

Women's and Men's Social Rights: Gendering Dimensions of Welfare States

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Gendering welfare states – bringing gender into the comparative analysis of welfare states – has moved to the top of the research agenda. While the importance of this project is increasingly recognized, opinions differ about how to gender welfare states. The most obvious method would be to apply mainstream theories and frameworks to an analysis of welfare states that explicitly focuses on women and men. An objection to this seemingly straightforward approach has been that central concepts and assumptions of mainstream research often contain a male bias. A prerequisite then is to illuminate how these concepts and assumptions are gendered by clarifying their implications for women and men and to what extent the implications differ. An additional objection is that mainstream analysis has totally omitted gender but its centrality makes it necessary to avoid procedures that merely 'add-on' gender to existing frameworks (Lewis and Ostner, 1991). This position represents a second approach which argues that new models and typologies must be devised if gender is to be incorporated into the study of welfare states and policy regimes. A third stance is that the best course is to build gender into mainstream frameworks of analysis (Orloff, 1993).

The strategy adopted here has not been to build gender into existing mainstream typologies but rather to separate it out. On the basis of the feminist critique of mainstream theories and research, I identify a number of dimensions of variation that have been either marginalized or not included in the mainstream models and typologies. As a heuristic exercise these dimensions are presented as contrasting ideal types. The dimensions of the models are the variations that I am interested in comparing cross-nationally in an empirical analysis of women's and men's social rights. I do not

are to determine the usefulness of the framework, to discover eventual deviations, and to improve the models on this basis.

The first part of this chapter discusses feminist criticisms of mainstream research. Drawing on the major points of this discussion, I present two models of social policy. The dimensions of variation of the models are then employed to analyse policies and women's and men's social rights in four countries – the UK, the US, the Netherlands and Sweden – in order to delineate similarities and differences and to determine to what extent the countries cluster into types. The final section comments on the implications of the analysis for gendering welfare state analysis and refining the original models and other typologies.

The feminist critique

Although mainstream research has produced many significant insights, it has not been very informative about the differing consequences of welfare states for women and men. I believe the reason for this is that the mainstream perspective is fundamentally incomplete, and that it must be complemented by a new set of dimensions of variation with respect to gender. Feminist scholarship can help us establish what is missing in the mainstream models.

As distinct from the mainstream debate on the determinants of welfare state development that has stressed economic processes – especially industrialization – and more recently class politics, feminists have emphasized the interrelationships of the family, the state and the market. They have concentrated on the dynamics and the shifting boundary between the private and public spheres, that is, both their interdependence and separation. Feminist research has pointed to a significant change in state–family relations – the extent to which tasks of reproduction and socialization, formerly activities of the family, have become functions of the public sector. As aptly put by Helga Hernes, the issue is the degree to which caring tasks and reproduction work, previously done in the home, have gone public (Hernes, 1984, 1987a).

Feminists have also highlighted how ideological constructs shape women's lives, and this emphasis has informed feminist accounts of the welfare state. Contrary to mainstream analysis, feminist writings on the welfare state have dealt extensively with the influence of familial ideology in structuring social policies and reproducing the social division of labour.