The politics of persuasion. Opinion-shaping activities and gender equality in Sweden, 1960-1970

Åsa Lundqvist
Department of Sociology, Lund University, Lund, Sweden

ABSTRACT
In this paper, the role and significance of opinion-shaping and persuasion activities are explored through an analysis of the activation of women in the Swedish labour market in the 1960s, highlighting the ways in which gender equality ideals became infused in these activities through a process of ‘transformative state feminism’. The analysis draws on qualitative data including archival material and interviews. Activation policies in the 1960s emphasised the ideology of full employment including the importance of increasing women’s participation in paid work, hence paving the way for a dual-earner family model. The concrete measures associated with implementation of such policies were carried out by the National Labour Market Board (AMS), and included retraining and advanced training courses but also a number of innovative opinion-shaping activities. Two of these are analysed in this paper: a radio series called ‘Housewife switches job’ and the establishment of a so-called ‘activation inspector’. Following this analysis, the underlying ideas permeating such opinion-shaping activities and the actors who infused ideals of gender equality into the process are examined. In conclusion, lessons for the ongoing transformation of traditional gender relations and prospects for future advances in gender equality are discussed.

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Introduction
Work-life balance policies have made a significant imprint on the Swedish welfare state. The fact that Swedish women’s and men’s labour force participation rates are currently similar (Statistics Sweden 2017) has largely been framed as a consequence of the implementation of labour market and family policy initiatives that are in turn embedded in gender equality ideals (Ellingsæter & Leira 2006; Leira 2002). Although policies directly oriented towards gender equality gained prominence mainly in the 1970s, with wide-ranging reforms such as individual taxation and the expansion of publicly funded childcare (Duvander et al. 2015), initiatives since the 1960s have facilitated women’s capacity to combine paid work and family life (Nyberg 2012; Leira 2002). Among early measures that encouraged women to become wage earners was the introduction of active labour market policies targeting women without a paid job (Lundqvist 2011).

While Swedish women’s high levels of labour force participation were undoubtedly facilitated by these early policy interventions, an overlooked aspect of the implementation...
of the active labour market measures in the 1960s was the use of opinion-shaping strategies and processes of persuasion. During the 1960s, active labour market policies were introduced as part of the full employment ideology. The National Labour Market Board (AMS) was responsible for the implementation of these policies, the goals of which were to retrain workers for the then expanding economy (Bonoli 2010, 2013), and to address the growing labour shortage (Wadensjö 2001). In addition to providing retraining and advanced training courses (Olofsson and Wadensjö 2009) the AMS also developed opinion-shaping activities that aimed to influence attitudes within the population. The goals were to challenge entrenched views on male breadwinner families (including negative attitudes towards women working) and facilitate women’s entry the labour force in line with a dual earner model (Lundqvist 2017). Directed persuasion campaigns were used in pursuit of these goals.

In this article I analyse the emergence and characteristics of these opinion-shaping activities. While I cannot gauge their impact directly, they need to be recognised as important complements to the 1960s’ active labour market policies, and part of the story of Sweden’s transition to a dual earner model. The focus of my analysis is on how opinion-shaping activities were articulated in labour market policy debates, especially regarding gender equality, at a critical juncture in Swedish history (1960–1970). Two opinion-shaping activities are selected for detailed examination: a radio series called ‘Housewife switches job’ and the establishment of a so called activation inspector whose main task was to activate women into paid work. The following questions guide the analysis: What opinion-shaping activities were developed to persuade and encourage women to enter the labour market? What underlying ideas shaped such activities? Which actors guided opinion-shaping activities and to what extent were ideals of gender equality infused and articulated in the activation project?

In addressing these questions I view opinion-shaping activities as parts of a process in which new ideas (for example on gender equality) are introduced into the political discourse in ways that may provide a basis for future policy development. They represent an under-recognised aspect of Sweden’s labour market and family policy history, providing early challenges to the prevailing housewife ideal and male breadwinner model. In this paper I extend my earlier analysis on this topic (Lundqvist 2017) by exploring the specific role of ‘transformative state feminism’ and its capacity for persuasion in the 1960s. In addition, the analysis offer reflections on what the lessons from the persuasion campaigns in the 1960s suggest about the pursuit of gender equality today.

The paper begins by identifying the theoretical perspectives that frame the analysis. This is followed by a section in which I explain the materials and methods used. The analysis itself is then presented in two sections. I first examine and describe key elements of opinion-shaping activities, and the role of persuasion. Of special concern are the role of media and the introduction of the activation inspector as articulations of how opinion-shaping and persuasion were used in the activation project. Subsequently, I analyse some of the main actors and underlying ideas that shaped the activation project including opinion-shaping activities. Finally, a concluding section is offered including a discussion of some implications for contemporary policy-making.

Theoretical perspectives: state feminism and the politics of persuasion

The analysis is approached from several theoretical starting-points. First, I search for the driving forces behind the surge of activation measures in a particular time in history. For
this purpose, I deploy the concept of transformative state feminism and seek to identify key actors (femocrats) who straddled the boundary between activism and policy processes. Second: throughout the analysis, and most importantly in this context, opinion-formation is framed through the notion of persuasion as a key strategic element in the pursuit of radical social change.

The literature on ‘transformative state feminism’ assumes that states and governments endorse ideas and demands of a feminist agenda if and when a set of politicians and civil servants (femocrats) emerge to create gender equality (MacBride & Mazur 2012). Femocrats thus actively cooperate with state agencies and/or political actors to bring about social change via the state (Florin and Nilsson 2000; cf. McBride and Mazur 2012).

In a Nordic context, the intertwining of feminist movements and state agency has a long tradition:

Since the 1970s gender equality policies, sometimes known as ‘state feminism’, have added to the tradition of state intervention in promoting greater social equality: the egalitarian tradition has been broadened to also address sexual or gender differences. (Leira 2002, 32)

However, state feminism has a pre-history, as civil servants with a feminist, or ‘women-friendly’, agenda have served in various state authorities before the institutionalisation of gender equality politics. As such they might be seen as forerunners to the this development. As an illustration of this, a group of femocrats (jämställdhetsfolket), civil servants/street-level bureaucrats in different state authorities, contributed to formulating and practising an early form of state feminism as early as the 1960s (Florin and Nilsson 2000, cf. Lipsky [1980] 2010). When we study change processes, we should therefore identify key actors who bridge and align different social and political spaces.

Effective policy implementation, especially where it requires social change, is arguably not only the outcome of connecting elites in different social and political spaces but also contingent on the capacity to form opinions more widely in society, beyond the binary relation between policy and movement elites. The concept of persuasion has recently been brought to the fore in studies of welfare reforms. Senghass, Freier & Kupka (2018) stress the role of intermediaries between the state and citizens in policy implementation. They identify persuasive means as central in establishing a trustworthy and legitimate relationship:

... our interviews consistently showed that more persuasive approaches were equally important in frontline work. When describing their interaction with clients, case workers laid strong emphasis on the importance of getting through to clients and establishing a rapport with them. (Senghass, Freier & Kupka 2018, 9)

In a similar vein, Peter von Staden (2014) uses the concept of ‘moral persuasion’ to explain how governments exercise persuasive means as a way of enforcing (in this case) industrial policies. In his analysis, ‘legitimacy in combination with the perceived importance of the countervailing forces’ (Ibid, 478) were critical in policy implementation. Effective policy implementation is therefore not merely a matter of rational calculation but also requires outcomes to be seen as legitimate by the various actors, in a complex web of interrelated interests where multiple perspectives are conjoined by persuasive outcomes. Persuasion thus serves as projections that multiple actors can share and be motivated by, and that have to be mobilized as alternatives to the current state of affairs.
I use this framing as a point of departure to analyse opinion-shaping activities and the role of persuasion. In the following section I outline the materials and methods applied in the analysis.

**Materials and methods**

The analysis builds mainly on in-depth interviews with former employees of the National Labour Market Board (AMS), different forms of archive data and radio material. In my attempt to explore and analyse past experiences and events I have used content and document analysis (Bowen 2009). During the research process, I have searched for patterns, meanings and understandings of the many activation activities directed towards women as they have been articulated in the interviews, archive data and in the radio programmes.

Twenty-seven interviews were conducted and transcribed between 2011 and 2014 with women and men who had worked at the AMS in various positions from the 1960s onwards – from those who had held the position of Director-General, heads of county labour boards and activation inspectors to job centre advisers and career guidance counsellors. I used different techniques when contacting the informants: I wrote directly to those who had been Director-General or head of a county labour board, in all cases receiving positive responses to my project and my request to interview them. In one of the interviews with a former head of a county labour board I learned about a woman who used to work as an activation inspector and had extensive knowledge about the activation project, especially regarding the activation of housewives. I subsequently wrote to her and she agreed to share her memories with me. She told me numerous stories about her involvement in the activation project and also how she – as a femocrat – actively informed housewives about the possibilities of becoming economically independent when having a paid job. She also gave me advice on others to contact, including a number of femocrats. This snowball sampling approach was later on used to recruit the rest of the informants (including the activation inspectors). Many of the informants held different positions with the agency over the course of their lives and as a result had extensive knowledge about the agency and its former activities, including opinion-shaping activities. It was also through the interviews that I came to learn about the opinion-shaping activities for the first time. The age of the participants was relatively high (all of them were over 70 years old), which did present a challenge, not least when discussing events and personal experiences and memories that took place more than 50 years ago (Olick et al. 2011).

I therefore also gathered and analysed archive data from the AMS archives repository, mainly to ascertain whether or not dates and other more concrete narratives were accurately remembered (Thompson 2000), but also to seek knowledge about what went unsaid in the interviews. The data on active labour market measures and activities in the archive is extensive, ranging from minutes recorded at various types of meetings, internal reports, summaries of conference proceedings and newsletters to folders, notes, personal letters, film manuscripts and more (cf. Lundqvist 2017, 26). As a strategy, I decided early on to concentrate on collecting information about the activation of the female labour force including the opinion-shaping activities carried out during the period. During the process, I encountered some unexpected problems: significant documents were missing (or disqualified) from the archive, for example the personal archive of the first female head of the
Activation section at the AMS, Ingeborg Jönsson. These files would have complemented the many stories about her as a true champion for the activation project directed towards women. Ingeborg Jönsson is portrayed both by my informants as well as in secondary literature as one of the main actors in the implementation of gender equality goals at the AMS, which I will return to in the analysis. However, even if some data were missing, the remaining material at the archive was indeed extensive, and – together with the interview material – enabled a reconstruction of how the opinion-shaping activities involved in the activation of women were articulated and carried out.

In addition to the interviews and the archive data I have also used radio material, specifically a radio series from 1965 [The housewife switches jobs]. The radio series highlights the importance of media in the activation process, showcasing how the AMS actively used the radio to reach out and persuade women to take on a paid job. It is important to note that the analysis in this article offers a reanalysis of all the material collected between 2011 and 2014, focusing especially on the actors engaged in persuasion campaigns and activities and the role of ‘transformative state feminism’.

Key elements of opinion-shaping activities and the role of persuasion: a descriptive overview

As noted earlier, the results will be presented in two main sections. This first section focuses on specific opinion-shaping activities and the role of persuasion and is mainly descriptive in form. It is answering the question ‘What opinion-shaping activities were developed to persuade and encourage women to enter the labour market?’ and is divided in two sub-sections.

The housewife switches jobs – persuasion through media

Within the realm of active labour market policies, an initial key element in the opinion-shaping activities was marked by the introduction of a radio program called ‘The housewife switches jobs’ (Hemmafru byter yrke), first broadcast in 1965. The aim of the series was to provide a ‘broad orientation on all the occupations and training paths available to women who were not in paid work’ (Lundqvist 2017, 113), and the final episodes also highlighted the importance of changing family and gender relations to facilitate women’s entry to the labour market. The radio series was broadcast nationwide hence reaching the Swedish population in the widest possible sense.

As described in detail in my previous work (Lundqvist 2017), the first eight episodes offered broad information about the barriers that women were assumed to encounter when entering the labour market. For example, in an attempt to convince female listeners how easy it was to get a job, vocational guidance advisers were interviewed, as were former housewives. Women who used to be housewives told the audience about the positive aspects of having a paid job: they had become economically independent and their social life had improved considerably since they became wage earners. The episodes also included information about retraining opportunities, various grants and other courses, the availability of part-time work in industry and job opportunities within the growing public sector. Here, certain specialities in health care occupations were highlighted such as assistant nurses, but also so-called ‘special training’ for ‘elderly care, mental health care and child welfare’. The
episodes also covered information about the employees’ and the employers’ rights and obligations (Stencil, Swedish Radio, August 1965).

The two last episodes emphasised the difficulties in combining a paid job with family responsibilities: How was a woman who was also responsible for the home and the family supposed to manage a paid job? The discussion provided advice on how families could plan and organise the housework among all members of the family (Stencil, Swedish Radio, August 1965). Along this line of argument, the radio program emphasised the importance of the introduction of a ‘democratic family model’ in which all family members were engaged in the household. Hence it was argued that the transition to a dual breadwinner model did not only involve women, but the entire family. All family members must, it was argued, be willing to adjust to a life beyond the traditional family model, and all family members must take responsibility for the home. It was all a matter of making life more efficient for all family members (from episode 9 of The Housewife switches job; Melander 1965).

The efficiency argument in the radio program was not unique in the debate. Efficiency was a lead theme in post-war Sweden, which also included advice on how to enable families to organize their households more effectively – not least in order to create free time for other activities such as paid work (Berner 2011; Rothstein 1996). In the radio programme, the efficiency argument was closely connected to the new family model in which not only the woman/mother was involved in the housework but also the man and the children: the ‘democratic family’, or as it was later articulated, a ‘gender equal family’.

The advice and information brought forward in all the episodes was marked by concrete examples of how the transition from unpaid work to paid work among housewives could proceed. According to the AMS, the radio program was a success but the activation of women was still proceeding too slowly. Among others, Ingeborg Jönsson and AMS Director-General Bertil Olsson strongly argued for more efficient methods of getting women into paid work. One telling example was the introduction of the activation inspector.

The activation inspector – direct persuasion

The activation inspector was introduced in 1966, and exemplifies how the AMS not only used the media as a way of reaching out to women but also direct activation methods and measures carried out by civil servants. The activation inspectors were employed by the AMS regional offices. Their main task was to activate women into a paid job, mainly through coordination of local activation initiatives and courses, information campaigns and networking/cooperation with local and regional employers. The activation inspectors was also tasked to ‘influence and change’ negative opinions and prejudices concerning working women, hence also changing traditional views on male breadwinner families (Koncept 1966, 9). Thus, as illustrated in my earlier work, the work performed by inspectors included elements of persuasion: ‘It was a matter of persuading people, both the unemployed and employers, and there you simply had to be flexible’ (Interview with Activation Inspector 2; cf. Lundqvist 2017, 150).

How then were women persuaded to enter the labour market? To get women interested in signing up for retraining or advanced training courses, activation inspectors organized numerous activities including informing the public about the labour market situation via newspapers, radio and television. They also went to public spaces, such as the cinemas: ‘We
were out in the cinemas, where we served coffee and talked with women – you had to grab people! We came up with all kinds of things to get people to come to the job centre!’ (Interview with Activation Inspector 10, cf. Lundqvist 2017, 151–152).

Once the women had attended a meeting to be informed about the situation in the labour market, the recruitment work began. It was not always easy to get women to sign up for the courses, in turn leading the inspectors to engage in persuasive interaction with the women. One of the inspectors went so far as to talk in terms of ‘preaching’ the message about the labour shortage and the need for women workers.

In order to get many of them to come, you had to go out and preach about how the labour market was changing and that workers were needed – that there were opportunities out there and if they had not done so before, they could go to school for retraining. (Interview with Activation Inspector 11; cf. Lundqvist 2017, 152)

In the interviews I asked if they could describe how they worked in practice in order to persuade women to become wage workers. In this context they did not only describe how they organized the meetings, but they also revealed what arguments they brought forward to persuade women to enter the labour market.

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 Activation Inspector 1, cf. Lundqvist 2017, 99)

As the quote demonstrates, even if the main goal was to recruit as many women as possible, important elements in the persuasion campaigns were marked by ideas of how to advance economic freedom for women. However, during this early period in the activation project, gender equality was not discussed as a concrete issue within the AMS. The recruitment of women to work in industry was instead predominantly a reaction to the prevailing labour shortage. Although there were voices in the public debate calling for a more gender equal labour market, the feminist influence must nevertheless be regarded as relatively limited in the early and mid-1960s. Still, from the mid-1960s, an increasing number of actors promoting a gender equal family and working life made their voices heard, thus contributing to pressures that would eventually alter traditional views on the family.

**Underlying ideas and actors in opinion-shaping activities**

This section identifies underlying ideas and key actors behind the opinion-shaping activities and also discusses how ideals of gender equality were infused and articulated in such activities. It is divided into two parts. In the first the question ‘What ideas lay behind the opinion-shaping activities?’ is investigated. In the second, the role of actors is analysed with the overarching aim to answer the question ‘Which actors guided opinion-shaping activities, and how were ideals of gender equality infused and articulated in such activities?’
Underlying ideas behind opinion-shaping activities

As noted in the Introduction, active labour market policies in the 1960s were introduced as part of the full employment ideology in turn embedded in, and featured by, a strong Social Democratic state (cf. Rothstein 1996). In this context, a major goal for the Social Democratic government and the labour market parties was to facilitate women’s entry into the labour force, first as a way of preventing labour shortage but later, in the 1970s, as a way of creating a more gender equal family and working life (Hirdman 2014).¹ The National Labour Market Board (AMS) was, as we have seen, given the mandate to enable women without paid employment to join the labour market.

In the beginning, the activation of women occurred through retraining and advanced training courses, but very soon, as we saw above, in the mid-1960s opinion-shaping activities were also used to make the activation project more effective and to overcome negative attitudes towards working women (Lundqvist 2017). In my earlier work, I identified the specific importance that the AMS placed on strengthening opinion-shaping activities, both to drive changes in the labour supply and to shape public opinion:

Changes in the labour supply are highly dependent upon the social climate and the attitudes therein concerning employment among various groups. This applies especially to the gainful employment of married women. It is not enough to only try and find new ways and forms of contact and better instruments for facilitating labour market entry. Shaping public opinion over the long term is an equally important task. Information with such an aim must be directed not only to the women themselves, but also to their spouses and children and all of those who, in the broadest sense, create work environments. Information initiatives aimed at changing attitudes must always take a long-term approach and be prepared to encounter some resistance. (1966; cf. Lundqvist 2017, 112)

The main goal and underlying ideas of opinion-shaping at the time was hence two-fold. On the one hand opinion-shaping activities were used to legitimise the overarching labour market policy goal of full employment. On the other hand, opinion-shaping was used to persuade women to become wage earners and also to convince the public about the positive aspects of activating women into paid work, hence facilitating a dual earner family model (1966. AMS: Stockholm). These goals permeated all opinion-shaping activities during the 1960s and the 1970s. Importantly, these activities were implemented by a number of key actors who partly also articulated gender equality goals early on in the process.

Femocrats, opinion-shaping activities and gender equality

A pioneering actor in the activation project was the first head of the Activation section at AMS, Ingeborg Jönsson. She was appointed head of the Activation section in the beginning of the 1960s, which gave her the mandate to formulate guidelines and recommend activation measures in order to more effectively activate women. Almost all of the former employees at the AMS referred to her during the interviews as a pioneering femocrat. Interestingly, a number of the interviewees also argued that her success was dependent on key members of the AMS management: the activation of women could not have been carried in such effective ways without the approval and support of, for example, the Director General Bertil Olsson. This was articulated in an interview with a former femocrat, Anna-Greta Leijon, who worked as...
a civil servant within the Activation section at the AMS in the 1960s, until she joined the
government in 1973 (she later became Minister of Labour, 1982 and 1987).

I started working for Ingeborg in the spring of 1964. It was such an exciting time to join the
organization, partly because the AMS had such tremendous freedom back then and was
allowed to do a great deal. But this was also the time when women were needed in the
labour market and women wanted to be out there. So there was a joint interest in
facilitating that while tearing down biases. But there was also opposition, including at the
AMS. But Bertil Olsson understood this, as did Ingeborg’s husband Ove Jönsson, who was
head of the A-Bureau [an influential section within the AMS, author’s remark]. There were
a lot of people at the AMS who thought that what Ingeborg was working with wasn’t
terribly important, but there were scads of supporters as well, including key members of
management. … Ingeborg, who worked very hard every second of the day, was extremely
dynamic. She had an incredible capacity for work. She was tough and a lot of people were
afraid of her. She was also a Liberal. But she had no blind spots – I was an active Social
Democrat, of course, but that was never a problem. (Interview with Anna-Greta Leijon, 2011,
cf. Lundqvist 2017, 63)

Ingeborg Jönsson led the work at the Activation section and through her leadership
a number of measures were developed and carried out by regional and local employment
officers, many of them defined as femocrats. One such measure was a method referred to as
‘personal influence’, wherein job centre advisers and activation inspectors including
a number of femocrats met with jobseekers in person. This method was seen as particularly
effective as the advisers could adjust their arguments depending on the questions asked by
the jobseeker. Personal influence as a method was developed not only by a number of
highly ranked civil servants at the AMS in Stockholm such as Ingeborg Jönsson and her
colleagues, but also by civil servants working at the Agency for Public Management, and
a number of social scientists (mainly psychologists and sociologists) (Lundqvist 2017). Hence
not only the AMS provided important actors to the activation project.

Another example of how various actors, many of whom can be identified as early
femocrats, were engaged in the activation project is the establishment of The Working
Group for Increased Labour Market Information to Families by the mid-1960s. The working
group was composed of representatives of the AMS, including Ingeborg Jönsson, the
trade unions and a number of women’s organisations. Its main goal was to inform
Swedish families about all the changes in the labour market and the many vocational
training courses. The group was also tasked with disseminating information ‘concerning
the family’s adjustment to the changes in society’ through ‘a deliberate discussion of, for
example, the traditional division of responsibilities within the family and the need for
rational cooperation in this area’ (1966; Lundqvist 2017, 126).

The working group developed numerous information campaigns during the late 1960s,
with the overarching goal to persuade women to enter activity programmes and eventually
the labour market. The information campaigns were not only directed towards women (and
their families) but also towards municipalities and employers to encourage them to facilitate
housewives’ engagement in paid work. The campaigns were published in newspapers, as
pamphlets available in job centres, and as advertisements on buses, billboards and cinemas.
As I have discussed in more detail in my previous work, television was also used as a way of
shaping public opinion. For example, a number of theme nights at Swedish Television were
planned when information programmes such as ‘Should Gender Determine Pay?’, or ‘The
Stay-at-Home Wife’s Other Alternatives’ were broadcast (Lundqvist 2017, 128), all of them developed by the femocrats at the Activation Section at the AMS and the working group.

The AMS was indeed a main driver in the accomplishment of the activation project. On a central level they formulated how to persuade women to enter the labour market and why, and through local job centres these goals were carried out in practice. However they could not have managed by themselves. Rather, they engaged a number of other actors and institutions in their quest, including other state agencies, trade unions, employers and social scientists.

During the 1960s, the AMS mainly directed its activities towards women without a paid job. As stated above, women were defined as having particular problems, which could be solved by the expansion of publicly funded childcare among other interventions. By the end of the 1960s and throughout the 1970s, this view on women and work changed. Increased equality between men and women, in family life as well as in working life, grew in importance, and the idea of a ‘gender equal family’ emerged (Lundqvist 2011). These debates – and the ensuing implementation of gender equality as a policy field of its own – originated with various actors such as social science scholars, political parties (mainly the Liberals and the Social Democrats), and feminist civil servants within state agencies such as the AMS (Florin and Nilsson 2000). The shift in policy altered the direction of activation project. If gender equality had been relatively downplayed in the 1960s activation project (even if early femocrats argued for the emancipatory benefits of a paid work), activities from the 1970s onwards were embedded in a clear gender equality discourse, transforming the view on women’s part-time work and men’s role as caring fathers (Lundqvist 2017).

It is important to note that although opinion-shaping campaigns continued in the 1970s, campaigns related to men’s role as caring father were not carried out by the AMS. Instead the National Social Insurance Agency became one of the main drivers behind many of the campaigns. For example, when the parental leave reform was launched, it was introduced as ‘Daddy on Paternity Leave’ (Johansson and Klinth 2008, 42). In these campaigns it was clear that ‘normative images of how men should feel, think, and act-normative images to which men must relate in some way’ were very much present as a way of persuading men to become caring fathers (Johansson and Klinth 2008, 43). The campaign was followed up by many other organisations, not only government offices but also employers, trade unions and civil society organisations. Hence, the AMS was not (a main) driving force behind the 1970s campaigns connected to men’s role as fathers, but the earlier conceptualisation of ‘a gender equal family’ was part of the backdrop for such developments.

**Concluding remarks**

The main aim of this article was to analyse the emergence of opinion-shaping and persuasion activities in association with the activation of women in the Swedish labour market in the 1960s, and to identify the ways in which they brought gender equality into the policy discourse. Such activities emerged and developed after a number of obstacles had been identified in policies to activate women. Some of the hurdles identified were the lack of childcare facilities, negative attitudes among employers, husbands and some women to female paid labour, but also fear among women about becoming wage workers. The AMS took these problems seriously, developing a number of actions to counteract them. One was the development of opinion-shaping and persuasion campaigns.
From the mid-1960s, the actions became increasingly sophisticated, seeking not only to attract women to the labour market but also to influence and change attitudes towards the prevailing housewife ideal and the male breadwinner model. The civil servants working with the activation project departed from the urgent need for labour force expansion, also arguing in their meetings with unemployed women that a paid job would improve their personal finances and, indirectly, enhance their independence. Hence, the persuasion campaigns combined economic independence with structural needs in the labour market. Such activities can be viewed as an example of an early state feminist approach – before the establishment of gender equality policies. A core element of this was the emergence of state feminists (femocrats) who operated within the state apparatus but were also closely aligned with, for example, women’s political organisations. As such they served as key actors, mainly by introducing new arguments (about women’s economic independence) into the AMS, thus contributing to pressures to alter traditional norms and ideas about working women.

Persuasion could also be viewed in line with the arguments put forward by Senghass et al. (2018), that is, as an intermediary between state policies and citizens. Senghaas, Freier and Kupka’s analysis is based on contemporary conditions, however the Swedish case underline the importance of recognising persuasion as a means to enhance policy implementation also in the past. Activation policies and measures in the 1960s used persuasive approaches in order to facilitate women’s entry to the labour market but also to build support for the establishment of a dual earner family model.

While it was not my goal in this article to assess the impact of the 1960s’ activation project, there are implications that can be drawn for contemporary policy-making. My analysis shows how the early policy measures designed to facilitate women’s movement into paid work were seen to require complementary ‘opinion-shaping’ activities, based on persuasive means, to be effective. The barriers that were encountered brought issues of gender equality into the public discourse and constructed the notion of a ‘democratic family’. The profiling of these issues provided a strong basis for subsequent family policy reforms, and Sweden’s current achievements in terms of a dual earner model no doubt reflect this policy and activation history.

However, as has been shown by numerous studies, gender inequalities in working life as well as in family life are still in place despite the policies enacted from the 1960s onwards. This is apparent in inequalities in the use of the parental leave insurance (Duvander et al. 2015), the ongoing wage gap between women and men (SOU 2015, 50), and the unequal division of labour in the homes and in the labour market (SOU 2014, 28). Hence it could be argued that persuasion was not sufficient to shift behavior everywhere, for example in relation to gender-segregation in employment, even if it is recognised more broadly as an important element in the delivery of activation policies (Senghass, Freier & Kupka 2018).

One example is the difference between part-time work among women and men. When women entered the labour market in the 1960s and the 1970s, part-time work was a highly attractive choice. As a result more than 50 per cent of all working women worked part-time in the 1980s. In contemporary Sweden this has reduced considerably, however 30 per cent of all women still work part-time (compared with 10 per cent of men), affecting their access to the social security systems and future pensions (Statistics Sweden 2017). Moreover, Swedish labour market remains highly gender segregated (SOU 2015, 50). Women dominate in the public sector and men in private workplaces, which in turn leads to marked
wage differences. The labour market is also ethnically segregated with migrants overrepresented in service occupations in particular (Schierup 2010). Migrant women are particularly vulnerable in the labour market: the employment rate among migrant women aged 20–64 years was 65.8 per cent in 2018, while the comparable figure for Swedish-born women was 85.2 per cent (Statistics Sweden 2018).

The dual earner family model currently in place is thus far from gender equal. Inequities between men and women as well as among women are still in place, and debates over policy options to change such patterns are ongoing. However what the lessons from the activities in the 1960s tell us is that where gendered norms are seen to impede effective policy implementation, and there are actors able and willing to challenge these views, persuasion measures can be mobilised that may have far reaching effects. While the activities analysed here were historically contingent measures, and strategies to advance gender equality into the future will inevitably need to be constructed differently, Sweden is well placed to take the next steps in advancing gender equality. This is at least partly due to early activation measures that contributed to the almost equal participation of Swedish women and men in the labour market today, and the role of transformative state feminism in raising consciousness in ways that supported subsequent advances in labour market and family policies.

Note

1. Throughout the 1970s, the gender equality ideology gained greater foothold in policy debates and reforms but still during the 1960s, women was seen as experiencing particular problems (Lundqvist 2011).

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Notes on contributor

Åsa Lundqvist is professor of Sociology at Lund University, Sweden. Her main research interests include feminist analysis of the history of the welfare state and welfare policies, especially labour market regulation and family policies. Her most recent book is Transforming Gender and Family Relations. How Active Labour Market Policies Shaped the Dual Earner Model (Edward Elgar 2017). Her research also appears in journals such as Social Politics, Journal of Family Studies, Journal of Family History, and Journal of Social Policy and Society.
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