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Paper Title:

Commodification, Defamilialization and Decommodification: Advancing the Gendering of Comparative Welfare Studies for 20 OECD Countries

The following abstract is submitted for consideration to two ESPA 2010 themes: *Family Policies and the Reconciling of Paid Work and Care*; and/or *Gender Equity and Social Policy*

Abstract

Family policy and the reconciliation of earning and caring is at the centre of comparative welfare state research. This is true for the important mainstream literature represented by Esping-Andersen (1999, 2002, forthcoming), and for the equally important feminist literature. The latter remains critical that mainstream scholars do not yet integrate the transformative implications of gendered analyses about care, power, the division of labour, and interdependency. As a result, Orloff (2009, 320) concludes that the “agenda of gendering comparative welfare studies remains unfinished.”

Three concepts have been central to this agenda: the degree to which states (a) induce the commodification of women as labour supply (Orloff 1993); (b) support defamilialization of citizens to live apart from family members (Lister 1994); and (c) promote the decommodification of men in order to oblige equal sharing of child care between the sexes (Fraser 1994; Gornick and Meyer 2003; Kershaw 2005). While each concept has received attention in studies of particular states, or comparison across several countries, the literature has yet to develop metrics to analyze all three issues simultaneously in a broad range of OECD countries.

This article addresses the gap by adapting the family benefit package methodology refined by Bradshaw and colleagues (1993, 2002, 2007) who have advanced cross-national analyses of social care by examining the widest range of taxation, income and social policy together in a single study. To date however, the benefit package methodology pays insufficient attention to the gender division of care because it is short on policy data about income splitting, child care services and caregiving leave. The author corrects the problem, adapting the methodology to provide robust cross-national measures of the commodification of women, defamilialization, and decommodification of men for 20 OECD countries. The resulting comparisons inform scholarship about the reconciliation of earning and caring, and accelerate the gendering of comparative welfare studies.