

# **GENDER AGENCY AT THE INTERSECTION OF STATE, MARKET AND FAMILY: CHANGES IN FERTILITY AND MATERNAL LABOR SUPPLY IN EIGHT COUNTRIES<sup>1</sup>**

*by*  
*Lynn Prince Cooke*

Current debates on the welfare state entail two intertwined questions. First, does a nation have sufficient active labor force participation to maintain the benefits for non-participants? Second, do social provisions exacerbate or attenuate class, ethnic and other distinctions within society? As predominantly structural or institutional debates, these discussions tend to exclude the impact social provisions have on facilitating individual agency among members of social groups. Yet the institutions of state, market and family interact to shape a gender order which specifies the types of social or civil claims that can be made by individuals. The gender order yields the societal boundaries within which agency can be exercised. This paper will present comparative evidence of how the package of social provisions in combination with market factors manifests in women's agency regarding family choices in eight countries. This, in turn, provides material evidence of whether the institutionally-framed gender order encourages gender difference or equity in terms of paid and unpaid work.

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## **I. The Welfare State in Context**

Discussions of the welfare state cannot be disentangled from either the market or the family. Early theorists focused on capitalism's effect on systems of interpersonal relations. Weber (1947) posited that the rationalization behind the growth of capitalism results in individuals replacing unthinking acceptance of traditions, myths, customs, etc., with deliberate consideration of self-interest. This leads to reassessment of the family unit in terms of how it satisfies economic interests. Polanyi (1947) claimed that capitalism, by commodifying labor, breaks down the bonds of reciprocity that force interdependence. He suggested that the role of the state is to intervene when market forces wreck havoc on individual lives. This could be considered the most rudimentary function of the modern welfare state.

Industrialization also resulted in a sexual division of labor, a division between production and reproduction. When production shifted from the field to the factory, the nuclear family unit evolved, with men undertaking the paid market work while women carried the burden of domestic and child-rearing activities (Chodorow 1999; Reskin & Padavic 1994; Weber 1927). Women's reproductive work is only indirectly rewarded economically via wages paid to working husbands (Dalla Costa 1972).

Early welfare state provisions reinforced this male-breadwinner model to varying degrees, in turn reinforcing both the differences between men and women and the relative economic dependence of women on men. One key mechanism was the evolution of the family wage system, justifying men's superior wages based on their economic responsibility for wives and children. The earliest social provisions across industrialized nations are those offering provisions for market wage failures (see Orloff 1996 for a summary). Maternalism movements of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries sought to ensure that mothers without a

male breadwinner through the latter's death or desertion could receive state payment for the work of raising future citizens (Michel & Koven 1990; Skocpol 1992). Some feminist reformers sought recognition for the importance of motherhood in its own right (Pedersen 1989). In either case, benefits and services for solo mothers always remained inferior to the economic circumstances of married mothers. Thus emerged masculine and feminine strata of the welfare state, with claims stemming from market participation generally superior to claims stemming from maternity (Bryson 1992; Fraser 1989; Nelson 1990).

By the early 1960's, equality emerged as a salient construct in feminist theory. Many feminists focused on women's ability to participate in and garner equitable rewards from the labor market. This, in turn, decreases the economic need for a nuclear family unit of male breadwinner, female caregiver and dependents. This theoretical perspective does not supplant that of the legitimacy of women's claims stemming from motherhood; it is an additional avenue of claims on the state for women. Evidence presented here will demonstrate that women's agency manifests as a trade-off between these two avenues of claims depending upon a combination of market and social policy factors.

Also in the early 1960's, welfare scholars extended the role of the state to include a goal of achieving greater social equality (Wedderburn 1965, as quoted in Ruggie 1984). Esping-Andersen (1990) presents perhaps the most-cited crystallization of this concept, asserting that the welfare state is a power resource, a reflection of social rights that "push back the frontiers of capitalist power" (Heimann (1929) as quoted in Esping-Andersen 1990). Equality is achieved when social policy underwrites the removal of certain groups from the labor market so that economic equality is maintained regardless of work status.

Esping-Andersen (1990) developed a typology of welfare regimes along three dimensions. One dimension is state-market relations, or the extent to which either the state or the market provides transfers. The second dimension is social rights, reflecting the extent to which the state grants social rights equal status with property rights, so that citizens have a right to “de-commodify” themselves from the cash nexus of capitalist markets. He also views the welfare state as a system of stratification in its own right.

This classification yields Esping-Andersen’s three typologies of welfare regimes: 1) corporatist-conservative regimes reinforcing existing stratification and encouraging loyalties to the state; 2) social-democratic regimes cultivating cross-class solidarity; and 3) liberal regimes reinforcing a dualism of social assistance, wherein only the lowest strata rely on the state for means-tested support. While he acknowledges there are no pure forms of these ideal-types, Esping-Andersen suggests that continental European countries tend to be corporatist-conservative regimes, the Nordic countries exemplify social-democratic ones, and the English-speaking countries of Australia, Canada, England and the US typify liberal regimes.

It is at this point that the two theoretical strands concerned with social equality collided. Feminists pointed out that Esping-Andersen’s concept of de-commodification implied that a citizen must be an active labor market participant (Lewis 1992; Orloff 1993). Because of the sexual division of labor, such a citizen is more likely to be male than female. By predicating social rights on labor market participation, Esping-Andersen tacitly excluded women from the right to make claims. Another critique is the typology’s silence on gender differentiated outcomes that result from social policy provisions (Orloff 1993; Lewis 1992; Lewis and Ostner 1995; Sainsbury 1994).

Orloff (1993) suggests extending Esping-Andersen's typology to include two further dimensions to accommodate gendered elements of the welfare state: the extent of social provisions that increase women's access to paid work, and women's capacity to establish and maintain autonomous households. In other words, the challenge for the welfare state to address gender differentiation is to enable women to commodify their work. Such commodification can be accomplished either by "(1) establishing secure incomes for women who engage in full-time domestic work and caring for their children; and (2) improving access to paid work and establishing services that reduce the burden of caring on individual households (Orloff 1993, pp. 320). In this way, Orloff adds a dimension for legitimizing women's claims of both difference (maternity) and equality (work).

## **II. Policy Support for Maternal Employment**

A growing research literature has emerged comparing the extent to which social policies support women's employment more generally and maternal employment specifically (cf. Bradshaw, Ditch, Holmes & Whiteford 1993; Cochran 1993; Gornick, Meyers & Ross 1997; Gustafson & Stafford 1995; Kahn and Kamerman 1994; Kamerman and Kahn 1994).

More recently, the umbrella of "family policies" has been extended to include other social policies that directly or indirectly affect women's labor force participation, such as elder care and taxation systems. Elder care is an important consideration with the increasing longevity of the population and often falls to women. This further disrupts women's paid work. Whereas a burden of childcare falls earlier in the life course, elder care becomes a burden later in the life course. Taxation systems can either encourage women's employment

by treating all household earners separately, or discourage it by imposing a tax penalty for two-earner households.

Mary Daly (2000) uses this broadened interpretation of family policies to compare female labor force participation in 19 countries on two dimensions: extent and continuity. Extent is a calculation of full-time equivalent employment among women to adjust for varying amounts of part-time employment. Continuity is a measure of the career path, reflecting whether employment on average is interrupted to accommodate childbearing and on-going care provision. While Scandinavian countries, representing social-democratic regimes, had both high extent and continuity, so did the liberal regimes of the US and Canada, along with corporatist-conservative regimes in Portugal, France and Austria.

Korpi (2000) puts forth that gender differences are the outcome of social policies which foster “inequality in terms of manifest achievements of wellbeing, and, on the other hand, inequality in terms of freedom to achieve” (2000, pp. 1). In this way, Korpi views social rights as shaping patterns of personal agency, with gender differences in labor force participation the outcome. To compare countries in this context, Korpi extends the social rights dimension along a continuum of support for the dual-earner versus a traditional family model. In the dual-earner model, women’s labor force participation is encouraged by state support for the redistribution of care work within society or the family. This model is prevalent in social-democratic regimes. The traditional family model supports the sexual division of labor and nuclear family structure wherein a woman’s unpaid domestic work is indirectly remunerated via wages paid to the husband. This model is prevalent in conservative-corporatist regimes. The absence of state position along this continuum presumes the development of gender agency is left to the market, reflecting liberal welfare regimes’ laissez-faire approach.

Incorporating these dimensions and comparing the range of family policy provisions in 18 OECD countries, Korpi (2000) finds the lowest gender differences, before children, in dual-earner support and market-oriented countries. Once including the presence of pre-school aged children, gender differences remain stable in the social-democratic countries, but increase in the majority of countries with either a general family support or market-oriented model.<sup>2</sup> These results are similar to the country distribution of family wage and employment gaps found by Harkness and Waldfogel (1999).

Policy, coupled with technological advances during industrialization, also allows women to control their fertility. Demographer Edward Shorter (1973) attributes the marked downward slide in fertility during the late 19th and early 20th centuries across industrialized Europe and the US to the diffusion of contraception technology. This early technology was little more than knowledge of *coitus interruptus*, diffused from mature middle-class women to women of other ages and classes (Shorter 1973).

The next technological breakthrough was the introduction of the birth control pill during the 1960's, not too surprisingly coinciding with feminist claims for gender equality rather than differentiation. Within two decades, women gained control of post-conception fertility as well; most industrialized countries revised strict legal bans on abortion in favor of more permissive statutes (Glendon 1987).<sup>3</sup> The two countries that hadn't done so, Belgium and Ireland, have since relaxed even their formerly strict bans on the induced termination of pregnancy (Rahman, Katzive & Henshaw 1998). As shown in Table 1, women's current

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<sup>2</sup> Exceptions to this include Italy and Belgium, where the difference between mothers' and men's employment is actually slightly less than the overall difference between men and women's employment in these countries. Korpi does not address these two countries, but given the rapid demographic change in these two traditional conservative countries, one could speculate that this reflects a strong cohort effect, where younger women with or without small children are more likely to be employed than older cohorts of women.

<sup>3</sup> During this same time period, most countries also relaxed their laws covering divorce so that women were more able, at least legally, to establish autonomous households (see Kamerman 1995 for an overview).

control of fertility is fairly homogenous among industrialized countries. A majority of women use some form of contraception, with most preferring highly effective ones.

O'Connor, Orloff and Shaver remark the topic of female body rights has been given “surprisingly little attention” (1999, pp. 157) in the comparative assessment of welfare states despite the politically charged debates surrounding them. They compared laws governing abortion in their assessment of four liberal regimes—Australia, Canada, Great Britain and the United States— from the perspective of abortion as a social versus civil right. This distinction has ramifications for the political vulnerability of body right provisions, but does not compare the effects of body rights on women’s agency. Specifically, it does not compare the effects of social policy and labor market factors supporting maternal employment, versus national trends in changes in fertility that have been made possible by body rights legislation. While the former factors are institutional or structural components affecting gender equality, fertility decisions reflect an important element of women’s personal agency vis-à-vis these structural or institutional constraints.

### **III. Gender and the Market: The Decision to Work**

Within economic theory, labor force participation is based on individual preferences for paid versus non-paid activity at a given wage rate. Modeling women’s labor force supply is more complex than for men due to the sexual division of labor. Women tend to retain the primary responsibility for domestic activity and childcare even when engaged in paid work, which in turn reflects in their preferences between paid and unpaid work.

For example, empirical evidence reveals that the minimum wage at which women will work, the “reservation wage,” is higher than for men (Ashenfelter & Heckman 1974;



Killingsworth 1983). Two streams of labor supply theory provide insight into how women's unpaid activities might account for these gender differences in the standard model. Blau and Ferber (1992) posit that domestic duties such as childcare increase the value women place on time in the home, making unpaid activities more dear than for men. Alternately, the cost of having childcare and other domestic tasks taken care of by others is really a family "tax" levied on women's wages, effectively lowering the net wage they might earn in the market (Connelly 1992; Michalopoulos, Robins, and Garfinkel 1992).

Wages paid to women engaged in family activities, therefore, are crucial to encouraging female labor force participation. Yet as of the mid-1990's, the female-to-male wage ratio among industrialized nations ranged from a low of 50 percent in Japan to a high of 90 percent in Sweden (Waldfogel 1998; pp. 140). Part of the differential can be explained by lower investments in education and experience women undertake if they intend to leave the labor force to have and raise children, as evidenced by persistent gaps in pay between women with and women without children (Joshi, Paci & Waldfogel 1999; Waldfogel 1997). In a recent analysis of seven industrialized countries, however, Harkness and Waldfogel (1999) find evidence that, even controlling for education and experience, women without children tend to fare better in hourly wages than women with children.<sup>4</sup>

It has been a tacit assumption in most analyses of female labor supply that women prefer family—as economist Becker (1985) claims, reflecting females' taste for unpaid work. Yet even in social-democratic states where social provision of support for maternal employment is high and the dual-earner model is encouraged, maternity still coincides with a

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<sup>4</sup> The seven countries were Australia, Canada, UK, US, Germany, Finland and Sweden. Only in Australia did women with children average an appreciably smaller wage gap to men than women without children. For Canada and Finland, differences between these groups of women were slight (Harkness & Waldfogel 1999, Table 1).

decline in labor force participation. Where such supports are absent, the family gap in employment is larger still. This places women on the horns of a dilemma, which, if sufficiently egregious, can ultimately force them to choose between work and family. Such a choice is a reflection of the agency granted to women at the intersection of state, market and family institutions.

#### **IV. Women's Equality-Maternity Choice Model**

National social policy and the labor market provide the institutional parameters within which women can exercise personal agency regarding both employment in paid work and extent of maternity. The social policy and market factors under which women choose claims based on equality (labor market participation), difference (stable or increasing fertility), or both are crucial to a full analysis of social policy and market effects on gender relations. These institutional factors shape the way in which women make rational choices in an effort to maximize personal satisfaction. A proposed model of women's choice between employment, reflecting agency via equality, versus fertility, reflecting agency via maternity, will be presented next.

Women's choices regarding fertility and employment vary depending upon the economic and social circumstances in which they find themselves. The range of possibilities reflecting these choices between maternal employment and fertility levels is presented in Figure 1. The four quadrants each represent patterns of how women might combine or trade-off employment with motherhood in industrialized countries. Changes over time in average hourly employment are represented on the x-axis; changes in national fertility levels are represented on the y-axis.

The choice model has several advantages over the current analyses of welfare regimes and gender effects therein. First, it inherently incorporates market effects, which social policy is intended to ameliorate when negative. But I do not think it is the intention of either welfare theorists or policy makers to amend market effects when they are positive. Consequently, both sources of provision are important in determining the extent to which women's burden of care is redistributed. Second, by focusing on women's actual behavior in the realms of paid versus unpaid work, the model provides evidence of which approach to equality is most prevalent and under what combination of market and policy provisions. This shifts the debate from theoretical desirability of the institutional inputs to consideration of the acceptability of institutional outputs. Four output scenarios are depicted in the choice model.

Quadrant I represents the Superwoman Choice. Here, women aggressively pursue both paid work and maternity, representing material pursuit of both gender equality and difference. This requires a strong labor market and some combination of social provisions or market factors that support domestic-related activities. If broad social provisions supporting maternal employment are either sufficient or the optimal way to ease the demands of family, then both fertility levels and employment should be higher in those countries with the most generous social supports for maternal employment.

Alternately, the market can provide at least some of the same services that social policy provides. While Esping-Andersen's typology included either state or market provision of transfers, the relative effectiveness of state versus market supports is at yet unexplored. For example, in this choice model, if the market is a sufficient or perhaps even more efficient way to deliver maternal employment supports, then fertility and employment should be higher in those countries with the most market-driven welfare regimes.

Quadrant II represents the Job-over-Maternity Choice. Women in this quadrant increase their labor market participation, but this is facilitated by a concomitant reduction in fertility. This would be expected where supports for maternity are insufficient to ameliorate the burden of it such as typically claimed within liberal welfare regimes, or where rewards for labor market participation are sufficiently high to shift a woman's preference away from unpaid work in the home. This represents a choice for labor market equality at the expense of maternity. In this scenario, the immediate needs of production are being met, but societal reproduction may be jeopardized over time.

Quadrant III represents Economic Disempowerment, where both labor force participation and fertility decline. This would be expected where economic conditions are so poor that growth in labor force participation is difficult to achieve. In addition, poor economic conditions are expected to continue indefinitely so that women reduce their fertility as well. Examples of this have been documented in the US during the Great Depression (Elder 1975), and more recently among former East Germans following economic unification (Witte & Wagner 1995). In this scenario, all the institutions have failed to sustain either production or reproduction.

Quadrant IV represents the Maternal Choice. Women in this quadrant reduce employment in order to accommodate childbearing. This trend is expected in conservative-corporatist regimes where traditional family structures are reinforced and forces women to be economically dependent on a male breadwinner. This choice is also possible, however, if women receive sufficient transfers from the state to de-commodify from the market for maternity. This scenario reflects the ideal for those preferring gender equality of difference over labor market equality.

## **V. Method and Data**

The choice model presumes a woman is deciding between two alternatives in order to make herself better off. The two alternatives to be assessed here are changes in maternal employment versus changes in fertility level in eight countries. Four of the countries analyzed represent liberal welfare regimes (Australia, Canada, the UK and US); two represent conservative-corporatist regimes (Germany and Luxembourg); and two represent social-democratic regimes (Sweden and Finland).

Using a simple change model eliminates heterogeneity in baseline levels that can obfuscate trends. Therefore, changes between mid-1980 and mid-1990 in average hourly employment are represented on the x-axis; changes in national fertility levels during the same time period are represented on the y-axis. If preferences are shifting, the relative preference for one alternative versus the other will change over time.

Data on changes in aggregate national fertility levels are derived from the OECD Health Data 1999 and the United Nations World Fertility Patterns 1997. Data on changes in average number of children and female employment are obtained from the Luxembourg Income Study (LIS). LIS is an archive of microdata sets from 25 industrialized countries including demographic, labor market, and income data at the household and individual levels. The eight countries selected are those for which the necessary variables were available for both time periods. For the earlier time period, datasets used were LIS Wave II surveys from 1984-1987; the second time period was from LIS Wave IV surveys from 1994-1995.

Three variables are used to form the basis for measuring change in employment: average number of weeks in the past year worked at full-time employment; average number of

weeks in the past year worked at part-time employment; and average hours per week worked. The most detailed variable is average hours per week employed. This variable was available for both time periods for six of the eight countries. Alternate employment calculations were derived for the two countries, Finland and Sweden, which did not have full information on average hours of paid work per week. For Sweden, the extent of work variables were missing for the mid-1980's (LIS Wave II), so the information was derived from that country's 1991 survey (LIS Wave III). For Finland, the average weekly hours variable was only available for Wave III. Information on number of weeks of full-time versus part-time employment, however, was available for the requisite time periods. The overall extent and change in part-time work was minimal across the two time periods; the greatest change was in weeks of full-time employment. Consequently, the change in weeks of full-time work was used to compute an average change in weekly hours.<sup>5</sup>

For each country and time period, a sample was selected of all adult females age 18 to 55 with the youngest child under 7 years of age. This group of females was selected as being the most likely to have the greatest family barriers to employment. The age of the youngest child was selected as being the latest year for which public primary school starts in all countries selected (See Gornick, et al 1997).

## **VI. Findings**

### *A. Changes in Employment Among Mothers with Young Children*

The changes in hours of employment between the mid-1980's and mid-1990 for mothers with children under 7 years of age are presented in Table 3. In the baseline period of

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<sup>5</sup> Each week of full-time employment was assumed to be 35 hours, with the average change in weekly hours computed by dividing this figure by the 52 weeks available in a year.

the mid-1980's, Canada and the US had the highest employment among mothers with young children, with mothers in both countries averaging over 24 hours per week. Sweden had the next highest average at 23.68 hours per week, followed by the UK at 21.84. Despite its social provisions in support of maternal employment, Finland's mothers averaged just 18.59 hours per week, on par with the two corporatist-conservative countries, Germany (20.01) and Luxembourg (17.82). Australian mothers were least likely to be employed, working an average of just 3.50 hours per week in mid-1980.

In the ensuing decade, country patterns diverge markedly. As to be expected in those countries promoting employment most aggressively, average hours of employment increased in Australia, the US, Sweden and the UK. But maternal employment declined in Canada and Finland, both countries with policies encouraging it. Declines in average hours of maternal employment also occurred in Luxembourg and Germany, with the greatest decline occurring in Germany. To test whether the severity of Germany's decline was related to that country's economic unification with East Germany, Wave IV analyses were run selecting only for women in the former West Germany. This makes the most recent sample commensurate with the 1985 sample when only West Germans were interviewed for the panel. Among West German mothers with young children, however, declines in employment were even greater than for the combined sample, over 11 hours per week less than in mid-1980.

Changes in employment hours, however, vary depending upon general economic conditions. Change in total population average hours of employment was also calculated for each country to determine whether maternal employment reflects or is disparate with trends for the adult population as a whole. These national changes in average hours of employment for all adults between the two time periods are shown in the last column of Table 3.

In Australia, changes in maternal employment follow the national trend, with the growth in average hours of maternal employment (+7.72) reflecting a smaller proportion of the total growth (+21.59). In Canada and Finland, overall employment declined between mid-1980 and mid-1990, with average hours of employment among mothers with young children declining even more steeply. In the two corporatist-democratic regimes of Germany and Luxembourg, total employment increased while maternal employment decreased.

In the remaining three countries, the trends among mothers with young children actually outpaced total population trends. In Sweden and the US, average hours of employment among the adult population increased, but average hours of employment among mothers with young children increased even more. In the UK, the average among the total population actually decreased by 7.66 hours per week, so the modest .84 hour increase among women with small children reflects an even greater relative maternal employment gain than in the US and Sweden.

In general, the results for the liberal regimes could be predicted from Esping-Andersen's typology, in that the average hours of employment among mothers with young children have increased. Yet this growth is more aggressive relative to the total population in the US, UK and Sweden than in Australia. Further, Finland and Canada diverge from expected regime patterns. Despite supportive social provisions (Finland) or market pressures (Canada) encouraging maternal employment, in countries with recessionary economies, employment among mothers decreased more sharply than among the population as a whole. Finally, while it is expected that corporatist-conservative regimes discourage maternal employment, it is unclear why the average hours among mothers in Luxembourg and Germany have declined even further when overall employment increased.



Interpreting these results in the aggregate assumes that the relative level of maternity is the same in each of the countries, which provides no insight into the type of gender agency the institutions encourage. To determine whether the combination of state and market factors encourages women to pursue claims based on equality versus difference, changes in employment need to be juxtaposed against changes in national fertility. These results are discussed next.

### *B. Relative Changes in Maternal Employment and Fertility*

Based on the choice model presented earlier, one can predict quadrant membership of each of the eight countries. If extensive social provisions reduce the burden of unpaid domestic work and a dual-earner model encourages employment, both Sweden and Finland should be in Quadrant I, representing Superwomen empowered by the state and market to pursue both work and family. The four English-speaking countries should be in Quadrant II, where maternal employment is increasing under market incentives, but at the expense of fertility given lack of social provisions to ease the burden of unpaid work. The shock of economic unification could well predict that Germany might be in Quadrant III, or as a corporatist-conservative country, share Quadrant IV membership with Luxembourg. Quadrant IV membership is one where fertility is achieved by reducing employment, such as under the traditional male breadwinner model. As noted earlier, Quadrant IV membership would also occur in that as yet unborn industrialized state where social provisions for motherhood allow women to exit the market for maternity at no loss of economic equivalence with married and working women or men.

As shown in Figure 2, only three of the countries, Australia, Germany and Luxembourg, actually place in their theorized quadrants. The remaining anomalies provide insight into the interplay between market and social policy provisions as they encourage gender agency. First, the placements of Finland, Canada and the UK illustrate the effects of general economic conditions on women's choices. As noted in Table 3, these three countries are the ones experiencing general declines in average hours of weekly employment for the population as a whole, as well as among mothers with young children across the decade being analyzed. Finland had the smallest decline in total employment as well as maternal employment, suggesting that the economic recession was not perceived as severe or long-lasting enough to reduce fertility rates. As indications of general economic difficulties become more acute, declines in fertility also become more acute. One could conjecture that if the general economic conditions improved to an equal level in all three countries, change in maternal employment would move to the right on the model, ultimately placing each country in its predicted quadrant.

The relative placements of Sweden and the US are more surprising. Sweden, despite its social-democratic dual earner model, appears to have encouraged gender agency based on equality at the expense of fertility. In contrast, only the US, with its liberal welfare regime, appears to have created sufficient agency for women to pursue both paid and unpaid work.

Sweden's relative placement on the choice model is less surprising given the history of the social supports for maternal employment. As pointed out by Jenson and Mahon, the Swedish social provisions encouraging maternal employment evolved, "more in the sphere of distribution than that of production" (1993, pp. 84). Policies ensured that women's wages

were more commensurate with men's, but women's access to private sector jobs was not expanded and their responsibility for reproductive work remained.

Lewis and Astrom (1992) expressed similar concern with the Swedish model, claiming that while it resulted in significant gains for women, serious problems remain. First, there is substantial sex segregation in employment, with women over-represented in public employment while men maintain dominance in both high-level and private employment. Second, the Swedish model is not gender-neutral, in that the policies forced women to add paid employment on top of unpaid care work without demanding any changes in men's activities.

The evidence here suggests these authors' caution is warranted, supporting Orloff's claim that, "the claims bases delineated by Esping-Andersen, Korpi, and others as important for the character of social rights must also be considered in terms of their gender content and that some concerns of women cannot be satisfied even by the generous social-democratic policy approach" (1996, pp. 67). Social support for maternal employment without equitable labor market access or other means of encouraging greater sharing of unpaid work is insufficient to sustain fertility.

The importance of market factors is evidenced further by the unique placement of US mothers in Quadrant 1. How is it that mothers in the theoretical laggard of social policy are realizing greater equality on both dimensions of gender equality between mid-1980 and mid-1990? The US economy was growing and robust during the time period being analyzed. This might suggest that under favorable economic circumstances market factors are more efficient supports of both maternal employment and fertility than are targeted social provisions. If this were true, however, Australia should also be in Quadrant 1.

A unique feature of the US, however, is its strong reliance on the market with less concern for redistribution so that all classes are afforded the same opportunities. Consequently, the aggregate country comparisons could be hiding class differences in both employment and fertility. Whereas market forces might garner equality among women with the greatest economic capital, they might exacerbate inequality among those with less economic capital. For this latter group of women, social policy might be needed to ameliorate class distinctions in terms of women's ability to pursue both employment and family. Therefore, before drawing conclusions about the relative value of social policy versus the market in encouraging gender equality via production versus reproduction, possible class differentials should be analyzed.

### *C. Social Class Stratification of Market and Policy on Gender Agency*

Based on household labor earnings contained within LIS, each country sample was subdivided into three groups representing the lowest income, middle income and highest income. Those households earning 25 percent or less of the national median household income were designated the lowest income group; households earning 26 to 74 percent of the national median income were designated the middle income group; and the upper quartile of earnings represented the high income group. Household income was used rather than individual income since it influences the need to work (versus preference) and is necessary to find possible shifts in gender relations at the family level. If mothers are working either the same or more hours as the total income group, this indicates some rejection of the traditional male breadwinner model. It may be a marker of greater economic autonomy or shifting intra-family equality.

Changes in both the income group population and employment levels of mothers with children under the age of seven are presented in Table 4. Also presented are changes in average number of children for the group, and then for mothers with at least one child. For each country, the change in hours of employment for mothers with young children versus the income groups' overall change in average number of children is plotted by income level in Figures 3 (low income), Figure 4 (middle income) and Figure 5 (high income).

Germany's three income groups remain within the same quadrant on the choice model regardless of social class. Mothers with young children in all income groups have reduced their hours of employment over the past decade, but the change in the average number of children across the population groups has been positive. This suggests that the predominance of the male breadwinner model has continued across the decade in Germany. Of note, however, is that the two extreme income groups—low and high—are more similar to each other than either is to the middle income group. Mothers in both low and high income households reduced hours of employment by more than 10 per week, with approximately equal increases in average number of children. In contrast, the middle income mothers reduced employment hours by just six per week and the increase in the group's average number of children was much more modest at .02. This suggests that middle-income German women might slowly be rejecting reliance on the male breadwinner model, despite that country's lack of social policy provisions in support of maternal employment.

Luxembourg also displays a consistent male breadwinner model in that maternal employment has declined across the decade. The gains in fertility, however, are only realized among the lowest income group, while fertility among the middle and upper income groups is declining. This suggests that while mothers may still reduce employment, women in the

higher income groups may be reducing motherhood. It is also worth noting that Luxembourg's largest ethnic minority, Portugese, is over-represented among the low-income group. It is possible that the observed increase in fertility among the low income group may be confounded by cultural differences between immigrants from a southern European Catholic culture, versus their new northern European country home.

Sweden displays similar fertility trends to Luxembourg. While hours of maternal employment have increased across income groups, fertility is only increasing among the lowest income group. It should be noted that among Sweden's low-income group, the average number of children at baseline was less than half the average number for the middle and upper income groups, and the increase still leaves this group's average fertility well-below that of the other groups. In addition, the increase in hours of employment among low-income mothers was more modest than among higher-income mothers. Together these data suggest that, despite Sweden's broad social provisions supporting maternal employment, they yield only modest increases in employment among the lowest-income mothers, and are not sufficient to encourage fertility among higher-income groups. A model based on encouraging maternal employment seems to do better at encouraging employment rather than maternity. This is a first indication that social policy needs to more squarely reward the value of unpaid reproductive work, not just subsidize its cost.

For Finland, LIS data reveal a starkly different fertility trend than that reported in the aggregate OECD fertility statistics. Across all income groups, the average number of children has declined between mid-1980 and mid-1990 by an almost equal amount. The lower and middle income mothers realized a decline in hours of work during this time, while among high income mothers, hours of work increased slightly. Given Finland's economic circumstances

during the time period being analyzed, these results are neither surprising nor necessarily negative. Patterns of maternal employment and class fertility need to be analyzed under better economic conditions to see how Finland's social policy provisions are similar to or differ from their Nordic neighbor.

Analysis for the different income groups in the liberal welfare regimes reveals interesting first evidence of how policy and market factors combine in creating gender agency. Australia, like Germany, remains in the same theory-appropriate quadrant regardless of income group. As predicted, increases in maternal employment in Australia coincide with decreases in fertility. The increase in hours of maternal employment was greatest among high-income households; the decline in fertility was the sharpest among the middle-income group. This suggests that there might be some threshold level of wealth necessary to have the market support some of the burden of care. But either these market supports are not sufficient, or preferences for paid versus unpaid work among women are shifting so that even higher-income women are reducing fertility.

This seeming preference for work over fertility among high-income women is evident in Canada as well. The average hours of maternal employment per week declined the least among the high-income group, but fertility in this group declined as well. The lowest income group displayed male-breadwinner tendencies, with the increase in fertility among this group accompanying the greatest decrease in hours of maternal employment. The greatest loss in fertility, as with Australia, is within the middle income group despite Canadian mother's decrease in hours worked.

That a threshold of wealth seems necessary to let the market support maternal employment is also evident in the US. All three income groups saw increases in maternal

employment, but an increase in fertility only occurred among the highest income households. The greatest increase in maternal employment and largest decline in fertility occurred among the lowest income group. So in the US, the market is not equally accessible as a mechanism for supporting maternity; clear stratification effects are evident. What should be disturbing even to political conservatives, however, is that the middle income households appear to have equal difficulty accessing market supports for maternity as do the lowest-income ones. Among middle-income households, the average hours of maternal employment increased even more than they did among high-income households, but declines in fertility were commensurate with the declines among the low-income group.

In the UK, the greatest decline in fertility occurred among the low-income group, followed closely by the middle-income group. Only high-income households increased fertility, although even among this group, employment among mothers declined. This suggests that despite economic prosperity in a market economy, the male breadwinner model is maintained in the UK as has been argued elsewhere (Lewis 1992). For the UK, it would appear that the market is not encouraging gender agency either via market equality or maternity differences.

## **VII. Conclusions**

Social policy, the market and family institutions intersect to form the boundaries within which women can exercise agency. Women's expression of this agency in terms of changes in maternal employment and maternity provides a yardstick by which to compare and assess the effectiveness of different welfare regimes. Evidence presented here suggests that the market can provide support for maternal employment, thereby enabling some aspects of



gender equality. This support, however, appears available only to the most privileged classes with the greatest access to capital. While maternal employment is encouraged, both low and middle-income women tend to trade-off unpaid for paid work. If social policy is intended to redistribute some of this access to less advantaged social groups, it does not appear to be doing a very good job of it. Women are voting with their wombs, with a decline in fertility the norm across welfare regimes and income groups.

These results point to a need for fundamental rethinking of policy approaches across regimes. First, while the market might currently support both paid and unpaid work agency among high-income women in the US, this market is reliant upon an abundance of low-wage workers for its sustainability. If fertility among this low-wage group is declining, market-provided supports will evaporate and this stratum of women will again face the dilemma of their grandmothers unless men begin to assume an equal burden of care. Evidence from Sweden further supports that it is not enough to provide services for women to work, but the fundamental burden of reproductive work must be shared by both genders.

Second, there is evidence that market rewards among the highest-income women in Australia, Sweden and Finland might actually be shifting women's preferences away from maternity in favor of equality in paid work. That this appears to be occurring among the two social-democratic regimes with the greatest maternal supports for employment should give pause to policy makers and theorists alike. Rather than tweak existing mainstream welfare regime typologies with gender amendments, a more fully gendered model is necessary if a balance between employment and fertility is to be restored. The relative effects of social policy elements and market factors need to be explicated and analyzed across industrialized

countries, and across social classes and ethnic groups within countries. Only then can we begin to answer the two questions put forth at the beginning of this paper.

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**-TABLE 1-**

**Comparative Abortion Rights and Contraceptive Use:  
Selected Countries**

	1980's		1990's	
	Abortion Early Pg. <sup>a</sup>	Rate <sup>b</sup>	Abortion Early Pg. <sup>c</sup>	Contraceptive Use <sup>d</sup> Any / Modern
Australia			Hardship	76 % 72 %
Austria	Elective		Elective	47 33
Belgium	Illegal		Elective	79 75
Canada	No statute		Elective	75 75
Denmark	Elective	18.6	Elective, P	78 72
Finland	Hardship	11.7	Hardship	77 75
France	Hardship	13.3	Elective, P	75 69
Germany	Hardship	5.9	Elective	75 72
Greece	Elective		Elective, P	n/a n/a
Ireland	Illegal		Danger	n/a n/a
Italy	Hardship	13.5	Elective	78 32
Luxembourg	Hardship		--	n/a n/a
Netherlands	Hardship	5.1	Elective	77 75
Norway	Elective	14.8	Elective, P	74 69
Portugal	Danger		Hardship, P	66 33
Spain	Danger		Hardship	81 67
Switzerland	Danger		Hardship	n/a n/a
Sweden	Elective	19.8	Elective	78 71
UK	Hardship	15.5	Hardship	82 82
US	Elective	27.3	Elective	71 67

- a. Glendon, Mary Ann (1987). *Abortion and Divorce in Western Law*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press. David, Henry P. (1992). "Abortion in Europe, 1920-1991: A Public Health Perspective." *Studies in Family Planning* 23:1 (pp. 1-22). Rate listed is number of abortions per 1,000 women aged 15-44. "Elective" indicates those laws that allow a woman to obtain abortion on demand; "Hardship" indicates those laws that require a women indicate some level of mental, physical or financial hardship before granting an abortion; and "Danger" indicates those laws requiring that the woman's or fetus' life be in danger before granting an abortion.
- b. Rahman, Anika, Laura Katzive, & Stanley K. Henshaw (1998). "A Global Review of Laws on Induced Abortion, 1985-1997." *International Family Planning Perspectives* 24:2 (pp. 56-64). "P" indicates Parental Authorization required in case of minor seeking abortion.
- c. United Nations Population Division and World Health Organization, *World Population Monitoring 2000*.

**-TABLE 2-  
Percent Civilian Employment in Service Sector  
In 10 Industrialized Countries**

<b>Year</b>	<b>1970</b>	<b>1980</b>	<b>1990</b>	<b>1998</b>	<b>Δ1980-98</b>
Australia	57 %	65 %	71%	74%	9 %
Canada	63	67	72	74	7
France	48	56	65	71	15
Germany	43	52	58	63	11
Italy	40	48	59	61	13
Japan	47	55	59	63	8
Netherlands	56	65	70	na	-
Sweden	54	63	68	72	9
United Kingdom	54	61	68	na	-
United States	62	67	72	75	8

Source: US Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, October 22, 1999:  
*Comparative Civilian Labor Force Statistics, Ten Countries.*

**-TABLE 3-  
Average Weekly Hours of Employment for  
Mothers with Young Children:  
Mid-1980 versus Mid-1990**

	1980's	1990's	Change in Employment	
	Average Hours/ Week	Average Hours/ Week	Mothers <sup>a</sup>	Total <sup>b</sup>
Australia	3.50	11.22	+ 7.72	+21.59
Canada	24.72	20.46	- 4.26	- 1.22
Finland	18.59	16.29	- 2.30	- 0.68
Germany	20.01	10.54	- 9.47	+ 1.93
Luxembourg	17.82	14.58	- 3.23	+ 7.10
Sweden <sup>c</sup>	23.68	28.93	+ 5.25	+ 4.11
UK	21.84	14.18	+ 0.84	- 7.66
US	24.87	30.79	+ 5.92	+ 5.13

- a. Adult women age 18 to 55 with youngest child less than 7 years old.  
b. Change in employment among all adults age 18 to 55 (individual periods not shown).  
c. Earlier time period data from 1991 survey.

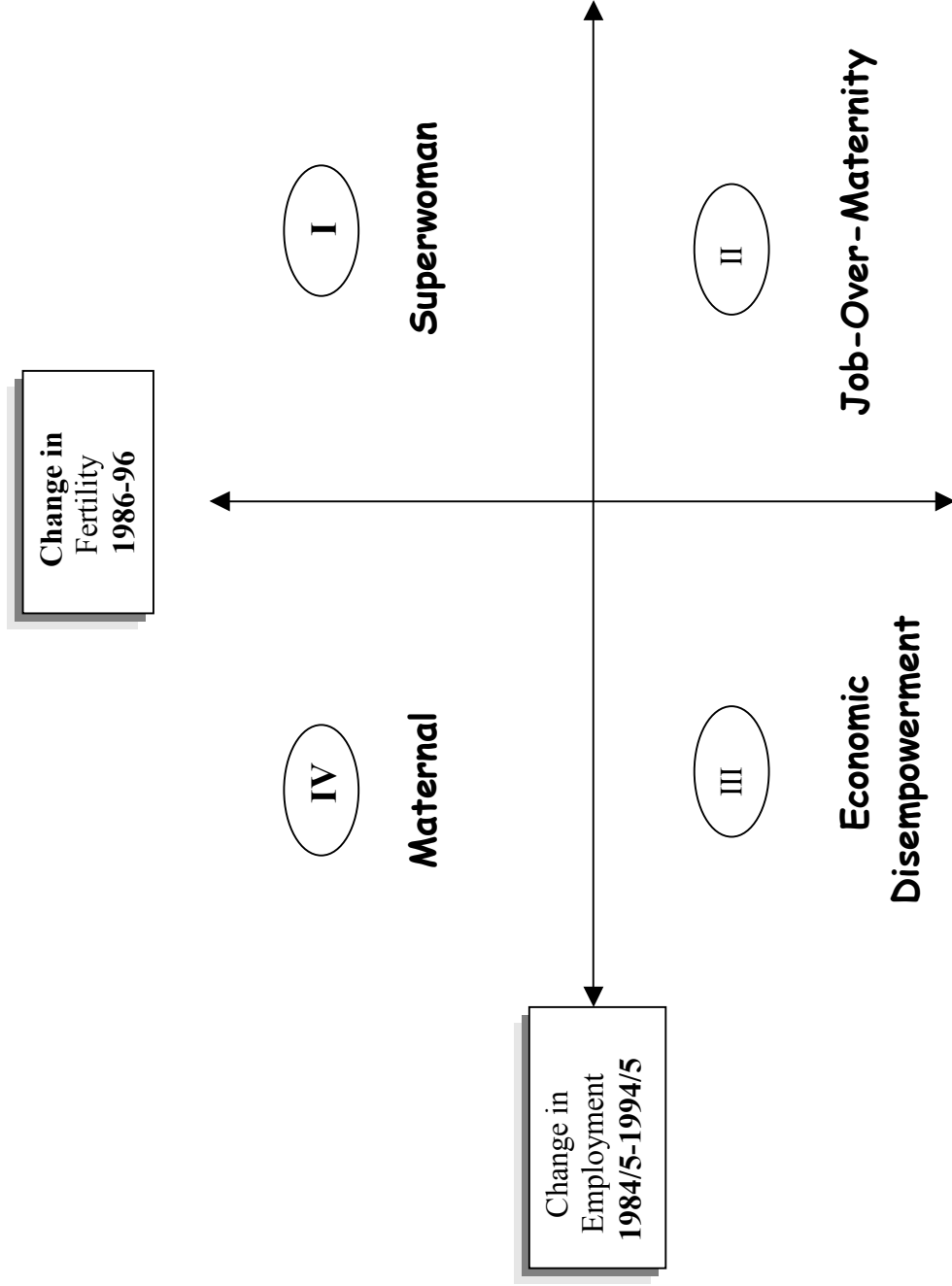
**-TABLE 4-**  
**Change in Maternal Employment versus Average Number of Children**  
**by Income Quartile**

	<b>Low Income</b>		<b>Middle Income</b>		<b>High Income</b>	
	<b>Total</b>	<b>Mothers</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Mothers</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Mothers</b>
<b>Australia</b>						
Change Hrs/Week	13.18	1.92	22.40	7.46	25.42	14.76
Change No. Kids	- 0.13	1.48	- 0.30	1.02	- 0.16	1.39
<b>Canada</b>						
Change Hrs/Week	- 5.00	- 7.99	- 0.56	- 4.42	- 0.03	- 1.17
Change No. Kids	0.01	1.40	- 0.09	1.20	- 0.03	1.42
<b>Finland</b>						
Change Hrs/Week	- 6.71	- 4.51	- 0.54	- 3.72	2.14	1.38
Change No. Kids	- 0.08	0.21	- 0.08	0.36	- 0.07	0.16
<b>Germany</b>						
Change Hrs/Week	- 0.56	-11.67	3.20	- 6.54	1.19	-13.63
Change No. Kids	0.07	1.33	0.03	1.23	0.10	1.66
<b>Luxembourg</b>						
Change Hrs/Week	4.22	- 3.41	6.73	- 3.27	10.34	- 2.53
Change No. Kids	0.07	1.55	- 0.11	0.94	- 0.04	1.39
<b>Sweden</b>						
Change Hrs/Week	- 9.50	6.93	7.76	11.49	7.24	8.57
Change No. Kids	0.08	1.67	- 0.04	1.27	- 0.05	1.37
<b>UK</b>						
Change Hrs/Week	- 8.43	- 7.32	- 0.91	- 7.71	- 2.48	- 7.48
Change No. Kids	- 0.16	1.05	- 0.14	1.08	0.03	1.32
<b>US</b>						
Change Hrs/Week	6.20	6.42	4.77	5.70	5.00	5.68
Change No. Kids	- 0.09	- 0.01	- 0.08	- 0.06	0.05	0.07

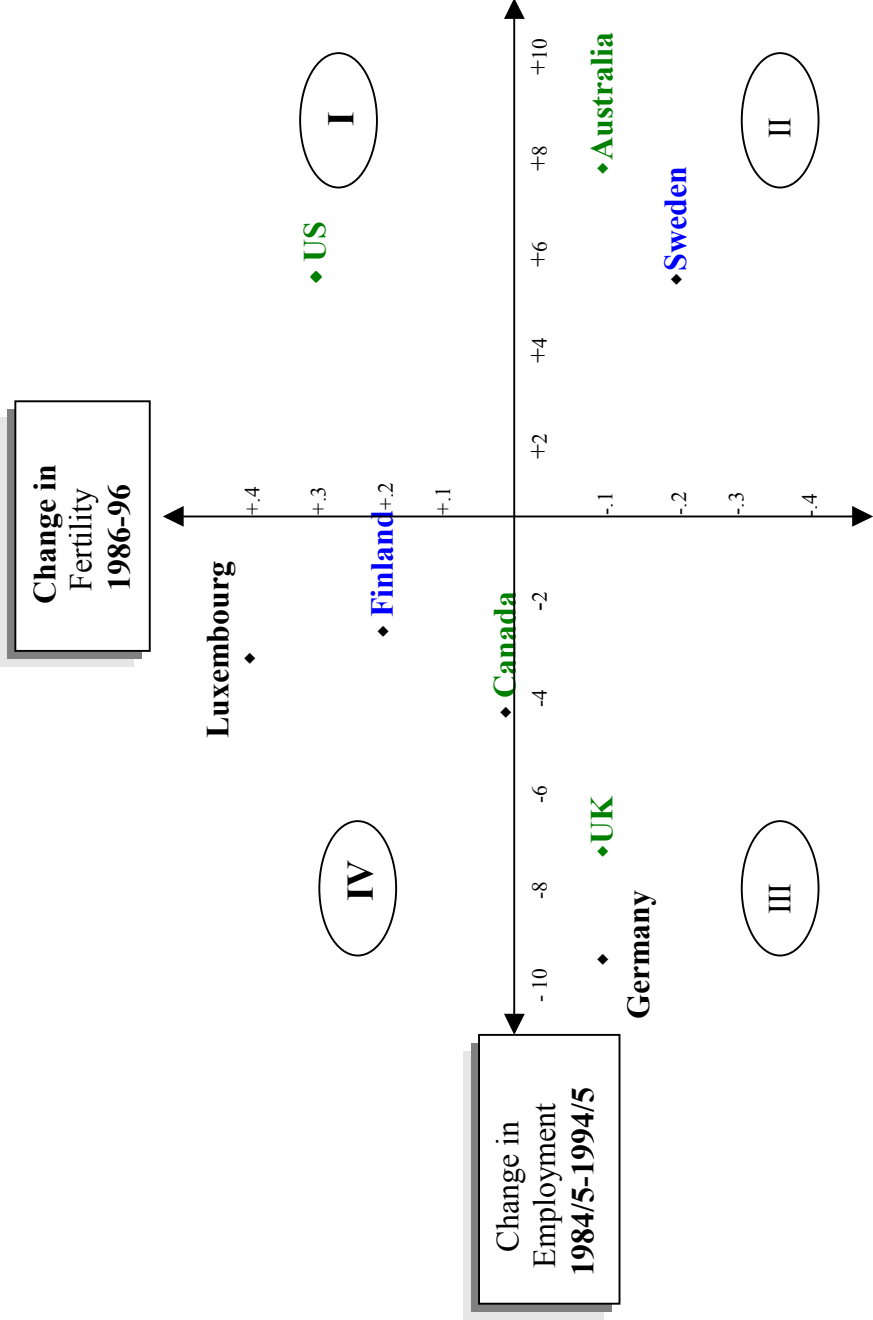




**-Figure 1-**  
**CHANGE IN MATERNAL EMPLOYMENT VERSUS FERTILITY**  
 Mid 1980 to Mid-1990  
 Mothers with Children Under 7, Selected Countries

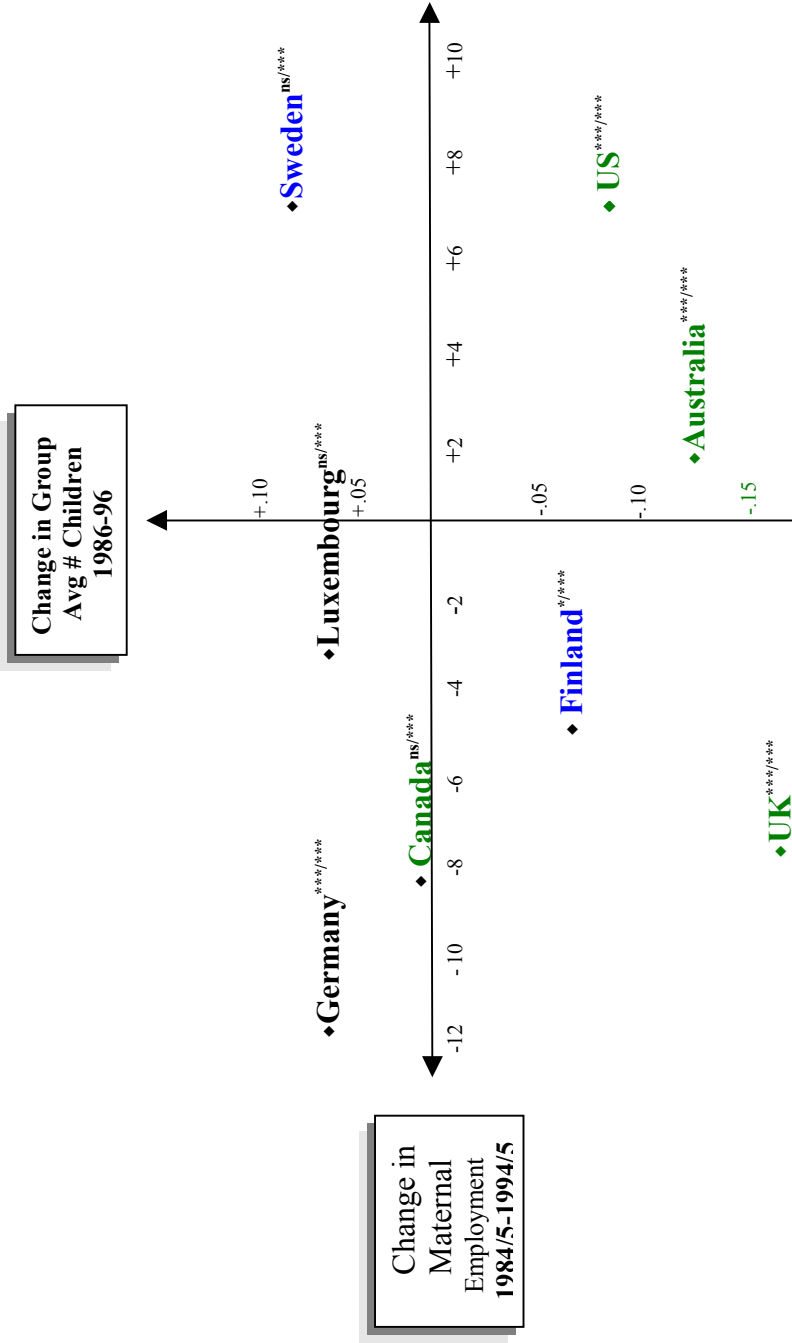


**-Figure 2-**  
**CHANGE IN MATERNAL EMPLOYMENT VERSUS FERTILITY**  
 Mid-1980 to Mid-1990  
 Mothers with Children Under 7, Selected Countries



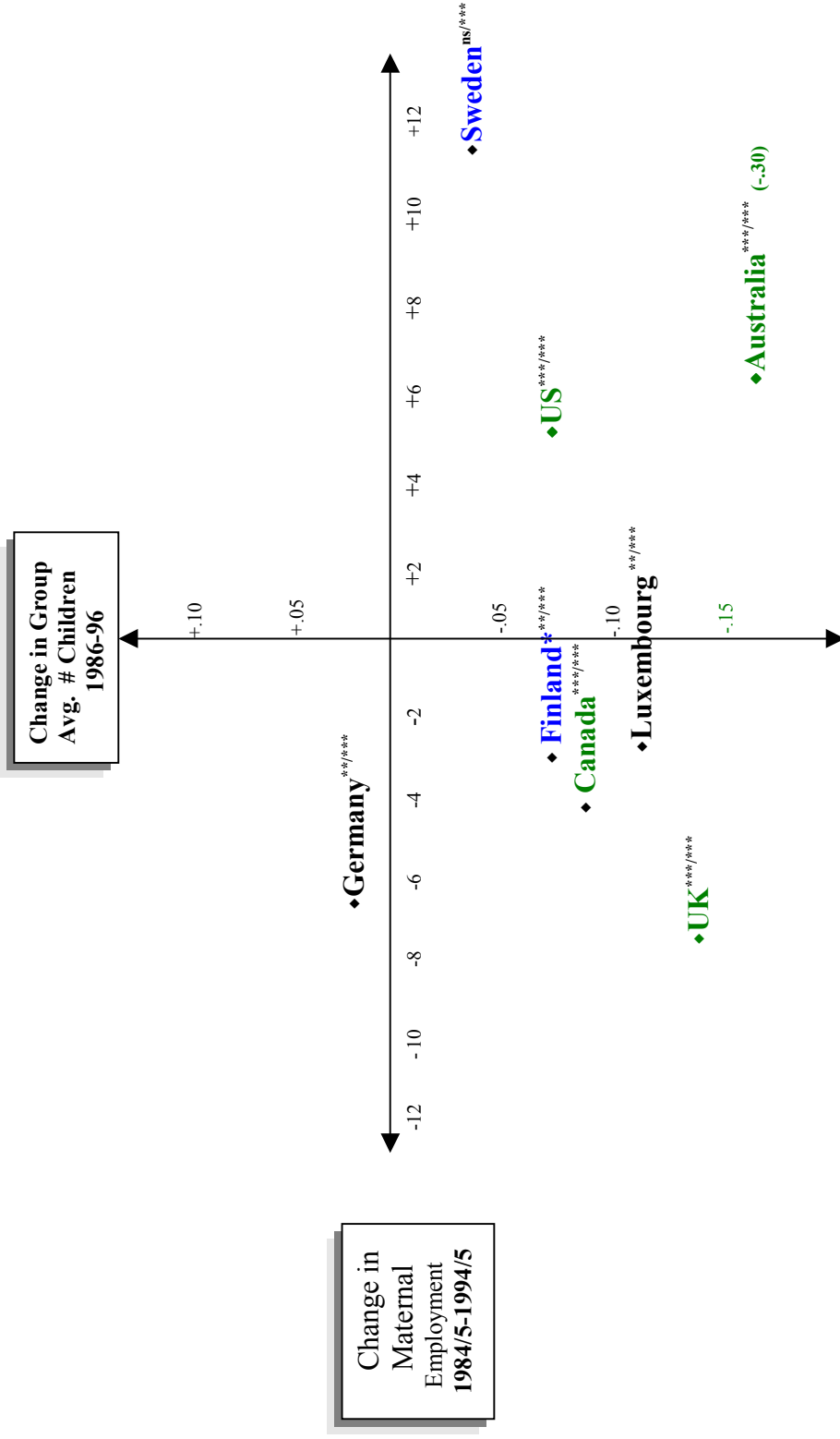
◆ Change in employment calculated as change in mean hours worked per week for women age 18 to 55 with youngest child less than 7 years old in the household, Luxembourg Income Study data, Waves III and IV for indicated countries.  
 ◆ Fertility rates OECD Health Data 1999.

**-Figure 3-**  
**LOW INCOME QUARTILE**  
**CHANGE IN MATERNAL EMPLOYMENT VERSUS GROUP CHANGE IN AVERAGE NUMBER OF CHILDREN**  
 Mid 1980 to Mid-1990, Selected Countries



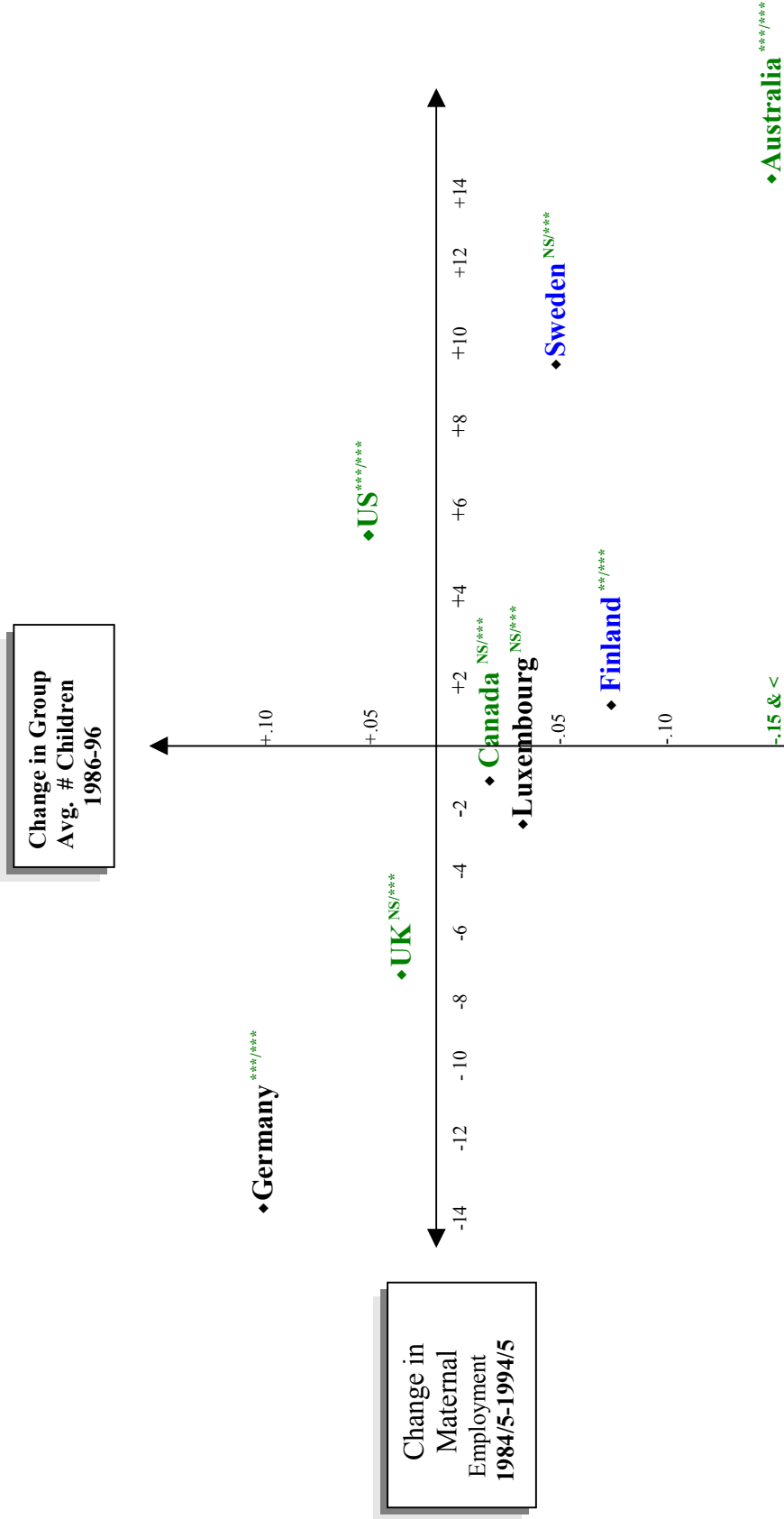
◆ Change in employment calculated as change in mean hours worked per week for women age 18 to 55 with youngest child less than 7 years old. Change in average number of children for total sample of income group, all adults.  
 \*\*\* / \*\*\* First symbol is significance for change in average number of children; second for significance average hours/week work.  
 \*\*\* p < .001; \*\* p < .01; \* p < .05

**-Figure 4-**  
**MIDDLE INCOME QUANTILES: CHANGE IN MATERNAL EMPLOYMENT VERSUS GROUP CHANGE IN AVERAGE**  
**NUMBER OF CHILDREN**  
 Mid 1980 to Mid-1990, Selected Countries



Change in employment calculated as change in mean hours worked per week for women age 18 to 55 with youngest child less than 7 years old. Change in average number of children for total sample of income group, all adults. \*\*/\*\*/\*\* First symbol is significance for change in average number of children; second for significance average hours/week work. \*\*\* p < .001; \*\* p < .01; \* p < .05

**-Figure 5-**  
**HIGH INCOME QUARTILE**  
**CHANGE IN MATERNAL EMPLOYMENT VERSUS GROUP CHANGE IN AVERAGE NUMBER OF CHILDREN**  
**Mid 1980 to Mid-1990, Selected Countries**



◆ Change in employment calculated as change in mean hours worked per week for women age 18 to 55 with youngest child less than 7 years old. Change in average number of children for total sample of income group, all adults. \*\*\* / \*\*\* First symbol is significance for change in average number of children; second for significance average hours/week work. \*\*\* p < .001; \*\* p < .01; \* p < .05.