

**From Maternalism to “Employment for All”:  
State Policies to Promote Women’s Employment across the Affluent Democracies  
by Ann Shola Orloff  
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Across the rich, developed democracies of Western Europe, North America and the Antipodes, we are in the midst of what might be called a series of “farewells to maternalism.” Countries are moving from a “maternalist” policy model, under which mothers were expected to stay home full time with their children and eschew employment, to a model of “employment for all,” under which women are expected to enter the labor force, as are men (but with the continuing assumption that they will provide or organize household care). Indeed, housewifery – that is, the full-time, life-long devotion of women to caring and household functions – has become all but extinct within the Nordic states. The majority of women, including mothers of young children, are employed, and social policy explicitly supports women (and, to a much lesser extent, men) as (paid) workers who are also caregivers. In most countries outside Scandinavia, housewifery is in serious, possibly terminal, decline, even as the political and cultural changes involved with women’s increasing employment are contested. For example, in the US, housewifery is upheld as an ideal by socially-conservative political forces, despite its real decline – to an extent close to that of the Nordic countries.<sup>1</sup> Support for full-time caregiving, the hallmark of a number of gendered policy regimes, is diminishing even in some of its former bastions, such as the UK

and the Netherlands. Other European countries, especially in Southern Europe, are under pressure, including from the EU, to bring women into their labor forces.<sup>2</sup>

State authorities are playing an important role in structuring the farewell to maternalism. The state has intervened in two critical ways. First, it has been one of the *causes* of the erosion of the maternalist model, encouraging mothers to enter the workplace and failing to sustain men's (relative) wages sufficiently for most men to support families alone. Second, it has shaped the *character* of this shift. Because state policies toward mothers' employment have varied from one country to the next, so, too has the nature of the farewell to maternalism.

The maternalist model is in decline for a number of reasons. The notion of sharply distinguished activities for men and women – breadwinning and caregiving respectively -- has been challenged by cultural changes and social movements. Women have entered employment for many reasons, including their own professional or material aspirations. Hard economic times have reinforced this cultural shift. Stagnant wages for manual laborers and high levels of unemployment mean that in many households, women's salaries are not simply a luxury or supplement to breadwinning men's steady paychecks. Rather, they are essential to household financial well-being. Increasingly, then, women both want and need to work.

Alongside cultural and economic pressures, the farewell to maternalism has been very much encouraged by states. To some extent, state policies reflect the shift in public outlook, the belief that it is normal and appropriate for mothers to be in the labor force. But state authorities are also motivated by more mundane considerations. With birthrates well below replacement levels and the baby-boom generation approaching retirement, the current surplus

of labor is slated to turn into a shortage. Workers will be needed not only to staff the factories and offices, but also to cover the substantial pension obligations owed to the swelling cohort of retirees. Consequently, new sources of labor will have to be found, and the principal alternative to women, immigrants, elicits considerable political opposition, particularly in Europe.

State authorities are combining carrots and sticks to encourage mothers to enter the labor market. The main stick, epitomized by the US welfare reform of 1996 eliminating the guarantee of support for (poor) lone mothers, has been the removal of state-sponsored alternatives to employment. The US approach is echoed in Europe (albeit generally in a somewhat milder fashion) by so-called “labor market activation” policies that pressure those outside the labor force – whether unemployed youths, the long-term unemployed, the disabled, older workers, or mothers – to take some kind of job. The explicitly gender-differentiated maternalist logic of politically recognizing, and financially supporting mothers’ caregiving is being displaced by ostensibly gender-neutral notions of recognizing and supporting only economically “active” adults, with support to care taking the form of temporary leaves to workers or public services for the care of their dependents. “Maternalist” arguments are on the decline among advocates of women’s equality, and political claims based on mothering are meeting less popular and elite approval. This is not to say that “motherhood” has lost its cultural support and resonances, but simply that making claims on the state for resources and recognition on the basis of motherhood, or care, is more difficult, and in some cases, politically impossible.

State authorities are marshalling inducements as well as coercive measures to increase women’s labor market participation. The end of support for women’s full-time

caregiving has been accompanied by new state initiatives to make women's employment more attractive. Tax and benefit reforms have increased the share of their earnings that employed mothers can retain. Governments in Europe have been steadily increasing public and subsidized childcare, in effect, socializing the costs of care that has traditionally been provided by women without pay. There has been some movement toward socializing the costs of elderly care as well. At a time of cutbacks in many social programs, policies to support women's employment stand out as an area of new and often expensive state commitments. Thus, it is not just changing cultural attitudes that are eroding full-time housewifery, but also conscious social engineering. The farewell to maternalism is, to a considerable extent, state constructed.

It is also state mediated, which points to the second central claim of this chapter. There is a contentious debate among US feminist scholars regarding the implications of the farewell to maternalism. Critics, often seizing on the US welfare reform, see mothers being deprived of public supports for caregiving and bullied into accepting low-wage, dead-end jobs that fail to lift them out of poverty (see, e.g., Mink 2002; Roberts 2004). Supporters, by contrast, note that paid employment can be an important source of women's autonomy, reducing dependence on the state or a breadwinning man, and can also provide a sense of fulfillment and empowerment.(see, e.g., Schultz 2001). They charge that critics too often ignore the experience of other countries, where encouraging women's employment has not been accompanied by the elimination of social rights, but rather by expanded public services -- in other words, where the "farewell to maternalism" has not been such an unhappy one.

This essay advances an alternative understanding. Whether the farewell to maternalism and transition to "employment for all" is a development that is "women-

friendly” depends very much on how state support for caregiving activities and employment is configured. Of course, “women-friendliness” is not an uncontested concept; my own preferred understanding rests on an understanding of women’s equality movements as advocates of policies which would undergird women’s capacity to form and maintain autonomous households (Orloff 1993b), which has sometimes dovetailed with policies which promote women’s employment, but not always. The policies deployed across the affluent democracies vary tremendously, meaning that mothers are being integrated into the labor market in very different ways in different countries. Moreover, the implications of public policies are not the same for all categories of women workers.

This chapter focuses on the US and Swedish cases. Sweden has long been celebrated as the archetype “women-friendly” welfare state, to use the term coined by Helga Hernes (1987). The state provides low-cost, quality childcare, paid parental leave, and reduced hours for parents, facilitating the reconciliation of family and household duties; women are employed at very high levels, often in the public sector, and paid good wages; and, as Table 1 reveals, child poverty is quite low, even for single-parent households. On the downside, Swedish labor markets are among the most gender-segregated in the world, with women finding it difficult to move into more fulfilling and highly-paid occupations in the private sector. Although Swedish state authorities have done more to induce men to assume caregiving responsibilities than their counterparts in most other countries, it has been difficult to induce men to take on substantial caregiving responsibilities, and the gender division of labor remains strong (Hobson 2002).

US social policy lies at the opposite end of the spectrum from Sweden, and nowhere more so than with regard to working mothers. The state does not provide childcare (except

for the very poor) or paid parental leave, nor does the state sector employ large numbers of women. When it comes to balancing jobs and family, working mothers are left largely to fend for themselves, and, as Table 1 indicates, child poverty rates are among the highest in the developed world. Social policy is not the only state activity that affects mothers' employment, however. In the judicial arena, far-reaching anti-discrimination laws, affirmative action programs, and hefty jury verdicts against employers convicted of sexual harassment have broken (or at least begun to crack) glass ceilings. American women occupy professional and managerial positions in much greater numbers than their Swedish (or other European) counterparts. US tax policy, notably the expansion of the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), has greatly improved the returns to paid employment at the low end of the labor market. Finally, US immigration and labor market policies have created a large pool of household and childcare workers, making privately provided care affordable for a substantial proportion of the population. The result is a more heterogeneous situation than in Sweden, with some mothers enjoying prestigious, high-paying careers and purchasing the best household help that money can buy, while other women find themselves struggling to get by and relying on unregulated, often-marginal child-care arrangements. One can certainly debate the relative merits of the Swedish and American approaches; what is beyond debate is that the farewell to maternalism in both countries has been structured in distinctive ways by state policy, much of it of recent origin.

This chapter analyzes the state-mediated farewell to maternalism across the affluent democracies. Section 1 examines the features of the maternalist model -- the predominant gendered divisions of labor and patterns of family and household formation which they depended upon and reinforced, for it is against these backdrops that current changes are

occurring. In section 2, I describe the social forces that have eroded the maternalist model. I then take up the policies and politics behind this shift. Section 3 analyzes the Swedish Social Democratic model, emphasizing public services as partially replacing familial care and providing women with employment. Section 4 illuminates the liberal US approach, where civil rights connected to women's employment are joined with market-provided services to partially replace mothers' care. Again, services provide women with employment, but outside the state sector. Section 5 briefly assesses the situation in the "conservative continental" or "Christian Democratic" countries of Western Europe, which have traditionally raised the greatest obstacles to women's employment. Of particular interest is the Netherlands, where women's employment has increased from quite low levels, and where politicians have articulated an ideal in which men and women would combine part-time employment and care work, supported by public services. (Dutch realities are less inspiring, as many women but few men combine household duties with part-time jobs.) Finally, I conclude in section 6 with some reflections on possible future developments, notably the question of whether it might be possible to join higher levels of women's employment with less displacement of family care to either market or state services.

## **1. Maternalism as Political Configuration**

The origins of modern welfare provision are to be found in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when, across most countries in the industrializing West, there emerged new forms of social protection for citizens against a range of different problems of income interruption and economic dependency -- old age pensions or insurance, unemployment compensation, benefits for widowed mothers and the like. These replaced

(only partially at first) the old systems of poor relief, which had stood as the sole protection against utter destitution, but at the price of citizenship rights and social respectability. During this formative era, alliances of working-class movements and intellectual, political, and reform elites – made up overwhelmingly of men – advocated programs that would give public benefits to breadwinning men, so that they could continue to support their families financially, even when they lost their jobs or wage-earning capacities, in ways that preserved respectability and political rights (Orloff 1993a). Theda Skocpol (1992) has called these programs “paternalist,” both because they supported fathers, but also because they involved paternalistic relations between elites and the recipients of government aid. In addition, in what modern scholars call a “maternalist” strand of welfare politics, reformers (mainly women) helped to establish state support to women in their roles as mothers as well as protective labor legislation for women workers and infant and maternal health programs (see, e.g., Koven and Michel 1993; Pedersen 1993; Skocpol 1992). In some countries politicians, administrators, employers, or church leaders supported these initiatives because they dovetailed with pro-natalist agendas or their desire to employ mothers. Indeed, all modern systems of social provision and regulation were built upon a gendered division of labor in which women were mothers, wives, caregivers, and domestic workers -- even if they also worked for pay -- while men supported families economically, almost always through paid labor. If women were not always housewives, they almost always cut back on or in some way made accommodations in formal economic activities in order to carry out their responsibilities for caregiving.

This gendered division of labor and the ideologies of gender difference that accompanied it were accepted by almost all political actors in the early part of the twentieth



century, including reform-minded women concerned about women's poverty or the specific needs of mothers who were also employed. Inspired by a "maternalist" vision, women reformers wanted to offer social support and political valorization to women in their roles as mothers, in some cases as full-time homemakers, but in other cases as workers with maternal responsibilities. "Maternalism" may be defined as, "ideologies and discourses which exalted women's capacity to mother and applied to society as a whole the values they attached to that role: care, nurturance and morality" (Koven and Michel 1993, p.4; see also Bock and Thane 1991; Skocpol 1992).<sup>3</sup> Women reformers -- like their male counterparts -- almost all shared the view that the gendered division of labor was both natural and good, and supported the development of gender-specific legislation and programs. However, this did not necessarily imply agreement about other aspects of gender relations, particularly the family wage for men and women's economic dependency, or the idea that women should not participate in the public sphere.<sup>4</sup> Maternalists made arguments for gender justice: women should be recognized and compensated by the state for their unique service to society -- through maternity and childrearing -- as men were for their service in war and industry (Orloff 1991, 1993). And women did enter the political sphere; indeed, they entered it largely on the basis of "difference," claiming their work as mothers gave them unique capacities for developing state policies that would safeguard mothers and children (Koven and Michel 1993; Lake 1992; Pedersen 1993; Skocpol 1992). Thus, maternalist reformers' claims on the state were for a kind of "equality in difference," and constituted a challenge to patriarchal ideologies and practices that linked women's "difference" to their inequality and their exclusion from politics. In essence, women reformers took part in the discourse of gender difference, but

attempted (with very limited success) to rearticulate gender difference to equal citizenship claims.

Nowhere did the programs of modern social protection instituted in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that have, after considerable expansion and restructuring, come to be called “welfare states,” embody feminist ideals of women’s individuality and independence. Instead, gender difference was linked to gender inequality and women’s lack of independence. Policy-makers responded to the gendered demands of workingmen to, in essence, secure their core masculine status of breadwinner, either through direct supports to fathers and husbands in the form of “family wage” prerogatives and labor market or tax advantages or through ostensibly more universal support to workers, who were predominantly men. Men’s employment sustained a private economy of caregiving, which begat women’s economic dependence, echoed in systems of social provision in derived benefits (i.e., benefits that depend on husbands’ contributions). The most visionary reformers called for universal motherhood endowments for full-time caregivers or generous family allowances coupled with equal pay for men and women called for by (e.g., Eleanor Rathbone [Pedersen 2004]; see also Lake 1992, 1994). In the absence of such measures, women’s caregiving in a capitalist wage economy created economic dependence on men and their disproportionate vulnerability to poverty when outside marriage (for theoretical discussion of the situation of lone mothers, see e.g., Hobson 1990, 1994; Lewis 1997a). Social provision for women was a “back-up” to the family wage system, almost always ungenerous, rather than a system of supports for the economic independence of women and their freedom to make choices about care.

Gender difference and inequality were institutionalized in the systems of all countries, although more deeply in some than others. But everywhere there were different expectations about paid work versus caregiving, rules and benefits for men -- wage workers and individuals -- and for women -- caregivers and family members. At the systemic level, gender relations were reflected in a gendered dualism within all systems of social provision: some programs dealt with risks of income interruption associated with the labor market, such as unemployment and retirement, while others targeted the risks of economically-dependent family members associated with family dissolution, such as widowhood (Nelson 1990; Fraser 1989; O'Connor, Orloff and Shaver 1999, chapter 4). The family-related programs were used almost exclusively by women and were usually inferior to programs targeted at paid workers, mainly men. In addition, programs were characterized by what we would now call sex discrimination; for example, women, even when paid workers, did not have the same pension rights as men (Brocas, Cailloux, and Oget 1990). There is nothing novel in the fact that contemporary states policies and practices shape gender relations, although there are clear differences across countries and eras.

I want to call attention to the fact of cross-national policy variation from the very origins of these systems, within an overall gender order that might appear quite similar. These differences stemmed perhaps less from what women reformers, now called "maternalists," demanded, than what they were able to achieve within political fields dominated by generally more powerful organizations of reformist elite men or workingmen. Some systems developed a more "maternalist" cast than others, which might be better described as "paternalist," the difference turning on whether women could make direct claims on the basis of their caregiving, or had to depend on indirect claims as wives in

systems geared to the risks and needs of workingmen. Systems also differed in the extent to which women's employment was accommodated within an overall system of support to women's childbearing and caregiving. Some countries – the UK is a prime example – developed policies which reinforced gender difference and supported breadwinning husband-caregiving mother families. Other countries, such as France – still operating on the principle of gender difference, and assuming that women would remain responsible for caregiving and domestic work – developed policies which allowed for some accommodation of women's employment (Jenson 1986; Pedersen 1993; Koven and Michel 1993). As Susan Pedersen (1993, p.106) explains, in her masterful comparative analysis of interwar family policy, given strong capital and a strong state in France, strong labor and a slightly less-powerful state in Britain, “the French state ceded authority over women workers to those who wanted to exploit them, the British state to those who wanted to exclude them [from the labor force].” These institutionalized differences in policy approaches to gender, labor market, and family have been significant in shaping later policy developments, especially in constituting distinctive gendered political groups, identities, and goals.

World War II was critical, of course, in many processes later implicated in the shifts around women's employment, mobilizing women economically, politically, and militarily. And it is perhaps not too obvious to remind ourselves that the defeat of fascism removed from the developed world a reactionary gender program, which subordinated women's childbearing and care work to murderous state projects (see, e.g., Bock 1991). In the period following World War II, partially in political repayment for the wartime sacrifices of the popular classes, the programs and policies of the “formative years of the welfare state” were expanded and reformed in the direction of broader coverage. Yet the gendered assumptions

and policy arrangements were, if anything, strengthened – even as the gendered division of labor itself was changing, as more and more women entered the labor force. More generous public retirement, disability, unemployment, and health insurance along with expanded family allowances improved provision for wage earners and their families. In the US, while some public programs were expanded, there was also significant provision for working-class men in generous veterans' benefits and "private" fringe benefits negotiated by unions, which have turned out to be more vulnerable to erosion than comparable programs of the welfare state proper (Orloff 2003).

The decades after World War II are now seen, correctly I think, as the heyday of the breadwinner/caregiver family. Working-class men's wages allowed many more to support stay-at-home wives, who provided care to children and others, than ever before. In the 1960s, women's labor force participation levels were considerably lower than today and showed less cross-national variation. Notably, levels in the Nordic countries and North America – now among the highest – did not stand out (Daly 2000). There was something of a consensus across the Western democracies around the need to support mothers' caregiving and to lessen their burden of wage earning, and social policy institutionalized that consensus. State benefits and services provided important supports to these families, on gendered terms – men as individual citizens and workers, women as caregivers and dependents. Many (certainly not all) women received economic protection and their caregiving was enabled, but at the price of their autonomy. While most women's care was supported indirectly, programs of provision for solo mothers involved some states in directly supporting women's care. An unintended consequence of such "back-up" programs, in combination with better employment opportunities, has been to enhance women's bargaining positions within

households and to ease women's exit from marriage and allow for the formation of independent households.

## **2. Transformations of Labor, Family Policy, and Social Politics in the Developed World from the 1960s to the Present**

“Maternalist” premises, programs, and policies were questioned, although not necessarily repudiated, with women's greater participation in the labor force and the rise of second-wave feminism – the women's movements of the late 1960s and 1970s, called the “second wave” as they built upon the achievements of the “first wave,” suffragists and other early women's rights campaigners. Indeed, one important strand of feminist thinking was concerned with valorizing traditionally feminine activities, including care work, and claiming their equivalence – if not superiority – to masculine ones. Among the developed democracies, cross-national differences in policy approaches to women's employment, associated with but not fully determined by different approaches to gender equality among feminists, became more significant in and after the 1960s. Some countries – principally in continental Europe – offered additional supports to the breadwinner-caregiver household, developed more protections for women's caregiving, but made little effort to help women work for pay, even as more, particularly among younger cohorts, entered the labor force. At the same time, other countries repealed discriminatory employment, social security and family laws and explicitly attempted to increase women's employment or to enhance its quality. Both Social Democratic and liberal policy regimes – or Nordic and predominantly Anglophone countries, if you prefer to avoid the terminology of welfare regimes – have moved decisively away from “maternalist” policy premises. As Figure 6.2 reveals, these

countries have relatively high rates of women's employment as compared to other affluent democracies, but also are notable for the levels of employment achieved by mothers. Yet liberal and Social Democratic policy approaches arose from different political circumstances, and imply different dilemmas for feminists and others concerned with the quality of care, gender equality, and economic sustainability.

Since the 1990s, mothers' employment is receiving renewed attention, as a confluence of forces – declining fertility, population aging, crises in pension funding, gender equality movements, among others – combine to destabilize earlier gender, family, and work arrangements. The European Union has set new, higher targets for women's employment. It is especially countries with a “strong male breadwinner model,” to use the terminology of Jane Lewis (1992, 1997b), and, often, well-developed “maternalist” policies as well (e.g., in the Netherlands; see Knijn 1994), that have come under pressure. The breadwinner model and major elements of “maternalism” have been disclaimed in some key political and policy arenas in the Netherlands, and expanding women's employment has been an important part of “the Dutch miracle” (Visser and Hemerijck 1997). Part-time work has been critical here, but so far, this presents problems for gender equality in income and employment opportunities (Knijn 1998). In a number of other European countries, employment among younger cohorts of women has risen, but is coupled with record-low fertility, for employment remains on the masculine model and is incompatible with childbearing and child-rearing. Thus, to the extent that countries cannot break from “strong male breadwinner” patterns, there will be deep problems of social sustainability (very low fertility) or continuing gender inequality. The politics of breaking from maternalism and the breadwinner model are therefore of great interest, both theoretically and practically. In the following pages, I

discuss the “adjos” and “farewells” which have already occurred in Sweden and those which are well underway in the US. In both countries, state authorities have deployed an array of new policies to move mothers into the workplace, but have done so in very different ways.

### **3. Sweden, the “Dual-Earner” Model, and Social Democratic Feminism**

The Swedish “dual-earner” or “citizen-worker-carer” policy approach is for many scholars the paradigmatic case of state support for women’s/mothers’ employment, the model to which other states wishing to enhance women’s work and gender equality should aspire (see, e.g., discussions of the “women-friendliness” [or lack thereof] of Nordic welfare states in Borchorst 1994 and Borchorst and Siim 2002; Hernes 1987 first coined the term). This dual-earner model has been the product to a considerable extent of conscious social engineering. In the 1960s, Swedish authorities, facing a labor shortage and wanting to limit the inflow of immigrant (“guest”) workers, introduced a series of reforms designed to encourage women to enter the labor force. Among the most important such policies were: low-cost, quality childcare; paid parental leave; flexible, part-time employment rules; and individualized taxation (the elimination of the so-called “marriage penalty”). Moreover, as the Social Democrats expanded public services, many women found reasonably attractive job opportunities in health care, child care, education, social work, and elderly care.

Today, the vast majority of Swedish women are employed most of their lives, as are men, and these high employment levels are also found among the mothers of young children. Policy explicitly supports mothers’ (and, more generally, women’s) employment, which is viewed as a cornerstone of gender equality. Housewifery and full-time mothering are all but extinct. As in most countries, leave provisions and other care-linked policies are formally



gender-neutral, but, more unusually, the Swedes have gone beyond formal gender neutrality to actively promote men's care.

While both men and women are earners in Sweden, gender difference has hardly disappeared, and women's caregiving is still central to social policy. Women manage employment alongside familial activities by virtue of the extensive state services that take over significant portions of care work and the maternity and parental leaves that allow "time to care." The policy logic underpinning most state initiatives assumes a gendered division of labor modified from the breadwinner/ housewife models that predominate elsewhere, but which nonetheless features significant gender differentiation. Women and men have similar (high) rates of participation, but substantial numbers of women work in part-time jobs. However, these jobs tend to be "good jobs," offering reasonable pay; indeed, overall earnings gaps are relatively low (Borchorst 1994; Borchorst and Siim 2002). Younger women are increasingly working full-time (Daly 2000, p.474), but they continue to take advantage of maternity and parental leave provisions to a far greater extent than do men (Jenson 1997; Haas 1992). Men are still principally citizen workers, while women, though employed most of their lives, remain linked to care.

Women not only bear children, but, according to extensive studies of the domestic division of labor, are still the principal caregivers. Women are also linked to care in that the overwhelming majority of public employees in care services are women. Thus, the public-private employment difference is a gendered one that contributes to Sweden's relatively high occupational sex segregation (Charles and Grusky 2004). Women are concentrated in public employment, while men have a wider range of jobs, and predominate in the private sector. The fact that women workers are caregivers to a greater extent than are men means that they

face barriers in occupations traditionally held by men, including positions of authority. There is a greater “authority gap” between men and women in Sweden than in the US, as well as greater difficulties in accessing the highest levels of management (Wright, Baxter and Birkeland 1995; Baxter and Wright 2000).

To translate into the terms I have been using, Sweden can be seen as already having bid farewell to “maternalism,” if that term is understood as implying that women’s political claims are based principally on motherhood. Things become slightly more complex if we think about policy supports for women’s caregiving, for here, the Swedish system is certainly directed toward this aim. Lewis and Astrom (1992) argue that Swedish women first established their citizenship claims on the basis of “sameness” – their status as workers -- then layered on claims based on “difference,” or care. I would put it slightly differently: Sweden succeeded in developing policies that foster women’s employment by conceding to gender difference, making women’s but not necessarily men’s employment compatible with parenthood and caregiving. What were the politics that led to the creation of these policies?

Analysts in the power resources or welfare regime traditions understand the patterns and policies which have led to high levels of women’s employment as products of the long tenure of the Social Democratic party. Ruggie’s (1984) classic study of Swedish and British policy on women’s employment and state policy argued that parties and the state were more significant for women’s employment outcomes than specific feminist mobilization: “for the successful achievement of their employment pursuits, women must be incorporated into labor, and labor must be incorporated into the governing coalition” (1984, p.346). This perspective is more recently echoed in work using a power resources framework, in which the overall configuration of state-labor-capital is the key to the character of gender policy

regimes (Korpi 2000; Huber and Stephens 2000, 2001; Esping-Andersen 1999, 2002).

Policies supportive of mothers' employment are seen as dependent on left governments willing to use public power to provide "defamilializing" services (that is, state services, such as childcare, that substitute for women's household labor), which both allow women to seek employment and directly employ many women (see also Gornick and Meyers 2003).

Sweden may indeed be the best case for making the "Social Democratic" argument, as both organized labor and the Social Democratic party have been more ambitious with respect to promoting gender equality via women's employment and state services than almost any other such organizations. (Less recognized is the fact that political forces dedicated to promoting women's employment and providing care services have been able to call on well-developed administrative capacities; more noticeable lately, given now-chronic fiscal constraints, is the fact that fiscal capacities during the formative years of the dual-earner regime were extensive.) But far from being a straightforward development on the basis of political commitments to equality "in general," where the Swedish Social Democrats have come to embrace some of the goals of women's equality, including support for women's employment, it has typically been because women's groups within or outside the party organization have pressed such claims (Ruggie 1988; Hobson and Lindholm 1997; Hobson 1998).<sup>5</sup> Gender analysts have pushed beyond the "dual-earner" label to reveal the continuation of gender difference and inequality, and the gendered patterns of politics. They have investigated women's agency as well as men's gendered interests, often reflected in positions of trade unions and political parties (Bergqvist 1999).

Swedish feminists have generally supported Social Democratic initiatives around women's employment. Indeed, in contrast to some other countries where full-time mothering

was exalted above and beyond employment, women's equality advocates have mostly been favorable towards women's employment. Until the 1960s, women's employment was understood as coming in sequence with caregiving activities, but feminists then sought policies which would allow women, and later men, to combine caregiving activities and employment. Swedish citizenship claims and rights have long been linked politically and discursively to employment, and not only for feminists. For example, we see early feminist efforts to preserve women's right to work and to be mothers during the Depression (Hobson 1993), or later efforts to give substantive support to such rights by expanding childcare services and parental leaves. Swedish women's mobilizing has been a variety of institutional feminism – that is, mobilization within existing organizations, and thus distinct from the autonomous feminist groups seen in the US or Germany, but no less effective or feminist for that (Hobson and Lindholm 1997; Edwards 1991; Siim 1994; Bergqvist 1999). The approach of Scandinavian women has reflected the availability of allies in the labor movement and Social Democratic party, as well as the way citizenship has been politically constructed.

Policies supporting mothers' employment have a fairly long history in Sweden. In the first decades of the twentieth century, countries such as the UK, Germany, and the Netherlands established strong social provisions for breadwinning men (and, to a lesser extent, for caregiving women) as well as labor regulations that hindered women's or married mothers' employment in most sectors, while guaranteeing the privileges of (most) men in the workplace. (The US, as will be discussed below, developed weak provisions for caregiving women, although this was more than what was available for working-aged breadwinning men; in the labor market, however, "maternalism" and the breadwinner ideal translated into "protective" legislation that was a mechanism for excluding women from many kinds of paid

work; see, e.g., Hobson 1993; Orloff 2003). By contrast, Sweden established universal citizenship provision, that is, entitlements that were not formally based on employment (although rhetorically, provision was seen to support worthy worker-citizens), and were therefore less structurally favorable to workers, predominantly men. Married women were also guaranteed a right to work, even though a comparably small proportion of women were actually in the labor force (Hobson 1993). Yet one could argue that this was still a variety of maternalism, for an important part of the impulse to give married women the right to work stemmed from concerns about their fertility. Then, as now, there was some concern that if forced to choose between paid work and childbearing, women might opt for employment.

Most students of Swedish (and Nordic) social policy developments agree that the distinctive Social Democratic model emerged only after World War II (even given favorable precedents established in the 1930s). Enjoying an unprecedentedly long tenure, well-developed state administrative and fiscal capacities, and a favorable macro-economic environment, the Social Democratic party fashioned extensive, egalitarian, universalistic social provision, active labor market policies, and a commitment to full employment, “solidarity wages,” and a labor market regulated by bargains between unions and employers’ associations (Swenson 2002; Huber and Stephens 2001). All of these have proved especially beneficial to lower-paid, blue-collar wage-earners. This also turned out to be a set of policy orientations quite favorable to women workers, for they tend to cluster at the bottom end of pay scales and occupational hierarchies.

The extensive development of policies supportive of mothers’ employment can be dated to the mid-1960s through early 1970s, that is, on the basis of the universalistic Social Democratic foundation laid down in the postwar years (for a good overview of these

developments, see Huber and Stephens 2000; Bergqvist 1999; Hobson 1998). First, decisions were made to expand women's labor supply, rather than bring in guest workers to cope with labor shortages, as in the continental European countries, or to ease immigration policies, as in the United States. Shortly afterwards, the Swedes developed policies allowing for what would now be called "work-family reconciliation": publicly-provided childcare services, parental leave, and shortened hours for parents. Also significant in altering economic incentives for wives' work was the shift from joint to individual taxation. Most recently, concerns about gender equality have moved toward enhancing men's involvement in parenting, beyond the gender-neutral citizenship right to take parental leave to positive incentives for men's participation (Hobson 2002; Leira 2002). Exemplary is the so-called "daddy month," a policy in which one month of parental leave is reserved for fathers, and is lost to families if not used by the father.

These policies have become the mainstays of the Swedish dual-earner model, and have been expanded or made more generous several times since their initiation, with brief setbacks during the economic crisis of the early 1990s and the short tenure of the bourgeois government (1991-1994). In the former case, the premise of supporting mothers' employment was not repudiated, but the generosity of policies was, for example, when replacement rates for leaves were reduced. In the latter, there was an attempt to change the premises of social policy by introducing the notion of "choice" around mothers' employment, with the government offering cash allowances as a substitute for public services. This initiative was ultimately rolled back by the succeeding Social Democratic government. The incident is notable for what it says about the political landscape of gender and employment policies in Sweden: opponents of the dual-earner model have been

relatively weak. There is no significant religious anti-feminist political force. To the extent that employers have disagreed with the Social Democratic approach, it has been mainly in terms of preferring greater privatization of services and liberalization of labor markets. This has contributed to gendered partisan differences, as analysts have noted an increasing advantage for the Social Democrats among women, who have mobilized to defend and extend the social policies and public services allowing mothers' employment on favorable terms. Moreover, within the Social Democratic and union camps, there have been disputes between men and women around care. For example, women's advocates backed a universal six-hour day, conducive to all workers participating in household work, while trade union men preferred to demand extra vacation time – and prevailed. These struggles continue.

One may identify two main challenges to the Swedish model. First, there are ongoing difficulties to do with government finances and the productivity of the system (Esping-Andersen 1999). The system is expensive, and various forces, including “globalizing” economic trends and developments within the European Union, produce pressures to cut back or keep public expenditures low. Second, there are challenges to further progress toward achieving gender equality (however defined) (Borchorst and Siim 2002). Analysts such as Huber and Stephens (2000) have identified a virtuous circle in Swedish developments, as women's employment has been facilitated by leaves and public services, while these services in turn provide employment to more women, who then demand further policy supports for employment. Yet within this circle, one also sees continuing gender differentiation, as women are associated with caregiving, and masculinity may be defined in opposition to care. Some may believe that continuing gender difference and women's “compulsory altruism” with respect to care work is compatible with gender equality, or even

with greater occupational opportunities for women in private employment and positions of authority. I am not so sure (see also Fraser 1994).

Can Sweden serve as an example for others? Certainly, many scholars have assumed that the Swedish model is the only one that can lead towards gender equality, even while acknowledging that Sweden has had a particularly favorable political context for the development of policies to support dual-earner households. But even if the lineup of women's movements, their potential allies and antagonists were to change elsewhere in a more favorable direction – as perhaps it will do, as more younger women gain education and enter employment – one must admit that times have irrevocably changed from the “golden age” of welfare development (prior to fiscal constraint), when the basics of the Swedish model were laid down.

But before we can ask whether there is a model better suited to our era of resurgent liberalism, we must agree that such a model could even exist. And this possibility is blocked for many analysts by what I would call a bad case of Swedophilia, by which I mean the problem of making “distance from Stockholm” (politically and geographically) the measure of policy progressiveness. Applied to the question of women's employment, it is reflected in assumptions that the Social Democratic approach of expanding the public service sector is the only way to increase women's employment, and is also the normatively preferable approach to gender equality. In particular, the English-speaking, or “liberal,” countries are poorly understood -- they are either ignored or seen as simply leaving women's employment to the market, as if women's equality projects have had no impact on policies for enhancing women's employment. This can be seen, for example, in analyses that group Japan or Switzerland with the US, Canada, UK, and Australia as having “market-oriented” gender



policies (e.g., Korpi 2000). Anyone familiar with the history of feminist movements and state policies would be shocked to find countries with explicit commitments to equal opportunities, body rights, and civil rights and some record of success – the (mainly) Anglophone countries – equated with countries which have been such all-around laggards on women’s rights, simply because none of them has gone the Nordic route of expanding public services. The Swedophile approach leaves us ill-equipped to understand cases where policy instruments other than public services undergird high levels of women’s employment, and political actors seek to achieve equality by other means.

#### **4. The United States, “Employment for All,” and Liberal Feminism**

The US is well known for the significant impact feminism has had on popular culture, intellectual trends, political life, access to traditionally masculine occupations, and intimate relationships. However, until fairly recently, the US was not recognized among scholars of the welfare state as a case of high women’s employment levels, nor has the role of state social policies been prominent in studies of US women’s employment. This reflects in part the analytic predominance of the Social Democratic approach and the paradigmatic status of the Swedish case. As we all know, “there is no socialism in America” – or even Social Democrats -- and the US has nothing like the array of services and leaves provided to working parents in Sweden. Meanwhile, flourishing equal-opportunity feminisms and their legal and regulatory victories, which have been significant in expanding women’s employment, have fallen outside the analytic boundaries of most scholarship on gender and welfare. Yet of late, the heightened levels of women’s and especially mothers’ employment in the US—considerably higher than most European countries (except Scandinavia), as

Figure 6.2 reveals, and with relatively little part-time employment -- have made the American case harder to ignore. With overall rates of women's labor force participation very similar to the Nordic countries, the US has lower rates of part-time employment, but with concomitantly lower rates of employment among mothers of young children – the group that takes most advantage of parental leave and provisions, allowing fewer hours of work for the parents of younger children in Scandinavia. And in a kind of mirror image of the Swedish pattern, the pay gap in the US is relatively high, but occupational sex segregation is relatively low, and in particular, American women have had relatively good access to traditionally masculine elite and blue-collar occupations (O'Connor, Orloff and Shaver 1999, chap.3).

The failure to recognize changed employment patterns among US women may also stem from the fact that in terms of ideology and cultural assumptions about the gendered division of labor, the US until very recently looked similar to countries with a “strong male breadwinner model,” such as the Netherlands or the UK. Moreover, maternalist programs were prominent (if not generous by the second half of the twentieth century), at least relative to the residual US system of social provision (Orloff 1991; Skocpol 1992). Recent policy changes have brought retrenchment, but also new forms of governmental action directed at increasing women's employment. The 1996 welfare reform “ended welfare as we knew it,” replacing Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), the policy descendant of early-twentieth century “maternalist” programs, with block grants to states for Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF). The law eliminated social rights to assistance (“entitlements”) on the basis of economic need and full-time caregiving, which up to that point had been permitted for poor parents of children under the age of seventeen. It included political mandates on state and local governments to increase the employment of those single

mothers who depended at least in part on “welfare.” (On US welfare reform, see Mink 1998, Weaver 2000; Noble 1997.) In other words, the US has had a very abrupt and uncompromising “farewell to maternalism”! At the same time, a number of programs, most notably the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), have been expanded, with the goal of incentivizing the paid work of single mothers and others and reducing the poverty of the low-paid – and have been somewhat successful. Discursively, government operates under the umbrella of “choice,” even as public policy provides no means to allow choice. A better name for the US model (to the extent that there is sufficient systematicity to call it a model at all) would be “employment for all.” “Maternalism” has all but disappeared in one of the cradles of its creation.

As yet, few scholars of social provision seem to know how to explain these patterns. (Nor are standard economic models of labor supply and demand adequate to the task – but that’s a different set of analytic challenges; see, e.g., England 1992; England and Farkas 1986.) The US case confounds simple versions of the Social Democratic model, for women’s employment does not depend on public services to replace family-based care, nor have Social Democratic parties been the principal supporters of women’s employment. Many believe that without heavy state spending on public services – ruled out in the US, it would seem, by strong neo-liberal political forces -- mothers’ employment is difficult if not impossible, at least without a sharp decline in fertility, as has been the case in Southern Europe (on Southern Europe, see Gonzalez, Jurado and Naldini 2000). But in the US, we see relatively high fertility rates – above European levels on average, and on a par with Swedish levels among native-born white women – and high employment levels, despite the absence of extensive public services.

The US state encourages women's employment, but not through the direct provision of social services. While there is explicit talk of the importance of "choice" for women vis-à-vis employment and temporary or life-long full-time caregiving, there have been no substantive public policies to support such choices outside of the Survivors' Insurance portion of Social Security, which serves a tiny proportion of single mothers who are widows with young children, and an extremely residual entitlement to social assistance for poor (and unemployed) single mothers, which was eliminated in 1996. Instead, the US features both "carrots" – positive state policies encouraging women's employment – and "sticks," most notably a lack of alternatives to commodification for women as well as men, and strict requirements to seek employment or perform work-like activities within remaining social assistance programs. The role of the state has hardly been eclipsed – except perhaps in rhetoric.

In contrast to Sweden, the US government does little to help women enter the paid labor force through provision of public care services or paid leaves that allow workers to attend to family responsibilities (on the history and character of childcare in the US, see Michel 1999). A minority of the very poor receive high-quality public care (Head Start), although this program was not developed to ease women's work-family conflicts, but rather to enhance development among underprivileged children. Some states now offer partial childcare subsidies to allow former welfare recipients or low-income workers to enter employment, but demand far outstrips supply. Instead, policy is predominantly in a liberal vein, giving incentives for private service provision in the form of tax deductions for childcare. There is a large supply of relatively inexpensive childcare in the private sector, supplied by workers whose low pay makes services "affordable" for slightly better-off

households, but who may themselves have few options for quality care. The quality of care is quite variable, and government does little to encourage better quality. At the federal level, an unpaid family and medical leave entitlement – for employees of large companies -- was passed in 1993, but there is little provision for maternity leave, let alone paid parental leave or child sick leave days.<sup>6</sup> A few states are experimenting with using state-level disability insurance for maternity coverage, and in 2004, California became the first state to provide paid family leave, financed through an employee-paid payroll tax. Possibly less noticed – though not by US governmental policymakers – is the fact that the market provision of services has facilitated women’s employment. Esping-Andersen (1999, p.166) presents data suggesting that the cost of childcare as a proportion of the average income for a working-class, dual-earner family is about the same for the US as for Denmark, and is less than for France. These data are reproduced in Table 3.

The US government is certainly not passive with respect to women’s employment, and does not simply “leave things to the market.” Rather than emphasizing social rights to care services, there is a well-developed apparatus around civil rights relevant for employment (O’Connor, Orloff and Shaver 1999). While “reconciling” care and work is assumed to be a private choice and responsibility, public policy is committed to enhancing women’s employment opportunities, and decades of equal employment legislation, court cases, and affirmative action – though contested (Nelson and Bridges 1999), and uneven in practice – have resulted in decreasing gender wage gaps (McCall 2001) and increased rates of women’s entry into some formerly-masculine occupations (both professional/managerial and working-class) (MacLean 1999; O’Connor, Orloff and Shaver 1999, ch.3). In general, gender wage gaps tend to be lower in systems with centralized bargaining structures (such as Sweden)

(Whitehouse 1992). However, US women's incomes have increased relative to men's over the past thirty years by virtue of increased hours worked and rising relative wages, themselves the product of declining occupational sex segregation and declining male wages (McCall 2001; Ellwood 2000). As noted above, the "authority gap" and overall sex segregation are lower in the US than in Sweden (Charles and Grusky 2004; Baxter and Wright 2000). One might also argue that state regulation and pervasive corporate policies to combat sexual harassment – where the US has been an international leader (Zippel forthcoming; Saguy 2003) -- reflect the political concerns feminists have raised about creating workplaces open to women.

Because care arrangements are assumed to be "private," some US women may have more scope for choosing *not* to care, by forgoing childbearing or purchasing care services in the market. These women are in a position to take advantage of employment opportunities and affirmative action programs that encourage employers to open formerly male-dominated positions to "qualified" women, which might be interpreted as "women who are like men," that is, without care responsibilities (or whose responsibilities are dealt with "privately," at little or no cost to the employer). One might argue that there are high levels of women's employment in the US because policy has "conceded to the market," with a political refusal of any public role in providing services or displacing private services and a strong political commitment to the division between public and private spheres, so that care is a "private" problem or choice. *If women are marginalized in Sweden because they care, in the US, care is marginalized, but some women may not be, because they can make "private" choices to shed care.* Of course, there are striking inequalities in women's capacities to do this, and inequality among women is related partly to the uneven burdens and costs care.

What are the politics producing this distinctive set of policies?<sup>7</sup> We have already disposed of one set of false narratives – that US gender and employment patterns are simply the result of state withdrawal. Are they the result rather of the relative strength of secular right parties, as Korpi (2000) would have it? One would have to concede at least that such parties do more than champion *laissez-faire* and that there are positive gender equality policies associated with liberalism. Certainly, such partisan patterns have been consequential for gender politics and policies, but, as in the Swedish case, one must also attend to the organization and ideologies of women’s equality advocates. However, in contrast to Sweden, especially in the contemporary US, feminism has had to face powerful opponents as well. In addition to the economic liberals of the Republican party, the US secular right party, who have often opposed state “intervention” in society to provide services or to regulate labor market practices, there are religiously-inspired conservative political forces committed to “traditionalism” in gender relations and therefore, opposed to feminism. However, these forces have consistently been quite uninterested in offering substantive support to breadwinner-caregiver families. Their commitment to market liberalism and small (domestic) government trumps their gender ideology.

US feminists have tended to form autonomous organizations, outside the parties, although sometimes in alliance with them, especially the Democrats. The characteristics of the American political system, especially its highly decentralized decision-making structure, the highly decentralized organization of political parties and the diversity of their policy preferences, frustrate social movement efforts to change policy. The successes achieved by the women’s movement have come largely through “sophisticated interest group” behavior (Costain and Costain 1987, p.210). In addition, predominant ideologies have shifted quite

dramatically between feminism's first and second waves (Freeman 1975). Early-twentieth century US advocates of women's equality were mainly "maternalists," championing women's right to care and claiming political rights on the basis of care; the majority favored protective legislation. In the contemporary era, feminists have tended to seek to make traditional breadwinner positions in the workforce available to women – partly by repealing the protective laws their foremothers had championed -- and have been less interested in championing policies that would support women's full-time caregiving. To use the terms popularized by Nancy Fraser (1994), US feminists have engaged in a "universal breadwinner" strategy, as compared to the "caregiver parity" strategy promoted by Swedish feminists. In terms of available allies and established political discourse, the US political context in the years after World War II has been quite encouraging to liberal feminist civil rights claims – such as equality of employment opportunity -- but less open to claims for social rights, such as paid parental leave or public childcare services (O'Connor, Orloff and Shaver 1999, chaps.2,6-7; Cobble 2004). Many of the most significant equality achievements by the US women's movement, such as anti-discrimination and equal opportunities decisions, were achieved largely through the courts, although in some instances legislatures and administrative bodies have also been involved. US feminists have supported public childcare services and paid leaves, but with little success. However, they have had much better success with political interventions that encourage the private provision of services, such as tax credits for child care (Michel 1999).

What scholars today call "maternalist" politics were particularly well-developed in the Progressive-era US (Skocpol 1992; Orloff 1991; Koven and Michel 1993). Women reformers made political claims based on women's service to society or the nation in the



form of childbearing and rearing. The policy “fruit” of these claims in the US was rather more meager than the provisions established for mothers and their children in countries such as Germany and France, with less-developed maternalist politics but greater legitimacy for state interventions, stronger state interests in pronatalism, and greater state administrative and fiscal capacities (Koven and Michel 1993). But this era did see the initiation of mothers’ pensions, allowances designed to permit full-time caregiving for widowed mothers of young children, which were the forerunners of Survivors’ Insurance and AFDC, both initiated in the 1935 Social Security Act. AFDC carried the logic of maternalist provision into the contemporary era, offering a means-tested entitlement to single parents (it was always formally gender-neutral, though overwhelmingly used by women) who were caring for children (under seventeen) full-time. On the labor market side, protective legislation designed to safeguard women’s reproductive capacities and activities was favored by most women’s equality advocates as well as male trade unionists; it often translated into workingmen’s privileges and outright discrimination against married women and women in general in employment. Interestingly, the US never developed the level of state social provision for workers, mostly men, that its European counterparts did, nor was there much in the way of a politically-guaranteed economic bonus for breadwinners (Orloff 1993a, chs. 7, 9; Orloff 2003).

While Sweden developed a universalistic system of social provision and active labor market policies under Social Democratic hegemony in the 1940s and 1950s, more conservative politics predominated in the US, eclipsing the policy initiatives of the social liberalism which had flourished in the 1930s, such as universal health insurance or full-employment efforts (Amenta 1998; Weir 1992; Weir, Orloff and Skocpol 1988). Instead,

outside of Social Security for the retired, which was almost continuously extended and made more generous, the US system of social provision for the working-aged population was left to become decidedly residual. Maternalist provision, especially AFDC, stood out as one of the few areas of positive state policy – meager when compared to retirement provision, but politically notable when compared to what was available for the general working-aged population, which is to say, not much. This pattern of provision gave rise to what has been called “dualism,” as many working-class and middle-class men in the postwar boom years benefited from private “fringe benefits” negotiated by particularly powerful unions or offered through corporate welfare (Stevens 1988) – and their wives benefited indirectly, as long as they stayed married -- and only those who had no alternative relied on public provision. Moreover, many men enjoyed relatively high wages and many also had access to veteran’s benefits, all of which helped to support a male breadwinner model “without the state” (Orloff 2003). These benefits, however, began to decline in the post-1973 era (Ellwood 2000), and US breadwinners found themselves more vulnerable than their European counterparts, who continued to enjoy public welfare state provision.

The period from the late 1960s through the early 1970s was in the US, as it had been in Sweden, the key period for the foundation of the dominant gender policy model, but perhaps more for what was excluded from political possibility than for what was enacted. Defeat was the fate of proposals that resembled scaled-down versions of both the European model of supporting breadwinners – Nixon’s so-called Family Assistance Plan, which would have offered economic subsidies to poor breadwinner families in addition to the single-mother families, who were the main clientele of AFDC (Quadagno 1990) – and the Scandinavian model of supporting women’s employment through the expansion of public

child care services (Michel 1999). But with the expansion of women's employment and the justifying rhetoric of second-wave feminism, mothers' employment was losing its stigma. And indeed, despite the failure of more sweeping reforms, work incentives were introduced into AFDC in 1967, so that women could combine employment earnings and welfare benefits, while retaining health coverage. Although favorable to beneficiaries in the short run, this line of policy development continued to leave the employed poor and most two-parent families outside the umbrella of social protection, which in turn made AFDC politically vulnerable (Weir, Orloff and Skocpol 1988; Ellwood 1988). Public provision construed single mothers as unemployable, as full-time caregivers, rather than as potential workers, even as women's labor force participation, particularly among married mothers of children under age six, was accelerating (Reskin and Padavic 1994). Adding to AFDC's political vulnerability, its clientele was expanding to include more women of color.

This era was also significant for current gender patterns because of changes in policy spheres far from the family policy or welfare arena (the usual spots to look). New waves of migrants, especially from Latin America and Asia, expanded the US labor supply as immigration rules were eased, helping to fuel a private service sector expansion that was also encouraged by deregulation of markets. Low-wage workers, many of them immigrants, staff the fast-food restaurants, nursing homes, hospitals and childcare centers on which the vast majority of Americans, working-class as well as more affluent, rely to care for their families (on the racial and gendered distribution of service work, see Glenn 1992).

The Reagan administration was the leading edge of a harder-right, anti-governmental spending political force that swept over most of the rich democracies, though with greater success in the US than perhaps anywhere but the UK and New Zealand (Pierson 1994;

Rhodes 2000; Schwartz 2000; Weir 1998). In terms of supports for caregiving or mothers' employment, little was done. However, new restrictions were enacted in AFDC against combining paid work and welfare, leaving in place a formal model of motherhood based on full-time caregiving, which over the course of the decade was increasingly out of sync with the behavior of most mothers, married or not (Reskin and Padavic 1994: 143-145). With the decline of jobs paying a "breadwinner wage," fewer people could sustain single-earner households, even if they wanted to. At the same time, women's educational levels increased, more women worked for longer periods of their lives, and advocates emphasized legal routes to equal opportunity, with considerable success. Thus, the continuation of the very marginal "maternalist" program, AFDC, increasingly identified with women of color, as all women's employment levels were increasing, was an explosive combination that was exploited politically by the Republicans, with Reagan's election and after.

Until welfare was "reformed," which is to say, repealed, political struggles raged over the maternalist model enshrined in AFDC and possible state endorsement of mothers' employment. These struggles reflected agendas shaped by concerns about gender and racial relations and about government's spending and regulation. Parallel struggles around work, care, and gender -- as embodied in policies such as the Family and Medical Leave Act, childcare subsidies or provision of services, and affirmative action -- were also significant, if strangely unlinked to the welfare debates. Yet one can discern some common threads: commitment to "choice" for women with respect to paid work and caregiving (either temporary or longer-term), but lack of substantive support to either employed or stay-at-home mothers -- which translated into an implicit model of "employment for all."

Government support for increasing poor women's employment is sometimes seen as reflecting a conservative political agenda and the ending of "maternalist" programs as evidence of racism and patriarchy<sup>8</sup> in denying a "right to care for their children" to poor women.<sup>9</sup> It would be hard to deny the political power of racist and conservative gender ideologies, and President Reagan and other Republicans mobilized these sentiments in the campaign against AFDC -- and the "welfare queens" supposedly enjoying its largesse -- in the 1980s. (See Gilens 1999 on welfare, public opinion and perceptions of the poor.) Still, conservative forces were not hegemonic; the elimination of AFDC was politically not possible under President Reagan, as Democratic control of the House was a bulwark against the most radical retrenchment. However, a Democratic president in 1995-1996 was not a bulwark against the efforts of a Republican Congress to eliminate AFDC. It is not simply a matter of divided government, but a question of what deprived AFDC of political protection, even among Democrats in 1996.

Democrats had argued that they needed to move to the right on "wedge issues" (Dawson 1994; Williams 1998), and Clinton was committed to Third-Way-like policies with respect to employment and welfare, but probably would not have repealed AFDC on his own. Increases in employment among most mothers and the lack of public support to the caregiving needs of most citizens made AFDC politically indefensible at worst, unattractive at best, even among many of those committed to women's equality (or racial justice). Beyond the tiny group of widows of Social Security-covered wage-earners with young children, the federal government provides *no one* (woman or man) any sort of *paid* parental leave. Economic self-sufficiency is expected from all, and any kind of time for care must be

privately financed.<sup>10</sup> Having lost the commitment of those forces traditionally favorable to social provision, welfare became vulnerable to the right's campaign for repeal.

By the 1990s, Democrats had joined Republicans in taking advantage of the electoral popularity of welfare "reform." Clinton turned around his party's vulnerability among white voters with his famous 1992 campaign pledge to "end welfare as we know it," while promising to "make work pay." His approach could more easily accommodate EITC expansion than the defense of the existing welfare system. Poverty would be fought not with higher benefits or expanded coverage, but by getting everyone -- including mothers -- into employment, then improving pay and conditions (Ellwood 1988). Clinton Democrats wanted to make AFDC more like unemployment insurance -- a short-term benefit to help claimants "get on their feet," but premised on employment. In fact, many women were already using the program in this manner, although the formal rules obscured this practice (Edin and Lein 1997). This suggests that even though women had lost their exemption from the demands of commodification, the "farewell to maternalism" in the US still might have taken a less harsh form than it ultimately did.

The elimination of AFDC became almost inevitable once Clinton made his famous promise.<sup>11</sup> Although Democrats sought to retain control of the welfare issue, the call to end welfare was seized on mainly by Republicans, who moved the debate in a sharply conservative direction -- to outright elimination of a right to assistance. After the Republicans captured the House of Representatives in 1994, President Clinton was challenged by Republicans to sign welfare bills much more restrictive and less generous than his own plan. After vetoing two bills, he ultimately signed the third. Did he have to do it? Critics point out that he could have continued his opposition; the Republicans probably could

not have overcome a veto. Yet Clinton apparently worried about losing his healthy margin in the polls in the 1996 race with Bob Dole if he were to come before the electorate having failed in his promise to “end welfare as we know it” (Reich 1999). And at the same time, former defenders of welfare, such as women’s organizations and organizations of African Americans, including the Congressional Black Caucus, did not, in the end, make preventing welfare reform a high priority (Williams 1998).

It might be a stretch, but one might consider as analogous to Social Democratic forces those parts of the Democratic party during the Clinton administration responsible for policies such as the Family and Medical Leave Act and policies that tried to “make work pay” for low-wage workers (especially single mothers) alongside the more celebrated welfare reform. But very much unlike European Social Democrats, even these “progressive” forces had to rely on the market and private provision to a great degree. They very much lacked the political clout of their European counterparts.

The deficiencies of the US model with respect to the vulnerable poor are quite well-known among comparativists and students of US social policy. This is a system that treats harshly those who have little training, many care burdens, and limited financial means. And indeed the quality of care for the poor, and even many workers and middle-class people is uneven, sometimes quite excellent (e.g., Head Start or the childcare centers sponsored by universities), but mediocre or dangerous too often. Given its residualism, this system is not obviously expensive, but we might well argue that the downstream consequences of failing to provide support to care and to families more generally are very costly – here one might think of imprisonment, or illiteracy. We are seeing a widening economic gap among women, as

has also been observed among men (McCall 2001). Class differences are as salient as gender differences in shaping social politics and policy preferences in the US.

But perhaps less well-articulated are the virtues of the US approach for women's employment. Women with good educations or training are able to take advantage of many employment opportunities, and have indeed penetrated the upper echelons of private business and the professions and masculine working-class occupations to a relatively greater degree than their Nordic or European counterparts. A vigorous private service sector has brought both employment and services to many men, women, and families, and clearly not all is of inferior quality (Esping-Andersen 1999). Moreover, the US policy regime does less than the Swedish to link women symbolically to care, precisely because there is little explicit policy around care. Saying "farewell to maternalism," has brought some advances to women in the economy and perhaps in personal life, but surely there are demonstrated needs for providing greater gender-neutral support to workers with caring responsibilities.

## **5. Other Models?**

The US model may be as hard to export as the Swedish, or, put differently, the US and Sweden are both varieties of exceptionalism. If Sweden has been unusually homogenous and solidaristic, the US is unusually diverse. In some social arenas and localities, such as San Francisco, the US is unusually tolerant, particularly of different ethnic cultural traditions and styles of living, while other parts of the country are reminiscent of the most isolated and xenophobic villages of old Europe. But both the Swedish and American models can be suggestive of the sorts of things that will have to change if others are to follow them in saying farewell to maternalism.



Where mothers' employment has been promoted, care has shifted to some extent to institutions other than the family, either public or private services.<sup>12</sup> Yet most continental European countries are notable for the "familialism" of their welfare regimes, which has meant that caregiving burdens are borne by families, mostly women; there is little market *or* state provision for young children or the elderly. This creates difficulties for women in reconciling employment and care (given that few fathers step in to bridge the gap), and labor force participation rates are considered lower than optimal by a range of commentators.<sup>13</sup> In some countries, notably where part-time jobs are few and service sector employment is scarce, most mothers drop out of formal employment, but a minority works full-time (Saraceno 1994; Esping-Andersen 1999). And this points to the other characteristic of these nations which has made increasing women's employment difficult: their labor markets are tightly regulated, and strong interest groups have opposed the expansion of non-standard employment such as part-time jobs, or service sector jobs. In other countries – the Netherlands stands out – services remain scarce, but labor markets have been liberalized sufficiently to allow the extensive growth of part-time and "flexible" employment that has been taken up by many women (Platenga 1998). Yet this pattern leaves in place a perhaps only slightly weaker version of the problems of the original breadwinner/caregiver model, especially men's and women's unequal access to economic and other resources.

In terms of politics, the continental or Christian Democratic regime faces several problems: the problem of resources, the problem of discourse or public opinion around gender, and the problem of mobilization.<sup>14</sup> Many continental European countries have transfer-heavy welfare states, which means that finding new resources to support an expansion of care services and other programs to increase women's employment would

involve difficult politics of rebalancing welfare efforts – taking money from pensions, for example. Sharing the resource of employment, especially through loosening labor market regulation, is also challenging, given political commitments to core workers' organizations. Changing gender relations is quite divisive, given significant investments by many political actors in defending housewifery and breadwinners' prerogatives. There is a sometimes subterranean connection between concerns around women's employment and concerns about fertility and the composition of national populations. However, these worries are increasingly coming to the fore in talk of "birth dearths" and below-replacement fertility, even if there is no agreed-upon solution to the problem. Finally, one can point to something of a "mobilization deficit" in those countries which most need a potent political force to push for strong policies supportive of women's employment.

The Netherlands is an interesting case precisely because it has had such strong policy supports for caregiving mothers and breadwinning men, but has moved to encourage and mandate greater employment of all citizens, including mothers. This was part of an overhaul of the welfare state and labor markets in a liberalizing direction, but occurred under political auspices also committed to gender equality (Visser and Hemerijck 1997; Bussemaker and Voet 1998). Women's employment has expanded, with the loosening of labor market regulations and the creation of more non-standard jobs, developments spearheaded by a coalition government with a strong liberal political streak. Moreover, Dutch policy goals present an emergent challenge to the view that women's employment will require extensive "defamilization" of services. Under the rubric of a "combination model," women's employment is definitely being promoted, as is men's care; however, care services have not yet been extensively developed. Instead of a greater development of public services to allow

high levels of employment, the Dutch say they will cut back on employment to allow care.

Platenga (2002) describes the logic thus:

The point of departure of the combination model is a balanced combination of paid and unpaid care work, whereas (sic) the unpaid care work is equally shared between men and women. The core concept here is that justice is done to both paid and unpaid work. Depending on the life-cycle phase, both men and women should be able to choose a personal mix of paid labour in large part-time (short full-time) jobs, part-time household production of care and part-time outsourcing of care. With some adjustments and with many concrete measures still to be developed, the combination model has been adopted by the Dutch government as the main guideline for policies in the field of labour and care....flexible, non-full-time working hours [i.e., individualised, non-standard working hours] for both men and women are deemed indispensable to reach gender equality.

In some ways, this is an attractive vision for feminists, as it calls for attention to *sharing* care work between men and women, while valorizing that work. Moreover, regulations about work time are being reformed in ways that allow flexibility from the worker's point of view. But it is far from clear that these Dutch government initiatives will actually lead toward greater gender equality, for women are still scaling back paid employment more than are men. Although Dutch men have the highest levels of part-time work in Europe, few of these part-timers are fathers of young children. Thus, Dutch policies might simply lead to an updated maternalism – if women are still the only ones who care, whose work must be scaled back to accommodate care, and whose political claims are based on care. Much will depend on the evolution of cultural practices and beliefs, but also on public policies that make the combination of part-time employment and caregiving more appealing to men as well as women.

## 6. Conclusion

Depending on each country's starting point, different strategies may be pursued to enhance women's employment, while reducing poverty and economic vulnerability and ensuring that caregiving activities are supported. Where women's employment and employment opportunities are well-established, as in North America, it is caregiving that needs attention: supporting parental leaves more generously and assisting more extensively in the provision of services. In addition, there is a need for financially supporting low-wage workers, so that they can in fact provide necessities, including high-quality care, to their families. If all are expected to be (paid) workers, it must be understood that workers have caregiving obligations which should be supported. In Scandinavia and France, where workers who are caregivers have excellent supports, but employers discriminate on the basis of caregiving responsibilities, it is women's opportunities in employment — rather than simply their participation in the labor force — that must be targeted, while assuring that services and leaves are not cut back. Here, where men are “just” workers, despite the rhetoric encouraging them to take up care, but women are carer-providers, it is women's roles as workers that must be emphasized, while continuing to make clear that men should be carers as well. In the many European systems, where women's care work in the family is supported, but their paid work is not, the systems of service provision and leave protection which allow women's employment must be built up, even as employment opportunities are expanded. Of course, identifying the way forward is not equivalent to mustering the political resources to undertake the trip.

Supporting mothers' employment presents a challenge not only politically and culturally, but also in terms of state capacities. Support for the breadwinner/caregiver family

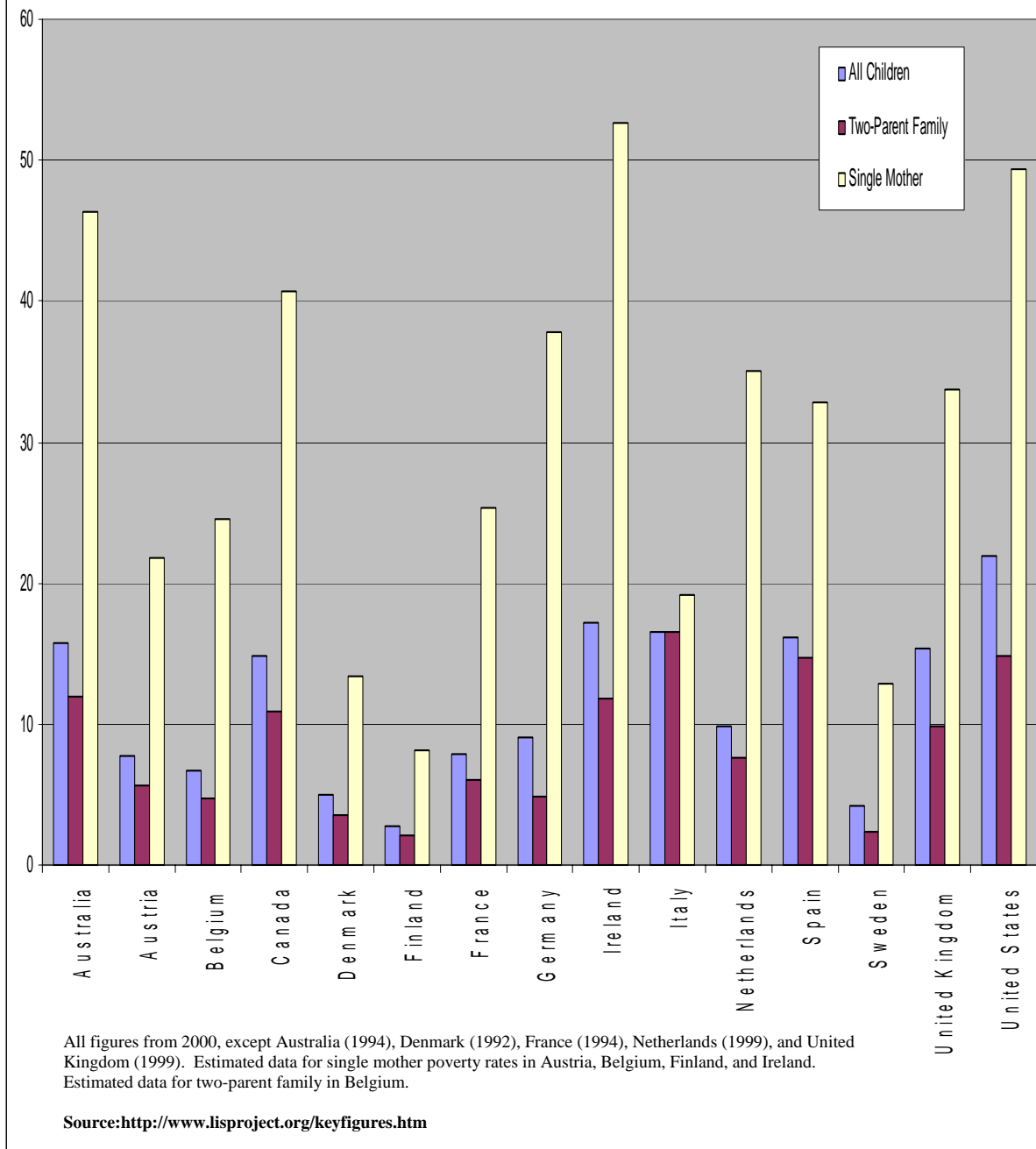
has been accomplished through “passive” means, such as cash allowances (subject to the caveat that the state’s regulatory apparatus has also been significant in policing those who deviated from dominant family models). In contrast, encouraging or mandating mothers’ employment brings the state into more “active” modes; to some extent, any employment initiative demands more than a “check in the mail” – training, rehabilitation, job creation, and the like. But “defamilializing” care so that those traditionally responsible for it can take up other activities demands more sophisticated capacities than even “rational” and “modern” states may possess.

The ultimate – though utopian -- solution to the problems of reconciliation of employment and care and women’s economic dependency in all systems depends on encouraging men’s care work to parallel women’s move into the world of paid work, and redesigning social institutions to allow adults to take part in both care and employment (or other forms of public social participation). This would call upon income security systems to insure that people can take time to care and have access to care services. And such changes would certainly put unprecedented demands on states. If women are to be employed in the new, liberalized economy – with political approval and policy support -- we still see continuing struggles around care and women’s independence and individuality. Is women’s personal (procedural) autonomy to be pursued in its own right? Or will women’s employment and fertility be subordinated to economic or demographic rationales? Can our need for care be reconciled with arrangements in which economically-dependent women in families are not available to provide it? Can we find ways to support both autonomy and care, for advantaged as well as less-advantaged women – and, if we are practical, can this be

done in the context of straitened state budgets, newly powerful neo-liberal ideologies, and globalizing labor and capital markets?

Bidding farewell to maternalism does not in itself solve the core problem it addressed: derived dependency or impaired capacities to participate as individual economic and political citizens, due to caregiving responsibilities for those who are inevitably dependent. Finding solutions to this problem will require changes in social attitudes and workplace organization to facilitate a greater willingness among men to take on unpaid household responsibilities. But it will also necessitate a shift in state policies: having pushed and prodded mothers to become workers; authorities now confront the even more daunting challenge of encouraging fathers to become caregivers.

### Table 1: Poverty Rates for Children by Family Type



	Women aged 25-52 with no children under age 15	Women aged 25-54 with one child under age 15	Women aged 25-54 with two or more children under age 15
United States	78.6	75.6	64.7
France	73.5	74.1	68.2
Germany	77.3	70.4	56.3
Netherlands	75.3	69.9	63.3
Italy	52.8	52.1	42.4
Sweden*	81.9	80.6	81.8

Taken from Table 2.4, OECD Employment Outlook 2001,  
Page 77. Figures from 2000.



**Table 3. The net, post-transfer/tax cost of childcare for a family with average income (children under age 3, mid-1990s)**

	Net cost as a percentage of average family income <sup>a</sup>
Denmark	10.9
Sweden	15.7
France <sup>b</sup>	9.4
Germany	19.4
Netherlands	23.2
Italy	39.3
United Kingdom	28.1
United States	10.6

<sup>a</sup> Average production worker income + 66 percent (wife's assumed income).

<sup>b</sup> French data are adjusted for the FF2000 per month additional subsidy for daycare. Note also that the French figures reflect the situation prior to the introduction of an income-test.

*Source:* Esping-Andersen, Gøsta. 1999. *Social Foundations of Postindustrial Economies* (New York: Oxford University Press) p. 66, Table 4.4.

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<sup>1</sup> The cultural currency of stay-at-home motherhood has helped to obscure how similar many American practices are to Scandinavian ones. The most notable example is that when mostly educated and affluent married mothers drop out of employment temporarily to care for infants and young children, this is heralded as an embrace of "traditional" values, even when it is clear that the retreat from the labor market retreat is meant to be temporary. I would argue that these withdrawals from the labor force ought to be understood as privately-financed parental leaves.

<sup>2</sup> That said, in Southern Europe, political debates feature greater reluctance to give up on housewifery, or even its defense, as, for example, the arguments of the Italian housewives' association (*Federcasalinghe*).

<sup>3</sup> Koven and Michel (1993) emphasize the ambiguous and competing meanings and uses of maternalist ideas. By their definition, maternalist thinking encompassed pro-natalists, who were more concerned with population increase than women's subordination, women who accepted the ideal of a family wage for men as the source of



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support for mothers, and feminists, who called for an independent state-supplied income for mothers (“the endowment of motherhood”). Other historians (e.g., Ladd-Taylor 1994, p.5) have preferred a more restricted definition that contrasts maternalism to feminism, particularly in terms of their positions on the desirability of the family wage and women's economic dependence (maternalists supported them, feminists opposed them). In an earlier article (Orloff 1999), I tried to map out the dimensions of gender ideology – sameness/difference, autonomy/dependence, equality/inequality, inclusion/exclusion – that characterize maternalism.

<sup>4</sup> Feminist maternalists also fought for the “endowment of motherhood” for all, conferring political recognition on mothering and providing an income which would free women from economic dependence on husbands, even as it confirmed their status as caregivers. However, the calls for endowing all motherhood did not succeed, at least partly because of men’s opposition. See Pedersen (1993) and Lake (1992) for analysis of these episodes.

<sup>5</sup> Ruggie (1988) qualified her earlier views, arguing that even given general agreement around a dual-earner model, men and women might have different gendered interests. These differences have been expressed by women’s caucuses and other bodies around questions of hours of work (the six-hour day was championed by Swedish women trade unionists, while men preferred more vacation time), affirmative action, access to jobs with authority, and the like. Such an understanding has been difficult to come by, given the predominant discourse of Swedish equality politics, which has construed gender equality as subsumed in class equality (Jenson and Mahon 1993).

<sup>6</sup> In this context, it is striking that the bulk of the “crisis of care” literature emanates from the US. Arlie Hochschild (1990), Juliet Schor (1991), Sylvia Hewlett (1991) and Theda Skocpol (2000) have all bewailed a culture of long working hours, paucity of time to care, and resulting family stress. My thanks to Jane Lewis for raising this point.

<sup>7</sup> See O’Connor, Orloff and Shaver 1999, chapter 6 for a more developed version of this argument.

<sup>8</sup> While women exhibit more generous attitudes than do men vis-à-vis social spending, they did not defend “welfare as we knew it.” Rather, public opinion data showed that their predominant sentiment was for helping those who tried to work for pay (Gilens 1999). Women’s interests were not politically united around welfare, and AFDC did not capture the pro-caregiving sentiments that many women express. Few women or women’s equality organizations mobilized to protest against welfare reform. Why did the proposed or actual elimination of AFDC not call forth popular protests similar to those that followed the 1989 Supreme Court *Webster*

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decision, when hundreds of thousands of women turned out to defend abortion rights? The Women's Committee of One Hundred, one of the few pro-welfare, feminist lobbying groups to appear when welfare was being debated, tried to mobilize under the slogan "a war against poor women is a war against all women" (Mink 1998). But it drew only hundreds in several demonstrations. In the case of abortion rights, women across the social spectrum saw an issue that engaged their interests; in the case of welfare reform, most women were not directly concerned.

<sup>9</sup> The situation of poor women is rhetorically contrasted with that of affluent women, who, unlike poor women, are said to have "choices" about employment and full-time care and to be targets of popular cultural encouragement to stay at home with their children. Of course, it is not direct state welfare policy that makes such choices possible, but rather private resources, such as affluent women's own savings or their partners' salaries. This is certainly undergirded by an unequal earnings and wealth distribution, which is not devoid of political support. Still, it would be a stretch to argue that the principal aim of sustaining these economic inequalities is to allow better-off women to stay at home with their young children.

<sup>10</sup> Consider the overall shape of the US welfare regime, with the large share of private provision for working-aged people. Before they reach retirement age, the majority of women, like most men, must rely on employer-provided or privately-financed services and benefits -- or do without. This includes the vast majority of single mothers, 84 percent of whom were in the labor force in 1997 (Meyer and Rosenbaum 1998). Women, particularly mothers of young children, sometimes depend at least partially on male partners' income, but labor force participation has become the norm for women as well as men. In 2004, among mothers of children aged six through seventeen, 74 percent of married women were in the labor force, almost the same level as for single mothers, with 77 percent (US Bureau of Labor Statistics, p.8). Even among mothers of children under age one, in 2003, half of married women were in the labor force, and 45 percent of other mothers (US Bureau of Labor Statistics, p.10).

<sup>11</sup> I make this argument at greater length in Orloff 2001.

<sup>12</sup> This phenomenon has been called "defamilization" by various analysts, but this usage – which focuses on the locus of care – may obscure its initial feminist usage to get at gendered questions about power and dependency within families.

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<sup>13</sup> While almost all European countries provide care for children from ages 3 to 6 in the course of fulfilling an educational mission, care for children under the age of 3, essential for mothers' employment, is much less developed outside the Nordic countries and France. Care for school-aged children is de facto provided by elementary schools, but there is less provision for after-school hours, and school days in many continental European countries are irregular.

<sup>14</sup> Thanks to Maurizio Ferrara for suggestions on these points.