

Divorce-Risk Patterns in Same-Sex „Marriages“ in Norway and Sweden

by Gunnar Andersson ¹, Turid Noack ², Ane Seierstad ², and Harald Weedon-Fekjær ³

November, 2004

Abstract:

The present study provides an investigation into patterns in divorce risks of partners in same-sex marriages, or *registered partnerships*, in Norway and Sweden. A comparison with patterns in divorce risks in heterosexual marriages is provided. Our study is based on longitudinal information from the population registers of the two countries, covering all persons in partnerships. Our demographic analyses involve information on the characteristics such as age, sex, geographical background, experience of previous opposite-sex marriage, biological parenthood, and educational attainment of the partners involved. We find that in many respects patterns in divorce are quite similar in same-sex and opposite-sex marriages. If we only compare levels in union dissolution, divorce risks are considerably higher in same-sex than in opposite-sex marriages. The divorce risk for female partnerships is practically double that of the risk for male partnerships.

¹ Max Planck Institute for Demographic Research, Konrad-Zuse-Str. 1,
18057 Rostock, Germany. E-mail: andersson@demogr.mpg.de

² Statistics Norway, POB 8131 Dep, 0033 Oslo, Norway.
E-mail: turid.noack@ssb.no and ane.seierstad@ssb.no

³ Section of Medical Statistics, University of Oslo, Norway.
E-mail: harald.weedon-fekjar@medisin.uio.no

1. Registered partnerships: A new family type

At present, the issue of granting legal recognition to same-sex couples is high on the political agenda in a large number of countries. Where this family type is not legally recognized, the debate tends to be intensifying. In many European states, this recognition is already well established, and the discussion more often concerns various amendments to existing rules. The first country to introduce legal recognition of same-sex unions was Denmark in 1989, and the term “registered partnership” was invented for that purpose. In all Nordic countries, same-sex couples today have the legal right to registered partnership, a civil status that in practice hardly deviate from the concept of marriage. Norway was the second country to introduce this family type (1993), followed by Sweden (1995), Iceland (1996), and finally Finland (2002). By 2003, same-sex unions had been given legal recognition in one form or another in Germany, France, Hungary, Portugal, Belgium, and the Netherlands, too¹. In 2001, the latter country became the first in the world to amend its marriage act to grant same-sex couples a marriage status equal to that of opposite-sex couples.

In terms of innovation in family-demographic behavior, the Scandinavian countries are often singled out as forerunners, with other countries tending to follow suit. It may be debatable whether this statement is generally true or not, but applied to same-sex partnerships it certainly seems to be a correct description. Consequently, it is worthwhile to have a closer look at the Nordic experience of same-sex family life. Several studies deal with various political and legal aspects of the introduction of same-sex partnerships in Europe². Knowledge about the demographic behavior related to this new family type, however, is still sparse. The purpose of our study is to provide some knowledge of that kind.

¹ In some other countries, such as the USA, Canada, and Spain, same-sex unions have sometimes been legalized at the level of states and regions.

² For a discussion on the passage of partnership legislation in Denmark, see Sølund (1998). Nielsen (1990) provides further evidence of legal aspects of the new family type. Noack (2000) discusses the introduction of registered partnerships in Norway, and Agell (1998) refers to the debate about the introduction of partnerships in Sweden. Martin and Théry (2001) discuss the introduction of another related family form, Pacte de solidarité civile (PACS), in France, which is open for same-sex and opposite-sex couples alike. For an overview of the way in which same-sex marriage was paved in the Netherlands, see Waaldijk (2001).

Our study provides an overview of the demographic characteristics of and patterns in divorce risks of couples in registered partnerships in Norway and Sweden. The analysis is based on information from Norwegian and Swedish population registers. To suit our purpose, we have linked information on various demographic and socio-economic characteristics of the same individuals from different administrative registers of other types. The study is an extension of previous work based on Norwegian data, where we, for example, found that the majority of partnerships were male and that the fraction of cross-national partnerships was fairly high (Noack 2000). A first analysis of divorce risks in same-sex partnerships showed that in Norway, lesbian couples had a considerably higher divorce risk than male couples. Another group with a high propensity to divorce were cross-cultural couples, i.e., couples in which one of the two partners was non-Nordic (Noack, Fekjær and Seierstad 2002). In the present study, we provide an elaborate comparison including similar data on partnerships in neighboring Sweden. In addition, we incorporate data on divorce risks of heterosexual married people. A comparison of divorce-risk patterns in opposite- and same-sex marriages as thorough as this one has never been performed thus far. The reason is, naturally, that the legalization of same-sex partnerships is a recent development, and that the time available for observation has been brief. In our study, we are able to compare patterns and demographic behavior of a clearly defined total population of “married” same-sex couples to an equally defined population of opposite-sex couples.

2. Family dynamics of gays and lesbians: Previous research

During the last decades, family patterns of many countries have become increasingly diverse. Although small in number and far from being accepted in most countries, the legalization of same-sex marriages neatly fits this development. The increasing diversity is often regarded part of a larger cultural change, implying an increase in freedom as well as an obligation for individuals to decide how to organize their lives in an individualized society (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 1995). Another factor that might have paved the way for same-sex marriages is the increasing separation between reproduction and sexuality in favor of a more plastic sexuality, in the terminology of Giddens (1992). Sexuality has naturally always been separated from reproduction in homosexual relations, and this separation is becoming increasingly

dominant also in heterosexual relationships. Thus, the disparity between homo- and heterosexual relationships is diminishing. The increasing acceptance and legal legitimacy of homosexual practice may be the most important change regarding sexuality in the last decades, or as Giddens (1992:33) expressed it "... sexual diversity, although still regarded by many hostile groups as perversion, has moved out of Freud's case-history notebooks into the everyday social world". Moxnes (1993), a Norwegian sociologist, has argued that same-sex marriages have become legalized not so much because homosexuality has become more accepted, but because marriage has become an increasingly empty institution and no longer is seen a mandatory entrance to adult life, sexual life, and parenthood.

New patterns of family life call for new research topics, and recent years have witnessed an increase in research on lesbian and gay lifestyles, and same-sex families. Although the literature on same-sex relationships is abundant, most of it does not allow for the deduction of any firm demographic hypotheses. Many studies are based on small numbers of individuals. They have given interesting but often anecdotal information. Large-scale quantitative studies are rare. Many studies face serious problems related to sampling or representativeness. In recent years, there has been an increasing recognition of the need to deal with these problems. As a result, more solid demographic studies have indeed appeared (Black et al. 2000).

2a. General problems in studying gays and lesbians

The lack of representative samples is the most fundamental problem in quantitative studies on gays and lesbians. Self-recruited samples from an unknown population have been and still are very common in studies of homosexuals. Respondents are, for example, recruited by snowball methods, from the readers of particular magazines, from members of organizations for gays and lesbians, or more recently from persons who are willing to fill in Internet questionnaires. Critical voices have also pointed out that much of the research on the family life of gays and lesbians is based on white, well-educated middle-class Americans (Patterson 2000).

In addition to these sampling problems, the question of how to identify homosexual people has increasingly become the focus of debate. Should respondents be asked to identify themselves, or is it better to measure sexual practice instead, i.e., to ask them about the number of life-time same-sex partners, any such partner within a certain

time period, the sex of the majority of partners, and so on? (Black et al. 2000). According to large-scale population studies carried out in the US, the proportion of men who had a male sex partner in the previous year is about 1-3 percent, as compared to 4-9 percent who had at least one male partner during the life span (Lauman et al. 1994). The proportions of women who had a partner of the same sex are somewhat lower, well over 1 percent and about 4 percent, respectively. A different pattern has been reported from a Norwegian study. Here, the proportion of respondents aged 19-26 was slightly higher for women than for men when it concerns same-sex experiences during the last 12 months as well as during the life span (Pedersen and Kristiansen 2003:11). All estimates referred to above are well below the frequently cited 10 percent benchmark of Alfred C. Kinsey's famous report. This estimate, however, seems to be a misinterpretation of what Kinsey in fact had said (Lauman et al. 1994). Kinsey's study was based on information about life-time homosexual activity as well as homosexual desire, resulting in different levels of estimates. Notwithstanding, Kinsey's sampling procedure also had its weaknesses.

Not only the methodology, but also the view that individuals can be categorized as gays, lesbians, bisexuals, and heterosexuals has met increasing criticism. The possibility that sexual identities may shift over time has attracted increasing attention (Patterson 2000). So far, little research has documented such contentions. A recently published study of younger Norwegians, however, finds some evidence of a confluent sexual culture, and more so among women than men (Pedersen and Kristiansen 2003).

To paint a statistical portrait of any gay and lesbian populations using traditional population surveys has also been considered difficult because of the mere size of the target groups. Or put another way, in standard demographic data sources, it may seem like looking for the needle in the haystack. In addition, the underlying assumption of most demographic surveys is that the respondents are heterosexual, and respondents often have no possibility to report other types of family behavior than those suggested by the survey designers (Hoem et al. 2000: 87). The seemingly sensitive character of the topic has probably also made it difficult to include it in questionnaires where it otherwise might have appeared natural. Nevertheless, a number of existing data sources today allow for research on same-sex couples as defined by any co-residence of two persons of the same sex.

2b. Same-sex couples and same-sex co-residence

For the United States, Black et al. (2000) have made a critical review and comparison of three sources available for systematic studies of gay and lesbian populations: The General Social Survey, the National Health and Social Life Survey, and the 1990 U.S. Census. Although documenting a number of measurement-error problems in the surveys and a considerable underreporting of same-sex couples in the census, they conclude that the data sets seem good enough to allow for credible analyses of gays and lesbians in the US. Based on these data, they compare partnered gays and lesbians with the general population and find that lesbians as well as gays have attained a higher education level than married and non-married heterosexual partnered women and men. Partnered gays, however, earn less than men living in opposite-sex marriages. For women, the opposite is the case, partnered lesbians earn more than married women. These results stem from comparisons between persons within similar age and educational categories. They conform to a related study by Black et al. (2001) that also include non-partnered individuals. A related study for the Netherlands, however, shows only negligible effects of sexual orientation on earnings (Plug and Berkhout 2004). For further research on the economic lives of lesbians and gay men, see Badgett (1997, 2001).

In addition, the US Census data indicates that 5 percent of male couples and nearly 22 percent of female couples have children living in the household. Although the media frequently writes about adoption and artificial insemination for lesbians and gays, Black et al. (2000) conclude that most of the children of partnered gays and lesbians recorded in the census probably have been born while the parents lived in a previous opposite-sex marriage. 20 percent of partnered gays and 30 percent of partnered lesbians were previously married. The data also gives information on patterns concerning geographical settlement. Gay men seem to be concentrated to a selected number of urban areas, preferably large cities. Lesbians are less concentrated, and more often live in smaller metropolitan areas. For a further discussion on the reason behind the geographical concentration of gay men, see Black et al. (2002).

Conventional demographic data have also been used to study the matching behavior of same-sex couples. Based on the 1990 US Census, Jepsen and Jepsen (2002) find positive assortative mating in four types of couples: married and cohabiting opposite-sex couples and male and female same-sex couples. Same-sex couples were

more alike as to their labor-market characteristics than opposite-sex couples, while the opposite was the case for various non-labor-market traits.

Evidently, census data that include information on household characteristics of surveyed individuals allow for the study of co-residing couples of the same sex. However, these data are not unproblematic as same-sex co-residential individuals are not necessarily synonymous with gay and lesbian couples³ (Voon Chin Phua and Kaufman 1999). These problems with data ambiguity also arise when studying heterosexual cohabitation. Co-residing persons of the opposite sex are not necessarily sexual partners (Baughman et al. 2002).

2c. Family dynamics in same-sex marriages as compared to opposite-sex marriages

The main purpose of our study is to provide information on the family dynamics in same-sex marriages as it can be measured by partnership-dissolution risks. In this respect, we do not have a large body of previous research that we can draw from. An overview of recent research on family relationships of gays and lesbians by Patterson (2000) gives some information on the stability of gay and lesbian relationships. The study of relationship duration typically requires a panel design or highly reliable retrospective data. So far, such data have been hard to establish for an appropriate study of couple dynamics of gays and lesbians⁴. Patterson (2000) concludes, however, that it seems reasonable to believe that some of the problems in homosexual relationships stem from the same roots as problems experienced by opposite-sex couples. A recent study by Kurdeck (2004) supports this assumption. The literature on divorce of heterosexual married couples is abundant, by contrast. Considering the impact of various demographic variables, studies of such couples indicate that pairing at a very young age,

³ A recent German large-scale data source that includes information on same-sex as well as opposite-sex couples exemplifies this. The German Mikrozensus includes information on co-residence and also asks respondents to specify if they consider themselves as living in a “Gleichgeschlechtliche Lebensgemeinschaft” (same-sex union) or any other type of family. The self-identified same-sex couples are much fewer than the total of co-residing same-sex couples. Eggen (2002) suspects that problems connected with self-identification results in underreporting, and assumes that any “true” level of same-sex cohabitation in Germany would lie somewhere between the numbers arising from the two possible definitions.

⁴ Kurdeck (1992, 1995) provides a study on the stability of childless gay and lesbian couples in the US. However, his work was based on such small data that it hardly offers a possibility to make generalizations about a wider population of gays and lesbians.

a low socio-economic status, low education, a considerable age difference between the spouses as well as socio-cultural differences are important risk factors for divorce (Clarke and Berrington 1999; Sayer and Bianchi 2000). For some of these factors, however, such as a high risk for spouses with little formal education and for those with manual-worker occupations, the elevated divorce risk might decrease with marriage duration (Jalovaara 2002).

3. Registered partnerships: Definitions, data, and methods

The object of our study is registered partnerships in Norway and Sweden. This type of civil-status has nearly the same legal consequences as marriage does. This means that registered partners have the same rights and duties as married heterosexual couples in relation to each other and society. The legislation is very much the same in all Nordic countries, but differs as to the adoption of children, artificial insemination, and the solemnization of the partnership⁵. This being said, the legal rights and duties connected to marriage are less decisive in Scandinavia than in other countries (for an overview of family law and the consequences of marriage in other European countries, see Hamilton and Perry, 2002). In the context of the Nordic welfare state, social rights are largely based on individuals, regardless of their family status. Economic motives that may be an important factor leading to marriage in the US, such as joint health-insurance coverage, are virtually non-existent in the universalistic welfare state.

The data for our calculations on partnership dynamics are derived from the population-register systems of Norway and Sweden. They cover the populations of the two countries and their recordable vital events with a high degree of accuracy. Each change in civil status is recorded, and since each individual living in one of the two countries has a unique personal identity code we have derived longitudinal histories of the family dynamics of each person who has ever registered a partnership formation in any of the two countries. Similar event histories can be collected for individuals who have entered a heterosexual marriage, and we were able to include

⁵ Churches do not conduct ceremonies of partnership formation. In Norway the act of registration is performed by a Notarius Publicus, in Sweden by a court or a private person with special authorization. Medically assisted insemination is not available to women in registered partnerships both in Norway and Sweden. Since 2003 registered partners in Sweden are jointly allowed to adopt children. This permission includes international adoption. Legal provision is made for the adoption of the partner's child only in Norway (Waalwijk 2003).

such data for Sweden⁶. This allows for an appropriate comparison of our populations of same-sex partnerships with that of an equally defined population of opposite-sex marriages. The populations are defined by their civil status; there is no ambiguity in the categories we use. Individuals who have never lived in either of the two countries cannot be traced directly in the registers and some partnerships that involve persons living abroad cannot be incorporated properly into our analyses. In the case of Sweden, we had to exclude 100 same-sex couples from our analyses since we had no information at all on one of the two partners involved.

The first part of our analysis is a descriptive one. Here we mention various demographic characteristics of individuals who have formed a partnership in Norway or Sweden. The characteristics are derived from various administrative registers and measured at the time of partnership formation. We have defined our variables so that they give the characteristics at the couple level. Our demographic description involves information on characteristics such as age, sex, geographical background, experience of previous opposite-sex marriage, parenthood, and educational attainment of the partners involved. Our variables are defined as follows.

We depict the *age composition* of persons registering a partnership by giving the mean age of the two partners at the time of registration. The distribution is provided by the categories “mean age 30 or less”, “mean age 31-40”, and “mean age 41 or above”. In addition, we give the distribution over various categories of *age difference* between the two partners involved.

For both countries, we describe the fraction of partnerships that involve at least one person *living in the capital area* at the time of partnership formation⁷. For Norway, this is the City of Oslo, while for Sweden, we use the Greater Stockholm Metropolitan Area as our geographical demarcation. We further describe the geographical background of the partners by giving the distribution over various *national origins*. In Norway, national origin is measured by citizenship at the time of partnership formation. In Sweden, by contrast, it is measured by country of birth. A

⁶ The data cover marriages contracted 1993-1999, Swedish partnerships entered 1995-2002, and Norwegian partnerships formed 1993-2001. The minor discrepancy in the observation period of marriages as compared to that of registered partnerships in Sweden is due to data availability.

⁷ Most partners are likely to live together at the time of partnership formation, but need not necessarily be registered (yet) as living at the same address. In our data for Sweden, we found that about half of the

distinction is made between couples where both partners are local residents, and couples where at least one of the partners comes from abroad. We report on couples where at least one partner comes from another Nordic country, another European country (including the Anglo-Saxon countries overseas), a non-European country, or where the national origin is not known. If both partners are foreigners and from different categories of countries, they are allocated to the most “distant” category of our country scale.

We further describe the partners by their previous experiences of registered heterosexual family life. We give the percentage of unions where at least one of the two partners previously has been *heterosexually married*, and where at least one of the two is a *parent*. Where this applies, we need to be aware that these figures cover events only that are registered in the local country. We have no information about possible previous marriages of immigrants contracted abroad or children of immigrants that have never lived in Sweden or Norway.

Finally, we provide a description of the partners’ educational characteristics. We report on the *highest educational level* at the time of partnership formation, as summarized at the couple level. In addition, we provide information on the various fields of education that the partners had at that time. The data on *educational orientation* contain nine categories, and we provide them as summaries on individuals rather than couples.

When examining divorce patterns, the fixed characteristics described above are used as determinants of divorce. In addition, a further covariate is added in order to account for if a couple belonged to the *pioneers* of same-sex marriages of the first twelve months during which it was possible to register a partnership in the country considered. A relatively large number of partnerships were entered in the first year and we may suspect that these pioneers differ somewhat in their behavior from those who registered in subsequent years.

Our study is a longitudinal event-history analysis of divorce risks. We calculate the relative risks of divorce by the various categories of our variables at hand. We follow each couple from the month of partnership formation to any registration of divorce or to censoring due to the death of one of the partners, emigration of both partners, or the end of the last year for which we have data,

partners involved had been registered as living together at the same address for a period of at least two years prior to partnership registration.

whichever comes first. The registration of partnership dissolution follows the same legal procedures as those of marriage dissolution in Norway and Sweden. The procedures differ between the two countries, however, and this affects the timing of the divorce registration. In Norway, as a main rule partners and spouses are required to register as being legally separated during a period of one year before being granted a divorce. In Sweden, there is no such prerequisite, but if one of the partners disagrees on the divorce he or she may ask for a six-month waiting period before the divorce is legalized and registered⁸.

Technically, we estimate proportional-hazards (intensity-regression) models of the divorce process. Such models are a standard tool for the analysis of time-dependent data like ours. In the Swedish analyses, we have incorporated the basic time variable *duration of partnership* as a piece-wise constant covariate. As for Norway, we have estimated models that are based on a non-parametric time factor. These differences in modeling are due to the different software that we have used: S-PLUS for Norway and RocaNova for the Swedish analyses. They have no impact on the relative risks that we present.

With our data on couples in different types of unions, we are able to compare the characteristics and patterns of behavior in male partnerships with those in female partnerships. Similarly, we can compare patterns in unions in Norway with those in Sweden, and, finally, patterns in same-sex marriages with those in opposite-sex partnerships.

4. The populations of registered partners in Norway and Sweden

Our first observation is that the incidence of same-sex marriage in Norway and Sweden is not particularly impressive in terms of numbers. Our data for Norway consist of 1,293 partnerships contracted 1993-2001⁹. During the same calendar period,

⁸ The legal differences in the timing of divorce in Norway and Sweden would have caused problems if we had estimated joint divorce models based on the combined data of the two countries. However, we aimed at estimating separate models for Norway and Sweden, and therefore have no problems in identifying the accurate divorce-risk patterns of each country considered.

⁹ The number of partnerships included in our study is slightly larger than that found in official statistics on partnership formation in Norway and Sweden, the reason being that official statistics only report events of individuals living in the country (at the time of partnership formation). Norwegian statistics report new *partnerships* if the oldest partner lived in Norway, while Swedish statistics are

190,000 heterosexual marriages were entered, which gives a ratio of around 7 new same-sex marriages to every 1000 new opposite-sex marriages. For Sweden our data comprise 1,526 partnerships entered 1995-2002⁹. Related to the corresponding 280,000 heterosexual marriages registered during the same calendar period, we get a ratio of 5 new partnerships to every 1000 new opposite-sex marriages. The ratios of partnerships to marriages are thus considerably lower than the various estimates of fractions of homosexuals that we referred to in Section 2. The incidence of partnership formation in the two countries also appears relatively low when compared to the levels of partnership formation in Denmark and the Netherlands (Waalwijk 2001: 463; Noack et al. 2002: Figure 1; Eggen 2002: 229; Digoix et al. 2004).

Trends in partnership formation by country and sex (Figure 1) reveal that the developments in annual numbers of new partnerships have been quite similar in the two countries. Both countries exhibited a particularly high level of partnership formation immediately after the legislation on registered partnerships came into force. In both countries, the number of partnerships of men has been about 60 percent higher than that of women: 62 percent of all partnerships have been male. The initial spurt in partnership formation was followed by a few years of stable trends at a lower level, and a subsequent increase in registration during the most recent years. The recent increase has been stronger for women than for men so that the sex gap in partnership formation has narrowed.

Table 1 gives a more detailed description of partnership composition. It also draws a comparison with couples of newly contracted opposite-sex marriages in Sweden. The table shows that new same-sex partners on average are considerably older than corresponding opposite-sex spouses¹⁰. About one third of all partnerships were contracted by partners at ages 41 and above. In Sweden, half of all new male partnerships involved partners with a couple mean age above 40. By contrast, only 14 percent of heterosexual marriages belonged to this category. The relatively high ages also account for substantial age differences between same-sex partners, which are more common than in opposite-sex marriages. By the same token, they are more frequent in partnerships between men than in those between women: Around one third

entirely based on individuals and thus report new *registered partners* living in Sweden. In our research, we have been able to retrieve information also on partners who subsequently moved to the country of partnership registration.

of all male partnerships are formed by men with an age difference between them amounting to ten years or more.

In both countries, same-sex couples tend to be concentrated to the metropolitan areas: Oslo and Stockholm. This tendency is stronger in Norway than in Sweden, and in both countries it is stronger for men than for women. In Norway, 62 percent of male partnerships and 45 percent of female partnerships involved a partner living in the city of Oslo. This compares to a mere 11 percent of the total Norwegian population living in Oslo. In Sweden, 47 percent of male new partnerships and 36 percent of female partnerships involved a partner living in the Stockholm region, as compared to 21 percent of registered heterosexual marriages.

Same-sex partnerships also differ from opposite-sex marriages in that one of the partners is more often foreign-born. This is particularly the case for partnerships between men. In Norway, 43 percent of male partnerships include a non-Norwegian citizen. In Sweden, 45 percent of gay partnerships involve at least one foreign-born partner. In the latter country, 22 percent of newly contracted heterosexual marriages also have at least one partner of foreign origin. This figure does not necessarily suggest that Swedes tend to marry foreigners: The 22 percent correspond rather well with the total share of foreign-born people living in Sweden at the ages when people marry.

It is not uncommon that partners in same-sex unions have experience of previous heterosexual family life. In our summary, we find that a fourth of lesbian partnerships include at least one partner who has been married to a man previously. This fraction happens to be exactly the same as that of newly contracted heterosexual marriages: one fourth of such unions involve at least one previously married spouse. Evidently, lesbian women are somewhat older at partnership formation and have had more time for previous marital life than their heterosexual counterparts. The corresponding numbers for male partnerships are somewhat lower.

The experience of previous heterosexual marital life corresponds well with the fractions of partnerships that involve a partner who is a parent. Female partners tend to be parents more often than male partners. Parenthood is also more common in partnerships in Sweden than in Norway. One third of lesbian partnerships in Sweden

¹⁰ The mean age of newly married heterosexual spouses was close to 30 years while that of all newly registered homosexual partners was close to 40.

have a least one parent. For newly contracted heterosexual marriages, the corresponding fraction is 58 percent. In Scandinavia, it is more common to marry after entry into parenthood than before having a first child, if at all.

When it comes to socio-economic characteristics, we find that same-sex partners have a relatively high educational attainment. In between 56 and 67 percent of homosexual partnerships at least one partner has a tertiary education. The corresponding fraction for new heterosexual marriages is 44 percent. The difference would have been even larger if we had accounted for the fact that educational attainment typically is higher for persons of younger cohorts and that same-sex partners more often than others belong to somewhat older cohorts.

We conclude our description by providing an overview of the educational *orientation* of individuals in our study populations (Table 2). Since the educational registers of Sweden and Norway also contain information on the type of education a person has attained, we are in a position to examine the extent to which we can find any systematic differences in characteristics as regards this dimension of individual educational capital, too. A comparison of the groups of married women reveals that the differences are not that dramatic, and that lesbians to a larger extent than their heterosexual equivalents have an education with an aesthetic orientation. Gay men who enter partnerships have a similarly high fraction of individuals with an aesthetic education (by around 10 percent), and do otherwise not differ largely from the populations of married women as concerns their field of education. They differ from heterosexual married men in that a much lower fraction of individuals has a technically oriented education. Heterosexual married men have a very low fraction of individuals with an education oriented towards health care.

5. Patterns of divorce in same-sex “marriages” in Norway and Sweden

In Table 3, we display the relative divorce risks of couples in registered partnerships for each sex and country separately. For comparison, we provide the corresponding risks for heterosexual marriages in Sweden. They are calculated for each of the variables described above, except for educational orientation. They give the effects of any level of a certain covariate relative to a baseline category of the same covariate. A risk of say 1.20 indicates that the risk of divorce is 20 percent higher for couples of

the relevant category than for couples belonging to the reference category of the same variable. The risks are derived from a multivariate model, which means that the effects of any variable hold when we control, or standardize (Hoem 1993), for the simultaneous effects of the other variables included in the model.

The general impression of the results of our calculation is that divorce patterns in partnerships and in marriages are remarkably similar when it comes to the effects of the covariates. The results can be summarized as follows¹¹. We find no systematic or important difference in divorce propensities between the *pioneering* partners of the first year of partnership registration and subsequently registered partners. For both heterosexual spouses and registered partners, there is a clear *age* gradient in divorce risks in that persons who contract a marriage or register a partnership at young ages have much higher divorce risks than persons who do this at more mature ages. In most cases, a relatively large *age difference* between the two partners is related to an elevated propensity for divorce. Divorce risks do not largely differ between couples of the *capital region* and couples registered elsewhere in the two countries. In contrast, the stability of unions is negatively affected by the involvement of at least one *foreign partner*. The destabilizing effect of any previous experience of a *heterosexual marriage* is not at all as apparent for same-sex couples as it is for heterosexually married couples. The effect of premarital *parenthood* seems to differ somewhat between male and female couples, but patterns appear quite irregular and should not be given too much attention. Concerning a couple's *educational* characteristics, we mainly find that a high educational attainment is related to lower divorce risks. For Sweden, there is a very clear gradient in the effects of partners' educational levels. For Norway, it is more irregular. Finally, the profile of divorce risks by *time since marriage formation* is practically the same for same-sex partnerships and opposite-sex marriages.

Next, we examine the extent to which propensity to divorce differs by the sex of the partnership, and whether it differs between registered partnerships and

¹¹ Statistical testing reveals that not all variables appear significant at a 5-percent level. For Sweden, it is only "age", "educational level", and "duration of partnership" that has a significant effect. For Norway, only "age" is significant in all models. As to heterosexual marriages, however, each single effect is significant at the 5-percent level. Note that most of the risk patterns we observe are very stable across the various sub-populations of married people. Regardless of significance, this stability in patterns reassures us that we in general can trust our findings, but that we should not take every single deviation in divorce risk as an established fact.

opposite-sex marriages or not. This is done by estimating common models for partnerships of women and men, and in the case of Sweden, for partnerships and marriages. A covariate for *type of union* gives information on divorce risks by the different family types. Tables 4 and 5 contain the relative risks for Norway and Sweden respectively. For Norway, an introductory model that only includes *type of union* as a covariate (Raw Model) first indicates that divorce risks are 77 percent higher in lesbian partnerships than in those of gay men. To some extent, this could have been the result of various differences in the composition of gay and lesbian partnerships over different demographic characteristics. However, a model that controls for the effect of such covariates (Extended Model) instead reveals that the excess risk of divorce in female partnerships actually is more than twice that of the risk in male unions.

For Sweden, we find the same relation between the divorce risks of lesbian and gay partnerships. In addition, we provide a comparison with the divorce-risk level of opposite-sex marriages (Table 5). An introductory model without further explanatory variables (Raw Model) shows that the divorce risk in partnerships of men is 50 percent higher than the corresponding risk in heterosexual marriages, and that the divorce risk in female partnerships is about double that of men. Again, such differences in risk levels could partly be the result of differences in the composition of the different groups under study. We know, for example, that same-sex partnerships relatively often involve a non-native partner and that such characteristics are related to higher divorce risks. On the other hand, registered same-sex partners are often older than corresponding opposite-sex spouses, which is a feature related to a lower propensity for divorce. It turns out that a control for the demographic characteristics at hand¹² (Extended Model) does not alter the basic relation we found between divorce risks in different types of families.

One basic difference between same-sex partnerships and opposite-sex marriages is that most often the former family type does not produce children. Possibly the relatively lower divorce risk of heterosexual marriages is to some extent related to parenting. In order to test this hypothesis we have estimated two additional models that are based on childless couples only. We have thus excluded all

partnerships and marriages where at least one of the two partners was a parent at the time of registration. In addition, we have censored each childless heterosexual marriage at the time of any first birth. A crude model without further demographic covariates (Raw Model C) indicates that the excess risk of divorce of gay partnerships tends to disappear when the comparison is based on childless couples. Nevertheless, an appropriate control for relevant covariates (Extended Model C) leaves patterns more or less as we first found them. This result does not preclude that there is an effect of parenthood in reducing the divorce risks in heterosexual marriages. To some extent, the disruption risks of childless heterosexual spouses may be reduced in anticipation of childbearing, i.e., when spouses stay together in order to fulfill their parenthood plans.

6. Reflections: The demographics of same-sex “marriages” in Norway and Sweden

In our study, we have provided an overview of the demographic characteristics and patterns in the union dynamics of the first cohorts of registered partnerships in Norway and Sweden. The data on these pioneering cohorts of same-sex spouses provide information on a family type that at present is introduced in a wider circle of countries. Since this still is a recent family type, we are in no position to say much about any long-term patterns or developments. However, our cross-country comparison still allows us to draw at least some conclusions about the dynamics of registered partnerships.

One finding is that male partners formed the majority of registered partnerships. To some extent, this may reflect a larger fraction of gays than lesbians in the total population. Most studies indicate that this indeed is the case. However, we know nothing about differences in the motivation for partnership registration between women and men. As a result we cannot readily translate it into an explanation for our finding. To some extent, however, it could reflect the relative importance of some instrumental motives that appear to be relevant for partnership registration. Two such

¹² In the common model of registered partnerships and heterosexual marriages we exclude variables for partnership cohort, previous marriage, and parenthood. The meaning of these variables differs between the populations and the relative risks of Table 3 show that the effects on divorce differ as well.

motives are more often likely to be relevant for groups of gay men than for others. The first is the need for legal protection of common assets in the face of the anticipated mortality of the partner¹³. The second is related to the migration of a foreign partner. Our data show that a very large fraction of male partnerships involve a foreign partner. In many such cases, a migration to Norway or Sweden and, consequently, co-residence may simply not be possible without the legal intervention of a partnership registration.

In many aspects, the different populations of partners and spouses are distinct in terms of their various demographic and socioeconomic characteristics. Note the interesting contrast in terms of educational achievement: Registered same-sex partners have achieved a considerably higher level of such individual investment than have opposite-sex partners who marry. This suggests that a high level of certain types of human capital often is needed in order to manifest a minority family status of the kind we study. It is interesting that such an effect appears so prominently even in an equality-oriented society such as in Scandinavia.

Our population of same-sex couples is defined by their change in civil status to that of a registered partnership. Such an unambiguously defined population of gay and lesbian couples has never been studied before. Nevertheless, we find that many of the various demographic characteristics of our Scandinavian couples resemble those found for other populations of same-sex couples, such as co-residing people of the same sex in the US (Black et al. 2000). Evidently, some aspects of gay and lesbian lifestyles seem to be of such a common nature that they appear regardless of the type of data at hand.

Finally, we provided a divorce-risk study. We found that divorce risks are higher in same-sex partnerships than opposite-sex marriages, and that unions of lesbians are considerably less stable, or more dynamic, than unions of gay men. In Norway as well as in Sweden, the divorce risk in female partnerships is practically double that of the risk in partnerships of men. Our data is based on legal unions of short durations only, so we can say nothing about the fraction of unions that

¹³ This motive for partnership registration could also affect the structure of the divorce risks we estimate. However, an evaluation of mortality patterns in the different study populations reassures us that differences in mortality are unlikely to affect divorce risks.

eventually will end in disruption¹⁴. Nevertheless, a higher propensity for divorce in same-sex couples is not very surprising given this group's relative non-involvement in joint parenthood and its lower exposure to normative pressure as to the necessity of life-long unions. The difference in divorce behavior between women and men appears somewhat more intriguing. It cannot be explained by differences in the composition of couples by our explanatory factors at hand. Nevertheless, some of these differences provide some insights into possible unobservable characteristics that may be relevant as well. We find that partnerships of women are demographically homogamous to a much larger extent than partnerships of men: Lesbian partners often have relatively similar characteristics while gay spouses more often differ in terms of age, nationality, education, and income etc.¹⁵. The similarity in characteristics may also reflect a deeper feeling of sameness in lesbian couples. This sameness and a corresponding lack of clear power structures may be inductive to a high level of dynamism in the relationship, but perhaps not to the kind of inertia that is related to marital stability. Differences in divorce risks may also appear from differences in the motives of lesbians and gays for entering a registered partnership in the first place. With our type of data, we are in no position to explore qualitative aspects of that kind, but have to leave this to colleagues in other scientific disciplines.

Acknowledgements

This paper is a joint work of the four co-authors. Our project was initiated by Turid Noack. Gunnar Andersson has contributed to the paper with the Swedish part of our study while the Norwegian analyses were performed by Turid Noack, Ane Seierstad, and Harald Weedon-Fekjær. We are grateful to Karin Wahlbin of Statistics Sweden for having prepared the individual-partnership data on Sweden. In addition, we extend

¹⁴ We applied life-table techniques to our data in order to estimate the fraction of partnerships that end in divorce within the time span that we can cover: In Norway, 16 percent of partnerships are likely to end in divorce within six years from partnership registration. A quarter of Swedish partnerships end that way.

¹⁵ For Sweden, we have also had access to data on the income of the partners. The data reveal that on average, the distribution of income between partners in gay couples is about as unequal as that of heterosexual spouses, while lesbian partners tend to have a similar earnings level.

our gratitude to Lee Badgett, Patrick Festy, Gerda Neyer, and Jens Rydström for their valuable comments. Finally, we thank Susann Backer for language editing.

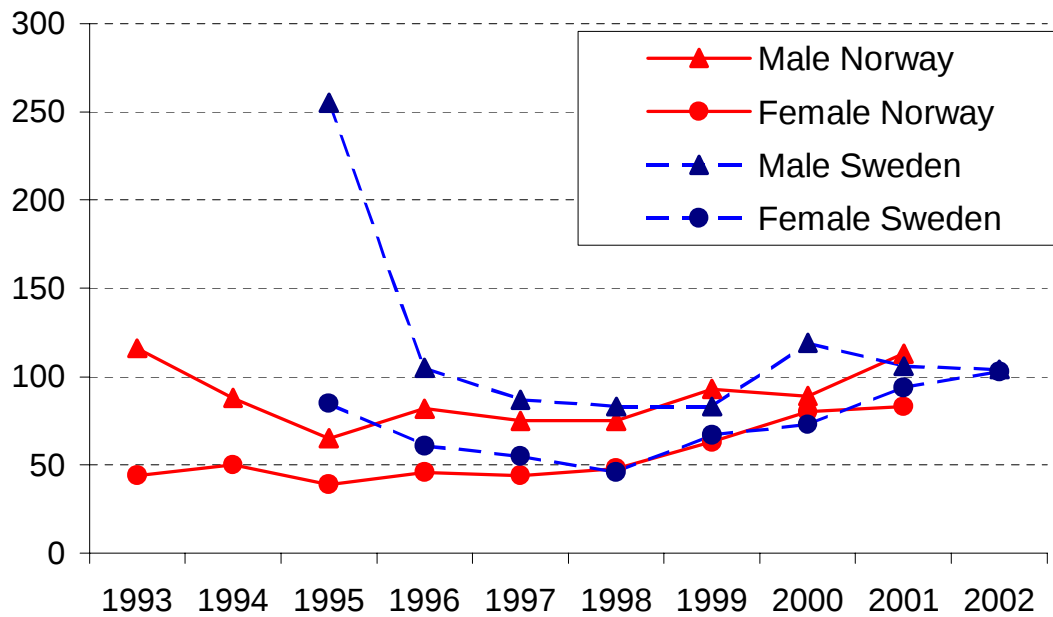
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Figure 1: Partnerships contracted in Norway and Sweden, 1993-2002



Note: The Norwegian partnership law became effective August 1, 1993. The Swedish law came into force January 1, 1995.

Table 1: Characteristics of partnerships contracted in Norway (1993-2001) and Sweden (1995-2002) and of marriages entered in Sweden in 1993-1999

	Norway		Sweden		
	<u>Male</u>	<u>Female</u>	<u>Male</u>	<u>Female</u>	<u>Opposite-sex marr.</u>
N=	796	497	942	584	222000
	%	%	%	%	%
Mean age of couple					
<31	21	21	12	24	52
31-40	46	49	38	47	34
41+	32	29	50	29	14
Age difference					
<3	24	38	24	38	50
3-5	23	28	21	24	27
6-9	18	21	22	22	14
10+	35	13	34	15	9
Region					
Oslo C/Stockholm	62	45	47	36	21
Nationality/origin					
Both native	57	81	55	70	78
One Nordic	5	6	11	11	5
One "European"	15	7	14	10	6
One non-European	19	3	21	9	7
One unknown	4	2	--	--	4
Previous heterosexual marriage					
At least one of partners	15	26	20	27	27
Parent(s) at registration					
At least one of partners	13	24	19	34	58
Educational level					
Both tertiary	19	34	20	32	17
One tertiary	37	33	36	25	27
Both secondary	16	20	14	19	29
One secondary	22	11	20	16	19
Both primary/unknown	6	1	9	8	8

Source: Population-register data of Statistics Norway and Statistics Sweden, authors' own computations

Table 2: Educational orientation of women and men in Sweden who registered a partnership 1995-2002 or married heterosexually 1993-1999, and of women and men in Norway who registered a partnership 1993-2001 (percent)

Sweden:	Women		Men	
Ed. orientation	<u>Reg. partners</u>	<u>Married</u>	<u>Reg. partners</u>	<u>Married</u>
General	22	24	20	20
Aesthetic	12	3	9	2
Teaching	6	8	5	2
Administrative	17	25	20	15
Technical	9	7	8	40
Health care	19	21	16	3
Agriculture	1	1	1	2
Service Industry	6	6	6	5
Unknown	8	6	16	9
	100	100	100	100

Norway:	Registered partners	
Ed. orientation	<u>Women</u>	<u>Men</u>
General	14	15
Aesthetic	13	10
Teaching	11	5
Administrative	21	17
Technical	8	10
Health care	15	8
Agriculture	2	3
Service Industry	2	2
Unknown	12	30
	100	100

Source: Population-register data of Statistics Norway and Statistics Sweden, authors' own computations

Table 3: Relative risk of divorce in registered partnerships in Norway and Sweden, by various demographic covariates, with a comparison of divorce risks in marriages contracted in Sweden 1993-1999

	Norway				Sweden						
	Male		Female		Male		Female		Opposite-sex		
	partnership		partnership		partnership		partnership		marriage		
Number of couples	796		497		942		584		222000		
Number of divorces	62		56		135		117		17800		
Partnership cohort											
First twelve months	1.06	0.59-1.90	0.70	0.36-1.35	1.11		0.95				
Subsequent cohorts	1		1		1		1				
Mean age of couple											
<31	3.82	1.93-7.56	1.33	0.65-2.73	1.51	*	1.33		1.39	***	
31-35	1		1		1		1		1		
36-40	0.65	0.27-1.56	0.69	0.29-1.64	0.70		0.38	***	0.93	**	
41+	0.38	0.15-0.92	0.56	0.24-1.28	0.31	***	0.34	***	0.81	***	
Age difference											
<3	1		1		1		1		1		
3-5	1.66	0.72-3.84	0.50	0.24-1.02	1.38		1.23		1.08	***	
6-9	2.40	1.05-5.49	0.77	0.35-1.70	1.39		1.23		1.17	***	
10+	2.46	1.05-5.75	0.85	0.37-1.96	1.44		2.16	**	1.41	***	
Region											
Oslo C/Stockholm	1		1		1		1		1		
Other	1.00	0.56-1.79	1.02	0.58-1.79	0.78		1.07		0.94	***	
Nationality/origin											
Both native	1		1		1		1		1		
One Nordic	2.11	0.69-6.45	1.20	0.35-4.13	1.12		0.86		1.33	***	
One “European”	1.74	0.79-3.83	2.28	0.94-5.53	1.63	*	1.09		1.28	***	
One non-European	2.58	1.22-5.45	2.22	0.28-17.60	1.79	***	1.68	*	1.76	***	
One unknown	1.95	0.58-6.59	4.36	1.35-14.00							

continued...

Previous heterosexual marriage									
None	1		1		1		1		1
At least one of partners	0.95	0.36-2.53	1.35	0.60-3.06	1.19		1.14		1.77 ***
Parent(s) at registration									
None	1		1		1		1		1
At least one of partners	2.41	0.99-5.87	0.95	0.39-2.34	1.19		0.82		1.33 ***
Educational level									
Both tertiary	1		1		1		1		1
One tertiary	1.13	0.52-2.46	1.38	0.65-2.93	5.36	***	1.80	*	1.58 ***
Both secondary	1.89	0.75-4.75	2.45	1.10-5.48	8.05	***	2.07	**	2.03 ***
One secondary	0.90	0.38-2.17	1.12	0.40-3.09	9.50	***	3.18	***	3.13 ***
Both primary/unknown	0.86	0.25-2.93	0.02	0.00--	10.37	***	3.71	***	3.69 ***
Duration									
1 st year					[1]		[1]		[1]
2 nd year	Non-param. baseline				1.33		1.86	**	2.42 ***
3 rd year					2.66	***	2.32	***	3.05 ***
4-5 th years					3.58	***	3.15	***	3.43 ***
6-8 th years					1.81		2.84	***	3.29 ***

Notes: For Norway, relative risks are given with 95% confidence intervals; for Sweden significance of effects are indicated by stars: *** = significant at 1% level, ** = significant at 5% level, * = significant at 10% level

Source: Population-register data of Statistics Norway and Statistics Sweden, authors' own computations

Table 4: Relative risk of divorce in registered partnerships in Norway, by sex

	Raw Model		Extended	
Type of union				
Male partnership	1		1	
Female partnership	1.77	1.23-2.54	2.32	1.51-3.54
Partnership cohort				
First twelve months			0.84	0.55-1.28
Subsequent cohorts			1	
Mean age of couple				
<31			2.37	1.48-3.79
31-35			1	
36-40			0.64	0.35-1.18
41+			0.45	0.25-0.81
Age difference				
<3			1	
3-5			0.85	0.51-1.41
6-9			1.36	0.80-2.30
10+			1.43	0.83-2.46
Region				
Oslo			1	
Other			0.95	0.65-1.41
Citizenship				
Both Norwegian			1	
One Nordic			1.64	0.73-3.68
One "European"			2.20	1.24-3.90
One non-European			3.04	1.62-5.69
Unknown			3.56	1.58-8.04
Previous heterosexual marriage				
None			1	
At least one of partners			1.10	0.60-2.02
Parent(s) at registration				
None			1.00	
At least one of partners			1.57	0.85-2.89
Educational level				
Both tertiary			1	
One tertiary			1.12	0.66-1.91
Both secondary			1.90	1.06-3.42
One secondary			0.93	0.49-1.77
Both primary/unknown			0.70	0.23-2.15
Duration	Non-param. baseline			

Note: Relative risks are given with 95% confidence intervals

Source: Population-register data of Statistics Norway, authors' own computations

Table 5: Relative risk of divorce in registered partnerships and marriages in Sweden, by type of union

	All couples		Childless couples	
	Raw Model	Extended	Raw Model C	Extended C
Type of union				
Male partnership	1.50***	1.35***	1.04	1.49***
Female partnership	2.67***	3.03***	1.96***	3.00***
Heterosexual marriage	1	1	1	1
Mean age of couple				
<31		1.15***		1.31***
31-35		1		1
36-40		1.08***		0.69***
41+		1.03		0.43***
Age difference				
<3		1		1
3-5		1.11***		1.10***
6-9		1.23***		1.16***
10+		1.50***		1.48***
Region				
Stockholm		1		1
Other		0.95***		0.85***
Country of birth				
Both Swedish-born		1		1
One Nordic		1.35***		1.01
One "European"		1.24***		1.21***
One non-European		1.96***		1.71***
Educational level				
Both tertiary		1		1
One tertiary		1.70***		1.36***
Both secondary		2.27***		1.61***
One secondary		3.71***		2.31***
Both primary/unknown		4.46***		3.01***
Duration				
1 st year	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]
2 nd year	2.40***	2.40***	2.62***	2.59***
3 rd year	3.02***	3.04***	3.82***	3.78***
4-5 th years	3.32***	3.40***	4.91***	4.94***
6-8 th years	3.07***	3.21***	4.00***	4.25***

Notes: *** = significant at 1% level, ** = significant at 5% level, * = significant at 10% level

Source: Population-register data of Statistics Sweden, authors' own computations