The Forest and the Trees: Industrialization, Demographic Change, and the Ongoing Gender Revolution in Sweden and the United States, 1870-2010

Maria Stanfors and Frances Goldscheider

Stockholm Research Reports in Demography 2015: 18
The Forest and the Trees: Industrialization, Demographic Change, and the Ongoing Gender Revolution in Sweden and the United States, 1870-2010

Maria Stanfors
Centre for Economic Demography at Lund University

Frances Goldscheider
Department of Family Science and Maryland Population Research Center at University of Maryland

Abstract: This paper examines the major trends unravelling the long-term gender division of family support and care structure that reached its peak in the middle of the twentieth century, often called the “worker-carer” or the “separate spheres” model. The unraveling of the “separate spheres” began with the increase in the labor force participation of married women and continues with the increase in men’s involvement with their homes and children, but its foundations were laid in the nineteenth century, with industrialization. We examine these two trends for two quite dissimilar countries, Sweden and the United States, advancing our understanding of the growth of female labor force participation and of men’s roles in the family. We show that despite short-term stalls, slowdowns, and even reverses, as well as huge differences in policy contexts, the overall picture of increasing gender sharing in family support and care is strongly taking shape in both countries. It is clear that role specialization within the household, though theoretically important, applied only for a limited period.
1. Introduction

What are the origins of the “separate spheres” approach to the activities of men and women, which reached its apogee in the 1950s and 1960s in most of the industrialized world? How did it happen that men came to dominate the public sphere of politics, arts, media and, above all, market work for wages? And women to dominate the private sphere of the home where unpaid caring, nurturance, maintenance and also unpaid production take place? This is not a new question (Cott 1976; Engels 2004 first published in 1884), but it has rarely been addressed in the context of the recent family changes of increasing ages at marriage and parenthood, declining fertility, and rising rates of cohabitation, unmarried parenthood and union dissolution, often called the “second demographic transition” (SDT).

It is increasingly clear that the worker-carer configuration of men in the public sphere of paid work and women in the private sphere of unpaid work in the family is not an eternal, fundamental gender system; it has been coming unraveled for the past half century with the growth in female labor force participation. While anthropologists tell us that every society makes distinctions between the activities of men and women, they also tell us that the content of these activities varies widely in pre-industrial societies (Rosaldo and Lamphere 1974). How, then, did the separate spheres arise and take on such power that the dominant social theorists of the family of the 1950s and 1960s, e.g., the economist Becker (1960, 1965) and the sociologist Parsons (1959), reinforced by their psychological contemporaries’ interpretation of Freud (e.g., Strecker 1946), assumed that this gender structure was necessary? So much so that another major sociological theorist of that era, William Goode (1963), who actually examined industrialization and family change, posited that with industrialization, family structures and activities would converge from great heterogeneity towards a homogeneous end point, the nuclear family with
1950s gender roles? Goode’s prediction was clearly wrong, apparently on many dimensions (Cherlin 2012). Most fundamentally, his massive review missed the increases in the labor force participation of married women that began to emerge in the 1950s and 1960s\(^1\), and strengthened greatly during the 1970s and 1980s; a change that from the beginning created great anxiety about the family (e.g., Hoffman and Nye 1974). To understand recent family changes, and perhaps why Goode was originally so wrong about women’s roles, requires re-examining his question of how industrialization has affected the family.

In this paper, we frame our analysis with economic theory (broadened to incorporate family care), but take a multidisciplinary approach, adding demographic and sociological perspectives to our analysis. We begin the narrative with the establishment of the separate spheres, as industrialization moved men out of the household-based agricultural economy into industrial and commercial occupations, thereby enormously expanding a “public sphere” of non-family activities.\(^2\) This left women behind, in the “private sphere,” initially managing the home, kitchen gardens and small animals with the help of the children. We continue the historical story past the 1950s, when the separation between the spheres was challenged radically first by married women’s labor market activity and then by the emerging increase in male domestic activity. By comparing historical data from Sweden and the United States, two quite dissimilar countries that differ both in the timing and the extent of men’s move into the public sphere and the speed with which women joined them, we will show that although the patterns and their timings vary, the trends are highly similar.

\(^1\) Nearly 20 years later, however, Goode (1982) recognized many of the revolutionary implications of the rise of married women’s labor force participation.

\(^2\) We realize that the public sphere was a much older construct, including such enduring institutions as government, the church, and other nonfamily institutions, but few men inhabited it in the way they came to, which is what made the public-private distinction the new foundation of gender roles in the family.
By taking this broad brush approach to gender change, we will see that the many studies that focus on the “trees”, i.e., only on married women’s inroads into paid work, or only on what seems like the glacial pace of change in men’s family roles as well as on the resistance to such change, are missing an understanding of the “forest.” This comparison will also suggest that later industrializing countries may follow quite different gender paths as their separate spheres’ structures weaken. They may minimize their gender differentiation, despite the strong impetus towards the separate spheres provided by the early industrializers (Boserup 1970; Garey and Townsend 1996; Thornton 2005). Even the early industrializers are making rapid headway towards much more equal gender roles, i.e., toward the complete destruction of the separate spheres.

2. Background: Industrialization and its implications

The story of the Industrial Revolution is frequently told (e.g., Ashton 1970; Floud and McCloskey 1981; Mokyr 1985; Pollard 1981), but its connection to the activities of men and women, and to the family, is a less frequent subject. Nearly all the foundational studies are profoundly male-biased, based primarily on the measurement of men’s activities.\(^3\) Although economic historians agree that the onset of the Industrial Revolution is the most important event in history since the agrarian revolution, the focus is mainly on its implications for production and its contribution to economic growth and increasing living standards (e.g., Ashton 1970; Crafts 1985; Hartwell 1971; Lindert and Williamson 1983). Yet it has had many other effects.

\(^3\) Important exceptions focusing on women include, e.g., Berg and Hudson (1992); Burnette (2008); Hudson (1995); Humphries (1991); Pinchbeck (1930); and Tilly and Scott (1975). Also, de Vries (2008) acknowledges the role of women through a more elaborate focus on the household economy in his analysis of the “industrious revolution”.

4
2.1 Industrialization, women and the family

In particular, in addition to raising living standards, industrialization has had far-reaching impacts on individuals and families, that is, on the social relations between individuals within families, not just on their economic activities. One impact that is acknowledged by demographers and family historians is critical to our narrative—the demographic transition from high to low mortality and fertility—as it is this set of changes, in conjunction with a transformation of women’s opportunities to undertake paid work outside of the home, that has revolutionized the productive roles of women. Thus, the Industrial Revolution not only fueled economic transformation, radically altering men’s productive lives as subsistence farmers, but also contributed to the transition to the much longer life spans and smaller families that first transformed women’s reproductive lives (Davis 1945; Demeny 1968; Notestein 1945; Thompson 1929) and then their productive lives.

These demographic changes, however, were not understood to change women’s roles. Reduced fertility was assumed simply to change their activities as housewives and mothers from caring for quantities of children to improving the quality of their children (Becker and Lewis 1974); any other extra time was assumed to be devoted to higher quality housekeeping, volunteer work, redecorating, and furthering their spouse’s career. Hence, there was considerable surprise when married women chose to use their new time to add at least occasional paid employment to their role set, but with initially little impact on men’s roles, and even more surprise when family change erupted in the 1970s, including delays in taking on the highly committed family roles of marriage and parenthood, together with increases in union instability. These trends, the SDT, include as well dramatically reduced fertility and great increases in both non-marital cohabitation
and childbearing. They are often linked with rising rates of female labor force participation (Cherlin 1996; Lesthaeghe 1983, 2010; van de Kaa 1987).

We agree with this link between female labor force participation and family change, although it is highly contested (Johnson and Skinner 1986; Sayer and Bianchi 2000), because the rise in female employment is the opening crack in the separate spheres construction of the family, and thus in our view the first half of the gender revolution. In this paper we add a gender frame to the ongoing story of industrialization and family change by studying trends in two highly industrialized but quite different countries, Sweden and the United States. We undertake a systematic comparison of long-term trends in non-agricultural employment for men and for married women, examining the gender sphere gap that emerged when men joined the public sphere (notably via industrial employment) while married women largely concentrated on private (domestic) sphere activities. We then examine the way the gap narrowed over time as women joined men in the public sphere. Finally, we examine trends in men’s contribution to the family in terms of domestic tasks, the final blow to the separate spheres construction of gender roles.

By doing so, we hope to make clear that if one takes a long enough temporal perspective, one sees dramatic changes among four types of productive relationships between men and women over the past 140 years. First, there was the agricultural household economy, in which men and women worked together face to face to ensure their family’s survival. The second gender relationship superseded the agricultural household economy when nearly all men moved into the emerging public sphere, while women became the guardians of the family, creating the separate spheres. The third relationship developed when women initiated the gender revolution by challenging men’s total dominance in the public sphere and eventually gaining a near comparable standing in the labor market, while maintaining responsibility for most of the (now
greatly reduced) domestic tasks. Fourth and most recently, men have come increasingly to share these necessary tasks in the private sphere of the family. The spheres remain, but are no longer so rigidly gendered.

Most studies focus on shorter time periods, on single country experiences, and/or only on one gender. Thus studies focusing on women find rapid and dramatic increases in their involvement in the public sphere, particularly labor force participation but also education, with little change among men, seeing “trees” as it were. From our longer-term vantage, however, the “forest” dominates the view. Only by analyzing men and women jointly can we get a true sense of change over time; change that is nothing less than a total gender revolution.

2.2 Sweden and the United States

Like all industrializing countries, both Sweden and the United States have experienced economic transformations that have greatly increased living standards, as well as dramatic changes in the family. Neither the United States nor Sweden was among the earliest industrializers; in each, modern economic growth took off in the mid-nineteenth century, and the period after 1870 marks the most rapid increases in industrialization and growth in both countries. They benefited from favorable resource endowments and from latecomers’ advantages with respect to technological and organizational advances made elsewhere. Innovations and new technologies, machines and materials appeared throughout the last half of the nineteenth century and culminated with electrification, capital-intensive industry, mass production and the emergence of big business in the early twentieth century (Chandler 1977; Landes 1969).

There were differences, of course. American industrialization was compressed into a shorter period of time and the United States became the world’s industrial leader with many
progressive features around 1900, while Sweden has more recently (since around 1970) become a leader in supporting gender equality and the family. Sweden industrialized more slowly and became a mature industrial economy somewhat later than the United States (Schön 2011), yet women’s entry into the public sphere was more rapid once it began. The two countries are also quite different from each other in size, institutional structure, social policy goals and the historical treatment of women. The comparison is useful, nevertheless, because to some extent they present extremes with regard to family and gender policies, with Sweden placing more emphasis on family support and on many aspects of gender equality. Should trends regarding men’s and women’s involvement in paid and unpaid activities converge in such disparate settings vis-à-vis both gender and the family, this makes a pretty strong case that what we observe is a general phenomenon, one that is undoubtedly already unfolding in many countries.

Our study focuses on the 140-year period between 1870 and 2010, a period of rapid growth that also includes the development of democratic welfare states and the growth in social spending (Lindert 2004). In the sections that follow, we outline our theoretical approach, as well as the data and methods we employ, followed by our analysis of the trends that together have been shattering the separate spheres: the move of women into paid employment and of men into the tasks of the home.

---

4 When it comes to economic growth, Sweden outperformed the United States on a per capita basis between 1870 and 1970, to some extent due to catch-up but also forging ahead in certain sectors that advanced Sweden’s position internationally.

5 Although the United States and Sweden share features of industrialization, perhaps the biggest difference is their welfare systems and social spending levels, and in this respect they represent two extreme cases. While the United States is a residual welfare state with a focus only on basic safety nets that largely leave family support to the market, Sweden is a comprehensive welfare state with general and universal rights and benefits that provide substantial government support to individuals and families.
3. **Theory: Broadening the standard model to include the family**

In order to understand the patterns of change we observe, we must place this portrait of women’s move into the labor force and then men’s emerging move into the home into the context of economic theory. This requires us to broaden the standard economic model of labor supply, in which paid employment is modeled as an alternative to leisure, and hence a male life course under the separate spheres, i.e., one in which men have no responsibility for family beyond providing. The model is, at least in its design, gender-neutral, but not neutral regarding family responsibilities and therefore limited both for women and for men with family tasks.

Given this limitation, factors that affect the decision to work for pay are only the market wage offered, own preferences for work versus leisure, and unearned, non-labor, income. In this traditional (male) approach to labor supply, an individual will work one more hour (and therefore reduce leisure by one hour) so long as the market values this hour more than the individual does. The wage rate reflects market time valuation; the opportunity cost of not working is the market wages foregone. The value of leisure time depends on how the individual is willing to trade off work and leisure. A higher wage causes both an increase in paid work hours, as work becomes more attractive through the substitution effect, and a decrease in work hours through the income effect, as the need to work is weaker, although the net effect of these two effects is uncertain. A change in wages contrasts with a change in unearned, non-labor related income, where only the income effect operates.

We extend the standard economic model to show that the choice function vis-à-vis the labor supply decision for those with family responsibilities (i.e., women) is more complex. It is shaped not only by potential earnings, preferences and unearned income (predominantly the husband’s earnings and transfers), but also by the costs of outsourcing household production (see
Blau, Ferber and Winkler 2013; Jacobsen 2007). Hence, more realistically, it is a trade-off among three uses of time instead of two: work, leisure, and home care.

What the best choice is depends on context and necessarily changes with economic conditions. For example, increases in unearned income, perhaps due to rising earnings of the partner (henceforward the man), will reduce the other’s (henceforward the woman’s) labor force participation through the income effect. If women’s wages rise, particularly if the female-to-male ratio increases, women’s labor force participation should increase, although how much depends on the relative strength of the income and substitution effects.

For women who are outside the labor force, female wage increases can only exert substitution effects, making their time in employment relatively more valuable. Because the presence of children implies time costs, reducing both paid work and leisure among parents, fewer children will lower the value of time in home production and increase labor force participation both in the sense that more women will work and those who already are in the labor force will work more hours.

If we put theory together with the economic constraints and opportunities associated with industrialization, we can summarize by saying that increasing wages for women increased the value of work time and the opportunity cost of not working, and thus increased female labor force participation. Increasing male wages not only increased living standards but decreased the value of paid work for married women (by reducing the marginal utility of their economic contributions), and hence, pulled in the opposite direction, reducing female labor force participation. Similarly, increasing productivity in home production reduced the value of a (marginal) hour of work in the home so that could be devoted to other activities, such as market work, which increased married women’s labor force participation.
Hence, the standard approach to labor supply, involving the choice between two kinds of time uses, is inadequate for women who have family responsibilities, and increasingly not a good representation of men’s choices, as more men face the same three-fold choice regarding how to use time (market work, leisure, and household work), not just for those in egalitarian couples but also the rising numbers of single fathers (Hofferth and Goldscheider 2015). With changing gender relations in the labor market and in the family, men have started to take on more family and household obligations and this is the second change we need to consider within our theoretical framework. To do so, we need to address Becker’s economic specialization theory.

Becker’s (1965) theory on specialization applies to couples’ allocations of market work and family work, assuming that men’s and women’s roles are complementary and that decisions about the allocation of time are made based on efficiency (i.e., the partners’ comparative advantages in either type of work). Typically, men are assumed to be more productive in market work while women are assumed to be more productive in non-market activities, such as housework and child care, and thus the model predicts a gender-based division of labor. According to Becker, specialization and trade at the household level create mutual dependence among partners and stabilize marriage (Becker 1973, 1974, 1985).

Becker’s assertion is similar to that of Parsons (1953, 1959), who added a further sociological advantage of specialization: the prevention of disruptive competition between spouses. These early researchers assumed that increasing female labor force participation

---

6 Small biological or human capital differences between men and women can be sufficient for this specialization (Becker 1981:23).
decreased gains to marriage, and would result in a large number of divorces, although empirical evidence on whether married women’s employment actually is disruptive is mixed.⁷

Both Becker’s and Parson’s theories of specialization were developed against the backdrop of the male breadwinner model, which dominated Western countries during the 1950s and 1960s. In this context, many household goods and services were still produced in the home, and productivity differences between men and women were real. Growing consumer aspirations and the tendency to buy goods and services (childcare included) reduced the gains to specialization, and, together with many other changes, made female employment and dual breadwinning relatively more desirable (de Vries 2008; Oppenheimer 1988, 1997). In essence, they responded to changing economic incentives as men had done before, but took into account the extent of home tasks, as men increasingly have to do.

4. Data and methods

In this paper we apply a mixed-methods approach, which is particularly useful when addressing the kind of “how” and “why” questions we are interested in. It is also appropriate when making a historically-informed and empirically-based argument about long-term change. This approach also implies that we make use of a mixed set of materials.

4.1 Data

The data we exploit in our analysis include time series of macro-level demographic and economic indicators, together with cross-sectional census data and data from various time-use

---

surveys. When dealing with these kinds of data, we try to maximize consistency across time and across our two geographic contexts. The time series are mainly taken from printed public statistics or publications, but some data are extracted from primary archival sources. Moreover, some of the figures relating to Swedish census data are new estimates. To the extent that we use already published secondary data, we re-examine and re-interpret them in a critical way.

4.2 Measurement issues

Research on women’s changing role in the public sphere, and particularly that on men’s changing role in the private sphere, is relatively recent. In each case, there are major measurement issues that cloud consideration of trends. Regarding public sphere activities, the concepts ‘employment’ and ‘labor force participation’ are difficult to measure and compare over a long period of time, particularly when the focus is on gender differences. The difficulties mainly derive from problems in data collection and from the way the data collected are categorized and defined. This has largely to do with the meaning of work and how work has been counted in the past. Measurement issues make studying change in the private sphere even more challenging.

The central measurement issue involved in our understanding of men’s and women’s roles in the public sphere arose from a conceptualization that focused on men’s market work outside the home, neglecting women’s activities. The censuses of Sweden and the United States, like many others, began with concepts of “usual occupation” and “gainful employment”, which referred primarily to full-time work in non-farm occupations (nearly all held by men), with other
men coded as “farmers” or “farm laborers”. Female heads of household were often widows who took over proprietorship of bakeries and other shops, but also pharmacies and farms, after their husband’s death (Goldin 1990: 46-50). Few women worked outside of agriculture and, when involved in non-agricultural activities, were either self-employed or unpaid labor in various family enterprises (Carlsson 1968; Richards 1974). Their productive activities were less regular than men’s, seasonal, part-time, and commonly combined with unpaid care and domestic activities (Abel and Folbre 1990; Atkinson 2012; Goose 2007), and hence, they were ordinarily ignored.

Relatively few men worked outside of agriculture, either, but because the activities they were involved in counted as gainful employment, most men were in the labor force. For a farm couple, the husband was typically coded by census takers as a farmer; the wife as a housewife (or much more rarely, as an ‘assisting/unpaid family worker’), and hence normally as not economically active, neither with a gainful occupation (thru 1930 for the United States and 1945 for Sweden) nor in the labor force thereafter. Thus censuses have underreported women’s economic activities in the past. Women’s productive work was invisible before the separation of home and market in early industrializing countries like Britain, across countries experiencing

---

8 Censuses were big costly projects to undertake. They were justified in pre-industrial as well as early industrial periods in Sweden by the need to list tax-payers and estimate military reserves while in the United States, of course, they were mandated in the constitution. Humphries and Sarasua (2012: 45) argue that the designation “worker” had strong connotations, first in terms of political and property rights, and later in terms of social rights and benefits. For these reasons, men were considered as workers more than women. There is today a big literature covering how definitions and practices among Census enumerators undercounted women’s work (see Humphries and Sarasua (2012) for a review).

9 In the case women were full-time industrial workers, they were recorded. Most accounts of large factories indicate that workers kept close to the factory’s scheduled hours and that there were penalties for tardiness and work irregularity (Atack and Bateman 1992; Goldin 1990: 183). In 1890 a working woman faced an average work day of 9.5 hours (Costa 2000b). Work hours in Swedish manufacturing industry were at the same time longer (between 60 to 65 hours per week, Stanfors et al 2014). For a fuller understanding of the gendering of economic activity, see Bose 1984, Durand 1975, and Goldin 1990.
later industrial breakthroughs, like the United States and Sweden and in most poor countries today (Durand 1975; Goldin 1995; Mammen and Paxson 2000).

The undercounting of women’s contribution to production is clearly a problem. It resulted not only from conceptual ambiguities regarding what work is but also from practical difficulties of collecting data (Waring 1988). Although attempts have been made to remedy the problem of undercounting overall female labor force participation (see Humphries and Sarasua 2012), there is no consensus on how to overcome the problem in a consistent manner.

As a result of this gender asymmetry in the official sources, we will focus on an area of less contestation by examining the growth of non-agricultural employment. This is measured directly for men, and can be compared with measures of women’s labor force participation, which we assume is essentially non-agricultural, given the great undercount of women’s agricultural work. Further, this will allow us to compare the longer-term changes for the genders directly, making census data, despite its deficiencies, useful.

Measurement issues are even more problematic for our understanding of change in men’s and women’s contributions to the private sphere. Housework and childcare were not only unpaid, so that hours were not tracked (as paid work in the public sphere has normally been), but were also defined as women’s core adult roles, especially with the emergence of the separate spheres. This has made it very difficult to ascertain trends over time in unpaid productive private sphere activities, challenging scholars to attempt to reconcile different approaches. Cain (1984), for example, determined after “new calculations” and “adjustments to the existing data” that previous research that had found little change in American women’s domestic work hours (e.g., Vanek 1973) was incorrect, and that between 1890 and 1975-76, married women’s housework

15
decreased by 41 percent and their total work time (including paid work) by 22 percent (Cain 1984, see also Ramey 2009).

There were a few early efforts at measuring women’s activities in the United States (see sources in Ramey 2009) and in Sweden (SOU 1939: 6; SOU 1947: 46), as well as the unpaid activities of both men and women (e.g., Morgan, Sirageldin and Baerwaldt 1966 for the United States; SOU 1965: 65 for Sweden). The measurement of domestic activities began to expand rapidly in the 1970s (see Marini and Shelton 1993 for a useful review of this early expansion) and the study of men’s share of housework and childcare is now a sizeable and growing area of research, both for these specific countries (e.g., Björnberg 2004; Dribe and Stanfors 2009; Evertsson and Nermo 2007 for Sweden; Aguiar and Hurst 2009, Ramey 2009 and Sayer 2005 for the United States) and comparatively across the Western industrialized countries (Baxter 1997; Cooke and Baxter 2010; Gimenez-Nadal and Sevilla-Sanz 2012; Hook 2006; Sayer et al. 2009; Treas and Drobnic 2010).

For the United States between the mid-1960s and the early 2000s, the development of reasonably standardized time use surveys has contributed greatly to our understanding of trends in paid work, domestic tasks, and leisure, at least for primary (or main) activities.10 Juster and Stafford (1985) examined change between 1965 and 1975, and Robinson and Godbey (1999) extended that analysis by adding the results of the 1985 survey, and included the new data for the early 1990s in their second edition. To date, the most comprehensive analysis, historically, is that of Aguiar and Hurst (2007).

---

10 It is not always easy to capture time in an activity, especially not activities that involve caring, as much takes place while doing other things. Hence, secondary activities are commonly ignored, leading to underestimations of how much time is really devoted to different activities (Craig 2006; Zick and Bryant 1996 being exceptions when it comes to childcare). While the Australian time use surveys seem to report secondary activities well (see e.g., Craig 2006), the Swedish time use surveys have poor information on secondary activities.
Trends in the time men spend in domestic tasks have been much less well documented for Sweden. Swedish time use studies did not begin until 1990, with another survey performed in the early 2000s and a third wave completed in 2010/2011. The other Nordic countries have longer series with Denmark starting to take time use surveys in the 1960s, Norway in the early 1970s, and Finland in the 1980s. As we will show, Scandinavian trends have been extremely similar and this will allow us to use them interchangeably.

5. Industrialization and the growth of paid activities

We begin our analysis by showing trends in first men’s and then married women’s entry into the public sphere of non-agricultural employment. In this section we build on already extant evidence for the United States, primarily that presented by Goldin (1990), and construct parallel analyses for Sweden. We document factors that contributed to married women’s entry into paid activities, including demographic change and the narrowing of the gender wage gap. We also discuss the growth of “good jobs” together with the spread of household technology and assess how these factors affected married women’s employment. We then go beyond the classic accounts of women in the labor force (e.g., Goldin 1990; Oppenheimer 1970) by examining the growth of men’s tasks in the home.

Our documentation of the growth in non-agricultural activities starts in the 1870s, when both countries industrialized rapidly. It is only after the industrial breakthrough that we have census statistics that enable us to map out the productive activities of the population by industry with any certainty. As noted above, only a small fraction of married women in either country were counted as part of the regular (i.e., paid) labor force in 1870. In this year, the major part of the population was still involved in agriculture, though the US economy at this time was
considerably more diversified than the Swedish one, and a larger share of the US labor force was in sectors other than agriculture. As we have noted, the many women who undertook various activities on the family farm as farmers’ wives did not usually count as gainfully employed in the censuses (but unmarried women hired at other farms were reported as agricultural workers). In the agricultural household economy, men and women would typically share work and family responsibilities, differentiated by age and normally subject to a gender-based division of labor, although temporary reassignments were fairly common (Löfgren 1974; Osterud 1991).

With industrialization, new jobs emerged in manufacturing and services that offered better economic opportunity than agriculture. While this was true for both men and women, the transfer of women’s work from the household to commercial employment was not as simple as men’s, as it was complicated not only by discrimination and social taboos against the employment of married women (Goldin 1990), but also by their reproductive responsibilities. Hence, the growth of men’s non-agricultural employment during the latter half of the nineteenth century created a new gender-based division of work and family responsibilities, leading to the emergence of the construct of the “separate spheres”. As men were drawn into workplaces away from the home and women were left in the home with full responsibility over the domestic, men became breadwinners and women homemakers. With the rapid growth in men’s non-agricultural employment, the concentration of men and married women in separate spheres continued to increase during the first half of the twentieth century and reached a maximum around 1950–1960 in both Sweden and the United States. This is graphically shown in the two panels of Figure 1.
Figure 1. The gender transition in employment: Change over time in the percentage of married men and women engaged in non-farm occupations, 1870-2010 and beyond.

A Sweden

Note: Figures for 1870-1960 for married women age 15 and over, figures for 1965-1985 married women 15-64, figures for the years 1990 and onwards include both married and cohabiting women, since the Swedish Labor Force Survey was EU-harmonized in 2005 the figures for 2010 denote women 16-74. Should that group be used, there would have been a decrease due to the inclusion of older non-working women in the population. Instead we use married/cohabiting women with at least one child 19 or younger in household in the year 2010. Figures for years beyond 2010 are based on extrapolations on the most recent rate of growth in labor force participation.

B The United States

Note: Figures for 1890-1980 are for married women age 15 and over, figures for 1990-2000 are for married women age 16 and over. Because of the inclusion of increasing numbers of women above retirement age (65 and over) due to ageing of the population, the overall figures stall after 1990 due to the inclusion of older non-working women in the population. Instead we use married women with at least one child 18 or younger in household in the year 2010.

Sources: Men are the fathers of children in Hernandez 1993, p. 103; married women (age 15 and older in years 1890-1980) are from Goldin 1990, Table 2.1; married women (age 16 and older in years 1990-2000) and married women with children under 18 (age 16 and older in 2010) are from U.S Bureau of Labor Statistics. Figures for years 1870-1880 and beyond 2010 are based on extrapolations on the closest rate of growth in labor force participation.
5.1 The emergence of the construct “separate spheres”

Figure 1 shows the development of men’s and married women’s non-agricultural employment in Sweden and the United States between 1870 and 2010 (with extrapolations into the future). The upper line shows the growth in men’s non-farm employment (i.e., classical industrialization). The lower line is simply the trend in married women’s labor force participation (as we discussed earlier, married women’s agricultural activities were largely uncounted in both countries). The patterns are thus more nearly comparable across gender than simple curves of male and female labor force participation.

This figure shows that as late as 1870, most men still worked in agriculture in each country. Effectively, in both countries most men and women occupied the same sphere, the household farm economy, where home and workplace were one. Thereafter, men took on non-agricultural jobs while married women, however productive they may have been, were still counted as inactive. Hence, the divide between men’s and women’s paid work expanded, reaching its maximum in each country about 1950; the peak of the separate spheres.

Two important things should be noted. First, although the countries are different in many ways, the patterns of growth in men’s and women’s employment are extraordinarily similar. The main conclusion from the graphs is that the emergence of the separate spheres and the growing sphere gap between men and married women occurred in the same period and followed similar lines in Sweden and the United States. Industrialization in the United States was earlier and more comprehensive than in Sweden with more extensive non-farm employment for both men and women in the United States from 1870 and well into the 1950s (Table 1). It is not until the 1960s that differences start to emerge between the two, as married women’s move into the labor force developed quite differently, partly relating to the different role of the state in the two countries.
Table 1. Industrial development of the labor force (both sexes): Sweden and the United States, 1870-1945/1950.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Agriculture</th>
<th>Industry</th>
<th>Services</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>United States</td>
<td>Sweden</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1870</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1880</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1890</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1900</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1910</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1920</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1930</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1940</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1945/1950</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Figures in the 1945/1950 row denote 1945 for Sweden and 1950 for the United States.
Sources: Kuznets (1957), Appendix Table 4, panels J (Sweden) and V (United States) for years 1870-1945/1950; Bureau of Labor Statistics (2005) for 1960.

Second, men’s move from the household economy to work in the public sphere of manufacturing and service was just as revolutionary as the more recent changes for women. Men’s move is normally described simply in terms of industrial change. However, it was also a serious move away from their families. There is a general consensus in histories of men and family that prior to the Industrial Revolution, men were highly engaged in family life, and particularly in the practical and moral education of their children (LaRossa 1997; Rotundo 1991).11 However, we have not been able to find much historical material on how men and their

11 Historian Grey Osterud, based on her study of family farming in New York State (1991, 2012), reported in a personal communication 2013 “…all the farmer-fathers whose diaries I read took care of their children during times of illness, alternating the responsibility of sitting up nights with their wives and other kin. They also took care of young children by themselves while women went out separately, such as to church or to visit relatives. They were present at and participated actively in home births, and frequently recorded their observations of milestones in their children’s development, such as when they sat up by themselves, started creeping, stood alone, and walked. They noted their cognitive development, as well, such as when they said their first words, made complete sentences, and began asking questions. . . Some fathers studied their children’s personalities and made entries regarding their individual temperaments and different inclinations.”
families experienced their greater separation. No doubt the fact that mothers remained in the home eased the effects on families of men’s (partial) withdrawal.

It is clear from Figure 1 that by taking a long-term perspective, similar patterns emerge for these countries regarding men’s and women’s paid activities, and in particular, a separate spheres gap emerges clearly and simultaneously. It provides a good picture of gender differences in labor force participation outside agriculture because by focusing on the gap between men and married women, we target the most significant labor market change that has taken place. As Figure 1 shows, married women’s employment was extremely low at the onset of industrialization. The sphere gap, while already noticeable, emerged as men moved out of the agricultural sector and then grew substantially as industrialization continued.

Similar to what happened when men joined the industrial workforce, the growth in married women’s labor force participation changed family life as well as the labor market. According to Figure 1, a particularly noticeable growth in married women’s non-agricultural employment started around 1960 in each country. Although different in pace, the process was similar in many other industrialized countries, as well, and first put the logic of separate spheres under strain. More married women were now part of the labor force and stayed so for increasingly longer periods of their lives than was the case before.

By 1960, agriculture was a negligible sector of the industrialized economies, whereas industry and services had become the dominant sectors of both the Swedish and US economies, providing new opportunities for women to work in a previously unknown way. But, perhaps more importantly, the constraints on married women’s work had eased considerably in the earlier decades through the lifting of marriage bars, the creation of scheduled part-time work, and the diffusion of modern (electric) household technologies, together with the reduced price of such
appliances. Housework became easier with the development of canned food, stoves and sewing machines, followed by the diffusion of basic utilities such as running water, electricity and central heating and then by the spread of household appliances such as refrigerators, vacuum cleaners and washing machines (Greenwood, Seshadri and Yorukoglu 2005; Hagberg 1986; Matthews 1987). This served to decrease married women’s reservation wage and increase female labor supply despite a substantial gender wage gap, as we will see, below.

5.2 Women at work

The sequencing of how women’s work opportunities changed over time relative to men’s has shaped the way married women’s labor force participation changed (see Figure 1). Improvements in men’s work opportunities and income without corresponding improvements in married women’s paid work opportunities and wages reinforced a sphere gap that only declined when women’s labor came to be more highly demanded, their earnings rose enough to outsource many of their domestic tasks, and when family and other domestic responsibilities such as child bearing and rearing became less incompatible with paid work activities.

5.2.1 Better jobs

The industrial breakthrough of the late nineteenth century accelerated the move of workers from agriculture to industry and eventually to services (see Table 1). Whereas in 1870, more than 70 percent of Swedish workers were agricultural, this dropped over the following 90 years to about 15 percent by 1960, with concomitant growth in industry (from 15 percent in 1870 to 40 percent in 1960). Services grew even more over the period. The move out of agriculture was both faster and more complete in the United States, which hence had an earlier and more comprehensive expansion of these sectors than in Sweden.
Table 2. Industrial development of the female labor force: Sweden and the United States, 1870-1960, in percent.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1870</th>
<th>1890/1900</th>
<th>1930</th>
<th>1960</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>na</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manual and other (manufacturing and transport)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>na</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic service</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>na</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White collar (sales, public administration and services)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>na</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ratio female/male participation rate</td>
<td>0.36</td>
<td>na</td>
<td>0.34</td>
<td>0.23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Figures denote women 14 years old and older prior to 1947, thereafter women 16 years old and older in the United States, but 15 years old and older in Sweden. Column 4 denotes year 1900 (Sweden) and column 5 denotes 1890 for the United States.
From a gender perspective, the move out of agriculture was more extensive among men than among women in the nineteenth century, particularly in Sweden (compare the levels for the total in Table 1 to those for women in Table 2). This led to the segregation of men and women into different sectors of the economy. Whereas men moved into better-paying industrial jobs, women (primarily young and single) worked more commonly in low-paying jobs in agriculture and domestic service. This applies to both countries, although around the turn of the last century (i.e., 1890/1900), agriculture was much more important for the few employed Swedish women (62%, 19% in the United States) and domestic service was more important in the United States (18% in Sweden, 29% in the United States).\textsuperscript{12}

During the early decades of the twentieth century, new white collar jobs opened up (particularly in sales, public administration, and services) that attracted women by providing “nice” work, with better working conditions than elsewhere. The shift to white collar work for women was particularly remarkable in the United States. There was also some expansion into manual and other jobs (manufacturing and transport), at least in Sweden.

This evolution in the nature of jobs is clearly one of the important new factors underlying the women’s emergence in the public sphere. Other factors, particularly changes in the gender wage ratio and demographic changes were also underway during this period, which we will discuss later. But perhaps the most important new factor that transformed women’s (and men’s) family lives was the emergence of married women’s employment.

\textsuperscript{12} In the United States, domestic service and particularly agricultural jobs tended to be held by black women. This likely is why Table 2 indicates that overall, and throughout the early part of the period we study, women in Sweden had a higher labor force participation rate, both absolutely and relative to men (Table 2 rows 6-7), than had white American women, but by 1960 both women’s participation rates and the ratios of the female-to-male labor force participation rates had converged across the countries.
5.2.2 Married women’s labor force participation

Marital status had for long provided an important dividing line for the activities of women, particularly their labor force participation. Census figures for all women hide significant changes in the labor force participation of married women. To clarify these changes during the twentieth century, we present labor force participation rates for women of working ages in Sweden and the United States, separately for the married and the unmarried (Table 3).

Table 3. Female labor force participation rates by marital status in Sweden and the United States, 1890-1990.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Sweden</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>United States</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>17.8</td>
<td>19.1</td>
<td>26.9</td>
<td>30.7</td>
<td>29.3</td>
<td>29.5</td>
<td>32.0</td>
<td>59.3</td>
<td>75.2</td>
<td>82.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>14.1</td>
<td>23.3</td>
<td>56.1</td>
<td>66.2</td>
<td>86.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single</td>
<td>48.8</td>
<td>51.7</td>
<td>52.4</td>
<td>56.8</td>
<td>58.2</td>
<td>61.7</td>
<td>53.8</td>
<td>65.9</td>
<td>74.4</td>
<td>73.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Total  | 18.9   | 20.6     | 23.7     | 24.8     | 25.8     | 29.5     | 35.1     | 41.6     | 51.1     | 57.5           |
| Married| 4.6    | 5.6      | 9.0      | 11.7     | 13.8     | 21.6     | 30.6     | 39.5     | 50.1     | 58.4           |
| Single | 40.5   | 43.5     | 46.4     | 50.5     | 45.5     | 50.6     | 47.5     | 51.0     | 61.5     | 66.7           |

In all years, a large fraction of unmarried women in Sweden and the United States worked for pay. The labor force participation rates of single women were higher than those of married women well into the 1970s in Sweden and throughout the years in the United States. Single women were more likely to be gainfully employed in Sweden than in the United States. During the period 1890-1920, single women were driving the change in female labor force participation, especially in Sweden, because they became increasingly urban and more likely to work for pay in industry and services.\footnote{It should be noted that the aggregate figures hide distinct differences between urban and rural areas in both the case of Sweden and the United States. Goldin notes that keeping urbanization constant makes the participation rate relatively stable for the period 1890-1960 (Goldin 1990: 54). This is curious because the American school system expanded rapidly between 1890 and 1930 through the high school movement (Goldin and Katz 2008). Increased education among young single women should have decreased their participation in paid employment. The same holds, in principle, for Sweden, though there was no high school movement and the expansion of education above primary education was more limited (Stanfors 2003: chapter 6).}

Figure 2. Women leaving the labor force in connection with marriage in Sweden and the United States, 1890-1990, in percent.

Source: Table 3.
In contrast, the participation rates for married women were extraordinarily low. Circa 1900, about one percent of married women in Sweden were in the labor force, a rate that did not surpass ten percent until 1950. Participation rates for married women in the United States were slightly higher for the major part of the period of our comparison. Sweden does not stand out as a country with exceptionally high rates of female labor force participation in the past; rather, their rates, while lower, were quite comparable to those in the United States from the late 1800s to 1960. The rapid increase which was to take Sweden to a world leading position in female labor force participation did not take off until the latter half of the 1960s.

The low participation rates of married women suggest that most women left the labor force at marriage in both countries. Using rates by marital status, we calculated an assumed proportion of employed women who left employment after marriage (Figure 2). This shows that in the late nineteenth century and well into the twentieth, the vast majority of women (90% or more) left the labor force in connection with marriage, both in Sweden and the United States (cf. Goldin 1990:16), with Swedish women more prone to exit the labor market upon marriage than women in the United States well into the 1960s. That behavior declined rapidly between about 1940 and 1970. By the late twentieth century, dropping out of the labor force at marriage had become a marginal phenomenon (about 10 percent); by 1990, it vanished in Sweden where marital status no longer affected labor force participation.

14 In the case of married women, different war experiences matter a lot, as a sizeable number of American women were drawn into the labor force during mobilization, some temporarily, and others permanently (Fernandez, Fogli and Olivetti 2004), whereas Sweden, neutral during World War II, never mobilized officially with war-time having limited impact on married women’s employment.
6. Explaining the first break in the separate spheres

So far, we have provided an overview of how the separate spheres construct emerged with the growth in men’s non-agricultural labor force participation and examined the expansion in female labor force participation that followed, emphasizing the growth in better (white collar) jobs at the expense of worse ones (in agriculture and domestic service). In addition, we showed the gradual breakdown of the once sharp distinction between being single and married for women’s labor market participation. We are left with the big question: why the change?

There is no simple explanation for such an extensive change. We nevertheless establish a reasonably coherent narrative as to why married women first were left in the private sphere with responsibility for family and care but then after many decades broke out and joined men in the public sphere. By so doing, they challenged the gender division of family support and care structure that was laid in the nineteenth century with industrialization.

In order to understand women’s increasing involvement in paid activities in the labor market (and men’s later involvement in the home), we need to think about incentives to work and the forces promoting/discouraging work for pay outside the home. For men, this is relatively easy. Industrialization provided work opportunities in factories, where wages were higher and meant a higher market time valuation, pulling men out of agriculture into industry. Their primary alternative time allocation was leisure, which on the family farm included parent-child interactions and home improvement, but increasingly, for many men in the late nineteenth century also implied under- or unemployment and low income, which affected the leisure time valuation negatively.

While labor market changes for men were largely exogenous, this was less the case for women. Married women had reproductive responsibilities, with a social stigma attached to their
working, as it indicated having an unsuccessful husband. When women made decisions concerning labor supply, they needed to consider more factors than men, including their productivity both in the home and the labor market, their own wage and their husband’s income, not to mention the well-being of other household members. If we are to understand the drivers behind the increase in married women’s labor force participation, we need to consider improving wages, declining fertility, and gains in life expectancy.

6.1 Women’s improving wages

Industrialization provided substantial improvements in wages in both Sweden and the United States. Real wages grew throughout the twentieth century in both countries, with higher and more stable growth rates than previously. In the 1970s, real wage growth stalled, but while it recuperated somewhat in Sweden in the 1980s, there has been little or no growth in the average US real wage over the recent decades (Dubovsky 2013; Schön 2011).

Like real wages, the female-to-male relative wage also increased during the twentieth century in both Sweden and the United States. The average hourly wage of female Swedish workers in manufacturing was 58 percent of the corresponding male wage in 1913. By 1995, it had reached 90 percent (Figure 3).  

The long-term process of gender wage equalization is quite similar for both countries (although the US series suffers from inconsistency and few data points). It includes periods of rapid rise as well as periods of stability and even small declines, but the overall trend is an equalizing one. Although manufacturing has only made up a limited part of women’s labor

---

15 This figure is high in international comparison. Swedish women earned, during the 1990s, one of the highest percentages of men’s earnings in the world (see overviews in Blau, Ferber and Winkler 2013 and Jacobsen 2007 for comparisons).
market (see Table 2), the same pattern of wage equalization has been observed for other sectors of the economy, at least in Sweden (Stanfors 2003: chapter 3). Thus we assume that gender wage equality in manufacturing is a good benchmark for overall gender wage equality. Blau (1998) has found that the overall wage structure in a country has an important impact on the gender wage gap. In fact, it explains most of the differences in the gender pay gap between Sweden and the United States. What distinguishes Sweden from the United States in Figure 3 is the more rapid narrowing of the gender wage gap, which provided women in Sweden with more incentives to work, particularly during the 1960s and 1970s.

Figure 3. Female-to-male hourly wage ratio in manufacturing in Sweden and the United States, 1913-2009.

Note: the wages are full-time equivalent earnings adjusted for gender composition of different industrial branches with different wage levels.
Source: For Sweden, the data series on wages rest on own computations by Svensson and Stanfors from Statistics Sweden, Social Reports (Sociala meddelanden) 1915-1927; Statistical Yearbook of Wages (Lönestatistik Årsko) 1928-1951; Wages (SOS) 1952-1999; Statistical Yearbook (Statistisk Årsko) 2000-2009. For the United States, information on wages comes from Goldin (1990: Table 3.1) and the Bureau of Labor Statistics (www.bls.gov).
6.2 The impact of the demographic transition on women’s lives

The demographic transition also contributed to women’s entry into paid employment by restructuring their adult lives. In the new equilibrium that emerged in the mid-twentieth century after the mortality and fertility transitions, caring for the young could no longer be a life-long, full-time career for women, as it had always been until well into the twentieth century, because they had longer life expectancy and smaller families. Demographic changes thus contributed to the first breakdown in the separate spheres.

6.2.1 Mortality developments in Sweden and the United States

In the agricultural economies of Sweden and the United States in the nineteenth century, lives were not very long. Although much of the overall gain in life expectancy between the late nineteenth and mid-twentieth centuries was due to the massive decline in infant and early childhood mortality, much was not. Young adults faced increasingly longer lives.

Based on data from the 1870s, at age 20 women could only expect on average another 40 (US whites) to 45 (Swedish) years of life. Hence, when nineteenth century women married in their mid-twenties, about age 24 for the United States (Haines 1996) and 27 in Sweden (Statistics Sweden 1999) and bore four to five children (Jones and Tertilt 2008; Statistics Sweden 1999) over their next ten to fifteen years (some of which, of course, did not survive), they would have children living at home until they were almost 60 years of age, when they were normally widowed and not in good health. Their adult years were their child raising years.

By the peak of the baby boom 80 years later (1951-1960), however, when young adults married and had children at very young ages, structuring a life around home and family no longer fit the years the demographic transition had given them (Watkins, Menken and Bongaarts 1987). If women married at age 20, as many American women did in the 1950s (Haines 1996),
and quickly had several children, when their last child left home they were still in their early- to mid-40s, yet they could expect to live many more years, with a similar pattern for Sweden.

The major analyses of the growth of female labor force participation conclude that economic changes creating increasing demand for women’s labor drove its growth (see Oppenheimer 1970 and Goldin 1990 for the United States, and Durand, 1975 for a comparative analysis). Nevertheless, demographic changes made women more willing to meet this new demand. Goldin (2006) argues that the extended time horizon was important for women’s human capital investment. The change from short- to longer-term decision-making was not limited to the highly educated and thereby had vast consequences for women’s family lives. Later marriage and childbearing, as well as divorce, make more sense when life seems long. Women’s move into the public sphere was certainly multiply determined, but whatever the combination of reasons, the result has been that the vast majority of women in both Sweden and the United States expect to spend the majority of their adult years employed for pay, as the majority of men expect them to do, as well (Goldscheider and Kaufman 2006; Thomson and Bernhardt 2010).

6.2.2 Fertility developments in Sweden and the United States

Like the industrial and mortality revolutions, the fertility decline profoundly changed the lives of women as they transitioned from having six or so children to only one or two. At the beginning of the twentieth century, while men were leaving agriculture and married women remained home, fertility was declining, ending in the 1920s-1930s, followed by a pattern of cyclical fertility variation. Although the long-term fertility trends are similar in many countries, these two cases show dramatic wave-like movements and variations and shifts in levels (Figure 4).
Both countries experienced a baby boom after World War II, although the one in the US was more extensive. They coincided with the 1950s peak of the separate spheres in each country. A family in which the husband worked and the wife stayed home was then considered the healthiest by psychologists, the most stable by sociologists and the most efficient by economists. In the 1960s, however, fertility fell in both countries, coinciding with increases in married women’s employment, raising concerns, but also challenging these interpretations.\(^{16}\)

Since the late 1960s US total fertility rate has been one of the highest among Western countries (around the replacement level of 2.1), while Swedish fertility has varied more, closely

---

\(^{16}\) In other parts of the Western world, however, the drop in fertility rates has been more dramatic (Kohler, Billari and Ortega 2002). Countries like Greece, Italy, and Spain have had sustained periods with total fertility rates below 1.3.
connected to variations in the business cycle. Female labor force participation, especially that of married women and mothers, nevertheless continued to increase in both Sweden and the United States. In parts of the Western world, however, the drop in fertility rates following upon women joining the labor force has been more dramatic.¹⁷

Moreover, in Sweden highly educated dual career couples are more likely to continue childbearing (and they are less likely to separate) than other couples despite the expected higher opportunity costs of childbearing and small gains to specialization (Dribe and Stanfors 2010). It seems to be the case that female labor force participation is negatively associated with fertility in developing countries with under-developed welfare states (cf. Stycos and Weller 1967), while positively related to fertility in countries that are more developed welfare states. This puts the much feared destabilizing impact of married women’s and mothers’ labor force participation on the family, proposed in the 1960s and 1970s, in perspective.

7. Men in the home: A second break in the separate spheres?
While female employment rates and women’s time in paid work increased substantially in the 1970s and 1980s, their time spent in unpaid work, while it declined a great deal, remained far higher than men’s domestic time (e.g., Bianchi 2000; Gauthier, Smeeding and Furstenberg 2004). As a result, women came to be seen as doing a “second shift” of unpaid work, giving them less time for leisure than men (Hochschild and Machung 1989; Sayer 2005), although differences in combined paid and unpaid work hours were small, as employed men usually

¹⁷ In some Southern and Eastern European countries the rates have dropped so much that Kohler, Billari and Ortega (2002) have introduced the concept of “lowest-low” fertility to describe heretofore unheard of low levels of fertility. Countries like Greece, Italy, and Spain have had sustained periods with total fertility rates below 1.3. Since the mid-1980s are total fertility rates and both female labor force participation and employment rates positively correlated across OECD countries (Adsera 2005).
worked more hours than employed women, and commuted longer distances (Aguilar and Hurst 2007). Nevertheless, men were not increasing their household work very much, leading many to characterize men’s lack of response to the increase in female employment as a “stalled revolution” (e.g., England 2010). In this section, we attempt to analyze trends and determinants of men’s slow move into the home and its tasks, the final crack in the separate sphere.

7.1 Explaining the delay

There have been numerous explanations for the delay in men’s taking up responsibilities in the domestic sphere in order to parallel women’s surge into the public sphere, including seeing the home as a “gender factory” and romantic unions as a “game.” Gender factory theory emphasizes that a traditional pattern of housework emerges through gender display even in dual career couples, partly because women compensate for their deviant behavior in the public sphere by doing more housework, partly because men resist (Bittman et al. 2003; Brines 1994; Fenstermaker 1985; Greenstein 2000). The game theoretic analysis suggests that so long as there are many domestically-oriented women available, men with wives wanting their participation in household tasks could threaten to leave for a partner with no such demands (Breen and Cooke 2005). However, as gender roles change and the proportions of women working increase, the “gender factory” will increasingly produce more egalitarian displays and the game will be over.

Nevertheless, whatever the explanatory power of the gender display and game theories in the early years of women’s entry into the public sphere, men’s roles did not really need to change and hence, did not. Both employed and non-employed women rapidly dropped the time they spent in housework. Between 1965 and 1975, they reduced housework by five hours per week
Women were responding to new opportunities by adding new roles while streamlining old ones. If anything, between the 1940s and the 1960s, which marked the height of the single-worker family yet with few children at home, given the low fertility of the 1930s, housewives had much less actual work to do than men did, and men began to notice. In fictional and non-fictional literature, women were accused of “momism,” meaning that they were using their extra time to become over-involved with their children, particularly with their male children (Friedan 1963; Roth 1969; Strecker 1946; Wylie 1942).

A more serious impediment was that men were far less prepared to break the separate spheres in their turn than women were. Women increasingly expected to work until they got married, encouraging them to obtain at least some education, making the ‘marriage bar’ increasingly artificial. Men’s socialization to avoid the tasks of the private sphere, in contrast, began at an early age. As their fathers’ chores in the household economy withered, so did sons’; even as school hours and years became fairly parallel in childhood, children’s housework hours differed sharply by sex (Goldscheider and Waite 1991; Hofferth and Sandberg 2001). An even more serious problem is that tasks in the domestic sphere are of low status, because they are unpaid (or outsourced to poorly paid women), with none of the perquisites of tasks in the public sphere (e.g., vacations, raises), and hence much less attractive to men than the jobs women were taking on in the public sphere were to them. Nevertheless, men have begun to share family tasks. How did this happen?

---

18 Aguiar and Hurst (2009) is one of several major studies of American’s time use between 1965 and 2005 published late in the first decade of the twenty-first century. Other examples include Fisher et al. (2009), Ramey (2009), Kan, Sullivan and Gershuny (2011), and Gimenez-Nadal and Sevilla-Sanz (2012). Ramey uses somewhat different definitions, consistent with her goal of covering the entire twentieth century; Fisher et al. focus more on the rich contextual information in the historical diary accounts, particularly concerning who else was present during an activity and when or where the activity occurred while Gimenez-Nadal and Sevilla-Sanz and Kan et al. focus on cross-national comparisons.

19 Most women, of course, were not over-involved, spending fewer childcare hours during this period than later in the twentieth century (Bianchi 2000).
7.2 Explaining changes in housework hours in Scandinavia and the United States

Pressure finally began to increase on men to contribute more to the well-being of their families by adding family care to their core adult roles. Although increased uncertainty in the labor market put more pressure on men to provide, it also increased the need for couples to have two incomes in case one failed (Oppenheimer 1997). If wives’ employment had once been primarily insurance (Warren and Tyagi 2004), it became a necessity for many families in order to meet consumer aspirations (cf. deVries 2008). As a result, between 1975 and 2005 more women became economically active, and although they shed another five hours of weekly housework time, the great increase in intensive parenting (Bianchi, Robinson and Milkie 2006) meant that they increased their time in child care by nearly as much (Aguiar and Hurst 2009), so women’s leeway to combine work and family on their own vanished. They needed fathers to help, both with childcare and with household chores.

The clearest picture of the great increase in men’s share of domestic work can be gleaned from a study on changes in combined housework and childcare hours for several countries between the 1960s and the early 2000s (Kan, Sullivan and Gershuny 2011). We calculated ratios of male to female hours for the Nordic countries (Denmark, Finland, Norway, as well as Sweden), and added parallel information for the same period for the United States (Aguiar and Hurst 2009). The results are powerful (Figure 5).
Figure 5. Men’s growing share of housework and childcare time in Scandinavia and the United States, 1960-2010.

![Graph showing the increase in men's share of housework and childcare time from 1960 to 2010 in Scandinavia and the United States.](image)

Source: For the Scandinavian countries, see Table 1 in Kan, Man Yee, Sullivan, Oriel and Gershuny, Jonathan. 2011. Gender convergence in domestic work: Discerning the effects of interactional and institutional barriers from large-scale data. Sociology 45: 234-251. Information for the US come from Aguiar and Hurst 2009, Table II.

In the 1960s, given women’s many and men’s few housework hours, men were spending less than 30 percent of women’s time in the United States and only 20 percent in Denmark. Men’s share increased slowly in the early 1970s, but there was a rapid increase to between 43 and 48 percent in the late 1970s to early 1980s (with Finland joining the series at the high end), which continued to near 50 and even 60 percent in the late 1980s. Sweden joins the series in the early 1990s, just above Norway (all just below 60 percent). After that, the rate of increase continued vigorously for Norway, Sweden and the US, reaching almost 70 percent in Sweden and around 60 percent for the others, as a result of women’s declines and men’s increases. Of course, the ratio of female to male labor force participation has even more closely approached equality. By 2012, it reached 90-95 percent in the Scandinavian countries, over 80 percent in
most of the rest of Europe, and even in Southern Europe, which continues to have the lowest level of female labor force participation in Europe, this ratio reached 78 percent (Oláh 2015).^{20}

Nevertheless, while the extent of gender convergence is considerably less for private sphere activity than for public sphere activity, it is still quite dramatic (Bianchi et al. 2000; Bonke and Esping-Andersen 2011). In a relatively short period of time (about 40 years), the picture of gender sharing of domestic work has been transformed. Further, younger men’s attitudes have become much more accepting of sharing domestic tasks equally (Gerson 2010). Change has been great enough that some scholars argue that “a genuine process of equalization is under way” (e.g., Esping-Anderson 2009:34). And vis-à-vis childcare, the change has been nearly revolutionary.

7.3 Explaining changes in childcare

Most studies of men’s increased involvement in the tasks of the home have focused on housework, with childcare often ignored. Nevertheless, this is likely to be the opening wedge, because time with children is experienced as far more personally rewarding than other household tasks (Krueger et al. 2009). Increasing childcare is a natural precursor to increasing housework, as men learn that children need food, clean clothes, a clean environment and help with their homework (Evertsson 2014). Most people also find housework easier to outsource or forego than childcare, hence the growth in meals away from home as well as the decline in food preparation (Raley, Bianchi and Wang 2012). In contrast, people attempt to minimize outsourcing childcare to the hours both parents are at work, pursuing active parenting to the extent possible.

---

^{20} Admittedly, this substantial increase in men’s share of domestic time, from barely 20 percent of women’s level to nearly 70 percent, is not based on as vigorous an increase in men’s actual time. Much of the change in the ratios reflects the drop in women’s reported hours. Of course, the same can be said for the labor force ratios, as male levels have been declining. Further, in many countries, a substantial proportion of working women work part time.
By the end of the twentieth century in the United States, fathers spent five more hours per week with their children than they had 20 years earlier, an increase that continued into the early twenty-first century (Aguiar and Hurst 2009; Bianchi, Robinson and Milkie 2006) with little if any sign of a stall. Men needed an entrée, and it is likely that this has emerged in the form of the growth of father involvement, i.e., childcare.

Most of the research literature on increases in father involvement, however, is quite separate from studies of gender differences in housework hours. Scholars in the father involvement tradition rarely write about housework (e.g., Pleck 2010), focusing instead on measurement of various dimensions (e.g., accessibility, warmth, monitoring, responsibility and engagement) and are normally published in journals focusing on psychology and in specialized journals (e.g., Fathering). In contrast, studies of housework are normally conducted by sociologists and economists. The former celebrate increase, the latter worry about stalls in trends.

An interesting indicator of the growth in men’s time in childcare emerges when hours spent are divided into weekday and weekend hours. Men’s childcare hours are much closer to equality on weekends than on weekdays (Craig and Mullan, 2010; Hook 2012; Neilson and Stanfors 2014; Sayer and Gornick 2012). One study in the United States using 1980s data found that while fathers were responsible for 40 percent of child care during the week, they took on fully 47 percent on weekends (Yeung et al. 2001).

7.4 Family leave in Sweden and the United States

There are two other indicators of increases in men’s involvement in the private sphere. The major one is the growth of men’s share of family leave, at least in countries such as Sweden, with state supported paid leave. In 1974, Sweden introduced a gender-blind system, the first in
the world, which included a six month parental leave with substantial earnings-related benefits (replacing 90 percent of pre-childbirth earnings). Since then, the length of paid leave has been gradually extended. In 1980, it included nine months of earnings-related benefits, with an additional 3-month flat rate benefit. The leave scheme also became more flexible (e.g., with the opportunity to be on leave part-time and to save days until later). In 1989, paid leave had doubled to reach 12 months, with an additional 3-month flat rate benefit. (See Stanfors 2003 (chapter 4 and appendix) for an overview of the development of the parental leave scheme).

Relatively few men participated in the early years (0.5 percent of total days of paid parental leave in 1974) until the next major change, which occurred in 1995, when one month of the total was designated for each parent. This meant that a month’s financial benefit would be lost if only one parent took all the leave; an additional month was added in 2002. As a result, parental leave is now used not only by nearly all mothers, but also by about 90 percent of fathers. While men continue to use less than half of the leave, the trend has been strongly upward, to more than 23 percent of all leave days by 2010. Clearly, men’s share increased significantly in response to the introduction of the “daddy months” (Duvander and Johansson 2012), as even employers were impressed with the absurdity of actually losing a government benefit if their male employees did not take leave (Haas and Hwang 2011).

The other indicator of change in Swedish men’s participation in the private sphere of the family can be found in the development of employer policies supporting men’s taking family leave. In the early decades of the new policy, most of the fathers taking leave worked in the large Swedish public sector, more insulated from the competitive pressures faced by those in the private sector (Bygren and Duvander 2006). Since that time, however, encouraged by legislation, even work places in the private sector have developed formal policies and practices that allow
men to take parental leave, as shown by surveys of large Swedish corporations in 1993 and 2006 (Haas and Hwang 2009). At the first date, barely two percent of workplaces had policies for any but top management (32 percent of which were reported to have allowed such family leave); by 2006, 41 percent of large corporations had policies supporting family leave (and 88 percent reported that men in top management took such leave).

The situation with regard to paid parental leave and workplace policies in support of it is, of course, very different in the United States. There is no national policy providing paid family leave, although The Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993 allows parents the opportunity to take up to 16 weeks of unpaid leave, with job protection. However, because of various limitations Ruhm (1997) estimates that only 20 percent of new mothers are covered. As with so many other family-related policies in the United States, however, there is considerable variation by state. Several states have provided a few weeks of paid maternity coverage around the delivery period through temporary disability programs (Milkman and Appelbaum 2013), and more recently, three states have instituted full-blown family leave programs.

In 2004, California implemented a program that provides up to six weeks of leave, with salary replacement of 55 percent (up to a ceiling of $1,011 per week in 2012), at no direct cost to employers. However, it provides neither job protection nor guaranteed medical insurance, and hence has experienced limited take-up. Nevertheless, a recent study found that employers were quite accepting of the program and that men have increasingly enrolled (Milkman and Appelbaum 2013). The other programs, in New Jersey and Rhode Island, are more recent, and have not yet been studied.

---

21 As many employers find that they can reduce the expenses of their own programs, workers at these firms are more likely to be informed.
Nevertheless, it seems likely that these programs will be expanded, both within these states and to additional states, as increasingly, research has shown that there are health benefits for both mothers (Chatterji and Markowitz 2008) and infants (Berger, Hill and Waldfogel 2005). However, their expansion might be blocked because of the existing patchwork of benefits provided by the private sector, by far the largest provider of parental leave. A national study of first time mothers showed that leave is highly selective by social class, likely reflecting the jobs these mothers are taking leave from. Women reported on the leave they were able to take for their first births, pooling sick leave, vacation days, and job-supported maternity leave, for the 2006-08 period. Among those with a college degree or more education, two-thirds received some family leave, while only 19 percent of employed mothers with less than a high school degree had any family leave (Laughlin 2011).

8. **Concluding discussion**

We focus in this paper on the growth and decline of the separate spheres approach to the activities of men and women in Sweden and the United States over the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The idea of the separate spheres helped account for the fundamental changes in the relationship between family and work wrought by the Industrial Revolution (Stone 1977), which shifted the main locus of men’s economic production from the agricultural household economy to the factory and greatly reinforced the distinction between men’s and women’s work. When men started to work outside the home, the economic contributions of women became invisible, focused as they were on the family and tasks that could be undertaken near the home, and their economic contributions were rarely acknowledged in official statistics. Men became breadwinners and the role of the home-maker became popular, starting among the middle
classes. The gap increased and was at its greatest about 1950 when it was considered normal and even necessary. Few realized that this period was extraordinary in many ways. Had comparisons been made with the more distant past, it would have been obvious that a situation where both men and women were involved in productive activities actually could be compatible with family life. But the 100 years of gender divergence had blinded families to this possibility.

We then attempt to account for women’s move into paid activities, the first crack in the separate spheres, by examining the forces promoting/counteracting their work for pay outside the home. We draw on standard economic literature (theoretical as well as empirical, including Costa, 2000a; Goldin 1990, 2006), but we emphasize that the family and its tasks need to be included in any theories of paid work and leisure. By doing so, we have built a foundation to begin to understand the early growth in men’s move into care for their children and their homes, the second crack in the separate spheres.

The same basic patterns appeared for both Sweden and the United States for most of the period, despite many differences. For example, during the period 1870 to 1920, there was an earlier and more vigorous expansion of labor market opportunities outside of agriculture in the United States but as this was the case for both men and women, it did not affect the spheres gap, or the two countries’ parallel trends. Working conditions were bad, hours were long, and wages were low during the early period of industrialization. Men could take these jobs, leaving domestic responsibilities to their wives, who, because of the many children at home and their domestic work load, found that the value of their time at home was greater than these new opportunities. There was a big income effect (a woman would only take up employment if her spouse’s earnings were very low), far exceeding the substitution effect, given that women’s potential earnings were too low to outsource their domestic activities.
In the decades between 1930 and 1960, the fertility transition had already been accomplished in both countries while at the same time women’s life expectancy had increased: women could expect to have much more time to spend on other activities than childcare and domestic work, lengthening their time horizon. Further, also in both countries, this period saw an increased demand for office workers, teachers, and nurses, jobs much more attractive to return to when children were older. These were important pre-conditions for married women’s employment to increase.

The third period (1960-1990) is often characterized as a revolution, in fact, the first half of the gender revolution. Basically all processes of change that had started to build up during the previous phases matured and became more important, affecting married women’s labor force participation in a comprehensive way. During this period there was a strong expansion of jobs, particularly in the service sector (with welfare state expansion in Sweden and the expansion of similar services, although private, in the United States). In this period, the average woman has more education than before and families are small. With better jobs and higher wages, more women could afford childcare, making new strategies to reduce the costs associated with intermittent careers increasingly attractive, increasing female labor force participation dramatically not only among married women but married mothers. This increase was particularly strong in Sweden, where women’s dilemma of choosing between work and family was eased by female-friendly jobs, primarily in the public sector, and the launch of government-sponsored family-friendly policies.

By now, the income effect is less important, given the weakening of the relationship between husband’s earnings and wife’s employment and the strengthening of the relationship between the woman’s own potential earnings and employment. Thus, the substitution effect
predominates. As a result, the sphere gap closes, more rapidly in Sweden than in the United States because all the important market forces were supported by policy initiatives (see Stanfors 2003: chapter 4 for more detail), including separate taxation (1971), which increased incentives for married women to work; policy initiatives like paid parental leave (1974) and daycare expansion (1980s), closing the sphere gap substantially more in Sweden than in the United States.

As a result of the dissolution of the separate spheres, it also appears that contemporary marriages are not only more egalitarian but also more flexible than those in the past (Crompton 1999; Sullivan 2006; Gershuny 2000). Recent research shows that when men and women share housework marital conflict decreases (Coltrane 2000), while women’s satisfaction with their marriage (Amato et al. 2003) and their sexual relationships (Gager and Yabiku 2010) and overall marital stability increase (Cooke 2006; Oláh and Gähler 2014). It would seem that the shattering of the separate spheres is a major gain for families and their members.

Nevertheless, although this view of the “forest” of the two-part gender revolution seems compelling, it is clearly far from “complete,” given gender differences in the public sphere (in earnings, occupations, and hours), not to mention the remaining even greater gender differences in men’s and women’s roles in the home. (Of course, it is not clear how close to equality families want to get.) Does comparing the progress of the first half provide insight into how the second half is likely to develop?

There are several striking similarities. In each case, the early inroads were roundly dismissed. At first, the growth of women’s employment was dismissed, as they were not taking “real” men’s jobs (and many men are still unwilling to take up “women’s” jobs, even as many job categories that had employed men are declining while women’s are increasing). Women’s
earnings were dismissed as “only pin money”; it did not count (in the United States throughout the 1960s, it was rare for banks to include her earnings in qualifying couples for a home mortgage, because, after all, she might get pregnant, leave her job and lose her income). The early growth in men’s family roles is still being dismissed; they are only doing child care, not housework, and then only the “fun stuff” with their children. Both halves started slowly, with early childhood experiences in the parental family playing a critical role (Lahne and Wenne. 2012; Waite and Stolzenberg 1976).

But there are also important differences. In childhood, women have had much greater preparation for earning than men have for taking on family care. Further, the contrast between Sweden and the United States suggests that policy can play a key role in facilitating progress on both halves of the gender revolution. Paid family leave, in particular, dramatically increased Swedish men’s involvement with their children from an early age.

This suggests that as other countries make decisions about facilitating these two halves of the gender revolution, the early application of policy could smooth the way, and perhaps avoid some of the costs that these two countries incurred, both during the century of the growth of the separate spheres and its slow and unbalanced unraveling. Will they follow Sweden, which has been a leader in both halves of the gender revolution (Goldscheider, Bernhardt, and Lappégård 2015), or not?
References


Neilson, Jeff and Stanfors, Maria. 2014. It’s about time! Gender, parenthood and household divisions of labor under different welfare regimes. Journal of Family Issues 35: 1066-1088.


Sveriges officiella statistik (SOS). 1890. Folkräkningen [Census] 1890.