

MARY DALY

What Adult Worker Model? A Critical Look at Recent Social Policy Reform in Europe from a Gender and Family Perspective

Abstract

Analyses regularly feature claims that European welfare states are in the process of creating an adult worker model. The theoretical and empirical basis of this argument is examined here by looking first at the conceptual foundations of the adult worker model formulation and then at the extent to which social policy reform in western Europe fits with the argument. It is suggested that the adult worker formulation is under-specified. A framework incorporating four dimensions—the treatment of individuals vis-à-vis their family role and status for the purposes of social rights, the treatment of care, the treatment of the family as a social institution, and the extent to which gender inequality is problematized—is developed and then applied. The empirical analysis reveals a strong move towards individualization as social policy promotes and valorizes individual agency and self-sufficiency and shifts some childcare from the family. Yet evidence is also found of continued (albeit changed) familism. Rather than an unequivocal move to an individualized worker model then, a dual earner,

gender-specialized, family arrangement is being promoted. The latter is the middle way between the old dependencies and the new “independence.” This makes for complexity and even ambiguity in policy, a manifestation of which is that reform within countries involves concurrent moves in several directions.

Policy relating to family life is one of the most active domains of social policy reform in Europe. However, as family policy has come to the fore, gender has been cast in the shade. This is different from a few decades ago—from the 1970s on, gender equality, albeit conceived in different ways, was a modernizing current in social policy development in Europe and was the spur for much reform in policy approaches. Then, it was family policy that was the more passive domain. Today, social policy reform looks over (or overlooks) gender equality, being oriented to objectives around children, family functioning, and family life along with participation in the labor market and in education or training. Yet there is a gender subtext to much policy reform and to understand what is going on the analytic eye has to be focused on both family and gender considerations. This article undertakes such a joined-up analysis. A challenge that it seeks to address is to characterize the kinds of models of family life and gender relations that are being supported by policy as it undergoes reform. In particular, an attempt will be made to pin down the argument about the adult worker model.

To be sure, there are grounds to suggest that individualization is a direction of welfare state reform in Europe. Notions of self-sufficiency, autonomy, and “independence” are powerful ideas in the policy imagination and lead to the assumption that Europe is undertaking a “Scandinization” of policy. Evidence of this is read from the heavy promotion of labor market participation for women, an increasing recognition of childcare as an exigency for public policy and a push to make social security and other public provisions more similar from the perspective of women and men. More nuanced versions of this argument are to be found in claims of partial individualization (Knijn 2004; Ostner 2004). It will be suggested here that both the reforms and individualization have to be seen and understood as complex. To elaborate on this, three arguments are developed. First, individualization as implied by the adult worker model is too one-dimensional to capture what is going on; secondly, reform is not unequivocally in one direction; thirdly, the gender and family underpinnings of the reforms are complex and often contradictory.

Empirically, the piece focuses on the range of state policies being introduced on family and gender. It does not limit itself to the policy

domain-labeled “family policy,” either because many countries do not operate with such a policy categorization or because even if they do many policies that actually affect gender and family functioning (whether intended or otherwise) are not titled as such. Hence, one has to range broader and include policies that relate to family as a sociological institution and family life as a set of structures, relations, and practices. A number of policy domains are key in this respect: parental leaves, cash benefits, tax allowances (especially those relating to the care of children), and service provision for families with children. The focus of analysis is not on trajectories of individual countries but rather developments across a range of countries in western Europe.¹ The goal is to identify the lineaments of the models or sets of ideas about gender and family that are embodied in the relevant reforms. There are risks involved in this kind of overview exercise. One risk is of decontextualization—in discussing developments apart from the context in which they are located and the historical and political background from which they evolved, one runs the risk of misunderstanding and therefore of treating phenomena as similar that are in fact quite different in character. The fact that reform is both wide ranging and quite rapid also exposes one to the danger of an analysis that quickly becomes outdated. On the plus side, however, in a time of change it is very important to put down a marker about what things were like at X point in time. This is what I attempt to do here, with changes in the first decade of the new century especially in focus.

The article is structured into three main parts. A critical discussion is offered of the strengths and weaknesses of the adult worker model, juxtaposing this frame of analysis to that of familization/defamilization. A framework is then developed on the basis of insights from the two approaches. The next section applies the framework to analyze the reforms that are being implemented. In its third and final part, the article pins down some explanations for what is happening and the appropriate characterization of the family models that are being promoted.

Conceptualizing Variations in Gender and Family Models in Current Social Policy Reform Programs

It is uncontroversial to say that there is a restructuring of social policy going on in Europe. The focus on activation—enabling or compelling people to be active for the purposes of employment, self-actualization and self-sufficiency—is widely acknowledged as a leading policy idea(l) and objective. A quite similar bundle of issues is animating policy reform and these issues focus on family relations

and family functioning in quite fundamental ways. The reforms mirror closely the concerns of the EU and the OECD (Lewis 2006; Mahon 2006).

Conceived in general terms, the new social policy consensus in Europe typically legitimates state activity and social and economic reorganization along the following lines:

- Encouraging if not compelling employment, for benefit claimants, “workless households” and mothers in the home;
- Expanding services for the education and/or care of young children;
- Balancing work and family life;
- Targeting men’s behavior as fathers;
- Providing financial assistance for families with care tasks and obligations.

There are different conceptions of what is happening and how to interpret developments. Some scholars claim that the turn in policy is best understood in terms of a social investment approach. This is especially used to frame the policies of Third Way administrations (like those of Tony Blair in the UK between 1997 and 2007, the Schröder coalition governments in Germany between 1998 and 2005, and the social policies promoted by the EU under the Lisbon agenda between 2000 and 2010). Jenson (2006) and Lister (2006), among others, have read the focus on children and child-rearing as centripetal to a new welfare paradigm in Europe. The paradigmatic features of this “new” welfare architecture are oriented towards children and the future and generally view social expenditures as most justifiable when they lead to the accumulation of a range of individual and communal “capital.” An alternative framing is to be found in the literature on new social risks (Bonoli 2005; Taylor-Gooby 2004). This argues that social policy reform should be understood as a response to the new social risks that people face as a result of the economic and social changes associated with the transition to a post-industrial society. Policy can no longer afford to ignore these social risks because they have reached a new volume and scale. Key driving factors here include the movement of women into the labor market in large numbers, the growth of unemployment and in-work poverty, the aging of the population, pressures around demographic renewal, and the growth of lone parenthood. A third framework charts the changes in terms of a move to an adult worker model. It is on this that I will focus.

The adult worker model thesis holds that social policy is increasingly treating women and men as individual (actual or potential) workers. Individual agency—“choice” in everyday terms—is both

valued and assumed and labor market participation is promoted as an expression of this “choice.” This kind of thinking draws from sociological depictions of change in contemporary society (Beck 2002; Beck-Gernsheim 2002). The underlying argument is about the erosion of tradition, long-standing practices, and venerated institutions. Theorists see the structure, role, and content of family changing as part of a general movement from constraint to choice in the age of “do-it-yourself biographies,” the rise of reflexive modernization, and the growing significance of individualized identities. Individualization is cast especially in terms of independence of agency (Hobson 2004) and is closely related to commodification of personal relations. The values and processes involved are seen to be affecting both women and men who, it is claimed, are becoming increasingly selective about their family lives—delaying marriage, carefully orchestrating the conditions under which they become parents (if at all), and so forth. Beck speaks of a “*post-family*,” a new negotiated family composed of multiple, contingent relationships (2002, 203).

Lewis (2001) was one of the first to identify the emergence of individualization as a normative model in social policy, advancing the thesis that the new norm in social policy is of an adult worker model and that this involves a set of assumptions about individuals and their work and family lives. Lewis has used the gap between this policy assumption and reality to pursue a critical investigation. While Lewis does not set out explicitly the features of the adult worker model as a set of social policies, she identifies a number of empirical elements of the social policy template involved. Of significance is the encouragement of employment on the part of both parents. A second relevant direction of recent policy is “defamilization,” essentially facilitating care to take place outside of the family—Lewis and Giullari (2005) identify this as a commodification of care whereby care is increasingly paid for. A third associated trend is individualization for social security purposes, in particular the granting of more individual rights to children and the fact that among female and male adults the aspect that counts increasingly for the purposes of getting access to benefits, tax allowances, and even services is their relationship to the labor market. All of this is associated with policy reforms that disincentivize one-earner families.

While Lewis used the framework with critical distance, the adult worker model has begun to be quite widely applied, both as a conceptual framework and a characterization of real life. The question has to be posed about how well-equipped the model is for what is being asked of it. I adjudge it to be helpful in several respects. First,

it picks up on and identifies emerging trends in social policy. It especially fits with contemporary discourses of choice because it is focused on the extent to which people have options (although it is biased towards the option of employment). In addition, it has a gender subtext in that in a critical usage “adult” is meant to depict a move to gender neutrality or sameness. However, this is implicit rather than explicit and the term adult could as easily be seen to qualify the term worker rather than depicting a particular gender arrangement. This highlights a relative silence in the formulation about the division of unpaid labor and the family arrangements implied by the adult worker model. The framework, furthermore, gives little or no attention to the broader institutional and other arrangements that underpin the model—family and other institutions are treated as a backdrop to individual functioning. While the focus on individual agency is apposite, the lack of attention to more collective considerations represents a considerable weakness. There is also the fact that the framework lacks nuance—it is not clear what if any variations there are to individualization. This too is a significant weakness, especially when the adult worker model is compared with Lewis’s earlier male breadwinner typology in which she described the main variations in the most developed western European welfare states in terms of whether they adhered to a strong, moderate, or weak version of the model (Lewis 1992). In a nutshell, the adult worker characterization is under-specified in its own right and as a comparative approach.

There is work that is more collective in focus. I refer here to the scholarship on the concept of familization/defamilization, which focuses on relationships and the trade-offs involved between work and family especially for women. It also has an analytic line on whether measures prop up or undermine family as an institution and way of life. Elements of this framework have been around since the 1990s (Lister 1994; McLaughlin and Glendinning 1994). In the hands of McLaughlin and Glendinning, for example, the framework referred to the terms and conditions under which individuals engage in family life especially as these are affected by state policies. So, while family and care are brought to the centre of analysis, the focus is the (gendered) individual. Lister (1994) took a more collective orientation—for her the framework captured the extent to which people can uphold a socially acceptable standard of living independently of family. This is similar to one of Orloff’s (1992) criteria for a gender-focused analysis and assessment of welfare states—women’s capacity to form and maintain households of their own without a male head. Another conceptualization of familization/defamilization, which has evolved from work on the conservative

welfare state model (e.g., [Leitner 2003](#); [Leitner, Ostner, and Schmitt 2008](#); [Pfau-Effinger 2005](#)), is much more focused on family as a collective unit. In these countries, the family has a history as a valued political and moral entity. Familialism, an ideology that promotes family as a way of life and a force for social integration, had deep roots in the national culture and some of the state's legitimacy was derived from its role as a defender and protector of families. Against this backdrop, the patterning of internal relations within families (partnership, parenthood, and generation), the functions performed by the family as a social institution, and the degree to which the family is integrated into society at large were of great intellectual significance ([Bahle 2008](#); [Wingen 1997](#)). When it comes to the analysis of policy, the continental European work utilizes familization to refer especially to the role played by and assigned to the family in regard to care and the extent to which policy reform is delimiting families' care obligations (defamilization) or extending them (refamilization) ([Leitner 2003](#); [Ostner 2004](#)). In a nutshell, this familization/defamilization scholarship tends to capture movements around the regulation of family solidarity and the allocation of mutual obligations and care work ([Knijn and Komter 2004](#)).

As a conceptual framework, familization/defamilization has both strengths and weaknesses. It too picks up on a real trend in policy, and especially if used in its more collective sense, recognizes that the individual is not the sole interest or focus of policy. It seems to me, therefore, that familization remains an important pole against which movements in policy should be analyzed. I have more of a problem with the contrasting notion of "defamilization," which tends to reify family. For example moves towards individualization are perceived in negative terms as a "de." Furthermore, using both familization and defamilization to capture the universe of variation risks viewing family in relatively static terms—an unproblematic concept of family as the unit against which change is evaluated carries little recognition that family itself may be changing and that family and its societal functions are always constructed, always contingent ([Daly and Scheiwe 2010](#)). I thus suggest that individualization is the more appropriate opposing pole to familization for the purpose of the analysis of the gender and family emphases of contemporary social policy reform (figure 1).

There is, then, the question of which dimensions of variation capture the key movements. I regard the following four dimensions as crucial: the treatment of people as individuals or family members, the favored location of care and its construction as paid or unpaid, the treatment of family as institution and living arrangement, and the treatment of gender (in)equality and especially how and whether

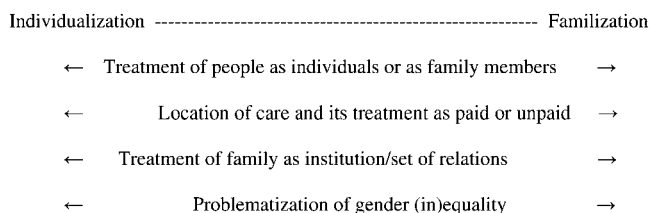


Figure 1. Conceptualizing Change in Gender and Family Models

gender inequality is problematized. The first is a long-standing dimension developed by feminist work (e.g., [Lewis 1992](#); [Sainsbury 1996](#)) and refers to the basis of entitlement and the unit used for granting access to benefits, tax allowances, and services. It illuminates the long and complicated history of women being granted some benefits by virtue of their maternal role and other derived benefits through marriage and husband. The second dimension—the treatment of care—has also come mainly from feminist work (e.g., [Daly and Lewis 2000](#); [Knijn and Kremer 1997](#); [Leira 1992](#)). This scholarship problematizes the treatment of care for children and older people especially in terms of the degree to which it is supported by the state and a source of social rights for those who need it and those who provide it or is privatized to the family or the market. I prioritize two aspects here for analytic purposes: the preferred location of care and the extent to which it is subsidized by the state or not [in recognition that policymakers are grappling with an increasing volume of care need and a decreasing supply of (free) care labor]. The third dimension—the treatment of family—is inspired by the familization/defamilization literature. The purpose here is to acknowledge and pick up on the extent to which family life, its nature and quality, and the role of family as a social institution proffer a rationale for policy reform. Finally, the degree to which gender inequality is problematized by policy has to be a dimension in its own right because we now know that reforms in the direction of individualization do not always target gender inequality but do always have gender implications ([Hobson 2004](#); [Ray, Gornick, and Schmitt 2010](#)).

To what extent is policy reform endorsing one or other (or indeed both) of these directions?

Analyzing the Emphases of Contemporary Policy

Table 1 sets out the main relevant reforms—taking account of reform of benefits, taxation, leaves, and services as they relate to

Table 1. Interpreting Significant Emphases in Contemporary Reforms as They Relate to Family and Gender

Focus	Moves towards individualization	Moves towards or continuation of familization
Treatment of people as individuals or as family members for the purposes of social rights	Granting some rights to children Reduction of lone mothers' claims to benefits Promotion of worker role for women, mothers especially Downgrading of derived benefits (pensions especially)	Support for part-time employment role for mothers
Favored location of care and degree of public compensation for it	Expansion in childcare services outside the home	Extending payments/subsidies to families around care Extension of rights around care (e.g., granting pension credits for periods spent on caring)
Treatment of family as institution/set of relations	Reduction in subsidies for one-earner families	Continuation of survivor pensions Continuation of marital or couple unit as a basis for benefits and services
Treatment of gender inequality	Daddy leave	Endorsement of maternal childcare (extension of maternity leave and directing parental leaves at mothers)

families with children—and locates them in terms of whether they primarily endorse an individualistic or a familistic model. The qualification in the last sentence defers to the fact that policy measures can tend in both directions.

We start with reforms that are taken to indicate a move towards individualization—the middle column of table 1—and then consider those that lead in the direction of familization.

In relation to the first parameter, there are three notable trends that are leading in the direction of individualization. The first is the tendency to grant children some individual rights and thereby to put distance between them and the family. The introduction of a guarantee to each child of a place in childcare in Finland, Germany, Sweden, and the UK can be taken as evidence of the emergence of a rights-based perspective on children. While there are limits on the extension of social rights to children, children are coming to be recognized as political citizens (Lister 2006). In addition, there have been strong moves to grant children rights to knowledge and information and to participation in decision-making heretofore defined as the province of adult authority (for example in cases of divorce or guardianship). While the Scandinavian countries always tended towards a view of the child as a public entity, the sharing being promoted more widely in Europe today is notable in two respects. First, it extends across a wide range of welfare states; secondly, especially in countries like the UK and Ireland where parents may have to put together a very complicated mixture of childcare providers and schedules, it embraces a range of “partners” including each of the parents, other family members, some state providers, local voluntary providers, and for-profit providers (both individuals and companies). Most commonly in Europe now, the child is a shared child rather than a public child.

A second trend focuses on lone mothers. In the push towards activation, lone mothers have been selected for measures that limit their entitlement to public support and compel them into or strongly encourage employment. While provision varied across Europe, historically lone mothers tended to be granted access to financial assistance on the basis of their maternal status so as to enable them to care for their young children on a full-time basis. They were the beneficiaries of a maternalist orientation, not only in Scandinavia but also in Ireland, The Netherlands, and UK. These countries are now typically cutting lone mothers’ eligibility for stay-at-home support. While specific measures are still on the drawing board in Ireland, in the UK from 2008 lone parents on benefits (mainly mothers) have been required to seek employment once their child reaches the age of twelve years (from 2010 on New Labour had plans to make it seven

years, had they remained in power). In The Netherlands, reforms in social assistance in 1996 required lone mothers to seek employment once their child reached the age of four, reduced from a threshold of eighteen years. This is part of a broader trend to promote a worker role and financial independence for mothers. Full-time motherhood for such women is no longer idealized by policy, except for a limited period. It has become a component of the life course rather than a life course in its own right (Pfau-Effinger 2005, 325).

A worker role for women is promoted also by a third trend—the downgrading of derived rights. Survivor pensions (most commonly widows' pensions) are, as Saraceno (2004, 73) points out, a most important bulwark of the male breadwinner model, acknowledging both a man's lasting responsibility to support his family and the marriage contract which legitimized a care-based and servicing role for women in exchange for financial support from their husbands. The qualifying condition for such benefits was being the spouse of a person who had pension entitlement (Leitner 2001, 107). Reform is proceeding to phase out such pensions or render them less generous, especially for people below retirement pension age. They are either being phased out for survivors who have no children under the age of twelve years (as in Sweden), being changed into a shortened period of income replacement (Denmark), or being subjected to income-testing (Belgium, Italy, Germany, The Netherlands). In addition, there is a general move to make the individual the unit of entitlement for the purposes of old age pensions.²

Individualization is furthered also by the moves to provide childcare services outside the family and the increasing interest on the part of European welfare states in the availability and range of childcare services. Even countries such as Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands, and the UK (under New Labour) which traditionally treated this as a “private” matter (for families themselves and/or for the market) have been undertaking reforms to improve the supply and widen the range of providers. Valorizing of childcare outside the home has at least two origins. First, it fits with a social investment approach in that it is oriented to building children's social capital (Jenson 2006; Lister 2006). This means that the new types of services that are emerging are especially oriented to the education of young children rather than (just) their care. Secondly, the provision of services has the aim of facilitating mothers' employment (Daly 2000).

Evidence of a further trend towards individualization is found in the decline in subsidies for one-income households (effectively the housewife bonus). These were long-standing features of European tax systems but are now being eliminated as Europe moves to an individualized taxation system (Dingeldey 2001). France, Germany,

and Ireland—where joint taxation still prevails as the majority practice—are the three main exceptions among the countries considered here. Separate treatment of spouses for taxation purposes is the norm in most countries in Europe. France is the only country that maintains mandatory joint taxation (OECD 2007).

A final relevant trend is the emergence in Scandinavia of policies that target men's behavior as fathers. Starting in Norway in 1993, the "daddy quota"—whereby a proportion of the parental leave is designated for the father and is lost to the family should he not take it—is proving influential across Northern Europe. The aim is to encourage fathers' involvement in the early life of their young children. While it has a number of roots, including some in father-child bonding, it also has purchase on gender equality. In particular, it draws from a problematization of the unequal distribution of family-related tasks between women and men as one of the sources of women's disadvantage, and a barrier to greater female employment. The Scandinavian countries constitute the pole of high-grade incentivizing for sharing of parental roles. In Sweden, for example, a gender equality bonus was introduced for children born after 1 July 2008—whereby mothers and fathers who take an equal number of leave days will receive the maximum bonus possible, provided the other parent is in employment when the leave is taken. Other countries are much more equivocal and as we shall see in the discussion to follow could be said to be familializing childcare by virtue of how they frame their leave policies.

This brings us to counter moves or tendencies which act to create or continue the familization of individuals' entitlements and personal functioning and to support the family as an institution and set of relations. The right-most column in table 1 sets out the most important developments. A number of these moves are prosecuted under the rubric of "balancing work and family life."

Beginning again with the treatment of individuals, and mothers in particular, moves towards individualization are tempered through the support for and promotion of part-time work. This is a significant social policy development that does not receive the attention it should. There are numerous examples of how welfare and other areas of social policy promote a part-time worker role and, while not always gender specific in language or stated intent, they most typically spell a secondary worker role for women. Many countries have granted parents the right to work part-time without losing benefits—in recent years, these include Austria, Belgium, Germany, and Portugal (Morgan 2009, 41). The promotion of a part-time worker role for women is also implicit, and sometimes explicit, in social policies. In its reform of parental leave in 2001, for example,

Germany made it possible to work 30 hours a week (up from 20) while on parental leave (Ostner 2004, 52–3). In France, the *Prestation d'Accueil du Jeune Enfant* encourages mothers on leave to re-enter work on a part-time basis (Morel 2007, 626). In their survey of work–family balance policies, Lewis et al. (2008, 277) say that they expected the reform of parental leaves to be in the direction of incentivizing an earlier return to work on the part of mothers but with the exception of Germany this has not happened. So, social policy is showing quite considerable tacit if not overt support for a part-time worker role for mothers suggesting that, far from moving to an adult worker model, some form of a one-and-a-half earner family arrangement is now favored.

Care is another significant domain of familization. Contemporary policy shows a notable propensity to assist and subsidize the family with care-related tasks and/or expenses. Europe has long made payments to families rearing children. Most commonly known as child or family benefits, these payments were in origin subventions to the family (man) to help with the costs associated with children (Gauthier 1996; Montanari 2000) and were often paid through the wage packet. As they became generalized in Europe, they retained their core purpose of assisting families financially and hence effecting some form of horizontal redistribution or “justice” between families with and without children. A quite different set of care-related subsidies and payments has taken root in Europe in the last decade or so. These are oriented to care in the sense that they seek to financially compensate for involvement in care and they are also underpinned by a value position on what constitutes appropriate care. If child benefits could be said to be about valuing the child and showing solidarity with families with children, the new payments for childcare are more instrumentally oriented towards the organization and location of childcare.

These care-related payments or benefits constitute something of a mixed bag, however, comprising, on the one hand, payments or subsidies that target particular types of care (e.g., parental care, purchased care) and, on the other hand, measures that are more oriented to financially assisting families with the costs of childcare regardless of where and by whom the child is cared for. A brief discussion of the two main types is in order, given their significance and their distinctiveness.

The first are cash benefits or financial subsidies paid to parents to assist with the costs of child-rearing and childcare. The UK under New Labour was a leader here. Child tax credits were introduced in 2003 and represent a significant general subsidy to families with children—some 90 percent of families (in and out of employment)

were eligible (Williams 2006). A more instrumentalist working tax credit was introduced in 2003 (payable to parents in employment for a minimum of 16 hours a week) and a childcare tax credit was also introduced, which could cover up to 80 percent of the costs of paid childcare. While a tax credit implies a move to support employment, the tax credits introduced in the UK under New Labour were not unequivocally in this direction. Since the credits are paid to the main carer regardless of her/his earning status, they are not promoting employment for the carer as such and one of their effects has been to transfer income from the earner to the main carer, a change that by the 2004–5 tax year was estimated to have increased mothers' incomes by about 10 percent (Campbell 2008, 462). The fact that this happened without necessitating employment on the part of mothers leads me to regard these as tending in the direction of familization of women.

Other countries are more direct about giving financial support to families to provide childcare at home, either by the parent or through the employment of a home-based childcare worker. Examples of the former include Finland and Norway (where a cash benefit for childcare is available after the period of paid parental leave has run out and provided the child does not attend state-subsidized childcare, until the child reaches the age of three) while France is an example of the latter. France has been especially active in promoting variation in how children are cared for and in recent years especially emphasizing parental "choice." In 1986 a new benefit, *Allocation de Garde d'enfant à Domicile* (AGED), was created for families who hire a private nanny (who does not need to be licensed or qualified) to care for a child in the parents' own home. This benefit covered the employer's social contributions and offered generous tax deductions (Morel 2007, 625). Another benefit, *L'aide à la Famille pour l'emploi d'une Assistante Maternelle Agréée* (AFEAMA), was introduced in 1990 to cover the cost of social contributions when parents employ a registered childminder to care for children in the home. A new streamlined benefit was introduced in 2004—the *Prestation d'Accueil du Jeune Enfant* comprises a birth allowance and a means-tested benefit paid out until the child turns three. There is also a free choice supplement which can take the form of a payment to a parent who personally cares for a child at home (until the age of three) or a benefit to help cover the cost of a private nanny or registered childminder. Spain, too, has a benefit encouraging home care—families with three or more children can reduce social security contributions by 45 percent if they hire a childminder or domestic worker.

Although they represent at base some commodification of care (Knijn and Ostner 2002; Ungerson 1997), the payments and subsidies are quite complex and have multiple aims. Sometimes they seek to directly influence where and how children are cared for—endorsing a particular type or location of care—and in other cases they function more as another layer of support to parents, especially those on lower incomes and where the second parent may not be in employment (Lister et al. 2007, 130). Caution is therefore advised in reading these provisions as uni-directional. Countries differ also because new measures always have to be set in the context in which they operate, especially in how they interact with incentives and disincentives inherent in existing provisions. Overall, though, these developments could be said to be indicative of a process which Anttonen and Sipilä (2005) describe as “childcare going public.” I view this in terms of the location of care and also increased public responsibility for childcare and a greater willingness on the part of governments to invest in the early years of childhood and to pay financial subsidies to families for childcare. The bottom line is that the family is still seen as the appropriate provider of childcare to young children, although not as the sole provider. The latter is a key difference with the past.

Another way in which care-related rights and entitlements are being endorsed is through pension credits for care provided to family members. These have existed for a considerable period of time—indeed during the 1970s and 1980s they were often introduced or expanded in the name of gender equality. If welfare states were seriously promoting individualization, they would start to abolish or cut back on these. That is not happening and so these measures continue to endorse home-based care by mothers. It is the continental European countries—Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, and Luxembourg—that are most likely to recognize care-giving for pension purposes. Most typically, the credits are for childcare, although Finland, Germany, Ireland, and the UK also grant pension recognition for periods spent caring for an elderly, ill, or incapacitated person (Leitner 2001). This is a particular type of derived right or entitlement, coming from the child to the mother or the elderly relative to the carer (Ostner 2004, 54).

While it enabled women to gain benefits and gave them certain entitlements to support, marital status as a conduit to rights, benefits, and services has elements that are counter to gender equality. In particular, the practice tends to perpetuate women’s secondary status and legitimate a second-order tier of social rights. Survivor pensions served to institutionalize women’s secondary status. They still exist in most countries, although as pointed out

above they are being curtailed, especially for survivors of working age, and also rendered increasingly subject to means-testing. While they are not the kind of derived right that they once were, their longevity attests to the continued significance of marriage as an institution of maintenance. A similar point can be made in regard to the taxation system in that many countries (Austria, Italy, The Netherlands, and UK according to [Saraceno \(2004, 75\)](#)) still maintain a tax bonus for married breadwinners where the spouse is not employed.

The decline in marriage as the institutional reference point has not necessarily led to individualization because the partnered couple has replaced the married couple as the reference unit. Several moves are leading in the direction of renewed “jointism.” This is especially the case for the many parental leaves that have been introduced. In France, the unit of entitlement for the paid parental leave benefit (APE) is the couple and also in Denmark the leave is increasingly constructed as a joint benefit for parents. In Germany too, a partnership model is envisaged in the parental leave reforms that have been put in place. The tax credits introduced in the UK under New Labour are joint in several ways. In fact, their only claim to individualization was that they are paid to one individual—either the person in paid work (in the case of working tax credit) or the main carer (in the case of the child tax credit and the childcare element of working tax credit). A growth in means-testing of benefits may also be indirectly leading to a growth of “jointism” in that such benefits almost always take the situation of both partners into account.

Finally, the absence of attention to gender equality and the construction of many of the reforms in gender-neutral terms act to endorse familization. In the earlier discussion, we picked out the Daddy quota as an example of moves towards individualization—it was classified as such because it is constructed in such a way (in terms of payment levels and duration for example) as to target the division of unpaid work between parents and to seek change in fathers’ behavior especially. This is not true for the bulk of paternity and parental leaves in place in Europe. These are typically of short duration and unpaid or paid at a low rate (especially the paternity leaves). The most recent evidence ([Ray et al. 2010](#)) shows that there is a huge contrast between the leave entitlements of mothers and fathers and that in most countries the leaves are more generous for mothers. Judged in terms of the degree to which change in fathers’ behavior is targeted as norm or practice, the measures are little more than symbolic and constitute but a low-grade incentive as many of the parental and paternal leaves are unpaid or paid at a flat rate. In the context of evaluating whether recent policy reforms tend in the

direction of endorsing traditional patterns or change, mention must also be made of the extension of maternity leave. This has happened in the UK where the New Labour government mandated a significant extension of paid maternity leave—from 26 weeks to 39 weeks in 2007 (Daly 2010). The female focus of this should be noted.

Overall, there are certainly some moves in the direction of individualization but there are also tendencies towards familization. Other scholars who have also noted this (Knijn 2004; Leitner 2003; Ostner 2004) have tended to characterize developments as partial individualization or qualified individualization (e.g., Knijn 2004). Saraceno (2004) captures a similar dynamic but uses the terms “rationing” and “inclusive” modes of both individualization and familism. What we are seeing, I suggest, is not some form of incomplete individualization—either because of a time lag or due to inconsistencies between norm and practice or among policy domains—but rather a middle way between individualization and familization. The point is that policy today at once familializes and individualizes. Parents, therefore, are getting very mixed messages and if mothers want to be in employment on anything other than a short part-time basis they have to put together rather complex care packages (Bettio and Plantenga 2004; Lewis, Campbell, and Huerta 2008). While enabling people to be out of employment might seem at odds with the activation and self-sufficiency orientation of policy reform, the fact that both are concurrent emphases of policy betokens complexity.

How to Characterize and Explain Developments?

While Jane Lewis viewed it with a critical eye, the adult worker model has started to be quite widely used as a fully-fledged model or characterization of real life. This is unwise. To the extent that it depicts an empirical trend towards individualization, the adult worker model is but a partial characterization of what is happening, as demonstrated by the evidence considered here. Certainly, there is greater recognition of female agency—women are treated as actors with some choices in a context where the “free choice” rhetoric for women between family and work extends widely. There is a sense in which “choice” for men has also become more widespread in that men are being given greater options *vis-à-vis* the family. In neither case, however, is the underlying welfare subject the unencumbered individual. While there is no doubt but that the agentic self is valorized by policy nowadays, it is not autonomous agency but a kind of “weighted” autonomy that is the ideal. The individual with family bonds and familial embeddedness is the ideal social policy subject.

The analyses offered here make clear that for contemporary welfare states in Europe, family has meaning as an institution and collective entity. The over-arching concern about work/family balance issues indicates this with its strong sense of reconciliation of two institutional domains of life. The increased support for familial-based roles and relationships is another example of states' concern to reinforce family as an institution and a factor in social integration. Viewed from the perspective of European welfare states, family life is still characterized by a web of dependencies organized in part anyway according to a gender hierarchy. A relational logic (to use [Ostner's \(2004, 50\)](#) term) still pervades many welfare state entitlements. The attention to care as either unpaid or poorly supported work is critical in respect of both gender and family. While there is a strong push to increase the availability of out-of-home childcare and children have been given certain entitlements in this regard, these are constructed so that they act as a complement to family care rather than as a substitute for it. In summary, states are organizing themselves to affect families *qua* families but the concept of family is itself also being recast in terms of roles, functions, and relations *vis-à-vis* other institutions ([Daly and Scheiwe 2010](#)).

How Are We to Explain What Is Going on?

A first step I suggest is to place welfare states in their contemporary societal context. As mentioned, the European welfare state today is functioning in a profoundly changed sociological context—it has to respond to “new” social problems that are not only related to economic issues but are linked to factors like people’s commitment to family (values) and how changing cultural norms and lifestyles affect people’s wish to pursue a family-based life ([Bahle 2008](#)). This suggests a rationale for why state policies might be concerned to re-embed individuals in family, and through this and other means to consolidate family as a source of stability and social integration. This is a plausible reading of the attempts to rebalance employment and family and to “modernize” social policies. Rather than describing countries as “ambivalent” about family therefore, one could underline the complexity for states in trying to find a balance between supporting family as a social institution and at the same time allowing individuals a degree of choice about how they manage their family lives and how they interpret family commitments.

Such a functionalist explanation is insufficient though. Ideology always counts when it comes to matters relating to gender and family. In fact, the strength of organized religion or the degree to which religious beliefs and morals have been institutionalized in party politics is one of the classic historical explanations for cross-

country variations in family policy (Bahle 2008). There are two strong philosophical currents in play at the moment and these are acting to put a brake on individualization. I refer to neo-familialism and the Third Way. As characterized by Mahon (2002), the neo-familialist approach draws on conservative views of gender relations but, recognizing the need to modernize, is prepared to grant women rights as carers and to subsidize care to a new degree although care by parents is preferred. We can see the imprint of neo-familialism in many of the measures being put in place by social policy reform. Third Way philosophy, in contrast, favors a dual-earner arrangement and seeks to generalize this. “Workless households” are seen as a problem and so tax and benefit reforms are introduced to incentivize or to compel employment for women and benefit claimants. This approach is prepared to subsidize nonparental childcare provision but has no particular commitment to equalizing the distribution of unpaid work between women and men (Daly 2004). In different ways then, both of these philosophies end up supporting a one-and-a-half earner model (Mahon 2002). I am not claiming that these exhaust the philosophies in play around gender and family in Europe. There is an egalitarian vision also, prevailing in Sweden and Denmark, which focuses on a gender perspective and on the basis of this and other conceptualizations of equality seeks to bring about a more equal distribution of both paid and unpaid work. Elements of this prevail in other parts of Europe as well, but it intersects with neo-familial and Third Way competing visions.

Finally we turn to how the emerging model should be characterized. If the adult worker model is meant to depict a movement away from both breadwinning and housewifery, it is accurate. Yet measures to encourage “greater symmetry in male and female roles and lifestyles” (Pfau-Effinger 2005, 338) do not amount to an adult worker model. It seems to me that a *dual earner, gender specialized, family model* is an appropriate characterization of the trends in policy reform that this article has identified. To get at the existing models I have suggested that four dimensions need to be investigated: whether social entitlements are granted on an individual or familial basis, the preferred location of care and whether it is considered appropriate for it to be paid or unpaid, the extent to which the family is supported as an institution, and the priority given to addressing gender inequality. This extends the existing work on modeling (Crompton 2006; Lewis 2001; Pfau-Effinger 2005) which has tended to use two main criteria of categorization: the degree of both partners’ involvement in employment and the sources or providers of care (e.g., parents, other family members, state, market, or voluntary sector services). I suggest the need to broaden the lens especially to take into account considerations around

valuing and supporting the family as societal institution. Some European countries are putting a renewed emphasis on both women and men's parental roles and, rather than moving care fully from the family, are endorsing a model of family life in which care is more widely distributed among individuals within a broader family context and also between family and other institutions. While this serves to change families, it also acts to re-embed the family as a societal institution and to link it more closely to economic and social functioning. This means that our analytic frameworks must, therefore, contain conceptions pertaining to both individuals and families.

NOTES

Mary Daly is with the School of Sociology, Social Policy and Social Work, Queen's University Belfast, University Road, Belfast, UK BT7 1NN. E-mail: m.daly@qub.ac.uk.

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1. The main countries to which the discussion refers are France, Germany, Ireland, Sweden, and the UK. Developments in Denmark, Finland, Italy, The Netherlands, and Spain are also adverted to but less systematically considered.

2. However, it should be noted that the implementation of individualization tends to be problematic because the pension norms have not been adequately adjusted to take into account the specificity of women's situation (Frericks and Maier 2008, 254).

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