



# Discussions on academic women and women scholars in two magazines of the Finnish women's movement, 1890–1939

Marjo Nieminen

To cite this article: Marjo Nieminen (2023): Discussions on academic women and women scholars in two magazines of the Finnish women's movement, 1890–1939, Paedagogica Historica, DOI: [10.1080/00309230.2023.2223524](https://doi.org/10.1080/00309230.2023.2223524)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00309230.2023.2223524>



© 2023 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group.



Published online: 19 Jun 2023.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 28



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

# Discussions on academic women and women scholars in two magazines of the Finnish women's movement, 1890–1939

Marjo Nieminen

Department of Education, University of Turku, Turku, Finland

## ABSTRACT

This article focuses on the history of Finnish academic women and examines the discussions about women's academic education and women scholars that took place in two Finnish magazines of the women's movement between 1890 and 1939. The article examines how the two magazines addressed the topics and represented academic women and women scholars. The results indicate that at first, access to higher education and the complex status of female students at the university were the centre of attention in the discussions. The discussions were supplemented by new tones, strengthening the support for educational equality in relation to human rights with utilitarian perspectives. The emphasis of the topics shifted during the first decade of the twentieth century, when the magazines raised public awareness of the career paths for women scholars. The representations of academic women and women scholars also highlighted the efforts of the women's movement to promote the scholarly work of women pioneering in academic circles.

## ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 14 October 2022

Accepted 7 June 2023

## KEYWORDS

History of education;  
women's history; history of  
higher education;  
emancipation; gender

## Introduction

The article examines discussions about women's academic education and women scholars that took place in two Finnish magazines of the women's movement between 1890 and 1939. The focus of this article – access to higher education and the career paths of women scholars – have interested historians of education for decades. Previous studies highlight how women gained access to academic studies and elaborate on the difficulties encountered and the successes achieved in their scholarly careers. Existing research employs various perspectives,<sup>1</sup> highlights ideas about women's places and roles in society and discusses essentialist assumptions regarding women and men. For example, Ruth Watts points out

**CONTACT** Marjo Nieminen  [marjo.nieminen@utu.fi](mailto:marjo.nieminen@utu.fi)  Department of Education, University of Turku, Assistentinkatu 5, Turku 20014, Finland

<sup>1</sup>Stephanie Spencer and Sharon Smith, "Women Professors and Deans. Access, Opportunity, and Networks", in *Handbook of Historical Studies in Education*, ed. Tanya Fitzgerald (Singapore: Springer, 2020), 795–811; Ruth Watts, "Students in Higher and Further Education", in *Handbook of Historical Studies in Education*, ed. Tanya Fitzgerald (Singapore: Springer, 2020), 777–93; Joyce Goodman, "Afterword: Histories of Women's Higher Education, Time, and Temporalities", *Paedagogica Historica* 56, no. 6 (2020): 847–56; E. Lisa Panayotidis and Paul Stortz, "Introduction", in *Women in Higher Education, 1850–1970: International Perspectives*, ed. E. Lisa Panayotidis and Paul Stortz (London: Routledge, 2016), 1–33.

that there has been a long-standing historical problem of general assumptions of girls' lesser ability in sciences (including medicine, mathematics and engineering).<sup>2</sup> Stephanie Spencer and Sharon Smith note that historians have employed a range of sources to explore the uneven progress of women's academic employment. Limited financial means or/and institutional settings as well as societal and legislative expectations together with a powerful male hold on academic tenure hindered or slowed down women's academic careers in the past. Nevertheless, when young women succeeded in gaining degrees or equivalent qualifications, their professional opportunities for a life in academia widened.<sup>3</sup> Joyce Goodman points out that exploring temporalities highlights how change is not random and attention to temporal threats is important for understanding the (im)possibilities of academic women's lives and careers inside and outside the universities.<sup>4</sup>

The perspective of gender includes various approaches and this article combines three of them. First, existing research examines permission to enter university and women's opportunities for higher education and scholarly work. For example, Judith Harford elucidates how the pioneers of higher education for Irish women negotiated and redefined the role of women in society at the end of the nineteenth century and notes that higher-education policy was influenced by a denominational power struggle over the control of the emerging system.<sup>5</sup> Mervi Kaarninen explores the higher-educational opportunities of Finnish women and the values, attitudes and experiences of the first generation of Finnish female students in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.<sup>6</sup> The second approach of existing research focuses on the biographical representation of scholarly women. For example, Heini Hakosalo examines the careers of Finnish women physicians and her studies focus on and elucidate both pioneering women and women whose careers could be characterised as common or ordinary.<sup>7</sup> Simonetta Polenghi also employs biographical accounts when analysing the academic work of the first five women professors in Italy.<sup>8</sup> Third, a stream of research investigates the role of various institutions (e.g. associations) in the changes related to gender equality in higher education and academic work. For example, Judith Harford analyses the endeavours of women's educational associations in promoting women's access to higher education in Ireland and the United States.<sup>9</sup>

In 2020, the Special Issue on the histories on women in higher education was published by *Paedagogica Historica*. In their Introduction to the Issue, Simonetta Polenghi and Tanya Fitzgerald note that using the lens of gender as a research tool,

<sup>2</sup>Watts, "Students in Higher and Further Education", 777–93.

<sup>3</sup>Spencer and Smith, "Women Professors and Deans", 795–811.

<sup>4</sup>Goodman, "Afterword: Histories of Women's Higher Education, Time, and Temporalities", 847–56.

<sup>5</sup>Judith Harford, "The Movement for the Higher Education of Women in Ireland: Gender Equality or Denominational Rivalry?", *History of Education* 34, no. 5 (2005): 497–516.

<sup>6</sup>Mervi Kaarninen, "Gifted Girls'. The Values, Attitudes, and Experiences of the First Generation of Finnish Female Students in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries", in *Families, Values, and the Transfer of Knowledge in Northern Societies, 1500–2000*, ed. Ulla Aatsinki, Johanna Annola and Mervi Kaarninen (New York: Routledge, 2019), 206–30.

<sup>7</sup>Heini Hakosalo, "Ille och Elin. Syskon, kön och medicinsk karriär i det tidiga 1900-talets Finland", *Historisk Tidskrift för Finland* 100, no. 2 (2015): 125–60; Heini Hakosalo, "Lääkäri Rosina Heikel", in *Naisten aika. Valkoinen varis ja muita oppineita naisia* [Women's Era. White Crow and Other Educated Women], ed. Riitta Mäkinen and Marja Engman (Helsinki: Gaudeamus, 2015), 21–36.

<sup>8</sup>Simonetta Polenghi, "Striving for Recognition: the first five Female Professors in Italy (1887–1904)", *Paedagogica Historica* 56, no. 6 (2020): 748–68.

<sup>9</sup>E.g. Judith Harford, "Women's Education Associations: The Role of the Central Association of Irish Schoolmistresses and the Woman's Education Association, Boston in advancing the Cause for Women's Admission to Trinity College Dublin and Harvard University", *Paedagogica Historica* 54, no. 5 (2018): 626–42.

each of the authors of the Special Issue deconstructs the ideological strains that produced cultural, social and economic obstacles to women's academic careers and independence.<sup>10</sup> This article contributes to and expands this research area. It employs gender as an analytic tool to examine how two magazines of the Finnish women's movement addressed the issues raised and represented academic women and women scholars between 1890 and 1939. Stephanie Spencer and Sharon Smith point out that research can focus on women's negotiations of space in academic institutions.<sup>11</sup> Because separate women's colleges inside universities were not established, Finland provides an interesting case study of equality issues in the academic world in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The magazines of the Finnish women's movement offer a corpus with rich insights into women's struggles and the dismantling of the academic, structural and hierarchical boundaries that hindered women's higher education and academic careers. Together, these magazines represent public discourses over a long time period, allowing one to examine discussions of changes, disruptions and continuations on women's scholarly careers. Moreover, it can be considered how the magazines promoted the aims of the women's movement regarding emancipation and women's higher education between 1890 and 1939.

The establishment of the Finnish women's movement – like those of many other Finnish social movements, such as the youth association movement, labour movement and temperance movement – was intertwined with the structural and social changes in Finnish society at the end of the nineteenth century; for example, the freedom of trade and occupation, industrialisation and changes in the education system, together with new social ideas and conscience, altered the basis of class society.<sup>12</sup> The oldest union of the Finnish women's movement,<sup>13</sup> Finsk Kvinnoförening – Suomen Naisyhdistys (Finnish Women's Association), started to publish the magazine *Koti ja Yhteiskunta* (*Home and Society*)<sup>14</sup> in 1889. The aim of this women's magazine was to “follow the development that . . . [is] taking place in order to raise the education of women and to establish [their] status at home and in society”.<sup>15</sup> Due to differences of opinion, Suomen Naisyhdistys divided into two groups, which laid the foundation for a new union, Naisialiitto Unioni

<sup>10</sup>Simonetta Polenghi and Tanya Fitzgerald, “Breaking Boundaries: Women in Higher Education”, *Paedagogica Historica* 56, no. 6 (2020): 724–8.

<sup>11</sup>Spencer and Smith, “Women Professors and Deans”.

<sup>12</sup>Riitta Jallinoja, *Suomalaisen naisialiikkeen taistelukaudet. Naisialiike naisten elämäntilanteen muutoksen ja yhteiskunnallis-aatteellisen murroksen heijastajana* [Struggle Periods of the Finnish Women's Movement] (Porvoo: WSOY, 1983), 35–8.

<sup>13</sup>Finsk Kvinnoförening – Suomen Naisyhdistys (Finnish Women's Association) was established in 1884.

<sup>14</sup>Baroness Alexandra Gripenberg (1857–1913) acted as the editor-in-chief of the monthly magazine *Koti ja Yhteiskunta* and was a long-term chairwoman of Suomen Naisyhdistys (1889–1904, 1909–1913). In addition, she was, perhaps, the most famous member of the Finnish women's movement abroad and worked actively in international women's associations, influencing her audiences both at home and abroad through her lectures and published pamphlets and writings. She adopted the bourgeois ideology of the international women's movement, including the ideas of female unity, alliance and sisterhood. Although she did not favour the suffrage granted to women in 1906 and thought that it had come too suddenly and early, she agreed to be a party candidate. She conquered her reluctance, and in the election she turned out to be a vote-getter in her electoral district. Although she did not stand for election again in 1909 for health reasons, she continued working in the women's association and served as an editor-in-chief until 1912, when the magazine was suppressed. (Maija Hirvonen, “Vapaaherratar Aleksandra Gripenberg. Unelma suuresta sisaruudesta” [Baroness Alexandra Gripenberg. Dream of Sisterhood], in *Naisten aika. Valkoinen varis ja muita oppineita naisia* [Women's Era. White Crow and Other Educated Women], ed. Riitta Mäkinen and Marja Engman [Helsinki: Gaudeamus, 2015], 87–110; Venla Sainio, “Gripenberg, Aleksandra”, in *Kansallisbiografia-verkkójulkaisu* [National Biography – Electronic Publication], *Studia Biographica* 4 [Helsinki: Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura, 1999, ref. 2.8.2022], <http://urn.fi/urn:nbn:fi:sk:skb-004437>.)

<sup>15</sup>Alexandra Gripenberg, “Koti ja yhteiskunta” [Home and Society], *Koti ja Yhteiskunta*, no. 1 (1889): 1.

(Feminist Association Union), established in 1892. Naisasialiitto Unioni's new magazine, *Naisten Ääni* (*Women's Voice*),<sup>16</sup> was first published in 1905 and set a mission of enhancing the status of women in society and supporting their emancipation. A few years later, as a result of organisational rearrangements, the magazine was transformed into an official magazine of another union of the women's movement, Suomalainen Naisliitto.<sup>17</sup> Despite disagreements on some issues, these unions and their women's magazines shared one ideological stance, which included values based on humanitarianism, the equality of people and the struggle for the oppressed, especially for women and girls. The members of the women's movement were counted among the educated classes and, therefore, social and emancipatory concerns, such as the equal right to education (especially the right to upper secondary and higher education), appealed to its members more than they did to less privileged women. Although the women's movement could be regarded as an elitist movement, it had quite a close relationship with the labour movement, especially in its early years. The magazines of the women's movement reached a broad reading public; for example, in 1917, *Naisten Ääni* had a circulation of 10,000 copies. The topics most commonly addressed were women's education, employment and emancipation. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the topics of suffrage and parliamentary issues were given more space in the magazines.<sup>18</sup>

The magazines of the women's movement have been digitised, and the database has been archived in the digital collections of the National Library of Finland.<sup>19</sup> Facsimiles of the magazines from this database were employed to collect the source materials for this article. The analysis included all writings related to the academic education and careers of women that were published in these two magazines between 1890 and 1939. Moreover, the topic of academic women awakened interest in other channels of the Finnish press, and pertinent issues were discussed beyond in the magazines of the women's movement. Some of these discussions in other magazines and journals were cited and commented on in the magazines of the women's movement; thus, the source materials of this article have been supplemented by these debates.

The analysis focused on the concrete issues the magazines raised regarding Finnish academic women and women scholars, and a close reading of primary source materials<sup>20</sup> was employed to identify themes related to the research topic. During the analysis

---

<sup>16</sup>Maikki Friberg (1861–1927) was a member of Suomalainen Naisliitto and belonged its central board from its founding in 1907 until 1924, acting as the president of Naisasialiitto Unioni from 1920 to 1927. She also worked actively in the temperance, folk education and peace movements. Maikki Friberg influenced mostly by lecturing and writing and assisted seventeen foreign magazines and journals. In 1905, she established *Naisten Ääni*, in which she worked as the editor-in-chief until her death in 1927. (Marjatta Hietala, "Friberg, Maikki", in *Kansallisbiografia-verkkojulkaisu* [National Biography – Electronic Publication], *Studia Biographica* 4 [Helsinki: Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura, 2000, ref. 2.8.2022], <http://urn.fi/urn:nbn:fi:sk:ks-kbg-003315>.)

<sup>17</sup>Both *Koti ja Yhteiskunta* and *Naisten Ääni* were published in Finnish.

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*, 13, 32–52, 60, 259, 278. These two unions were mainly separated by the political viewpoints, and it has been noted that the division of the women's movement was a clear proof that the movement was easily affected by the politico-ideological influences. Suomen Naisyhdistys was closely attached to the right-wing party (Vanhasuomalaiset), and Suomalainen Naisliitto, to the other right-wing party (Nuorsuomalaiset).

<sup>19</sup><https://digi.kansalliskirjasto.fi>.

<sup>20</sup>Jyrki Pöysä, "Lähiluku vaeltavana käsitteenä ja tieteidenvälisenä metodina" [Close Reading as a Travelling Concept and as an Interdisciplinary Method], in *Vaeltavat metodit* [Travelling Methods], ed. Jyrki Pöysä, Helmi Järviluoma and Sinikka Vakimo (Joensuu: Suomen Kansantietouden Tutkijain Seura, 2010), 331–60; Tuomas Tepora, Mirikka Danielsbacka and Matti O. Hannikainen, "Johdanto: tutkimuksen työkalut" [Introduction: Tools for Research], in *Avaimia menneisyyteen. Opas historian tutkimuksen menetelmiin* [Keys to the Past], ed. Mirikka Danielsbacka, Matti O. Hannikainen and Tuomas Tepora (Helsinki: Gaudeamus, 2022).

process, a researcher must try to capture the meanings of texts. The emphasis of the analysis was not only the topics and themes discussed, but also the detailed descriptions provided in the texts.<sup>21</sup> The analysis included multiple readings, and, during the analysis, the writings were placed in the historical context of Finnish higher education and juxtaposed with historical macro-level events of society. The results of the analysis comprise four major themes. First, the discussions in the magazines concentrated on women's opportunities related to university studies. Second, in the first decade of the twentieth century, the emphasis of the discussions shifted to women scholars and their place inside and outside the academic world. Third, in the 1930s, the concerns targeted the future of women scholars. Fourth, the last theme concentrates on biographies published in the magazines and the efforts of the women's movement to promote the scholarly work of women pioneering in academic circles.

In the next section, the history of Finnish women's academic education and scholarly careers is briefly outlined to elucidate the situation in the decades of the 1870s through the 1880s and to provide a historical and temporal context for the period in which the researched discussions took place. This outline is followed by sections covering the target period of 1890–1939 and presenting the detailed results of the analysis.

### Academic women in the 1870s and 1880s and the historical context of Finnish higher education

Switzerland, the pioneer of women's higher education, gave women the opportunity for university studies at the University of Zürich in 1864. France, England, Sweden, Denmark, Italy and Finland followed the example of Switzerland, when women were admitted to their universities in the 1860s and 1870s. In Finland, the medical faculty at the university in Helsinki granted women the "right to take advantage of teaching in the faculty" in 1871. Aura Korppi-Tommola refers to the period from the 1860s to the 1920s as the period of diversification of opportunities for Finnish women. At first, the discussion in society emphasised secondary education opportunities for girls, but very soon the question of women's right to university studies became a topic of debate. As egalitarian ideas influenced the country's education policy, the demand to expand women's educational opportunities became more prominent. Women's higher education was supported by multiple stakeholders, especially by the women's movement and the circles around it. The unofficial social nexuses of women and ladies' associations encouraged and helped to promote women's academic studies. In addition, women's academic education was supported by the principals of girls' schools, some professors and politicians and a number of civil servants in the central administration.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>21</sup>Ibid. See also Barry Brummett, *Techniques of Close Reading*. 2nd ed. (Los Angeles: Sage, 2019).

<sup>22</sup>Aura Korppi-Tommola, "Naisten kasvatuksen ja koulutuksen tutkimus" [Research on Women's Upbringing and Education], in *Naiskuvista todellisuuteen. Tutkimusnäkökulmia naishistoriaan* [From Representations of Women to Reality: Perspectives on Women's History] (Helsinki: Gaudeamus, 1984), 136–51; Aura Korppi-Tommola, "Naisten koulunkäyntimahdollisuuksien laajeneminen vuoden 1860 jälkeen" [Women's Widening Opportunities for Education after 1860], in *Nainen historiassa* [Woman in History], ed. Auvo Kostiainen (Turku: Turun yliopiston historian laitos, 1985), 148–67; Karmela Bélinki and Riitta Mäkinen, "Johdanto. Naisten aika ja verkostot" [Introduction. Women's Era and Nexuses], in *Naisten aika. Valkoinen varis ja muita oppineita naisia* [Women's Era. White Crow and Other Educated Women], ed. Riitta Mäkinen and Marja Engman (Helsinki: Gaudeamus, 2015), 7–12.

In the 1870s, women did not have the right to enter university as general students, but they could apply for a dispensation to obtain permission to study.<sup>23</sup> The first women who took advantage of this opportunity were Rosina Heikel and Emma Irene Åström. Rosina Heikel passed the exams for a licentiate in medicine in 1878 and received a limited licence to practise medicine. She remained the only female physician in Finland for nearly two decades.<sup>24</sup> Heini Hakosalo characterises Heikel's career as reflecting the loneliness of a long-distance runner and notes that, although Heikel was a lone figure in Finland, her university studies and career resembled the experiences of pioneer scholars in other countries.<sup>25</sup>

Emma Irene Åström began her university studies in 1873, a few years later than Heikel, and became the first Finnish woman to receive a Master of Arts degree in 1882. It took her nine years to complete her studies due to disruptions caused by family matters. Although she did not pursue an academic career at university, she respected and appreciated scholars and the academic world throughout her life. Her occupational path led her to the field of teaching and to a teacher training seminar. In 1927, the faculty of philosophy at the University of Helsinki conferred on her the first honorary doctorate given to a woman. Mervi Kaarninen describes her personality and career as those of a living legend.<sup>26</sup>

The pioneering educational path of Rosina Heikel was taken again in 1885, when Karolina Eskelin and Ina Rosqvist entered university. Although their medical studies were equivalent to those of men, their academic status at university was not. Nevertheless, they did not encounter social isolation similar to that of Rosina Heikel. Women students who began their university studies in 1885–1890 constituted a group of their own, as women students were not allowed to join to student associations. Karolina Eskelin and Ina Rosqvist were the leading figures in the group of women students.<sup>27</sup>

After these pioneering women, the number of female students at university gradually increased. Previous studies point out that entering university studies demanded that the first female students have nonconformist minds and, in some cases, make great efforts to raise funds for their studies.<sup>28</sup> During the 1880s, a total of 17 women commenced their university studies, and, at the turn of the decade, the number of female students was over

<sup>23</sup> Ordinarily (i.e. for men), access to the university was achieved through a matriculation examination which was equivalent to the French baccalaureate, the German Abitur and the Swedish studentexamen. In addition to the matriculation examination, women had to apply for dispensation in order to have the right to begin their university studies. See e.g. Kaarninen, "Gifted Girls"; Marjo Nieminen, "Breakers of Glass Ceilings: the Professional Careers of Women in Finland and the Graduates of three Girls' Upper Secondary Schools (1890s–1910s)", *Paedagogica Historica* (2022), <https://doi.org/10.1080/00309230.2022.2077118>.

<sup>24</sup> In Finland, the degree of Licentiate in Medicine was both an academic degree and an official examination for the doctoral profession. Heikel was not allowed to take the Hippocratic Oath; therefore, she was not certified as a licensed physician. Instead, she received a limited licence to practise medicine, *venia practicandi*, which allowed her, for instance, to have an office but not to take medical posts in the university hospital. Hakosalo, "Lääkäri Rosina Heikel".

<sup>25</sup> Heini Hakosalo, "Kivuton murros? Naisten oikeus akateemisiin opintoihin 1800- ja 1900-luvun taitteen Suomessa" [The Painless Revolution? Women's Right to Academic Studies in late 19th and early 20th Century Finland], *Historiallinen Aikakauskirja* [Historical Journal] 104, no. 4 (2006): 397–407; Hakosalo, "Lääkäri Rosina Heikel".

<sup>26</sup> Mervi Kaarninen, "Maisteri Emma Irene Åström", in *Naisten aika. Valkoinen varis ja muita oppineita naisia* [Women's Era. White Crow and Other Educated Women], ed. Riitta Mäkinen and Marja Engman (Helsinki: Gaudeamus, 2015), 37–55.

<sup>27</sup> Heini Hakosalo, "Tohtori Karolina Eskelin", in *Naisten aika. Valkoinen varis ja muita oppineita naisia* [Women's Era. White Crow and Other Educated Women], ed. Riitta Mäkinen and Marja Engman (Helsinki: Gaudeamus, 2015), 192–207; Venla Sainio, "Rosqvist, Ina", in *Kansallisbiografia-verkkajulkaisu* [National Biography – Electronic Publication], *Studia Biographica* 4 (Helsinki: Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura, 1999, ref. 19.8.2022, <http://urn.fi/urn:nbn:fi:sk:kg-003607>.)

<sup>28</sup> Päiviö Tommila, "Suomalaisen tieteen voimakkaan kasvun kausi" [The Period of Intense Growth in Finnish Science], in *Suomen tieteen historia 4* [The History of Finnish Science], ed. Päiviö Tommila (Helsinki: WSOY, 2002), 28–145; Kaarninen, "Gifted Girls". Stephanie Spencer and Sharon Smith also point out that early women academics needed family backgrounds with sufficient financial resources to support their studies; Spencer and Smith, "Women Professors and Deans".

10 every year. Thus, Swedish- and Finnish-speaking women have been continually matriculating at university since 1887 and 1895, respectively. By 1901, nearly 630 women had entered university. Women's share of all university students was 15% in 1895 and 40% in the 1910s.<sup>29</sup>

The increase in women university students overlapped with growth in the number of male students due to the expansion of upper secondary education. Parallel to these developments, the social characteristics of university students gradually changed, becoming less upper-class. In the 1910s, 60% of university enrollees were the first-generation students. Moreover, the demand for the academically educated people increased rapidly. For example, the number of government posts sextupled between 1870 and 1910. Urbanisation and the expansion of the labour market continued after independence in 1917, and national policy-making was no longer hindered. Consequently, the education system, including higher education, expanded. In 1926, a new law granting women the right to hold government posts was enacted, improving women's career opportunities. At the end of the 1930s, 76% of women university students were in the faculties of humanities or natural sciences aiming to graduate as secondary and upper-secondary school teachers.<sup>30</sup>

The next section of this article elaborates on the discussions found in two magazines of the Finnish women's movement between the 1890s and the 1930s, describing the outcomes of the conducted analyses of the primary source materials and an in-depth examination of the issues related to academic women and women scholars.

### Women students: at the core or on the periphery of the university?

The topic of women's opportunities related to university studies awakened interest in the women's movement and was repeatedly brought up in its magazines. In the 1890s, *Koti ja Yhteiskunta* (*Home and Society*) published positive comments on the news of expanding educational possibilities for women.<sup>31</sup> The gist of the writings was that education was a vehicle and an aim of emancipation. For example, in 1891, the magazine promoted higher secondary education for women and noted that it not only provided formal education but also offered women a path to university studies. Moreover, emphasis was placed on both the advantages for women and the benefits for society: "Higher secondary education is for them – at least for Finnish women – the only educational institution which . . . leads to the university those [women] who want to versatilely develop their natural gifts. In that way, women's abilities can naturally be more fully and equally used in the service of society".<sup>32</sup>

In 1901, *Koti ja Yhteiskunta* triumphantly reported that women were accepted to university on the same terms as men, that is, women no longer had to seek a dispensation. Titled "A step forward", the writing stressed that women had gained and would continue

<sup>29</sup>Tommila, "Suomalaisen tieteen voimakkaan kasvun kausi", 28–145; Kaarninen, "Gifted Girls".

<sup>30</sup>Tommila, "Suomalaisen tieteen voimakkaan kasvun kausi", 40–45; Mervi Kaarninen and Pekka Kaarninen, *Sivistyksen portti. Ylioppilastutkinnon historia* [The Gate to Education: The History of Matriculation Examination] (Otava: Helsinki, 2002), 168, 189.

<sup>31</sup>E.g. Anon, "Oman maan kuulumisia" [National News], *Koti ja Yhteiskunta*, no. 1 (1890): 10–11; Anon, "Suomen Naisyhdistyksen vuosikertomus vuodelta 1890" [Annual Report of Finnish Women's Union 1890], *Koti ja Yhteiskunta*, no. 3 (1891): 29–32; E.L., "Huomautus naisille!" [Comment to Women], *Koti ja Yhteiskunta*, no. 12 (1891): 133–4.

<sup>32</sup>E.L., "Huomautus naisille!"

gaining a foothold at university. As justification for women's education, the magazine mentioned that it was "for the benefit of home, native country and mankind".<sup>33</sup> This justification demonstrated that education was not considered to be merely an individual or private matter; rather, it was regarded as an important question in society.<sup>34</sup>

Furthermore, the magazines of the women's movement constantly reported what had been done to promote women's university studies. Such news and writings covered three main subject areas: the study fields and faculties open to women students; scholarships and grants targeted at women students; and the acceptance of women students as part of the university community. Items in the first two subject areas were generally short, news-like bulletins or statistical information presented in the magazine. For example, *Koti ja Yhteiskunta* had a section called "National News" that included announcements and statistics on women who had graduated from university. Furthermore, the magazines published writings in which women's university studies were not the main topic. In them, women's university studies were employed as a rationale for other emancipation demands, such as the demand that women be appointed to posts in public offices on the same terms as men.<sup>35</sup>

The third issue – women's participation in the university community – was brought up in writings that concerned student associations.<sup>36</sup> As mentioned previously, when the first generation of female students entered university in the 1870s and the 1880s, they did not have the right to be members of student associations.<sup>37</sup> In 1889, women students applied for permission, but, although they had obtained the approval of some student associations, the chancellor denied them access. *Koti ja Yhteiskunta* reported on the situation in the section of short news bulletins when some of the associations allowed women students to attend their meetings and take part in celebrations in 1890.<sup>38</sup>

Seven years later, women were granted permission to participate as full members in all activities of the student associations. In this connection, *Koti ja Yhteiskunta* cited the speech of the rector of the university<sup>39</sup> which was given at the beginning of the new academic year in 1897. He threw into relief the disadvantaged women students who were shut out of student associations: "It may have been nothing more than detriment to women students that they have been excluded from the refreshing mental impact that a life organised in the student associations is liable to give".<sup>40</sup> Moreover, the rector emphasised two positive consequences of the equal status of women and men students, thus shifting the status of women students closer to the core of the university. First, he

<sup>33</sup>Anon "Askel eteenpäin" [A Step Forward], *Koti ja Yhteiskunta*, no. 7–8 (1901): 68.

<sup>34</sup>See also Kaarninen, "Gifted Girls".

<sup>35</sup>E.g. Anon, "Oman maan kuulumisia" [National News], *Koti ja Yhteiskunta*, no. 4 (1890): 48–9; Anon, "Oman maan kuulumisia" [National News], *Koti ja Yhteiskunta*, no. 10 (1890): 120; Anon, "Suomen Naisyhdistyksen vuosikertomus vuodelta 1893" [Annual Report of Finnish Women's Union], *Koti ja Yhteiskunta*, no. 2 (1894): 19; Anon, "Oman maan kuulumisia" [National News], *Koti ja Yhteiskunta*, no. 7–8 (1897): 86; Anon, "Oman maan kuulumisia" [National News], *Koti ja Yhteiskunta*, no. 9 (1897): 101; Anon "Oman maan kuulumisia" [National News], *Koti ja Yhteiskunta*, no. 6 (1910): 81; Lucina Hagman, "Naisten virkanimitykset" [Appointing Women to Posts], *Naisten ääni*, no. 6–7 (1907): 81–2.

<sup>36</sup>E.g. Anon, "Oman maan kuulumisia" [National News], *Koti ja Yhteiskunta*, no. 4 (1890): 48–9.

<sup>37</sup>Because women students were not allowed to join students' associations, they established one of their own, namely, De Kvinnliga (The Women's League). When women students were finally accepted into students' associations, this association became unnecessary and dissolved itself during the 1890s. (Riitta Mäkinen, "De Kvinnliga – naisten 'osakunta'", in *Naisten aika. Valkoinen varis ja muita oppineita naisia* [Women's Era. White Crow and Other Educated Women], ed. Riitta Mäkinen and Marja Engman (Helsinki: Gaudeamus, 2015), 184–8.)

<sup>38</sup>E.g. Anon, "Oman maan kuulumisia" [National News], *Koti ja Yhteiskunta*, no. 4 (1890): 48–9.

<sup>39</sup>The university in Helsinki.

<sup>40</sup>Anon, "Oman maan kuulumisia" [National News], *Koti ja Yhteiskunta*, no. 9 (1897): 101.

noted the benefits of this change for the student associations.<sup>41</sup> Second, he mentioned the advantages of the change for the university and society: “The university, which is tasked with spreading light as widely as possible to all civic layers, has no reason to disapprove of women among them, since their diligence, success in their studies and behaviour cannot be given anything but the best commendations”.<sup>42</sup>

The status of women students in the student associations was described in a writing published in 1898 that addressed the relations between women students and the women’s movement. The writing was based on a speech given by a woman member at the meeting of a student association and emphasised, on one hand, women students’ ability to work in associations and, on the other, their obligation to participate in them. The message was that the rights that women had obtained were accompanied by responsibilities towards other students, the university, society and even the women’s movement: “Admittedly, our main duty as a student is the conscientious practice of studies . . . in that way, we can even promote the aims of the women’s movement . . . and inspire confidence that women also are capable of scientific work . . . In these meetings of associations, we can grow in such a way that when we graduate from the university, we are able not only to meet the responsibilities of the home, but also to fulfil the obligations that we receive as members of society”.<sup>43</sup>

The writing also described the prejudices that women students encountered at university because of their connection with the women’s movement. For example, they were accused of imitating men and losing their femininity. Some women even feared being derided by male students if they were involved in the women’s movement: “They do not admit that they are in favour [of women’s rights], because they were afraid of having to suffer ridicule organised by their fellow colleagues”.<sup>44</sup> Fundamentally, the issue was that the traditional social order based on the distinct gender roles in society was destabilised by female students. These prejudices and accusations can be seen as attempts to restore the previous academic world dominated by academic men.<sup>45</sup>

The status of female students within the university was not stable at the beginning of the twentieth century. The situation was detailed in three writings published in *Koti ja Yhteiskunta* and *Naisten ääni* in 1904, 1906 and 1913. The first discussion concerned the so-called “women’s faculty”, and the debate emerged when Lucina Hagman<sup>46</sup> and Alexandra Gripenberg wrote their response to Professor Palmberg’s lecture in which he, among other things, proposed establishing a separate faculty for women.<sup>47</sup> This

---

<sup>41</sup>Ibid.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid.

<sup>43</sup>Toini Åkerman, “Naisylioppilaat ja naisasia” [Women Students and the Women’s Movement], *Koti ja Yhteiskunta*, no. 12 (1898): 92–4.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid.

<sup>45</sup>See also Hakosalo, “Kivuton murros?”; Harford, “The Movement for the Higher Education of Women in Ireland”; Spencer and Smith, “Women Professors and Deans”.

<sup>46</sup>Lucina Hagman (1853–1946) was one of the leading figures of the Finnish women’s movement. She acted as the chairwoman in Naisasialiitto Unioni [the Feminist Association Union] (1892–1908 and 1913–1920), and as the honorary chairwoman in 1908–1946; she also participated in establishing Suomalainen Naisliitto [the Finnish Women’s Association] (served there as the chairwoman in 1908–1914 and 1920–1927). When the universal and equal suffrage was implemented in 1906, Lucina Hagman was elected in the spring of 1907 among the first MPs to parliament. Being a distinguished head teacher, writer and MP, she was first to receive the title of professor for her life’s work. (Anne Ollila, “Lucina Hagman”, in *Kansallisbiografia-verkkojulkaisu* [National Biography – Electronic Publication], *Studia Biographica 4* [Helsinki: Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura, 1998, ref. 2.8.2022], <http://urn.fi/urn:nbn:fi:sk:skbg-004644>).

<sup>47</sup>Professor Palmberg’s lecture was cited in other journals and newspapers. E.g. Anon, “Pedagogiska förenings förhandlingar” [Educational Association Minutes], *Tidskrift utgiven av Pedagogiska föreningen i Finland*, no. 5–6 (1904): 300–3; and Anon, “Ett kvinnligt protestmöte” [Protest Meeting organised by Women], *Fyren*, no. 13 (1904): 3.

lecture was given at a conference on coeducation in secondary schools, but he also touched upon the issue of women students and their university studies. In his proposition regarding a separate faculty for women, Professor Palmberg suggested that the academic subjects could include health education, child care, education, economics and accountancy. In their thorough response, Lucina Hagman and Alexandra Gripenberg rejected the views of the professor and defended women's right to university studies that would include all academic subjects: "It is impossible to understand the benefits of a female faculty being set up at university . . . Women even now have the right to attend the lectures . . .".<sup>48</sup> Hagman and Gripenberg also defended women students against the accusations, such as their number being too high, their success in studies too low and their progress in university studies too slow.<sup>49</sup> The debate was characterised by the allegations and criticism that women students were confronted with inside and outside the university.<sup>50</sup>

In addition to this debate, the status of women students at university was discussed in a writing published in 1906 by *Koti ja Yhteiskunta* titled "What are the Benefits for Finnish Women from University Degrees?" This provocative writing took a stand on two issues: first, the fact that, despite having the same education and degrees, women earned less than men and, second, once again, women's right to study at university. Commenting on a speech delivered by a university rector in 1902, the author of the writing defended female students against the allegations with which they were confronted. For example, the rector had stated in his speech that "female students abandon their university studies or at least dilute them". In the writing in *Koti ja Yhteiskunta*, the author described and commented on the rector's speech: "As a reason for this [female students abandon their studies], the rector posits a lack of intellectual tenacity and a difficulty in managing a wider (abstract) amount of knowledge. He also mentioned as reasons: women's weaker physical strength and marriages . . . But the rector fails to mention that the minimal benefit that women have from their university degrees must be one of the main reasons why they relatively weakly dedicate themselves to university studies".<sup>51</sup> The writing brought into relief the ambivalent status of women students: on the one hand, women gained ground at university, both academically and in the terms of the community; on the other hand, they still encountered disparagement and discrimination. The writing also noted that women benefited less than men from the merits and status in society given by university degrees.<sup>52</sup>

The complex status of women students was again brought up in 1913, when *Naisten Ääni* published a writing commenting on *Ylioppilaslehti*'s<sup>53</sup> debate on "the unfavourable

<sup>48</sup>Lucina Hagman and Alexandra Gripenberg, "Yhteiskasvatus Suomessa" [Co-education in Finland], *Koti ja Yhteiskunta*, no. 5 (1904): 62–3. Hagman and Gripenberg's response was also published in other journals and newspapers: e.g. Anon, "Yhteiskasvatus Suomessa" [Co-education in Finland], *Uusi Suometar*, no. 104 (1904): 3–4.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid.

<sup>50</sup>See also Kaarninen and Kaarninen, *Sivistyksen portti*.

<sup>51</sup>Anon, "Mitä hyötyä naisilla on Suomessa yliopistotutkinnoista?" [What are the Benefits for Finnish Women from University Degrees?], *Koti ja Yhteiskunta*, no. 3 (1906): 39.

In 1901, the rector welcomed women into university by describing how "women affect[ed] student life courteously and refiningly". In his opening speech at the beginning of the academic year of 1902, the rector reported women students' academic success being, in some cases, of inferior quality compared to men. *Rehtorin puheet lukukausien avajaisissa 1900–1902* [The Speeches of the Rector 1900–1902] (Helsinki: Keisallinen Aleksanterin Yliopisto, 1903), 41–2, 47–60.

<sup>52</sup>See also Hakosalo, "Kivuton murros?"; Harford, "The Movement for the Higher Education of Women in Ireland".

<sup>53</sup>*Ylioppilaslehti* was published by the student associations.

opinion that has begun to grow among men students towards women's education".<sup>54</sup> As in the previous decades, the debate focused on the same accusations and justifications that women students were confronted with earlier. Moreover, *Naisten Ääni* mentioned the issue, saying that it was "in contemporary times, a question that tastes like mould".<sup>55</sup> Nevertheless, the writings published in *Ylioppilaslehti* clearly brought out into the open the competition between female and male students and also the point that male students feared losing their privileged status at university and in society.<sup>56</sup>

## Women scholars – equals among equals?

The magazines of the women's movement closely followed not only women university students but also the educational paths of scholarly women who continued their studies after earning master's degrees. These writings included short, bulletin-like news on the progress of women scholars' careers. The magazines also reported every milestone on women's academic paths,<sup>57</sup> such as the first woman with a licentiate in medicine, Ina Rosqvist,<sup>58</sup> the first woman with a doctoral degree, Karolina Eskelin,<sup>59</sup> and the first woman to hold the title of docent and be appointed as a professor, Alma Söderhjelm.<sup>60</sup>

In addition, the magazines commented on the difficulties that women encountered in their academic careers. For example, *Naisten Ääni* published several short writings

<sup>54</sup> Anon, "Katsaus omasta ikkunasta" [Overview of One's Own Window], *Naisten Ääni*, no. 8 (1913): 109–10.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.; Anon, "Naisten opiskelu yliopistossa" [Women's Studies in the University], *Ylioppilaslehti*, no. 10 (1913): 112–14; Anon, "Naisten opiskelu yliopistossa" [Women's Studies in the University], *Ylioppilaslehti*, no. 11 (1913): 122–6.

In *Ylioppilaslehti*, the debate went on throughout 1913 and gradually diminished. Women students was a topic which appeared occasionally in *Ylioppilaslehti* during the 1920s and the 1930s.

<sup>57</sup> E.g. Anon, "Oman maan kuulumisia" [National News], *Koti ja Yhteiskunta*, no. 12 (1895): 153; Anon, "Oman maan kuulumisia" [National News], *Koti ja Yhteiskunta*, no. 5–6 (1906): 65; Anon, "Kotimaan uutisia" [National News], *Naisten Ääni*, no. 13 (1925): 204; Anon, "Kotimaan uutisia" [National News], *Naisten Ääni*, no. 10 (1926): 154; Anon, "Ensimmäinen naispuolinen professori valtion yliopistomme" [The First Women Professor in our State University], *Naisten Ääni*, no. 22–4 (1930): 478.

<sup>58</sup> Ina (Alma Josefina) Rosqvist (1865–1942) was the first Finnish woman who achieved the degree of Licentiate in Medicine in 1896. During her career, she first worked as an assistant physician, and later, in 1923, she was appointed a senior physician in an outpatient clinic and a district physician in Helsinki. She also published academic articles and delivered lectures. She actively participated in organisations whose activities involved social issues, especially national health work. Moreover, she took part in the work of the women's movement. (Venla Sainio, "Rosqvist, Ina", in *Kansallisbiografia-verkkojulkaisu* [National Biography – Electronic Publication], *Studia Biographica 4* [Helsinki: Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura, 1999, ref. 19.8.2022], <http://urn.fi/urn:nbn:fi:sk:skbg-003607>.)

<sup>59</sup> Karolina Eskelin (1867–1936) pioneered in the field of medicine in several ways. When she and Ina Rosqvist began their university studies, they were the only women students at the university. Karolina Eskelin received the degree of Licentiate in Medicine in 1896, and at the end of the same year she became the first woman who achieved the degree of Doctor of Medical Science. Although she excelled in the academic field, her career inside the university lasted only two years. During her later career, she had a doctor's surgery of her own and even established her own hospital. (Hakosalo, "Tohtori Karolina Eskelin".)

The other woman pioneer was Tekla Hultin (1864–1943) who was first in Finland to receive a doctorate in history when she defended her doctoral thesis in 1896. During her career, she worked as a journalist, an MP and an actuary. (Venla Sainio, "Tohtori Tekla Hultin", in *Naisten aika. Valkoinen varis ja muita oppineita naisia* [Women's Era. White Crow and Other Educated Women], eds. Riitta Mäkinen and Marja Engman (Helsinki: Gaudeamus, 2015), 208–26; Venla Sainio, "Hultin, Tekla", in *Kansallisbiografia-verkkojulkaisu* [National Biography – Electronic Publication], *Studia Biographica 4* (Helsinki: Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura, 2022, ref. 2.8.2022). <http://urn.fi/urn:nbn:fi:sk:skbg-003486>.)

<sup>60</sup> Alma Söderhjelm (1870–1949) defended her doctoral dissertation in 1900, and six year later she became the first Finnish woman who held the title of Docent. She was appointed the first woman professor by Åbo Akademi in 1927. (Marja Engman, "Professori Alma Söderhjelm", in *Naisten aika. Valkoinen varis ja muita oppineita naisia* [Women's Era. White Crow and Other Educated Women], eds. Riitta Mäkinen and Marja Engman (Helsinki: Gaudeamus, 2015), 227–42; Marja Engman, "Söderhjelm, Alma", in *Kansallisbiografia-verkkojulkaisu* [National Biography – Electronic Publication], *Studia Biographica 4* [Helsinki: Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura, 1999, ref. 2.8.2022], <http://urn.fi/urn:nbn:fi:sk:skbg-002852>.)

addressing the situation of Alma Söderhjelm, whose academic career was full of turns and obstacles. The news rebuked the rejection of Söderhjelm's attempt to obtain a professorship by dispensation<sup>61</sup> and was followed by other news casting light on the next phases of her career.<sup>62</sup> *Naisten Ääni* either published neutral news or harshly criticised those who hindered women's careers: "We have recently again experienced how prejudices are still rampant and conservatism is on the winning side . . . in the country where there are hundreds of women students, a woman just cannot become a professor after all".<sup>63</sup> Despite the support received, Alma Söderhjelm did not succeed in earning a professorship at the University of Helsinki. Instead, she obtained a sponsored professorship at Åbo Akademi in 1927. *Naisten Ääni* described Söderhjelm's academic career as a "thorny road" and referred to it as an example of why the women's movement had still not reached its aims regarding the emancipation of women.<sup>64</sup>

Besides the difficulties in their career paths, women also experienced a diminishing of their academic achievements. *Naisten Ääni* noted in three writings published in 1912, 1927 and 1931 that women were not addressed in accordance with their academic degrees (e.g. doctorates). The 1912 writing described situations in which women were addressed only as "Miss", ignoring their academic degrees. The magazine condemned such behaviour as being against equality: "In the ears of every friend of equality, it sounds as strange as if a man of legal age and a docent was addressed only as a gentleman, that is, the little gentleman . . . but it is also a clear sign that the idea of equality is quite a murky concept for [those who diminish women's merits]".<sup>65</sup> The writing that came out 15 years later, in 1927, resembled the earlier situation, commenting indignantly: "When addressing women scholars, the use of the academic degree of doctor would have been a sign of equality, and it is not suitable or proper [to address them instead of academic titles as only Miss or Mrs]".<sup>66</sup> The third writing brought up the same issue and adopted a humorous perspective when recalling an incident that had happened to Elsa Ryti,<sup>67</sup> who had a doctorate in medicine: "When one hospital amanuensis, a bachelor of medicine, asked 'Miss Ryti' for advice on a scientific question, she replied, 'Miss Ryti' doesn't know, but ask D.Med. [Doctor of Medicine] Ryti, she knows".<sup>68</sup> The writings focused on the complicated relations and persistently prevailing prejudiced attitudes towards educated women and women scholars. Although women students and scholars

<sup>61</sup>The exemption was not granted on the grounds of the legislation of the time, which prevented women from being appointed to state offices.

<sup>62</sup>Anon, "Lain varjon alla" [Under the Shadow of the Law], *Naisten Ääni*, no. 23 (1911): 268–9; Anon, "Sillä kannalla me vielä olemme" [That is the View still], *Naisten Ääni*, no. 3 (1913): 29–30; Anon, "Kotimaan uutisia" [National News], *Naisten Ääni*, no. 4 (1913): 55; Anon, "Kotimaan uutisia" [National News], *Naisten Ääni*, no. 28 (1915): 298; Anon, "Kotimaan uutisia" [National News], *Naisten Ääni*, no. 1 (1921): 11.

<sup>63</sup>Anon, "Sillä kannalla me vielä olemme" [That is the View still].

<sup>64</sup>Anon, "Kotimaan uutisia" [National News].

<sup>65</sup>Anon, "Kotimaan uutisia" [National News], *Naisten Ääni*, no. 7 (1912): 97.

<sup>66</sup>Anon, "Katsaus omasta ikkunasta" [Overview of One's Own Window], *Naisten Ääni*, no. 19 (1927): 278.

<sup>67</sup>Elsa Ryti (1895–1931) is characterised as one of the first women to make a name for herself in medical science in Finland. She achieved the degree of Licentiate of Medicine in 1921, the doctoral degree of MD in 1924 and became docent in serology and bacteriology in 1926. Although she was primarily interested in basic medical research, she also worked as an assistant physician. She was an active member of Duodecim Society (the Finnish-speaking medical society) and was among the society's most active presenters of scientific papers during the latter half of the 1920s. Owing to her brother Risto Ryti, who was a member of parliament in 1919–1924, minister of finance in 1921–1922 and 1922–1924, prime minister in 1939–1940 and president in 1940–1944, she was also well-known in larger social circles than only the scientific field. (Heini Hakosalo, "The Ryti Case: Language, Gender and the Rules of the Game in Finnish Academic Medicine in the 1920s", *Scandinavian Journal of History* 37, no. 4 (2012): 430–60.)

<sup>68</sup>Anon, "Kun uusi tohtori leivottiin" [When a New Doctor was graduated], *Naisten Ääni*, no. 19 (1931): 269–70.

were no longer isolated cases at university at the beginning of the 1930s, their status inside the academic hierarchy was not self-evident.<sup>69</sup> Heini Hakosalo notes in her article that Ryti's colleagues were unwilling to acknowledge her expertise and academic status. She also refers to "the rules of the academic game", pointing out that early women students and women academics were careful not to emphasise their gender, and that medical women had chosen the tactics of behaving in a manner that showed that full professional integration was a matter of fact. In addition, Hakosalo notes that discrimination inside the academic world seldom took the form of grand gestures or extreme chauvinistic statements.<sup>70</sup>

Furthermore, according to *Naisten Ääni*, women encountered other, very concrete obstacles and difficulties during their academic career paths at university. One of the issues was the limited number of women scholars, which made women feel isolated and lacking female role models. The impact of the situation on female students was described in *Naisten Ääni* in 1923: "However, male students now have the advantage that the teachers they have to associate with represent their own gender. Young female students are all adrift at the university. There is not a single female professor to whom they could turn to get advice".<sup>71</sup> In the 1920s, women scholars were still somewhat invisible to female students at university, and the need for inspiring examples can be seen clearly in the writings.<sup>72</sup>

In the next decade, *Naisten Ääni* again mentioned the small number of women scholars when MP Mandi Hannula introduced and pondered the sectors and fields in which there was space for women's expertise and work contribution. Some of Hannula's writings concerned universities and women scholars: "We have thought about ways to persuade more women to gain the highest academic degrees . . . However, some women should vigorously orient their goal upward, to management and leadership, not for the sake of honour, but in order to find tasks there that men have ignored".<sup>73</sup> Commenting on Hannula's views in the next issue of *Naisten Ääni*, a PhD candidate writer pointed out that one of the hindrances was the cost of postgraduate studies.<sup>74</sup> These writings described the difficulties that women faced in their academic careers and outlined a clear need for scholarly women: "I will end this presentation with the serious plea that young women, when choosing a career in life, would not judge their strength as too low and not surrender exclusively to old conventional occupations".<sup>75</sup>

## Mapping the future of women scholars in the 1930s

In the 1930s, the magazines of the women's movement continued writing about the academic careers of women scholars and thereby brought to the foreground the conflicting views on academic women and efforts to increase equality inside the academic

<sup>69</sup>Anon, "Katsaus omasta ikkunasta" [Overview of One's Own Window]; Anon, "Kun uusi tohtori leivottiin" [When a New Doctor was graduated].

<sup>70</sup>Heini Hakosalo, "The Ryti Case".

<sup>71</sup>Anon, "Mikä siihen lieenee syynä" [What is probably the Reason for it], *Naisten Ääni*, no. 19 (1923): 263–4.

<sup>72</sup>See also Kaarninen, "'Gifted Girls'"; Spencer and Smith, "Women Professors and Deans".

<sup>73</sup>Mandi Hannula, "Ammatteja ja toimialoja joissa on tilaa naispuolisille työvoimille" [Occupations and Sectors where is Space for Female Labour], *Naisten Ääni*, no. 6 (1930): 121–4.

<sup>74</sup>Anon, "Ajatuksia naisten opiskelusta" [Thoughts about Women's Studies], *Naisten Ääni*, no. 7 (1930): 159.

<sup>75</sup>Mandi Hannula, "Ajatuksia naisten opiskelusta II" [Thoughts about Women's Studies II], *Naisten Ääni*, no. 8 (1930): 177–8.

community. For example, *Naisten Ääni* remarked on scholarly women in three writings in 1931, 1934 and 1937. In 1931, a writing quoted two professors' comments on female students and their university studies that were published in a newspaper. *Naisten Ääni* condemned the critical and rather sceptical viewpoint of the professors, according to whom women students were accused of being reluctant to carry on their doctoral studies: "Women students usually do not undertake scientific work . . . The majority of them, by my calculations [the professor's] about half, marry and break off their former careers . . . I do not consider that it is worth choosing and raising a follower and docent among female students". *Naisten Ääni* defended women's rights and emphasised their ability to pursue doctoral studies and academic careers: "Upon reading these statements, attention is drawn to the fact that neither of the professors denies that women students have the capability for scientific work".<sup>76</sup> *Naisten Ääni* also encouraged female students and scholarly women to pursue academic work and to believe in their abilities and merits. The writing demonstrated the clearly contradictory status of women students and scholars at university and the belittling opinions that still prevailed in the academic community at the beginning of the 1930s.<sup>77</sup>

The second writing, published in 1934 in *Naisten Ääni*, approached the issue from another perspective and showcased the achievements of women in science. The writing was titled "A Glory Day of Women in our University" and it described the public defence of a doctoral thesis at which both the opponent (Professor Laimi Leidenius) and the doctoral candidate were women. The writing described the event in detailed and positive expressions pertaining to the expertise of both academic women: "One rarely hears such an elegant and well-performed presentation. Even the uninitiated was happy to listen to it . . . Research that will certainly greatly benefit and facilitate in the field of medicine was discussed by both of these women scholars with great knowledge and expertise".<sup>78</sup> The writing emphasised the importance of the event for equality reasons and pinpointed the aims of the women's movement and its benefits for the university, science and society. In addition, the writing constituted a representation in which academic women were given equal professional status at university: "The whole public defence of a doctoral thesis was the most excellent testimony of how we are already accustomed to the presence of women in the high places of science. Without any fuss, almost unnoticed – as if the most natural thing in the world – the remarkable event was drawn into history as easily and naturally as if women from time immemorial had been walking in the shelter of the Alma Mater".<sup>79</sup>

*Naisten Ääni* took another stand on behalf of women's academic careers in 1937 and pondered the reasons for women's underrepresentation in scholarly work. Self-criticism, marital status and the novelty of academic careers were given as explanations for the lack of women scholars in the field of science. The writing also pinpointed that the social expectations and norms that women were burdened with constituted an implicit frame that limited the scope of studies and careers possible for women. Duties and careers of a self-sacrificing nature, such as motherhood or a career in nursing, were outlined as the

---

<sup>76</sup> Anon, "Löytöjä muista lehdistä" [Discoveries from other Journals], *Naisten Ääni*, no. 9 (1931): 136.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Anon, "Naisten kunniapäivä yliopistossamme" [A Glory Day of Women in our University], *Naisten Ääni*, no. 11 (1934): 182.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

common positions that conformed with social conventions. Employing a rather critical tone, the writing noted: “For as long as women’s scientific ability and achievements are viewed with suspicion, as if they are a temporary rarity, women will have to struggle under a much heavier burden than men”.<sup>80</sup> Moreover, the writing raised the issue of women struggling to make a living when they decided to continue their academic careers after graduation. Emphasising the unequal treatment of women and men, the writing mentioned the unfairness present in all phases of women’s careers: “Male students are tacitly favoured at university . . . Scholarships of scientific associations and cultural funds are almost without exception given to men . . . Posts and positions will, of course, be predetermined for those scholarship recipients”.<sup>81</sup> Constituting at first a rather dismal discourse on the status of women scholars inside the academic community, the writing, nevertheless, ended with hopeful thoughts: “Absolute open-mindedness is a fundamental requirement of all scientific research. May it apply to researchers as well. Science has no gender. It does not favour one more than the other”.<sup>82</sup> The writing further demonstrated the uncertainty of career opportunities for women scholars; by bringing these grievances into view, the magazine sought to strengthen the position of women scientists in the academic field and thereby foster the emancipatory goals of academic women and the women’s movement.<sup>83</sup>

### Biographical notes on women pioneers in scholarly work

The representations of scholarly women in the biographies published in the magazines of the women’s movement form an interesting source material that reveals multiple perspectives on women pioneers in the academic world. The magazines of the women’s movement, especially *Naisten Ääni*, published dozens of biographical writings introducing the pioneers among women scholars and elaborately describing their careers in various academic fields. Such writings included biographies which were published when a woman scholar achieved a postgraduate academic degree (e.g. the degree of doctor or the title of Docent<sup>84</sup>) or a high academic post (e.g. professorship<sup>85</sup>). Additionally, the writings could contain anniversary writings dedicated to women scholars celebrating their birthdays or anniversaries, presenting a usual biographical part, along with an academic biography accompanied by congratulations.<sup>86</sup> Finally, the magazines also published obituaries, which consisted of biographical accounts related to the academic achievements of the deceased.<sup>87</sup> Biographical writings can be understood as

<sup>80</sup> Anon, “Keskustelua” [Discussion], *Naisten Ääni*, no. 15–16 (1937): 207–8.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> See also Spencer and Smith, “Women Professors and Deans”.

<sup>84</sup> The university could award the title of Docent to a person who had comprehensive knowledge of their field, a capacity for independent research demonstrated through publications and strong teaching skills. This title was awarded during the academic postgraduate phase (i.e. after the person has achieved a doctor’s degree and continued academic research and teaching). The title of Docent is sometimes translated as Adjunct Professor or Associate Professor.

<sup>85</sup> E.g. Karin A. Spoof, “Laimi Leidenius”, *Naisten Ääni*, no. 22 (1913): 285–7; Anon, “Yksi lisää” [One more], *Naisten Ääni*, no. 2 (1924): 19; Anon, “Elsa Ryti”, *Naisten Ääni*, no. 10 (1926): 154; Anon, “Ensimmäinen naispuolinen professori valtion yliopistoomme” [The First Women Professor in our State University].

<sup>86</sup> E.g. Anon, “Tekla Hultin”, *Naisten Ääni*, no. 14 (1914): 175–6; Anon, “Tohtori Tekla Hultin”, *Naisten Ääni*, no. 7 (1924): 97–8; Anon, “Laimi Leidenius”, *Naisten Ääni*, no. 3 (1927): 41; Anon, “Tekla Hultin 70 v. 18.4.”, *Naisten Ääni*, no. 8 (1934): 126; Anon, “Professori Laimi Leidenius 60-vuotias”, *Naisten Ääni*, no. 4 (1937): 44–5.

<sup>87</sup> E.g. Anon, “Elsa Rytin elämäntyön päätyessä” [At the End of Elsa Ryti’s Life’s Work], *Naisten Ääni*, no. 15–16 (1931): 228.

representations of the lived and experienced lives of scholarly women, constituting and reconstituting discursive constructions of women scholars.

A notable example of the above-mentioned discursive practices were writings dedicated to Laimi Leidenius,<sup>88</sup> whose academic career had been described in a series of biographies published in *Naisten Ääni* since 1913 when she became the second woman in Finland to achieve a doctoral degree in medical sciences.<sup>89</sup> The biographies usually included her merits both in education and in work careers, explained thoroughly and with positive connotations: “She is such a popular doctor that she hardly has time to receive and treat all those patients who seek her”;<sup>90</sup> “she has also won the absolute trust of her male colleagues because of the great serenity, assurance, speed, dexterity and skilfulness with which she performs her duties”.<sup>91</sup> In addition, the writings outlined the personality of Laimi Leidenius: “As a person, she is the most tactful, endearing, humane and self-sacrificing”. Moreover, biographical writings usually highlighted the traits that inspired pride in the achievements of women scholars: “Women have reason to rejoice and take pride in of this unusually skilled, hard-working and vigorous woman”.<sup>92</sup>

Biographical writings in the magazines of the women’s movement, including those dedicated to Laimi Leidenius, characterised all women scholars in a similar style and portrayed them as possessing vigorous character, indefatigable, persistent, modest and as people who put others before themselves. They portrayed women in a manner that emphasised that they were both hard-working and humble: “The vibrant interest, indefatigable vigour and the skill of concentration have produced respectable results in all of her activities”.<sup>93</sup> In some writings, women scholars were presented as role models for other women, especially university students: “It is an example to many women of how rich and useful she can form her life”.<sup>94</sup>

Apart from individual biographies, the magazines of the women’s movement included writings that introduced women scholars as groups or their small-scale set biographies (prosopography).<sup>95</sup> Such group biographies were compiled using various criteria, such as the academic fields in which the women worked or the associations in which they participated. Such writings could also portray prominent academic women figures of historical importance.<sup>96</sup> For example, in 1913, *Naisten Ääni* published a long writing casting light on

<sup>88</sup>Laimi Leidenius (1877–1938) achieved a degree of Licentiate in Medicine in 1908 and defended her doctoral dissertation in Medicine in 1913. The next step in her academic career was the Title of Docent, which she achieved in 1925. When appointed as a professor in 1930, she was the first women professor in the University of Helsinki and the second women professor in Finland. Improving prenatal care and the care of newborns were the main focuses of her very successful career. (Marjatta Hietala and Anto Leikola, “Leidenius, Laimi”, in *Kansallisbiografia-verkkojulkaisu* [National Biography – Electronic Publication], *Studia Biographica* 4 (Helsinki: Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura, 2016, ref. 2.8.2022, <http://urn.fi/urn:nbn:fi:sk:kg-006855>.)

<sup>89</sup>Spoof, “Laimi Leidenius”; Anon, “Laimi Leidenius”; Anon, “Professori Laimi Leidenius 60-vuotias”. See also Anon, “Ensimmäinen naispuolinen professori valtion yliopistoomme” [The First Woman Professor in our State University].

<sup>90</sup>Anon, “Laimi Leidenius”.

<sup>91</sup>Spoof, “Laimi Leidenius”.

<sup>92</sup>See note 90 above.

<sup>93</sup>E.g. Anon, “Elsa Ryti”.

<sup>94</sup>E.g. Anon, “Tohtori Tekla Hultin”.

<sup>95</sup>Heini Hakosalo, “Coming Together: Early Finnish Medical Women and the Multiple Levels of Historical Biography”, in *Gender and History: Nordic Perspectives*, ed. Erla Hulda Halldórsdóttir, Tiina Kinnunen, Maarit Leskelä-Kärki and Birgitte Possing (Turku: University of Turku, 2017), 209–30. Hakosalo defines distinctions between the concepts of set biography (prosopography), collective biography, group biography and individual biography.

<sup>96</sup>E.g. Anon, “Katsaus naislääkäriemme toimintaan ja oikeudelliseen asemaan” [Overview of the Activities and Legal Status of our Female Physicians], *Naisten Ääni*, no. 24–5 (1913): 318–22; Anon, “Sananen heistä jotka ovat viitoittaneet tietä” [A Word about Them who have paved the Way], *Naisten Ääni*, no. 11–12 (1927): 159–61, 165–7; Anon, “Akateemisten naisten kevätairueet” [Spring Herald of Academic Women], *Naisten Ääni*, no. 23–4 (1931): 332–3.

academic women in the field of medicine. The writing first presented a short chronological introduction to the history of women doctors and then continued to outline their individual academic and occupational merits. In addition, the writings described each prominent woman scholar in the context of the history of medicine and offered a group portrayal of their personalities and achievements: “We can already say that, despite the limitations on their careers, their work has been successful . . . . Finally, let it be also mentioned, our female doctors have been engaged in scientific writing work. In addition to two dissertations, a number of writings and studies published in scientific journals have come out of their pens”.<sup>97</sup> Moreover, group biographies described the groundwork for the forthcoming demand for full recognition of women doctors, allowing them to be appointed as medical doctors without applying for exemption. From that perspective, these writings acted as one vehicle for promoting the emancipatory aims of women.<sup>98</sup>

## Conclusions

Since the 1870s, the ideas of egalitarianism based on human rights had influenced the discussions of women’s right to academic education in Finland.<sup>99</sup> The women’s movement was one of the core stakeholders in the debates.<sup>100</sup> Thus, during the period between the 1890s and the 1930s, the discussion continued in the magazines of the Finnish women’s movement. At first, access to higher education and the complex status of female students at university were the centre of attention in the discussions. The discussions were supplemented by new tones, strengthening the support for educational equality in relation to human rights with utilitarian perspectives. The arguments in favour of women’s widening opportunities for academic education were not justified solely by human rights; rather, they were based on the advantages to larger entities, such as universities, academic communities and society at large. The discussions can be understood as echoing the Protestant ethics propounded by Max Weber, under which one was given a vocation and, when accepting it, fulfilled one’s social status and place.<sup>101</sup>

The emphasis of the discussions in the magazines of the Finnish women’s movement shifted during the first decade of the twentieth century, when the magazines raised public awareness of the career paths of women scholars and the status of women in scholarly work. The change in topics accelerated after women’s access to university became established in 1901. The representations of academic women and women scholars also highlighted the efforts of the women’s movement to promote the scholarly work of pioneering women in academic circles. The changes in the discussions can be understood as echoing the social and educational context of Finnish society of that time. During the period, the

<sup>97</sup> Anon, “Katsaus naislääkäriemme toimintaan ja oikeudelliseen asemaan” [Overview of the Activities and Legal Status of our Female Physicians].

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> See also Kaarninen, “‘Gifted Girls’”.

<sup>100</sup> Jallinoja, *Suomalaisen naisasialiikkeen taistelukaudet*; see also Harford, “Women’s Education Associations”. Judith Harford points out that the women’s associations in Ireland and in the United States used media and scholarly journals to promote their aims in advancing women’s higher education.

<sup>101</sup> According to Anne Ollila, the constructed femininity of that time expressed women’s new roles where duties combined with calling, self-sacrifice and conscientiousness. (Anne Ollila, *Jalo velvollisuus. Virkanaisena 1800-luvun lopun Suomessa* [Noble Duty. As a Career Woman at the End of the 1800s in Finland] (Helsinki: SKS, 1989). See also Jallinoja, *Suomalaisen naisasialiikkeen taistelukaudet*, 13, 32–52.)

educational system, including higher education, expanded; for example, two new universities were established in 1917 and 1920, increasing university places and career opportunities for women.<sup>102</sup>

The academic emancipation of women, particularly in various previously male-dominated occupational fields, constituted breaches in the traditional social order of female and male citizenship, which featured recognition of the social hierarchy of power among individuals (e.g. educational merits exalted one in the social hierarchy). The education and degrees obtained by women contested the prevailing order of that time, which was reflected in writings on social interactions and relationships between people. For example, a dismissive attitude towards academic women and women scholars could be understood as an attempt to cling to the prior social order, in which women were denied the right to enter university to obtain education. Previous studies note that social order is maintained by interactions and nexuses between people,<sup>103</sup> and those who possessed social prestige sought to maintain a jointly recognised social order. Thus, academic and educated women who challenged the status quo in the university and society at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century became subjects of criticism by the male-dominated community.<sup>104</sup>

Gaining space in the academic sphere strengthened Finnish women's emancipation and the equality between women and men. Nevertheless, at that time, academic study was mostly obtained by elite and middle-class women, often excluding women of lesser means.<sup>105</sup> That interesting theme leaves opportunities for further historical studies of women academics and their career paths.<sup>106</sup>

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

## Notes on contributor

**Marjo Nieminen**, is a university lecturer in the Department of Education, University of Turku, Finland, and she has worked earlier as a researcher at the Centre for Research on Lifelong Learning and Education (CELE). Her recent studies have covered the history of education from primary schooling to the upper secondary and university levels, and they have included methodological reflections on various historical sources, such as archives, written narratives and visual sources.

---

<sup>102</sup>See e.g. Tommila, "Suomalaisen tieteen voimakkaan kasvun kausi"; Kaarninen and Kaarninen, *Sivistyksen portti*, 168.

<sup>103</sup>E.g. Hakosalo, "Kivuton murros?"; Harford, "Women's Education Associations"; Spencer and Smith, "Women Professors and Deans".

<sup>104</sup>See also e.g. Hakosalo, "Kivuton murros?"; Judith Harford, "The historiography of the professoriate: reflections on the role and legacy of Professor Mary Hayden (1862–1942)", *Paedagogica Historica* 56, no. 6 (2020): 807–18.

<sup>105</sup>See also e.g. Kaarninen, "Gifted Girls"; Nieminen, "Breakers of Glass Ceilings".

<sup>106</sup>For example, Ruth Watts notes that social reproduction theory applied by historians could be utilised when studying class hierarchies. As regards Finland, the social mobility could also offer a lens to the questions of equality in higher education. Watts, "Students in Higher and Further Education".