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Gender Differences at School

Boys' domination in the Swedish classroom

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1 Introduction

Gender patterns in the western world are changing when it comes to conditions, attitudes, demands, and actions. Boys and girls receive an education, men and women go to work, are involved in bringing up children and take part in society. But do boys and girls, men and women, have the same opportunities? There are many people who argue that boys still get more speaking time at school, and they still get more attention from teachers. Men still have the leading positions in politics and business, they still make more money than women, and people listen more to what men say. So are boys and girls, men and women, equal? An equal society is a place where everybody has the same rights, opportunities and responsibilities (Berge & Ve, 2000, p. 15).

Education plays an important role on the road to achieving equality between women and men (Wrigley, 1992, p. vii). Many people assume that education functions in a gender-neutral way, but there are also those who say that the school system is and has always been controlled by men (Spender, 1982, p. 3; Jönsson, 1992, p. 51; Steenberg, 1997, p. 12). Everybody working in schools should work for equality between the sexes. Equality should be a natural and continuous part in everyday work. The Swedish Education Act (2010:800) states that schools actively and consciously must promote equal rights and opportunities for both sexes. Schools have a responsibility to work against traditional gender perceptions. The Swedish Discrimination Act (2008:567) states that no one should be discriminated against because of their gender, ethnicity, religious or political beliefs, sexual orientation, social background, age, or for having disabilities of any kind. In educational debates in the western world today though, economic efficiency is a main concern. Also, more interest is drawn to how boys cope than to how girls cope (Arnot, David & Weiner, 1999, p. 7). Furthermore, cultural differences overshadow the question of gender, though this question is important in schools and also in society as a whole (Berge & Ve, 2000, p. vii).

A starting point for a great deal of pedagogic research, such as Spender (1982) and Gulbrandsen (1994), has been that girls have been treated unfairly, as Lakoff (1973; 1975) claimed, and this has also been a central point in pedagogic gender research (Wernersson, 2006, p. 23). However, in the last decade or so, this focus on girls has been criticised as girls perform better academically than boys (Arnot, David & Weiner, 1999, p. 7; Wernersson, 2006, p. 24). It has been claimed that the girls' academic progress is at the expense of the boys and that boys are the losers of the educational system in the western world (Öhrn, 2002, p. 10). Plenty pedagogic research shows that boys talk a lot more in the classroom and that boys get most of the attention from the teacher (Einarsson & Hultman, 1984, p. 82; Wernersson, 2006, p. 43; Wedin, 2009, p. 11). This does not

lead to an equal and democratic society. When men and women, boys and girls, share the power and influence in all parts of society, then we are equal (Wedin, 2009, p. 17).

This paper deals with gender differences in the Swedish classroom. Boys dominate, but why, and in what ways? There are other questions like; How do girls experience this domination from boys? and Are teachers aware of the boys' domination? These questions are very important if we want boys and girls to have an equal education and to be equal as men and women later in life. If we want to do something about the domination from boys, we need to know what the situation is like today. Many things can be done to create a society more equal between the sexes and we need to start at school before the gender patterns have set in.

The paper has the following structure: in section 2 I look into previous work that is of relevance, especially studies by Dale Spender (1982), Jan Einarsson and Tor G. Hultman (1984) and Jorun Gulbrandsen (1994). I concentrate on research in the Anglo-American and Scandinavian countries. In section 3 I will describe how I collected data through observing one class and giving them a questionnaire to answer. A different questionnaire was given to teachers. In section 4 I will show my results, which will be discussed in more detail in section 5. In section 6 I present my conclusion on boys' domination in the classroom.

2 Background

This part of the paper will present previous research in the field of gender differences at school which shows how oppressed or suppressed girls are in the education system still today. This research is based on the situation in the western world. I will focus on studies conducted in Anglo-American societies and in Scandinavia. My focus is on the age group 6-16. I will start by looking at a few things that can serve as part of an explanation for some of the gender differences at school.

Gender is found in everything around us according to Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2013, p. 21). It is found in ideology and beliefs, in our feelings and wishes and we do not always think of conventions as supporting gender differences (2013, p. 22) The environment teaches us to dress and behave in a special way, and what we think is our own wish is just part of the gender order. Both men and women are stereotyped, men as strong and powerful and women as weak and dependent.

There are unwritten rules for how men and women respectively are supposed to act. These stereotypes are carried into the classroom where boys get space and attention, and girls do not.

Research on classroom interaction was started at the end of the 1970s when the women's movement had been active for some time. At the beginning of the 1970s, Robin Lakoff wrote that women and men use language differently, and that this gave them different roles in society (Lakoff, 1973;1975). Men's language was more assertive, forceful, and they frequently expressed their opinions. Women's language was emotional but not loud, it was vague and powerless. If a woman expressed an opinion, it was often accompanied by a tag question, hedges or raising intonation in declarative statements. A woman's language was used to prevent her from having power and authority. Language was used to keep the woman in a demeaning position and not take her seriously. The use of certain language also treated women as subordinates, as objects or servants. Boys learnt from an early age that this was how men spoke, and girls similarly learnt that this was how women spoke. Language was a way to keep the woman in her place. Women's language was more polite and did not impose views on anyone else (Lakoff, 1973;1975).

2.1 Anglo-American societies

One of the first persons to research on classroom interaction was Dale Spender in the United Kingdom. She was a teacher herself and found in studies of her own as well as of other people's teaching that boys got most of the teacher's attention. She taped her own and other teachers' lessons and analysed the tapes afterwards. Both she and her colleagues were surprised and somewhat shocked that boys were given so much more attention than girls. Spender decided to make a real effort to equalise the situation between the sexes and tried systematically to give girls more attention in her own teaching. One thing she did was to allocate more questions to the girls. Despite her efforts, she did not succeed in this. The girls never got more than 42% of her time although she sometimes felt that it had been distributed equally (Spender, 1982, p. 56). She also got strong reactions from the boys, who thought that she favoured the girls. Spender concluded that boys think it is fair that they should have two thirds of the teacher's attention and if they do not get it, they feel discriminated against. Many boys pressurised teachers in different ways, for example by complaining to authority or behaving badly to disturb the lesson, when they did not get the attention

they wanted and felt they were entitled to (Spender, 1982, p. 57). According to Spender, boys behaving badly is a main reason why they get so much more attention, praise and encouragement than girls (1982, p. 59). When boys need teacher attention, they get it quickly in order not to disturb the others in the classroom. Girls do not only get less attention, but they also have to wait longer to get it (Spender, 1982, p. 62).

Furthermore, Spender said that teachers do not discriminate against girls on purpose and that teachers are unaware of doing this. They want to treat the sexes equally and believe they do, but are proved wrong when their lessons are taped and analysed. Giving two thirds of one's attention to boys seems very common. But Spender concluded that in a society where equality means that males get more attention, it is not easy to change this at school (1982, p. 54). Not only is our society male oriented, but the materials and topics which are used in education are all reflections of this and of the way we look at the world and it also affects our actions (1982, p. 56). Teachers need to plan their lessons for all pupils, not only for the ones that may create trouble in the classroom, mainly boys (Spender, 1982, p. 54).

Plenty of what Spender found has been confirmed by Sunderland (2004). She said that there are established gender patterns at school. Girls conform more to classroom rules for talking and boys have tendencies not to follow these rules and also to undermine girls (Sunderland, 2004, p. 97). She wrote that teachers seem to talk more to male students at all levels of education. Not only are male students asked more questions, but they get more challenging questions as well. Moreover, they are praised and encouraged more and the teacher seems to engage more in the boys' answers (Sunderland, 2004, p. 80). Sunderland believed that boys need this extra attention (2004, p. 80). A result of giving all this attention to boys is that boys get a better education (Sunderland, 2004, p. 80). Sunderland also said that boys undermine girls (2004, p. 97). Another thing boys do is to try out their heterosexual masculinity by putting girls down and harassing them. One example of this is boys using sexually abusive language when they talk to and about girls (Arnot, David & Weiner, 1999, p. 147).

One thing that has influenced equality at school in the UK is the introduction of a National Curriculum. Both sexes have been forced to take an obligatory set of subjects and the sex segregation of subjects has been reduced (Arnot, David & Weiner, 1999, p. 18). Subjects such as maths and technology were earlier usually taken by mainly boys, and home economics and, to some

extent, languages, were usually studied by girls, but now these subjects are compulsory. Social and economic factors, though, are more important than actions taken within education, according to Arnot, David & Weiner (1999, p. 47). They also say that there is very little proof that school policies and procedures have had any effect at all (1999, p. 150). It is important to add that education does not exist in a vacuum. There are other factors that influence education, such as ethnicity, race, school locality and social class (Arnot, David & Weiner, 1999, p. 9).

2.2 Scandinavia

Plenty of the research results from the studies conducted in the Anglo-American schools have also been found in research in Scandinavia (Denmark, Sweden and Norway). Einarsson and Hultman (1984) and Gulbrandsen (1994) have also found that boys get two thirds of the teacher's attention, but also that boys get two thirds of the speaking time and two thirds of the support teaching (Einarsson & Hultman, 1984, p. 82, Gulbrandsen, 1994, p. 17). They also found that if boys experience that girls get too much attention, they get angry, noisy and disruptive (Einarsson & Hultman, 1984, p. 178, Gulbrandsen, 1994, p. 18). The girls, on the other hand, unconsciously think it is only natural for the teacher to give the boys most of the attention (Gulbrandsen, 1994, p. 53; Wernersson, 2006, p. 40). In Gulbrandsen's study, the boys got angry when the teacher only asked girls and the girls agreed with the boys and thought that it was wrong of the teacher to do this (1994, p. 18). Furthermore, boys are more often reprimanded more strictly than girls (Einarsson & Hultman, 1984, p. 201), and this is another way of giving attention to the boys. In addition to this, Einarsson and Hultman's research also shows that boys take for granted that they will get the attention that they want (1984, p. 78). Einarsson & Hultman write that boys' mischief takes a lot of energy from the teacher and removes the attention from the well-adjusted pupils, mainly girls. This leads to girls getting used to a subordinate role (1984, p. 148). Girls have to put up with playing second fiddle and have to tolerate the boys' domination. The question that then arises is: How will girls later in life react to unfairness and inequalities, when they have been taught at school that this is the way things are supposed to be? (Gulbrandsen, 1994, p. 13).

Furthermore, Einarsson and Hultman and Gulbrandsen have found another example of how the sexes are treated differently at schools, and that is how the teacher talks to pupils. When

speaking to girls, the teacher uses a slightly higher-pitched tone and a softer voice. The teacher also sounds as if s/he talks to a younger, weaker and inferior person. When speaking to boys the voice is darker and more determined. The teacher also speaks in a more grown-up way, as if the boy is older than the girl (Einarsson & Hultman, 1984, p. 61; Gulbrandsen, 1994, p. 53).

Several researchers have found that teachers have different expectations on girls and boys. Girls are considered responsible and they are supposed to be supportive of the teacher. They do what they are told and they help the teacher to maintain order in the classroom, for example by sitting next to disruptive boys, being a buffer between boys and also helping the boys when they do not know what to do. Sometimes they even have to help the teacher to raise the boys (Einarsson & Hultman, 1984, p. 77; Gulbrandsen, 1994, p. 12; Steenberg, 1997, p. 40; Öhrn, 2002, p. 19; Wernersson, 2006, p. 42). Steenberg said that girls should not have the time to help boys but should be given more stimulating and more difficult things to spend their time on (1997, p. 40). In one subject, physical education, boys have to get better results than girls in order to get the same grade as the girls. This signals that girls are not considered as good as boys. This is of significance as what expectations other people have on a person, plays an important part in how well that person performs. If people around expect things from a person, that person is more likely to believe in himself and actually achieve those things (Gulbrandsen, 1994, p. 48). Recognition is important for all children. It boosts their self-esteem and gives them self-confidence ("Nationella sekretariatet", 2013). Quite often girls are recognised for having worked hard but boys are recognised for being clever (Gulbrandsen, 1994, p. 53).

As we have seen, gender patterns are present in Scandinavian schools too. Girls are undermined here as well (Wedin, 2009, p. 13). They are ridiculed, silenced, commented on, and made invisible by boys, but this is not only directed towards girls but sometimes towards quiet boys too. Girls are often interrupted by boys (Öhrn, 2002, p. 43). Being made invisible makes one feel down-graded, not important and insignificant (Berge & Ve, 2000, p. 20). Sexual harassment of girls is often denied by teachers or given excuses like "it was not the boy's intention" (Öhrn, 2002, p. 34). Boys are expected to be loud, take up more of the physical space in the classroom, bend the rules and need more support for learning and also need more attention (Öhrn, 2002, p. 24).

So what do these researchers think can be done to lessen the boys' domination in the classroom and make the sexes more equal? Steenberg (1997, p. 40) emphasised that every child

should early in the education system learn to take responsibility for himself and his own learning. The responsibility to increase and equalise the attention that girls are given, must be the teachers'. The time designated for the girls must come from both the teacher and the boys' time. If women are to get more influence in society, they need to be listened to at school (Steenberg, 1997, p. 52). Everybody will benefit from society becoming more equal. It would liberate not only girls, but boys too, as boys might feel that they have to behave in a certain way even if they do not want to ("Könsmakt i skolan", 2004). A teacher can go through his/her entire teaching education without ever even hearing the word *gender* being discussed and this needs to change ("Könsmakt i skolan", 2004). That teachers need to plan their lessons for all pupils in the classroom is emphasised by Gulbrandsen (1994, p. 22). It is not only adults that can make a difference. Girls at school can be made aware of the fact that boys dominate the classroom and that girls are at a disadvantage. They need to learn that things can change (Gulbrandsen, 1994, p. 8). Boys should also be made aware that inequalities exist at school (Steenberg, 1997, p. 52).

There are researchers, such as Jönsson (1992, p. 59), who believe that some of the measures taken to equalise between the sexes, have been taken to make girls' education and careers more like boys'. In addition to this, it is said that girls no longer seem to be as subordinate as they used to be. Unfortunately, there are too few recent studies and the ones there are investigate boys and girls' achievement rather than gender differences as such (Öhrn, 2002, p. 10, p. 77). Gender patterns and inequalities at school are very complex and it is more difficult to deal with them than one might think (Berge & Ve, 2000, p. 4). What happens in the classroom is a reflection of what happens in society (Wernersson, 2006, p. 41).

3 Methods and material

In this study I wanted to investigate gender differences in the Swedish classroom today and see how boys dominated. I was interested to see whether Swedish schools lived up to the high standards set in the Swedish Education Act and the Swedish Discrimination Act (see Introduction, p. 1). The data on which this study is based were collected during observations in a Swedish language class. I observed four lessons (three lessons à 40 minutes and one lesson à 60 minutes; two lessons with

female teachers and two lessons with male teachers) at the end of October, 2013. The lessons were recorded and the parents had approved of the recordings beforehand. The study is also based on a questionnaire that the pupils answered (see Appendix 1), and a questionnaire that ten teachers answered (see Appendix 2). Both questionnaires were in Swedish. All answers have been translated into English by me. I was present when the pupils filled in the questionnaire to be able to answer any questions that they might have had. The teachers were sent the questionnaire by e-mail and they also replied by e-mail.

The school I visited was situated in a small middle-class town. The school had just under 500 pupils from the ages of 12 to 16. My test subjects were in the 8th grade in the Swedish school system, which meant that they were about 14 years old. The class had 21 pupils, 13 girls (62% of the class) and 8 boys (38% of the class). The pupils told me that they liked their class and enjoyed each others' company. They also said that they were nice to one another. This corresponded with what the teachers said about the class. They agreed that the class was positive and that there was a good atmosphere during the lessons, but said that the level of achievement was slightly below average.

During the lessons, I had a list of things to observe (see Appendix 3). I wanted to see how many questions were given to boys and how many were given to girls. Furthermore, I wanted to see how the different sexes asked for help. Another thing I observed was if the amount of time given to the different sexes depended on there being a female or male teacher, and if there was a difference in how much praise and encouragement a pupil was given depending on them being boys or girls. The last thing I observed was if what I henceforth will call domination strategies were used and by whom. Domination strategies are undermining (Sunderland, 2004, p. 97; Wedin, 2009, p. 13), ridiculing, silencing, commenting, making invisible and interrupting (Öhrn, 2002, p. 43) other people in the class.

Listening to and analysing the recordings took a long time. Each lesson had to be listened to several times. Sometimes it was difficult to hear or make sense of what was going on in the classroom. Some utterances, from both boys and girls, have therefore not been included in my results. It was important for me to be present during the lessons although they were recorded, as the recordings were not always clear. When there have been discrepancies between my observations during the lessons and my notes from the recordings, I have gone with my observations of the

lessons as the recordings were more difficult to analyse. When analysing the recordings, I counted questions asked by the teachers, the number of questions directed to boys and girls respectively, the number of questions answered without being given to a specific pupil, and I looked and listened for praise and encouragement as well as domination strategies.

The questionnaire for the pupils had eight questions. Most of them could be answered by only ticking a box and three questions were follow-up questions, where they could leave comments and explanations. Through this questionnaire I wanted to find out how the pupils perceived what happened in the classroom when it came to gender patterns. The questionnaire for the teachers was mainly made up of questions which needed comments. Through this questionnaire I wanted to find out what the teachers thought about gender patterns in the classroom. In addition to this, I wanted to know whether they had received information about gender issues during their teaching education. Only a few of the teachers who answered the questionnaire actually taught this class, but I thought that it would not matter which classes they taught because they taught at the same school and would represent all teachers at the school. All pupils and all teachers answered the questionnaires.

This study is based on only one class, but I believe that this class is a typical Swedish 8th grade in a typical Swedish school, and my results are, therefore, representative. The class was randomly selected and I did not know anything about it beforehand. The pupils did not know exactly why I was there, only that I wanted to look at how they behaved in the classroom, and so I believe that they showed their true faces. The teachers, also randomly selected, are all qualified teachers with 5-20 years of experience each and know what they are doing. My belief is that this study gives an accurate picture of what the situation is like at this school and I cannot see why this school should be that different from other schools.

4 Results

In the previous section I discussed my methods of collecting data and now I will present the results. First I will report what I found in the lessons, then I will carry on to the pupils' questionnaire and after that the teachers' questionnaire. I will go through one lesson at a time. When I write that the teacher handed out questions, I mean that the teacher allocated a question to a specific pupil by

saying that pupil's name. There were some questions in each lesson that were answered before the teacher could say the name of a pupil.

4.1 The Lessons

The first lesson started at nine o'clock in the morning. The pupils were quiet and listened carefully to the teacher. After some information about the lesson the teacher started to go through some new material mixed with old material. The teacher encouraged the pupils to ask questions when and if they did not understand. The teacher asked 21 questions. Girls got nine and boys eight of these questions. Four questions asked by the teacher were answered by two girls and two boys without them having put their hands up or being directed the questions. As the pupils started working on their own, they all seemed to be concentrating on the topic. When girls wanted help, they sometimes asked each other or they put their hands up and waited for the teacher to come and help them. Boys in need of help put their hands up or said the name of the teacher, which happened six times. The girls did not do this at all. My impression is that these boys got the teacher's attention faster than the girls who sat with their hands raised. I could not detect any domination strategies (see *Methods and Material*, p. 8) from either boys or girls. Although, in some ways, it is an interruption to say the name of the teacher rather than putting one's hand up as the teacher went to these pupils very quickly even though there were girls, and other boys, waiting for help with their hands raised. I will look at this as an interruption, a domination strategy.

The second lesson started at ten o'clock. As in the previous lesson, the pupils were very quiet and attentive to the teacher for the first ten minutes or so. The teacher asked 14 questions and five of these were given to girls and six to boys. Three boys answered questions without being directed the questions. During this lesson, six girls and eight boys said the name of the teacher when they needed help and only a few pupils, two girls and two boys, raised their hands to get help. Boys asked boys for help and girls asked girls for help. The sexes did not ask each other. The teacher said that the boys in the class needed more attention and support than the girls but that this was known among the teachers. There were no domination strategies used here except for what I earlier called interruptions.

The third lesson started at 11.40. The pupils had not yet had lunch and they expressed great hunger. It took five minutes before they settled down and the teacher could start the lesson. There were three groups of pupils who had oral presentations. The first group consisted of three boys. They were not very serious and did their utmost to get the class to laugh, which they did. The other groups consisted of two and three girls and they were well-prepared. Everyone seemed attentive and listened to each other. During this lesson the teacher handed out 16 questions, five to girls and seven to boys. Two girls and two boys answered without being given the questions. There was quite a lot of noise in this lesson but the pupils seemed to do what they were supposed to do. Only a few of them, three boys and three girls, put up their hands when they needed help. Most pupils, ten boys and eight girls, called the teacher's name (interruptions). Three boys on three different occasions became a bit loud when the teacher did not come directly to them when they said the teacher's name and one of them called the teacher's name five times, louder each time, until he got the help he wanted. Girls seemed to help each other but not many boys did that. The teacher commented, after the pupils had gone, that it was a tough time to have a lesson as the pupils were very hungry and had more difficulties in concentrating than during the other lessons in the week.

The fourth lesson started at 14.20. The pupils were now fairly tired and wanted to go home for the day. It took some time before they settled down and the teacher could start the lesson. 19 questions were asked and seven of these went to girls and seven to boys. Two girls and three boys answered the remaining questions without putting their hands up. The pupils needed a lot of help, and some of the pupils who had raised their hands had to wait for some time before that help turned up. These pupils were mainly girls. Yet again a lot of the pupils, eleven boys and six girls, said or shouted the name of the teacher instead of raising their hands (interruptions). I found that if a pupil raised his/her voice, the teacher came faster. Girls helped each other and a couple of the boys asked the girls for help. One boy walked round the classroom and helped the other pupils. This lesson was noisier than the other lessons and a few pupils did not do any schoolwork on their own.

All four teachers praised and encouraged the pupils when they answered questions. When the pupils worked on their own and the teachers walked around in the classroom helping them, I could hear *good, well done, nice one, clever* and so on and to my ears it sounded as if it was just as much to girls as it was to boys. Male and female teachers did the same.

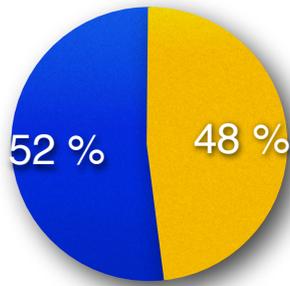


Figure 1: Boys were given more questions than girls.

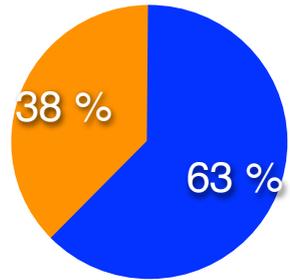


Figure 2: Boys answered more questions without being given the questions.

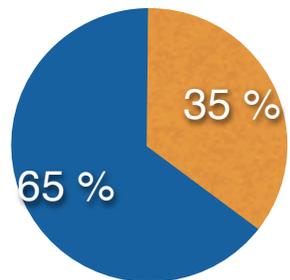


Figure 3: Boys made more interruptions than girls.

4.2 The pupils' questionnaire

The questionnaire had four statements which the pupil could answer by just ticking a box. There were three questions to which the pupil could comment on his/her answer to the question/statement.

The first statement was *I dare say what I want to in the classroom when everyone listens*. Five boys and six girls answered always, three boys and five girls answered often. Two girls answered sometimes (see Figure 4). The follow-up question was *Why do you not dare to do this?* Two girls have answered

1. I am afraid they will laugh at me.

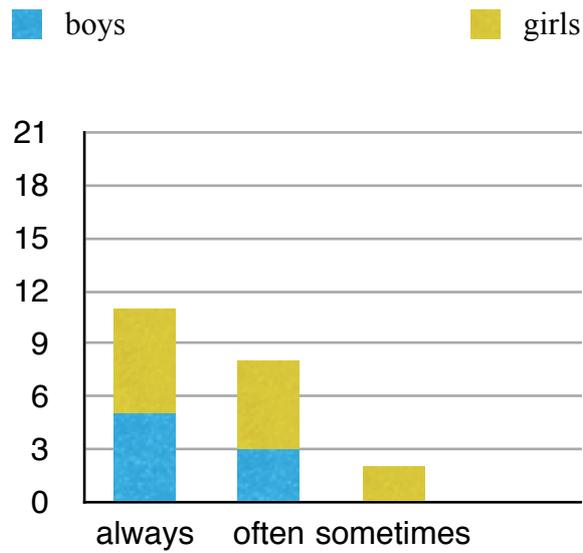


Figure 4: I dare say what I want in the classroom when everyone listens.

The second statement was *I raise my hand when I want to answer a question, have a question or need help*. Three boys and four girls have answered always. Five boys and five girls have answered often. Four girls have answered sometimes (see Figure 5).

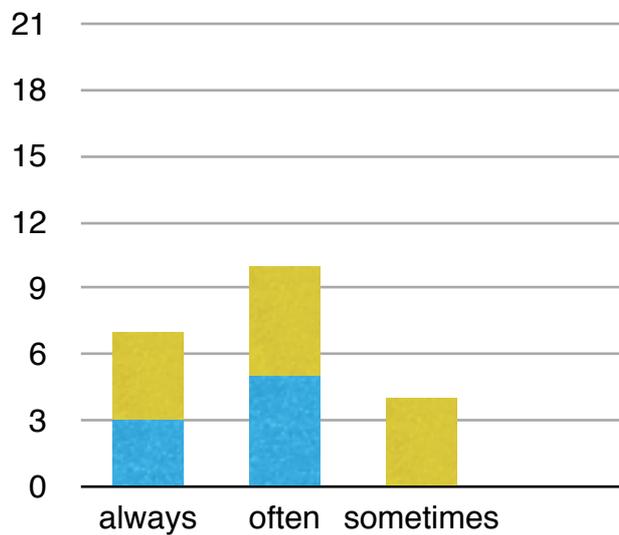


Figure 5: I raise my hand when I want to answer a question, have a question or need help.

The third statement was *In my class mainly boys, or girls, or boys and girls talk the most*. One boy and six girls have answered boys. One boy and one girl have answered girls. Six boys and six girls have answered that boys and girls equally talk the most (see Figure 6).

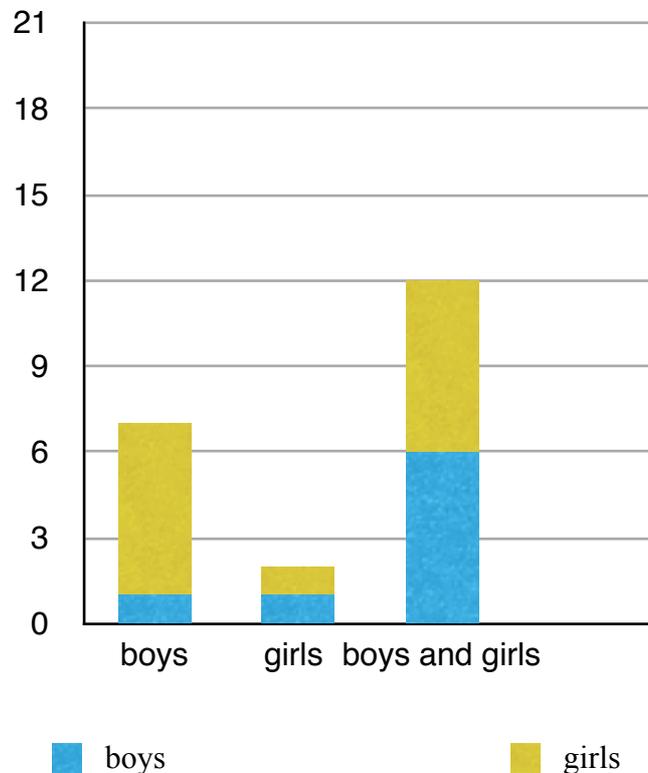


Figure 6: In my class mainly boys, or girls, or boys and girls talk the most.

The follow-up question was *Why do you think it is like this?*

2. boys are always heard the most (two boys)
- 3 .the boys' voices are louder (one girl)
4. the boys say funny things (three girls)
5. the boys do not wait for their turn (one girl)
6. it depends on which teacher we have (two girls)
7. it depends on the time of the day (one girl)
8. the boys do not listen carefully to instructions and have to ask again (three girls)
9. there are more of the girls and therefore they are heard the most. (one girl)

The fourth statement was *The teacher gives most attention to boys, or girls, or boys and girls equally*. All eight boys and nine of the girls have answered that boys and girls get the same amount of attention. Four girls have answered that boys get most of the attention (see Figure 7).

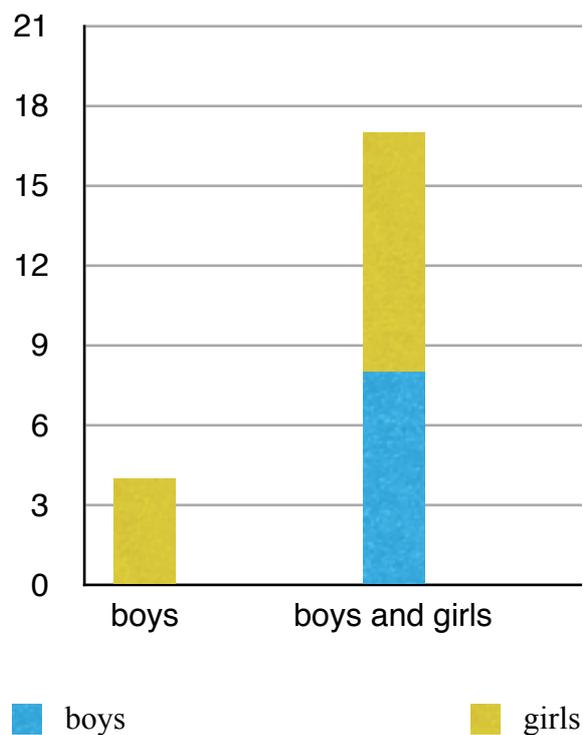


Figure 7: The teacher gives most attention to boys, or girls, or boys and girls.

The follow-up question was *Why do you think it is like this?*

- 10. a teacher should always treat everyone the same (one boy)
- 11. the boys need more help than us (two girls)
- 12. depends on which teacher we have (four girls)
- 13. there are more of us girls so we should get more attention (one girl)
- 14. everyone should get the same amount of attention (one girl).

4.3 The teachers' questionnaire

The questionnaire to the teachers was answered by five male and five female teachers. They were all qualified teachers and had been working as teachers for 5-20 years. The questionnaire had one question and two statements, one of which with a follow-up question, and the teachers could make comments on the question, on both of the statements and on the follow-up question.

The first statement was *During my teacher education we discussed gender issues*. Among the male teachers three answered yes and two answered no. The result was the same among the female teachers (see Figure 8).

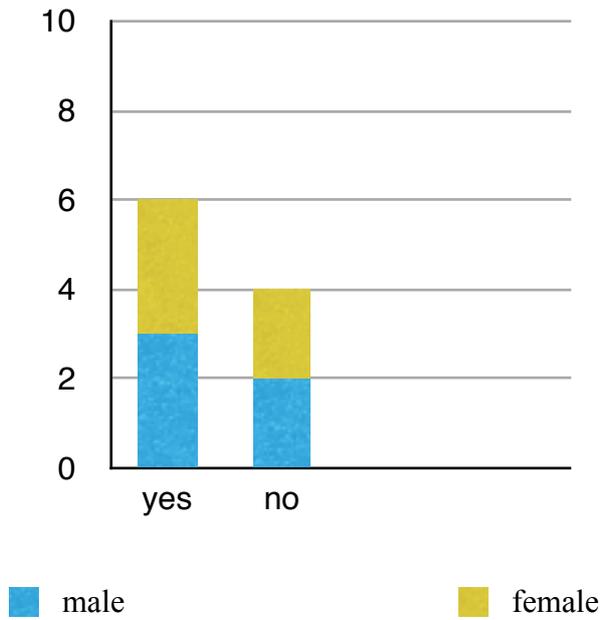


Figure 8: During my teaching education we discussed gender issues.

The follow-up question was *Would you have preferred more education about gender issues?* Two of the male teachers and four of the female teachers answered yes, three male teachers and one female answered no (see Figure 9).

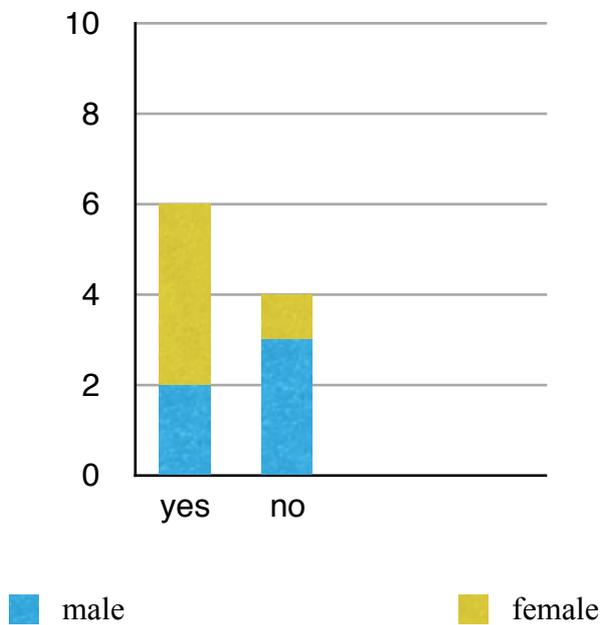


Figure 9: Would you have preferred more education about gender issues?

The comments that were given were:

15. this is a very important issue (two female, one male))
16. we need to be aware of what goes on at school when it comes to boys and girls (two female)
17. I need advice on how to strengthen the girls (one male)
18. I see every individual and not boys and girls (one male)
19. I try to give one question to a girl, then the next one to a boy and so forth (one female, one male)
20. I am sick and tired of this - everybody is equal in my classroom (one male).

The second statement was *I think about gender issues when I teach or plan my teaching*. Three male and four female teachers answered yes, two male and one female teachers answered no (see Figure 10).

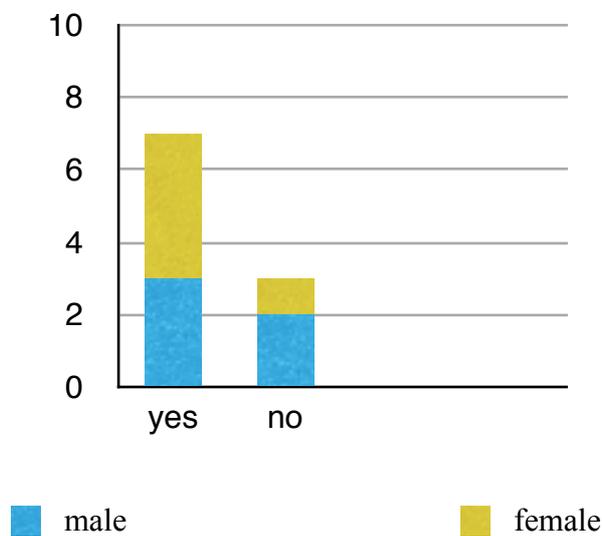


Figure 10: I think about gender issues when I plan my teaching.

Their comments were:

21. I try to find something interesting for everyone (one female, one male)
22. I see them as individuals and not boys and girls (one female)
23. according to the National Curriculum I have to do this (one male)
24. it is very natural for me to do this (one female, one male)
25. it is my job to do this (one male).

The questionnaire finished with the question *Who do you think dominate in the classroom?* Six teachers (three male and three female) answered boys, and the other four teachers (two male and two female) answered both boys and girls.

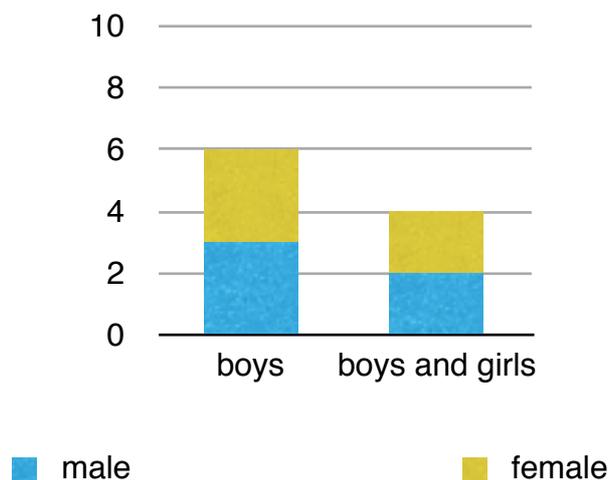


Figure 11: Who do you think dominate in the classroom?

The teachers commented that

26. boys are always heard more but do not necessarily talk about the subject (two male, two female)
27. boys often talk without asking permission to do so (two male, two female)
28. boys do not raise their hands as often as girls but talk anyway (two male, one female)
29. boys ask for help by talking, girls by raising their hands (one male, two female)
30. if boys do not get help straight away, they are heard (one male)
31. I wish girls would say more things (one male, two female)
32. Girls are more afraid than boys of giving the wrong answer (one male)
33. the clever girls speak just as much as the boys (one female)
34. boys with difficulties speak a lot but not girls with difficulties (one male, one female)
35. depends very much on the topic (one male)
36. I talk more to boys as I have to tell them how to behave much more than girls (one male)

5 Discussion

In my study to find out how boys dominate in the Swedish classroom, I focused on how many questions the teachers addressed to boys and girls respectively, how the pupils asked for help, if it mattered whether the teacher was male or female when it came to how much time each sex was given, if domination strategies were used and how the pupils were praised and encouraged. All of these things are part of gender patterns.

5.1 The lessons

If we start by looking at the number of questions handed out to pupils, we find that 70 questions in total were asked by the teachers. 54 of these were addressed to a specific pupil. 26 questions (48%) were given to girls and 28 questions (52%) were given to boys (see Figure 1). This means that boys did not get two thirds of the questions as mentioned in the background section (Spender, 1982, p. 54; Einarsson & Hultman, 1984, p. 82; Gulbrandsen, 1994, p. 17) if we only look at the number of questions each sex was given. However, if we look at how big a group the different sexes constituted, we find that the boys (38% of the class) got 52% of the questions, and the girls (62% of the class) only got 48% of the questions and this is more in line with what has been discovered in earlier studies. Each boy got 3.5 questions and each girl got 2 questions. That is quite a striking difference. Of the questions not specifically directed to a pupil, when the teachers did not have the time to say a name before the answers were said, the boys answered ten out of sixteen questions (see Figure 2). Another 1.2 questions to each boy and only 0.5 question to each girl. The difference is even bigger, 4.7 questions to each boy compared to 2.5 to each girl. Therefore, I think it is correct to say that boys definitely get most of the questions in the classroom. I cannot help but wonder what the result would have been, if both groups were equally big, that is 50% of the class. How little time would then have gone to the girls?

How the pupils asked for help varied between the lessons. They started the first lesson by raising their hands and waiting for their turn. As the day progressed though, they said the teacher's name more often than raising their hands. This was especially noticeable when it came to the boys. They seemed to grow more impatient and this was a quicker way of getting help than putting your hand up and having to wait for the teacher to come. The boys called the teacher's name 35 times to get help and the girls did this 20 times (see Figure 3). My impression, although I could not measure this, is that the girls (and some boys) who raised their hands had to wait longer for help, also shown by Spender (1982, p. 62). A consequence of this must be that they do not get as much done as those who got help quickly, as they cannot carry on working before they have been helped. Sunderland (2004, p. 80) argued that boys get a better education as they get more attention and I agree. Girls seem to spend a fair bit of time waiting as boys get the teacher's attention. Girls helped each other and boys helped each other. It was not often that help was offered, nor asked for, between the sexes.

It was not possible for me to measure how much of the time of the lesson was given to the different sexes and therefore I cannot compare this to what I found in previous studies mentioned in the background section, where boys seemed to get two thirds of the teacher's attention (Spender, 1982, p. 57; Einarsson & Hultman, 1984, p. 178; Gulbrandsen, 1994, p. 18). Considering how many more questions the boys got and how much faster they got help, I believe that it is quite evident that they did get more time. I could not see that it made a difference whether the teacher was male or female. There was overall very little difference in how the teachers allocated questions, praised and encouraged boys and girls. One thing I noticed, though, was that all pupils were more prone to call the teacher's name when they needed help when they had male teachers, 35 times compared to 20 times with female teachers. This might be a result of what time of the day the lesson took place or a result of what the teachers allowed the pupils to do.

The only domination strategy (undermining, ridiculing, silencing, commenting, making invisible and interrupting other people in the class, see Methods and materials, p. 8) that I noticed was interruption, which was used by both sexes when asking for help. They called out the teacher's name and did not wait for their turn. Even though this was done by both boys and girls, boys did it more often, 35 times compared to the girls' 20 times. As mentioned earlier, I found the atmosphere in the classroom pleasant and all pupils seemed to get on with one another. No one seemed to be nasty to anyone, at least not that I could detect anyway.

5.2 The pupils' questionnaire

As written before, I thought that the pupils were nice to each other and this is supported by their answer to the first statement in the questionnaire *I dare say what I want to in the classroom when everyone listens* (see Figure 4). 19 pupils have answered *always* or *often* and only two *sometimes*. The comment that was made by both girls who answered *sometimes*, was that they were afraid to be laughed at. They did not specify if they meant boys, or girls or both boys and girls. It would be interesting to know what they meant and also to find out what had caused this worry in them.

In the questionnaire, all boys and nine out of thirteen girls said that they always or often raise their hands when they ask for help (see Figure 5), but this was not all true. Even girls called for the teacher but not to the same extent as boys, only 20 times compared to the boys' 35 times.

My impression was that the teacher went to the pupils who called the teacher's name before going to the ones who waited with their hands up, and this could be a reason for the pupils calling the teacher's name. They knew that help would come faster if they did this rather than follow the school rule of putting their hands up.

Twelve pupils (52% of the class, both boys and girls) thought that boys and girls talk the same amount in the lessons (see Figure 6). 33% (one boy and six girls) think that boys talk the most. The comments the pupils have given (examples 2-5, 8) imply that the reason for boys talking the most is that boys are not as serious or focused as the girls are. Spender (1982, p. 59) said that one reason for boys getting more time was because they behaved badly in some way, and I suppose that could be that they did not listen, wanted to be funny and did not wait for their turn, just like the comments state. Einarsson and Hultman (1982, p. 201) also claimed that reprimanding is a way of giving attention.

When it comes to the pupils' perception of who gets the most attention in the classroom (see Figure 7), only four girls answered boys. There could be several reasons for this. When it comes to the boys' answer, it could be that they take for granted that they will have most of the time as Spender (1982, p. 57) and Einarsson and Hultman (1984, p. 78) say. It is fairly clear though, that boys do not dominate on purpose. They seem oblivious to this. One reason for the girls' answer could be that they actually thought that roughly half the time was given to boys and the other half to girls, not considering how much smaller the group of boys actually was. Another reason could be that girls think it is natural that boys get most of the attention, which was shown in the studies by Gulbrandsen (1994, p. 53) and Wernersson (2006, p. 40), that girls are so used to this fact that they do not think about it. One boy and one girl (examples 10 and 14) have expressed that everyone should get the same amount of attention/time from the teacher. Two girls say that boys need more help (example 11) and this is confirmed by Öhrn (2002, p. 24). Four girls commented that who dominated in the lesson was due to what teacher they had (example 12). It was not specified what they meant by that. It would have been interesting to know, though, if they were talking about the sex of the teacher or just individual teachers.

5.3 The teachers' questionnaire

Six of ten teachers had been informed about gender issues during their teaching education (see Figure 8) and the same number of teachers, not the same teachers though, would have wanted more information about this (see Figure 9). Examples 15-19 show that there is an awareness of gender differences, that they feel it is an important issue and that there is a will to make a change. Most teachers would like more education in this area and especially to be able to strengthen the girls (example 17). Most of the teachers think about gender issues when they plan their teaching (see Figure 10) and it seems to be a natural part of their job (examples 23 and 25).

Six teachers think that boys dominate in the classroom, four think that both boys and girls dominate, and no teacher thinks that girls dominate (see Figure 11). Their reasons for why boys dominate (examples 26-29 and 36) are basically the same reasons as Spender (1982), Einarsson and Hultman (1984) and Gulbrandsen (1994) put forwards. The teachers state that girls are afraid to give the wrong answers, they ask for permission to speak, put their hands up when they need help and that girls with difficulties do not talk that much (examples 27-29, 32 and 34). This is exactly what I found in my study. One comment was that girls need to be strengthened in the classroom (example 17) and I think this is very true. Girls should not need to be afraid of giving the wrong answer, and they should feel comfortable asking for help, which boys with difficulties seem to do, according to the comments from the teachers (example 34). One teacher said to me during my observation that the boys in this class needed more attention and support. This is confirmed by Öhrn (2002, p. 24), who writes that boys need more of this.

5.4 Other thoughts

One thing that springs to my mind, is that in recent studies, (Arnot, Davies & Weiner, 1997, p. 7; Wernersson, 2006, p. 23) girls perform better academically, despite the fact that they do not get their share of the teaching, and I cannot help but wonder how well girls would do if they were given the same amount of time as boys get. If girls were given this time and attention, would this mean that there would be more women on the boards of big companies? Would it mean that women would make the same amount of money that men make? Would it mean that women would be more

listened to? Would it mean that our society would be a society where everyone had the same rights, opportunities and responsibilities? These are all interesting questions, which could be investigated in the future. I am very interested in finding out the answers and, hopefully, someone else will be too. I agree with Öhrn (2002, p. 77) when she says that more studies need to be made in the field of gender differences at school. Another thing to look at could be education on higher levels. Do men dominate there?

6 Conclusion

In this paper I wanted to investigate gender differences in a Swedish school and in what ways boys dominate. I also wanted to see how girls experienced this and if teachers were aware of it. From the results presented above, we can conclude that boys do dominate in the classroom by getting more questions, more time and attention from teachers. They also get help faster by not following the classroom rule of putting up one's hand when one needs help. They call the teacher's name and the teacher goes to them first, before helping the ones (mainly girls) who follow the rule and raise their hands. This is a kind of interruption, a way to get what one wants straight away without having to wait for one's turn. All of this is supported by the background reading. Some girls notice that boys dominate in the classroom but not all of them. Most teachers seem to be aware of the boys' domination and many of them ask for help in making their teaching more equal. Swedish schools do not live up to the standards set in the Education Act and the Discrimination Act.

Gender differences at school is still a problem and it is something we need to do something about. It is not only girls at school who would benefit from more equality at schools but also boys, who are not all alike. Furthermore, in the long run, everybody would benefit from this as it would probably mean that our society would be more equal for everyone.

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Appendix 1

ELEVENKÄT

Sätt ett kryss på den rad som passar ditt svar.

1 Jag är pojke ___ flicka ___.

2 Jag vågar säga vad jag tycker i klassrummet när alla lyssnar

Alltid ___ ofta ___ ibland ___ sällan ___ aldrig ___.

3 Om du svarat ibland, sällan eller aldrig på fråga 2: Vad är det som gör att du inte alltid vågar säga vad du tycker?

4 Jag räcker upp handen när jag vill svara, har en fråga eller behöver hjälp

Alltid ___ ofta ___ ibland ___ sällan ___ aldrig ___.

5 I min klass pratar mest

Pojkar ___ flickor ___ pojkar och flickor lika mycket ___.

6 Om du svarat pojkar eller flickor på fråga 5: Varför är det så, tror du?

7 I min klass ger läraren mest uppmärksamhet till

Pojkar ___ flickor ___ pojkar och flickor lika mycket ___.

8 Om du svarat pojkar eller flickor på fråga 7: Varför är det så, tror du?

Appendix 2

LÄRARENKÄT

Jag är man _____ kvinna _____

Jag har arbetat som lärare i _____ år.

1 Under min lärarutbildning diskuterade vi genusfrågor. Ja _____ nej _____

2 Jag önskar att vi diskuterat genusfrågor mer. Ja _____ nej _____
Varför/inte/?

3 Jag tänker på genusfrågor när jag planerar mina lektioner. Ja _____ nej _____

4 Vem dominerar i klassrummet, tycker du?

Appendix 3

Observation list (in the classroom)

1. Questions given to boys:

Questions given to girls:

2. Questions answered without allocation, boys:

Questions answered without allocation, girls:

3. Asking for help; boys putting hands up:

Asking for help; girls putting hand up:

4. Asking for help; boys calling teacher's name:

Asking for help; girls calling teacher's name:

5. Time to boys: male/female teachers

Time to girls: male/female teachers

6. Praise and encouragement to boys:

Praise and encouragement to girls:

7. Domination strategies from boys:

Domination strategies from girls: