Ready, Willing and Able

The Divorce Transition in Sweden 1915-1974

Glenn Sandström

Department of Historical, Philosophical and Religious Studies, Centre for Population Studies and Umeå Centre for Gender Studies, Graduate School for Gender Studies, Umeå University, Sweden

Umeå 2012
Ready, Willing and Able
The Divorce Transition in Sweden 1915-1974

Glenn Sandström

Akademisk avhandling

som med vederbörligt tillstånd
av rektorsämbetet vid Umeå universitet
för avläggande av filosofie doktorsexamen
framläggs till offentligt försvar
i Hörsal F, Humanisthuset,
fredagen den 26 oktober, kl. 10:15-12:00.

Avhandlingen kommer att försvaras på engelska
Fakultetsopponent: Professor, Bart Van de Putte,
Department of Sociology, Gent University, Belgien.
Abstract
This thesis attempts to extend the historical scope of divorce research in Sweden by providing an analysis of how the variations in the divorce rate over time and across geographical areas are connected to the economic, normative and institutional restructuring of Swedish society during the period 1915-1974.

The thesis finds that the economic reshaping of Sweden into a modern market economy is at the center of the process that has resulted in decreased marital stability during the twentieth century. The shift from a single- to a dual-provider model and an increased integration of both men and women into market processes outside the family have resulted in lowered economic interdependence between spouses, which in turn has decreased the economic constraints to divorce. This conclusion is supported by the empirical finding that indicators of female economic self-sufficiency are associated with increased propensities for divorce, during the entire period under research in this thesis. That changes in the constraints experienced by women have been important is further emphasized by the finding that women have been more prone than men to initiate divorce, and that this gendered pattern of divorce was established already during the early twentieth century in Sweden.

The results further indicate that the growth of divorce is connected not only to a shift in the provider model but also to the way sustained economic growth has resulted in a general increase in the resources available to individuals, as proposed by the socio-economic growth hypothesis. During the 1920s and 1930s, high-strata groups, such as lawyers, journalists, engineers and military officers, exhibited a divorce rate on the same level as in the general population of Sweden today. By the early 1960s, however, this positive association between social class and divorce had changed: by then it was rather couples in working-class occupations who exhibited the highest probability of divorce, which is a pattern that appears to have persisted since then. These findings indicate that a general increase and more even distribution of economic resources between both genders and social classes have facilitated individuals’ possibilities to sustain themselves independent of family ties. This democratization in the access to divorce has meant that growing segments of the population have gained the means to act on a demand for divorce.

However, another result of the thesis is that it is not possible to limit the analysis to a strictly economic perspective. Rather, economic changes have interacted with and been reinforced by changes in values, as well as in institutions, during the periods when widespread and rapid behavioral change has occurred. In Sweden, like in most other Western countries, this was primarily the case during the 1940s and a period covering approximately the second half of the 1960s and first half of the 1970s. The studies of the thesis suggest that these two periods of rapid growth in the divorce rate stand out as periods in Swedish history when attitudes also changed more rapidly toward values that can be regarded as permissive, secular and more open to individual freedom of choice. Trenchantly, these two periods also correspond to the two harvest periods in Social Democratic welfare state policy. In the thesis it is argued that the marked increase in government services and social security at these time points integrated with and reinforced economic restructuring in a way that worked to “de-familialize” individuals by making them less dependent on family ties for social security. Institutional changes of this type have been particularly important for making single life more feasible for women and low-income groups. In the thesis, it is argued that the timings of substantial behavioral change become difficult to understand if the analytical perspective does not explicitly incorporate how such contextual-level changes in values and institutions have integrated with changes in the provider model and the economy during these dynamic periods of the divorce transition in Sweden.

Keywords: history, divorce, marriage, Sweden, twentieth century, gender regime, emancipation, individualism, dual-provider model, socio-economic growth, de-familialization, welfare state
Ready, Willing and Able
The Divorce Transition in Sweden 1915-1974

Glenn Sandström
Report No. 32 from the Demographic Data Base,
Umeå University 2012

Centre for Population Studies,
Umeå University
SE-901 87 Umeå
Sweden

Telephone: +46(0)90-786 59 75
Email: glenn.sandstrom@ddb.umu.se
http://www.ddb.umu.se
http://www.idesam.umu.se

Copyright© 2012 by Glenn Sandström

ISSN 0349-5132

Cover photo: www.dreamstime.com
Printed by: Print & Media, Umeå, Sweden 2012
Acknowledgements

There are many people to whom one is indebted, both intellectually and practically, for being able to complete a research project of this type. At least in the humanities and the social sciences, the writing of a thesis is often pictured as a solitary endeavor by the researcher, working late nights at the library, lab and office. However, a PhD project is perhaps better described as a drama of sorts, where the researcher is supposed to play the leading part but is dependent on the support of a director as well as the skilled work of many supporting actors. Without the efforts of these surrounding people, there would not be much of a play.

Firstly I want to thank my wife, Malin Sandström, for her patience and unfailing support during the four years I have worked on this project, and for making it easy to be a husband and a father. For this, and for a thousand other reasons, I love you. Secondly, I want to thank my mother, Inga Sandström, for her selfless support in all private matters during these years, and for being the one who has “picked up the slack” when various emergencies with sick children and other practical inconveniences have arisen. Without your help, everything would have been much harder.

Regarding my development as a researcher during these years, I am first and foremost indebted to my supervisor, Associate Professor Lotta Vikström. Thank you for always keeping your door open for discussions, for your guidance and encouragement, and for your concrete and meticulous feedback on both small and large matters concerning my research. Both the level of your commitment and your prestigeless attitude toward intellectual exchange have been a source of continued inspiration during these years. I also want to thank my two excellent assistant supervisors, Lena Karlsson, PhD, and Sofia Kling, PhD, for always giving insightful feedback on the various drafts I have produced. Special thanks to Henrik Holmberg, PhD, Erling Lundvaller, PhD, and Professor Göran Broström at the Centre for Population Studies (CPS), for our many interesting and valuable discussions regarding statistical matters pertaining to my research.

I also want to thank all the participants of the higher seminar at CPS, where all my papers have been presented, for your many valuable comments. Especially, I want to thank Professor Anders Brändström and Professor Sören Edvinsson, who have chaired the seminars and made them an inclusive environment for the open exchange of ideas. In the same manner, I want to express my gratitude to the participants of the seminar group at the Umeå Centre for Gender Studies (UCGS) for their valuable comments and cross-disciplinary perspectives on my research. I especially want to ex-
press my gratitude to the chair, Åsa Andersson, PhD, for her critical perspectives and insightful objections. I have also been fortunate to be able to participate in the higher seminar at the Department of Historical, Philosophical and Religious Studies at Umeå University, and wish to thank all the participants for our valuable discussions. All three seminars have been inspiring environments to participate in, and have contributed a great deal to my working out various theoretical and methodological issues in the thesis. Special thanks are also in order to both CPS and UCGS, for providing the main funding for my PhD position. I would also like to express my gratitude to the Department of Historical, Philosophical and Religious Studies at Umeå University and UCGS for providing funding for international conferences in Utrecht in 2009 and Boston in 2011, as well as my one-month stay at the University of Michigan during the summer of 2011. The funding provided by the J.C. Kempes Memorial Fund, which made it possible for me to attend the 2010 Social Science History Conference in Chicago, was also important for the dissipation of my research and was sincerely appreciated. I am also grateful to Professor Gunnar Andersson at the Department of Sociology, Stockholm University, and to Helena Bergman, PhD, at the Department of History, Stockholm University, for agreeing to act as opponents during my mid-seminar in the spring of 2011. Your comments were of great value for the further development of my thesis. Thanks are also in order to Professor Jonny Hjelm at the Department of Historical, Philosophical and Religious Studies, Umeå University, and Mattias Strandh, PhD, at the Department of Sociology, Umeå University, who both provided valuable comments at my mid-seminar.

Further, I owe thanks to Professor Anders Brändström at the Centre for Population Studies, Umeå University, Professor Tom Ericsson at the Department of Historical, Philosophical and Religious Studies, Umeå University, Emma Lundholm, PhD, at the Department of Geography and Economic History, Umeå University, and Karin Lövgren, PhD, at the Centre for Population Studies, Umeå University, for agreeing to participate in the reading committee for the final draft of the thesis. Your comments were gratefully appreciated, and assisted me in my work to add further structure to the arguments presented in the thesis.

I would also like to sincerely thank the co-authors of Papers II and IV for the inspiring cooperation. I am grateful to Per Simonsson, PhD, at the Economic History Department, Stockholm University, whom I met at the 2009 World Economic History Conference in Utrecht and subsequently wrote the second paper of the thesis with. Many thanks also to Associate Professors Olle Stjernström and Magnus Strömgren at the Department of Geography and Economic History, Umeå University, for being willing to work with me on the fourth paper of the thesis and for being such great guys.
I am thankful to all my colleagues at the Centre for Population Studies, Ageing and Living Conditions, Centre for Sami Research, and the Demographic Data Base at Umeå University. They have all volunteered as sounding boards for research problems during coffee breaks and have made my workdays pleasant as well as interesting.

As a final word I would like to express my gratitude to my children, Gabriel and Ebba, for being a constant reminder of the important things in life and for keeping me grounded. For this I am deeply in your debt.

Glenn Sandström

Umeå, September 2012
# Table of contents

1. INTRODUCTION ........................................................................................................... 1  
   THE DIVORCE TRANSITION IN SWEDEN – A BRIEF BACKGROUND ...................... 2  
   DEFINITIONS AND DELIMITATIONS ........................................................................... 6  
   AIM OF THE THESIS .................................................................................................... 8  
   MAIN FINDINGS OF THE THESIS ............................................................................... 8

2. THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES ON INCREASING DIVORCE RATES DURING THE TWENTIETH CENTURY ................................................................. 11  
   READY, WILLING AND ABLE – AN INTEGRATED ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK.. 11  
   INDUSTRIALIZATION AND THE SPREAD OF MARKET SOCIETY – ECONOMIC RESTRUCTURING AND DIVORCE ................................................................. 14  
   INDIVIDUALIZATION AND DIVORCE – THE ROLE OF NORMATIVE CHANGES... 16  
   DE-FAMILIALIZATION – THE ROLE OF INSTITUTIONAL RESTRUCTURING  
   IN THE ABILITY TO DIVORCE ...................................................................................... 22  
   SECOND DEMOGRAPHIC TRANSITION – TOWARD AN INTEGRATED APPROACH......................................................................................................................... 24  
   FEMINIST VIEWS – THE CONNECTION BETWEEN CHANGING GENDER  
   REGIME AND DIVORCE ............................................................................................... 28  
      Power and divorce – theoretical comments ......................................................... 28  
      Feminist views on the relationship between divorce and the gendered distribution of power ................................................................. 30  
      Gender as an analytical category in demography ............................................. 36

3. DETERMINANTS OF DIVORCE – PREVIOUS RESEARCH .......... 40  
   DEMOGRAPHIC DETERMINANTS ............................................................................... 41  
   SOCIO-ECONOMIC DETERMINANTS ......................................................................... 43  
   CONTEXTUAL AND NORMATIVE DETERMINANTS .................................................. 45

4. DATA AND METHODS .................................................................................................. 49  
   DATA SOURCES ......................................................................................................... 51  
      Annual divorce statistics, Statistics Sweden....................................................... 52  
      Censuses 1910-1975, Statistics Sweden.............................................................. 52  
      The ASTRID database, Statistics Sweden............................................................. 52
Swedish newspapers and periodicals 1964-1969, National archive ................................................................. 53
Methods .................................................................................................................................................. 54

5. SUMMARY OF PAPERS.................................................................................................................. 56
Contributions by co-authors .................................................................................................................. 56


6. CONCLUDING DISCUSSION......................................................................................................... 72
Socio-economic changes facilitating the readiness to divorce .... 72

Normative and institutional change facilitating the ability and willingness to divorce ................................................................. 77

7. SVENSK SAMMANFATTNING (SUMMARY IN SWEDISH)........... 89
References .............................................................................................................................................. 92
1. Introduction

In Sweden, and generally in the Western industrialized world, divorce has become a common feature of social life that all married couples must consider as a possible outcome of their marriage. For couples married since the early 1980s, nearly one in two Swedish marriages are likely to end in divorce.\(^1\) This stands in stark contrast to the situation at the beginning of the twentieth century, when divorce was still very rare. During the 1910s approximately 450 couples filed for divorce annually, out of a total married population of nearly 1.7 million.\(^2\) Driven by concerns over falling marriage rates, the Swedish parliament passed a new divorce law in 1915 that included no-fault grounds for divorce, which considerably reduced the legal constraints against divorce.\(^3\) Although the divorce rate did not increase dramatically in the short term, its long-term growth gained momentum in the decades that followed. In 1974, the Swedish parliament passed the divorce law that remains in effect today, which made divorce available on an individual basis, without any requirements for a prior separation or for the plaintiff to state reasons for the decision.\(^4\) The same year the number of divorces per 1,000 married women reached 14.33, a figure that has not yet been surpassed although the divorce rate has stabilized at a high level.\(^5\) This means that the probability of experiencing a divorce since the mid-1970s has been on average more than 20 times higher in comparison to the early twentieth century. The main theme of this thesis is how this marked change in demographic behavior is interconnected with the economic, institutional and normative restructuring of Swedish society during the twentieth century.

---


\(^3\) No-fault grounds means that the court does not need to investigate the cause for the couple’s decision to file for divorce. For a discussion of the political motives for the new legislation see Kari Melby et al., *The Nordic model of marriage and the welfare state* (Copenhagen: Nordic Council of Ministers, 2000); Kari Melby et al., *Inte ett ord om kärlek: äktenskap och politik i Norden ca 1850-1930* (Göteborg: Makadam, 2006).

\(^4\) The only limitation in the individual right to an immediate divorce the 1974 divorce law is a mandatory waiting period of 6 months if the couple has children under the age of 16 years or if one of the spouses actively opposes the divorce. See “Äktenskapsbalken 1987:230,” in *Svensk författningssamling* (Stockholm: Thomson Fakta AB, 2009).

An integral part of the reshaping of Sweden into an industrial society during the past century is thus a fundamental reorganization of family life and sexuality. The monoculture of marriage as a life-long commitment, and the only form of socially acceptable heterosexual union for cohabitation and reproduction, is being replaced by an order of intimate life in which close relationships are much more contingent, more diverse, and open to personal choice. As divorce can be regarded as a primary indicator of these societal changes, it can be argued that the study of divorce has wider implications than being just a study of the event itself. Arguably, divorce can function as a looking glass through which we are able to study a wider historical landscape. Changes to marital stability appear to be an integral part of the cultural and economic reshaping of Western industrialized countries during the twentieth century. Investigating the development of divorce, what types of men and women dissolved their marriages, and how divorce was viewed by the surrounding society, informs us on a broad set of issues regarding societal changes. In particular, divorce reflects the changes that have occurred in the gender regime, the functions of the family and the views of men and women on close relationships in general. The effects of these changes penetrate deeply into the personal sphere of men and women, as it determines the external circumstances under which people must struggle to achieve personal happiness and to lead a life that is connected to significant others.

Consequently, an extensive amount of both empirical and theoretical research has been done on the history of divorce internationally in academic disciplines such as demography, sociology, economics and gender studies. An overarching theme in these works is that the decreased stability of marriage is a result of industrialization and the spread of market society. Economic explanations have strongly focused on how the spread of the dual-provider model has resulted in decreased economic interdependence between family members, while cultural models have asserted the increased significance of individualism in Western market societies.

The divorce transition in Sweden – a brief background

The history of the twentieth century in Sweden represents an interesting case for the study of the divorce transition, given the emphasis on individualism, gender equality and decreased economic interdependence in the theoretical models on increasing divorce. Ideological change came early in Sweden. Already during the nineteenth century, Nordic authors such as August Strindberg, Carl Jonas Love Almquist and Henrik Ibsen all wrote literature

---

that advocated a liberal view on marriage that was highly critical of the puerile state of dependence that marriage invoked on women. Their works contributed to the onset of an intense discussion in the Nordic countries on women’s legal status, and integrated with the demands of the first wave of feminism. This debate resulted in a string of reforms that recognized women as independent legal subjects as well as a far-reaching modernization of marital law. During the 1910s the Swedish parliament passed laws of universal suffrage, granted married women legal majority and equal rights to community property, and granted divorcees the right to sue for alimony. The new marital law of 1915 has been characterized as markedly progressive, in the respect that it permitted no-fault divorce more than 50 years before similar legislation was introduced in most other Western countries. Scholars argue that the early breakthrough of liberal principles and gender equality in Nordic politics makes it possible to talk of a specific Nordic model of marriage that contrasts with the rest of Europe and the US. This avant-garde position among the Western states has remained intact during the course of the twentieth century, and Sweden has been characterized as one of the most gender-equal societies in the world, with feminist claims having been extensively incorporated into the political culture.

Although economic restructuring into an industrial economy occurred late in Sweden as compared to many other Western countries, it progressed quickly during the first decades of the twentieth century and resulted in an extensive commodification of male and female labor. After the Second World War, modernization accelerated as Sweden benefited from an intact infrastructure due to the country’s neutrality during the war. Sweden could benefit from the high demand for industrial goods after 1948, when the

---

7 It should be noted that Strindberg’s views can hardly be regarded as feminist. Although he argued for independence between men and women within marriage, he did so from a strongly misogynist point of view. Stig Hellsten, Kyrklig och radikal äktenskapsuppfattning i striden kring C. J. L. Almqvists “Det går an” (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1951), 231–239; Henrik Berggren and Lars Trägårdh, Är svensken människa?: gemenskap och oberoende i det moderna Sverige (Stockholm: Norstedt, 2006), 127–130.

8 Melby et al., The Nordic model of marriage and the welfare state, 655–657; Melby et al., Inte ett ord om kärlek, 113–116.


Marshall Plan was adopted and the rebuilding of Europe started. The result was very high levels of economic growth in the decades that followed the Second World War, which brought a widespread industrialization of the economy and an urbanization of the population. The female labor force participation rate grew to one of the highest in the world during the 1960s, and reached the level of male participation during the 1980s. Scholars argue that the type of welfare-state capitalism that has developed in the Scandinavian countries has reduced the individual’s dependence on family more than in other Western societies, and that state policy has worked to maximize the relative economic independence of women by strongly advocating female employment opportunities.

Figure 1 shows the development of divorce in Sweden from the 1880s to 2000 in relative terms as a rate per 1,000 married women, which accounts for changes in the number of married individuals. It is clear that the propensity for divorce has grown in an almost exponential fashion, starting slowly already during the last decades of the nineteenth century to reach a peak corresponding to 14.33 divorces annually per 1,000 married women in 1974. Since then, the divorce rate has stabilized at approximately the levels reached during the 1970s. In the long-term development, the surge in the divorce rate from 1941 to the beginning of the 1950s and the rapid increase during 1963-1974 stand out as the most dynamic periods in Sweden. Hence, it seems as if the current divorce behavior was established during the latter parts of the 1960s and the early 1970s. Another aspect of the deinstitutionalization of marriage is also evident in Figure 1 in terms of the long-term decline in marriage rates during the second half of the twentieth century. Since the late 1960s the combination of decreasing marriage rates, high divorce rates and old marriages being dissolved by death has meant that the proportion of the adult population that is married has embarked on a trend of systematic decrease.

A comparison of the development of divorce in Sweden with that in other Western countries shows that the sharp increase in the divorce rate during the twentieth century is by no means unique. International comparisons show that the overall tendency of increase, and the timings of the surge in the divorce rate, have been similar across Western nations during the twentieth century. In Europe, the countries with the highest levels of di-


orce have been Sweden, Denmark and Great Britain, with the Protestant Northern European countries generally exhibiting higher divorce rates than the Catholic countries in Southern Europe.\textsuperscript{13}

![Figure 1: Number of divorces per 1,000 married women, marriages per 1,000 inhabitants and percentage of population married in Sweden 1880-2000.](image)


In comparison to the international context, the history of divorce during the twentieth century has received little scholarly attention in Sweden. Research has primarily been conducted by demographers and sociologists, and has almost exclusively focused on the development since the 1970s.\textsuperscript{14} However,


\textsuperscript{14} Jan M. Hoem, *Trends and patterns in Swedish divorce risks 1971-1989: a case of modern demographic analysis* (Stockholm: Demography Unit, 1992); Britta Hoem and Jan M. Hoem, *Dissolution in Sweden: the breakup of conjugal unions to Swedish women born in 1936-60* (Stockholm research reports in demography (Stockholm: Demography Unit, 1988); Ying Hong, *Patterns
at this point in time the divorce rate had already reached the levels of today and the entire transition period from a low to high divorce rate regime has only been briefly discussed as part of other research questions. These works have discussed the influence of increased divorce on the distribution of consumption between family members, on female labor force participation, and on marital legislation. Historical demographers and social historians have thus not investigated the long history of the transformation from a low to high divorce rate regime in Sweden, which means that there is an important void to be filled regarding the history of the family in Sweden during the twentieth century.

Definitions and delimitations

The central outcome variable of this thesis is de jure divorce as a legal event. Marriage disruption of other kinds, such as de facto separations, did of course occur but are not investigated in this study. That people choose — or more likely are forced — to live separately rather than dissolving their marriage indicates a lack of freedom to individually choose whom to live with and for how long. Assuming that the presence of such constraints will tend to reduce the number of people who actually separate, the aggregate level of divorce will be a functioning proxy for the number of actual marital disruptions and a good indicator of the supply and demand for dissolving a union at different points in time.

Divorce is an issue that is infused with normative connotations that vary among individuals depending on the intersections of a wide range of personal traits, of which political and religious outlook are some of the more important. Historically, the dominant perspective on divorce, in both popular and academic discourse, has been to regard it as a “social problem” that holds various adverse consequences for the individuals involved. It is only


15 Per Simonsson, Bidrag till familjens ekonomiska historia: inflytande över konsumenten inom svenska hushåll under 1900-talet (Stockholms universitet, 2005); Maria Stanfors, Mellan arbete och familj: ett dilemma för kvinnor i 1900-talets Sverige (Stockholm: SNS förlag, 2007); Melby et al., The Nordic model of marriage and the welfare state; Melby et al., Inte ett ord om kärlek; Catrine Andersson, Hundra år av tvåsamtet: äktenskapet i svenska statliga utredningar 1909–2009 (Lund: Arkiv, 2011).
during the past decades that divorce and divorcees have lost some of these dominantly negative connotations. Permissive attitudes toward divorce have been shown to be more prevalent in countries like Sweden that have moved the furthest toward the demographic regime characteristic of a second demographic transition.\(^\text{16}\)

In academic discourse, the perspectives suggested in gender studies and by theorists such as Antony Giddens — basically expressing a view on divorce as both a cause and a consequence of a democratization of the family — are good examples of a greater diversity in the interpretations of the consequences of divorce.

With regard to the issue of normativity, clarifications on some of the concepts used in the quantitative studies of this thesis are necessary. Several of the statistical methods applied in the various papers were originally developed in mortality studies and epidemiology, and use concepts such as “risk” and “survival”. Readers who have their academic basis in more qualitatively oriented fields of research can interpret these concepts as implying a value regarding the desirability of the event itself. It is important to stress that this is not the intended connotation and that these concepts are used in statistical analyses neutrally, partly for historical reasons but mainly to ensure conceptual clarity regarding exactly what type of outcome measure is used. Furthermore, the aim of this thesis is not to investigate the various consequences of divorce — which can be interpreted as positive or negative depending on personal outlook — but to analyze the connections between societal changes and the development of new demographic behavior.

Temporally the thesis covers the development of divorce in Sweden during the period 1915-1974, although for matters of comparison some outlooks are shown on contemporary patterns of divorce and on the period prior to 1915. The choice of this delimitation was motivated by three considerations. Firstly, the divorce law of 1915 remains in effect during the entire research period, which means that there is a consistent legal framework that holds the ability to divorce fairly stable. Secondly, almost the entire transition from a low to high divorce rate regime in Sweden occurred between these two time points. Since the sharp peak of 26,802 divorces in 1974, the divorce rate has leveled off and stabilized at approximately 20,000 divorces a year. Consequently, this means that the current divorce behavior was established by the mid-1970s. Thirdly, as this study explores the growing instability of formal marriages and does not consider other types of unions, it is an advantage if the degree of unmarried cohabitation is low. Oth-

erwise, this might work as a disturbing factor as an increasing number of union disruptions will not be registered by the dependent variable. Research on the prevalence of unmarried cohabitation shows that it was only during the late 1960s that these unions started to increase from low levels. In 1974, 88% of all couples engaged in cohabitation were married, which means that by the end of the period examined in this study cohabitation was still fairly marginal. Given these arguments, 1974 was chosen as a good finishing point for the study.

Aim of the thesis

The overarching aim of this thesis is to extend the historical scope of the research on divorce in Sweden by providing an analysis of how the variations in the divorce rate over time and across geographical areas are connected to an economic, normative and institutional restructuring of Swedish society during the period 1915-1974. Central questions that will be addressed are:

How have the socio-economic and demographical characteristics of Swedish men and women influenced the propensity for marital disruption during the period under research?

How did the long-term development of aggregate levels of divorce covary with indicators of a) an economic restructuring of Sweden into a modern industrial economy; b) institutional changes in legislation and the development of the welfare state; and c) normative changes pertaining to marriage, sexuality, and gender regime?

Answering these questions will help to achieve a better understanding of how societal changes in Sweden are linked to the demographic patterns that have characterized marital dissolution during the twentieth century.

Main findings of the thesis

Prior to giving a more detailed account of previous research relevant to this thesis and the different theoretical perspectives on divorce that have been important for the interpretation of empirical patterns in the separate papers, a brief overview of the main results of the thesis will be given below. This thesis is the first attempt to write a history of the divorce transition in Sweden that covers the entire shift from a low divorce rate regime in the early twentieth century until the peak and subsequent stabilization of the divorce rate at a high level after 1974. It is argued that a historical perspective is necessary, as the results show that there have been both continuity and

---

change in the demographic and socio-economic determinants of divorce. Important indicators such as gendered initiative, socio-economic position and children have influenced the propensity for divorce in different ways during the course of the development, which means that a backward extrapolation of contemporary patterns of divorce is not sufficient for understanding how decreased marital stability is linked to historical change.

A short summary of the findings is that they indicate that the economic reshaping of Sweden into a modern market economy is at the center of the process that has resulted in decreased marital stability during the twentieth century. The increased integration of both men and women into market processes outside the family has resulted in decreased economic interdependence between spouses, which in turn has decreased the economic constraints to divorce for both genders. This is supported by the finding that indicators of female economic self-sufficiency have been associated with increased propensities for divorce, both during the early twentieth century as well as during the most intensive growth period of divorce during the 1960s and early 1970s. That changes in the constraints experienced by women have been important is further emphasized by the finding that women have been more prone than men to initiate divorce, and that this gendered pattern of divorce in Sweden was established already during the early twentieth century.

Regarding the role of economic changes, the study further finds that the decrease in marital stability is connected not only to a shift in the provider model, but also to the way sustained economic growth has resulted in a general increase in the resources available to individuals, as proposed by the socio-economic growth hypothesis. The results show that there has been a shift from a positive to a negative socio-economic gradient of divorce during the twentieth century, which can be interpreted as a process of equalization in the capacity for exit from a marriage between both genders and social classes. The results show that divorce was much more common in groups with high incomes and high levels of education than in the low socio-economic strata in the early twentieth century, but that this relationship had been reversed by the early 1960s. By then it was rather couples in low-income working-class occupations who exhibited the highest probability of divorce, which is a pattern that appears to have persisted since then. These findings can be used to argue that an economic restructuring, in terms of a general increase and a more even distribution of economic resources between both genders and social classes, has facilitated individuals’ possibilities to sustain themselves as singles independent of family ties, making it possible for growing numbers to act on a demand for divorce.

However, another result of the thesis is that it is not possible to limit the analysis to a strictly economic perspective, but rather that economic changes have interacted with, and been reinforced by, changes in values as well as in
institutions during the periods when widespread and rapid behavioral change has occurred. As evident in Figure 1, the positive secular trend established already during the late nineteenth century has not been uniform over time. In fact, more than four-fifths of the total increase from one divorce per 1,000 married females in 1915 to 14 in 1974 is concentrated to two time periods, namely 1941-1951 and 1963-1974. The analysis shows that these periods of rapid growth in the aggregate levels of divorce also stand out as periods in Swedish history when attitudes toward family, marriage and sexuality changed more rapidly toward values that can be regarded as permissive, secular and open to individual freedom of choice.

Further, the growth periods during the 1940s and 1960s are also characterized by institutional restructuring in terms of a rapid expansion of the Swedish welfare state. In the thesis it is argued that the marked increase in government services and social security at these time points integrated with and reinforced economic restructuring in a way that worked to “defamilialize” individuals and make them less dependent on family ties for social security. Arguably, institutional changes that have resulted in decreased socio-economic differentials have been important for making single life more feasible for women and low-income groups, which helps to explain why a shift from a positive to negative socio-economic gradient of divorce has occurred.

In the thesis it is argued that the timings of substantial behavioral change become difficult to understand if the analytical perspective does not also explicitly incorporate how such contextual-level changes in values and institutions have integrated with changes in the provider model and the economy in a way that has increased both the supply and demand for divorce during these dynamic periods of the divorce transition in Sweden.
2. Theoretical perspectives on increasing divorce rates during the twentieth century

As mentioned above, several theoretical perspectives have been suggested as attempts to explain why Western marriages have become less durable. Broadly conceived, they all focus on the consequences of industrialization and the spread of market society, and rely on some combination of normative, institutional and material changes produced by these processes. Although there is agreement that the rising standard of living and the incorporation of both men and women into market processes outside the household are important forms of restructuring that help explain the decrease in marital stability, there are substantial differences in how the causal links are viewed and whether a structural or individual level of analysis should be applied. This section identifies the main differences and similarities between these perspectives by comparing their respective causal models and contrasting them with an overarching analytical framework for behavioral change, suggested by the Princeton demographer Ansley J. Coale.

Ready, willing and able – an integrated analytical framework

Combining methods as well as expanding the types of independent variables used to estimate models can be a way to gain a better understanding of changing family behavior. However, the research design must also apply an analytical model that can account for both material and non-material changes, to be able to adequately integrate the results reached from different methods. Ron Lesthaeghe argues for this kind of integrated approach in his work on the theory of a Second Demographic Transition. For him, the solution is to incorporate a broader set of variables that takes into account both socio-economic and normative changes, and to adopt a multi-dimensional model of the type suggested by Ansley J. Coale in his Ready, Willing and Able (RWA) formulation. In a 1973 paper, Coale developed the RWA conceptualization as a way to better explain the historical leads and lags in the fertility transition in Europe. His rationale for suggesting a multi-dimensional model was the realization that models primarily centering

---

20 Ibid.
on economic restructuring failed to consistently account for the onset of the fertility transition in different parts of Europe. The basic idea of Coale’s approach is that behavioral change can only come about when normative, economic and technical-institutional preconditions simultaneously interact and augment new behavior. If one of the factors is resistant to change, it acts as a bottleneck that will prevent changes in the demographic regime. This is a weakest-link perspective on behavioral change that assumes that economic, cultural and institutional conditions must change in conjunction with and reinforce one another.

However, the model proposed by Coale in 1973 received only limited attention until Ron Lesthaeghe and Camille Vanderhoeft discussed it in an article in 2001. In this article, they convincingly argue that Coale’s model can be used as a tool to structure the analysis of transitions to new demographic behaviors. Lesthaeghe has also made use of Coale’s model to explain the temporal and geographical differentials in the onset of sub-replacement fertility, which is a key determinant in his theory of a second demographic transition. However, Coale’s model has thus far not been used to analyze the rise in divorce during the twentieth century. An advantage of using a model such as Coale’s, which combines multiple theoretical constructs that must work in conjunction, is that it avoids the theoretical tension between perspectives that emphasize either normative or economic factors as main causes for historical change. Just like the “nature vs. nurture” debate in biological research, such distinctions risk becoming an intellectual blind alley for questions of why change occurs at a particular time and place. As opposed to an analytical dichotomy of this kind, Coale argues for a pragmatic position that assumes that changes in both material and cultural conditions are necessary for a broad-scale adoption of new behavior.

The first factor in Coale’s model, readiness, refers to the economic utility effects of the behavior in question. For example, if family planning appears advantageous to individuals in a personal cost-benefit analysis, this will work as an incentive for them to limit the number of children they give birth to. However, actions are not solely determined by rational considerations regarding the potential gains and losses of choosing a particular course of action. Economic gains from family planning alone will not give rise to any considerable drop in fertility if the individuals harbor internalized norms that the control of fertility is morally unacceptable.


Coale terms this normative component of behavior *willingness*. With this second factor, Coale acknowledges that a demographic innovation will not become generalized if the behavior runs contrary to strong and prevailing normative structures in society. If such attitudes are dominant this will severely limit the number of individuals who choose to implement the behavior in question, regardless of the utility gains it might entail. Willingness will be determined on an individual level, to the extent that traditional codes of conduct are internalized and determine private moral considerations. Irrespective of these private ethical considerations, societal norms will also exert a structural influence on personal decision-making. Individuals will always have to consider the risk of sanctions from the surrounding social environment, to the extent a behavior can become known to others. So even in cases in which contraception or divorce might be regarded as acceptable and advantageous on a personal level, the risk of social stigma can function as a strong disincentive that ensures that most people will refrain from the behavior.

The third and final dimension of Coale’s model, *ability*, refers to institutional-technical conditions determining the feasibility of the behavior. With regard to fertility, this is mainly the availability of and knowledge about methods for contraception, as well as legal constraints against certain methods such as abortion. Thus, one should not think of ability in purely technological terms; it can just as well refer to the legal institutional structures that govern the conditions on which divorce is granted. Concerning divorce behavior, the way the legal regime constrains access to divorce is the most evident aspect that can be interpreted as part of the ability dimension. Of course, it will not matter how advantageous divorce might be from a utility perspective, or how acceptable it is from a normative point of view, if it is impossible to actually get a divorce through the legal system. Other aspects of the institutional setting can also be regarded as part of the ability dimension. One such example is the access to institutionalized childcare, which is of great importance for the feasibility of sustaining a single life if one is a parent.

It is important to note, however, that the these different factors in Coale’s model are strongly interconnected and that a change in one of the dimensions will likely transfer to changes in the others. For example, normative changes whereby divorce becomes more accepted will likely influence the legal regime in the long run. A change in institutional settings, such as the access to public childcare, child allowances, housing benefits for single parents, etc., will have economic effects that influence the utility calculations of individuals with small children when they contemplate getting a divorce. Coale’s model is thus an analytical tool that helps to structure the analysis in which the concepts used to label different influences on the demographic behavior are dynamically dependent on one another. In the concluding sec-
tion of the thesis, Coale’s model will be used to interpret the results reached in the different empirical studies conducted in the separate research papers. Although Coale’s model is not explicitly mentioned in several of the papers, the epistemological vantage point of regarding normative, institutional and economic driving forces as mutually important for the establishment of new behavior has directed the work on the thesis since its early phase. It is thus primarily in this summary analysis of the complete thesis that the RWA model is systematically applied as a way to integrate the results reached in the papers, which test different aspects of divorce theory and apply different methodological approaches.

The rest of the section will discuss the different theoretical perspectives that have been suggested as explanations for the divorce transition in Western societies. It will be argued that these theories are important for the understanding of the different processes that have produced the divorce transition. However, standing alone they tend to be incomplete and fail to sufficiently acknowledge all the necessary aspects of how increased divorce rates have come about. To varying degrees they focus on a particular subset of determinants that are primarily economic, normative or institutional, and disregard the way these forms of restructuring are dynamically interconnected in a process that produces behavioral change. In this thesis I will argue that Coale’s framework can be used as a pragmatic approach to integrate the analytical power of these different perspectives in a way that can be applied in empirical research.

**Industrialization and the spread of market society – economic restructuring and divorce**

The theoretical discussion in demography regarding the connection between changing economic structures and decreased family stability has strongly emphasized the importance of the incorporation of women into market processes outside the family. Essentially this has been a readiness perspective on divorce, arguing that rising educational levels and increased labor force participation among married women have reduced both the economic constraints to divorce and the gains from marriage. For women, the access to individually based incomes has increased their level of independence and their possibility to act on unsatisfactory circumstances in their marriages. In these histories, divorce is viewed as a consumer good that can be acquired to the extent that it is affordable. Dysfunctional marriages, previously kept intact by strong economic disincentives, can thus be dissolved in increasing numbers as divorce becomes available as an option due to increasing afflu-

---

ence and more and more individuals being able to manage to sustain a single household.

This rational-choice perspective on divorce has been most extensively elaborated on in economics, but has also had a strong influence on demographic research. Gary Becker’s neoclassical theory of a household production function and his specialization and trading model, which focuses on micro-economic processes of utility maximization within the family, have come to form a basis for this so-called independence hypothesis of marital instability. Jacob Mincer and Robert J. Willis have provided other important contributions to this model, and the neoclassical approach to family dynamics is often given the overarching term New Home Economics.24

Becker argues that the individual decision to terminate a marriage is primarily determined by the economic and psychological utility gains from remaining married as opposed to being single. Becker proposes that symmetrical labor force participation and a decreased gender role specialization within marriage have reduced both the cost of divorce and the utility of remaining married for both spouses.25 The idea is that when the gendered specialization between market and non-market work disappears, the utility of remaining married decreases because there are no longer any differences in skills that can be traded between the spouses.26 Although the independence effect will be counteracted by a negative income effect, as both spouses will benefit from the increase in family income, the net effect on divorce propensities is thought to be positive among proponents of the specialization and trading model.27 Characteristic of this readiness perspective is a focus on a micro-level analysis of cost-benefit calculations of individuals. This perspective is based on an ontology whereby individuals are rational actors who have the ability to consciously act on correct information in trying to balance their utility against their disutility at each particular point in time.

24 The Becker-Mincer-Willis model of the household production function is sometimes also used to label their combined contributions. The main contributions by Mincer and Willis are found in Jacob Mincer, "Market prices, opportunity costs, and income effects," in Measurement in economics: studies in mathematical economics and econometrics in memory of Yehuda Grunfeld, ed. Carl F. Christ (Stanford University Press, 1963); Robert J. Willis, “A New Approach to the Economic Theory of Fertility Behavior,” Journal of Political Economy 81, no. 2 (1973): 14–64.


The Beckerian approach has received wide criticism for being too simplistic in its assumptions about what type of factors are involved in utility maximization in a marriage, as well as for disregarding how normative influences interact with economic calculations. Valerie Kincade Oppenheimer argues that the model is anachronistic in a setting where female employment is generalized and modern flexible labor markets have resulted in lowered employment security on the individual level. In such a setting, the reduced sustenance risks experienced by dual-earner households result in a situation in which the utility of marriage (or cohabitation) is highest when both spouses make a significant contribution to household earnings. Ron Lesthaeghe focuses on the role of normative factors and argues that the Beckerian model is incomplete, as it fails to incorporate how changes in the willingness dimension have contributed to increased divorce rates and also fails to specify any mechanisms that can link material to non-material driving forces.

**Individualization and divorce – the role of normative changes**

If economics, and to some extent demography, have had a strong focus on the readiness dimension and micro-level analysis, sociologists have more extensively analyzed how socio-economic changes have worked to establish norms that have increased the willingness to divorce. Also, the discussion has centered on the macro-structural level and on assumptions that subjects cannot be regarded as fully rational and autonomously acting individuals. Rather, this perspective assumes that actions are always highly determined by social processes of internalization that act on the individual through structural and discursive mechanisms.

Among sociologists, the tendency for decreasing family stability and the spread of more liberal values regarding marriage, family and sexuality have generated intense theoretical discussion during the past couple of decades. Influential sociologists such as Niklas Luhman, Zygmunt Bauman, Anthony Giddens and Ulrich Beck together with his wife Elisabeth Beck-Gersheim, have all published works on the subject. Outside the field of sociology, the

---


interpretation that has received the most attention is the so-called individualization hypothesis, asserted in the works of Ulrich Beck and Antony Giddens. Although Giddens and Beck have presented separate works on this subject, there is a high degree of overlap and agreement between their respective accounts.

A highly condensed version of Beck and Giddens’s view is that the increased influence of market mechanisms on the everyday lives of men and women has caused individuals to gradually distance themselves from collective attitudes of self-sacrifice, duty and social conformity. Instead, individualistic values of autonomy, emotional fulfillment and self-realization have increasingly come to determine subjects’ decision-making process. These normative changes have fostered new views on marriage as a democratic and contingent relationship, dependent on reoccurring negotiations that must be completed successfully if the relationship is to survive. Individual expectations concerning marriage have also increased, due to an incorporation of ideals of romantic love and a greater emphasis on emotional and sexual fulfillment. The consequence has been that relationships have become inherently unstable, and can only be sustained as long as both individuals find that the gains outweigh the costs in comparison to other available options. Giddens labels this kind of relationship “pure”, while Beck prefers the term “individualized”.31

The individualized relationship that has developed during the twentieth century is fundamentally different from the traditional marriage, which mainly had economic and social functions. During pre-industrial times, the choice of partner was primarily driven by the imperative to ensure the economic security and social standing of one’s family. For the security of sustenance needs, the individual was highly dependent on being part of a kinship network that worked together collectively to handle the everyday perils of making ends meet. Marriage and family constituted the primary way of organizing labor on farms and in small businesses, and tradition dictated strict roles for both the genders and the generations. Under such circumstances, the personal preferences of the individual were highly constrained by family interests of preserving status and property, as well as by conventions regarding religion, social class and ethnicity.32


Giddens and Beck both stress the importance of the idea of romantic love and its growing influence on the discourse of bourgeois marriage during the nineteenth century. The traditional idea of marriage as an economic unit in which family members helped each other to make a living was reinterpreted into a couple sharing emotions and intimacy, in a private sphere separate from the competitiveness of life in the public arena. This new view on marriage as founded on emotional preferences worked to undermine the norms that had previously limited the free choice of a partner for men and women. In Beck’s and Giddens’s accounts, the increased legitimacy of romantic love facilitated the breaking up of the “traditional ties, beliefs and social relationships” that had governed the pre-industrial marriage. These views on marriage as being primarily an emotional attachment successively spread to other groups in Western societies, and became an integral part of the norms governing the modern marriage. Also, the increased importance attached to personal feelings in choosing whom to marry opened up to the possibility that a marriage was not worth maintaining if it failed to be emotionally and sexually fulfilling.

Individualization, expressed as a greater emphasis on romantic love during the nineteenth century, integrated with the effects of market capitalism during the twentieth century in a way that has destabilized Western marriages. The bourgeois family ideal based on a single-provider model managed to effectively conceal the tension between market capitalism and stable marriages, as it ensured that the individualization process primarily influenced the standard biography of men. Family stability could thus be preserved by means of a polarized gender regime, where market participation was reserved for the husband. During the twentieth century, Western politics have increasingly incorporated an imperative of economic growth as the sine qua non of political discourse. Over time this has meant that an increasing proportion of the population has been incorporated into market work. After the Second World War the single-provider model came increasingly into question, and was identified as a gross waste of productive labor. The economic dependence of women in marriage was also ideologically branded as a primary cause of the subjection of women. Policy as well as ideological

36 Yvonne Hirdman, “Kvinnorna i välfärdsstaten,” in *Den svenska modellen*, ed. Per Thullberg and Kjell Östberg (Lund: Studentlitteratur, 1994), 190; Christina Florin, “Skatten som be-
change thus stimulated increasing numbers of married women to become directly incorporated into the market economy as producers by engaging in wage labor outside the home. Beck argues that the effect was that the structural influence of market processes penetrated the private sphere and worked to destabilize marriages. The spread of the dual-provider model made it necessary for married women to act as individuals engaged in economic competition on the labor market, rather than functioning as a domestic support system for the market activities of their husbands. Consequently, the socio-economic changes connected to the development of consumer capitalism during the twentieth century have accelerated individualization and resulted in a convergence of the standard biographies of men and women. Beck contends that this development does not foster union stability, as wives and husbands alike are forced to adapt to the demands of the market and:

[...] build up a life of their own by way of the labor market, training and mobility, and if need be to pursue this life at the cost of their commitment to family, relations, and friends.37

Individualization in this sense thus entails that husbands and wives are removed from the strict boundaries and roles of a polarized gender regime. At the same time, this introduces a multitude of opportunities for interests to collide within marriage, as both sexes are forced to reconcile the imperative of individual market productivity with the reproductive responsibilities of the private sphere.38

A fundamental difference from the preordained and predictable nature of the traditional marriage is that modern marriages always have to be able to stand the test of being the best possible option compared to other alternatives. Both Giddens and Beck stress that a central aspect of modernity is its reflexive nature.39 In a cultural order in which the subject is always confronted with a multitude of alternatives that are not limited by the constraints of tradition, it transforms “identity from a given into a task”.40

37 Italics from original source, Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, The normal chaos of love, 6.
the absence of an externally produced answer to the question of “who I really am”, it becomes a necessity for the subject to actively construct and monitor a coherent sense of self-identity. This has to be achieved by means of continuous self-observation and reflexive evaluation of past and present choices.41 Relationships and marriage are central components in this choice biography, according to Giddens:

A pure relationship is one in which the external criteria have become dissolved: the relationship exists solely for whatever rewards the relationship as such can deliver. In the context of the pure relationship, trust can be mobilized only by a process of mutual disclosure. Trust, in other words, can by definition no longer be anchored in criteria outside the relationship itself – such as criteria of kinship, social duty or traditional obligation. Like self-identity, with which it is closely intertwined, the pure relationship has to be reflexively controlled over the long term, against the backdrop of external transitions and transformations.42

Subjects are thus forced to choose a way of life among a multitude of available options: How should I live; Should I live with you or somebody else; Should we have children; If so, who should take care of them; Should one of us or both have a career; How do we share the work at home? As tradition loses its grip, the number of choices radically increase and insert into marriage a multitude of questions that have to be resolved successfully through negotiations, which might or might not fail, making marriage inherently unstable.

Both Beck and Giddens point to the development of market capitalism into a society of mass consumption as an important structural condition for the individualization of marriage. However, this focus on the effects of market mechanisms is more pronounced in Beck’s account than in Giddens’s. Giddens adds another perspective by proposing that technological change and modern science have transformed the conditions of sexuality in a direct way and have thus played a part in the normative changes regarding marriage. According to Giddens, the disentanglement of reproduction from sexuality, made possible by the spread of modern contraceptive technology, has produced a new form of sexuality that he calls “plastic”, which is central to the functioning of the pure relationship. As sexuality is decoupled from reproduction and the constant threat of childbirth, it can become a moldable part of self-identity that is open to personal choice in the same way as

42 Ibid., 6.
the pure relationship became open when the economic interdependence between spouses subsided. When reproduction and sexuality are separated, sexuality can be engaged in freely and for its own sake, and thus become part of the reflexive construction of self-identity. Consequently, sexuality and the fulfillment of sexual needs come to comprise an important part of the individualized marriage. This entails that a lack of sexual compatibility and mutual sexual fulfillment has become a valid reason for men and women to dissolve their marriages.

Giddens regards the changes outlined above as a driving force behind the development of a more symmetrical gender regime in Western countries during the twentieth century. As pure relationships entail an institutionalization of the principle of personal autonomy, the changes that have produced the pure relationship bear with them the potential for a truly democratic relationship between men and women within marriage. Beck, on the other hand, paints a much more pessimistic view of the ability of the institution of marriage to adapt to the changed circumstances. Although he argues that both men and women have a fundamental right to being treated as equal individuals, Beck states that we cannot expect that this will lead to “a happy world of cooperative equals but to separateness and diverging interests”. Beck concludes that individualization undermines the prerequisites for long-term conjugal relationships and promotes single life:

The existence led by single people is not a peculiar side-effect of social change; it is the archetypical existence behind a full market economy. According to the logic of the market we do not have any social ties[…]

The more both men and women accept these imperatives of the market, and strive to be independent, the less able they will be to maintain any close relationships to significant others. Zygmunt Bauman strongly asserts this argument in his book Liquid Love, and states that the archetypical personality produced by the growing influence of market processes on everyday life is:

---

46 Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, The normal chaos of love, 145.
47 Ibid.
[...] men and women without social bonds. They are the ideal residents of the market economy and the type that makes the GDP watchers happy.48

What unites scholars such as Beck and Giddens as well as Bauman is the idea that the divorce transition during the twentieth century can be explained by a penetration of market rationality into the family that in turn has increased the willingness of men and women to divorce one another. Although the focus is on changing norms as a primary mechanism, the idea is that behind these normative changes lies the economic restructuring of Western society that has resulted in a penetration of individually based market rationality into family life. Increased readiness in terms of decreased economic interdependence, as well as institutional changes that have increased the ability to divorce, are implicit in individualization theory but are not at the forefront of the analysis, which is strongly focused on the increased significance of individualism as a direct cause.

De-familialization – the role of institutional restructuring in the ability to divorce

Gøsta Esping-Andersen’s conceptualization regarding the effects of different types of welfare regimes is not explicitly aimed at explaining divorce. However, his concept of de-familialization is nonetheless highly informative concerning how the development of state institutions works to either increase or decrease individuals’ dependence on family for social security. As a consequence, the design of state institutions and social policy will function as an important determinant of individuals’ ability to sustain themselves as singles, and consequently their ability to dissolve a marriage they feel is unsatisfactory to them. An example in the Swedish case is the expansion of inexpensive state-provided childcare during the late 1960s.49 This reform must have substantially decreased the disincentives for married parents to divorce as it lowered the structural barriers to the labor force participation of single parents — i.e., single mothers.

Esping-Andersen’s model of welfare regimes is based on a typologization of how different states distribute and manage sustenance risks between state, market and families.50 “Familialistic” states are characterized by poli-

48 Italics in original source, Bauman, Liquid love, 69.
cies that assign most or all welfare obligations to the household, while a “de-familialized” welfare regime works to “maximize the individuals’ command of economic resources independently of familial or conjugal reciprocities.” A process of de-familialization is thus characterized by a reallocation of social service production and insurance functions from the family to either a welfare state or the market. In a de-familialized welfare regime, either the state or the market absorbs the social risks of the individual through insurance systems that are individually based and paid for either collectively through taxes or privately by the individuals themselves.

According to Esping-Andersen, the archetypical example of de-familialization through market is the US, where government-produced social services are limited and access is exclusively aimed at low-income groups who are unable to buy the services on the open market. Welfare functions such as child-, elderly- and health-care are thus primarily produced by private companies and bought by the households — that can afford to do so — on the open market. The opposite model is a de-familialization through the welfare state, as most typically exemplified by the extensive social security systems developed in the Nordic countries since the Second World War. According to Esping-Andersen, two central features of the welfare regime that have developed in the Nordic countries set it apart both from the familialistic systems of, for example, the Catholic countries in southern Europe, as well as from the liberal model of de-familialization through market that characterizes the Anglo-Saxon countries. Firstly, transfers have been designed to replace loss of income in cases of childbirth, unemployment, illness and old age rather than being designed as flat-rate sustenance benefits. Secondly, the systems have expanded beyond cash transfer systems in terms of providing care services that are comprehensive in scope and equally distributed. The main result, according to Esping-Andersen, has been the development of an institutional structure in the Nordic countries that:

[..]stressed activating employment and, above all, the integration of women into the labor market. The Nordic model may be famous for its generosity and universalism, but what really stands out is its emphasis on employment and the de-familialization of responsibility for providing welfare.

51 Esping-Andersen, Social foundations of postindustrial economies, 45.
52 Esping-Andersen, Social foundations of postindustrial economies, 74–77.
Here he argues that the consequences of the Nordic de-familialization through the welfare state have primarily been an increased self-sufficiency of women in relation to men, as “female independence necessitates de-familialization of welfare obligations”, and that this has been achieved more extensively in the Nordic countries, as “social policy has been explicitly designed to maximize women’s economic independence.” Esping-Andersen argues that a special characteristic of Nordic policymaking — as compared to other Western countries — is the extent that feminist claims have been incorporated into political culture, and that this explains the strong commitment to a dual-provider model in practical policy.

Taking into account Esping-Andersen’s model of welfare state regimes, the readiness perspective proposed by New Home Economics and the willingness perspective of individualization theory must be extended to also incorporate how institutional change influences the ability to divorce. Arguably, divorce cannot become a generalized behavior in a population until a substantial majority of the population reaches a level of economic and social security that makes single living feasible even for parents of small children. According to Esping-Andersen, international and chronological variations in women’s economic independence are strongly dependent on the extent to which the state has intervened to alleviate families — i.e., women — from welfare obligations in the household and to stimulate a commodification of female labor. Thus, the development of state and/or market welfare institutions and the extent to which these institutions generate de-familialization form one of the central components of a complete analysis of how constraints to divorce have developed in a country such as Sweden during the twentieth century.

### Second Demographic Transition – toward an integrated approach

Another strand of literature that attempts to explain the rise of mass divorce is the theory of a Second Demographic Transition (SDT), initially suggested by Dick Van de Kaa and Ron Lesthaeghe. Lesthaeghe has further developed the theory in a way that bears many similarities to individualization theory. However, SDT theory more explicitly tries to incorporate the role of economic and institutional restructuring into a multi-dimensional model in the same manner as Ansley Coale suggested in his ready, willing and able model. Similarly to Beck and Giddens, Lesthaeghe argues that the reduced stability of marriage during the twentieth century is a result of a cultural shift that accentuates self-realization and the autonomy of the individual. However, Lesthaeghe’s views on the mechanisms that connect economic and norma-

---

tive change are different than the one found in individualization theory. Rather than seeing the decreased stability of marriage as a result of a penetration of market rationality into the family, he argues that it is the increasing security of sustenance needs that is the primary cause of the diffusion of norms that can be construed as individualistic and anti-authoritarian.

As previously argued, most demographic research on divorce tends to put the economic aspects of readiness in the foreground when analyzing the connection between economic growth and the stability of marriage—particularly how the increased economic independence of women has contributed to the lowering of structural constraints to divorce. In these histories, divorce has been regarded as a consumer good that can be acquired to the extent that it is affordable.\(^55\) When Lesthaeghe points to the increase in affluence as a key mechanism, he thus ties into this dominant view in historical demography that regards economic growth as a key macro-structural determinant of divorce. What sets SDT theory apart is that it places willingness rather than readiness in the foreground and offers a more elaborate analysis of how economic growth has caused normative changes that have decreased the stability of Western marriages.

Here Lesthaeghe is inspired by an idea developed by the political scientist Ronald Inglehart, concerning how increased affluence in Western countries has resulted in a spread of attitudes that can be labeled “post-materialistic”.\(^56\) Traditional values focus largely on physical and economic security, leaving little room for attitudes that are conducive to individual self-expression. The fertility decline of the first demographic transition (FDT) was anchored in a process of realizing basic material needs, and the resulting decrease in overall mortality rates made it possible for families to focus on “fewer children of better quality”. This quality-oriented approach originated in the bourgeois class, and the fertility decline of the FDT can essentially be regarded as a result of a penetration of the bourgeois single-provider family model into the lifestyles of the lower classes.\(^57\) Marriage as an institution was never threatened during the FDT, as the family model rested on institutionalized, asymmetrical gender roles in which women were assigned the sole responsibility for maintaining a domestic sphere. This sep-

---


\(^57\) This was originally suggested by Philippe Ariès, “Two Successive Motivations for the Declining Birth Rate in the West,” *Population and Development Review* 6, no. 4 (December 1, 1980): 647; Lesthaeghe, “The Second Demographic Transition in Western Countries: An Interpretation,” 18–22.
aration of private and public, and the exclusion of women from market participation outside the family, ensured a high degree of interdependence between family members that in turn contributed to family cohesion. However, Lesthaeghe argues that the continued growth of Western economies into societies of mass consumption during the twentieth century undermined this demographic regime. He contends that when affluence reaches a sufficient threshold, the preconditions of the bourgeois fertility regime are destabilized due to a “Maslowian preference drift”. When basic material needs are sufficiently satisfied, individuals start to prioritize non-material, expressive life goals, rather than simply being content with the security of sustenance needs.  

The consequence was a marked shift in the demographic regime that started to appear during the late 1950s and accelerated during following decades. This Second Demographic Transition entailed a sustained sub-replacement fertility based on postponement of first birth, cohabitation and increased extramarital fertility, as well as a pronounced increase in divorce. Regarding the new fertility behavior, Lesthaeghe argues that when post-materialistic values become generalized, fertility control is exercised for different reasons than during the FDT. As post-materialistic values increase in significance, adult-centered preoccupations with self-fulfillment become more important for fertility decisions. Although children and their well-being are still of great importance to parents, more attention is being given to the quality of the relationship between mother and father. The most important indicator of this shift in values is the fact that children are no longer regarded as a direct impediment to parental divorce. However, divorce is affected not only by the way post-materialism affects the rationale of parenthood but also by how it increases expectations regarding the individual returns from marriage. An increased recognition of the legitimate claims for self-realization of both men and women through labor market participation and education has resulted in a more symmetrical gender regime and a more equal distribution of individual resources between the genders. At the same time, this has made individual interests more difficult to balance within marriage, as “The Realpolitik of dual careers does not foster union stability, nor does it lead to earlier parenthood”. According to Lesthaeghe, when existential needs such as emotional and sexual fulfillment become more important, the expectations of returns from marriage increase:

---

58 Lesthaeghe, The Unfolding Story of the Second Demographic Transition, 3–11.
59 Lesthaeghe, “The Second Demographic Transition in Western Countries: An Interpretation,” 19.
60 Italics in original source Ibid., 30.
Rising demands and aspirations, however, are more difficult to satisfy in symmetrical than in asymmetrical dyads. Such relationships become increasingly vulnerable as new minimal standards of quality are established. This vulnerability accounts for the rise in divorce rates, the trial period in union formation, and the decline in remarriage rates as soon as financial autonomy permits.\footnote{Ibid., 34.}

It is clear that Lesthaeghe does see normative changes as the linchpin of the demographic shift during the 1960s, but he also explicitly incorporates economic and institutional changes in his analysis:

All too often, discussions have been conceptualized and phrased in terms of socioeconomic or structural versus cultural and ideational explanations. In our opinion, there are very good reasons why such an explanatory duality is inadequate and even misleading [...]\footnote{Lesthaeghe, \textit{Long-Term Spatial Continuities in Demographic Innovations: Insights from the Belgian Example}, 1846-2000., 2.}

Lesthaeghe acknowledges the validity of Becker’s readiness perspective that the institution of marriage has been weakened as a result of “[…] rising female economic autonomy [due to] increased female employment and higher female wages [that] have led to reductions in gains from marriage and to rising opportunity costs for women.”\footnote{Lesthaeghe, “The Second Demographic Transition in Western Countries: An Interpretation,” 20.} However, Lesthaeghe argues that the systematic finding that behavior such as divorce and fertility in consensual unions is connected to secularization on the individual level proves that “purely economic theories are incomplete (not that they are incorrect)”\footnote{Ibid., 26.}

In my opinion, there is considerable merit in adopting this kind of pragmatic theoretical position, which makes it possible to acknowledge the roles of both material and non-material driving forces as necessary conditions for historical change. This makes it possible for the empirically oriented researcher to construct richer models that can produce more complete explanations of observed variability in behavior across time and between individuals. A disadvantage of SDT theory as an explanatory framework for divorce is the limited temporal perspective. In Sweden, as in most Western countries, the divorce rate started to climb considerably already during the first half of the twentieth century, well before the other indicators implicated in the second demographic transition. Rather than being a demographic innovation of the 1960s, it is evident that the increase of divorce has a long
history, stretching back at least to the late nineteenth century. Although Lesthaeghe recognizes that he does not “see a clear distinction between the demographic changes prior to the 1950s and those emerging since the 1960s”, he has very little to say about the surges in the divorce rate that occurred prior to the plateau during the 1950s. This should not be regarded as a statement regarding the validity of SDT theory as an explanatory framework for the demographic behavior that has emerged after Second World War; rather, it is simply a recognition of the limitations in explanatory power of SDT theory regarding the long-term increase in divorce that evidently has a history prior to the 1950s. Still, if one assumes that the development lacks a sharp break during the 1960s and that the shift has been more gradual, the problem is not with the causal mechanisms suggested by the theory but rather with the idea of a clearly distinguishable structural break at a specific point in time, as opposed to a more gradual fading in of a new demographic regime. Support for the view that the development toward post-materialism has been more gradual than what Lesthaeghe argues can be found in the demographic research conducted prior to the Second World War. Jan Van Bavel has shown that demographers during the 1930s who tried to explain the sub-replacement fertility that had occurred in most Western countries during the 1920s clearly identified symmetrical labor force participation and an increased significance of self-actualization among both men and women as main determinants of the development already during the 1930s and 1940s.

**Feminist views – the connection between changing gender regime and divorce**

*Power and divorce – theoretical comments*

When studying interpersonal relationships such as marriage, one is inevitably going to be confronted with questions regarding the distribution of power between men and women. If we assume that divorce is a manifestation of conflict within a marriage, power becomes an even more central issue, in terms of both how power is exercised as well as how it is distributed between spouses. This section starts with a short discussion of how power has been conceptualized in the thesis before going into the question of how feminist scholars have discussed divorce as an expression of changes in the gender regime during the twentieth century.

---

65 Ibid., 18.

When interests collide in a relationship the resulting conflict can be “resolved” by negotiation, use of force, or exit. The amount of resources an individual possesses relative to one’s spouse will determine the likelihood that a conflict can be resolved in a way that is favorable – or at least acceptable – to that individual. It is important to note that the concept of power is highly complex and has been intensely debated in the social sciences. For the present purposes a view of power that assumes that personal resources, in terms of the amount of social, cultural, and economic capital accessible to the individual, will be an important determinant of the outcome of bargaining processes between spouses is sufficient. Based on social exchange and bargaining theory, it can be argued that personal resources will strongly influence the cost of exit for the individual, but the capacity to exit will also work as a particular form of power between spouses. Having a low threshold to exit, that the other is aware of, reduces a spouse’s capacity to resolve a conflict by the use of force/coercion, as exit provides the means to withdraw oneself from a situation in which one experiences exploitation. Thus, it stands to reason that a symmetrically distributed capacity to leave a relationship will work to reduce opportunities for an abuse of power between spouses. If we assume that both partners act rationally and share a desire to preserve the relationship, low barriers to divorce will make it harder for one of the spouses to impose conditions on the other that he – or more often she – regards as unfair. If both partners can opt out of the relationship at any given time, this will motivate them to negotiate and take each other’s needs into consideration in their decision-making if they regard the stability of the partnership as important. This will be true even in a situation in which individual resources in terms of economic and cultural capital are unevenly distributed in the relationship, as long as the disadvantaged partner has enough resources to regard exit as a viable option. In such a game theoretical framework, the threat of exit will reduce the ability of the stronger

---

67 For an introduction to this debate and alternative views on the concept, see Steven Lukes, Power: a radical view (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).
party to exploit the weaker one as the privileged individual has to take into account the possibility of the other withdrawing from the relationship. To the extent that the shared decision-making leads to more equally distributed opportunities for both spouses, it will increase possibilities for the disadvantaged partner to accumulate capital. This will in turn further decrease the disincentives to divorce for this individual, and make it even more necessary for the other partner to assume that he or she will not accept unfavorable results in negotiations. In sum, increased access to divorce should over time promote a more symmetrical distribution of power between men and women within marriage and make marriage function in a more democratic manner.

**Feminist views on the relationship between divorce and the gendered distribution of power**

Given the historical significance of marriage as an organizing principle of the gender regime of Western societies into present time, it is not surprising that the consequences of the distribution of power within marriage have been at the center of both feminist research and debate. Since the beginning of the feminist movement, marriage has been a focal point for criticism of the uneven distribution of power between men and women. This criticism of the traditional male-breadwinner marriage can be traced all the way back to classics like John Stuart Mill’s *The Subjection of Women* and Marie Wollstonecraft’s *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*. Wollstonecraft defines marriage as “legal prostitution”, and Mill brands it as slavery in the often-cited statement that “there remain no legal slaves, except the mistress of every house”.71 During the twentieth century Simone de Beauvoir and Nancy Friedan, whose writings contributed to the onset of the Second Wave of feminism, were both critical of how bourgeois single-provider marriage served to keep women in a state of infantile intellectual and economic dependence on men. For them, the confinement of women in the domestic home ensured that they could not take part in society as equal citizens.72 For a number of contemporary feminist theorists, the way the heterosexual marriage functions has even been identified as a primary mechanism by which women become subjected to men, not only in the family but in all areas of society. This notion of family and marriage as the cornerstone of patriarchal society was summated in the slogan “the personal is political”, which became popular among feminists in the 1970s. In this feminist discourse on

---


marriage, patriarchal society has transmuted and integrated with liberalism in a way that has reserved its universalist claims of equality for men. The private-public dichotomy and the sexual division of labor that structures modern marriage have ensured that men can monopolize the access to economic and political resources in the public arena and keep women in a state of dependency that makes them vulnerable to exploitation.73

Susan Moller Okin and Carole Pateman are two of the most explicit examples of this line of reasoning among contemporary feminist theorists. Pateman criticizes liberal social contract theory for being implicitly dependent on a “sexual contract” that is essential to the understanding of why marriage and the family are still characterized by patriarchal power. She argues that “contract is the specifically modern way of creating relationships of subordination”, and that the marriage contract functions in a way that “both establishes orderly [sexual] access to women and a division of labor in which women are subordinate to men.”74 She also argues that marriage takes the form of a “quasi-feudal institution”, as the sexual division of labor produces patterns of dependency that were characteristic of pre-modern social relationships. The statuses of husband and wife in a single-provider marriage bear similarities with the social relationship between master and slave, as:

    [...] a wife who works full time in the conjugal home is not entitled to pay. Wives are housewives and housewives, like slaves, receive only subsistence (protection) in return for their labors.75

The fact that more and more women have entered the labor market during the twentieth century has not removed this imbalance of power between men and women as the sexual division of labor has been transposed and reproduced in the workplace. The labor market is highly segregated by sex in modern market economies and women are over-represented in low-paid, low-status and non-supervisory jobs in a way that has maintained an economic pressure on the woman to be married to a man.76 Pateman does not discuss the consequences of increased divorce on these gendered patterns of

75 Pateman, The sexual contract, 124.
76 Ibid., 132–133; Pateman, The disorder of women, 132.
power, but does contend that marriage must be seen as matter of “status” rather than a true contract between free and equal individuals as long as both spouses do not have an equal capability to leave the relationship.\textsuperscript{77}

Susan Moller Okin also regards the division of labor in marriage as a key explanation for why women find themselves in a disadvantaged position in all areas of society. Okin argues that any valid theory of social justice must challenge the public-private dichotomy because the systematic exclusion of the private sphere from political theories of justice works to conceal the causes of the uneven distribution of power between men and women.\textsuperscript{78} The gender regime that structures modern marriage forces women to shoulder the main responsibility for unpaid reproductive work in the domestic sphere in a way that will systematically make them more vulnerable than men.\textsuperscript{79}

According to Okin, women are put in position of structural disadvantage already prior to marriage, as they are expected to shoulder more domestic work than men if they marry or have children. Women are presented with a labor market in which jobs (that produce high returns) are organized around the assumption that an employee can focus entirely on market participation. The archetypical career professional is a man with a dependent wife who provides domestic support. Women are put in a position of structural disadvantage, as employers will be less prone to hire women in career positions as they anticipate that they will not focus entirely on their job. Women (who wish to have a family) have thus been forced to choose career paths that make it possible to combine their market participation with the role of primary caregiver, and have consequently found themselves restricted to low-paid, part-time employment. The effect on family income structure is that a woman on average is married to a man who contributes more to the family economy than she can, even when both work full time. The structural inequalities on the labor market thus effectively inhibit the development toward a more equal gender regime in the family, as economic rationality dictates that both spouses prioritize the career of the man. This will strongly shift the capacity of exit toward the man, as divorce will entail a much more significant drop in the living standard of the woman as compared to her husband. The economic vulnerability of wives also increases as a function of the length of their marriage. The longer a woman finds herself in a marriage in which the accumulation of market human capital is concentrated to the husband, the greater the cost of divorce will be for her.\textsuperscript{80} The asymmetrically distributed capacity to exit the relationship tips power in the marriage in fa-

\textsuperscript{77} Pateman, \textit{The sexual contract}, 143, 183–184.
\textsuperscript{78} Okin, \textit{Justice, gender, and the family}, 7–17.
\textsuperscript{79} Ibid., 149–148.
\textsuperscript{80} Ibid., 146–156.
vor of the man. Okin therefore argues that there is a direct connection between the accessibility of divorce and the gender regime in marriage:

[…]because the asymmetric dependency of wives on husbands affects their potential for satisfactory exit, and thereby influences the effectiveness of their voice within marriage.81

Consequently, Okin identifies a direct connection between the accessibility of divorce for men and women, respectively, and the distribution of power in the family that is transferred outwards from the family to the gender regime in society as a whole. Although both Pateman and Okin identify the capacity for exit as a vital determinant of the balance of power between men and women in marriage, they fail to address the question of why marriage has successively become more unstable. This empirical fact is explicitly addressed in the work of Karla B. Hackstaff on the development of a “divorce culture” during the twentieth century.

Hackstaff recognizes a direct connection between the divorce transition and the development of a more equal distribution of power between men and women. Hackstaff contends that the emergence of a divorce culture, and women’s increased willingness to use divorce as a means to change their life, has served as an important bargaining chip for wives in their strive to change the gender regime in the private sphere.82 Hackstaff rests her argument on the empirical finding that the attitudes and behavior of women are more important for contemporary patterns of marital stability. Studies of the gendered attitudes to divorce have consistently shown that women exhibit more positive attitudes toward divorce as a way to change unsatisfactory circumstances in their lives, and express more dissatisfaction with their marriages, than men do.83 A finding that is consistent between different countries is that women have been more prone to unilaterally initiate divorce.84 This gendered divorce pattern also appears in studies on Swedish data from the 1970s. Questionnaire data collected by Jan Trost and Örjan Hultåker from a random sample of individuals who finalized their divorces in 1971 show a clear effect of gender in the self-reporting of the initiative to file for

81 Ibid., 167.
83 Hackstaff, Marriage in a culture of divorce., 48.
divorce. In this survey 67% of the women report that they were the primary initiator of the divorce, whereas only 10% indicate that their husband initiated it. Although the men report a somewhat lower proportion of female initiative, they also identify their wife as the initiator more often than themselves. Hackstaff contends that similar empirical patterns in the US, as well as her own interview studies of three generations of married American couples, indicate that women have been more important for the establishment of a divorce culture in the US during the twentieth century. Hackstaff’s definition of divorce culture bears many similarities with that of Anthony Giddens’s “pure relationship”. Divorce culture entails a re-conceptualization of the meaning of marriage as a contingent agreement between individuals based on an emotional commitment that has to be reflexively monitored by both spouses at all times for the marriage to be worth maintaining. Similarly to Giddens, Hackstaff argues that this is clearly expressed in the widespread attitude that marriage requires “work” and in the therapeutic discourse that has developed regarding “marital problems”.

That there is a causal link between the development of a more symmetric gender regime in modern Western societies and the increased accessibility of divorce (especially in terms of women’s capacity for exit) is thus a common theoretical theme among feminist scholars. This hypothesis has also found support in empirical research. Cross-national research shows that cultural settings where divorce is more accepted and practiced manifest such traits as lower levels of spousal violence and a more equal division of labor in the household, compared to regions where divorce is rare. Betsey Stephensson and Justin Wolfers find a significant negative connection between the permissiveness of divorce laws in different states in the US and the levels of spousal homicides and violence as well as suicides among married women. Research on domestic violence further supports the hypothesis that an increased independence of women in terms of an increased capacity for exit works to decrease oppression in terms of spousal violence. This research shows that women who are relatively more educated and have an income

90 Ibid.
that is separate from their husband’s are more prone to divorce an abusive spouse than women who experience a high degree of economic dependency.\textsuperscript{91}

The theoretical and empirical findings produced in feminist research thus show that changes in the gender regime and divorce rates are connected to one another. Okin and Hackstaff both offer a convincing argument that there is a causal link between better access to divorce for women and the development of a more equal gender regime. Simply put, the argument is that divorce generates equality. It is possible, however, that the causality is the other way around in that feminist claims have resulted in an increased awareness among women of being disadvantaged in marriage. This increased awareness might explain the more positive attitudes toward divorce among women and may have stimulated their willingness to seek divorce. Another alternative, suggested by Janet Saltzman-Chafetz, is that the connection is indirect. She argues that both the increase in divorce and the increased legitimacy of feminist claims are the result of an economic restructuring that has caused an increased economic self-sufficiency of women by means of increased labor force participation.\textsuperscript{92}

Based on both the theoretical and empirical arguments discussed above, I contend that a strong case can be made for the position that an increased readiness, willingness and ability to divorce among women will influence the gender regime in an egalitarian direction. There is nothing that precludes the possibility that all these interpretations of the connection between divorce and changed gender regime reflect parts of the truth. Arguably, there should be an element of mutual reinforcement at work in this process, as an increased awareness of a disadvantaged position among married women will increase their willingness to divorce. Thus, the question of what comes first – divorce or demands for gender equality – is difficult to disentangle. The point I am trying to make is that regardless of the actual causal direction between gender equality and divorce, the writing of a long history of divorce in a Western country such as Sweden will inevitably also be the writing of a history of the development of a more symmetrical gender regime. Furthermore, gender is an essential analytical category for understanding an event.


such as divorce, as it is closely connected to conflict and the distribution of power between gendered subjects in the family.

**Gender as an analytical category in demography**
The need to include gender as an analytical category in demographic analysis has been stressed in recent years by feminist scholars. A part of this discussion has been a criticism of the positivist orthodoxy that has characterized the demographic paradigm and particularly how this has resulted in a failure to consider how gender influences demographic outcomes. The conceptual development in critical traditions such as feminism has had a profound impact on the epistemology of other social sciences. Surprisingly, demographers have remained largely unaffected by this broader development, and have not managed to produce any substantial critical reassessment of the “view from nowhere” that has characterized conventional liberal scholarship. According to this criticism, the consequence has been that demographic inquiry has become “long on methods and short on theory” in a way that has reduced the explanatory power of demographic models, especially when it comes to research problems pertaining to family and gender.

It is possible to identify three main themes in this criticism: Firstly, demographic explanations do not consider how the distribution of power between men and women influences individual decision-making in families. Secondly, the way agents actively maneuver and try to influence the constraints they experience tends to be insufficiently considered. Thirdly, the effects of culture and norms are either not considered or are regarded as an unknown residual, resorted to only when all other explanations fail. Feminist demographers propose that these problems would be resolved by the incor-

---


95 Williams, “Doing feminist-demography,” 203.
poration of a more elaborate analysis of gender.\textsuperscript{96} Incorporating a concept of gender that regards it as a socially constructed property of the individual that determines relationships of power in a way that constrains and augments behavior will inevitably make power and agency a natural part of interpretations. Jill Williams contends that demographers have often conflated gender with sex, which causes the analysis to disregard how gender works to bestow behavioral expectations on men and women that in turn effect relationships of power between gendered subjects.\textsuperscript{97} If power and gender are not consciously considered, the consequence is that the agency of both men and women – in terms of being individuals who sometimes have diverging interests – escapes explicit analysis in a way that can lead to incomplete or even misguided conclusions. Susan Greenhalgh concludes that when the issue of power in the family is “assumed away we lose our ability to understand how the world really works, especially for the powerless”.\textsuperscript{98} With regard to a demographic outcome such as divorce, that evidently is closely related to issues of power and conflict between individuals within the family, these critical points are important. When one investigates divorce, issues of gender, power and agency must be elaborated on regardless of what method one applies to uncover empirical patterns. In this thesis it is therefore assumed that men and women are active agents who interact in the family as separate individuals and that they make “collective, but not necessarily consensual” decisions.\textsuperscript{99} Here, I agree with Alison Mackinnon that this basic condition of family life makes families inherently “prone to conflict and compromise, to domination and resistance”.\textsuperscript{100}

However, feminist demographers usually contend that this does not mean we should abandon the advances that some 70 years of quantitative methodical development have produced. Statistical methods applied on large and representative datasets are extremely good at documenting gen-


\textsuperscript{97} Williams, “Doing feminist-demography,” 204.

\textsuperscript{98} Greenhalgh, “Anthropology theorizes reproduction: integrating practice, political economic, and feminist perspectives,” 17.

\textsuperscript{99} Mackinnon, “Were women present at the demographic transition?,” 228.

\textsuperscript{100} Ibid.
dered inequalities in such areas as income, education, health, etc., in a way that cannot be disregarded as partial accounts. The main point is that demographic models must incorporate variables that can reflect the effects of gender and account for the gendered distribution of power in theoretical interpretations of empirical patterns to achieve better explanatory power.

An additional strategy to account for the effects of gender is to adopt a multi-methods approach that combines quantitative and qualitative methods to better understand the meaning of quantitative empirical patterns. Susan Greenhalgh argues that this would enable us to construct “whole demographics” that can accurately contextualize demographic behavior, not only in social and economic terms but also in political and cultural terms. The use of a multi-methods approach is a common remedy suggested by those who focus on the third strand of criticism reviewed here: that demographic models must be expanded to take into account how cultural norms affect demographic behavior. In short, they argue that demographic models have strongly focused on differences in the readiness dimension of Ansley Coale’s model but that the influence of willingness has largely been disregarded.

The positivist epistemology that has dominated the field has resulted in a resistance to theoretical constructs that are difficult to operationalize, measure and analyze as variables. This character of the demographic discipline can explain why the roles of attitudes and norms have had a hard time finding their way into explanatory models. David Kertzer argues that culture has often been defined as an unknown residual that demographers resort to when other explanations fail. However, since the days of the Princeton European Fertility Project in the 1970s there has been a lively discussion of how to expand the explanatory framework of demography to better account for the effects of normative factors on individual behavior. This is arguably a way

---


forward, although its feasibility is highly dependent on the availability of adequate quantitative sources on the distribution of ideational traits in the population at a given time in history. Unfortunately, sources containing such information that can be analyzed quantitatively are sparsely and unevenly available when we move just a few decades further back in time. For historical demography, the multi-methods approach of combining qualitative and quantitative methods thus appears to be the most feasible way to gain insight into questions of how cultural attitudes influenced individual behavior in the past.
3. Determinants of divorce – previous research

In demography the empirically oriented research on divorce has generally departed from the rather complex narratives of divorce theory out of necessity. In general, the approach has been to investigate what types of men and women have contributed to the increase in divorce more than others, in search for what have been termed determinants of divorce. To give an adequate background to the findings in the thesis, a condensed review of previous research will be presented below. The discussion of the empirical findings will focus on the most widely researched issues that are relevant to the problems addressed in the thesis. The reader is referred to the detailed research reviews that already exist in the literature for more extensive discussions of various topics that have been addressed in international divorce research.106

In the field of family history, William Goode and Roderick Phillips have both conducted extensive historical overviews of the development of divorce in Western countries.107 Although the works of Goode and Phillips are mainly of a descriptive character, they have been influential as they compare and describe the divorce transition in Western countries and have a longer historical perspective than what has usually been the case in divorce research. The lion’s share of previous research on marital stability in Western countries has been done on divorces that have occurred since the 1970s, due to the limited availability of data for historical populations. However, some notable exceptions using nineteenth and early twentieth century data from Belgium, the Netherlands and Japan do exist.108 Consequently, the findings presented below primarily pertain to factors influencing divorce probabilities in contemporary Western societies.


Demographic determinants

The chronological aspects of a marriage have a strong influence on marital stability, other things remaining equal. The general finding is that both the marriage duration and the age of the spouses are negatively associated with divorce probability. The probability of marriage disruption will increase directly after marriage, reach a peak a couple of years after marriage, and then decrease as a function of time. Couples who marry at a mature age have markedly lower dissolution rates than do young couples, even when controlling for confounding factors such as income and education. These findings are usually explained with increased transaction cost due to a longer accumulation of marriage-specific capital in the Beckerian sense as duration increases, and by better matching due to longer search time for couples who marry at higher ages. Age heterogamy, whereby one of the spouses is significantly older than the other, has been found to be associated with higher disruption rates, especially if the woman is the older spouse. Previous divorce is also consistently found to be positively associated with increased risk of divorce in subsequent marriages. Given the increase in divorce over time, marriage cohort and period will also have an effect, although such variables are arguably mere proxies for aggregate changes in time-variant variables that are not controlled for in models. The types of influences captured by these variables include, among other things, changes in institutional and normative constraints as well as effects of variations in the business cycle that influence the economic constraints to divorce.

Fertility behavior prior to and within marriage is associated with the probability of divorce. Children can be regarded as marriage-specific capital, particularly for men, who run the risk of losing day-to-day contact with their children under legal regimes where it is normally the mother who is awarded custody. For women, the increased sustenance needs produced by children will work as a disincentive to divorce as access to a partner provides better possibilities to distribute risks (for example, loss of income due to

---


112 For a discussion, see Lyngstad and Jalovaara, “A review of the antecedents of union dissolution,” 259.

caring for sick children) and share costs of unpaid domestic work associated with child rearing as opposed to being a single parent. Thus, children should reduce the probability of divorce and the effect should be larger the younger the children are. For the most part, empirical studies of the effect of children on divorce confirm such predictions. The general finding is that having a first child decreases the risk of dissolution and that this negative effect decreases as a function of the age of the child. Higher-parity births (2-3) are usually not found to have the same preventive effect as the birth of the first child. A number of studies in fact find that subsequent children increase the risk of dissolution, especially if statistical techniques are applied to correct for the fact that couples who experience high marital quality in the first place are those most likely to increase family size while those who experience low quality are incentivized to refrain from childbearing. Gunnar Andersson shows that differences in divorce risk between mothers and childless women in Sweden decreased during the 1980s and 1990s. Torkil Hove Lyngstad and Marika Jalovaara argue that this might be an effect of a changing normative climate, in that children are becoming less and less regarded as an impediment to divorce. The changing institutional setting in Sweden during this period, with expanding welfare state provisions that make the economic disadvantages of single parenting less pronounced, should also work to decrease the role of children as an economic disincentive to divorce. Another factor pertaining to children that increase the probability of marriage disruption concerns whether the child was born prior to marriage.


118 Lyngstad and Jalovaara, “A review of the antecedents of union dissolution,” 263.
as opposed to births occurring within matrimony. The kinship of the parents and children is also of importance and the presence of stepchildren increases the risk of divorce, especially if the wife is the biological parent.

**Socio-economic determinants**

One of the most extensively investigated issues in divorce research has been how the socio-economic characteristics of married men and women influence the probability of divorce. The main point of departure for studies of the association between socio-economic differentials and divorce has been the question if whether the independent hypothesis is correct. In short, the results have been mixed, and depend on what dimension of the socio-economic position is investigated as well as on the gender of the individual investigated. For men, all indicators of socio-economic position have been found to be negatively associated with divorce during recent decades, while the results for women’s education, hours worked, income and total share of household income have uncovered more complex patterns. US studies on the effect of female income are divided, with several studies using large nationally representative datasets confirming the independence hypothesis while a substantial number of others do not. In Europe the results have been less conflicting, and a majority of studies do find support for a positive independence effect of female income on divorce. However, it appears that the effect is dependent on the context and time period under study. Research on marital stability in Sweden and Denmark during the 1980s and 1990s has found that high income has a negative effect on di-

---

119 For reviews, see Amato, “Research on Divorce,” 651; White, “Determinants of Divorce,” 906.


122 For a discussion of these inconclusive findings, see Liana C Sayer and Suzanne M Bianchi, “Women’s Economic Independence and the Probability of Divorce A Review and Reexamination,” Journal of Family Issues 21, no. 7 (October 1, 2000): 906–943.

123 Lyngstad and Jalovaara, “A review of the antecedents of union dissolution,” 266.
orce probabilities for both men and women, at least as long as the woman’s income is not substantially greater than that of the husband.\textsuperscript{124}

Regarding education, studies of North European and US data find a negative effect of female educational levels on divorce, while results are mixed for central and southern Europe.\textsuperscript{125} Italian and Dutch studies have found an opposite positive association between female educational attainment and divorce.\textsuperscript{126} Several scholars have argued that these contextual differentials in the effect of female educational attainment are most readily explained by applying William J. Goode’s often-cited prediction of changes in the determinants of divorce over the course of the transition from a low to a high divorce rate regime.\textsuperscript{127} The so-called Goode hypothesis states that in societies where divorce is uncommon due to high normative, economic and institutional constraints, divorce tends to be restricted to individuals who can marshal enough resources to be able to traverse or circumvent structural barriers.\textsuperscript{128} Hence, in countries like Italy, where divorce is still less common than in Scandinavia, and Catholicism still has a significant influence on marital ideology, more resources might be needed to traverse structural barriers that work against divorce, thus explaining why the gradient of education is positive in Italy. Studies show that the gradient of education on divorce in the US, Japan and Europe have become increasingly negative during recent decades, thus supporting Goode’s notion that the socio-economic gradient of divorce becomes increasingly negative as structural barriers are reduced over time.\textsuperscript{129} However, few tests have been done to determine whether the socio-

\textsuperscript{124} Nilsson and Strandh, “Skilsmässor och separationer”; Svarer and Verner, Do Children Stabilize Danish Marriages?.

\textsuperscript{125} An extensive review of these results can be found in Lyngstad and Jalovaara, “A review of the antecedents of union dissolution,” 264–265.


\textsuperscript{127} Hans-Peter Blossfeld, Education, modernization, and the risk of marriage disruption : differences in the effect of women's educational attainment in Sweden, West-Germany, and Italy, Stockholm research reports in demography (Stockholm University, Demography unit, 1993); Salvini and Vignoli, “Things change,” 147; Lyngstad and Jalovaara, “A review of the antecedents of union dissolution,” 264.


\textsuperscript{129} Ono, “Husbands’ and Wives’ Education and Divorce in the United States and Japan, 1946-2000”; Juho Härkönen and Jaap Dronkers, “Stability and Change in the Educational
economic gradient of divorce was indeed positive at the early phase of the
divorce revolution and, if so, when the shift occurred during the twentieth
century.

Another reoccurring hypothesis in divorce research is that changes to-
ward a more symmetrical gender regime and the generalization of female la-
bor force participation will work to change the destabilizing independence
effect of female income from a positive to a negative relationship. This is es-
tentially saying that the income effect will increase in importance in relation
to the independence effect. When female labor participation becomes a ma-
jority behavior adopted by most couples and norms of gender equality are
internalized, similarity in domestic and professional roles can work as a sta-
bilizing rather than disruptive factor. Several studies of Swedish and US data
from recent decades find evidence of such an interpretation, in that the
wife’s economic activity is associated with greater marital stability among
couples who express gender-equal values and behavior, and that a positive
association between economic independence of women is only found
among couples in which the distribution of unpaid labor is uneven and the
perceived quality of the marriage is low.\textsuperscript{130} Hence, an explanation for the
contextual and chronological differences in results regarding the effect of
female economic independence might be the extent to which the gender re-
gime has been transformed toward an institutionalized dual-provider model
in a society at a particular point in time.

**Contextual and normative determinants**

As discussed in the section on socio-economic determinants, the gender ideol-
ogy of the spouses and the division of unpaid domestic labor interact with
female economic independence. In some contexts, such as Sweden\textsuperscript{131} and
the US,\textsuperscript{132} relationships characterized by gender-equal values and practices
exhibit lower disruption rates, while the opposite seems to be the case in
countries like Germany, where a single-provider model and more traditional

\textsuperscript{130} Cooke, “‘Doing’ Gender in Context”; Nilsson and Strandh, “Skilsmässor och separa-
tioner”; Kalmijn et al., “Interactions Between Cultural and Economic Determinants of Di-
vorce in The Netherlands”; Sayer and Bianchi, “Women’s Economic Independence and the
Probability of Divorce A Review and Reexamination”; Robert Schoen et al., “Wives’ Em-
528.

\textsuperscript{131} Nilsson and Strandh, “Skilsmässor och separationer”; Livia Sz. Oláh, “Gender and fami-

\textsuperscript{132} Sayer and Bianchi, “Women’s Economic Independence and the Probability of Divorce A
Review and Reexamination.”

The constraints to divorce found in most Western legal systems at the beginning of the twentieth century were legitimized by religious values that stressed the sanctity of marriage as a life-long institution.\footnote{Phillips, Putting asunder, 1–5.} The conditions required by the legal system to allow for the dissolution of a marriage are also the most direct form of structural constraint to divorce. Furthermore, in liberal democracies the law should at least in principle be a reflection of general attitudes toward a behavior, although considerable lag between normative changes and legal reform is normal due to the natural inertia of a political system. Most studies on the effect of the introduction of liberal divorce laws during the twentieth century conclude that normative and behavioral change largely preceded legal reforms, and that the divorce rate has developed fairly independent of the legal system in both overseas Anglo-Saxon countries and Europe.\footnote{J. Wolfers, “Did unilateral divorce laws raise divorce rates? A reconciliation and new results,” The American Economic Review 96, no. 5 (2006): 1802–1820; Thorsten Kneip and Gerrit Bauer, “Did Unilateral Divorce Laws Raise Divorce Rates in Western Europe?,” Journal of Marriage and Family 71, no. 3 (August 1, 2009): 592–607; White, “Determinants of Divorce,” 904.}

The direct effects of legal changes have been constrained to short-term period effects attached to lower transaction costs and more rapid divorce procedures when the new laws were introduced.

One of the most firmly established patterns of divorce in both Europe\footnote{See e.g. Chester, Divorce in Europe, 311; Pieter A. Gautier et al., “Sin City? Why is the Divorce Rate Higher in Urban Areas?,” Scandinavian Journal of Economics 111, no. 3 (2009): 439–456; Marika Jalovaara, “Socio-Economic Status and Divorce in First Marriages in Finland 1991-93,” Population Studies 55, no. 2 (July 2001): 119–133; TH Lyngstad, Does Com-
marital stability. Theoretically, this positive relationship between the population density of the living area and the propensity for divorce has been explained in a number of ways. Supply-side effects in the marriage market have been pointed out as one causal mechanism. The higher population density of urban areas as opposed to rural settings increases the number of potential partners married individuals come into contact with, which in turn influences both incentives and constraints in a way that promotes divorce. Firstly, according to what has been called the macrostructural opportunity hypothesis, an extensive supply-side in the marriage market will increase the probability that a spouse will find a better match than the current partner, thus providing increased incentives to divorce. Secondly, exposure to more social contacts provides a better remarriage market, which reduces search costs if an individual wants to find a new partner after a completed divorce. Empirical support for such effects has been found in several studies that find an increased risk of divorce for married women who work in a male-dominated occupation, as well as for couples who experience a local marriage market in which the sex composition is highly skewed and one of the spouses is exposed to more abundant alternatives. Many scholars point to explanations that focus on differences in normative climate between urban and rural contexts. The general idea is that the greater anonymity and lower degree of social control in urban milieus will work to reduce the structural constraints to divorce for urban couples.

As evident in the brief review above, there has been a large amount of empirical research on individual-level determinants of divorce. However, one limitation in the current knowledge regarding divorce is that studies have

---


more or less exclusively relied on data from the 1970s and onward. As pointed out in the introduction, the transition to a high divorce rate regime was already complete in most Western countries by this point in time and the divorce rate has since stabilized at about the same levels reached during the 1970s. Internationally, only a few studies exist regarding what types of men and women contributed more than others to increases in the divorce rate during the long period of growth from the beginning of the twentieth century to the international peak in the divorce rate during the 1970s. In Sweden, only two studies partly cover the development during the 1960s. These are based on the Swedish fertility register, and are limited by only having information on the woman in the couple and a limited number of cases that were at risk of divorce during the 1960s. Consequently these studies have been forced to use crude measures of, for example, socio-economic status, such as being employed or not, and cannot account for the role played by the husband in the divorce process. To my knowledge, there have been no studies of determinants of divorce regarding the first half of the twentieth century. Hence, the knowledge regarding historical changes in divorce behavior in Sweden is limited.

143 Phillips, Putting asunder, 585.

144 Oláh, “Gender and family stability”; Hoem and Hoem, “The disruption of Marital and Non-Marital Unions in Contemporary Sweden.”
4. Data and methods

This section starts with an overview of the main datasets used in the thesis and then continues with a discussion of the methodological choices and considerations that are relevant across all papers of the thesis. The subsequent overview is in summary form, and the reader is therefore referred to the individual papers for a more in-depth discussion of these issues.

Table 1 below gives a summary overview of the methods, datasets and covered time periods in the different papers of the thesis. The structure of the quantitative papers is that the two first ones analyze the development of aggregated trends over time, to then move successively toward the micro level in Papers III and IV. These papers use a cross-sectional design to study the propensity for divorce, firstly in sub-groups of the population based on occupation during the 1920s and 1930s, and in Paper IV among all married individuals in Sweden during the years 1960-1962. In the fifth and final paper, the multi-methods approach is applied by means of a qualitative study of the public debate on divorce during 1960s and 1970s, which is the most dramatic period in the development of divorce in Sweden during the twentieth century. The aim of this combination of methods is to achieve a better understanding of how socio-economic and normative change interacted and contributed to new demographic behavior during this dynamic period in Swedish history.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Paper</th>
<th>Main data sources</th>
<th>Methods</th>
<th>Time period</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

(Table continued on following page.)


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Paper</th>
<th>Main data sources</th>
<th>Methods</th>
<th>Time period</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Quantitative – Logistic regression</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data sources

A general impediment to the possibilities to investigate divorce prior to the 1970s is the lack of workable micro-data sources that can be used for the quantitative analysis of divorce. Although the information on the outcome variable is available in court records and other archive sources containing information on relevant independent variables, it would be necessary to link the individuals who filed for divorce between these different sources. Constructing representative samples for enough time points to be able to investigate changes over time would be an immensely time-consuming task, impossible for a single researcher to undertake. However, this does not imply that divorce during this period cannot be studied with inferential methods. Since the beginning of the twentieth century, Statistics Sweden has annually collected an extensive range of information on divorcing couples that has

---


149 Glenn Sandström, “’Laws shouldn’t chain people to one another”: Attitudes toward divorce in Swedish public debate 1964-1972” (presented at the 36th Annual Meeting of the Social Science History Association, Boston, Massachusetts, 2011).
been compiled to aggregate statistics. This provides a good basis for the descriptive analysis of divorce trends in Sweden. Additionally, the divorce statistics can be combined with census material in order to achieve a disaggregation of the annual statistics by calculating the divorce rate in sub-groups of the population. Beginning in the 1960s, the Population and Housing Censuses [Folk- och bostadsräkningarna] are available in computerized form, giving access to individually based datasets that cover the entire population. Below is a short description of these sources and how they have been utilized in the different papers, followed by a discussion of the overarching methodological considerations of the thesis.

**Annual divorce statistics, Statistics Sweden**

Statistics on divorce are found in the printed series *The Population Development 1911-1962* [Befolkningsrörelsen 1911-1962]; *Population Changes 1961-1970. Summary for the Decade*. [Befolkningsförändringar 1961-1970: översikt för årtiondet,]; *Population Changes, Part III* [Befolkningsförändringar, Arsböcker 1967-1974. Del 3, Hela riket och länen m.m.], based on data on all divorces in Swedish courts. These sources provide information on, for instance, length of marriage, ages of spouses, number of children, husband’s profession, who filed for divorce, and geographical variables at county and municipal level for each year between 1911 and 1974 in the entire country. This information provides a good basis for extensive descriptive analyses of temporal and spatial trends regarding the properties of the divorcing couples during the research period.

**Censuses 1910-1975, Statistics Sweden**

Statistics Sweden has conducted censuses at five- to ten-year intervals during the twentieth century that include all Swedish inhabitants. Combining the annual divorce statistics with census data makes it possible to ascertain the total married population at risk and to calculate divorce rates per 1,000 married women in the country. Divorce rates in sub-groups based on geographical regions and occupation can be calculated using the primary worktables from the censuses stored in the archives of Statistics Sweden, as these are much less aggregated than the printed material. This disaggregation allows inferential analyses of the propensity for divorce in the mentioned sub-groups. This method is applied in both Paper I (counties and municipalities) and Paper III (occupations). The computerized *Population Register* [Befolkningsregistret] at Statistics Sweden that covers the period after 1968 has also been utilized with regard to the analysis of geographical patterns during the 1970s.

**The ASTRID database, Statistics Sweden**

Papers I and IV make use of data from the longitudinal geo-referenced micro-database ASTRID, which covers all individuals living in Sweden since 1960. This database was originally compiled by Statistics Sweden from cen-
suses and various registers maintained by Statistics Sweden to form the basis of research on population dynamics on whole or partial populations on a micro level. The database is hosted at the Department of Social and Economic Geography at Umeå University, Sweden. The part of the database that covers the 1960s is based on the Population and Housing Censuses, conducted at five-year intervals. The database includes an extensive set of demographic, socio-economic and geographical variables that can be used to analyze the properties of all married individuals who experienced divorce in Sweden since 1960. The information in the database makes it possible to both pinpoint all couples who experienced divorce between two censuses, and if at least one of the spouses has not remarried by the time of the next census the exact time point of the divorce can also be determined. The main advantage of this source is the large number of independent variables that are included and the complete coverage of the entire population at risk. The main disadvantage of the Population and Housing Censuses is that observations are made at five-year intervals rather than for some shorter interval. However, the extensive nature of the source and the fact that it contains rich information on the personal characteristics of both the man and the woman enable a cross-sectional analysis of the properties of the divorcing couples during a highly dynamic period in Swedish family history that has received only limited attention until now. This thesis is the first study that uses the Population and Housing Censuses to investigate divorce prior to the divorce law of 1974.

In addition to these sources, several secondary quantitative sources were also used as a supplement to the three main sources mentioned above. This was necessary to gain additional information on aggregate patterns in independent variables such as female labor force participation, income, educational attainment, GDP, urbanization, etc.150

Swedish newspapers and periodicals 1964-1969, National archive
For the qualitative study, the primary source consists of an extensive collection of articles on divorce published in Swedish newspapers and periodicals during the period 1964-1969 that has been retained at the The National Archives of Sweden. The articles were collected by the government information agency [Statens upplysningsbyrå] on behalf of the two Family Law Committees that investigated the Swedish divorce law during the 1960s and early 1970s, and have been retained as part of the committee archives. The archive contains 180 articles from 34 different national and local newspapers

150 Regarding the various supplementary sources, the reader is referred to the separate papers for a more detailed presentation.
directly addressing divorce as a political, social or individual issue. The collection includes articles from all major newspapers in Sweden and a wide variety of local papers from all parts of the country. The political affiliations of the newspapers represented in the source material cover all political parties represented in the Swedish parliament during this period, with the exception of the Communist Party. The distribution of articles according to the political affiliation of the editorial page is quite even between social democratic, liberal and conservative newspapers, which compromise approximately 30% of the total number of articles for each political affiliation. Although it is unlikely that the sample covers all articles published regarding divorce during the second half of the 1960s, the size of the collection, geographical spread and coverage of political affiliations make it unlikely that there is a tendency in the selection of the articles. Furthermore, the articles were collected by a state agency whose mandate was to provide accurate and 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.

Methods
Although the majority of the papers in the thesis use quantitative methods, the critical points raised by feminist researchers presented in the theoretical section above have been important for the methodological choices of the thesis. The thesis adopts a pragmatic approach that combines both quantitative and qualitative methods of inquiry in order to better understand how normative and institutional as well as socio-economic changes have influenced marital stability during the research period.\textsuperscript{151}

In the quantitative papers, efforts are made to consistently consider the possible role of gendered power relations and normative influences, both in the choice of independent variables as well as in the interpretation of statistical relationships. Variables that can be used as proxies for normative factors are included in the models whenever adequate data exist. An example is the analysis of regional patterns of divorce conducted in Paper I, in which voting patterns for Christian democrats are used as a proxy for popular support for non-secular attitudes in different regions in Sweden. Additionally, in Paper I the use of epidemiological data on the prevalence of sexually trans-

mitted diseases in different regions during the 1940s was used as a proxy for regional sexual mores. However, there are considerable limitations to the available quantitative sources in this respect as variables that firstly pertain to economic aspects of readiness are more readily available. Therefore, the analysis of how normative factors might have contributed to the increase in divorce up until the Second World War is primarily based on what can be ascertained from the historical research on changing attitudes toward family and sexuality in Sweden. The consequences of institutional changes that determine the ability to divorce are discussed primarily in relation to time trends in the divorce rate (Papers I and II) and how institutional reforms were discussed and motivated in the qualitative sources used in Paper V.

Papers III and IV, which investigate socio-economic determinants of divorce in the decades following the divorce law of 1915 and during the 1960s, respectively, apply classic demographic statistical methods. Primarily, these papers test the extent to which the independence hypothesis and the socio-economic growth hypothesis are consistent with group and individual determinants of divorce in Sweden prior to the 1970s. The datasets used in these studies do not permit analysis of the role of normative factors, and are thus focused on the readiness dimension of Coale’s framework. The most intensive increase in the divorce rate in Sweden occurred during the 1960s and the first half of the 1970s. To contextualize the results of the quantitative study on socio-economic determinants of divorce during the 1960s, Paper V tracks the debate on divorce in Swedish newspapers during the period 1964-1972 by applying qualitative methods to investigate changes in publicly expressed norms regarding divorce (i.e. willingness).

Divorce research in general has had a strong focus on how the characteristics and behavior of women contribute to divorce, while the part played by men in this demographic shift has not been explored to the same extent. This is arguably a result of the theoretical focus on the role of decreased economic interdependence between spouses, which tends to put the position of women front and center in the analysis. However, this thesis is governed by the explicit strategy to investigate the contribution of both men and women to the propensity for divorce. The fact that divorce inevitably involves both a man and a woman, and that the development of divorce is connected to changes in the gender regime, arguably makes it necessary to investigate both individuals in the couple.

The majority of the datasets used in the thesis include the entire population of Sweden. This is of course nothing peculiar with regard to the aggregated datasets that are utilized, but this is also the case regarding the micro-dataset used in the cross-sectional analysis in Paper IV. The advantage of this design as compared to finite samples is that it eliminates problems associated with sample selection and makes it possible to investigate many independent variables simultaneously.
Paper V is a qualitative analysis of the main themes in the divorce debate in Swedish newspapers during 1964-1972. Firstly, themes and dominant actors in the debate and how they changed over time were identified through content analysis methodology. The main theoretical basis for this paper is 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. To identify what kind of opposing values occurred in the divorce debate, in a second step the analysis was directed at questions of how demands for and against an increased access to divorce were formulated within the dominant themes and how actors tried to legitimize different positions in the debate. The analysis thus becomes more concerned with questions of how gendered subjects battle over the meaning of divorce as a social and individual issue. As this incorporates elements of conflict, knowledge claims and meaning, the analysis in this step becomes more a question of how the discourse of divorce was structured and how it changed during the period under investigation.

5. Summary of papers
The following section starts with a description of the contributions of different authors in the collaborative papers, followed by a summary of the respective main results reached in the five papers of the thesis.

Contributions by co-authors
Three of the papers in the thesis are single-authored by myself, while Papers II and IV were written in collaboration with other researchers. The second paper of the thesis, entitled “Ready, Willing, and Able to Divorce: An Economic and Cultural History of Divorce in Twentieth-Century Sweden” (2011), was written together with PhD Per Simonsson, who at the time was a researcher at the Department of Economic History at Stockholm University, Sweden. All sections of the paper include contributions by both authors, in terms of both providing data and the analysis. The authors agreed that Simonsson should be designated as the first author as he was the more experienced researcher at the time, and he functioned as the corresponding author with the journal.

Paper IV, entitled “Socio-economic determinants of divorce in Sweden 1960-1965”, was written in collaboration with Olof Stjernström and Magnus Strömgren. Stjernström and Strömgren are Associate Professors at the De-

partment of Social and Economic Geography, Umeå University, Sweden. They prepared the dataset from the ASTRID database that is the empirical basis for the study, and participated in the interpretation of the results produced by my statistical analysis of the data. The actual writing of the paper was done by myself, while Stjernström and Strömgren provided much appreciated feedback on the final text.


The first paper explores how the divorce rate in Sweden has varied over time and across different geographical areas between 1911 and 1974, and how these variations can be connected to political, socio-economic and cultural changes during this period. The paper also addresses the importance of gender in divorce behavior prior to the 1970s.

An argument asserted in Paper I is that Swedish society can in many respects be regarded as an ideal type of the structural conditions identified as conducive to divorce in the research on changing family patterns in the Western world during the twentieth century. The causal models presented in the literature on rising divorce rates focus on the effects of decreased economic interdependence within marriage. In these histories, a rising standard of living and more general market participation by both men and women have caused intertwined economic and cultural processes that have transformed marriage into a contingent relationship, based on bilateral and continuous negotiation. An increasing commodification of labor has also forced political structures to adapt to a situation in which families are no longer the natural locus of social security. Esping-Andersen shows that the specific type of welfare-state regime that developed in Scandinavian countries, based on individual social security and dual-income households, has made Sweden one of the most de-familialized societies in the world. De-familialization renders women free to act autonomously in relation to men within the family, and facilitates their participation in a market society as producers and consumers.\(^{153}\) These processes have been highly prevalent in Swedish society, and since the mid-1960s Swedish women have exhibited one of the highest labor force participation rates in the world.\(^ {154}\) Looking at the development of normative structures, the comparative research on secularization shows that Sweden and Denmark stand out in Europe as the region where traditional religious attitudes toward family and sexuality have the lowest de- 


The early adoption of no-fault divorce in 1915 reinforces this general picture of Sweden as a forerunner in the cultural changes that have reduced the normative constraints to divorce in Western societies. In spite of a strikingly permissive legal framework, the immediate effects of legal reform on the time trends are weak in Sweden. Rather, the increase in the divorce rate took place gradually over time, more or less independent of the legal framework. Arguably, causes of the ebb and flow in the divorce rate in Sweden should thus be sought in other structural factors in Swedish society. Both the spatial and the temporal analyses conducted in the paper provide empirical support for the hypothesis that changing family stability in Sweden is connected to a decreased economic interdependence between spouses.

The analysis of the geographical patterns of divorce shows a strong connection between the degree of urbanization and the divorce rate on a regional level. Both the descriptive and inferential analyses in this study support the conclusion that these patterns can be explained by the more pronounced effects of industrialization in urban areas compared to rural settings. The social and economic environments in urban areas have worked to facilitate economic independence between family members, primarily by providing a larger and more qualified labor market, with higher wages for women. The shift from a single- to a dual-provider family model has thus been more pronounced in urban milieus and has made individuals less dependent on family for the security of subsistence needs, thus making divorce more attainable in these areas.

Paper I also contributes to the discussion on the gendered nature of divorce behavior, through the examination of court statistics describing female and male agency in divorce cases. Previous research shows that women generally exhibit more positive attitudes toward divorce, are more dissatisfied with their marriages and are more prone to initiate divorce as compared to men. The data analyzed in Paper I show that this pattern of excess female initiative was present already during the first half of the twentieth century in Sweden. Female agency in divorce cases thus exhibits a long historical continuity that stretches back at least to the beginning of the twentieth century in Sweden. An interesting discrepancy in this pattern is that this was not the case prior to the new divorce law of 1915, which gave wives increased legal rights to community property and the right to sue for alimony. A finding in Paper I is that although the legal reforms during the 1910s did not have any marked effect on the overall divorce rate they did, however, promote female agency in divorce cases. This lends support to a hypothesis that the increased legal rights of women reduced the economic constraints against di-

---

155 Thorleif Pettersson and Ole Riis, Scandinavian values: religion and morality in the Nordic countries, Psychologia et sociologia religionum (Uppsala: Uppsala University, 1994), 67–73.
orce for wives in Sweden and improved their possibilities to leave an unsatisfactory marriage.


The main objective of Paper II is to test the feasibility of using Ansley Coale’s Ready-Willing-Able framework for an analysis of the development toward a high divorce rate regime in Sweden during the twentieth century. Coale’s concepts are used to identify and discuss the relationship between divorce and structural changes in Sweden, with regard to both shifts in gender relations and the country’s transformation into an urban-industrial society. The early introduction of bilateral no-fault divorce in 1915 did not give rise to any marked increases in the divorce rate in Sweden during the 1920s and 1930s. In terms of Coale’s model the law reform did increase the ability to divorce, but it was obviously not a sufficient change in itself as people were neither ready nor willing to divorce yet. Similar to international divorce research, the empirical results from Sweden presented in Paper II indicate that shifts in the economic and cultural structure stimulated marital dissolution. From approximately World War II onward, there was a strong connection between the rise of mass divorce and the development of female relative wage – the latter capturing one element of the readiness to divorce. In Sweden, two distinct periods show a surge in both divorce rate and women’s relative wage. The first period occurs during World War II, whereas the second appears in the early 1960s through the mid-1970s. Both periods are identified as key phases for changing gender relations, in both Swedish and Western history. It is likely that the labor shortage associated with World War II drove up female relative wage dramatically. This war period was followed by stagnation in both female relative wage as well as divorce, lasting until the early 1960s. From the mid-1960s until 1974, Sweden experienced a second period of dramatically increased divorce, yet again accompanied by an equally dramatic increase in female relative wage. After 1974, both female relative wage and divorce rate have remained remarkably steady in Sweden.

However, according to our long-term analysis of Sweden, the divorce rates had been steadily increasing already during the interwar period, climbing from 1.33 divorces per 1,000 married females in 1920 to 2.74 in 1939. This finding cannot be explained by a rise in female relative wage, which only increased from 60 to 64% of the mean male blue-collar wage. During this time period, a more plausible explanatory variable is female high school graduation, which rose by a factor of four, whereas men’s graduation increased on-
ly 1.5 times. Here, the increased female educational attainment is interpreted as indicative of cultural values that view women as individuals separate from the family, which in turn would increase their willingness to leave a marriage that is unsatisfactory to them. We also tried to capture couples’ readiness and willingness to divorce through variables not directly connected to changes in gender structure, but rather to a general transformation of Sweden into an industrial nation. GDP per capita was used for readiness, and urbanization for willingness. Although similar in trends, the fluctuations and changes in gradients were not as directly connected to divorce rate as to female educational attainment, and even more so to female relative wage.

Our analyses of court records confirm that the interwar period demarks a significant shift in how divorce occurred in Sweden. Three changes are readily identified. First, there was a gradual change toward divorce that utilizes the paragraphs stating that fault did not need to be established during the 1920s and 1930s. Second, an interconnected but different change is that more requests for divorce came to be mutually filed, rather than one-sided exits. Third, of the divorces still filed by only one spouse, over time a larger share came to be filed by women, with their share overtaking that of the men by 1920. These changes reveal an ideological shift in how divorce was looked upon by the spouses, as well as the surrounding society, giving yet another indication that a cultural shift in marital ideology in Sweden can be located to the interwar period, and perhaps even earlier. We argue that these ideological shifts increased couples’ willingness to divorce, which increased the propensity to divorce one another based on joint decisions that could be privately negotiated rather than by one-sided exits achieved by assigning blame to the other partner in court.

Our findings show that there are significant advantages associated with looking at the history of divorce as one in which multiple empirical factors are examined in conjunction, recognizing that legal, economic and cultural factors contribute to divorce and play different roles in different contexts. It is not unreasonable to assume that the reform in 1915 drastically increased the ability to obtain divorce. However, as the absolute majority was neither ready nor willing to divorce, we cannot see any impact on divorce rate. The one discernible effect of law changes is in 1974 and 1975, after the introduction of complete unilateral no-fault divorce in 1974. During these two years, the ability to divorce led to the realization of an accumulated demand for divorce by people who were both ready and willing, but until then had not possessed the ability to divorce.

However, we know relatively little about how and why divorce has come to be such an integral part of people’s lives in modern society. Sweden is an interesting case from a comparative perspective, as its historical development is somewhat different from the dominating patterns of both continental and Anglo-Saxon history. Sweden did not industrialize until the mid-
nineteenth century, significantly later than most of Western Europe, whereas values and attitudes associated with modernity came early. This pattern is reflected in the history of divorce as well. The onset of legal as well as normative change pertaining to divorce occurred comparatively early in Sweden. Changes to the economic structure that determined the readiness to divorce did not come until later, but were highly associated with increases in divorce rate. The history of Sweden thus suggests that the gendered economic structures were of importance in the development of divorce, but that the changes that induced divorce occurred in conjunction with previous cultural shifts. Even though more historical research is needed to clarify the matter, the results of this study detect some of the conditions necessary for a transition to a high divorce rate regime and suggest that they have a long history, in which the gendered interplay between economic and cultural conditions constitute the driving force.


Paper III utilizes a combination of Swedish census data and aggregated divorce statistics collected by Statistics Sweden during the 1920s and 1930s to test four hypotheses of how socio-economic factors influenced the divorce risk of males in different occupations. The study investigates the effect of group differences on the probability of divorce as measured by the four variables mean yearly income, relative female workforce participation, mean number of children in household below 15 years of age, and urban or rural living area.

The first hypothesis tests the idea that divorce can be regarded as a consumer good that can be acquired to the extent that it is affordable. This idea is the basis of William Goode’s socio-economic growth hypothesis, which predicts that the contemporary connection between low socio-economic position and high divorce risk was reversed during the early phase of the divorce revolution.\(^{156}\) In other words, divorce becomes available as an option when enough affluence has been reached. Theoretically, this is based on the idea that when economic and normative constraints to divorce were more pronounced, divorce was more frequent in privileged groups, who could marshal sufficient resources to traverse the high structural barriers. In such an interpretation, the trend of decreasing family stability in the Western world during the past century is a consequence of a democratization of divorce, in terms of successively larger proportions of the middle and lower classes gaining the means to dissolve a dysfunctional marriage.

The regression results in Paper III support this hypothesis and show a marked positive relationship between the mean income in a certain occupation and the corresponding divorce rate during the 1920s and 1930s in Sweden. The multiplicative effect amounts to a 13% increase in the divorce rate for an income difference of 1,000 Swedish kronor. In terms of the effect on the dependent variable, the income level is the most influential variable of the four covariates in the model. During the 1920s and 1930s, divorce rates were considerably higher in the affluent strata as compared to low-income groups. The results also lend support to a social diffusion hypothesis, that more permissive attitudes toward divorce in Sweden developed in the affluent strata of society and could then successively spread to the middle and lower classes during the course of the twentieth century as divorce rates continued to increase in the following decades.

The second hypothesis, that higher levels of female workforce participation would be associated with higher divorce rates, is also confirmed. Divorce theory contends that an important explanation for decreased marital stability is the development of market society during the twentieth century. In these histories, the transformation of Western societies into modern market economies has resulted in increased levels of education and labor force participation among women, as well as a development from a single- to a dual-provider family model. The fact that increased proportions of married men and women have gained access to individually based incomes has reduced the economic interdependence between spouses, which in turn has decreased the economic constraints to divorce. The regression analysis in this study supports this theoretical line of reasoning, and finds that the propensity for divorce in a group of males is positively related to the proportion of wives engaged in gainful employment in that group. The sample range is 26%, and the estimated effect in the model amounts to a 5% increase in the divorce rate for a 1% increase in female workforce participation.

The effect of the mean number of minor children on the divorce risk for married males was also tested and proved to be negative. Children can be regarded as an economic as well as an emotional investment in marriage, for wife and husband alike. These shared investments would normally increase the ties between spouses and decrease the probability of marriage disruption. Additionally, the shared responsibility for minor children imposes added subsistence needs that constrain a parent’s self-sufficiency, which in turn increases the degree of economic interdependence and raises the relative cost of divorce. The effect on the outcome is clearly significant at the 5%

---

level, but explains a smaller amount of the variability than female employment and income do.

A relatively universal result in previous research on divorce is that urban environments are more conducive to divorce than rural areas. This empirical relationship is confirmed in this study. Occupational groups residing in urban municipalities exhibit divorce rates twice as high as those of groups residing in rural municipalities, when the other variables in the model are controlled for. Why urbanization matters is not perfectly clear, as it has a multitude of ways of affecting divorce rates. Previous research suggests several theoretical explanations for this tendency, but mostly emphasizes the role of reduced social integration as compared to rural areas. Sociologist Göran Therborn expresses this reoccurring view in family history, arguing that urbanization “challenged traditional authorities of all kinds, including patriarchy, by its display of heterogeneity, its offers of option, and its escapes from social control”. In such an interpretation, urbanization is thought to influence divorce rates mainly through facilitating cultural change in a direction that reduces the normative constraints experienced by individuals contemplating divorce. Indirectly, however, this process is of course also the result of the economic transformation of society from an agrarian- to an industrial-based economy. The fact that the expansion of employment opportunities for women during the first half of the twentieth century was highly concentrated to urban areas should have worked to reduce the alternative cost for women seeking divorce in such a setting, as compared to women living in the countryside. Furthermore, the better supply-side in the marriage market in more densely populated areas reduces the cost of divorce in urban settings for both men and women, as remarriage is more feasible.


159 Therborn, Between sex and power, 22.

Paper IV examines a range of determinants of divorce using an extensive dataset drawn from the Population and Housing Census covering the entire married population of Sweden in 1960. Special attention is given to the question of how the socio-economic composition of the couple influenced the risk of marriage breakdown during the period in Swedish history when both female labor force participation and the divorce rate rapidly increased. The main results show that the rapid modernization process and change in provider model contributed to the marked decrease in marriage stability during this period in Sweden. Dual-provider families had approximately a 70% higher probability of divorce as compared to couples in which the wife was a homemaker. During the 1960s most married women were still housewives, although the norm that married women should stay at home had started to come under considerable pressure as more and more married women opted to enter the labor market. For the women who chose to embark on life courses more similar to those of their male companions, the result appears to have been that their marriages became less durable.

In Sweden during the 1960s it seems that dissimilarity, which placed the wife in a disadvantaged position with regard to cultural and economic capital, worked to promote marital stability. The impact of differences between spouses is of course influenced by the attitudes promoted by the prevailing gender regime in society at any given time. In a society where power and resources are asymmetrically distributed in favor of the male gender, spousal dissimilarity in terms of an atypical distribution of social and cultural capital in favor of the female can be assumed to destabilize marriage. This is apparent when it comes to the effects of age differences as well as socio-economic position in Sweden during the 1960s. Prevailing norms in Western culture have long regarded unions between younger women and older men as normal, while the opposite is less common and regarded as discrepant to prevailing gender norms. In this dataset, this is reflected by the fact that the increase in divorce risk due to age differences is much greater for couples in

---

160 I would like to express my gratitude to Christer Lund for organizing the session Consequences of Marital Exogamy – Past and Present at SSHA 2010 in Chicago, where this paper was first presented. I would also like to thank the other session participants and discussant Lionel Kesztenbaum for providing valuable comments on the paper. Original title of conference paper: Sandström et al., “Do birds of a feather flock together? Effects of socio-economic homogamy on divorce risks in Sweden 1960-1962.”
which the husband is the younger spouse than among couples in which this asymmetry is in the opposite direction.

Sandström (2010a) found that during the 1920s and 1930s the relationship between socio-economic position and the probability of divorce was positive, as suggested by William Goode’s socio-economic growth hypothesis. In this study we find that by the early 1960s this relationship had shifted in the manner suggested by the socio-economic growth hypothesis, so that males in the lower socio-economic strata exhibited increased risks relative to more affluent males. Thus, the democratization of the access to divorce seems to have been well under way by the early 1960s, which of course was a necessary precondition for the rapid increase in the divorce rate that occurred on the aggregate level in Sweden during the 1960s and 1970s. If a society is to make a transition from a low to a high divorce rate regime, the access to divorce cannot be socially exclusive but must rather be economically feasible for the majority of married men and women in the population.

With regard to the influence of the wife’s socio-economic position (SEI) the tendency for lower risk at higher SEI positions is also present, but much weaker than for males. Rather, it is the higher risks among all gainfully employed wives, as opposed to those outside the labor market, which is the most marked effect. However, there is an interesting divergence from this pattern exhibited by women employed in middle white-collar occupations such as teachers and nurses. These women have only marginally higher dissolution risks compared to women outside the labor force. It is possible that these groups exhibit normative traits that are internalized as part of their professional roles and that promote marriage stability. The fact that a large share of the female middle white-collar employees were found in what has been labeled caring professions, such as nursing and teaching, might indicate that a more conservative normative culture persisted in these professions and worked to inhibit divorce among these women. When these occupations were professionalized during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the professional roles incorporated ideals of strict morality and respectability. Employment as a nurse or an elementary school teacher usually required that a woman be unmarried, thus implying sexual chastity. Possibly, the historical development of these feminine caring professions and cultural preconceptions of respectability attached to the professional roles im-

posed greater normative constraints to divorce for women in these occupations that can help to explain the lower rates of divorce in this group.

One of the more interesting results of this study is the increased probability of divorce among couples with children, and that this effect is more pronounced among the dual-provider families. That children increase rather than decrease the probability of divorce, and that this effect is more pronounced in dual-earner couples, is possibly explained by the structural differences between the 1960s and later periods; with regard to differences in both gender regime as well as the institutional settings. During the 1960s children of pre-school age were normally cared for in the home by their mothers, and it was not until the 1970s that institutional arrangements for day-care started to expand significantly in Sweden. This made gainful employment more difficult to organize for families with pre-school children than was the case during the 1970s and 1980s, when municipalities started to guarantee low-cost day care. The fact that married women entered the labor market at a rapid pace during the 1960s in Sweden, despite the lack of a developed institutional support system for dual-working families, is a possible explanation for the reversed relationship between children and the excess divorce risk during this period in the case of working mothers. It is plausible that strains on marriage due to role conflicts were more accentuated in a normative climate where the employment of wives — although rapidly increasing — was not yet a given choice and was still only practiced by a minority.

Decreasing family stability appears to be a fundamental demographic aspect of the development of modern society and as such the question of family stability, and the factors that influence it, can be a powerful prism for viewing the structural changes Western societies have undergone during the twentieth century. During the 1960s Sweden entered a highly dynamic period of change in economic, social and normative structures, characterized by high economic growth, the establishment of the extensive Scandinavian welfare state, rapidly increasing female labor force participation, the sexual revolution and the Second Wave feminist movement’s questioning of the traditional gender regime. One aspect of the social development during the 1960s was also a faster increase in aggregate divorce rates than during any other period of the twentieth century. The results of this study underline the importance of a historical perspective on family stability. The results indicate that the determinants of divorce have varied across different phases of the divorce transition during the twentieth century. Important determinants of

162 SOU, Förskolan.

divorce, such as socio-economic position and the presence of minor children, have influenced family stability in different ways during different time periods in Sweden. This shows that it is not possible to extrapolate backwards to gain a firm understanding of the changes in family stability, and that a historical perspective is necessary if we are to understand the long-term process that has produced current marital behavior.


During the 1960s and 1970s in Sweden, both the labor force participation rate of married women and the divorce rate increased more than during any other period of the twentieth century. During the same period, levels of extramarital fertility increased and age of first birth rose substantially. Additionally, cohabitation among unmarried men and women started to become common. These demographic developments are central indicators of the Second Demographic Transition, and were markedly evident in Sweden during this period. This paper traces the impact of these demographic and socio-economic changes on the public debate on divorce in Swedish newspapers from 1964 to 1969 prior to the implementation of the 1974 divorce law. This law introduced unilateral no-fault divorce, which meant that almost all restrictions to the individual right to divorce were removed from the law. The paper identifies which normative views on divorce dominated the public debate before the law of 1974, and how these changed during the years that led up to the new divorce law in Sweden. This is achieved through an analysis of an extensive collection of articles on divorce in the daily press, collected by the state information agency [Statens upplysningsbyrå] in Sweden during the 1960s. The paper also sets out to identify the main actors in the debate with regard to their gendered and political positions. The analysis of the divorce debate in the daily press during this dynamic period gives further insight into the question of how changes in normative values interact with dramatic demographic developments.

The main results reached in the analysis indicate that two principal positions for and against restrictions in the individual right to dissolve a marriage

---

164 I would like to express my gratitude to Kirk Scott and Catherine Fitch for organizing the session International Perspectives on Work and Family at the Beginning of the Second Demographic Transition at SSHA 2011 in Boston, where this paper was presented. Special thanks to Kirk Scott, for agreeing to be the discussant and for his valuable comments on the paper.
opposed one another in the discussion of divorce during the second half of the 1960s. A conservative opinion resisted changes in the divorce law that would mean an increase in individual rights to dissolve a marriage. This conservative opinion was primarily voiced by members of the Conservative Party and by Christian organizations like the Pentecostal Movement [Pingströrelsen]. Conservative arguments to retain restrictions to divorce were based on a marital ideology that viewed the conjugal family rather than the individual as the most important social unit in society. In their view, stable marriage guaranteed a stable society and it was therefore natural that marital law should constrain the freedom of the individual for the collective good of the family and, by extension, society. Conservatives defended the legal restrictions that had been in effect since the early twentieth century, such as obligatory mediation and the requirement of a completed separation period in no-fault divorce cases, as well as damages in fault-based divorce. The main rhetorical strategy for defending maintaining or even increasing state efforts to reduce the number of divorces was to stress “the rights of children to a father, a mother and a home”. Consequently, individual rights to divorce had to be constrained, as decreased family cohesion would negatively influence society’s ability to raise healthy and productive citizens due to the negative impact of divorce on children.

As predicted by the theory of the Second Demographic Transition, this traditional marital ideology was increasingly challenged and criticized in the public debate on divorce during the second half of the 1960s. A radical opinion attacked the limitations to the right to divorce in the 1915 law, and pushed for liberal reforms based on arguments stressing individual autonomy and the right to an actualization of emotional fulfillment for both men and women. The analysis of the debate in the news press shows that these radical values strongly dominated the debate on divorce during the second half of the 1960s and that the conservative positions were successively marginalized in the debate. The radical opinion was first primarily driven by editorials and organizations affiliated with the Liberal Party and by the women’s organizations, but was increasingly also supported by representatives of the Social Democratic Party toward the end of the period under study.

Surprisingly, the actors who argued for an unconditional right to divorce did not try to formulate arguments against the claim that children would be negatively influenced by increased divorce. They simply refrained from commenting on the issue, or just dismissed the argument as an expression of an outdated conservative opinion that wanted to preserve the status quo. For these radicals, it was rather the issue of how the divorce law constrained the personal freedom of the adults that was the central problem. According to Ron Lesthaeghe, children ceasing to be regarded as a restriction to paren-
tal divorce is a primary indicator of a breakthrough of the individualistic values associated with the Second Demographic Transition.\textsuperscript{165}

It is clear that the divorce debate was influenced by an ongoing renegotiation of the gender regime during the 1960s, caused by the rapid shift from a single- to a dual-provider family model. Both men and women who were critical of the limitations in the right to divorce attacked the divorce law for conserving gender inequality, as marital law worked to preserve economic dependence between the spouses. The rapid expansion of Swedish welfare state institutions during this period was also used to argue that individuals were no longer dependent on family for social security and that marital law should therefore treat the genders symmetrically and assume that both spouses should provide for themselves independently of one another. The rights to maintenance during marriage and alimony after divorce could therefore be branded as an expression of a marital ideology that regarded marriage as a “sustenance institution” for women rather than a voluntary union between two independent individuals. Restructuring in the form of expanding welfare state institutions had thus — according to the critics of the divorce law — resulted in a process of de-familialization that made economic obligations between spouses after divorce unnecessary and, even worse, legal constraints that worked to retain economic ties in marriage resulted in a conservation of female dependence and gender inequality.

From a male position, the increased legitimacy of individualism and personal autonomy was used to reject economic responsibility after divorce in the form of alimony. Alimony could thus be defined as unjust, as it constrained the freedom of divorced men and reduced their economic capacity to start a new family due to financial responsibilities to the former wife.

Interestingly, women’s organizations like the Fredrika Bremer Association and the Swedish Association of Professional Women did not explicitly argue against this male position, which points to the high degree of legitimacy of individualistic values among critics of the divorce law. Instead, the women’s organizations focused on how damages in cases of infidelity constrained the freedom of economically dependent housewives, who both lost their right to alimony and were forced to pay part of the communal property in damages if they were found guilty of infidelity. This was actually an argument against the principle of fault-based divorce in general, as the women’s organizations argued that it was impossible for an external party to assign blame to one of the spouses for causing the marriage to fail. Instead, they argued, infidelity was often a symptom of marital problems rather than the cause of them. In their criticism of damages, the women’s organizations expressed a quality-based view on marriage that argued that spouses could not

\textsuperscript{165} Lesthaeghe, “The Second Demographic Transition in Western Countries: An Interpretation,” 19–20.
be regarded as the personal property of one another. Consequently, it was unreasonable to penalize one spouse for being unfaithful, as infidelity was often caused by the other spouse’s failure to provide a fulfilling relationship. As no court of law could determine who was actually at fault for marital failure, any attempt to investigate the matter would just be an illegitimate violation of the individual right to privacy. The mandatory mediation in no-fault cases and the inquisitive court procedure in fault-based divorce could thus be attacked on the grounds that they meant an intrusion into private matters by a paternalistic state that tried to limit the free will of married individuals.

The definite breakthrough in concrete policy for this individualistic and quality-based perspective on marriage and divorce came in 1969, when the Social Democratic government presented its directive to the 1972 Committee on Family Law. Minister of Justice Herman Kling stated that a new divorce law “under no circumstances should force a person to continue living in a marriage they wanted to free themselves from.”\footnote{Special Advisers on Family Law [Familjelagsskunniga], Family and Marriage: report, Official Policy Reports (SOU) 1974:41 [Statens offentliga utredningar] (Stockholm, 1972), 58.} This directive resulted in the 1972 committee report that proposed a complete unilateral no-fault divorce law in which the only limitation to the individual right to an immediate divorce was a mandatory waiting period of six months if one of the spouses actively opposed the divorce or if the couple had children under the age of 16.

A central conclusion of the analysis conducted in the paper is that when the individual was put at the center of marital ideology, the reasons for wanting to leave a relationship both started and ended with the subjective opinion of the individual. Given this individualistic and quality-based view on marriage, any external attempts to limit the expression of the individual’s free will appeared illegitimate. In 1968 and 1969, this radical opinion marginalized the conservative resistance to changes in the divorce law and gave public voice to markedly permissive attitudes toward divorce. This indicates that normative change did interact with the evident economic and institutional changes that occurred during the same period in a way that contributed to making divorce more accessible. The findings thus support two central ideas in the theory of the Second Demographic Transition: that knowledge of normative changes is important for the understanding of why widespread changes in demographic behavior occur at a particular point in time; and that it is important to account for the way economic, institutional and normative factors interact to produce dramatic demographic shifts of the type that occurred in marital stability in Sweden during the 1960s and early 1970s. Often, it can be difficult to obtain adequate quantitative data to measure how normative and institutional factors influenced the behavior of historical
populations. In such cases, qualitative studies of the kind presented here can provide additional insight into the role played by these non-economic determinants of demographic behavior and address the issue of what type of processes are hidden in the residuals of quantitative models.
6. Concluding discussion

In Sweden today, more than two-thirds of all couples have their first child out of wedlock and a substantial proportion of parents choose to not marry at all.\textsuperscript{167} Of the couples who do marry, nearly one in every two marriages is likely to end in divorce.\textsuperscript{168} These facts clearly illustrate that marriage has now become one option among others, open to personal choice, rather than the required institutionalized form for heterosexual cohabitation that it once was. The aim of the studies in this thesis was to explore historical changes in the demographic characteristics of men and women who have experienced divorce, as well as what type of economic, normative and institutional changes in Swedish society can help to explain the reorganization of behavior and attitudes regarding divorce. The main results of the individual papers will be discussed below by applying Ansley Coale’s concepts of readiness, ability and willingness in order to integrate the empirical findings and address the question of how different forms of restructuring have decreased the practical and symbolic significance of marriage for the organization of heterosexual relationships in Sweden during the period 1915-1974.

Socio-economic changes facilitating the readiness to divorce

With regard to the issue of how socio-economic factors have influenced marital stability, two main conclusions can be drawn from the results presented in the papers. Firstly, a historical perspective is important, as there have been both continuity and change in how socio-economic and demographic characteristics of men and women have influenced the probability of divorce in Sweden. Secondly, it can be argued that the general pattern is one of democratization whereby groups that have had a disadvantaged position due to their socio-economic or gendered positions have increasingly gained the means to act on a demand to dissolve marriages they wanted to free themselves from.

Papers III and IV, which investigate socio-economic patterns of divorce in Sweden during the 1920s and 1930s and the early 1960s, respectively, show that the socio-economic growth hypothesis fits Swedish data well. The conclusion of the 1915 Committee on Family Law that the so-called Copenhagen travels were the preferred way of getting a divorce for bourgeois couples prior to the 1915 divorce law illustrates how socio-economic re-

\textsuperscript{168} See introduction on Page 2.
sources influenced the practical possibilities to divorce when constraints were high during the early twentieth century. Moving to Denmark even temporarily must have been very difficult to achieve for most couples from the middle and lower classes. Such qualitative findings suggest that divorce tends to be socially exclusive as long as constraints remain high, and that this will keep population levels of divorce at a low level. However, when societal norms become more permissive and individuals become less dependent on the family for their livelihood, divorce will become accessible to larger proportions of the population and allow the divorce rate to increase. Additionally, as constraints are lowered the strains that relative deprivation puts on a marriage can increasingly have a manifest effect on marital stability. In sum, this will allow the effect of the couple’s socio-economic position to shift from a positive to a negative gradient over time.

During the 1920s and 1930s, when the overall divorce rate was still low in Sweden, divorce was much more common among high-income groups as compared to the working class. An interesting finding is that already during the 1920s and 1930s the divorce rate among, for example, male journalists, military officers, engineers and lawyers was more or less on the same levels as in the general population of Sweden today. Paper IV, which investigates the individual-level determinants of divorce among Swedish couples during the period 1960-65, shows that 30 years later this positive socio-economic gradient had shifted to become negative for Swedish men. In the early 1960s it was no longer professionals like lawyers and journalists with high income and high educational levels who divorced the most. Instead, it was lower blue-collar men who exhibited an excess probability of divorce as opposed to higher white-collar professionals who had the most stable marriages in relative terms.

Based on the results, it can thus be established that a shift in the socio-economic gradient of divorce had occurred in Sweden by the early 1960s. This shift can also have the interpretation that the increase in divorce has been the result of a diffusion of elite behavior. The higher divorce propensities in urban high-income groups during the 1920s and 1930s shows that the increased tendency to act on individual dissatisfaction with one’s marriage through divorce started out as a behavior in privileged groups in the urban bourgeoisie that later spread to the lower classes, as the divorce rate continued to increase in the following decades. That divorce by the 1960s had become practically feasible for low-income groups as well was arguably a nec-


\[170\] Sandström, “Socio-economic determinants of divorce in early twentieth-century Sweden.”

ecessary precondition for the rapid surge in the divorce rate that occurred during the following years, and for reaching the all-time high of 14 divorces per 1,000 married females in 1974. The conclusion is that one important form of restructuring for the long-term growth of divorce has been that more equal socio-economic conditions and increased levels of affluence have resulted in a democratization of the access to divorce that has made it possible for a majority of couples to act on dissatisfaction with their marriage. If divorce is to become a generalized behavior that is adopted by nearly 50% of all couples, the access to divorce cannot be socially exclusive but must instead be attainable for more or less all couples, regardless of their relative socio-economic position.

These conclusions are further reinforced when contrasted against research on the socio-economic determinants of divorce during the 1980s and 1990s. Divorce research on the period after 1974 finds that the negative relationship between divorce and the socio-economic resources of couples in Scandinavia has been inversely associated with divorce probabilities, and that the gradient of education has become increasingly negative in Sweden and Denmark, as well as the US, during recent decades. Hence, it appears that the trend that emerged in the 1960s has been stable since then and that there has been a tendency for the negative gradient to be further reinforced during the 1980s and 1990s in Sweden.

An interconnected but different form of equalization in the access to divorce is tied to the development of a more symmetrical gender regime in Sweden. The commodification of female labor increased the symmetry in the capacity for exit between the genders. As a consequence, women have experienced increased possibilities to individually decide whether or not they want to stay married. Adding up the results in the separate papers, there is strong evidence that an increase in the readiness to divorce among Swedish women, as proposed by the independence hypothesis, has been a central form of restructuring behind the long-term shift from a low to high divorce rate regime in Sweden. The results show that economic independence, in the form of the gainful employment of wives, has been associated with in-

---

172 Nilsson and Strandh, “Skilsmässor och separationer”; Svarer and Verner, Do Children Stabilize Danish Marriages?


creased propensities for divorce, during both the early phase of the divorce transition in the 1920s and 1930s as well as the 1960s. The divorce rate in male occupational groups during the 1920s and 1930s was positively associated with the labor force participation rate of the wives. The estimated divorce rate increased by 5% for every percentage point increase in the level of gainful employment among the wives.\textsuperscript{175}

Regarding the increase in the readiness of Swedish women, the 1960s stand out as the most dynamic period. Although the measurements of female labor force participation in the census of 1960 and the more precise statistics available from 1963 and onward are not directly comparable,\textsuperscript{176} we know that the labor force participation of married women grew more rapidly during the 1960s than during any other decade of the twentieth century. During the first half of the 1960s, it increased by 7%. After 1965 it accelerated further, growing by another 9% to reach a total of 56% of all married women in 1970. The proportion of wives with an individual salary continued to grow during the 1970s, although at a slower pace, until the late 1980s when the labor force participation of married women reached approximately the same levels as for men.\textsuperscript{177} Paralleling this development, the divorce rate also had its most intense growth period, as it essentially tripled from 5 to 14 divorces per 1,000 married females during the period 1963-1974.

The results show that the relative risk of divorce during the period 1960-65 was 1.7 times higher for couples in which the wife was gainfully employed, as opposed to couples remaining in a traditional single-provider model. The rapid shift from a single- to dual-provider model during the 1960s thus also meant that a large proportion of the couples were shifted into a socio-economic category that exhibited substantially higher dissolution rates and that this development contributed to the rapid increase in divorce during the 1960s.\textsuperscript{178}

The analysis of the time trends of aggregate divorce rates and regional patterns of divorce in Papers I and II further supports the hypothesis that women’s economic independence has been important. When the association between aggregate levels of divorce and a number of theoretically implicated variables is investigated, female wage is the variable that exhibits the strong-

\textsuperscript{175}Sandström, “Socio-economic determinants of divorce in early twentieth-century Sweden.”

\textsuperscript{176}For a discussion of the differences in the definitions of labor force participation between the censuses and the more detailed labor market statistics collected from the 1960s and onward, see e.g. Per Silenstam, Arbetskraftsutbudets utveckling i Sverige 1870-1965 (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1970), 19–21; Åmark, “Women’s labour force participation in the Nordic countries during the twentieth century,” 300–303.

\textsuperscript{177}Stanfors, Education, labor force participation and changing fertility patterns, 81–86.

\textsuperscript{178}Sandström et al., “Socio-economic determinants of divorce in Sweden 1960-1965.”
est positive association with the divorce rate, both over time and between different geographical regions. This is true regardless of whether female wages are measured as a proportion of male wages over time or as absolute levels in different regions of the country. At the regional level during the 1970s, absolute female wages were strongly associated with the regional divorce rate. Looking at the relative wage of women in blue-collar occupations, Paper II concludes that the first marked increase in the divorce rate during the 1940s was accompanied by a strong increase in the relative blue-collar female wage, which grew from approximately 60% to above 70% of the male blue-collar wage. Although the level of the full-time employment of married women does not appear to have increased markedly during the 1940s, it has been well documented that the demand for female labor expanded substantially in Sweden during the Second World War as more than 700,000 Swedish men were enlisted at one time or another. The surplus demand for female labor and increased relative wages arguably lowered the alternative cost of divorce for married women, as opportunities to make an individually based livelihood improved. As the divorce rate leveled out during the 1950s, there was a marked negative deviation in the time trend of female wages consistent with the pattern of a positive relationship between female relative wage and divorce. Then, again, when the divorce rate started to increase rapidly during the early 1960s, female relative wage grew from 70% of the male wage to over 80% in the late 1960s. Hence, the results underline that socio-economic growth and the increased economic independence of women are two important forms of economic restructuring that have resulted in an increased readiness to divorce, and that these forms of equalization between social classes and genders have been important mechanisms that help explain the divorce transition in Sweden.


180 The main reason for using blue-collar wages is that complete information for the entire labor market is only available for the later part of the period under study. However, the blue-collar wage is arguably a good working proxy for the alternative cost of marriage for a housewife. On average, homemakers can be assumed to not have a strong labor market attachment, and jobs with lower qualifications are thus the most likely option for a majority directly after a divorce. For a discussion of these data, see Stanfors, Education, labor force participation and changing fertility patterns, 46–53.

Normative and institutional change facilitating the ability and willingness to divorce

Although the results discussed above underline that economic changes were important, there are good reasons to also consider how normative and institutional changes have interacted with and reinforced the influence of socioeconomic factors during the time periods when the divorce rate underwent substantial changes. The influence of the non-economic factors is not as easy to determine, as they are more difficult to operationalize as variables on the individual level and the proxies that might be used are often not available for historical populations. However, it is possible to discuss how the time trends in divorce developed in relation to what we know about the extent and timing of normative and institutional changes in Sweden to arrive at some conclusions of how these factors played a role in changing the constraints to divorce.

As evident from this thesis, the decrease in marital stability has not been uniform over time. More than four-fifths of the total increase from one divorce per 1,000 married females in 1915 to 14 in 1974 is concentrated to two periods during the twentieth century, namely 1941-1951 and 1963-1974. Actually, more than two-thirds of the total increase occurred in the last ten years of the period investigated in this thesis. Inspired by Ansley Coale’s ready-willing-able formulation, Ron Lesthaeghe argues that the type of pronounced change in demographic behavior that occurred in Sweden and other Western countries during the 1960s only comes about if the effects of economic restructuring coincide with normative and institutional change. If the causal model proposed by both Coale and Lesthaeghe is correct, there should be evidence of marked changes in these contextual factors during the high growth periods that can help explain why divorce behavior changed so rapidly at these points in time. Also, it is important to acknowledge that economic, normative and instructional change is fundamentally interconnected, and that changes in one area will influence the others through feedback. Normative and/or economic restructuring will result in, for example, a demand for political reforms to adapt institutions to new conditions in society. Several findings in the papers support the notion that the development of economic constraints to divorce has been dynamically interconnected to changes in legislation and welfare state institutions that have resulted in defamilialization, as well as to ideational changes regarding marriage, sexuality and gender.

The conditions under which divorce is granted in marital law arguably constitute the most direct form of institutional constraint to divorce. Despite this directness, the effects on the divorce rate due to the introduction of bilateral no-fault divorce in 1915 were quite inconspicuous, and it was not until the 1940s that the trend in the divorce rate made a substantial upward
shift. Apparently, the increased ability to divorce caused by the legal change in 1915 was in itself not enough to cause any rapid shift in behavior, as the economic constraints to divorce remained high during the 1920s and 1930s, particularly for women. However, the legal change did have a long-term influence, as it meant a substantial improvement in the ability to divorce that would have effects when the economic possibilities improved and the social stigma was reduced in later decades. Paper I, which investigates differentials in gendered initiative in divorce cases, concludes that the 1915 divorce law that granted former housewives the right to sue for alimony was an early contribution to an equalization of the capacity for exit between the genders. This finding is supported by the fact that there was a shift in gendered initiative to divorce, from a majority of male filings to a majority of female filings after the introduction of the law in 1915. This surplus of female initiative persisted into the 1940s, when Statistics Sweden stopped recording these data. The change in gendered initiative is an illustration of how the economic readiness and the ability of women to divorce have been interconnected. That women were granted the right to alimony in 1915 shows how their capacity for exit was determined not only by their integration into market processes outside the family but also by an institutional restructuring that has resulted in de-familialization.

Although the discussion here is focused on how women’s constraints have been lowered, it is important to realize that this change in the legal regime also had long-term consequences on the development of the economic constraints experienced by men. It can be argued that the right to sue for alimony increased women’s ability to divorce while it decreased men’s ability. In Sweden, alimony was in practice only awarded to former housewives who were unable to provide for themselves after a divorce. If the wife had means of her own, or was gainfully employed, the husband could expect to not be forced by the court to pay alimony. This meant that the husband of an employed wife experienced fewer economic disincentives to divorce than a man whose wife was a homemaker, and that the shift from a single-to dual-provider model in an individual household resulted in lowered economic constraints for both spouses. In this respect, as well as by lowering the legal constraints to divorce in general by introducing no-fault divorce, the more permissive law of 1915 set the stage for the growth that occurred...

---

183 Roderick Phillips originally pointed out the interconnectedness of females and males under legal regimes that grant alimony. Phillips, Putting asunder, 620.
when increased readiness and willingness could also contribute to the development in the following decades. The legal framework introduced in 1915 was thus a necessary, but not sufficient, change for the great increases in the divorce rate that would occur only later, when reinforced by economic and normative changes.

The findings indicate that the first time point when more than one of the factors in Coale’s model contributed the secular trend of increase is localized to the 1940s. That the late 1930s and 1940s constitute a pivotal shift in Swedish history, with regard to both the spread of secular, more permissive norms as well as being a breakthrough period for the development of the Swedish welfare state, has been extensively documented by Swedish historical research. Normatively, several changes occurred already in the late 1930s as the Social Democratic Party began its hegemonial period in Swedish politics after the election of 1932, first through cooperation with the Agrarian Party and after the election in 1936 as a purely Social Democratic government. This Social Democratic dominance continued uninterrupted until the elections of 1976, and meant the development of the specific type of extensive Nordic welfare state. The most substantial periods of expansion of state-provided social security occurred during the so-called “harvest periods” in the second half of the 1940s and during the 1960s and early 1970s. Trenchantly, these periods closely correspond to the two high growth periods in divorce during the twentieth century.

The new social policy developed in state commissions during the 1930s in response to the economic depression and the “population crisis” — whereby Sweden in 1934 had the lowest recorded period fertility in the world — resulted in a string of reforms from the Social Democratic Party to “moral legislation” during the late 1930s, as well as a breakthrough for Keynesian economic policy and an expansion of social insurance in the second half of the 1940s. Swedish historical research argues that the 1930s constitute a shift in the political history of Sweden, and that one important aspect of this was that “social engineers” representing the medical and social sciences replaced the Church as the main source of legitimation of social policy. The new goal of social politics was the rational scientific planning of a “people’s home” that would do away with the endemic poverty, illness and destitution that had plagued preindustrial society. During the 1930s and 1940s a comprehensive set of welfare policies was introduced in Sweden —

unemployment benefits (1934), public pensions (1935, 1946), childbirth benefits for mothers (1937), two weeks’ paid vacation (1938), public health insurance (1946), grants to municipalities for school meals (1946) and child benefits (1947) being some of the more important reforms. These new policies made individuals less dependent on the family for social security and contributed to a process of de-familialization in the late 1930s and 1940s. With regard to the de-familialization of women, the general child benefit and free school meals are especially worth mentioning. The child allowance was given directly to the mother regardless of her level of income, and thus contributed to the independent economic resources of the mother whether or not she was employed.\textsuperscript{186} Free school meals were also introduced, with the explicit goal of making it feasible for housewives to seek gainful employment during school hours as they would not need to stay home to tend to their children during lunch breaks.\textsuperscript{187}

In a similar manner, the late 1930s and 1940s are further characterized by normative changes that resulted in the expression of more liberal and permissive attitudes regarding family and sexuality. The secular and “scientific” outlook on sexuality promoted by the population commission and in the works of Gunnar and Alva Myrdal — in which they argued for a principle of voluntary parenthood — raised the issues of sexual education, access to contraceptives and the possibilities for women to combine gainful employment with the rearing of children in the late 1930s.\textsuperscript{188} The radical views present in the debate on women’s roles during the late 1930s is well exemplified by Alva Myrdal in her discussion of the confined life of housewives in \textit{Crisis in the Population Question} (1934). In her discussion of making female employment more compatible with childbearing, she argued that housewives who were deprived of their “functions in productive life” tended to become “fat, lethargic and self-centered”.\textsuperscript{189} What was also radically new in comparison to

\textsuperscript{187} Hatje, \textit{Befolkningsfrågan och välfärden}, 107–110.
\textsuperscript{189} Alva Myrdal and Gunnar Myrdal, \textit{Kris i befolkningsfrågan} (Stockholm: Bonnier, 1934), 163–164.
traditional norms was that sexuality and the use of contraceptives were described as something natural, both inside marriage as well as in “marriage-like” relationships.\textsuperscript{190} Ann-Katrin Hatje argues that the influence of the population commission in its efforts to create new rational sexual morals is mainly found in its impact on public opinion. However, two main policy results during the 1930s were the decriminalization of infidelity in 1937 and the abolition of restrictions on the sale of and information about contraceptives in 1938.\textsuperscript{191} Lena Lennerhed traces the origin of the liberal ideas and reforms to legislation that occurred during the sexual revolution in the 1960s back to the criticism of Christian sexual moralism voiced in the public debate by the population commission in 1936 and by the National Association for Sexual Education (RFSU), founded in 1933.\textsuperscript{192}

This thesis shows that there is evidence of normative restructuring in terms of changed sexual behavior during the 1940s. The prevalence of sexually transmitted diseases (STD) more than doubled during the Second World War, despite increased access to condoms due to the deregulation of sales in 1938. Interestingly, there appears to be a connection between high levels of venereal disease and high levels of divorce, as Paper I finds an evident positive relationship between the prevalence of STDs and the divorce rate at the regional level during the period.\textsuperscript{193} If we assume that non-monogamous behavior is necessary for the spread of venereal disease, and that the level of such behavior is related to the social acceptance of having more than one sexual partner as well as to the permissibility of sexual relationships outside marriage, the sharp increase in STDs during the 1940s can be interpreted as an indication of a change toward more liberal norms. Such evidence reinforces the overall picture of a spread of more permissive attitudes and suggests that these norms resulted in an actual change in behavior.

Like in most other Western countries, the 1950s turned out to be an intermediate period in the history of divorce in Sweden. Beginning in 1951 the gradient of increase began to level out, and even decreased slightly from the mid-1950s until 1963. Regarding the economic interdependence in marriage, the decrease in female relative wage has already been mentioned as an indication that economic disincentives to divorce likely increased for women during the 1950s, and although the labor force participation of married

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{190} Hirdman, \textit{Att lägga livet till rätta}, 138–139; Hatje, \textit{Befolkningsfrågan och välfärden}, 190.
\textsuperscript{192} Lennerhed, \textit{Frihet att njuta}, 21–38, 225–252.
\end{flushleft}
women did increase during the 1950s\textsuperscript{194} this did not result in any increase in the divorce rate at the aggregate level. Period effects that in part explain the negative deviation from the secular trend during the 1950s were that nuptiality decreased sharply and that period fertility was elevated during the baby boom years in the 1940s and 1950s. Both these factors worked to decrease the proportion of short-duration and childless marriages, which tend to exhibit lower stability.\textsuperscript{195} The small birth cohorts during the first half of the 1930s meant that the number of people who entered their 20s in the 1950s was relatively small, which explains why nuptiality decreased despite the fact that mean age at marriage was lower in the 1940s and 1950s as compared to the first decades of the twentieth century.

In international divorce research, the downturn in the divorce rate is primarily attributed to the change in normative climate during the 1950s. The Western renaissance for familialistic attitudes during the 1950s has been extensively documented, and many scholars have identified this normative trend as the primary reason for the stagnation of the divorce rate during the decade.\textsuperscript{196} Regarding Sweden, the fact that female wages stagnated while male wages increased considerably during the 1950s meant that even working-class men could afford to support a stay-at-home wife. This had been a longstanding goal of the Social Democratic Party and the labor movement, but it was only during the 1950s that social democratic politicians could assume that it was also practically feasible for a substantial proportion of their constituents.\textsuperscript{197} Swedish gender historians such as Christina Florin and Yvonne Hirdman argue that after the comparatively radical discussion of women’s roles during the 1930s, and the period of increased demand for female labor during the Second World War, the normative climate during the late 1940s and 1950s was characterized more by a backlash against the view that women should be able to be economically active in the labor market.\textsuperscript{198} Women’s roles as mothers and primary caregivers were again more strongly emphasized. Rather than questioning the public-private dichotomy, the political debate during the 1950s did not result in any attempts to further

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{198} Hirdman, “Social Engineering and the Woman Question,” 90–91; Florin, “Skatten som befriar,” 107.
\end{footnotesize}
female employment but rather in a reaffirmation of a gender regime based on a “housewife contract”.199

The expansion of the Swedish welfare state slowed down during the 1950s, as Social Democrats were again forced to cooperate with the Agrarian Party after the election in 1948 when the right wing nearly managed to win the elections. The coalition years of 1951-1957 have been described as a maintenance period for social policy, and it was not until the early 1960s that the expansion of the welfare state accelerated during the “second harvest period”.200 That the process of institutionally driven de-familialization slowed down during the 1950s might thus be yet another factor that contributed to the temporary halt in the growth of divorce during the 1950s.

After a decade of negative deviation from the secular trend during the 1950s, economic, institutional and normative conditions entered a new phase of rapid and simultaneous change beginning in the early 1960s. The restructuring of Swedish society during the 1960s and early 1970s can almost be characterized as a perfect storm, regarding changes toward conditions we might expect to be conductive to divorce. The 1960s were characterized not only by an increased readiness of Swedish couples due to a rapid shift from a single- to dual-provider model, but also by extensive institutional and normative restructuring. Focusing on the most dynamic period of the divorce transition during the 1960s and early 1970s, this thesis shows that there was a marked change in publicly expressed attitudes toward divorce between 1964 and 1969. During these years, the opinion that marital law had to limit the individual right to divorce due to society’s interest of keeping families intact was replaced by a discourse on marriage that argued that the right to personal freedom demanded an unconditional right to divorce.201

Paper V finds a sharp contrast between the two Committees on Family Law that investigated the divorce law during the 1960s. The 1964 committee proposed to retain all the restrictions on divorce present in the 1915 divorce law and actually suggested further limitations, such as an extended requirement for mediation. The strong emphasis on children’s right “to a father, a mother and a home” illustrates how the committee argued for a traditional view on marriage based on the Judeo-Christian tradition. To the members

---

199 Hirdman, “Kvinnorna i välfärdsstaten,” 184–189.
201 Sandström, “‘Laws shouldn’t chain people to one another”: Attitudes toward divorce in Swedish public debate 1964-1972”
of the 1964 committee, it seemed natural that marriage should constrain the freedom of the individual for the collective good of the family and, by extension, society. However, the criticism of the committee report grew in intensity, to reach a peak in 1968 during the same period when the divorce rate also grew rapidly. Women’s organizations and organizations tied to the Liberal Party attacked fault-based divorce and the tendency for marital law to reinforce economic dependence between spouses. In 1968 the Social Democratic government incorporated this position and appointed a new Committee on Family Law, with a radical directive that stated that a person “under no circumstances should be forced to live in a marriage they wanted to free themselves from.” As the 1960s shifted into the 1970s, even the conservative newspapers supported liberal reforms and defenders of limitations in the right to divorce were constrained to a Christian opinion, which had become marginalized in the debate. The analysis of the divorce debate in Sweden during the 1960s clearly demonstrates that there was a shift in the publicly expressed values regarding divorce and marriage during the most dynamic period of the divorce transition. The finding that the criticism of the divorce law was strongly determined by the increased legitimacy of values of gender equality and personal autonomy ties this debate on divorce closely to other issues of gender and sexuality that were also restructured during the sexual revolution and the Second Wave of feminism in the 1960s. The finding in Paper I that the regional divorce rate was negatively associated with the number of votes for Christian Democrats in the parliamentary elections in 1973 is another indication that norms, and particularly the spread of secular values, did matter during this dramatic phase of the divorce transition.202

The thesis also finds that a reoccurring argument among those who argued for complete no-fault divorce was that the rapid expansion of the Swedish welfare state during the 1960s resulted in a process of defamilialization as the increased access to state social security made individuals independent of the family. For the critics of the divorce law, the problem was that marital law had not adapted to societal change and still treated marriage as a “sustenance institution” for women. Consequently, the right to alimony and damages in cases of divorce should be removed, as it was not in harmony with the contemporary view of marriage as a free commitment between two independent individuals who should be able to provide for themselves by individual wage labor or, failing that, by individually based social security.

The second “harvest period” in Social Democratic welfare state policy entailed a massive expansion of government taxation that grew from 21.7%
of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 1960 to 30.6% in 1975. An illustration of the co-variation between the expansion of the government sector and divorce can be found in Figure 2, which shows the divorce rate per 1,000 married women and total government consumption in percent of the GDP for the years 1900-2000. The positive co-variation between the level of government consumption and the divorce rate is clearly distinguishable in Figure 2. Growth periods in the divorce rate during both the 1940s and 1963-1974 occurred at the same time as a marked expansion of government expenditure.

Figure 2: Number of divorces per 1,000 married women and total government consumption as percent of gross domestic product 1900-2000.


Hadenius et al., Sverige efter 1900, 386.

Figures for the ratio of total government consumption and GDP are based on calculations from source data in Rodney Edvinsson, Growth, accumulation, crisis: with new macroeconomic data for Sweden 1800-2000, Stockholm studies in economic history, 41 (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 2005), 323-326.
Many scholars argue that one of the distinctive characteristics of Scandinavian policymaking during the 1960s, and the Nordic welfare state that developed during this period, was that social insurance systems treated women as independent citizens and that policy was explicitly designed to improve female employment opportunities.\textsuperscript{205} Expanding state institutions in health care, education and social services during the 1960s and 1970s was a central determinant of the rapid increase in female labor force participation.\textsuperscript{206} In this respect, the increased readiness of Swedish women due to the rapid shift to a dual-provider model during the 1960s was closely related to changes in state institutions. There is thus an apparent interaction between the expanding welfare state and increased female economic independence, in terms of a growing service sector being the major demand-side change that explains the sharp increase in female labor force participation. The development of welfare state institutions during the 1960s and 1970s provided both a new female labor market as well as the services needed to free women from reproductive work in the domestic sphere. Furthermore, the expansion of the welfare state was also one of the central arguments for increasing the individual right to divorce in the debate that resulted in the liberalization of the divorce law in 1974, which again illustrates how changes in economic readiness, normative willingness and institutional ability have been dynamically interconnected.

The chronological scope of the divorce transition and the complex ways that divorce as a micro-level process in the couple is influenced by macro-level change in the economy, value systems and state institutions makes it only possible to map the contours of this development in a work of this scope. Consequently, there are many issues of the divorce transition in Sweden that would merit further investigation.

In particular, valuable new insights might be attained when adequate individual-level datasets recording vital events for married couples during the first half of the twentieth century become available. There is currently a development of individual-level longitudinal datasets in Sweden that covers the


\textsuperscript{206} Åmark, “Women’s labour force participation in the Nordic countries during the twentieth century,” 315.
period from the beginning of the twentieth century through the 1960s. These datasets will make it possible to conduct detailed studies of socio-economic determinants of divorce in Sweden during the first half of the century using event history methods, which have many advantages over cross-sectional studies. An especially interesting issue that has not been possible to investigate in this thesis due to a lack of workable data is how the individual- and couple-level determinants of divorce developed during the 1940s when the first surge in the divorce rate occurred. Also, further investigation of how divorce risks changed for different kinds of couples during the 1950s, when the divorce rate leveled out, would be worth investigating.

Another issue that has not been studied in Sweden is how divorce probabilities were distributed and how they changed over time prior to the legal change in 1915. Internationally, there are few detailed individual-level studies of determinants of divorce during the period of the nineteenth century when divorce was still rare. The high quality of Swedish demographical data and access to a longitudinal dataset covering the nineteenth century could be utilized to further the knowledge of the distribution of divorce risks in low-divorce societies. Another issue worth investigating further is the extent to which changes in government services and transfers are associated with changes in the propensity for divorce, both on an individual level and through time-series methods.

Qualitative studies that might prove valuable are, for example, investigating how divorce was discussed in the legislative work during the late 1930s as well as studying how couples argued for divorce in court records during the first half of the twentieth century. This would offer further knowledge of how the norms regarding divorce developed in connection to the increases in the divorce rate during this earlier period. Although the decriminalization of infidelity in 1937 indicates a shift toward more permissive attitudes and a move toward secular values in divorce legislation, to my knowledge the issue of how legislative change was motivated by different political actors has not yet been investigated in Swedish historical research.

This thesis is the first attempt to write a long-term history of the divorce transition in Sweden, and I have argued that a historical perspective is necessary if we are to understand the process that has produced current marital behavior. The results of the thesis show that there have been both continuity and change in how individual-level factors such as social class, gender and family composition have influenced the propensity to use divorce as a way to change one’s life. The changes revealed in the gendered and socio-

207 POPUM III at the Demographic Database, Umeå University, as well as SEDD, Scanian Economic Demographic Database at the Centre for Economic Geography, Lund University.
economic distribution of divorce show how the divorce transition reflects aspects of socio-economic and gendered equalization during the twentieth century. That the divorce rate was on contemporary levels in many elite groups already in the early twentieth century shows that substantial demand for divorce existed—at least in some segments of the population—already during the early twentieth century, when the aggregate level of divorce was still low. A conclusion that can be drawn from the changes in empirical patterns of divorce is that an important precondition for decreased marital stability has been an increase and a more equal distribution of the resources available to the individual, independent of family ties. These parallel processes of equalization between both genders and social strata have made it possible for growing proportions of the population to choose more freely whom to live with and for how long; particularly, this development has influenced the possibilities for women and low-income groups to choose more freely as compared to the early twentieth century.

A contribution of the thesis is that it illustrates the utility of combining quantitative and qualitative methods of inquiry as well as several theoretical constructs in a multidimensional framework such as the ready, willing, able model. In this concluding discussion and overview of the different phases of the divorce transition in Sweden, I have stressed that the timings of substantial behavioral change are difficult to understand if the analytical perspective does not incorporate how contextual-level changes in cultural values and institutions have integrated with economic restructuring. In divorce research the analysis of institutional change has mostly focused on reforms of divorce legislation, while other institutional changes like increases in government services and in social security systems have seldom received much attention. A model such as Coale’s highlights connections that might otherwise fade into the background, like the mutual dependence between increased economic readiness and institutionally driven de-familization.

To summarize, the findings of the thesis demonstrate that changes in readiness, ability and willingness have been closely intertwined and have reinforced one another during the periods when the divorce rate has undergone substantial increases in Sweden. I have argued that the way divorce reflects the connections between micro-level changes in family dynamics and societal-level restructuring, caused by a shift to a modern consumer capitalist society during the twentieth century, is the principal argument for why the history of divorce is especially worth investigating. In particular, the gendered nature of divorce reflects how these societal transformations have resulted in changes in the gender regime and indicates that divorce can function as an important indicator of historical changes in the power relations between men and women.
7. Svensk sammanfattning (Summary in Swedish)


En central slutsats i avhandlingen är att förändringar i familjens funktionssätt, vilka framdrivits av omformningen av Sverige till en modern marknadsekonomi, har varit avgörande för att minska de hinder som tidigare gjort skilsmässor svåra att genomföra, inte minst för mindre resursstaka grupper i samhället och för kvinnor. Skiftet från en traditionell en-försörjar modell till en två-försörjar modell och den ökade integrationen av både kvinnor och män i marknadsprocesser utanför familjen har resulterat i ett minskat ekonomisk beroende mellan gifta makar. Detta har medfört att de ekonomiska hindren för skilsmässa har reducerats och att fler gifta par har kunnat agera på en efterfrågan på skilsmässa. Denna slutsats stöds av att olika indikatorer för kvinnligt ekonomiskt beroende har varit förknippad med högre benägenhet till skilsmässa under hela den tid som undersöks i denna avhandling. Att förändringar av kvinnors livsvillkor och förmåga till självständigt agerade har varit viktiga för minskningen av äktenskapsstabiliteten, får ytterligare stöd av att kvinnor har varit mer benägna än män att aktivt söka skilsmässa, och att denna skillnad i initiativ mellan könen etablerades redan under 1900-talets första hälft efter införandet av 1915 års skilsmässolag.

Resultaten visar också att andra ekonomiska förändringar som inte är direkta förbundna med genutvecklingen och de ekonomiska förhållandena mellan män och kvinnor i familjen har bidragit till den minskade äktenskapsstabiliteten. Den allmänna välgöringsökonomen och utjämnningen av inkomster mellan sociala klasser under 1900-talet har lett till att den genomsnittliga mängden resurser som är tillgängliga på individnivå har ökat. Fler och fler människor har således nått en ekonomisk standard som är tillräcklig för att försörja sig själva individuellt, oberoende av familjen. Studien visar att redan under 1920 och 1930-talet hade många manliga höginkomsttagagruppor som t.ex. jurister, journalister, ingenjörer och officerare skilsmässotal som motsvarade de man finner i den allmänna befolkningen idag. Under 1960-talet då skilsmässorna påbörjade sin mest intensiva ökningsperiod under 1900-talet hade dock detta förhållande förändrats så att det nu var individer i
arbetarklassen med lägre inkomster och kortare utbildning som uppvisade den största benägenheten att skiljas. Detta negativa samband mellan socioekonomisk status och skilsmässa är ett mönster som tycks ha bestått sedan dess. Dessa resultat indikerar att transitionen från låga till höga skilsmässotal i Sverige under 1900-talet är förknippade med en dubbel utjämningsprocess mellan sociala klasser och mellan könen i förmågan att agera på en efterfrågan på skilsmässa. Resultaten visar att en förutsättning för att skilsmässa ska kunna bli ett majoritetsbeteende som omfattar närmare hälften av alla äktenskap är att en demokratiseringsprocess äger rum vilken gör skilsmässa tillgänglig och praktisk genomförbar för en majoritet av befolkningen, snarare än att bara vara tillgänglig för resursstarka grupper.


Vad gäller frågan om hur institutionell omvandling har samverkat med ekonomiska och normativa förändringar i den process som gjort skilsmässor mer accepterade och mer tillgängliga under 1900-talet, visar avhandlingen att perioderna då kraftig ökning i skilsmässotalen har ägt rum nästan perfekt sammanfaller med de två perioder under 1900-talet då den svenska välfärdsstaten har expanderat som mest intensivt. Avhandlingen argumenterar för att utbyggnaden av statlig service och den snabba expansionen av socialförsäkringssystemen under de socialdemokratiska ”skördetiderna” på 1940-talet och 1960-talet bidrog till att ”de-familiserade” individer. Välfärdsfunktioner som barnomsorg, äldre vård, sjukförsäkring, arbetslöshet etc., vilka tidigare helt eller delvis producerats inom familjen, absorberades i stigande omfattning av det offentliga. Nyttjande av dessa system var i regel individuellt baserade och knöts till individens arbetsmarknadsdeltagande, vilket har bidragit till att göra vuxna män och kvinnor mindre beroende av familjeband för
sin sociala och ekonomiska trygghet. Empiriskt är det tydligt att både skattekvoten och omfattningen av den offentliga konsumtionen uppvisar ett markant positivt samband med skilsmässofrekvensen under 1900-talet. Avhandlingen drar slutsatsen att institutionella förändringar av det här slaget var särskilt viktiga för kvinnor och låginkomsttagares förmåga till skilsmässa. Vidare är det en slutsats att timingen av snabba förändringar i skilsmässobeteendet under 1900-talet blir svåra att förstå om inte det analytiska perspektivet inkluderar hur normativa och institutionella faktorer har samverkat med ekonomiska förändringar under de mest dynamiska perioderna av den svenska skilsmässotransitionen.
References


———. Individualization: institutionalized individualism and its social and political


Kalmijn, Matthijs, Sofie Vanassche, and Koenraad Matthijs. “Divorce and


Special Advisers on Family Law [Familjelagssakunniga]. Family and Marriage:


Therborn, Göran. Between sex and power: family in the world, 1900-2000. Interna-


Watkins, Susan Cotts. “If All We Knew About Women was What We Read in Demography, What Would We Know?” *Demography* 30, no. 4 (1993): 551–577.


Wollstonecraft, Mary. *A vindication of the rights of woman: with strictures on political and moral subjects*. J. Johnson, 1796.


This thesis extends the historical scope of divorce research in Sweden by providing an analysis of how the variations in the divorce rate over time and across geographical areas are connected to the economic, normative and institutional restructuring of Swedish society during the period 1915-1974.

A main finding of the thesis is that the reshaping of Swedish society into a modern market economy has changed the economic functions of the family and made individuals less dependent on family ties for social and economic security. Integration of both men and women in market processes outside the family and a general increase in the level of affluence have made single life feasible for both women and low income groups that experienced severe economic constraints to divorce in the early twentieth century.

However, it is not possible to limit the analysis to a strictly economic perspective. The thesis finds that the increase in divorce is strongly concentrated to two periods, namely the 1940s and during the years 1963-1974. In the thesis it is argued that these periods of Swedish history is characterized by a synchronized change in both economy, values and institutions that all simultaneously changed in a way that resulted in decreased constraints to divorce. During these periods women experienced better opportunities to support themselves through labor force participation, at the same time as values that empathized individualism and permissive views on family and sexuality gained increased legitimacy. These periods also coincides with the “harvest periods” in Social Democratic welfare state policy in Sweden as the public sector grew more rapidly than during other periods of the twentieth century.

That the public sector provided better and more extensive social insurance worked to “de-familialized” individuals in terms of making them less dependent on the family for their social security. In the thesis it is argued that these periods of substantial behavioral change become difficult to understand if not the analytical perspective explicitly incorporates how these contextual factors in the value system and institutional structure integrated with economic change during the most dynamic periods of the Swedish divorce transition.