

Project description

The Gender and Work Project, part 2: “What Happened to the Two-supporter Model? Marriage, Servanthood and Spousal Cooperation in Sweden 1750 to 1900”

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

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

Much has been written about gender and work both in the early modern period and in the nineteenth century. No one has, however, studied men’s and women’s everyday practices of work throughout several centuries and with the same method. Methodological consistency is hard to overestimate, yet often difficult to achieve in historical research.^[1] Relying on the method already created, we will be able to achieve such consistency. We have, therefore, the possibility of making a unique contribution of knowledge to the historiography of the nineteenth century, while at the same time addressing long-term change and continuity by linking the distant past (before 1800) to the recent past and, eventually, to the present.

^[1] Karen Harvey has pointed out that there is an obvious risk that what appears to be different phases (in this case of masculinity) are merely the effects of historians having changed focus and sources. Harvey, ‘The History of Masculinity, circa 1650-1800’, *Journal of British Studies* 44 (April 2005) 296–311.