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Equality and Family Policy in International Perspective: Toward a Feminist Theory of the State

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This three country comparison uses case studies of family policy in Britain, Canada and the US to explain how governments utilize family policies to maintain patriarchal systems and to promote labor force and economic goals. The paper examines how equality/difference theories are applied in family policy. Propositions are developed in order to provide a basis for developing new approaches to family policy based on gender equality.

In the international social welfare field, considerable scholarship has emerged on comparative family policy (i.e., Kamerman and Kahn, 1978), the connection between women/feminism and social policy/welfare (Gelb, 1989; Maclean & Groves, 1991), and the feminist critique of national social welfare policies (i.e., Gordon, 1990; Holter, 1984; Miller, 1990, and Nijeholt, 1991). What is neglected, however, is international, comparative scholarship aimed at developing general theories about why and how social policy is used by states to reinforce patriarchy. This paper addresses this need by presenting a three country comparison of family policy using case studies of Britain, Canada and the US.

Introduction

Feminist theories of social welfare generally posit a "white masculine world view" in which men have "power over" women and children and the economically dependent status of women in their roles as wives and mothers is written into social policy. Social policy is thus seen as a mechanism for the enforcement of gender-based values and beliefs (Dale and Foster, 1986).

Efforts by Western feminist theorists to understand the State's interest in controlling women and reinforcing traditional family

values have focused on examining the connection between a particular model of production (capitalism) and the functioning of the family as the site of the production of future workers and warriors needed to serve the interests of capitalism. However, recent work has demonstrated that the mode of production is not the critical factor. At least two comparative studies have documented the role family policy plays in maintaining patriarchal systems. Based on a study of six countries (US, Canada, Britain, Sweden, the Soviet Union, and China) Dominelli (1991, 199–200) concluded that, while variations exist, family policy in both capitalist and socialist systems share key features, including the endorsement of age, race, gender, and sexual orientation divisions; the subordination of women's interests to those of men, children, and the economy; the reinforcement of gender-based inequality in both social and domestic production; the formulation of policies for women, without involving women; and limitation of efforts to improve women's position.

In a four-country comparative study of Sweden, East Germany, West Germany, and the US (three of which have constitutional guarantees of equality between the sexes), Spakes (1995) notes the consistent use of family policy to maintain patriarchal systems, regardless of the mode of production, and attributes variations in national family policies to the labor needs of the political/economic system; alternatives available for meeting those needs; the political notion of "equality" and "equal result" promoted by the state; the concept of "equal opportunity" promoted by the state, and attitudes toward gender, motherhood, and "equality/difference theories."

Both Dominelli and Spakes see social policy as serving the interests of economic policy, but Dominelli argues that the varying priorities given to women's issues and the level of women's organizational activity are important factors in explaining the variation among family policies. Spakes, on the other hand, argues that given the lack of agreement on what constitutes "equality" and how it should be achieved, both in feminist theory and in other forms of discourse, states have been able to co-opt equality theories, establish the parameters of the debate, and set limits to what can be achieved. Spakes does not see that feminist movements have had substantial impact on the development of social

policies, unless the goals have happened to coincide with other goals of the state.

"Equality" is conceptualized here in terms of two major components: formal equality, equality of formal rights between men and women, and material equality, which is related to equal access to welfare and opportunities (Bussemaker, 1991). This dual concept arises "out of the contradictions of Keynesian welfare policies, which on the one hand, harbored an official family oriented political program, but on the other hand, promised individual work and welfare for every "citizen" (Sevenhuijsen, 1986, 334). In modern, industrialized welfare states, each of these inter-related concepts provide focal points, to a greater or lesser extent, for social policy and "feminist" political activities.

While the concept of equality before the law is generally accepted, there are varying theories regarding how gender differences affect the attainment of both formal and material equality. Feminist equality theorists focus on the "sameness/difference" debate, in which three basic positions have emerged. One position is that "equality" implies equity or impartiality. Since there are no fundamental differences between men and women, laws and social policies should be "gender-blind" or "gender neutral," providing the same benefits, rights, and responsibilities to all citizens with no distinctions (MacKinnon, 1987). Recent efforts to gender-neutralize policies once directed only to men in their roles as family heads and primary wage earners (Unemployment Compensation and Social Security in the US, for example) are based on theories of impartial treatment.

A second position is that since people are not identically situated, equality does not mean treating people identically, but rather requires recognition and validation of differences. Women are inherently different from men in reproductive and nurturing responsibilities, which gives women a separate sphere of influence critical to society, but traditionally undervalued. Equality requires protection and support for women in their reproductive role equal to the level of protection and support accorded to men in their productive role. This is the argument used in the 1920s by feminists who sought protective labor legislation that recognized women's separateness and difference, and more recently for homemakers' and dependent care allowances.

A third position argues that differences must be taken into account and compensated, whether they are “naturally occurring” or caused by past discrimination. While women and men may be fundamentally the same, reproductive responsibilities have put women at a disadvantage. Some special privileges or supports are necessary to compensate and put women on an equal, competitive footing with men, especially in the workforce (i.e., paid maternity leave and child care).

Social policies based on these theories of equality can seek to either reinforce or to reorder private as well as public institutions (i.e., the family and the church, as well as the workplace). Thus, the welfare system can be used to maintain difference or to promote a particular vision of equality in the society. Understanding how these basic “positions” on equality have affected social/family policy in any particular country is extremely difficult, however. Not only have all these theories been used at one time or another, but often all are simultaneously used to provide arguments in favor of the same policy in order to appeal to different constituencies.

There are also different concepts of the state’s responsibility in promoting formal equality, either by ensuring *equality of opportunity* or *equality of result*. Equality of opportunity implies that all individuals are equal at birth and should have equal access to the same opportunities. The assumption is that equality of opportunity will, over time, produce equality of result, but it is not guaranteed. How far a state goes to ensure equality of opportunity depends on prevailing notions of what equity and fairness require. Fairness might require only that people be given the same chances, and then individual circumstances, personal choices and other factors mitigate the results. Alternatively, fairness might require that individual circumstances and personal factors be equalized to the fullest extent possible through state intervention. Equality of result implies the achievement of total equity in all aspects of social life. In general, governments have focused on equal opportunity and have directed both rhetoric and actions away from policies aimed at equality of result.

Family Policy

As Kamerman & Kahn (1978) point out, the term “family policy” has had multiple definitions. They use family policy to

refer to "the extent to which family well-being (whatever the components) is employed as an outcome criterion for assessing policies or as a source of decision rules for developing options and making choices," and refer further to a "cluster of policies, measures, benefits, and so forth which are directed at the family" (Kamerman and Kahn, 1978, 7). The European Commission (EC) defines family policy as "policy measures geared at influencing families, including actions by bodies other than central government to assist families" (Dumon, 1991, 9) and excludes policies not aimed directly at families. A broader definition suggested by Hantrais (1994,145) takes into account the unintended outcomes of policies for families, describing family policy as "a range of measures and objectives which policy makers pursue in order to ensure the effectiveness of the family as a social institution."

While definitions vary, a common theme is intent on the part of the state to "support" or "influence" families. A key word is *intent*, which relates to the debate regarding which countries do and do not have family policy. If a targeted, planned set of policies and programs is required, then it can be argued that the US is the only Western country without a national family policy, though Canada and Britain may also fall into that category. Alternatively, all countries may have national family policies because they all have social policies that affect families. Certainly, all countries have one or more of the programs usually considered to be important elements of family policy: family allowances, child benefits or child tax credits; maternal and parental leave, child care, and housing.

Some family policies are certainly more comprehensive, clearly articulated, and intentional than others. Differences are often explained in terms of variations between countries on cultural values and traditions (i.e., the degree to which familism and community are valued over individualism.) The degree of "conservative" as opposed to "liberal" thinking on social issues is also cited as a deciding factor (Bystdzienski, 1993). Still others identify different types of welfare models and see family policy as reflecting one of those models (i.e., Esping-Anderson (1991). None of these explanations is sufficient, as the following analysis will show.

The "starting point" for comparative analysis is the early 1940s, and the introduction of the British Beveridge plan, which greatly influenced both Canadian and US policy. Income security,

maternity leave, and child care policy are considered, since these are critical elements of any family policy. Each nation's position on equality for women is also reviewed.

Britain

British family policy must be seen in the context of its membership in the European Community since 1973. Since that time, it has been affected by pressure from the EC to comply with its family policy directives. The historical background of Britain's family policy is, however, close to that of the US and Canada.

The Beveridge Report is often cited as the major influence on family policy in Britain. Armed with a new post-Depression era understanding of the risks and consequences of a *laissez-faire* approach to economic systems, many countries reconsidered their approach to government intervention in the marketplace. Beveridge's plan was based upon several assumptions: that low wages and oppressive working conditions of the early industrialized period were no longer an issue; that poverty was limited to small sectors of the population for whom employment was a problem; and that temporary unemployment could be addressed through insurance schemes paid for by workers. Otherwise, families would be adequately supported by the wages of the male breadwinner (Benenson, 1991). The state has an obligation to promote full employment; however, some will remain chronically unemployable: the elderly, disabled, sick, and housewives. The state has some responsibility to provide for their welfare.

These assumptions are based upon a patriarchal view of the family that stresses women's role in the family as caretaker/homemaker, men's role as provider, women's dependency on men or on the state in the absence of the male. A National Insurance Act was passed in 1944 to establish a national assistance program, and a Family Allowance Act followed in 1945. The Family Allowance Act reflected concern over declining fertility and predictions that by the year 2000, the population of England and Wales would be reduced to that of London (Lewis, 1992). Britain joined other post-war European countries in enacting measures intended to encourage women to produce larger families.

(Feminism was blamed for the declining birth rate, since it encouraged women's paid employment and weakened male domination in the family.)

Supporters of a Family Allowance noted women's unpaid labor in the home, legal status, vulnerable position, and the importance of securing an income for children in the event that the male breadwinner could not provide. Rather than making paid employment easier, the focus was on facilitating women's withdrawal from the labor force (Marlow, 1991). This allowance is paid to mothers, regardless of marital status, for any child under 16 or until 19 when pursuing studies or training. Maternity, widowhood and dependency grants were added in 1946, (though maternity grants were abolished in 1987 and replaced by a means tested lump sum payment for low income families.) A family credit, (the "family income supplement" introduced in 1971) targets low income, working parents who work at least 24 hours a week.

Given the assumptions of the British welfare system, it is not surprising that Britain has only reluctantly developed maternity leave benefits for working women. This is an area in which pressure from the European Community to conform to its policy of providing more generous provisions has allowed for limited expansion. The EPCoA (Employee Protection (Consolidation) Act of 1978) provides maternity leave protection; however, eligibility requirements are complex. Full time employees who have worked for the same employer for two years prior to pregnancy (5 years for part-time) are allowed an absence of 40 weeks, and women may stop work 11 weeks before the birth. They receive 90% of their earnings for six weeks, then a small flat rate amount. Although reinstatement in the same or an equivalent job is provided if the woman returns to work within 29 weeks, when women stop work, the employment contract terminates, ending other employee benefits (Hantrais, 1990; Hodgson, 1993). Women who worked 6 months into the 15th week of pregnancy and earned a level of income sufficient to make contributions to the National Insurance program are eligible for Statutory Maternity Pay (a small flat rate amount) for 18 weeks. With low benefits, limited eligibility, and a confusing system, many women in lower level positions do not take the leave (McRae, 1991; Stoiber, 1989).

Although reinstatement is a right stipulated in the Council of Europe Charter, Britain has the most restrictive reinstatement rights. Employers need not provide the same job, and employers with fewer than 5 employees are exempted. Women are required to submit three written notifications of the intent to return to work. Britain has no family leave to care for a sick child and no statutory paternity leave.

In terms of child care, a British analyst notes, "The rearing of children puts considerable demands on a community; without the family, it is unlikely that the economic structure of western societies, as presently organized, could tolerate them" (Eekelaer, 1984, 205). Thus, the British state sees its commitment as education, which begins at 5. Care for younger children is best provided by mothers, and child care is sporadic. The state provides a small amount of public care targeted for special needs children, but "child-minders," unlicensed in-home care providers, give the majority of child care. For children under 2, the state provides only 2% of public care (Hantrais, 1990.) In 1990, the government extended tax relief for child care facilities situated at the workplace (Dumon, 1991, 117). The European Community has pressured Britain to provide adequate child care, but this has been resisted as unwarranted interference in family responsibilities.

Women's position in the labor force was addressed in the early 1900's in the same way it was addressed in other developing industrialized nations: by passing protective legislation that excluded women from certain occupations and certain shifts of work. Arguments were also made for a minimum wage to raise men's wages so that women would not have to work (Lewis & Davies, 1991). During the 1960s and 1970s, equality feminists argued that protective legislation should be eliminated. The Sex Discrimination Act of 1975 was passed, prohibiting direct or indirect discrimination in employment and requiring equal opportunity in the workforce. The burden of proof of discrimination was on the victim; numerous exceptions were provided to employers; compensation to victims who prevailed was provided in money, but not a job; and limits on women's employment for health and safety reasons were allowed to stand. An Equal Pay Act was passed in 1970 and revised in 1976, due to pressure from the EC. The new act gave women the right to equal pay for

"work of the same or broadly similar nature." The burden of proof remained on women, with a cumbersome appeal process. After the European Court of Justice struck down the act as not conforming to their definition of "work of equal value" (Ruggie, 1984), the Sex Discrimination Act of 1986 abolished all restrictions on women's work and hours of work (Lewis and Davies, 1991).

British family policy uses difference theory as a basis for family labor market policies targeted at keeping women in the home as caregivers. Support for working women is minimal. Family income benefits are tied to employment status; maternity benefits are limited and contingent on firm commitment to the labor force. While equal treatment in the workplace is required, enforcement is difficult, and the policies of the workplace are substantially at odds with social policies. It is considered "morally wrong" for the British state to intervene in families and influence personal decisions. Intervention is justified only to protect children in time of need. Britain resists EC pressure to adopt its directives on part time work, parental and family leave, and temporary work on the grounds that these matters are best dealt with between employer and employee (Hantrais, 1990).

Canada

As a former British province, Canada developed an economic and family policy system that reflects British thinking, as well as US influence. However, Canada's central government in Ottawa has historically been much weaker, with much social welfare policy delegated by constitution to the provinces (Pal, 1987a).

Canada experienced the same Depression-era difficulties as Britain and the US, adopted similar "make work" programs, and was helped out of the Depression by World War II. Bakan and Stasiulis (1994) also document the concern in Canada (pre-World War II) for eugenic theories and notions of Anglo Saxon superiority, which influenced social policy.

The idea of a social insurance program based on worker contributions came to Canada via Roosevelt's New Deal. The Canadian government subsequently adopted similar provisions (Bureau, Lippel and Lemarche, 1986). The court declared this effort unconstitutional, and World War II subsequently restored economic

prosperity. The value of social insurance continued to be debated, however, as concern was raised over how to keep consumer spending up and the economy growing after the war. In Canada, the Unemployment Insurance Act passed in 1941, during a period of relative economic prosperity. The theory was that money invested in the system during high growth years could be used in case of post-war economic downturn to keep spending up. In 1944, a universal Family Allowance was implemented to promote buying power among families while encouraging women to leave the labor force. A universal approach was used in order to spread the investment potential throughout the country (Armstrong, & Armstrong, 1988; Bureau, Lippel & Lemarche, 1986).

During the 1960s, the US War on Poverty also stimulated Canadian thinking. How to keep wages low to promote full employment and still give people enough to live on was the question, and Canadians considered two choices: develop some type of targeted assistance plan (like AFDC in the US) or expand their unemployment insurance plan, while avoiding a guaranteed minimum income. In 1966 the Canada Assistance Plan was passed to encourage the provinces (through cost sharing) to provide for all unemployed families no matter what the cause (Bureau, Lippel & Lemarche, 1986). In 1971, Canada passed a new Unemployment Insurance Act to expand coverage by lowering the number of hours per week required for coverage. Finally, in 1978 a child tax credit was added for below-average income families in order to redistribute income (Johnson, 1987b).

The Canadian government believed it was possible to control the workforce and economy to produce full employment, and insurance programs could keep enough money in the economy during downward cycles to restore growth. Supplemental benefits given to workers would enable them to support families, while keeping the cost of labor down. The actual implementation of this approach resulted in serious budget deficits during recessions. Consequently, the government has moved to reduce the high costs. Family allowances were "reduced," first in amount and subsequently by indexing benefits to retarget the money to families earning lower incomes (Johnson, 1987b). General Assistance for the unemployable is controlled at the provincial level, and most provinces distinguish between employable and unemployable recipients. It is income-tested and covers persons who are blind

or disabled, and mothers with dependent children. Benefit levels vary across provinces (Banting, 1987).

Paid maternity leave was implemented in the Unemployment Insurance Act of 1971, which makes it clear that this is an employment policy (Girard, 1994). Canada provides 17 weeks of paid maternity leave.

In 1987 Canada implemented a national child care plan allowing substantial tax deductions for children in daycare. Although criticized heavily for its market bias and regressiveness, it was based on the assumption that parents as consumers were the best judges of appropriate care, without need for further regulation or assistance (Lightman, 1991). The legislation provided funds for research and special initiatives, as well as subsidies for building new daycare centers (Bystdzienski, 1993).

In Canada, the federal government has jurisdiction over federal departments and agencies as well as its own corporations, but the provincial legislation covers the remaining 89% of the labor force (Wilson, 1991, 104). Equal pay legislation was introduced as equal pay for equal or "substantially similar" work, but the International Labor Organization (ILO) has been influential in trying to get this revised to "equal pay for work of equal value." An Employment Equity Act was passed in 1988. It requires that companies doing business with the federal government and companies with 100 or more employees identify and eliminate discriminatory employment practices. The Constitution Act of 1982 contains a section known as the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which guarantees women's equality.

Canadian family policy reflects primarily the desire of the government to regulate the economy and promote full employment. The implicit assumption regarding the separate sphere of responsibility for women is present, but not so explicitly as in British family policy. Canadian policy neither actively impedes nor actively supports women's participation in the labor force. It has tended to follow social change, as is the case with the child care legislation.

United States

US family policy also reflects some of the basic assumptions of the Beveridge report. Implementation in the US reflects that

country's slightly different social and economic circumstances. As in both Britain and Canada, the US approached its Depression era economic problems through a combination of Unemployment Insurance and Public Assistance. Using the same assumptions of women's dependent status and primary role in the home, eligibility for Unemployment Insurance was based on the primary wage earner's strong attachment to the labor force, with benefits for the wife and children contingent on his earnings record (Pearce, 1985), while support for single mothers and their children, and persons who are blind or disabled was provided through means tested general assistance programs. Policy concentrated on providing a guaranteed minimum "family" wage for men and protective labor legislation for women forced by circumstance to work. Since it was assumed that the economy could accommodate all who wished to work, joblessness was seen as a result of personal choice or personal failure. A reasonable amount of unemployment was expected and tolerated; consequently, full employment was never made a policy goal.

The 1960s War on Poverty changed the government's position on its proper relationship to industry. Market forces alone were deemed insufficient; job training, education, affirmative action laws, and federal employment programs were needed in order to promote equality and put everyone to work. The problem of under-employment for certain groups, particularly ethnic minorities and poor women, was framed as the lack of equal opportunity. Work and training would bring both groups into the labor force. Poor women would also be helped with federally subsidized day care, food, and housing programs, as well as social services designed to attack the multiple problems that prevented them from gaining access. The US embarked on a strategy of government-corporate partnership in providing opportunities for women and minorities to work. The government provided training, family/employment supports, and tax incentives to corporations and took many women and minorities into federal employment.

The trends that set the stage for comprehensive family policy based on an equality approach were reversed by a major recession and a change to conservative leadership. The government retreated from its role as partner to the private sector and balancing

force between the corporate (public) and family (private) sectors. It retreated from the idea that the public shares responsibility for families and returned to the notions of family privacy and individual/family responsibility.

The two tier system of benefits in the US combines an insurance approach (Unemployment Insurance and Social Security) with welfare benefits (Aid to Families with Dependent Children -AFDC; Supplemental Security Income) (Spakes, 1992). Tier 1 benefits are based on full-time, continued attachment to the labor force (especially by the husband), with benefits guaranteed as a right and reflect what Abramovitz (1988) calls "the home-maker ethic." Tier 2 benefits are significantly lower. The means tested AFDC program provides the lowest level of benefits of all the federal programs. Designed initially to support women in the caretaking function, benefits have been kept at a minimal level in order to promote a work incentive. "Workfare" is being expanded, reflecting a strong bias that mothers of low income children should no longer be supported as caregivers.

The US does not provide statutory maternity benefits but treats childbirth as a disability and requires that coverage in the same way employers cover any other disability. Under the Pregnancy Discrimination Act, if employers provide health insurance and disability coverage, they are required to include pregnancy in their policies. It is estimated that less than 40% of working women are eligible for a paid six to eight week leave for pregnancy disability (Ford Foundation, 1989).

The Family and Medical Leave Law (1993) requires employers with 50 or more employees to provide up to 12 weeks of unpaid leave (or paid leave if earned) for eligible employees working in large firms. Since small employers are exempt and leave is generally unpaid, the legislation has been criticized as providing very little help for the majority of women—particularly those who earn the least.

The US child care system is "a patchwork of parents' contributions, various types of employer assistance, government subsidies, and increasingly, the public schools" (Ford Foundation, 1989, p. 22). Federally subsidized child care is targeted at low income families and for children in abusive situations. In addition, an income tax deduction is provided for child care, and the

decision whether to use private, center-based care or in-home care is left to the family. Employer provided programs and employer subsidies are available in some large companies. As in Britain and Canada, it is assumed that the family is the best judge of quality care, and the private sector is the best place to provide it.

An Equal Pay Act was passed by Congress in 1963 and requires "equal pay for equal work." It has never been expanded to include work of equal value. Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act prohibits employment discrimination on the basis of sex (as well as race, religion, color, and national origin). Title VII also granted the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) the right to sue private sector respondents. In 1972, equal employment policy was strengthened and expanded, and equal opportunity in education became federal policy for the first time (Beller, 1982). This approach is directed toward addressing both the problem of access to the employment sector and equal opportunity within it. An Equal Rights Amendment to the Constitution was never approved by the states.

The US uses a two tiered approach to family policy in which insurance benefits for women are tied to the attachment of a wage earner (most often, the husband) to the labor force. Lower tier benefits are provided for low income, unemployed women with children. The US is steadily enacting the expectation that low income mothers should work, and the government's responsibility is to provide sufficient child care to support that goal. This policy reflects a great degree of ambivalence toward women's roles, holding simultaneously to the notion that some (poor) mothers must work, while others (those firmly connected to the labor force through their spouse's employment) should be able to stay home. Rhetoric generally discourages additional government intervention as "interference" in family responsibilities, and the private sector is seen as the best place for families to have their needs met.

Conclusion

The following propositions are offered as a basis for a theoretical understanding of how and why governments control the equality debate in the construction of family policy.

1. Family policy is not the tool for women's emancipation that some liberal feminists believe it to be.
2. While couched in the rhetoric of family values and strengthening families, family policy is, in fact, labor market policy.
3. The type of family policy a country has is directly related to: the availability of other sources besides women to meet the needs of an expanding labor force (i.e., immigration); the nation's stated commitment to gender equality; its use of equality/difference theory in its approach to both social policy and labor force equality.
 - When the goal is to entice women into the labor force, equality theory is stressed.
 - When the goal is to keep women out of the labor force, difference theory is stressed.
 - When there is no particular goal in either direction, family policy is less well developed and more inconsistent, and is argued on the basis of both equality and difference theories.
4. Countries often simultaneously hold belief in gender equality and a desire to regulate the labor force in order to meet the needs of the economic sector (however it is constructed). Consequently states must appear to pursue equality while simultaneously using economic and social policy to reinforce inequality in the workforce. Difference theory provides a convenient rationale.
5. A strong economy, expanding labor force, and low immigration are necessary conditions for the development of family policy that supports women's integration into the labor force.

At the present time, Free Trade Agreements are having tremendous impact on world economic and social policies (Hart, 1994). These trade agreements may have an equalizing effect on family policies because generous family policies offset the cost of labor by keeping wages artificially low. It is increasingly being recognized that this gives some countries "unfair" advantage in a global free market. Rather than expanding family policy, pressure will be exerted by trade negotiators to cut back. The rhetoric of family, community, and individual responsibility has already been successfully manipulated by all three governments, in the

context of severe budget deficits, to cut back on family supports (Abbott & Wallace, 1989; Pall, 1987b; Pierson, 1994). This trend could become even more pronounced.

In the past, supporting the economy has been the primary goal of family policies, and that has required the promotion of some inequalities in society. Gender based inequality has been an especially convenient one to use because it is so imbedded in family and social values. Social policy based on difference theory is used to both manage and maintain (at varying levels) these differences. It is clear that modifying a nation's family policy with small policy changes (i.e., parental/medical leave policies) may help a few women, especially those in privileged positions, but will do little to address fundamental equality.

Addressing gender equality through family policy would require a comprehensive plan aimed at equality of result (as well as equality of opportunity) in the social policy sphere as well as the legal and economic spheres. This, however, would require a total rethinking of how government relates to people who are not actively and consistently in the labor force. Such an approach might incorporate, for example, some of the strategies derived from the War on Poverty in the US.

As the economic situation changes, previous theories on the appropriate role of the state in relation to families and the economy will increasingly be seen as inadequate. As Emmerij (1994) points out, nobody really believes the old solutions will be effective. Increasingly, policy analysts are calling for intergovernmental cooperation and creative approaches to redesign systems based on out-dated assumptions. A feminist theory of the state and increased understanding of how the state promotes gender equality or inequality through family policy could significantly impact social policy approaches that will be designed for the post-industrial era. This paper offers the barest start toward the development of such an approach.

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