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Reaction Paper

I think the question behind both of these articles is interesting - do women's movements and the role of women in particular societies influence the creation of welfare states, and if they do, does this influence actually help or hinder women? I found it really interesting that when these welfare programs were created in the US, France, and UK that it was around the 1930's - back when women really were seen as housewives. Therefore the welfare system that was set up reinforced the current norm - of having non-working wives in the homes.

In current times, we have to consider that any welfare programs or workplace policies that are set up will have consequences like this - whether reinforcing the norm or creating a shift in standard social behavior. Additionally, we also can't expect these policies to immediately create a large shift in social behavior and culture. Consider parental leave. Even though workers are guaranteed 12 weeks of maternity leave, many upper level management workers do not take it, as stated at the beginning of "Taking Time." Even though this workplace policy was in place, the corporate culture still continued this trend of having women not take maternity leave.

Even though we can't force social change with our policies, these articles reveal that it is important to look at how the structure of a welfare state will define the nuclear family. Does the welfare state incentivize one member of the family staying at home? Does it support one parent families? If a policy is chosen without considering the repercussions on the family, it may cause more harm than good. For instance, family allowances were originally handed out directly from the companies in France to the families, and were based on the number of the children in the household. This made a company more likely to hire a person who did not have several children so they could pay a lower allowance, thereby reinforcing the low birth rate in France that they were worried about. The fix was simple - having the companies pay into a central fund that was then redistributed to the workers based on family size.

One concept that I found interesting in the reading was that in France, the family allowances were given to the stay at home women by the companies, instead of the employed fathers themselves, so that the money would be spent on what it was supposed to be. I think this brings up an interesting topic that we haven't really touched on in class. While we have discussed who does the work to bring in money, and how household labor is divided, we haven't really discussed who in the family spends the money and manages the finances. I know that my parents lived off of the same bank account at the beginning of their marriage and it just wasn't working for them to budget together - so they split them. Some percentage of my father's paycheck goes into my mother's account. Then my father is in charge of all the bills (mortgage, utilities, car repair, etc), whereas my mother is in charge of groceries, children's clothing, and other household supplies. This division of money even further puts my mother in the realm of 'housewife' and my father as the provider, however, it works really well for them. What is the 'ideal' way for money and purchasing to be divided in a family? How does it change when both parents are working?

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