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Restructuring Family Policies: Convergences and Divergences.

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Book Notes

Maureen Baker. *Restructuring Family Policies: Convergences and Divergences*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006. \$65.00 hardcover, \$29.95 papercover.

If *convergence* describes two different things coming together and *divergence* describes similar things moving apart, then Maureen Baker's book on the restructuring of family policy is right on target. It is written at a unique time in history when the social construction of the family and resulting policy response takes simultaneously convergent and divergent forms, such as policies that support gay marriage and competing policies that reward heterosexual marriage.

Maureen Baker describes and analyzes how family policies are changing in Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries, which include Western European Countries, the United States, Australia, New Zealand and Japan. This choice was made based on the availability of data and well-developed family policies in these nations. Admittedly, this is a formidable task, as the countries vary considerably not only in how family is defined, but in the existence, coverage, extent and future of family policies. Despite this challenge, Baker asserts that there are common influences affecting the trajectory of family policy, and that complex internal national pressures affect these influences. Changing demographics, categorization in a liberal or conservative welfare state, and growing internationalization are evident and are compounded by religious, cultural, civil rights, lobbying and other pressures internal to the country. Part of the central thesis is that, despite the country, there are differences between discourse and actual policy change, specifically that policy makers are often more influenced by cultural values than by actual demographic data. This results in both the

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strengthening and erosion of the same family policies in different countries. Baker attributes demographic changes in the family to concrete economic and political processes, such as the market's effect on families. Under this lens, trends in issues such as reproductive health, the relationship between work, gender and parenthood, child welfare, housing and income maintenance, divorce and international migration are analyzed.

The book has a clearly articulated thesis coupled with solid definitions of concepts that tend to be taken for granted in policy literature, such as family, family policy, and globalization. Baker's cogent writing style provides the reader with a clear roadmap woven seamlessly and consistently through each chapter. It is a refreshing approach to such an intricate subject. Baker herself cautions that the book runs the risk of overgeneralizing when discussing trends in family policy, and she is correct. Because the variation between countries is sometimes so vast, it is difficult to clearly track patterns and relationships. For example, when addressing work and family issues, paid maternity leave ranges from fifty weeks in Canada to none in the U.S. or Australia. *Restructuring Family Policies* tackles a complex topic without getting tangled up in detail and provides a guide for examining the newest incarnations of family policy from a multi-country perspective.

Mary Ager, University of California, Berkeley

Roberta Rehner Iverson and Annie Laurie Armstrong. *Jobs Aren't Enough: Towards a New Economic Mobility for Low-Income Families*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2006. \$74.50 hardcover, \$26.95 papercover.

As is widely known, the numbers of families receiving income support under the AFDC program has fallen dramatically since the new TANF program was introduced in 1996. Although it is frequently claimed that former welfare clients are now "off welfare" and working and living the American dream, numerous studies have shown that this is not the