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Ideology, family policy and gender economic inequality: Different models, different tradeoffs

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Luxembourg Income Study Working Paper Series

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**Ideology, Family Policy and Gender Economic Inequality:
Different Models, Different Tradeoffs**

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Abstract

This paper focuses on cross-national differences in patterns of gender economic inequality, revealing their affinity to both welfare state policies and prevailing conceptions of gender equality. By mapping multiple aspects of inequality and assembling them into distinctive profiles, the paper shows that each pattern of state intervention is accompanied by an uneven record of achievements and failures in promoting gender equality. These tradeoffs can best be understood by placing them in the ideological contexts in which gender-related policies are embedded. Empirical illustrations are provided for four countries - Sweden, the USA, Germany and Italy - in each of which both the welfare state and the pattern of gender stratification are qualitatively distinct. Data are presented on labor force participation, women's placement in the occupational and wage hierarchies, their economic wellbeing, and their autonomy from male partners.

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The role of the state in reproducing gender stratification has been central to feminist discussions of the welfare state. In parallel, extensive empirical research has demonstrated the impact of public policy on the massive entrance of women into the labor market over the last half century. Orloff (2006) has recently pointed out that this process of “farewells to maternalism” has taken different forms in different societies. This variability is the subject of the current paper, which seeks to identify configurations of gender inequality and to reveal their affinity to both welfare state policies and prevailing gender ideologies.

The paper shows that each of the typical patterns of state intervention is accompanied by an uneven record of achievements and failures in promoting different aspects of gender economic equality. These achievements and failures are rooted in divergent understandings and aspirations concerning gender in/equality. Thus, country-specific tradeoffs can best be understood by attending to the multiple dimensions of gender economic inequality, and by taking account of the diverse ideological contexts in which policies that impact on gender equality are embedded.

The article begins by identifying the different understandings of gender equality – based on either similarity or difference – which, throughout the history of welfare states, have served as the basis for demands for social protection for women. These different conceptions of gender equality are linked to the multi-dimensional configurations of gender economic inequality that characterize different welfare regimes. Empirical evidences for the theoretical arguments are provided for four countries – Sweden, the USA, Germany and Italy. These four cases are illustrative of the diversity captured by Esping-Andersen's three

welfare regimes, which represent distinct configurations of both welfare states and gender stratification (Esping-Andersen 1990; 1999). Data are presented on labor force participation, women's placement in the occupational and wage hierarchies, their economic wellbeing, and their autonomy from male partners.

The findings reinforce the assertion that state interventions, especially the ways in which public policies encourage or repress women's entry to the labor market, have a crucial bearing on the nature of gender stratification in employment and in society at large. Moreover, mapping multiple aspects of inequality and assembling them into distinctive profiles reveals the tradeoffs inherent in different policy regimes. These findings pave the way to a discussion which links broad cross-national differences in outcomes to parallel differences in public policies and prevailing gender ideologies.

Equality between women and men: similarity versus difference

Advocates of gender equality are committed to a variety of different ideals. Nevertheless, demands to empower women by allowing them to set up an independent household, calls for an equal division of labor between spouses and the protection of women's economic independence, are among the requirements consistently voiced as conditions for the attainment of equality between women and men (see, for instance, Fraser 1994; Hernes 1987; O'Connor 1996; Orloff 1993). The economic and social importance of the labor market has led both mainstream and feminist researchers to see women's participation in it as a principal and essential condition for meeting those demands.

Because labor market attainments are the most important determinant of life chances, the gendered division of labor between breadwinner and housewife not only makes women economically dependent on their spouses in the immediate present, but also prevents their

equal access to social rights that are tied to paid labor in the long term (Orloff 2002; Sainsbury 1993; 1996). Moreover, because employment is the main source of self-realization and social status as well as income and social protection, labor market activity has become a necessary condition for equality in contemporary societies.

In the liberal approach to gender equality, this outlook is taken to its extreme. As an economic ideology, liberalism regards paid work in a free market as properly being the almost exclusive determinant of individual life chances. It follows that paid employment is not only a necessary, but in most cases also a sufficient condition for attaining economic equality between men and women. The United States is the closest empirical approximation to a political economy in which the state supports an uninhibited market that is not only the dominant mechanism for service provision, but also the primary source of social protection. Consequently, care services that facilitate women's employment, such as daycare, are mostly purchased in the market, with price determining quality. Likewise, paid maternity leave is not provided universally by the state, but rather is conditional on each mother's terms of employment (Gornick and Meyers 2003; Kamerman and Gatenio 2002; OECD 2005). The state takes no practical responsibility for the special needs of women as childbearers and mothers. In the liberal belief that there is no better alternative to the labor market for attaining economic independence, women, like men, are seen as potential earners, and the grounds for achieving gender equality rest clearly on similarity rather than difference.

Although participation in the labor market is seen as a choice made privately by the individual, rather than as a public responsibility, the liberal state is committed to enabling the market to work efficiently and without interference. Accordingly, it seeks to remove obstacles by legislating against discrimination, with the aim of ensuring equal competition for jobs and salaries. In keeping with this ideology, liberal-feminist calls for gender equality

are based on women's status as workers rather than as mothers, and are aimed at guaranteeing the interests of working women by ensuring equality of access and equivalent salaries (Goldberg and Ureman 1990), or by offering tax credits (Orloff 2006). Adopting the terminology proposed by Chang (2000), the liberal regime is characterized by formal egalitarianism, rather than the substantive egalitarianism that characterizes settings in which the state actively intervenes in the stratification process by providing public services and cash transfers.

A contradictory opinion to the liberal notion of equality of access is based on the notion of differences. This view rejects the idea that women must compete with men in the labor market in order to attain equal rights and social recognition, and bases its demands for equality on women's status as mothers and caregivers. As part of this ideology, maternalist values of motherhood, giving and caring for others are extolled (Koven and Michel 1993). Researchers in this stream criticize the linkage of basic social rights – such as the right to health, a pension, and a decent living – to active participation in the labor market, and argue that such a position makes equal rights between men and women conditional on women's efforts to be like men, that is, to compete with men “on their terms”. Instead of making claims for equality as “equals”, women should aim for “equality in difference”, whereby traditionally feminine activities associated with caring would provide housewives with the same rights as a wage-earner, and would afford social recognition and esteem. A key claim is that if caregiving were to accrue social and economic rewards, this would improve the chances that both sexes would turn to both types of work (Fraser 1994; Koven and Michel 1993).

From this standpoint, tying social rights to motherhood is an alternative mechanism for economically empowering women, one that is not conditional on their employment status.

Translated to existing family policies, the ideology of difference legitimates financial support to mothers in preference to employment-supportive policies. Subsidies for mother-carers have been adopted mainly in the conservative welfare states of continental and southern Europe. Even in the 1980s and 1990s, in the wake of the dramatic rise in women's education and the weakening of the single-earner model throughout Europe, daycare services for infants remained extremely limited in conservative states. Instead, some of them, such as Austria, Germany, Italy, France, and Belgium, have begun to provide child-allowances that encourage women to stay at home with infants for the first few years of their lives (Kammerman 2000).

Although economic support for non-working mothers may have the potential to advance women's economic independence, in practice their purpose was never meant to do so. In contrast to income-related benefits, cash benefits for mothers that are unrelated to employment are provided on a flat-rate basis and at best they barely reach a third of the average wage, (Ferrarini 2003; OECD 2005). Such limited allowances are insufficient to independently run a household, and are therefore only effective when accompanied by the protection of an institutionalized marriage. The fact that such financial support is most common in conservative states and has historically always been low, reinforce the conclusion that its aim is to strengthen the traditional household division of labor, rather than to promote women's autonomy.

The contrast drawn here between the liberal principle of similarity that links equality to free competition in labor markets, and the principle of difference that ties social rights to unpaid carework, reflect extreme attitudes. With the entrance of women into the labor market and the prevalence of dual-earner families, women started to benefit from the social rights associated with employment in an increasingly independent manner. As a result, demands based on difference and similarity began to be mixed together. This mix between

contrasting principles reflects the importance of the labor market as a means of attaining gender equality, on the one hand, and on the other the state's obligation to help women to integrate within it, in recognition of their being child-bearers and mothers.

This hybrid tendency has been especially evident in Scandinavia. Public policies in these settings have explicitly sought to bring women into the labor market, thereby providing them with social rights based on paid work, while at the same time actively intervening to meet the special needs of working mothers. Unlike contexts where women's movements have been guided by liberal-feminist ideology, their counterparts in social-democratic countries have been less concerned with mechanisms that would facilitate a better functioning labor market, instead demanding that the state actively intervene to provide services and resources to reconcile work and family commitments (Goldberg and Ureman 1990; Lewis and Astrom 1992). Thus, while both settings have shared the aspiration of turning women into workers, it has been translated into very different practices in social democratic and liberal welfare regimes.

Social policies in the social-democratic nations reflect a clear assumption that women's advance in the labor market is impossible without active efforts by the state to protect their rights as mothers, and to provide them with comfortable terms of employment and services. Foremost among these efforts is the extensive supply of high-quality public daycare subsidized by the state, in addition to flexible terms of employment, long maternity leaves, and paid leave to care for a sick child. (Esping-Andersen 1999; Gornick and Meyers 2003; Kamerman 2001).

In the Nordic countries, then, the attempt to introduce women into the labor market, i.e. to change their status from housekeeper to provider on a similar basis to men, does not come at the expense of attaching rights to women as mothers. The social-democratic model,

especially its Swedish version, has managed to overcome the sameness/difference dichotomy by simultaneously providing women with rights based on their being both workers and mothers (Lewis and Astrom 1992). This hybrid form, I will argue later, explains the distinctive pattern of gender stratification in the labor markets of the social democratic nations, in which high levels of female labor force participation coexist with occupational and earnings attainments for working women that are inferior to those found in other welfare regimes.

In what follows I will claim more broadly that different definitions of gender equality – based on either difference, similarity, or a combination of both – not only underlie different patterns of state intervention, but also explain the diverse patterns of gender stratification found in rich democracies. The next section summarizes evidences on different facets of gender economic inequality, highlighting the tradeoffs between them and their connection to the dominant modes of state intervention in the four countries under study. This provides the descriptive grounding and empirical anchor for the subsequent discussion, which paints a broader picture by demonstrating the affinity of distinctive profiles of gender stratification to prevailing conceptions of gender equality and gender role ideologies.

Differing profiles of intervention – differing profiles of inequality

In order to tap different facets of gender inequality, I utilize a range of indicators of the economic position of women, from rates of labor force participation, through occupational attainments and economic rewards, to outcomes such as poverty rates and economic autonomy. Most measures have been calculated from national datasets collected by the Luxembourg Income Study (LIS). Definitions of the indicators used and other technical information can be found in Appendix 1.

Data are provided for four countries: Sweden, the United States, Germany and Italy. These cases have been chosen to illustrate the distinctive policy configurations identified in the previous section. Following Esping-Andersen's (1990) typology, Sweden and the USA are prime examples of the social-democratic and liberal welfare regimes, respectively, while Germany is a continental-conservative and Italy a Mediterranean-conservative country. A considerable body of comparative research confirms that forms of state intervention, as reflected by the provision of welfare and care services, indeed vary significantly across these four countries (e.g. Esping-Andersen 1990; 1999; Korpi 2000; Gornick 1999; Gornick and Meyers 2003; Orloff 2006). Sweden typifies the dual-earner model, where the state takes an active role in providing social and family services; in the U.S., markets are the dominant mechanism for service provision; and Germany and Italy follow what Lewis (1992) described as the "male breadwinner" model, in which a conservative welfare state attempts to preserve the traditional division of labor in the home and foster reliance on the family for providing both welfare and care services.

These distinctive models of state interventions are first and foremost noticeable for the extent that they encourage or repress women's entry into the labor market (Daly 2000; Gornick, Meyers and Ross 1997; Korpi 2000). Figure 1 provides data on female labor force participation that affirms the efficiency of the Swedish dual-earner model in raising women's participation rates, most notably among mothers of young children. The Swedish pattern is also revealed by the tiny proportion of couple-headed households in which the man is the sole earner as shown by Figure 2. The US holds a middle position with relatively high rates of women's and mothers' labor force participation and dual-earner families. Comparatively low proportions of working mothers and a large number of households with a single male wage-earner characterize the conservative countries. Italy is the only one of the four

countries examined here in which male-breadwinner households are more common than dual earners. While the overall proportion of women participating in the labor market is low in Italy (less than half of all women of working age), in Germany children constitute the primary obstacle to employment, as shown by the dramatically lower participation rates among women with small children.

Figures 1 & 2 about here

The restricted access of women in general, and mothers in particular, to sources of independent income in the conservative countries increases women's dependence on their partners, as illustrated by Figure 3. As income from paid employment is the major source of economic autonomy for women, low female participation rates in Germany and even more in Italy are translated into high levels of economic dependency on their husband earnings. Further analysis, which excludes Italy because of missing data, shows that childcare and maternity allowances slightly reduce the dependency levels of German women and bring them into line with the US, where the paucity of these allowance causes them to have almost no effect on the average woman's income. Because of their commitment to paid work, Swedish women enjoy comparatively low economic dependence on their partner. The data show that the state's generosity towards mothers in Sweden further reduces women's dependency levels, but without inhibiting their high rates of paid employment.

Figure 3 about here

The impressive entry of Swedish women into the labor market and the relative economic autonomy that they enjoy from their partners have not however been accompanied by equality of labor market attainments. On the contrary, in the protected Swedish labor market women are concentrated in high proportions in female-typed jobs within the public sector, and, compared to other countries, have less access to positions of power and prestige

and enjoy lower economic rewards (e.g. Mandel and Semyonov 2006; Wright, Baxter and Birkelund 1995). Figures 4 and 5 illustrate this through two of the most notable parameters of gender inequality in Scandinavian countries – horizontal and vertical gender segregation. Compared to the other three countries, Sweden has the highest rate of occupational sex segregation and the lowest proportion of women in managerial positions. Given the high rewards that usually accompany these positions and the comparatively low pay typical of female-type occupations, women's position in the occupational structure has tangible consequences for their economic achievements (Petersen and Morgan 1995). Figure 6 shows the proportion of women in each country's top and bottom wage quintiles. Sweden is the country furthest from egalitarian representation – 20% – at both poles of the wage structure. Women are over-represented in the bottom quintile and under-represented at the top.

Figures 4, 5 & 6 about here

In comparison to Sweden, both indicators of women's attainments are more favorable in Germany and Italy. Apparently German women have been fairly successful in attaining positions of power and authority. The likelihood that they will reach managerial positions is a bit higher than Italian women, and significantly higher than in Sweden. Italian women, however, are the most successful in maximizing their income. Figure 7 shows that the gap between the mean wages of men and women is exceptionally small in Italy. Levels of gender occupational segregation are unusually low compared with the other countries, and women's penetration into the upper wage quintile very nearly reaches equality of representation with men.

Figure 7 about here

In Sweden, then, the equality indicated by measures of women's employment rates reverts to inequality when we turn to the achievements of working women. In Germany, and

even more in Italy, the picture is reversed: low participation of women in paid work is parlayed into relatively favorable attainments for those who enter the labor market. This is something of a surprise for societies with a conservative tradition. One plausible explanation is that women who enter an economy dependent on highly-committed male labor tend to be those with a careerist orientation. They are a relatively selective group able to compete with men in a labor market that is not adapted to women and does not offer them preferential terms of employment. Figure 8, which presents the two factors that most influence women's employment – motherhood and education – substantiates this selectivity of female labor in conservative settings, particularly Italy. Only in Sweden are there virtually no barriers to employment – all women work, regardless of the limitations of motherhood and education. In the U.S. motherhood plays a larger role than education in women's decisions to enter the labor market, while in Germany motherhood is the central obstacle to labor force participation, even among educated women. Italy is the most interesting case in this regard. While motherhood does not impede employment (see also Figure 1), holding a college degree has an enormous effect. Nearly all women with a B.A. work – including mothers of pre-school children – while women without a college education have very low levels of employment, even when they do not have children. The low rates of women's participation in the labor market in Italy would seem, therefore, to be more a result of gender conservatism than familial constraints. The female labor force in Italy is very selective and employment is routine only among educated women, who succeed in attaining relatively highly-paid positions.

Figure 8 about here

Turning to the United States, Figures 4 and 5 show that the American labor market, in notable contrast to the Swedish, is less gender-segregated both horizontally and vertically.

Thus, general levels of occupational segregation are comparatively low, and women have succeeded in penetrating relatively privileged positions. As Mandel and Semyonov (2005; 2006) have recently noted, the fact that women in the U.S. do not enjoy gender-specific benefits and have to function in the labor market without special concessions makes them more attractive to employers and eases their access to prestigious jobs. This is accompanied by high levels of awareness regarding equal opportunity and demands for affirmative action, which further assist women to compete with men for jobs and rewards (Orloff 2006).

Thus, at first sight it seems that the American version of the dual-earner model has managed to avoid the failures of the social-democratic and conservative welfare regimes, succeeding in both bringing women into the labor market and providing them with access to senior positions. However, these successes have not been without costs, costs that are paid primarily by disadvantaged women.

The data show that whether women's economic disadvantage is measured by poverty rates or the gender wage gap, the US exhibits by far the highest level of gender inequality. Figure 7 indicates that the gap between the average hourly wage of men and women is five times higher in America than Italy, and much higher than in Sweden. The America's unregulated wage-setting and employment conditions, which generate a highly unequal wage distribution found to be the dominant cause for the high gender wage differentials. Because women in general continue to hold less advantaged positions than men, wide wage differentials exacerbate the overall wage gap between men and women (Blau and Kahn 1996; 2003; Rubery et al. 1997).

Figure 8 about here

In addition, since women have entered a broad range of positions, class inequality is translated into class differentiation among women themselves. Figure 9 indicates that the

wage gap between high and low-educated women is twice as high in the U.S. than any of the other three countries. It would therefore be mistaken to interpret the impressive success of American women in entering managerial positions as representing success for women as a whole. For most women the attaining economic independence without protective social rights, comprise a significant disadvantage. Figure 8 shows that motherhood continues to constitute an obstacle to employment in the U.S., even among educated women. But while married mothers who withdraw from the labor market are protected by their husband's income, this is not the case for the unmarried. The limited support for mothers in the U.S. – either in terms of financial transfers or public services that facilitate their employment – is a central factor behind the high rates of poverty among women in general, and lone mothers in particular (Christopher 2002; Kilkey and Bradshaw 1999). Table 1 shows that nearly all non-working lone mothers live in poverty, as do nearly half of those who work. These rates are incomparably higher than those of the other countries. Bearing in mind that one quarter of all households in the U.S. are lone-parent families, and that the vast majority of those families live in poverty, it would appear that legislation of equal opportunities is ultimately not enough for a considerable portion of women.

Table 1 about here

Swedish conditions for lone mothers are almost the mirror-image of those in the United States. State interventions promoting mothers' employment not only allow women to gain economic independence from their spouse, but also permit them to maintain a reasonable standard of living without relying on a spouse's salary at all (Christopher 2002; Kilkey and Bradshaw 1999; Casper, McLanahan and Garfinkel 1994). Table 1 confirms that poverty rates among both working and non-working lone mothers are relatively low in Sweden, and that almost half of Sweden's lone mothers are single, compared to only 4% who

are widows. This suggests that there is an important element of choice in the phenomenon of lone-mother families in Sweden, a choice that undoubtedly relates to cultural attitudes towards gender egalitarianism but is also made possible by state support. This assumption is strengthened by the contrasting distribution of marital status in Italy and Germany. The high percentage of widows and the low percentage of singles among lone mothers indicates that in conservative settings lone-parent motherhood is more imposed on women than a matter of choice.

Despite the importance of state support, Table 1 shows that the best economic protection for women in all four countries – including Italy and Germany – is participation in the labor market. As financial assistance to lone mothers is ungenerous in both Italy and Germany the participation rates of lone mothers are high in absolute and relative terms, posing a striking contrast to their low rates of married mothers' employment. However, the most notable feature of the Italian landscape is that so few women are lone mothers, indicating that the strength of the institution of marriage is the main source of protection against poverty for women (see also Casper, McLanahan and Garfinkel 1994).

To sum, this section has highlighted the diverse configurations of gender stratification in the four countries analyzed here. While in some contexts traditional gender roles restrain women's entry into the work cycle, others erect barriers against women's access to prestigious and highly-paid positions. In some motherhood is the biggest obstacle to economic autonomy, while in others women's labor market participation and attainments are stratified by education, marital status or class affiliation. These variations are not random. The findings exhibits here reveal that multiple indicators of gender economic relations combine into distinctive patterns of gender inequality. These configurations are qualitatively distinctive across different welfare state regimes, and each one implies different tradeoff. By linking

these tradeoffs to different conceptions and ideals of gender equality, the section that follows highlights the different stratifying patterns of state intervention found in different welfare regimes.

Policy Tradeoffs and Gender Stratification

The findings above reveal that each distinctive pattern of state intervention succeeds in narrowing certain aspects of gender inequality, while also widening others. Indeed, the very success of a policy on one count may be the source of its inadequacies on another. The gender segregation characteristic of the labor market in Sweden indirectly results from the state's success in eliminating the gender gap in labor force participation. In the conservative countries, women's relative success in penetrating positions of power is explained in terms of the selectivity of the female work force, that is, the barriers that discourage many women from entering the labor market in the first place. In the liberal US context, the burden placed on economically disadvantaged women is the outcome of the very same policy that has enabled relatively advantaged women to attain high rewards in the labor market. These seeming contradictions underline the importance of paying attention to multiple interventions and outcomes and probing the ideological logic that underpins a country's overall policy package.

Patterns of inequality in Sweden, like other countries with a social- democratic welfare regime, reveal a clear tradeoff. Aiming to encourage mothers to join the labor market, the state passes laws that protect their jobs and provide them with convenient terms of employment. Similar effects result from the state's direct role as an employer. This policy package knowingly brings women with a weaker attachment to work into the labor market. It also channels the female workforce into gender-specific occupations within the public sector, and heightens the reluctance of employers in the private sector to hire them. The labor market

in social-democratic countries thus becomes more and more gender-segregated the more that the state attains its goal of high rates of employment among women and mothers.

Esping-Andersen sees the commitment of the social-democratic welfare state to full employment, and the use of the public sector as a mechanism for creating jobs for women, as one of its more noteworthy achievements (Esping-Andersen, 1990, Chapter 6). The assumption at the basis of the productivist welfare regime, one based on employment rather than financial transfers, is that it is better to “over-employ”, or at least to provide non-profitable jobs, than to financially support non-workers (Esping-Andersen, 1990, p. 149). In consequence, while the benefits accruing to working mothers make female workers less attractive to private employers, this is justified by the higher aim of full employment. Women’s entry into the labor market, even at the price of their concentration in feminized ghettos and their relative exclusion from positions of economic power, is seen as an important step towards equality in that it provides more women with the elementary right to independence: liberation from longterm dependency on their spouses and families on the one hand, or the state’s welfare institutions on the other. From this perspective, part-time work and a high concentration of women in education and care services are legitimate means to the end of narrowing gender inequality by supporting women’s employment. The byproducts – unusually gender-segregated working patterns and low glass ceiling – are justified by social-democratic ideology, which in sharp contrast to liberal ideology aspires to advance equality on a universal basis, even at the expense of hampering the attainments of the advantaged.

While the stratifying outcomes of the Nordic pattern of state intervention appear more benign when viewed through social-democratic than liberal lenses, Scandinavian feminists have been increasingly critical of the price that it exacts from women. The context in which social-democratic family policies first emerged - the 1940s and 1950s, years in which career

women were a very rare phenomenon - explain their emphasis on integrating working life with the family, rather than providing women with the means for competing with men in the labor market. The innovations of the late 1960s, through which women won social rights on the basis of motherhood, are today clouded by feminist criticism concerning the outcomes of this “friendliness”, as seen in gender segregation and discrimination. These discussions recognize that attempts to fit the labor market to women, by taking into account their special needs as mothers, prevent them from competing with men for the most desirable and lucrative positions in the labor market because they sustain the model of “women’s two roles” (worker and caregiver) as opposed to “men’s one role” (Casper, McLanahan and Garfinkel 1994; Hernes 1987; Langan and Oster 1991; O’Connor 1993, Orloff 1996). As a result, contemporary feminist demands for gender equality in the Nordic countries seek to go beyond policies aimed at easing mothers' double role, and insist on seeing both parents as wage-earners and caregivers. Learning from the Scandinavian experience, prominent feminist scholars in other countries also now argue that for the dual-earner model to bring about substantive change in gender roles and power relations, it must be accompanied by a dual-caregiver model (e.g. Fraser 1994; Gornick and Meyers 2003).

The limits of social-democratic policies have different parallels in the other welfare regimes. While Scandinavia's segregated labor markets are a byproduct of successful attempts to provide more women with a source of independent income, in conservative settings the picture is reversed: a relatively egalitarian labor market within a non-egalitarian society. Italy is the clearest example in all likelihood. The significance of the Catholic church has been reflected in both the political establishment and social ideology which upholds the traditional gendered division of labor within the family. The absence of employment-supportive policies is bolstered by strong ties of solidarity and dependency

within both the nuclear family and the extended family (Mingione 1995; Saraceno 1994). As demonstrated above, this results in limited participation of women in the labor market and a high level of economic dependence on their husbands. Nonetheless, based on parameters of occupational segregation and earnings, this traditional society actually has a relatively egalitarian labor market. In the absence of part-time jobs, most Italian women are working full time (Daly 2000; Gornick 1999; Orloff 2002), and levels of gender occupational segregation are very low. The group of employed women is more selective and more educated than in other countries, and is thus better able to integrate into a labor market that does not offer women special terms of employment. Given that this market has a relatively small service sector and a limited supply of part-time jobs, women who work are able to attain high salaries, as reflected in the more egalitarian wage ratios between men and women.

Both Italy and Germany testify to the fact that cash benefits to mothers cannot sufficiently replace employment in the labor market as a basis for women's economic independence. While caregiver subsidies can potentially enhance gender economic equality, it definitely cannot reach it in its current limited scope. Today, however, there is little likelihood that feminists' appeals to increase financial assistance to women being implemented, in the context of contemporary pressures to curtail public expenditure and increase the tax base by expanding employment. Under these circumstances this type of assistance can be perceived as a potential trap so far as women's economic independence is concerned. For this reason, Sweden's Social Democratic party revoked child-care allowances only six months after they were legislated (Nyberg 2006).

The traditional gender role ideology that animates family policy in the conservative welfare regime received clear expression in the comparatively low proportion of working mothers and limited support for lone mothers in the two cases examined here. In Germany,

for example, the male breadwinner model rests on two mutually reinforcing foundations: sparse provision of public care services and extensive protection of male wage-earners, based on the assumption that they bear sole economic responsibility for the household. This has freed married women from financial pressure to support their family, and allowed their selective entry into the labor market with a bias in favor of women with a careerist orientation and high levels of human capital. On the other hand, the miserly aid available to lone mothers has forced them to participate in the labor market at considerably higher rates (Christopher et al. 2002).

Given the role of selectivity, continuing increases in female labor force participation in conservative countries can be expected to accentuate gender inequality within the labor market. The decline in fertility rates, which especially characterizes central and southern Europe and which has been convincingly linked to the difficulties experienced by mothers in these countries in combining paid and unpaid work (Esping-Andersen 1999; Hobson and Livia 2006), may create pressure on conservative states to help women to integrate work and family (as has already happened in Japan (Peng 2000)). However, many questions remain open. Will the integration of women in a labor market that is attuned to male working patterns require women to also adopt those patterns? Or will the vocational training programs that lead to jobs in core industrial firms –which are currently more suited to men than women (Estevez-Abe 2005; Soskice 2005) – be replaced by gendered forms of training that channel men and women into segregated sectors and occupations? In either case new woman workers would disproportionately find themselves on the economic periphery. Alternatively, with the growth in women’s employment, the public service sector in continental European countries may expand in the direction of the Scandinavian model. Even today, health, education, and welfare services in conservative countries are overwhelmingly provided by the public sector.

A prediction of convergence between these two welfare regimes is also supported by the literature on Varieties of Capitalism, which has emphasized the similarities between the political economies of conservative and social-democratic countries, including extensive labor market regulation (Estevez-Abe 2005; Soskice 2005). On the other hand, the fact that conservative welfare states have historically prioritized transfer payments over personal services (Esping-Andersen 1990; Huber and Stephens 2000), together with their continued support for the male breadwinner model, points to a future that will continue to differ from the social-democratic and liberal welfare regimes.

The liberal model exemplified by the US is similar to conservative settings in that the state plays a passive role regarding women's employment. However, unlike the interventionism of conservative states in regulating working conditions and providing social protection, the liberal state largely refrains from interfering with class stratification. High participation rates of women are, therefore, the joint result of market-based provision of care services and the sheer necessity of working due to miserly income guarantees. The prevailing ideologies of "non-intervention" (Korpi 2000) and "gender neutrality" reflect the liberal faith in markets. However, given the limitations placed on women as primary caregivers, and the consequent unequal division of labor within the family, mothers cannot compete with men on equal terms. Family policies that adopt an attitude of "gender neutrality" are therefore similar to social policies based on "class neutrality".

The consequences of the liberal model are evident in the contrasting impacts of women's employment on their economic wellbeing in the US and Sweden. While in Sweden women's high rates of participation coincide with a relatively high wage floor and publicly subsidized care services, in the United States high rates of employment have not succeeded in reducing the substantial risk of poverty among women. In a market-oriented economy where

success is determined mainly by personal characteristics and skills (Rosenfeld and Kalleberg 1990), women's ability to escape poverty is largely depends on the amount of time they can allocate to paid employment. Most women, would therefore need policies that will ease the family burden and help them combine their caregiving obligations with commitments to the workplace. An absence of such policies is the most substantial barrier for equal competition between men and women, and equality of access legislation is not enough to overcome it

State passivity not only explains women's disadvantage in relation to men, but also contributes to the pronounced diversity among women because of the contradictory effects of non-intervention on different classes. For advantaged women, whose skills enable them to successfully compete with men without assistance from the state, the liberal labor market provides fertile pastures for success. They benefit from the state's insistence on gender neutrality, with the absence of legislation mandating paid maternity leave being the most significant example – as it reduces employers' tendencies to discriminate against women on the basis of gender. In any event, many women who work in higher-status and well-paid jobs benefit from maternity leave by virtue of private arrangements with employers. They are also able to consume relatively cheap childcare services, given that the state refrains from regulating the qualifications and employment conditions of caregivers (Morgan 2005). And so they do not need the state's help in entering the labor market and are not harmed by the potentially negative consequences of such policies, as in the Swedish case. The liberal assumption that free competition will advance equality without state interference, is therefore substantiated in the case of higher-class women. On the other hand state's interventions in ensuring free competition in the labor market through equal opportunity laws is mostly beneficial for advantaged women, as they are in the best position to exploit it (O'Connor, Orloff and Shaver 1999).

Conditions for working women who are less skilled and educated are very different. The non-compulsory character of paid maternity leave means that most of them do not benefit. Likewise, limited public financial assistance for families with children and public provision of care services render the child penalty especially burdensome for these women. Finally, the same unregulated market that enables higher-class women to purchase care services quite cheaply denies their lower-class counterparts economic security. For these women, therefore, class inequality looms much larger than gender discrimination as a source of disadvantage in the labor market.

Conclusion

This article views the nature of gender stratification as an outcome of various modes of welfare state intervention, and sees them as meeting different understandings of gender inequality and as reflecting varying ideological contexts. In practice, it would seem that neither paying women to mother their children, nor providing them with benefits designed to ease work/ family conflicts, have succeeded in eradicating gender economic inequality, mainly because both approaches take traditional gender roles for granted. The solution favored by conservatives, income replacement for mothers, could potentially empower women economically without requiring their participation in the labor market. But with the possible exception of the Netherlands, in practice childcare allowances have not provided women with financial independence and do not constitute a viable alternative to the protection afforded by marriage. In this sense policies based on the assumption that there is no real alternative to paid employment contribute more effectively to women's economic autonomy.

This realization has been translated into very different policies in liberal and social-democratic welfare regimes, but neither has succeeded in eradicating gender inequality in employment, managing only to change its form. On the one hand, ignoring the traditional division of labor within the household and attempting to sustain gender neutrality places a greater burden on women, especially those who are less privileged. On the other, efforts at making the labor market friendlier to women by recognizing their special needs as child-bearers and mothers transfers the traditional division of labor from the family to the labor market and unwittingly encourages gender discrimination by employers.

The attempt made in this article to link patterns of gender inequality to modes of state intervention emphasizes the pivotal role of state action or inaction and stresses the different challenges that different contexts pose to overcoming gender inequality. Each pattern of state intervention, and the configuration of gender stratification which it promotes, operates in a deeply-rooted ideological and cultural context. As a result, solutions cannot easily be imported from one context to another. Nevertheless, this does not imply that forward movement is impossible. Based on past experience, the most likely scenarios for increased gender equality will entail processes of change that evolve within specific contexts.

An example of such a process is provided by the development of policies towards women's paid and unpaid labor in Scandinavia during the last half century. In the late 1940s state support for motherhood was aimed at facilitating a two-stage career, starting before women had children and continuing after they began school (Lewis 1990). Twenty years later, the dual-earner model offered support for the employment of mothers of preschool children in order to integrate work and family throughout the life cycle. The reforms of the 1970s indeed changed the position of women, but left that of men relatively intact (Lewis and Astrom 1992). The recognition that women's entry to the labor market is not a sufficient

condition for them to advance within it so long as the burden of care remains on their shoulders is what prompted feminist calls for a dual-earner/dual-carer model.

These paradigm shifts have received concrete expression in changing policies of maternity leave in Sweden (and most other Scandinavian countries as well). In 1974 traditional maternity leave was replaced by parental leave covering fathers as well. Subsequently in 1995 an additional month of leave was offered solely to fathers. True, apart from this innovation the dual-earner/dual-carer model has still largely to be translated into substantive policies, and in the 2006 election campaign the social-democratic party chose not to advocate further enlargement of the quota reserved for fathers. Nevertheless, in the new millennium the existing quota (which was raised to two "daddy months" in 2002) was increasingly utilized, with fathers' share of total leave rising rapidly to reach one-fifth by 2006. Notably, while the transition to gender-neutral parental leave had very little effect on the behavior of fathers, this is not the case for the "use it or lose it" system (Kamerman and Gatenio 2002; Nyberg 2006)¹. The lesson is that when states offer strong incentives to men to participate in care work, they are able to powerfully influence their actions.

¹ The proportion of fathers who utilized parental leave after the Swedish reform in 2002 increased from 9% to 47% within a single month (Ekberg, Eriksson and Friebel 2004).

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Tables and Figures

Table 1: Characteristics of lone mothers' families

	% lone mothers families	Distribution of lone mothers families			% of lone mothers employed	Employment ratio Lone mothers / other mothers	Poverty rates	
		% widows	% singles	% divorced or separated			Not in paid work	In paid work
Germany	16	30	23	47	67	1.2	64	11
Italy	5	34	12	54	69	1.7	22	8
Sweden	15	4	46	50	70	0.9	16	4
United States	25	6	35	59	60	0.9	93	43

Source: Kilkey and Bradshaw. 1999.

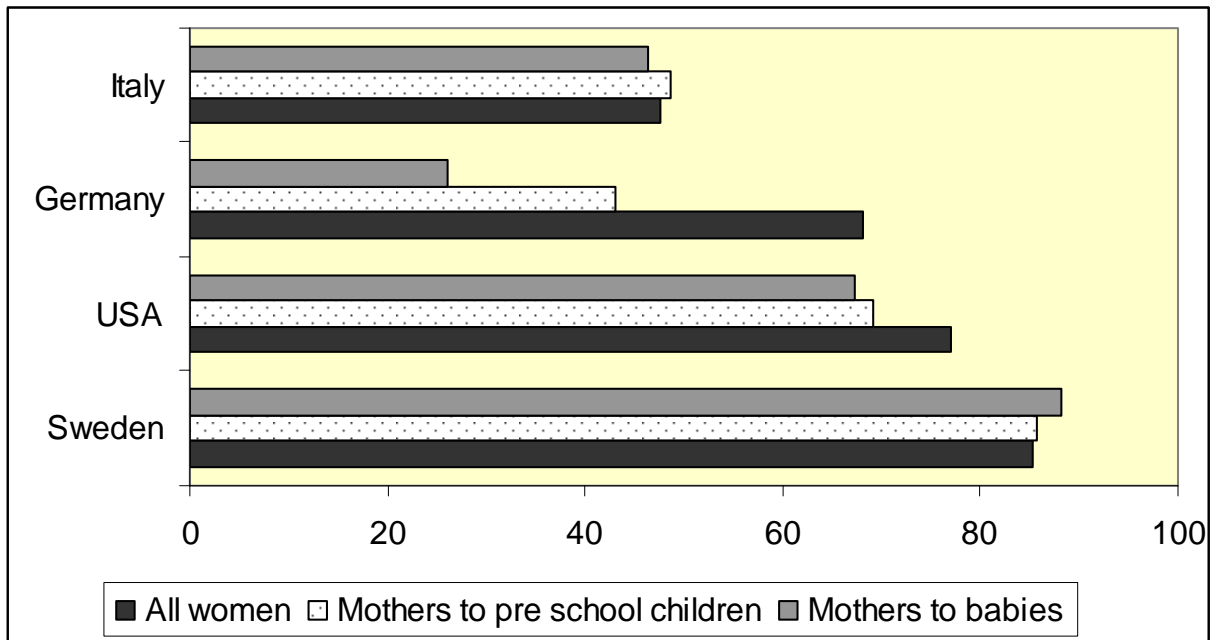


Figure 1: Labor Force Participation Rates for Women (aged 25-60) by Motherhood

Source: LIS

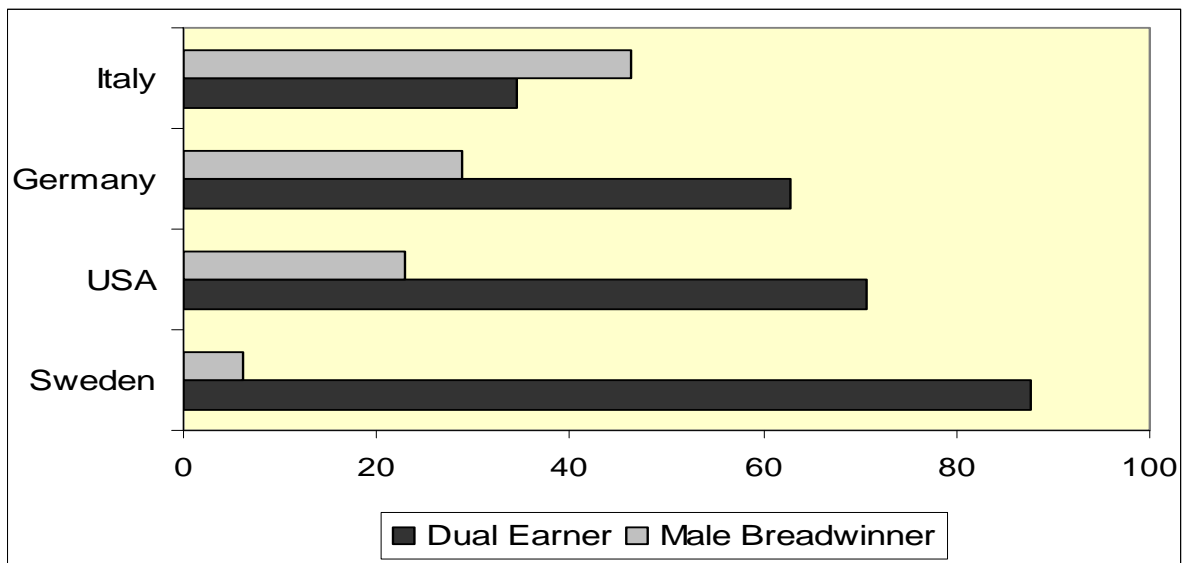


Figure 2. Distribution of Households by Breadwinner Type.

Source: LIS

Note: the figure does not present households with a female sole-breadwinner and those in which none of the spouses works. Thus, percents for each country do not add to 100.

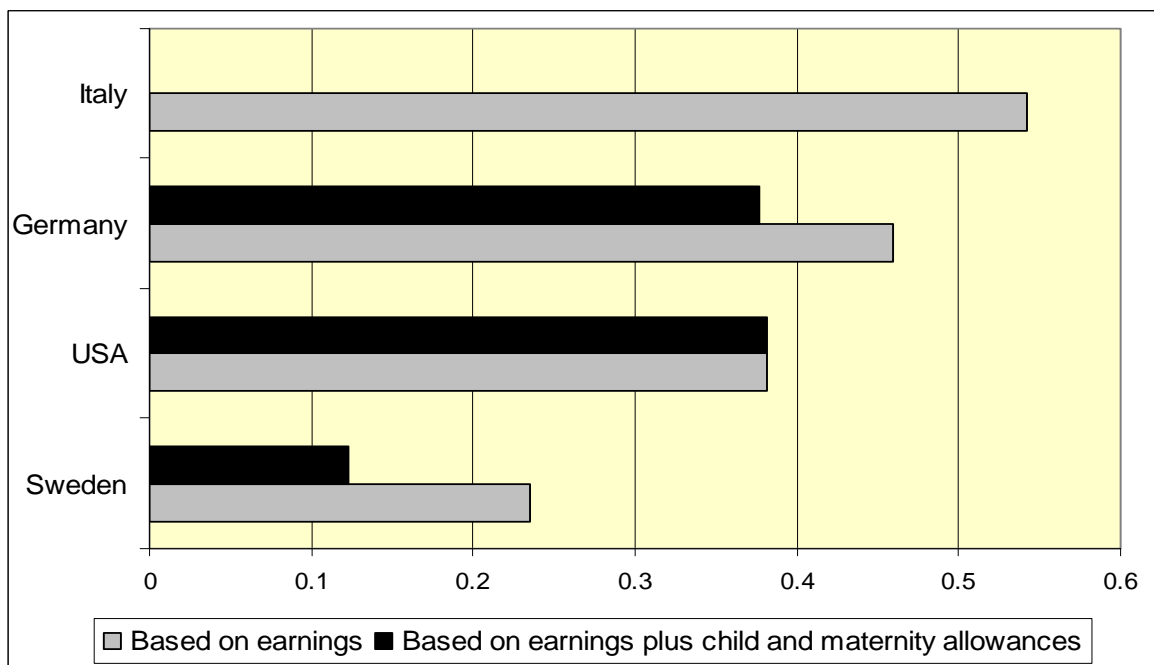


Figure 3: Women's Earnings Dependency Levels among Couple-headed Households.

Source: LIS.

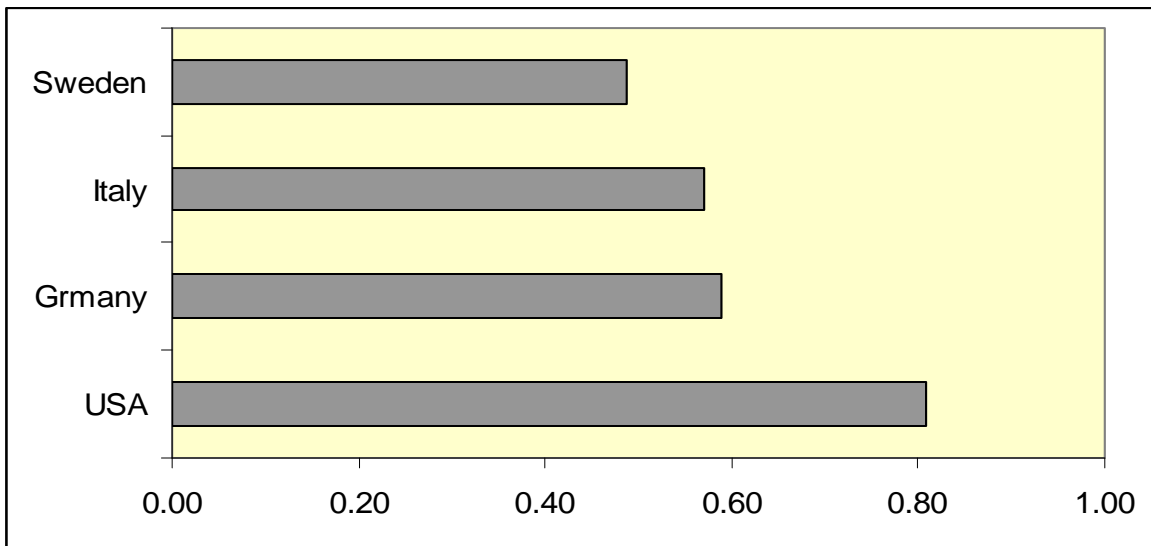


Figure 4: Gender Ratio in Managerial Positions.
Source: LIS. (Sweden, LNU, 2000)

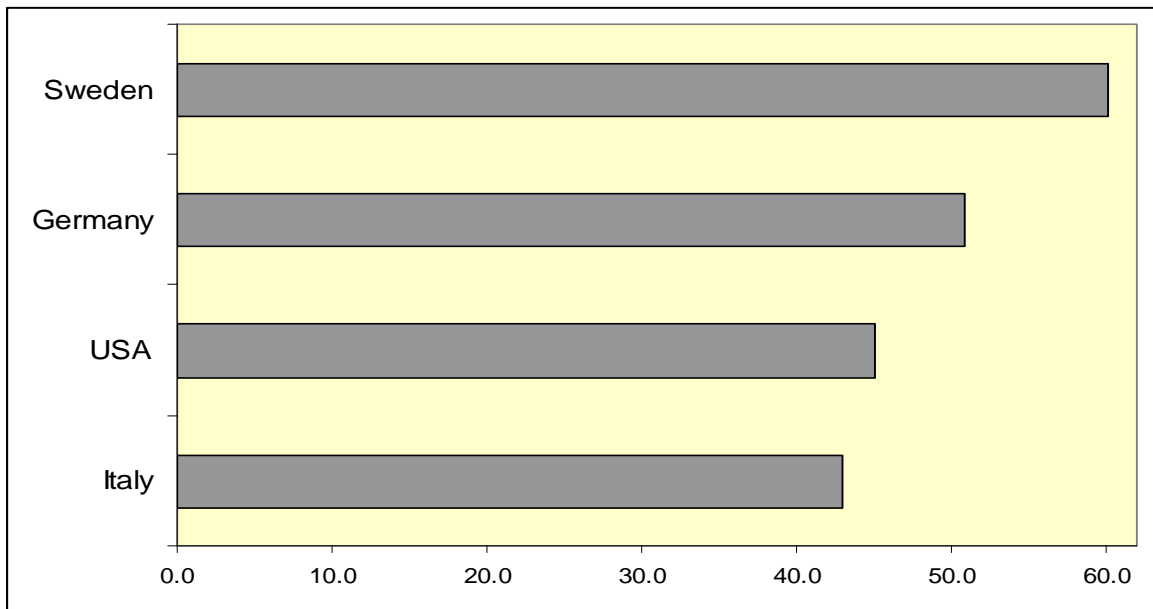


Figure 5: Index of Dissimilarity
Source: Charles and Grusky, 2004, Table 3.3 (P. 71).

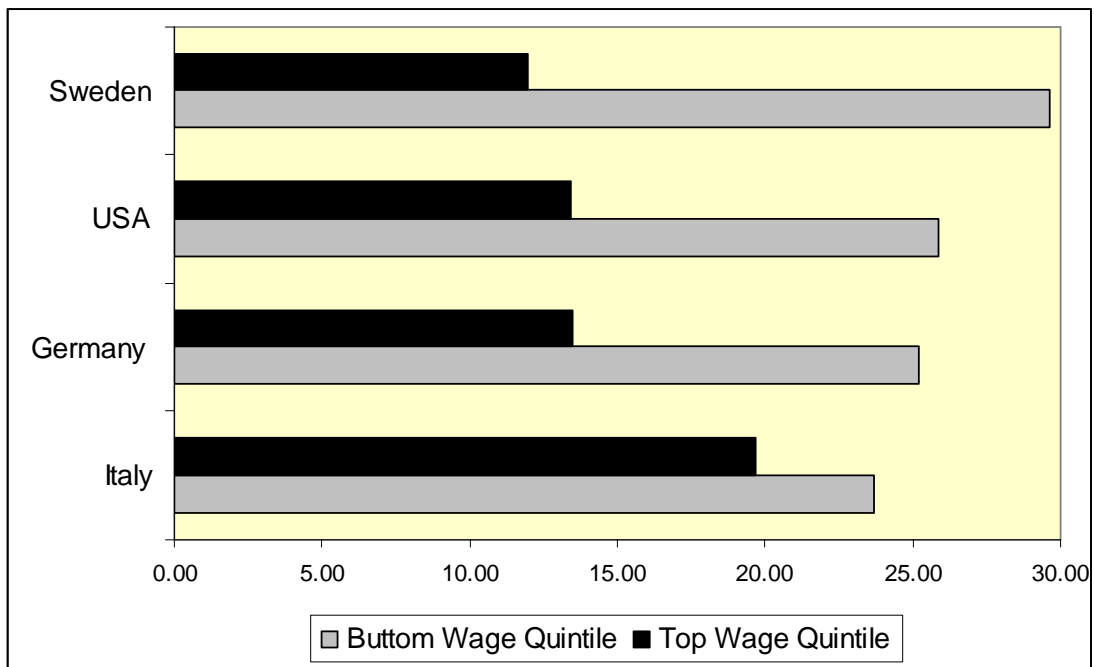


Figure 6: Women's Representation by Wage Quintile

Source: LIS. (Sweden, LNU, 2000)

* A value of 20% would imply equal gender representation in a quintile.

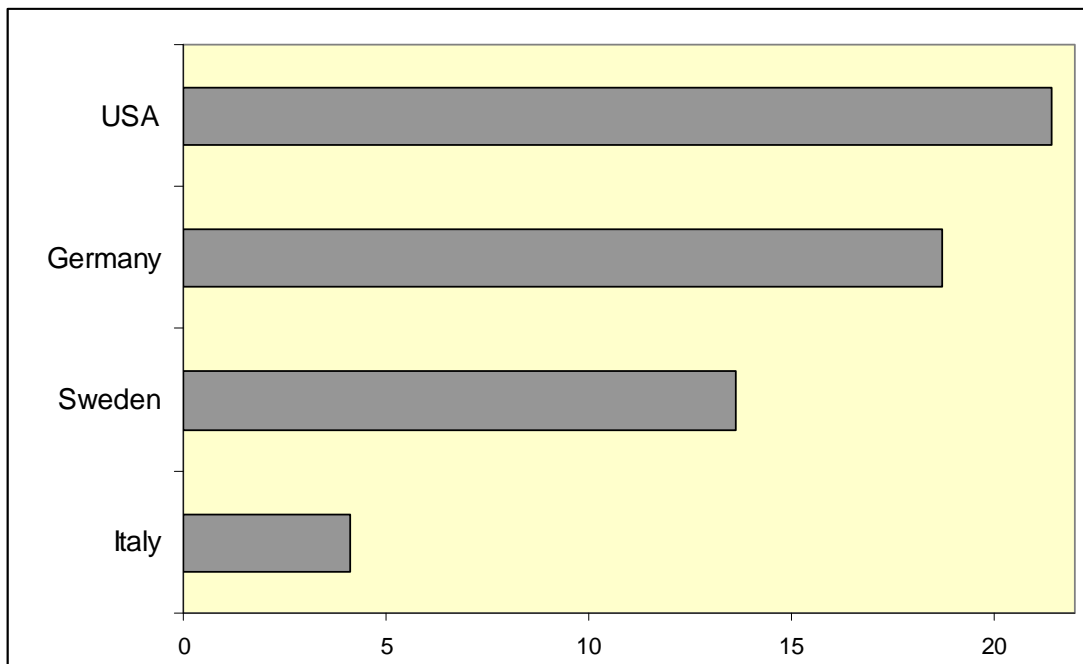


Figure 7: National Gender Wage Gaps (hourly earnings).

Source: LIS. (Sweden, LNU, 2000)

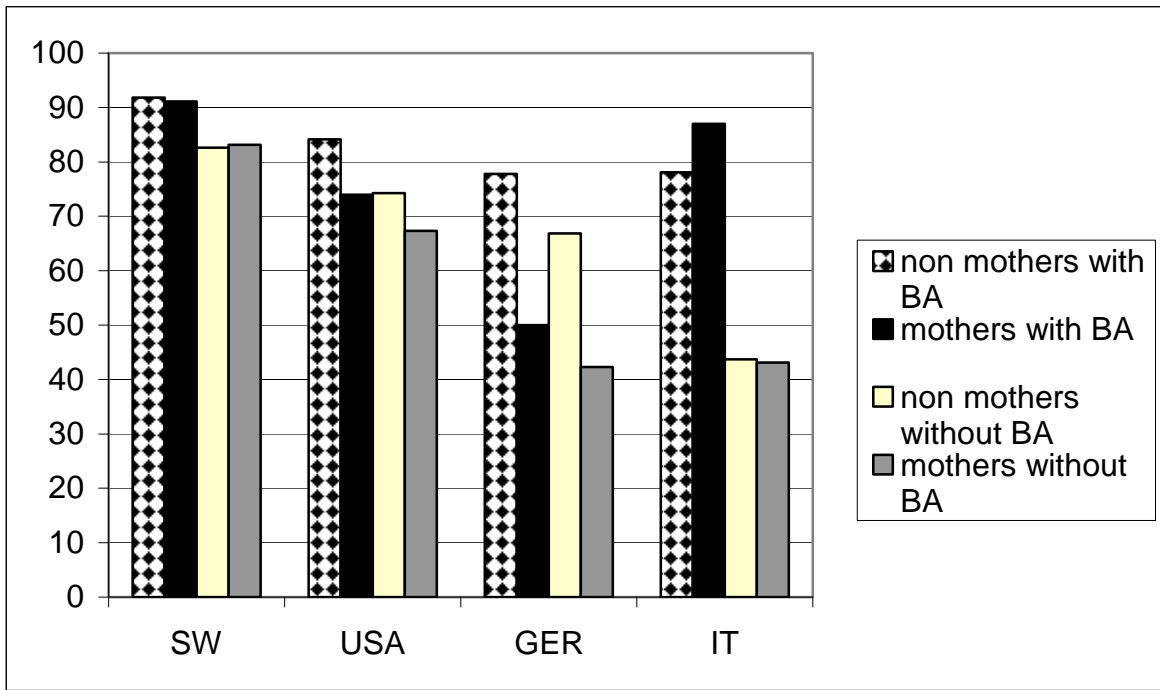


Figure 8: Labor force participation of women (aged 25-60) by education and motherhood
Source: LIS.

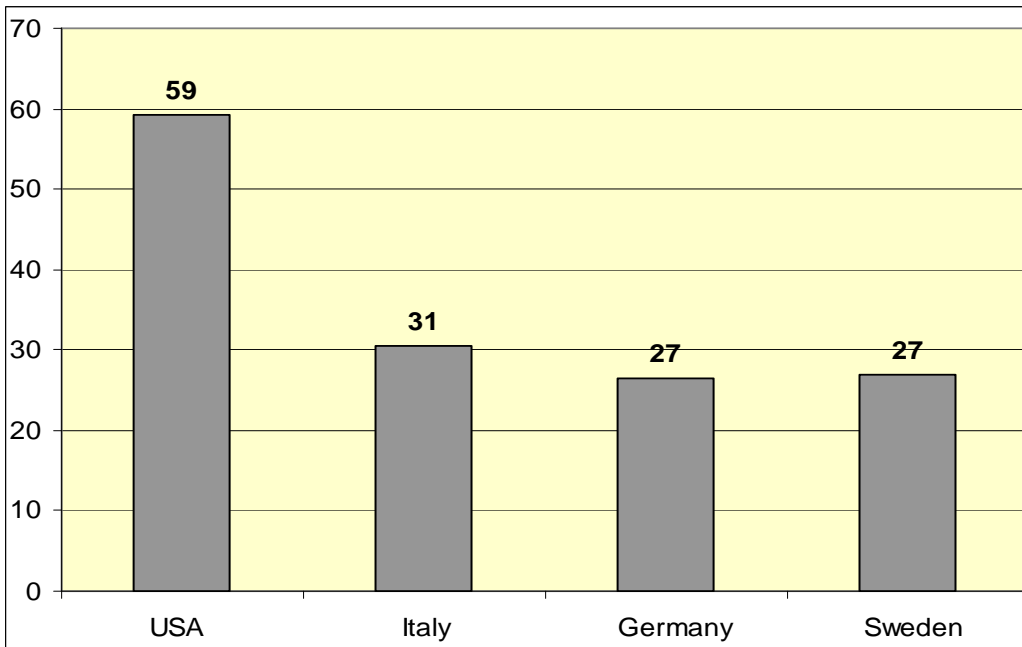


Figure 9: Wage gaps (percent) between high and low educated women
Source: USA&Italy, LIS, 2000. Sweden, LNU, 2000. Germany, GSOEP, 2000.

Appendix Table 1: Measurements and Data Sources by Figures/Table

Figure	Data Source	Variables	Definition	Note
1	LIS, All countries Wave V. Sweden Wave IV	All women	Mothers and non mothers	aged 25-60
		Preschool children	0-6 years old	
		babies	0-3 years old	
2	LIS, Wave IV	Dual earners	Married or cohabiting couples where both partners have earnings	The figure does not present households with a female sole-breadwinner and those in which none of the spouses have earnings. These households are relatively rare in all countries.
		Male breadwinner	Married or cohabiting couples where only the men have earnings	
3	LIS, All countries Wave IV, USA, wave V	Women's earning dependency: - based on annual earnings only	The dependency levels were computed as the gap between the spouses' relative contribution to the household income: Dependency = [(male earnings/total couples' income)-(female income / total couples' income)]*100	Includes married or cohabiting couples, aged 25-60. Child and maternity allowance were added to women's income only. Data were not available for Italy
		- based on annual earnings plus child and maternity allowance ("income")		
4	All countries LIS; Wave V. Sweden, LNU Survey, 2000	Managers	Major Group 1 (legislators, senior officials and managers) as defined by ISCO88.	Includes salaried workers only, aged 25-55, who work at least 8 hours a week
5	Charles and Grusky, 2004.	Segregation levels	Index of Dissimilarity (Duncan&Duncan, 1955)	Charles, Maria and David B. Grusky. 2004. <i>Occupational Ghettos: The Worldwide Segregation of Women and Men.</i>

				Stanford, California: Stanford University Press. P. 71, Table 3.3.
6	All countries LIS; Wave V. Sweden, LNU Survey, 2000	Earnings quintiles	Earnings quintiles were computed for hourly wage. The Figure display the proportion of working women who are in the top and bottom quintiles of their country's earning distribution. A value of 20% would imply equal gender representation in a quintile.	Includes salaried workers only, aged 25-55, who work at least 8 hours a week
7	All countries LIS; Wave V. Sweden, LNU Survey, 2000	Gender wage gaps	In hourly wage.	Includes salaried workers only, aged 25-55, who work at least 8 hours a week
8	LIS; All countries Wave V. Sweden Wave IV	Mothers Non-mothers	To pre-school children (aged 0-6) To pre-school children (aged 0-6)	aged 25-60
9	Italy and USA LIS, Wave V. Sweden, LNU, 2000. Germany, GSOEP, 2000	Wage gaps between high and low educated women	- Wage gaps were computed for annual wage. - High and low education was identified according to LIS standardized education levels: Low education: up to compulsory education, or initial vocational education. High education: university/college education, or specialized vocational education.	Includes salaried workers only, aged 25-55, who work at least 8 hours a week
Table 1	Kilkey and Bradshaw (1999)		See: Tables 5.1 (pp. 156-157), 5.2 (pp. 158-159), and 5.3 (p. 161).	Date in all Tables refer to 1990's