

The GaW Project part 2:

What happened to the two-supporter model? Marriage, servanthood and spousal cooperation in Sweden 1750 to 1900

From the distant past to the recent past

Studying people's concrete practices of work in early modern Sweden, the GaW project showed that early modern Swedish society was built on the idea and reality of the two-supporter model. GaW also showed that married and unmarried people had radically different repertoires of practice: servants seldom carried out the same tasks as their masters and mistresses. Finally, GaW pointed to a number of institutional and ideological circumstances that made marriage desirable and attractive to most early modern people.

What happens if we follow these lines into nineteenth-century society? Did the two-supporter model persist? Did marriage still confer a number of resources and benefits? Did people's ways of making a living still reflect their marital status? Addressing these straightforward questions, the GaW project will reconsider the nineteenth century: a period known for dramatic changes not least with the respect to gender and work. Is it possible that the roots of the Swedish model, with its pronounced focus on gender equality, go back to the early modern period? Should the nineteenth century consequently be conceptualized in terms of continuity rather than change?

Much has been written about gender and work both in the early modern period and in the nineteenth century. No one has, however, studied men's and women's everyday practices of work throughout several centuries and with the same method. Methodological consistency is hard to overestimate, yet often difficult to achieve in historical research.¹⁶ Relying on the method already created, we will be able to achieve such consistency. We have, therefore, the possibility of making a unique contribution of knowledge to the historiography of the nineteenth century, while at the same time addressing long-term change and continuity by linking the distant past (before 1800) to the recent past and, eventually, to the present.

Marriage and the two-supporter model across time

Among the most important results of the Gender and Work-project was the strong impact of marital status on early modern people's repertoires of practice. Married women were more like married men, in terms of what they did for a living, than unmarried women. Probably, unmarried men were also more like unmarried women, in terms of what they did, than married men. There was a significant albeit far from complete overlap between what married men and married women did for a living. By contrast, there was very little overlap between the work of married and unmarried people. Instead, married people's repertoires of work were the mirror images of those of the

¹⁶ Karen Harvey has pointed out that there is an obvious risk that what appears to be different phases (in this case of masculinity) are merely the effects of historians having changed focus and sources. Harvey, 'The History of Masculinity, circa 1650-1800', *Journal of British Studies* 44 (April 2005) 296-311.

unmarried. Whilst Ogilvie has reached a similar result,¹⁷ the full implications of the results remain to be better understood.

The GaW results are consistent with what we know about how marriage was institutionalized in early modern society. Through a number of legal mechanisms and cultural norms, married life was encouraged, supported and upheld as the ideal form of human life, in Protestant culture and elsewhere.¹⁸ The effects of these regulations were that marriage turned into a sort of privilege in the sense that it was connected to various economic, political, social and legal benefits. Marriage was not necessarily *experienced* as a privilege by everyone, and the fact that few good alternatives to married life were at hand should be borne in mind. The downsides of married life were however balanced by upsides that often made it rational in the early modern period to regard marriage as attractive.¹⁹ The results are also consistent with what we know about the necessity of spousal cooperation to make a living. Marriage created ‘the working couple’ (Heide Wunder).

What happened to marriage with the arrival of modernity? Historiography offers a number of answers that can be sorted as follows:

1. In some contexts, *marriage turned into even more of a privilege*, in the sense that it was not easily available to everyone. Access to marriage could be controlled and rationed, for instance by local elites.²⁰ Low demand for labour and, hence, small chances of saving up could also make marriage less accessible.²¹
2. In some contexts, *marriage turned into less of a privilege*, in the sense that the benefits connected with it were not as pronounced as before. Even social groups with weak access to material resources (such as journeymen) were increasingly able to marry. Marriage was democratized.²²
3. In some contexts, *marriage turned into a pronounced male privilege*, in the sense that the husband’s control of the wife and her property increased.²³
4. In some contexts, *marriage turned into an institution of support* for married women as the demand in society for their paid work declined.²⁴

The intersections of sex, marital status and social class obviously varied depending on the context. Alternatives 1 and 2 highlight the accessibility of marriage, whereas 3 and 4 describe its character. The alternatives can of course be combined in different ways.

¹⁷ For similar results, see Ogilvie, *Bitter Living*, 145,172-74, 204-5: married women performed other types of work than unmarried women, and married women clearly benefitted from being married; Humphries & Sarasúa, ‘Off the Record: Reconstructing Women’s Labor Force Participation in the European Past’, *Feminist Economics*, 2012, 18:4, 55-56.

¹⁸ Roper, *The Holy Household* (1989)

¹⁹ Kandiyoti, ‘Bargaining with patriarchy’, in *Gender and Society*, 1988 vol. 2:3; Mahmood, ‘Feminist theory, embodiment, and the docile agent: some reflections on the Egyptian Islamic revival’, in *Cultural Anthropology* 2001, vol. 16:2. Ogilvie suggested that “[r]estrictions on married women’s work created very strong incentives for females to achieve or regain the married state, even with the lowest quality of men.”

²⁰ Mantl, ‘Legal restrictions on marriage’, *History of the Family* 1999, 4:2, 185-207. See also Hull, *Sexuality, State and Civil Society in Germany, 1700-1815*, Cornell 1996, on absolutist legal regulation of marriage in the German-speaking area.

²¹ Humphries & Weisdorf, ‘The Wages of Women’.

²² For a discussion of this possibility, suggested by Boserup, see for instance Fertig, ‘The invisible chain: niche inheritance and unequal social reproduction in preindustrial Europe’, *History of the Family* 2003, 8:1, 7-19.

²³ For Sweden, see Ågren, *Domestic Secrets: Women and Property in Sweden, 1600-1857* (2009)

²⁴ Humphries & Weisdorf, ‘The Wages of Women’; Humphries & Sarasúa, ‘Off the Record’, 39-67

What was the situation in Sweden? Research on late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century political debate has shown that:

1. It was regarded as desirable that people could marry, and the state was given a responsibility in this regard. Couples who lacked the economic means should, it was argued, be assisted so that they were able to marry.
2. It was taken for granted that all women should work, and it was regarded as desirable that unmarried women could support themselves in honest and socially acceptable ways. The state was given a responsibility in this regard.
3. Rural women's industrious work was described as particularly hard and this was used as an argument for why their legal rights should be improved.
4. The hierarchic household remained a model for society, even after the years of revolution (France 1789, Sweden 1809).
5. A reformed version of 'the good father and husband' survived as a fertile symbol of legitimate authority.
6. A frugal and independent life-style was condoned and a life in luxury condemned. Moreover, luxury was not only seen as a female vice but as a male vice too.²⁵

The political discourse probably referred to specific social groups – the middling sort – and it does not, of course, say anything about people's everyday practices. Nevertheless, these results dovetail with the picture painted by GaW: the two-supporter model had wide purchase at least until c. 1800, and the inactive wife was frowned upon. Marriage was described as a partnership rather than as a relationship of dependence, but not necessarily as an equal partnership. Moreover, these results suggest that there was a political will around 1800 to democratize access to marriage, and that the state and the hierarchic household model continued to draw ideological strength from each other. Taken together, the results entitle us to assume that *gender relations were reformulated around 1800 in a way that transformed central early modern arrangements into modern ones*. We can even conjecture that a well-known twentieth-century phenomena like 'the people's home' (Sw. *folkhemmet*) was a modern manifestation of the idea to model the state upon the household, and that the modern two-breadwinner model originated in the two-supporter model. But this is merely a hypothesis. In order to show what actually happened, we need to look at people's everyday practices of work: how men and women supported themselves.

The institution of marriage has been subject to many historical studies. However, these have mainly been carried out within a framework of family law and family history; matters of inheritance, coverture, marital guardianship, spousal conflicts, sexuality, divorce, remarriage, stepchildren, have been in focus. That marriage was a gendered institution with relations of hierarchy and subordination built in to it has also been shown. Less has been written about how the institution of marriage *structured everyday behavior*, but this was exactly what GaW was able to show.

²⁵ Hassan Jansson, 'Marriage, Family and Gender in Swedish Political Language, 1750-1820', in *Scandinavia in the Age of Revolution: Nordic Political Cultures, 1740-1820* (2011). See also Hassan Jansson, 'Det riksmöte som grundade nationens frihet, bröt också våra bojor!', in *Maktbalans och kontrollmakt: 1809 års händelser, idéer och författningsverk i ett tvåhundraårigt perspektiv* (2009), Hassan Jansson, 'When Sweden Harboured Idlers: Gender and Luxury in Public Debate, c. 1760-1830', in *Sweden in the Eighteenth-Century World: Provincial Cosmopolitanisms* (2013), Ågren, *Domestic Secrets*, 173-185.

Four clusters of questions

1. What were people's repertoires of work practices *on the level of the household*?
 - a. Did the difference between married and unmarried people's work prevail after 1800?
 - b. Did married women's work become less similar to that of their husbands, and more similar to that of their maid servants? If so, when did this happen?
 - c. What role did social group play?
 - d. How are changes and continuities to be explained? What roles did for instance labour law and proletarianization play?
2. What were people's repertoires of work practices *outside the household*, e.g. in the service and labour markets?
 - a. Did married women's work lose importance? If so, when did this happen?
 - b. Did the distinction between 'inside the household' and 'outside the household' gain importance with the arrival of modernity?
 - c. What role did social group play?
 - d. How are changes and continuities to be explained? What roles did for instance industrialization and urbanization play?
3. What happened to *the two-supporter model*?
 - a. Was it enforced or undermined at the level of everyday practice? If so, when did this happen?
 - b. What role did social group play?
 - c. How are changes and continuities to be explained? What roles did for instance changing notions of privacy and of independence play?
4. What *cultural meanings* were ascribed to work, particularly to notions of difference and sameness created through practices of work?
 - a. Can similarities in work practices explain notions of gender equality?
 - b. What role did social group play?

Cultural meanings attached to practices of work

The early modern institution of marriage evidently endowed some people (the married) with the power to control the workforce of other people (the unmarried), and the effects can be seen in the different work patterns. We have here a clear example of how a social institution structured everyday behavior.

On the other hand, it is reasonable to assume that practices, in their turn, can have constitutive effects, i.e., they can create and enforce social structures and identities. The married mistress and the unmarried maid servant would, according to this line of thought, manifest both social group, household position and age through their different daily practices of work. Indirectly, marriage 'sorted' people into *two mutually dependent groups*: the married and the unmarried. Similarly, women and men would 'do gender' through their different daily practices of work.

These ideas about how meanings are constructed are indebted to Bruno Latour and to Judith Butler, among others.²⁶ Latour has stressed that 'the social dimension' is something in need of being constantly re-established, and that this happens through practices that connect people to each other

²⁶ Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, 1959; Butler, *Undoing gender* (2004); Latour, *Reassembling the social: an introduction to actor-network-theory* (2005).

in various ways. Butler has conceptualized gender as something that is staged and performed through practice. A large historiography has picked up these ideas. This is particularly clear in research on how social status was manifested in early modern society through use of objects. Through such practices of consumption and display, people signaled to each other to what group they belonged, thereby distancing themselves from other groups. Other results show how outward behavior, often involving violence, was vitally important to protect and uphold rights and privileges.²⁷ In brief, we know that *practices in general* were parts of sophisticated communication systems, contributed to social recognisability, and constituted identities.

Less has been written on how *practices of work* communicated meanings and created notions of difference between groups. This is surprising. If, for instance, sartorial practices have the power to create notions of difference, this must surely apply to practices of work too. The results from the Gender and Work-project definitely suggest that practices of work had the potential to create and enforce meanings of difference between unmarried and married people and between women and men. As people did different things during the days they signaled difference.

Even more interesting from a theoretical point of view is the possibility that practices of work also created and enforced notions of *sameness*. Because of similar albeit not identical work tasks men and women of the marital estate could be seen as similar, especially in contrast to servants and other dependent groups. Little has been written about how notions of sameness are produced. However, if notions of difference are culturally produced, such production must take place in contrast to notions of sameness. Logically, notions of difference presuppose notions of sameness. The GaW project showed that it is likely that practices of work did create notions of sameness between married men and women, while at the same time creating notions of difference between unmarried and married people.

The empirical focus of the project

The follow-up project will be designed so as to answer the four clusters of questions described above. In order to achieve methodological consistency, the project will rely mainly on the verb-oriented method, but this method will be combined with analysis of other types of sources, most prominently legal regulation and popular print (see more below).

Questions 1a, 1b, 1c, 2a, 2b, 2c, 3a and 3b will rely mostly on the verb-oriented method and on an extended version of the GaW database. Questions 1c, 2b, 2c and 3b will also require the use of some complementary sources and research literature. Questions 1d, 2d, 3c, 4a and 4b will rely only on other sources.

We will expand the quantitative basis by adding more observations (in the form of verb phrases with contextual data) from Sweden in the period 1750 to 1900. Seven geographic areas of interest have already been identified, including both rural and urban environments. These areas will also yield information on a broad social spectrum ranging from local elites to proletarian wage workers and vagrants.²⁸ We will make concerted efforts to find information on marital status for the majority

²⁷ Ågren, *Att hävda sin rätt: synen på jordägande i 1600-talets Sverige speglad i institutet urminnes hävd* (1997); Eibach, 'Das offene Haus'; Sennefelt, 'Runaway Colours: Recognisability and Categorisation in Sweden and Early America, 1750-1820', in *Sweden in the Eighteenth-Century World: Provincial Cosmopolitanisms* (2013)

²⁸ Skellefteå, Linköping, Kålland, Östra härad, Stockholm, Orsa, and a judicial district in Finland to be named.

of people whose work activities will be registered and analyzed, and we will also take social class into consideration.

Historians have shown that in the early modern period, people's social position reflected where they were in the life-cycle. Age, household position, marital status and – as GaW showed – work tasks tended to correlate, although never perfectly. Unmarried people were often young people. Sometimes, they were even children. Children and young adults were alike in the respect that they were subordinated to their parents/masters/ mistresses and had to work on their orders. Therefore, it is not always possible, or meaningful, to ascertain whether it was the age or the marital status that decided what people did in the early modern period. In many languages, the words for a young person and a worker/slave were partly the same.

There is an assumption in previous research that with increasing proletarianization, the life-cycle ceased to be as important as it used to be. Many people would reach adulthood and get married *but their work would not change accordingly*. A maid servant could now be married, and being a maid servant was no longer merely a phase in life. Presumably, her work would still consist in doing servant tasks. In this way, the neat distinction between (married) mistresses and (unmarried) maids was blurred. With the verb-oriented method and the GaW database, the project has a unique possibility to check whether this was indeed what happened.

In order to explain the patterns we find (questions 1d, 2d, 3c), we will look more closely at the accessibility of marriage. Demographic research supports the picture that far from everyone was married, but it also shows that up until c. 1800, remarriages occurred frequently in Sweden, suggesting that marriage was desirable.²⁹ We do not, however, know if it was easily accessible. We will also look more closely at the mechanisms that placed unmarried people in a subordinate position. How strong were these mechanisms and did they change over time?

Here, compulsory service will be of interest (Sw. *tjänstehjonsstadgan*). We know that, according to law, young people without independent means had to enroll as servants and to subordinate themselves to the power of a master/mistress, but we know relatively little about the scope and effects of this system in the early modern period and in the nineteenth century.³⁰ Another factor of interest is the attitude of the clergy. Did the priests act as gate-keepers, making it difficult for the less wealthy to get married, or did they regard it as more important that all children were born within wedlock? A third factor of interest is the increasing demand for private soldiers and civil servants from the seventeenth century onwards. Did it make it easier for young people in Sweden to get married? Whereas many European states preferred soldiers to be unmarried,³¹ the Swedish state was conspicuous for its permissive attitude in this respect. By paying attention to forces that may actually have made it easier to get married in the early modern period and in the nineteenth century, we hope to arrive at a nuanced analysis of the mechanisms behind the differences between married and unmarried people.

²⁹ Lundh, 'Remarriages in Sweden in the 18th and 19th centuries', in *History of the Family* 2002

³⁰ For Sweden, Harnesk, *Legofolk: drängar, pigor och bönder i 1700- och 1800-talens Sverige* (1990)

³¹ See for instance Engelen, *Soldatenfrauen in Preussen: eine Strukturanalyse der Garnisonsgesellschaft im späten 17. und 18. Jahrhundert* (2005)

In order to answer question 4a and 4b, we will use a source material deriving from the public political sphere. In this material, we will focus upon how notions of gender, work, spousal cooperation, home, privacy, marriage, servanthood and independence intersected. It is revealing that in the late eighteenth century, Swedish men were exhorted not to treat their wives as if they were nothing but thralls or slaves.³² This exhortation was part of the project to reform the role of father and husband. Through statements like these, the difference between independent and dependent members of society was stressed, and spousal cooperation was encouraged. The writer of an early nineteenth-century pamphlet longed for ‘the times when ... husband and wife with joint forces worked for the prosperity and continuation of the household’.³³ Were these meanings subject to any major changes during the period 1750 to 1900? If not, why?

In this context, notions of domestic privacy and female vulnerability are probably important. New research has underlined that early modern households were open to inspection and control from neighbors and kinsmen.³⁴ Julie Hardwick’s results regarding local communities and local courts in early modern France support this view. Hardwick stresses that male power could never be taken for granted; it had to be gained and reasserted every day precisely because the household was open to inspection from justices and neighbors. Men’s capacity to work hard and to take responsibility was regarded as particularly important to (re)gain power and authority.³⁵ But if households were open to external control in the early modern period, did this remain true in the nineteenth century?³⁶ Whether or not the home was regarded as a private sphere was probably very important to the meanings attached to marriage, servanthood and spousal cooperation.

The project will sustain its cooperation with the international network of historians described in part I of this application.

Summary

Building on the many results achieved for the early modern period, the GaW project will explore how gender, work and marriage were interrelated in the period 1750 to 1900. Did the two-supporter model disappear, to be resurrected as the two-breadwinner model in the twentieth century, or was there continuity between the distant past, the recent past and the present in this respect? With its strong method, its large database and its theoretically innovative take on practice, the GaW project promises to deliver new results that will bring even more positive attention to Swedish historical research.

³² Hassan Jansson, ‘Marriage, Family’, 202

³³ Hassan Jansson, ‘When Sweden Harboured Idlers’, 262

³⁴ Eibach, ‘Das offene Haus’

³⁵ Hardwick, *Family Business: litigation and the political economies of daily life in early modern France* (2009). In a similar vein, Bina Agarwal has stressed that, in general, married women’s bargaining position is improved if they live near their families of origin and can ask for succour. Agarwal, *A Field of One’s Own. Gender and Land Rights in South Asia* (1994)

³⁶ Eibach, ‘Das offene Haus’, 621-664.