

Outside the networks

Aurora Olin's and Saima Grönstrand's struggles as female editors in the turn-of-the-20th-century Finnish press

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Abstract

In this article, we examine Aurora Olin (1855–1924) and Saima Grönstrand (1863–1932) through the lenses of journal editing, journalistic networks, and their biographies. They were among the first women journalists in the Finnish press, and their women's journals were some of the earliest produced outside the suffragette movement by a private person. Not only did they not establish their own journals, *Kodin-Ystävä* (Home's friend) and *Kalevatar* (Woman of Kalevala), but also took sole responsibility for the editorial work and, to a very large extent, the production of content for the journals. These women serve as excellent examples of how challenging it was to establish and publish periodicals at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, especially for women who had sole responsibility for finances, editing, and content creation. Both women had the education and the opportunities – nevertheless, the lack of wealth and networks made it hard to succeed.

KEYWORDS

Grand Duchy of Finland, editors, journalism, magazines, networks, press

Introduction

I wanted to have my own peculiar magazine, where I could express all my ideals, all the feelings and wishes of my heart to my people. And how happy I was when my first issue saw the light of day! I received compassion and kindness, even envy and hatred on the other hand. I came to see what people are really like.

(*Kodin-Ystävä*, 15 Dec 1905, pp. 4–6, own translation).

So wrote Aurora Olin as she ended her seven-year-old magazine and her two-decade-long career as a writer for the press in 1905.

In this article, we examine Aurora Olin (1855–1924) and Saima Grönstrand (1863–1932) through the lenses of their magazine editing, journalistic networks, and their biographies. They were among the first women journalists in the Finnish press, established their own magazines, took sole responsibility for the editorial work, and, to a very large extent, the production of content. *Kodin-Ystävä* (Home-Friend) and *Kalevatar* (Maiden of Kalevala) were some of the earliest women's magazines in Finland produced outside the suffragette movement by a private person. They were also among the first periodicals to focus explicitly on women of the working class and lower rural social strata. This article sheds light on these two female editors who have been largely neglected in previous press history. It demonstrates how various factors influenced publishing practices and determined which publications succeeded and which did not.

Olin and Grönstrand serve as excellent examples of the challenges faced in establishing and publishing periodicals at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, particularly for women who bore sole responsibility for finances, editing, and content creation. We explore the identities of these women, their qualifications, and the opportunities they had to manage their magazines. What conditions surrounded their editorial work? What content did their magazines feature, and who were the intended readers? What networks, if any, did Grönstrand and Olin have with fellow editors and authors?

We apply a press-historical perspective when examining the magazines' content and the women's editorial roles and an intersectional lens when examining Olin's and Grönstrand's biographies. There is no single, clear-cut definition of intersectionality, but according to sociologists Patricia Hill Collins and Sirma Bilge, it is an analytical tool that helps make sense of the complexity of the world, people and experiences by focusing on the intersections of the factors that shape people's lives (Collins & Bilge, 2016, p.1–4). In this article we are applying intersectionality by considering gender-related intersections such as marital status, family situation, social

class and place of residence. This way we gain insight into how different social intersections shaped individuals' opportunities to work as journalists, establish publications, and manage them. Factors such as living environment and life choices played a significant role in this context.

The history of magazines, and especially women's magazines, has been sparsely studied in Finland, although they have been widely used as sources, for example for sociology and gender history (Turunen, 2014, p.38–39). In the multi-volume *Suomen lehdistön historia* (The History of the Finnish Press) a few chapters were dedicated to women's periodicals (Leino-Kaukiainen, 1992, pp. 134–137, 221–223; Malmberg, 1991), but *Kodin-Ystävä* and *Kalevatar* received only a few lines of mention (Leino-Kaukiainen, 1992, p. 136, 161).

The research gap in women's magazines has since been addressed by media scholar Maija Töyry with her doctoral dissertation on early Finnish women's magazines (2005), media historian Henriikka Zilliacus-Tikkanen (2005, 2007) with her research on the first Finnish female journalists, and ethnologist Arja Turunen with her research articles on early Finnish women's magazines (2014, 2024). Zilliacus-Tikkanen compiled information from various directories on 80 Finnish female journalists active before 1900. Among them, Grönstrand was briefly mentioned, whereas Olin was absent from the list (2005, pp. 174–182). Töyry and Turunen have not addressed Olin or Grönstrand or their magazines in their studies. The early women who have written for the press have also been featured in historian Pirjo Munck's doctoral dissertation (2016) on the early stages of professional organization among journalists, as well as in historian Eeva Kotioja's doctoral dissertation (2018), which focused on Adelaïde Ehrnrooth, an early influencer in the suffragette movement. In her 2019 doctoral dissertation, historian Reetta Hänninen studied female journalists' entry into Finland's largest newspaper, *Helsingin Sanomat*, and their workplace experiences, noting they also worked broadly as magazine journalists and even editors-in-chief.

We originally came across Olin and Grönstrand while researching other topics and became interested in them because of their exceptional nature. The digitization of newspapers enabled searching for information about the women across large data sets¹. This recent technological possibility may partly explain the previous marginalization of Olin and Grönstrand in research, but only partly. Their obscurity may also partly be because *Kodin-Ystävä* and *Kalevatar* were not regarded as women's magazines or were seen as having insignificant content compared to the publications of the suffragette movement.

The term “women’s magazine” is challenging when applied to Finnish magazines from the 1880s to the 1930s because they have been difficult to categorize based on their content and because they differ from their Anglo-American counterparts, for example, by resembling general-interest magazines (Turunen, 2014, pp. 52–53). In this study, we define a women’s magazine as a magazine that is edited by women, implicitly or explicitly aimed at women, and written mostly by women (see also Töyry, 2005, p. 26).

The first periodicals considered “Finnish” in the territory of Finland, then part of Sweden, were published in the 1770s (Tommila, 1988, pp. 48–58). From the late 18th century until the latter part of the 19th century, most of the Finnish periodicals were written in Swedish until the linguistic balance shifted in favour of Finnish in the 1880s. The first Finnish magazine aimed at women, *Om konsten att rätt behaga*, was published in 1782. A few other women’s magazines were published in the 19th century, but the actual women’s press emerged only at the end of the 19th century with the publications of the suffragette movement (Leino-Kaukiainen, 1992, pp. 136–137, 161; Turunen, 2014, pp. 43–45; Turunen, 2024, pp. 88–89).

The history of women’s magazines is not only a history of changing societies and representations of women, but also of broader developments in journalism and publishing (Turunen, 2024, p. 85). The Finnish press was rapidly growing in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, offering numerous opportunities for writers to publish their texts. (Tommila & Salokangas, 1998, pp. 77–78.) By the end of the 19th century, there were about three hundred publications in the Grand Duchy of Finland, of which one-third were newspapers and the rest magazines and other publications. Two-thirds of the publications were in Finnish and one-third in Swedish (Leino-Kaukiainen, 1992, p. 123).

Unfortunately, the circulation data for the Finnish press of the period is not precise. However, it can be concluded that most magazines had a circulation of only a few hundred, at most a couple of thousand copies. The magazines with the largest readerships were primarily illustrated magazines and certain religious publications. Among women’s magazines, *Koti ja Yhteiskunta* (Home and Society) had the highest circulation, exceeding three thousand copies. It was founded in 1889 by the Finnish Women’s Association (Suomen Naisyhdistys) (Leino-Kaukiainen, 1992, pp. 127–129).

Although journalism was slowly becoming a more professionalized field, this trend seemed to apply mostly to newspapers. Editing a magazine was still largely regarded as a vocational calling, driven by the desire to bring one’s own opinions and ideology into the public sphere, and pursued alongside other work (Leino-Kaukiainen, 1992, pp. 155–162; Munck, 2016, *passim.*, esp. pp. 51–56, 85–87;

Kinnunen, 2024) In the early stages of magazine publishing, it was common for periodicals to be founded by individuals who were also responsible for the content. Most publications were established by men who were writers, newspaper journalists, teachers, or clergymen, but book publishers also engaged in magazine production (Leino-Kaukiainen, 1992, pp. 155–157). It was only with the advent of the 20th century that some magazines began to transform into profit-oriented enterprises employing multiple salaried journalists (Uino, 1991, pp. 47–48).

The field of press publishing and journalism was male-dominated in the Nordic countries and elsewhere. The few women in the field were expected to write for either columns intended for women or women's magazines (Johannesson, 2001, pp. 232–234; Leino-Kaukiainen, 1992, pp. 160–161; Samuelsson, 2014, pp. 19–21; Sorvali, 2023b, pp. 54–55; Stenberg, 2014, pp. 50–53; Turunen, 2014, pp. 46–49. See also Töyry, 2005, pp. 54–55, 82–86). There were a few exceptions such as the prominent upper-class Finnish women Adelaide Ehrnrooth and Fredrika Runeberg. Ehrnrooth began her career in newspapers in the 1860s and concluded it as the editor-in-chief of a women's association journal at the turn of the 20th century. Runeberg also worked as an acting editor-in-chief on the newspaper *Helsingfors Morgonblad* next to her husband, the poet J. L. Runeberg (Zilliacus-Tikkanen, 2005, pp. 51–70; Kotioja, 2018, *passim*). Maria Ramstedt was the first female editor-in-chief in Finland, serving from 1889 to 1894. She took on the role after inheriting the newspaper *Savonlinna* following her husband's passing (Zilliacus-Tikkanen, 2005, p. 109).

Unfortunately, very few archives of the 19th-century Finnish newspapers and magazines have survived to this day. It would have been interesting to see what kind of correspondence Olin and Grönstrand had – or if they had – with other journalists and editors. The surviving material is very fragmentary. Only six letters from Aurora Olin have survived in the Finnish archives and from Saima Grönstrand, sources are even scarcer, and most of the surviving letters are requests to various contemporaries for money.

The National Library of Finland has digitized both magazines, and we browsed through their entire publication period. In all, 77 issues of *Kodin-Ystävä* and 17 issues of *Kalevatar* were examined in terms of layout, content, and information about the contributors. In addition, we searched the National Library's digital service for the names of Olin and Grönstrand, the pseudonyms they used and the names of their magazines. The material collected was approached through press history and biography perspectives.

Aurora Olin and the beginning of her public writing

Aurora Eugenia Olin (née Vanhanen) was born in 1855 in the eastern Finnish city of Vyborg to a bookkeeper father and a housemaid mother (parish records of Vyborg Cathedral Church). Olin described her childhood as cramped both mentally and physically, with a family living from hand to mouth and lacking affection or encouragement. Olin said she longed for something beyond mundane tasks, but her interests went unappreciated at home. Seeking escape, she became a private tutor in the countryside, where she met and married Karl (Kaarlo) Wilhelm Olin in 1882 (parish records of Vyborg Cathedral Church; *Kodin-Ystävä*, 15 Apr 1899, pp. 4–8).

When they had a son in 1883, Olin focused all her “extinguished dreams” on that child, but when he suddenly died a few years later, it seemed that Olin would also bury her ideals and her aspirations “away from narrow materialism”. This did not happen, as she decided to pursue her dreams by starting to write for newspapers and participating in organizational activities (*Uusi Suometar*, 14 Aug 1883, p. 1; *Wiipurin Sanomat*, 11 May 1886, p. 1; *Kodin-Ystävä*, 15 Apr 1899, pp. 4–8).

According to her own words, Olin started writing for newspapers in 1887 (*Uusi Suometar*, 5 Jan 1901, p. 6), but in this study, the first references to Olin’s writings were found from 1890, when she contributed to the regional newspaper in Vyborg, *Wiipurin Sanomat*. Olin wrote about, for example, temperance, age differences in marriages, self-development, the power of mothers-in-law over daughters-in-law, care of the poor, and prostitution (*Wiipurin Sanomat*, 4 Feb 1890, p. 3; 3 May 1890, p. 3; 15 Jul 1890, p. 3; 5 Aug 1890, p. 3; 10 Dec 1890, p. 3; 17 Jan 1891, p. 4). Newspapers and magazines in the late 19th century were not able to pay contributors substantial fees, and most often they paid nothing at all (Leino-Kaukiainen, 1992, p. 163; Leino-Kaukiainen, 1988, pp. 577–578). Olin’s motive for writing, therefore, could not have been financial; rather, as she expressed it, she longed for intellectual engagement and wanted to make her ideology public.

It would be interesting to know how Olin became a regular contributor, but unfortunately there is no information on this. It is possible Olin knew the editor-in-chief of *Wiipurin Sanomat* at the time, Matti Kurikka, from her association activities. Networking through associations, particularly within the suffragette movement and the magazines they founded, provided most Finnish women in the late 19th century with a pathway into journalism and opportunities to contribute to the press (Zilliacus-Tikkanen, 2005, pp. 155–157). For example, the noblewoman Adelaïde Ehrnrooth became acquainted with the editor-in-chief of the national newspaper *Helsingfors*

Dagblad in the 1860s through a women's association, which enabled her to publish her opinion pieces in the newspaper (Kotioja, 2018, p. 81). As Kotioja points out, women's lifestyles and power were shaped not only by wealth and intellectual capabilities but also by their networks (2018, p. 31).

In April 1891, Olin sent her article for publication to the well-known and influential upper-class woman Alexandra Gripenberg, the editor-in-chief of the magazine *Koti ja Yhteiskunta*. Olin also asked if Gripenberg would accept her as a permanent contributor and described her background with *Wiipurin Sanomat* (SKS, Alexandra Gripenberg's archive, 310:79:1). The text on clothing care was published in the next issue of *Koti ja Yhteiskunta* (*Koti ja Yhteiskunta*, 15 May 1891, pp. 5–6). Olin got a few texts published in the following years (*Koti ja Yhteiskunta*, 15 Dec 1891, pp. 2–3; 15 Feb 1893, p. 5; 15 Jul 1894, p. 11).

In addition to writing for the press, in the 1890s Aurora Olin acted as the chairperson in a local sewing society, in the Finnish Women's Association's branch in Vyborg and the Vyborg Servants' Association (*Wuoksi*, 9 Jan 1892, p. 2; *Wiborgsbladet*, 24 Nov 1893, p. 3; *Nya Pressen*, 17 May 1894, p. 2; *Talven kukka: palvelijattarien albumi*, 1 Jan 1902, p. 13). She also handled "women's affairs" in her county clerk husband's office, likely involving employment services (*Wiipurin Sanomat*, 28 Feb 1894, p. 1; 30 Aug 1894, p. 1).

One of Olin's finest moments of social influence was her visit to Helsinki in 1894 to attend the tenth anniversary of the Finnish Women's Association, where she was able to deliver a speech (*Nya Pressen*, 17 May 1894, p. 2). On this occasion, Olin had the opportunity to become acquainted with people in the suffragettes' movement, such as the editorial board of *Koti ja Yhteiskunta*. The networking was unsuccessful, as no correspondence with women in the movement can be found in the remaining archives, apart from a few letters which were not very personal.

Olin's letter to Gripenberg in late 1897 reveals that the Olin couple struggled financially. Aurora Olin had hoped to find work for both intellectual and financial reasons, but there were few opportunities for a married woman. As mentioned earlier, writing for the press was typically unpaid. When she had applied for a job, she had been told that, since she had a husband, he should support her (SKS, Alexandra Gripenberg's archive. 310:79:2). It seems that Olin did not find paid employment, but she found a way to satisfy her intellectual appetite.

Establishing *Kodin-Ystävä*

In January 1899, the birth of a new Finnish-language magazine, *Kodin-Ystävä*, was covered in the high-circulation national press (*Nya Pressen*, 3 Jan 1899, p. 2; *Uusi Suometar*, 3 Jan 1899, p. 2; *Hufvudstadsbladet*, 3 Jan 1899, p. 4). The publishers of the magazine were said to be “county clerk C. V. Olin and his wife Aurora Olin”.

In her 1899 letters to Emma Åkerman, the chair of the Vyborg Women’s Association, and Alexandra Gripenberg, Olin mentioned that she had applied for permission to establish a magazine already in the summer of 1898. Finnish publications were closely monitored by Russian authorities and an independent agency, the Press Supervisory Authority (Painoasiain ylihallitus) granted permits to establish newspapers and magazines. Olin’s first application had been rejected because, by law, a married woman could not be held responsible for a publication. The problem had been solved by putting her husband, Kaarlo, nominally editor-in-chief (NL, Åkerman-Voipio family archive, 266.53; SKS, Alexandra Gripenberg archive, 310:79:3). *Wiipurin Sanomat* explained the anomaly to its readers (*Wiipurin Sanomat*, 5 Jan 1899, p. 3), perhaps at Aurora Olin’s request, but the greater audience probably mistook Kaarlo Olin for the editor-in-chief. This may also explain why *Kodin-Ystävä* and Aurora Olin have been left out of previous research on women’s periodicals.

It must be acknowledged that Kaarlo Olin’s role in founding and managing *Kodin-Ystävä* was decisive. Without his consent and flexibility, the magazine could not have been launched, nor could its operations have been secured. Successful women in public debate often had the respect and support of male family members (Kotioja, 2018, pp. 31, 218–219), as was the case with Olin. Even though Aurora Olin addressed issues related to marriage in her magazine, she did not disclose details about her own marriage.

As the new magazine was launched, *Wiipurin Sanomat* published a flattering introduction to it, encouraging its readers to subscribe (*Wiipurin Sanomat*, 15 Jan 1899, p. 3). It is possible that Olin herself was behind the article, or that it was written by Julius Anselm Lyly, then editor-in-chief of the newspaper, chairman of the Vyborg Workers’ Association and an acquaintance of Olin’s in both newspaper and association circles (Sainio, 1997). Despite this, the article did not go unnoticed by Emma Åkerman, Olin’s fellow member of the Women’s Association, who suspected the praise of *Kodin-Ystävä* was dishonest. She doubted Olin’s abilities as a journalist and editor and pointed out that *Kodin-Ystävä* was by no means the only magazine in Finland devoted to women’s issues. *Koti ja Yhteiskunta* had been published for more than a decade and could not even be compared to a minor publication like *Kodin-Ystävä* (*Wiipuri*, 31 Jan

1899, pp. 1–2). Clearly something had happened between these women and Olin had not forgiven Åkerman's "degrading outburst" even years later (*Kodin-Ystävä*, 15 Dec 1905, pp. 4–6).

Kodin-Ystävä had no contributors at the start (SKS, Alexandra Gripenberg's archive, 310:79:3). In April 1899, Olin asked Hilda Käkikoski, an activist of the Finnish Women's Association, to send articles to *Kodin-Ystävä* (SKS, Hilda Käkikoski's archive, 326:99:1), but these articles were never seen in *Kodin-Ystävä*, at least not with Käkikoski's name or with her well-known pseudonyms. It is difficult to say, in the absence of archival material, whether Olin had approached other societal influencers, authors or journalists to write for the magazine, but at least the statement of the influential Åkerman on *Kodin-Ystävä* certainly did not help her acquire contributors.

An expert- and well-known pool of contributors was regarded as a key indicator of a high-quality publication, and it was customary for both newspapers and magazines to publish advertisements that introduced the writers contributing to the publication. Publications provided contributors with a platform to articulate their views, popularize scientific research findings, and publish literary works. It has been estimated that in the Finnish press of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the number of contributors amounted to a couple of hundred (Leino-Kaukiainen, 1992, pp. 162–164).

Aurora Olin described the early years of *Kodin-Ystävä* as very stressful. She had to write almost the entire content of the magazine herself, using different pseudonyms. Olin was also burdened by the ever-increasing debt she had to take on to print the magazine. But she was determined to succeed (*Kodin-Ystävä*, 15 Dec 1905, No.12, pp. 4–6).

Kodin-Ystävä's content, contributors and target audience

The eight-page *Kodin-Ystävä* was published in Vyborg monthly, and it could be ordered in rural areas through agents and purchased in Vyborg's bookshops. Most of the articles in *Kodin-Ystävä* were about sobriety, women's empowerment, and the need for gender equality, chastity, domesticity, and child-rearing. A typical issue featured a polemical editorial, written by Olin, other concise opinion pieces, poems, aphorisms, short stories, and advertisements. The texts reflected the magazine's agenda, took a strong stand on social issues and appealed strongly to the reader's emotions. In this sense, previous research's characterisation that *Kodin-Ystävä* did not publish political statements (Leino-Kaukiainen, 1992, p. 136) seems misleading.

Aurora Olin contributed to the magazine with a wide repertoire, from pithy opinion pieces to romantic short stories and emotional poems. The similarities between *Kodin-Ystävä* and *Koti ja Yhteiskunta* are quite evident from the names of the magazines to the layout, tone and content. Olin seemingly aimed to shape *Kodin-Ystävä* into a version of *Koti ja Yhteiskunta* for women from the lower social classes by incorporating poetry and short stories along with its factual content. Many of Olin's writings reflect a direct tone and a straightforward expression of irritation, which was highly unusual for women within the public emotional and discursive culture of the time, at least in Finland (Sorvali, 2023b). The look of *Kodin-Ystävä* was quite modest as the typefaces and layout were monotonous and there were no photographs, only decorative vignettes. This could be due to both a lack of expertise and financial constraints, or it may have been a deliberate stylistic choice.

Most of the articles, signed with pseudonyms or initials, were written by women, as indicated by both the topics and the pen names, while male contributors were few and mostly submitted poetry. Apart from a few texts, well-known journalists or authors were notably absent.

Browsing through *Kodin-Ystävä* reveals the steady growth of Olin's confidence over the years. From early 1903 onwards, she dared to appoint herself editor-in-chief (see, e.g., *Wiipuri*, 13 Jan 1903, p. 1). And while at the beginning she filled her magazine with different pseudonyms, from 1904 onwards she signed her writings, sometimes with her full name and sometimes with her initials – A. O. (*Kodin-Ystävä*, 15 Feb 1904, p. 8).

Kodin-Ystävä was hardly written about or quoted in other papers, with only a few exceptions. For example, some of Aurora's editorials were published in certain newspapers in western Finland, whose male editors she is not known to have had any connection with (*Raahen Lehti*, 21 May 1904, p. 1; *Oulun Ilmoituslehti*, 22 May 1904, p. 2; *Oulun Ilmoituslehti*, 25 Dec 1904, p. 1; *Kokkola*, 24 Feb 1903, p. 3; *Kokkola*, 31 Aug 1904, p. 3). These articles were not the most typical of *Kodin-Ystävä*, promoting temperance, chastity and women's issues, but appealing to a wider readership and quite moderate in their themes and sentiments. This shows that *Kodin-Ystävä* spread across the country and was also read by men, at least to some extent.

The content of the *Kodin-Ystävä* subscription notices remained more or less the same throughout the entire period of publication. In the beginning, the magazine promised to work "for the benefit of the home and woman, especially the woman of the common people, to awaken in a woman a greater sense of self-consciousness" (*Kodin-Ystävä*, 15 Jan 1899, p. 1; 15 Jan 1900, p. 1; 15 Jan 1901, p. 1). Olin, an educated civil servant's wife and herself middle class,

targeted *Kodin-Ystävä* especially at women from the lower social class in rural areas. Most of the time, however, her editorials and other texts were directed at educated middle- and upper-class women, and on the rare occasions when she addressed “the common people”, the working and uneducated class, directly, her rhetoric was often condescending. Olin reprimanded her potential readers on several occasions. She wrote, for example, about how few women in rural areas read the newspapers, suggesting that the obstacles to reading, such as lack of time or money, were not real (*Kodin-Ystävä*, 15 Jan 1899, p. 8). According to Olin, the working class was uninterested in self-education and preferred to read trivial, low-quality material: “If there is the least bit scientific or educational – there’s not enough time! [...] Let’s put a romance novel or a rubbish story in the hands of many, and we’ll have time!” (*Kodin-Ystävä*, 15 Jul 1902, p.1–2.) When the magazine made such claims, it certainly did not encourage less affluent women to read it.

This style was also noted in the labour press. Hilja Pärssinen, a representative of the labour movement and later a journalist, wrote in *Eteenpäin* magazine that publications such as *Koti ja Yhteiskunta* and *Kodin-Ystävä* were not genuinely on the side of socialism, but represented an old-fashioned point of view firmly attached to prejudice (*Eteenpäin: kalenteri kansalle*, 1 Jan 1904, p. 53).

Olin defended herself and said that the purpose of the publication was not to insult, but to honestly and sincerely point out various grievances that should be resolved for the good of all concerned (*Kodin-Ystävä*, 15 Oct 1904, pp. 1–2). It is relevant to consider whether Olin understood “the common woman” she addressed well enough to be able to write to her. Olin never mentioned her mother’s background as a housemaid or the influence it might have had on her. She may have seen it as shameful, as she focused instead on her own experiences of hiring and guiding servants, often highlighting their incompetence. Her marriage was a step up in the social hierarchy and it seems she wished to emphasize her status as part of the educated class, avoiding ties to the working class her mother came from. While her mother could have offered connections to working-class women, which would have been valuable for gaining subscribers and readers, Olin seems to have preferred keeping her distance, engaging with them only through her magazine.

It must be stated that, in the late 19th century, the lower social classes in rural areas might still have been suspicious of books and newspapers, not only for religious reasons but also due to social factors (Mikkola, 2005, pp. 16–23, 29). The reason *Kodin-Ystävä* was not popular among the reading working class was not that they did not want to educate themselves, but because of the content of magazines such as *Kodin-Ystävä* in general; women’s issues seemed

distant, the content was considered dry, one-sided or depressing, or simply the value of the magazines was not understood (see also *Kodin-Ystävä*, 15 Oct 1901, pp. 6–7).

By the end of 1904, the intended readership of the magazine had expanded, as *Kodin-Ystävä* was now said to be aimed at “everyone, rich and poor, men and women, old and young, high and low” (*Helsingin Sanomat*, 23 Dec 1904, p. 1). The target group of the magazine remained, therefore, unclear. Aurora Olin herself may not have had any idea who ultimately subscribed to and read her magazine.

The tough journey of *Kodin-Ystävä* and its final closure

The lack of contributors and subscribers overshadowed *Kodin-Ystävä* throughout its existence. Already in October 1899, Aurora Olin reported that the magazine was under the threat of closure because of too few articles (*Kodin-Ystävä*, 15 Oct 1899, p. 6). Later, even a small fee was offered as a token if the writings were “more advanced”. For the others, it was enough to be honoured if they made it into the magazine (*Kodin-Ystävä*, 15 Jun 1902, p. 7). In August 1905, the year of *Kodin-Ystävä*’s closure, Olin appealed for a last time to the readers: “It is truly a wonder that such a small number of Finland’s youth attempt to assist in writing for newspapers and magazines” (*Kodin-Ystävä*, 15 Aug 1905, No.7–8, p. 3). In fact, the constant complaint about the lack of contributors might have only worsened the situation, as readers could assume that if there were no or few contributors, there must be something wrong with the publication.

When letters were received, they were often unsuitable for publication. Like many editors of her time (Uino, 1991, p. 48; Sorvali, 2023a), Olin faced challenges with articles that either required extensive editing or were entirely unsuitable for the magazine. (*Kodin-Ystävä*, 15 Aug 1900, p. 11). Olin explained that she could not print a piece of writing if it had no content, but “just a bunch of catch-phrases stuck together”. Others were too religious for *Kodin-Ystävä*’s style or just “outbursts of emotion”. She also insisted that the writing had to have a clear structure and context, for a successful magazine had to be skilfully edited, vary in content, and entertain (*Kodin-Ystävä*, 15 Aug 1905, p. 3). Her demands for a quality magazine align with the views of contemporary newspaper editors regarding the stressful and time-consuming selection and editing work required for texts sent by readers (Sorvali, 2023a). Olin was no different from other editors in this respect.

According to press historian Pirkko Leino-Kaukiainen (1992, pp. 159–162), all journalists and editors working in the field of magazines were self-taught. Guidance and peer support provided by

others were undoubtedly important for many (see, for example, Kotioja, 2018, pp. 218–219). Olin had had the opportunity to learn through her editorial connections with *Wiipurin Sanomat* in the 1890s. However, she appears to have been excluded from such support due to a lack of networks, especially after the newspaper's editor-in-chief, J. A. Lyly, died in exile in 1903 (Sainio, 1997).

In the last year of *Kodin-Ystävä*, competitors entered the market: a magazine for middle-class mothers, *Emäntälehti* (Mistress magazine), and one for servants, *Palvelijatar* (Servant woman), for working-class women.

In the final issue of *Kodin-Ystävä* in December 1905, Aurora Olin explained that, from a financial standpoint, publishing the magazine had always somehow been possible, even though it had been challenging. However, the mental toll was more difficult to bear. Now, feeling mentally exhausted, she was faced with the tough decision to put an end to her seven-year-long work career: "Although it seems very difficult. It feels like parting with someone who has become very dear to me. Just as I struggled with myself when I established the magazine, so I have struggled with myself now as I finish it" (*Kodin-Ystävä*, 15 Dec 1905, No.12, pp. 4–6).

After her journalist career, Aurora Olin became an entrepreneur, offering skin, hair, and nail care treatments (*Östra Finland*, 18 Sep 1906, p. 1; *Karjala*, 24 Mar 1909, p. 2). Although Olin was a passionate writer, she appears to have stopped publishing after 1905, at least under her own name or a known pseudonym. The reasons remain unclear, possibly financial, personal, or health-related. In a 1915 letter to Maikki Friberg, editor of *Naisten Ääni* (Women's Voice), she mentioned sending an opinion piece to the magazine in 1914, asking if it could be presented at an international women's congress (NA, Maikki Friberg archive). The piece was not published, and it is uncertain if this was the only text she wrote for the press after 1905 or if there were others. If there were, she no longer wished to be identified as their author. Aurora Olin died at the age of 68 in 1924 after suffering a long period of health issues. The obituary mentioned Olin's association activities, but also her work as a journalist and as the sole editor of *Kodin-Ystävä*. (*Karjala*, 9 May 1924, p. 2).

Saima Grönstrand, an aspiring author

Saima Grönstrand (1863–1932) was primarily a short-story writer and translator. Most of her literary work was published in newspapers, although she did publish a collection of short stories, *Kerkkiä*, in 1892 (Grönstrand, 1892). She intended to continue publishing her

collections and to become a “real novelist” as she put it (NA, WSOY archives, Saima Grönstrand to W. Söderström, 19 Oct 1894). However, her propositions were rejected, and she continued to publish merely in the newspapers. Additionally, she managed to get her journalistic articles into several newspapers in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Altogether, Saima Grönstrand is an illustrative example of a writer who had to make her living in the challenging field of writing (Hänninen, 2017).

The life history of Saima Grönstrand is based on fragmentary, sometimes almost non-existent sources (Hänninen, 2017). Some events can be extracted from her literary work, as her short stories often revolve around the life of a young woman aspiring to prosperity – but with little success (see, for example, *Prinsessa*, *Päivälehti*, 6 Nov 1898 issue B and 8 Nov 1898). These texts enrich the otherwise scarce sources; nevertheless, it is significant to keep in mind that fictional texts must be treated with a good amount of caution.

Saima Grönstrand was born in central Finland, in the rural parish of Viitasaari near the town of Jyväskylä. She was the firstborn, and over the next 18 years there were six more children, five of whom lived to adulthood (Hänninen, 2017). Their father, Johan Grönstrand, was a merchant and could provide Saima and her siblings with a financially secure childhood. In the short stories about her childhood, Saima Grönstrand often refers to the artefacts and habits of a middle-class family in late 19th-century Finland. She mentions the grand piano, dollhouse coffee sets, house plants, chandeliers, plays the children acted in, and how the local society came to see the children perform (see, for example, *Kalevatar*, 15 Jan 1895; *Päivälehti*, 16 Apr 1899).

The family spoke both Swedish and Finnish, which was not unusual for middle-class families at the time. The parents seemed to cherish Fennomanian ideas of raising the status of Finnish culture and the Finnish language, as they chose to enrol 10-year-old Saima in the Finnish School for Girls in Jyväskylä. The school was the first to provide education for girls in Finnish. In 1880, Saima Grönstrand graduated at the age of 17 (National Library of Finland, Topelius archives, coll. 244.22; Saima Grönstrand to Z. Topelius, 18 Nov 1896; School years, see *Jyväskylän tyttökoulu ja tyttölyseo 1864–1964*, p. 94).

There are very few sources regarding the following years. Saima Grönstrand probably spent time at home with her parents and younger siblings, as it was expected that a girl would help at home, learn to keep house, and take care of her sisters and brothers. (Häggman, 1994.) Her first known writing was published in 1887 in the Young Fennomanian magazine *Valvoja* (Pappilan tyttäret, *Valvoja*, 6–7/1887). However, it is possible that there were even earlier

writings, as it is nearly impossible to track down her writings from the large volume of digitized newspaper and magazine material due to false positive matches in databases. Saima Grönstrand published under the name “Saima” or “S. G.”, and these acronyms also refer to other common words in Finnish and thus yield approximately 15,000 matches in total when searched in the database of the Finnish National Library between the years 1880 and 1887.

Nonetheless, it is certain that by the end of the decade, she wrote for the leading provincial newspaper *Keski-Suomi*. It was run by Eero Erkko, who later became a prominent figure in the Young Finn Party and its paper *Päivälehti*. In 1888, *Keski-Suomi* published her report on a visit to one of the most prominent writers of the time: novelist, journalist and political figure Zachris Topelius (*Keski-Suomi*, 24 Oct 1888). It can be argued that Saima Grönstrand had the means to form a connection with nationwide literary circles, at least to some extent. In 1890, Saima Grönstrand had her short story published in *Päivälehti*, just months after Eero Erkko and other Young Fennomans had founded the newspaper. It seems that her provincial contacts helped her as she became the most productive literary freelancer for *Päivälehti*, with 74 published short stories between 1890 and 1904 (Rytönen, 1946, p. 74).

At the same time, the Grönstrand family faced a setback as the debts of the father Johan Grönstrand drove his business to bankruptcy in 1884. The process was slow, as the assets were put on sale as late as 1890 (*Nya Pressen*, 15 Oct 1884; *Keski-Suomi*, 27 Sep 1890). The family seemed to have some wealth, as Saima Grönstrand's younger sister Aina was sent to a merchant school in the capital, Helsinki (*Pohjalainen*, 2 Jun 1891). Still, the bankruptcy process had an effect, as the family moved further away from the centre of the Viitasaari parish. The father seemed to continue a small business and sold bagels near the rural road leading to Viitasaari. The decline of the Grönstrand family's wealth quickened when Johan Grönstrand died in November 1893 after a long and consuming illness. After his passing, the sale of the family property continued (*Suomalainen*, 25 Jul 1892; *Keski-Suomi*, 11 Nov 1893).

Only a month after her father's death, Saima Grönstrand was imprisoned for unpaid debts. In December 1893, she spent ten days in the county prison of Katajanokka in Helsinki (Hänninen, 2017). Even though the conditions were harsh, she took the stand of a writer and made observations on the women prisoners and their circumstances. She utilized her experience in at least two fictional and non-fictional writings (*Päivälehti*, 26 Sep 1894; *Nuori Suomi*, 1896).

Given the strict norms imposed on women at the time, one might assume that a conviction would have harmed her social standing (see, for example, Vares, 2005). However, it seems that Saima

Grönstrand emerged from imprisonment without severe damage to her reputation. She continued to publish her stories in *Päivälehti*, and in 1894, newspapers all over Finland announced the forthcoming magazine *Kalevatar*, published by the “well-known writer Saima Grönstrand”. The newspapers described the forthcoming magazine: “It will be edited in the same vein as the Swedish *Idun* – a practical magazine for the home” (*Päivälehti*, 27 Oct 1894.) The name of the magazine was adopted from *Kalevala*, the national epic of Finland, indicating that the magazine would be published in Finnish. The magazine’s lifespan was short, barely a year, yet it was a remarkable attempt to bring something new to the Finnish audience.

***Kalevatar*: Amusement and advice**

“*Kalevatar* wants to be free, outside all parties and groups. It takes its subjects from wherever it finds something useful, pleasant, and good, its only aim being to please its readers. If it can shorten a long evening with its stories, give a housewife some advice on the secrets of cooking or a daughter some new instructions on sewing, it will be pleased” (*Kalevatar*, 0/1894).

In her first leading article, Saima Grönstrand stated the aims of the new magazine. It was supposed to serve not only articles on housekeeping, sewing, knitting, and gardening, amusing little stories, poems, sketches and puzzles, or educational essays on outstanding women, science and society, but also advice to the readers. Grönstrand emphasized the struggle that women in rural areas experienced when it came to housekeeping:

“In cities, one learns so much from others, has the opportunity to see and hear from friends about such and such, about the type of food or the materials used in the home and clothing that can be made with so little effort and from such inexpensive materials. It will be years before such information reaches the country with the travelling and school-going daughters” (*Kalevatar*, 0/1894).

The influence of the Swedish magazine *Idun*, which the newspapers mentioned, is obvious.² *Idun* started in 1887 and continued until 1963. Due to the scarcity of sources, it is challenging to trace the extent of Grönstrand’s networks and explore whether she had any connections with the editors of *Idun*. She did not need direct contacts in Sweden, only access to the magazine. Coming from a bilingual home, reading Swedish was not an obstacle for her.

Typical of the era, several elements were the same: aesthetics (such as the fonts and mastheads), the subjects, poems, puzzles etc. However, there were also some differences. While *Idun* served its readers news about the royal family, especially the crown princess, *Kalevatar* was more practical. The latter magazine had hands-on

advice for its readers and recipes such as boiled pike or lung stew. Judging from the content of the magazines, *Idun* was aimed at middle- and upper-middle-class women, whereas the readers of *Kalevatar* were more of the middle- or lower-middle-class women (*Idun*, volumes 1894, 1895).

This element of advice was essential in *Kalevatar*. However, contrary to the conventions of the time, the editor did not take the role of an authority. She even admitted that her knowledge was limited and that she needed the help of the readers. In the fifth issue of *Kalevatar*, Grönstrand presented a completely new approach to guiding the readers: several women had sent her questions regarding housekeeping and various other things, and she asked for answers from other readers. The questions were numbered and printed in the magazine, and the answers were published in the next issue. The first questions dealt with how to prepare a newly purchased cauldron, where to buy a certain type of loom and how to cure a squint-eyed child. All readers received answers in the next issue, and new questions were published (*Kalevatar*, 4/1895).

This cycle of questioning and answering created a completely new way of participating. According to our knowledge, it took several decades before any other magazine adapted the method of readers discussing among themselves without the editor visibly involved. There are no mentions of this kind of approach in the 19th-century Finnish press in previous studies, as they demonstrate the relationship between the editors and the readers as formal, or at best, “sisterly”; however, in most cases, the relationship was more hierarchical (Töyry, 2005, pp. 155, 162, 203).

Kalevatar did not have a long lifespan. At the beginning, the magazine was published twice a month, but halfway through 1895, the rate of publication started to slow down. In the last issue of the year, Grönstrand regretted the delays and explained how starting a magazine alone without any financial and other support was difficult, and she felt “like a shoeless horse pulling a heavy load up a steep, slippery hill”. But she had strong faith that next year would be even better (*Kalevatar*, 18–19/1895). However, the last issue of *Kalevatar* was published in January 1896.

Lacking networks – and lacking sources

Networking was essential for personal and professional success in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Maarit Leskelä-Kärki (2006) has demonstrated how the writing sisters of the Krohn family – Helmi, Aino, and Aune – leveraged their familial networks, as their father, brothers and husbands were integral members of Finnish intellectual circles. In journalism, strong connections with

journalistic, literary and political networks were crucial. These connections not only enhanced the content of newspapers but also provided economic stability, as trusted associates guaranteed each other's bank drafts. This mutual confidence and willingness to take financial risks sustained publications like *Päivälehti* (Jensen-Eriksen, Mainio & Hänninen, 2019, pp. 115–117).

Her contemporaries knew Saima Grönstrand as a short story writer (Suomen naisyhdistys, 1896, p. 65). Nevertheless, previous studies have indicated that Saima Grönstrand lacked relevant networks or at least was not as well connected as many of her contemporaries (Hänninen, 2017). Unmarried and with no financial or other help from her family, she did not have a natural support system, as did, for example, the Krohn sisters. While it is clear that she knew prominent individuals, as evidenced by her correspondence with notable Finnish figures, the surviving letters primarily consist of requests for financial assistance, however. Even though it can be argued that she had a connection with literary circles, she did not regularly exchange letters with influential literary figures. In her letters, Grönstrand describes her dire circumstances, hunger and even a lack of writing paper. These letters reveal a power dynamic rather than an equal relationship, with Grönstrand diminishing herself and pleading in a subservient manner (see for example NA, WSOY archives, Saima Grönstrand to W. Söderström, 11 Sep 1894 and 9 May 1898).

In these letters, she also explains the reasons behind the rapid failure of *Kalevatar*. In an appeal to the politician Leo Mechelin in October 1895, she recounted how she managed to publish the magazine with the support of 900 subscribers and advertisements. Although 1895 began promisingly, her illness and other adversities led to financial difficulties. Facing foreclosure, she requested a loan of 200 marks, promising to repay it at the beginning of the following year when orders would resume (NA, Leo Mechelin archives, Saima Grönstrand to Leo Mechelin, 14 Oct 1895).

Conclusion

This article contributes new knowledge about the press of the late 19th and early 20th centuries by examining two (women's) magazines and (female) editors who have remained largely overlooked in previous research. These magazines are worthy of scholarly attention not only because they were among the first to emerge outside the suffragette movement, but also because they were among the first publications explicitly aimed at working-class women and women from the lower social strata in rural areas. This article also

sheds light on the conditions and constraints within which female editors and magazine founders of the period had to operate by examining them from a holistic, intersectional perspective, which means in this case looking at the women from the perspective of gender, class, marital and family situation and place of residence.

As late as 1915, female writers in the press discussed women's underrepresentation in Finnish journalism compared to the UK and Sweden, citing lack of confidence, perseverance, skills, and financial stability as key obstacles (Zilliacus-Tikkanen, 2005, pp. 157–161). While Olin and Grönstrand had encountered and addressed most of these challenges, networks also played a crucial role in women's willingness and opportunities to work in the industry, as we have demonstrated in this article.

Both Olin and Grönstrand were intellectual, resilient and determined; they had the education and the opportunities. Nevertheless, the lack of wealth and networks made it difficult to succeed. This is the key aspect that distinguished Olin and Grönstrand from other female press writers such as Adelaïde Ehrnrooth and Alexandra Gripenberg.

This is particularly evident in the case of Saima Grönstrand, who was unmarried and lacked both familial wealth and social networks. The networks she established herself appear, based on the limited available sources, to have been rather tenuous. Furthermore, she referred to health issues at the time of discontinuing *Kalevatar*, which further complicated the solitary nature of her work.

Olin's networks within Vyborg's association activities provided crucial support to *Kodin-Ystävä* during its early years, possibly complemented by connections through her civil servant husband. However, these networks alone were insufficient. To gain more contributors to the magazine, especially well-known contributors, Olin should have established connections with the well-educated middle- and upper-class women of the time who appeared in public literature. In the absence of sources, it is difficult to determine whether Olin made attempts to involve them or whether they declined to contribute because they did not know Olin, her reputation or *Kodin-Ystävä* or simply did not value *Kodin-Ystävä* as a magazine. For instance, the women of the Finnish Women's Association and its Vyborg branch did not participate in *Kodin-Ystävä*. Olin should have also had connections with the target readers of *Kodin-Ystävä*, the "women of the common people" to be able to write for them. Olin's mother or the housemaids she hired could have served as links, but instead, she wanted to distance herself from them.

Both women were free from childcare obligations, which allowed them more time for writing. Like working middle- and upper-class women in general, women journalists of the era were often

unmarried, just like Grönstrand. Most of those who were married had husbands working in the newspaper industry (Zilliacus-Tikkanen, 2005, p.165). Olin was an exception in this regard, as her husband was not active in the press in any way. His mental and financial support, however, proved essential for the magazine's publication.

Earlier research does not mention the legal aspects regarding the establishment of newspapers or magazines by married women. This raises the question of whether early married female journalists should be reconsidered from this perspective. Was Kaarlo Olin, nominally placed in charge of the magazine, a complete exception, or were there perhaps more similar cases in which the wife took primary responsibility for the publication, if not even entirely? Kaarlo Olin's nominal appointment as editor-in-chief may have contributed to one of the earliest Finnish women's magazines being largely overlooked in previous research on the women's press.

Kodin-Ystävä and *Kalevatar* are interesting material from the perspectives of gender, press and labour history. They both address the middle class and "women of the common people", but in different ways. While *Kodin-Ystävä* strongly expressed the opinions and ideology of its editor and provoked criticism from the labour movement, apolitical *Kalevatar* appears to have avoided similar reactions. Aurora Olin's motivation for writing and publishing was ideological, whereas Saima Grönstrand aimed to publish entertaining and useful content for women. *Kalevatar* was more successful in activating and engaging readers through its question-and-answer column. It did not demand structured and ideological opinion pieces from its readers; it was closer to the daily lives of its readers and did not criticize them. The short lifespan of magazines was a defining characteristic of the Finnish press at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. It has been estimated that up to two-thirds of Finnish magazines ceased publication before 1917 (Leino-Kaukiainen, 1992, pp.124–126). In this sense, both *Kodin-Ystävä* and *Kalevatar* were typical publications of the era.

The intense workload and demands on an editor were not tied to gender; it was an integral part of journalism at the turn of the century for both men and women alike. Research on Olin and Grönstrand has shown that these women applied journalistic quality standards and work processes similar to other editors of their time.

In our article, we suggest that research on late 19th-century female journalists would benefit from an intersectional perspective. We highlight the contradictions arising from the differing social backgrounds of a magazine's target readers and its editors, as well as how marital status constrained women's opportunities –

marriage prevented them from establishing newspapers and magazines, while singlehood limited their access to networks and financial support.

The biographies of those behind *Kodin-Ystävä* and *Kalevatar* illustrate the emergence of modern Finnish journalism, the professionalization of journalists, and the societal conditions at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries in which gender, social background, networks, and peer validation played a central role.

NOTES

¹ Digitized newspapers and magazines, National Library of Finland:

Eteenpäin: kalenteri kansalle
Helsingin Sanomat
Hufvudstadsbladet
Kalevatar
Karjala
Keski-Suomi
Kodin-Ystävä
Kokkola
Koti ja Yhteiskunta
Nuori Suomi
Nya Pressen
Oulun Ilmoituslehti
Pohjalainen
Päivälehti
Raahen Lehti
Suomalainen
Talven kukka: palvelijattarien albumi
Uusi Suometar
Valvoja
Wiborgsbladet
Wiipurin Sanomat
Wuoksi
Östra Finland

² See *Idun* from the digitized collections of the Gothenburg University Library: <https://gupea.ub.gu.se/handle/2077/37659>.

DATABASES USED

Gothenburg University Publications Electronic Archive.

<https://gupea.ub.gu.se>

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- Alexandra Gripenberg archive
- Hilda Käkikoski archive

National Archives of Finland (NA)

- Maikki Friberg archive
- Leo Mechelin archive
- WSOY archive

National Library of Finland (NL)

- Topelius Archive
- Åkerman-Voipio family archive

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