

Engendering Social Policy for Single Mothers:  
Cross-National Comparisons

By

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## Abstract

In this thesis, I explore the following questions: Do social policies vary across today's welfare states? What outcomes do variations across social policies have for women, especially single mothers? Finally, is single mothers' labour force participation facilitated by women-friendly social policies? These questions are answered through the examination of select welfare state social policies asserted by feminist scholars as necessary for: a) women's access to secure employment and equitable wages and b) women's economic independence/capacity to maintain an autonomous household. In particular, I examine family leave and benefits and childcare policies and how they might affect the employment outcomes of single mothers in three specified countries: Sweden, the United States and Canada. Chapter One outlines a select range of theoretical perspectives used by sociologists to examine contemporary welfare states. Chapter Two outlines the methodology employed in the study. In Chapter Three, the maternity, paternity, and parental policies of Sweden, the United States and Canada are examined with reference to the last decade and a half, referred to as the post-Fordist era. Chapter Four examines the main childcare policies and services available in each national case example. The purpose of this chapter is to highlight cross-national variation when Sweden, the United States and Canada are compared. Chapter Five pulls together the evidence to answer the three key questions posed in my purpose statement and concludes with a discussion of the study's limitations and lines for further research.

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## Introduction

### **Engendering the Welfare State**

The welfare state represents “a state commitment of some sort which modifies the play of market forces in an effort to realise greater social equality for its population” (Ruggie, 1984: 11). But how well does the welfare state do in insuring equality for all segments of a country’s population? In particular, how effective is the welfare state in promoting *gender equality* in employment and family life?

The scholarly debate surrounding women’s relationship with the welfare state can be grouped into four main perspectives: mainstream scholarship, early feminist scholarship, post-Fordist scholarship and cross-national feminist scholarship. Mainstream scholarship offers a comprehensive approach to studying welfare states, and is especially concerned with understanding the role of the welfare state in fostering equality among citizens in capitalist societies (Esping-Andersen and Korpi, 1987; Esping-Andersen, 1989; Mishra, 1986). This approach has been criticized, however, for its lack of attention to the gender underpinnings of the welfare state.

Early feminist scholarship attempted to reveal the male bias inherent in mainstream research by bringing gender into the analyses of the welfare state. By focusing on how welfare state policies affect women and men differently, early feminists argued that the welfare state functions as a public form of patriarchy. While successful in revealing the male bias in mainstream analyses of the welfare state, early feminist scholarship is inadequate because it overlooks

the diversity among actual welfare states in regard to women's social rights.

Post-Fordist scholars are concerned with the apparent decline of the welfare state in industrial capitalist societies in the last decade and a half—marked by the globalisation of capitalism. The ensuing economic restructuring of national economies is said to involve a transition from the Fordist era of extensive worker's rights and strong welfare states to a post-Fordist period of decline of social rights and the welfare state itself. One shortcoming of the post-Fordist perspective, however, is that there is scant evidence to date that all welfare states are moving along an inevitable track towards retrenchment.

In opposition to post-Fordist theorists, feminists conducting cross-national research of welfare states and their social policies argue that crucial social policies of some welfare states have been maintained and sometimes even enhanced during the last decade and a half. This latter group of scholars attempt, then, to expose the variability of social policies across and within welfare states and demonstrate how this variability affects women and men differently ((Orloff, 1993; Sainsbury, 1996; O'Connor, 1993; Benoit, 2000). Feminists conducting cross-national research on the welfare state attempt to measure the degree to which individual welfare states and their policies facilitate or hinder women's equality in both paid and unpaid work; they argue that the extent to which welfare states encourage women to participate in the paid labour force determines their degree of women-friendliness. More specifically, degree of women-friendliness can be defined as the extent that welfare states and their social policies a) secure women's access to employment and equitable wages in

the paid labour force and b) secure women's economic independence/capacity to maintain an autonomous household. It is this emancipatory potential that has sparked my own research interest. What social policies in what welfare states are the most successful in enhancing women's equality with men in employment and family life?

Those social policies that improve women's access to the paid workforce and at the same time grant them recognition for their substantial non-paid caring work are said to be the most 'women-friendly' social policies (Orloff, 1993; Sainsbury, 1996; O'Connor, 1993; Larsen, 1998). Two policy types that consider paid and non-paid work roles of women include family leaves and benefits and childcare policy. These two types of policies encourage women to fully participate in the paid labour force by helping to both alleviate their unpaid caring role and at the same time secure for them a position in the paid labour force. Such comprehensive family and childcare policies are of benefit to all women, but especially to single mothers. Because of their economic vulnerability, single mothers are often studied as a litmus test of the women-friendliness of welfare states (Lewis, 1980; Borchorst and Siim, 1984; Leira, 1992; Orloff, 1993; Duncan and Edwards, 1997; Larsen, 1998).

Regarding actual welfare states to examine, feminists conducting cross-national research often include Sweden as a case example of the survival of a comparatively progressive welfare state, even during the current period of the globalisation of capitalism (O'Connor, 1993; Orloff, 1993; Leira, 1992; Hernes, 1987). Sweden often serves as a best-practice case in which to measure other

welfare states against, as it also does in this study. On the other hand, the United States is often included in cross-national feminist analyses of the welfare state research to represent a non-interventionist welfare state (Orloff, 1993; Sainsbury, 1996; Esping-Andersen, 1989). Finally, Canada is intriguing as a case example because it typically falls in between these two other countries along the welfare state continuum.

### **Purpose Statement**

As described above, feminists conducting cross-national research assert that, while commonplace, welfare state retrenchment is neither inevitable nor universal across high-income countries. In effect, these feminists argue that women-friendly welfare state policies can continue to exist even during the current post-Fordist period. Hence my purpose statement:

*Do social policies vary across current welfare states? What outcomes do variations across social policies have for women, especially single mothers? Finally, is single mothers' labour force participation facilitated by women-friendly social policies?*

### **Summary of Chapters**

Chapter One, *Conceptualising Welfare States*, outlines a select range of theoretical perspectives used to examine welfare states. This chapter groups the research into four distinct perspectives: mainstream scholarship, early feminist scholarship, post-Fordist scholarship and cross-national feminist scholarship. The pros and cons of each approach are outlined, as well as my reasons for choosing the cross-national feminist approach for this study. The

final section of this chapter restates the purpose of this study.

Chapter Two, *Methods*, outlines the methodology used for the study. Chapter Two is divided up into two main parts: Study Design and Data Analysis. In the Study Design section, the step-by-step process employed in the examination of the variability of social policies across three welfare states (Sweden, the United States and Canada) is described. This section also includes definitions of central concepts and a description of the scope of the study, including the reasons for choosing a particular historical time frame, the selected countries and the specific social policies. As well, the reasons for choosing a comparative methodology are discussed, including the limitations of this methodology. The Data Analysis section consists of a detailed description of the procedures employed in my examination of family leave and benefits and childcare policies, including a description of the types of secondary sources employed in this study.

In Chapter Three, *Family Leave Policies of Sweden, the United States and Canada*, the maternity, paternity, and parental policies of Sweden, the United States and Canada are examined. These social policies are investigated with specific reference to the last decade and a half, referred to above as the post-Fordist era. This chapter investigates how certain types of maternity, paternity and parental policies, or lack thereof, may aid or obstruct the ability of single mothers to participate in the paid labour force.

Chapter Four, *Childcare Policies of Sweden, the United States and Canada*, examines the main childcare policies and services available in each

case example. The purpose of this chapter is to highlight cross-national variation when Sweden, the United States and Canada are compared. As with Chapter Three, the specific outcomes for single mothers are given close attention.

Chapter Five, *Outcomes for Single Mothers in the Post-Fordist Era*, pulls together the evidence to answer the three key questions posed in my purpose statement: Do social policies vary across welfare states? What outcomes do variations across social policies have for women in general and single mothers in particular? And is single mother's labour force participation facilitated by women-friendly social policies? This chapter also discusses the limitations of this study and suggestions for further research.

## Chapter One

### **Conceptualizing Welfare States**

This chapter will provide an overview of the types of theoretical perspectives applied when studying welfare states. Of particular interest are theoretical perspectives that examine women's relationship with the welfare state. It is possible to distinguish between four theoretical perspectives in this area. Each are examined in turn below.

#### **Mainstream Scholarship**

Mainstream scholars have been concerned with understanding the role of the welfare state in fostering equality among citizens in capitalist societies (Esping-Andersen and Korpi, 1987; Esping-Andersen, 1989; Mishra, 1986). Scholars working within the mainstream perspective draw heavily upon the work of T.H. Marshall, in particular his path-breaking book, *Class, Citizenship and Social Development* (1965). Marshall (1965) early on defined citizenship as the "status bestowed on those who are full members of a community...All who possess the status are equal with respect to the rights and duties with which the status is endowed"(92). Marshall went on to define three types of citizenship: civil, political and social. *Civil citizenship* can be described as an individual's liberty rights, including their property rights; *political citizenship* relates primarily to the right to vote and to organise with other members of civil society; *social citizenship* refers to an individual's right to economic welfare and security (Marshall, 1965). Marshall was particularly concerned about how welfare states

foster this third dimension of citizenship, social citizenship, by making available an assortment of social rights to its members. According to Marshall, truly egalitarian societies are those that have comprehensive welfare states that promote social citizenship, and at the same time democratic structures that grant members access to a full range of civil and political rights.

However, Marshall's assumption that full citizenship (i.e., access to social, civil and political rights) equates to societal equality remains problematic. This is because not everyone in possession of full citizenship is equal with regard to the rights and duties with which the status is bestowed. For example, even though women may be granted the same political rights as men, for reasons associated with women's unequal societal location, they remain under-represented (although less so in some countries than in others) in formal political systems (O'Connor, 1993).

Marshall's failure to acknowledge possible variations in citizenship status for different groups within a society is linked to his grounding of the concept of citizenship. Marshall utilized wage or salary workers as representative of the 'average citizen'. He was thus primarily concerned with extending citizenship entitlements to working class men. This was because women at the time when Marshall was writing (post-World War II) were only marginally attached to the paid workforce in most capitalist societies (O'Connor, 1993; Benoit, 2000).

In brief, Marshall failed to take into account how the opportunity to enjoy the formal rights of citizenship may be determined by an individual's societal location. Most importantly for this thesis, access to the same citizenship rights

does not necessarily mean that women will actually enjoy equality with men in society<sup>1</sup>.

Subsequent mainstream analysts have drawn on Marshall's work in an attempt to categorize welfare states into ideal types. One of the first attempts in building a typology of welfare states focused on polar ideal types. Scholars working from this tradition placed welfare states in one of two opposing categories (Mishra, 1986; Esping-Andersen and Korpi, 1987; Titmuss). For example, Mishra (1986) has constructed a typology that divides the welfare states of industrial capitalist countries into two groups, *pluralist* and *corporatist*, pluralist being a residual state role in social provision and corporatist being a highly interventionist role. Esping-Andersen and Walter Korpi (1987) have likewise built a welfare state typology premised on polar ideal types. This typology classifies welfare states as either *marginal* or *institutional*, again distinguishing between residual and interventionist welfare state provision. These welfare state models are useful in distinguishing between easily defined welfare state types, but are problematic when a particular welfare state seems to have characteristics of both polar types, and thus is difficult to classify. In sum, having only two options to choose from makes for a limited analysis of the welfare state.

In another vein, Esping-Andersen (1989) has extended the polar ideal type method to compare welfare states focusing on three key dimensions: state market relations, stratification, and social citizenship rights. Under the dimension

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<sup>1</sup> Access to citizenship rights is multifaceted and complex. Accessibility not only cuts across gender, but across ethnic and socio-cultural backgrounds. My study does not deal with distinctions based on race or class because of complexity, length and time constrictions.

of social citizenship rights, Esping-Andersen (1989) includes the concept of 'decommodification of labour', defined as the extent to which workers are insulated from the market by welfare state social provision. Esping-Andersen (1989) uses three key dimensions to distinguish between regime types: quality of social rights as measured by decommodification, the pattern of stratification resulting from welfare state policies, and the nature of the state-market relations. Based on these features, Esping-Andersen distinguishes between three welfare state regimes: *liberal*, *corporatist* and *social democratic*.

The liberal welfare state is based on means-tested assistance and consists of moderate universal transfers, if any. Included in the liberal regime are the United States, Canada and Australia (Esping-Andersen, 1989). An example of the types of social policies offered in these countries includes meagre cash benefits administered by the welfare state to low income families. The second type of welfare state identified by Esping-Andersen (1989) is the corporatist. This regime includes the Netherlands, Austria, France, Germany and Italy, and consists of state types often shaped by interactions between the state and the church. While there may be some universal transfers in the corporatist regime type, because of the allegiance to the church, these transfers often result in a commitment to preserve traditional family patterns. Countries which adhere to a corporatist regime type, for example, tend to have underdeveloped childcare systems due to expectations that mothers will take care of their children in their own homes.

The third regime identified by Esping-Andersen (1989) is the social-democratic welfare state, which includes the Nordic countries: Sweden, Finland, Norway and Denmark. Nordic welfare states are organized around principles of universalism and the decommodification of social rights. Social policies in Nordic countries are comprehensive in nature because their citizens believe they are entitled to receive a very broad range of services and benefits and are at the same time willing to pay for such services through their tax systems (Esping-Andersen, 1989). As well, social policies in Nordic countries are based on the principles of universality, as they are made available to all citizens (Esping-Andersen and Korpi, 1987).

While this three-type regime model is an advancement beyond earlier mainstream analyses of the welfare state, Esping-Andersen's typology nevertheless remains inadequate for capturing the variability that exists within clusters of welfare states (Sainsbury, 1996; O'Connor, 1993; Orloff, 1993). The problem is that countries may cluster together along some social policies but not others (Hunsley, 1997). For instance, some welfare states make available comprehensive family leaves and benefits but have paltry childcare policies. Such divergence in regard to particular social policies becomes problematic when trying to classify a welfare state within a particular regime cluster. Further, contemporary mainstream theorists studying the changing nature of welfare states continue to base their research on Marshall's concept of citizenship, using the male worker as the primary unit of analysis (Esping-Andersen, 1989; Esping-Andersen and Korpi, 1987; Mishra, 1986). As a result, along with Marshall,

these mainstream scholars can be criticized for excluding gender in their analysis of the welfare state (Benoit, 2000; O'Connor, 1993). As discussed in the next section, feminist scholars studying particular welfare states have attempted to reveal the male bias inherent in mainstream analyses.

### **Early Feminist Scholarship**

Early feminist scholars (1970s-1980s) studying the welfare state were intent on revealing the male bias in mainstream analyses. Feminist writers argued that by basing their studies on the male worker, mainstream theorists assume that the welfare state is gender neutral, that there is a little difference in women and men's relationship to the welfare state (Pateman, 1988). Feminists examining the welfare state in the 1970s began to debunk the notion of gender neutrality underlying mainstream analyses by highlighting how particular social policies affected women and men differently (Walby, 1989; Siim, 1987; Hernes, 1984; Borchorst and Siim, 1987). The welfare state, these feminists have concluded, is a patriarchal institution because it is almost always women who are disadvantaged as a result of welfare state policies.

To understand the patriarchal nature of the welfare state one needs to examine the shift from women's private to public dependence (Hartmann, 1979; Borchorst and Siim, 1987; Hobson, 1990; Siim, 1987; Hernes, 1984; Walby, 1989). Feminist scholars argue that while the welfare state has helped to decrease women's dependency on men, women remain dependent on the state for economic support (i.e. in the form of social assistance). Moreover, once women become dependent on the welfare state for income support, the welfare

state gains public control over women's dependence (Hartmann, 1979; Borchorst and Siim, 1987; Hernes, 1984; Pascal, 1986). To the extent that more women are reduced to the dependent status of 'wards' of the state, the welfare state can hardly be seen as gender neutral, but rather as reinforcing an historical deeply ingrained sexual division of labour based on gender inequality.

In general, these feminist scholars of the welfare state have argued that because of women's primary caring role, they have been rendered dependent upon men and their lives shaped by state policies (Borchorst and Siim, 1987). Some feminist theorists even argue that women and men are channelled into separate welfare programs, often resulting in a system of *dual welfare*. Men's typical dependence on the welfare state is through social insurance schemes based on their claims as earners; women make their claims on the welfare state on the basis of their domestic work and rely more heavily on means-tested public assistance programs (Nelson, 1984; Pateman, 1988:241-2; Bryson, 1992; Sainsbury, 1996). In other words, because of women's primary caring role, they are often affected differently – and more negatively -- by state policies than men.

Both mainstream and feminist approaches to understanding the welfare state have methodological limitations. On one hand, mainstream theories have conducted cross-national research, but have largely excluded the analysis of the gendered impact of social policies. On the other hand, early feminist theorists of the welfare state focus on gender difference, but are not comparative in their analysis (Benoit, 1998). The next section examines a third body of sociological

literature -- post-Fordism – asserting that the welfare state is no longer a viable institution due to the globalisation of capitalist economies.

### **Post-Fordist Scholarship**

Post-Fordist scholars maintain that welfare state in general are in decline due to the structural forces brought on by globalisation. Globalisation is based on a number of different trends associated with the gradual transition from Fordism to post-Fordism. The post-Fordist era (roughly the last decade and a half) is characterized by key opposing characteristics to the earlier Fordist era: these include de-industrialization, transnational corporate linkages, international trade agreements, weakened unions, limited labour contracts, chronic unemployment and welfare state retrenchment. Below I will focus on welfare state retrenchment, which is of key characteristic importance to my thesis.

Scholars adopting a post-Fordist perspective reveal a number of negative outcomes of a shrinking welfare state for women. One direct result is the reduction or even elimination of women-friendly social services. An example is the reduction of cash benefits to disadvantaged households dependent on the welfare state for income assistance (Armstrong and Armstrong, 1994). Considering that a large majority of those reliant on the welfare state are women, a reduction in benefits directly affects their level of income and pushes them even further into poverty (Armstrong and Armstrong, 1994). Retrenchment of the public sector also means the loss of crucial family policies.

Retrenchment of welfare state women-friendly policies also mean a loss

of social service jobs related to healthcare services and childcare services, such as nursing and social work. Again, since women are largely employed in these public sector jobs, this reduction directly affects their employment status (Armstrong and Armstrong, 1990).

While the post-Fordist perspective wisely cautions against the assumption that the welfare state is a permanent fixture in capitalist societies and thus here to stay, this third perspective nevertheless 'jumps the gun' by arguing that the welfare state is in inevitable decline in the post-Fordist era.

### **Cross-National Feminist Scholarship**

Feminists performing cross-national research attempt to expose the lingering variability of social policies across and within welfare states in the last decade and a half marked by globalisation and, in particular, how this variability affects women and men differently. Feminists performing cross-national research examine these variations by combining methodological aspects of mainstream and post-Fordist theories with a feminist perspective to create a cross-national gendered approach to studying welfare states (Gordon, 1990; Hernes, 1987; Orloff, 1993; Sainsbury, 1996; O'Connor, 1993; Skocpol, 1992; Sarvasy, 1992; Dahlerup, 1994). This group of scholars hope that by providing such a synthesis they will advance the conceptual understanding of the relationship between gender (in)equality and the welfare state (Orloff, 1993; Sainsbury, 1996; O'Connor, 1993).

Feminists adopting a cross-national perspective on the welfare state borrow methodological aspects of mainstream analyses and subsequently transform them to incorporate gender relations. They do this by both reconceptualizing and replacing concepts found in mainstream analyses, such as 'citizenship' and 'decommodification of labour', and making them applicable to both women and men (Orloff, 1993; Sainsbury, 1996; Benoit, 2000; O'Connor, 1993). These feminist scholars agree with mainstream theorists in that access to full citizenship is necessary for women to achieve genuine equality, but argue that the degree of accessibility of full citizenship may differ for men and women (O'Connor, 1993; Sainsbury, 1996). While early feminist theorists were intent on revealing the male bias inherent in the concept of citizenship, current feminists performing cross-national research take this a step further by revealing the ways in which women experience limited access to citizenship (O'Connor, 1993; Orloff, 1993; Leira, 1990). Feminists adopting a cross-national perspective argue that women's access to full citizenship, and thus genuine equality, is premised on them achieving: 1) access to secure employment and equitable wages in the paid labour force; 2) economic independence/capacity to maintain an autonomous household (Orloff, 1993; Sainsbury, 1996; Benoit, 2000; O'Connor, 1993).

The necessity of including the first dimension, "access to paid work and paid wages", is because all individuals, including women, need to be able to participate in the paid work force in order to achieve economic equality (O'Connor, 1993). Orloff (1993) goes on to argue that the second dimension is

also important because “the capacity to form and maintain an autonomous household” (economic independence) provides the foundation needed for women to be able to enter and exit from marriage or cohabitation (318-319). O’Connor (1993) agrees that it is important for women to have “the capacity to maintain an autonomous household”, which she refers to as the achievement of “personal autonomy”. This refers to the insulation of an individual from personal and/or public dependence (public dependence being the marketplace and personal being dependent on a male breadwinner for economic support). In essence, to the extent that women are not dependent on the state or a male breadwinner for economic support, the greater degree of personal autonomy they experience. O’Connor (1993) argues that by using the term personal autonomy, analysis of the welfare state moves away from studying the market-state relationship inherent in mainstream analyses towards studying the tripartite relationship of the state-market-family relationship.

By reconceptualising certain concepts used by mainstream theorists, feminists conducting cross-national studies of the gendered nature of the welfare state effectively demonstrate the ways in which social policies affect women and men differently. Several recent studies performed by feminists conducting cross-national research reveal that women are not only the majority of those dependent on the welfare state, but that a gender component regarding access to state supports exists (Sainsbury, 1996; Orloff, 1993; O’Connor, 1993). This is because more often than not men’s economic maintenance apart from wages/salaries is through social insurance schemes based on men’s claims as

earners, while women have tended to make their claims on the basis of domestic their work and thus rely more heavily on means-tested public assistance programs (Nelson, 1984; Pateman, 1988:241-2; Bryson, 1992; Sainsbury, 1996; O'Connor, 1993,). The problem is that those collecting employment based benefits often receive a higher payment than those collecting social assistance benefits (Orloff, 1993). In effect, by enacting social policies that do not equate women's unpaid labour with men's paid labour, the state is reinforcing a patriarchal sexual division of labour (Orloff, 1993).

Feminist scholars also show the ways in which women face obstacles to full employment based on their primary caring role. It is argued that because women are predominately responsible for the majority of unpaid labour, not least of all, childcare, that they often find it difficult to gain access to secure employment (Orloff, 1993; Sainsbury, 1996; O'Connor, 1993; Larson, forthcoming, Duncan and Edwards, 1997). This is especially the case for single mothers, as they are often the sole providers for their children. Unpaid caring duties are often so time consuming that single mothers may find themselves unable to be fully available for paid work. As a result, when single mothers access paid employment, it is often part-time. It is well known that in most countries part-time work is paid badly, involves little by way of job security and is poorly protected by government legislation and typically non-unionised (Armstrong and Armstrong, 1990, Walby, 1994). In essence, feminists conducting cross-national welfare state research contend that welfare states need to encourage women's full employment by enacting policies aimed at

alleviating their non-paid caring role (Orloff, 1993; Sainsbury, 1996; O'Connor, 1993; Larsen, 1998; Benoit, 2000).).

Feminists conducting cross-national research thus examine existing social policies with the aim of measuring their degree of *women friendliness*. This brings us to the question - "Which types of social policies are the most women-friendly? Rather than investigate the general orientation of all social policies (more often than not the goal of mainstream analyses), feminist scholars examine specific social policies that impact women's paid and unpaid work activities (Orloff, 1996; Sainsbury, 1996; O'Connor, 1993; Leira, 1990; Benoit, 2000). Two policy types that consider paid and non-paid work roles of women include family leaves and benefits, and childcare policies. These two types of policies encourage women to fully participate in the paid labour force by both alleviating their caring role and guaranteeing them a secure position in the paid labour force. As well, the logic of parental leave legislation is to intensify labour force attachment by increasing incentives to take time off rather than time out of (i.e., exiting from) the labour market (Garrett, Wenk and Lubeck, 1990).

Comprehensive family leave and childcare policies are beneficial to all women, but especially single mothers. Single mothers are often used by feminists performing cross-national research as case examples when examining social policies and employment outcomes for women (Borchorst and Siim, 1984; Leira, 1992; Orloff, 1993; Duncan and Edwards, 1997; Larsen, 1998). As already noted above, feminists adopting a cross-national perspective argue that women face barriers to paid employment because of their responsibility for

unpaid labour. This is especially true for single mothers because, unlike two parent families, single mothers are often the sole providers for their families. Orloff (1993) shows how the capacity to form and maintain an autonomous household is particularly difficult for single mothers. This is because if a mother does not have a male breadwinner to share income with, she is more likely to suffer economically (Orloff, 1993). Duncan and Edwards (1997) provide an in-depth comparative evaluation of the ways social policies, such as family leaves and benefits and childcare services, help to alleviate some of the main barriers single mothers experience upon entering the paid workforce and remaining securely attached to careers. Larsen (1998) concludes that the more comprehensive the social policies of the welfare state, the better the economic circumstances of single mothers. In other words, from an economic stance, single mothers are better off in those countries where family leaves and benefits and childcare services are generous in nature and universally available, regardless of family type (Larsen, 1998).

Since earnings provide the only adequate income for single mothers, labour force participation and employment statuses are obviously of critical importance. Because of this importance, feminists performing cross-national research often examine women and/or single mothers in terms of *outcomes* (O'Connor, 1993). In other words, what affects do particular social policies have for women, particularly single mothers? One of the ways feminists conducting cross-national research examine outcomes for women is by using the criteria of female labour force participation rates to reflect women's economic position

(O'Connor, 1993; Blau and Ferber, 1992: 31). Studies indicate that the greater the level of female labour force participation, the lower the incidence of poverty among women in industrial capitalist countries (Larsen, 1998).

Single motherhood and family values are culturally bound, both in regards to definition and conceptualisation. Different categories are often used to describe single mothers: widowed, divorced, separated, never married (Sugarman, 1998; Sugarman, 1998). Whether or not certain categories are included in the definition of single mothers varies from country to country. When one thinks about a single mother, one typically pictures a mother living alone with her children. The problem is that those referred to as "cohabitants" are also defined as single mothers in a legal sense even though the household consists of two adults who may be both contributing an income (Sugarman, 1998: 13). For instance, in Sweden and Canada there is a very large number of men and women who live together (co-habit) and have children together (co-parent), but who do not go through the formalities of marriage (Sugarman, 1998:14; Lundgren-Gaveras, 1996: 132).

Further, single mothers are often perceived as a 'social problem' in many industrial capitalist countries. This includes both Canada and the United States, where single mothers are often criticised for their 'welfare dependency' (Sugarman, 1998). In effect, single mothers are stigmatised as 'welfare moms' who 'live off the system.' Yet in Sweden, single motherhood does not carry the same negative stigma, nor is it seen as a social problem to the extent that it is in Canada and the United States.

Yet there are also a number of important differences between these two North American cousins that bear importance for this thesis. For example, it is generally agreed that there is a greater public acceptance of a more interventionist welfare state in Canada, leading to comparatively comprehensive social policies when compared alongside of the United States (Techtsoonian, 1996: 122). More on this in subsequent chapters.

### **Purpose Statement**

As described above, feminists conducting cross-national research assert that, while commonplace in the recent period, welfare state retrenchment is neither inevitable nor universal across high-income countries. In effect, these feminists argue that it is an empirical question as to whether women-friendly welfare state policies can survive post-Fordism. I would like to examine whether this is so for my three case examples – Sweden, the United States and Canada.

The purpose of this thesis is to answer the following questions: Do social policies vary across welfare states at the present time? What outcomes do variations across social policies have for women, especially single mothers across different welfare states? In particular, is women's labour force participation facilitated by particular welfare state social policies?

These questions are answered through the examination of select welfare state social policies asserted by feminist scholars as necessary for: a) women's access to secure employment and equitable wages in the paid labour force and b) women's economic independence/capacity to maintain an autonomous

household. In particular, I examine family leave and childcare policies and the employment outcomes of single mothers in three specified countries: Sweden, the United States and Canada. The next chapter presents the methods used to gather the secondary data informing the thesis.

## **Chapter Two**

### **Methods**

This purpose of this chapter is to outline the methodology I have chosen for the study of the gendered underpinnings of welfare states as they relate to particular social policies. This chapter is divided up into two main parts: *Study Design* and *Data Analysis*. In the *Study Design* section, the step-by-step process employed in the examination of the variability of social policies across three welfare states (Sweden, the United States and Canada) is described. The *Data Analysis* section consists of an outline of the procedures employed in my examination of family leave and childcare policies, including a description of the types of sources used for this study.

#### **Study Design**

The comparative approach is defined as the “systematic analysis of similarities and differences” (Smelser quoted in Ragin, 1987: 2). Sociologists tend to use the comparative method when examining large macrosocial units such as the welfare state (Ragin, 1987: 1). For the purpose of this study, the “welfare state” is referred to “a state commitment of some sort which modifies the play of market forces in an effort to realise greater social equality for its population” (Ruggies, 1984: 11). This definition includes the various dimensions of the welfare state such as health, education, social security and social welfare.

In this study, the examination of welfare state social policies is limited to the historical time frame of approximately the last 15 years. Reasons for employing this limitation include reducing the vast amount of research in this

area, as well as the availability of data (elaborated later on). The main reason for choosing to look at only the last decade is because I am primarily concerned with the most recent historical changes to social policy taking place in the 'post-Fordist era'. As mentioned in Chapter One, the post-Fordist era represents the time period of approximately the last decade and a half which, according to post-Fordist theorists, is characterised by a shrinking welfare state. As also mentioned in Chapter One, feminists conducting cross-national research assert that the degree and manner in which welfare states in different industrial capitalist countries are being altered varies significantly, both with regard to the range and level of social provision, and the orientation of social policies. In sum, the time frame of this study is limited to the recent period in order to examine if variability across welfare states continues to exist even during a time when welfare states are alleged to be in retrenchment.

As outlined in my purpose statement, my analysis stems from a number of research questions. My first question is: "Do social policies vary across welfare states in the post-Fordist era?" In order to answer this question I examine the current variation of specific family and childcare policies across the welfare states of Sweden, the United States and Canada. These three countries are chosen because they share many characteristics, including their common stage of industrial capitalist development, democratic institutions, and comparatively high standard of living for citizens and residents. Yet, as shown in the subsequent chapters of this thesis, they differ significantly in regard to the gender underpinnings of their respective welfare states.

Sweden is often used by feminists conducting cross-national research to illustrate a 'woman friendly' welfare state that manages to persist, despite the challenges of globalization (O'Connor, 1993; Orloff, 1993; Leira, 1992; Hernes, 1987). In this regard, Sweden often serves as a basis to measure other welfare states against, which is also the case in this study. The United States is chosen because it is often presented as a country where the welfare state plays a minimal role. The U.S. is thus also used to measure other welfare states against, as is the case in this study (Orloff, 1993; Sainsbury, 1996; Esping-Andersen, 1989). I have chosen Canada as my third case example because of convenience but also because of the tendency in the sociological literature to conflate the welfare state of Canada with that of the U.S., as if they shared the same social policies. However, one of the aims of this study is to show that some Canadian social policies differ significantly from those of our neighbour to the South, with important consequences for women, particular single mothers.

The two social policies I have chosen to conduct my cross-national examination of welfare states are family leaves and benefits, and childcare policies. These policies will be examined at the national level of the three case examples. Of course, these two sets of social policies do not exhaust the variety of social policies supported by the welfare states in the three case examples. Rather, I have chosen these two sets of social policies because, in my view, they best represent the types of policies feminists conducting cross-national research assert are necessary for: 1) women's access to secure employment and equitable wages in the paid labour force and 2) women's economic

independence. There are other social policies that may aid women in achieving these two goals, such as those that encourage women's access to higher education and formal health care. Yet it can be argued that the social policies chosen for this study hold the most emancipatory potential for women in that they facilitate women into paid work by alleviating their primary caring role—care of young children.

Below I examine the extent to which these two types of social policies vary in regard to comprehensiveness, duration, eligibility criteria, level of benefit, coverage and other related criteria. There are limitations in adopting this comparative approach. One such limitation is that policy descriptions are not always comparable across welfare states. This is because characteristics considered key in defining a specific social policy in one country might not be considered key in another. For example, studies regarding social policy in Canada often use eligibility as a key variable in defining access to family leave and benefits, while studies of family leave in Sweden rarely use eligibility as a defining characteristic in their analyses. Instead, in the Swedish case, right of citizenship is more often than not the key variable.

Another limitation of the comparative approach is that it tends to gloss over differences within nation states, such as those that may exist among counties, states or provinces. Because of this concern, I will to some extent discuss differences within individual welfare states, though this is not the main aim of this thesis.

As mentioned in Chapter One, I am interested in finding out how these variances in social policies across (and to some extent within) welfare states affect women. In particular, I ask the question, "What outcomes, as measured in labour force participation, does welfare state variance in social policies have for women, especially single mothers? And does the availability of family leaves and benefits and publicly-funded childcare facilitate single mothers into paid employment?"

Single mothers are often focused upon by feminists performing cross-national research as a test case for examining women-friendly social policies (Borchorst and Siim, 1984; Leira, 1992; Orloff, 1993; Duncan and Edwards, 1997; Larsen, 1998). This is because single mothers represent the ultimate economic vulnerability of women, as they are often the sole providers for their family; as a result, single mothers tend to face formidable obstacles in accessing paid work. I understand that social policies may have different consequences for single mothers across social class, as well as ethnic and socio-cultural backgrounds (Leira, 1992). As well, the age of single mothers may also determine the ways in which they are affected by different social policies. For example, in the United States, a comparatively large portion of single mothers are still in their teens, also commonplace in Canada, but a rarity in Sweden. Teen mothers will more likely benefit from other social policies that facilitate their ability to complete their education, rather than family leave policies that are more appropriate for older single mothers (such as those who are separated or divorced) and who have already completed their formal education (East and

Felice, 1996). Due to space and time concerns, these intervening variables are not discussed in this study.

As with social policies, it is also difficult to define single mothers when using the comparative method. Different categories are often used to describe single mothers: widowed, divorced, separated, never-married (Sugarman, 1998; Sugarman, 1998). Whether or not certain categories are included in the definition of single mothers varies from country to country. Because of this difficulty of definition, up to this point in time most studies of single mothers have been limited to a single country. As well, when one pictures a single mother, it is often of a woman living alone with her children. The problem is that those referred to as “cohabitants” are also defined as single mothers in a legal sense even though two adults may be contributing to a household income (Sugarman, 1998: 13). For instance, around half of Swedish couples with children “co-habit” and do not go through the formalities of marriage (Sugarman, 1998:14; Lundgren-Gaveras, 1996: 132). Single mothers may also receive child support payments that would, as with having a cohabiting partner, directly affect their level of income. As a result, the category of single mothers may also vary in terms of economic vulnerability. These difficulties associated with defining single mothers often complicate the collection and analysis of data in a comparative study. However, since this study is mainly focused on describing the possible employment outcomes that variations in social policies may have for single mothers, such data complications are of less concern than might otherwise be the case.

This is not to say that I do not intend to examine any statistics related to single mothers. In fact, I dedicate a portion of my discussion chapter to looking at the labour force participation rates of single mothers in an attempt to answer the third question posed in my purpose statement, "Is single mothers' labour force participation facilitated by welfare state social policy?" Since earnings provide the major income for mother-only families, labour force participation and employment status are obviously of critical importance (Kamerman and Kahn, 1988: 20). For this reason I felt that it was not only important to discuss the ways in which certain social policies may or may not facilitate single mothers into the paid workforce, but also to examine specific employment outcomes of single mothers measured by labour force participation rates

Besides the problems related to defining single motherhood when comparing data, there are also problems with using labour force participation rates. Three problems stand out: labour force statistics may be calculated in different ways across countries, time frames for collecting data may vary, and significant data may be missing altogether (Lasseey, 1997). Concerning the first problem, my examination of the secondary statistics showed that there are often different national measurements of part-time and full-time employment. However, since the main focus of the study is on access to paid employment in general (i.e., labour force participation), inconsistent terminology in regard to part-time employment does not directly affect the study design. More to the point, annual labour force statistics are not readily available for the three countries included in a study. For this study, labour force participation rates

were available for 1995 in Canada, 1998 for Sweden and 1997 for the United States. Because these statistics are the most current that I could find for the three countries, I cautiously compare them one against the other. As well, when looking at statistics of single mothers with dependent children the definition of the concept 'dependent child' tends to vary cross-nationally with regards to age (Duncan and Edwards, 1997). However, this problem of defining the concept of a 'dependent child' does not apply to this study either, as I am not analysing different groups of single mothers divided by the ages of their dependent children.

In an effort to enhance validity, whenever possible I rely on cross-national statistical sources to help validate national sources. Such international statistics are usually available from standard sources – OECD, International Development Indicators, World Bank, World Development Report, Human Development Reports. When the international statistics are not standardised, I note inconsistent definitions.

## **Data Analysis**

This study involved the collection of governmental documents and other secondary data sources detailing family leaves and benefits and childcare policies at the national level. Governmental documents include official social policies in the form of Acts and Regulations such as *the Family and Medical Leave Act* (1993) of the United States, the *Parental Insurance Act* (1974) of

Sweden and the *Employment Standards Act* (1995) of Canada. Other secondary data sources include research (obtained mainly from library searches) conducted by others performing case studies of specific countries and cross-national examinations that include one or more of the specified countries for this study. For example, Diane Sainsbury's book, *Gender Equality and Welfare States (1996)*, provides an example of a cross-national examination of the welfare state. Government publications also provided an excellent source of secondary data. This includes a Canadian report by the National Council of Welfare in Spring 1999, "Preschool Children: Promises to Keep."

All of the research pertaining to policy descriptions was collected via the Internet and/or library searches. Valuable Internet sites include those developed by government and large national organizations. For example, the Ministry of Children and Families' website in Canada was helpful in accessing the most current legislative changes relating to national childcare policies. The Ministries of Labour sites in both Sweden and Canada provided useful information regarding family leaves and benefits, including providing copies of the most current legislation. The United States has numerous helpful websites as well. For example, the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) ([www.government/U\\_S\\_Government/Executive\\_Branch/DepartmentandAgencies/Bureau\\_of\\_Labor\\_Statistics](http://www.government/U_S_Government/Executive_Branch/DepartmentandAgencies/Bureau_of_Labor_Statistics)) provides links to many working articles on policy issues, such as formal childcare arrangements across the states. As well, many of the articles for this study came from sociological journals including *Sociological Perspectives* and *The American Sociological Review*.

Labour force participation statistics for single mothers were similarly obtained from numerous sources, both national and international. Statistics Canada provides extensive labour force statistical information. In particular, government publications by Statistics Canada such as *Families in Society (1998)*, illustrate employment statistics broken down by family type, including dual career and single parent families, as well as a further breakdown by gender of parent. Statistics Canada provides access to much of its employment statistics via its Internet website ([www.statcan.ca](http://www.statcan.ca)). This website also supplies links to other international sites containing related statistics, such as Statistics Sweden ([www.scb.se](http://www.scb.se)). Statistics Sweden provides a detailed analysis of income and employment for many different family types. In the United States there are many helpful Internet sites that display employment and other related statistics. For example, the Census Bureau ([www.census.gov](http://www.census.gov)) site presents detailed statistics of income for all family types, including single parents by gender. The website for Child and Family Statistics in the United States also contains similar information, including poverty statistics ([www.childstats.gov](http://www.childstats.gov)). Nordic Statistics ([www.scb.se](http://www.scb.se)) makes available labour, social care and income statistics for most Nordic countries, including Sweden. There are also numerous international websites that provide employment-related statistics (OECD, Human Development Reports, EUROSTAT, United Nations, etc...). These international resources are useful for validating employment-related and social policy statistics provided by national sources.

## **Summary**

This chapter has provided a detailed outline as to how I examined the variations of social policies across the welfare states of Sweden, the United States and Canada. More specifically, I discussed my reasons for limiting my analysis to the recent decade and a half, my reasons for choosing to study specific social policies of three particular countries, and my reasons for focusing on single mothers. I described how I will specifically examine the variations of social policies and how these variations may affect the lives of single mothers. I also examined the limitations related to conducting a comparative analysis including problems related to defining social policies and single mothers, as well as the problems related to the comparative analysis of labour force participation rates. In this chapter, the availability of and types of sources used for this study were also described. The next chapter examines the maternity, paternity and parental policies of the three national contexts.

## **Chapter Three**

### **Family Leaves and Benefits in Sweden, the United States and Canada**

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the current family leave policies of Sweden, the United States and Canada in order to discover if they differ or not, especially in the outcomes for single mothers. The chapter examines family leaves and benefits in the three countries in regards to type, eligibility, level of benefits, etc. (displayed in Table 3.1 at the end of this chapter). Before moving on to describe the policies for each country, it is important to define the different types of maternity, paternity and parental policies. This is discussed below.

In general, family leave policies refer to time away from paid work when a child is born that includes some degree of economic compensation. These policies offer job-protected leave, but may range in terms of benefits offered. For example, some family leave policies include continued health insurance coverage or wage compensation and others may not. Although these policies may differ across countries, job protected leave is included as part of the employment policy and wage compensation is included as part of the social insurance or the social security system. Eligibility criteria are usually tied to the labour market, as are with the policies of Canada and the United States. However, in some cases eligibility is based on citizenship, as it is to an extent in Sweden.

There are three types of leaves discussed in this chapter – maternity leave, paternity leave and parental leave. Both maternity and paternity leaves

are *gender specific*. Maternity leave is granted to mothers only, and is generally limited to the time frame necessary for their physical recovery following the birth of a child. There are two types of paternity leaves: “daddy days” and a one-month leave. Daddy days consist of a few days (typically ranging from 7 to 11 days) to be taken consecutively immediately following the birth of a child. The one-month paternity leave can be taken anytime up until the child is one year of age. Both of these paternity leaves are available solely to natural or adoptive fathers and the latter is found at present in only two countries –Sweden and Norway (Benoit, 2000).

Parental leave is a gender-neutral leave that can be taken by either parent (although not simultaneously) to care for a natural or adoptive child. Parental leave allows mothers and fathers the flexibility to choose as to whom will take time off from employment to care for their child during the first year of life. In some countries, parents may divide the leave between them, opt to work part-time, or even spread the leave over the child’s first eight years of life.

All of the previously mentioned leaves may also be accompanied by benefits. The most common types of benefits are wage replacement, child sick leave and health insurance coverage. Wage replacement is usually based on a percentage of the wage collected at the time just prior to the leave being taken. A sick child benefit is offered as a wage replacement that accompanies a leave taken by either parent to care for an ill child (Hofferth and Deich, 1994). These types of benefits are presently available only in select countries, and even then the level of wage compensation varies widely.

Although there is some similarity in the types of leaves and benefits available across the three case examples, there are also significant differences that impact new mothers, particularly single mothers. These variations are examined in the following sections.

## **Sweden**

The historical development of social policy in Sweden has been largely based upon the goals of full employment and egalitarianism. Emphasis on both of these goals can be traced back to the early 1900s when Sweden enacted pro-family policies to address a declining fertility rate (Gottfried, 1988; Spakes, 1992). The enactment of such policies resulted in improved maternity care provision for Swedish women, including a maternity bonus, marriage loan, special tax deductions and the introduction of children's allowances (Spakes, 1992). Sweden, like the United States and Canada, experienced a labour market shortage in the post-World War II period, escalating in the 1960s and 1970s (Spakes, 1992). Unlike the United States and Canada, however, which both relied heavily on immigration to fill their respective labour shortages, Sweden created policies that encouraged women to participate in the paid labour force (Spakes, 1992). This included the enactment of a universal maternity leave with a low benefit to all new mothers in 1955.

The parental insurance policy that exists today in Sweden is the direct result of the *Parental Insurance Act* that came into affect in 1974. The *Act* offered leaves of absence surrounding the birth of a child to either parent, natural or adoptive, and also included job protection and financial support. Since the

mid-1970s, Sweden's parental insurance policy has expanded in type, coverage and scope. Today, parents are entitled to 12 months of leave at 80% wage compensation, plus an additional 3 months at a flat rate for a total paid leave of 15 months (Benoit, 2000; Hyde et al., 1996; Hofferth and Deich, 1994, Baker, 1997). As well, an extra six months of family leave with accompanying benefits is made available to parents who have multiple births (Baker, 1997). Parental benefits are funded by contributions from employers and the Swedish government (but not employees, as in Canada). The employer contributes 10.1% of payroll, which covers about 85% of the cost, while the government covers the remaining 15% (Baker, 1997: 59).

Over the last decade, the wage compensation level of Sweden's parental policy has experienced some fluctuations. Parental leave wage compensation was reduced to 80% from 90% in 1992 (at a time when Sweden was in the middle of economic recession). This was further reduced in 1996 to 75% only to be increased back to 80% in 1998 (Ministry of Labour, Fact Sheet, 1998). The duration of leave was also reduced from 450 days to 360 days in 1992 (Ministry of Labour, Fact Sheet 1998). Single mothers in Sweden are able to draw upon the full parental leave of 15 months (Benoit, 2000; Bjornberg and Eydal, 1996).

Either parent, natural or adoptive (including single parents), is eligible to take family leave in Sweden, but parents may not take it simultaneously (Baker, 1997; Benoit, 2000). The leave can be used to cover a complete leave from employment, or can be used part time by either parent up until the child is 8 years of age (Benoit, 2000; Hofferth and Deich, 1994; Baker, 1997; Leira, 1992,

Kammerman, 1991). Also included in the Swedish parental insurance policy is a reduced working day (6 hours) available to either parent to be taken up until the child is 8 years of age (Baker, 1997; Leira, 1992; Kammerman, 1991; Hofferth and Deich, 1994). As well, in 1995, one parent was granted the right to take the whole parental leave if the other parent did not qualify for the leave (Bjornberg and Eydal, 1996: 160). In sum, Swedish parental policy allows parents amazing flexibility in choosing which parent will take what portion of the leave.

Although having choice as to which parent will take the leave does not apply to the situation of single mothers, having flexibility with regards to when the leave can be taken is highly beneficial for them. As the primary and sometimes only caregiver for their children (however, as noted above, a relatively large number of separated/divorced parents in Sweden continue to co-parent their child/children, although the child/children tend(s) to spend more time actually living with their mother), single mothers benefit from a reduced workday and the collection of benefits on a part-time basis. This may provide them the time needed to accomplish the care giving duties that would normally be shared with a partner residing in the same household. For example, working a reduced workday or engaging in part-time employment allows single mothers time to pick up their children from school or do the shopping before dinner. As well, single mothers may be encouraged to return to work earlier if they were able to enter employment on a part time or reduced hour basis.

In Sweden, eligibility requirements for family leave and benefits are not tied to employment status, but granted on the basis of *citizenship/residential*

*status*. Benefits at a fixed flat rate are granted to those few claimants who are unemployed (Bjornberg and Eydal, 1996; Lewis and Astrom, 1992). The rest of the claimants must be insured for at least 240 working days prior to the birth of a child (Baker, 1997; Bjornberg and Eydal, 1996). It is worthy of note as well that even if claimants in Sweden work part-time, the part-time work is usually high in hours (around 25 hours per week as compared to less than 20 in Canada and the United States) (Sainsbury, 1996; Nyberg, 1997; European Commission Network on Childcare, 1999). As a result, with a wage compensation level of 80%, the benefits received by part-time workers are not that much different from the benefits received by full-time workers. Because the level of benefits is determined by one's income level at the time surrounding the birth of a child, paid leave promotes equal opportunity for women by encouraging them to find permanent work before their first pregnancy and thus increases their attachment to the labour force. With an increased attachment to the labour force, single mothers in Sweden also lower their risk of welfare dependency; they in fact have one of the lowest social assistance rates among single mothers in the industrial world (Sainsbury, 1996; Benoit, 2000).

Additional family leave options in Sweden include pregnancy leave, sick child leave, "daddy days," and contact days. In 1995, pregnant women were granted the unconditional right to take leave seven weeks before and seven weeks after delivery (Bjornberg and Eydal, 1996). By including this right under the parental insurance policy, pregnant women no longer had to claim through sick leave.

The sick child benefit offers parents job protection and wage compensation to care for an ill child. The sick child benefit was first made available in 1980 and can be taken by either parent up until a child is 12 years of age (Hofferth and Deich, 1994; Baker, 1997). The duration of leave was raised from 3 to 4 months in 1990 and is currently available at an 80% wage replacement level (Hofferth and Deich, 1994; Baker, 1997). The wage replacement level was subject to the same fluctuations as the parental leave wage replacement in the early and mid-1990s; decreasing from 90% to 80% in 1992 and to 75% in 1996 (Ministry of Labor, Fact Sheet 1998). Like the parental leave wage replacement level, the sick child leave benefit was reinstated back to 80% in 1998 (Ministry of Labor, Fact Sheet 1998). All parents find it difficult to take time off from work and care for their ill children. Having the right to take such a leave, as well as collect an attractive level of wage replacement, lessens this burden considerably. This is especially beneficial for single mothers as taking time off to care for an ill child may be financially stressful, or worse: not having access to sick child leave and benefit may force them to exit their job permanently.

In Sweden, fathers are entitled to take paternity leave surrounding the birth of a child. Currently, there are two types available: "Daddy days" and a one-month paternity leave. "Daddy days" were first made available in 1980 and consist of 10 days granted to fathers immediately following the birth of a child (Benoit, 1999; Hofferth and Deich, 1994). In 1995, one of the 12 months of parental leave was set aside exclusively for fathers (paternity leave) and another

for mothers (maternity leave), either of which may be taken up until the child is one year of age (Bjornberg and Eydal, 1996). That is, each parent has the exclusive right to 30 days of paid leave that cannot be transferred to the other parent. This leave was strongly supported by Swedish feminists and women parliamentarians. By establishing at the national level a policy that fathers have the right to at least one-month leave to participate in caring for their newborn, another step was taken towards gender equality in employment and family life.

In 1990, two additional child contact days were also made available in Sweden for either parent. Contact days are offered at the same wage compensation rate as the parental and sick child benefit (80%) (Hofferth and Deich, 1994: 435; Baker, 1997). Contact days are to be taken when a parent has to participate in an activity that involves their child's school or daycare. As with the sick child benefit, having the ability to take contact days is important for all parents but especially single mothers. This is because a single mother may often be the only parent responsible (for example) for seeing that their child gets settled in a new daycare school. As a result, contact days enable single mothers to take time off from work to care for their children without having to worry about lost wages.

As has been demonstrated, Swedish policies support full employment by guaranteeing a job protected well-paid, flexible leave. Virtually all employed mothers in Sweden take advantage of the parental insurance benefit, and about 85% return to work by the end of their paid leave or by the time the child reaches their first birthday (Baker, 1997: 61; Kamerman, 1991). This lessens the demand

for childcare in the first year of a child's life and at the same time offers parents and their children a better start together. In fact, less than 2% of infants (under 12 months) are enrolled in public childcare in Sweden (Hofferth and Deich, 1994: 434).

This is not to say that the system in Sweden is without problems. It has been noted, for example, that it is mainly women who continue to utilise the majority of the parental insurance provisions (Baker, 1997; Kamerman, 1991). This is often because women make less than their male counterparts and as a result are the ones to take time off of work to care for their children. This may also reinforce their role as primary caregiver. On the other hand, by offering a relatively high wage replacement benefit, women may be encouraged to make secure attachments to the labour force prior to starting a family. Further, since the enactment of the paternity leave in Sweden, more and more fathers have exercised their right to spend time with their child, and men's share of parental benefits has increased from 8.8 percent in 1990 to 11.7 percent in 1996 (Abrahamson, 2000).

The Swedish system has also been criticized for the slight reduction in benefits over the last ten years or so (the period referred to above as the post-Fordist era). Yet, as Table 3.1 displays, family leaves and benefits in Sweden have remained fully in place, though benefit levels have dropped marginally. Even with some minor setbacks, the Sweden welfare state offers a comprehensive family leave and benefits system than both the United States and Canada, as is demonstrated in the following sections.

## The United States

Unlike Sweden, where family leave and benefit policies were established from the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century onwards to enhance the labour force participation of all adult women, including new mothers, the United States for a much longer period relied on increased immigration to fulfil its labour shortage (Sidel, 1986). In fact, no nation-wide maternity, paternity or parental benefit exists in the United States to this day. This is not to say that attempts to pass legislation have not been made, but the results have mostly been a series of disappointments. Over the last decade, social rights in the United States in general has faced enormous cutbacks. The federal government in the United States has tended to adopt a “hands off” role in regard to the development of social welfare policy.

Up until a few years ago, there was no mandatory parental leave of any kind in place in the United States. The only legislation that did exist was the *Pregnancy Discrimination Act* of 1978 that defined pregnancy as a temporary disability that should be covered by existing sickness and medical plans. Women working in firms that offered disability insurance had their coverage extended to include pregnancy and maternity, yet the Act did not obligate employers to provide such insurance (Gottfried, 1996: 338; Baker, 1997: 63). Very few firms offered this sort of insurance, and as a result many U.S. women were not able to access disability leave. Only 18% of employees working in small firms in the United States were allowed unpaid maternity leave, and in 1991 unpaid maternity leave was available to only 37 percent of employees in private sector firms with 100 or more employees (Baker, 1997).

The U.S. federal *Family and Medical Leave Act* (FMLA) came into effect in 1993. This new policy granted full-time workers leaves of absence with job protection for childbirth, adoption and family emergencies. While definitely an improvement over the former state of affairs, the FMLA remains inadequate in many respects. This is because while a guaranteed leave is made available to either parent (natural or adoptive), the duration of leave offered is short, does not include guaranteed accompanying benefits, and does not apply to all employees. Under the FMLA, only full-time workers in a company with more than 50 employees are granted 12 weeks of unpaid leave during the birth of a child. Further, these 50 employees must work within 75 miles of the particular work site. Eligibility not only rests on the company having enough employees, but an employee must have worked with the same company for at least 12 months and accumulated at least 250 hours within this time period (FMLA, 1993). The only flexibility that parental leave under the FMLA offers is that it can be taken on a part time basis or staggered up until the child is one year of age (FMLA, 1993).

By limiting parental leave to companies with greater than 50 employees, as many as 45% of the U.S. workforce are not covered (Marks, 1997: 56). This means that a large majority of employed mothers (and fathers) are still not eligible to take a leave of absence to care for their newborn. In fact, leave arrangements cover only 25% of working women (Larsen, 1998: 22). As a result, women may be forced to leave their job permanently if they wish to care for their children during infancy. For two-parent families this means the loss of one wage, but for single mothers this may mean the loss of an entire family

income. Single mothers in the U.S. may not be able to afford to take the time off from work to care for their child. Because they cannot afford to be unemployed, single mothers may decide to return to their job without taking the full 12 weeks of leave to which they are entitled. This would mean that they would be unable to fully participate in their child's earliest stages of life. On the other hand, single mothers may decide that the expense of childcare outweighs the financial incentive of returning to paid work and instead resort to social assistance to maintain themselves and their child.

As noted above, social rights in general have faced enormous cutbacks over the last decade and a half in the United States. The end result is that little attention, apart from the enactment of the family leave policy mentioned above, has been paid to developing a comprehensive national family leave and benefits package. Because of this, it remains largely up to state governments, employers and unions to provide periods of paid leave and benefits. The end result is minimal compensation for a small percentage of the population.

## **Canada**

With regards to family leave and benefits, Canada falls somewhere between Sweden and the United States in its degree of women-friendliness. Like the United States, Canada also enacted policies aimed at increased immigration to fill labour shortage in the post-WWII period (Spakes, 1992). Even though family leave policies exist at the federal level in Canada, many of the provinces have set in place policies that exceed the federal standards. Although this section makes reference to relevant provincial legislation, the main focus will

remain at the federal level due to the emphasis of this thesis.

Canada has both maternity and parental leaves and benefits. These types of policies emerged in the 1970s when various provinces began to offer women maternity leaves. The *Unemployment Insurance Act* of 1971 offered 15 weeks replacement benefits to women employees who were absent from work for pregnancy and childbirth. In 1990, parental leave was introduced under the Employment Standards (ES) Act, with entitlement to accompanying benefits covered under the Employment Insurance (EI) Act (previously called the Unemployment Insurance Act). This parental leave grants either parent (natural or adoptive) benefits for an 10-week leave without altering the existing 15 weeks of existing maternity benefits for a total duration of 25 weeks (EI Act). The most recent advancement in parental leave legislation is the announcement by the Government of Canada that parental leave will be extended from 10 weeks to 35 weeks, making the total available duration 50 weeks in all or approximately 12 months. This will be done without altering the existing 15 weeks available for maternity leave, however. This legislation is to take affect after December 31, 2000 (Human Resources Development Canada – [www.hrdc-drhc.ca](http://www.hrdc-drhc.ca)).

Entitlement to maternity and parental leaves is also covered under the Employment Standards Act at the federal/provincial and territorial levels. Different Canadian provinces place varying requirements on the length of time a parent must be employed to make a leave claim, ranging from zero to 12 months in some provinces and six months for federal employees. Upon return to employment, the legislation states that the individual must be reinstated with the

seniority they had prior to taking the leave (ES Act, 1995). The legislation also requires pension, health and disability benefits to be continued during the leave (ES Act, 1995).

Wage compensation levels for parental and maternity benefits are covered under the Employment Insurance Act. Today, both parental and maternity leaves are compensated at a wage replacement level of 55% up to a maximum of \$413 per week (EI Act). The wage compensation is administered through the Employment Insurance program (previously the Unemployment Insurance program) by the federal government. The wage replacement level of 55% was recently dropped from 57% in 1993 and from 60% in 1990 (Baker, 1997). In light of the new legislation that extends parental leave to 12 months, the wage replacement level of 55% will also be extended to cover the full 12 months ([www.hrhc-drca.gc.ca](http://www.hrhc-drca.gc.ca)). Presently, when parents share parental benefits the mother and father must each serve a two-week waiting period without benefits, but with the new legislation as of December 31, 2000 only one waiting period will be served ([www.hrhc-drhc.gc.ca](http://www.hrhc-drhc.gc.ca)).

A relatively low wage replacement is hardly adequate for most Canadian families, especially those heading families on their own. Single mothers in Canada may not be able to afford to take time off to care for their child, and a 55% wage compensation may not be enough of a wage replacement to those who have only one income to rely upon. On the other hand, for those single mothers who can manage to make ends meet with the 55% wage benefit, the extension of parental leave to 12 months may help offset their childcare

expenses in the short-term and also make it possible for them to spend more time with their child during its first year of life. Even in light of this new legislation, however, it is likely that single mothers will have to return to work before the end of their benefits in order to increase their income. Unlike in Sweden where there is a publicly funded childcare system (discussed in following chapter), parents in Canada have to seek childcare for their infant if they wish to return to paid work. For two-parent families this may range from sharing the responsibility with their partner, to paying for part-time care, to paying for full-time care. Whatever the scenario, the financial burden of childcare is shared by both parents. With single mothers this is not the case, and as a result finding affordable childcare is difficult (it is important to note that co-parenting as mentioned above in Sweden is much less commonplace in Canada as well as in the U.S). Faced with the financial costs of childcare, many single mothers in Canada seek out social assistance, rather than return to employment. Offering a wage replacement level at a higher rate may result in single mothers seeking employment before starting a family in order to secure a higher benefit when they take parental leave.

Family leave benefit levels fall under the *Employment Insurance (EI) Act* in Canada. At present, an EI claim for maternity or parental benefits requires a minimum of 700 hours or 20 weeks of work in the past 53 weeks or since the last claim (EI Act). With the new parental leave legislation, the Government of Canada has reduced this requirement to 600 hours for parents of a child born or placed in their care for adoption on or after December 31, 2000 (hrdc-

drca.gc.ca). Even with this reduction in hours, because women often find themselves employed in “non-standard” jobs, they are often not eligible to collect benefits through EI. Non-standard jobs include holding down short-term contracts, working part-time, working in domestic jobs and engaging in seasonal work. In fact, it is estimated that only 50% of all working mothers in Canada collect maternity leaves (Benoit, 2000).

On the positive side, maternity and parental leaves and benefits are offered with some degree of flexibility in Canada. Maternity benefits can be activated as early as 8 weeks before birth and as late as 17 weeks after giving birth (ES Act, 1995). Because maternity leave is reserved for natural mothers only, adoptive parents are only eligible to collect the 10 weeks of parental leave (ES Act, 1995). The entire leave can be split between both parents (natural or adoptive), can be taken exclusively by one and can even be taken at the same time by both parents (ES Act, 1995). Parental leave can be spread out and taken up until the child’s first birthday (ES Act, 1995).

As Table 3.1 displays however, lacking at the federal level is provision for sick child benefits, paternity leaves, contact days or reduced working days. However, the province of Quebec stands out as a notable exception in regards to the above-mentioned programs. In 1997, the Act in Quebec responsible for labour standards regarding parental leave was amended in order to increase the provincial parental leave to 34 weeks (unlike the combined 25 weeks that were available in most other provinces at this time). It seems that Quebec was ahead of its time in extending the duration of parental leave. As well, maternity leave in

Quebec already covered the two-week waiting period and there is talk of getting rid of the waiting period all together (National Council of Welfare, 1999). Quebec is also talking of topping up wage replacement to 70% and relaxing eligibility requirements to where an employee would only have to earn a minimum of \$2000 over the past 52 week period to be eligible for parental benefits (National Council of Welfare, 1999). This would allow part-time workers, domestic workers and seasonal workers to collect family leave benefits, and thus women who occupy a large majority of these job types, would have more access to collecting leave with benefits. Quebec has also proposed to extend the benefit to self-employed employees (National Council of Welfare, 1999). The wage replacement level of 70% and relaxed eligibility requirements stand above those offered by the federal government, even in light of the new parental leave legislation that will come on stream in December 2000.

In Canada, as in the United States, access to comprehensive maternity and parental benefits may also vary depending on one's place of employment. Some firms, as well as the federal and some provincial governments, offer enhanced leaves and benefits to attract and retain employees. In a survey of almost 400 Canadian employers, it was found that about 50% of them provided additional leave time or increased benefits over and above the mandated minimum standards. This includes "topping up" maternity and parental benefits to a maximum in some cases of 95% of the employee's regular salary (Skrypnek and Fast, 1996: 799).

Over the last decade or so (the post-Fordist era), women in Canada have

benefited from the implementation of a parental leave policy that includes wage replacement benefits and full healthcare coverage. Although the wage replacement level is relatively low and has been subject to decreases, the extension of parental leave to 12 months is definitely a step in the right direction in making available a comprehensive parental policy. The policies of Canada still need further development in order to aid women in balancing their paid employment and primary caring roles. For now, Quebec remains an outlier in regards to enacting policies that encourage women to balance their paid and unpaid work.

## **Summary**

In summary, the types of family leaves and benefits examined in this chapter vary significantly across Sweden, the United States and Canada. In Sweden there is a great degree of variety of the types of leaves offered including, parental leaves, maternity leaves, paternity leaves, sick child leave and contact days. The parental insurance system in Sweden not only grants parents leaves of up to 15 months to be taken anytime up until a child is 8 years of age, but at a relatively high wage replacement level of 80%. As well, the Swedish Parental Insurance Act grants parents access to the above social policies independent of their employment status. Conversely, maternity and parental benefits in Canada are based exclusively on labour market status, and in the United States, mothers must have the right employer or live in the right state to have access to any leave at all. In other words, the United States is the least

women-friendly of the three countries because it does not offer a national parental or maternity benefit. In terms of women-friendliness, Canada finds itself somewhere in the middle of Sweden and the United States. Both Canada and the United States have seen welfare state reductions over decade and a half. In the United States, there has been a lack of funding that has gone into creating and maintaining existing social programs. Although in Canada the parental and maternity leave benefit has experienced some cutbacks in regard to the wage replacement levels, progress has been made with the extension of parental leave and accompanying benefits to 12 months. Accompanying this extension of leave has been a relaxation in eligibility requirements and the elimination of the two-week waiting period for one parent. In Sweden, the parental insurance system remains intact and offers very comprehensive women-friendly social policies, in spite of a small retrenchment (90% - 80%) in wage compensation levels.

A second closely related social provision underlying women's (and men's) dual statuses as employees and parents in public childcare services. I turn to this welfare state policy in the next chapter.

**Table 3.1: Family Leaves and Benefits in Sweden, the United States and Canada.**

	Type	Length of Leave	Eligibility	Benefit Level	Recipient	Other Benefits
Sweden	Parental leave	12 months + 3 months at flat rate.  One-month set-aside exclusively for mothers and another exclusively for fathers.  6 months extra for multiple births.	Each parent must be insured for at least 240 working days before confinement.	80% of wage for 12 months.  Flat rate for 3 months.	Either natural or adoptive parent including single parents.  Can be used to cover a complete leave from work, or can be used part time by either parent.  Can not take parental leave at the same time.	6-hour workday till child is 8.
	Maternity Leave	12 months		80% of wage for 12 months.	Reserved for natural mother only.	
	Paternity Leave	1 month		80% of wage		
	Sick Child Leave	4 months. Up until child is 12 years of age.		80 % of wage	Either natural or adoptive parent.	
	Contact Days	2 days		80% wage	Either parent	

<b>United States</b>	Parental Leave	12 weeks	50+ employees only within 75 miles of work site.  12 months same company. At least 250 hours in the last year.	Unpaid	Either adoptive or natural.	Can be taken staggered up until child's first birthday
	Maternity	None				
	Paternity	None				
<b>Canada</b>	Parental Leave	35 weeks  Can be combined with maternity for a total of 50 weeks.	A minimum duration of continuous employment is required in order to meet eligibility requirements for job reinstatement following childbirth. The range is 6 months in federal jurisdiction and 12 in some provinces. To be entitled to benefits parent must have contributed to EI for 600 hours in the previous year since their last claim.	55% of earnings *	Either adoptive or natural parents.  Can be taken fully by one parent or split.	Parental Can be taken up to a child's first birthday.

Maternity	17 (unpaid) weeks no earlier than 11 weeks prior to the expected date of birth and ending no later than 17 weeks following the actual date of birth.	A pregnant employee must have contributed for 600 hours in the last year.	55% wage for 15 weeks **	Natural parents only	
Paternity	None***				
Sick Child leave	None				
Contact Days	None				

\*Quebec proposal: 34 wks combined leaves, plus 26 extra weeks for a third child.

\*\*Quebec Proposal: 70% wage

\*\*Also under discussion in Quebec

## Chapter Four

### **Childcare Policies of Sweden, the United States and Canada**

Childcare has become an issue of significant public interest in most industrial countries today. Among other reasons, this is because the labour force participation rate of women in most of these countries continues to rise resulting in an increased need for childcare services. Some countries have responded to the increased participation of women in the labour force by establishing a comprehensive public childcare system. Other countries have responded in a more piecemeal fashion and enacted childcare policies designed to target only segments of the population.

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the variations across my three case examples--Sweden, the United States and Canada--regarding childcare policies and services as to their degree of women-friendliness. As with the last chapter, this will be done by reflecting on outcomes for single mothers. More specifically, this chapter investigates how certain types of childcare policies and services, or lack thereof, may aid or obstruct the ability of single mothers to participate in the paid labour force. Before moving on to describe the policies for each of these countries, it is important to define the different types of childcare policies and services.

In general, childcare policies include a wide range of governmental strategies designed to address the need for non-family care. Governmental strategies include 1) publicly funded childcare services (comprehensive national

childcare system); 2) financial subsidies to private providers of childcare; 3) financial subsidies to parents in the form of grants or child allowance; 4) tax relief. Government action may also include legal enforcement of quality childcare and the legislated collection of child support payments from non-custodial parents. Although mentioned, these types of enforcement and legislation are not thoroughly discussed in this chapter, as it is beyond the scope of this study.

*A public childcare service* is essentially a tax-based comprehensive childcare arrangement that forms part of a country's welfare state social provision. A comprehensive national childcare system generally consists of universal pre-school for children from age 2 to the age of commencement for compulsory schooling (Kamerman, 1991). These programs usually operate out of formal childcare centres that are run by licensed and professional childcare providers. The childcare centres are typically free of charge for all parents or otherwise heavily subsidized (Kamerman, 1991). Access to these programs is based on citizenship/residency rather than on labour force status.

*A private childcare service* maximizes individual parental responsibility for the care of children; parents, under this system, are expected to shoulder most/all of the cost of the childcare services purchased on the market. Though in some instances governments may provide care assistance as a last resort, the primary aim of last resort assistance is to establish a safety net of resources for special groups of children only, such as the disabled or those who live below the poverty line.

Unlike the public childcare system where licensed childcare centres predominate, countries adhering to the private responsibility model tend to display a plurality of childcare arrangements that fall along a formal/informal continuum. Formal arrangements include care by a non-relative in their own private home, unregulated free-standing childcare centres and municipal-licensed subsidized centres (England, 1996). These formal arrangements may or may not operate on a commercial/for-profit basis; however, commercial/for-profit childcare arrangements are a common phenomenon in countries that adhere to a private responsibility to care (Friendly, 1994). Informal childcare arrangements include care provided by a relative or friend (i.e. a neighbour or sitter) in a child's home or the home of the care provider. In general, informal care involves lower out-of-pocket expenses for parents. On the downside, informal care arrangements are by definition unregulated, meaning that there are no official checks on the quality of care that children receive in informal settings.

Other types of childcare policies include child allowances and tax relief. Child allowances are available only in a few select high-income countries where a public model of responsibility predominates. Child allowances are cash benefits provided on a monthly basis to all parents with dependent children. Tax relief is found in countries that view childcare as exclusively the private responsibility of parents. For example, child tax credits are typically paid out on an annual basis, and are usually available only to low and moderate income parents with children in formal childcare arrangements.

As is evident, there are a great variety of childcare policies and services

available to choose from today. This wide range is also represented by the three countries under examination in this study—Sweden, the United States and Canada.

## **Sweden**

Expansion of childcare facilities has been a major focus of Swedish social policy in the last two decades. In the mid-1980s, the Swedish government made a commitment to expand licensed childcare spaces across the country so that by 1991 all children ages eighteen months or older would be guaranteed a place in a licensed and government supervised childcare facility (The Swedish Institute, 1994; Kamerman, 1991: 186). In 1990, full implementation of the commitment to provide every child with a childcare space was deferred, but then finally came into place in 1995 (The Swedish Institute, 1994). Legislation in 1995 gave all parents who were either employed or studying the right to a place in a publicly funded service for children aged 1 to 12 years (Bjornberg and Eydal, 1996). This includes placement in childcare centres for children less than 6 years of age and leisure centres for children aged 7-12 years. The reason that there is no allotted childcare spaces to children under 1 year of age is because, as discussed in the previous chapter, Sweden offers a comprehensive family leave policy that allows at least one parent to spend the full first year with their child. By 1991, 95% of children under the age of 1 were cared for by their parent(s) (Friendly, 1994: 116).

The Swedish National Board of Health and Welfare is responsible for

administering the childcare system on a municipal level. Funding for the system comes in part from the National Board of Health and Welfare (covering approximately 50% of the total cost), contributions from all employers that amount to 2.2% of their total salary budget (or approximately 40% of total cost), and minimal user fees paid by higher-income parents (approximately 10% of total cost) (Baker, 1995: 321-23). The Swedish childcare system is thus focused on out-of-home care provisions for employed parents with pre-school and school age children below a certain age. Additionally, the Swedish national effort includes relatively high standards in regard to relatively small group size, low staff-child ratios, and formal caregiver qualifications (Kamerman, 1991: 185).

Despite being a national system, there exists a variety of publicly funded childcare services to accommodate both pre-school and school age children in Sweden. This includes childcare centres for children aged 1-6 (compulsory schooling starts at age 7 years), part-time pre-schools for children aged 4-6, regulated family childcare, open pre-schools for those children without any regular pre-school place, and leisure centres for school age children up to 12 years of age (Friendly, 1994). Childcare centres offer free hot lunches to children and are typically open regular workday hours until 6 p.m. (Gustafsson and Stafford, 1991). In some communities, childcare centre hours have been extended to accommodate parents with different working hours (Gustafsson and Stafford, 1991).

Eligibility to public childcare services is a universal benefit, and like the parental insurance system in Sweden, is granted on the basis of

citizenship/residency status. For single mothers, the outcomes are in most instances positive since they are able to access affordable care where eligibility is not based on their labour market or socio-economic status. Sweden also offers single mothers (and fathers) as well as immigrant parents preferential treatment in accessing places for their children in municipal centres. Both also have access to reduced fees, and most pay no fees at all (Kamerman, 1991).

About half of Swedish children age one year or older are in some sort of state-sponsored care, either pre-school or after school programs (see Table 4.1 at the end of this chapter). Of children aged 3-6 years of age, about 80% are enrolled in full-time public childcare (Gornick, 1997). In other words, the high usage of public-funded childcare services clearly expresses a need for this type of system. This need is also expressed in increasing waitlists for childcare spaces, despite the rapid growth in public childcare spaces over the last decade (Friendly, 1994:116). In order to deal with this strong demand that is outstripping available resources to build ever-more childcare centres, some Swedish municipalities have increased user fees (Lunden-Gaveras, 1996: 142). This seems to be a somewhat regressive move in an otherwise social progressive/egalitarian childcare system.

Besides offering publicly funded childcare services, the Swedish childcare system also includes a child allowance. Tax-free child allowances were first established in 1947 in Sweden, and currently amount to about 5% of the average wage (Hofferth and Deich, 1994). The child allowance is paid to parents of all children up to age 16 years, regardless of parental income or employment status

(Jonung and Persson, 1994). The universal allowance continues for children beyond this cut off as long as they remain in secondary school (Jonung and Persson, 1994). In addition to child allowance, school lunches, primary health care, dental care and an assortment of recreational activities have been awarded to all Swedish children up until they finish secondary school (Jonung and Persson, 1994: 50).

Another important government legislated policy in Sweden, especially for single mothers, is the child support system. The Swedish government makes advance payments to single mothers in the absence of the other parent's support obligation. This occurs when fathers fail to pay, pay irregularly or make minimal payments (Kamerman and Kahn, 1988: 97). As a result, single mothers do not have to rely on taking legal action if they wish to collect the child support to which they are entitled. In Sweden, the child support system guarantees a further supplement to a single mother's income, and thus greatly increases her economic security and that of her child(ren).

### **The United States**

As noted in the last chapter, the welfare state in the United States has been subject to enormous cutbacks over the last decade. In 1996, the federal government enacted a welfare reform law which stipulated that the federal government would no longer need to match state spending on social welfare, and instead states would receive a lump sum amount (Sugarman, 1998: 34; Resnick, 1998). This recent move allows individual states freedom to decide

where and how much will be spent on which social programs, including childcare services (Sugarman, 1998: 34). As well, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), which replaced Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) in the mid-1990s, places tighter restrictions on those eligible to collect welfare benefits (Benoit, 2000). Also, the direct source for funding childcare, Title XX of the Social Security Act of 1975, has also been the subject of various cutbacks.

The U.S. has a fragmented system of childcare policies and services that approximates the private responsibility model. The types of childcare services that do exist include *Head Start*, funding for childcare through income assistance (TANF), grants to the “working poor” not already collecting TANF, provision of food to children from low-income families who are in care-approved settings, and tax credits for working parents. Because the funding for these services is provided by block funding to the states (except for *Head Start* and tax relief), many of these programs have to compete for funding with a variety of other state programs (Kamerman, 1995). As well, only a small percentage of the population has access to these types of programs, as they are means-tested.

The *Head Start* program is the only directly-funded federal childcare program. This program provides educational, health, nutritional, social and other services to primarily low-income pre-school children and their families ([www.nhsa.org](http://www.nhsa.org)). However attractive, these programs do not typically meet working parents' childcare needs because they are often only available on a part-time basis (Hofferth and Deich, 1994). In other words, the *Head Start*

program best serves the needs of parents' collecting social assistance benefits. Parents accessing the program are not inclined to seek employment as it may result in them losing their childcare space. As well, the employed low-income parents who have enrolled their children in the Head Start program may be discouraged from seeking higher paying employment because a wage increase would likely mean the loss of their child's space in the program. For many U.S. parents, including single mothers, the financial and personal incentives associated with finding a job are often on a lower scale than the benefits of free childcare (even if it is only part-time), health services, educational services, and so forth that accompany the Head Start program.

The types of childcare programs available in the United States vary across states in terms of both type and quality. This is because, as mentioned above, in 1996 block funding, referred to as the Childcare and Development Fund, replaced direct federal funding for specific childcare programs (Sugarman, 1998: 34). Subsidies are available for the following types of programs: "At-risk Childcare" and "Transitional Childcare." The "At-risk" program is aimed at low-income families that are not receiving TANF, but who risk becoming "welfare dependent" if childcare services are not provided ([www.aspe.os.dhhs.gov/94gb/sec12](http://www.aspe.os.dhhs.gov/94gb/sec12)). Eligible families are required to make some contribution to the cost of care, based on a state-designed sliding scale. The "Transitional Childcare" program is directed to TANF recipients if childcare is needed for individuals to accept employment, participate in state approved education and training, or to remain employed. These programs are far from

adequate; it is estimated that only 10-20% of those children eligible for them actually receive funding (Sainsbury, 1996).

There are some modest tax credits in the United States designed to alleviate the costs of childcare. These include the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) and the Dependent Care Credit. The Earned Income Tax Credit is targeted to households with a low-income. Eligibility is based on a family income below \$20 000, the presence of at least one dependent child, and one employed parent (<http://aspe.os.dhhs.gov/94gb/sec12.txt>). The 1990, childcare legislation increased the basic EITC and adjusted it for family size, with additional increases through 1994 and 1995 (<http://aspe.os.dhhs.gov/94gb/sec12.txt>). Employed single mothers are generally eligible for this credit, since their incomes are likely to be low. Unemployed single mothers are not eligible for this tax credit (<http://aspe.os.dhhs.gov/94gb/sec12.txt>).

The Dependent Care Credit allows parents to claim childcare expenses providing they produce a receipt for fees paid (Hofferth and Deich, 1994). However, producing a receipt is often difficult for many parents, especially those who rely on non-formal methods of care such as relatives, neighbours or friends. Further, parents most likely to rely on informal care arrangements are low-income and/or single parents (see Table 4.1). The outcome for single mothers is that they are often not able to claim childcare expenses because they cannot produce an official receipt. It is telling that in 1989, when the tax reform law was enacted mandating the production of a receipt for childcare services, filed claims dropped significantly (Bloom and Steen, 1991).

For-profit childcare spaces in the U.S. have seen an increase significantly over the last two decades (Adams and Johnson, 1991). In fact, the country has the highest percentage of for profit childcare than any other country (Adams and Johnson, 1991). About 50% of US childcare arrangements in the early 1990s operated on a for-profit basis (Friendly, 1994.) As noted above, those who can afford it, namely middle and upper class families, tend to be the families that access for-profit childcare. At the same time, proportional childcare cost continues to rise as family income decreases (National Childcare Survey, 1991). For instance, for those families who earn less than \$20,000 yearly, the average childcare cost is about 25% of their income (National Childcare Survey, 1991).

Having to pay for childcare expenses is financially burdensome for many parents, but especially for single parents who may rely on one income to support their family. Having to pay childcare expenses may not outweigh the financial incentive of paid employment, and thus single mothers may choose to exit employment altogether. Besides childcare costs incurred by returning or remaining employed, single mothers also incur social security and income taxes and, to make matter worst, are likely to lose food stamps and medical benefits. And as discussed in Chapter One, even if employed, single mothers are more likely to find themselves in part-time low paying jobs. In fact, 15% of single mothers in the United States are employed in part-time jobs as compared to 12% in Sweden and 8% in Canada (Larsen, 1998). Employed single mothers who are unable to afford childcare services and who cannot find informal care must leave their children to care for themselves. These children are referred to as "latchkey

kids.” It is estimated that they represent 7.6% of the children of employed women in the United States (Casper, 1994).

The United States has no advanced maintenance child support system. Single mothers rely on legal action through the court system to enforce payment and collection of child support from fathers (Baker, 1995). The U.S. Social Security Act does make states responsible for establishing paternity up to the child’s eighteenth birthday and enforces legislation that allows employers to garnish the wages of those who do not meet their obligations. However, this legislation can be easily avoided by the non-custodial parent by changing jobs or moving to another state (Baker, 1995).

In short, the United States takes a minimalist approach to the provision of childcare for employed parents. Although in the last decade and a half the federal government has expanded programs such as Head Start, strict eligibility requirements remain the order of the day and many families are excluded. As well, tax relief is largely beneficial to middle and upper class families.

## **Canada**

As discussed above in regard to our neighbour to the south, Canada has yet to put in place a comprehensive national childcare system. This is not to say that numerous attempts to address the problems associated with lack of adequate childcare services have not been made. As early as 1970, the Royal Commission on the Status of Women recommended the introduction of a National Child Care Act (Doherty, 1998). Thirty years later, however, and

despite the production of numerous federal and provincial task forces and parliamentary committees, a national childcare system is nowhere in sight, although some provinces have made steps further in this direction than others.

What remains today in Canada is a fragmented childcare system consisting of several funding schemes through which the federal government helps to pay the childcare costs for selected families. These include tax measures, income support programs, vouchers to help families purchase services, the direct funding of services and subsidies for individual families. These various programs/services (excluding the tax measures) are funded through the Canadian Health and Social Transfer (CHST) (Childcare Resource and Research Unit, 1995). The CHST is part of the recent block funding scheme of the federal government to help the provinces finance the programs they deliver at the regional level (the Canadian block funding scheme is similar to the U.S. scheme mentioned above, but a much higher level of compensation). Block funding in Canada allows provinces to make decisions regarding how much money they will devote during any particular year to health care, education and social assistance (including designated childcare services). Because each province is responsible for administering its own childcare policy, further similarities can be drawn between Canada and the US with regards to regional variation. The province of Quebec and to some degree the province of British Columbia, stand out as exceptions to the general Canadian rule. More on this shortly.

All Canadian provinces and territories provide fee subsidies for low-

income families to help pay for the cost of childcare (Friendly, 1994). To be eligible for the subsidy parents must be employed, attending school/taking a training program or undergoing medical treatment (Childcare Resource and Research Unit, 1994). Low-income single mothers in Canada are often discouraged from seeking a higher paying job because it may result in the loss of their childcare subsidy. On the more positive side, participants in training programs sponsored by the federal government who have young children requiring care are eligible for dependent care allowances of up to \$20 per day (Minister of Human Resource Development, 1994).

Canadian parents who are eligible for subsidies are typically required to use approved care spaces—i.e., care spaces that are duly licensed or regulated through the provincial or territorial government (except in BC where the subsidy is given to the childcare provider of the parent's choice) (Friendly, 1994).

Licensed or regulated childcare means that the care facility must meet minimum standards in areas such as health and safety, group size, available space and child-staff ratios (National Council of Welfare, 1999). Licensed childcare may be provided in childcare centres or in family day care homes (National Council of Welfare, 1999). Although providing care that meets some degree of minimum standards is admirable, unfortunately there are not enough licensed care spaces available to meet the demand by Canadian parents for quality childcare spaces (National Council of Welfare, 1999). In 1998 (see Table 4.2), the number of regulated spaces to accommodate children was only 10% (increase from 8.4% in 1995) and in some provinces waiting lists are several years long (National

Council of Welfare, 1999). Many Canadian parents find themselves in an unenviable catch-twenty-two situation: in order to receive a government childcare subsidy, they must find a licensed space. But the latter are in very short supply, leaving many parents short-handed on both counts.

This scenario is particularly burdensome for single mothers who are often eligible for a subsidy, but are unable to find a licensed care space for their child (National Council of Welfare, 1999). Without this subsidy, single mothers may have to seek out other care alternatives. For-profit childcare facilities are available in Canada (they represent 30% of childcare facilities), but as already noted, this type of care is very expensive and usually not accessible to single mothers unless they have a relatively high income (Friendly, 1994) (Table 4.1). Unable to afford for-profit care arrangements, single mothers tend to end up relying on informal/unregulated care arrangements (Table 4.1). Unregulated childcare may be provided by a close relative or a caregiver in the child's own home or the home of the caregiver. As indicated in Table 4.1, single mothers in Canada rely on informal childcare provided by a relative almost equally to using licensed care facilities. As a last resort, employed single mothers may have to leave their children unattended. Without access to subsidised childcare and because of their low income, many single mothers may not be able to remain employed. That is to say, the costs of remaining at home to care for their children and resorting to social assistance may outweigh the financial and personal gains of employment.

Again, as noted in the previous chapter, Quebec stands out in regard to

progressive childcare policies. In 1997, the Quebec government introduced a comprehensive childcare policy. Under this new policy, childcare spaces are to be made available for all pre-school children whose parents request them for \$5 a day; and as little as \$3 a day for low income families (National Council of Welfare, 1999). As well, Quebec has replaced several financial support programs for families (the baby bonus, the income supplement for families with children who depend on welfare and the universal family allowance) with one unified family allowance (National Council of Welfare, 1999). In sum, Quebec has put in place a universal childcare system that encourages women into the paid labour force by alleviating the cost of childcare. British Columbia has also recently implemented a similar plan to that of Quebec (Ministry of Social Development and Economic Security, 1999). All licensed childcare spaces will be offered for school age children at a cost of \$7 per day. There has also been a promise to increase the number of licensed care spaces (Ministry of Social Development and Economic Security, 2000). Already in existence in British Columbia is the BC Family Bonus, which consists of a maximum annual benefit in \$1,236 per child administered on a means-tested basis (Mendelson, 1997).

While falling short on licensed and affordable childcare spaces, Canada does offer some tax relief programs aimed at alleviating the costs of childcare. Such programs make it possible for parents to deduct childcare expenses from their taxes by producing receipts for fees paid. However, the problems associated with producing receipts for childcare expenses are similar to those

mentioned above in regard to the U.S.: actual receipts for childcare expenses tend to be associated with formal care arrangements, which are in short supply in both countries. As well, single mothers in Canada often rely on informal care arrangements (Table 4.1) where receipts are rarely made available. The result for single mothers is that they are often not able to claim childcare expenses because they cannot produce the proper documentation. Ironically, it tends to be that more economically advantaged families are more likely to make childcare expense deductions from their taxes because they are more apt to be able to afford formal care.

The Child Tax Benefit replaced the universal Canadian Family Allowance (Child Allowance still exists in Quebec) and the Child Tax Credit in 1993 (Baker, 1997). This Child Tax Credit is not directed at families of low or moderately low incomes (Baker, 1997: 58). And since many single mothers are low income, they do not tend to benefit from this tax credit. The National Child Benefit provides federal funds over and above the Child Tax Benefit to all families with children to offset the costs of childcare and related expenses. The National Child Benefit is beneficial to single mothers because it allows them to claim a minimum of childcare expenses without a receipt. The actual benefit level is calculated automatically by the income declared on tax returns ([http://www.intergov.gc.ca/docs/intergov/ncb/6\\_e.html](http://www.intergov.gc.ca/docs/intergov/ncb/6_e.html)). In sum, single mothers in Canada benefit more from tax relief than in the United States.

Canada, like its southern neighbour, has no advanced child support maintenance system. It is up to the custodial parents to pursue legal action if

they wish to collect child support payments from delinquent parents. With no advanced child support system in place, single mothers may not be able to rely on child support payments as a steady source of income.

## **Summary**

In sum, the Canadian childcare policy closely resembles the private model of childcare in operation in the United States today. This approach to childcare provision found in the two countries creates numerous problems for single mothers, including childcare costs often outweighing the financial incentives of remaining employed or returning to paid work after a child is born. Sweden, on the other hand, has made significant inroads towards establishing a public model of childcare in the last decade and a half, which among other things has helped to alleviate single mothers' primary caring role by encouraging them into paid employment. This, coupled with its comprehensive family leave system, points to the fact that Sweden's welfare state is comparatively women-friendly, not least of all in regarding to the situation of single mothers. I turn to this finding in the final chapter of the thesis.

**Table 4.1: Primary Childcare Arrangements in Sweden, the United States and Canada for Specified Years.**

		Total Public Care	Relative	Non Relative (sitter or neighbor in child's home)	Day Care Centre	Other*
<b>Sweden</b>	Single Mothers 1994	76%				24%
	Two parent 1994	47%*				53%
	All Families 1995/96	61%*		5%		35%
<b>United States</b>	All Families** 1994/96		43%	21%	26%	10%
<b>Canada</b>	Single Mothers*** 1988/90		24%	45%	22%	10%
	Two-parent 1988/1990		17%	67%	15%	
	All Families 1988		19%	33%	17%	30%

\*Other includes care by parents directly, and latch-key children. Note that in Sweden children under one year of age are usually being cared for by parents on parental leave, and thus may not need public childcare services.

\*\*Breakdown of the data by family type not available.

\*\*\*Numbers may not add up due to rounding.

Sources: Families in Canada. Statistics Canada, 1988, Catalogue No. 96-307 E. National Child Care Survey, 1990. Current Population Reports, Bureau of the Census, 1996; Casper, 1994; Friendly, 1994; Bjornberg and Gardberg, 1996.

**Table 4.2: Regulated Child Care Spaces in Canada – 1998**

Province/Territory	Centre based full and part day child care	School age child care	Regulated family day care	Total regulated spaces	Proportion of children 0-12 for whom there is a regulated child care space (%)
Newfoundland & Labrador	3740	535	none	4275	5
Prince Edward Island	3196	482	39	3717	15.4
Nova Scotia	10994	N/A	169	11163	7.3
New Brunswick	9048	N/A	156	9204	7.7
Quebec	60541	92700	21761	175002	14.9
Ontario	148947	N/A	18143	167090	8.5
Manitoba	13104	3897	3489	20490	10.5
Saskatchewan	3970	919	2235	7124	3.9
Alberta	40528	N/A	6505	47033	8.8
British Columbia	35217	16404	17357	68978	10.8
Northwest Territory	N/A	N/A	N/A	1351	N/A
Yukon Territory	665	226	416	1307	N/A
Total	329950	155163	70270	516734	10

Source: (University of Toronto, Childcare Resource and Research Unit, 1998).

## Chapter Five

### **Outcomes for Single Mothers In the Post-Fordist Era**

This study has examined select social policies in place in present-day Sweden, the United States and Canada. Family leave and benefits and childcare policies were chosen for their importance in promoting equality for women in employment and family life. In regard to time frame, I have focused largely on the last decade and a half, the so-called post-Fordist era, in order to discover whether or not the two sets of social policies mentioned above have managed to survive threats to welfare states by global capitalism. I posed three main questions: First, do social policies vary across welfare states during the post-Fordist era? Secondly, what are the outcomes of such social policy variation for women's paid and unpaid work, especially for single mothers? Thirdly, is single mothers' labour force participation facilitated by women-friendly social policies? Answers to the first two questions have already been presented in Chapters Three and Four but are summarised below. These summaries are followed by a discussion of the impact of social policy variation on single mothers' labour force participation. The chapter concludes with mention of some of the limitations of my study and lines for further research.

#### **Do social policies vary across welfare states?**

As noted in Chapter One of this thesis, mainstream scholars studying the organisation of welfare states group different countries together based on similar

characteristics (Esping-Andersen and Korpi, 1987; Esping-Andersen, 1989; Mishra, 1986). Esping-Andersen, for example, clusters welfare states together based on the extent of citizens' social rights as measured by such features as decommodification, pattern of stratification resulting from welfare state policies, and the nature of the state-market relations. Based on these features, Esping-Andersen distinguishes between three welfare state regimes: liberal, corporatist and social democratic.

Esping-Andersen places the countries under examination in this study in two polar-opposite regime clusters: Sweden is placed in the social-democratic cluster and both the United States and Canada in the liberal regime cluster. Yet feminists performing cross-national research assert that the clustering of welfare states into a small number of regime types (liberal, corporatist and social democratic) remains problematic because it makes it difficult to examine variations in social policies within specific welfare state clusters. Such cross-national variation in regard to social policy is often overlooked because mainstream scholars, including Esping-Andersen, have largely ignored gender when conducting research. Feminist scholars called for gendered analyses of welfare states and close attention to social policies in regard to their degree of women-friendliness. More specifically, welfare states and their social policies need to be studied in regard to the extent that they a) secure women's access to employment and equitable wages in the paid labour force and b) secure women's economic independence/capacity to maintain an autonomous household.

Unlike mainstream theorists, post-Fordist theorists make room for gender in their analysis by examining the ways in which women are being short-changed by a dwindling welfare state. Yet, while apparent in some countries in the last decade and a half, welfare state retrenchment is neither inevitable nor universal across industrial capitalist countries. Indeed, as presented above in Chapters Three and Four, there exists significant variation of family leave and benefits and childcare policies across the welfare states of Sweden, the United States and Canada. The evidence shows, among other things, that Sweden's welfare state currently includes a comparatively lengthy parental leave and high level of wage compensation at 80% of earnings. As well, the evidence shows a variety of additional family policies available to parents in Sweden, including paternity leaves, sick child benefit, daddy days and child contact days (see Table 3.1). In regards to childcare policy, Sweden offers a universal public-funded childcare system that has shown substantial growth in the last decade and a half.

Social policies enacted by the United States on most respects directly contrast those of Sweden. As shown in Chapter Three, the U.S. has no national parental leave benefit or national childcare policy. What does exist instead is a 12-week parental leave without accompanying benefits, and a fragmented array of childcare services.

The welfare state of Canada seems to straddle the middle ground between the United States and Sweden with regard to its maternity, paternity and parental policies; in terms of its childcare policies, however, Canada more closely resembles the private model found in the United States. Family leave in

Canada has recently been extended to 12 months, but is still compensated at a low wage replacement level of 55% of earnings. Although childcare policy in Canada has had some small advancements with the growth in licensed care spaces in some provinces, this growth in no way meets the demand for quality childcare spaces. Social policies also vary across Canada, as in the case of Quebec and British Columbia's recent implementation of a universal publicly funded childcare system.

### **What outcomes do variations across social policies have for women, especially single mothers?**

As mentioned above, feminists conducting cross-national research often use single mothers as a litmus test in regard to the women friendliness of welfare state social policies. In this study I investigated how the availability of a variety of family leaves and benefits and childcare services, or lack thereof, facilitated or obstructed single mothers' ability to participate in the paid workforce. The evidence shows that these social policies are indeed advantageous for single mothers; Swedish single mothers are generally in a better economic situation than their counterparts in Canada and especially in the United States. This is because the comprehensive parental insurance and childcare systems of Sweden help to alleviate women's primary caring role in families, thereby enhancing their labour force participation. For example, by offering a high wage compensation for family leave, Sweden encourages single mothers to make secure attachments to the labour force. If this relatively high wage compensation

was offered in the United States or Canada, single mothers might be more apt to seek employment before starting a family. A comprehensive childcare system allows single mothers in Sweden to engage in paid work without having to worry about finding affordable, accessible childcare. This is not the case in either the United States and Canada where due to a lack of quality reasonably priced childcare single mothers may have to rely on informal childcare arrangements, or alternately, to opt out of the labour force altogether and rely on social assistance to sustain themselves and their children. As well, other policies, such as contact days and the sick child benefit offered in Sweden, allow single mothers to take time off from their jobs to care for their children without having to worry about lost wages or having to exit the labour force permanently.

In sum, single mothers are better off in Sweden where comprehensive family leave and childcare systems work in tandem to alleviate their primary caring role by encouraging them into paid employment. As a result, it can be surmised that the economic circumstances of single mothers are strongly influenced by the availability of women-friendly social policies.

### **Are single mothers' labour force participation facilitated by social policy?**

Since earnings in most instances provide the only adequate income for single mothers, labour force participation and employment statuses are obviously of critical importance. Because of this importance, feminists performing cross-national research often examine women and/or single mothers in terms of *outcomes* (O'Connor, 1993). One way of measuring outcomes is to examine

labour force participation rates for women cross-nationally (O'Connor, 1993; Blau and Ferber, 1992). The tables below display the labour force participation rates for single mothers and the poverty rates for children in single mother families in the three countries that form the comparison of this study.

**Table 5.1: Labour Force Participation Rates for Single Mothers for Specified Years in Sweden, the United States and Canada.**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Sweden %</b>	<b>United States %</b>	<b>Canada %</b>
1998	75.65		
1997	76.75	69	
1996	78.8	66	
1995	81.5	61.05	63

**Sources:** Statistics Canada, US Department of Labour, US Census, US Bureau of Labour, Statistics Sweden (special request) (all selected years) Sainsbury, Diane, 1996. *Gender Equality and Welfare States*. Cambridge: University Press. Tables 4.1 and 5.1.

**Table 5.2: Poverty Rates for Children in Single Mother Families**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Sweden %</b>	<b>United States %</b>	<b>Canada %</b>
1996	5.2	59.5	50.2

**Source:** Unisef. *The Progress of Nations*. 1996: 44 in Benoit, 2000. *Women, Work and Social rights: Canada in Historical and Comparative Perspective*. Scarborough, Ontario: Prentice Hall Canada.

As Table 5.1 above indicates, labour force participation rates for single mothers varies across welfare states, with the Swedish rate over time comparatively higher than either the U.S. or Canadian rates. As well, as Table 5.2 indicates, children in single mother families in Sweden have a very low poverty rate. This may indicate that women-friendly social policies positively affect single mothers' economic circumstances by facilitating their labour force

participation and lowering their chances of living in poverty.

What is also clear from the data, however, is that the economic recession of the 1990s, in part caused by globalization, has had a negative effect on Swedish single mothers' labour force participation. Social policies, then, are not the only variables in shaping the employment outcomes for single mothers. Employment outcomes for single mothers may be shaped by other numerous factors (discussed further in the next section). Nevertheless, substantial differences in outcomes for single mothers remain across these three countries, as the labour force participation and child poverty rates show.

### **Limitations of This Study**

As mentioned above, conclusions cannot be drawn about the possible correlation between social policies and the labour force participation rates of single mothers for a number of reasons. Labour force participation rates only reflect one dimension of women's employment outcomes. Other statistical dimensions of the employment outcomes of single mothers include (but are not limited to) employment rates, unemployment rates, social assistance rates, poverty rates, job segregation statistics etc. Space and time limits have not permitted me to explore these additional dimensions which would allow for a more comprehensive understanding of the economic situation of single mothers across welfare states.

There are also other limitations to this study. Along with the social policies examined in this study, there may also be other policies worthy of analysis that

impact women's economic outcomes. These include (but are not limited to) employment and educational policies. As well, in the United States, there is a high incidence of teenage pregnancy but little by way of a comprehensive sex education system as part of the high school curriculum. By contrast, the Swedish public school system provides students a well-rounded sex education program, and it is noteworthy that this country has comparatively very low teenage pregnancy rates (Benoit, 2000). Women's participation in different levels of government may also shape the types of social policies adopted by particular welfare states. In this regard it should be pointed out that Swedish women have the highest membership rates in national parliament across high income countries (40.2% in 1998), while the Canadian rate is substantially lower (20.1%) and the U.S. even more so (12.9%) (Benoit, 2000: 155).

### **Summary and Conclusion**

In terms of degree of women-friendliness, Sweden today offers the most progressive policies, the United States the least and Canada finds itself somewhere in the middle. The Canadian welfare state remains difficult to position since it has some social policies that are more women-friendly than others (parental policy as compared to childcare policy); and social policies also vary regionally (as was demonstrated with Quebec). Because of the differences across the social policies of Canada and the United States, it can be concluded that these two countries should not be always conceptually lumped together when the economic situation of women is taken into account. Grouping welfare

states together into cluster regimes, as in the Esping-Andersen tripartite typology, may not accurately reflect the gendered arrangement of a country's welfare state. As has been demonstrated in this thesis, countries which are often grouped together (as with the United States and Canada), may actually differ in ways that have an important outcomes for women's life chances. This is especially the case for single mothers.

A large part of this study was spent arguing against a central aspect of the post-Fordist perspective--that welfare states across industrial capitalist are in inevitable decline. As with feminists performing cross-national research, I argue that, while commonplace, welfare state retrenchment is neither inevitable nor universal across high-income countries. This was clearly demonstrated throughout this study by examining the variations of social policies across the welfare states of Sweden, the United States and Canada over the last decade and a half. Despite some regressions (some would argue a sign of post-Fordism) such as a decrease in the parental leave wage replacement level and a drop in single mothers' labour force participation over the last decade, the Swedish welfare state remains to a large extent in place. In fact, it has even experienced some growth in both its childcare system (i.e., the guarantee by government that every child in need of a licensed childcare space will be provided one) and parental insurance system (provision for a paid one-month paternity leave). Canada's welfare state, although not as comprehensive as that of Sweden, has also experienced some growth for the last decade and a half. Family leave will be extended to 12 months as of December 2000, and the

number of licensed childcare spaces has also increased in the 1990s. As well, at the provincial level, Quebec and British Columbia have expanded their welfare state to include a comprehensive childcare system. The United States currently offers very limited women-friendly social policies. Yet even in the U.S. case, the lack of progressive social policies can hardly be blamed on post-Fordism since such policies never existed in the first instance.

### **Suggestions for Further Research**

Where to go from here? One useful line of inquiry would be to examine other relevant social policies (apart from those examined above) that also impact single mothers' economic situation in different welfare states. It would also be beneficial to study the socio-demographic backgrounds of single mothers and their differential access to social rights within and across countries. A third line of research would involve first-hand investigation of a random sample of single mothers across a select number of countries inquiring which social policies, in their view, enhance their labour force participation and support their economic independence.

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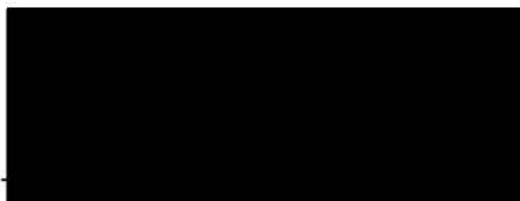
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