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# Social Support and Future Prospects for a Gender Equal Working life

ÅSA LUNDQVIST



# Introduction

- Gender equality a hallmark of the Swedish welfare state
- Current Sweden: Women and men are in paid work to largely the same extent (84% women and 88% men in 2015)
- Result of a number of family policy interventions:
  - Expansion of child care (covers today about 85% of all children age 2-15)
  - Parental leave insurance, 1974 ('daddy months' from 1994)
- **Labour market policy**
  - Labour shortage; politics of full employment; active labour market policy
  - Activation of the female labour force – 1960s →
  - National Labour Market Board (AMS)

# Introduction

- Married women – that is, the housewives – became a prime group to be targeted
  - In only 20 years, between 1960 and 1980, the percentage of working women increased from about 38 per cent to 83 per cent – “a bloodless revolution”
- In this context the housewife became part of the labour market: she was now to be activated to seek and find paid work
- From being categorised as a ‘married woman’ in statistics and governmental analysis, the housewife was now defined as unemployed.

## Transforming Gender and Family Relations

*'Sweden's social policies have a central place in both academic and political discussions of the role of states in promoting women's labor market activation and gender equality. Lundqvist's innovative, historically rich and theoretically sophisticated study analyzes a key episode in the building of these policies, focusing on the agency of Sweden's activation inspectors. She brings to light for the first time the critical role of women inspectors in the building of Sweden's policy architecture. Scholars of gender, social policy, states and labor markets will find here fresh insights and understandings of the gendered transformations of state policies and politics which continue into our own time.'*

Ann Orloff, Northwestern University, USA

*'Åsa Lundqvist has written a compelling study on gender, the labour market and the welfare state. Based on a profound historical-sociological analysis of Swedish labour market and family policies, including the 1960s activation campaigns attracting women into the workforce, the book is an exciting history of gendered welfare-state efforts to change social structures and individual behaviour. With her historical sensitivity and theoretical and methodological skills, Lundqvist makes a highly important contribution to current discussion on activation, workfare, and work-family relations.'*

Pauli Kettunen, University of Helsinki, Finland

Sweden has gained a worldwide reputation for its family friendly policies and the high share of women in paid employment. This book discusses the particular importance of early activation policies in the increase of women's paid employment and in changing gender and family relations. It explores how the integration of women into paid work was actually accomplished: on what ideological grounds, and using what concrete measures, were the conditions created for increasing the employment ratio of women?

A number of activation measures are analyzed in more detail: vocational training, opinion-shaping, persuading activities and the work done by activating inspectors, specially installed to initiate housewives into paid labour. The book showcases how early activation policies contributed to the transformation of gender and family relations and thus to a farewell to male breadwinning.

The book will appeal to undergraduates as well as graduate students, lecturers and researchers in gender studies, social and public policy and across the fields of politics, European studies, and contemporary history.

Åsa Lundqvist is Professor in the Department of Sociology at Lund University, Sweden.

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## Transforming Gender and Family Relations

How Active Labour Market Policies Shaped the Dual Earner Model



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# Activation Policies: Early Attempts

- The Activation Section was established in 1961 - Ingeborg Jönsson
- The Activation Section was established to facilitate efforts to activate the female labour force through
  - developing and planning different activation measures (i.e. education)
  - reach out to employers, municipalities and service institutions
  - Reach out to the families (men and women)
- The argument was two-folded: the housewife was needed in the labour force, to secure economic growth. At the same time, by encouraging and persuading women to become gainfully employed, with an income of their own, the full employment politics facilitated the emancipation of women – later on, gender equality

# Opinion-shaping activities

- TV-shows, films
- Radio programmes (Housewife switching her profession)
  - *Taking the big step*
  - *Industry – office – retail – What should I choose?*
  - *New doors are opening*
  - *Where all strengths are needed*
  - *Retail – a job for the energetic*
  - *Being an employee – your rights and obligations*
  - *Getting it all done – and having the energy*
  - *Hints for women in a hurry*
  - *Aiming for the future*

|                  | Dad  | Mum  | Anders, aged 13   | Maria, aged 10                             | Anna, aged 7         |
|------------------|--|--|---|--|----------------------|
| <b>General</b>   | All major dry-cleaning<br>Errands & repairs<br>Household finances      | Most cooking<br>Organization<br>Taking care of clothing (mending etc.) | Keep his room tidy<br>Take care of own clothes<br>Help with car, etc. | Take care of the birds<br>Put clothes away | Take care of the rat |
| <b>Monday</b>    | Make two beds  | Make two beds<br>Breakfast   | Make bed<br>Set and clear table                                       | Shop                                       |                      |
| <b>Tuesday</b>   | Breakfast  | Make four beds<br>Set table  | Make bed  | Clear table                                | Shop                 |
| <b>Wednesday</b> | Make two beds  | Make two beds  | Breakfast<br>Shop   | Make bed                                   | Set and clear table  |
| <b>Thursday</b>  | Pick up after oneself<br>Breakfast<br>Make two beds                    | Pick up after oneself<br>Make two beds                                 | Set table   | Breakfast                                  | Clear table          |
| <b>Friday</b>    | Take rugs outside in the morning<br>Make bed                           | Clean the whole house<br>Make four beds<br>Shop                        | Set table   | Breakfast                                  | Clear table          |
| <b>Saturday</b>  | Make bed<br>Breakfast<br>Set table                                     | Make two beds<br>Shop<br>Cooking (for weekend)                         | Make bed<br>Clear table   | Make bed                                   |                      |
| <b>Sunday</b>    | Whole family takes turns with breakfast (trays), making beds and lunch |  |   |  |                      |

# Opinion-shaping activities

- Advice
- Information campaigns in newspapers
- Meetings (including “fika”)
- Door-knocking (“We were out there knocking on people’s doors”)
- Cinemas (“We were out in the cinemas, where we served coffee and talked with women”)
- Information folders (often distributed at the job centers)



# Advice

- **Take care of your health. Think about fitness!**
- Judge food from a nutritional standpoint rather than a traditional cookbook view. Many foods are more nutritious the less they are prepared.
- **Stay enthusiastic!** There are always opportunities to achieve improvements. Life is not – it is built.
- Do not resign yourself to what seems like an impossible situation. You can always do something, somehow.
- **Do not let furniture and things rule the home.** Store or discard things that no longer fill an essential function. Life is too precious to spend it dusting.
- Place your tools and equipment so that you save steps and unnecessary movement.
- **Keep your equipment in good condition.** Get rid of things that are not used often enough to justify taking up much-needed space.
- Check whether the height of work surfaces truly fits your own height. If dad or Billy is going to wash the dishes, the height of the sink should be adapted to their height and not mum's. Figure out what can be done to improve the work environment.
- **Discuss with the family which parts of housework you think are most important.**
- **Make a plan for the work and make sure the family helps carry it out.**
- Assess every new purchase from the care perspective as well. Does it make the work easier or will it be an additional burden?
- **Save what you have the least of! These days, that might be time!**
- **Let 'simplify and share' be the passwords!**

# Activation inspector

- “We left work in the afternoon and the meetings were held at seven or seven thirty in one community centre. ... Someone from the municipality participated, a union representative and an employer. And then us from the job centre – we were supposed to inform people about available job opportunities – and so we directed our efforts especially towards women. We gave information and showed pictures of the opportunities out there and about the retraining courses and the associated benefits. We persuaded them by telling them it would improve their personal finances and we told them about the situation in the labour market and what kind of workers were needed. We also talked a lot about the transition from the agricultural society to the industrial society and all the new opportunities to make money” (Interview with AI1).

# Activating towards gender equality?

- To accomplish a gender equal working life would require ‘something like a bloodless revolution – and change both in the life of the individual and change of the entire society’ (Florin, 2002, p. 19).
- The role of state feminists: The ‘gender equality people’ contributed to formulating and practising an early form of state feminism, which gradually became a cornerstone of government
- The gender equality people “showed up suddenly everywhere, at several levels of society, in various political parties and organizations. They talked about “sex roles” as something made up that could be changed, about equity, parity or gender equality’ (Florin, 2002, p. 18)
- But did they succeed?

# Effects and results in current labour market patterns

- In combination with family policy reforms (especially parental leave and child care), the activation project contributed to the farewell of male breadwinning and the establishment of a dual earner family model
- Gender equality permeates all policy areas in Sweden (feminist government etc.)
- → But, also other consequences:

# Effects and results in current labour market patterns

- More than 50% of all working women worked part-time in the 1980s, today about 30% women (10% men) affecting access to social security systems, pensions etc. - *conditional gender equality*
- Major gender-segregated labour market (women work in public sector and men in private = wage differences)
- Major variations within women's employment, both in terms of class and ethnicity
- Women use parental leave days in higher degree than men - paradox
  - Traditional family roles difficult to change despite interventionist policy agendas

# Future prospects for a gender equal working life

- Gender equality ambitions are central to politics – a lot of the infrastructure is in place
- Difficulties to break traditional norms/barriers in family life and in working life
- Variations between women (today especially in terms of ethnicity)
- Despite many unsolved problems: important to acknowledge the role of the 'gender equality' people:
  - " The AMS created the opportunity for me to leave the life as a poor housewife and to become a professional and self-sufficient woman"
- Their experiences and contributions are important for the future prospect for a gender equal working life ("bringing the state back in")

Thank you!



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