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This is the accepted version of a paper presented at *36th Annual Meeting of the Social Science History Association, Boston, Massachusetts, 17-20 November, 2011..*

Citation for the original published paper:

Sandström, G. (2011)

“Laws shouldn’t chain people to one another”: Attitudes toward divorce in Swedish public debate 1964-1972.

In:

N.B. When citing this work, cite the original published paper.

Permanent link to this version:

<http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:umu:diva-60212>

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**Paper presented at the Social Science History Association (SSHA) Meeting
in Boston, Massachusetts, November 17-20, 2011**

Network: Family History/Demography

Session proposal and organizer: International perspectives on work and family at the beginning of the second demographic transition, Catherine A. Fitch

“Laws should not chain people to one another”: Attitudes to divorce in Swedish public debate 1964-1972.

Introduction

In September 1968 the nationwide newspaper *Aftonbladet* interviewed Maj-Britt Sandlund, a 33 year old official at the department of interior, on account of her choice to live together with her boyfriend Gunnar Johansson without being married. Sandlund and Johansson stated that they choose to not get married due to the way marital law constrained the freedom of choice of married individuals. Sandlund stated that: “Laws should not chain people to one another” and explained that “We are two independent adults that want to live together without a bunch of rules and regulations. And we want to be able to move apart without anyone else meddling in our private affairs.”¹ The article about Sandlund is interesting as it describes how the legitimacy of a formal marriage and the laws that governed it could be questioned with references to the individuals’ right to be unconstrained by external authority. Ron Lesthaeghe have in his theory of a Second Demographic Transition (SDT) emphasized the need to account for how economic, institutional and normative restructuring must work in conjunction and reinforce one another to produce changes in demographic behavior.² During the second half of the 1960s and early 1970s the divorce rate in Sweden exhibited it’s most intense growth period during the twentieth century, rising from 5 divorces per 1,000 married females in 1960 to over 14 in 1975.³ During the 1960s, rising divorce rates, higher levels of extramarital fertility, increased unmarried cohabitation and increasing age at first birth combined with rapid growth in the labor market participation of married women and institutionalization of state provided social security. These phenomena all exemplify developments associated with the onset of the

¹ Birgitta Evers, “De lever i ett samvetsäktenskap. ‘Man ska inte stifta lagar som kedjar fast folk vid varandra’ .,” *Aftonbladet* (Stockholm, September 23, 1968).

² Ron Lesthaeghe and Johan Surkyn, “Cultural Dynamics and Economic Theories of Fertility Change,” *Population and Development Review* 14, no. 1 (March 1, 1988): 1-45; Ron Lesthaeghe and Camille Vanderhoeft, “Ready, Willing, and Able: A Conceptualization of Transitions to New Behavioral Forms,” in *Diffusion processes and fertility transition: selected perspectives*, ed. John Casterline (National Academies Press, 2001), 240-264.

³ Glenn Sandström, “Time–Space Trends in Swedish Divorce Behaviour 1911–1974,” *Scandinavian Journal of History* 36, no. 1 (2011): 65-90.

Second Demographic Transition and they were markedly evident in Sweden during the 1960s and 1970s.⁴

To explain the demographic regime that have developed in western countries since the 1960s, Lesthaeghe focus on how economic growth have increased western living standards up to a point where individuals are able to prioritize “higher order needs” in terms of expressive life goals aimed towards the achievement of emotional fulfillment and self-actualization. For Lesthaeghe, decreased marital stability is a key empirical indicator of the onset of these “post-materialist” values and thus also with the shift in demographic regimes between the First and the Second Demographic Transition.⁵ In Sweden, two different law committees investigated marital law during the 1960s and a substantial reform was implemented in 1974 when a complete unilateral no-fault divorce law was introduced.⁶ Roderick Phillips have pointed out that the Swedish divorce law of 1974 was “extremely permissive” as compared to the divorce laws of most western countries and Lesthaeghe argues that Sweden and Denmark are the countries in the world were the shift to a “post-materialist” value system first became manifest and have developed the furthest.⁷ With regards to Sweden the publicly expressed attitudes regarding divorce prior to the 1974 reform have not been investigated and due to the theoretical connection between divorce and SDT it is interesting to explore the norms for and against an increased access to divorce during the period that lead up to the liberalization of the Swedish divorce law.⁸ Using an extensive collection of articles regarding divorce published in Swedish national and local newspapers between 1964 and 1969 the aim of this paper is to investigate cultural values regarding divorce as they were expressed in civil society in Sweden during the second half of the 1960s. The daily press helps to detect the arguments that were raised for or against an increased access to divorce and how the argumentation changed over time. Questions that will be addressed in the paper are:

What themes dominated the discussion of divorce in the Swedish newspapers during the second half of the 1960s?

What types of arguments were formulated within these themes to press for a more permissive or restrictive divorce law?

Who participated in the divorce debate and to what extent did they represent political or other group affiliations?

To what extent was the type of individualistic and anti-authoritarian values identified in the theory of the second demographic transition prevalent in the public debate on divorce prior to the liberalization of the Swedish divorce law during the first half of the 1970s?

⁴ Johan Surkyn and Ron Lesthaeghe, “Value Orientations and the Second Demographic Transition (SDT) in Northern, Western and Southern Europe: An Update,” *Demographic Research Special Collections* 3, no. 3 (2004): 45-86.

⁵ Ron Lesthaeghe, “The Second Demographic Transition in Western Countrys: An Interpretation,” in *Gender and family change in industrialized countries*, ed. Karen Oppenheim Mason and An-Magritt Jensen, International studies in demography (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 19; Ron Lesthaeghe, *The Unfolding Story of the Second Demographic Transition* (Michigan: Population Studies Centre, University of Michigan, Institute for Social Research, January 2010), 3–11.

⁶ Unilateral no-fault means that divorce can be attained single handedly by one of the spouses and that the person filing for divorce need not give any reasons to why they want a divorce. Roderick Phillips, *Putting asunder: a history of divorce in western society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 571.

⁷ Lesthaeghe, *The Unfolding Story of the Second Demographic Transition*, 12, 20; Johan Surkyn and Ron Lesthaeghe, “Value Orientations and the Second Demographic Transition (SDT) in Northern, Western and Southern Europe: An Update,” *Demographic Research Special* 3 (2004): 45-86; Phillips, *Putting asunder*, 571.

⁸ Catrine Andersson has discussed the works of the 1964 and 1972 law committees in her investigation of how marriage was discursively constructed by Swedish law committees during the twentieth century. Anderssons focus is however, marriage rather than divorce and the views on this intuition given in the state appointed expert committees rather than the views on divorce expressed in the public debate in civil society. Andersson, *Hundra år av tvåsamhet*.

Focusing on the divorce debate in the public media, the findings achieved will contribute to the knowledge on cultural change interact with dramatic demographic developments such as the marked decrease in marital stability in Sweden during the 1960s and 1970s.

The societal context of the Swedish divorce debate during the 1960s: A background

The 1960s in Sweden was characterized by rapid restructuring of the economy and the provider model. Economic growth reached some of the highest levels of the twentieth century and increasing proportions of the population was incorporated in to market work.⁹ During the 1960s the idea that married women could and should work outside the home had a definitive breakthrough in social practice as well as in political discourse in Sweden.¹⁰ The labor market participation of married women grew more rapidly than during any other decade of the twentieth century increasing from 23,3% in 1960 to 56,1% in 1975.¹¹ Driven by raised demand for female labor in the expanding public sector, the wages of women increased rapidly and reduced the difference in relative wage between men and women.¹²

Demographic research on divorce has focused on how the spread of market society have worked to decrease the constraints to divorce. The so called independence hypothesis argues that divorce can be regarded as a consumer good that can be acquired to the extent that it is affordable.¹³ This model focus on how divorce and economic change is interconnected and argue that symmetrical labor force participation and decreased gender role specialization within marriage has worked to decrease the constraints as well as the utility of remaining married for both men and women.¹⁴ That decreased economic interdependence have been a form of restructuring that have contributed to decreased marital stability have been shown for the Swedish case.¹⁵ Regarding the effects of female economic independence in marriage during the 1960s in Sweden Glenn Sandström et.al. have shown that dual earner families exhibited approximately twice the probability of divorce as compared to traditional single provider households while controlling for a large number of possible confounders.¹⁶

Changes in the provider model thus played a part in the increased incidence of divorce in Sweden during the 1960s. However, institutional changes in state provided social security have also worked to further extend the possibilities of spouses to leave an unhappy marriage and sustain themselves as singles. During the 1960s, the particular Nordic model of welfare state capitalism

⁹ Rodney Edvinsson, *Growth, accumulation, crisis: with new macroeconomic data for Sweden 1800-2000*, Stockholm studies in economic history, 41 (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 2005), 169.

¹⁰ Klas Åmark, "Women's labour force participation in the Nordic countries during the twentieth century," in *The Nordic model of welfare: a historical reappraisal* (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, 2006), 323–234; Christina Florin and Bengt Nilsson, *Något som liknar en oblodig revolution: jämställdhetens politisering under 1960- och 70-talen* (Umeå: Jämställdhetskommittén, Univ., 2000).

¹¹ Maria Stanfors, *Mellan arbete och familj : ett dilemma för kvinnor i 1900-talets Sverige* (Stockholm: SNS förlag, 2007), 79–83.

¹² Lars Svensson, "En historia om löneutjämning – kvinnors och mäns löner i långsiktigt perspektiv," in *Kvinnors och mäns löner - varför så olika? : rapport till Utredningen om fördelningen av ekonomisk makt och ekonomiska resurser mellan kvinnor och män*, ed. Inga Persson and Eskil Wadensjö, Statens offentliga utredningar, 1997:136 (Stockholm: Fritze, 1997), 14-44.

¹³ William J. Goode, *World changes in divorce patterns* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 26; Roderick Phillips, *Untying the Knot: A Short History of Divorce* (Cambridge University Press, 1991), 224–229.

¹⁴ Gary S. Becker, *A treatise on the family* (Cambridge, Massa: Harvard Univ. Press, 1991), 30–79.

¹⁵ Glenn Sandström, Olov Stjernström, and Magnus Strömgren, "Do birds of a feather flock together? Effects of socio-economic homogamy on divorce risks in Sweden 1960-1962" (presented at the 35th Annual Meeting of the Social Science History Association, Chicago, 2010); Britta Hoem and Jan M. Hoem, *Dissolution in Sweden: the break-up of conjugal unions to Swedish women born in 1936-60* (Stockholm: Demography Unit, 1988).

¹⁶ Sandström, Stjernström, and Strömgren, "Do birds of a feather flock together? Effects of socio-economic homogamy on divorce risks in Sweden 1960-1962."

based on a large public sector and government financed, individually based social security was institutionalized. Public sector expansion in health-care, education, and service shifted many of the social security functions that had previously been produced within the family to the public sector.¹⁷ Gøsta Esping-Andersen argues that the type of welfare-state capitalism that developed in the Scandinavian countries reduced the individual's dependence on family more than in other Western societies, and that state policy worked to maximize the relative economic independence of women by strongly advocating female employment opportunities. Esping-Andersen labels this process by which the expansion of state welfare provisions decreases the individual's dependence on his/her family as "de-familialization" and argues that Sweden is the country in the world where this tendency have been most evident.¹⁸

Economic and institutional restructuring that increased the self-sufficiency of individuals thus developed in a way that decreased the constraints to divorce during the 1960s in Sweden. However, Lesthaeghe have pointed out that decreased constraints is not sufficient to single handedly cause wide spread behavioral change if not cultural norms develop in a way that makes what is economically feasible also culturally accepted or even desirable.¹⁹ Given what we know from research on normative changes during this period regarding family, sexuality and gender regime there is reason to believe that ideational change was an integral part of the rapid increase in divorce during the 1960s. Roderick Phillips has argued that the 1960s was characterized by "a widespread breakdown of traditional values and behavior" in western societys.²⁰ Historians have shown that Sweden was by no means an exception to this general trend. During the 1960s, the generation of the postwar fertility boom entered adulthood and the universities in large numbers and revolted against traditional values. The norms that governed traditional marriage was extensively discussed and criticized as part of the second wave of feminism where the single-provider model was identified as a gross waste of productive labor and a root cause for the subjection of women in marriage.²¹ The introduction of the contraceptive pill in 1964 and the political activism of a young generation arguing for "new morals" made sex among young men and women before marriage more culturally accepted. Lena Lennerheds investigation of the sexual liberalism in Sweden during the 1960s has shown that student organizations with ties to the Liberal Party propagated intensively during the first half of the 1960s in news media, books and conferences against "lingering Christian conservatism". Liberal students argued for the right of young people to enter sexual relationships before marriage and their political agenda included demands for better sexual education in schools, better access and information on the use of contraceptives, legalization of abortion and the abolition of censorship of pornography.²² The demands raised in this debate for a more liberal legislation were more or less universally realized in Sweden during the early 1970s.²³

Given this tendency for a broad critique of the way state regulation effected issues of gender and sexuality during the 1960s, it is not surprising that the law governing divorce was also put into question. The Swedish divorce law of 1915 was markedly liberal at the time of it's introduction

¹⁷ Svensson, "En historia om löneutjämning – kvinnors och mäns löner i långsiktigt perspektiv," 25.

¹⁸ Gøsta Esping-Andersen, *Social foundations of postindustrial economies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 45–94.

¹⁹ Lesthaeghe and Vanderhoeft, "Ready, Willing, and Able: A Conceptualization of Transitions to New Behavioral Forms"; Lesthaeghe and Surkyn, "Cultural Dynamics and Economic Theories of Fertility Change."

²⁰ Phillips, *Putting asunder*, 561.

²¹ Yvonne Hirdman, "Kvinnorna i välfärdsstaten," in *Den svenska modellen*, ed. Per Thullberg and Kjell Östberg (Lund: Studentlitteratur, 1994), 190; Christina Florin, "Skatten som befriar: hemmafruar mot yrkeskvinnor i 1960-talets särbeskattningsdebatt," in *Kvinnor mot kvinnor*, ed. Lena Sommestad and Ulla Wikander (Stockholm: Norstedts, 1999), 106-135.

²² Lena Lennerhed, *Frihet att njuta: sexualdebatten i Sverige på 1960-talet* (Stockholm: Norstedt, 1994), 119–140, 247.

²³ Lennerhed, *Frihet att njuta*; Andersson, *Hundra år av tvåsamhet*, 99.

as the law included the right to bi-lateral no-fault divorce.²⁴ The 1915 divorce law stated that spouses did not need to specify a reason for the divorce other than the fact that they agreed that a “long-term and permanent breakdown” characterized their marriage.²⁵ Despite the relative permissiveness of the Swedish divorce law the Swedish parliament recognized that there was a need to “modernize” Swedish family law in already in 1959 and two law committees were assigned the task to investigate the Swedish divorce law during the 1960s.²⁶ Both committees were instructed by the social democratic government to produce suggestions for reforms, as it was obvious that new attitudes to marriage and divorce had developed as a result of changes in economic conditions and cultural values during the course of the twentieth century.²⁷ The first committee presented its conclusions in 1964 (SOU 1964:35) and despite the instructions from the social democratic government the committee ended up not recommending any significant changes to the rules governing spouses right to divorce. The result of the second committee (SOU 1972:41) that submitted its report to the Swedish parliament 8 years later was however a complete revision of the law of 1915. The committee suggested a new divorce law based on uni-lateral no-fault that would give the individual spouse “a unconditional right to dissolve ones marriage”.²⁸

Data and method

The primary source material of this study is an extensive collection of newspaper articles stored at the Swedish National Archive. The articles were collected by the government information agency [Statens upplysningsbyrå] on behalf of the two Family Laws Committees that investigated the Swedish divorce law during the 1960s and early 1970s and have been retained as part of the committee archives. All articles used as sources for this paper were thus part of the background material that the committees used to ascertain how different issues that was regulated in family law was discussed in civil society. The archive contains 180 articles from 34 different national and local newspapers that directly address the divorce issue. The archive contains articles from all major newspapers in Sweden and a wide variety of the local newspapers from all parts of the country. The political affiliations of the newspapers that are represented in the source material cover all parties represented in the Swedish parliament during this period with the exception of the Communist Party. Figure 1 plots all articles in the sample by the political affiliation of the editorial page of the paper and shows that both social democratic, liberal and conservative papers took part in the debate. It is important to note that more than half of the articles in the sample are not editorials. These articles can either be debate articles that many times do not share the political outlook of the editorial page or articles published on the news pages that in principle should be unbiased reports of events. Methodologically it has been important to differentiate between the editorials and the other types of articles to avoid miss specifying the political affiliation of the author of an article.

²⁴ Kari Melby, Anu Pylkkänen, and Bente Rosenbeck, “The Nordic Model of Marriage,” *Women’s History Review* 15 (September 2006): 651-661.

²⁵ Birger Ekeberg, *Äktenskapslagstiftningen: en översikt över 1915 års lagar och författningar* (Stockholm: Nationalförlaget, 1917), 40–44.

²⁶ Committee on Family Law, *Marital law: Section 2, Motivations*, Official Policy Reports (SOU) 1964:35 [Statens offentliga utredningar] (Stockholm, 1964); Special Advisers on Family Law [Familjelagssakunniga], *Family and Marriage: report*, Official Policy Reports (SOU) 1974:41 [Statens offentliga utredningar] (Stockholm, 1972).

²⁷ Committee on Family Law, *Äktenskapsrätt, 5*; Special Advisers on Family Law [Familjelagssakunniga], *Familj och äktenskap*, 57–60.

²⁸ Special Advisers on Family Law [Familjelagssakunniga], *Familj och äktenskap*, 52.

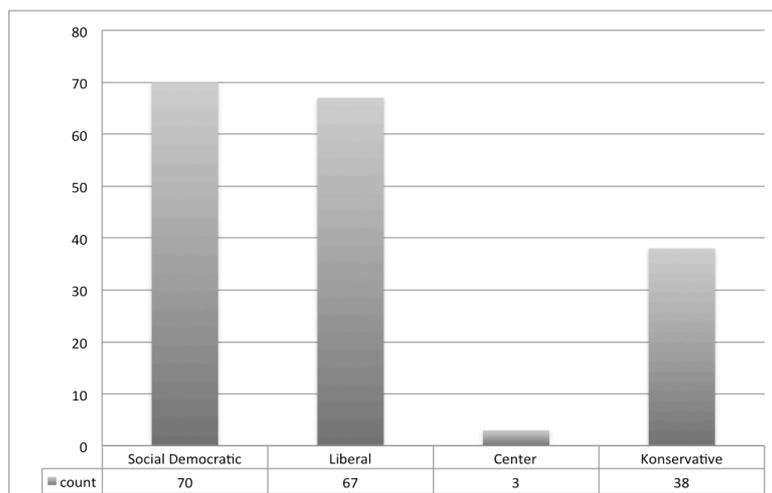


Figure 1: Articles by political affiliation of the editorial page.

The distribution of the articles over time is plotted in Figure 2 and shows that the debate was particularly intense during 1968 prior to the government bill that was presented during this year on the basis of the proposals from the 1964 commission. However Figure 2 shows that the issue of divorce was continuously discussed in the media during the entire period under investigation.

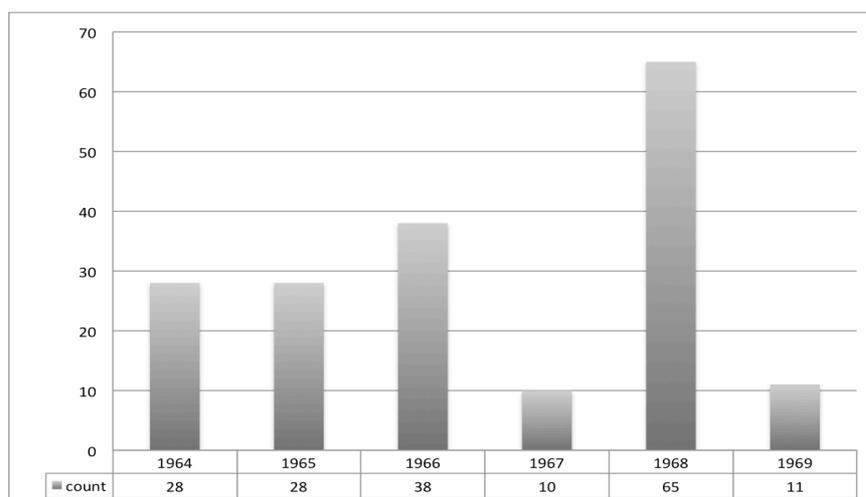


Figure 2: Articles by year of publication.

Although it is unlikely that the sample covers all articles published regarding divorce in Swedish newspapers during this period, the size of the material and its political and geographical spread make it unlikely that there is a tendency in the selection of the articles. Furthermore, the articles were collected by a state agency who's explicit mandate was to give accurate an unbiased information on conditions and attitudes in society in order to assist state organs in their decision making. Political or other biases in the sample thus appear unlikely and it is reasonable to assume that the collection of articles gives a good picture of how divorce was discussed in public media during this period.

To aid the qualitative analysis of the articles some initial quantitative categorization of the 180 articles was performed to gain an overview of the source material. The articles were first digitalized and added to a database to make it possible to register essential information about the articles such as background information about the publication and the authors. Articles were then read at least two times and where coded according to the subject matters that was addressed in the article with a free number of keywords to be able to estimate quantitatively what themes and

subject matters that dominated the debate and who the main actors were in the debate. Further more all articles were coded in to three categories depending on the position taken for and against state measures to prevent divorce. Those that exclusively argued for a removal of restrictions were coded as radical and those that defined divorce as a “social problem” and argued for keeping or even increasing state measures to prevent divorce were labeled conservative. Articles that only neutrally report events rather than argue for a particular standpoint and thus could not be categorized were referred to a third neutral/ambiguous category.

After this initial phase that was aimed at identifying the dominant themes and actors in the debate, a more detailed reading and analysis of the subject matters that dominated the debate was performed. In this step, the analysis was directed at the questions of how actors of different political and gendered positions argued for and against state regulation of divorce and how they formulated and legitimized their respective positions. The main theoretical basis for the analysis have been the discussion of the shift from a materialistic to a post-materialist value system as proposed by the political scientist Ronald Inglehart and the demographic application of this theory suggested by Ron Lesthaeghe in his theory of a Second Demographic Transition.²⁹

The debate on Divorce in Sweden 1964-1972

As mentioned in the introduction the divorce laws in the Nordic countries was in an international comparison liberal as they included no-fault grounds for divorce.³⁰ However, the Swedish divorce law of 1915 that was still in effect during the 1960s did include several limitations in the individuals right to divorce. The most notable being that immediate uni-lateral divorce was only possible if one of the spouses was found guilty of one of the nine offences that the law specified as legitimate fault-grounds for divorce. The offences specified in the law were adultery, contracting a venereal disease, chronic alcoholism, mental illness, imprisonment, battery, bigamy and different cases of abandonment were the whereabouts of the other spouse could not be determined.³¹ Couples who agreed that “a long-term and permanent breakdown of the marriage” had made the continued cohabitation intolerable could thus not receive and immediate divorce. This kind of bi-lateral no-fault divorce required that a mandatory separation period of at least 1 year had to be completed before the spouses could file for a final divorce. The couple was also required to subject themselves to mandatory counseling where the mediator (usually the parish priest) was assigned the task to try to reconcile the couple before the court could grant the final divorce.³²

The 1964 Committee on Family Law

As will become evident in the analysis below, much of the divorce debate that was conducted in the newspapers was influenced by the proposal for reforms of the Swedish marital law made by the Committee on Family Law in 1964. The committee was appointed by the social democratic government in 1959 and was headed by Supreme Court judge Gösta Wallin. The rest of the seven members of the committee were made up of an even mix of lawyers and members of parlia-

²⁹ Ronald Inglehart, *Modernization and postmodernization : cultural, economic, and political change in 43 societies* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1997); Lesthaeghe, “The Second Demographic Transition in Western Countrys: An Interpretation”; Lesthaeghe, *The Unfolding Story of the Second Demographic Transition*; Surkyn and Lesthaeghe, “Value Orientations and the Second Demographic Transition (SDT) in Northern, Western and Southern Europe.”

³⁰ Göran Therborn, *Between sex and power: family in the world, 1900-2000*, International library of sociology (London: Routledge, 2004), 188–189; David Bradley, “Family laws and welfare states,” in *The Nordic Model of Marriage and the Welfare State*, ed. Kari Melby, Nord 27 (Copenhagen: Nordic Council of Ministers, 2000), 39–43.

³¹ Ekeberg, *Äktenskapslagstiftningen*, 40–46.

³² Committee on Family Law, *Äktenskapsrätt*, 182–184.

ment from the Social Democratic Party and the Liberal Party.³³ As noted in the introduction, the first half of the 1960s was characterized by a radical normative debate questioning the position of marriage as the only legitimate form for heterosexual relationships and procreation. An indication that the committee was not unaware of these changes is that they starts out their discussion in the 1964 report by concluding that new societal and economic conditions had made many aspects of marital law appear outdated and that this was: “especially the case regarding the rules that governed the dissolution of marriage through divorce”.³⁴ That the attitudes toward divorce in society had changed in a liberal direction was apparent to the committee as they concluded that more than one in five marriages were dissolved by divorce in 1961 as compared to only 3 percent in 1915. Other societal changes that the committee regarded as important was the rapid and ongoing increase of gainfully employed wives.³⁵

Despite these introductory remarks the committee did not see fit to suggest the removal of any of the restrictions against divorce. On the contrary, it becomes clear that the committee still in 1964 regarded divorce as a “social problem” that in principle was a negative event both for the individual and for society. It seems to have appeared natural for the committee to think that the state should try its best to counteract the tendency for divorces to become more common and that the divorce legislation should be designed with this goal in mind. The interventionist outlook of the delegates can in part be inferred from the general lack of suggestions for liberal reforms. The conservative view is however explicitly expressed in their discussion of mediation and regarding the issue of divorce due to infidelity. The committee states that the Swedish divorce law was “liberal” but that the introduction of new restrictions to limit the access to divorce was not a viable way to address the issue of decreasing marital stability.³⁶ Rather the committee concludes that that “other options has to be considered” and that “given the high contemporary divorce rate the mediation institute should be reinforced and made more effective to be able to contribute to the prevention of impetuously decided divorces”.³⁷ The committee argued that mediation should also be required in cases where one of the spouses sought an imitate fault based divorce due to infidelity in the same way as completed mediation was required for spouses that jointly filed for a legal separation on the basis of the no-fault paragraph. Here the committee argued that in cases where the infidelity was not “long-term or recurrent”, mediation could provide a chance for the spouses to reconcile.³⁸ Regarding infidelity the committee retains a fault-based view and argues that: “Sexual fidelity is of fundamental importance to the preservation of a good relationship between the spouses [...]. And it is the committees opinion that this position should be clearly expressed in the legislation.”³⁹ Thus it was natural for the committee to not discuss any changes of the right of “the innocent” spouse to receive damages in cases of infidelity.

Another theme in the report is that the consequences of marital problems for children be better considered in the law. The committee argued that the 10§ regarding battering be amended to also grant divorce in cases where one of the spouses seriously mistreated children that lived in the marital home.⁴⁰ Furthermore the committee stated that the divorce law should be amended with explicit instructions to mediators to take “special consideration to the interests of the children” in their counseling of couples. The committee argued that mediators should work to make it evident to the spouses the possible effects that a divorce might have for the children.⁴¹ The commission discusses the critique that some mediators refused to issue a proof of mediation in order to im-

³³ Carlösten Nordmark, “I åtta år utredde de samlevnaden. Nu underkänner de sig själva,” *Aftonbladet* (Stockholm, October 1, 1968).

³⁴ Committee on Family Law, *Äktenskapsrätt*, 5.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 16–17.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 28, 34.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 312.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 196–198.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 217.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 181.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 323.

pose continued counseling against the wishes of the spouses. Although they remark that the mediator should not “unduly delay” the handling of divorce cases, they empathize that spouses should not have a legal right to demand a proof of mediation as this would risk reinforcing the view that the mediation was only “a empty formality”.⁴²

In sum, the 1964 report given by the Committee on Family Law is surprisingly unaffected by the trends towards more individualistic, anti-authoritarian values that have been observed in previous research on the normative development during the 1960s in Sweden. This development is only commented on indirectly by the committee in their recognition of marked changes in behavior regarding divorce and the observation that the provider model was changing in a way that increased the self-sufficiency of married women. Rather it is a traditional view of marriage as an institution that should restrict the autonomy of the individual for the collective good of the family and society that is expressed. The legitimacy of a fault-based view on divorce is not questioned and the committee discusses the categorization of spouses as “guilty” and “innocent” in cases of infidelity as natural or unproblematic. Due to the fact that the committee report did not result in a government bill to the parliament until 1969 the report became a reference point for much of the discussion of the divorce issue during the second half of the 1960s.

The divorce debate in the Swedish press 1964-1969

Economic independence vs. dependence in marriage: Alimony and maintenance

In the conservative press and in parts of the liberal press the initial reactions to the committee proposal were positive.⁴³ Although, it was generally recognized that the suggested reforms was of limited scope this was defined as a problem exclusively by liberal and to some extent the social democratic editorials. The most substantial part of the committee proposal was the purposed limitations in the right to immediate divorce on account of infidelity. After 1966 this part of the proposal would increasingly come into focus in the debate and receive hard criticism as the government bill based on the report approached in 1969. Initially tough, the comments on this issue were mostly low-keyed and characterized by neutral reporting. As I will show below, the Committee on Family law did receive critique on the editorial pages of large liberal newspaper such as Dagens Nyheter and Expressen, as well as by the social democratic Aftonbladet for representing an outdated and conservative view on marriage during the first years after proposal. However during this initial phase the critique was more focused on the lack of recognition of changes in the gender regime and provider model rather than the issue of infidelity and damages.

The social democratic Aftonbladet attacked the committee for their proposal to extend the rights to of the spouse that was awarded custody of children to both receive the right to continue living in the marital residence as well as receiving a larger share of the movable property. Aftonbladet argued that the increased economic self-sufficiency of women would make it necessary to reassess any reforms that treated the genders asymmetrically with regards to the economic outcome of divorce and that the unwillingness of the committee to propose more far-reaching reforms was motivated “in the worst possible manner”, simply by making “references to tradition”.⁴⁴ Other social democratic newspapers such as Örebro kuriren and Ny tid also deemed the proposal to conservative. That the committee proposal did not suggest any reforms to disentangle the role of the state and the church in marriage, that men and women was not treaded neutrally regarding the eligible age, gendered differences in the rights to communal property and that

⁴² Ibid., 324.

⁴³ “Riktig reform,” *Kvällsposten* (Malmö, September 3, 1964); Dolly Lindén, “De som gifter sig för pengar riskerar mista del av kakan,” *Kvällsposten* (Malmö, June 1, 1964); “Sänkt ålder för giftermål,” *Sydsvenska dagbladet* (Malmö, October 9, 1964); “Äktenskapsrätten reformeras,” *Uppsala nya tidning* (Uppsala, September 8, 1964); “Ny lagstiftning om äktenskap,” *Bohuslänningen* (Uddevalla, September 25, 1964).

⁴⁴ “De förslag...,” *Aftonbladet* (Stockholm, September 2, 1964); “I Tidens,” *Aftonbladet* (Stockholm, December 31, 1964).

the divorce law from 1915 would remain more or less unaltered was characterized as an expression of conservatism that was not adapted to “a modern secularized and democratic society”.⁴⁵

The largest liberal newspaper in Sweden, *Dagens Nyheter*, quoted the Association for Swedish Professional Women that accused the committee for having a view of marriage as “being primarily a sustenance institution” for women.⁴⁶ That the proposal included parts that extended the communal property to include private insurances like pensions was not reasonable in a society that wanted to extend the right to independence for both men and women according to the editorial of *Dagens Nyheter*. The editorial argued that it should not be family law that guaranteed the economic security of individuals, but rather the fruits of individual employment and the benefits provided by insurance in case of illness, unemployment and old age. Rather than moving towards a complete economic community in marriage, that further increased the economic ties between spouses, the legislation should be reformed in an individualistic direction. As support for this view the paper concludes that:

Does not the increased individual freedom, the increase in state guaranteed living standards, the growth in gainful employment among married women and the increase in the divorce rate point in the direction that the spouses should be regarded as economically independent and to a lesser extent be assumed to rely on one another’s income and wealth as a sustenance guarantee?⁴⁷

For the liberal *Dagens Nyheter* it was obvious that the increased market participation among married women and the expansion of individually based social security had resulted in a process of de-familialization in Esping-Andersens terms. In their view, family law should adapt to and reflect this decreased dependence on the family and recognize both married men and women as self-sufficient individuals rather than try to slow-down or reverse this development. It is clear that the liberal commentators were early and outspoken in their critique of the Committee of family law. Liberal newspapers like *Dagens Nyheter*, *Expressen* and *Göteborgs tidningen* were all critical of the report. Also the organizations close to or affiliated with the Liberal Party were the most critical in their formal responses to the committee report during 1965. The youth organization of the Liberal Party fiercely attacked the committee report in several articles in the liberal press. They argued that the changed gender regime and the increased independence of Swedish women had made marital law obsolete and that a pressing need for reforms had existed for a long time. Especially the increased levels of gainful employment among married women made the duty to provide maintenance to an unemployed spouse outdated and even offensive as the law made it possible for a wife who did not work and had no children to sue the husband for not providing maintenance.⁴⁸ The youth organization argued that the legislation naturally should ensure the economic security of children and that they received a proper care but that: “it was natural that every adult and able person provide for them self. It cannot be society’s task to ensure the maintenance of a particular category of people irrespectively of what they do only due to the fact that they have registered cohabitation with a specific person”. The youth organization concluded that it was an absurd consequence of the law that a woman with no children and a maid had a legal right to be provided for by her husband. Although the youth organization mainly attacked maintenance in marriage they argued for an economic individualism that later in the debate could also be used to question alimony after divorce.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ “I Tidens”; “På väg mot en ny äktenskapsyn?,” *Örebro kuriren* (Örebro, December 29, 1964); “Föräldrad äktenskapslag,” *Ny tid* (Göteborg, March 30, 1965).

⁴⁶ “Bräcklig trygghet,” *Dagens Nyheter* (Stockholm, April 7, 1965).

⁴⁷ “Giftorätt och laglott,” *Dagens Nyheter* (Stockholm, March 13, 1964).

⁴⁸ Per Gahrton, “Ny utredning om äktenskapet,” *Kristanstats bladet* (Kristianstad, April 6, 1965).

⁴⁹ Per Gahrton, “Kvinnan och familjerätten,” *Dagens Nyheter* (Stockholm, April 24, 1965).

The position that men and women were asymmetrically treated by marital law with regards to maintenance during marriage, alimony after marriage and in custody cases in a way that disadvantaged men was a reoccurring theme in the debate of the marriage law and the committee report. Many articles describes the detrimental economic effects of divorce for men having to bear the burden of a “large alimony” and being forced out of the home that they “had built with their one hands” and consequently being forced to live under small circumstances.⁵⁰ The conservative newspaper *Kvällsposten* concluded that this was especially a problem for men in the working class that was forced to live on the state determined subsistence level as everything else was consumed by child support and alimony. The small economic circumstances experienced by these working class men made it impossible for them to start a new family according to *Kvällsposten*. Despite fact that both *Kvällsposten* and other commentators acknowledged that it was more or less the rule that the sum of the court determined child support and alimony in these cases was so small that it made the former wife dependent on welfare it was the situation of the men that primarily was framed as a problem by these commentators.⁵¹

Interestingly, the representatives of the women’s organizations did not directly challenge this view in which men was described as having the short end of the stick in divorce. Divorce as an issue was definitely discussed as an event that was infused with gendered conflict, and depending on the political and gendered position of the person discussing it, both men and women was described as disadvantaged by the way marital law worked. However, those that were critical of the divorce law were united in the attitude that individualism and the right to self-determination were legitimate values. As I will show below these values were also used to legitimize critique against how damages in divorce cases disadvantaged women. Liberal and social democratic women’s organizations that dominated the discussion in the press were all critical against how marital law conserved the economic dependence between spouses both during and after marriage. Rather than being critical of an individualistic perspective these organizations argue that legal effects should be tied to the presence of children rather than to marriage. For them gender equality demanded that the economic dependence of women in marriage be broken and that this was best accomplished if women secured an education and an income of their one and stopped relying on marriage as a source for economic and social security.⁵²

Fault vs. no-fault divorce: infidelity, damages and mediation

Between 1964 and 1966 the discussion on divorce in the press was mainly focused on the economic issues tied to divorce and marriage such as maintenance and alimony. Starting with the formal responses to the committee report given by political organizations and other consultative bodies in 1965 the discussion of divorce in the media shifted towards the way that the divorce law regarded adultery as a specific ground for divorce and the right of the “innocent” spouse to receive damages. The discussion of infidelity intensified gradually during the following years and reached a maximum during 1968 in connection to the government bill on marital law that was proposed that year. Of the 180 articles in the source material infidelity and the

⁵⁰ For examples of this position see e.g. “Frånskilda männen behandlas för snävt,” *Expressen*, September 30, 1966; Bengt Johansson, “Yrkeskvinnan övergav sin 60-årige hemma-man,” *Aftonbladet*, July 1, 1966; Bengt Johansson, “De skildes för att han bara såg på TV,” *Aftonbladet*, June 30, 1966; Bent Johansson, “Hustrun krävde hela hans ATP,” *Aftonbladet*, July 6, 1966; Sussie Bjuvstedt, “Får männen rättvisa?,” *Expressen*, October 20, 1966; Gustav Löfqvist, “Den ensamme mannen,” *Sydsvenska dagbladet*, September 29, 1968.

⁵¹ “Alla har inte råd att skiljas,” *Kvällsposten* (Malmö, May 5, 1966).

⁵² Lena Rosengren, “Kvinnors rätt att få samma ställning som mannen i äktenskap,” *Kvällsposten* (Malmö, May 10, 1965); Brita Wigforss, “Sammanhållning eller promiskuitet,” *Göteborgs handels- och sjöfartstidning* (Göteborg, February 4, 1966); “Kvinnokongress kritiserar äktenskapslagstiftningen,” *Svenska Dagbladet* (Stockholm, May 7, 1968); “Fredrika-basen till storms mot försörjningsprincipen i äktenskaps lagstiftningen,” *Västernorrlands allehanda* (Härnösand, April 25, 1968); “Familjerätt på kvinnokonferens,” *Arbetarbladet* (Gävle, April 26, 1965); “Svårare och lättare,” *Arbetet* (Malmö, May 8, 1968).

possibility for the “innocent party” to be awarded damages appears as one of the central themes in almost half of the total number of articles.

The consultative organizations where with the exception of the church and the women’s organization of the Conservative Party more or less critical of the committee report.⁵³ In the same manner as with the issues of economic ties in marriage organizations close to or affiliated with the Liberal Party where the most outspoken in their critique of how infidelity and damages was discussed in the 1964 report. The youth organization of the Liberal Party argued in 1965 that the committee report was “unfit as a basis for a new marital legislation and that a new and unprejudiced” committee should to be appointed as soon as possible.⁵⁴ They argued that it was of no concern to the state why a couple wanted a divorce and that those that did not have children should have the right to an immediate divorce regardless of their reasons. Regarding the mandatory mediation the youth organization argued that counseling naturally should be performed strictly on a voluntary basis for these couples as the divorce did not concern or affect any one but the couple themselves.⁵⁵ The women’s organization of the Liberal Party argued against the fact that the proposal wanted to retain the right for spouses to receive damages in cases of proven infidelity. They found that the description of infidelity as causing a “serious indignity” against the “innocent” spouse was the remains of an old moral under which one spouse was regarded as the personal property of the other.⁵⁶

The way that a fault based divorce law attached economic consequences to the sexual fidelity of husband and wife was an important theme in the critique against damages. In a similar manner as alimony and maintenance was discussed from a gendered perspective the discussion of damages was criticized for treating men and women asymmetrically but in this case from a female rather than a male gendered position. Astrid Schönberg the chairwomen of Sweden’s largest women’s rights organization, the Fredrika Bremer association, argued that the infidelity clause was based on a view of marriage that assumed that a “physical” ownership existed between the spouses and that this was problematic as it attached the “social security” of women who where homemakers to their sexual fidelity. What Schönberg rejected was the fact that a spouse that that was found guilty of infidelity lost both their right to maintenance payments in addition to losing part of the community property as damages.⁵⁷ That this effected women more adversely than men, as homemaking was a socioeconomic position more or less exclusively reserved for women, was recognized both in the press and by the Swedish Lawyer Association.

The social democratic *Aftonbladet* stated blatantly that “a housewife can never afford to be unfaithful” in a headline of a 1968 article and argued that the treat of damages and the loss of alimony meant that infidelity was equal to economic ruin for a housewife but not to the same extent for the gainfully employed husband.⁵⁸ The Lawyer Association argued that although the wife had been found guilty of infidelity it was “unreasonable” that a woman was deprived of maintenance if she was awarded custody and had to take care of the husbands under aged children after the divorce.⁵⁹ The Association for Swedish Professional Women where also critical of how infidelity was treated in the divorce law and found that the Committees failure to consider why infidelity occurred and that they discussed infidelity in terms of a “guilty” and “innocent” party was a view on infidelity that many times would result in an unfair assignment of blame. In their reply to the committee report they argued that it was not unusual that the “innocent” spouse had driven

⁵³ “Bräcklig trygghet”; Leif Silbersky and Carlösten Nordmark, *Älska i lagens namn : en debattbok om familjerättskommitténs förslag till äktenskapsrätt*, Prisma (Stockholm: Prisma, 1968), 21–27.

⁵⁴ Gahrton, “Ny utredning om äktenskapet.”

⁵⁵ Lena Rosengren, “FBU ger betyg åt familjerättskommittens betänkande: Underkänt,” *Kvällsposten* (Malmö, May 5, 1965).

⁵⁶ Silbersky and Nordmark, *Älska i lagens namn*, 25.

⁵⁷ Brita Håkansson, “Social trygghet ska inte bero på sexuell trohet,” *Expressen* (Stockholm, April 24, 1967).

⁵⁸ Carlösten Nordmark and Birgitta Evers, “En hemmafru har aldrig råd att vara otrogen,” *Aftonbladet* (Stockholm, September 23, 1968).

⁵⁹ Silbersky and Nordmark, *Älska i lagens namn*, 25.

the partner into the arms of another by refusing intimacy for a long time, or simply by withdrawing from the relationship by abandoning the "unfaithful" spouse for work or other activities outside the marital home. The Association of Professional Women were quite explicit in their examples and questioned if an unfaithful wife could really be labeled as the "guilty spouse" if the traveling husband made love to her a few times a month for the sake of duty or vice versa the husband who's wife "refused intercourse for months" or "made love like a wooden log".⁶⁰

In comparison to the discussion regarding the right to alimony, where men were described as the victims of the legislation, the critique of damages thus focused on how the right to damages asymmetrically constrained the freedom of women. Those that were critical against damages argued that it was absurd that one spouse should receive an economic punishment for a failed marriage as no court could fairly judge why two spouses had drifted apart. Furthermore that the loss of the right to alimony and payment of damages restricted the freedom of the economically weaker spouse in a way that was unjust and that contributed to an already existing state of subjection. The view on marriage that appears in this critique is clearly a quality based view that contends that marriage must provide more than just material security and that a lack of emotional and sexual fulfillment is a legitimate reason for a spouse to break the marital bond. Those that were critical of the infidelity paragraph in the divorce law thus argued that it was not possible to externally assign guilt in cases of infidelity but also that any attempt to investigate such matters would be an unacceptable intrusion into the private sphere by the state.

The right to personal privacy was also at the center in the critique of how the state tried to intervene in divorce cases through mandatory mediation. For those that argued for a reformed divorce law during the second half of the 1960s, forced mediation was an unacceptable violation of the individual's right to privacy and an example of a paternalistic infringement of the personal freedom of choice. Even in the no-fault cases where the couple only needed to claim "a long-term and permanent breakdown of the marriage" the state still required the spouses to see a mediator to discuss why they wanted divorce. That the state forced couples to divulge their personal matters in order to get the required certificate of mediation were to the critics of the divorce law an example of state interference into private matters that was none of their business. A debate article titled "Harmful mediation" published in liberal *Dagens Nyheter* in 1965 by the well-known Swedish journalist and foreign correspondent Cordelia Edvardsson is a typical example of the arguments raised against compulsory mediation during this period. The article is a fierce attack against state paternalism in the form of non-voluntary mediation in divorce cases. Edvardsson begins her article by questioning the divorce laws failure to recognize the individual's right to autonomy and a private sphere:

In a time when the individual's right to self-determination and personal freedom is asserted strongly it is surprising that not more frequent and stronger criticism is raised against an institution that I personally find being a flagrant intrusion in to the private matters of the individual: the compulsory mediation in divorce cases.⁶¹

Edvardsson argues that an unquestionable civil right of a citizen must be the right to freely choose how to organize one's private life. Given that the state regarded all individuals that had achieved a legal majority capable of entering marriage she argued that it was peculiar that the state saw fit to intervene when the same person wished to leave the very same marriage. Edvardsson described the mediation as an interrogation in which spouses were forced to reveal to a stranger the intimate details of their marital problems. Edvardsson attacked the Committees proposal to extend the requirement of mediation to cases of infidelity and questioned what was gained by trying to keep dysfunctional relationships intact. That the committee specifically motivated their increased emphasis on mediation as a way to better accommodate the interests of children in marriage was dismissed by Edvardsson with the observation that this was a typical rhetorical strategy

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Cordelia Edvardsson, "Skadlig medling," *Dagens Nyheter* (Stockholm, December 19, 1965).

among those “that wanted to legitimize reactionary claims” regarding the family. Here Edvardsson exemplifies what Ron Lesthaeghe have identified as a central empirical indicator of the value system characteristic of the second demographic transition; that children are no longer viewed as a definite impediment to parental divorce.⁶² For commentators such as Edvardsson the efforts of the state to hinder spouses that was discontent with the quality of their relationship to leave one another was an unacceptable infringement on personal freedom. Neither were references to responsibilities for children a sufficient argument to legitimize constraining the free will of parents or their right to seek personal happiness.

After 1965, the opposition to this quality based view of marriage articulated as a support for the Committees proposal to reinforce and extend the reach of the mandatory mediation mainly came from representatives of the church and the Conservative Party.⁶³ Mårten Werner was both a pastor and a Member of Parliament for the Conservative Party. In a debate article in the conservative Svenska Dagbladet in 1968 he argued for a stronger emphasis on the interests of children and for the use of priests as mediators in divorce cases. Werner accused the media of being politically left biased. Rhetorically he asked why the church was “banned from participation” in the media debate on marriage and argued that the lack of consideration for the interests of children in the debate was peculiar. Rather the discussion was “entirely centered around the wellbeing of the spouses”. Werner asked if not the right of the children to “a father, a mother and a home” should be allowed to bear some weight in a democracy that supposedly should safeguard the rights of the weak against the strong. Furthermore he opposed the often expressed opinion that professional counselors rather than priests would be more appropriate as mediators. According to Werner, it would be equally absurd to argue that lawyers were unfit to handle divorce cases because they had knowledge of the law.⁶⁴

Prior to 1968 the critique of the infidelity, damages and mediation usually did not go as far as to openly argue for complete unilateral no fault where all fault based criteria was removed from the law. However, during 1968 this position was explicitly expressed in the press on an increasing number of occasions. In April 1968 when the social democratic minister of justice Herman Kling presented the content of the government bill for a reformed marital law based on the report from the 1964 the debate on infidelity was markedly intensified and the critique became more radical. For the most part the bill followed the recommendations of the committee but embraced some of the criticism that had been raised by the women’s organizations that argued for an equal age requirement for men and women. The committee had suggested a minor change in that the age requirement be kept at 18 for women but lowered for men from 21 to 20 years. Instead the bill suggested an equal age requirement of 18 years for both sexes. Also the critique from liberal commentators against the obligatory church bans being at odds with the right to religious freedom appears to have influenced the bill as these were made voluntary, contrary to what the committee had suggested.⁶⁵ Neither of these amendments of the committee’s proposal appears to have been controversial. These changes to the committee proposal all received favorable comments in the press regardless of the political orientation of the editorial page in 1968.

Rather it was the issue of the legitimacy of a fault based divorce legislation in general and the issue of damages in cases of infidelity that raised critical commentary during 1968. The fact that the bill had retained the committee's recommendations for limitations in the right to an immediate divorce in cases of infidelity and that the court could choose separation as an alternative ruling if a divorce “was not in the best interests of the children” was meet with outspoken skepticism during 1968, primarily by editorials in the liberal and social democratic press. The social

⁶² Lesthaeghe, “The Second Demographic Transition in Western Countrys: An Interpretation,” 19.

⁶³ “Äktenskapslagstiftningen,” *Dagen*, August 29, 1968; “Gift eller sammanboende,” *Dagen* (Stockholm, September 28, 1968).

⁶⁴ Mårten Werner, “Äktenskapsdebatten,” *Sydsvenska dagbladet* (Malmö, September 24, 1968).

⁶⁵ Carlösten Nordmark, “Giftasåldern blir 18 år och lysningen försvinner,” *Aftonbladet* (Stockholm, August 28, 1968).

democratic Östergötlands Folkblad asked if the bill would mean that access to divorce actually would become more restricted as the courts would be able to refuse immediate divorce in cases of infidelity. Folkbladet predicted that the infidelity paragraph surely would be a source of continued debate as “many commentators argued that the divorce procedure should be made simpler rather than more difficult” and that “an administrative notice to the authorities might well replace the unpleasant court procedure.”⁶⁶

The liberal Dagens Nyheter also argued for “a more modern view than the one represented by the Committee of family law”. Rather than introducing further limitations to the right to immediate divorce the editorial argued that the government should remove the right to damages and “in general reduce the economic obligations attached to marriage and divorce”. Dagens Nyheter concludes that such reforms would make it unnecessary to determine blame in divorce cases and that it was unfortunate that the government bill did not reconsider the committee’s proposal in this regard.⁶⁷ In another editorial in September the same year Dagens Nyheter extended this argument and contended that:

[...] public opinion, apart from some of the religiously determined, now tends to view marriage as a form of voluntary union, among other possible unions, between also economically independent individuals.⁶⁸

According to the editorial the terms of divorce should be determined on a “rational ground” that did not attempt to point to a “guilty” and “innocent” party as “neither a court of law or some other external party” was qualified to make such a determination regarding a failed marriage. The editorial also dismissed the rationale for a separation period regarding divorce cases where the spouses had filed for divorce in agreement. The only case where the paper thought it was necessary with a period of consideration was when there were minor children in the family. However, the paper argued that a separation period of one year was excessively long and that separation in these cases might well be shorter in duration.

Justice minister Herman Kling defended the decision to retain infidelity as a specific cause for divorce as late as May 1968 when representatives of the Association of Social Democratic Women criticized the so called “fornication paragraph” at their convention. However, after the summer had passed he had more or less completely retracted from this position.⁶⁹ In September, Kling is quoted in both the social democratic Aftonbladet and the liberal Dagens Nyheter stating that the government bill should just be regarded as partial reform and that a new committee followed by a new law should rapidly be realized. The justice minister assured the readers that a reform that fundamentally reassessed marital law on the basis of a contemporary attitude to marriage, as “being a voluntary union between also economically independent individuals” would be undertaken as soon as possible. Kling states that the result of this revision will likely be that “the right to damages and infidelity as a specific cause is expunged from the law”.⁷⁰

That a shift towards a broad acceptance of uni-lateral no-fault divorce can be localized to the year 1968 is further reinforced by the fact that actors that previously defended the conclusions of the 1964 committee retracted from this position in favor of a removal of state interventions against divorce. Several of the conservative newspapers in fact supported Klings proposal during the fall of 1968 for further reforms based on the results of a new committee that would be given a more radical mandate.⁷¹ The conservative Kvällsposten argued that the small amendments to

⁶⁶ Claes-Göran Kjellander, “Lättare eller svårare att skiljas nästa år?,” *Östergötlands folkblad* (Norrköping, April 25, 1968).

⁶⁷ “Snabbskilsmässa,” *Dagens Nyheter* (Stockholm, May 8, 1968).

⁶⁸ “Äktenskapet och familjerna,” *Dagens Nyheter* (Stockholm, September 25, 1968).

⁶⁹ “Kvinnokongress kritiserar äktenskapslagstiftningen.”

⁷⁰ “Frivillig samlevnad,” *Dagens Nyheter* (Stockholm, September 3, 1968); Birgitta Evers and Carlösten Nordmark, “Vad vet du egentligen om otrohet, Herman Kling,” *Aftonbladet* (Stockholm, September 28, 1968).

⁷¹ See e.g. “Giftas,” *Kvällsposten* (Malmö, October 26, 1968); “Äktenskapet i TV,” *Norrbottnens kuriren* (Luleå, September 25, 1968).

the divorce law that was proposed in the government bill meant that the law would still be “far behind the development in society”. The editorial expressed support for a more liberal divorce law and stated that “hopefully we will not have to wait too long for more extensive reforms [that] improves individual freedom by removing outdated norms governing marital law”. Interestingly, *Kvällsposten* expresses support for the radical view that the presence of children in a marriage “cannot be used as a motive to prevent divorce”.⁷² In an article in *Aftonbladet* in October the 1964 commissioners themselves retract from their one conclusion and express support for more extensive reforms than what they themselves had suggested in their report. They argue that quite a “long time has passed since the proposal” and that a new committee “with other directives should be appointed” to assess how “a more extensive modernization of the law” might be achieved.⁷³

During the second half of 1968 and 1969 the only ones in the conservative block that still expressed support for retaining limitations in the right to divorce were representatives of Christian groups such as the paper *Dagen*, that represented the Pentecostal Movement, and representatives of the church like the previously mentioned Mårten Werner. They disagreed with the position taken by *Kvällsposten* and other more reform minded conservatives during 1968 and argued that the focus on the happiness of the adults and the lack of responsibility for the needs of children was a severe threat to society and the wellbeing of a young generation.⁷⁴ *Dagen* argued in an editorial against Herman Klings position and stated that when children existed in a marriage the spouses had “a shared responsibility against a third party that make it difficult to regard marriage as being just a ‘a form of voluntary cohabitation between two independent individuals’”. *Dagen* feared for the consequences of more divorces and argued that the rootlessness of an growing number of children of divorce would result in increased “antisocial behavior and crime”. The strictly conservative positions like the one represented by *Dagen*, that exclusively argued for limitations in the right to divorce, was however in a marked minority in the sample during the entire second half of the 1960s. Of the 180 articles only 16 exclusively argue for retaining the limitations in the 1915 divorce law or stress the need for measures to counteract the increasing number of divorces. By the second half of 1968 and in 1969 an interventionist view on divorce is exclusively found among representatives of Christian groups rather than in the conservative editorials in general. By the fall of 1968 non-confessional conservative commentators either explicitly support the proposed reforms or just neutrally report the outline of the government bill and the new committee directive.

The results of the divorce debate: The 1972 committee report and the divorce law of 1974

Given this strong dominance of anti-authoritarian values and increased legitimacy of the right to individual autonomy in the debate on divorce during the late 1960s it is not surprising that the new committee that was appointed in August 1969 was given a radically different directive than the committee of 1964. In the directive the minister of justice repeats the principle that the law should regard marriage as “a voluntary form of cohabitation between two independent individuals” but extends the argument by unconditionally dismissing the legitimacy of damages and a fault based divorce law. In the directive Herman Kling states that marital law must:

[...] be constructed in a way that ensures that spouses can retain a high degree of personal freedom within marriage. The forms for entering and dissolving a marriage should be simplified. The increased self-sufficiency of spouses caused by the current education-, labor market- and social policy must result in limitations in the economic legal effects of

⁷² “Giftas.”

⁷³ Carlösten Nordmark, “I åtta år utredde de samlevnaden. Nu underkänner de sig själva,” *Aftonbladet* (Stockholm, October 1, 1968).

⁷⁴ “Äktenskapslagstiftningen”; Bengt Karlsson, “Indoktrinerad kärleksyn,” *Svenska Dagbladet* (Stockholm, July 1, 1969); “Gift eller sammanboende.”

marriage. The legal rights and duties of spouses in connection to a divorce should not be allowed to be influenced by any morally based judgment of the character of their personal relationship or of their behavior in marriage.⁷⁵

Kling further states that the fact that a spouse could not get an immediate divorce if the other party objected was in conflict with the requirement to respect the free will of the individual and that a new law “under no circumstances should force a person to continue living in a marriage that they wanted to free themselves from.”⁷⁶ Kling concludes that the suggested unconditional right to divorce made it “unnecessary to have certain ‘privileged’ reasons for divorce in the law” and that this had the consequence that the question of fault in divorce cases would be inconsequential in the eyes of the law.⁷⁷

The committee proposal given in 1972 followed the directive to the letter and the committee proposal satisfied all demands for liberalization that had been raised in the debate during the 1960s. The resulting new divorce law that went in to effect in 1974 was thus a complete unilateral no-fault divorce law that did not acknowledge any reasons other than the unilateral will of a spouse to dissolve the marriage. The requirement for a separation period and mediation was removed. The only limitation in the immediate right of a spouse to achieve a divorce was a mandatory waiting period of six months before the divorce had legal force in cases where the spouses did not agree, or if they had custody of children under the age of 16 years. There were however no requirements on how people lived and with whom during this waiting period. The economic effects of 1974 marital law were restricted to a fifty-fifty split of the communal property that had not been reserved in a prenuptial agreement and spouses could no longer receive any kind of damages as part of a divorce settlement. All economic responsibilities after a divorce were entirely based on the presence of children that had the right to receive child-support payments until they reached legal maturity. The right to maintenance and alimony was also entirely removed from Swedish marital law.

Conclusions

A process of individualization of Swedish marital law started already with the law reforms of 1915-1920 that introduced bi-lateral no-fault grounds for divorce. However, the reforms at the beginning of the century were still based on a traditional marital ideology that grew out of the industrial revolution during the late nineteenth century. The law thus assumed a strong economic cohesion in marriage produced by a male provider model and a strong dependence on the family for social security. The importance of the conjugal family for the social and economic organization of society made the preservation of marital stability important to the legislators and it was not possible to leave a marriage based on a uni-lateral decision.⁷⁸ Marital law was thus still during the 1960s framed around values of collective solidarity and duty between family members and an ideology that viewed the conjugal family rather than the individual as the most important social unit.

In the debate on divorce during the 1960s support for this collective view of marriage came from the Conservative Party and in particular from Christian organizations like the Pentecostal Movement. For these conservatives, it was natural that marriage should constrain the interests of the individual for the collective good of the family and by extension also the good of society. Restrictions against divorce were thus necessary as stable marriages guaranteed social order and the reproduction of healthy and productive citizens. To legitimize state intervention against divorce conservatives argued that the needs of children “to a father, a mother and a home” required that

⁷⁵ Special Advisers on Family Law [Familjelagssakunniga], *Familj och äktenskap*, 58.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 59.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ Kari Melby et al., *Inte ett ord om kärlek: äktenskap och politik i Norden ca 1850-1930* (Göteborg: Makadam, 2006), 159–160.

individual rights to divorce could not be unconditional and should be constrained to protect family cohesion.

As predicted by SDT theory, the traditional view of marriage was however successively marginalized in the public debate in Sweden during the second half of the 1960s in favor of a new marital ideology based on values that prioritized individual autonomy and actualization of emotional fulfillment. These values strongly dominated the debate after 1964 and were used to argue for a removal of restrictions to divorce in Sweden. The definite breakthrough in concrete policy came in 1968 when the Social democratic government presented the directive to the 1972 committee on family law. The committee directive stated that a new law should be based on the principle that the individual had an unconditional right to marital dissolution.

The dominant actors in the debate that lead up to the directive in 1968 were at first organizations and newspapers affiliated with the Liberal Party and the women's organizations. Gradually also the Social Democrats joined this radical front against limitations in the right to divorce.

Surprisingly radicals seem to have found it unnecessary to disprove the argument that limitations to divorce were necessary to protect children from having to experience family disruption. Those that argued for liberal reforms simply dismissed the issue as an expression of conservatism or just refrained from commenting on how children might or might not be affected. Radicals did not explicitly argue that "a good divorce is better than a bad marriage" and that this rule also applied to children if they found themselves living in a failed marriage, rather it was how the divorce law constrained the freedom of adults that was the central issue for those that argued for liberal reforms. That children stop being regarded as a restriction to parental divorce and that the quality of the dyadic relationship between the parents became a prioritized goal is according to Lesthaeghe a central empirical indicator of the penetration of post-materialist values.⁷⁹ This indicates a cultural acceptance of individual behavior that puts personal self-fulfillment at the center of decision-making and these attitudes were prevalent in the divorce debate during the second half of the 1960s in Sweden and manifested themselves in the rejection of children as a legitimate reason to stay married.

The critique of restrictions to divorce in the public debate that lead up to the liberalization of the Swedish divorce law 1974 can be partitioned in two major areas. Firstly, radicals argued that the divorce law worked to conserve gender inequality by preserving economic dependence between men and women in marriage as well as after divorce. Secondly, they questioned the legitimacy of externally assigning fault to one of the spouses for causing the marriage to fail. The divorce debate during the 1960s can be interpreted as an expression of a renegotiation of the gender regime that was generated by the shift from a collective family wage system to a dual provider model, which was a process that progressed more rapidly during the 1960s than during any other decade of the twentieth century. Both men and women used the value of gender equality to argue against aspects of marital law that tied spouses together economically and counteracted the self-sufficiency of individuals. Critics of the divorce law agreed—regardless of their gendered positions—on the individualist premise that spouses should be able to provide for themselves by engaging in wage labor and not depend on marriage as a "sustenance institution".

The normative changes pertaining to marriage was intertwined and reinforced with institutional change. For those that argued for a more liberal divorce law the expansion of the Swedish welfare state was a positive development and could be used as a supporting argument that individuals were no longer dependent of marriage for social security. State infringements on the right to divorce was thus an outdated remains of a society where individuals were tied together in the family through mutual economic dependence. Thus they argued that a process of de-familialization in Esping-Andersens terms meant that limitations to individual freedom in marriage had out-served its purpose and should be removed.

⁷⁹ Ron Lesthaeghe, "The Second Demographic Transition in Western Countries: An Interpretation," in *Gender and family change in industrialized countries*, International studies in demography (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 19–20.

From a male position the increased legitimacy of individualism and autonomy was used to reject the economic responsibilities after divorce in the form of alimony and label them as unjust as these responsibilities constrained the individual freedom of men after divorce. That the women's organizations did not directly defend the right to alimony and attack this male rejection of a traditional provider role is an indication of the extent that values of individualism had penetrated the cultural climate.⁸⁰ Rather, the representatives of the Swedish women's movement criticized how marital law conserved the economic dependence of women but they focused on how damages and the loss of the right to alimony in fault-based divorce disadvantaged economically dependent housewives.

The debate of how economic sanctions were tied to the sexual fidelity in marriage overlapped with the other major area of critique of the divorce law that all together rejected the legitimacy of fault-based divorce. Again the argument centered on a quality-based view of marriage and contended that fidelity must be conditional on the emotional and sexual fulfillment that the marriage provided for the individual. If a husband or a wife failed to meet the needs of the partner it was unreasonable to punish the unfaithful spouse by awarding damages. The main argument was that it was impossible to externally assign blame for marital failure. When the individual was put at the center of marital ideology the reasons for wanting to leave a relationship both began and ended with the subjective opinion of the individual. For radicals, personal freedom meant that state interference and measures to acquire information on the circumstances that had resulted in marital breakdown could be branded as state paternalism and an unacceptable breach of the private sphere. The increased legitimacy of the right to individual autonomy thus meant that fault-based divorce with an inquisitive court procedure and the requirement of mediation in no-fault cases could be described as an unacceptable intrusion into private matters and an unmotivated limitation of personal freedom. The end result of this debate, that by 1968 exhibited a strong dominance for the above described radical positions, was the 1969 committee directive that resulted in the introduction of the complete uni-lateral Swedish divorce law of 1974.

Empirical research on the transition to a high divorce rate regime during the twentieth century have focused on how economic restructuring have resulted in reduced economic dependence between spouses. Quantitative analysis of the effects of female labor force participation during the 1960s and 1970s show that decreased economic interdependence in marriage was an important determinant of divorce in Sweden during the 1960s. The effects found are however of a size that indicates that also other unmeasured factors must have contributed to the surge in divorce during the period. The qualitative analysis conducted in this study indicate that the normative restructuring during the 1960s resulted in the expression of markedly permissive attitudes to divorce in the public debate. This change in the cultural climate must have worked to reduce the constraints that individuals experienced by lessening the social stigma of divorce. Also the intensified discussion of divorce as an issue in the public media might also have made persons more aware of divorce as an alternative. The finding here thus support two of the central notions in the theory of the second demographic transition. Firstly that normative change must be accounted for in explanatory models of demographic behavior. Secondly that economic, institutional and normative restructuring must work in conjunction and reinforce one another to produce dramatic and widespread change in behavior like the one that occurred regarding marital stability in Sweden during the 1960s. Optimally we would like to have access to individual level data on representative samples to study such effects but this is often difficult if not impossible for historical populations. In these cases, qualitative studies of the type that have been offered in this paper can give indications to the extent that normative change have contributed to new demographic patterns and thus give a better idea what lies in the residuals of quantitative models.

⁸⁰ Ehrenreich discuss male resistance to the traditional provider role in post WWII United States and argue that the increase in female labor force participation was rather a reaction to decreased marital stability than the cause of it. See Barbara Ehrenreich, *The hearts of men : American dreams and the flight from commitment* (London: Pluto, 1983), 169–182.

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