

Review: Searching for a Democratic Equalizer: How Citizenship Education Moderates Inequalities in Internal Political Efficacy (PhD by Joke Matthieu, Vrije Universiteit Brussel)

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Gender and social inequalities in internal political efficacy have long been persistent challenges in the domain of political engagement. Joke Matthieu's PhD thesis addresses the critical question of why these inequalities endure and examines avenues for enhancing young people's internal political efficacy.

In her PhD thesis, she focuses on the role of citizenship education in moderating inequalities in political efficacy among senior high school students in Flanders. The article-based dissertation comprises four original empirical papers, complemented by separate introductory, theoretical, methodological and concluding chapters. While each chapter features as a strong standalone paper, the collective work is much more than the sum of its paper-parts. It scrutinises established theories and introduces an innovative and timely re-evaluation of how gender, social class and status, and education structure young people's political engagement. The manuscript is moreover written in a fluent and accessible manner, appealing to both academics and practitioners.

Of all the strong points, I would like to highlight three in particular.

The first strength is Joke Matthieu's nuanced critique of the conventional resource model used to explain gender and social disparities in political efficacy. Rather than attributing these disparities solely to a lack of resources or skills, Matthieu's research contends that social status and people's sense of entitlement play pivotal roles in determining how they perceive their place in the political sphere. These fresh perspectives are sure to inspire numerous future studies.

Secondly, the dissertation challenges the role of citizenship education as a democratic equaliser in internal political efficacy. It underscores that the effectiveness of citizenship education hinges on how it is embedded in a school environment and how it resonates with existing (gender) norms. While citizenship education may mitigate inequalities for some groups, it could exacerbate inequalities for others. This revelation calls for a more nuanced and comprehensive examination of how citizenship education can genuinely work to the benefit of all.

A third notable strength is Matthieu's adoption of an interdisciplinary approach, drawing from diverse academic fields, including political science, sociology, gender studies and education studies. Her engagement with emerging research on gendered political so-

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cialisation provides novel insights into the endurance of gender inequalities in political engagement, even within politically resourceful contexts.

As expected, the dissertation does have some limitations, which the researcher acknowledges and discusses. Notably, the use of correlational data restricts the ability to establish causality, and the dataset's focus on Flanders limits generalisability to other regions and countries. Nonetheless, Matthieu suggests that future research can address these limitations, e.g. through comparative analyses or experimental research.

In conclusion, Joke Matthieu's dissertation is essential reading for anyone interested in political socialisation, political engagement and citizenship education, particularly in the context of promoting gender and social equality in democratic learning. By challenging conventional ideas and theories, emphasising the complex interplay of social factors, and adopting an interdisciplinary approach, the dissertation makes a substantial mark in the field and offers many valuable avenues for future research and policy development in this area.