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United States vs Sweden in Gender Equality

In the current day and age, the demand for gender equality increases every single day as citizens struggle for the access of equal rights and opportunities, regardless of their gender. Some countries are more ahead than others in regards to policies and procedures put in place to strive for gender equality. In particular, Sweden is far more ahead, while the United States continues to lag behind. According to the Global Gender Gap Index of 2015, which ranks 145 different economies on a scale from 1 (total equality) to 0 (no equality), Sweden scores a 0.823 with a rank of 4, while the United States scores a 0.740 with a rank of 28 (“Gender Equality in Sweden”). Why is the United States ranked so low, especially when it’s considered to be the country of freedom and opportunity, while Sweden lies in the top five? This report will focus on comparing and contrasting the gender equity laws of both countries, with special attention being placed on education, employment, and wage gaps.

When it comes to education, Sweden strongly adheres to the Education Act, which makes sure that gender equality is paramount within schools. No one is discriminated against, regardless of their race, gender, etc. Gender equality is also enforced in schools “with the aim of giving children the same opportunities in life, regardless of their gender, by using teaching methods that counteract traditional gender patterns and gender roles” (“Gender Equality in Sweden”). Because of Sweden’s strict adherence to gender equity in schools, girls have

excelled greatly within the past few decades. Women are also most likely to attend college, and “nearly two-thirds of all university degrees in Sweden are awarded to women” (“Gender Equality in Sweden”). In the United States, these numbers of women in postsecondary education are roughly equivalent. In schools, “females represented 57.4% of students receiving a bachelor’s degree and 62.6% of students receiving a master’s degree” (“Gender Equity in Education”). The current president and First Lady of the United States, Barack Obama and Michelle Obama, launched Let Girls Learn in 2015, which aims to “place a particular emphasis on community-led solutions to reduce barriers that prevent adolescent girls from completing their education” (“FACTSHEET”). However, girls in the United States are still more likely than boys to be bullied and/or harassed based on sex. While the success and encouragement of girls in the school system in both countries are comparable, there are still instances where Sweden trumps the United States in gender equality in schools.

Sweden also promotes gender equity in the workplace through their extensive welfare system. This system allows parents to “share 480 days, or around 16 months, of paid parental leave when a child is born or adopted” (“Gender Equality in Sweden”). If the parent is single, they are awarded the full 480 days. It doesn’t matter whether the employee is a mother or a father, they are all entitled to the same amount of paid parental leave. However, in the United States, a mother is lucky if she even qualifies for three months of paid parental leave. Fathers are generally not allowed to take parental leave at all. According to the United States Department of Labor, “[o]nly 12 percent of U.S. private sector workers have access to paid family leave through their employer” (Perez). This statistic leaves 84% of U.S. private sector workers without paid parental leave. There is a huge difference between paid parental leave

between Sweden and the United States; hopefully the U.S. will strive to give employees the parental benefits that Sweden gives to its citizens. However, the United States does have laws in place that promote gender equality in the workplace. Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 “makes it illegal to discriminate against someone on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, or sex” (EEOC). The Pregnancy Discrimination Act makes it illegal for employers to “discriminate against a woman because of pregnancy, childbirth, or a medical condition related to pregnancy or childbirth” (EEOC). So, while the United States has issues with parental paid leave, they also fight against discrimination based on sex in the workplace.

Wage gaps are still an issue when it comes to gender equality. In Sweden, “women’s monthly salaries in Sweden are currently just under 87 per cent of men’s – 95 per cent when differences in choice of profession and sector are taken into account” (“Gender Equality in Sweden”). In the United States, “the average woman working full time, year round in 2014 made just 79 percent of what a similar man made” (ThinkProgress). However, colored women have an even wider wage gap between men in the United States. Although Sweden also beats the United States in having a lower wage gap, a wage gap still remains. Both countries would benefit from passing more laws that will hopefully lessen the wage gap until it no longer exists.

When it comes to gender equality between Sweden and the United States, Sweden has more laws and protections whereas the United States has less. Although both are ranked high on the Global Gender Gap Index of 2015, they have still not yet reached complete gender equality. However, both countries are on the right track—Sweden more so than the United States. Hopefully the day will come when both countries reach complete equality; in the

meantime, the United States should look to Sweden for guidance on how to make their country more equal for the benefit of both sexes.

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United States vs Sweden: Divorce

Divorce has been around ever since marriage began. Divorce is defined as the legal dissolution of a marriage by a court or other competent body. Oftentimes, divorce is a long, arduous, and stressful legal process that couples go through in order to legally terminate their marriage, and many different factors contribute to how stressful the process will be. This legal process also varies from country to country, and in the case of the United States, it can vary from state to state. This essay will focus on comparing and contrasting the process of divorce between the United States and Sweden, and focus on several specific factors of divorce, such as the legal process, the settlement and distribution of assets, and child support and custody.

In the United States, the legal process for divorce varies from state to state. Apparently, “[d]ivorce in America is governed by the laws of the individual state in which it occurs” (“U.S. Divorce Law Center”). So, the laws of divorce depend on which state the spouses currently live in. Before 1969, divorce was fairly difficult to go through, since there had to be a legitimate reason for the couple to get a divorce, such as adultery, insanity, imprisonment, et cetera. However, in 1969, California passed what are called “no fault” divorces, which meant that couples could file for a divorce without needing a legitimate reason (History Cooperative). Eventually, every state adopted this no fault divorce law, and now it is much easier to file for a divorce on the case of “irreconcilable differences.” In Sweden, to get a divorce one must “apply for divorce to the district court where you are registered” (Divorce). To apply, the spouses must fill out the one of the two forms, which are joint or individual, and send it in. However, if one spouse is not in agreement about the divorce, in most cases, the filing spouse can fill out the form by his or her self. According to Juristjouren, “[g]etting a divorce in Sweden is quick and relatively straightforward.” In Sweden, it is much quicker to get a divorce, while in the United

States, it can be slower, since there are many different factors that contribute to how the process plays out.

One of the key factors that determines how long a divorce may take is the settlement and the distribution of assets for the divorce. The distribution of assets is resolved in differing ways between the United States and Sweden. In the United States, “courts divide property under one of two basic schemes: community property or equitable distribution” (U.S. Divorce Law Center). In the community property scheme, both spouses equally own all monetary and property assets that were acquired from the day they were married to the date of separation. In the equitable distribution scheme, all assets are divided fairly, but not equally. The division of assets usually takes the longest for a divorcing couple to decide, especially in the case where the spouses do not agree and must both individually hire lawyers and go to court over who gets what. Another key aspect that is somewhat related to assets is spousal support, or alimony. In most cases, both parties have to agree on how one person helps provide for the other, and if they can’t agree, then it’s usually brought to court. In Sweden, the division of assets is similar to the United States. According to Juristjouren, “the assets are divided equally between the spouses, but the spouses are free to agree on an alternative solution that suits them. All marital property, assets minus liabilities, which are not private property by a prenuptial agreement, a will or a deed of gift is to be divided.” So in Sweden, the distribution of assets is usually 50-50 between both spouses, unless other agreements are made, which is also the case in the United States.

Perhaps the most difficult part that is handled in a divorce is determining arrangements for any children that both spouses had. In the United States, custody of children can get rather complicated. There are several different types of custody in the United States, and they are sole, joint-legal, joint-physical, split, and a relatively newer type called birdnesting (Diekow). In sole

custody, one parent gets complete authority over the children. Joint-legal is a lot like sole custody, except the other parent still gets some say in the child's life. In joint-physical, both parents have equal custody of the child. In split custody, the children are separated from one parent and half their siblings, and lose all contact with them. Finally, in birdnesting, the children reside in the same house, and each parent takes turns living with the children for a certain amount of time. On the other hand, in Sweden, divorcing parents will automatically have joint custody of the children if they were married when they had the children; if not, sole custody is granted to the mother. There are other instances where one parent is given sole custody, such as in the case of the other parent being abusive, et cetera. However, since Sweden typically views that joint custody is best for the children, then parents will automatically be granted joint custody, except in the case of extenuating circumstances.

When it comes to the legal process of divorce and all the factors that come with it, the United States and Sweden have some similarities and differences. However, divorce remains to be a somewhat stressful experience that many couples end up going through, but it is oftentimes for the best. It's always better to terminate a relationship where one or both of the spouses feel uncomfortable, for the betterment of their lives, as well as their children. It's time the world comes to see divorce as a more positive than negative thing. Instead of thinking of it as unfortunate, we should start to think of it as a new beginning, so that everyone involved can move on in a healthier way.

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