
24. ‘Plus ça change’? The gendered legacies of mid-twentieth century conceptualisations of the form and function of the family

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1. INTRODUCTION

In his 2004 presidential address, titled ‘Public sociology’, Michael Burawoy described the plight of the typical graduate student who wants to learn ‘more about the possibilities of social change’ as follows:

[S]he confronts a succession of required courses, each with its own abstruse texts to be mastered or abstract techniques to be acquired. After three or four years she is ready to take the qualifying or preliminary examinations in three or four areas, whereupon she embarks on her dissertation. The whole process can take anything from 5 years up. It is as if graduate school is organized to winnow away at the moral commitments that inspired the interest in sociology in the first place. (Burawoy 2005, p. 14)

When I read this, I found myself imagining what it must have been like for a young woman scholar entering the profession in the middle of the twentieth century, not just as the potential public sociologist who attracted Burawoy’s sympathy, but as a woman wanting to understand as well as change the world she inhabited. In their contribution to *The American Sociological Association Centennial History*, ‘The Presence and Absence of Gender in American Sociological Research’, Ferree et al. (2007) provided some idea of what it must have been like for the growing number of women entering American sociology departments in the 1950s and 1960s. Although the organisation of their graduate education was probably less ‘regimented’ than that of the student Burawoy (2005) imagined, the texts they encountered must have been not just abstruse, but demoralising. The conceptual frameworks that these new entrants first had to master as students and then put to use in their own research made women’s experiences invisible or difficult to comprehend. Many of the women wanting to shift the focus away from men’s concerns, or who sought to make sense of women’s experiences, would find that the prevailing conceptual frameworks and orienting assumptions were not up to the task. Moreover, students inspired by a burgeoning feminist movement in the 1960s would have struggled to describe the social problems they wanted to confront in the public sphere with the canonical knowledge and the conceptual toolbox they were expected to use.

Our young student would have soon encountered the functionalist social theories of Talcott Parsons (1951), which naturalised the relegation of women to the separate sphere of the family, where they would perform an essential expressive role. She would be taught that a rigid gendered division of labour – with men as breadwinners and the public face of the family – best suited the needs of the industrial economy, and was necessary for promoting family stability and social order (Budig 2004; Cherlin 2012). Such theories legitimised a conceptual division between the family and other social institutions: the public–private divide.

They also legitimised the implicit assumption that the (ostensibly ungendered) individuals located within those other institutions were male. Drawing on the metaphor of society as a biological organism (Levine 1995), she might learn to see different societies as being at different developmental or evolutionary stages, with the modern Western family representing the final or most advanced stage of development (Thornton 2005). As these theoretical frameworks assumed that a long-term state of equilibrium had been reached in the West, the implication was that the Western nuclear family model would inevitably emerge elsewhere as poorer countries modernised and followed the same developmental trajectory. A young sociology student eager to 'learn more about the possibilities for social change' (Burawoy 2005, p. 14) would instead be taught that any efforts to change the status quo would be wrongheaded and (to use the language of structural-functionalist writers) *dysfunctional*.

She would likely find that while applications of the sex role model that saw gender 'as a socialized role carried by individuals and primarily produced in and by families' (Ferre 2010, p. 420), and which involved treating gender as an individual-level category of analysis, were empirically convenient,¹ they were extremely limited in terms of both what they were able to show and what they were able to explain (Acker 1992). To the extent that gender was produced in the private, separate sphere of the family, it would be difficult to conceptualise or talk about gender oppression as a public social problem.² To achieve recognition that gender oppression was a social problem would, after all, require that gender first be made visible in non-family macro- and meso-social institutions, such as the economy and the firm. Within the family, the sex role model – which relied on the process of socialisation to differentiate sex from gender – would seem to suggest that 'while gender may be achieved, by about age five it was certainly fixed, unvarying and static – much like sex' (West and Zimmerman 1987, p. 126). The functionalist separate sphere framework and the sex role model would be unable to provide compelling explanations for rapid changes in gender relations in the United States, or to offer much guidance or inspiration to scholars committed to bringing about further social change in both the public and the private spheres. Armed only with the sex role model, these scholars were told to accept the reality that changing gender relations would mean having to 'wait for another generation to be socialized differently' (Deutsch 2007, p. 107). This model provided little hope that the current generation of women 'could lead radically different lives from their mothers' (2007, p. 107). The conceptual division of the family from the rest of society also ensured that gender and the family remained a specialist area that was not relevant to core concerns of sociology.³ Making the decision to study women's lives would also mean accepting a place on the margins of the discipline.

In order to succeed in graduate school, our student would first have to excel in courses taught by instructors who, like 'most sociologists at the time considered Western-style industrialisation as the high-water mark of social organization, so too did they consider the Western-style breadwinner–homemaker marriage the high-water mark of family organization' (Cherlin 2012, p. 584). Along with others, I would add to this the *middle-class, white*, Western-style breadwinner–homemaker model against which African-American families and working-class families were compared and found deficient (Mann et al. 1997). I agree with Andrew Cherlin (2012, p. 584) that '[i]t is perhaps too much to expect that a scholar steeped in functionalism and modernisation theory would have made the intellectual leap to imagining the twenty-first century family'. At the same time, I wonder what it must have been like to have been taught by someone who, like William Goode, 'clearly saw the contradictions of the breadwinner–homemaker family [but] failed to grasp their implications for social change'

(2012, p. 584). Our imaginary student would first have to succeed in a system that required her to be able to demonstrate a good understanding of conceptual frameworks that depicted families with working mothers – the kinds of families that our student may have started to aspire to herself – as dysfunctional, and the status quo as (globally) inevitable.⁴ Only then would it be possible for our student to challenge that thinking with an authoritative voice, and in a way that might stand a chance of getting past the gatekeepers of the discipline. At least initially, critical sociology would have offered our student an equally uncomfortable home:

Leftist thinking often relied on the socialist orthodoxy that working class women were best served by raising men's wages to a 'family wage' so that they could 'stay home' and 'not work' ... Gender issues were addressed by explaining class; the status of women was seen as a 'residual category' that would be resolved with the alleviation of class domination. (Ferree et al 2007, pp. 458–9)

To continue to borrow from Burawoy (2005), it is as if the entire sociological canon was organised to winnow away at the personal and political commitments that might have inspired a young scholar to study sociology in the first place. Taken together, our imaginary student – and myriad others like her – might be forgiven for deciding to look elsewhere for theoretical and political inspiration.

We owe a great debt to those early scholars who persevered, and who, as insider-outsiders, eventually obtained positions that allowed them to use their standpoint to (more or less) effectively challenge the taken-for-granted assumptions of the discipline. These women and their male allies showed why it was necessary to rework the way sociologists conceptualised social institutions and the gendered social actors that inhabit them.

While the contributions to knowledge that feminist sociologists produced are valuable in their own right, their experiences and their process of critical engagement provides a concrete illustration of the claims of feminist empiricists who advocate for 'strong objectivity' as a standard of science: the inclusion of researchers from a different social location contributed to the identification of the biases and exclusions in theory (Harding 1991; Intemann 2010). Confronted with profoundly unsatisfactory theories and concepts, feminist sociologists and gender scholars engaged in 'a multifaceted critique ... including the social theories, methodologies, and epistemological assumptions' of mainstream social science (Orloff 1993, p. 318). Ferree et al. (2007) described in some detail the structural model of gender⁵ that came out of feminists' critique and revision of sociological theory. The structural model that conceptualises 'gender in a ... multilevel and dynamic way' (Ferree 2010, p. 425), and that sees gender power exercised and institutionalised through interactions at multiple sites, requires a very different approach to studying families and other social institutions (Ferree 1990, 2010). The structural model of gender 'treats institutions such as families, states, and markets as inter-connected sites rather than separate spheres or even discrete systems' (Ferree 2010, p. 425). In stark contrast to structural-functional and modernisation theories, the structural model of gender posits that there will be variation and change, rather than convergence and stability; and thus soundly rejects ahistorical, uncontextualised accounts of social patterns and social change. Ferree et al. (2007, p. 466) argued that differences between this model and the early sex role model of gender 'are profound enough to warrant the term *paradigm change*'. Despite the decline of functionalism in sociology making way for new theoretical perspectives to gain a toehold, the long-anticipated second stage of the paradigm shift – 'the acceptance of ... transformations [in orienting assumptions and conceptual frameworks] by others in the field' (Stacey and Thorne 1985, p. 302) – did not follow. The 'feminist revolution' in sociology – first predicted in the

1970s – has yet to emerge. Describing feminist scholarship as having ‘had a dramatic impact on most substantive fields of sociology’, Burawoy (2005, p. 6) also conceded that it was still ‘not quite let into the canon’. Six years after Burawoy’s observation, Ferree (2010) used the glass half-empty/glass half-full metaphor to describe the influence of feminist scholarship on family studies in the previous decade. I am not confident that a similar assessment from the perspective of 2020 would indicate that much has changed.⁶

The limitations of early theoretical approaches and the stalled feminist revolution have had important implications for how family research has been carried out in the decades since. The legacy of structural-functionalism and modernisation theory can be detected in the persistent conceptual division of the (public) political economy from the (private) family. It can also be seen in theories that assume movement towards institutional equilibrium, with different societies expected to go through similar stages of development (Cherlin 2012; Zaidi and Morgan 2017). As feminist scholars have long acknowledged (see, for example, Budig 2004), the legacy of functionalist assumptions has clearly had an enduring influence on how changes in women’s public and private lives have been interpreted in both academic and political circles. The same theoretical legacies may have influenced how researchers have approached the study of men in families. Was it plausible to expect to see variations in men’s family behaviours; and, if so, were those variations going to be relevant or interesting? Implicitly, I think the answer to those two questions was often ‘no’. In what follows, I will examine two areas of research in which the consideration of changes in women’s lives has been a prominent motivation for the analysis. In both areas, men’s behaviour appears to have been taken for granted. I ask whether, how, and with what effect a more careful consideration of men in families entered (or might have entered) the analysis as well.

2. THE NEW FACE OF FUNCTIONALISM: SPECIALISATION AND TRADE

Although historical accounts of sociological theory often report that structural-functionalism had been put to rest by the 1970s, in the decades that followed, functionalist logics and the sex role model continued to inform the way family theories were taught (Mann et al. 1997), and the way families were studied empirically at the micro level in sociology (Smith 1993; Budig 2004) and demography (Watkins 1993; Presser 1997). When the family was conceptualised as a functional separate sphere in which gender as an individual characteristic – a sex role – was produced, family sociology was a niche area; an ‘intellectual backwater’ (Cherlin 2012) in which women, but not men, were studied as spouses and parents (see also Goldscheider and Kaufman 1996). The equation of women and the family was ‘nearly absolute’ (Ferree et al. 2007, p. 438), and family sociology was ‘wives’ family sociology’. While women were of little interest to sociologists outside of their role in the family – except as ‘deviants (‘nuts and sluts’)’ (Ferree et al. 2007, p. 439) – men were of little interest to sociologists studying the family, unless and until men failed to fulfil their instrumental role, which (in line with structural-functional models) was largely to do with economic provision. It was only when men were entirely absent from their families that their role as disciplinarians and gendered role models for their children (sons especially) was brought into focus. Functionalist conceptions of the family as a sphere of companionate and consensual relations meant that men’s violence against women in the private sphere was difficult to even conceive. Talcott Parsons,

for example, said virtually nothing about the subject (Mann et al. 1997). Ferree et al. (2007) remarked that although some research on the topic appeared in the *Journal of Marriage and Family* in the 1970s, nothing on domestic violence was published in the ‘big three journals’ of American sociology until 1984.⁷

By the 1970s, functionalist family models in sociology were thoroughly undermined by empirical evidence that their theoretical predictions about family stability (in the United States) and change (elsewhere in the world) were far off the mark (Alway 1995; Wiley 1985). By the beginning of the 1980s, Gary Becker had turned his attention to the family, an institution similarly neglected as a separate – and uninteresting – sphere in the field of economics (Benería 2016). While his book, published in 1981 and titled *A Treatise on the Family*, might be commended for making the case that the family was indeed an important site of production (think, for example, of labour supply models that unproblematically assumed that individuals divided their time between paid work and leisure) and a relevant area of economic inquiry, the New Home Economics he developed – which used neoclassical economic theory to explain and predict and prescribe family behaviours – bore a striking resemblance to functionalist theories in sociology. Where the functionalists in sociology saw social order and sought to predict it, Becker saw market equilibria and sought to explain those. Specifically, chapter 2 of *A Treatise on the Family* revived a functionalist account of the need for a gender division of labour in the family (Budig 2004; Lucas 2007). Becker’s model, however, offered an individual-level explanatory account that differed from earlier functionalist models in sociology, which saw the form and function of the modern Western family as offering the best ‘fit’ to the industrial economy. Borrowing from a simple model of international trade – familiar to any student who has taken an introductory macro-economics course – Becker argued that the ‘gains’ would be greatest when marital partners specialised in paid or unpaid work according to their comparative advantage. While the limitations of Becker’s model did not pass without comment (see, for example, Bergmann 1995 and Oppenheimer 1997), his ‘anchored narrative’ (Van de Kaa 1996) which legitimated the sexist status quo, resonated with many mainstream economists, as well as with scholars in other disciplines such as sociology and demography (Presser 1997; Watkins 1993).

Deflecting accusations of sexism, Becker (1981) argued that specialisation is the most efficient division of labour even if family members are biologically identical. Small initial differences between family members were all that were needed for there to be comparative advantage. If men and women were socialised differently during childhood, this could explain gendered patterns of comparative advantage. Becker’s model of specialisation and trade could be seamlessly integrated into literature reviews and empirical study designs that relied on functionalist understandings of the family, and a sex role understanding of gender. This ease of integration might help explain why Becker’s *A Treatise of the Family* continues to be so highly cited by family scholars in sociology. In 2013, it was 19th on Neal Caren’s list of the most highly cited works in sociology journals. Because the specialisation and trade model has been and remains prominent in sociology, a closer look at how the model has been deployed, evaluated, and tested may shed light on how sociologists think about families – and particularly about men in families.

Typically, the specialisation and trade model is presented as predicting that a rise in employment among women and mothers will undermine the benefits of co-residence and marriage. Consequently, a large number of papers have used cross-sectional and time series analyses to examine whether women’s labour market opportunities are associated with non-marriage

and divorce, and whether men's labour market success stabilises marriage (see, for example, Blau et al. 2000; Hoffman and Duncan 1995; Moffitt 2001; Van der Klaauw 1996). A positive association between women's employment and divorce was often interpreted as being consistent with a decline in the gains from specialisation. In reviews of the literature, some scholars have questioned the robustness of the statistical findings (Oppenheimer 1997). Others have suggested that this association might reflect reverse causality: rather than employment causing divorce, those women who anticipate a divorce might be more inclined to enter paid employment. A different set of critiques have been more theoretical in their focus (Bergmann 1995; Oppenheimer 1997), highlighting other potential benefits of women's employment that might be substantial enough to predominate in some contexts. For example, marriage (or co-residence) allows for the joint consumption of goods, some of which, like housing, might lead to large economic savings. To the extent that at least some consumption is joint, gains from marriage might increase with income, regardless of which partner earns it. Moreover, a strategy in which both partners engage in paid work can reduce risk. If only one partner specialises in paid work and then becomes ill, unemployed, or absent, the couple's earnings from paid work will fall to zero (Moffitt 2000).

Although the specialisation and trade model applies to both paid and unpaid work, most empirical tests and theoretical critiques of the model have focused only on the relationship between women's labour market participation and divorce (an indicator that the gains from marriage are undermined by diversification). The implicit assumption seems to be that men always specialise in paid work. The primary emphasis on variations in women's paid work means that few scholars have set out another testable hypothesis, much less examined it empirically: namely, that men's contributions to unpaid work should, in some instances, destabilise marriage by reducing gains to specialisation (Sigle-Rushton 2010). Moreover, few studies have carefully thought through and properly measured deviations from intra-household specialisation. A one-and-a-half-earner model – in which the man works full time and the woman works part time, but assumes responsibility for the home – is not, strictly speaking, a deviation from specialisation, at least according to the specialisation and trade model that Becker imported from international trade theory. If the family's need for domestic production is met efficiently enough, women could specialise in domestic work and devote any remaining work time to the labour market. Those families would still be described as specialising. Assuming this situation does not result in any status competition between a woman and her husband, it is the sort of arrangement that even Talcott Parsons might have found acceptable in those urban, low-fertility contexts in which a woman's domestic role had 'declined in importance to the point where it scarcely approaches a full-time occupation for a vigorous person' (Parsons 1942, p. 62, cited in Cherlin 2012). Similarly, if the family's need for economic resources is met so efficiently that men have surplus hours of working time, men should, according to the specialisation and trade model, devote any remaining hours to home production. A one-and-a-half-earner or a one-and-a-half homemaker model can be the most efficient allocation of both partners' time. Only when both partners diversify are the putative efficiency gains posited by the specialisation and trade model clearly attenuated. Consequently, an empirical test would ideally use information on both partners' contributions to paid and unpaid work and a modelling strategy that adequately differentiates between specialised and non-specialised gender divisions of labour. Even if we assume that most women engage in home production and most men engage in paid work, we still require information on women's employment and men's home production. However, information on men's household production has rarely

been considered in tests of this model, presumably because it is assumed that men devote little, if any, time to home production. But if that is the case, the rise in women's paid employment should not undermine the gains from marriage. As I argued a few years ago (Sigle-Rushton 2010), the real testable hypothesis of Becker's model is not whether women engage in paid work, but whether men's engagement in unpaid work destabilises marriage when women engage in paid work.

In the case of the specialisation and trade model, inattention to what men do in families has led to some potentially important theoretical blind-spots and misinterpretations. A more structural understanding of gender that focuses on gender relations instead of gender roles would underscore the importance of bringing men more squarely into the domestic frame. However, some scholars have expressed concerns that structural models of gender – especially when applied to topics such as gender divisions of paid and unpaid work – are more often used to demonstrate the intransigence of gender inequality than to identify the ways that gender inequality could be challenged (Deutsch 2007). While I am sympathetic to that concern, it is, perhaps, equally important that a structural understanding of gender underscores the importance of contextual variation (Risman 2011). Findings that support a hypothesis or offer an explanation in one setting cannot be generalised to other settings in which the institutional context (for example, levels of economic insecurity that might make relying on a single earner especially risky) is different. This insight suggests that even when patterns of gender inequality are explained, they cannot and should not be assumed to be natural, universal, or inevitable, as notions of a 'transition' in family demography too often (still) seem to imply (Zaidi and Morgan 2017). This, at least, points to the possibility of change.

3. GENDERED WELFARE REGIME STUDIES: CHALLENGING THE FAMILY AS A SEPARATE SPHERE?

In the last decades of the twentieth century, the break from structural-functionalist thinking about the family was arguably more decisive in social policy scholarship than in family sociology and demography (Watkins 1993; Greenhalgh 1996; Cherlin 2012; Zaidi and Morgan 2017). Notions of convergence were replaced by notions of path dependency that led to different sets of institutional complementarities (see, for example Orloff 1996 and Myles and Quadagno 2002). In the welfare regimes literature, for example, the working mother – when she was eventually made conceptually visible and interesting – was presented as less of a social problem than in the micro-level empirical studies of the family that were discussed in the previous section. Indeed, in the gendered welfare regime literature, the working mother became what Lisa Brush (2002) has described as the 'privileged subject' of feminist social theory. This is at least partially due to the fact that it was feminist scholars – rather than mainstream scholars – who first brought her into focus. The working mother provided an evocative illustration of the problems that emerged when the family was conceptualised as a separate sphere, and when the political economy (e.g., the state and market) was examined without reference to the family:

Working mothers bridge home and work, public and private, and thus transgress the presumptively separate spheres of modern industrial societies. Both at work and home, working mothers are a symbol of challenge and change, lionized by feminists and vilified by conservatives. Working mothers live the spillover of family life into work and politics and are most constrained by the 'time

bind' that results from escalating expectations on the job and little relief from domestic responsibilities. (Brush 2002, pp. 172–3)

Feminist scholars engaged in a multi-fronted critique of Gøsta Esping-Andersen's (1990) *Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism* by highlighting its lack of attention to institutional support for different family models, as well as its conceptual biases. For example, Jane Lewis (1992) showed that support for male breadwinning – whether it was weak or strong – cut across the three clusters of welfare regimes that Esping-Andersen identified (conservative, social democratic, and liberal). Ann Shola Orloff (1993) highlighted and sought to redress the androcentric biases in the way Esping-Andersen conceptualised the social rights of citizenship. These feminist theoretical interventions were primarily about making visible variations in women's activities, but not in men's behaviour. Although recent studies have documented variations across welfare regimes in men's contributions to core housework and child care from the 1970s onwards (see, for example, Altintas and Sullivan 2017), the idea that differences in men's time availability across welfare regimes (perhaps as a consequence of differences in working time regimes) might lead to variations in their contributions to unpaid work and child care was not an issue that focused the minds of many of the scholars who, in the early 1990s, sought to bring more of a gendered perspective to the welfare regimes literature. Women were assumed to have retained responsibility for the bulk of unpaid work in the home, even as they entered the labour market with greater or less support from the state:

Nowhere in the industrialized West can married women and mothers choose not to engage in caring and domestic labor (unless they are wealthy enough to purchase the services of others). Land and Rose (1985, p. 93) call this situation 'compulsory altruism' for women (Taylor-Gooby 1991, p. 102). The core aspects of the sexual division of labor remain: Women perform most domestic work whether or not they work for pay, while men do very little domestic work. (Orloff 1993, p. 313)

An unintended consequence of the focus on working mothers may have been that while the family was accepted as important for understanding the 'special' case of women workers, the assumption that the unqualified (male) worker could still be studied without bringing the family to the state–economy nexus (the family as a separate sphere theoretically) may have persisted. Throughout much of the 1990s, variations in men's roles in families were assumed to be minimal, and thus not worthy of greater scrutiny in the welfare regimes literature. For example, Sullivan and colleagues (2018, p. 265) have suggested that it was not until the first decade of the twenty-first century that researchers began to study men's and fathers' unpaid work empirically. The assumption that men's experiences in different welfare regimes could be examined without much reference to the institution of family was largely undisrupted, at least until the 'use it or lose it' daddy quotas were first introduced with some success in those countries classified as social democratic welfare regimes (see, for example, Hobson 2002). The level of enthusiasm for such policy innovations in the gendered welfare regime literature – innovations which on their own encouraged men to take on caring responsibilities for a very short period of time – could be read as evidence of how little could be expected of men as carers in their families, and how far removed from Fraser's (1994) *universal caregiver model* things remained, even in those welfare states in which politicians expressed support for such an arrangement (Tunberger and Sigle-Rushton 2011; Rubery 2015). The privileging of the working mother may also have contributed to an overly narrow conceptualisation of gender inequality as being only about gender divisions of paid and unpaid work (Brush 2002;

for a recent example, see Goldscheider et al. 2015) and gender power as being primarily about (economic) bargaining power in the private sphere. As in the structural-functionalist models of the mid-twentieth century, considerations of gender relations remained largely relegated to the institution of the family, and the family was seen as relevant only (or maybe especially) when the special case of women was considered (Ferree et al. 2007). Moreover, studies of why men did or did not take up their parental leave entitlements and cross-national comparisons of men's time use in families were often viewed as relevant to understanding variations in women's paid employment. For example, Sullivan et al. cited a number of cross-national comparative studies that showed that 'women do less housework and men do more housework in countries that have (a) higher levels of full-time employment among women, (b) greater provision of publicly funded child care, (c) relatively short paid maternal leave periods, and (d) more egalitarian gender attitudes' (2018, p. 265). Despite some shift of focus towards men in families, a review of research since 2010 reported that cross-national comparative studies of fathers' involvement with children are still 'rare' (Schoppe-Sullivan and Fagan 2020, p. 176).

Considering how gendered welfare regime research has developed over time – drawing attention to the importance of the family to women's lives, but not to men's – it is, perhaps, not entirely surprising that the Varieties of Capitalism (VoC) model (Hall and Soskice 2001), which emerged after a decade of engagement with and revision of Esping-Andersen's work, replicated his inattention to the family as a (complementary) social institution. As in the literature on gender and welfare regimes, scholars critical of the VoC model focused predominantly on how differences between women's labour market experiences were not well differentiated, particularly within the broad group of co-ordinated market economies (CMEs), which includes such diverse countries as Sweden, Germany, and Japan (Mandel and Shalev 2009; McCall and Orloff 2005). While the implicit assumption that variations in women's labour market patterns were not relevant, and the functionalist explanations that were then offered to explain those differences were soundly critiqued (including the taken-for-granted assumption that discrimination against women workers would be rational for firms operating in CMEs⁸ (Rubery 2009)), the exclusion of the family from the analysis was implicitly assumed to be less problematic in the case of men and fathers.

4. CONCLUDING REMARKS

This chapter took as its starting point that in the middle of the twentieth century, dominant theories in American sociology were inadequate for understanding (or even seeing) gender oppression, or for predicting the profound changes to gender relations and families that were to take place in the coming decades. The legacy of androcentric biases and problematic gendered background assumptions meant that the public–private divide has persisted. Efforts to conceptualise the causes and the consequences of women's entry into the public sphere were often conceptually inadequate and incomplete. Making women visible was extremely important, but it is the working mother who has been the most visible woman of all. This is not without consequences. In 2002, Lisa Brush suggested that in the welfare regimes literature, the privileging of the working mother has led to a narrow, employment-focused conceptualisation of gender equality: the extent to which women can behave like men in the labour market and in politics. She has argued that this perspective has caused important issues like men's violence against women – and issues of men's power and privilege more generally – to fall out of the

picture. Men's contributions to unpaid work and care have received increasing attention in recent years, but their (increased) contributions to domestic work or their take-up of parental leave tend to be viewed as having more of an impact on their partner's life than on their own. Men are still expected to be full-time workers; and this is the 'norm' against which women's (mothers') patterns are judged equal or not. Except in a small (but growing) body of literature on stay-at-home dads (Schoppe-Sullivan and Fagan 2020), it has been more or less taken for granted that most men cannot choose not to engage in paid work. This assumption, I think, may have contributed to the conceptual persistence of the public-private divide in the mainstream comparative welfare state literature. In quantitative studies of family structure and divorce, the working mother has also figured prominently. But in this literature, she has been the target of blame as much as she has been the object of study. The result has been less a thin conception of gender than the deployment of a gendered caricature (the selfish and greedy 'bad' mother). What men do or might do in families has (often implicitly) been assumed to vary too little to merit any real attention when this model has been deployed. Changing the subject in this area of research has the potential to produce better empirical evidence of family dynamics, and a more theoretically coherent account of family variation and change. But ultimately, such work will, I expect, illustrate the need for a more decisive and definitive exorcism of the ghosts of family sociology's theoretical past.

NOTES

1. Empirically convenient because 'gender' could be operationalised with a sex dummy variable.
2. Indeed, in their longitudinal content analysis of textbooks in family sociology, Mann et al. (1997) noted that theories of gender oppression were largely absent until the late 1970s.
3. It was not just gender that was compartmentalised. Frameworks and approaches that studied gender at the individual level in the family, class in the market and the economy and race as a national issue 'distorted analyses of these inequalities and institutions' (Ferree 2010, p. 425). The different levels of analysis typically associated with each of these inequalities also made it difficult in the years that followed to incorporate intersectionality into study designs in sociological research (Choo and Ferree 2010).
4. As less developed countries moved through the stages of development or adapted their institutions so that they provided the best 'fit' for industrial society, Goode and theorists who more explicitly drew on a biological metaphor (societies 'progress' through the same developmental stages) (Cherlin 2012) or an evolutionary metaphor predicted convergence to the Western nuclear family model (for an excellent, concise description, see Thornton 2001, p. 450).
5. Sometimes referred to as the gender relations model or gender as institution (Ferree et al. 2007).
6. In their contribution to the 2020 Decade in Review, Few-Demo and Allen (2020) provide examples of studies that have used gender as a structure framework (using a critical and intersectional perspective), but they do not provide an assessment of whether the number of studies using this conceptualisation of gender has become more widespread.
7. I am not aware of any studies that have surveyed the coverage of domestic violence in the top European journals over the same period.
8. The logic is that firms in CMEs tend to make high levels of firm-specific investments in their employees. Such firms see women as a risky or less profitable investment because they are more likely than men to take career breaks for childbearing.

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