in Braunsberg (Braniewo) where the Holy See offered northern scholars free tuition. The youngest of the brothers was Michael Jussoila. He was only sixteen when he left Sweden and consequently not yet ready for proper college education and therefore did not qualify for a grant. He appears to have entered a gymnasium in Braunsberg and paid for his studies by himself. (Biaudet 1 I.A.5. fol 492; Hockman 2015, 113–115)

It is very likely that the Jussoila brothers acted according to their family's inclinations and encouragement. They sent letters and even gifts back home. In addition, at first, the career choice did not seem bad for although the country had adopted Protestantism earlier in the sixteenth century, the fate of religious policies seemed less than certain at the latter end of the century. Jesuit schools had a good scholarly reputation and the intention to study in them might have been a result of academic ambition, not necessarily deviant from the parent's wishes. At first students who had studied at Jesuit colleges and seminaries were able to return to Sweden and work there. Johannes Jussoila returned in 1584 to serve as the chaplain for the Crown Prince Sigismund who, having had a Polish education, was a Catholic. In 1587 when Sigismund was elected king of Poland, Jussoila moved with him to Warsaw in Poland. (Garstein 1992: 113–114, 119–122)

Some students may have had a clearer conflict with their parents as their motive for going. Such a case may have been Caspar Juusteen, the son of a Lutheran Bishop, Paulus Juusten of Vyborg. Caspar first enrolled at a Lutheran university in Königsberg (Kaliningrad) but in the middle of his studies, he moved to a Jesuit College in Braunsberg. The extant source material does not state Caspar's motives, but his action was clearly against his father's interests and caution. Caspar eventually cut his studies short to join Sigismund's court in Poland as a clerk. (Nuorteva 1997: 226–

30, 236, 237) At this point, position of Catholics had considerably deteriorated in Sweden. King John III's policies were objected in Sweden by the nobility and clergy. His son Sigismund's brief reign ended with a bloody civil war in 1596-97, his uncle seized the power as Charles IX in 1599, and Catholicism was increasingly identified with Polish competition to the throne until conversion to all other religions but Lutheranism was legally equated to Treason in 1617. By this time, it was clear that none of these students could ever have a career anywhere near home: Caspar's break with his parents was final.

Conversion stories of young boys and girls were used as part of missionary rhetoric in both Catholic and Protestant circles, in European and global colonial mission. Indeed, organizing schools were an essential part of the early modern mission. (Hect 2002) The Sami experience of the Swedish church's Lutheran mission in the north may serve as a counterexample of the stories of the aforementioned students. At the end of the sixteenth century and the beginning of the seventeenth, Sweden (and Denmark for its part) sought to take control of the Sami areas in the north. The crown's economic interest was significant, in taxation, in the metal resources and in the harbours and transport routes of the Arctic Sea but religion was part of establishing control. This work was slow, perhaps partly because the Sami religion and culture emphasised the chains of generation and ancestry: everyone was a son or a daughter to someone who demanded obedience and respect – in fact, in the place of the young people – and therefore one could not abandon their forefather's religion. (Villstrand 2011: 364)

Nevertheless, as more and more effort were placed on the Sami mission towards the eighteenth century, more effort was also placed on schooling the children. The Lutheran church and government administration, notwithstanding their own conservative and patriarchal nature, also used conversion stories of the young: such as the story told by bishop Peder Krog about a 25-year old Einer from Lycksele in Northern Sweden and 16-years old "Finn" from Tromsø, Norway during his visitation to the northern most parts of Norway in 1709, or the conversion of a 19-year-old

Sami handyman called Anders in Sweden, told by an eighteenth-century school teacher. (Lindmark 2006; Skjelmo & Willumsen 2017a: 314, 316)

The young Sami had a similar relationship to religion as a sphere of rebellion and seizing agency as described by Underwood for the English Catholic young, or by many historians of early modern colonial missions. Nevertheless, similar to the conversion stories of other non-Christian individuals around the world, As Hect point out, the indigenious were described as childlike and that was the quality that made them teachable, educatable and “christianizable” (Hect 2002). At the same time, the conversion stories of the young, these stories the conversions of the young, especially, often connected to schooling and learning to read, also served to create a narrative of progress from savage heathenism to civilized and modern Christianity. Religious righteousness was always a accepted as potential ground to defy patriarchal authority, especially perhaps in the Catholic context where religious vows removed even legal power (Lipsett-Rivera 2002: 63). However, while the stories bestowed agency to the young, they also tightly controlled how the newly-found agency was used. Although the Christian descriptions of the non-Christian people such as the Sami grew more ethnographical or even genuinely interested during the early modern period – similarly to what Tali Berner (2020) has noted for visual depictions of Judaism – these were still narratives with a political purpose. These processes were not completely one-sided or completely oppressive, and that the suppression of non-Christian religions also produced new arenas of action and agency. Nevertheless the Sami converts’ own experience - or the experience of other indigenious individuals or populations - may have been different, and family structures, including parental power, may have had much more weight in structuring it, though it was not as rivetingly highlighted in written sources – if at all. It is a challenge for historians that most of the written sources were authored by members of the dominant or colonizing culture, and it is not made easier by the fact that so is a good part of the current historiography (Skjelmo & Willumsen 2017b. For some information about

Jewish communities see Shear 2010 and attitudes to conversion. On Religious mission and suppression in Latin America Charles 2010: 1–12).

### **Moral authority and rebellion: control and sexual agency**

When studying young people outside their family context, in apprenticeship, service or school, their opportunities may seem more harshly restricted. Apprenticeships and service were, after all, full time roles of obedience and work within strict and formal hierarchies with little free time and ideally under constant supervision. It was supposed to be a way of life rather than a job, and the practical power relationships could lead to abuse, fear, and intimidation, increased by the rigid length of contracts. Service and apprenticeship contracts were made for fixed periods: apprenticeships were supposed to last a set number of years, which extended the subordination of the young (Ben-Amos 1994: 205–6; Griffiths 1996: 12 and chapter 6; Rappaport 1989: 322–9; Ojala 2018; De Munck 2010). Nevertheless, there was some free time as one can see in the university consistory records which revealed Klaus Fleming’s adventures above, or in various court records and in descriptions of printed scripts of festival plays of the young. Free time was normally recorded and described only when something went wrong or disturbances, crimes or accidents took place. It shows that the young acted in their own way in places outside the official rule of society and that normally this caused no opposition or indeed remark among the adult society.

Historians have also looked at youth play and gaming cultures in search of less hierarchical and authoritarian spheres of life, providing more opportunities for subjective agency. Results have been both encouraging and cautious. Historiography on play and games has often concentrated on what Alexandra Shephard has termed “rituals of youth” (Shephard, 2003: 101) and what Natalie Zemon Davis has called jurisdictions (Davis 1971: 55).

Natalie Zemon Davis suggests that carnival misrule plays were a chance for the young and the oppressed to play with society’s rules, to simultaneously challenge them or turn them upside-down

and to create, define and re-create those rules. As such, misrule plays and carnivals functioned as rites of passage in that young people used them to define both the community and their own role in it – the agency they took was, therefore, partly directed to molding themselves into roles reserved for them in society, thereby upholding the rules that made those roles and partly re-fashioning society and their roles in it into something that they would indeed fit in. As Davis puts it, “...*rural society did not stimulate the possibility of exploring alternate identities..., nevertheless these youth groups played certain of the functions which we attribute to adolescence. They gave the youth rituals to help control their sexual instincts and also allowed them some limited sphere of jurisdiction or "autonomy" in the interval before they were married.*” (Davis 1971: 55; Lamb 2014: 32)

Similar traditions of masculine youth culture, peer bonding and revelry can be found not only in various places in France but also in Italy, in England and in parts of Germany. (Davis, R. 1994: 59–62; Shepard 2003: 98–99, 166–70; Voltmer 2009)

In towns apprentices organized events from misrule plays to artistic work exhibitions in their workshops. In rural areas local schools, farmers’ sons and young labourers attended similar rituals of merriment. Certain themes were toyed with in the plays: power, jurisdiction, misrule, folly, even madness, and most importantly for this chapter, youth. In these rituals, the young misrulers played prescribed roles but in doing so they also took “jurisdiction” over the behaviours of people of their own age, the youth of the town, including marriageable girls and young strangers coming to court their girls, whom they would fight or fine, regulating the nature of their play according to whether they thought the girls in question were virtuous or of questionable virtue. (Capp 1977: 127–33; Ben-Amos 1994; Griffiths 1996; Shephard, 2003; Smeith 1973: 149–6; Yarborough 1979: 67–81. Regarding the Jewish girls judgement and women’s voices see Weinstein 2004.)

The young also passed judgement over the behaviours of people older than themselves, most importantly married couples. The young would mock those who did not conform to the expectations of marital hierarchy and fidelity in the comedies they played but often they would also do so with direct physical violence. This frequently focused on gendered and sexual power relationships. Early modern views on the sexuality of the young were conflicting in many senses. On one hand, the innocence of the young was to be protected by their elders. On another hand, growing up with an awakening sexuality, sexual desire and gaining a relative (according to sex and status) control over one's body was thought of as an inherent part of youth on which literature and youth culture played. Popular literature portrayed apprentice heroes escaping adult control and taking sexual agency, if only in fantasy – portraying sexual adventures as an exciting and eventually advantageous if not in a very realistic manner. The “jurisdiction” of carnival plays and other youth culture revelry also brought the control of sexuality partly into young men's own hands. (Davis 1971: 52–3; Spufford, 1985: 55; Fletcher 1995: 88–9; Lamb 2014: 31, 41; Griffiths 1996: 18)

Considerably less sexual agency was granted to girls and young women who were usually presented, both in fiction and in court records, as victims of seduction or sometimes even rape, and it was their fathers who claimed compensation for the loss of their virginity and honour. This was obviously not only an assessment of female sexual agency, valid as such all around Europe, but also a means of reducing their culpability sometimes also used by young men who (or whose parents) wanted to get out of a promise of a marriage to which they had been seduced. However, the rhetoric of seduction did not always reflect the whole story. While clearly ill used in service, often by their masters who held power and should have protected their staff, girls could be flattered, infatuated and therefore either ignorantly or wilfully oblivious of the consequences of seduction. Elisabeth Cohen describes young women from Renaissance Rome who seized the opportunity and offers for future benefits – economic settlements for either marriage or religious life – in return for sexual arrangements in their teenage years. Cohen emphasizes that while these affairs had a mercenary

side, some girls also “cared and loved“ their partners and were able to describe their situations in clear and confident ways, thereby showing not only rational and economic but also emotional agency. (Roper 1994; Cohen 2018, Miettinen 2012; On young men and promises of marriage, see Välimäki 2013 and Välimäki 2018, On European Jewish cultures Weinstein 2004 and 2009)

In England young servant women often took their search for a marriage partner into their own hands by actively engaging in courtship and the kind of leisure activities that allowed for sexually flavoured encounters. In Northern Europe both men and women of marriageable age attempted to get a feel of a potential marriage partner by “night walking” or spending time intimately with their potential spouse. This could also compromise them but did not always do so. When the encounter led to pregnancy, they might choose to marry the person or to take a legal punishment in fines and stay unmarried. It has been shown that at least among the peasant classes of northern Europe, motherhood outside marriage posed problems mainly for those women who had no father (or adult brother) to protect them. (Hubbard 2018; Miettinen 2012) Again, this shows a conflict between the level of autonomy that was expected of the young and especially young females and the dependence of that autonomy in practice on the protection of adult male members of their community.

As far as semi-organized misrule plays and work exhibitions accorded agency and authority, they usually did so for the male youth as apprentices, journeymen and students. Girls and young women were more confined to the domestic sphere and had considerably less organized public space or arena for their identity or action. Yet the rules of patriarchal society applied differently to girls and children and young women and grown-up women. The young had a different role and different possibilities – in some respects more restricted, in others more fluid than those concerning adults or children and those concerning boys and young men. (Cohen & Reeves, 2018: 12) Yet girls and young women were involved in calendric youth games and processions: various song and procession traditions have been recorded in various parts of Europe but they have been given different meanings. In Finland a tradition of a “procession by virgins of the parish” has been

recorded. According to folklore researchers, there are similar traditions in Scandinavia and the Baltic region and perhaps elsewhere in Europe. Nineteenth-century traditions present the custom as an orderly affair of respectable virgins singing printed songs – probably influenced by nineteenth-century elite collectors’ interest in building a “pure” and virtuous national culture where pure girls processing around the parish was to ensure the bounty and faultlessness of the following summer’s harvest. (Enäjärvi-Haavio 1953: 16–17)

The recorded tradition from Häme included four songs, three of which were themed around female sexual adventure. The first song was a local version of an old Swedish-Danish song *Lagmansvisa* of a girl who was in love with one suitor but whose brothers wanted her to marry a richer one.

*Annikkaisen virsi* was a warning song by a girl lured into a sexual relationship and then betrayed by a travelling salesman – she raises a storm to drown the salesman. *Mataleenan virsi*, a localized retelling of the Mary Magdalen story of a young woman whose suitor, after being refused, turned out to be Jesus and revealed she had already had three sons and had murdered them. She then repents and asks Jesus to punish her for the infanticides - but not for the relationships the babies were a result of. The stories are warnings but also emotionally engaging descriptions of young women’s agency and sexual adventure, which, though they had consequences, were not as such condemned. (Kallio et al. 2017: 416–443; Lönnrot 1840: 260, 290; Miettinen 2015: 57–58)

Tiina Miettinen has found descriptions of the Whitsun festivals in seventeenth-century court records, which take the theme of female sexuality further: together with considerably more informal merriment, the four songs were sung in a procession going around the village on Whitsuntide followed by dancing, drinking, play and bonfires outside the village and without adult control. The procession was not an orderly parade but a lively group walking and running around in no particular formation. The songs themselves were varied and recreated, as oral culture usually was, according to mood and acute topics of interest. The action sometimes took subversive and even criminal forms (such as a rape, the incident which had caused the events to be recorded in court) and the

participants' virginity, virtue or even marital status were not issues of interest. Fun, risk and the community were crucial to the content of the event – and when they were no longer, the community gathered to punish the culprit. (Kallio et al 2017: 411–420; Enäjärvi-Haavio 1953: 16–17; Miettinen 2012, 52–53, 270; Miettinen 2015: 57–58. – I am grateful to Tiina Miettinen for letting me benefit from her on-going research on the Finnish young womens' Whitsun festivals.)

Court records include other descriptions of girls' activities as well. For example, in the late seventeenth century, a group of girls, including a manor owner's daughter and three servant girls, had been sledge-riding during Shrovetide "like the young people of the area usually do". The girls were in a playful mood and carried out a series of pranks: they tried to scare an old woman by tapping on her window and running away. When they arrived home, they told the young male servants of the manor a story of how they had scared her and seen "a broom fly across sky that was steered by a human hand". The story spread and led to a witchcraft accusation where the girls were witnesses. (Toivo 2008: 70–72)

Because the material is more fragmented, matters relating to young women also seem more sporadic than carnival and misrule. Nevertheless, the court records often hint, that the young women's festivities were annual, calendric affairs, too. Whereas apprentices' semi-formal exhibitions and plays were often documented or written down and printed, it looks like the girls' and young women's activities were written down less often and documented only when "something went wrong". The court records describing young women's affairs show considerably more conflict than the written down, printed scripts of the misrule plays that suggest, according to Natalie Zemon Davis, that "*the older generation's expectations for the young and [the younger?] generation's expectation for themselves did not differ very much,*" (Davis 1971, 55). It should not, however, be assumed that young women's agency was always in conflict with early modern society's values, but rather that young women's agency was recorded when it caused conflict – otherwise it was self-evident rather than noteworthy. Since the court records emphasise things that went wrong, they also

give a picture of messy action that deviated from the expectation, the script. Therefore, it shows women's traditions as freer than the scripted misrule plays, and therefore potentially allowing the creation of a more individual or even self-based identity and agency. However, such a conclusion overemphasises a difference that is based on the nature of the source materials only.

### Youth agency in the Renaissance and the Reformation

Did youth agency develop during the Renaissance or the Reformation? What changed and what remained the same as in the Middle Ages, or did the agency available to youth not change until the Enlightenment and the Industrialization were well on their way?

The basic need to protect livelihood – crops, livestock, one's own safety – against natural elements such as rain and frost or beasts, was a considerable part of agrarian life, and, since the towns were usually reliant on the surrounding countryside to produce their food, also that of many urban communities. These needs remained largely the same from the late medieval to the early modern period, as did family structures. This meant that a good part of the preconditions and structures of authority and ordinary youth agency also stayed the same. This is often observed in the history of the everyday and from below: in striking contrast to ideological and political developments, high culture, theology and philosophy, change in the everyday muddling through human life is so slow and gradual that it may be difficult to discern: continuities appear stronger. But there was change too. Arts and sciences developed and brought new technologies into everyday life in e.g. farming. This made work easier, creating more leisure time and consequently more time when the young were not so strictly under immediate adult supervision as they were in workshops, cattle sheds and kitchens. On the other hand, the Reformation reduced the number of regular holy days, turning them back into work days. This may have meant, at least for some young people, that their regular and expected chunks of free time were replaced by more unpredictable and sporadic, shorter but perhaps

more frequent escapes into back alleys or playing fields outside the village. Youth, action and agency may have grown more frequent, but it also moved further away from the domestic and adult public spheres.

There were also new influences that grew, giving new options for the young to attach their hopes, fears and identities to. Religion was one of these. The rise of printing and cheap literature created new types of entertainment to appeal to young readers and although censorship was heavy, new ways to stay slightly ahead of attempts at control were constantly created. (Nayar 2018: 42–46) The result was not so much a change in the conditions and structures through which the young took agency and faced authority but a change in the options that were available for adapting to those conditions in communication, leisure, etc. What still clearly regulated the limits of any young person's autonomous action was the fact that most humans and especially the young were in dire straits if they lacked the support of their families and communities.

The young as a topic for research is in a similar position to what Mona Gleeson argues in her critique of agency-oriented histories of childhood, perhaps even more so because of the way “youth” was and is defined as a period of transition, the “in-between” time of childhood and adulthood and of dependency and autonomy. The search for the youth's agency as *a priori* goal in analyses runs the risk of limiting rather than expanding our ability to show how they contributed in significant ways to change over time. The search for agency, for youth and for all other powerless groups, stems from a desire to challenge assumptions regarding their alleged status of powerlessness. They rely on binaries (adult/child; master/servant; powerful/powerless) which tend to downplay nuances and negotiations between the young and those in formal authority. Perhaps even more importantly, the binaries downplay power struggles among the young people themselves. In general, the mundane and the everyday “real” life where rules were there to be bent and power was constantly contested is often left out. As historians try to look past the ideological binaries of powerless and powerful, they may also need to look past those that have been seen as “good” and

“bad/evil”. Agency as such is neither but it can be used for unpleasant things such as bullying and violence and the young can fall victim to each other’s power struggles.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> "K:S. tu skaltt och fruchte och ähre then godhe man som thin scholmester ähr och wara honom hörig och lüdiigh och mercke och minnis grantt huat han tig lerer och tencke ther vpå, och som tu bliffuer straffatt aff honom for tin lerdom skull heller for ander tin broth, thåå schaltu icke knorre heller ildskis emot honom, heller gå bortt och take ille heller fortale honom heller klage på honom för drenger heller annor som gerne höre förtall."

<sup>2</sup> "lüdug och ydmiuk, licke som iag wore sielff altit hoss tig och holle them i ähre".

<sup>3</sup> "när som thu kommer heem igien thå war icke fåfeng, öffue tig at schriffue och kaste vtt och tiill att legge reckenskap".

<sup>4</sup> "haffuer iag forstatt på tin schriuelse som du haffuer for ett åår seden, schreffuitt tin modhr tiill, det du kundhe thet haffue betencht, att tin hemkumpst schulle haffue warit for dig nogit gangn eller det du hadde kunnit leredh eller faridh bättre her en dheer du nu est, hadde iag gerne haffitt budh effter tig, du west sielffuer ennu icke ditt egit beste och kantt intet besinne huatt digh ähr nu gotth jemuell bliffuer ij framtidhn dig nütigt och gangligit."