

Parental Leave Policy's Efficacy in Attaining the Goal of Gender Equality: A Comparative Analysis of the United States and Sweden

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INTRODUCTION

Historically, only men have been regarded as citizens of the state, as the prevailing ideology of patriarchy, which reifies male dominance and female subordination, has been ingrained into society with minimal opposition due to the dissemination of values and beliefs that manifested within hierarchical white, male-centred institutions.¹ This system of thought created a distinction between public and private spheres, and thus, formed a divide between two genders – the ‘male sphere’ as “the public world of work, of politics and of culture,” and the ‘female sphere’ as “the private world of family, home, and nurturing support for the separate public activities of men.”² Although the patriarchal underpinnings of this dichotomy may still be perceived as remaining persistent in contemporary societal norms and the legal systems, the contributions of feminism and the goals it aims to achieve has played a substantial role in challenging conventional gender order and norms; for instance, men and women’s work and family roles are now often accepted as interchangeable.³ Social policies directed towards families now have been reconceptualised to challenge the traditional gendered division of labour; for instance, the progressive approach to interpret social policy “assumes the obligation of both men and women to

support themselves, as well as to jointly share in the responsibilities of parenthood.”⁴ Family, and parental leave policies in particular can now be seen as a phenomenon that encompasses the scope of both the public and private sphere.

Parental leave policies are at the centre of welfare state development and at the heart of countries’ child and family policies. These policies are widely recognized as an essential element for attaining important social and economic goals, and intertwines many different, intersecting policy areas, including child well-being, family, gender equality, employment, and demography. Leave policies, therefore, give unique insight into a country’s values, interests and priorities. My intent is not to assess the links between the length of parental leaves and the health benefits; there have already been extensive studies outlining the benefits of longer leave in association with improved health outcomes for women and children.⁵ Rather, I intend to explore the relationship of the provisions of parental leave measures in relation to women’s mobility through a comparative analysis between two countries. I will argue that the Nordic countries (notably Sweden) currently have the best model of parental leave that assures women greater power and mobility, as opposed to the lagging leave policies of the United States. Furthermore, for women to attain greater mobility and social equality, which can be mobilized

¹ Joni Lovenduski, *Feminizing Politics* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005), 27.

² Lucinda M. Finley, “Transcending Equality Theory: A Way Out of the Maternity and the Workplace Debate,” *Columbia Law Review* 86, no. 6 (1986): 1118.

³ Richard Delgado and Helen Leskovic, “Politics of Workplace Reforms: Recent Works on Parental Leave and a Father-Daughter Dialogue,” *Rutgers Law Review* 40, no. 4 (1988): 1035.

⁴ Gail Lapidus, *Women in Soviet Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 343.

⁵ Francoise Core and Vassiliki Koutsogeorgopoulous, “Parental Leave: What and Where?,” *Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development. The OECD Observer* 195 (1995): 15.

through strong parental leave measures, I will also argue that men must play a greater role in the caretaking process.

The basis of women's mobility, specifically, will be determined by the assessment of gender equality. I will first briefly describe the concept of parental leave policies and the conceptualization of this policy measure through a gender lens. I will then undergo a critical examination on certain cases around the world and assess the ability of these policies in leveraging women's agency in society. I will first take a look at the United States, and analyze their leave measures, which can be viewed as lagging far behind most of the other Western industrial states' leave measures. I will also examine Sweden, one of the leading pioneers in parental leave policies. Although Nordic countries are the closest to the best model for gender equity, there are still additional policy provisions that can be made, which I will propose to best foster gender equality – primarily, providing a general framework that places the greater importance of fathers undertaking the caretaking role through parental leave, and ways to have them further integrated into parental leave.

1.1 EXAMINING PARENTAL LEAVE POLICIES THROUGH A GENDER LENS

States and social policies have shown to be the impetus of the construction of social and gender norms. Brush argues that the governance of gender and the gender of governance points to the suggestion that “states and social policies potentially provide leverage for tipping the balance of power in ‘private’ (commercial, familial, or sexual) relationships.”⁶ The existence of power pervading in states and social policies, and apparatuses of rules and control can be utilized to reinforce and shape public policies that further mould social, economic, and political relations in society, which *can* affect men and women disproportionately. Hence, using a gender lens helps identify the social context and consequences of the topic in focus, which, in this case, is primarily on parental leave policies. Parental

⁶ Lisa D. Brush, *Gender and Governance* (New York: AltaMira Press, 2003), 129.

leave policies are the pinnacle of welfare policies, as it gives families the much needed time to adjust to the entrance of a new child. Mothers must physically recover from pregnancy, labour, and childbirth, and parents need time to adjust to the new weight of parenthood. With a gender lens however, the efficacy and outcomes of the policies come into question, and the consequences from the governance of gender – such as the social, political, economic consequences – become highlighted. Henceforth, parental leave should be reconceptualised, and the aspect that this paper aims to focus on is the possible equitable revision of gender roles.

1.2 CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

It is important to note that the varying historical roots and cultural beliefs from country to country on leave periods and parental time input for newborns and infants have implications for welfare measures. For instance, parental leave measures in Nordic countries (Denmark, Norway and Sweden) compared to the United States are not only grounded in material differences (for example, the conditions of the Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993 (FMLA) are short, unpaid, and subject to limited eligibility, while Nordic countries are longer, paid, and universal) but also based on the contrasting ideological differences (for instance, the Nordic welfare state stresses on the importance of children's well-being as the central core in its policy development, and thus, inheriting a “social/parental investment” approach, whereas the United States' welfare state is much less prominent than the Nordic model).⁷ These cross-country differences between the Nordic countries and the United States reveal the historical roots of these policies but also their cultural differences. Whereas the United States has implemented country-wide parental leave only a few decades ago, almost all of the western countries outside of the United States, specifically in Europe, already introduced maternity leave policies more

⁷ Judith Galtry and Paul Callister, “Assessing the Optimal Length of Parental Leave for Child and Parental Well-Being: How Can Research Inform Policy,” *Journal of Family Issues* 26 (2005): 234.

than a century ago as a way to ensure the protection of the health of women and children.⁸

1.3 MEN AND PARENTAL LEAVE

The process of understanding the gender equality discourse in relation to parental leave is further complicated when the father's role in parental leave is taken into account. Unpaid leave can produce large effects on men, as most families cannot afford to bear the financial loss of having a father taking the time off for caretaking. This can serve to reaffirm traditional gender roles, as women are given paid compensation and the time to focus on the ‘nurturing’ and ‘caretaking’ roles, while men who take on a large role in their child's development are expected to manage the same responsibilities without the same compensation; as a result, they would place their job in higher regard, which provides them with little incentive to fully commit to the caretaking role. Although troublesome to heterosexual couples, it is crippling to gay couples (and particularly gay men), as certain state institutions do not necessarily acknowledge these family forms in their policies.⁹ States that offer parental leave policies that advocate for both parents to spend time with their infants on the other hand offer not only the development of children's welfare, but also the advancement in gender equity goals, lessening the impact of patriarchal ideas of the roles that should be played.¹⁰

1.4 THE IMPACT OF FEMINISM

The rise of feminism and women's movements has also shaped the way parental leave policies are perceived and formed. In Sweden, linkages to the government was very limited prior to the 1960s, as the well-established representational system already created only a limited conveyor belt to state policies, such as unions to the party system, as well as

⁸ Jane Waldfogel, “Policies Toward Parental Leave and Child Care,” *The Future of Children* 11, No. 1 (2001): 102.

⁹ Margaret W. Sallee, “A Feminist Perspective on Parental Leave Policies,” *Innovative Higher Education* 32, Issue 4 (2008): 182

¹⁰ Galtry and Callister, *op. cit.*, 235.

corporatist and parliamentary channels.¹¹ In the 1960s however, the system opened up to new demands, and as a result, Swedish feminists were able to form networks, such as Group 222, creating the “wage earner” approach, which “allowed them to coordinate across party and union lines to advance their feminist-humanist vision of a world in which men and women would be free simultaneously to be wage earners and parents.”¹²

On the Canadian front, second wave feminism has made one of the largest impacts for opening up outlets for gender equality. In the 1960s, feminists were able to successfully establish organizations that pressured the federal government to recognize the principle of “equitable access.”¹³ Additionally, the women's movement not only provided an opening, but they developed a zone of “coalition politics,” which provided a contributive environment “to the formation of an alliance of women's groups, trade unions, and child care experts behind a social democratic, feminist alternative.”¹⁴ These women's movements on different ends of the globe helped spur the feminist drive towards more equitable public policies, but more importantly, helped to advance the opportunity for more input and contribution into the fundamental values of parental leave policies. The next sections will focus on the modern day system of parental leave of two countries: the United States and Sweden.

2.1 THE UNITED STATES CASE: THE POLITICS AND CULTURE THAT HAS SHAPED THEIR PARENTAL LEAVE MEASURES

Policymaking is a highly complex, intricate process, involving a mix of “personal views, popular discourse, political bargaining, and the weighing of finite resources against uncertain policy outcomes.”¹⁵ The United States is one such example, in which the FMLA was subject to major

¹¹ Rianne Mahon, “Child Care in Canada and Sweden: Policy and Politics,” *Social Politics* 4, Issue 3 (1997): 406.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Galtry and Callister, *op. cit.*, 221.

trade-offs to gain the equal support of both Democrats and moderate Republicans.¹⁶ Unfortunately the policy borne out of the FMLA is far behind the times compared to most Western industrial societies.¹⁷ Even since the passage of the FMLA, critics have notably criticized the United States for its minimal legislation on parental leave policies. Compared to the Swedish “social democratic” welfare state, the more “liberal” United States welfare state to a certain extent can show the interesting differences in culture. Sweden and many other European countries have been widely publicly funded in their leave policies, with variances of the share of costs covered by the government.¹⁸ The United States government on the other hand, view the use of child care for infants as a private decision, with the government providing little to no commitment in aiding with the costs of child care unless of mitigating circumstances.¹⁹ Although leave policies vary among states, on the federal level, only 24-weeks of *unpaid* leave is granted under the FMLA, and is eligible only for those who qualify under the specific conditions; that is, those who have worked at least 1,250 hours in the prior year, and must work in a firm of at least 50 employees.²⁰ Due to the strict eligibility criteria, many parents are not covered by the FMLA especially impacting families who are already economically and socially marginalized.

2.2 THE IMPACT OF THE UNITED STATES' PARENTAL LEAVE POLICIES ON FAMILIES

As addressed, due to the lack of compensation or pay during leave, workers who are even eligible for leave may not necessarily accept it, as given the limited finances of families with new children, taking leave without pay would be a costly option that is better to turn down. Furthermore, time away from the workforce can be attributed to “signaling”

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Waldfogel, *op. cit.*, 105.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 106.

²⁰ Galtry and Callister, *op. cit.*, 233; Waldfogel, *op. cit.*, 101.

effects, in which employees are perceived as less committed to their careers.²¹ With the culture in the United States particularly, there are higher career costs and risks in association with parental leave to care for children.²² This culture only reinforces the stigma within the psyches of the public that men must strictly remain in the public sphere and maintain their ‘breadwinning’ position, which is that of dominance and higher stature. Undertaking anything focused in the private sphere will otherwise lead to derision, as they would be in defiance of patriarchal gender roles – especially so in the United States where the gender division is upheld and the status quo is rigid and constricted.²³ This leaves women being relegated to the traditional childrearing role within the private sphere, restricting their mobility in society. To do so otherwise for the sake of attaining agency, one must put the career in the highest priority first, as unpaid leave provides little to no incentive in stepping away from competitive and tenuous labour markets.

Thus, maintaining such archaic parental leave measures on a federal level leaves little hope for greater gender equality particularly in the United States, as the public and private split and the gender divide is still present under the veil of their parental leave policies – women are expected to perform under the private sphere, as the ‘nurturer’ and ‘caretaker’ (and that is if they are willing to step away from their careers with meagre compensation and uncertain security of their jobs), while men are conformed to prioritize and focus on their duties under the public sphere, and thus being far removed from the private sphere. Because the United States is such a deeply patriarchal society, the preconceived notions of gender and the status quo shape the governance of the state. And since the patriarchal state is so rigid, the governance of gender in society reproduces the status quo, and hence, constructs the endless cycle of maintaining a culture with little latitude for women’s mobility – especially for those

²¹ Galtry and Callister, *op. cit.*, 223.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ R.W. Connell, “Gender Politics for Men,” *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy* 17, No. 1/2 (1997): 65.

who are already marginalized. The lagging policies that the United States uphold can only be seen as drastically different to the Nordic model of parental leave, which are much further advanced.

3.1 THE SWEDISH CASE: FOSTERING GENDER EQUALITY (JAMSTALLDHET) THROUGH PARENTAL LEAVE MEASURES

Now that this paper has analyzed parental leave measures in the United States, this paper aims to look at a much more progressive approach – the most renowned model being that of Sweden. Instead of conducting a comparison and contrast assessment, I will examine the top three key aspects that makes Sweden and most Nordic countries more successful in parental leave policies in comparison to most of the world, and more specifically, to the United States. But first, I will look at the amount of success Sweden has gained as the pioneers of gender equality through leave measures. Sweden has no doubt visibly done the most in implementing both mothers and fathers into economic and caretaking roles. Their goal for gender equality (*jamstalldhet*) was resolute and first clearly expressed in a 1968 report to the United Nations.²⁴ The concept of *jamstalldhet* in particular insists that men and women have “equal responsibilities in the areas of economic support of the family, housework, and child care.”²⁵ Their view of the economic interest depicts an interesting distinction with the United States’. The Swedish economy, along with the financial stability of Swedish families is grounded heavily upon the “permanent attachment of mothers to the labour force.”²⁶ Thus, gender equality becomes a central element to the concerns of the economy, as men are encouraged to be more active in the role of childrearing to give women the mobility in the labour force. The Swedish government’s basis for extending maternity leave to men in 1974 states:

“The change from maternity leave to parental leave is an important sign that the father and mother share the responsibility for the care of the child ... It is an important step in a policy which aims through different measures in different areas to further greater equality, not only formally but in reality, between men and women in the home, work life and society.”²⁷

Furthermore, out of all of the other *paid* parental leave programs that are available to fathers in the six other countries (which are mostly in the Nordic region), Sweden’s model has been observed to be the only one to directly base their foundation of their commitment to gender equality.²⁸

3.2 THE THREE CENTRAL ELEMENTS THAT THRIVE UNDER THE SWEDISH MODEL

One of the three key elements that have fostered such a successful leave policy is compensation towards parental leave, as it strengthens generosity and gender equality. Parents are entitled to paid leave for 480 days, with 390 of the days paid at 80% of previous earnings, and the remaining at a standard, flat rate.²⁹ Paid leave crosses two ends of a path, as the generosity of large sum of compensation allows lower wage parents the financial security to accept the leave available to them (in contrast to the United States), fortifying the country’s backbone in new families.³⁰ And in terms of gender equality, generous paid leave actually allows the higher wage parent the incentive to take parental leave without losing the family’s main source of income.³¹ The second key aspect is the non-transferability of parental leave between parents. Non-transferability helps control the balance of social and economic responsibilities for families; otherwise, fathers could

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ Sheila B. Kamerman, “Fatherhood and Social Policy,” in *Fatherhood and Family Policy*, eds. M. Lamb and A. Sagi (Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1983), 24.

²⁹ Galtry and Callister, *op. cit.*, 234.

³⁰ Rebecca Ray, Janet C. Gomick, and John Schmitt, “Parental Leave Policies in 21 Countries: Assessing Generosity and Gender Equality,” *Center for Economic and Policy Research* (2008): 18.

³¹ *Ibid.*

transfer their required portion of parental leave (or vice versa), thereby reducing the father's role in caretaking and also the mother's attachment to labour work.³² Hence, in Sweden, there is a portion of family leave reserved for fathers (12 weeks to be particular), which are referred to as "daddy days/months."³³ The third key aspect is one that is unconventional and unique to contemporary leave policies: the application of parental leave in combination with committing to work part-time over several years – this way, not only does it allow more schedule flexibility balanced around the needs of families, but it additionally does not entail any of the sacrifices of job mobility that the United States model commonly faces.

The influence of the Swedish model is far-reaching and not just within its neighbouring countries. In the Canadian scene, Quebec leads the rest of the provinces in its family policy, as it has adopted policies which provide public support for parents attempting to bring together work and family life. This policy can be accredited to the Nordic welfare states, as Quebec's family policy is modelled after the Nordic model, as opposed to the Canadian model, which provides considerably less support for working parents.³⁴ The Swedish model along with its neighbouring countries has made a significant impact to the other countries around the world, and a model to follow.

One must also acknowledge on the contrary however that a longer period of leave may actually in fact, make it more difficult for individuals to reengage with the labour market, and thus become detached from their employer and the possible advances of their career. Furthermore, the fact that mainly women still take parental leaves instead of men can raise concerns on the basis that long parental leaves can "impede progress toward gender equity in the labour market" and "reinforce the

³² *Ibid.*, 19.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ Kimberly Earles, "Sheila B. Kamerman and Peter Moss (eds), *The Politics of Parental Leave Policies: Children, Parenting, Gender and the Labour Market*," *International Sociology* 27 (2012): 279.

traditional gender division of labour in the home."³⁵ To address the more societal concern of gender inequality (as women still take the greater portion of parental leave), the solution I will provide aims to expand on the Swedish model but also intends to emphasize and stress the importance of the role of both parents in the childrearing process, and thus, introduce a clear "divisible" leave period that integrates the responsibility of both parents.

4.1 THE EQUALITY VERSUS DIFFERENCE PARADIGMS

The equality versus difference dichotomy has been synonymously perceived to be two opposite terms that can rarely ever be tied together. Often in gender and governance discourse, European countries hold the perception of women being different, as they are viewed as nurturers and caretakers of society. The United States on the other hand views women as equal and the same. To an extent, this also holds quite true to parental leave policies, as evident throughout this paper, Europeans value caretaking and child-development (acknowledging differences), and hence, their emphasis on longer parental leaves, whereas Americans put lesser emphasis on leave measures, and focus more on the individual's autonomy (acknowledging that women have the agency to be equal to men). As Scott defines the dichotomous pair, "if one opts for equality, one is forced to accept the notion that difference is antithetical to it. If one opts for difference, one admits that equality is unattainable."³⁶ However, I argue that in order to attain the true essence of equality one must also give attention to difference. This provision I put forth combines the consideration of difference with the focus on equality. To elaborate, parental leave must first be split into two divisions of leave policies: the distinction between childbearing leave and parental leave. Childbearing leave recognizes and acknowledges the needs of women who give birth,

³⁵ Waldfoegel, *op. cit.*, 103.

³⁶ Joan W. Scott, "Deconstructing Equality-Versus-Difference: Or, the Uses of Poststructuralist Theory for Feminism," in *Feminist Social Thought*, ed. Diana T. Meyers (New York: Routledge, 1997): 765.

and gives the opportunity of mothers to recover from the demands of pregnancy. This policy attempts to dispel the misconception that raising a newborn child is solely a mother's responsibility, as childbearing leave is solely to help assist the demands of women's pregnancy. Parental leave on the other hand, would be available to both parents, regardless of gender, to help bond with their new child. Hence, childbearing mothers are permitted to both branches of leave, as the two serve different functions. To otherwise grant all parents equal length of parental leave would be to ignore the differences and demands of pregnancy of a woman.

3.2 PARENTAL LEAVE – A STATISTICAL PORTRAIT

Certain groups of scholars believe that parental leave policies will always be disproportionately occupied by women, and, consequently, deepen the forms of gender inequality and also create new gender inequalities.³⁷ Specifically, these scholars argue that leave time reinforces gender divisions in care-giving at home, and worsen employers' incentives to discriminate against women.³⁸ In one survey, Calleman and Widerberg note that women that were interviewed prioritized parenthood over employment. Moreover, the concerns of gender division can be actualized, as women in every country take the majority of leave following childbirth.³⁹ In Sweden, where the parental leave policies are perceived as the most advanced, 98% of mothers and 18% of fathers took 60 or more days of parental leave (and 84% of mothers took 300 or more days of leave).⁴⁰ By analyzing these patterns, equalizing women's and men's employment situations perhaps can never be truly attained. However, it is the task of this paper to reject the

³⁷ Rebecca Ray, Janet C. Gomick, and John Schmitt, "Who Cares? Assessing Generosity and Gender Equality in Parental Leave Policy Designs in 21 Countries," *Journal of European Social Policy* 20 (2010): 209.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ Galtry and Callister, *op. cit.*, 232.

⁴⁰ Sweden National Social Insurance Board, "Statistics on father's use of parental leave in Sweden," 2001, www.rfv.se/english/stat/famba/pa.htm.

notion that parental leave policies deepen the gender divide. Although parental leave has been predominately taken up by women, provisions can be made to change that and dismantle the roles that are traditionally undertaken in parental leave.

3.3 SOLUTION: THE EMPHASIS ON MEN AND A CLEAR, DIVISIBLE MODEL

Haas's study shows the benefit of men being more involved with their children at an early age enhancing their involvement in their children's lives by becoming less absorbed in their occupational achievements.⁴¹ Thus, the governance of gender can break through the rigid patriarchal gender norms by promoting participation of fathers in parental leave, and thereby, encouraging men to lessen their occupational involvement in order to better handle work and family roles. When men are able to become more active in parenting, then their challenge on gender norms could pressure institutions to change, so that individuals can combine employment and parenting (which includes challenging the perceptual conflict between the roles of 'breadwinner' and child 'caretaker'). Hence, the solution and framework I would like to propose is simple, but essential – both parents share the commitment and time for parental leave policies. This is essentially adopting the Swedish model of their shared, gender-neutral parental leave; however, much more provisions are needed to highly integrate men into the scheme in order to advance the goal of gender equality by eroding patriarchal gender straightjackets. As stated, implementing a combined leave would remove the burden of responsibility on one individual. One of the most common shortcomings that countless studies show in regards to parental leave policies in European countries are the long periods of parental leave, which can be potentially detrimental to the mobility of new parents' employment and economic outcomes.⁴² Thus, in response, shared responsibility between the two parents solves the problem of the long leaves that may distance one individual from the labour

⁴¹ Haas, *op. cit.*, 422.

⁴² Galtry and Callister, *op. cit.*, 232.

force and public sphere, as commitments are split in half rather than on one member of the family.

These policies still need to be revised and better fleshed out, and thus, further critical provisions are to be laid out; my suggested framework that I put forth intends to build upon the foundations of the Swedish model. Bearing in mind the equality versus difference paradigm, a one-two month initial childbearing leave must be granted to pregnant women (which will be a part of the 16 months parental leave). After that period, the 15 months of potential leave must be divided fairly. Currently, as stated, men have only a maximum requirement of two "daddy months," which is clearly not enough to offset the childrearing responsibility weighed on to mothers. I have outlined many of the advantages of having men bear a greater responsibility in the caretaking role – from producing greater mobility for both genders to guaranteeing their financial security through compensation. Thus, in a 15-month period of parental leave (plus the 1 month minimum given in the childbearing leave phase), the leave can be divided into three portions: five months for the mother, five months for the father, and granting the flexibility of five months decided by the family (and this is all established given that they choose to extend their shared parental leave to the longest period of 16 months).

CONCLUSION

The challenge this paper have put to test early in the discussion is the question "can parental leave policies be used effectively to attain the goal of gender equality?" Evidently, certain models fail (the United States), and other models rise in success (Nordic countries), but nevertheless, parental leave policies have shown to make an impact on gender equality, and the Nordic countries specifically are well-regarded to positively influence the gender equality scale. Continuing along the lines of the Nordic countries, this paper has demonstrated the three key elements promoting gender equality that made Sweden's model successful: a gender-neutral, generous paid leave, non-transferability of the terms, and flexible scheduling through a possible part-time option. However, the basis of gender inequality still

lingers, as the role of parenthood is still dominated by women. Kamerman states that more support is needed for "fathers in their nurturing and caretaking roles and for mothers in their economic roles."⁴³ Hence, for parental leave to be more successful in eliminating gender-based role responsibilities, more fathers must undertake parental leave for longer periods of time. Sweden's model has currently been involved in tackling efforts for gender equality through their parental leave model, but further efforts need to be made in order to change the system in all western countries, as gendered perceptions are so deeply entrenched in our society, our institutions, and our beliefs.

I would like to acknowledge and stress that different societies have different cultural values, and hence are distinct. Caution must be placed in applying the practices of the general framework proposed (which is predominantly derived from the Swedish approach) to other industrial societies, as each society has its own distinct sociocultural values, and the adoption of a system may not necessarily undergo similar processes and results from country to country. For instance, my proposed model would be more difficult to implement in the United States where the power relations regarding welfare policies and gender equality remain in the hands of authorities and powerful institutions that only wish to maintain the status quo.

Furthermore, due to the limitation of space for this paper, I am unable to acknowledge and examine the many other perspectives and ideas into this discussion. For instance, challenges LGBT face in response to the norms of the family and gender order demands greater attention and insight. My proposed solution, nevertheless, covers many aspects and perspectives, and posits a parental leave model that provides the mobility of women in society and the workforce, and also the inclusion of men in the childrearing role. Undergoing this analysis through a gender lens, it can be understood that parental leave policies are indeed a social and political aspect that is worth devoting and investing time into, as there are indeed room for much needed improvements.

⁴³ Kamerman, *op. cit.*, 24.

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