

# Understanding Gender Economic Inequality Across Welfare Regimes

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## Introduction

The process of “farewell to maternalism” (Orloff, 2006) has taken diverse forms in different societies over the last few decades. With the massive entry of women into the labor market, significant cross-country variations have emerged not only in the level of women’s employment but also in their patterns of integration and in the nature of gender stratification in the labor market. To keep pace with this process, the literature on welfare states and gender stratification has branched out to cover a variety of gendered outcomes, besides women’s participation rates. This variability has yielded contradictory conclusions concerning the implications of welfare states for gender stratification. While countries characterized by progressive family policies were generally found to be those with the highest women’s labor market participation rates, and thus the lowest levels of women’s economic dependency and poverty rates, they were also found to be those with the lowest women’s occupational and earnings attainment (e.g. Daly, 2000; Esping-Andersen, 1999; Korpi, 2000; Mandel & Semyonov, 2005, 2006; Misra, Budig, & Moller, 2007; Orloff, 2006; Wright, Baxter, & Birkelund, 1995).

This chapter seeks to understand the equivocal findings of previous studies by analyzing multiple aspects of gender inequality simultaneously and mapping them into distinctive profiles. Shifting the focus from a single aspect of gender inequality to the relation between several aspects, the chapter examines the inherent tradeoffs between them, relating these tradeoffs to the institutional context in general and to welfare state strategies in particular.

The empirical evidence to illustrate the different strategies of state interventions and their relations to gender inequality are provided by four countries: Sweden, the United States, Germany, and Italy. Following Esping-Andersen’s (1990) classic typology, Sweden and the USA are prime examples of the social-democratic and liberal welfare regimes, respectively, while Germany is a continental-conservative and

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46 Italy a Mediterranean-conservative country. As each of the four countries represents  
47 a different type of welfare state, I have chosen them as representative cases to estab-  
48 lish the linkage between welfare state policy and patterns of gender inequality. Thus,  
49 after framing the institutional context in general, the distinctive pattern of gen-  
50 der stratification in each welfare regime will be identified, empirically illustrated,  
51 and theoretically related to the different institutional context that characterizes each  
52 regime.

53 The findings of this chapter reinforce the assertion that state interventions, espe-  
54 cially the ways in which public policies encourage or repress women's entry into the  
55 labor market, have a crucial bearing on the nature of gender stratification. Moreover,  
56 the findings show that mapping multiple aspects of gender inequality and assem-  
57 bling them into distinctive profiles not only reveals the costs and benefits of each  
58 policy regime, but also highlights the linkage between welfare state strategies and  
59 their presumed outcomes.

## 62 **Framing the Institutional Context**

63  
64 The most well-known contribution to the distinction between different profiles of  
65 state intervention is that of Gosta Esping-Andersen (1990). Despite, or maybe  
66 because of, the vast feminist criticism of Esping-Andersen's welfare regimes, (e.g.  
67 Gornick, Meyers, & Ross, 1997; Langan & Ostner, 1991; Lewis, 1992; O'Connor,  
68 1993; Orloff, 1993) his threefold terminology has deeply permeated feminist  
69 research and taken up permanent residence in studies of the welfare state and gen-  
70 der inequality. To rebut feminist accusations of neglect of gender-related criteria and  
71 the effect of welfare state institutions on gender relations, in his 1999 book Esping-  
72 Andersen relates different modes of care provision to different welfare regimes and  
73 stresses their importance for understanding a variety of gendered outcomes, such as  
74 women's labor force participation and fertility rates. He also coined the term "defam-  
75 ilialism" – which describes the extent to which the state (or the market) reduces  
76 the centrality of the family as a welfare provider. As an analytical tool for analyzing  
77 the relationship between the state, the market, and the family, this term has become  
78 fundamental to any discussion of welfare regimes and gender inequality.

79  
80 Subsequently, a considerable body of comparative research has largely recog-  
81 nized the explanatory power of Esping-Andersen's triple typology as a basis for  
82 distinguishing between institutional contexts, and its importance to gender. These  
83 studies confirm that forms of state intervention, as reflected by the provision of  
84 welfare and care services, vary significantly across welfare regimes, and therefore  
85 across the four countries that represent them in this study (e.g. Esping-Andersen,  
86 1990, 1999; Gornick & Meyers, 2003; Korpi, 2000; Misra et al., 2007). Sweden  
87 typifies the dual-earner model, where the state takes an active role in providing  
88 social and family services; in the USA, markets are the dominant mechanism for  
89 service provision; while Germany and Italy follow what Lewis (1992) described as  
90

91 the “male breadwinner” model, in which the state attempts to preserve the traditional  
92 division of labor in the home and foster reliance on the family for providing both  
93 welfare and care services.

94 The different modes of state interventions constitute the interpretive framework  
95 of this chapter. This interpretive framework is illustrated by ideal types of wel-  
96 fare regimes, which explain the different patterns of gender stratification. Patterns  
97 of gender stratification are identified by multiple indicators of gender economic  
98 inequality. In order to encompass the major expressions of gender inequality, differ-  
99 ent indicators of women’s economic position are utilized, from rates of labor force  
100 participation, through occupational attainments and economic rewards, to outcomes  
101 such as poverty rates and economic autonomy. This collection of indicators not only  
102 covers a wide range of women’s economic positions, but also comprises measures  
103 that capture the economic position of women in different class situations (such as  
104 access to managerial positions at the top and poverty rates at the bottom). Detailed  
105 definitions of the variables and measures are found in Appendix 1.

106 In the following three sections I will show that the diversified indicators consti-  
107 tute a unique configuration of gender stratification in the four countries studied,  
108 which can be best understood by the dominant modes of state intervention in each  
109 context. Because the importance of my analysis lies in its potential for highlighting  
110 configurations rather than distinctive dimensions, cross-country comparisons will  
111 encompass several indicators presented in the different figures, and will refer to  
112 each figure several times. All figures and Table 1 are therefore located at the end of  
113 the chapter.

## 114 115 116 **The Social-Democratic Context – Equal Employment, 117 Unequal Achievements** 118 119

120 The social-democratic welfare state advances a “dual-earner model” which, unlike  
121 the other regimes, is explicitly targeted at encouraging the employment of women.  
122 Although not its sole purpose, one of the goals of this policy is to advance gender  
123 equality by reducing women’s economic dependence. The active role that the state  
124 takes in encouraging women’s paid work is based on the social-democratic tradi-  
125 tion, which sees the provision of social services on a universal basis as a primary  
126 means of promoting equality. Historically, this model can be found as early as the  
127 1940s and 1950s, when a career woman was still an unusual phenomenon, but the  
128 idea of “women’s two roles” had begun to gain momentum (Lewis, 1990). During  
129 the 1960s, with the establishment of the welfare state and the massive growth of  
130 the public services sector, the ideology of “women’s two roles” was replaced with  
131 the ideology of the dual-earner family. In contrast to the former, which encouraged  
132 the incorporation of women into paid work before and after raising their small chil-  
133 dren, the dual-earner ideology supported women’s entry into the labor market even  
134 when they were mothers to young children, aimed at integrating work and family  
135

136 throughout the life cycle. Within this ideological framework, legislation protecting  
137 social rights in general, and working mothers in particular, was formulated and insti-  
138 tutionalized, in addition to the extension of childcare services provided by the public  
139 sector (e.g. Lewis and Astrom, 1992; Korpi, 2000; Ellingsater, 2009).

140 The exclusive feature of this welfare regime is not its emphasis on the importance  
141 of employment as a means of attaining gender equality, but rather its translation  
142 into practical terms. This is demonstrated by the large supply of public daycares  
143 subsidized by the state, in addition to the use of the public sector as a mechanism  
144 for creating jobs for women (Esping-Andersen, 1990). Because of the active role  
145 of the state as an employer, most working women in social-democratic countries  
146 operate within a protected labor market, which provides them with flexible terms of  
147 employment while protecting their rights as mothers. Other universal benefits and  
148 entitlements that protect mothers come in the form of lengthy maternity leave and  
149 job security.

150 Figure 1 provides data on female labor force participation that affirm the effi-  
151 ciency of the Swedish dual-earner model in raising women's participation rates,  
152 most notably among mothers of young children (see also Daly, 2000; Gornick  
153 et al., 1997; Korpi, 2000; Mandel & Semyonov, 2006). The success of the Swedish  
154 model in raising women's participation rates is also revealed by the prevalence of  
155 dual-earner households, and the tiny proportion of couple-headed households in  
156 which the male is the sole earner, as shown in Fig. 2.

157 The fact that the Swedish state allows women easy access to an independent  
158 income increases their economic contribution to the household at a significantly  
159 higher rate than in the other countries, and thus reduces their economic depen-  
160 dency on their partners, as seen in Fig. 3. Earnings dependency is measured by  
161 the gap (in favor of the husband/partner) between the relative contributions of the  
162 two spouses to the household income (see also Bianchi, Casper, & Peltola, 1999).  
163 In the gray bar – which displays dependency level by earnings alone – depen-  
164 dency levels are primarily influenced by access to a paycheck, although they also  
165 reflect differences between the spouses' incomes. The black bar – which displays  
166 dependency level after adding childcare and maternity allowances to women's con-  
167 tribution – indicates that state generosity towards mothers in Sweden further reduces  
168 women's dependency levels. This, however, does not inhibit their high rates of paid  
169 employment.

170 The high proportion of working mothers not only reduces women's economic  
171 dependence on their spouses' income, but also enables women to make a living  
172 without relying on a spouse's salary at all. The empirical evidence for this is pro-  
173 vided by the relatively low poverty rates among single mothers in Sweden, as  
174 shown in Table 1 (see also, Christopher, 2002; Kilkey & Bradshaw, 1999; Casper,  
175 McLanahan, & Garfinkel, 1994). Poverty rates among both working and nonwork-  
176 ing single mothers are relatively low, and almost half of the single mothers in  
177 Sweden are single, compared to only 4% who are widows. This implies that sin-  
178 gle motherhood in Sweden is often a matter of choice, one that is made possible by  
179 the state's support for single mothers.

181 The impressive entry of Swedish women into the labor market and the relative  
182 economic autonomy they enjoy from their partners have not, however, been accom-  
183 panied by equality of labor market attainments. On the contrary, in the protected  
184 Swedish labor market women are more concentrated in female-type jobs within the  
185 public sector, and, compared to other countries, have less access to positions of  
186 power and prestige and enjoy lower economic rewards (e.g. Mandel & Semyonov,  
187 2006; Wright et al., 1995). Figures 4 and 5 illustrate this through two of the most  
188 notable parameters of gender inequality in Scandinavian countries – horizontal and  
189 vertical gender segregation. Compared to the other three countries, Sweden has the  
190 highest rate of occupational sex segregation and the lowest proportion of women  
191 in managerial positions. Given the high rewards that usually accompany these posi-  
192 tions and the comparatively low pay typical of female-type occupations, women’s  
193 position in the occupational structure has tangible consequences for their economic  
194 achievements (Petersen & Morgan, 1995). Figure 6 shows the proportion of women  
195 in each country’s top and bottom wage quintiles. Sweden is the country farthest  
196 removed from egalitarian representation – 20% – at both poles of the wage struc-  
197 ture. Women are overrepresented in the bottom quintile and underrepresented at  
198 the top.

199 It would appear, then, that equality in Sweden, as represented by employment  
200 yardsticks, reverts to inequality when measured by labor market achievements.  
201 While the social-democratic state does succeed in bringing more women into the  
202 work cycle, it places them in a “feminine niche” that provides them with comfort-  
203 able working conditions, but at an economic and social price. The comfortable terms  
204 of employment enable women to be both workers and caregivers, but make it more  
205 difficult for them to compete with men for high positions and economic rewards  
206 within the labor market. As many feminists claim, the massive entry of women into  
207 the labor market in social-democratic countries has not altered the traditional divi-  
208 sion of labor between men and women, but rather transferred it from the household  
209 to the labor market (e.g. Hernes, 1987; Langan & Oster, 1991; O’Connor, 1993;  
210 Orloff, 1996). My claim is that this specific pattern of gender stratification is a  
211 direct product of the dual-earner model. In other words, the very attempt to fit the  
212 labor market to women in the social-democratic regime perpetuates women’s eco-  
213 nomic inferiority, because it sustains the model of “women’s two roles” (worker  
214 and caregiver) as opposed to “men’s one role,” by sapping women’s motivation to  
215 compete with men over market rewards and making female workers less attractive  
216 to employers.

217 The stratified configuration of the social-democratic welfare state, however,  
218 should be judged and understood within its ideological context. Although the  
219 benefits accruing to working mothers make female workers less attractive to pri-  
220 vate employers, this is a byproduct of a broader aim. Through social-democratic  
221 lenses, full employment for women – even at the price of their concentration in the  
222 public sector and exclusion from positions of power – is an important step towards  
223 equality, as it protects most women from poverty, and fulfills their right to indepen-  
224 dence: liberation from long-term dependency on their spouses and families or the  
225

state's welfare institutions. This byproduct is a reasonable price to pay in a social-democratic ideological context, which aspires to advance equality on a universal basis, even at the expense of maximizing profits for strong groups.

## The Conservative Context – Unequal Employment, Equal Achievements

The social-democratic regime finds its mirror image in western and southern European states – the conservative welfare regime, according to Esping-Andersen's typology. In contrast to employment-supportive policies in social-democratic states, the conservative tradition, which has been deeply influenced by religious parties, has given rise to welfare policies that tend to strengthen traditional gender roles within the family. Social rights are associated with employment, and, given the lack of active efforts to bring women into the labor market, they have primarily been provided to men. Women, therefore, enjoy such rights mostly as wives. As mothers, they are given payments through childcare allowances or paid maternity leave, which in turn entrenches their position as caregivers within the household. Strengthening the traditional male-breadwinner family, provision for "atypical" households, such as single mothers, tends to be residual (Esping-Andersen, 1999).

The strategy of relying on the family to provide care services, as expressed by the "male breadwinner model," is a central characteristic of the conservative welfare regime in both the continental and the southern European countries (Fraser, 1994; Esping-Andersen, 1999). In this regard the welfare state acts as a supplementary force. On the one hand, it extends protection to the wage-earner, on the assumption that he bears sole economic responsibility for the household, which has allowed women to refrain from participating in financially supporting the family and granted them protection as wives and mothers. On the other hand, it provides very few care services outside the family, as reflected by the comparatively small size of the public service sector. Even throughout the 1980s and 1990s, following the dramatic rise in women's education and the weakening of the single-earner model in Europe, daycare services for infants remained extremely limited. Instead, to compensate for this, certain conservative states (such as Austria, Germany, Italy, France, and Belgium) have begun to provide child-allowances that enable women to stay at home with their infants for the first few years of their lives (Kamerman, 2000; Morgan & Zippel, 2003). In other words, they continue to provide support for women by virtue of their being mothers.

Although countries identified with a conservative welfare regime share common basic characteristics, this regime displays the greatest heterogeneity, both among continental European states (i.e. Misra et al., 2007),<sup>1</sup> and between them

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<sup>1</sup>For instance, France and Belgium are well known for their provision of care services, as seen in the large supply of daycare centers for babies and young children in comparison to other central

271 and the southern European countries (e.g. Mingione, 1995; Naldini & Saraceno,  
272 2008; Trifiletti, 1999). Indeed, such is the variety that the three worlds of Esping-  
273 Andersen's welfare capitalism (1990) have frequently been extended to four,  
274 separating the southern European countries from the continental.

275 The southern European countries diverge from the typical conservative regime  
276 in their "rudimentary welfare state," which relies on a shortage of resources to  
277 subsidize social protection and rests on a weaker legal and institutionalized basis  
278 (Leibfried, 1992, p. 128). This also translates into less developed family poli-  
279 cies, in terms of both financial transfers to families with children and policies  
280 that help reconcile family and work. Although most conservative regimes are not  
281 employment-supportive, in southern European countries the "familistic model" is  
282 more deeply rooted. In general, the more familistic the welfare state, the less gen-  
283 erous the family benefits. Thus, social protection and care services in southern  
284 European countries are more heavily reliant on the family unit, based on strong  
285 solidarity and family interdependency within the nuclear and the extended family  
286 (Mingione, 1995; Saraceno, 1994). Moreover, while in countries such as Germany  
287 family transfers are often regarded as redundant, given the practice of a fam-  
288 ily wage (Esping-Andersen, 1999), in Italy, for instance, the traditional family  
289 role of the nonworking mothers was not given sufficient protection through addi-  
290 tional benefits for the male breadwinner (Trifiletti, 1999). Consequently, in this  
291 chapter I have taken two countries to represent the conservative welfare regime:  
292 Germany – archetypical of this type of regime – and Italy, a southern European  
293 state.

294 Turning to the gendered outcomes of the male breadwinner model, Figs. 1 and 2  
295 show the comparatively low proportions of working mothers and large number  
296 of households with a single male wage-earner that characterize the conservative  
297 countries. Italy is the only one of the four countries examined here in which male-  
298 breadwinner households are more common than dual-earners. While the overall  
299 proportion of women participating in the labor market is low in Italy (less than half  
300 of all women of working age), in Germany children constitute the primary obsta-  
301 cle to employment, as shown by the dramatically lower participation rates among  
302 women with small children.

303 The restricted access of women in general and mothers, in particular, to sources  
304 of independent income in the conservative countries increases women's dependence  
305 on their partners, as illustrated by Fig. 3. Because income from paid employment is  
306 the major source of economic autonomy for women, low female participation rates  
307 in Germany, and even more so in Italy, are translated into high levels of economic  
308 dependency on their husbands' earnings.

309 However, encouraging employment is not the only way the state can offer finan-  
310 cial assistance to women. As mentioned above, tying social rights to motherhood,

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312  
313 European countries. It is interesting that this large supply of daycare centers in France and Belgium  
314 does not come at the expense of relatively generous financial transfers to mothers who prefer to  
315 raise their children at home (but see also Morgan, 2002).

316 which is more common in this regime, is an alternative way to economically  
317 empower women unconditional on their labor market participation. Paid childcare  
318 leave – financial support to mothers who choose to raise their children at home for  
319 the first few years of their lives – is an example of just that. Sufficient data on paid  
320 childcare leave are not available, but further analysis (depicted by the black bar  
321 in Fig. 3), which excludes Italy because of missing data, shows that childcare and  
322 maternity allowances slightly reduce the dependency levels of German women and  
323 bring them into line with the USA, where due to the paucity of these allowances  
324 they have almost no effect on the average woman's income. Nonetheless, in contrast  
325 to income-related benefits (like parental or maternal leaves), care allowances are on  
326 a flat-rate basis and barely reach a third of the average wage, at best (Ferrarini, 2003;  
327 OECD, 2005; Morgan & Zippel, 2003). These extremely limited allowances do not  
328 provide enough to independently run a household, and as such are only effective  
329 when accompanied by the protection of marriage. The fact that such financial sup-  
330 port is most common in conservative states and has historically always been low,  
331 strengthens the assumption that its aim is not to promote women's economic inde-  
332 pendence, but rather to strengthen the family institution and its traditional household  
333 division of labor.

334 This assumption is also supported by the widely differing approaches adopted by  
335 Italy and Germany regarding single mothers. Table 1 shows that the best protection  
336 for women in all countries, but particularly in Italy and Germany, is participation  
337 in the labor market. In striking contrast to the low rates of women's employment  
338 in Italy and Germany, the rates of single mothers who work are high in both abso-  
339 lute and relative terms. In Italy, the low proportion of single mothers (an indication  
340 for the strength of the marital institution), is the main source of protection against  
341 poverty for women (see also Casper et al., 1994). Also, both in Italy and Germany,  
342 the high percentage of widows and the low percentage of singles shown in the table  
343 imply that single parent motherhood in conservative countries is mostly imposed on  
344 women rather than a matter of choice. Given the conservative tradition and the lack  
345 of employment-supportive policies to reconcile family and work obligations, this is  
346 not surprising.

347 The paucity of care services for infants, which would support women's full-  
348 time role as wives and mothers, fits within an economy that traditionally depends  
349 on highly committed male labor. In the absence of a large service sector provid-  
350 ing women with care services on the one hand and employment on the other,  
351 and given the lack of institutional arrangements that have traditionally developed  
352 with women's entry into the labor market (such as a supply of part-time jobs),  
353 working women in these two countries are expected to integrate within a male  
354 economy.

355 That said, the question of what happens to women who do go out to work is  
356 an interesting one. On the one hand, it may be that in societies with a conserva-  
357 tive tradition, where religious forces play a central role and further conservative  
358 attitudes towards the family in public opinion, women will only enter the labor mar-  
359 ket when they have no other choice (single mothers, for example). In other words,  
360 we might expect the majority of working women to be low-class women whose



361 spouses' earnings are not enough to live off, or single women who do not enjoy the  
362 social protection that comes with being married. Alternatively, it may be that women  
363 who enter the labor market in such a regime are actually those with a careerist ori-  
364 entation, namely, a relatively selective group of educated women who can compete  
365 with men in a labor market that is not adapted to women and does not offer them  
366 preferential terms of employment.

367 Figures 4, 5, 6, and 7 provide some empirical evidence of the second alterna-  
368 tive. German women have been fairly successful in attaining positions of power and  
369 authority, such as jobs in management. The likelihood that they will reach man-  
370 agerial positions is greater than that of Italian women, and is significantly higher  
371 than that of Swedish women. Italian women, who are less successful in reach-  
372 ing positions of power in the labor market, are most successful in maximizing  
373 their income. General wage gaps between men and women are substantially lower  
374 in Italy, where rates of gender occupational segregation are very small compared  
375 with the other countries, and women's penetration into the upper wage quintile is  
376 extremely impressive (very nearly reaching equal representation).

377 Figure 8, which presents labor force participation rates of women from different  
378 groups by the two factors that most influence women's employment – motherhood  
379 and education – strengthens the concept of selectivity. Whereas in Sweden there  
380 are virtually no barriers to employment, that is, all women work regardless of the  
381 limitations of motherhood and education, in the other countries this is not the case.  
382 In the USA motherhood inhibits employment, but not as severely as in Germany,  
383 where motherhood is a major obstacle to entering the labor market, even among  
384 educated women. Italy is the most interesting case in this regard: while motherhood  
385 is not an obstacle to employment (see also Fig. 1), holding an academic degree is a  
386 crucial factor. Nearly all women with a B.A. work – including mothers of preschool  
387 children – while nonacademic women show lower rates of employment, even when  
388 they do not have children.

389 Generally speaking, women's achievements in the labor market in Germany and  
390 Italy are negatively correlated with their participation rates. If we accept the expla-  
391 nation based on selectivity, then women's achievements in the labor market are a  
392 direct outcome of their low rates of participation, as conservatism toward women's  
393 employment keeps many women at home – in Germany, mothers to small children,  
394 in Italy, the uneducated.

395 Generally, the findings reveal that Germany and Italy share the same basic pat-  
396 tern of gender stratification, but Italy takes it to the extreme. The measures show  
397 that participation levels in Italy are the lowest, and thus the more selective group  
398 of women who do work has more impressive access to highly paid positions and  
399 enjoys the lowest levels of sex segregation. These findings provide further support  
400 of Esping-Andersen's decision to include Germany and Italy under the same wel-  
401 fare regime. Justifying his decision, Esping-Andersen claims (1999, Chapter 5) that  
402 the basic principle which lies at the foundation of the conservative welfare state –  
403 reliance on the family as the dominant welfare provider – is shared by continental  
404 and southern European nations. This shared principle is validated here by its shared  
405 outcome – similar patterns of gender stratification.

## **The Liberal Context – The Dual Model: Equal Opportunities and Class Divisions**

In sharp contrast to the conservative regime, in the liberal welfare regime – as in social-democracy – the importance of women’s employment as a means for achieving gender equality is widely acknowledged. In the spirit of the liberal tradition, and in the belief that there is no better alternative to the labor market for attaining economic independence, women, like men, are seen as potential earners. However, the conceptions of women as workers and wage earners translate into very different practices in the social-democratic and liberal regimes, despite their common emphasis on paid employment. While the importance of women’s employment for attaining gender equality in the social-democratic welfare regime is acknowledged by active state support, in the liberal regime – most notably in the USA – the market is the dominant mechanism for service provision, as well as social protection. Thus, care services that are most relevant to women’s employment, such as daycare centers, are mostly bought in the market in accordance with their quality (Morgan, 2005). Likewise, the USA is the only advanced society in which paid maternity leave is not provided universally by the state, but is conditional on private terms of employment (Gornick & Meyers, 2003; Kamerman & Gatenio, 2002; OECD, 2005). The state takes no practical responsibility for the special needs of women as child-bearers and mothers, assuming instead that these are matters of personal responsibility.

The need to work, due to miserly income guarantees, along with incentives to employment in the form of advancing anti-discriminatory legislation and tax credits (Orloff, 2006), results in relatively high rates of women’s participation in the labor market, and relatively low economic dependency of women on their spouses, as shown in Figs. 1, 2, and 3. The fact that women in the USA do not enjoy gender-based benefits (such as lengthy maternity leave, or leave to care for sick children), and have to function in the labor market without any concessions, makes them more attractive to employers in the private sector. This is accompanied by a high level of awareness regarding equal opportunities at the workplace and the demand for affirmative action, which helps women compete better with men for prestigious positions. Figures 5 and 6 show that women in the USA, in notable contrast to Swedish women, have succeeded in reaching senior positions in the labor market and are less concentrated in female-type jobs.

It would seem, therefore, that the American dual-earner model has managed to overcome the failures of the two previous regimes – in terms of both getting women into the labor market and affording them access to senior positions. However, the predominance that this regime accords to market forces creates large class differences, which intensify the disadvantages of the more vulnerable and needy groups. This class stratification has two consequences: it deepens wage gaps between men and women on the one hand, and it deepens class differentiation among women on the other. On the one hand, ignoring women’s limitations as child-bearers and mothers intensifies their difficulties in competing with men, and increases their chances of being overrepresented at the bottom of the wage hierarchy. The lack

451 of regulation of employment conditions and wages – a central characteristic of the  
452 liberal labor market – erodes the wages of the weaker groups, in which women are  
453 overrepresented. Indeed, this is held to be the main explanation for the large wage  
454 gaps between men and women in liberal markets (Blau & Kahn, 1996, 2003; Mendel  
455 & Shalev, 2009), as seen in Fig. 7.

456 On the other hand, the class stratification characteristic of the American mar-  
457 ket also creates large class divisions among women themselves (Shalev, 2008).  
458 Figure 9 provides empirical evidence for this claim by depicting the wage gaps  
459 between high- and low-educated women. As can be seen, the wage gaps between  
460 these two groups of women are twice as high in the USA as in any of the other  
461 countries. The wide wage gaps among women are an indicator of their diverse abil-  
462 ities to purchase care services in the market. Thus, for many women, the fact that  
463 they must attain economic independence without any protective welfare programs  
464 beyond those offered by the market comprises a significant disadvantage, critically  
465 so for unskilled women. Christopher, England, Smeeding, and Phillips (2002) indi-  
466 cate the poverty risk for different groups in the USA: as groups become weaker  
467 and in greater need of state assistance, the chance that they will be poor increases.  
468 Thus, women are poorer than men, mothers are poorer than nonmothers, and single  
469 mothers are poorest of all. While this is a familiar vulnerability in every society, it  
470 is particularly notable in the USA, where poverty rates are much higher than in any  
471 other welfare state (Christopher et al., 2002; Table 1).

472 Figure 8 shows that motherhood still constitutes an obstacle to employment, even  
473 among educated women. However, while middle- and upper-class women are pro-  
474 tected by their husbands' income, in the USA the lack of support for low-class  
475 mothers is a major factor behind the high rates of poverty among women in general,  
476 and single mothers in particular. Table 1 shows that nearly all nonworking single  
477 mothers in the USA live in poverty, as do nearly half of the working single mothers.  
478 These rates are incomparably higher than those of the other countries. Bearing in  
479 mind that one quarter of all families in the USA are single-parent families, and that  
480 the vast majority of these live in poverty, it would appear that strategies for enhanc-  
481 ing gender equality in the liberal regime are of no use to a considerable portion of  
482 women.

483 In conclusion, although advancing women's employment is a common goal  
484 for both the liberal and the social-democratic models, the former resembles the  
485 conservative model in its reluctance to actively support it. High rates of women's  
486 employment in the liberal regime are, therefore, also a result of the lack of protec-  
487 tion beyond the market, and, unlike in Sweden, have not succeeded in reducing high  
488 levels of poverty among women. A market-oriented welfare state, however, ben-  
489 efits women whose skills enable them to successfully compete with men without  
490 assistance from the state. For strong women the liberal labor market provides fertile  
491 pasture for success. They do not need the state's help in entering the labor market  
492 and are not harmed by the potentially negative consequences of such policies, as  
493 in the Swedish case. The maintenance of "gender neutrality," which would seem to  
494 justify the lack of benefits to women on the basis of difference, acts in their favor  
495 by protecting them from gender-based discrimination and betters their chances of  
reaching powerful positions in the labor market.

### Summary and Conclusions

This study reveals that welfare state strategies, especially the ways in which they encourage or repress women’s entry into the labor market, have a crucial bearing on the nature of gender stratification. The different patterns of state intervention succeed in narrowing certain aspects of gender inequality, while widening others. Moreover, the very success of a policy on one count may be a source of its limitation on another, so every welfare regime paints a clear tradeoff. The high levels of gender occupational segregation characteristic of social-democratic labor markets are the result of policies aimed at transferring care-giving work from the family to the labor market via the public sector. Consequently, the more the labor market in social-democratic countries attains its aims – high rates of employment among women and mothers – the more gender-segregated it becomes. In the conservative regime the picture is reversed: based on parameters of occupational segregation and earnings, this traditional society actually has a relatively egalitarian labor market, which is achieved in part by the low levels of women’s participation rates. The success of the liberal regime in advancing gender equality also comes at the price of its failures, as the very same state interventions have contradictory consequences for women from different classes.

The attempt made in this chapter to link patterns of gender inequality to modes of state intervention emphasizes the important role of the state. The concept of welfare regimes suggests that each pattern of state intervention, and the configuration of gender stratification which it promotes, operates in a different ideological and political context. As a result, solutions cannot easily be imported from one context to another. Although this does not imply that forward movement is impossible, it does suggest that increased gender equality will entail processes of change that evolve within each specific context. By framing the distinctive patterns of gender stratification across regimes in this chapter, I have highlighted the different challenges that different contexts pose to overcoming gender inequality.

### Tables and Figures

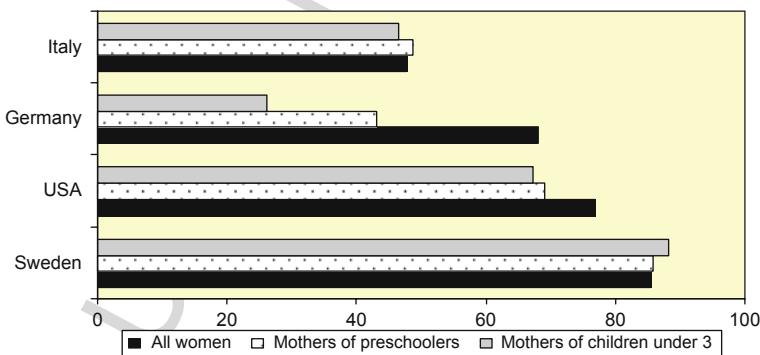
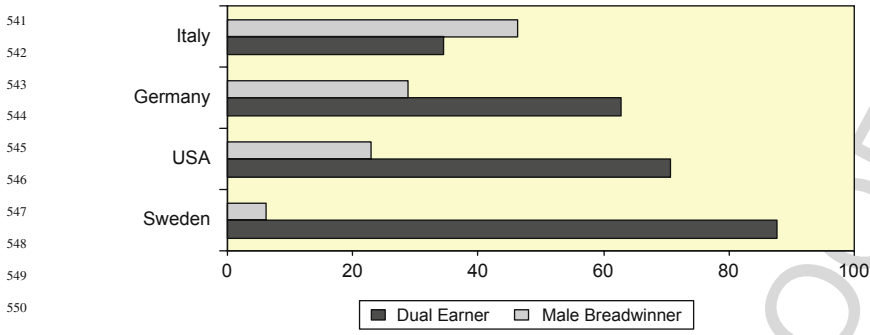


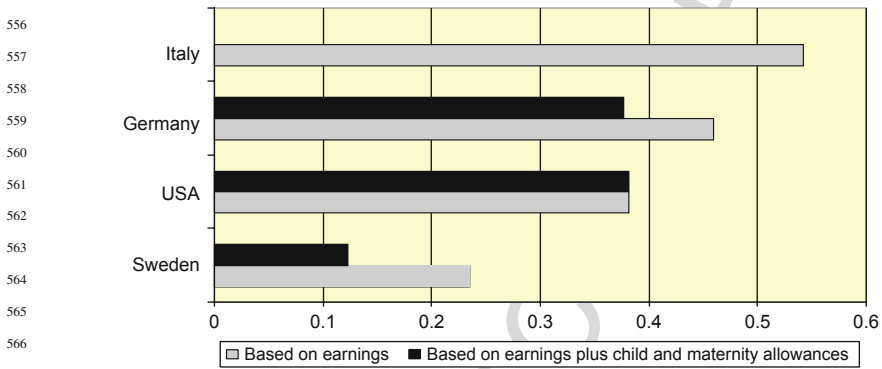
Fig. 1 Labor force participation rates for women (aged 25–60) by motherhood status

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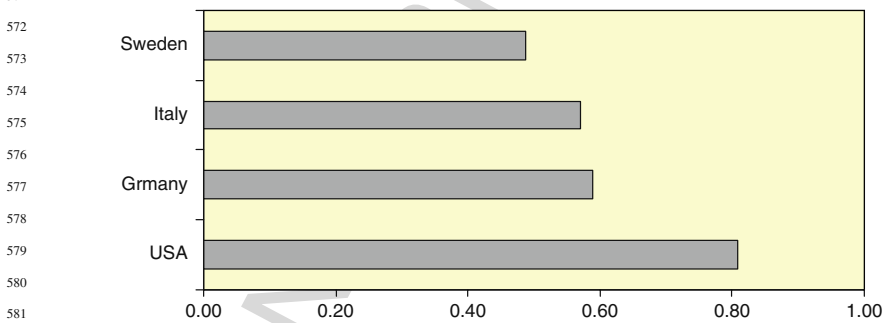
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Fig. 2 Distribution of couple-headed households by family type



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Fig. 3 Women's earnings dependency levels among couple-headed households



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Fig. 4 Gender ratio in managerial positions

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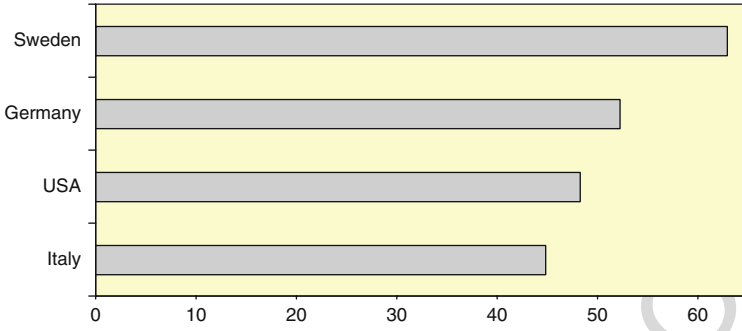


Fig. 5 Occupational sex segregation (index of dissimilarity)

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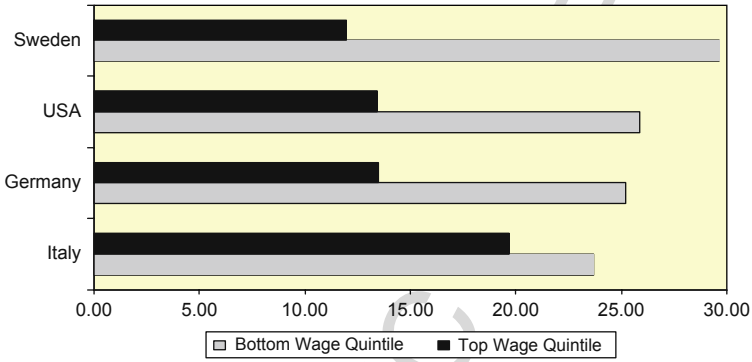


Fig. 6 Women's representation by hourly wage quintile (Note: A value of 20% would imply equal gender representation in a quintile)

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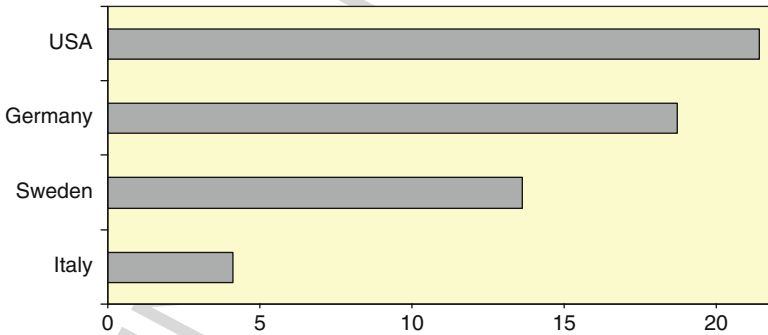


Fig. 7 National gender wage gaps (hourly earnings)

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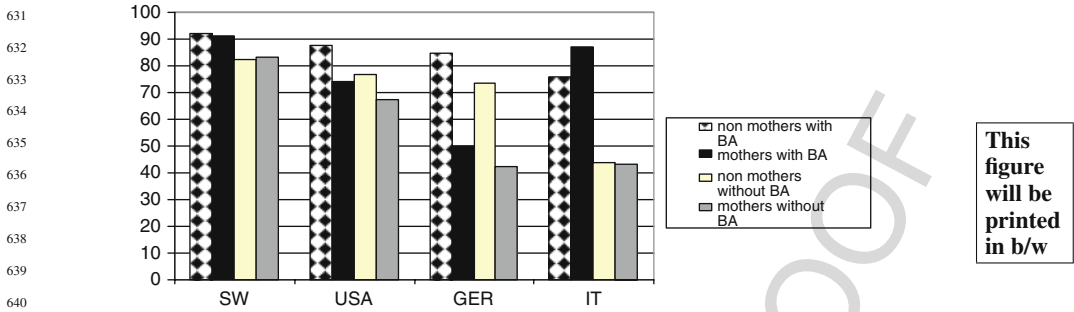


Fig. 8 Labor force participation of women aged 25–60 by education and motherhood

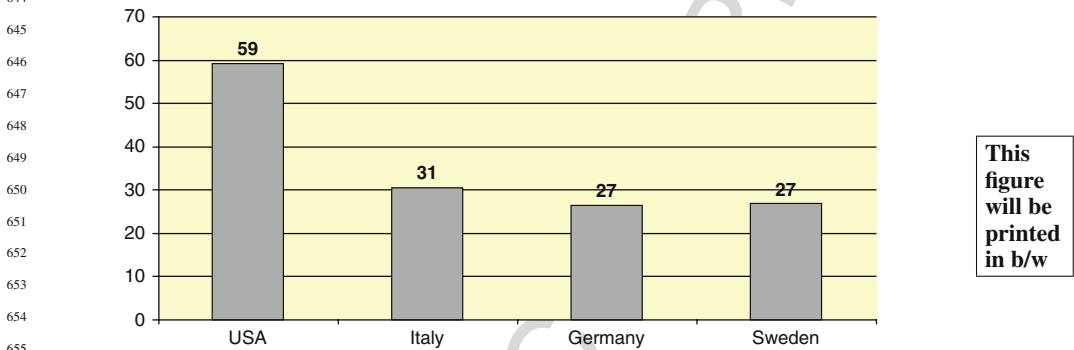


Fig. 9 Wage gaps (%) between women with high and low education

Table 1 Characteristics of single mother families (1990)

Single mother families (%)	Distribution of single mothers by marital status (%)			Single mothers employed (%)	Employment ratio single mothers/other mothers	Poverty rates <sup>a</sup>		
	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

<sup>a</sup>People in poverty are defined as those whose equivalent disposable income is less than 50% of the average equivalent disposable income in their country.

Source: Kilkey and Bradshaw (1999), Tables 5.1. (pp. 156–157), 5.2 (pp. 158–159), and 5.3 (p. 161).

## Appendix 1: Measures and Data Sources of the Gender Inequality Indicators Presented in all figures

Figure No.	Variable	Data source	Definition	Notes
1	Labor force participation	LIS Wave V, except Sweden Wave IV	For women aged 25–60	
2	% Dual-earners households (%)  % Male breadwinner (%)	LIS Wave IV	Married or cohabiting couples where both partners have earnings  Married or cohabiting couples where only the men 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
3	Women's earning dependency	LIS Wave IV, Except USA Wave V	The gap between the spouses' relative contributions to the household income: Dependency = (male earnings/both spouses' earnings)–(female earnings/both spouses' earnings)	Gray bar: Based on annual earnings Black bar: Based on annual earnings plus child and maternity allowance added to women's earnings
4	Access to managerial positions	All countries LIS; Wave V. Sweden, LNU Survey, 2000	Women (%) / men (%)	
5	Occupational segregation levels	Charles and Grusky (2004, Table 3.3)	Index of dissimilarity (Duncan & Duncan, 1955)	
6	Women's representation by hourly wage quintile	All countries LIS; Wave V. Sweden, LNU Survey, 2000	The proportion of working women in the top and bottom quintiles of their country's earnings distribution	Based on hourly earnings quintiles
7	Gender wage gap	All countries LIS; Wave V. Sweden, LNU Survey, 2000	$100 \times [1 - (\text{average female hourly wage} / \text{average male hourly wage})]$	In hourly earnings
8	Labor force participation by motherhood	LIS; All countries Wave V. Sweden Wave IV	Mothers of preschool children (aged 0–6)  Nonmothers of preschool children (aged 0–6)	Aged 25–60



Figure No.	Variable	Data source	Definition	Notes
9	Wage gaps between high- and low-educated women	Italy and USA LIS, Wave V. Sweden, LNU, 2000. Germany, GSOEP, 2000	$100 \times [1 - (\text{average annual earnings of low-educated} / \text{average annual earnings of high-educated})]$ 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 or college education, or specialized vocational education	

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