



What is Suitable Education for Girls? Women's Participation and Statistical Arguments in Sweden's 1888 Girls' School Committee

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Abstract • This article delves into the historical context of the second girls' school committee in late-nineteenth-century Sweden, exploring aspects of gendered content and conduct in its formation and operations. Firstly, the study investigates the media representation of the committee's inclusion of women and how it was framed for the public. Secondly, it examines the committee's use of statistics in its 1888 report to advocate for a particular type of education for girls, based on notions of their "female nature." By adopting a feminist approach to historical writing, the article aims to shed light on the committee's significance in terms of breaking the male-dominated pattern of state decision-making. As a result, this article contributes to the field of gender and history of education by examining the groundbreaking inclusion of women in the girls' school committee and the utilisation of statistics to shape educational policies in a society grappling with conflicting notions of female nature and women's expanding roles in education and the workforce.

Keywords • girls' schools, secondary schools, gender, statistics, newspapers, hygiene

Introduction

In late November of 1885, a committee came together in Stockholm for its first session to discuss their allocated task to collect data from Sweden's secondary girls' schools and draft policy recommendations for the government based on their findings. During the two weeks of their meeting, the committee explained in its later published report, they came up with a plan, constructed questionnaires to inquire about the hygienic, pedagogical, and economic circumstances at the girls' schools, and scheduled inspection trips to the schools. Over the next year, the committee collected its data. During 1887 the committee members worked on their drafted report, the final version of which was signed over to the government on January 19th 1888.¹ This was not unusual for a governmental committee; in fact, it was not even the first of its kind as a large-scale investigation of girls' schools. Still, this particular one stands out because it was the first committee commissioned by the Swedish state that had women in its ranks. These two of six members, Sophie Adlersparre (1823–1895) and Hilda Casselli (1836–1903), had previously gained visibility on the state level through their longstanding work in the women's movement and in girls' and young women's higher education, respectively.

This article addresses the following two research questions about this so-called girls' school committee (*flickskolekommitté*). I start by asking how the creation of the committee was reported in Swedish newspapers; specifically, how the inclusion of

1 Einar Löfstedt et al., *Undersökning af Sveriges högre flickskolor: Underdånigt utlåtande afgifvet den 19 januari 1888 af utsedde komiterade* (Stockholm: Ivar Hæggströms boktryckeri, 1888).

women was framed therein for the public. Then, I examine the question how statistics was used in the committee's 1888 report to argue for the kind of education girls should receive in light of their "female nature." The article is situated within a feminist approach to history writing through which allows statistics to be given a gender perspective.² A feminist analysis of the state aims to examine the significance of sex and gender relations as constitutive elements of the modern state. Among other aims and findings, feminist state theory analyses the persistence of patriarchal and masculinist patterns in statehood.³ Statistics as an important practice for seemingly objective modern state policymaking is framed here as an aspect of the masculinist state and is therefore analysed not as a neutral agent of reason, but as a form of argumentative conduct that has a constitutive gendered aspect.

The girls' school committee 1885/1888 is of particular interest for historians of gender and secondary education. First, the novelty of including women in a governmentally appointed organ to draft policy recommendations is relevant. It is interpreted here to signify a break in the purely male domination of state decision-making. Secondly, the report had to find a plausible balance in its situatedness within the socio-political setting in which the secondary school sector rapidly expanded for girls. Although the public and the state had come to somewhat accept women's need and desire to participate in higher education and the work force, very strong notions about "female nature" and its presumed implications for girls' education prevailed.

The remainder of this article is structured as follows. First, I lay out my fundamental theoretical perspectives on thinking the state and its technologies such as statistics as gendered. The section on methods and materials discusses the sources used to answer the two research questions. Based on a brief outline of the emergence of girls' secondary schooling as a contested phenomenon during the mid-nineteenth century, the reporting in public newspapers on the appointment of the girls' school committee is analysed, with particular focus on the framing of the inclusion of Sophie Adlersparre and Hilda Casselli as the first women in a royally commissioned committee. The committee's 1888 report is the subject of the last section, where I go deeper into the use of statistics in the argumentation for the committee's recommendation of policy and funding for Sweden's girls' secondary schools. The conclusion provides a summary of the article's central points.

Theoretical perspectives: Gendering the state – gendering statistics

The present article aims to contribute to the field of history of girls' education with a

2 Sue Morgan, "Writing Feminist History: Theoretical Debates and Critical Practices," in *The Feminist History Reader*, ed. Sue Morgan (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 1–19; Joan W. Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," *The American Historical Review* 91, no. 5 (1986), 1070–75.

3 Gundula Ludwig, Birgit Sauer, and Stefanie Wöhl, "Staat und Geschlecht: Grundlagen und aktuelle Herausforderungen. Eine Einleitung," in *Staat und Geschlecht: Grundlagen und aktuelle Herausforderungen feministischer Staatstheorie*, ed. Gundula Ludwig, Birgit Sauer, and Stefanie Wöhl (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2009), 13; Eva Kreisky and Marion Löffler, "Maskulinität und Staat: Beharrung und Veränderung," in *Staat und Geschlecht: Grundlagen und aktuelle Herausforderungen feministischer Staatstheorie*, ed. Gundula Ludwig, Birgit Sauer, and Stefanie Wöhl (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2009), 75–77.

critical perspective on statistics as gendered.⁴ Based on the feminist state theory, my analysis is framed by a distinction between gendered content and gendered conduct.⁵ Distinguishing between the two makes it possible to analyse both the overt and the implicit aspects of gender in the commission's report and its use of statistics specifically, and in the discussion on girls' education in general. Gendered *content* relates to central topics of "female nature" and a "suitable education" for girls, and the types of knowledge and insights that are commonly accepted within the discussion. This content can be expressed overtly and through the use of numbers, as I aim to show. Gendered *conduct* refers to the framework conditions of the debate, specifically how truth and legitimacy are conveyed. This critical perspective is applied to the historical context of statistics as a gendered tool of reasoning and conducting decision-making in the modern state. I argue that content and conduct are both contingent on the dominant bourgeois gender ideology and on the corresponding organisation of the state and social order.

The fundamental theoretical perspective for this article's dual interest in the newspaper reporting of the committee and in the use of statistics in the report is derived from research in the field of feminist state theory. According to feminist theorisation, the modern state is fundamentally a masculine institution.⁶ Modern state power systemically constructs and upholds a gendered dichotomy that elevates the masculine in spaces of political negotiation. Male domination appears naturalised. This ideology of male supremacy can be called *masculinism*.⁷ During the nineteenth century, following the economic, social, and political shifts of the previous century, the emergence and dominance of bourgeois ideology facilitated the creation and solidification of the conception of ontological gender characteristics. A major factor for this were the changes in the industrialised economy through which the notion of separated gendered spheres evolved. The realm of public life, of breadwinning and politics came to be understood as that of men, while the private home was seen as the natural space of women. This dichotomous thinking permeated the organisation and interpretation of modern society. Corresponding with the gendered spheres, passivity, devotion, and emotionality were coded as feminine, while activity, assertiveness, as well as rationality

4 For previous research on the intersection of statistics and gender, see e.g. Margo Anderson, "The History of Women and the History of Statistics," *Journal of Women's History* 4, no. 1 (1992); Silke Neunsinger, *Die Arbeit der Frauen – die Krise der Männer: Die Erwerbstätigkeit verheirateter Frauen in Deutschland und Schweden 1919–1939* (Uppsala: Uppsala University, 2001), 106–39; Héléne Périer and Rebecca Rogers, "Women and the Language of Statistics in Late-Nineteenth-Century France: Reading the Graphs of Madame Pégard," *French Politics, Culture & Society* 37, no. 3 (2019); Joan W. Scott, "A Statistical Representation of Work: La Statistique de l'Industrie à Paris 1847–1848," in *Gender and the Politics of History*, ed. Joan W. Scott (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018); Joan W. Scott, "Women in *The Making of the English Working-Class*," in *Gender and the Politics of History*, ed. Joan W. Scott (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018).

5 Gender is here understood as the sex-based assumptions, expectations, and boundaries with which women and men are confronted in certain socio-political, geographical, and historical circumstances, which structure their understanding of each other and the world, and which constitute the relationships of power between them. I base this definition on Scott (1986), 1067–1070; Stephanie Spencer, "Educational Administration, History and 'Gender as a Useful Category of Historical Analysis,'" *Journal of Educational Administration and History* 42, no. 2, 110.

6 Kreisky and Löffler (2009), 76.

7 Arthur Brittain, "Masculinities and Masculinism," in *The Masculinities Reader*, ed. Stephen M. Whitehead and Frank J. Barrett (Malden: Polity Press, 2001), 53.

and logic were coded as masculine.⁸ Modern state power, which could no longer legitimise decision-making through the God-given authority of a ruler, came to operate on the assumption of objective and fact-based governing. Thus, this type of governing had to exclude “the feminine” on an ideological basis. In practice, this prevented women from participation in the decision-making process within male circles (*Männerbünde*) because of their assumed ontological “female nature” and destiny as homemakers, and their assumed lacking in the “masculine qualities” of impartiality and reason.⁹

In the establishment of the modern nation-state, statistics became a central tool for decision-making. Statistics – numbers in rigorously labelled tables recording births, lives, deaths, occupation, education, sickness, or poverty – provided a means to create seemingly impartial policies that took standardised circumstances and characteristics into account to shape the future based on past trends and regularities. As a bureaucratised practice, statistics served the scientification and thus legitimisation of politics in the episteme of the modern nation-state.¹⁰ Thus, statistics became “what it is to reason rightly.”¹¹ It came to hold significant persuasive power, not just for statesmen in the positions for policy-making but also for the wider public.¹² Since statistics fundamentally operated on the assumption of the possibility of objectivity, rationalism, and the abstraction of experience, it can be linked to the set of attributes that had become well-connected to assumed male nature. Furthermore, because of its authority over reason and governing, statistics can be considered a powerful agent for upholding and substantiating the masculinist structure of modern statehood. However, there are two sides to this coin. On one side, statistics had the power to shape social reality, how it was perceived, governed, and ultimately lived, and to legitimise the (implicit) ideologies of those in control of statistics. On the other side, statistics provided the promise of a powerful tool, a subversive element, that could potentially be employed to argue for a less accepted contention, precisely because it was not dependent on the authority of its author.¹³

When connoting modern statehood and statistics as its mode of reason with a prevalent image of idealised masculinity, there is a danger of concluding that women are fundamentally the “repressed Other of patriarchal reason.”¹⁴ However, this is not the premise nor intention of this article. When studying the debate on female education on a state level in constitutive contrast to male education, it is necessary to analyse its gendered content, the dichotomy between male and female nature invoked by the

8 Karin Hausen, “Die Polarisierung der ‚Geschlechtercharaktere‘. Eine Spiegelung der Dissoziation von Erwerbs- und Familienleben,” in *Sozialgeschichte der Familie in der Neuzeit Europas*, ed. Werner Conze (Stuttgart: Ernst Klett, 1976), 368.

9 Kreisky and Löffler (2009), 79; see also Hans-Jürgen Heinrichs, “Politik als männerbündnisches Handeln und Verhalten,” in *Männerbünde, Männerbände: Zur Rolle des Mannes im Kulturvergleich*, ed. Gisela Vögler and Karin v. Welck (Köln: Raustentrauch-Joest Museum, 1990).

10 Neunsinger (2001), 106.

11 Ian Hacking, “‘Style’ for Historians and Philosophers,” *Historical Ontology*, ed. Ian Hacking (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 188; Ian Hacking, *The Taming of Chance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 35–36.

12 Hacking (2002).

13 Itay Snir, “‘Not Just One Common Sense’: Gramsci’s Common Sense and Laclau and Mouffe’s Radical Democratic Politics,” *Constellations* 23, no. 2 (2016), 271.

14 Rita Felski, *The Gender of Modernity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 7.

participants in the discussion. Despite having considerable obstacles in their way, women actively took part in shaping the political and public discourse on education, professional opportunity, and political rights. Women's agency is not negated by framing the state and its tools as gendered conduct or fundamentally masculinist, nor is "modernity per se" understood as purely masculine. Rather, the kind of epistemology and social configuration within which women's argumentation and participation needed to operate is highlighted.

Methods and materials

This article is based on two source types to answer its two research questions.¹⁵ The central source document is the report of the 1885/1888 girls' school committee, specifically its chapter on hygiene because there the use of statistics is most prevalent. While the report has been acknowledged by previous research on the expansion of female education in the late nineteenth century, it was often mentioned only as an aside in the development of girls' schooling. More room was usually given to the general contemporary public, professional, and parliamentary debates, an earlier girls' school committee, women's activists and organisations, or financial decisions on girls' schooling.¹⁶ Where the committee's report received more attention, for instance in research by Anna-Karin Frih or Marie Nordström, the focus was on the health aspects or on the issue of co-education discussed therein.¹⁷ An often-cited overview of the girls' school committee was provided by Gunhild Kyle, who showed its key aspects as part of her discussion on the historical debate on the definition of girls' educational goals.¹⁸ This existing research on the girls' school committee 1885/1888 makes its report certainly not an obscure source. However, I aim to show that it is worthwhile to analyse the report not only as a documentation of contemporary views on the schoolgirls' constitution and their appropriate education, but also to shed light on how statistics was *used to make* such arguments on girls and women in the male-dominated domain of secondary education in the context of masculinist modern statehood. This is what is conceptualised here as gendered conduct.

The second source type is Swedish newspapers. To find reporting on the girls' school committee's beginnings, I used the digital data base *Svenska dagstidningar* (Swedish daily newspapers) by the Swedish Royal Library and conducted a key word search for "*flickskolekommitté*" (girls' school committee) using different historical spellings of the word.¹⁹ This key word search resulted in 393 hits for the years 1883–1907. I chose 1885, with 48 hits, as the focal period of investigation. This was the year when the committee

15 Both the girls' school committee's report and the newspaper reports are in Swedish, therefore all direct quotes from the sources used in this article are translated by the author.

16 Ingela Schånberg, *De dubbla budskapen: Kvinnors bildning och utbildning i Sverige under 1800- och 1900-talen* (Lund: Studentlitteratur, 2004), 97–98, 253; Ingela Schånberg, *Genus och utbildning: Ekonomisk-historiska studier i kvinnors utbildning ca 1870–1970* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Siksell International, 2001), 69; Sara Backman Prytz, *Borgerlighetens döttrar och söner: Kvinnliga och manliga ideal bland läroverksungdomar, ca. 1880–1930* (Uppsala: Uppsala University Library, 2014), 23, 101.

17 Anna-Karin Frih, *Flickan i medicinen: Ungdom, kön och sjuklighet 1870–1930* (Örebro: Örebro University Library, 2007), 118–23; Marie Nordström, *Pojkskola – flickskola – samskola: Samundervisningens utveckling i Sverige 1866–1962* (Lund: Lund University Press, 1987), 44–48.

18 Gunhild Kyle, *Svensk flickskola under 1800-talet* (Gothenburg: Kvinnohistoriskt arkiv, 1972), 88–97.

19 The commonly used version during the nineteenth century appears to be "flickskolekomitén."

was first announced and the members, especially the female ones, were reported to the public. I am interested in the public perception of these women because their inclusion in a state committee can be viewed as a signifier of a change of times, when women were no longer seen as completely incompatible with participation in state-decision making.

Work with a digitised newspaper archive has certain limitations. As Johan Jarlbrink and Pelle Snickars showed, the optical character recognition (OCR) of the digitised Swedish newspaper *Aftonbladet* (The Evening Paper) for the years 1830–1862 is considerably faulty which negatively impacts the word search. The authors warned against relying too much on the digitised version of such sources.²⁰ Nevertheless, as Joakim Landahl argued, digitised newspaper archives are a great resource for historians because they make it possible to search a large body of material from a wide range of national and local newspapers.²¹ For the purposes of this article, the key word search brought satisfactory results to provide an overview of a number of Swedish newspapers' representation of the committee's inclusion of women.

Girls' education as the solution for the political problem "women"

In Sweden, the 1840s and 1850s were marked by intense debates on the issue of schooling. As part of this, discussions around girls' education took place in politics and among the broader public. Middle-class families often found themselves in the difficult situation of having to take care of their adult daughters who were expected to marry and become mothers and homemakers. Due to the demographic circumstances of what was labelled the "surplus of women," making a suitable match was not a reliable option for many. In addition, the families of origin found themselves often in difficult financial situations following the economic crisis that made it difficult to care for their unwed female relatives.²² As Christina Florin and Ulla Johansson put it: "During the nineteenth century women became an explicit political problem in Sweden."²³

A perceived solution for this situation was to offer young women education while they waited for marriage. By the mid-1860s, institutions that offered education to become elementary school teachers had been established.²⁴ This expansion of female secondary education brought up the question of the state's responsibility in the matter. To explore the issue further, in 1866, the Swedish Parliament (*Riksdagen*) first tasked a committee with investigating the need to build and publicly fund further secondary girls' schools and, if this was found to indeed be necessary, how such schools needed

20 Johan Jarlbrink and Pelle Snickars, "Cultural Heritage as Digital Noise: Nineteenth Century Newspapers in the Digital Archive," *Journal of Documentation* 73, no. 6 (2017).

21 Joakim Landahl, "De-Scandalisation and International Assessments: The Reception of IEA surveys in Sweden During the 1970s," *Globalisation, Societies and Education* 16, no. 5 (2018), 568.

22 Kyle (1972), 44; Schånberg (2001), 44; Catherine L. Dollard, *The Surplus Woman: Unmarried in Imperial Germany, 1871–1918* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2009).

23 Christina Florin and Ulla Johansson, "Education as a Female Strategy: Women Graduates and State Grammar Schools in Sweden, 1870–1918," *Journal of Thought* 26, no. 1/2 (1991), 10.

24 Agneta Linné, "Lutheranism and Democracy: Scandinavia," in *Girls' Secondary Education in the Western World: From the 18th to the 20th Century*, ed. James C. Albisetti, Joyce Goodman, and Rebecca Rogers (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 139.

to be organised.²⁵ This first girls' school committee recommended that schools be structured with the dual goal of preparing young women for both marriage and for the eventuality of becoming part of the public labour force.²⁶ It was stressed that the girls should receive an education that would take their intellectual, physical, ethical, and aesthetic development into consideration.²⁷

In the decades that followed the 1866 committee's report, the school sector for middle-class women expanded significantly across Sweden. Many institutions were privately run, some of them subsidised by the government, while others were formally established through parliamentary decisions.²⁸ In 1870, young women formally gained access to the state matriculation exam (*studentexamen*), which opened the possibility of university studies to them, even though it would take many more decades until women could work in their chosen academic fields.²⁹ Normal schools and other teacher training seminars qualified young women for more viable occupational opportunities and the teacher profession became an attractive field for women – much to the dismay of their male colleagues.³⁰ Overall, the question of working middle-class women's position in society, girls' schooling, the issue of their "female nature," and the state's role in such educational matters remained a hot topic in Sweden.³¹

Another girls' school committee was to provide clarity in this situation. Signed on February 9th, 1884, a motion to the Swedish Parliament called for another examination of the kind and quality of education at the country's secondary girls' schools. This new committee's findings should lead to the formulation of recommendations as to how these schools should be organised and financed by the state.³² The motion was granted in March 1884.³³

Newsworthy: Women in a royally commissioned committee

An examination of Swedish newspapers indicates that the girls' school committee indeed was perceived to be a newsworthy item. The committee and its members were announced in a variety of Swedish newspapers on November 12th, 1885, after a notice with title *Flickskolekomitén* had been sent out via telegram from Stockholm the previ-

25 Adolf Leonard Nordvall et al., *Underdånigt Betänkande afgifvet af den i Näder tillsatta Kommissionen för behandling af frågor rörande ordnandet af undervisningen för qvinlig ungdom* (Stockholm: P. A. Norstedt & Söner, 1870), 1–2, 63.

26 Nordvall et al. (1870), 4–7, 15.

27 Kyle (1972), 87.

28 Linné (2010), 139–141.

29 Greta Wieselgren, *Den höga tröskeln: Kampen för kvinnans rätt till ämbete* (Lund: Gleerups, 1969); Christina Florin, "Kampen om kunskapen," in *Kvinnohistoria i Sverige*, ed. Berith Backlund and Anna Sjö Dahl Hayman (Gothenburg: Gothenburg University Library, 2011), 20.

30 Christina Florin, *Kampen om katedern: Feminiserings- och professionaliseringsprocessen inom den svenska folkskolans lärarkår 1860–1906* (Stockholm: Stockholms universitet, 2000).

31 Florin (2011).

32 Motion 1844:44, *Om afslåtande af skrifvelse till Kongl. Maj:t med begäran om utredning beträffande undervisning i de enskilda högre skolorna för qvinlig ungdom m.m.* (Motioner i Första Kammaren, 1884).

33 Riksdagens Protokoll 1884:17, *Första Kammaren: Lördagen den 15 Mars, e.m.* (1884), 33.

ous day.³⁴ At first, most of these reports did not make explicit mention of the novelty of women being part of a state commission, nor were the first names of the committee members mentioned. Nevertheless, it was made clear to the reader that two of the members were female through their grammatically gendered aristocratic and professional titles, respectively.³⁵

The committee consisted of Chairman Professor Einar Löfstedt, Baroness Sophie Adlersparre, co-principal of the higher female teachers' seminar (*högre lärarinneseminariet*) Hilda Casselli (also spelled Caselli), principal of a girls' grammar school (*elementarläroverk*) Gustaf Cederschiöld, Lector A. N. Hammar, and physician Dr P. Sigurd Lovén.³⁶ However, following his application to be freed from his obligations, Lovén was replaced almost immediately by physician Dr August Edvard Goldkuhl (1830–1904).³⁷ Goldkuhl was praised in the news as a good choice because of his expertise in school hygiene, an area of knowledge that would make up a major part in the committee's report.³⁸ He had published *Handledning i Skolhygien* (Handbook of School Hygiene) in 1883 where he gave, among other things, precise recommendations on suitable classrooms, lighting, or punishment.³⁹

The two female members chosen for their pioneer role in this official state committee were distinguished in the Swedish women's and education movement. Sophie Adlersparre was a central figure for the moderate women's movement.⁴⁰ Most notably, she was one of the founders and editor of the first journal to discuss women's issues in Sweden *Tidskrift för Hemmet* (Home Review; established in 1859 and renamed *Dagny* in 1886). Adlersparre also founded and participated her whole life in the women's association *Fredrika-Bremer-Förbundet* (Fredrika Bremer Association; founded in

34 Many of the shorter notices on the girls' school committee were published almost word for word in a plethora of newspapers since they were based on official statements from the capital. In such cases, the footnotes will only give some examples (indicated by "e.g.") to avoid redundancy. These examples are not selected according to specific parameters but are intended to reflect a broad range of newspapers reporting on the committee.

35 E.g. Anon., "Flickskolekomitén," *Sundsvalls Tidning*, November 12, 1885, Telegram t. Sundsvalls Tidning; Anon., "Flickskolekomitén," *Nya Wermlands-Tidningen*, November 12, 1885, Telegram; Anon., "Flickskolekomitén," *Smålands-Posten, Kronobergs Läns Tidning*, November 12, 1885, Småland: Staden och länet. Telegram.

36 For a discussion on translating terms of national school systems into English, see Johannes Westberg, "Neither Compulsory nor Public or National? Translating the Swedish Terminology of 19th-Century Primary Schools, Teachers, and Pupils," *Global Education Review* 10, nos. 1–2 (2023).

37 E.g. Anon., "Flickskolekomitén," *Aftonbladet*, November 20, 1885, Stockholm den 20 november; Anon., "Afsägelse af ledamotskap," *Post- och Inrikes Tidningar*, November 20, 1885, Officiellt; Anon., "Till ledamot i flickskolekomitén," *Hernösands-Posten*, November 25, 1885.

38 E.g. Anon., "Flickskolekomitén," *Smålands-Posten, Kronobergs Läns Tidning*, November 24, 1885, Småland: Staden och länet. Telegram.

39 Goldkuhl was against corporal punishment and shaming, and preferred detention. Carl Wilhelm Herlitz, *Skolhygienens historia: En översikt främst av utvecklingen i Sverige* (Stockholm: Bergvalls, 1961), 89–90.

40 The term "moderate" is used in demarcation to the less prominent groups within the Swedish women's movements that were more radical, such as left-wing liberals or socialists. The latter groups demanded fundamental societal changes. The moderates laid their focus on expanding education and women's rights *within* the prevalent framework of society. Ulla Manns, "Historico-political Strategies of Scandinavian Feminist Movements: Preliminary Perspectives of a Research Project," in *The Memory of Labour and Social Movements: A Global Perspective*, ed. Jürgen Mittag and Berthold Unfried (Leipzig: Akademische Verlagsanstalt, 2011), 219–20.

1884 and still active today). *Dagny* functioned as the official mouthpiece of the association, with Adlersparre as the journal's first editor and formative thought leader.⁴¹ The other woman appointed to the committee was Hilda Casselli. She was a reform pedagogue and principle of several institutions for higher girls' education. Furthermore, she was the founder of the so-called girls' school meetings (*flickskolemötena*) that took place seven times between 1879 and 1901 as a national forum for debate around girls' education.

Initially, the appointment of two women as committee members was not stressed in the news. In the numerous reports of November 12th, 1885, the members of the girls' school committee were merely mentioned by last name and title. The conservative newspaper *Stockholms Dagblad* (Stockholm's Daily Newspaper) appears to be the only one to have acknowledged the novelty of women in a royally commissioned committee on the same date. The newspaper stated unmistakably that “[a]mong the members of the committee . . . there are two *women*.”⁴² The page on which the report was printed did not show liberal use of italics within the running text, which made the word “women” stand out clearly to the reader. The report continued as follows:

However natural it may seem that in the investigation of questions such as these female forces should be called upon, it is, if we are not mistaken, the first time ever that women have been appointed to a committee appointed by the Royal Majesty.⁴³

Since public debate on girls' schooling had been ongoing in Sweden for decades, the readers were likely familiar with women's presence in the debate on female education, as this formulation indicates. This probably made the “female forces” of the two “*women*” in the investigation on this matter appear “natural” – even if the curiosity of their appointment was stressed. The report went on to inform readers that while it was the first time that women had been part of a royal committee, women had been committee members on the communal level more than once “where it had been found appropriate.”⁴⁴ This formulation points to the prevalence of a gendered understanding decision-making and the relevance of gendered content for women's inclusion in it. A topic had to be “appropriate” for women to be deemed fit to discuss and investigate it in an official decision-making body, even on the communal level.

A short biographical note on both women followed in the *Stockholms Dagblad* report, even though the names of the “distinguished practicing teacher” or the “active female publicist, who for more than twenty-five years has been the editor of the *Tidskrift för Hemmet*” remained unmentioned for now.⁴⁵ The report was continued further down in the column (after two wholly unrelated short reports on the railways) with a description of the committee's task and a list of the members. As if to leave no doubt about the sex of the two female members, they were introduced with their full first names (Carin Sophie Adlersparre, including her maiden name Leijonhufvud, and Hilda Vilhelmina

41 Ulla Manns, *Kvinnofrågan 1880–1921: En artikelbiografi* (Lund: Arkiv förlag, 1992), 19.

42 Anon., “Flickskoleundervisningen,” *Stockholms Dagblad*, November 12, 1885, Stockholm (emphasis in original).

43 *Stockholms Dagblad*, November 12, 1885, Stockholm.

44 *Stockholms Dagblad*, November 12, 1885, Stockholm.

45 *Stockholms Dagblad*, November 12, 1885, Stockholm.

Josefina Caselli), while the male members were only listed with their titles, first name initials, and full last names.⁴⁶ The two parts of the report can be interpreted to reflect both the understanding that the two women were considered suited for their task based on their sex and their merit, but also indicate the need to emphasise the oddity that was *women* in a state commissioned organ.

On the following day, November 13th, 1885, the novelty of women in the state committee was reported more widely. The liberal newspaper *Göteborgs Handels- och Sjöfarts-Tidning* (Gothenburg's Trade and Seafaring Paper) published a short report with the title "Women in a committee appointed by state." The report repeated the announcement published in *Stockholms Dagblad* that, for the first time, women were instated in a committee commissioned by the king, without italicising the word "women."⁴⁷ Other newspapers announced the novelty in a similar yet briefer fashion.⁴⁸ A section in Sweden's oldest newspaper *Smålands-Posten* (Småland's Post) from November 26th, 1885, put the committee's female members in line with other women who had successfully taken on roles usually reserved for men. Under the heading "To the history of women," the newspaper reported that the girls' school committee was the first in which "the woman is given a place," without mentioning Adlersparre and Casselli by name. The report went on to list female pioneers of previous centuries by name: the first woman to head a post office, the only woman to have received a nobility title "through her own efforts," and the first woman to have been honoured by the Swedish Academy for eloquence in a historic treatise.⁴⁹ By adding the women of the girls' school committee in this line-up of women entering male-exclusive spheres, it appears that the author deemed them pioneers in the realm of male-dominated decision-making.

When the committee began its work with a meeting on November 26th, 1885, *Aftonbladet's* announcement stressed the current relevance of what was called the "education question." The report reflected on how, not only in Sweden but also in several other "civilized countries," the humanistic *Bildung* had given way to an education that put the focus on modern language and natural science. The report stated that the emerging study load had a "divisive and tiring effect on young people's mind," which manifested itself in "sickliness, nervousity, and hopelessness" in the youth. Other countries, the report continued, had opted to seek compensation in physical activity, gymnastics, sport, and needlework.⁵⁰ These questions and issues were indeed a feature of education discussion at the time.⁵¹ The girls' school committee's report would feature an extensive section on "hygiene" which addressed these issues in great detail – supported by statistical tables and argumentation.

46 Notably, Adlersparre signs the 1888 report only with "S. Adlersparre" with the addition of her maiden name.

47 Anon., "Kvinnor i en af staten tillsatt komité," *Göteborgs Handels- och Sjöfartstidning*, November 13, 1885.

48 E.g. Anon., "Två qvinnor," *Härnösands-Posten*, November 14, 1885.

49 Anon., "Till qvinnans historia," *Smålands-Posten, Kronobergs Läns Tidning*, November 26, 1885, Småland: Staden och länet. Telegram.

50 Anon., "Den kungliga Flickskole-komitén," *Aftonbladet*, November 26, 1885.

51 Anna-Karin Frih, "Becoming Healthy, Free and Physically Active: Medical Discourse on Girls in Sweden c. 1880–1930," *Girlhood Studies* 6 no. 2 (2013); Daniel Tröhler, Johannes Westberg, and Anne Berg, ed., "Special Issue: Physical Education and the Embodiment of the Nation," *Nordic Journal of Educational History* 4, no. 2 (2017).

The use of statistics in the girls' school committee's report

The report of the girls' school committee was titled *Undersökning af Sveriges högre flickskolor: Underdånigt utlåtande afgifvet den 19 januari 1888 af utsedde komiterade* (Investigation of Sweden's higher schools for girls: Subservient report issued on January 19th, 1888, by the appointed committee) and was divided into four chapters. The first chapter went into detail about the different school subjects and how they could affect a proper education for girls, often complemented by reform suggestions.⁵² The second chapter discussed the hygienic circumstances of the girls' learning environment. Of interest were the school buildings and equipment, the girls' physiological development, their working hours and free time were included, as were numbers related to their sleep and nutrition, and the frequency of illness and mortality. The third chapter listed the economic state of girls' secondary schooling. The fourth chapter was dedicated to school management and teachers. The appendix included essays by some of the committee members who did not fully agree with the report's consensus. These included Sophie Adlersparre, who objected to salary recommendations, and the physician Goldkuhl, who had strong views on the female physical constitution.

The introduction to the report stated that women had the same intellectual capacities (*andliga krafter*) as men and that, therefore, they too were in need of an education that promoted the harmonic formation of their forces and potentials; just because girls were generally speaking more emotional than boys and had less inner resistibility, this could not mean that their other aspects could be neglected.⁵³ The fact that this had to be stated in the introduction points to the prevalence of gendered content in the political and public debate on girls' education. While common ideas of feminine emotionality and vulnerability were clearly affirmed, girls' intellect was emphasised and developing these capacities through education was declared as the goal of the report. Nevertheless, this education should be tailored to their female constitution and perceived feminine needs. Even though middle-class women had been a strong presence in the labour market for decades by the 1880s, the report still saw the driving force of "female nature" leading girls to take on lives as wives and mothers after their education. It stated that schooling should provide education for both ways of life – career and motherhood – which had already been the suggestion of the aforementioned 1866 committee.⁵⁴ Thus, despite being ascribed the same intellectual capacities, girls were not to receive the same education as boys; after all, they were perceived as being more delicate and prone to illness when studying too much.⁵⁵ Therefore, the girls' curriculum suggested by the committee was less dense than that for the boys. Furthermore, the standard education at girls' schools would not prepare them for the matriculation exam, to which girls had had a right since 1870. Taking the exam could only be considered after taking additional years of advanced courses. Overall, despite the image of women, of their intellect, and their real life having changed since the 1860s, the recommendations of the 1885/1888

52 While these reform suggestions are very interesting, especially when focussing on the gendered content of the report in relation to the wider social debates, it lies beyond the scope of the present article to provide a deeper analysis of the school subjects. For an overview, see Kyle (1972), 93–95.

53 Löfstedt et al. (1888), 12, 22–23.

54 Löfstedt et al. (1888), 15–16.

55 Löfstedt et al. (1888), 179–182.

committee did not reflect this.⁵⁶ Its discussion of girls' education recommendations did still operate within the common notions of gendered content.

The report's second chapter about school hygiene is of special interest here since it featured the report's vast majority of statistical visualisation, most notably in the form of tables but also as statistical description of circumstances in the running text.⁵⁷ The report's 82-page chapter on hygiene included 14 statistical tables where the results of the statistical investigation in up to 118 secondary girls' schools were displayed. The results mainly concerned the state of health or the overall sickness of the female students. This was determined by factors such as the mortality rate, as well as emerging and ongoing health problems. The categorisation of the data on school hygiene varied between the tables. This allowed for various comparisons, such as between the investigated schools, which illustrated differences in their respective school equipment; between age groups; between male and female students of the same age; between Swedish and Danish school girls; or between different school committees' results. The use of statistics to discuss the physical condition of girls and the consequences of attending years of secondary school demonstrates the intertwining of gendered content and gendered conduct in the discussion of girls' secondary education. Gendered assumptions of "female nature" and "feminine frailness" measured against the status quo of male-dominated secondary schooling were expressed, discussed, and legitimised through the rationalising and masculine-connoted tool of statistics.

The feature of statistical comparison between the results of different committees on school hygiene is especially interesting regarding the differentiation between boys' and girls' fitness for a study-heavy secondary education. The girls' school committee referred often explicitly to the work of Professor Axel Key (1832–1901), who had been a member of the secondary school's committee (*läroverkskomitén*) and author of its 1885 report on the hygienic circumstances at the different Swedish secondary schools (*läroverk*). Key's statistical numbers focused largely on boys' secondary schools because of their greater number in 1880s Sweden compared to such education institutions for girls. Of the 233 numerical tables Key offered in the report's extensive appendix, only 16 were on girls' health and work hours. The tables on boys also offered significantly more detail.⁵⁸ According to Key's findings, boys and girls in secondary schools both suffered from illnesses such as lack of appetite, headaches, nervousity, and anaemia. However, girls were especially affected by the latter two and had even shorter sleep hours than boys, who already slept one to two hours less than recommended.⁵⁹ August E. Goldkuhl, the physician of the girls' school committee, had made a similar observa-

⁵⁶ Kyle (1972), 93–95.

⁵⁷ Two other multipage tables can be found in the appendix, one on hours per subject and the other illustrating financial and organisational details.

⁵⁸ Axel Key, *Läroverkskomiténs underdåniga utlåtande och förslag angående organisationen af rikets allmänna läroverk och dermed sammanhängande frågor: Bilaga E. Regogörelse för den hygienska undersökningen* (Stockholm: Kongl. Boktryckeriet P. A. Norstedt & Söner, 1885). Interestingly, in addition to the numerical tables, Key's report featured 101 so-called graphic tables in which the results of his statistical studies on the health, working hours, and sleep schedule of the male students attending secondary education were depicted in scatter and bar diagrams. Only three tables featured the girls. The focus lied on their change in weight and height, not on their overall health or work hours.

⁵⁹ Herlitz (1961), 93–94.

tion in his 1883 handbook on school hygiene where he pointed out that anaemia was a common ailment especially among girls and that most sicknesses among secondary students, boys and girls, could be categorised under “illnesses of the nervous system.”⁶⁰

These findings were congruent with the overall narrative of the time. The supposed “female nature” of girls was thought to be oriented ontologically towards a domestic life. Thus, if their school environment mimicked that of boys too much, who were thought to be destined for life in the public, secondary education was deemed as inappropriate or even harmful for girls. The assumed weaker constitution of girls would make them especially prone to illnesses if they were over-burdened by heavy study loads. Especially during puberty, which was thought to impact both boys and girls negatively but to have more severe consequences for girls’ physical health, the intellectual capacities of girls would suffer. According to the girls’ school committee’s report, long-term and even incurable damage was to be expected if girls partook in a “prolonged sedentary life and a lot of brain activity.”⁶¹ Therefore, questions about an education that would not endanger girls’ physical health unnecessarily were of high relevance.⁶²

While the committee relied heavily on Key’s statistics, despite not containing nearly as much information on girls’ than on boys’ schools hygiene circumstances, the committee had collected some new statistical information on work and sleeping hours, school buildings – and on the important issue of myopia or near-sightedness.⁶³ Myopia was a central concern in the context of the expansion of secondary schooling as the long working hours in less than optimal conditions and a substantial reading load over the span of many years was thought to worsen students’ eyesight.⁶⁴ According to the committee’s numbers, among the girls, 11.5 per cent were suffering from myopia, and 5.3 per cent from other eye illnesses.⁶⁵ When calculating the different categories of sickliness, the report had to draw the conclusion that among the Swedish female youth, “great sickliness” was statistically proven. Was this an issue of the girls’ nature, or one that had its roots more in the environment? A comparison with the same demographics among Danish girls pointed to the latter. The data on Danish girls were taken from a Danish committee’s reports on their secondary schools. The following table from the Swedish report (Figure 1) showed that 61 per cent of the investigated Swedish girls had to be considered sickly – and that is without the inclusion of myopia (which would have increased that number to 65.7 per cent), whereas only 39 per cent of Danish girls fell into that category. Boys were also healthier in Denmark than in Sweden, even though this difference was less dramatic.⁶⁶

60 Herlitz (1961), 90.

61 Löfstedt et al. (1888), 182; see also 179–80.

62 Backman Prytz (2014), 25, 101–3; Frih (2013), 104–6; Kyle (1972), 90–91.

63 Löfstedt et al. (1888), 227; Frih (2007), 117. Reasons given for the reliance on Key’s work were that his numbers had not yet been outdated by the time the girls’ school committee commenced its work, that there had been no significant changes in girls home and school life that would render Key’s results obsolete, and that the re-interpretation of Key’s raw material would have required more workforce than the committee could muster. They stated to have found no reason to doubt the accuracy of Key’s results. Löfstedt et al. (1888), 224–25.

64 Herlitz (1961), 93.

65 Löfstedt et al. (1888), 225.

66 Löfstedt et al. (1888), 229, 225.

Sammanställning af sjukprocenten, närsyntheten frånräknad, för olika åldersklasser vid nedannämnda skolor.

Sjukprocenten för	Fyllda år	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	Summa
	Danmarks samtliga gosskolor		19	24	28	29	30	29	31	29	29	27	28	34	26	—
Danmarks latinska skolor.....		—	—	—	—	—	26	32	33	34	32	30	34	29	—	32
Sveriges allmänna läroverk		—	—	—	—	—	34	37	38	37	36	34	38	40	36	36
Danmarks högre flickskolor		23	27	28	39	40	39	42	50	48	40	40	—	—	—	39
35 högre flickskolor i Sverige		—	28	50	47	55	59	64	64	63	63	62	68	—	—	61

Figure 1. "Compilation of the sickness rate, muopia excluded, for different age groups in the schools mentioned below. Source: Löfstedt et al. (1888), 229.

Despite its gendered premises on the different nature of girls and boys, specifically the overall weakness that assumedly befell girls with puberty, the report's conclusion at the end of its hygiene chapter made it very clear that the current data did not make it possible to contribute this overall sickliness solely to schooling. The factors of illnesses were considered too complex to statistically study them satisfactorily. The report claimed that, statistically speaking, only the emergence of myopia and scoliosis in female students could be correlated with their years spent in schools – and even these ailments should be attributed to poor school equipment rather than schooling itself. Thus, the commission concluded, there was no reason to deny girls secondary education on the basis of their perceived sickliness.⁶⁷

However, the roots for Swedish girls' great sickliness could not be ascribed to schooling alone, the report stated, but were grounded in circumstances upon which schools had no influence. A comparative look at Denmark revealed the underlying maladies of girls' worrisome state of health: the lifestyle of a detached middle-class and the weak national sentiments of Swedes. The report showed that while Danish school girls had to work longer hours, had less free time, little social life, and worse school buildings, they still were 22 per cent healthier than the Swedish girls.⁶⁸ This was traced back to the simpler, "more natural" and active lifestyle of the Danish middle-class.⁶⁹ Notably, the main reason for the overall better health of Danish girls was seen in the fact that Danish men were obligated to several months of military service. The committee assumed that the general military service, this "source of national strength and health" had a positive trickle-down effect on the state of health in Danish schools. In the same line of argumentation, the committee lamented the prevalence of alcoholism in Sweden as a factor that could point to school children's poor health being "an inherited weakness."⁷⁰ Consequently, the committee demanded reforms, not only of school buildings, equip-

67 Löfstedt et al. (1888), 231.

68 Löfstedt et al. (1888), 234.

69 Löfstedt et al. (1888), 234.

70 Löfstedt et al. (1888), 234.

ment, and health consultation through public funding, but also of the nation's habits. They appealed for proper ventilation of the homes, encouragement of movement, and adequate recreational activities at home.⁷¹

The conclusion, that the issue of widespread sickliness among female secondary school students could not be statistically proven to correlate with schooling per se, is significant. Statistics – this established and accepted tool of communicating truths and objective facts – was used here to combat or at least relativise notions that “the female” was physically unsuited to receive higher education. Some restrictions applied, such as the correlation between years of schooling and eye and back problems, but these problems were immediately attributed to unsatisfactory school equipment, lighting, physical activity, and deficiency of the Swedish nation's sentiments and lifestyle. Such conclusions indicate an important tension in how gender was portrayed in the report of the committee. Using statistics, the report reproduced well-known themes about the vulnerable female body. Based on these, recommendations were made to give the female students a less dense curriculum than boys with restricted prospects.⁷² At the same time, however, statistics enabled the committee to link the problems that female students suffered at least partly to society, making it a national issue that the Swedish state could and needed to address. Here, the comparison with female students from another, culturally familiar country, showed that not only the government, but society at large had responsibility for their young, middle-class women and thus for the future of their Swedish nation.

Conclusion

In this article, I have shown that the appointment of two women in the 1885/1888 girls' school committee found keen interest in public newspapers. The novelty of women in a governmentally appointed committee was received largely positive. Furthermore, the addition of female members was reported as suitable for a commission tasked to investigate the female sphere of girls' secondary schools. This theme of a gendered field of competence, in other words of gendered content of the debate on female education, continued in the report itself. I have analysed the use of statistics in the committee's report on girls' physical constitution and the conclusions drawn from these numbers. The committee operated based on commonly held gendered assumption on female frailness and a weaker mental resistibility, which they addressed with statistical numbers. Despite the conclusion that the female body was not demonstrably weakened by prolonged secondary education, girls were nevertheless deemed not adequate to the same curriculum as boys and should receive a reduced curriculum with fewer prospects.

In the context of this article, statistics is understood as an instrument of upholding the gendered episteme of the modern nation-state, where attributes connected with statistics such as objectivity, rationality, and impartiality were connoted as masculine, whereas attributes that were supposed to be factored out by statistical methods such as empathy, emotionality, and fickleness were connected with femininity. Applying the

71 Löfstedt et al. (1888), 235, 237–39.

72 Johannes Westberg “Girls' Gymnastics in the Service of the Nation: Educationalisation, Gender and Swedish Gymnastics in the Mid-Nineteenth Century.” *Nordic Journal of Educational History* 4, no. 2 (2017).

established definitiveness of statistics onto the female body and deriving therefrom conclusions of suitable feminine education is interpreted as an exercise of masculinist power over the female population that was ideologically excluded from participating in this form of decision-making. The fact that two women were included in the drafting of the report can be viewed as a concession to the work of the moderate women's movement and female educators in their pursuit of improved female education. However, the methods and conclusions of the report indicate that the authority over how the female mind and body were conditioned and how this was legitimately determined and institutionalised remained in the framework of masculinism. As Gunhild Kyle pointed out, the pedagogical premises and aims of the 1885/1888 girls' school committee were not new nor radical. The reformation of girls' schooling had been going on for more than two decades by the time the report was published, and the ideas of the 1885/1888 girls' school committee were largely congruent with those of the 1866 committee.⁷³

In conclusion, the limitations of the upheld ideal of objectivity and impartiality that the gendered conduct of statistics and the gendered content of secondary education for girls implicitly imposed can be illustrated by the briefly mentioned reservation by committee member Dr Goldkuhl. In his retention, he predicted catastrophic consequences stemming from the notion of equality between men and women. He warned that, by ignoring their physical frailty, women would suffer weakness, degeneration, and sickness if they were to be educated emulating the male ideal.⁷⁴ The statistical results from the hygienic portion of the report, according to which female sickliness could not be attributed easily to education per se but could be traced back to societal and institutional causes, were not enough. They evidently did not convince Goldkuhl to rethink his position on girls' aptitude to keep up with, or even overtake their male counterparts in terms of educational performance under optimised circumstances – and in good health. This line of thinking can serve as an illustration of statistics' premises within masculinist thinking of the supremacy of the male intellect, and its limitations when its ideals of objectivity were to suggest that gendered notions of girls' education and health might need to be reconsidered. Thus, in the late nineteenth century, reason – in this case, statistics – was not always convincing enough.

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⁷³ Kyle (1972), 96–97.

⁷⁴ Löfstedt et al. (1888), 317.

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