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EDUCATION INQUIRY

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Admission policy of Swedish teacher education favouring men: Discussion in Parliament in 1962

Maria Hedlin*

Abstract
In 1962 the Swedish Parliament decided on a school reform. Meritocracy and equal opportunity were important goals. However, these ideals were not applied to elementary school teacher education, where a sex quota policy favoured male applicants. In the parliamentary debate, a woman member of the Right Wing Party raised objections to the policy. A man representing the Social Democrat government’s education politics had to explain why the admission policy that favoured men was not abolished. By evoking historical ideas of women teachers as inferior, and warnings of the feminisation of schools as a great threat, the admission rules were defended. Further, analysis of the debate shows that women were supposed to hold back their individual rights and a woman arguing in favour of a gender-neutral admission policy risked being labelled ‘unwomanly’.

Keywords: teacher education, teachers, equality, femininities, masculinities

In 1948 a Swedish commission report proposed a unified school system which would give all students an essentially common schooling. The background was that after World War II great attention was paid to the democracy-fostering and democracy-keeping role of schools. The existing school system’s sorting function was perceived as undemocratic. In many cases, the students were placed in different types of schools according to sex, social class and whether they lived in rural or urban areas. This resulted in very different possibilities to go on to education above elementary school (folkskola). There was a strong belief that only talent and capability should determine a student’s educational opportunities. The vision was a school fully embracing both scientific and democratic ideals. A trial period during the 1950s was decided on and in 1961 a new commission report presented the final proposal on the school reform. All students, regardless of sex, social class and location of their home would now get together in the same schools. Skills and talent would then determine the possibility of admission to further education (Kallos & Lundgren, 1979; Nilsson, 1989; Lyon, 1999). The reform was considered a ‘modern’ project. Meritocracy, efficiency and social justice were important goals and an egalitarian socialisation of boys and girls was put forward. In fostering the future modern citizen, boys and girls should

*Linnaeus University, School of Education, Psychology and Sport Science, Kalmar, Sweden. E-mail: maria.hedlin@lnu.se

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be treated as equals. Up to grade seven, students would be taught the same subjects and both girls and boys would learn textile crafts, woodwork and home economics. Thus, meritocracy and equal opportunity for all individuals were aimed for (Elgqvist-Saltzman, 1991). However, these ideals did not apply to male and female students wishing to become elementary teachers.

Women and men who wanted to become teachers at the intermediate level of compulsory school did not have the same possibilities to be admitted to elementary school teacher education (folkskoleseminarium). Half of the available positions went to female applicants and half to males, regardless of the number of women and men applicants. Since there were more female candidates than male ones, this admission policy made it harder for women to be admitted. From the start of the school reform, with its ideals of meritocracy and equal opportunity, it took nearly ten years until the admission policy for elementary school teacher education caught up to the ideals (Berge, 2004). So, despite meritocratic ideals being emphasised when the school reform was being discussed, there was another way of thinking about teacher education.

The gender quotas that made it harder for a woman than for a man to be admitted to teacher education appear to have been forgotten today. However, the paradox in aiming for individuals’ equal opportunity in school policy, treating boys and girls as equals, while their male and female teachers were admitted to their teacher training on unequal terms deserves to be discussed. It is therefore my intention in this paper to bring this matter to light. I do this by examining a debate on the teacher education admission policy involving two Members of Parliament prior to the formal decision on the school reform.

Firstly, I outline the historical background of the issue of female and male teachers. Next, the theoretical starting point is presented. The material is described and the research questions are specified. I then explore how the question of allocating places for elementary school teacher education according to sex was discussed.

The historical background

When the Swedish elementary school was introduced in 1842 teaching was a male job. On the whole, there were few occupations open to women. However, it was hard to recruit men to elementary school teaching as the work was both difficult and poorly paid. In 1859 women obtained the right to hold elementary school teaching positions (folkskollärare). Yet a man might have been given preference when a position was to be filled (Florin, 1987; Marklund, 1997). During the latter half of the 1800s the scarce employment opportunities for unmarried middle class women became an increasing problem. Women from lower classes worked as maids or in the emerging industry, but this was socially impossible for middle class women. Gradually, more occupations were opened to women. After 1860 women could be employed at the postal service and a few years later the opportunity to work at the telegraph service was created. The positions women were allowed to hold were the lower and least-skilled services.
Nevertheless, these jobs gave women an opportunity to make a living and provide for themselves. Demand grew for the education required for these jobs. More and more schools for girls were opened. In the late 1800s many middle class girls went to private girls’ schools financed by student fees and donations (Schånberg, 2004).

Middle class boys attended grammar school which was funded by the state and open to male students only. Competence and capacity were ideals valued in grammar school. Around 1900, a group of women who had managed to obtain university degrees drew on these ideals. They wished to change the law that barred women from higher office. They argued they should have the right to have their competence evaluated and consequently have a chance of being employed, for example, as teachers at grammar schools. In the general debate, the women did not attract much sympathy for their claims (Wieselgren, 1969; Florin & Johansson, 2002/1993). It was argued that women’s individual rights and interests must give way to what would benefit the nation. The women were requested to see the bigger picture. For the sake of the nation women were needed in the home as wives and mothers. Another argument was that women teachers would have a feminising influence on the male students. Feminisation and the decay of schools were threats that made a large impact on the public debate. These threats were also strong arguments for the male grammar teachers who could thus claim they were not simply guarding their own interests when they objected to female colleagues. Male teachers were required for male students to develop the right masculine traits (Wieselgren, 1969; Florin & Johansson, 2002/1993).

In elementary school, attitudes to women were different, at least initially. The male elementary teachers welcomed their female colleagues. Elementary school teaching had a low status and the male teachers came from families of farmers and workers. However, the female teachers mostly had a middle class background. Thanks to such a background, the female teachers were a positive force for improving teachers’ reputation. However, these positive views changed after some time. At the end of the 1800s, it was argued that women were becoming too numerous (Florin, 1987). Conservative attitudes grew in society and women were pushed back. Instead, men’s particular suitability as teachers was stressed (Olofsson, 1996). There were junior school teachers (småskollärare) and elementary school teachers (folkskollärare) and it was argued that junior school teacher was the only proper teaching position for women (Florin, 1987).

Yet this did not stop women from seeking elementary teacher education. Further, the female applicants for elementary teacher education achieved better results at the entrance tests than their male counterparts, and during the education they performed better and completed their training more rapidly than males. Women consistently earned better assessments and, when their studies had been completed, they were sought after in the market. Nevertheless, or perhaps because of this, a procedure that favoured male candidates for teacher education started around 1900. The Swedish state decided to regulate admissions and women were thereby rejected in favour of
less competent men. This was the start of the practice of sex quotas for Swedish elementary teacher education (folkskollärarutbildningen) (Florin, 1987).

Many women involved in work for Swedish women’s franchise in the early 1900s were teachers. Respectable women were expected to remain at home and in the private sphere, although women teachers were exceptions. They could act as public persons and still be considered respectable (Rönnbäck, 2004). However, they were also ridiculed. Opponents of women’s franchise did their best to portray those women as vulgar, repulsive and unfeminine, and through the jest press, ridiculing caricatures and scurrilous portraits of both women teachers and franchise women were spread. It therefore became important for them to emphasise their feminine appearance to stress that they were not mannish (Florin & Kvarnström, 2001; Florin, 2004; Rönnbäck, 2004; Florin, 2006).

In the United States influential men had already started to argue for more women to be hired as teachers in the first half of the 1800s. The motive was economic; women were given lower salaries than men, although in the discussions women’s characteristics were put forward as being very appropriate for teaching. It was argued that female teachers were particularly capable of controlling unruly students. To hire women would thus solve discipline problems (Preston 1993). In 1900, 70 percent of all teachers in the United States were women. Most of them were single, widowed or divorced since not being married was generally required of women teachers (Blount, 2005; Oram, 2007).

In the United States, Canada, Great Britain and Australia, just as in Sweden, the large number of female teachers began to be perceived as a problem around 1900. Also, in these countries the concern that school boys would be negatively affected by women was widespread. There was talk of a feminine climate in schools and in classrooms. It was claimed that this would prevent boys from developing masculine traits (Trotman, 2006). In the United States, voices were raised to criticise the high number of single teachers. The spinster was associated with sexual deviance and manish behaviour. Thus, they were stamped as unwomanly and were accused of making boys effeminate (Blount, 2005). In addition, the female nature was reevaluated. The traits and qualities that had been perceived as feminine and been used to stress women’s talents for teaching in the 1850s were being used around 1900 to claim that women were not fit to teach. Rumours of ‘the woman peril’ were spread. The term reflects a view of women as unfit, even dangerous, as teachers. This rhetoric characterised the discussions in the first decades of the 1900s (Weiler, 1989; 1994).

In Sweden, the resistance to female teachers returned in the 1920s. At this time, due to the sex quotas in place the proportion of women elementary teachers (folkskollärare) did not exceed more than around 40 percent. Yet, many male colleagues felt there were too many female colleagues. During the 1920s women teachers requested equal pay and also questioned some practices regarding job appointments. Folkskolläraren, the publication of the male elementary school teachers’ union, ran
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a campaign against women teachers. Such women were portrayed as selfish, backward and afraid of motherhood. The female teacher who claimed to be man’s equal was depicted as unfeminine. Male teachers were said to be superior to women in the professional role. Further, it was claimed that boys’ education in particular required male teachers. The female influence would make the boys weak and, as a consequence, the whole of society would suffer. In the campaign against their female colleagues the men benefitted from a general fear of the danger of the feminisation of society. The rhetoric, however, was contradictory. On one hand, the women’s weakness and femininity were emphasised. On the other, the same women were portrayed as unfeminine and strong in an aggressive struggle to invade schools and displace men (Östberg, 1997; Sparrlöf, 2007).

In sum, in Sweden as well as other countries women teachers met resistance and were belittled. An argument put forward was that women’s individual rights must give way to more important societal interests. Another argument was that male students need male teachers. In addition, women claiming their rights were portrayed as repulsive and unfeminine.

Theorising gender

In this paper the philosopher Sandra Harding’s (1986) gender theory constitutes the theoretical point of departure. According to Harding, gender is an essential category for ascribing meaning and organising social relations. Qualities, activities, behaviour, objects and so forth are gendered, which means they are classified as feminine or masculine. This classification is due to a dichotomous division which also implies an asymmetrical valuation, i.e. masculinity is assigned a higher status than femininity. In Harding’s theory, such genderisation forms a gender order with three levels that are intertwined in a complex way. First, there is a symbolic level. At this level symbols, objects, characteristics and qualities are gendered. For instance, the public is connected to masculinity, while the private is linked to femininity. Standing up for oneself is gendered masculine and submission is gendered feminine. Also, control is categorised as masculine, whereas care is classified as feminine. At a structural level, responsibilities, tasks and jobs are gendered. For example, being a manager is gendered masculine and taking care of children is gendered feminine. Finally, at the individual level, individual masculine and feminine identities are constructed by relating to the representations at the other levels. However, in reality humanity is not divided in a dichotomous way. Relating to ideas concerning masculinity and femininity does not mean that we have to accept or follow them. Nevertheless, even though we can relate in different ways, there are also limitations. The choices are not free in the sense that there are no costs. Whether there is a price for violating gender norms and how high it will be always depends on the context.

As described above, women working for women’s right to vote at the beginning of the 1900s, as well as female elementary school teachers claiming the same oppor-
tunities and salaries as their male colleagues, were stamped ‘unwomanly’. Labelling women ‘unwomanly’ or men ‘unmanly’ may be understood as a threat that can be used to sustain gender norms. According to the historian Ekenstam (2007), the concepts ‘unwomanly’ and ‘unmanly’ may therefore be useful analytical tools for exploring the social punishment for violating gender norms (c.f. Lilienquist, 1999).

The material and the aim

This paper examines the political debate surrounding the Swedish school reform. Before Parliament took a formal decision on the unified school system, the school reform was debated for two days, namely 22-23 May 1962, in both chambers. The material examined is the Minutes of the Parliamentary Debates in the First and Second Chambers. (The chambers will be referred to as FC and SC.) The text has been translated from Swedish. In making the translation into English the intention was first and foremost to capture the meaning of the original statements in the Minutes.

The research question used to confront the material is: How did the discussion proceed of the paradox of the new school aimed at equal opportunities for all and the fact teacher education admitted women and men on unequal conditions?

When the material was examined, it was found that a change in the teacher education admission policy had only been proposed by two Members of Parliament. Objections were briefly mentioned in the First Chamber by a member of the Right Wing Party, Mr. Kaijser (FC May 22, 1962, p. 54). This did not lead to any further discussions. Stronger criticism emerged in the Second Chamber from another member of the same party, Miss Karlsson. This led to a debate between her and a prominent Social Democratic school politician. I explore this discussion below.

The school reform debate and admission to teacher education

Prior to the decision on the school reform the issue was discussed for two days in both the first and second chambers of Parliament. Ragnar Edenman, the Social Democrat government Minister of Education and Religion (ecklesiastikminister), says the upcoming school reform will have a profound significance. The decision Parliament will take on the nine-year compulsory school has been called “so far the most important decision parliament has been facing concerning schools”. He further says that the comprehensive school that is soon to be introduced is a school that aims to give all students the same opportunities and chances (SC May 22, 1962, p. 43).

That the admission procedures for elementary school teacher education did not follow the guidelines of giving the same opportunities and chances for all was brought up by a member of the Right Wing Party, Miss Eva Karlsson. According to her, it would be desirable if more students were to aim at teaching. On the whole there is a need for the teaching profession to be appreciated and made more attractive, she says. Further, the male applicants for teacher education are few and their qualifications are not very good. According to the old admission rules, sex quotas are applied. She
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points out that the rule to admit just as many male as female students means that well-qualified girls have to give way to less qualified boys. In addition, the women candidates have to go through more difficult tests, which Karlsson calls “grotesque” (SC May 22, 1962, p. 54).

Moreover, the admission rules are called outdated. Even boys with very low competence are given priority because of their sex. This traditional thinking must be stopped, she says. The issue is to be handled by the commission assigned to investigate the teacher education reform, but Miss Karlsson objects to the opinion that this issue needs to be investigated further. She says: “To me, it’s next to ridiculous that a state commission is to deal with the matter of whether to admit the most qualified students or not, and whether boys and girls should meet different requirements” (SC May 22, 1962, p. 54).

Another Member of Parliament, Mr. Stellan Arvidson, responds to Miss Karlsson’s criticism. Arvidson is a very prominent Social Democratic school politician. He has a background as both a teacher and principal. Moreover, he was the secretary of the commission that in 1948 proposed the school reform and the comprehensive school and was currently a member of the commission investigating the teacher education reform which Karlsson mentioned.

Mr. Arvidson says that Miss Karlsson’s description of elementary school teacher education is correct. The admission is conducted according to a sex quota procedure. Half of the positions go to female students and half are reserved for men. This is an old tradition, Arvidson explains. The motive for this is a wish for a sex balance among the teaching staff. It has now been proposed that the quotas be abolished. Instead, the most qualified, regardless of sex, should be admitted to the programme. About this, Arvidson says:

I must say that I have exactly the same opinion. That is how it ought to be. I also hope that we shall get there. However, honoured members of the chamber, a principle may be correct in itself, and still you might hesitate to turn it into practice. If we were today to admit students to elementary school teacher education with no account taken of the person’s sex, this would just mean that men would broadly be knocked out and we would have an almost exclusively female elementary school teaching staff. As such, I am not afraid of this. If women are better teachers, no damage is done. I do not have the same fear of “eine Verweiblichung der Schule” [a feminisation of schools] as a German principal had when on a visit to this country some years ago, he declared that this was the greatest peril threatening German schools for the time being. The consequences, however, for both teacher education institutions and for schools are so extensive and so unpredictable that Parliament hardly can decide whether to modify the admission rules without a proper investigation of the problem. Therefore, the issue has been passed on to the 1960 education experts. I guess that the matter, when it has been referred to the commission, will be granted both my and Miss Karlsson’s blessings. May the right principle prevail! (SC May 23, 1962, p. 46).

The quote above begins with Mr. Arvidson claiming that he holds precisely the same opinion as Miss Karlsson, which is hardly true as unlike Karlsson he expresses himself
quite ambiguously regarding the quota procedures. Yet Arvidson explains his unclear stance by distinguishing between principle and practice. What is right in principle, that is, in theory, might be wrong if it is put into practice. The consequences might be too radical. According to Arvidson, only a few of the male candidates would meet the entry requirements if merits were the only selection basis. The fact that few men would face up to the competition would in turn lead to elementary school teacher staff consisting almost exclusively of female teachers in the long run.

According to Arvidson’s description, there is thus a major difference between the male and female applicants’ qualifications. The result that the men would be knocked out in a sex-neutral admissions process would not make any difference if women are better as teachers, he continues, thereby implying that this is not the case. A question of a more speculative nature is thereby raised, namely, the question of whether women or men are better teachers. The matter, however, does not concern which sex might be “best” and critics of the sex quota system have not claimed that women would be better teachers. On the contrary, they argue that sex should not hold any relevance in the selection for teacher education. They argue for a meritocratic admissions process where competence and qualifications, not sex, determine who will enter the programme.

Mr. Arvidson refers to a German principal who has warned about the female influence on schools. He says he does not agree with the German headmaster about the high risk brought by female teachers but, by taking up this example, a threat is evoked. This is not a gentle warning that has been made, according to Arvidson. The German headmaster is reported to have said that feminisation of the German school was “the greatest peril threatening German schools for the time being”. With his school background and involvement in national school policies, Arvidson can be assumed to be familiar with how female teachers have historically been portrayed as threats to both boys’ education and the whole of society, in both Sweden and other countries. Karlsson also must have knowledge about these attitudes. Earlier in the debate, when speaking about the appropriate number of pupils in classes, she referred to her “more than 35 years of teaching” (SC May 22, 1962, p. 50). If that time span refers to the most recent years, Karlsson started her teaching in the second half of the 1920s, i.e. at the time there was a campaign against women teachers.

Thus, Arvidson brings to the fore a well-known historical rhetoric that has aimed to insult and undermine female teachers’ positions and occupational status. He also speaks of “extensive” and “unpredictable” consequences that would arise if male applicants were no longer to be given priority by the quotas. The consequences of abolishing the quotas must be evaluated carefully and the matter must therefore be postponed, he claims. Whatever these serious consequences might be is not explained, but by calling them extensive and unpredictable the male teachers are assigned an exceptional position. For men, individual skills and competence seem to be of less interest. The main thing is that they are men. Moreover, Arvidson says that the issue
will be accepted with both his and Karlsson’s blessings. He thus reconnects to the opening words that suggest that the two debaters agree.

Miss Karlsson notes that Mr. Arvidson has admitted that her argument is right. However, they have come to different conclusions. She does not agree that the matter must be postponed. On the contrary, she calls Arvidson’s description of the current procedure scary. She points out the inconsistency of making small demands on male applicants, while the approaching school reform will bring great demands on teachers. In order to create a good school, the entire teaching staff must be well qualified, Karlsson says. She stresses that it is no feminist issue. Instead, it is a matter of making the teaching profession so attractive that qualified men will also pursue elementary school teaching (SC May 23, 1962, pp. 49-50). The argument that only the most qualified applicants should be admitted to teacher education may seem like an uncontroversial requirement. Yet, Karlsson stresses that it is no feminist issue, suggesting both that the matter is delicate and that issues associated with feminism are viewed negatively.

Discussion

The admission policy which meant that still in the 1960s men with less qualifications might be given preference in admission to elementary school teacher education at the expense of more qualified women was well in line with an asymmetric gender order whereby men and masculinity were attributed a higher value than women and femininity (Harding, 1986). Historically, the conflict between Swedish male and female teachers concerned the elementary school teacher (folkskollärare), i.e. grades 3–7. The junior school teacher (småskollärare), teaching children in grades 1–2, was perceived early on as a suitable job for women. Since it was associated with care that at a symbolic level was categorised as feminine, and also since it was a job with low pay and a low status, it was considered to be appropriate for women. On a structural level the occupation thus came to be gendered feminine (Harding, 1986; cf. Acker, 1995). Men did not fight for the right to teach the youngest students, and the state did not impose any quotas to ensure men’s positions in junior school teacher education. The quotas were only applied to students aspiring to teach at the intermediate level (Florin, 1987).

However, the admission rules corresponded poorly with meritocratic ideals, and the policy was inconsistent with the school reform’s intention to provide equal opportunity for all students. To openly argue that men, just by being men, should be guaranteed half of the available positions, was hardly politically possible.

In the parliamentary debate these inconsistent approaches were clarified when Stellan Arvidson, a representative of the Social Democrat government’s education politics, was forced to explain why the admission policy that favoured male students was not abolished. Arvidson stressed he was in favour of the meritocratic principle. Yet, he claimed, there were reasons suggesting the policy should be left on a theoretical level where it had no practical consequences.
A fair but deceptive speech

The discussion shows how it is possible to describe oneself as respecting ideals of equality and at the same time defend an unequal system. This way of reasoning is in line with the empirical results the masculinity researcher Lars Jalmert (1984) found when he interviewed Swedish men at the beginning of the 1980s. The men said they were in favour of men and women in the family sharing both domestic work and the responsibility for children. Yet this stance was only of a principal nature, which meant that what was reported to be right in theory had no practical significance. Jalmert called this an in-principle position.

Opposition against women teachers has at times been mobilised. Female teachers have been portrayed as inferior to their male colleagues and thus were expected to accept poorer conditions and second-rate positions in schools. Those women who did not submit were branded ‘unwomanly’. As a result of women being perceived to be inferior there have been recurring warnings about the feminisation of schools and society. This historical background reappeared in Arvidson’s speech in Parliament. According to his description, very few male applicants for elementary school teacher education would measure up if the quotas were abolished. Hence, few men would become teachers. After giving this description of the situation, Arvidson said it would not matter if the women were better teachers. By bringing up the question of which sex is the best at teaching, he evoked the old discussion of women as inferior. When women and men are compared in terms of being better and worse in this way, the asymmetric valuation of femininity and masculinity consequently gives women a weaker position (Harding, 1986).

Further, Arvidson evoked the historically recurrent warnings of the feminisation of school and society in an insidious way. In his speech he referred to a German principal who had allegedly claimed that the feminisation of schools, and thus female teachers, was a real threat. Sparrlöf (2007) describes how openly aggressive criticism of women teachers was expressed in the 1920s in “Folkskollärarnas tidning”, the journal of the male teachers’ union. Thereafter, the criticism became more indirect. The journal could, for example, cite negative opinions of women teachers, without giving any comments of its own. According to Sparrlöf, the journal spoke through an agent and by doing this the journal tried to repudiate any responsibility for the negative opinions. In a similar manner, Arvidson can be interpreted as speaking through an agent in the parliamentary debate when he called to mind the historical conflict in which women teachers who had claimed the same conditions as their male colleagues were not only belittled professionally, but also were depicted as ‘unwomanly’.

The idea that women teachers would be the greatest threat to schools might have sounded like an exaggeration to many people’s ears already in 1962 but, since Arvidson said he rejected this opinion, he might have been perceived as quite reasonable. Compared with the German principal’s rhetoric, Arvidson’s hesitation to alter the admission policy may have appeared like an expression of sensible caution.
However, although Arvidson claimed he rejected the idea of women as a great threat, he talked about the extensive and unpredictable consequences that would follow if only the most qualified candidates for elementary school teacher education were to be admitted. Hence, he intimated that women’s individual rights were secondary. According to Arvidson’s reasoning, the women who had to give way to less qualified men should hold back their individual interests and rights. By talking of extensive and unpredictable consequences, he referred to larger and more important societal interests. As shown above, this way of arguing has been used in previous historical discussions when women have tried to claim their rights.

Moreover, Arvidson claimed that he and his opponent in the debate, Miss Karlsson, were in complete agreement. Despite the obvious disagreement, and that Karlsson used quite strong words like “grotesque”, “ridiculous” and “scary” in her arguments, Arvidson suggested that they had reached a consensus.

**Not a feminist issue**

Women who have objected to asymmetric valuations, i.e., that women by definition would be inferior to men and do a worse job, have violated the prevailing gender order (Harding, 1986). Also, since standing up for oneself is associated with men and masculinity, whereas submission is gendered feminine, a woman protesting against the degradation might be labelled ‘unwomanly’ (Ekenstam, 2007). Perhaps, this is what Miss Karlsson had in mind when she stressed that the issue of admission policy was not a feminist issue. Her marking a distance from feminist issues should also be seen in the light of women’s minority position in the Swedish Parliament. In 1960, 90 percent of Members of Parliament were men and thus the representation of women was only 10 percent. The organisation researcher Rosabeth Moss Kanter (1977/1993) uses the term *token* to describe the position people in a minority position tend to get. Those not belonging to the majority group might be regarded as a symbol of their minority group. Whereas people in the majority group look upon each other as individuals, people in minority groups tend to be regarded as representatives of their group. This in turn leads to them being attributed stereotypical traits, interests and motives.

In a similar way, Faulkner (2007) uses the term *in/visibility paradox*. This concept refers to the situation where women get into jobs dominated by men. The women tend to become highly visible as women, but at the same time invisible as professionals. When Miss Karlsson argued that the admission rules which favoured men should be abolished, she risked being regarded as a feminist with all the negative associations and feelings this would bring (Florin, 2006) and, even if she was not perceived as a feminist, there was still a risk that her argument would be judged as a statement from a woman rather than from a Member of Parliament.

In addition, Miss Karlsson herself had a background as a teacher, which possibly made her debate position even worse. When the topic was class size, she made reference to her own working life as a teacher. In that way she could claim to be an authority, some-
one with expertise and extensive experience. However, the background as a woman teacher was probably not an asset when she argued to do away with the preference for men in teacher education. In this case, there was a risk she would be perceived as arguing for her own cause, something that would be particularly blameworthy and ‘unwomanly’ because women, according to the asymmetric logic of gender norms, should prioritise others’ needs and interests (Harding 1986).

The Right Wing Party and the Social Democratic Party
In this parliamentary debate, a member of the Right Wing party spoke against a representative of the Social Democratic party, but why did not more Members of Parliament object to the admission policy? Parliament was going to decide on a major school reform and consensus had long been strived for. Finally it had been reached, with one exception. The Right Wing Party had withdrawn from an important agreement (Marklund, 1983). The Right Wing Party was opposed to the school reform in many ways. The teacher education admission policy was just one of several questions the party was objecting to in the parliamentary debate. Eva Karlsson criticised this particular issue. She was both a woman and a teacher, so perhaps it was considered to be ‘her’ issue.

Nevertheless, given that the Social Democrats had been strong advocates of equality in education in other contexts, the debate between Arvidson and Karlsson might seem strange. The fact that, on one hand, Arvidson was an advocate of equality and meritocratic values and, on the other, defended a system in which male sex was enough to supplant well-qualified women illustrates the difficulties the Swedish Social Democrats and the labour movement have had with integrating gender issues into their politics. For male Social Democrats, women’s conditions and rights could be perceived as something outside the intention to provide equal opportunity for all. Women were not always included in the ‘all’. During this time, issues affecting women as a group were not a priority of the Swedish Social Democrats (Sjögren, 2003).

Conclusions
In summary, the answer to the research question is that the paradox of the new school aiming at equal opportunities for all, while teacher education admitted women and men on unequal conditions, was discussed from two different points of departure. Miss Karlsson had meritocracy and equal opportunity for all individuals as her starting point when she put her stance forward. As a consequence, she could not accept the teacher education admission policy favouring men. In contrast, Mr Arvidson’s equal opportunities for ‘all’ did not include women who wanted to become teachers at the intermediate level. Hence, he defended the admission rules and in this he made use of historical threats.

Finally, one might ask if there is something to learn here. May a discussion in the Swedish Parliament in 1962 hold any meaning for us today? In recent years the sex distribution among elementary teachers has again been noted as a problem (Skelton, 2009).
In the United States, as well as many other countries, there has been a request for “strong male role models” (Blount, 2005; Johnson, 2008). In addition, different measures to recruit men for primary teaching have been taken. For instance, in England and Wales there have been introductory courses, mentoring schemes and training bursaries for male students. However, the talk about “role models” has been criticised for resting on commonsense notions that sustain more than challenge the binary gender division. As Carrington and Skelton (2003) point out, the role model concept comes from role theory, a theory which had its heyday some decades ago. Mills, Martino and Lingard (2004) analysed the Australian policy on the recruitment of more male teachers and found that the reasoning is based on simplistic assumptions about gender issues. Expectations are often expressed to men teachers that they should portray a certain kind of masculinity. For example, a study in New Zealand found that primary school principals requested rugby-playing ‘real men’ (Cushman, 2008).

Further, the media frequently makes use of gender stereotypes and implicit warnings about feminisation and schools dominated by women (Martino, 2008). Thus, Martino and Kehler (2006) criticised the Canadian media debate and calls for more men in schools to reinforce a gender order founded on essentialist notions of masculinity and femininity. The rhetoric about more male teachers risks both limiting the men teachers’ acting space and blaming women teachers. A hierarchical gender order where women are perceived as inferior might be reinforced (cf. Acker, 1983). As many researchers have pointed out, the focus should instead be placed on the gendering processes connected to the binary division into femininity and masculinity. Greater attention to how historical discourses tend to live on would also work against them being uncritically repeated and passed on in the media, politics and education.

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