

Fertility and Work/Family Policies,
Australia and the U.S.

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ABSTRACT

Fertility rates are lower in Australia than in the United States. This paper explores the role of work/family policies as an explanation. For a broad range of public and private sector policies, conditions are similar across the two nations. However, Australia provides far greater supports for employees wishing to work reduced hours, including pay equity for part-time employees, national health insurance, and portable pensions. Consistent with this argument, a far higher proportion of Australian relative to U.S. women work reduced hours.

Improvements in reduced hours options should enhance the ability of individuals to make simultaneous commitments to employment and family, and hence increase fertility. We therefore face a puzzle: why is fertility *lower* in the nation with policies more favorable to reduced hours employment?

We suggest this result is due to the influence of norms around motherhood and ideal workers in Australia. These norms lead individuals to view employment and parenting as a trade-off: either be a good (male) employee with limited parenting responsibilities or be a good (female) parent with limited employment commitments. Policies supporting reduced hours employment may have fed into these norms, creating what Moen (2000) labels “neotraditional families,” where men earn most of the family income and women perform most parenting, with regular but limited crossover between employment and parenting. In the U.S., stronger norms around gender equity in the workplace, particularly due to the efforts of second wave feminists, may have slowed the emergence of the neotraditional family and enhanced the perceived ability of women to simultaneously parent and hold full-time employment.

The results suggest that the introduction of reduced hours policies *per se* may adversely affect gender equity. Policies to increase reduced hours employment among men and particularly fathers hold greater promise for improving gender equity and potentially for improving economic performance.

Introduction

If a society makes it easier for adults to balance commitments to work and family, will fertility rates rise as a result? Peter MacDonald (2000) has recently asked and answered this question using European data, and concludes that societies providing greater supports for families exhibit higher fertility rates. Following the slightly more well-worn path blazed by other social scientists, we fall firmly on the side of the different answer, ‘it depends.’ We here analyze the Australian and U.S. settings to get to this answer.

As background, we begin with a discussion of fertility behavior across the two nations, and ask whether there is a fertility problem. The following section summarizes work/family policies in the two countries, and we ask whether work/family policies should be more favorable to high fertility in Australia or in the U.S. Finding that the Australian context is more favorable, we face a puzzle: why are fertility rates lower in the society where it seems easier to balance work and family commitments? Our answer hinges on the continued prevalence of norms around motherhood and ideal workers, and we conclude that policies emerging from rather than challenging these norms are insufficient to address work/family conflict in an equitable and arguably efficient fashion.

Before proceeding, it is worth noting that we are likely to be accused of taking a pronatalist position. That is not our intent, but is true in the following limited sense. If some adults face systematic constraints on childrearing decisions that others do not, then those constraints are unfair and should be removed. The groups we are referring to are professional women and professional men, and we argue that penalties for childrearing are far more severe for women, particularly in Australia. We believe those penalties should be reduced. It could be argued to the contrary that it would be just as fair to make parenting more difficult for professional men. While that is formally correct, we see no good reason to take such an explicitly antinatalist position in any effort to redress burdens that are unfairly distributed.

Fertility in Australia and the U.S.

Figures for Total Fertility Rates (TFR) in Australia and the U.S. are provided by Barnes (2001). The TFR is calculated for a given year and tells us how many children the average woman in the population can expect to bear if fertility patterns across various age groups hold into the indefinite future.

Table 1: Total Fertility Rates

	<u>1980</u>	<u>1997</u>
Australia	1.90	1.78
United States	1.84	2.06

Source: Barnes (2001)

These TFR differences are striking. Australian women were bearing slightly more children than their U.S. counterparts in 1980, but the pattern switched by 1997. Indeed, by the latter year, Australian women were bearing an average of one-quarter fewer children than U.S. women.

A comparison of the Total Fertility Rate with the number of children women actually bear during their lifetime would rarely yield the same figure. There are two reasons for differences to emerge. First, fertility rates tend to change, so the expectations generated from figures for one year are unlikely to be the same 10 years later; people change their minds. Second, fertility patterns often diverge from one age group or cohort to another. This distinction is important because any differences between the fertility patterns of older and younger women could either be usual and long-lasting, or instead because younger women are demonstrating new and different fertility patterns that will continue to hold as they age.

The specific change of relevance here concerns delayed childbearing. Suppose that many young Australian women are currently putting off childbearing, but will eventually have the same number of children as women in previous generations. If this is true, then TFR figures will be temporarily and artificially dampened because the high rate of childbearing that will occur later among the younger generation has not yet happened. In this case, the apparent divergence between Australian and U.S. TFR figures may be temporary and in some sense almost fictitious, warranting a closer look.

Delayed childbearing has indeed become more prevalent in both Australia and the U.S., and is most pronounced in the prior nation. As shown in Table 2, the average age at first birth is now close to 30 in Australia, and around 25 in the United States.

Table 2: Average Mother Age at First Birth

Australia (1999)	29.1 years
United States (1999)	24.8 years

Source: Barnes (2001) for Australia, Ventura et al (2001) for the U.S.

Will Australian women make up for these delays by bearing more children later?¹ Writing about fertility behavior in Australia, Barnes (2001, pp. 5-6) suggests that rates of childbearing among delayed childbearers tend to be lower in general. Regarding the U.S., we analyzed data from the Cornell Ecology of Careers database (see Moen, Sweet and Swisher 2001) to obtain some notion of whether there is a make up effect among delayed childbearers. A subsample of 1,223 white mothers age 40 and above, living in upstate New York and surveyed in 1998, was split according to the mother's age at first birth. Mothers who bore their first child between the ages of 15 and 24 had an average of

¹ The issue is slightly more complicated than portrayed here. Suppose each woman in a given population bears two children. If the children are born when the women are aged 20, then five generations will be born during a century. If delayed childbearing occurs and women bear children at age 40, only 2.5 generations will be born during a century, thereby reducing the population growth rate.

2.98 children, a figure that declined to 2.45 children for women who entered motherhood between the ages of 25 and 29. For those who began between the ages of 30 and 34, the figure fell to 2.18, and for women who started at age 35 or above, the average number of dependent children was only 1.79.² Effectively, childbearing delayed is often linked to childbearing denied. We therefore have no reason to expect that fertility in Australia will rise dramatically as young women age. Differential rates of fertility across Australia and the U.S. are therefore likely to continue to hold into the near future.

So there is a difference between the two nations. The implicit question this raises is why we should care about fertility. Does it make a difference to society whether fertility is often or rarely delayed or denied? One reason for concern with delayed childbearing is that health care costs systematically rise with the age of the prospective mother because of risks to the child, risks to the mother, and infertility treatments. Delayed childbearing adds a significant burden to our health care systems and to the costs imposed on families seeking children (Varner and Drago 2001). Second, the employment and hence tax base of the U.S. and Australia, relative to retirees who place demands on public revenues and services, is shrinking. As Barnes (2001) argues, both countries have responded to this problem in part through a heavy reliance upon immigration. They will in all likelihood become more dependent upon immigration as they struggle to shore up their tax bases in response to the aging of the populations and resulting financial burdens on public support systems. In what is already shaping up as an international ‘war for immigrant talent,’ the U.S. probably enjoys substantial advantages here. Nonetheless, neither country can view immigration as a complete solution, since the numbers do not add up (Barnes, 2001). Further, even if the numbers do add up for any given country, successful reliance upon the strategy would involve playing ‘beggar-thy-neighbor’ with the rest of the world, and severely draining the talent pools of other nations.

We therefore view the differential in fertility rates as problematic for the future of Australia.

Work/Family Policies

In both Australia and the U.S., much public policy surrounding employment, wages and working conditions was historically built upon the model of ‘separate spheres’ (Bailyn, 1993; Kanter, 1977; Williams, 1999). According to the model, husbands worked for wages in the public sphere, while wives served as unpaid housekeepers and child rearers in the private sphere of the home. Status, power, wealth and income were associated with the public sphere, while love, care, and low status tasks were relegated to the private sphere.

Although the model of separate spheres continues to be embodied in many public and private sector policies, and to influence behavior, norms and expectations across the two societies, the key objective condition underpinning the model no longer exists. As of this writing, over 40 percent of employees in the U.S. and in Australia are women, and in both countries a majority of mothers of dependent children are employed. Nor has either country witnessed a corresponding decrease in male employment nor a return of fathers

² It is theoretically possible that the women who started later intended to continue bearing children until the average number of children reaches that for women who started earlier. Unpublished figures provided by Bickley Townsend, who worked on the project at Cornell, suggest this possibility is purely theoretical. Only eight percent of mothers who bore their first child at or above age 35 intended to bear more children.

to the home for child rearing and housekeeping purposes of anywhere near the scope that would be required to make up for the historical loss of the unpaid hours of work provided in the home by women. The result is a ‘care gap,’ wherein families, governmental bodies, employers and labor organizations, and community and non-profit organizations are left scrambling to figure out how to make up for the loss of unpaid labor. The brunt of this care gap has fallen upon families who have attempted to either decrease their unpaid child care time or avoided child rearing responsibilities entirely, and the burden has fallen particularly hard upon women as caregivers (both paid and unpaid) for children, the disabled, and the elderly.

In response, corporate policies have been developed to ease the ability of employees to balance work and family commitments. Although others are sometimes provided, the major reason corporations implement these policies concern the retention of valued employees. The logic is that work/family policies serve to keep high-productivity types, and particularly the women among that group, such that the firm does not have to undergo the expense of replacing the employee or face the possibility of hiring lower-quality employees.

Comparing Australia and the U.S., Russell and Bowman (2000) find that work/family policies are more prevalent in U.S. corporations. A sample of relevant results is provided in Table 3, where we see that the incidence of flexible hours is almost 20 percent higher in U.S. corporations, and on- or near-site childcare is almost six times more prevalent among U.S. employers.

Table 3: The Prevalence of Corporate Work/Family Policies

	<u>Australia</u>	<u>United States</u>
Flexible Hours	56%	74%
On- or Near-Site Childcare	3%	17%
Childcare Resource & Ref.	25%	83%
Paid Maternity Leave	25%	26%
Paid Paternity Leave	14%	26%
Paid Adoption Leave	23%	29%

Source: Russell & Bowman (2000)

There is good reason to believe that many of these programs have little substance. For example, in the U.S., where the programs are ostensibly flourishing, Fried (1999) studied a corporation that considered itself a model in terms of work/family policies, and

found only a handful of employees who could afford to use the on-site childcare center. Similarly, Hochschild (1997) was invited to study an anonymous corporation precisely because their policies were so little used.

These findings lead us to suspect that, for most of these policies, the differences across the two countries in terms of effects on the day-to-day lives of employees are minimal, as are the options open to them for balancing work and family. It is not that there is no variance in the application of the policies across different workplaces and firms; certainly that would be true. It is just that the overall pattern strikes us as similar and unlikely to alter patterns of fertility.

Waldfoegel (1998) argues that paid parental leave might exert a substantial positive influence on gender wage inequality relative to other policies just considered. Basically, she suggests that paid parental leave improves the ability of women to make and meet simultaneous (or near-simultaneous) commitments to work and family. If she is correct, then rates of fertility might respond to divergent rates of coverage in terms of paid leave. Regardless of whether this argument is true, differences in coverage in terms of paid parental leave for new biological or adoptive mothers or fathers across the two nations are small, and in neither country are even so much as one-third of employees covered by paid leave provisions (see Table 3). It therefore seems reasonable to conclude that these differences are unrelated to the fertility differential.

Divergence in coverage for unpaid parental leave across the two nations is far more pronounced. The 1993 Family and Medical Leave Act guarantees 12 weeks of unpaid leave for new parents in the U.S., while Australian permanent employees are guaranteed a full year, a benefit recently extended to long-term casual employees under an Australian Industrial Relations Commission ruling. Nonetheless, it is hard to believe that unpaid leave for new parents would have much of an impact on fertility behavior. Infants do not leave home to seek productive and remunerative employment at the ripe old age of one year, much less after a mere 12 weeks of training in the ways of the world.

It therefore seems safe to conclude on the basis of these policies that differences in the effects of work/family policies on fertility across the two countries should be minimal, *ceteris paribus*.

Where we might instead look for a key to understanding fertility differences is in the treatment of part-time or reduced hours employment. Relative to Australia, prospective employees in the U.S. have strong incentives to avoid part-time employment, including:

- 1) *Lower hourly wages*. The hourly wage penalty for working an otherwise similar job under part-time as opposed to full-time hours arrangements is around 30 percent in the U.S. (Budig & England, 2001; Williams, 1999). To the best of our knowledge, no such wage gap has consistently appeared in Australian studies.
- 2) *Lack of pension coverage*. Only 15 percent of part-time female workers in the U.S. participate in a private pension plan (Crittenden, 2001, p. 199). All Australian employees who are hired on a permanent or casual basis participate in a superannuation scheme with immediate vesting.
- 3) *Lack of health care coverage*. In the U.S., health care insurance is closely linked to employment and particularly full-time employment. While 78 percent of full-time workers have health care insurance, only 22 percent of part-time employees

are covered in the U.S. (Crittenden, 2001, p. 261). The Australian health care insurance system covers all residents, regardless of employment status.

To the best of our knowledge, these policy differences did not emerge in direct response to work and family considerations. Nonetheless, the incentives involved are sufficiently large that we might expect to see far higher rates of part-time employment in Australia, particularly among parents.

Table 4 provides comparable figures regarding part-time employment among mothers and all adult women in Australia and the U.S. Figures from both countries use a cut-off of 35 hours per week or less to define part-time employment, but the U.S. figures are for 1999 while the Australian figures are from May of 2001.

Table 4: Part-time Employment among Mothers and Adult Women

	<u>Mothers</u>	<u>Adult Women</u>
Australia	44%	23%
United States	27.7%	5.6%

Sources: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2000) and Australian Bureau of Statistics (2001)

Regardless of the slight incomparability in dates of survey administration, the differences in rates of part-time employment are very large. Close to half of Australian mothers, but only a little over one-quarter of U.S. mothers, hold part-time employment, while rates of part-time employment among all women are almost four times as high in Australia.

These differences in rates of part-time employment are consistent with the differences in policies relevant to reduced hours employment in the two nations outlined above. Australia provides equity if not equality in terms of income, pensions, and health insurance for employees working reduced hours, and has generated far higher rates of part-time employment in response. The larger question is whether these differences are linked to fertility behavior, the question to which we next turn.

Fertility and Part-time Employment

It would seem reasonable to believe that part-time employment is linked to higher rates of fertility. In economies where most adults are employed, and absent the universal public provision of childcare services, reduced hours may permit many employees to make and meet simultaneous commitments to work and family. Higher rates of fertility should follow in the wake of or rather in tandem with higher rates of part-time employment.

To see whether this argument is correct, we undertook an analysis of average fertility rates for samples of employed U.S. and Australian women using 1997 data. To

get some notion of how fertility varies by age group, and perhaps of how fertility is changing, each sample is split into women age 31-60 and age 16-30. U.S. figures are from the 1997 National Study of the Changing Workforce, a stratified random sample of U.S. employees, here weighted to approximate the population distribution (Bond, Galinsky & Swanberg, 1998), while the Australian figures are from the 1997/98 Income and Housing Costs Survey, an add on to the Monthly Population Survey which is used to generate published labour force statistics.

Prior to an analysis of the effects of part-time employment, we consider the role of education and immigration. Education is an important consideration due to the ideal worker norm (Williams, 1999). The ideal worker is someone who enters a profession immediately upon receiving the relevant educational credential, works his or her way up the career ladder by putting in long hours without interruptions beyond short vacations, and continues in this fashion until retirement age. The ideal worker can contribute financially to the family, but cannot make substantial time commitments to children or other family members without endangering his or her career. Pay and promotion systems, practices, and rules around working time, absence, vacations, and retirement systems, and the beliefs of those from previous generations who have succeeded as ideal workers and currently manage organizations in both Australia and the U.S., are all built upon the presumption that only ideal workers should be hired, retained, and rewarded.

To the extent educated women in the two nations are subject to the ideal worker norm, we would expect that group to delay and deny childbearing. Delayed childbearing would be attributable to efforts to make some initial headway up career ladders before attempting to combine work and family commitments. Childbearing denied would make sense for women who believe that any substantial external time commitments represent a barrier to career success.

Immigration is important here because it could mask underlying patterns in the native population. That is, patterns of fertility could be imported from abroad and thereby yield an inaccurate understanding of the effects of long-standing domestic policies and norms.

Beginning with the groups of employed women age 31-60 years, Table 5 shows similar overall rates of fertility across the two groups in the two countries, with Australian women raising a slightly lower average of .91 children compared to .92 children in the U.S. sample. The same table suggests that the effects of education are far smaller in Australia, where women holding at least a 3-year degree are raising an average of .93 children, compared to women with lesser educational attainment raising an average of .91 children. Given that education levels are typically negatively associated with fertility, we suspect that this slight difference is mainly due to women with lower education levels bearing children earlier such that many of the children are raised and have left home for the older women in the sample (e.g., for those over age 50).

In the U.S., the more usual educational pattern appears, with college degreed women raising an average of .81 children, compared to .97 children for other women. Note also that the table provides sample percentages for women in the categories, and the rate of college education for the U.S. sample is 60 percent higher than for the Australian sample (31.2% of the sample compared to 19.5% of the sample, respectively).

Rates of childrearing for immigrants as compared to native-born women as slightly different, and help to explain the overall fertility differential. In the Australian

sample, immigrant women within the age category were raising an average of around .1 fewer children (i.e., .94 less .85 children), while immigrant women in the U.S. were raising slightly more children (.96 compared to .92). These differences according to immigrant status are nonetheless relatively small compared to overall differences in fertility (see Tables 1, above, and 7, below).

Table 5: Avg. Number of Children at Home, Education and Immigration: Employed Women Age 31-60

	Australia	United States
Total	.91	.92
At least 3-yr Degree	.93 (19.5%)	.81 (31.2%)
Less than 3-yr Degree	.91 (80.5%)	.97 (68.8%)
Native-born	.94 (70.2%)	.92 (94.2%)
Immigrant	.85 (29.8%)	.96 (5.8%)
Sample size	2,029	1,003

Turning to differences in childrearing according to part- and full-time employment status in Table 6, we encounter larger differences. Australian women who are employed part-time within this age group are raising an average of 1.26 children, compared to 1.15 children for the comparable U.S. sample. This pattern reverses and becomes more pronounced among full-time employed women, where the Australian sample averages .66, and the U.S. sample .84 children. That difference of .18 children is the largest single difference across the columns comparing Australian and U.S. figures in either Table 5 or Table 6, suggesting that the U.S. economy for some reason provides an environment more consistent with the combination of full-time employment and parenting.

Table 6: Avg. Number of Children at Home, Part-time and Full-time Empl.: Employed Women Age 31-60

	Australia	United States
Total	.91	.92

Full-time	.66 (57.9%)	.84 (75.1%)
Part-time	1.26 (42.1%)	1.15 (24.9%)
Sample size	2,029	986

These patterns become clearer in an examination of comparable samples of Australian and U.S. women aged 16-30, as shown in Table 7. Given that delayed childbearing is less common in the U.S. (see Table 2), we would expect far higher rates of childrearing among young U.S. women compared to their counterparts in Australia. The overall pattern confirms that expectation, with Australian women in the age group rearing around one-third the number of children (.23) found in the U.S. sample (.67).

Considering patterns by education and immigrant status for these youthful groups, we find more usual patterns in terms of education. Australian women with at least a three-year degree were raising an average of .05 children, compared to .28 children for women with a lesser investment in schooling. Similarly, U.S. women with degrees averaged .31 children, compared to .82 children for those without these levels of educational attainment.

Although these within-country differences according to education level are striking, and consistent with the prevalence of the ideal worker norm in both countries. Nonetheless, they cannot go far toward explaining divergent fertility rates across the two nations. Women with college degrees have far fewer, and women without such degrees have far more, than the average in each country.

A consideration of immigrant status takes us no further in explaining the overall difference in fertility patterns. In the U.S., immigrant women within this younger sample are raising an average of .21 fewer children than their native counterparts (.69 less .48), while immigrant women in Australia are rearing .16 fewer children (.25 less .09). In both countries, young immigrant women are pulling down the childrearing figures.

Table 7: Avg. Number of Children at Home, Education and Immigration: Employed Women Age 16-30

	<u>Australia</u>	<u>United States</u>
Total	.23	.67
At least 3-yr Degree	.05 (21.3%)	.31 (28.6%)
Less than 3-yr Degree	.28 (78.7%)	.82 (71.4%)
Native-born	.25	.69

	(85.2%)	(92.7%)
Immigrant	.09 (14.9%)	.48 (7.3%)
Sample size	852	329

We next turn to rates of childrearing according to part- and full-time employment status with evidence presented in Table 8. The patterns are very similar across the two countries in terms of the average number of children for women employed part-time, with only a slightly higher U.S. figure (.58 compared to .54). The patterns mainly diverge with respect to childrearing among the full-time employed. In Australia, the sample of full-time employed young women are raising an average of .11 children, a figure that rises over six-fold to .71 for comparable women in the U.S.

Table 8: Avg. Number of Children at Home, Part-time and Full-time Employed Women Age 16-30

	<u>Australia</u>	<u>United States</u>
Total	.23	.67
Full-time	.11 (72.8%)	.71 (69.2%)
Part-time	.54 (27.2%)	.58 (30.8%)
Sample size	852	325

The major conclusion we draw from this evidence is that full-time employment is considered a far stronger barrier to childrearing among Australian relative to women in the U.S., and that this barrier is largely responsible for the fertility differences across the two nations.

Looking back to comparable figures for the samples of women age 31-60 suggests that Australian women who are full-time employed are in part merely delaying childbirth, since the rate rises from .11 in the younger to .66 in the older sample. Nonetheless, delayed childbearing alone cannot explain what is going on here, since rates of childrearing remain far lower among full-time Australian relative to U.S. women who are older. On the other hand, the slightly lower rate of childrearing among the younger Australian women who are part-time employed in Australia, relative to comparable U.S. figures, does reverse for the older groups. This suggests that full-time employed

Australian women who wish to bear children tend to switch to part-time in the process of childbearing and childrearing.³

Explanation and Conclusions

These results suggest that public policies making part-time employment more equitable can have the unintended effect of reducing overall rates of fertility. The evidence presented here is far from conclusive, since longitudinal data would be required to see what happens to the work hours of women and men as children are born and raised. Nonetheless, the evidence is consistent with this conclusion.

If the conclusion is correct, it is not difficult to explain. Starting in the 1960s, second wave feminists in the U.S. explicitly and repeatedly fought against the marginalization of women in professional careers and positions of leadership. Although many second wave feminists might be accused of ignoring children, an accusation with some validity (Drago, 2001), the battle to gain entry into the clubhouse, boardroom, and more generally positions of power was one that was in large part successful and had far-reaching implications. For example, as of 1996, women held 10.2 percent of board seats for the Fortune 500 companies in the U.S., while a comparable study in Australia that same year found women holding only six percent of board seats (Burton, 1997).

Implicit in that battle was a belief that anything standing in the way of women's economic equality was to be avoided. Writing in 1978, Heidi Hartmann foresaw attempts by men to marginalize the hours, promotion opportunities, wages, and benefits received by employed women, and particularly mothers. She believed that, if women in the U.S. allowed it to happen, they would successfully enter the labor force only to find dead-end, low-wage, short hours jobs, and continued financial dependence upon men as husbands.

Although relatively few women in the U.S. may have read Hartmann's original words, the public response to a 1989 article in the *Harvard Business Review*, by Felice Schwartz, was very consistent with Hartmann's position. Schwartz argued that women would benefit from the development of a 'mommy track' in various professions, a track involving reduced hours that would permit simultaneous commitments to work and family. As Ann Crittenden has recently documented (2001, pp. 30-32), Schwartz was publically pilloried by feminists in the U.S. who believed that such a mommy track would marginalize women in the economy.

Because this debate was less vocal in Australia, and because of the policy differences documented above, the outcome that Hartmann feared seems to have occurred here. Australian mothers have in large part, and certainly in relation to the U.S., been shunted off onto a mommy track.

These arguments alone cannot explain lower rates of fertility in Australia. The major divergence lies not in the behavior of part-time employed women, but rather in the fertility patterns of the full-time employed. To explain this behavior, we need to extend the argument to one involving norms. What seems to have happened in Australia is that the norms of motherhood and of the ideal worker are sufficiently strong that they have generated a shared expectation regarding a trade-off for women: either work full-time *or* raise children and work part-time. On balance, young Australian women seem to have

³ Longitudinal data is required to get at movement between part- and full-time employment status, and the relationship between such movement and childrearing. Nonetheless, the supposition here seems a reasonable one.

responded in favor of full-time employment. Childlessness has thereby become the battleground over which the battle for gender equality is being waged in Australia at the most personal of levels.

The irony of this argument is that the champions of childbearing and childrearing turn out to be the second wave feminists in the U.S. These women fought against the economic marginalization of women, and expanded opportunities for working mothers in the bargain.

For Australia, this outcome is arguably unfair and inequitable. Australian men, like their U.S. counterparts, have never been forced to view employment and children as a trade-off. Further, the outcome is quite likely inefficient. If the most talented men are filtered through the labor market to the heights of the Australian economy, while many of the most talented women are shunted onto a mommy track, then valuable talents and opportunities are being wasted.

None of this is meant to suggest that the U.S. represents some sort of golden utopia. The nation continues to exhibit the highest rates of child poverty, incarceration, and capital punishment among the developed nations. Further, as Moen notes (2000), the modal family with children in the U.S. is indeed one where fathers work longer hours for pay than mothers, and mothers perform most of the unpaid work in the home. Nonetheless, that pattern is less strong in the U.S., and the constraints on combining family and work commitments appear far weaker than those found in Australia.

The policy implications of these conclusions are three-fold. First, efforts to move the battle for gender equality in Australia above the individual level to that of the body politic, as the Labour Party has striven to do in recent years, could have the unintended side-effect of raising rates of fertility. Second, it is possible that efforts to restructure part-time employment options such that they are consistent with career success might enhance rates of fertility. Third, if men were to take advantage of existing part-time employment options when they become fathers, the stigma associated with part-time employment would likely be reduced, and fertility rates might rise as a result.

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