Gøsta Esping-Andersen

Families in the 21st Century

SNS FÖRLAG

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SNS Förlag
Box 5629
SE–114 86 Stockholm
Sweden
Phone: +46 8 507 025 00
info@sns.se
www.sns.se

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Foreword

In this book the author, Gøsta Esping-Andersen, Professor of Sociology at the Universitat Pompeu Fabra, Barcelona, is taking a close look at the state of the family in the 21st century. Is the family eroding or can we identify a revival? How is gender equality developing and how does it affect the future of the family? Are families polarizing and, if so, what does this mean for children´s life chances? To answer these and other questions, Esping-Andersen presents a theoretical framework and analyses the available data to draw conclusions.

We hope this study can contribute to the contemporary debates on families, and also be of value for decision makers. The views expressed are, of course, those of the author. SNS as an organization does not take a position. The mission of SNS is to initiate and present research-based analyses of issues of importance for society.

Robert Erikson, Professor of Sociology at the Stockholm University, and Anna Sjögren, Associate Professor of Economics and a researcher at the Institute for Evaluation of Labour Market and Education Policy (IFAU), scrutinized the manuscript and provided the author with many valuable suggestions on how to improve the text, and also with ideas on how to delve further into the subject. Many thanks for that. Full responsibility still rests with the author alone.

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The reference group members and the entities they represent are in no way responsible for the analysis and the conclusions in the report. This responsibility, as mentioned, rests with the author alone.

Stockholm in September 2016
Stefan Sandström
Research Director, SNS

Executive Summary

Citing valid as well as questionable evidence, both the media and social scientists have for decades now portrayed the family as an endangered species: evermore citizens opt for singlehood or less binding kinds of partnerships (like "living apart together"), marriages appear evermore unstable, and people appear reluctant to have children—witness historically record low (and persistent) fertility rates across much of Europe.

In fact, the ever-less family scenario is very much what the two theoretical perspectives that dominate demographic research would predict. Gary Becker identifies the gains from conjugal specialization (one in paid employment, the other in domestic work) as the key advantage of partnering. It follows that the changing economic role of women will undermine this utility. The rival framework, known as the Second Demographic Transition thesis, predicts the very same outcome but emphasizes the role of "postmodern values" which promote individualism and self-realization.

Chapter 1 in this book is dedicated to a close scrutiny of the evidence. With the most up-to-date evidence available, I examine long-run trends on all the key dimensions of family life. The dynamics I uncover seem to fit well with the family erosion thesis. But only up to a point. Since the mid-20th century, we do see a significant erosion of family formation on most dimensions—the divorce boom, the surge in single person households, the rise of cohabitation, and sharply falling marriage and fertility rates. But the most up-to-date evidence ends up contradicting the "less family" thesis on almost all points. We discover that what citizens define as the ideal number of children has not changed at all since the postwar decades. And in a non-trivial number of countries, Scandinavia par excellence, the family is clearly recovering. We see a rise in marriages, partnerships are increasingly more stable, and fertility has risen and is now close to matching actual preferences. These new trends are especially visible in the two most recent decades.

Perhaps the single most revealing fact is that the return to "more family" is led by exactly the same social strata who, initially, spearheaded the "less family" scenario—namely the higher educated. In other words,

it is now increasingly the lower social strata that epitomize the "less family" scenario.

What then explains this double rebound? Contrary to what Gary Becker predicted, the revolution of women's roles appears now to be compatible with strong families, stable partnerships, and also with childbearing. This leads us to ask: Are some countries (like Sweden) now turning their back on "postmodern" values? Or put differently, in 21st century Europe it is countries like Italy and Spain which display family erosion most blatantly.

What primarily motivated me to write this book was my conviction that the reigning theories had it all wrong. The key driver behind contemporary family dynamics is neither the end of the housewife, nor postmodern individualism. Instead, as I argue, the dynamics are driven by the revolution of women's roles.

In *Chapter 2*, I develop the central argument of my thesis, namely that the revolution will, in its early stages, indeed provoke fewer births, more singlehood, and less stable partnerships. The key turning point comes when both men and society at large adapt to women's new roles. It is when a new family equilibrium emerges, becomes stable, and enjoys broad normative acceptance that we will see stronger inclinations to partner and marry, more enduring relationships, and also a return to fertility levels that match citizens' actual ideals.

Chapter 2 is dedicated to empirical demonstrations of the validity of my "u-shaped" dynamics thesis, i.e. that the family is in fact resurgent. I show that societies with advanced levels of gender egalitarianism (the Scandinavian in particular) boast not only more marriages and births, but also more stable partnerships. In comparison, in nations such as Germany, Italy or Spain, where conventional gender norms remain salient, this is where the "less family" scenario is most marked. What is particularly clear is that the new gender egalitarian family equilibrium requires not only that social institutions (such as the labor market and the welfare state) become "women friendly," but also that men adapt within partnerships—in particular by equally sharing domestic chores and child rearing.

But what are the conditions that promote male adaptation? Why is male adaption now much more advanced in Scandinavia compared

to, say, Germany? Indeed, if we turn the clock back to the 1960s we find that Danish men contributed less to domestic tasks than did their German counterparts. Analyzing the data there is one factor that stands out very clearly, namely any serious male adaptation occurs once women adopt full-time, life-long careers. To exemplify, the average Danish male partner contributes now about 43–45 percent of all housework. As long as women remain prevalently part-timers (as in Germany or the Netherlands), conventional gender norms will largely persist.

The emergence of a gender egalitarian equilibrium is not written in stone. My analyses of the U.S. case are quite revealing in this respect. Once one of the forerunners of women's role change, the gender revolution in the U.S. seems to have stalled mid-way. To exemplify, around one-fourth of American couples still adhere to the traditional male breadwinner-female housewife model. It is tempting to conclude that this is for lack of any genuine welfare state support for working mothers. As argued above, the emergence of a stable gender egalitarian equilibrium necessitates adaptation at both the societal and partnership level.

In the final part (*Chapter 3*), I shift the focus to children in general and child well-being in particular. There is a broadly shared assumption that women's dedication to careers can be harmful for their offspring. This is not only because a full-time dedication to paid work limits the parents' time dedication to children, but also that mothers will return home tired and stressed, thus affecting children adversely. I marshal all the evidence available and conclude that neither the new family, nor the gender revolution, has any negative effects on children, be it in terms of their cognitive development or educational progress.

This is certainly good news. But it comes with an important qualifier. What we observe is that parental time dedication has risen spectacularly among the higher educated strata (including among career mothers). Additionally, it is here where cognitively enriching parenting (such as reading and playing with the children) is particularly intensive. The same, however, has not occurred within the less educated strata where a more passive socialization model still tends to prevail. The upshot is a potentially alarming degree of polarity across the social spectrum in terms of children's life chance potential.

And yet, the data for Scandinavia suggest that—at least so far—there

are no signs of polarizing life chances among children. This, I conclude, is very much a bi-product of Scandinavia's early and comprehensive welfare state adaptation to women's new roles: generous parental leaves and high quality and universal child care centers in particular.

Introduction

Each epoch champions its own unique debates and controversies, many of which are premised on assumptions that we believe to be absolutely true. In this new millennium, there are three such that helped inspire this booklet.

The first centers on the future of the family. Public opinion, the media and even reputed scholars often claim that the family is an eroding and increasingly endangered species. It is of course not the case that we are now shunning love, romance and companionship. But postmodern values, it is frequently argued, weakens the will to commit oneself to lifelong commitments because citizens increasingly prioritize individualism, autonomy, and self-realization. The evolution of our everyday language seems to have caught on to this. Witness the proliferation of concepts such as "living apart together," "helicopter parenting" or "cocooning."

And consider the proto-typical partnerships in today's TV shows, a far cry from the 1950s hardworking husband and father of four whose wife would lovingly tend to their every need. The men and women we now watch seem to move in and out of singlehood and partnerships on a weekly basis, spending most of their free time chatting and dating in cafes and bars.

Children too are now also very much in the public limelight. Here, oddly enough, today's concerns seem in many ways to echo those of Plato. His primary worry was whether the Athenian armies could count on an adequate supply of high-caliber young men. Our preoccupations are doubtlessly less bellicose; today's worries center on our children's welfare and life chances.

Such preoccupations appear particularly intense in the United States with its high rates of youth delinquency, drug-use, obesity, and incarceration. In contrast to the worries about how kids from the bottom-layers of society will fare, there are also concerns that the privileged classes may be over-stimulating and hyper-protecting their children to the point where they suffer from excessive stress and become socially dysfunctional. Here the scenario is one of parents who have become obsessed with their children's future career advancement. Across the entire social spectrum, therefore, the question is: are we investing well in the coming generations?

To foreshadow one of my main conclusions, the data do not point at all towards a future of family erosion. To the contrary, there are clear indications that the family is on the rebound—but of course not in its traditional guise. In a nutshell, the family will become more stable if and when it is firmly premised on a new and more egalitarian gender contract. In this respect the good news continues since such a new contract of this type will simultaneously yield an important welfare dividend for children.

The second controversy is related to the new role of women and its impact on family life. To be sure, only a fringe-minority sees the revolution of women's roles as something that must absolutely be rolled back. But there is considerable worry about the second-order consequences, particularly because it is widely assumed that female careers imply low birth rates (and therefore population ageing and decline), too much family instability and divorce, and too little attention to (those few) children we do have. As we shall see, the altered economic role of women is unlikely to provoke such adverse outcomes. In fact, scientific research has now for decades concluded that women's employment is not negatively associated with fertility. I will try to demonstrate more broadly that if both partnerships and society at large manage to adapt successfully, we shall see stronger and more stable families. If so, the relevant question is: what kind of adaptation is needed?

Finally, the third big debate stems from the fact that we are in the midst of a powerful and wholly unexpected inegalitarian surge.[1] Twenty years ago, who would have thought that a book like Thomas Piketty's *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* could ever become an international best-seller, rivaling the likes of Stephen King? But here serious scholarship (like Piketty's) and much of popular opinion seem miles apart. In popular opinion, the blame is often laid at the door of sinister capitalist conspiracies, of third world countries, or the immigrants who come from these places, all of whom are taking away the steady, well-paid jobs of the hardworking American, Danish or French working man.

The new inequality debate also reflects intensifying fears that we may now be "progressing backwards", on a return voyage to the bad old days of "upstairs-downstairs," and the "haves and have-nots." Are the

1 A fourth is obviously immigration, an issue that I shall not be able to address very much in this small book.

world's richest, most developed, and most democratic nations becoming ever more class-ridden and polarized?

My aim in this book is to tie these strands together, and to marshal empirical evidence in order to sort out which assumptions and beliefs are true and which are not. In Chapter 1, I shall demonstrate that the scenario of family erosion was indeed a valid depiction of trends in the latter part of the 20th century. But, increasingly, it is no longer the case. In some societies, we are now witnessing reversals that even seasoned demographers did not anticipate. Fertility is on the rebound and, more importantly, we see that the number of children citizens have is approaching the number that they actually desire. This implies an important welfare gain. We are also witnessing a rise in marriage propensities and, most surprisingly, partnerships are becoming more stable, i.e. the risk of divorce is declining.

This is all good news, it would seem. But, unfortunately, it is accompanied by bad news. The return-to-family trend is driven by the well-educated. Indeed, the exact opposite is underway among the less educated, who now experience less stable partnerships and far higher divorce rates. Here the "less family" scenario is to a large extent still valid. As a result, we may expect a more polarized world in terms of family life and well-being.

The aim of Chapter 2 is to explain exactly why we encounter such a turnaround. This is where a new explanatory framework is called for. The two theoretical traditions that have so much dominated family research are not well-equipped to explain why we now experience a turnaround. Therefore, an alternative is needed.

In a nutshell, the explanation that I offer has its underpinnings in the gender revolution: in times past, when the male breadwinner model still held sway, gender role expectations were very clear, and women and men slid easily, even unthinkingly, into their respective gender-specialized life course. Family life was in "equilibrium," meaning that expectations and actual behavior were in sync; the core set of norms and ideals that guided life course behavior were pretty much universally accepted.

The correlates of this were early and stable marriages with lots of kids. As women moved out of housewifery and eventually began to "masculinize" *their* life course, an era of normative disorientation emerged, provoking contradictory views on what is desirable, "normal" and *comme-il-faut*.

In turn, this normative limbo as regards family life paved the way for greater hesitancy to marry, more couple instability, and less childbearing.

The forging of a new and stable family equilibrium will, in today's world, require adaptation to women's altered roles. In this respect, my analyses parallel the path-breaking contributions of Goldin (2006) and Goldscheider, Bernhardt, and Lappegård (2015). The core thesis that guides Chapter 2 is that the more a society has managed to adapt, the more likely it is that we will see the consolidation of a new gender egalitarian equilibrium that will promote, yet again, "more family."

Chapter 3 attacks the inequality question, but from a very different perspective than that of Piketty's work and most other research on rising income inequalities. My primary concern is with equality of opportunities, and the question I ask is whether the *combination* of more income dispersion and family polarization will have problematic consequences for children's life chances and social mobility prospects. There are several reasons why the two dimensions overlap and hence promote more polarization. Family types that are at high risk of poverty, such as lone-mother households, are increasingly concentrating at the bottom end of our social hierarchies. We also witness growing gaps in parental child investments, in particular as regards the time they dedicate to the stimulation of children's learning abilities.

I very much hope that this highly synthetic book will invite a rethinking of what is the true nature of family transformation and social inequality within our society here and now. And I must thank SNS for their invitation to write it. It meant a good deal of sweat and anguish, but I learned a great deal from being forced to pull all my research into some kind of (hopefully) comprehensive, compact and also readable whole. And I must thank Margarita Chudnovskaya for her truly impressive contribution to the Swedish data analyses, and Jorge Cimentada for his excellent work on the IALS and PIAAC data. Likewise, I benefited tremendously from the critiques and generous suggestions of the two external reviewers, Robert Erikson and Anna Sjögren. And my gratitude extends also to those who read and commented on the manuscript, in particular Jens Bonke, Frances Goldscheider, and John Myles. Lastly, I am grateful for the ERC Advanced Research Grant which made possible all the research that goes into this book.

CHAPTER 1.

The Return of the Family?

The notion that the family is moving towards extinction has been a leitmotif within the social sciences over the past decades. From a completely different starting point the two most influential theories of family behavior end up predicting a rather similar long-term scenario of fewer marriages and children, the postponement of motherhood, greater marital instability, and more singlehood, combined with relationships (like cohabitation or "living apart together") which permit more freedom and require less binding commitments.

Gary Becker's (1981) classical economic theory views marriage and family formation as the rational way to maximize utility if, that is, partnerships are premised on spousal specialization. Here the male breadwinner-cum-housewife arrangement is seen as optimally efficient and therefore also welfare producing. From this starting point it logically follows that the revolution of women's roles will contradict the core *raison d'être* of marriage: if women and men are increasingly similar in terms of education, employment and earnings, the rationale behind gender role specialization obviously evaporates. Nock (1995; 2001), in fact, finds that couple instability climaxes when the partners command basically identical economic resources. Westoff (1986) made the point quite clearly: "with men and women earning the same income … what then is the point of marriage?" Note however that Becker's theoretical framework includes alternative sources of couple utility such as "being together" and, not least, boosting joint consumption by having two incomes (see also Stevenson and Wolfers, 2007).

The theoretical rival, commonly known as the Second Demographic Transition (SDT) thesis, heralds "postmodern" value change as the main engine of family transformation. Its foremost proponents, Dirk van de Kaa

(2001) and Ron Lesthaeghe (2010), premise their argument on Maslow's famous needs-hierarchy: as the basic requirements of life are secured, citizens will increasingly prioritize higher-order needs such as individualism, the quest for self-realization, emancipation and empowerment. As values like these take hold we should, once again, expect fewer marriages and children, and also less binding relationship forms. Unsurprisingly, the highly educated are expected to be the vanguard of postmodern value shifts.

Both theories appeared (until recently) to capture long-run trends perfectly. The decline in fertility and marriages, the surge in divorce rates, as well as the spread of cohabitation and more singlehood coincide almost perfectly with the rise of postwar prosperity (as the SDT theorists would claim) and also with the disappearance of the housewife (as Becker would predict). To illustrate, in Sweden the probability of divorce rose by almost 50 percent in the 1970s–1980s; and in the U.S. it even doubled (Sobotka, 2009; Stevenson and Wolfers, 2007; UN Demographic Yearbook, various issues).[2] This is also when fertility plummeted. The Scandinavian total fertility rate (TFR) dropped from 2.6 children in 1965 to 1.6 in 1985 (after which it has recovered). The fall has been even more dramatic in Southern Europe, where the TFR fell from almost 3.0 to 1.3 in 1995 (and a recovery is not yet in sight).[3]

Both theories seem to gain additional credibility when we scratch a bit below the surface and examine *who* were the vanguards of "less family." All evidence shows that they were from the more privileged social strata and, in particular, higher educated career women, i.e. the obvious trend-setters of value change. If we go back three or four decades, we see that they were over-represented among those who experienced a divorce or childlessness, and also among those who opted for cohabitation or prolonged singlehood. To illustrate, in 1980s Denmark the share of higher educated women who remained single by age 40 was twice as high (8 percent) as for the low educated (4 percent). And this pattern

2 As with the surge in divorce, the marriage rate declined in basically all advanced OECD countries. In some, like Sweden and the U.S., the fall was modest (15 and 8 percent, respectively), in others substantial (40 percent in Holland and 44 percent in Finland).

3 UN Demographic Yearbook, various issues. The TFR is a synthetic indicator which measures the number of births to women within the fertile age-range within any given year. It can be misleading if there are major shifts (such as postponement of motherhood) in women's age-specific fertility choices during the period being examined. As a rule of thumb, a TFR of 2.1 is required for population replacement. For additional clarification, see Sobotka (2009).

was almost perfectly paralleled for 1950s childlessness—compared to those with less than upper secondary schooling, highly educated Swedish women were 50 percent more likely to end up without any children in the 1960s–1970s (UN Demographic Yearbook, various issues).

Similarly, in those decades higher educated women in the U.S. and in Scandinavia were almost twice as likely to experience a divorce as the less educated (Esping-Andersen, 2009).

The Great Demographic Reversal

Literally out of the blue, and clearly not anticipated by family scholars, we are now observing a major turnaround. In a growing number of countries the "ever-less family" scenario appears to have come to a halt and is being replaced by "more family" on all key dimensions. To be fair to the "less family" theorists, the reversal is of very recent vintage, only truly manifest in the new century. And it certainly has not taken hold everywhere. It is most evident in the Nordic countries and hardly visible at all in Southern Europe. In any case, where it has taken root the turnaround appears to be genuine and here to stay. And this means that our dominant theoretical models are rapidly becoming invalid.

Before I develop an alternative explanation to that of Gary Becker or the postmodern thesis, let us examine more closely the contours of the *Great Demographic Reversal*. As a first step, I shall examine trends at the macro-level of nations. The second step moves to the micro-level of individuals, exploring how family change varies across the citizenry.

Family Values

On one important dimension, the "ever-less family" argument had it all wrong from the very beginning. This is especially true for the SDT thesis with its strong emphasis on how value shifts promote more individualistic preferences.[4] Recent scholarship has in fact emphasized how key values and preferences regarding family life show little change (see in particular Bertrand, Kamenica, and Pan, 2015; Goldin, 2006; Scott and Braun, 2006). And this is supported by facts. All available data point

4 The SDT's emphasis on postmodern value change owes much to the writings of Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2003) and to Ronald Inglehart (1977; 1990).

Table 1. Fertility Preferences among Women Aged 25–39 in Selected Nations. Percentages.

	No children	One child	Two children	Three+ children
Denmark	0	2	52	27
France	1	2	54	34
Germany	3	10	47	20
Italy	2	15	53	15
Netherlands	1	2	54	24
Spain	2	2	43	29
Sweden	2	2	43	29
U.K.	2	3	38	34

Source: European Fertility Surveys.
Note: The data refer to the mid- and late-1990s. The rows do not sum to 100 percent because the table omits the "don't know" answers.

to an amazing degree of stability, from one generation to the next, as regards the preferred family type and size.

As we see in Table 1, the desire to have no children or at most one child is everywhere limited to a tiny minority. The solid majority aims for two and, as is the case in Sweden and most societies, almost one third want three or more children. And when we compare across birth-cohorts we observe basically no change in preferences. Table 1 focuses on women of childbearing age in the new century, but the pattern is basically identical when we examine those who were of childbearing age in the 1960s or even the 1940s.[5]

The absence of any profound value change is similarly evident when, instead, people are asked whether they believe that "marriage is out of date"—an obvious indicator of "postmodern" value change. In Scandinavia those who agree comprise a modest minority (15 percent). Surpris-

5 A note to the reader: as you will see, the countries included in my comparisons will vary. This is in large part due to data limitations. In any case, my first priority for country inclusion is to highlight contrasting cases (in Table 1, for example, I include representatives of both very low (like Italy) and higher (like Sweden) fertility levels.

ingly, we find much broader agreement in more traditional societies such as the Spanish (here, 25 percent agree).[6]

The Fertility Welfare Gap

Fertility has been a major public concern since the birth of modern civilization. But how we have defined the issue has changed quite significantly throughout history. In antiquity, as noted in the introduction, Plato's writings reveal that he worried about having enough soldiers for the Athenian armies, and also about ensuring that they were of a sufficiently high caliber. In medieval times, landlords actively promoted procreation among the peasantry so as to obtain cheap and abundant labor.

A few centuries later we find that fertility was considered a menace, most famously articulated by Malthus in his *An Essay on the Principle of Population* (first published in 1798). His theory predicts that fertility will rise in response to more income and wealth. Since he assumed that food production would increase linearly while population growth would be exponential, the end result, he feared, would be famine—a bad trade-off if ever there was one.

Happily, Malthus was contradicted by history. Since the mid-1800s, there has been no connection between societal wealth and fertility. To the contrary, as nations became richer their fertility declined (Guinnane, 2010; Jones and Tertilt, 2008). There is, however, a clear pro-cyclical response: birth rates dropped sharply during the 1930s depression, and this we see again in the post-2008 crisis. The fall of births during hard times is, to be sure, primarily due to postponement of motherhood. But if the economic downturn is prolonged, as was the case in the 1930s—and quite similarly also now—postponement might very well translate into a permanent fertility deficit.

Fertility has frequently been sponsored for pro-natalist reasons, often connected to the promotion of a nation's *grandeur*. Such ideologies emerged very strongly in France, along with its quest to become the leading European power. To be sure, pro-natalism was not limited to bellicose power-seekers. Sweden also promoted pro-natalism in the

6 Data are calculated from the 2009 European Values Survey. Not surprisingly, family values are certainly changing on one dimension, namely preferences in favor of the conventional male breadwinner arrangement. In Sweden, those who agree are a tiny minority (8 percent). In more traditional societies, such as Germany or Spain, support is substantially greater (23 and 25 percent, respectively).

inter-war decades. In fact, a pioneering scientific analysis of low fertility was Alva and Gunnar Myrdal's 1934 book, *Kris i befolkningsfrågan* (Crisis in the Population Question). Their remedy was to build up family policies. Pro-natalism continues to resurface, most recently in Putin's Russia.

A society can only maintain its population size if the average number of children per woman exceeds 2.1. If this fails to happen over prolonged periods, we shall witness two problematic outcomes. One, the population will become older and older. This means of course that an ever-smaller number of young people must care for an ever-larger mass of aged citizens. To illustrate the magnitudes involved, the projected old-age dependency ratio for 2050 is 72 for Italy (a lowest-low fertility country) and 44 for Sweden.[7] Two, the total population size will shrink. This will not become visible in the short- or medium-term. But in the long-run, the effects of persistent low fertility can be truly dramatic.

Consider the following forecasts: if a society can sustain a fertility rate of 1.9 children per woman (which is close to the Swedish level), its population at the end of this century will have declined by about 15 percent—ignoring any immigration. If, however, a society is stuck with persistent "lowest-low" fertility, defined as less than 1.4 children per woman, its total population at the end of the century will be only 25 percent of its present size (McDonald, 2002). As a thought experiment, this would entail that Spain (now with around 43 million inhabitants) would end up like Sweden; and Denmark's population would be hardly larger than Luxembourg's.

The preceding arguments are pitched at the macro-level of countries, and they unquestionably do address welfare issues in one form or another—be it economic prosperity, population size, or national *grandeur*.

We can also define fertility as a welfare issue at the level of individuals and families. As a matter of fact, having children is one of the fundamental ingredients in citizens' pursuit of well-being and life satisfaction. And this is supported by data. A number of studies find that having children produces a significant happiness dividend (Aassve, Goisis, and Sironi, 2012; Kohler, Behrman, and Skytthe, 2005). This dimension has, quite inexplicably, received remarkably little attention in policy debates.

7 The old-age dependency ratio is the population 65+ divided by the active ages 20–64. Source: Vienna Institute for Demography Data Sheet 2014.

It was, however, a leading theme in the Myrdals' advocacy of active family-friendly policies.

When examining citizens' views of the ideal size of families, one is struck by three surprising facts. The first is that women *and* men share very similar notions about what is ideal. The second, as we have just seen, is the continuity of preferences across many decades and cohorts. The third surprise is that the very high fertility rates (i.e. 5+ children per woman) that obtained up to the 19th century probably exceeded peoples' true preferences. Shorter (1973) as well as Guinnane (2010) argue that a two–three child model was probably closer to the true ideals. Perhaps the welfare gap in days long gone was one of too many children—although we should not forget the high child mortality rates that reigned then.

One way to identify the welfare gap is to examine the distance between preferences and actual outcomes. This is usually done by comparing stated ideals against the TFR. Nowadays, there is a group of countries, like Britain, France, the U.S. and Scandinavia, where the TFR lies close to 2.0. Here the welfare-fertility gap seems rather minor; but for countries that are mired in persistent lowest-low fertility, i.e. below 1.4, the gap looks huge.

Total fertility rates may not actually be the best yardstick since they simply represent the average number of births in any given year divided by the number of women of childbearing ages. They can be very misleading if ever more women delay maternity (which is very much the case in recent times). We should perhaps instead measure the gap with data on completed fertility rates (CFR) for those women whose childbearing years have ended (conventionally defined at age 45–50).

To obtain an idea of today's welfare gap, we should therefore study women born around 1965–1970. Here we find that the Swedish rate (1.95) comes quite close to the preferred number. Germany and Spain, however, exhibit a substantial welfare gap since their CFR is only 1.6 (Bongaarts and Sobotka, 2012; Sobotka, 2009).

The Fertility Reversal

If we take a long historical view, births have been declining steadily since the 1800s, long before any postmodern values had any chance of influencing peoples' behavior. Very much in line with advanced nations, the Swedish TFR fell from about 4.0 in the 1890s to 3.2 in 1920. From

then on it dropped to around 2.0 until it bottomed out around 1.6 in the 1970s and 1980s. Fertility recovered again in the 1990s (up to 2.1), but dropped momentarily in the 2000s. It is now back to around 1.9–2.0.[8]

Let us turn our attention to the recent reversal. Basically all advanced nations experienced a (sometimes) sharp fall in fertility from the 1970s into the 1990s. The drop was particularly dramatic in some cases, like Germany, Italy and Spain (where the TFR fell to ca. 1.3), and less so in others, like Sweden or the U.S. In a number of countries, starting with the U.S. and France, birth rates began to climb again already in the 1980s–1990s. And between 1990 and 2010, 12 out of 30 countries (including all of Scandinavia and parts of Western Europe) experienced a clear return to fertility levels that come quite close to the two-child norm (i.e. a TFR around 2.0) and to population replacement (a TFR of 2.1). Here, in other words, the "welfare gap" has basically been closed. See Figure 1.[9]

As is often pointed out, immigrants have more babies than the native population. One might therefore conclude that the fertility recovery is being driven by the large immigration waves arriving since the 1990s. But since it is well-established that immigrants eventually converge with the local population this means, demographically speaking, that the recovery would be only temporary.

Studies which carefully identify the immigrant contribution generally conclude that its impact is relatively minor. For Sweden, immigrant fertility accounts for only 5 percent of the total increase in births during the 2000s; in Denmark, its impact is actually negative. In countries with exceptionally large immigrant populations, the impact is certainly greater. In France, to cite an extreme case, the immigrant effect is 27 percent (Sobotka, 2009). Put differently, the fertility recovery (where it has occurred) appears to be primarily—even overwhelmingly—driven by the native population.[10]

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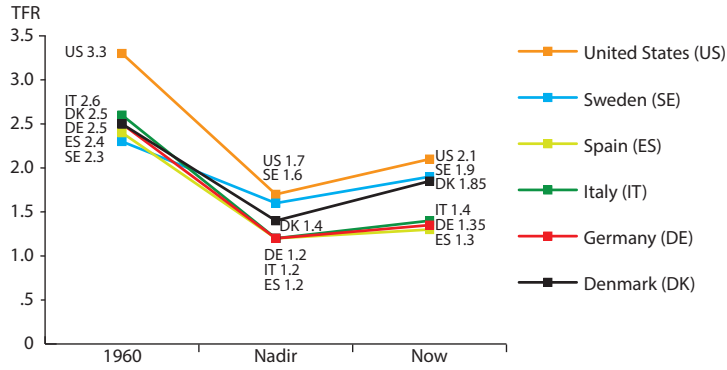
8 Long historical series on fertility can be found in Rowland (2007).

9 This is additionally evident from completed fertility data for the most recent cohorts, and from projections for the cohort born in 1979. For the cohort born in 1970 we see completed fertility rates close to 2 in 12 out of 20 OECD nations. And yet, the picture is dualistic. In Austria, Germany, Italy, and Spain the rate is down to 1.5 children—again evidence of a major "welfare gap." And projections for the 1979 cohort show that the recovery nations will, on average, have 2.0–2.2 children (data from European Demographic Observatory and from Sobotka, 2009).

10 The U.S. is a partial exception. As Frank and Heuveline (2005) show, women of Hispanic origin continue to boast very high fertility rates (with a TFR around 3.0).

Figure 1. Fertility Trends from the 1960s to 2010.



Source: UN Demographic Yearbook, various issues.
Note: TFR is the total fertility rate in any given year.

Marriage and Divorce

If we once again turn the clock back a hundred years or so, we will find surprisingly low marriage rates, certainly when compared to the golden years of the postwar era. To illustrate with Swedish data, the never-married rate for women born around 1900 (observed at age 50–55 in 1950) was 21 percent (Statistiska centralbyrån, 1950). This is exactly three times higher than for women born in the 1940s. This was, of course, not because Swedish women a hundred years ago were exceptionally "post-modern," but rather because a significant share of the population simply could not permit themselves the luxury of marrying—the daughters of poor families would very often end up as live-in servants and maids to the wealthy.

Elsewhere, especially in Germany and France, marriage rates in the early decades of the 20th century were low also due to the shortage of men as a result of the mass fatalities in World War I.

After a prolonged slump in recent decades, marriage may be enjoying a renaissance. We observe a rise in formal marriages, especially in Scandinavia—the very same societies that are world-leaders in cohabitation. This is clear in Sweden where the annual number of marriages has risen by 67 percent since the late 1990s: from 30.000 in 1998 to 50.000 on

average in the years 2008–2014 (Statistics Sweden, Population statistics).

As I mentioned earlier, the 1970s and 1980s saw a virtual divorce boom unfolding in basically all advanced nations.[11] In Southern and Eastern Europe, the boom has not abated, but it has been reversed in a non-trivial number of countries over the past two decades, falling in 12 out of 24 OECD countries (Härkönen and Dronkers, 2006). In the U.S. the decline has been truly remarkable (a 30 percent drop), but here we must remember that the U.S. has traditionally boasted extraordinarily high divorce levels—probably because Americans also boast higher marriage rates, particularly at young ages. But we also register a noticeable decline in Scandinavia (13 percent in Norway and 4–5 percent in Denmark and Sweden).

Table 2 depicts the long-run trend in the crude divorce rate for representative OECD nations.[12]

Except for the U.S., divorce was a rare phenomenon in most countries in the 1960s. This all changed from the 1970s onwards, climaxing in most countries in the 1980s–1990s. In a number of cases, such as Germany, Italy and Spain (not shown) the upward trend has continued. Indeed, once legalized the Spanish rate rose explosively, placing Spain at the top of the European divorce league (Creighton, Esping-Andersen, Rutigliano, and van Damme, 2014). In others, like Scandinavia, the Netherlands, the U.K. and the U.S., we register significant drops. Here, once more, the data appear to contradict theory head-on: we see more union stability in the most advanced, rich countries, and ever more fragility in the less developed nations.

A different way to identify couple (in)stability is to examine mean marital durations. Here we encounter the same basic scenario. Marriages have become far more stable in Denmark and Norway (where the average duration has risen by two to three years); vice-versa, they have become more short-lived in countries like Italy and Spain (OECD's Family Database).

11 In Portugal and Spain the boom started later due to the prohibition of divorce during the dictatorships.

12 The crude divorce rate is a summary indicator of the percent of all concurrent marriages that terminate in any given year.

Table 2. Crude Divorce Rates over the Past Half-Century.

	1965	1995	2005–2010
Denmark	1.4	2.6	2.2
Norway	.7	2.5	2.0
Sweden	1.1	2.5	2.2
France	.6	2.0	2.1
Germany (West)	.9	2.0	2.5
Netherlands	.5	2.4	2.0
U.K.	.7	3.1	2.4
U.S.	2.3	4.6	3.7

Source: UN Demographic Yearbook, various years.

The stratified demographic rebound

The very same countries which now promote "more family" are also the forerunners of change in the stratified profile of marriage, divorce and childbearing. Some decades ago we would have seen that singlehood, childlessness, or union instability were highly concentrated within the more privileged classes—in particular among highly educated career women. This is precisely what both Becker and the SDT theory would have predicted.

Since, for Becker, the basic rationale of marriage derives from spousal complementarities (one specializing in the domestic sphere, the other in earning an income), it follows logically that a dual career couple will appear less welfare optimizing unless, of course, its primary aim is simply to maximize income and consumption. In the latter case, the couple is surely unlikely to have many children, and its durability should depend very much on the income potential of both partners. The SDT thesis would, in a parallel vein, also predict fewer marriages, greater couple instability, and fewer births among the highly educated because they are far more likely to champion postmodern values.

On basically all dimensions we are now witnessing a complete turnaround in the stratified nature of family life, most visible in the countries that spearheaded the reversal.

Marriage and Partnering

In the past, when housewifery was still the common female destiny, the most likely groups to be married were highly skilled, high-earning men and less educated women. Women with university level degrees were particularly prone to experience singlehood, especially if they pursued careers (Cookingham, 1984; Houseknecht, Vaughan, and Statham, 1987; Spreitzer and Riley, 1974). This still appears to be the case in some countries, such as Germany and the Netherlands (Blossfeld and Huinink, 1991; Dykstra and Poortman, 2010). But most recent studies point to a clear educational cross-over: nowadays the higher educated women have the edge, marriage-wise. This is the case in the U.S. (Cherlin, 2010; Goldstein and Kenney, 2001; Hwang, 2016), in Scandinavia (Bracher and Santow, 1998; Thomson and Bernhardt, 2010) and, as Kalmijn (2013) notes, it is generally the case within more gender-egalitarian countries.

However, narrow focus on marriages may be misleading for those societies, like the Nordic countries or France, where cohabitation is widespread and fully institutionalized.[13] Using the Swedish registry data files, I therefore re-examined the changing educational profile of marriage by also including those within a (registered) cohabiting arrangement.[14] Comparing three birth cohorts (born, respectively, in 1950, 1960 and 1970), Table 3 depicts the education-specific incidence of being (or of having been) married or cohabitating by age 40.

From Table 3 we see that marriage (or cohabitation) has lost ground in Sweden. But we should not forget that the statistics exclude a large population which has not formally registered its cohabiting status. Furthermore, recall that the Swedish marriage rate has risen by more than 60 percent over the most recent decade.

In any case, while levels of marriage or cohabitation were similar within the oldest cohort we see a clear differential emerging. The proportion of married/cohabiting has declined by a considerably larger percentage among the low-educated, especially within the most recent birth cohort.

Analyses conducted on the Danish registry data show basically the same trend. From the 1980s to 2010, the proportion of women who had

13 For a comparison of the meaning of cohabitation versus marriage across societies, see Perelli-Harris (2014).

14 It is unfortunately impossible to identify those who are not formally registered as cohabiting, and the latter are primarily couples without children.

Table 3. The Changing Educational Profile of Married or Cohabitating Status by Age 40 in Sweden. Percentages.

	Born 1950	Born 1960	Born 1970
Lower secondary education	82	70	62
University level education	82	71	69

Source: Swedish Official Registry Database.

never partnered rose among the low-educated and fell sharply (from 11 to 3 percent) among those with a university degree. The Danish analyses can, by the way, serve as a corrective to the Swedish since they do include *all* cohabiting couples. In Denmark we observe, as in Sweden, a drop in the proportion of married or cohabiting partnerships from the 1980s to 2010. But compared with the 62 percent of low-educated and 69 percent of highly educated who had partnered in Sweden, we find in Denmark, respectively, 77 and 79 percent.

Comparing education levels across time, as we do here, is not as straightforward as it may appear. This is because the group of low-educated has declined in size while the high-educated has expanded. In other words, selection into both categories is undergoing change (see also Boschini et al., 2011). To illustrate, it is likely that those who today fall into the low-education group are systematically less ambitious or gifted than was the case for, say, the cohorts born in the 1950s. This may, in turn, influence their chances of partnering.

Divorce

More than half a century ago, William Goode (1956; 1962) launched what would become a highly influential explanation of why divorce varies across the social classes. He argued that as long as divorce was uncommon (and expensive) it was likely to remain limited to the privileged classes. As it eventually gained broader social acceptance, one would see a convergence across all social strata.

Goode's predictions were a bit off the mark. As it turns out, the highly educated are enjoying increasingly stable relationships while the less educated experience ever more fragile marriages. As Härkönen and Dronkers (2006) show, in nine out of 17 countries it is now the less

educated who face the highest probability of divorce.[15] Table 4 presents trends over time for the divorce ratio of low versus high educated couples for representative countries. The pattern is clear: prior to the 1990s, the higher educated tended to have less stable marriages. Now it is exactly the opposite in some societies. In Denmark, as in the U.S., the low-educated are now more than twice as likely to experience a divorce compared to those with a university degree.

Hoem (1997) found a reversal in Sweden, in that the partnerships of higher educated are now more stable. Here the less educated are 40 percent more likely to experience a marital breakdown. Also Gähler and Palmtag (2015), focusing on social class effects, find that the divorce gap between the "service class" and the unskilled has been reversed.[16] For those born in the 1950s, the service class was more divorce-prone; moving forward, we find that the unskilled, born in the 1970s and 1980s, are now roughly 60 percent more likely to experience a divorce.

"Survival analysis" offers a particularly revealing way of examining the stratified nature of marital stability. For Sweden I have followed two marriage cohorts over 15 years: those partnered in 1980 compared to those in 1995 (for a similar approach analyzing Britain, see Boertien and Härkönen, 2014). As can be seen in Figures 2 and 3, the educational gap has widened considerably. Comparing the two cohorts, the low-educated have become far more divorce-prone: by the 15th year about 30 percent from the early cohort had divorced; for those married in 1995, almost 50 percent ended up divorced. The higher educated, in contrast, show no rise in their divorce propensity. This entails that the educational "divorce gap" has widened substantially: for the early cohort, the gap was about 10 percentage points; for the 1995 cohort it has widened to almost 30 points. Boertien and Härkönen's (2014) analyses identify similar differentials in Britain. By the 15th year, about 72 percent of the partnerships of the lowest educated remain intact, compared with 85 percent of the highly educated (a 13 percentage point gap).

As before, we must also here take into account the compositional changes within these educational strata: with the expansion of educa-

15 For Norwegian evidence, see Lyngstad (2004). Blossfeld et al. (1995), Kalmijn (2007), and Matysiak, Styrc, and Vignoli (2014) also agree that the educational gradient of divorce has reversed or, at least, has narrowed substantially.

16 The service class refers to managers, professionals, and high-level administrators.

Table 4. The Changing Educational Profile of Divorce: Divorce Ratios for Low:High Educated Women.

	1970s	1990s	2010 ca.
Denmark	n.a.	1.6	2.6
Germany	.8	1.3	n.a.
Sweden	.7	1.6	1.4
U.S.	1.1	2.2	2.1

Source: UN Demographic Yearbook, various issues. For Denmark, the estimates derive from Danish registry data; for the U.S., from analyses of the PSID data.

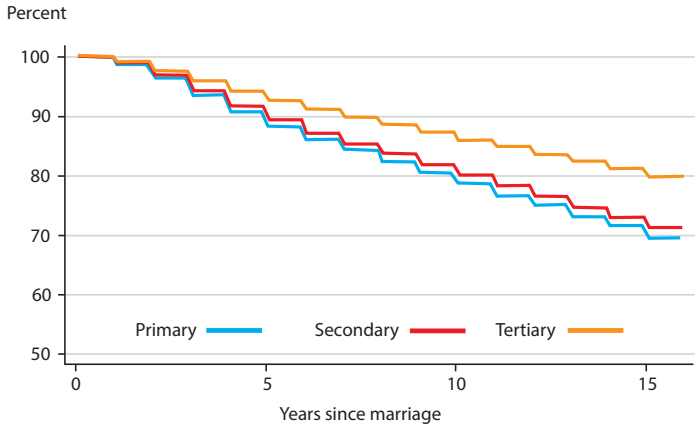
tional attainment, those who are now selected into the low-education group may very well share socially adverse attributes that make them comparatively more divorce-prone.

The evidence we have scrutinized seems to contradict both the Becker and SDT thesis. As is well known, higher educated women are far more likely to pursue careers and economic independence. But, as Cooke et al.'s (2013) data show, wives' employment is a marital stabilizer in all the Nordic countries and it has no divorce-inducing effect at all in France or the Netherlands. And the broader pattern is clear: wives' employment weakens marriages only in the more gender-traditional countries, such as Italy. This was also brought out in Sayer and Bianchi's (2000) study of trends over time in the U.S. They found that, in the past, women's economic independence heightened divorce risks but that this effect has all but disappeared in recent times.

The enhanced partnership stability that the more educated strata now enjoy may, of course, derive from their income maximization potential. If so the trend does not contradict the Becker thesis.[17] The problem is

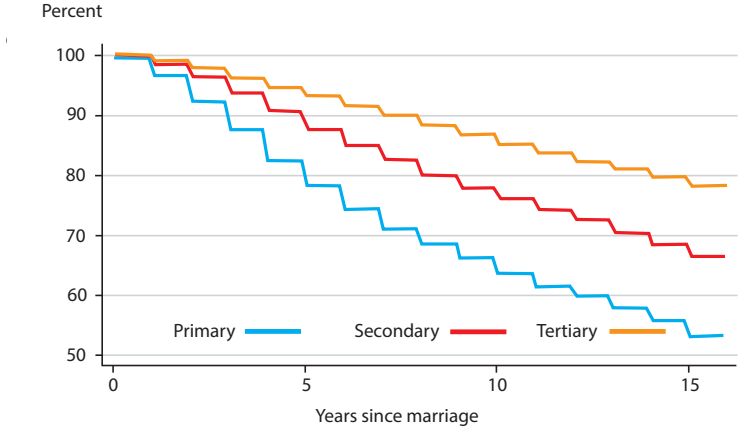
17 The reasons for greater marital stability among the well-educated that are typically cited are: one, they marry later and are thus more mature when deciding on a commitment (Lyngstad and Jalovaara, 2010); two, they typically have superior relationship skills (Amato, 1996); and, thirdly, higher educated men are more likely to adopt gender egalitarian practices in the home (Cooke, 2006; Bonke and Esping-Andersen, 2011). Amato (2010) offers a comprehensive overview of related research.

Figure 2. Marital Survival by Education in Sweden. Couples Married in 1980.



Source: Swedish registry data.

Figure 3. Marital Survival by Education in Sweden. Couples Married in 1995.



Source: Swedish registry data.

that the social gradient of fertility is experiencing a parallel reversal. If income maximization were the primary rationale, one would expect low fertility within dual earner couples since births and motherhood are obvious obstacles to a career and the maximization of income.

Fertility

As regards fertility, a large number of studies conclude that the income or education effect is influenced by the timing of both partnering and childbearing (Lappegård, 2000; Martin, 2006). The higher educated delay marriage and/or opt for cohabitation, and both of these factors should influence childbearing (Baizán, Aassve, and Billari, 2003; 2004). Higher educated women will logically seek to minimize the child penalty to their careers by delaying or perhaps even foregoing maternity.

As far as education-specific child preferences are concerned, we observe quite dramatic differences across nations. In some, including Canada, Spain and the U.S., the gap is substantial between high and low educated women as regards the ideal number of children. To exemplify, university-educated American women prefer no more than 2 children, whereas those with only elementary level education define 3.5 as their ideal. In contrast, there are almost no differences by education level in the Nordic countries. In Sweden the ideal is 2.5 children on average, be it among the lowest or highest educated. Indeed, employed Swedish women show stronger preferences for having more children (almost 3.0) than those not working (2.4).[18]

But, as with partnering and divorce, the educational gradient of fertility is also turning upside-down, most clearly in North America and Scandinavia (Hazan and Zoabi, 2011; Kravdal and Rindfuss, 2008; Esping-Andersen, 2009). This apparently holds also for earnings, since recent evidence suggests that high-income women, at least in Scandinavia, may explicitly forego higher wages in the interest of motherhood (Datta Gupta and Smith, 2002). A straightforward economic opportunity-cost explanation is therefore problematic.

The changing social gradient is perhaps most evident as regards childlessness which, in the past, was heavily concentrated among highly

18 The data refer to 2010–2012 and derive from the 6th wave of the World Values Survey. See OECD's Family Database, Chart SF2,2 (www.oecd/social/family/database).

educated career women. To exemplify with Dutch data, university educated women born in the 1940s were three times as likely to end up childless compared to those with only elementary schooling. This distance has narrowed considerably. For the cohort born in the 1960s, the higher educated are now only .5 times as likely to end up without any child at the end of their fertile years (i.e. at age 50). The trend in Scandinavia is quite similar (Bellani and Esping-Andersen, 2014). For Swedish women born in the 1940s, the higher educated were about 50 percent more likely to end up without any children. For those born in the 1960s, it is exactly the other way around: the less educated are now twice as likely to shun motherhood. Andersson et al. (2009) conclude that fertility rates for higher and lower educated women are now converging in Scandinavia; Kravdal and Rindfuss (2008) and Hoem and Hoem (1989) find that the higher educated are actually more fertile in Norway and in Sweden.

Since the vast majority aim for two or more children, we should logically focus on the changing social gradient of higher birth orders. Here the turnaround in Scandinavia is certainly evident. For Swedish women born in the 1940s–1950s, the likelihood of having a second child was 20 percent higher among the less educated. But for those born in the 1960s, it is perfectly reversed: it is now the highly educated who enjoy a 20 percent advantage. In Denmark and Norway the shift is even more remarkable. For the 1960s cohorts, university-educated Norwegian women are 50 percent more likely to have at least two children (and in Denmark, 60 percent) compared to those with only elementary level education (Bellani and Esping-Andersen, 2014; Kravdal and Rindfuss, 2008).

Explaining the Return of the Family

If citizens continue to prioritize children and married life (or at least stable partnerships), how do we then explain the roller-coaster dynamics that we have experienced over the past three to four decades?

The SDT thesis and Gary Becker's economic theory appear to offer a valid, indeed persuasive, explanation of the downturn phase. Neither, however, offers any clear rationale for why we now observe a reversal. As regards the postmodernist SDT thesis we have already noted one basic flaw, namely that family preferences have remained largely unchanged

over the past half century. In fact, as Scott and Braun (2006) demonstrate, the one single piece of evidence that supports the postmodern value shift has to do with tolerance of sexuality. And more generally, why would the Scandinavians or the Americans suddenly abandon postmodernism? And why are societies, such as the Italian or the Spanish, now suddenly the vanguards of postmodernism, individualism and ever-less family?

The Becker theory suffers from similar shortcomings. The return to family is, as we have seen, far more evident in those countries, again like the Nordic, where gender role symmetry is most advanced. Here the housewife has *de facto* disappeared, and most women invest heavily in human capital (in fact even more than men) and dedicate themselves to a life-long career. Economically speaking, women are increasingly "masculinized." This will, of course, boost couples' consumption potential and allow them to outsource those household chores that get in the way of career advancement. And yet, if consumption and leisure are the prime motive behind partnering, it is difficult to understand why such couples also prefer—and have—many children.

The "masculinization" of women's economic behavior is one facet of emerging gender symmetry. As we shall see in Chapter 2, this is—albeit slowly—emerging also in the domestic sphere. Here, then, we see a "feminization" of men's roles. If the primary gains to marriage derive from couple specialization, the ongoing transformation of gender roles would logically imply its demise. And, yet, it is exactly where gender convergence is most advanced that we observe more marriages, enhanced conjugal stability, and more births—particularly among the higher educated. This seems to contradict Becker head-on.

The Revolution of Women's Roles and the Centrality of Gender Equality

Considering the "masculinization" of the female life course, it should be quite obvious that key decisions regarding family life will depend on altered gender relations. This reasoning has now become central within fertility research. McDonald's (2000; 2002) gendered fertility thesis has in this respect exerted a major influence.[19]

The crux of the argument is that low fertility occurs when society

19 Note also that Goldscheider, Bernhardt, and Lappegård (2015) have developed an argument that in many respects parallels the thesis I develop here.

fails to adapt to the new economic role of women. The decision to have children in today's world requires adaptation at two levels. Firstly, the welfare state needs to promote family-friendly policies that permit role reconciliation. These, however, are unlikely to be genuinely effective unless accompanied by a concomitant equalization within couples. The key to the latter is the formation of a critical mass that promotes the diffusion of gender egalitarianism as the norm (Esping-Andersen and Billari, 2015; see also Neyer, Lappegård, and Vignoli, 2013; Sleebos, 2003).

A number of studies give empirical support to this claim. There is clear evidence that fertility is higher, particularly for career women, when fathers contribute more equitably to domestic tasks and child care (Brodmann, Esping-Andersen, and Güell, 2007; Cooke, 2004; 2009; Craig and Siminski, 2011; de Laat and Sevilla-Sanz, 2006; Duvander and Andersson, 2006; Myrskylä, Kohler, and Billari, 2011; Oláh, 2003; Sevilla-Sanz, 2010). These studies have examined a variety of gender-egalitarian behavioral effects, largely focusing on the spousal division of domestic tasks.

Since forming a union is almost always the antecedent to parenthood, the impact of gender egalitarianism may, in the first round, operate via how individuals select themselves into partnerships. In a rare study which examines such prior selection, Gimenez-Nadal, Molina, and Sevilla-Sanz (2012) discover that where very traditional family norms prevail, women are significantly less inclined to marry and this in turn affects fertility adversely. In parallel, it has been shown that partnerships are more stable when the male partner plays an active role in facilitating the reconciliation between motherhood and a career (Fernández, Fogli, and Olivetti, 2004; Mencarini and Vignoli, 2014).

However, most research examines the direct link between gender egalitarianism and births. Some have focused on the relative contribution of men to domestic tasks. And here a main finding is that sharing child care is more important than splitting the housework (Neyer, Lappegård, and Vignoli, 2013). A few researchers have examined how a more egalitarian take-up of parental leave influences subsequent births. For Sweden, the effect is found to be quite positive (Duvander, Lappegård, and Andersson, 2010). A third approach is represented by the Neyer, Lappegård, and Vignoli (2013) study, which examines how a more equitable work-sharing within couples influences future fertility

intentions. They uncover quite substantial effects, although primarily within one-child couples. Predictably, the effect is weaker when the parents already have two or more children. Interestingly, their study also reveals that women's satisfaction with the division of labor has a stronger bearing on fertility intentions than does the actual allocation of domestic tasks. This fits very nicely with Esping-Andersen and Billari's (2015) argument that perceived *fairness* is likely to be truly decisive.

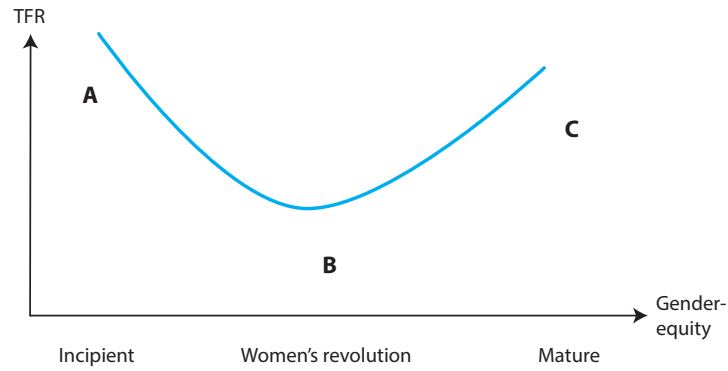
But, as Esping-Andersen and Billari also emphasize, the link between gender equity and family outcomes is driven by the revolution of women's roles. It should therefore be u-shaped. This means that we would expect more marriages, greater conjugal stability, and fertility levels that approximate preferences in two kinds of normative equilibria: in the traditional male-breadwinner regime and in a gender egalitarian environment. Marriages and fertility will bottom out when, on one hand, the traditional family has eroded and, on the other hand, when no new egalitarian alternative has yet become manifest. In fact, a u-shaped effect of this type has been documented for the U.S. (Miller Torr and Short, 2004).

Using the example of fertility, the dynamics are depicted in Figure 4. At stage "A," the dominant norm of family life remains very much the traditional male breadwinner-cum-housewife arrangement (which, as long as it remains broadly accepted, will produce high fertility rates—and also more marriages and less divorce). If this family norm is truly dominant (as was the case in the postwar decades) it is, according to economic theory, in *equilibrium* (Durlauf, 2001). Theoretically speaking, under such conditions change will only occur if society experiences *exogenous* shocks. Goldin's (2006) highly acclaimed research on women's economic history identifies three such shocks: one, modern birth control; two, the spread of women's education; and, three, labor-saving household technologies.[20] These all helped emancipate women and altered the cost-benefit calculus of housewifery versus a career.

As the changes in women's role progress while neither partnerships nor welfare policy adapt adequately, we will find ourselves moving into stage "B," a situation of normative flux and confusion about what are

20 The impact of new household technologies is certainly not trivial. Consider the washing machine, which reduced the required time for clothes washing by hours.

Figure 4. The Revolution of Women's Roles and Fertility.



the desirable and proper ways to arrange partnerships and family life. A widely cited example of this is the "double-shift" phenomenon: even though she is employed outside the home, the wife also does the lion's share of housework and child care.

Economists would characterize stage B as a "multiple equilibrium" situation; one in which several and possibly contradictory normative guidelines co-exist. Here normative confusion is likely to prevail and, as a result, citizens are uncertain about what to expect. This, in turn, weakens their trust in fellow citizens and creates uncertainty as regards to what the future has in store. And there is strong empirical evidence that trust is a decisive precondition for fertility, and logically also for partnering in the first place (Aassve, Billari, and Pessin, 2012).

So, what will a new stable equilibrium (i.e. stage C in Figure 4) look like, and what are the dynamics that will bring it about? For the first question, the answer is quite straightforward: since the revolution of women's roles is irreversible (at least in the advanced democratic nations) the new stable equilibrium must clearly be founded on norms *and* practices that are genuinely gender symmetric. Only when these are broadly adopted, and also socially expected, can one expect a return to pervasive trust and confidence within family life.

The answer to the second question is similarly straightforward: it

requires an accelerating process of diffusion of the new norms related to gender roles and relations. As McDonald (2000; 2002) greatly emphasizes, the key lies in the consolidation of gender egalitarianism at both the level of the couples and of the welfare state. And echoing his argument, normative adaptation must occur at both levels in order to have any significant effect on fertility or, for that matter, on all aspects of family life. The key importance of diffusion of egalitarian gender norms is, in one respect, good news since the higher (and ideologically more influential) educated strata are clearly the forerunners in the process of value change.[21]

The theoretical model I have sketched out here is more successful, I believe, in making sense of the roller-coaster ride that family life has experienced over the past half century. It helps us understand why some societies (like the Nordic) have progressed much further in the new "more family" direction, and are now boasting more stable partnerships as well as fertility levels that more closely match preferences.[22] As we shall see, Scandinavia has adapted family life and public policy to mirror the revolution of women's roles earlier and to a far greater degree than in most other countries. The Nordic countries have arguably entered stage C. In contrast, in Germany as in Italy or Spain (and elsewhere) welfare state adaptation lags far behind—as does also the adoption of more gender symmetry in the domestic sphere. These countries appear stuck in a multiple equilibrium in which normative uncertainty and confusion most likely prevails. They appear to remain stuck in stage B.

21 This will become evident later when I turn to trends in gender egalitarianism.

22 As we would expect, the U-shaped curve is more accentuated in some countries and less in others. Sweden is an example of the former, arguably thanks to its early introduction of active family policies. If measured with the TFR rate, Swedish fertility in the 1960s (an era indisputably dominated by the traditional family model) was around 2.5, dropping to 1.6 in the late 1970s, and then recovering (with oscillations) to a level around 1.9–2.0. A fairly similar profile emerges if, instead, we focus on fertility trends by the number of children being born to women (Andersson, 2002).

CHAPTER 2.

Gender Egalitarianism and Family Revival

Will gender equalization better our lives and improve the society we inhabit? If and when a gender egalitarian equilibrium takes hold, will citizens be more likely to partner and have the number of kids they truly desire? I will begin by reviewing data on how gender equality has evolved and turn thereafter to the question of how much it really matters.

To begin, we must decide on how to identify progress towards a gender egalitarian regime. Research has primarily centered on three kinds of measures: one, comprehensive gender equality indices at the national level; two, data on couples' allocation of housework and child care utilizing time use data; three, data on gender role preferences from attitude surveys.

The first measure, launched by the World Bank and the UNDP, comprise composite measures of gender differentials in health, education, and employment. As critics claim, their relevance is minor for the highly developed world, since they do not capture key dimensions such as gender pay or promotion differentials, job segregation, or the degree to which domestic chores are gendered. As a consequence, some studies opt for alternative data, like the World Values Surveys, which provide questions related to gender views. Arpino, Esping-Andersen, and Pessin (2015), to exemplify, utilize agreement/disagreement with the statement "when jobs are scarce, men should have more right to a job than women" to assign gender (in)equality scores to countries. In order to identify more precisely how far nations have moved towards egalitarianism, they construct a gender-gap indicator that captures the distance that separates men's and women's adherence to egalitarianism.

A second option is to measure partners' time allocation, in particular

for housework. There is a long tradition of time use surveys, but they are typically years apart and they usually do not permit us to connect such information with relevant outcomes, such as partners' satisfaction with the marriage, divorce, or the decision to have children. A handful of panel studies, such as the American PSID, the German GSOEP, and the Swedish YAPS, do permit us to link time allocation patterns with relevant outcomes—and these will be utilized intensively in the pages to follow.[23]

How Far Has the Revolution of Women's Roles Progressed?

As noted in the previous chapter, the postwar surge in female education and employment gave the decisive kick-start to the revolution of women's roles. When we—once more—go back a century or so, the dynamics are quite clear. Over the first half of the 20th century, role change was slow indeed. Then, beginning in the 1970s, we observe a sudden surge, pioneered by the Nordic countries and the U.S.

Historical data from the U.S. describe the momentum very well. The education gap began to close in the 1980s and has now been radically reversed—in just about all advanced nations. And the employment of married women and, most remarkably, of mothers with small children literally exploded.[24] See Table 5.

While timing-wise very similar, the historical dynamics in much of Europe—albeit less in the Mediterranean basin—were hugely influenced by the part-timer option, a clearly more hesitant "pre-revolutionary" first step. To illustrate, in the mid-1980s about half of all employed Swedish women were part-timers. The primary reason why they did not work full time was, in the first place, household duties followed by child care. Today (2013 data) the incidence of female part-time employment is down to 18 percent (Statistics Sweden, 2014; OECD, 2015a).

More broadly, to understand the revolution's degree of maturation let us examine a few pertinent gender convergence indicators. Let us begin by examining the degree to which the traditional housewife status

23 The PSID is the Panel Study of Income Dynamics; the GSOEP is the German Socio-economic Panel; the Swedish YAPS is the Young Adult Panel Study.

24 We note however that American female employment has leveled off at lower levels than in the Nordic countries (which now boast about 15 percent higher female employment rates than in the U.S.).

Table 5. A Century of Gender Convergence. United States.

	Male-female ratio of college degrees	Employment % of married women	Employment % of mothers with pre-school age children
1900	4.2	6	n.a.
1920	1.9	9	n.a.
1940	n.a.	14	11
1960	1.9	32	19
1980	1.5	50	45
2010	.7	68	64

Source: Historical Statistics for the United States and U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

is vanishing and, at the same time, the degree to which the female is becoming the income-dominant partner. Using Luxembourg Income Study data, Table 6 traces the relative proportion of partnered women with zero earnings (a straightforward way to identify housewives).[25] In parallel, Table 6 attempts to capture how mature is the "masculinization" of women's roles by identifying the proportion of partnered women who are the dominant earner, i.e. whose income contribution to the household exceeds 50 percent. I compare countries that represent international variations in terms of the advancement of the female revolution quite well.

Table 6 illustrates well the uneven development of the "new" woman. In Scandinavia the housewife has basically disappeared; in Italy, she remains a prominent figure in contemporary family life. We note with some surprise its persistency (25 percent) in the U.S., once a pioneering nation in terms of women's role change. As we shall see further on, the female revolution in the U.S. appears to have stalled and this, in turn, produces a notable degree of dualism in the distributions of families.

Focusing instead on female income dominance, the cross-national differences are quite marginal. The share of dominant wives hovers

25 I do however consider as earnings-equivalent also income from maternity, sickness and unemployment benefits.

Table 6. The Disappearance of the Housewife and the Emergence of Female Income Dominance.

	% housewives, mid-1980s	% housewives, mid-2000s	% where female is income dominant, mid-1980s	% where female is income dominant, mid-2000s
Denmark	11	9	20	23
Germany (W)	39	22	12	20
Italy	56	41	17	25
Sweden	7	9	15	21
U.K.	40	22	17	24
U.S.	28	25	19	26

Source: LIS Data.

around 20–25 percent in the new century. Here, we must remember the bias in favor of female part-time work in several countries, especially in Germany.[26]

Moving along, let us now focus on the employment penalty of motherhood. This can be captured via two simple indicators: a) the difference in employment rates between mothers (with two children) and childless women; and b) the proportion of mothers (again with two children) whose employment is limited to a part-time role. Secondly, since it is so well-established that less educated women have trailed quite far behind the higher educated on virtually all labor force dimensions, I calculate the gap (i.e. the difference in employment levels) between the university educated and those with only lower secondary education—the larger the gap, the less advanced is the revolution. Table 7 gives an overview of representative countries' progress towards gender convergence in employment. The data refer to the latest data available.

Here we witness strong international differences. The Nordic countries have without doubt progressed furthest towards gender convergence, although the revolution has clearly not reached full maturity—this

26 In Austria and the Netherlands, two other examples of the part-timer bias, the share of female income dominance is similarly much lower (11 and 15 percent, respectively).

Table 7. Gender Convergence in Employment, ca. 2015.

	Part-timers among mothers with 2 children, %	The employment gap for mothers with 2 children (compared to non-mothers), %	The female employment gap: The difference between high and low educated
Denmark	17	2	21
Finland	9	5	8
Norway	19	5	23
Sweden	22	0	23
Nordic average	17	3	19
France	32	15	16
Germany	60	21	28
Netherlands	83	12	34
U.K.	63	18	36
"West European" average	**60**	**17**	**29**
U.S.	24	14	32

Source: OECD Employment data bases.

is particularly evident in the persistent employment lag among lower educated women. On basically all counts, the U.S., once again, appears stagnant—as we also observed in Table 5, where female employment rates seem to remain stuck a bit below the 70 percent level (compared to around 80 percent in Scandinavia). The main reason is primarily the comparatively (and persistently) very low participation rates among less educated American women (a 34 percent participation rate compared to 72 for college-educated women).[27]

27 Here we must remember that there exist no maternity (or parental) leave entitlements in the U.S. This implies major reconciliation problems (and the need to abandon employment), in particular for low-income mothers who cannot afford child care substitutes. In Scandinavia, in contrast, generous birth-related leaves imply that most recent mothers are

Indeed, as we shall see further ahead, the diffusion dynamics seem to have come to a halt in the U.S. where gender equalization appears rather bi-modal—a "two-societies" scenario. Finally, with the partial exception of France, the rest of Europe lags much further behind (this conclusion also holds were we to include data for additional nations such as Austria, Belgium, Greece, or Portugal).[28]

The data we have examined so far do not reveal the full picture. Firstly, the meaning of part-time employment varies considerably across nations. While it is highly regulated and subject to the same standards and provisions as are regular contracts in most Northern European economies, its status is quite marginal in many countries. In some, like Italy or Spain, it is largely limited to public sector jobs. And in Denmark it has, since the weekly work-hours reduction in the 1990s, basically become a convenient (and usually brief) interim between maternity leave and the resumption of full-time status (Esping-Andersen, 2009).

Secondly, female employment rates may very well converge with men's, but this may occur in a highly gendered context. This, in fact, is very much the Scandinavian story. Most studies of gendered job segregation single out the Nordic countries as comparatively extreme cases, with working women hugely concentrated in public sector jobs, especially in human services such as child and elderly care (Charles and Grusky, 2004; Petersen and Morgan, 1995; Estévez-Abe, 2006; Mandel and Semyonov, 2006). To exemplify, women are six times as likely to be in health sector employment as are men in both Denmark and Sweden; in Finland, a whopping nine times! (OECD, 2000).

Some feminists define this as institutionalized sex discrimination. The evidence points to very different kinds of decisional processes, namely that women (even very early on) self-select themselves into occupations and sectors that more easily help reconcile careers with motherhood. Datta Gupta and Smith (2002) capture these dynamics very well,

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not actually at work during the child's first year—although they remain classified as in the labor force.

28 Yet another telling indicator of gender convergence is the likelihood that women will exit employment for long durations (or even permanently) subsequent to giving birth. Using the ECHP data from the late 1990s permits us to follow recent mothers over a 5-year time span. Here, again, we find pretty much the same pattern as on the other indicators. In Denmark, the "leavers" are a tiny minority (9 percent); in France, Germany and the U.K., we find exit rates around 25 percent.

showing that Danish career women sacrifice higher-paid private sector jobs by moving into the more motherhood-friendly public sector when having children. On this count, the vanguard Scandinavian position in the international league of gender equalization seems rather dubious.

On a last, but very important note, let us return back to the part-time versus full-time issue. It is not likely that the shift towards gender egalitarianism will be particularly powerful if the typical female role remains limited to the part-time status. It is, arguably, first when the full-time-for-life identity becomes near-universal that we should expect a powerful diffusion towards gender egalitarianism as the overwhelmingly dominant norm.

There are several reasons for this, all quite straightforward. Firstly, as long as the typical woman opts for a part-timer identity, the implicit message is that she remains with one foot in the more conventional domestic sphere. Secondly, when the full-timer status approaches universality and becomes normatively expected for, and by, any given woman, this is also when pressures to adapt will seriously mount, both within partnerships (a more equitable and symmetric allocation of household duties) and towards the welfare state (more family-friendly policies with child care provision in top place).

There is in fact evidence which supports the decisive influence of the full-timer transition. Table 8 below uses the Danish time use survey from 2001 to estimate which factors are most likely to push men to adopt gender symmetric (versus traditional) behavior in the domestic sphere. Here traditionalism implies that the male contribution to household tasks is less than 20 percent; gender symmetry obtains when the male exceeds 40 percent. The estimations include a large number of control variables (see note to table).

We would naturally have assumed that education would be a decisive factor, and it does play a role, albeit significantly weaker than the full-timer effect. Higher educated men are less likely to contribute below the 20 percent share (an odds-ratio of .77),[29] and more prone to locate themselves on the egalitarian side of the 40 percent marker (an odds-

29 Odds-ratios measure the relative probability of an outcome compared to the reference population. An odds-ratio of less than 1.00 implies a comparably lower probability; an odds-ratio *larger* than 1.00 represents, in contrast, a comparably higher likelihood. To illustrate: the 1.92 odds-ratio of contributing 40 percent+ when she is a full-timer implies that men

Table 8. The Odds of Men Being Traditional or Egalitarian in Housework Participation. Denmark, 2001.

	Men contribute <10%	Men contribute <20%	Men contribute >40%
Male high education	.79*	.77***	1.14**
She full-timer	.31**	.50**	1.92***

Source: Danish Time Use Survey, 2001.
Note: Includes controls (not shown) for (log) male and female earnings, marital educational similarity (i.e. homogamy) age of partners, number of children, whether the mother is on leave, and whether the household receives outside help with cleaning. * = significant at .01 level; ** = significant at .001 level; *** = significant at .0001 level.

ratio of 1.14, i.e. about 14 percent more likely). But in comparison, the female full-timer status clearly exerts a far stronger effect. Here, the odds of male egalitarianism almost double (a highly significant odds-ratio of 1.92) and, vice versa, the likelihood of behaving traditionally is cut in half (an odds-ratio of .50 of contributing below the 20 percent share).

These results go a long way towards helping us understand the substantial international differences in gender egalitarianism. As we shall see below, the Scandinavians are quite far ahead of the rest of the world on virtually all measures of gender equality, be it behavioral or attitudinal.

Probably no one would attribute this to any inherent cultural traits. Indeed, as we will discover below, Danish men in the 1960s–1970s were actually more gender-traditional than the Germans. And the data do suggest that the strongest thrust towards change occurred somewhere in the 1990s—which is precisely the decade which saw Danish women move massively from the old part-timer identity towards a life-long full-time dedication (see also Esping-Andersen, 2009).

The normative shift towards female full-time status is clearly still far away in most of Western Europe, particularly in Britain, Germany and the Netherlands. A few exceptions exist and the United States is the clearest and most puzzling one. But here we recall the dualism that

partnered with a full-time employed woman are almost twice as likely to do more than 40 percent of the housework. I would like to thank Jens Bonke for these estimates.

so much prevails in the pattern of American female employment—the less educated women are the most likely to not work at all.

The Diffusion of Gender Egalitarian Attitudes

International differences in gender egalitarianism are quite marked when we examine attitudes. In 2006, the *Eurobarometer* asked citizens whether it is desirable that "both men and women should contribute to household income."[30] In Denmark and Sweden, the overwhelming majority agreed (around 75 percent). In Germany, agreement is a low 35 percent (and less than half agree in Italy, the Netherlands, Spain, and even in the U.K.). Equally telling is the "agreement gap" between men and women, basically zero in Denmark and Sweden but big in Italy and the Netherlands (male agreement with the statement is, respectively, 10 and 16 percentage points lower than for females).

Here again I use the widely adopted World and European Values Studies' attitude measure which asks respondents if they disagree with the statement: "when jobs are scarce, men should have more right to a job than women" (Arpino, Esping-Andersen, and Pessin, 2015; Azmat, Güell, and Manning, 2004; Fortin, 2005). From the latest wave we find a 90-plus percent disagreement in Scandinavia, and roughly 80 percent in Belgium, France, and Canada. Further down the egalitarianism scale (60–70 percent agreement) we find Germany, Spain, and the Eastern European countries. Perhaps most telling, once again, is the gender gap within this disagreement: close to zero in Scandinavia (and also France), but in Austria, Germany, Spain, and the U.S. it is quite huge: here men are 20–30 percentage points more in agreement (Arpino, Esping-Andersen, and Pessin, 2015). Once again we see evidence that the U.S. gender revolution is stagnant (see also Cotter, Hermsen, and Vanneman, 2011).

Gender Symmetry in the Home

Attitudes and behavior do not necessarily go hand-in-hand. Survey respondents may declare themselves to be egalitarian and yet behave traditionally behind the four walls of their home. Indeed, recent Swedish research unveils very telling links between family outcomes (such as

30 Unfortunately, this question has not been included in later surveys.

divorce), on the one hand, and the discrepancy between gender attitudes and actual behavior, on the other hand (see Goldscheider, Bernhardt, and Lappegård, 2015; Oláh and Gähler, 2014). Divorce risks decline significantly when the twain go hand-in-hand, but that is not the case for those who are self-declared egalitarians but do not behave accordingly.

To identify gender symmetry in practice, the obvious place to look is couples' division of domestic tasks. This is where time use surveys come in handy. Such surveys began in the 1960s, and in most countries they are conducted roughly every 10 years. The 1960s is actually not a bad place to begin since this was an era when the male breadwinner and female housewife model still remained dominant in most societies, including the Nordic.

For one country, the U.S., we can actually trace couples' time allocation patterns back to the turn of the old century. This is thanks to Stanley Lebergott (1984), who uncovered an anthropological time use study conducted in the city of Indianapolis in the year 1900. Here emerges a picture of hyper-specialization, no doubt very much governed by the excruciatingly long hours that men devoted to paid employment (66 hours per week) and women to domestic chores (84 hours).[31] In contrast, the husband's contribution to housework was effectively zero, as was the wife's to paid work. In those days, of course, there were no washing machines, dryers, or dishwashers, and couples usually had many children (who also pitched in with the housework).

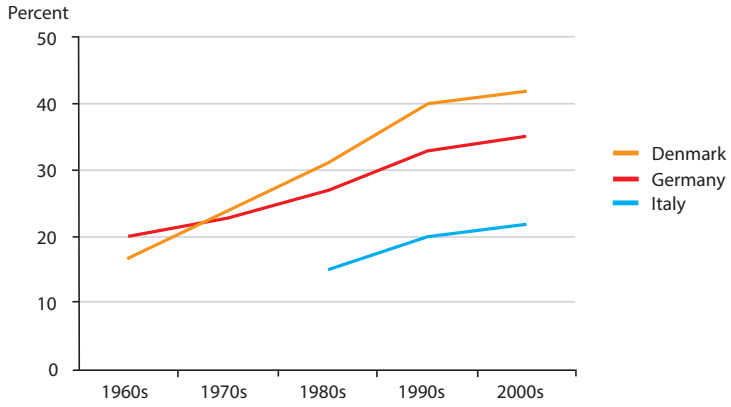
Moving forward to the 1960s, conjugal specialization appears somewhat less extreme. In Denmark and Germany, the male contribution to housework was then around 20 percent—and this is what we find in Italy even today! Bonke and Jensen (2014: Table 1) report a female to male housework ratio of 15 to 1 (!) for Denmark in 1964. Figure 5 depicts long-term trends in men's contribution to housework in these three countries, chosen because they differ markedly on all gender symmetry indicators.[32]

Today (most recent data from 2001) Denmark is clearly a champion of gender symmetry in the domestic sphere. On average, Danish men

31 Lebergott (1984: 38 and footnote 4) reports that a very similar study was conducted in Italy in the closing years of the 19th century. The patterns there were apparently quite identical to those we find for Indianapolis.

32 A very comprehensive treatment of long-run trends in the division of housework is found in Hook (2010)

Figure 5. Trends towards Gender Symmetry in Housework: Men's Contribution to Domestic Work.



Source: National time use surveys.

contribute 42 percent towards the housework and, most surprisingly, we find that 31 percent actually contribute more than half (Esping-Andersen et al., 2013).[33] This compares quite favorably to Germany (where men's share is about a third) and particularly to Italy where, amazingly, male input remains steadfastly at the 20 percent level.

Analyzing data from the *Gender and Generations Surveys (GGS)*, Norway emerges as a perfect parallel to Denmark. Here, too, the male share is now a bit more than 40 percent on average; in Belgium and France, however, males have not made impressive strides in the direction of gender symmetry. Their contribution is more similar to the Italian at around 25 percent.[34]

But in line with my earlier discussion, here again we see how suddenly gender egalitarianism emerges. Recall that Danish men's participation

33 For 2009, Bonke and Jensen (2014) report a female to male housework ratio of only 1.1 to 1.0, i.e. almost perfect symmetry.

34 The GGS surveys also pertain to the new century. The first waves were conducted in the first decade of the 21st century (the Norwegian in 2007–2008). At the time of writing the more recent Swedish GGS survey was not yet ready for analyses.

was even lower than German men's back in the 1960s. It was after the 1980s that they made the great leap forward. The abruptness of this change combines a double-effect: one, men's total housework contribution is, no doubt, rising. But the single strongest effect comes from a far steeper reduction in women's housework duties, driven by their increased labor supply (the shift towards full-timer status), fewer children, and technology-driven reductions in the absolute time required for washing, cleaning, and cooking (Kan, Sullivan, and Gershuny, 2011; Sullivan, 2010).

Showing averages of men's housework contribution only tells part of the story. A more revealing picture of the degree of gender symmetry requires us to examine the entire spectrum of couples. Table 9 now compares Denmark with Spain and the U.K., chosen because the three countries are very representative of the broader international variation in gender role change. The data are taken from the Esping-Andersen et al. (2013) study. Note that these data exclude what are conventional male tasks (repairs or washing the car).[35]

A 20 percent or lower male contribution reflects quite well the conventional world of partnerships. Recall that this was more or less the male share back in the 1960s in both Denmark and Germany. In today's societies the differences between nations are big. In Denmark, the traditional male is now minoritarian; in both Spain and the U.K, he is still pretty much the norm. And in Denmark more than half (53 percent) of all couples are close to gender-parity; in the two other countries, that is far from the case. These data confirm once again the notion that the

Table 9. Egalitarians and Traditionalists. Men's Share of Housework.

	He <20 percent	He >40 percent	He >50 percent
Denmark	22	53	31
U.K.	56	30	17
Spain	67	17	8

Source: Esping-Andersen et al. (2013).

35 It may of course be the case that men concentrate on the more pleasurable chores (cooking the dinner) while women remain saddled with the more onerous ones.

Nordic countries have moved quite decisively towards a gender symmetric normative order.

Social class differentials are very much in evidence. As anyone would predict, the less educated trail behind. Honing in on child care, fathers in general continue to contribute less—although the gender difference is far smaller than for housework chores, in particular the most onerous ones like ironing or housecleaning. Using the same time use data for Denmark and Spain, as above, and including also Bianchi, Robinson, and Milkie's (2006) data for the U.S., we find a very similar pattern: the child care dedication of highly educated fathers is basically twice that of fathers with less than secondary level education. In Denmark (but not Spain, nor the U.S.), higher educated fathers' child care time is not appreciably lower than mothers'. In fact, England and Srivastava's (2013) very recent data for the U.S. show a continued large gender gap (mothers' child care dedication is double that of fathers across all education levels)—yet another indication of the "stalled revolution" in the U.S.

Gender convergence in parenting appears more pronounced in Sweden, especially with respect to (the more enjoyable) "active developmental" activities such as reading, teaching, and playing with kids. Using the 2000 Swedish time use survey, the gap between mothers' and fathers' time input is virtually nil: only 3 minutes (48 versus 45 minutes) for the highly educated; and surprisingly, it is practically zero for those with less than upper secondary schooling (41 versus 40 minutes).[36] In other words, on this dimension we observe almost perfect gender symmetry across the social classes—yet another indication that gender equality is reaching a mature stage in Sweden.[37]

But genuine gender convergence in child care seems basically limited to the Nordic countries. Analyzing the cross-national files in the harmonized European time use surveys (HETUS), we find persistent gender gaps everywhere else. At some distance behind Scandinavia the U.S. emerges as the least gendered, and yet in two-child families the mother contributes 70 percent more than the fathers on average. In

36 The England and Srivastava study (2013, Table 3) shows that the gender differential narrows somewhat for active developmental activities also in the U.S.

37 This does, of course, not hold across-the-board. As far as the less enjoyable child care activities are concerned (changing diapers or dressing the kids), the gender gap remains significant.

France, Germany, Italy, and the U.K., the maternal share is everywhere around three times greater.

When we pull together the attitudinal and behavioral data, the upshot is quite clear. Whatever indicator we examine, it almost invariably ends up painting the very same picture. A full-blossomed gender egalitarian equilibrium may not yet be in place anywhere, but it is on all counts moving towards maturity in the Nordic countries. And the distance that separates these countries from the rest of Europe (and North America, too) is quite substantial.

Does Gender Egalitarianism Yield a Welfare Dividend?

So, does the onward progress towards gender equality actually exert any decisive and positive influence on demographic behavior? Is it the true driver of the new "more family" trend? Will it help narrow or even close the gap between citizens' preferences and their ability to attain them?

One thing is to identify a link between gender change and family life; another is to conclude that the connection is truly causal: gender change, in the latter case, would then be the indisputable driver. Most of the evidence presented here will not permit any strong causal claims. Still, if we observe the very same patterns across many behavioral dimensions this would help bolster our ability to arrive at "quasi-causal" conclusions. In the following, I focus primarily on two key outcomes: childbearing and divorce risks.

The questions I pose here are obviously not especially new. The social sciences have grappled with them for decades now. When one reviews the literature, there is one facet that is striking indeed. Studies from the 1980s into the 1990s typically concluded that women's new roles had adverse effects on marriage propensities, fertility, and couple stability. The most recent high-quality research, in contrast, weighs heavily towards the exact opposite conclusion.

To exemplify, Espenshade (1985) concluded that women's employment lowered the likelihood of marriage, and many early studies showed that it also induced lower fertility (for an overview, see Andersson and Scott (2007) and Brewster and Rindfuss (2000). As we move into the new century, research finds that gender equalization plays an increasingly positive role. McDonald (2000) is no doubt the primary spokesman for its positive influence on fertility; Goldscheider, Bernhardt, and

Lappegård (2015) find that more equal sharing of household duties in Sweden increases fertility. The fertility bonus emerges also very clearly in Neyer, Lappegård, and Vignoli (2013), and from the comparative studies in Esping-Andersen (ed.) (2014).[38]

Cooke (2006) shows that more gender symmetry within American couples lowered divorce risks, but the opposite was the case in the more gender-traditional German society. Examining a large number of OECD countries, de Laat and Sevilla-Sanz (2011) find that husbands' contribution to domestic tasks has a strong positive effect on fertility, the logic being that this supports wives' ability to reconcile careers with motherhood. As previously discussed, Olah and Gähler (2014) find a clear impact of equality on couple stability, at least when egalitarian attitudes parallel actual egalitarian behavior. As discussed earlier, Sevilla-Sanz (2010) and Bertrand, Kamenica, and Pan (2015) show that gender symmetry boosts the chances of partnering to begin with.

The Fertility Dividend

Let us now turn to some comparative evidence for fertility. Exploiting the European and World Values Studies, we traced how gender egalitarianism (disagreement with the statement that "when jobs are scarce, men should have more right to a job than women") has influenced childbearing over time (from the 1980s to 2009), as well as across 27 nations (Arpino, Esping-Andersen, and Pessin, 2015).[39] See Figure 6.

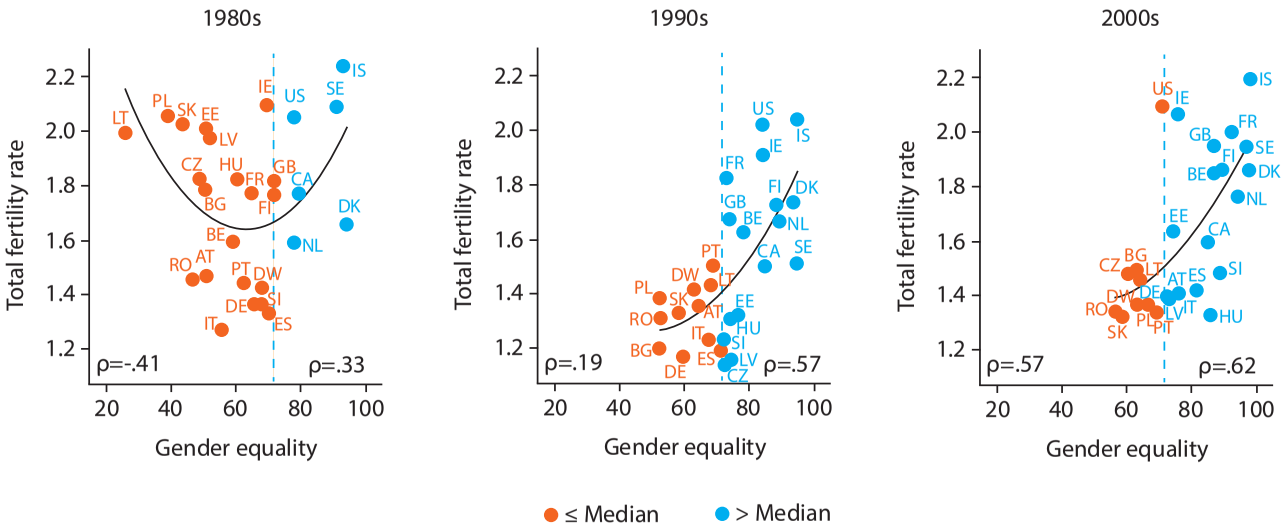
A quarter of a century ago (the late 1980s), the distribution was clearly u-shaped. Here we see the highest fertility in the least and also in the most gender egalitarian nations (of which there are very few). Fertility was exceptionally low in exactly those societies which hovered between the old traditional family model and the advancement of women's new roles—Germany and Italy epitomize this status of flux perfectly.

Moving into the 1990s, we register a decisive shift towards the "right,"

38 The evidence suggests that the effect of wives' employment on divorce varies considerably across countries (Liefbroer and Dourleijn, 2006). For good overviews, see Özcan and Breen (2012), and Schoen, Rogers, and Amato (2006).

39 I use the concept of gender egalitarianism here (rather than *equity* as earlier) because the value statement attempts to capture notions of equal treatment of men and women. In contrast, the notion of equity is more narrowly a question of fairness (for example, if the division of domestic chores is fair).

Figure 6. Gender Values and Fertility Rates (TFR), 1980s to 2000s.



Source: Arpino, Esping-Andersen and Pessin (2015).
Note: The median is the vertical, dashed line. Austria (AT), Belgium (BE), Bulgaria (BG), Canada (CA), Czech Republic (CZ), Denmark (DK), East Germany (DE), Estonia (EE), Finland (FI), France (FR), Great Britain (GB), Hungary (HU), Iceland (IS), Ireland (IE), Italy (IT), Latvia (LV), Lithuania (LT), Netherlands (NL), Poland (PL), Portugal (PT), Romania (RO), Slovakia (SK), Slovenia (SI), Spain (ES), Sweden (SE), United States (US), West Germany (DW).

i.e. more nations had joined the gender egalitarian club, boasting at the same time higher birth rates. This trend is further consolidated in the new century: as countries adopt ever higher levels of gender egalitarianism, they also reap a non-trivial fertility dividend. Put differently, when the diffusion of gender egalitarianism accelerates, societies will experience a narrowing of the fertility gap, and birth rates will begin to approach citizens' child preferences.

The Marital Stability Dividend

In the older studies, we recall, women's new roles were associated with elevated divorce risks. Recent research tends to conclude the opposite for the new century. Here, the focus was not so much on the influence of gender egalitarianism as on wives' career dedication and economic autonomy. We would of course expect that marital tensions related to women's new economic status will abate once couples (and especially men) adopt more gender egalitarian views. In a similar vein, it stands to reason that the new woman will be more satisfied with her relationship once the male partner thinks—and ultimately behaves—in the spirit of egalitarianism.

Let us begin with the broad international picture. Using the very same approach that was used in the preceding fertility analyses, Figures 7a and 7b depict the link between national levels of gender egalitarianism and divorce rates.[40]

The negative impact of women's new roles found in older studies was overwhelmingly premised on American research. The same kind of impact seems, however, to have occurred more broadly across the advanced nations. As Figure 7a demonstrates very clearly, in the late 1980s divorce rates increased linearly and steadily in tandem with levels of gender egalitarianism.[41] In fact, the differences between nations are

40 Here again the gender equality measure derives from the World and European Value Surveys, referring to degree of agreement with the statement that "when jobs are scarce, men should have first priority." The late 1980s refers to 1988–1989 for the majority of nations; the "late 2000s" refer to (ca.) 2008. Divorce rates refer to the proportion of 40–60 year olds in the population who are divorced or separated (the latter data derive from the UN Demographic Yearbook (various issues).

41 The shaded areas in Figures 7a and 7b represent statistical significance. Perhaps the best way to interpret this is the following: if the yellow line were to fall outside the shaded area, the results would not have been statistically significant.

quite remarkable. The "most egalitarian" group (including Denmark, Finland, Sweden and the U.S.) had a divorce rate that was 10 percentage points higher than the middle group (including for example Belgium and the U.K.), and the latter exhibited divorce rates that, once again, were roughly 10 points higher than the "least egalitarian" group. As previously noted, in this epoch gender egalitarian scores were heavily dominated by women's responses: the gender gap in attitudes was substantial almost everywhere, except perhaps in Scandinavia.

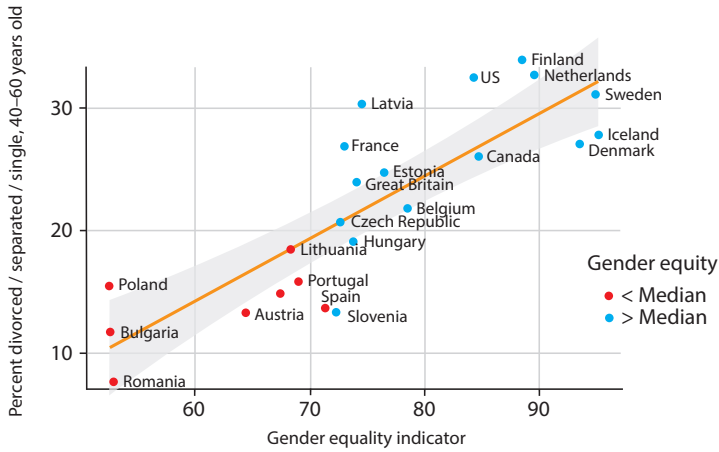
As we turn the clock forward two decades, to Figure 7b, the connection between divorce and gender values looks qualitatively different. We now find an inverted-u-relationship, implying that divorce rates are lowest in two settings: where gender egalitarianism is, respectively, weakest and strongest. Countries hovering on the middle ground are now most divorce-prone. And the magnitudes that separate the groups are still quite substantial. Now we find a mean divorce level of around 20 percent in the least egalitarian group; 30+ percent in the middle, and around 25 percent among the egalitarian leader-nations. Our results for contemporary societies are, in other words, very much in line with the more recent studies.

These data offer, of course, only a rough and rather superficial portrait of international trends. To obtain a deeper understanding of the link, we now move to more detailed country-specific analyses. I shall focus on two questions. Firstly, following couples over 15 years of marriage, I estimate the relative risk of divorce within traditional versus gender egalitarian couples. Here we shall compare (West) Germany (a clear representative of quite conventional gender roles) against the U.S. (where, as we have seen, gender equalization has progressed further). As Cooke (2006) emphasizes, the norm that mothers should prioritize the domestic sphere is persistently strong in Germany but far less so in the U.S.[42]

Secondly, I shall conduct what might be regarded as an "acid test" of egalitarianism. The idea here is to explore whether wifely income dominance in the partnership heightens couple instability and provokes greater divorce probabilities. Here I focus on Denmark and Sweden,

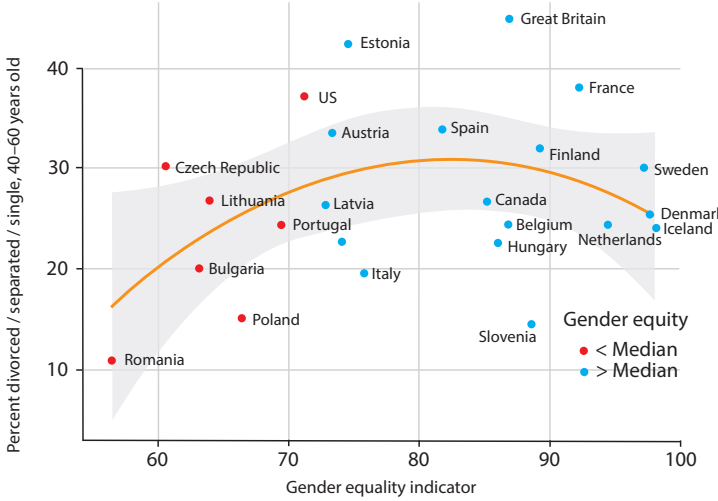
42 We should keep in mind that gender role norms have clearly changed in Germany in recent years—witness the introduction of a policy to guarantee universal child care services. This shift is, however, too recent to allow us to capture its effects with the data we have available.

Figure 7a. Gender Egalitarianism and Divorce, late 1980s.



Source: World and European Values Surveys.

Figure 7b. Gender Egalitarianism and Divorce, ca. 2008.



Source: World and European Values Surveys.

arguably the two most gender symmetric societies within the contemporary world. We shall compare across three marriage cohorts, those partnered in 1980, 1990 and in 2000, and we follow them over 15 years (except for the most recent cohort for which we only have 12 years of observation).

Gender Arrangements and Divorce Risks in Germany and the U.S.[43]

The question here is whether, and for which kinds of couples, gender equity will diminish the risk of divorce.[44] Equity refers to fairness and should not be confused with the concept of equality which I use to describe gender symmetric relations throughout this book. Fairness can obviously be obtained in conventional male breadwinner marriages and in gender symmetric ones. It will, however, take very different forms. In the former, equity will prevail if, at the end of the day, both the male earner and the female housewife experience similar levels of leisure and work, each within his or her own specialized sphere. In the latter, basically by definition, equity can only exist if the relationship is gender symmetric: both partners contribute similarly to household chores and both work similar hours.

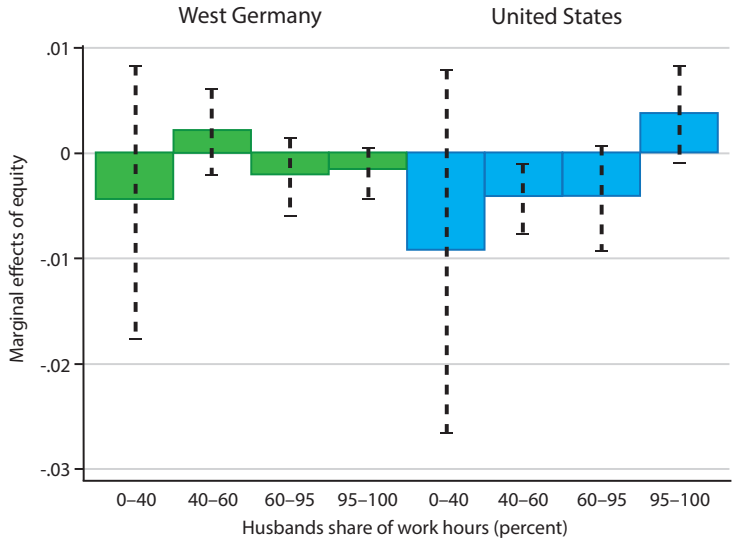
Before moving to the evidence, we should keep in mind that the salience of equity in the division of household chores varies across countries. The U.S. ranks it highly in terms of importance (47 percent report that it is very important for a successful marriage), while (at only 20 percent) West Germany ranks it as less crucial (Yodanis, 2005: 183).

The analyses are based on longitudinal panel data for Germany (the GSOEP) and the U.S. (the PSID), both of which provide good information on the hours that partners dedicate to various activities, and both of which allow us to follow couples over an extended time (here we estimate divorce risks for 15 years of partnership duration). All analyses include the standard repertoire of control variables commonly used in divorce estimations (including the partners' age and age difference, the duration of the marriage, education and, for the U.S., also race). Our estimations

43 The following data derive from an ongoing (and unpublished) study by Daniela Bellani, Gøsta Esping-Andersen and Léa Pessin at Pompeu Fabra University.

44 Previous studies find that spousal equity has positive effects for couple stability. See, for example DeMaris (2007) and Wilkie, Ferree, and Ratcliff (1998).

Figure 8. The Effect of Equity on the Risk of Divorce at Different Levels of Husbands' Share of Paid Work in West Germany and in the United States.



Source: The German Socioeconomic Panel (GSOEP) and the U.S. Panel Study of Income Dynamics (PSID). Note: The black vertical (dotted) lines depict the statistical confidence intervals (i.e. the 95 percent confidence interval) which do not permit more than a maximum of a 5 percent level of error. Long lines indicate a substantial level of uncertainty—statistically speaking. The longer the line, the more difficult it is to conclude with certainty.

show, firstly, that equity *per se*, i.e. without taking into account couple arrangements, has only a modest stabilizing effect, reducing the odds of divorce by roughly 15 percent in both countries.

Focusing on the marginal effects of equity across couple types (depicted on the vertical axis), we observe in Figure 8 quite stark differences.[45] We find that in both countries, when the husband works (for pay) fewer hours than the wife (0–40 percent of their combined hours)—a

45 Here the marginal effects represent the effect when controlling for a number of variables (like age, duration of the relationship etc.) The zero value on the vertical axis denotes no change in divorce risk; a minus implies a lower probability of divorce (for example, the -.01 value for the United States can be interpreted as a 10 percentage points lower divorce risk).

small minority in both societies—the risk of divorce is reduced substantially. In any case, our real concern is with the equity effect in, respectively, male breadwinner (his share is 60–100 percent) and symmetric partnerships (his share is 40–60 percent). In Germany, fairness lowers divorce risks only within traditional male breadwinner couples. In contrast, in the United States equity reduces the risk of divorce whenever both partners are employed. And here, the equity effect is particularly strong within symmetric dual-career couples.

Female Income Dominance and Divorce in Denmark and Sweden

We have already established that the rise in women's employment has no adverse effects on couple stability, and certainly not in Scandinavia. Far less clear is the influence of female partners' enhanced independence that derives from their work income. There are two distinct reasons why this may provoke more marital instability. One, greater economic autonomy allows women to leave a bad marriage, what Ross and Sawhill (1975) call the "independence effect." In fact, the causal direction here is highly ambiguous. Wives may augment their income so as to raise the couple's living standard (i.e. they are investing in the marriage) or they may do so because they plan to leave the relationship. Two, women's command of income will contradict conventional notions of proper gender roles and may, therefore, provoke marital tension, conflict, and ultimately divorce. If the male breadwinner role remains the normative guideline for partnerships, a lack of fit between expectations and reality may increase divorce risks (Amato et al., 2003).

The latter effect can, of course, be circumvented if economically dominant wives choose to adopt the traditional female identity at home (Brines, 1994; Brines and Joyner, 1999; Bittman et al., 2003). But doing so may very well imply an inequitable "double-shift" scenario which, when blatantly inequitable, should ignite frustration and weaken the relationship.

As both Sayer and Bianchi (2000) and Olah and Gähler (2014) emphasize, one would expect that the impact of wives' earnings on marital instability should weaken—or disappear altogether—once gender egalitarianism becomes the norm. But earnings *per se* may not offer the best possible test. They are far more likely to provoke tensions when, and if,

the wife's income share visibly exceeds the partner's; when she becomes the dominant partner.

Bertrand, Kamenica, and Pan (2015) argue that conventional gender norms define an income-share threshold beyond which the wife should not venture. They define the barrier at 50 percent, and mapping the distribution of wives' relative income across four decades for the U.S., they discover a steep drop in the number of couples once the wife's share approximates (and exceeds) half of total income. This, they believe, demonstrates that prevailing norms dictate that wives should not assume the main breadwinner role. As evidence of this aversion their analyses show that wives with a greater income potential than their husbands are very likely to reduce their labor supply so as not to cross the 50 percent barrier.

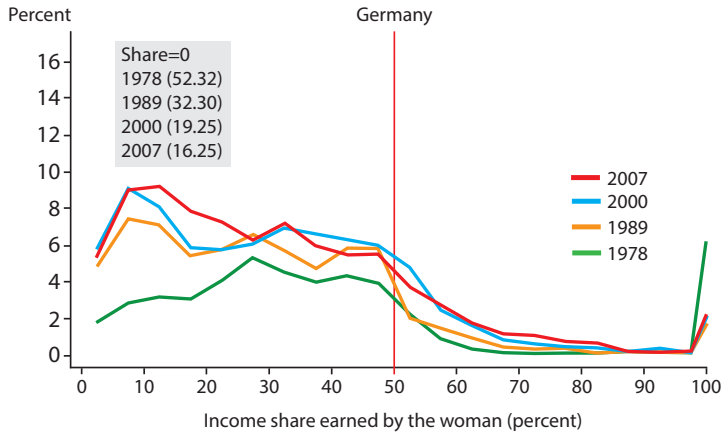
As we saw earlier, even in the advanced countries the share of income-dominant female partners is everywhere limited. And this was certainly even more the case two or three decades ago. It is no doubt for this very reason that empirical research on the topic is surprisingly scarce: for quantitative analyses, the numbers are simply too few. This is brought out in Vitali and Mendola's (2014) study which also defined dominance as a female share exceeding the 50 percent mark. They find that the proportion ranges from a low of about 10 percent of couples in Germany and the Netherlands (where female part-time work is the norm) to 15–20 percent in the Nordic countries, France and the U.K.

Inspired by the Bertrand study, I used LIS (Luxemburg Income Study) data to map the distribution of wives' income share (including cohabiting couples), comparing this across several decades. If we here limit the comparison to Germany and Sweden, two very contrasting cases in terms of women's role change, the contrast is quite spectacular. Figures 9a and 9b describe trends over the past decades.

In Germany (Figure 9a), we first notice the persistently large—albeit declining—share of zero-income wives. We see also the very high degree of concentration of women in the 10–35 percent range. This obviously mirrors their inclination in favor of the part-timer status. And the incidence of female income superiority is clearly minor, indeed marginal.

Sweden presents a very different kind of distribution. See Figure 9b. Here, already since the late 1980s, women have concentrated in the 35–45 percent range and the proportion of zero-earners was half that of Germany. And if we examine the parity range, i.e. 45–55 percent by

Figure 9a. The Distribution of Wives' Income Share in Germany, 1978–2007.



Source: Luxembourg Income Study Data.
Note: The vertical axis represents the percent of partnered women; the horizontal axis represents what proportion of total household income they earn. Income = labor income + short-term insurance.

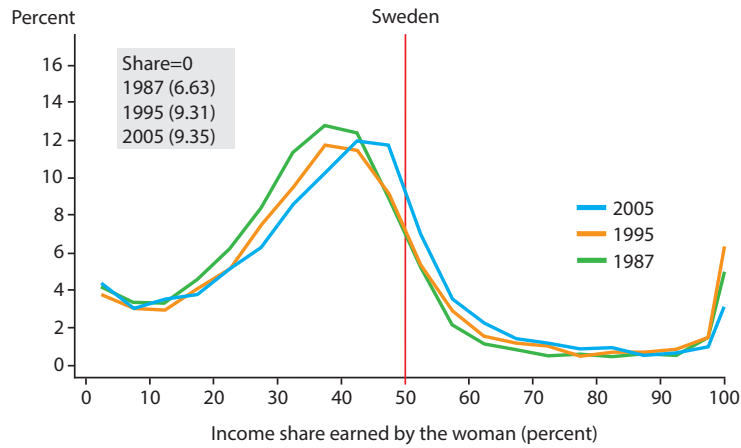
adding the percent located at all the points between 45 and 55 percent, the proportion cases rises from 19 to 39 percent from the 1980s to 2005.

But the majority of Swedish women with zero earnings are in fact on maternity leave. When we add maternity benefits to earnings, the Swedish "no-income" rate drops to less than 4 percent. Using this income concept, a substantial proportion of Swedish women (9 percent in 1987 and almost 30 percent in 2005) contribute in excess of the 50 percent mark.[46] The German equivalent is less than 15 percent in both the first and the most recent year.

So, female income dominance in Scandinavia was perhaps a marginal

46 Due to the higher incidence of female full-time employment in Denmark (and also due to wage compression), the distribution there is even more slanted towards the "right." Here the modal woman earns around 45 percent of household income, and a full 15 percent account for 50–65 percent of total income. Apropos, the U.S. pattern is in many ways more similar to the German than to the Scandinavian. For one, the share of zero-income wives is very large (25 percent in 2010). But unlike Germany, there is no concentration around the part-timer quota of 20–30 percent.

Figure 9b. The Distribution of Wives' Income Share in Sweden, 1987–2005.



Source: Luxembourg Income Study Data.
Note: Income = labor income.

affair in the 1980s, but in the new century it appears to be commonplace. In fact, the great surge in female income dominance occurred in the 1990s, very much in tandem with the move towards full-time employment—as previously discussed.

The key question is whether this shift goes hand-in-hand with normative change. Has female income dominance now become non-controversial in Sweden, something that men now readily accept?

Is Female Income Dominance Becoming Normatively Acceptable?

A review of research on these questions yields no clear answers as to what we might expect and, to boot, most studies have focused on the U.S. case.[47] One problem that pervades much of this literature is its inclination

47 There are exceptions. Henz and Jonsson (2003) estimate the risk of divorce when the female partner earns 54 percent-plus of the couple's income for Sweden. They find an added divorce risk (odds-ratio of 1.4). For Denmark, Christoffersen (1997; 2002) furnishes similar estimates, although his approach differs quite a deal from ours: it examines only couples

to use linear estimation. What this implies is that we estimate whether a percentage increment in wives' income share produces a corresponding rise in divorce risks. An example of this is Booth et al.'s (1984) study, which concluded that divorce probabilities intensify the more that the wife contributes to family income. But this linear assumption is problematic because it is quite unlikely that couple instability will intensify if her share rises from, say, 25 to 35 percent. Three influential studies (Nock, 1995; 2001; Rogers, 2004) discovered, in fact, a logic that reflects an inverted *u*: divorce risks climax when the wife's income reaches parity with the husband's; when she moves beyond that point, the risk actually declines. Exactly the opposite conclusion emerges from other studies. Here, couples appear particularly stable when they approach income-parity. The rationale behind this is that gender symmetry nurtures a greater sense of conjugal collaboration (Coltrane, 1996).

Turning now to the evidence: are Scandinavian men now fully at ease if and when their partner assumes the role of chief provider? To examine this, we analyzed both Swedish and Danish registry data (the latter in collaboration with Anders Holm), estimating divorce risks of female income dominance by education level. The analyses compare couples that were formed over three decades: 1980–2010. The criterion for dominance is that the female's income share exceeds 55 percent of total income. In order to exclude short-lived dominance, we stipulate that female dominance must have lasted a minimum of two years. And we focus only on income *transitions*, i.e. on partnerships in which the woman moves into income superiority from one year to the next. The "shock effect" is likely to be greater, of course, if *her* income dominance occurred after the couple was formed.[48]

Female income dominance may occur as a result of two distinct changes: the male suffers from income decline, say due to illness or unemployment, or the female enjoys wage increases. Examining the data, it is the latter which occurs in the lion's share of cases. In any case, the

with children born in 1973. He finds an added divorce risk (odds-ratio of 1.20) if the female's income exceeds the male's by more than 5 percent.

48 In order to disentangle the ambiguities involved, i.e. female income dominance may be triggered by her expectation that the relationship is coming to an end, the analyses included tests with one, two and three year lags. The estimates changed very little in any of these cases, suggesting that her income dominance was not driven by the anticipation of a divorce.

analyses control for both male unemployment and incapacity.

Let us now turn to the empirics. In Denmark we see a very clear trend. Overall, and across education levels, the divorce risk associated with female dominance declines significantly across the decades. For couples formed in 1980, when the female became income dominant the divorce risk was 40 percent higher among those with university-level education and almost three times greater for those with less than upper secondary education. Moving forward to those who partnered in 2000, there is no additional divorce risk among the higher educated, and for the less educated, the risk drops from 280 percent more, to only 60 percent more. See Table 10.[49]

The Swedish results point in the same direction, although Sweden on this dimension appears both more and less advanced in terms of gender egalitarianism: compared to Denmark, there is a smaller risk of divorce among the low educated but a larger risk within the high educated strata. For all married (and officially registered cohabiting couples), the divorce risk of female dominance has declined by 68 percent, comparing couples formed in 1980 and in 2000. Here, we do not find an educational differential as in Denmark. And in contrast to Danish trends, the more educated in Sweden display higher divorce propensities than do the less educated throughout the three decades.[50]

As in our earlier comparisons across education levels, we should also here keep in mind the compositional changes within each level due to the expansion of education over the decades. The ever-smaller low-education group is, for example, increasingly likely to be dominated by persons with few abilities, skills or other adverse traits that select them into the low-education stratum. In this particular case, however, such potential selection effects are not likely to dominate since, in fact, we observe a parallel (and even more accentuated) trend towards more couple stability as with the highly educated.

These analyses can, accordingly, be regarded as an "acid-test" of whether the maturation of gender egalitarianism will be associated with superior family welfare and, more indirectly, whether it constitutes the

49 The analyses are based on event-history estimation, tracing the hazard of marital breakdown year-by-year over 15 years for the early cohort, and 12 years for the youngest.

50 In fact, my Swedish estimates are quite similar to those from the Henz and Jonsson (2003) study.

Table 10. The Odds of Divorce when Wives Become Income Dominant in Denmark and Sweden: Comparing Two Marriage Cohorts.

	1980 marriage cohort	2000 marriage cohort
Denmark: low-educated	2.8***	1.6***
Denmark: high-educated	1.4***	1.0
Sweden: low-educated	1.7***	1.2***
Sweden: high-educated	1.8***	1.3***

Source: Population registry data for both countries.
Note: Three asterisks denote strong statistical significance (at the .001 level). The analyses include all standard control variables typically used in divorce research. As explained earlier, odds here represent the comparable likelihood (of divorce in this case) compared to the reference population (here, couples where the woman is not income dominant).

primus motor that drives (at least some) societies towards "more family." With one notable exception, namely the extraordinary degree of job segregation, the Nordic nations are the clear frontrunners of a more gender egalitarian society. On a speculative note, one might of course hypothesize that gender-segregated employment is a precondition for gender equalization in other domains.[51]

In conclusion, there is one question that we can obviously not answer at this point: namely are the Nordic countries the trend-setters who will eventually be followed by others some day in the future? Or are they simply a one-of-a-kind model that will remain so also in the future? My interpretation of the data persuades me that the former scenario is likely, albeit far from assured. We do see evident signs of "more family" *and* of gender equalization across a non-trivial number of advanced nations.

But nothing is written in stone. As the American case suggests, the "revolution" may stall before full maturation. We should additionally not forget that the Scandinavian path towards gender egalitarianism has been internationally quite unique: active family-support policies came at an early stage in the revolution of women's roles, and they are

51 Indeed, research suggests that the Nordic countries exhibit very high levels of gender segregation in employment (Anker, 1998).

comparatively speaking extraordinarily generous and comprehensive; and women's role transformation was no doubt eased by the plentiful supply of (more family-friendly) public sector jobs. Such facilitating conditions are near-absent not only in the U.S., but also throughout much of Europe.

CHAPTER 3.

Inequalities and Children's Life Chances

A golden rule in stratification research is that the transmission of privilege or poverty from parents to children is powerfully determined by the prevailing degree of income inequality.[52] In unequal societies, social origins exert a far stronger influence on children's future education, income or social position; where there is more income compression, the link between origin and destination is much weaker. We should accordingly expect more social mobility in egalitarian societies. The logic is straightforward. Inequality within the parental generation implies greater gaps in those family resources that can be invested in the life chances of its offspring (Björklund and Jäntti, 2009; Jäntti et al., 2006; Solon, 1999).

If the golden rule remains valid, this spells bad news for today's youth, considering the surge in income inequality in the western world. It has been exceptionally powerful in the U.S. and U.K., where the Gini coefficient of inequality has risen by roughly 30 percent since 1970 (Mitnik, Cumberworth, and Grusky, 2014; Esping-Andersen and Myles, 2009). In Germany it rose by 18 points, and Sweden has even outpaced the U.S. with a 35 percent rise since the mid-1980s (OECD, 2015b).[53] To be sure, Sweden started from an extraordinarily compressed income distribution in the 1980s, so Sweden remains nonetheless one of the

52 As we shall also see below, the influence of parental income on the income of their offspring as adults is clear and strong. The impact of parental education and social class position is less straightforward.

53 In Denmark and Norway the trend has been somewhat weaker—a 4 and 10 percentage rise respectively. Note that the Gini measures disposable income, i.e. after-tax and government redistribution.

most income-leveled nations. To give an idea of the magnitudes that separate Scandinavia from the U.S., the latter's Gini coefficient in 2010 was 53 percent higher than the Swedish.

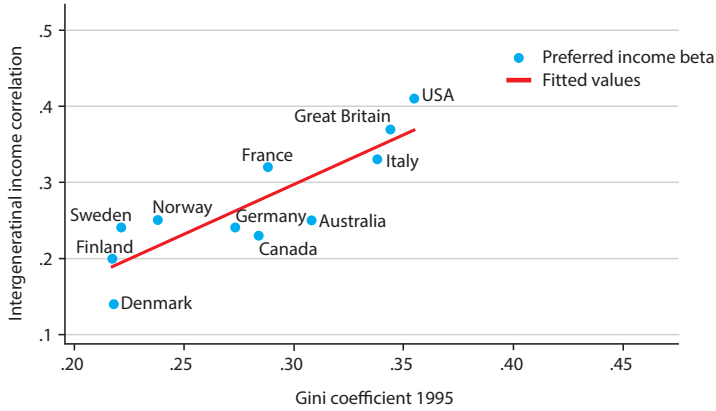
Figure 10 summarizes the link between income inequality (the Gini coefficient on the horizontal axis) and social inheritance (the correlation between parental and offspring income on the vertical axis). The connection is quite evident. Here Denmark (below a .2 correlation), followed by the other Nordic countries and Canada, boasts exceptionally small parent-child income correlations, and the gulf that separates them from the U.K. or U.S. is huge (the latter countries are almost three times as immobile as is Denmark).

The rise in income inequalities in the Nordic countries, and especially in Sweden, should in theory produce more stratified child outcomes for those cohorts born in the past 10–15 years. We can, of course, only verify this in the decades to come.[54] But this will depend very much on two sets of conditions. Firstly, what the main drivers of rising inequality are. In some countries, like the U.S., it is a double-edged sword where, at once, the top enjoys massive income gains while the bottom is losing ground. In others, like in the Nordic countries, it is primarily the very top that is racing away from the rest. It will, secondly, depend on institutional buffers—in particular the welfare state's ability to uphold welfare standards across the board. This is brought out in recent research which shows no change in the distribution of children's health conditions in Sweden (Mörk, Sjögren, and Svaleryd, 2014).

As Sarah McLanahan's (2004) notion of "diverging destinies" emphasizes, also family demographic trends are moving in a similar inegalitarian direction. Indeed, this is what we should expect, considering the inverted stratified nature of family life described in Chapter 1. If incomes and families are moving in an increasingly polarized direction, this should have adverse consequences for today's and tomorrow's child cohorts. Let us now explore whether such a trend is under way. In the following I shall focus on dimensions of family life that are commonly shown to influence child welfare, focusing on family structure and parenting.

54 An indication of what the future may have in store comes from recent U.S. estimation which shows that the surge in income inequality over the past decades has reduced social mobility rates (Mitnik, Cumberworth, and Grusky, 2014).

Figure 10. Income Inequality and the Correlation between Fathers' and Sons' Income.



Source: Gini coefficients are from Luxembourg Income Study, Key Figures. Parent-child income correlations are from Corak (2004).
Note: Children's income is measured when they were adults.

Are Families Polarizing?

Three trends stand out in terms of potential polarization: firstly, the maternal employment bias in favor of the higher educated; secondly, the concentration of divorce and lone parenthood in low social status households; and, thirdly, the deteriorating position of low-skilled males. All three of these trends should promote greater income and resource polarization across households.

In the early stages of the female revolution it was primarily the highly educated who moved from housewifery into employment and they were, again, the vanguard that opted for lifelong full-timer status. Since career-oriented, high-status women are most likely to partner with a male equivalent, this should distance these households from those where the (most likely low-skilled) male remains the only or primary earner. As the revolution spreads throughout society, such polarizing effects should weaken.

This can be illustrated with data for Denmark. In the mid-1980s, the employment rate of wives with high-income (in the top quintile)

husbands exceeded by 15 percentage points that of women married to bottom-quintile men. By 2004, the gap had been reduced to about 8–9 percentage points (OECD, 2015b: Annex 5.A1). Put differently, when female employment approximates universality, household inequalities should diminish; where it remains a more marginal affair, it is likely to fuel more inequality.

A comparison of Danish and Spanish couples brings this out very sharply. In Danish couples, the top-quintile income male earns 5.8 times as much as one in the bottom-quintile; in comparison, the same ratio for wives is a much smaller 4.3 ratio. The end result is a household ratio of 5.2, i.e. smaller than the male ratio. In Spain we see the exact opposite: the male ratio here is 8.8 and the female a whopping 23.1 ratio. In this setting, the end outcome at the household level is a 10.6 ratio (Esping-Andersen, 2009).

As for the second trend, we have already seen that the low-educated are increasingly more divorce-prone. Due also to deteriorating marriage prospects, the combined effect is a rising concentration of single-motherhood at the bottom-end of the income distribution. In the U.S., children of low-educated women are more than five times as likely to grow up in a lone-mother family as are children of the higher educated. The latter, in turn, are twice as likely to live in a dual earner household.

Here we can immediately see the seeds of polarization. It is well-documented that the educational progress and life chances of children are adversely influenced by parental divorce and by growing up with a single parent, especially if they are poor (McLanahan, 2004; Mayer, 1997; Waldfogel, 2006). But as Mayer (1997) emphasizes, the poverty effect is potentially spurious if, as is likely, the real cause lies in those parental characteristics that, in the first place, explain why they are poor.[55]

Children of divorced parents manifest inferior psychological well-being and more behavioral problems. They do less well in school and, as adults, they are significantly more likely to also divorce (Amato, 2000; Lee and McLanahan, 2015; for a review of the literature, see Bernardi

55 A similar causal logic emerges also in Björklund, Ginther, and Sundström's (2007) Sweden-U.S. comparison of the effects of parental divorce on children's education: it is not so much divorce which influences child outcomes adversely, but more likely parental characteristics that promote greater divorce risks.

et al., 2013).[56] But the precise causal connection is very difficult to establish. To begin with, the negative effects of divorce vary considerably across the child's age. They are less severe when children are very small or approaching adulthood. The nature of the divorce also matters: was it conflictive or amicable?

Here again the conundrum lies in the underlying process of selection. We have already noted that the low-educated are less capable of managing marital conflicts and are more likely to divorce. As also Gähler and Palmtag (2015) emphasize, perhaps the inferior well-being and educational performance of children from broken homes is mainly attributable to such parental traits rather than to the divorce per se. In any case, the main point that needs to be stressed is that stratified divorce propensities are one important source of childhood inequalities.

The third, closely related trend is driven by the deteriorating position of low-skilled men in terms of earnings, unemployment, and career prospects (de la Rica, Dolado, and Llorens, 2008; Gregg and Wadsworth, 2001; Wright and Dwyer, 2003). And it does not end here because low-skilled men also experience a worsening marriage market and fewer chances of fatherhood (Boschini et al., 2011).

These three trends point to the intensification of child poverty, especially within vulnerable families such as lone-parent and low-skilled households. But here national context and, in particular, welfare state support, makes a huge difference—perhaps less in terms of income transfers and more in terms of employment promotion. Aggregate child poverty rates in Scandinavia remain stubbornly very modest, around 4 percent; they are considerably higher in Western Europe (11 and 14 percent, respectively, in Germany and the U.K.), and almost twice that level in the U.S.

Although there is no real difference in the rate of lone motherhood (it hovers around 20 percent both in Scandinavia and the U.S.), the contrast in single mothers' employment profiles are spectacular. In the U.S., the majority (65 percent) are not working, compared to only a

56 Gähler and Palmtag's (2015) study demonstrates similar divorce-effects for Sweden. Interestingly, when comparing across birth cohorts, they find that there has been no change over time in the magnitudes of divorce effects. In a sense this is surprising. One would have assumed that the rising social acceptance of divorce should lessen its stigma and thus provoke less anxiety.

fifth in Sweden and Denmark.[57] As we can see in Table 11, this makes a huge difference for children's risk of growing up in poverty. Virtually all American children in workless lone-mother families are poor.

More generally, it is abundantly evident that maternal employment is a truly effective guarantor against poverty across all family types. In the lone-mother case, it lowers the poverty risk by a factor of roughly five; in dual earner two-parent families, child poverty drops to almost zero. Here polarization is quite evident. The less educated are far more at risk of lone motherhood and they are concomitantly less likely to work; and if they do their earnings are falling behind. Women's new roles are a truly effective antidote against child poverty. But the dualism of the female revolution can be a source of enhanced polarization if maternal employment and earnings are concentrated within the higher social strata.

A brief spell of low income will not necessarily lead to long-term harmful consequences, but a sustained experience of poverty certainly will. On this count, the international differences are truly dramatic, as can be seen in Table 12. Using the European Community Household Panel (ECHP) for the late 1990 and the PSID data for the U.S., I follow families that slid into poverty in year one and examine what proportion of these families remain poor one, two and three or more years thereafter.[58] In order to avoid trivial poverty exits, I stipulate that the family must exceed 60 percent of median equivalent income in order to be out of poverty.

Denmark is evidently best able to minimize longer term poverty. For the majority (59 percent), the duration of poverty is of less than one year, and virtually no families experience prolonged deprivation. The likelihood of remaining poor for at least two years is considerably higher in the rest of Europe, and yet here, too, the group that suffers three or more years of poverty is relatively limited. A dramatic contrast is found in the U.S., where "once poor, forever poor" describes the American reality quite accurately.

Since the ECPH did not include Sweden, similar estimations were conducted with registry data. For the first two years, the Swedish dy-

57 The OECD Family Database provides up-to-date data on parental employment distributions.

58 Poverty here is measured as falling below 50 percent of median income (adjusting for family size).

Table 11. Child Poverty Rates by Family Type, ca. 2010.

	Lone mother not working	Lone mother working	Couple, one earner	Couple, two earners
Denmark	27	6	9	2
Netherlands	58	23	15	2
Sweden	57	11	18	1
U.S.	91	31	28	6

Source: LIS data.
Note: Poverty is here defined as falling below 50 percent of median family income.

Table 12. The Persistency of Poverty in Families with Children.

	One year	Two years	Three+ years
Denmark	.410	.282	.026
France	.590	.418	.128
Germany	.490	.303	.091
Italy	.635	.411	.161
Spain	.597	.369	.120
U.K.	.494	.287	.110
U.S.	.814	.704	.576

Source: The European Community Panel Study. The U.S. data are estimated with the PSID.
Note: Estimation is based on Kaplan-Mayer survival functions. Poverty is measured as less than 50 percent of median equivalent income.

namics parallel those in Denmark and Germany. But for the three or more years duration we find, quite surprisingly, much more persistency in Sweden. Here the proportion which remains poor is 23 percent, which is twice the typical level found in the European countries. It is not easy to explain why Sweden differs so sharply from neighboring Denmark on this particular indicator. One possible explanation may be related to immigration (and the lower rate of employment among immigrant

females). In any case, we must not forget that the persistently poor group in Sweden is numerically very small.

Parents and the Welfare State

In Gary Becker's theory, parents influence children's life chances via genetic transmission, monetary investments, and time dedication (Becker, 1962; Becker and Tomes, 1986). Genetics aside, income also plays a major role for child welfare and school performance. Parenting intensity is decisive for children's cognitive and emotional development, in particular if biased in favor of stimulating activities. The distance that separates the "top" and "bottom" of society is, as we have seen, widening both financially and family-wise. We register a very parallel scenario in both the quality and quantity of parenting.

Studies of the effects of parental time dedication are few and far between. What evidence we have suggests that it may play a role as important as that of monetary investments (Fiorini and Keane, 2014; Hsin and Felfe, 2014). Moreover, intellectually stimulating parenting practices have been shown to compensate for unequal initial endowments (Friend, DeFries and Olson, 2008). More generally, as Waldfogel (2006) shows, inadequate contact with parents, particularly during early childhood, can be harmful for children's cognitive and emotional development.[59]

The rise of maternal employment has given cause for concern since it should affect mothers' child dedication adversely, not merely due to less available caring time, but also if mothers return home stressed and tired. The empirical evidence is, however, far from conclusive. Most studies conclude that maternal employment has problematic consequences in the first year of a child's life. This is because attachment in the child's first year is decisive for its subsequent developmental prospects. Thereafter, as the lion's share of research suggests, there appear to be no negative effects of maternal employment if, that is, the outside child care alternative is of high quality (Ermisch and Francesconi, 2013; James-Burdumy, 2005; Waldfogel, Han, and Brooks-Gunn, 2002).

But the link between mothers' employment and child dedication ap-

59 For research within developmental psychology, see also Landry, Smith and Swank (2006).

pears paradoxically to move in the exact opposite direction from what is typically assumed. To begin with, fathers' involvement in child care has increased significantly, although primarily among the higher educated and when the mother works (Craig, 2006). Additionally, both mothers and fathers now dedicate far more time to their children than only a few decades ago—but again this holds primarily for the higher educated (Bianchi, Robinson, and Milkie, 2006).

The quantity dimension aside, we observe also major differences in parenting style and content. Lareau's (2003) influential qualitative work suggests that middle- and upper-class parents are more inclined to favor the "concerted cultivation approach," stressing activities that promote social skills and cultural capital. They are, for instance, more likely than working-class families to employ verbal reasoning when disciplining children. In contrast, lower educated parents are far more likely to adopt a more passive "natural growth" approach (see also Bianchi and Robinson, 1997; Craig, 2006; Hsin, 2008; Sayer, Bianchi, and Robinson, 2004). In a similar vein, the OECD's *Starting Strong* program identifies two contrasting parenting styles, one prioritizing children's imagination, the other stressing a "work hard" ethos. The study notes that the former is increasingly dominant in Scandinavian child rearing while the latter is prominent in France and the U.S. (OECD, 2013; 2010: 32ff).

The stratified profile of parenting is evident. This is clearly the case for reading to small children, an activity that signals an active intellectual stimulus orientation. British data show that 80 percent of high-SES (socio-economic status) parents read to their children on a daily basis, compared to only half that within the low-SES population (Esping-Andersen, 2009). A very similar socioeconomic gap emerges when we, more broadly, examine differentials in parents' (active) caring time.

In Table 13, I compare mothers' and fathers' average daily time dedication to "active" and nurturing care, such as reading, discussing, and playing with the children. As we can see, the socioeconomic gap is pretty similar be it in Scandinavia or Spain. The one curious exception is Swedish fathers whose input hardly varies across education levels.[60]

60 I thank Pablo Gracia, Jens Bonke and Margarita Chudnovskaya for their assistance in estimating these figures.

Table 13. The Ratio of Caring Time: The Ratio of High versus Low Educated Parents.

	Mothers	Fathers
Denmark	2.2	1.7
Spain	1.7	2.7
Sweden	1.9	1.2

Source: Danish Time Use Survey, 2001; Spanish Time Use Survey, 2003; Swedish Time Use Survey 2001.

Is the Family-Friendly Welfare State Corrective?

Family conditions may produce very unequal life chances within the next generation, but this effect may be modified, or perhaps even nullified, by other institutions that exert a significant influence on children's development.

As Heckman greatly emphasizes, the earliest years in childhood are decisive—in particular ages 1–6, i.e. during the pre-school phase (Heckman and Lochner, 2000; Heckman and Krueger, 2003; see also OECD, 2013). As Heckman and co-authors' research demonstrates, high-quality external child care may exert a significant—and potentially equalizing—effect on children's cognitive abilities and, more generally, on their school readiness. His analyses, to be sure, are primarily focused on truly vulnerable (American) kids, and his very optimistic conclusions come from a handful of special programs (like the Perry preschool project) that are explicitly targeted to such children.

To summarize his core findings, Heckman argues that each dollar invested in high- quality child care yields a 12 dollar return—a rate of return that virtually no stock market investment can beat. This is because the experience raises children's school performance and subsequent earnings capacity while, simultaneously, minimizing the need for expensive (and typically quite ineffective) remedial programs.

Research that broadens the perspective to early child care more generally (for the ages 0–6), typically arrives at similar, albeit less spectacular, conclusions. Most of the evidence adds up to a fairly clear picture: early child care helps equalize children's cognitive abilities and school

readiness significantly. This is so because children from low-SES families benefit the most—particularly in terms of cognitive development. However, this egalitarian outcome depends ultimately on two principal conditions: firstly, that the institutions are of high quality (especially as regards the ratio of children per teacher and the qualifications of personnel).[61] Secondly, the more universal the coverage, the more likely it becomes that child care programs will even the playing field.[62] This is in part because policies targeted to the poor are less likely to receive generous financing, thus producing low-quality services; and in part because take-up within the low-SES population is likely to be inferior if the services are viewed as stigmatizing.

Enrolment levels at the kindergarten level (ages 3–6) are quite high almost everywhere. The EU average is around 80 percent (but only 60 percent in the U.S.). It is *de facto* universal in France, Spain and Scandinavia. Differences are far more accentuated in the 0–3 age range. Here the EU mean is only a 30 percent coverage rate and in some cases, like Germany, it hardly reaches 20 percent. Again, the Scandinavian countries top the rankings (70 percent in Denmark and 50–55 percent in Sweden).[63]

And let us now turn to the evidence. As mentioned, empirical research usually uncovers an equalizing effect although not of the magnitudes reported by Heckman. This is of course what we should expect since his analyses focus on a small segment of extraordinarily vulnerable children.

Let us begin with a brief synthesis of findings from the rather limited number of country-specific studies.[64] These typically estimate the impact of early child care on later cognitive-type abilities (like reading comprehension) or on children's likelihood of progressing into the higher

61 For a detailed treatment of these issues, see OECD (2013).

62 Another dimension of coverage is the amount of hours of care typically provided. In some cases, like Germany and the Netherlands, day care services are usually provided only a few hours per day or even per week. In others, as in Scandinavia, they typically provide care on a full-day basis (OECD's Family Database, Chart PF3.2B).

63 Formally Denmark's policy is universal coverage. The principal explanation for the lower real level (70 percent) is, just like in Sweden, that parental leave ensures that a parent will be with the child until age one. The coverage data derive from OECD's Family Database.

64 The following synthesis of the evidence across countries builds on Dämmrich and Esping-Andersen (forthcoming). Yoshikawa et al. (2013) offers a very comprehensive overview of U.S. program evaluations.

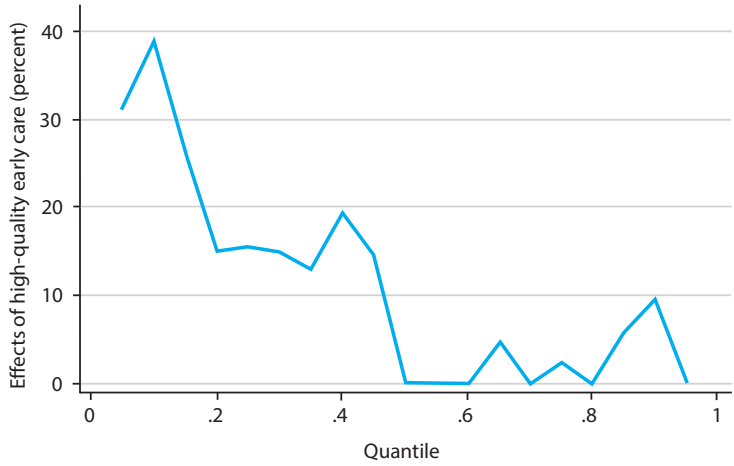
educational echelons. A Norwegian study finds significantly positive benefits for children from all social backgrounds, but markedly higher for children from low-SES families. The latter obtain an estimated 75 percent gain on cognitive tests. Evidence from Finland, where the child care effect was tested on children's chances of attaining an upper secondary level education, is likewise positive. The effect was marginal for high-SES kids but substantial (an added likelihood of 33 percent) for those from low-SES families. We find very similar effects for Germany (for a review of this evidence, see Cordero Coma and Esping-Andersen, 2015). One study of the U.K. which measured cognitive abilities at school entry, found a substantial (57 percent) ability-gain among immigrant children but, quite surprisingly, a negative effect for (native) children of low-SES origins. A more thorough U.K. study (based on a large sample of children) arrives at rather different conclusions: all children who participated in high-quality child care display superior cognitive abilities at age 11 compared to those who did not attend, and children from the lowest SES levels benefited the most. The study underscores the key importance of the quality dimensions of child care facilities, i.e. low child:teacher ratios and advanced pedagogical training of personnel (Sylva et al., 2008).

Cross-national comparisons are very rare. One of the few is Esping-Andersen et al.'s (2011) Denmark-U.S. comparison. Here we find that cognitive test scores, measured at age 10–12, were positively and significantly improved for the children of low educated parents in Denmark (a 35 percent gain), whereas it had no significant effects in the U.S. (mainly due to the highly uneven quality standards across the U.S. day care market). In Denmark, children of higher educated origins showed no significant improvements whatsoever. However, Hsin (2008) and also Hsin and Felfe (2014) find positive effects for both the U.S. and Germany.

To illustrate how early child care influences later achievements differently across the socioeconomic spectrum, I here reproduce the main findings from the Danish analyses in Esping-Andersen et al. (2011). The advantage of focusing on Denmark is its virtually universal day care coverage and unrivaled uniformity in terms of (high) quality standards. In other words, children are not enrolled selectively in terms of social origins.

The approach here (applying quantile regression estimation, dividing the population into fifths) examines whether the impact of participation

Figure 11. The Differential Effects of Early Child Care in Denmark.



Source: Esping-Andersen et al. (2011).

in high-quality early care yields different effects across the distribution of children.[65] As is evident in Figure 11, it is the group in the lowest (far left) part of the distribution which enjoys substantial benefits. From the middle upwards, there is no real effect at all. These findings differ from the Sylva et al. (2008) (British) study, which found that there were significant gains for all children, irrespective of their social background.

Finally, Dämmrich and Esping-Andersen (forthcoming) analyze the PIRLS (measuring competencies at age 10) and PISA (at age 15) data to compare early child care effects in four distinct countries: Austria, Denmark, Hungary, and Spain.[66] These were selected because each represents a very distinct child care model: Austria provides low coverage with low-quality services; Hungary, too, has low coverage but surprisingly high-quality standards; Denmark stands as a model where high

65 The advantage of quantile regression estimation is that we do not have to assume a simple linear increase (or decrease). Instead, it permits us to estimate how effects may be distinct across different population sub-groups (here divided into 5).

66 PIRLS is the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study and PISA, the Program for International Student Assessment. Both are OECD sponsored surveys of cognitive abilities.

quality combines with near-universal coverage; and Spain, finally, boasts moderately high, but low-quality coverage. In Austria and Spain, attendance produces no cognitive gains whatsoever. In contrast, we find significant beneficial effects in both Denmark and Hungary, and these are considerably stronger for children of low-educated parents. To illustrate, pre-school enrolment in Denmark is on average associated with a 10 score-points increase in reading test scores in primary school; for children of low-educated parents, the increase is 17 points (which is the equivalent to five months of schooling). What seems all-evident is that the equalizing potential of early child care programs depends very much on their quality levels.

On balance then, the evidence does suggest that child care services—if, to repeat, they are of high quality—can contribute significantly to rectify inequalities that have their roots in family life. Let us now turn to the final question to be tackled in this chapter: what are the principal determinants of children's life chances in the contemporary world?

Diverging Destinies Revisited: Life Chance Inequalities and Their Determinants

Let us explore inequalities from a life course perspective, beginning at age 15. This, in most countries, is the decisive moment when children face three basic and yet all-important options: dropping out of education altogether, going for some type of practical vocational training, or seeking entry into the higher secondary levels with the principal aim of a subsequent tertiary level degree.

The ongoing transformation within the world of work tells us that the first option is likely to result in a life of low earnings, elevated unemployment risks, and poor marriage and family life prospects, particularly for males. On the female side of the coin, the major risks include early childbearing and lone motherhood—especially in the U.S. I will principally utilize PISA data to identify inequalities at this first life course stage.

Educational attainment is the next stage in our examination. Here, we shall explore which factors are particularly determinant for the achievement of low versus higher levels of human capital. And moving forward to mature adulthood, the third stage to be investigated, here I shall focus primarily on social class mobility.

Social Origins and Inequalities in the Early Teens

Age 15 marks the end of compulsory education. Indeed, this was exactly the rationale behind the OECD's choice of focusing on 15-year olds in the PISA program. The PISA studies aim to capture cognitive skills, i.e. the ability to understand and interpret information in key domains of direct relevance, not only for continued learning and problem solving, but also for adequate functioning in modern society. The PISA domains of cognitive abilities include "literacy" (interpreting texts), "mathematics" (ditto for quantitative information) and "science."[67]

Whenever new PISA results arrive, the popular press usually focuses on nation differences—is Sweden superior or inferior to other countries? Country differences in students' average performance levels are essentially trivial, and statistically speaking non-significant (except for extreme cases, like the distance between Mexico and Finland). But if we examine student performance at the extremes, we do find decisive variations. Two measures that say much about levels of inequality are the percent of children scoring below the PISA-defined minimum (defined as *de facto* dysfunctional), and the percent scoring in the top percentiles (i.e. the "cognitive elite").[68]

Table 14 gives a snapshot of the degree to which youth are prepared for the ever-rising skill demands in contemporary societies. We immediately note the substantial national differences in both dimensions. Finland excels on the first, boasting a very small rate (8 percent) of early school abandonment (i.e. the proportion with only compulsory schooling—ISCED 1–2); the U.S. falls at the other extreme with 20 percent.[69] Here Denmark emerges as a poor performer (14 percent).

As regards cognitive dysfunction (falling below the PISA-defined minimum score), the Nordic countries (with the partial exception of Sweden) perform quite well, certainly compared to the U.S. (where basically a fifth of the youth population falls below the minimum). Examining the "cognitive elite" distributions, one is struck by the coincidence of a pervasive degree of both dysfunction and elite performance in these

67 For details consult OECD's website (www.oecd.org/pisa).

68 Dysfunction implies the incapacity to interpret even quite straightforward information. One example from the PISA tests is whether a child can understand a standard label on an aspirin bottle (… no more than two tablets every six hours etc., etc.).

69 ISCED stands for the International Standard Classification of Education.

Table 14. Skill Profiles among Youth in Advanced Societies.

	% with only ISCED 1–2 (age 20–24)	% below PISA minimum (math)	% PISA 'Cognitive elite' (math)
Denmark	14	5	4
Finland	8	7	19
France	14	7	4
Germany	15	9	5
Sweden	10	12	11
U.K.	8	13	16
U.S.	20	18	12

Source: ISCED data from OECD (2003: Table C5.2). PISA data directly from raw data files. Note: PISA elite refers to the percent scoring in the top 5th level (in mathematics). The U.S. figure refers to those who did not complete highschool (12 percent) plus those who obtained only GED diplomas (8 percent).

very same countries. In contrast, Finland stands out here, too, combining a small share of dysfunctional with an impressive share of "elites."

Let us now turn to family-of-origin effects. What are the main determinants of cognitive skills? Using the PISA data files, I have estimated (with standard OLS regression) the relative influence of four key family attributes: whether the mother has a university degree; whether the mother is employed full-time; whether it is a lone-mother family; and the number of books in the home (a strong indicator of the family's "cultural capital" resources). The analyses include controls for child's sex, immigrant status, father's education, and the parental SEI score (a synthetic measure of socio-economic status which combines income level and occupational status). See Table 15 which compares across four distinct countries: Sweden, Denmark, Germany and the U.S.

As one would expect, the mother being highly educated (versus the rest) plays a significant role, in particular in Denmark and Germany and more modestly so in Sweden and the U.S. In Denmark, it helps raise

Table 15. Family Characteristics and Cognitive Inequalities. OLS regression.

	Denmark	Sweden	Germany	U.S
Nation mean	388.9	433.4	375.9	425.1
Mother high education	52.7***	17.2*	49.9***	14.6*
Mother full-timer	.8	7.5	-3.0	-8.2
Single mother family	.6	3.9	1.3	-17.8***
Family cultural capital	34.2***	30.9***	36.4***	33.3***

Source: PISA 2003.
Note: These analyses use the literacy scores. Statistical significance levels: * = .05; ** = .01; *** = .001.

the child's score by 14 percent; in Sweden by only 4 percent.[70] The once widely held view that maternal employment is harmful for children seems here completely invalidated. The effect of mothers being full-time employed is nil. That is also true for the second oft-cited risk, growing up in a lone-mother family, but with the one startling exception of the U.S. Here the adverse consequences are significant (producing 4 percent lower test scores). Reverting back to our earlier discussion, this uniquely American effect derives surely from underlying selection dynamics: the low-SEI (socio-economic status) bias among American lone mothers is exceptionally strong (Mayer, 1997).

Most remarkable is the large cultural capital effect. Having many books in the home yields a 7 percent "cognitive gain" in Sweden; in Denmark and Germany, almost 10 percent. All told, these first analyses do not support the notion that mounting differentials in family structure are the main source of child inequalities. Instead, the key message appears to be that inequalities in families' intellectual milieu are quite pivotal.

Immigration is yet another potential driver of heightened inequalities. The social selection of immigrants will no doubt make a significant difference: are they primarily from poor and remote rural areas in Turkey or are they well-educated East Asians? In Table 16 below, I conduct a similar analysis as previously outlined, now focusing on the differential

70 These percentage effects are obtained by dividing the coefficient for mothers' education with the mean level.

between immigrant and native children's skills. As is widely known, immigrant children typically do relatively poorly in the education system in comparison to natives. This of course can be due to language problems. In order to neutralize the latter, my analyses now utilize the math files in the PISA studies.

Two things stand out in this table. Let us begin with the raw immigrant effect—the analyses include no control variables at all. Here, we find systematically greater gaps between immigrants and natives in societies with a Germanic language. It is impossible to say whether this is due to the selectivity of immigrant recruitment or perhaps due to difficulties of mastering the local language (even if we use the math test). In any case, the magnitudes are substantial, also in Scandinavia. In the Swedish case, the immigrant (raw) deficit is almost 40 percent (in Germany, almost 70 percent!).

Table 16. The Immigrant Deficit in PISA Math Comprehension.

	Raw immigrant effect	Adjusted immigrant effect
Austria	-60	-36
Belgium	-82	-56
Denmark	-33	-17
Finland	-18	-22
France	-33	-20
Germany	-68	-40
Ireland	+15	+13
Netherlands	-73	-43
Spain	-21	-23
Sweden	-37	-25
U.K.	-21	-21
U.S.	-35	+14

Source: PISA 2000 data files.
Note: The deficit measures the difference between native and immigrant children. Adjusted effect includes controls for mother education, parental SEI, gender, and books in home.

The second notable finding is that the immigrant deficit is very much driven by underlying social selection dynamics. To capture this, I re-analyze the data by including controls for mother's education, parents' SEI score, the child's sex, and number of books in the home. Here we see the immigrant gap closing significantly in most countries; in some, like the U.S., the immigrants now do better than natives. In Sweden, the immigrant gap is reduced from a deficit of 37 to 25, a 32 percent reduction.[71]

From our examination of children's human capital potential at this early stage of the life course we do not find any strong evidence that family structure plays any important role. The data pretty much reaffirm the unquestionable salience of families' socioeconomic status. One influence that traditional social stratification research typically failed to identify is here surprisingly strong, namely the cultural capital resources that parents command. One might assume that the latter simply go hand-in-hand with education. But here we come in for a surprise because the correlation between the two is, in all countries, very modest (in the .2–.3 range).

The salience of cultural capital may derive from the educational and career advantages it bestows upon people. A superior mastery of language and symbols may translate into superior modes of self-representation (demonstrating the command of "middle class" cultural markers). It is also, as research shows, a resource that enhances performance in schools and on exams, and ultimately also career advancement (DiMaggio, 1982; Sullivan, 2001).

Social Origins and Educational Attainment

We now turn to the next life-course stage and examine differentials in young adults' educational attainment. Comparative social mobility research has consistently singled out Sweden (and maybe the Netherlands) as an exception to Erikson and Goldthorpe's (1992) famous constant flux thesis. Their study focused on the association between parents' and children's class positions across many generations, finding no visible rise in mobility chances anywhere, save in Sweden. The constant flux scenario emerged also in the Shavit and Blossfeld (eds.) (1993) study

71 See Marks (2005) for a comprehensive study of immigrant differentials in skills. Gracia, Vázquez-Quesada, and Van de Werfhorst (2016) provide an up-to-date examination of immigrant human capital and subsequent employment penalties.

which, instead, focused on educational attainment. They concluded, similarly, that the influence of social origins on children's educational attainment has remained stubbornly constant in all nations other than Sweden (and, again, possibly also the Netherlands).

These studies did not include Norway and Denmark and they date back a third of a century. One might assume a more widespread democratization of educational opportunities since then. Why? For one, if in fact early high-quality child care can level the playing field, this should in Scandinavia have only become visible for the more recent cohorts. Secondly, the major educational reforms aiming to equalize educational attainment, starting with the Swedish reforms in the late 1960s (and with a ten year or so lag in the rest of Scandinavia, and a twenty year lag in most EU countries), can only be expected to have had any genuine impact for cohorts born after the 1960s.

There is evidence to show that the Scandinavian school reforms diminished the class bias in educational attainment. But whether this, in turn, also fostered more inter-generational mobility in terms of class positions is less clear (Erikson and Jonsson, eds., 1996). In fact, the expansion of higher education may very well produce the exact opposite effect, as happened in Britain (Blanden, Gregg, and Machin, 2005). There are, however, features of the Nordic reforms that both directly and indirectly should equalize opportunities. The elimination of early tracking, the comprehensive school model, and the absence of financial constraints should all help reduce the class bias, in particular with regard to the higher educational levels.

The empirical evidence leans towards a weakening effect of social origins. Jaeger and Holm (2007) show a clear effect for Denmark. Bratberg, Nilsen, and Vaage (2005) conclude similarly for Norway, although here the impact appears more modest. Both Holmlund (2006) and Holzer (2007) conclude the same for Sweden, but both studies include important caveats. Holmlund argues that the weakened impact of class origins was primarily the indirect—and unanticipated—consequence of declining assortative marriage brought about by the comprehensive schools. Holzer shows that the mobility dividend obtains for all but children of very low-educated parents.

The comparative studies of Richard Breen and his colleagues (2005; 2009) confirm the status of Sweden as exceptional, but also find that

some other countries now exhibit an enhanced democratization of children's educational attainment. All these comparisons included only Sweden among the Nordic countries. But even this more recent research utilizes quite old data: their youngest cohort was born in 1959–1966.

The IALS and PIAAC studies are an excellent source of data if our aim is to trace trends across birth cohorts and many countries.[72] Their great advantage lies is the inclusion of information on respondents' cognitive abilities (test score data). A drawback is the lack of detailed information on respondents' social class origins. We can, however, approximate this with data on parents' education level. I begin with an analysis of the probability (odds-ratios) of attaining upper secondary schooling for sons of very low-educated fathers (ISCED 1–2, i.e. no more than compulsory level education), compared to those with higher educated fathers. I compare across cohorts born, respectively, in the 1940s, in the 1950s–1960s, and after 1970. Here, using the IALS data, the comparison includes Sweden, Denmark, Germany and the U.S. See Table 17.

The sons of low-educated fathers remain disadvantaged everywhere when compared against the rest of the population. In Sweden, the odds for the youngest cohort are .32 which implies that their likelihood of attaining upper secondary schooling is roughly a third compared to the rest. Nevertheless, an equalization of opportunities has definitely taken place—albeit limited to the two Scandinavian nations.[73] In Denmark and Sweden the odds of attaining upper secondary level schooling doubled and tripled, respectively, when comparing the youngest with the oldest cohort.

We find no equalizing trend at all in either Germany or the U.S. In all four countries, the 1940s cohort faced quite similar unequal opportunity structures. For this cohort, the son of a low-educated Swedish father had

72 The IALS (International Adult Literacy Surveys) studies were conducted in the mid-late 1990s by Canada Statistics; the PIAAC (Program for International Assessment of Adult Competencies), a follow-up, ca. 2012. Both can be consulted and also downloaded from the OECD (http:/www.oecd.org/skills/piaac).

73 The IALS surveys were conducted between 1994 and 1998 (by Statistics Canada). Using the same IALS data, but using a different analytical approach, Hertz et al. (2007) come to basically the same conclusion. Among the advanced Western democracies included in his 49-nation study, a significant decline in the father-child educational correlation (measured in years of education) is only observed in the Nordic countries. And, as also my analysis shows, Hertz et al. conclude that the equalizing trend starts with the most recent birth cohorts.

Table 17. The Odds of Upper Secondary Education for Children of Low-Educated Fathers. Comparing Three Birth Cohorts.

	U.S.	Denmark	Sweden	Germany
Cohort 1	.115***	.449**	.320**	.094***
Cohort 2	.097***	.248***	.164***	.067***
Cohort 3	.133***	.213***	.091***	.098***

Source: IALS (International Adult Literacy Survey).
Note: Cohort 1 is born 1970–1975; cohort 2 1955–1964; cohort 3 1945–1954. The cognitive test scores refer to reading comprehension. Reference group for estimations is fathers with ISCED 3 or more. Significance levels: * = .1; ** = .05; *** = .01 or better.

only one-tenth the chance of educational achievement as had the son of higher educated parents. Here, in fact, Denmark performed better.

Moving now to the youngest (1970s) cohort, the nation differences are truly noteworthy. We observe that the youngest Swedish cohort is three times as likely to attain higher education compared to its German or American equivalent. Sweden is clearly not the only exception to the constant flux scenario, though, since also Denmark has experienced a notable "democratization" of educational opportunities. In contrast, both Germany and the U.S. validate the scenario quite perfectly.

The next step in our life-course approach is to examine inequalities in educational attainment at the university level. Now I use the 2012 PIAAC study in order to compare a pre- and a post-"welfare state" cohort.[74] The oldest cohort was born between 1952 and 1966 and represents essentially the "pre-welfare state" cum "pre-education reforms" child generation. The youngest, in turn, was born between 1967 and 1982. The latter cohort's childhood evolved in the "post-reform" era. Like the IALS, the PIAAC study includes information on respondents' cognitive abilities. Here, too, we use the father's education level as a proxy for the

74 I use the PIAAC survey for these analyses since the youngest cohort in IALS is still not old enough to have had a chance of completing higher education. In these analyses I examine both daughters and sons, but the models include a gender dummy since levels of female employment differ substantially between the countries included in the study.

family's socioeconomic status.[75]

Table 18 presents the odds-ratios of attaining a university degree (ISCED 5+) for two cohorts in Denmark, France, Italy, Sweden and the U.K. This nation comparison was chosen so as to include countries which vary sharply in terms of economic inequalities more generally. In rows 3 and 7, I have calculated the relative advantage (the ratio of the odds for high versus low origins) that children of high-educated fathers enjoy relative to those of low-educated origin. This statistic summarizes very well the overall degree of equalization of opportunities in any given country (the lower the ratio, the greater is the level of equality).

Examining the "high:low ratios," we immediately notice that in some countries access to higher education has become more "democratized" than in others. The ratio has declined for the younger cohort in Sweden and Italy, but has actually risen in Denmark. France and the U.K. appear basically unchanged. And also these results support the argument that Scandinavia is quite unique in terms of promoting equality of educational opportunities. In both Denmark and Sweden, the advantage that children of highly educated fathers enjoy is significantly smaller than elsewhere—almost twice as egalitarian as in France and a whopping four times as much as in Italy![76]

Another way to gauge the degree to which privileged origins matter more than talent or abilities is to compare the odds for children of high-educated fathers against the odds of their cognitive scores (not shown in Table 18). In Denmark and Sweden (and also in France), the latter overwhelm the influence of social origin; the opposite is the case in Italy and the U.K. Here again Italy is an extreme case since the high-education father effect (3.14 for the young cohort) is almost twice as large as is the cognitive effect (1.9).[77]

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75 I would have liked to have included also Germany in these analyses, but throughout the estimations the German data appear to lack reliability. As noted repeatedly throughout this book, the social composition within the high versus low educated population has changed substantially over the decades under study. In this particular analysis, such compositional effects are unlikely to influence the key results since we must assume that any compositional change has been quite similar across these four advanced societies.

76 My analyses of the Netherlands (not included in Table 18) support the conclusions in earlier research that this country lies closer to Scandinavia.

77 In a recent study based on a very large sample of Swedish children, Erikson (2016) concludes very similarly: children's cognitive abilities, as transferred from parents are much

Table 18. The Odds of Attaining Higher Education.

	Denmark	France	Italy	Sweden	U.K.
Young cohort:					
Ratio high:low	1.6	2.6	5.3	1.1	2.0
Dad high education	1.4***	2.0***	2.3***	1.2***	1.5***
Dad low education	.9***	.7***	.44***	1.0***	.7***
Old cohort:					
Ratio high:low	1.1	2.5	7.5	2.5	1.9
Dad high education	1.1***	2.1***	2.3***	1.6***	1.4***
Dad low education	1.0***	.9***	.3*	.7***	.7***

Source: PIAAC 2012 Study.
Note: Significance levels: * = .1; ** = .05: *** = .01 or better.

So how do we explain the unmatched egalitarian trend in Scandinavian educational outcomes? It cannot be attributed to some innate and deep historical tradition of equality: for the older cohorts the Nordic countries were basically as unequal and class-ridden as elsewhere.

To begin with, the comprehensive school reforms no doubt make a difference to the extent that they boost the likelihood of any given child completing upper secondary school. A second plausible explanation lies in the day care effect. For the oldest cohort, day care attendance was relatively uncommon in Denmark and even more so in Sweden. And those most likely to be enrolled were the children of employed mothers who, in those days, were prevailingly also highly educated. But as we move forward to the youngest cohort, child care coverage had expanded greatly (as had maternal employment beyond the more privileged strata) and this, in turn, should have yielded an extra bonus for children from

more decisive for education than is the direct effect of parents' social status.

less advantaged families. One telling statistic is the cognitive literacy gap between youth in the highest versus the lowest score deciles. In Scandinavia the top decile score is 40–50 percent higher than in the bottom decile. In the U.K. it is 80 percent higher; in the U.S. a whopping 130 percent higher![78]

A third tempting explanation lies in one of the golden rules of mobility research: more income compression implies more social mobility. Indeed, it was exactly in the 1970s that the Scandinavian countries experienced the great leap in income compression. As Atkinson and Søgaard (2013) show, the income share of the bottom half rose by 30–33 percent during the 1970s and early 1980s, remaining at this level until 2000. And this was accompanied by far greater income security thanks to the expansion of the welfare state. Incidentally, over the same years the top decile earners experienced a 20 percentage point decline in relative terms.

Social Origins and Unequal Destinies

As is now well-established in stratification research, the influence of social origins tends to be far stronger for educational outcomes than for final occupational or class destinations. This is also very much borne out in my own recent research. But interestingly, we discover that the relative weight of direct (parent-> child's adult destiny) and indirect (parent -> child's education -> adult destiny) effects depends very much on the overall strength of the associations (Esping-Andersen and Wagner, 2012). In France, where social inheritance effects are overall quite strong, the indirect effect overwhelms the direct effect. We find basically the same pattern for Italy and Spain. But the opposite is the case in Denmark and Norway, where the direct effect is far stronger than the indirect effect. In other words (and as our earlier analyses demonstrated), the influence of parental social status on educational attainment has, in these countries, weakened significantly.

This is actually what one might expect. When educational attainment becomes increasingly democratized, its role as a social filtering mechanism ought to weaken. The continuing influence of social origins will, as a consequence, primarily be related to how parental characteristics

78 Calculated from the IALS data. These differentials refer to youth aged 16–24 (the youngest ages observable in the data).

steer children into the occupational structure.

To identify the changing impact of social origins on children's adult social class position, I shall focus on the likelihood that sons of, respectively, low and highly educated fathers will—as adults—achieve *service class* status, i.e. become professionals, high-grade managers and executives (see Erikson and Goldthorpe, 1992). To establish trends over time I use, once again, cohort comparisons. Table 19 presents the odds-ratios of attaining a service class occupation for the two cohorts. The oldest "pre-welfare state" cohort was born 1952–1966; the youngest ("welfare state" cohort) between 1967 and 1982. We observe them at ages 30–45. I examine sons and daughters together, but include a dummy control for gender to take into account the lower level of life-long career dedication among women, particularly in some of the countries included in the comparisons.

Estimating with odds-ratios (for example the odds of a child of highly educated parents attaining service class status compared to all others) captures relative rates of social mobility—in other words the degree of equality of opportunity in any given society. In Table 19 I examine social origin effects, defining low status origin as whether the father had only compulsory level education (i.e. ISCED 1–2), and high status origins in terms of whether the father had university level education. Where there is a lack of information on parents' occupation, their educational attainment is our best (and only) "origin-class" identifier. It would have been preferable to control also for mothers' education, but it is highly co-linear with fathers' education. The models control for number of books in the home, immigrant origins, a gender dummy, and a dummy variable for whether both parents are highly educated. And all estimations include a control for cognitive test scores (as before). We shall subsequently examine the relative importance of origins vis-a-vis cognitive skills.[79]

As in the previous analyses, we also here observe a substantially greater degree of equalization in Scandinavia, where the high:low ori-

79 There is a fairly strong correlation between fathers' and mothers' education (even if measured differently). With very little variation, the simple correlation is around .5. But the results remain unchanged whether or not we include mother's education in our models. Surprisingly, the correlation between fathers' (or mothers') education and child's cognitive score is quite modest everywhere (on average .2–.3). In Sweden, the correlation is only .13.

Table 19. The Likelihood of Attaining Service Class Status. Odds-Ratios.

	Denmark	France	Italy	Sweden	U.K.
Young cohort:					
Ratio dad high:low	1.6	2.6	5.3	1.1	2.0
Dad high education	1.4***	2.0***	2.3***	1.2***	1.5***
Dad low education	.9***	.7***	.4***	1.0***	.7***
Old cohort:					
Ratio dad high:low	1.1	2.5	7.5	2.5	1.9
Dad high education	1.1***	2.1	2.3***	1.6***	1.4***
Dad low education	1.0***	.9	.4*	.7***	.7**

Sources: IALS and PIAAC.
Note: Significance levels: * = .05; ** = .01; *** = .001 or better.

gin ratios are roughly half as large as in other countries (Italy is again an extreme case with a ratio that is five times greater than the Swedish within the "welfare state" cohort). And the trend towards more equality of opportunities is clear in the Swedish case (and to a degree also in the Italian—the latter starting from an extremely inegalitarian level). France and the U.K. epitomize the constant flux scenario.[80]

Like before, we can also gauge the degree of meritocracy by comparing the odds of cognitive skills against the social origin odds (not shown

80 The Danish models suggest that there was more egalitarianism in the older compared to the younger cohort. Examining the odds-ratios we observe that the change is mainly due to the greater (relative) likelihood that the higher educated attain service class status. The underlying reason may lie in the huge expansion of (public sector) employment which coincided with the era in which the younger cohort reached maturity. In fact, when we estimate separately for sons and daughters we find that the greater degree of equality in the old cohort is strictly a female affair. The ratio for sons is 1.4 and for daughters 0.8. It was in this older cohort that we observe a massive increase in girls' higher education, and it was also this cohort of young women that benefited hugely from the expansion of welfare state jobs.

in Table 19). In all the countries except Italy (where the origin effect is almost 70 percent stronger), we find that the influence of cognitive abilities is stronger than that of origins. This is especially the case in Sweden and the U.S. And particularly noteworthy is the trend: for the oldest Swedish cohort, the cognitive effect was 41 percent stronger; for the young cohort it more than doubled (97 percent).

Summarizing the results that cumulatively emerge from our life course panorama, there are a number of trends that stand out. Starting backwards, we discovered that Sweden is not a solitary exception to the constant flux thesis. On the key dimensions, Denmark and Norway have also equalized life chances quite (and perhaps even more) effectively. But outside the Scandinavian enclave we register no major progress in an egalitarian direction.

A remarkable feature of life-chance democratization, Scandinavian-style, is its consistently asymmetric profile, promoting the life chances of those at the bottom without really touching the privileges that go with high birth. This is evident on basically every single dimension we have examined: poverty has become a marginal social ill, and the life chances of the especially vulnerable, such as children in lone-mother households, are not hugely inferior to others. We also observe a considerable degree of equalization of educational opportunities and, later in life, of social class destinies. Such pervasive equalization seems basically to be absent elsewhere within the group of advanced societies we have examined.[81]

We should in any case conclude with caution. The pattern of more equality, albeit asymmetric, that the data portray mirror more a bygone era than the present. The youngest cohorts we have examined were born in the golden age of Scandinavian equality, i.e. in the 1970s–1980s. The shift towards substantially more income dispersion is of a more recent vintage.

I had expected to find that the doubly polarizing trend that ensues from rising economic inequalities in tandem with widening gaps in family structure would translate into more unequal life chances. This appears not to have occurred. In some countries—Scandinavia *par excellence*—we see exactly the opposite. I have given much emphasis to two factors which

81 The Netherlands (not included in this study) comes closer to Scandinavian egalitarianism than to the more unequal profiles found elsewhere.

influence both family welfare and societal outcomes positively. Firstly, I very much stressed the key importance of early childhood conditions and stimuli—in particular what we might call "cognitive equalization." At the risk of exaggeration, I do believe that Scandinavia's massive investment in early child care accounts for much of its success story in terms of democratizing the distribution of skills, educational attainment and, more broadly, children's future life chances.

I have, secondly, given much weight to the transformation of women's roles. A dimension here that I have argued is fundamental is the "masculinization" of women's economic status. The typical Scandinavian woman and mother is a full-timer and this has a number of decisive second-order consequences: it accelerates the diffusion of gender egalitarianism, and it is arguably the single best guarantee against poverty in general and child poverty in particular.

In a nutshell, the increasingly egalitarian world that Scandinavian children have inhabited over the past few decades is, to a large extent, the rather unanticipated result of the early (comparatively speaking) arrival of the "new" woman concept coupled with the welfare state's commitment to high quality child care for all.

I may be exaggerating too much how unique the Nordic countries appear as far as life-course inequalities are concerned. As we have seen, Sarah McLanahan's (2004) notion of diverging destinies may apply well to ongoing trends in the U.S, but it appears—so far—to fit poorly with European reality more generally. We did not register any signs of greater polarization of children's life chances anywhere in Europe. However, neither did we find any equalization that matches Scandinavia's accomplishments. The "constant flux" appears still to be a very apt depiction of trends elsewhere in Europe.

This said, we should not forget that our data are always out of date. I have as far as possible tried to mobilize the most recent statistics—which have typically captured conditions up to around 2010 or so. But we have experienced a massive economic crisis since 2007, that still reverberates today: witness the continuation of double-digit unemployment rates in many European societies. And in the worst-hit countries we see a substantial rise in child poverty between 2005 and 2010–2012: a 12 percent rise in Italy, 24 percent in Spain, and a truly alarming 42 percent increase in Greece. The Swedish child poverty rate, notwithstanding the

absence of a deep economic recession, jumped from 4.7 percent in 2005 to 8 percent in 2012.[82] In neither Denmark nor Norway do we register any real increase in child poverty. How this may affect children's future opportunities will only become visible a decade or two from now.

The trend towards more family structural polarization that I examined in Chapter 1 and 2 has, in other words, not—or at least not yet—translated into more unequal childhood experiences (with the possible exception of the U.S.). But the trend itself does appear real.

82 The poverty definition used here is the same as earlier—less than 50 percent of adjusted median income. The data derive from LIS Key Figures, except for the 2012 Swedish figure which is from OECD's Income Distribution Database

Conclusions

The key theoretical argument I have tried to develop in this book builds on multiple equilibrium models that are widely applied within economics. Such models are inherently also sociological because the basic dynamics are driven by normative change. In my application of such models to ongoing family change, I have highlighted the centrality of women's role transformation as the main initial driver of the decay of the old male breadwinner norm of family life. As this norm was increasingly challenged and obsolete, modern societies entered a phase of normative confusion and conflicting expectations of partnerships and family formation. The "less family and more individualism" scenario that the postmodernists see as an epochal value shift is, in my theoretical framework, more likely a temporary phase.

It is in this phase that the notion of "multiple equilibria" exists. To be sure, the concept is a bit of a misnomer. If there is an absence of dominant norms which guide citizens' expectations of what is *comme-il-faut* behavior, there can be no equilibrium. In fact, economists basically use this concept to denote a situation with conflicting norms and a lack of clarity of what to expect. My major ambition with this book was to identify how the old male breadwinner family equilibrium eventually is replaced by a new gender symmetric one. And the prolonged interim phase does, in my view, bear all the markings of normative ambiguity and uncertainty. And this, in turn, helps us understand why family life is going through such travails.

A good part of this book has explored whether or not the family is making a genuine comeback. Do we see a rise in partnering and marriages? Are couples becoming more stable? And do they increasingly manage to have a number of children which corresponds to their prefer-

ence? The thrust of my theoretical argument is that such a comeback will ensue once the diffusion of a novel set of family norms has matured. And given that the key trigger behind such normative change has been the revolution of women's roles, it follows (almost logically) that any viable new family equilibrium must be premised on gender egalitarianism.

I believe the data I managed to mobilize in order to trace these dynamics do provide support for the argument. My (and, I hope the reader's) interpretation of the data suggests that—here again—the Scandinavian countries represent the international vanguard in terms of the degree to which the revolution of women's roles has progressed. Be it men, families, or social institutions, all have adapted to a degree not found elsewhere. Gender egalitarianism may not yet have attained the status of normative hegemony since, as we have seen, the less educated strata do seem to trail behind on many dimensions of gender symmetric behavior. Regardless, it is in these societies where a new gender egalitarian family equilibrium is most visible. The U.S. was, no doubt, also a pioneering country on both counts, and yet, here it appears to have stalled. Whether or not the diffusion dynamics will pick up again is impossible to tell. But the U.S. case tells us that the move towards a gender egalitarian equilibrium is far from being a deterministic certainty.

As I tried to emphasize in Chapter 2, the vanguard role that the Nordic countries now occupy in terms of gender equalization and, as a result, also of "more family," would have been difficult to predict back in the 1960s. So, what are the factors that spurred such an early and rapid move towards gender egalitarianism in these societies? There is obviously no single smoking gun. The data tell me that a trio of conditions was quite decisive. The first is the very early welfare state response to women's altered roles, in particular the rapid development of comprehensive and high-quality child care. The second is also induced by the welfare state: namely the uniquely labor-intensive nature of the Scandinavian public sector, due very much to its bias in favor of servicing families. This, in turn, established a huge (and family friendly) employment reservoir which contributed effectively to the promotion of maximum female labor force participation. And last, but not least, the shift towards the full-time employment norm among Scandinavian women and, most importantly among mothers, was a decisive catalyst behind men's sudden and rapid

conversion to more gender symmetric behavior in the domestic sphere.

Full-time employment, be it for women or men, is also the norm elsewhere—be it in the U.S., Italy, or Spain. So why have these nations progressed far less along the gender egalitarian path? The answer, I believe, lies in the absence of progress on my first and second conditions: the lack of family support from, and only a modest expansion of jobs within, the welfare state.

If these are indeed decisive preconditions for any significant progress towards a dominant, let alone hegemonic, egalitarian family equilibrium it is rather uncertain whether we shall see any significant international convergence in this direction. As noted, the momentum appears to have stalled in the U.S. On the other hand, recent reforms in Germany may very well propel it in a Nordic direction—in particular if German women (and especially mothers) move in favor of a full-time employment norm.

And returning once again to the question of equality, we have seen that the single most effective remedy against poverty is maternal employment. Its degree of universality will also influence the overall income distribution positively. Where wives' labor supply is limited, as in Italy or Spain, their contribution to family income promotes greater income disparities. If, as in contemporary Scandinavia, virtually all women work, the distance that separates families at the top and bottom of the income pyramid narrows.

This said, the key question I had hoped to be able to answer, but simply could not, is the following: will a full-fledged gender egalitarian equilibrium result in a more fair *and* egalitarian society, rising income inequalities notwithstanding? I think we must wait another decade or two before we will know.

* * *

In the meantime, I think we can rest assured that the family of the 21st century is not headed for any kind of post-modernistic inspired decay.

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The family has been a fundamental social institution throughout the history of mankind. But in recent decades it seemed to be eroding on virtually all fronts: fewer marriages and children and also far greater instability. But quite unexpectedly, the family seems now to be on the rebound. In some societies, the reversal is very clear: the number of children citizens have is approaching the number that they actually desire, the propensity to marry is rising, and partnerships are becoming more stable.

The return-to-family trend is very much driven by the well-educated, and less stable partnerships are increasingly concentrated among the less educated. There are indeed strong indications that the world of families is becoming ever more polarized.

How can we explain the (uneven) turnaround? This book presents a new theoretical framework for understanding the dynamics of contemporary family life. The key lies in how and to what extent both partnerships and society at large manage to adapt successfully to the altered economic role of women. The analyses which follow demonstrate that the more successful is the adaptation, the more we shall see a return to stronger and more stable families. And this will in turn have positive effects for children's life chances and social mobility prospects.

Gøsta Esping-Andersen is Professor of Sociology at the Universitat Pompeu Fabra, Barcelona.

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