

Further Thoughts

Janet C. Gornick and Marcia K. Meyers

December 31, 2007

In our 2003 book, Families That Work, we first presented our collaborative work on policies for reconciling parenthood and employment. During the course of writing our book, we understood that we were proposing an ambitious policy proposal, and that we had embedded it in a radical end vision, but we did not overtly conceptualize these components as utopian.

In extending the analyses of that earlier work for this book in the *Real Utopias Project* series, our first task was to identify what exactly defined “our” Real Utopia. As we saw it, and still see it, our Real Utopia is defined by the end vision of the dual-earner / dual-caregiver (henceforth, earner-caregiver) society. The earner-caregiver society is defined by gender symmetry in work and care; the participation of both mothers and fathers in the care of their own children; high-quality care for all children, whether by parents or well-trained and well-compensated non-parental caregivers; and the socialization of a portion of the costs of raising children through redistributive social policies. To advance these ends, we recommend a package of work-family reconciliation policies that we believe would, in the short run, enable individuals and families to care for their children and live more gender-egalitarian lives and, in the longer run, increase the value that society places on caregiving work and greatly reduce, and ultimately dissolve, the gendering of divisions of labor.

Wright, in his discussion of emancipatory social science, charges us to develop coherent, credible theories of the alternatives to existing institutions and social structures that would advance the goals of social and political justice (CITE). We take up this charge in this essay by organizing our comments to address two of the three criteria he recommends for evaluating social alternatives: the *desirability* of the ends, imagined without the constraints of feasibility, and the *viability* of the proposed social and institutional approaches to achieve these ends. The third of Wright’s three criteria, *achievability*, involves the “practical work of strategies for social change” within the contingencies of present and future conditions. For the purposes of this essay, as for most

of the essays in this volume, the question of achievability is largely bracketed to make room for the central questions posed by the RUP: what are the ideal ends and what would be the institutional designs to achieve them?

Desirability

As Wright defines it, the project of imagining a Real Utopia begins with the specification and defense of the desired outcomes. Our earner-caregiver society imagines four social outcomes: gender symmetry in market and care work; extensive parental involvement in caregiving, particularly during children's early years; high-quality, non-parental care for children provided by well-compensated care workers; and the socialization of a portion of the costs of raising children. Are these outcomes in fact desirable? The essays in this volume pose two particularly thought-provoking challenges to the desirability of the earner-caregiver society that we envision.

First, several essays in this volume argue that these outcomes may be desired by some individuals, but that there is enormous diversity in family forms, allocations of time to market and caregiving work, and beliefs about gender roles. Ann Orloff takes us to task for not sufficiently respecting the merit to be found in “the different visions of the good held by members of the polity, that is, in pluralism”; our Utopia, she adds, is not defined in terms of choice. Michael Shalev argues that, although the majority of women from all class backgrounds reject the male-breadwinner model of gender roles, there are also systematic differences by education and occupational class. In Shalev's view, our proposals are most consistent with the orientations of relatively privileged women. Rosemary Crompton also reminds us that attitudes towards gendered divisions of domestic labor vary widely within and across societies.

By specifying the earner-caregiver society as an end goal, we may be imposing “one size fits all” social arrangements that run roughshod over individual preferences and social and cultural diversity. This criticism could be leveled at each of our utopian outcomes. Some parents may not want to devote time and energy to caring for young children. Others may not want to place their children in any non-parental care arrangements. A fair number of individuals, particularly those with abundant private

resources, may object to socializing the costs of raising children. Most commonly, however, the critique that our proposals involve social engineering targets the outcome of gender symmetry in market and caregiving work.

To some extent, these criticisms overstate the extent of social engineering in our policy proposals. When we envision an earner-caregiver society it is one in which men and women share equally in market and caregiving work *on average* and children receive intensive parental care and high-quality substitute care *as appropriate*. Our Real Utopia does not require adults in all dual-parent families to allocate exactly the same time to market and care work, nor does it require all families to use the exact same combination of parental and non-parental care for their children.

That said, we readily admit that our proposed policies do require state action to redistribute resources and secure workplace rights. More subtly, some specific policy features are intended to apply what Norwegian sociologist Arnlaug Leira calls “mild structural coercion” to de-gender caregiving and encourage parental care. Most notably, non-transferable, individual leave rights are intended to create incentives for equal participation by mothers and fathers. At the same time, generous wage replacement for paid leaves enables parents to reduce paid hours of work in the first year after the birth or adoption of a child. Limiting paid leaves to six months, and subsidizing non-parental care, makes it feasible for all parents to enter or return to employment shortly after childbirth or adoption.

Can this institutional coercion be reconciled with respect for individual choice and diversity? It can if we recognize that these policies are means to an end, not an end in themselves. Our proposed work-family reconciliation policies are designed to create *options* for combining market and caregiving work and parental and non-parental care. In a world in which all adults had these options, unconstrained by gender or private resources, we would be agnostic about the actual distribution of these choices. In the real world, in which gender and parental identities are socially constructed within historical and social contexts that are inegalitarian and overwhelmingly patriarchal, we are not agnostic. While respecting diversity, we cannot and should not interpret existing distributions of family forms and gender relations as revealed preferences, that is, as the

“true” distribution of how men and women would choose to spend their time and organize the provision of care in the absence of institutional and normative constraints.

Individuals cannot make unconstrained choices until they have both realistic opportunities and social approbation for those choices. Work-family reconciliation policies can increase parents’ choices by, for example, replacing wages during parenting leaves and subsidizing non-parental care. In the absence of changes in social norms about gender, work and caregiving, however, parents’ choices will remain constrained by their own constructed identities as “male breadwinner” or “female caregiver.” Through the gentle coercion of incentives – for example, for more paternal leave-taking and for maternal employment – social policies can also contribute to changes in social and gender norms that allow meaningful choices. As Erik Wright and Harry Brighthouse argue, policies operate not only by changing opportunities and incentives but also by reinforcing or challenging social norms that inform both public behaviors, such as employment decisions, and private identity formation.

A second, and very important, critique of the desirability of our Real Utopia is that the outcomes are limited to de-gendering child care and improving the quality of care for children. As several critics point out, social and gender inequalities result from what Nancy Folbre terms “the general social organization of care,” not just to the care of children. Heidi Hartmann and Vicky Lovell, likewise, argue that supports for care should be extended well beyond child care; they argue that both moral and practical concerns require us to broaden our policy package. Joanna Brenner also urges us to go further “toward socializing and democratizing the organization of care over the life cycle.” Myra Marx Ferree places this argument squarely in the American context: “Rather than expanding maternalism to encompass men in families, as the more progressive elements of the European systems have done, American feminists should expand the concept of ‘social security’ to be more truly inclusive across gender and generational lines.”

In our original formulation of the earner-caregiver society we argued that the provision of care for children in families headed by two heterosexual parents provided the most pertinent “test case” for gender-egalitarian policy design. The birth or adoption of children is particularly disruptive for women’s employment and an especially crucial point for the negotiation of gender roles in heterosexual couples. We were also persuaded

that the “public goods” dimension of child rearing, and the lifelong consequences of poor quality early care, elevated the importance of child care issues.

The essays and discussions provoked by the Real Utopias Project have challenged our thinking on this formulation. As Folbre argues, arrangements to care for other dependents is often intertwined with care for children and poses many of the same dilemmas, including the limited substitutability of paid and unpaid carework, the economic vulnerabilities for both paid and unpaid caregivers that result from prisoner-of-love dilemmas, and the regressive distribution of private support for caregiving. Efforts to “de-gender” child caregiving that ignore other forms of care are unlikely to bring about the social transformations that we envision.

We have been persuaded that the desired ends of the earner-caregiver society would include de-gendered caregiving for all dependents, realistic opportunities for men and women to be involved in all forms of caregiving for loved ones, high-quality and well-compensated substitute care arrangements for the elderly and disabled as well as for children, and greater socialization of the costs of these care arrangements.

Broadening the focus of our analysis raises the question of normative justification. Earlier, we argued that de-gendering and socializing the costs of raising children is justified on both efficiency and equity grounds by the shared social benefits of “well raised” children. This instrumental justification could be more difficult to apply to the case of other dependents, such as the disabled and elderly, who are not expected to make future social and economic contributions. But, as Folbre argues in this volume, the public goods framework may, in fact, be extended to “well cared for” dependents more broadly: “Children represent a specific kind of public good, but care in general also has public good aspects and spillover effects that make it vulnerable to undervaluation by the market.”

In the end, the strongest justification may be that of social rights: everyone should have the right to care for loved ones and the right to be cared for. In a Real Utopia, these rights would be protected for all and their costs, in terms of time and money, would be shared equally between men and women and between the family and society.

Viability

Wright argues that the viability of all proposals for Utopian institutional development or reform must be assessed because “not all desirable alternatives are viable.” He suggests several criteria for assessing the viability of proposed reforms. First, we should be concerned with “whether, if implemented, they would actually generate in a sustainable, robust manner, the emancipatory consequences that motivated the proposal.” Second, we should question whether there are “contextual conditions-of-possibility” that are needed for the proposed policies to achieve the desired outcomes. Finally, we should consider whether there are potential “perverse” unintended consequences that could actually subvert or prevent the achievement of these outcomes.

Several of the essays in this volume raise important questions about the viability of our proposals for gender-equalizing work-family reconciliation policies. We consider three particularly compelling questions below: whether the proposed policies could substantially affect the gendered distribution of work, whether some policies might actually exacerbate gender divides, and finally, whether these policies are only viable in the rich countries and may, in fact, contribute to the exploitation of the developing world.

First, several authors argue that the policies we propose are simply too weak to advance gender equality because men and women will be unwilling to relinquish the immediate rewards of existing gendered divisions of labor. Ann Orloff is especially pointed in her critique of our analysis of the persistence of gender roles. While she recognizes that both men and women are invested in existing gender relations, she emphasizes men’s recalcitrance, in particular, because they stand to lose the most from a realignment of gender roles: “To my mind, [Gornick and Meyers] take too lightly the deep investments people have in gender... Of particular concern for the prospects of a gender-symmetric utopia that will depend on men’s recruitment to caregiving, men’s attachment to the powers and privileges of masculinity seems to be underplayed in Gornick and Meyers’ account. I am thinking here of men’s work to keep in place gendered divisions of labor by avoiding dirty work at home and in the workplace or by excluding women from favored positions in the paid labor force through sexual and other forms of harassment, or discrimination in hiring, pay, or occupational access.”

Cameron Macdonald makes a somewhat parallel argument about the powerful hold that mothering has on many women, perhaps even more so in the U.S. than elsewhere: “‘The ideology of intensive mothering’ is unquestionably a powerful aspect of the contemporary American cultural repertoire... [Both employed and stay-at home mothers’] strong adherence to the ideology of intensive mothering runs contrary to their self-interest, and [raises] the question of whether institutional change would be enough to challenge the fear of being inadequate as a mother.”

We agree that both men and women are invested in existing gender roles. Men’s power is bound up with their disproportionate engagement in employment and commerce and they reap benefits from their higher status jobs and their greater levels of income and wealth (relative to women’s) and from the various forms of power and control that those resources confer. Many women find deep satisfaction in caregiving and their greater investment in care work (relative to men’s) provides other forms of status, legitimacy and power within the family and society.

There is no question that preferences for employment and caregiving vary across individuals and, perhaps, for a single individual over time. As we argue above, however, it is impossible to know the extent to which the gendered distribution of these preferences is socially constructed by material conditions as well as social norms. If we believe that gendered identities are socially constructed we must also acknowledge the possibility that they would be different in the context of different conditions and norms.

We are not policy determinists; we know that policies operate alongside many political, social, economic, and psychological factors that shape preferences and inform behaviors. But to the extent that gender identities, expectations and preferences are socially constructed, social policy is one of the factors that influence them. Orloff and others in this volume remind us, however, that this understanding of the socially constructed nature of gender, and the capacity of social institutions to change existing norms, may fail to address the strength of existing power and privilege. Power differentials between men and women remain large and history suggests that existing systems of power and privilege are not easily disrupted. The “mild structural coercion” of policy reform may not be enough to alter the gendered divisions of labor without more direct and forceful action by the state and polity.

On the other hand, we are perhaps more optimistic than Orloff about men's commitment to current arrangements. Our optimism is shared, to some extent, by Scott Coltrane. In this volume, Coltrane reviews a substantial literature on men's involvement with caregiving. Coltrane is not sanguine about men's willingness to alter domestic divisions of labor. He notes that many men resist change because "it is in men's interest to do so.., as [current divisions of labor reinforce] a separation of spheres that underpins masculine ideals and perpetuates a gender order privileging men over women." However, Coltrane also finds evidence that new "fatherhood ideals" are emerging in many of the rich countries; substantial numbers of men show signs of willingness to invest more at home. Synthesizing recent research, Coltrane reports that "as men's and women's jobs and work histories begin to look more alike, they are also likely to share similar family concerns." He notes that, in the U.S., over 60 percent of both men and women report that they would like to work fewer hours on the job, and 60 percent of men and 55 percent of women say that they experience conflict in balancing work, personal, and family life. The majority of both men and women also report that they feel torn between the demands of their jobs and wanting to spend more time with their families. Coltrane concludes that there is good reason to believe that employer and state policies are important influences on men's engagement in caring and other domestic work. In the end, he says, "[p]olicies designed to help families should assume that both men and women want to contribute to their families through both breadwinning and the provision of everyday care and unpaid support work."

The formidable challenge of changing gender roles is closely related to a second particularly compelling question raised by several essays in this volume. A number of authors argue that, in the absence of a major realignment of gender roles, policies that enable parents to take breaks from paid labor or to reduce working time could actually cause more gender inequality by exacerbating gendered divisions of labor and by slowing women's labor market advancements.

Barbara Bergmann argues that our policy proposal is, in a word, dangerous. She believes that women will always take-up options such as paid family leave and part-time work at higher rates than men. As a result, enacting or strengthening policies that support these options "would have adverse effects on gender equality in the workplace as well as

the home.” The only way to ensure equal labor market is to restrict these options – for intermittent and reduced-hour work – for both women and men.

Michael Shalev raises a related set of concerns. Shalev draws on his own comparison of labor market outcomes in the U.S. compared to Sweden, as well as a growing cross-national empirical literature on this question, and concludes that highly-educated, highly-skilled women in settings with generous work-family policies may face a lower and more impenetrable glass ceiling than will women where policy supports are more limited. Where policy offerings are generous and take-up is disproportionately female, employers are motivated to statistically discriminate against women. That discrimination will be most intense with respect to women in (or seeking) upper-level occupations, because their temporary labor market absences are understood to be especially costly. Shalev cites a recent finding that women's probability, relative to men's, of having a managerial occupation is more than 80 percent greater in the US than in Sweden.

Kimberly Morgan adds to this chorus of worries the possibility that countries could start the process of implementing gender egalitarian policy packages but then get stuck with a partial package that could cause harm. “Rather than arriving at a set of gender egalitarian arrangements for work and care,” she notes, “countries may stall halfway there in a modified male breadwinner model.” A country might, for example, adopt generous paid family leave but lose the gender egalitarian requirements and incentives – a result, she argues, that would undermine gender equality. Finally, Kathrin Zippel warns that – without effective anti-discrimination and affirmative action policies – the policy package that we propose could create more damage than good. She argues specifically that workplace inequalities will foreclose the intended positive effects of work-family policy: “Given the persistence of gender inequalities at work, optional leave and reduction of working hours are likely to be taken by mothers, and reinforce rather than ameliorate inequality in workplace and home.”

We consider the possibility that, in the absence of major transformations in gender roles, our proposals for paid leave and reduced-hour work would do more harm than good to be one of the most serious and worrisome critiques in this volume. These

critiques have pushed us to think more analytically about the potential hazards and to disaggregate the underlying causal arguments more carefully.

While we are sympathetic with Bergmann's overall logic that higher take-up of these benefits by women is problematic, we are at least somewhat optimistic that this risk can be minimized through policy design. As she hints in the title of her essay -- "Long leaves, Child Well-being, and Gender Equality" -- Bergmann's main concern is that long leaves will encourage women to leave employment for long periods of time, with consequent erosion of human capital and increased risk of employer discrimination. In light of these concerns, and empirical evidence that suggests that long leaves are associated with greater labor market inequalities, we specifically limit the duration of paid leave to six months following the birth or adoption of a child. Short, highly-paid leaves have been shown to increase women's employment rates, to increase their likelihood of returning to work within a year after birth or adoption, to raise the chances that women return to the same employer, and to diminish the wage penalties associated with childbearing. All of these ultimately narrow, not widen, gender gaps in employment.

We find Shalev's argument about statistical discrimination (presumably associated even with short leaves), and its impact on the glass ceiling for women, to be more challenging. As with Bergmann's argument, the concern that high-achieving women will hit the glass ceiling assumes that women will be much more likely than men to take up paid leaves and opportunities for reduced-hour employment. Shalev, and others contributing to this growing literature, suggest that, if gendered differentials in take-up persist, employers will impose limits on women's advancement because they assume that women will be more costly employees than men.

There is no question that this is a worrisome scenario. As we see it, this underscores the enormous importance of policy design. If "god is in the details" in any policy arena, it is surely true in the case of work-family policies. Policies that support parents' caregiving time are not necessarily gender-egalitarian but the converse is true as well -- they can be designed to maximize incentives for gender egalitarian take-up and outcomes. If men's take-up increases substantially the glass ceiling may remain in place for parents but it will become de-gendered. (We return to this below, when we reflect on anti-discrimination protections for caregivers.) Arguments about incentives for statistical

discrimination also remind us that we need to constantly evaluate our policy designs to ensure that they subject employers to as little hardship as possible; strains and costs for employers can be alleviated through required notification periods, cost-sharing mechanisms, and the absence of experience rating.

We are also particularly challenged by the political hazards raised by Morgan. The passage and enactment of “half of a policy loaf” could in fact be worse than none. Introducing generous leaves for women without options and incentives for men, for example, or without ample quality childcare, could have the perverse effect of creating incentives for women to withdraw from the labor market. Raising the availability of part-time work without raising its quality could have the perverse effect of further feminizing part-time work and entrenching the existing part-time compensation penalty. In advancing reform proposals it is crucial to think not only about the design of each but about potential interactions among policies that have the capacity to further or to impede progress toward an earner-caregiver society.

The possible synergy among policies underscores the importance of Zippel’s emphasis on anti-discrimination and affirmative action policies. We agree fully that such policies are part of a comprehensive approach to gender-equalizing work-family policies. To the extent that they protect women’s right to participate on an equal footing with men in the workplace these laws promote gender equality and reduce the risk that work-family reconciliation policies will have perverse, unintended effects. That said, anti-discrimination laws based on gender may not be enough to reduce the risks associated with supporting parents in their caregiving activities. Our reading of the literature leads us to conclude that it is no longer gender *per se*, but gendered divisions of caregiving labor, especially mothers’ withdrawals and reductions in employment, that are the primary cause of continued male-female disparities in wages and occupational attainment.

Zippel’s argument prompted us to think again about how anti-discrimination policies should be constructed and targeted. We have come to agree with the many social activists in the U.S. and Europe now calling for anti-discrimination protections aimed at caregivers as an important complement to protections targeted on women. Employment penalties associated with caregiving harm men’s employment prospects and women’s

even more so. Even if discrimination against caregivers *per se* were successfully eliminated, it may still be the case that caregivers will be paid less and granted fewer advancement opportunities, relative to non-caregivers. If caregivers are, in fact, less productive in their paid work, all else equal, there may be pay/employment penalties. The question is then how large a productivity-related penalty is fair. In many of the rich countries, this penalty may simply be too high at present. Equity and reproductive concerns might suggest that states offer some compensatory support.

A third particularly compelling question about the viability of our proposals is raised by Shireen Hassim in her essay, “Whose Utopia?” She argues that given the existing distribution of resources and state capacities, our proposed work-family reconciliation policies are simply not viable in much of the world without radical changes in economic and institutional arrangements. Even more problematically, the implementation of these policies in rich countries may depend on continued exploitation of the developing world.

In making her case that our proposed work-family reconciliation policies are not viable in much of the world, particularly the global south, Hassim describes formidable barriers to the development of gender-equalizing, redistributive work-family reconciliation policies. Formal economies are dwarfed by informal economies in much of the developing world and work-based benefits are rare and inequitably distributed to privileged elites. Possibilities for de-gendering market and caregiving work are hampered by both traditional gender expectations and by the exclusion of women from the formal economy. Weak and unstable government institutions greatly limit the capacity of the state to redistribute resources, regulate private employers or extend social protections. The globalization of capital, production and labor markets have exacerbated the problems of the developing world, as have demands by supranational and international financial institutions that poor countries forego the development of state-centered social protections in order to grow their labor and export markets.

We agree with Hassim that some level of economic and state development is a critical precondition for the implementation of the work-family reconciliation policies that we propose. This would preclude the development of gender-equalizing work-family policies only if we believe that these preconditions will never be achieved. Given the

necessary economic and institutional capacity, there is no reason to conclude that currently developing countries would not have the political will to pursue these policy developments. In fact, many developing countries do provide some protections for working parents, if only in the formal economy. Jody Heymann and her colleagues have studied work-family policies in 173 countries and find evidence of relevant policy developments globally.¹ Heymann's team reports, for example, that 169 countries offer some guaranteed leave with income to women in connection with childbirth, 66 countries ensure that fathers either receive paid paternity leave or have a right to paid parental leave, at least 107 countries protect working women's right to breastfeed, 137 countries mandate paid annual leave, at least 134 countries have laws that fix the maximum length of the work week, and at least 145 countries provide paid sick days for short- or long-term illnesses.

As Hassim points out, these protections are limited when only a small portion of the workforce participates in the formal economy. Many are also maternalist and reinforce gender inequalities by increasing the costs of employing women relative to men. Although they are far from complete, the adoption of policies protecting the health and time of working parents in so many countries, rich and poor, suggests that there is no absolute north-south divide in the political will to develop work-family policies.

A potentially more damning critique of our blueprint is that it actually depends on the continued impoverishment and exploitation of poor and developing countries. In the broadest terms, this critique suggests that the wealth of the rich countries would not be possible without continued economic imperialism. More narrowly, the argument advanced by Hassim, and others, is that of a "global care chain" in which the equalization of labor market opportunities for women in rich countries depends on the exploitation of low-wage, often immigrant, female workers who forego their own caregiving needs to work as caregivers for affluent families in rich countries.

The existence of global care chains that exploit female workers from poor countries is well documented. We would argue, however, that the policies that we propose challenge rather than reinforce these arrangements. By valuing caregiving labor,

¹ See Jody Heymann et al. 2007. *The Work, Family, and Equity Index: How Does the United States Measure Up?* McGill University: The Institute for Health and Social Policy.

increasing public financing, and regulating the quality of non-parental care, our proposals will increase the skills needed and the wages provided to non-parental caregivers. In the rich countries, these changes hold promise for reducing severe gender imbalances in the paid caregiving workforce, encouraging workers to shift from the informal to the formal economy, and improve their conditions of work. Higher wages for caregivers in the rich countries will also reduce the demand for low-skilled, low-waged labor from developing countries. Whether these policies reduce total demand for non-parental caregiving labor by immigrant and nonimmigrant women is an empirical question. Giving parents the right and opportunity to care for their own children is likely to reduce demand for non-parental care for infants, but this may be offset by an expansion of subsidized care for preschoolers and before- and after-school care for older children. Whether or not these policies reduce the importation of caregivers, they promise to reduce the exploitation of these workers as cheap alternatives to parental labor.

Higher wages for caregivers in the rich countries may weaken the links in the global care chain. They will not directly improve conditions for women in poor countries (including those who may be effectively expelled from carework in the rich countries). For parents and children in the developing world to benefit from gender-equalizing reconciliation policies, the rich countries of the world will need to invest more directly and much more generously in the development of the state, market and civil society institutions that are a prerequisite to the effective adoption of these policies in developing countries.

Hassim describes one intriguing mechanism for redistribution, first proposed by Ruth Pearson: a “Maria Tax”. A Maria Tax could be imposed on the value of exports that would reflect the proportion of women in the export labor force. Such a tax could be levied by governments (on, for example, producers or importers), and re-invested in initiatives to achieve gender equity for women workers. The raised revenues could be spent on child-care facilities, health facilities and insurance, and educational and social welfare programs.

Less directly, it is reasonable to believe that the adoption of more egalitarian policies in the global north is consistent with and may even encourage investments in the developing world. To the extent that we can promote the adoption of egalitarian, non-

exploitative work-family policies in the rich countries, we can hope to de-legitimize continued economic imperialism, slow the exportation of neo-liberal social reforms to the global south, and reduce international pressures on poor countries to delay investments in their social and educational infrastructure. The more egalitarian Nordic countries contribute more to international aid, as a share of their GDP, than do the less egalitarian rich countries. Rather than intensifying global inequalities, more egalitarian and gender-equalizing organization of caregiving within the rich countries is compatible with, and may advance, a commitment to greater global redistribution and equality.

Conclusion

As we explain in our core essay, our work on the earner-caregiver society was motivated in part by our observation that scholars and policy-makers have been engaged in least three overlapping but nonintersecting conversations about work and family life. We hoped to create an intersection by linking concerns about child wellbeing in high employment societies to emerging problem of work-family balance and longstanding feminist demands for gender equality in the home and workplace. We had a critical breakthrough in our thinking when we recognized that the apparently competing interests of women, men and children reflected the failure of social, market and policy institutions to adequately address the care of children in high-employment societies. The insight that the solution to the triad of problems had to involve men as well as women, and the state as well as the family, informed our subsequent analyses and recommendations for policies that, we believe, promise to simultaneously reduce gender inequalities and improve care for children.

In this essay we have considered a few of the penetrating critiques and challenges to these proposals that were raised by our colleagues during the RUP process. Although we remain convinced that the earner-caregiver society offers both a worthwhile long-term ideal, and a useful framework for policy development in the short term, grappling with these issues has been a daunting task.

One of the issues raised by a number of the participants also gives us renewed optimism about the desirability, viability and the ultimate achievability of a more gender-

egalitarian, caring society. We are persuaded that expanding the focus of policy development to include care for all family and loved ones – including the disabled, the ill and the elderly, along with children – is normatively and strategically sound. It forces us to rethink the justification for these policies and to deemphasize instrumental concerns in favor of the more basic claim that in a just society all individuals should have the right to care and to be cared for. By expanding the focus of concern to include other dependents, it knits together even more clearly the interdependences within families, and among families, employers and the state. Recognizing the commonalties in the interests of adults caring for the youngest and the oldest, often at the same time, holds promise for building broader and more effective coalitions in support of gender-equalizing reconciliation policies. As Folbre astutely observes, there is a potential political alliance between paid and unpaid caregivers. Acknowledging the common interests and continuing exploitation of caregivers – in the home and in the market, in the rich countries of the north and in the developing countries of the south – holds even greater promise for advancing political demands that call for recognizing, honoring and supporting not only earning but caregiving as well.