

**SOCIOLOGY AND DEMOGRAPHY:  
A PROMISING RELATIONSHIP?  
WOMEN'S EMPLOYMENT, PARENTAL  
IDENTITY AND FERTILITY IN EUROPE.  
AN ANALYSIS OF THE FAMILY  
AND GENDER ROLES**

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For Europe in the 1990s, and in the longer run for the world, however, demography's most fundamental problem is to explain why adults in rich countries, who have choice in the matter, continue to choose to have any children at all, and in so far as they do, if there is any enduring reason over and above transient social pressures, why the average should be around two children rather than some other number, possibly a much smaller one.' (Coleman 1996: 48)

'There are three main tendencies working for extreme family limitation: the feeling of insecurity in modern life, particularly with regard to economic support; the cumbersomeness of children and difficulty of fitting their lives into the pattern of adult life in modern civilisation, particularly in the cities; and the fact that children exert a greater and greater pressure on the family economy. Can any means be found that would tend to counterbalance these tendencies?' (Myrdal, 1941:119)

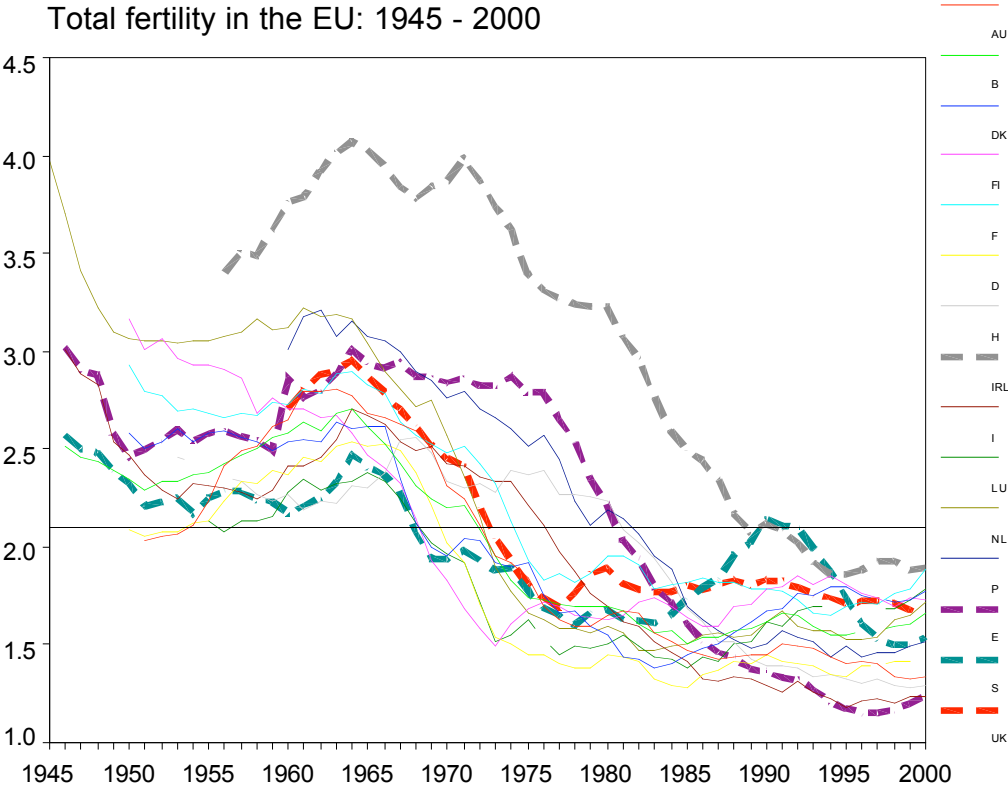
**1.- Introduction: below replacement levels of fertility and their implications for sociology and demography**

The purpose of this paper is twofold: it argues that sociology can learn much from demography - and vice versa - and that such an interdisciplinary approach is fruitful for understanding recent demographic developments in Europe. Second it reviews a number of empirical sources, and in particular the 1994 ISSP survey 'Family and Gender Roles II' to make the case for developing the concept of 'parental identity' in order to analyse the causes of low fertility levels. This concept can be seen as a useful example of an analysis that is rooted in both disciplines.



All European and almost all OECD member countries have now experienced below replacement levels of fertility<sup>1</sup> for a substantial time. Graph 1 shows the post-war pattern for all EU member countries. As is well known, this change has been particularly great in countries such as Italy and Spain. In the latter, the total fertility rate fell from 2.8 to 1.2 between 1975 and 1995. However other countries have recorded substantial if less dramatic changes. Graph 2 shows the change for Scotland. An illustration of the scale of these developments is the actual number of births occurring each year. In 1964 the peak year of the post-war baby boom in Scotland, there were over 104 thousand births. In 2001, there were 52,527: barely half the number of forty years before and the lowest figures recorded since registration started. The decline has been faster in Scotland than in the rest of the UK, but there has not yet been any research about *why* (Randall 2002).

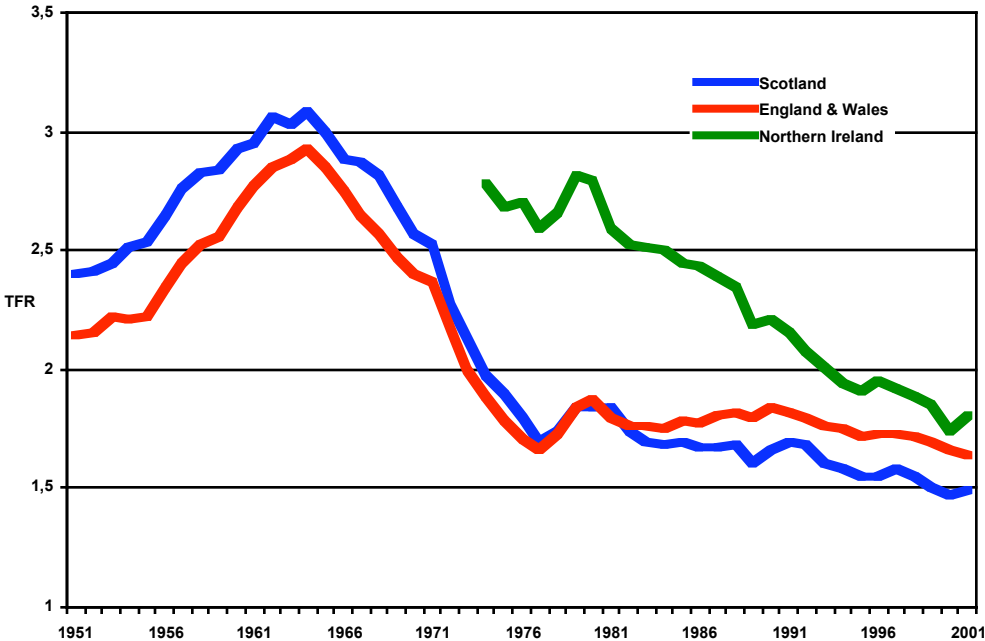
**Graph 1.-**



<sup>1</sup> The replacement rate of fertility is the rate at which the population of a society, net of migration, would remain stable. In contemporary societies this occurs with a total fertility rate of around 2.1. The total fertility rate is a measure that expresses the number of births that each woman in a society would have were she to bear children in accordance with the current average age specific fertility rates in that society.

As well as sociological interest, low and falling fertility rates have policy implications because of their short and medium term consequences for the age structure of the population, age-dependency ratios and immigration, and, in the longer term, for population levels, and according to observers as diverse as Marx (1973) and Chesnais (1998) for the power of states. The latter points to the modern historical congruence between high fertility and imperial expansion. Birth rates are far more important for age structure and population trends of contemporary societies than mortality rates. Coale (1956) showed some decades ago that even if the population of the United States achieved immortality it would raise the population by only about 25% (unless scientific developments were to prolong the human age of fertility substantially). Conversely low fertility has dramatic consequences in the long run. McDonald (2000) has shown that at current fertility rates (even if there were no further fall) the population of Italy or Spain would be reduced to a few million by the end of this century. Chesnais (1998) illustrates the dramatic difference between higher and lower fertility over time by contrasting two scenarios for Germany. In the first its fertility rate at the start of the C20 is imagined to remain constant over that century and this one. In the second this fertility rate is replaced with that of contemporary Germany. The first scenario produces a Germany with a population of some 650 million in 2100, in the second only 6 million are left!

**Graph 2 Total Fertility Rates UK & Scotland 1951- 2001**



Source: Randall 2002.

## **2.- The causes of below replacement level fertility rates**

A growing literature has offered various explanations for these trends. The factors singled out for comment can be grouped into three categories, although they are mostly interrelated, so that a number of different typologies are equally plausible:

### ***Changes in family forms:***

- increases in the age first marriage;
- increases in the age of women at first births;
- increasing rates of cohabitation, separation and divorce;
- increased incidence of single parent households and 'step-families';
- more diverse family forms (e.g. living apart together, same sex couples).

### ***Changes in economy and society:***

- increases in women's, especially mothers' employment;
- increased difficulty of balancing employment and family obligations;
- increased relative scarcity of time;
- increased 'cumbersomeness' of children in urban, mobile environments;
- increased individualism and associated social and spatial mobility;
- decline of patriarchal authority and women's subordination;
- changes in the form and timing of the intergenerational transfer of wealth.

### ***Changes in fertility attitudes and behaviour:***

- increased availability, knowledge and use of contraception and abortion;
- falls in ideal family size;
- decreased infant mortality;
- innovations in reproductive technology.

However although there is some consensus about the kinds of factors that might explain chronic fertility decline, sometimes known as the 'second demographic transition' (Van de Kaa 1988), there is little agreement about how different factors might interrelate, how they operate, or directions of cause and effect. Chesnais (1998 93) argues that '[d]emographers do not have a clear causal framework, only intuition regarding a puzzle of changes affecting all spheres of daily life'. There are perhaps three reasons for this. Until recently demography, a discipline partly shaped by policy considerations, has been more concerned with the issue of high fertility in developing countries and the nature and timing of the demographic transition there, rather than with the heartlands of the world economy. This is now changing (Demeny 1997) as governments become concerned with the policy implications of ageing populations. Second (as

I discuss in section 9) there is an unresolved controversy within economic approaches to demography about whether increased living standards ultimately increases or reduces the number of children that families want. This debate reaches back to the very origins of the discipline in the ideas of Malthus (1817). And in part it is because there has perhaps been insufficient exchange of ideas between sociology and demography.

Third, until very recently, most contemporary sociology has paid little attention to demography, thinking about 'social reproduction' in terms of the socialisation of societies' new members rather than thinking much either about their biological origin or about what determines their number. For example William Goode started his study of the family with the remark that it was 'the only social institution charged with transforming a biological organism into a human being' (1964:8) while virtually ignoring the equally salient fact that families are the only institution able to produce such 'biological organisms' in the first place – *should they choose to do so*. The discipline has not always ignored this issue in the past. Between the two world wars birth rates fell across the industrialised North; several states in Europe (including the UK, France, Germany, Norway, Denmark and Sweden) experienced fertility rates below replacement level, and demographers and sociologists such as D.V. Glass, for example, in his *The Struggle for Population* (1936) surveyed pro-natalist policies, which had been adopted on a widespread, if piecemeal, basis in order to reverse this trend. He reached a pessimistic conclusion about their prospects for success.

A key question today is whether current low fertility in Europe is a *temporary* phenomenon, caused, amongst other factors, by leads and lags in institutions such as the family and labour market adjusting to gender change or a *chronic* problem inherent in *any* technologically advanced, mobile, market oriented society. As I argue below, this discussion has its roots in a debate started in the 1930s when sociologists of the family took a keen interest in demographic issues. Kingsley Davis (1937) (along with others such as Alva Myrdal 1941) was initially a proponent of the second view, basing his arguments on a functionalist theory of the family and arguing that industrial society destroyed the previous, status-based 'familialist' social order in which the family was pre-eminent and reproduction central to the family. While the post world-war two baby-boom caused him to revise his ideas in a less pessimistic direction (e.g. Blake and Davis 1956), he returned to his earlier insistence of the significance of women's employment for low fertility later in life (e.g. Davis 1984). Meanwhile no less a figure than Talcott Parsons (Parsons and Bales 1956) dismissed the apocalyptic scenario painted by Davis, and argued that any fertility problem was temporary and stemmed from the disorder created by the *transition* to modern society.

### 3.- The reconciliation of work and family life

The ‘reconciliation of work and family life’, work-life ‘balance’ or ‘family friendly’ employment policies has also become a focus for both academic and policy analysis recently. We can cite only a selection of recent official reports and academic studies in the UK, but might observe that when the Treasury, rather than just the Department of Work and Pensions or Social Security is getting in on the act, then we can be fairly sure that the policy interest is robust (HM Treasury 2003, Bevan et al 1999; Deven et al 1998; Kazak 1998; McRae 2002; Fisher and Layte 2002; Iacovou 2001; Warin et al 1999). The main reason for this is the continuous expansion, common to all European and all OECD member countries, of women’s, especially mothers’, employment, and the consequent transformation of female activity rates across the life course into a distribution similar to that of men (Solsona and Treviño 1995). This expansion of mothers’ employment has fatally eroded the male breadwinner system that previously regulated the relation between paid work and families through a sex based division of labour between male *earners* and female *parents*; between paid employment and unpaid family caring work, including the reproduction of children.

For example between 1960 and 2001 the relative female activity rate (RFAR - women’s economic activity rate expressed as a percentage of the male rate; Siaroff 1994) increased from 44% to 75% in the fifteen member countries of the European Union. Again, change has been especially rapid in Spain, where the RFAR rose from 26% to 59% in this period, including a rise of fifteen percentage points in the last decade (OECD 2002). In Barcelona, in only five years from 1991 – 96, the percentage of married mothers of children under 18 who were economically inactive ‘housewives’ fell from 47 to 33% (Brullet & Torradobella 2002).

Table 1 shows a similar measure: the *relative female employment rate* (the proportion of women aged 15 – 64 in employment expressed as a percentage of the proportion of men of the same age in employment) for EU countries since 1960. As well as showing the dramatic change in relative employment rates over the last forty years it suggests that members of the EU can be grouped fairly easily into three distinct categories according to this measure. In the Scandinavian countries (Finland, Denmark and Sweden) women’s employment is around 90% of that of men. In the UK, the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany Austria, Portugal and France it is around 80% while in Spain Italy and Greece it is just under 60%. Only one country does not fit well into these three groups: Ireland has moved, in the course of the 1990s, from the third to the second group.

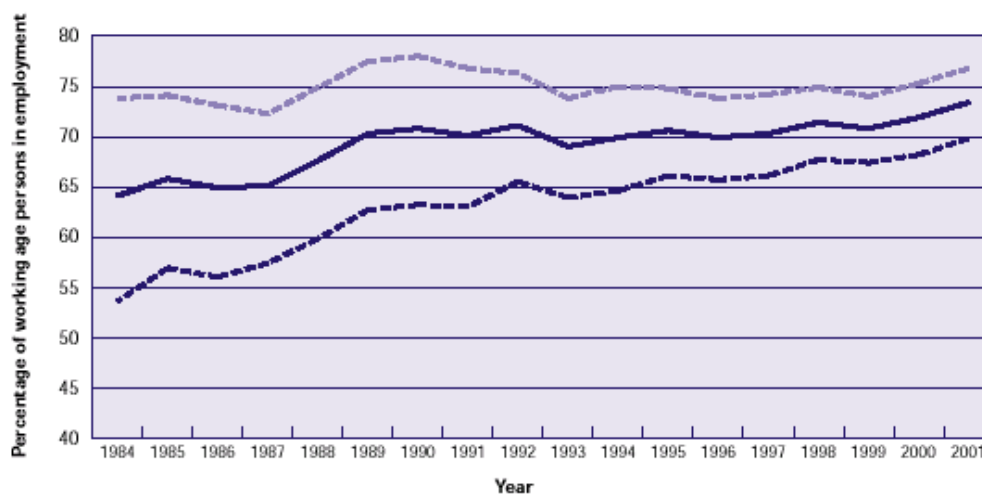
**Table 1.- Relative female employment rate: EU 1960 – 2000\***

	Aus	Bel	Dk	Fi	Fr	D	H	Irl	I	Nl	P	E	S	UK	Scot
<b>1960</b>	na	na	na	na	na	52.2	na	na	40.4	na	na	na	na	46.7	Na
<b>1965</b>	na	na	na	na	51.6	52.2	na	na	36.8	na	na	na	58.6	50.7	
<b>1970</b>	57.5	na	na	na	54.2	51.9	na	36.9	36.2	na	na	30.6	66.6	54.8	
<b>1975</b>	58.0	na	na	na	58.6	57.8	na	38.3	na	37.5	na	35.2	75.2	61.7	
<b>1980</b>	59.0	54.0	na	84.6	63.1	61.5	40.6	41.7	43.7	43.9	55.9	37.0	83.8	66.1	
<b>1985</b>	62.9	59.7	82.7	90.8	69.4	62.8	50.3	46.5	46.2	52.0	62.8	38.9	91.0	71.9	76.7
<b>1990</b>	68.7	66.9	86.5	91.5	72.6	67.7	53.8	54.1	51.5	62.7	68.3	44.4	94.9	76.7	81.0
<b>1995</b>	75.4	71.9	84.6	91.0	77.0	74.9	56.0	61.0	52.6	70.7	75.7	50.9	96.4	82.1	88.4
<b>2000</b>	77.1	74.4	88.8	90.7	80.5	79.0	53.8	69.3	57.6	76.6	78.8	57.7	94.9	83.1	90.6

Source: Author's analysis based on: EU, OECD 2002; Scotland: Scottish Executive 2002 tab 4.1.

\*Data for Scotland are not strictly comparable as female employment is expressed as a proportion of women aged 16-59 rather than 15-64. Other things equal this increases the relative female employment rate.

**Graph 3.- Male and female employment rates Scotland: 1984- 2001**



(From Scottish Economic Statistics 2002, p. 101)

The origins of this new academic and policy interest in joining up the sociology of employment and the family does not lie, as is frequently claimed, (e.g. Palomba 2003: 2) in new, more far-sighted, attempts to synthesise analyses of these two social institutions which in the past were kept separate. Both sociological and economic theory (e.g. Davis 1937, Myrdal 1946, Parsons and Bales 1956, Becker 1960) has long attempted such an integration. What has changed is rather that the collapse of the male breadwinner and family wage employment system has profoundly altered the *nature* of the family-employment relationship. It was fairly easy to separate out the sociologies of the family and employment in societies where only men had careers, or were assumed to be primarily oriented to a lifetime's participation in the labour market, and where women's central life interest was assumed to be parenthood, even though they might seek employment until becoming mothers and seek to resume it some time after this. Workers could usually be assumed to be relatively free of domestic labour commitments (and often, until the impact upon the discipline of second wave feminism, be assumed to be male) while parenting could be assumed to be, essentially, mothering. Thus while we have many surveys asking respondents about their views of working mothers, only in the last two decades or so has there been much interest in working fathers, *as fathers*. Indeed, some of the most impressive social psychological theorising about parenting in Britain - attachment theory developed *inter alia* by Bowlby (1973) and Winnicott (1965), could be conducted using the terms 'mother' as synonymous with parent.<sup>2</sup>

#### **4.- The sociology of the male breadwinner system and fertility**

Moreover, it is often forgotten that classic sociological analysis of the rise of the male breadwinner system was developed *as an explanation for the ability of modern industrial societies to develop a family form that would maintain replacement fertility rates*. To appreciate this it is useful to revisit the terms of this debate. In 1937 Kingsley Davis published an iconoclastic and provocative article in *Sociological Review* (1937) arguing that because *industrialism* (by which he meant modern, market based, urban, mobile societies) destroyed *familism* (by which he meant societies based on the patriarchal authority of family heads and household subsistence production) it also destroyed the family, and thus created an irreversible trend decline in fertility rates:

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<sup>2</sup> Both authors however consistently pointed out that their theories were actually about parents of either sex.

'[within familism] Parents receive economic security from their children. They enjoy intimacy and affection from kinsmen rather than outsiders, and from their own children rather than those of others. They gain recognition, power and authority through offspring, for children and grandchildren increase the strength of the family unit. Finally insofar as people need a 'cause' to live for, they can find it in the family, its extension back in time to ancestors and forward through progeny constituting the abstract principle around which concrete sentiments are clustered ... individuals have every reason to reproduce, maintain, socialise and place children, because the family represents within itself an almost complete organisation of life. One does not fit into this organisation unless one does rear children, and if one does not fit into the family organisation one does not fit into society. ... The prime familial function being to give birth, the family is invariably strong where inherited status is strong, and weak where individual mobility reigns. As our mobile society, with its doctrine of equal opportunity and its adulation of the self made man, continues to nullify the inheritance of status, it continues to kill the family ... in a mobile society children are, at any level, a hindrance to social climbing... the correlation between a high income and low birth rate makes it obvious that simple lack of money is not the reason for childlessness' (1937: 295, 296, 301, 305).

If the state tried to step in to subsidise the cost of parenting or provide services this would eventually lead to the industrialisation of the family:

'a system in which the father's role is assumed by the state and the mother's role by professional women paid by the state for their services' (1937:304).

In place of the centrality of sexual reproduction, the focus of the family was changing to one of the development of intimacy and of a 'haven in a heartless world' (Lasch 1977). However neither such intimacy nor sex itself was any longer confined to or regulated by the family. Modern society facilitated 'unconventionalised intimacies' while marriage itself was progressively reduced to the status of 'an amorous adventure'. In fact, sixty years before Giddens (1992) Davis put forward the central ideas of the transformation of intimacy, the decline of reproductivist ideas of sex, the rise of plastic sexuality, the decline of patriarchal authority within the family and the rise of democratised and 'pure' relationships. But in contrast to Giddens, Davis foresaw two problems. If the family was no longer powerful, and sexual reproduction no longer its focus, then fertility must fall: nor was there any obvious reason for it to stop falling. And if family relations increasingly came to resemble other more



public social relations, what would happen to intimacy, attachment and the role of the family as a 'haven' from heartlessness. What would a world with no heart be like? Davis abandoned these themes in the face of the post-war baby boom, and the 1956 article written with Blake is, amongst other things, an attempt to explain why fertility might be just as high in industrial societies as in more traditional ones. However when the boom turned to slump in the 1980s, Davis returned to his earlier argument:

The fundamental principle of the family is ascription of status. ... The principle of industrial society is the opposite. By rewarding people for achievement, for what they do rather than who they are, industrialism generates competition and mobility. ... Replacement of population however - at least insofar as it depends on biological motives - has not been "industrialized". It has been left to the family ... In a sense, then, industrial societies have left the important function of population replacement to a unit that is not only alien in principle to industrialism but which is vestigial, a social fossil. ... But of late the encroachments of modernity have so demoralized the family that it is failing to fulfil its reproductive function. (1987: 59-60)

Davis' arguments can also be seen as the origin of Parsons' theory of the family, which came to have a great impact on sociology in the post-war period. Although Parsons hardly ever mentions Davis by name, the language he uses makes it clear that he had what he saw as Davis's theories of 'race suicide' in his sights. The key thing, argued Parsons, was the sexual division of labour between a breadwinner husband, who maintained the family in material terms, and a carer wife, who specialised in its emotional health and the care of its members. The Oedipus complex, borrowed directly from Freud, was taken as the model both of socialisation into and reproduction of this sexual division of labour, and the key role of the family became 'the stabilisation of adult personality'. Moreover, in Parsons' theory *this gender based division of identity itself supported fertility levels*. The family changed its form rather than being destroyed.

'The two generations are, by virtue of the isolation of the nuclear family, thrown more closely on each other. ... By and large a "good" marriage from the point of view of the personality of the participants, is likely to be one with children; the functions as parents reinforce the functions in relation to each other as spouses. ... Put very schematically, a mature woman can love, sexually, only a man who takes his full place in the masculine world, above all its occupational aspect, and who takes responsibility for a family; conversely, the mature man can only love a woman who is really an adult, a full wife to him and mother to his children... Indeed we argue that probably the importance of the family and its functions for society constitutes the primary set of reasons why there is a

*social* as distinguished from purely reproductive, differentiation of sex roles. ... the recent change in the American family itself and in its relation to the rest of society ... is far from implying an erasure of the differentiation of sex roles; in many respects it reinforces and clarifies it.' (1956:23, 20 - 22)

But what would happen if the male breadwinner system was to change: for example as a result of rising women's employment: a phenomenon well known to Parsons? At first he sought to minimise its importance. In 1942 he wrote:

'The majority of "career" women whose occupational status is comparable with that of men in their own class, at least in the upper middle and upper classes, are unmarried, and in the small proportion of cases where they are married the result is a profound alteration in family structure ... only a very small fraction have gone very far in this direction. It is also clear that its generalization would only be possible with profound alterations in the structure of the family,' (1942:94, 96)

But by the end of the 1950s it was obvious that in the USA at least, women's employment was indeed reaching a scale at which some profound alteration in family structure must take place. Parsons reaction to this development is (in a negative sense) profoundly illuminating. In outright contradiction to the entire thrust of his earlier writing, and offering no new empirical evidence or analytical argument, he suggested that the collapse of the breadwinner system need have no significant effect:

'it is interesting, *and in line with our general view*, that this process of the reinforcement of the nuclear family has coincided with a very large increase in the participation of married women in the labour force' (1961: 213-4, my emphasis, JM).

Given this analytical lacuna it is not surprising that the issue of fertility faded from view in the sociology of the family, in both its traditional and radical versions, because in the absence of a male breadwinner system, it was not at all clear that the sociology of the family had any explanation for reproduction at all.

## **5.- The collapse of the male breadwinner system**

The male breadwinner system has been eroded by four interrelated developments, all of which ultimately have their roots in the way liberalism undermines patriarchy (Mann 1994, MacInnes 1998). First, there has been the consolidation of increasingly equal opportunities

(‘credentialism’ and gender meritocracy in both education and training *for* and recruitment *to* employment) together with the rise of the service sector (‘de-industrialisation’) and the consequent ‘feminisation of employment’.

Second, dramatic generational changes in *attitudes* about gender roles have occurred. For example, while in 1988 a majority of adults in Spain agreed with the central tenet of male breadwinner ideology that ‘A man’s job is to earn money; a woman’s job is to look after the house and family’ by 2002 less than one in six agreed with this idea, and 71% described their ideal family as one where ‘both the man and woman are employed and share household chores and childcare’ (CIS 2448). This is a good description of the ‘dual earner dual carer’ model of production and reproduction suggested by both Fraser (1994) and Folbre (1994). Comparable data for Europe will become available from the ISSP survey Family and Gender Roles III fielded in 2002, but we already have UK data for 1980 to 1999 (for women only) from a survey by McRae (2002) which shows a similar change in attitudes. Since the views of men and women on this issue rarely diverged substantially in Europe in 1994 (when Family and Gender Roles II was fielded) it is likely that the dimensions of attitudinal change found in Spain will have been repeated elsewhere. We know, of course, that *behaviour* lags some way behind *attitudes* (Anderson et al 1994, Gershuny et al 1997, Valiente 1997 Vila 1999). Employers’ development of ‘family friendly’ policies in response to the feminisation of employment has been limited by competitive pressure, despite public and government encouragement, while evidence on change in the division of domestic labour and childcare suggests that the decline of gender inequality in practice is much slower than changes in public norms.

Third, governments’ commitment to gender equality as represented in equal opportunities legislation and subscription to international conventions has as often as not taken them from soaring rhetoric to implementing practical measures that have led to real progress. For example article 11(2)b of the 1981 UN *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women* committed governments:

‘To encourage the provision of the necessary supporting social services to enable parents to combine family obligations with work responsibilities and participation in public life, in particular through promoting the establishment and development of a network of child-care facilities.’ (UN 1981)

The European Union’s *Equality Strategy*, includes in its objectives the ‘modification of sex roles and stereotypes’ and measures to ‘improve the reconciliation of work and family life so that men as well as women find it easier to re-enter the labour market after an absence’. The

existence of these kinds of promises makes it easier to persuade states to take action on gender inequality, as well as reinforcing the general legitimacy of gender equality. As Connell (1995) has noted, patriarchy faces a legitimisation crisis.

Finally, states have developed increased direct and indirect state support for childcare through the provision of income transfers, maternity and parental leave, childcare, health and education services, which benefits mothers insofar as they have historically undertaken the majority of this work. As well as socialising part of the cost of rearing children, such transfers (in combination with greater labour market gender equality) permit a greater flexibility of family form and in particular facilitate single parent families, and free mothers from automatic dependence on an earner patriarch. Castles (2001) shows that, contrary to expectations, neo-liberalism and globalisation have not decreased such state expenditure. However it varies widely across different states. If we look only at social expenditure which excludes education, the percentage of this destined to support for families with children varied from a high of 17% in Sweden to a mere 2% in Spain. However, as I argue below, the law of declining relative labour productivity in services identified by Baumol (1967) implies that the share of such expenditure in national income must progressively *increase* to continue to provide a similar level of service: maintaining expenditure, even in 'real' terms, may actually represent reductions in provision.

It is worth considering why it is that despite the interest in 'reconciliation of work and family life' 'work-life balance' or 'family friendly' employment, there is a notable lack of analytical precision, and remarkable absence of the development of any *indicators* which would allow us to measure or compare the degree of 'reconciliation', 'balance' or 'family friendliness' inherent in any given employment relationship or family organisation. The lack of such indicators not only results in analytical confusion and imprecision, but makes it difficult to identify factors which frustrate or facilitate 'balance' or reconciliation, including the issue of parenting. The reason for this is that 'reconciliation' *as such*, is not the important issue, nor is it a new one. The male breadwinner system, as Parsons and others showed, did an effective job of reconciling work and family life, however it did so at the cost, *inter alia*, of systematic sexual inequality. What is new, and needs to be adequately thought through, is how such reconciliation might take place in gender egalitarian terms, and thus what the essence of 'reconciliation' or 'balance' *comprises*, or the *forms* that the family is to take, to which policies might be 'friendly'.

## 6.- Reflexivity and parental identity

Contemporary, late modern, society has been argued by commentators such as Giddens (1991, 1992), Castells (1996, 1997) and Beck and Beck Gernsheim (1995) to be witnessing a decline in the significance of socially, normatively defined, *status* and a rise in the importance of autonomously and reflexively defined *self-identity*. We can trace the roots of this change to three related and irreversible developments: (1) the rise of formal equality (the franchise, legal equality, the discourse of human rights, equal opportunities legislation), (2) the incessantly mobile nature of modern society (Gellner's 'culture become structure') and (3) the continuing 'globalisation' of the economy, culture and communications. These authors all argue that within the material and ideological constraints that they face, men and women increasingly seek to develop and realise personal life projects over which they seek autonomy and control. Giddens (1992) and others have argued that both sexual activity and the formation of sexual unions (whether or not involving marriage) have become increasingly divorced from the purposes of reproduction, leading to what he calls 'plastic sex' and 'pure relationships'.

Works by US authors such as Dealey (1912), Davis (1937) and Wirth (1938) can be seen as earlier and prescient formulations of such ideas. Dealey described the family as coming to resemble 'a temporary meeting place for board and lodging' (192, 90-91). Davis argued that modernity facilitated 'unconventionalised intimacies' and that contemporary marriage was like 'entering upon an amorous adventure' (1937:296, 297). Because child rearing was no longer central to the family, Davis speculated, provocatively, whether the 'industrialisation' of the family might be in prospect, as a logical extension of increased state involvement in, and responsibility for, reproduction: 'a system in which the father's role is assumed by the state and the mother's role by professional women paid by the state for their services' (1937:304). Wirth suggested that 'urbanism' created a rise in individual autonomy and freedom to pursue 'divergent interests' that extended to relations within the family.

It is thus easy to overstate the nature of changes that Giddens, Castells and Beck and Beck-Gernsheim all posit. The fact that other commentators such as Wirth could anticipate their arguments, if not their terminology, by over half a century suggests that change has been less rapid than they imagine. It is also important not to confuse the *imagination* of autonomous life projects, identity and reflexivity, or the discussion of the life course or biography in these terms with the *actual realisation* of a self-defined life project and identity as Craib (1994, 1998) argues.<sup>3</sup> However, as Weeks (1995) suggests, it seems fairly clear that the authority of tradition has been greatly undermined by the ideology of self-determination: that even those who appeal

to the scriptures or nature to make sense of their values or to justify them, do so in the knowledge that ‘they have no choice but to choose’.

While much attention has been given to aspects of this process such as gender identity and the crisis of masculinity (Bourdieu 2000; MacInnes 1998) or national identity (Anderson 1991, Billig 1995, Cohen 1996) and theorists of the second demographic transition have used such ideas to account for change in family formation and dissolution referred to briefly above, taking them fully into account makes some older sociological schema of the determinants of fertility behaviour rather redundant.

In a classic article Blake and Davis (1956) outlined 11 ‘intervening variables between ‘natural fertility’ – the rate of fertility that might exist were there no social regulation – and achieved fertility. They divided these variables into factors that (1) determined exposure to coitus (2) determined the risk of conception from coitus and (3) determined the success of the pregnancy. For example the first set of factors concerned norms and institutions that affected the formation and dissolution of sexual unions (principally marriage) and the frequency of coitus within them, while the second set concerned knowledge and use of contraception, and the incidence of voluntary (planned) or involuntary sterility. This schema, and its various refinements, was employed widely and productively in both the historical study of fertility patterns and analysis of developing countries, where, to take one example, the emphasis on the length and nature of legitimated sexual unions, was clearly central to understanding fertility change. However it offers little purchase, as Chesnais’ comment cited above implies, on what is happening in contemporary Europe, where knowledge and use of a range of contraception techniques is widespread and the concept of sexual union probably less important than the nature of that sexual union (is it centred for example on ‘plastic’ or ‘reproductive’ sex). The range of intervening variables described by Davis and Blake is now more likely to be determined by behaviour that is consciously followed by adults with the potential fertility consequences of their actions very much in mind. Rather than intervening ‘independent’ variables they might better be considered as variables that have become dependent on a prior variable of desires and practices relevant to fertility formulated in the context of developing various life projects. In this context Lesthaegue’s argument that demography must understand “the ever more important role of the pursuit of individual goals, that is, the right and liberty of the individual to define his own ends and the means to attain them”<sup>4</sup> (1983, p. 429) is especially relevant. For example, demography

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<sup>3</sup> I use the term ‘imagination’ in the sense employed by Anderson (1992).

<sup>4</sup> My translation of ‘el papel cada vez más preponderante del logro de las metas individuales, es decir, el derecho y la libertad del individuo a definir sus metas y los medios para alcanzarlas”

has often been concerned, for good reasons, with marriage rates, given the importance of legitimate sexual unions in determining the status of children, so that Malinowski (1927) could confidently state that in the entire anthropological literature there was ‘... no single instance ... of a community where illegitimate children ... enjoy the same social treatment and have the same social status as legitimate ones’. This clearly no longer holds when one in four births in the European Union are to parents who are unmarried, and as a consequence, the contrast in the status of cohabitation and marriage becomes less salient.

The fact that, on the one hand, it is becoming more common to try to understand social behaviour in terms of identities, and that on the other fertility behaviour seems increasingly to be a form of behaviour influenced by ‘life project’ factors, suggests that it makes sense to explore the concept of *parental identity*. Moreover survey evidence suggests that it may be a central but under-theorised and under-researched aspect of contemporary ‘reflexive’ identities. Given a range of different dimensions of identity and asked to prioritise them respondents in both Scotland (Scottish Social Attitudes Survey 2001) and Catalonia (Castells & Tubella 2002) chose responses bound up with the ‘family’ as tables 2 and 3 show. The Scottish study, which disaggregated responses more finely, showed that within the family it was *parental* status that was most often cited. Moreover, these tables understate the importance of parental identity as they include responses from non-parents who are hardly likely to cite parenthood as an important way in which they think of themselves. If we look only at parents its significance increases still further. Table 4 suggests that parental identity is particularly salient for prime age women, and that for men of this age group it overtakes (just) the competing dimensions of economic status and national identity.

**Table 2.- With what do you most identify?**

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With my family	56.0
With myself	8.7
I don't feel identified with anything in particular	5.4
With my work	5.1
With people my age	4.9
With my culture	4.7
With humanity as a whole	3.2
With being a man/woman	3.0
With my country	2.5
With my religion	2.5
With nature	2.3
With my language	1.7
N	3005

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Source: Castells and Tuebba (2002).

**Table 3 Respondents' first and second choice of 'identities', grouped<sup>5</sup>.**

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	First choice	Second choice
A mother / A father/wife/husband	29.5 )	29.4 )
A woman / A man	9.5 ) 39.0	8.0 ) 37.4
A working person/retired/unemployed	13.3 )	14.2 )
Working class/middle class	9.5 ) 22.8	9.3 ) 23.5
Scottish/British	21.1	16.5
Young/Elderly	5.1	4.8
Protestant/Catholic/(Not) religious	4.6	7.8
A country/city person	3.9	5.1
Black/White/Asian	.8	1.4
Other / None/ DK	2.7	3.4

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Source: Scottish Social Attitudes Survey 2001, author's analysis

To argue that parental identity might be a useful analytical concept says nothing about the *content* of that identity however, or for example, whether there are imagined to be differences between father- and mother-hood. What we might think of today as 'parental identity' would have been of fundamental importance in a patriarchal social order where the status of biological fatherhood bestowed a range of powers – especially over the disposal of the labour of wives and children. However it is perhaps significant that the Scottish survey showed *mothers* to be twice as likely as fathers to prioritise their parental identity (49% versus 24%) and less than half as likely as husbands to cite their spousal one (4% versus 11%). Whatever values and ideas parental identity might currently embrace, a revival of the *patria potestas* does not seem to be one of them.

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<sup>5</sup> Respondents were asked:

'Some people say that whether they feel British or Scottish is not as important as other things about them. Other people say their national identity is the key to who they are.

If you had to pick just one thing from this list to describe yourself - something that is very important to you when you think of yourself, what would it be? ... And what would the second most important thing be?'

Comparison with the Catalan results suggests that the introduction may have encouraged respondents to think in terms of national identity.



**Table 4.- Identity priorities, Scotland, 2001 by sex and age**

1. MALES	Age Group			
	18 – 29	30 – 54	55-65	65+
Family and gender	15	33	25	19
Of which fatherhood	4	21	12	11
economic status	24	25	33	38
nationality	34	32	33	23
Age, life course	13	1	1	8
Religion	8	7	2	6
Location	2	3	6	6
Race, ethnicity	5	*		
(n)	139	310	105	134
<b>Females</b>				
Family and gender	39	65	51	31
Of which motherhood	20	42	29	19
economic status	14	15	25	31
nationality	22	13	13	15
Age, life course	16	1	2	10
Religion	3	2	3	7
Location	3	3	7	5
Race, ethnicity	3	1		1
(n)	160	432	121	204

Source: Scottish Social Attitudes Survey 2001, author's analysis

The concept of parental identity could be useful, *not* to define what it is to be a parent, or what all parental 'life projects' entail, but rather to capture what those who are or aspire to be parents (or indeed those who wish to avoid that status) imagine it means and the consequences which they perceive to flow from that. It will thus probably be both diverse across generations, class, race or sex and dynamic over the life course. It will include some vision of the obligations due to children, in terms both of emotional attachment and material provision and support. It will include some negotiation between individual parental ideals and the constraints of social structure and material resources in terms of time, income, availability of support (whether from family, friends the local or national state, actual or potential employers), the legal framework (such as family and inheritance law), child friendliness - or otherwise - of the material and ideological environment (a concept well grasped by Myrdal in her 1941 discussion of the relative social 'cumbersomeness' of children in different societies), and finally the alternative life chances foregone that time devoted to children entails.

Since parenthood and childhood are virtually fused, changing discourses about childhood (Aries 1987, UN 1990) are fundamental to definitions of parental identity, especially insofar as they impact upon the emotional intensity of the parental role and its costs in terms of time, money and alternative opportunities foregone. The related reversal in the net flow of the intergenerational transfer of wealth (Caldwell 1976) and change in its organisation across the life course also has implications for parental roles, however these are subjects for another paper. Similarly parental identity will also be influenced by the evolution and increasing diversity of family forms cited above.

Finally parental identity also embraces various ‘spiritual’ dimensions in the sense of providing an increasingly ‘missing’ link between fatality and continuity in modern societies. Anderson (1991) has argued that disenchanted societies have a conceptualisation of themselves as structures which are rationally understandable - in principle if not always in practice - and which move progressively (in all senses) through ‘homogeneous empty time’ according to a logic of cause and effect.<sup>6</sup> In fact it could be argued that Anderson’s theory actually suggests that it is only modern societies that imagine themselves to be societies at all, at least in any sense in which sociology would recognise the term. This conceptualisation, argues Anderson, marginalizes compassion for suffering or transcendental understandings of the world, whereas the power of world religions had always been their ability to address suffering *by transforming fatality into continuity*. This is an issue recognised, albeit rather weakly, by Giddens when he notes the importance of ‘ontological insecurity’ in late modern societies). One might say that one step beyond the ‘unprecedented inner loneliness’ of Weber’s Calvinist lies the spiritual desolation of a thoroughly disenchanted rationalism which at first glance appears to squeeze out any space for mystery, faith, teleology or compassion. As Gellner used to emphasise, modernity is a heartless space.

Anderson’s purpose in making this point was to argue that ‘national’ forms of imagining arise, in part, to fill this gap and provide a link between fatality and continuity. Whether or not his argument is valid, it is by no means clear that national identity is the only way that such links might be sought, and it is instructive that Anderson himself turns to *parenthood* when he searches for an illustration of his argument, which is worth quoting at some length.

If the manner of a man’s dying usually seems arbitrary, his mortality is inescapable.  
Human lives are full of such combinations of necessity and chance. ... The great

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<sup>6</sup> Gellner (1983) makes a similar argument, focusing on the philosophy of causation rather than time.

merit of traditional religious world-views (which naturally must be distinguished from their role in the legitimation of specific systems of domination and exploitation) has been their concern with man-in-the-cosmos, man as species being, and the contingency of life. ... their imaginative response to the overwhelming burden of human suffering-disease, mutilation, grief, age, and death. ... The great weakness of all evolutionary/progressive styles of thought, not excluding Marxism, is that such questions are answered with impatient silence. At the same time, in different ways, religious thought also responds to obscure intimations of immortality, generally by transforming fatality into continuity (karma, original sin, etc.) In this way, it concerns itself with the links between the dead and the yet unbom, the mystery of re-generation. *Who experiences their child's conception and birth without dimly apprehending a combined connectedness, fortuity, and fatality in a language of 'continuity'?* (1991, 10 – 11, my emphasis)

Is not one aspect of parenthood the 'imagined community', not *horizontally*, of nations, but *vertically*, of descendents, including those 'yet unbom'? Is the prioritisation of an infant's interests over that of its parents (biological or social) not a powerful demonstration of 'deep comradeship' that is vertical rather than horizontal in form and is fundamentally about 'sacrifice'? What else does 'attachment' (Bowlby 1973, Winnicott 1965) comprise than a comradeship almost without limit? Does the significance of this sacrifice not grow in a society where, by definition, the essence of the parent-infant relationship is that no obligation can be placed on the latter other than that which promotes the child's own interests, which countless conventions, treaties, legal rulings and so forth declare must be paramount? It would be just as wrong to overstate changes in social understandings of childhood as it would be to ignore them. Van de Kaa (1997) has pointed out that the net cost of the youngest children has always been positive, while all manner of exploitation and abuse reminds us that the 'rights' that are proclaimed for children (United Nations 1989) may be honoured more in the breach than the observance. I simply want to suggest here that using the tools of analysis associated with identities and their evolution may prove fruitful in the field of analysing both the behaviour and attitudes of parents and of those thinking about becoming parents. As such it may in particular prove to be a useful addition to more traditional ways of understanding used in demography to think about the determinants of fertility. It might go some way to filling the analytical gap identified by Chesnais. However, in doing so it will be important to conceptualise identities carefully, in particular differentiating between parental self images, ideologies of 'responsible' parenthood and individual and social aspirations about parenting.

## **7.- Social attitudes towards family forms, mother's employment and fertility plans in contemporary Europe**

A first step towards grasping the contours of parental identity in contemporary Europe is to review some survey evidence about adults' views on the nature of parenting and its relationship to other individual and family aspirations or obligations such as earning money. Comparative information about attitudes towards marriage, the family, children, parenting and gender roles is available from the ISSP European wide survey 'Family and Gender Roles' fielded in 1988 and 1994 and repeated again in 2002 (data from the latest round has yet to be made available). Because most of the questions asked were general ones, they are a more reliable guide to what people imagine the social norms to be that surround these issues contextualising, rather than directly regulating, their behaviour. In the tables that follow the results of the ISSP survey from participating Western European countries has been analysed with responses weighted by the adult population of the respondent's country in 1994. The survey covered adults in the UK (including Northern Ireland), the Republic of Ireland, the unified Germany, Austria, the Netherlands, Spain, Italy, Sweden and Norway. All the results discussed below are statistically significant at the 1% level, but it should be borne in mind that the size of the sample (almost 16000) respondents, means that quite weak relationships reach levels of significance.

There is substantial tolerance across Europe for the idea of cohabitation. Almost two thirds of respondents thought that 'it is alright for a couple to live together without intending to get married', and while there was also substantial support for the idea that those wanting children should get married (just over a half (57%) thought so), this did not imply rejection of the idea that single parents could bring up children just as well as couples: almost two fifths (38%) agreed that 'one parent can bring up a child as well as two parents together.. There was little support for the idea that the main purpose of marriage should be to produce children (only just over a quarter of respondents thought so) and very little support for the concept of marriage as an end in itself. The idea, for example, that a 'bad' marriage is better than no marriage at all, was supported by only one in twenty respondents. Nor was there much resistance to ending a problem marriage when there are children present: only a quarter thought that 'parents should stay together even if they don't get along', compared to 8% who resisted separation when there were no children present. These results suggest that there is no longer any question of 'not fitting into society' as Davis put it, if one does not marry. Nor was marriage seen as conferring either greater happiness - only a third agreed with this proposition or that its main advantage was to gain economic security: again only around a third agreed.

There was still great belief in the abstract desirability of children: nine out of ten people agreed that 'watching children grow up is one of life's greatest joys', however only two fifths agreed that such fulfilment was fundamental to any life project by agreeing that 'people who have never had children lead empty lives'. There was also strong support for the principle of children's self expression: over 70% thought that it was more important for children to 'think for themselves' rather than 'be obedient' when preparing them for life. But just over a quarter of respondents thought that 'having children interferes too much with the freedom of parents'. Table 5 shows these results, according to the age of respondent (differences by sex were almost always negligible).

'Male breadwinner' norms now command little support. Under one third agreed that it is 'a man's job is to earn money, a woman's job is to look after the home and family' and a slightly greater proportion thought that 'what most women really want is a home and children'. Such low support was related both to the recognition that families need two incomes and to the belief that employment is a key component of women's independence.

Over seven out of ten thought that 'most women have to work these days to support their families', that 'both the man and woman should contribute to household income' and that 'having a job is the best way for a woman to be an independent person'. It was also related to confidence that employment and motherhood is not necessarily contradictory: two thirds thought that 'a working mother can establish just as warm a relationship with her children' as other mothers. However there was still concern about the employment of mothers of young, pre-school children. Just over a half of respondents thought that 'a pre-school child is likely to suffer if his or her mother works' and a similar proportion thought that mothers in this situation should stay at home. However around two-fifths thought that such mothers should work part-time. Just over half thought that 'family life suffers' when women have a *full time* job, but just under two thirds also agreed that family life suffers 'because men concentrate too much on their work'. Table 6 shows the main results. (Unfortunately no other questions were asked about attitudes towards working fathers).

While such views confirm that the normative order portrayed by Davis as 'familism' no longer exists in Europe, they are hardly consistent with the kind of attitudes we might expect had the 'industrialisation' of the family he feared developed very far. They also suggest that the ideology of the male breadwinner system set out by Parsons has only limited and declining support. As we shall see it has been weakened by the experience of women's employment and the increasing gender egalitarianism of younger generations. Thus increasing women's employment has been associated with changes in gender attitudes too.

**Table 5.- Views on marriage and the family: Europe 1994 by age group**

% agreeing with the following statements...*	Age Group			All	(n)
	Under 30	30s & 40s	50+		
It is alright for a couple to live together without intending to get married.	<b>81.1</b>	<b>76.9</b>	<b>46.1</b>	<b>66.4</b>	15454
It's a good idea for a couple who intend to get married to live together-first.	<b>73.3</b>	<b>66.2</b>	<b>48.0</b>	<b>61.0</b>	15358
People who want children ought to get married.	<b>38.3</b>	<b>46.6</b>	<b>78.2</b>	<b>56.7</b>	15587
The main purpose of marriage these days is to have children.	<b>17.1</b>	<b>22.3</b>	<b>37.7</b>	<b>26.9</b>	15424
It is better to have a bad marriage than no marriage at all.	<b>3.0</b>	<b>3.3</b>	<b>7.5</b>	<b>4.8</b>	15514
Married people are generally happier	<b>17.0</b>	<b>26.0</b>	<b>48.1</b>	<b>32.2</b>	14644
The main advantage of marriage is that it gives financial security.	<b>18.0</b>	<b>21.8</b>	<b>42.0</b>	<b>28.6</b>	15422
One parent can bring up a child as well as two parents together.	<b>40.5</b>	<b>40.4</b>	<b>33.6</b>	<b>37.9</b>	15348
Divorce is usually the best solution when a couple can't seem to work out their marriage.	<b>59.9</b>	<b>68.0</b>	<b>71.9</b>	<b>67.6</b>	15144
When there are children in the family, parents should stay together even if they don't get along.	<b>16.3</b>	<b>20.1</b>	<b>38.9</b>	<b>26.3</b>	15109
Even when there are no children, a married couple should stay together even if they don't get along.	<b>5.7</b>	<b>5.6</b>	<b>12.2</b>	<b>8.1</b>	15264
Watching children grow up is life's greatest joy.	<b>83.8</b>	<b>86.7</b>	<b>92.9</b>	<b>88.5</b>	15218
People who have never had children lead empty lives.	<b>27.9</b>	<b>34.9</b>	<b>51.2</b>	<b>39.6</b>	14722
Having children interferes too much with the freedom of parents.	<b>29.8</b>	<b>27.3</b>	<b>26.5</b>	<b>27.6</b>	15490

\*Note respondents who said that they neither agreed nor disagreed are included in the base upon which these percentages are calculated.

**Table 6.- Views on women and employment: Europe 1994 by age group**

% <i>agreeing</i> with the following statements...*	Age Group				(n)
	Under 30	30s & 40s	50+	All	
A man's job is to earn money; a woman's job is to look after the home and family.	<b>14.7</b>	<b>21.2</b>	<b>49.0</b>	<b>30.2</b>	15730
A job is alright-but what most women really want is a home and children.	<b>27.2</b>	<b>29.4</b>	<b>51.3</b>	<b>37.2</b>	15163
Most women have to work these days to support their families.	<b>66.9</b>	<b>71.6</b>	<b>72.9</b>	<b>71.0</b>	15493
Having a job is the best way for a woman to be an independent person.	<b>69.4</b>	<b>68.4</b>	<b>71.4</b>	<b>69.8</b>	15473
A working mother can establish just as warm and secure a relationship with her children as a mother who does not work	<b>72.4</b>	<b>70.2</b>	<b>62.3</b>	<b>67.7</b>	15647
A pre-school child is likely to suffer if his or her mother works.	<b>49.0</b>	<b>49.1</b>	<b>66.9</b>	<b>55.8</b>	15517
All in all, family life suffers when the woman has a full-time job.	<b>37.3</b>	<b>48.0</b>	<b>64.4</b>	<b>51.7</b>	15528
Family life often suffers because men concentrate too much on their work.	<b>58.4</b>	<b>63.3</b>	<b>66.5</b>	<b>63.3</b>	15270

\*Note respondents who said that they neither agreed nor disagreed are included in the base upon which these percentages are calculated.

There is little difference between the views of men and women, but age has a substantial impact. Although this evidence is cross sectional, we can look at changing attitudes across generations, although we have to bear in mind that attitudes may also change with age across the life course. This revealed lower levels of support for the centrality of marriage as an institution, and in particular as an institution vital for the reproduction of children, amongst younger respondents. If we compare the views of respondents in their teens and twenties) with those in their fifties and above (so that we are comparing, roughly, respondents before and after family formation) we find that the younger respondents are much less positive about

marriage and overwhelmingly reject male breadwinner norms. Twice as many younger respondents are tolerant of cohabitation, (81% compared to 46%), they are much less likely to believe that married people are happier, and very few, around 17%, think that the purpose of marriage is to have children. Half as many as in the older group think that people who want children should get married (38% compared to 78%). However they are more confident of the ability of women to combine parenthood and employment. While almost two thirds (64%) of the older group thought that family life suffers when the woman has a full time job, just over one third of the younger group agreed (37%). They were also less likely to think that pre-school children of working mothers were disadvantaged or that mothers ought to stay at home when such children were present. While they were more likely to think that children should think for themselves, they were no less likely than older respondents to think that children were a joy, that those without children led empty lives, or that children were too burdensome.

**Table 7.- Views on marriage, women's employment and the family: Europe 1994 by type of welfare regime**

% agreeing with the following statements...*	Type of Welfare Regime				All	(n)
	Continental (South)	Continental (North)	Liberal	Scandinavian		
The main purpose of marriage these days is to have children.	37.8	23.3	17.5	17.5	27.3	14507
A man's job is to earn money; a woman's job is to look after the home and family.	34.9	34.7	24.2	12.8	31.4	14792
All in all, family life suffers when the woman has a full-time job.	62.3	57.9	33.5	33.4	53.1	14592
A pre-school child is likely to suffer if his or her mother works.	62.6	66.0	39.1	31.9	57.3	14596
People who have never had children lead empty lives.	47.4	42.2	18.9	20.0	37.8	13859
Watching children grow up is life's greatest joy.	94.3	87.3	77.8	89.7	87.9	14290
Having children interferes too much with the freedom of parents.	41.7	27.7	10.3	6.2	28.2	14560

\*Note respondents who said that they neither agreed nor disagreed are included in the base upon which these percentages are calculated.



We might also expect views to change according to which welfare regime respondents live under. Following Esping-Andersen (1990), we can group countries into three groups: *Social Democratic* or *Scandinavian* (Norway and Sweden) *Liberal* (Great Britain and Northern Ireland) and *Continental* (W. Germany, Austria, the Netherlands, Ireland, Spain and Italy). Sometimes it is useful to distinguish the last two states, in which case I refer to them as *Continental (South)* There is little difference in views about *marriage* across different types of welfare regime, although in the Continental regimes, especially the Southern Continental, there is greater support for the idea that the main purpose of marriage is to have children.

However we do find more variation across types of welfare regime over views of *male breadwinner norms*. As we might expect such norms are more strongly supported in the Continental regimes (35% agreeing) than in either the Scandinavian (13%) or Liberal (24%) ones. We also find less belief in the ability to reconcile employment and motherhood. Respondents in Continental states are much more likely than their counterparts in Liberal or Scandinavian ones to think that family life generally, or more particularly pre-school children are likely to be harmed by mother's employment. We also find that views on children vary: respondents in Continental regimes are more likely to endorse the view that children are central to a fulfilling life, and that watching them grow is a 'joy', but they are also much more likely to think that having them 'interferes too much with the freedom of parents: a view endorsed by only 6% of respondents in Scandinavian regimes, 10% in the liberal UK, 28% in the Continental regimes and no less than 42% of respondents in the Southern Continental regimes of Spain and Italy. This paradox is partly explained by the point made by Esping-Andersen (1998): 'familialist' continental regimes actually do least to support the child producing family: on the contrary, they expect the family to assume the burden of child care costs that are to a degree collectivised by the state in Scandinavian systems, or eased by the ability to buy in household services in the Liberal system.

## **8.- Views on women's employment and marriage and their relationship to fertility**

What relationship, if any, does this pattern of social attitudes have on respondents' views about fertility and their preferred number of children? Since children are not a 'commodity' that people simply desire more or less of (Blake 1968) adults' ideas about ideal numbers of children ought to be treated as an ordinal rather than interval variable. Negligible numbers (<1%) admit to wanting no children and few say they want only one, since it is often believed, for various reasons, that an only child has a less positive experience than those with siblings. As table 8 shows, two children is overwhelmingly the modal preference across Europe. The table shows the distribution and mean 'ideal' number of children preferred in each country,

together with the actual TFR 1994. In every country the ideal number of children is above the number actually born, so that while preferences are *above* the replacement rate of fertility (approximately 2.1) the TFR is substantially *below* it, especially in Spain and Italy. As Chesnais (1998) argues there is a substantial amount of ‘latent’ fertility, but contrary to his argument that Scandinavian countries have been more successful in filling this gap, it is not clear from Table 8 (or Graph 1) that this is in fact the case. What the table does confirm is that across Europe, if adults had actually had the number of children they said they would ideally like, then every country would enjoy replacement levels of fertility.

**Table 8.- Mean and modal ideal number of children and total fertility rate: Europe, 1994**

	Spain (ex cat)	Catalonia	Austria	Germany	Italy	UK (incNI)	Sweden	Nether lands	Norway	Ireland	All
Mean ideal no. of children	2.41	2.26	2.19	2.19	2.27	2.29	2.45	2.60	2.62	3.12	2.30
TFR	1.21		1.44		1.22	1.74	1.88	1.57	1.86	1.86	
Absolute difference	1.20		0.75		1.05	0.55	0.57	1.03	0.76	1.26	
Relative difference	99.2		52.1		86.1	31.6	30.3	65.6	40.9	67.7	
% adults with preference for:											
None or one child	6.0	6.0	6.0	7.0	4.7	2.4	.7	4.2	.9	1.1	4.9
Two children	59.7	71.6	71.3	71.2	67.8	74.0	63.7	53.4	48.2	31.4	67.6
Three + children	34.3	22.4	22.7	21.9	27.5	23.6	35.7	42.5	50.9	67.6	27.5
(n)	1807	352	453	4631	3331	3035	443	909	226	185	15372

We know, however, that preferred number of children is a function of generation amongst other things, so that it makes little sense to discuss potential future trends in fertility behaviour in terms of the views of those who have already ‘completed’ their fertility behaviour or are close to doing so. Table 9 thus shows similar data to Table 8 for those respondents who were under 46: again replacement level fertility is – theoretically – desired.

This raises the questions of what factors lie behind variations in ideal and actual family sizes, and the difference between them. If we look at the patterns revealed by the ISSP study, we find that many of the factors which have been the subject of extensive debates in demography have surprisingly little impact. Religion has no substantial effect, nor does gender, income (whether or not controlled for age), the domestic division of labour, educational qualifications, subjective social class or the ‘welfare regime’ of the respondent’s government. Age has an effect, but this is almost certainly a generational rather than life course one, reflecting the progressive decline of preferred family size in Europe over the last three decades.

**Table 9.- Mean and modal ideal number of children: Europe, 1994, adults under 46.**

	Spain (ex cat)	Catalonia	Austria	Germany	Italy	UK (incNI)	Sweden	Nether lands	Norway	Ireland	All
Mean ideal no. of children	2.31	3.12	2.12	2.16	2.21	2.32	2.44	2.51	2.59	2.95	2.26
% with preference for:											
None or one child	7.6	6.2	7.8	8.3	6.2	2.4	.8	5.2	.7	1.0	5.9
Two children	63.9	75.4	75.0	71.8	68.7	72.3	63.2	55.7	50.0	37.8	68.4
Three + children	28.5	18.5	17.2	19.9	25.1	25.3	36.0	39.1	49.3	61.2	25.7
(n)	992	195	256	2503	1930	1667	253	540	150	98	8584

However attitudes associated with alternative visions of a ‘life project’ *do* have some effect. Those who hold ‘reproductivist’ rather than ‘pure relationship’ views of sex and marriage tend to favour larger families. For example those who think that cohabitation is a bad idea, who think that adultery is wrong or that sex before marriage, or by teenagers or people of the same sex is wrong; those who think that the main purpose of marriage is to have children, that people who want to have children should get married or who think that married couples (especially those who are parents) should never divorce and those who oppose abortion are all slightly more likely to cite preferences for more than two children. Similarly, the 26% of respondents who thought that children should be brought up to obey their parents rather than think for themselves were more likely to prefer more than two children ( $\gamma = -.19$ ). As we might expect those who are less convinced that children are ‘life’s greatest joy’ or are more aware of children’s impact on parental freedom are less likely to favour such larger numbers of children Table 10 summarises the effects, showing the value of gamma for the relationship between respondents’ views on each statement and their ideal number of children.

All of the relationships are statistically significant at well below the 1% level, but the multi-country sample in the ISSP survey was a large one, so that even quite small effects have a strong likelihood of being detected. Table 11 shows the detail of the relationship between views on abortion and on whether those wanting to be parents should get married and preferred number of children, to illustrate the size of effects. Finally insofar as the survey collected information about *behaviour* relevant to marriage and the family, this seemed to be consistent with these attitudes. Those who had cohabited with their present partner before marriage ( $\gamma = 0.19$ ) those with any experience of cohabitation (with their present cohabitee or another person) ( $\gamma = 0.15$ ) and those who had ever been divorced ( $\gamma = 0.17$ ), or whose current partner had been divorced ( $\gamma = 0.14$ ) were all less likely than others in couples to favour three or more children.

**Table 10.- Attitudes on marriage, children and families by ideal number of children. Europe 1994**

% agreeing (strongly) or saying never or only sometimes wrong with the following statements...*		Relation with ideal no. of children (Gamma)	N
A pregnant woman should be able to obtain a legal abortion for any reason whatsoever, if she chooses not to have the baby.	54	<b>-.27</b>	1597 0
Do you think it is wrong or not wrong if a man and a woman have sexual relations before marriage?	83	<b>-.26</b>	1599 5
What if they are in their early teens, say under 16 years old, in that case is it ...( wrong or not wrong)?	24	<b>-.22</b>	1597 9
It is alright for a couple to live together without intending to get married.	64	<b>-.20</b>	1596 7
What about a married person having sexual relations with someone other than his or her husband or wife, is it...(wrong or not wrong)?	13	<b>-.19</b>	1599 1
It's a good idea for a couple who intend to get married to live together-first.	59	<b>-.19</b>	1596 6
Having children interferes too much with the freedom of parents.	27	<b>-.15</b>	1596 8
Divorce is usually the best solution when a couple can't seem to work out their marriage.	64	<b>-.14</b>	1596 3
And what about sexual relations between two adults of the same sex, is it ... ( wrong or not wrong)?	34	<b>-.10</b>	1598 2
One parent can bring up a child as well as two parents together.	36	<b>-.07</b>	1595 9
The main advantage of marriage is that it gives financial security.	28	<b>-.05</b>	1595 4
People who have never had children lead empty lives.	40	<b>.04</b>	1596 4
Married people are generally happier than unmarried people.	29	<b>.08</b>	1597 9
It is better to have a bad marriage than no marriage at all.	5	<b>.08</b>	1594 8
The main purpose of marriage these days is to have children.	26	<b>.13</b>	1595 2
People who want children ought to get married.	55	<b>.13</b>	1594 0
Even when there are no children, a married couple should stay together even if they don't get along.	8	<b>.14</b>	1596 9
Watching children grow up is life's greatest joy.	84	<b>.15</b>	1597 3
When there are children in the family, parents should stay together even if they don't get along.	25	<b>.16</b>	1596 4

\* Percentages show the proportion of respondents who chose the relevant options. Those not asked were treated as missing, but those saying 'don't know' 'cannot choose' or 'neither agree nor disagree' are included in the total from which the percentage shown is calculated. Source: ISSP 2620 Author's analysis

**Table 11.- Ideal number of children by views on abortion and on marriage**

Col	%	Agree Strongly	Agree	Neither nor	Agree Disagree	Disagree	Disagree Strongly	All
<i>People who want children ought to get married.</i>								
<b>None</b>	<b>or</b>	3.9	3.7	5.3	5.4	9.2	4.9	
<b>one child</b>								
<b>Two</b>		63.6	67.9	68.0	70.1	68.9	67.7	
<b>children</b>								
<b>Three</b>	<b>or</b>	32.5	28.4	26.7	24.5	21.9	27.5	
<b>more</b>								
<b>children</b>								
(N)		2904	5599	1684	3366	1459	15012	
<i>A pregnant woman should be able to obtain a legal abortion for any reason whatsoever, if she chooses not to have the baby.</i>								
<b>None</b>	<b>or</b>	9.0	4.5	4.9	2.8	2.3	4.9	
<b>one child</b>								
<b>Two</b>		71.8	73.0	68.5	64.1	55.6	67.7	
<b>children</b>								
<b>Three</b>	<b>or</b>	19.2	22.5	26.6	33.1	42.1	27.4	
<b>more</b>								
<b>children</b>								
(N)		3295	4466	1583	2770	2326	14440	

A second key set of influences comes from attitudes towards *women and work*. Those who take a more egalitarian view of sex roles, including parental ones, or who approve of women or mothers working, tend to favour smaller family sizes. This is shown in Table 12. There are some problems with question wording and its interpretation: in particular it there is a clear distinction between believing that women ought to be able to choose to combine employment of different kinds with being a parent of a child at various stages of development, and thinking that women ‘should’ work outside the home.

Of course people’s imagined preferences as described to a social survey interviewer may vary from their actual behaviour, but the ISSP survey gathered evidence on the latter as well. Respondents were asked about their own work histories if they had had dependent children, those of their partners and finally whether their mother had ever worked outside the home for at least a year at any time up until their own fourteenth birthday. The answers to these questions also confirmed the importance of women’s employment. If we confine our attention to those respondents who were living or had lived in a couple, we find that those respondents whose own mothers had been employed when they themselves were children (gamma = .23), respondents (both *male* and *female*) from couples where both did paid work (gamma = .26),

or from couples where the woman had done paid work when they had children – either part time or full time - before they reached school age (gamma = .20), were all more likely to prefer only one or two children rather than a greater number.

**Table 12.- Attitudes about women and work**

% agreeing (strongly) with the following statements or saying 'never or only sometimes wrong' ...*		Relation with ideal no. of children (Gamma)	N
Having a job is the best way for a woman to be an independent person	67	<b>-.12</b>	15934
Most women have to work these days to support their families	70	<b>-.12</b>	15978
A working mother can establish just as warm and secure a relationship with her children as a mother who does not work	66	<b>-.11</b>	15984
Both the man and woman should contribute to the household income	70	<b>-.11</b>	15944
Families should receive financial benefits for child care when both parents work	46	<b>-.04</b>	15959
Working women should receive paid maternity leave when they have a baby	87	<b>-.03</b>	15974
Family life often suffers because men concentrate too much on their work	60	<b>.06</b>	15978
A pre-school child is likely to suffer if his or her mother works	54	<b>.08</b>	15929
A man's job is to earn money; a woman's job is to look after the home and family	30	<b>.09</b>	15974
All in all, family life suffers when the woman has a full-time job	50	<b>.10</b>	15948
A job is alright-but what most women really want is a home and children	35	<b>.12</b>	15931
Being a house wife is just as fulfilling as working for pay.	38	<b>.14</b>	15945
Do you think that women should work outside the home full-time, part-time or not at all under these circumstances:			
After marrying and before there are children.	87	<b>.13</b>	15948
When there is a child under school age.	35	<b>.11</b>	15922
After the youngest child starts school.	77	<b>.08</b>	15913
After the children leave home.	83	<b>.02</b>	15913

This remains true when we control for age, and indeed these variables have a stronger effect on those in their thirties and forties: precisely those who are most likely to be having and brining up young children. Table 13 shows the results for this age group comparing three categories of parents across Europe. The first is those who mothers worked when they themselves were children *and* who worked themselves (if they were women) or whose

partners worked (if they were men) when they had pre-school age children. The second comprises respondents for which one, but not both of these conditions holds and the third comprises those whose mothers stayed at home and who also did so themselves (if they were women) or whose partners did (if they were men).

**Table 13.- Preferred number of children by family work history: adults 30 – 49, Europe 1994**

<b>Ideal number of children</b>	<b>Mother or worked</b>	<b>&amp; self spouse worked</b>	<b>One only worked</b>	<b>Neither worked</b>	<b>All</b>
<b>None or one</b>	7.4		5.0	3.3	5.2
<b>Two</b>	74.7		69.2	62.0	68.8
<b>More than two</b>	17.9		25.9	34.7	26.0
N	1339		1715	1259	4313

Source: Author's analysis ISSP 2620.

## **9.- Parental identity and theories of fertility: the economic context**

The results presented above suggest that both economic factors in general and women's employment in particular are a key context within which parental identity is developed. Yet within demography the integration of sociological and economic arguments in a way that gives sociology a proper role has been problematic. Easterlin's widely criticised synthesis (1978) relegated sociology to a mere theory of the origin of utility preferences. Economic issues are clearly important for how people think about children, but are profoundly ambivalent in their effects. For example, in Spain in 1998, CIS study no 2283 found that four out of five respondents cited 'family economics' (razones economicas familiares) as a major explanation for people having fewer children than desired. Respondents who had children, but fewer than they would ideally wish, were also more likely to cite such reasons than any other. Such 'economic reasons' as cited by respondents in several other surveys centre on three interrelated issues: time, resources and the division of paid and unpaid work (including childcare) between (potential or actual) mothers and fathers.

Care of children both requires time and resources in itself and also creates corresponding opportunity costs: time or money spent on children is time or money unavailable for other

activities. It is thus hardly surprising that experience of women's employment figured as prominently as it did in the results reviewed above from the ISSP study.

However the relationship between these three factors and fertility has always been an ambiguous one. The controversy surrounding its analysis goes back to the birth of demography itself. Malthus (1817) thought that rising incomes must mean *rising* population: higher living standards reduced 'checks' on population caused by absolute material want and made it possible for parents to have the number of children they desired. But as early as 1890, Dumont argued that 'attraction capillaire' – his term for social mobility – would lead families to *reduce* their fertility. He argued that rising living standards increased the direct costs of children by opening up new possibilities for social advancement for offspring in whom enough resources had been invested, and increased their opportunity costs by creating a greater range of leisure activities or forms of consumption for parents that competed with the time needed for childcare. This was potentially true both diachronically (comparing individual parents, families or societies over time) and synchronically (comparing parents, families or societies of different levels of wealth or income at the same time).

Dumont's arguments have been developed by Landry (1909), Davis (1937) and incorporated into the central tenets of transition theory by Notestein (1945). Meanwhile the ideas of Malthus have essentially been restated by Becker (1960, 1991). The contemporary form of this paradox is controversy over the impact of rising women's employment on fertility. Those who follow Dumont and Davis argue that its long term effect is negative and that it is thus the erosion of the male breadwinner system that explains below replacement fertility. They might even point to elements of Becker's theory to sustain their arguments. He argued that, regardless of working hours, economic growth increases the relative scarcity of time by increasing its utility and opportunity cost (Becker 1965, see also Linder, 1970). In richer societies people have more potential activities competing for their time, and more material resources to pursue these activities. Meanwhile, Baumol (1967) demonstrated that 'technologically non-progressive' service activities must become progressively more costly as economic growth produces continual technological innovation: a steadily rising proportion of societies' resources must be taken up by activities that by their nature cannot benefit from technological innovation. Baumol cited the example of live performance: a string quartet, play or opera cannot be 'rationalised' or speeded up, although it may be increasingly replaced by recording, broadcasting or other forms of reproduction. Child-care is perhaps the perfect example of a technologically non-progressive activity. To be sure there have been various technological innovations (disposable nappies, bottle feeding, pre-prepared baby-food, alarms, children's videos) but none of these substitute for the relatively full attention of a responsible

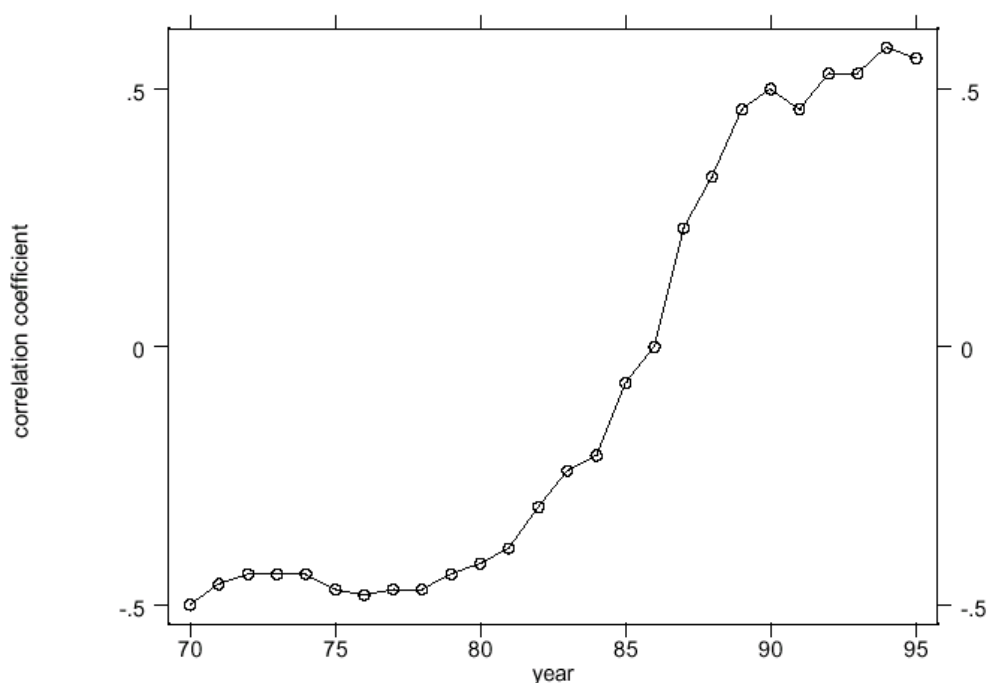


adult. On the contrary, the increased specialisation and rationalisation of the division of labour in modern societies make it *less* easy to combine childcare with other activities: whether of production or consumption. Childcare was more easily combined with both when a less extensive division of labour and subsistence production and consumption made it possible for children to be present at both these processes.

If we put these arguments together we can conclude that as technical innovation occurs and disposable income *rises*, the relative productivity of childcare *decreases* so that its cost *increases*, while the relative scarcity of time *increases* increasing its opportunity costs. We thus face that paradox that as the standard of living rises, the 'economic' constraints on childbearing and rearing *increase*. Parents find it more difficult to distribute their time between employment and family *even in the absence of any social change*. If, however, we add in the effects of the collapse of the male breadwinner system, it is hardly surprising that 'reconciliation' of work and family life now looms so large in policy frameworks. We face a 'law' here rather similar to Marx's arguments about technological innovation and labour intensity. Mechanisation, rather than simply reducing the burden of work (although it might indeed reduce its *physical* intensity) places a premium on the most efficient possible use of new technology, so that the pressure to work intensively tends to increase. The difference, of course, is that rather like a life performance of a string quartet, bringing up children cannot be intensified or subject to speed up, at least not without similar consequences for the quartet or the child.

Those who follow Becker tend to argue that increased living standards ultimately make it possible for parents to have more children, or children of higher quality (that is, children with greater amounts of time and resources invested in their upbringing). We can even place Myrdal in this tradition, insofar as her work on population and employment assumed that there was an almost pre-social 'demand' for children which social arrangements could either facilitate or repress: '... it is tacitly taken for granted that some desire to have children exists in mankind and that this desire has remained fairly constant. It can hardly be analysed...' (Myrdal 1941:53) Such arguments can take two forms. On the one hand, those with substantial faith in market mechanisms, such as Becker himself, believe that such developments as the market delivery of childcare services will eventually 'correct' short term deficiencies in the demand for and supply of children. On the other hand, those such as Esping-Andersen (1998) or Castles (2001) who insist on the central role of the state in managing risk, externalities and inter-generational arrangements follow Myrdal in arguing that the proper organisation of social policy, including monetary transfers, service provision and pregnancy and childcare related employment rights, can push fertility trends in the right direction.

**Graph 4.- Cross Country correlation of female participation rate and total fertility rate: OECD 1975 – 1995**



Source: Ahn & Mira 1998

Such theorists frequently point to the recent reversal in the cross sectional relationship between the level of women's employment and fertility in OECD countries as evidence of a changing, more positive relationship between women's employment and fertility. For example Ahn and Mira produce graph 4, based on the changing correlation coefficient between the women's participation rate (the proportion of women of working age who are either employed or unemployed) and the total fertility rate for member countries of the OECD between 1975 and 1995, and use it to suggest, as do Castles 2001 and Esping-Andersen 1998, that there is now a positive relationship between women's employment and fertility since countries with higher fertility rates also tend to be the countries with higher female participation rates.

However it is always problematic to infer longitudinal developments from cross sectional evidence for two reasons. First, treating individual countries as cases in this way implies (as less cautious economists sometimes tend to do) that we can search for general laws equally applicable across an analytically homogeneous space and time, so that one country's present might show us another country's future. This rather heroically ignores the particular complexities and vicissitudes of the development of individual societies and the evolution, for

example of their state and social policy systems. Thus we know that in the time period covered by this graph countries such as Italy and Spain which had hitherto had high fertility rates and low levels of women's employment experienced a sharp fall in fertility rates, while women's employment expanded from a very low base. Conversely fertility rates in Scandinavian countries (which had had high levels of women's employment for some time) fell much less, thus changing the cross country correlation coefficient, despite the fact that within almost all individual countries the total fertility rate continued to fall and women's employment to rise. The change in the relationship might simply be a function of composition effects.

Second, this approach, like some others in demography, ignores the crucial impact of feedback effects: awareness of the results of research directly affects the objects of studies (Oppenheim Mason 1997). The potential and reality of *reflexivity* is fundamental. Individuals and policy makers learn from history (whether well or badly is irrelevant here) and attempting to alter their behaviour, or indeed to make efforts to preserve their 'traditional' behaviour or attitudes in the face of pressures to change them. Social actors (such as the state in developing societies) are aware both of the history of more developed societies and of the results of social research on both types of society. Another way of thinking of this is of the need for demographic analyses to be appropriately aware of the nature of *society* itself. The conception underpinning Ahn and Mira's approach (and those of many others) is of societies as an ensemble of social relations and institutions understandable in terms of 'variables' which are (in principle if not always in practice) measurable, and correlated and to which causality is attributable given a conception of time as linear, homogeneous and progressive. But this is a fundamentally 'modern' conception of society, that social actors outside the Western Europe and North America from the seventeenth centuries onward, together with regions of the world influenced by these societies, would struggle to recognise (Anderson 1991).

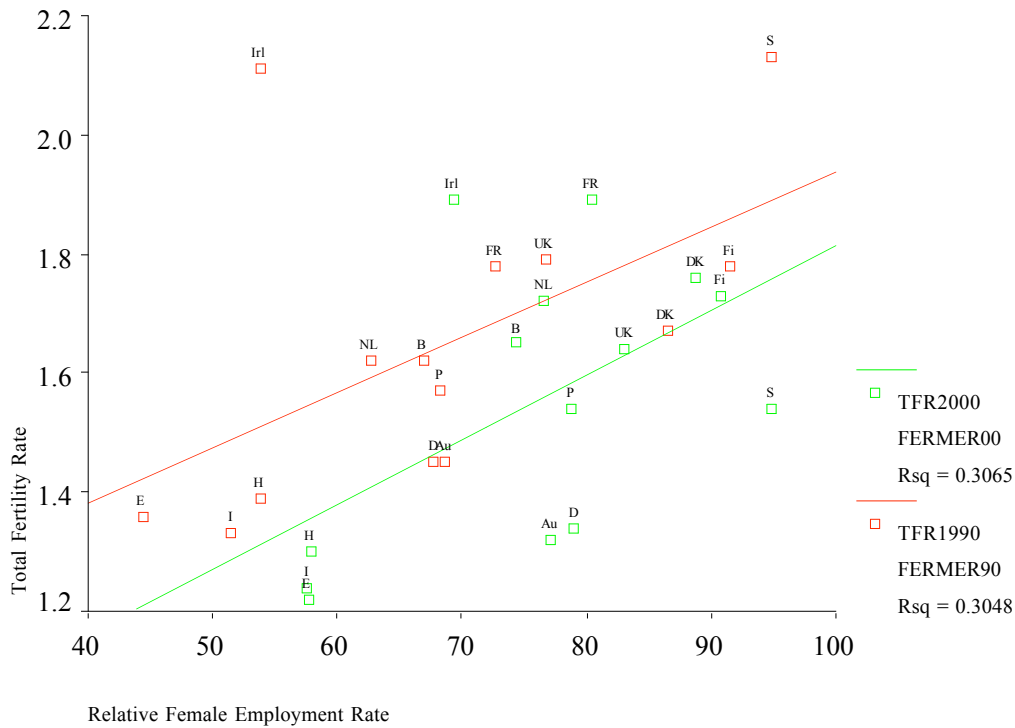
Finally, while Ahn and Mira use participation rates, for our analytical purposes the *relative female employment* rate would be more useful, since it controls for changes in employment levels resulting from changes in the general level of economic activity across the business cycle.

Graph 5 thus uses longitudinal evidence directly, and reveals a different story behind the aggregate changes in cross sectional patterns portrayed by Ahn and Mira. The graph plots the relation between the relative female employment rate and the total fertility rate for each country for the two years 1990 and 2000.

## **Graph 5**

## Total Fertility Rate and Relative Female Employment Rate

Europe 1990 & 2000



The arrows show the change over that decade for each country. Thus arrows pointing downward indicate a fall in a country's fertility rate, and those pointing rightwards indicate an increase in the relative female employment rate. Were there any consistent relationship between fertility and women's employment we would expect the arrows to have a roughly similar slope, and were this relationship to be positive we would expect the direction of the arrows to slope upward and to the right. The graph also shows the regression line obtained from a cross sectional analysis of the relationship between the TFR and RFER in the two years. The results show clearly that there is no consistent relationship over this decade between women's employment and fertility in Western Europe. For a minority of countries there is a positive relationship: France, the Netherlands, Belgium and Denmark. For others there is a strong negative relationship: Ireland, the UK, Portugal, Greece, Italy, Spain, Germany and Austria. In Finland both the absolute and relative employment rate of women fell in this period, while in Sweden women's and men's employment fell at about the same rate. Both countries experienced a fall in fertility: especially pronounced in the case of Sweden. It is instructive to compare the experience of these two countries with Denmark. Although these three countries might be thought to have similar 'welfare regimes', their

demographic and employment experiences over this period could hardly have been more different. This suggests that to understand the impact of women's employment on fertility we need to generate and understand a range of intervening variables that can make sense of such divergent experience. In the light of the discussion above, a conceptualisation of these variables in terms of parental identity and the material constraints within which it is developed might well prove fruitful.

Finally it is useful to look at the contrast between the slope of the arrows and the slope of the two cross sectional regression lines for 1990 and 2000. These regression lines summarise the evidence that could be gleaned from a cross sectional analysis in each year. They indeed slope upward, indicating a positive cross sectional relationship between employment and fertility, and the slope increases slightly in 2000 – indicating a more positive relationship which is consistent with Ahn and Mira's evidence. The graph shows clearly, however that this cross sectional data gives a quite misleading summary of a complex picture.

In passing we might also note that there is no example of an arrow sloping upward and to the left: a situation of declining women's relative employment and increasing fertility. Such a scenario is that advocated by conservative observers of the family and employment who advocate a return to something like the male breadwinner system (e.g. Fukuyama 1999, Kristol 1998). I am not aware of any country, over any recent period, which has experienced such a change, nor is it easy to imagine the conditions under which it might come about: it remains a case of conservative wishful thinking. As Myrdal put it over half a century ago: 'The fertility of working wives might be low but nobody should think that these wives would bear more children if they were compelled to stay at home and their families were deprived of part of their incomes. (1941: 403).'

## **10.- Conclusion: parental identity and a 'right to parent'?**

Let me review what has been a rather varied and complex argument. I began by arguing that below replacement fertility is a matter of both analytical sociological interest and practical policy concern. I went on to suggest that while there is some consensus about what are the main social factors influencing fertility, there is none over how best to theorise them properly or how they interrelate. I then reviewed some of the intellectual history of relevant sociological and demographic debates and tried to put them in a historical context of changing social and political concern with fertility and substantial social change in the way that households and families relate to employment. I suggested that the difficulties encountered in theorising these changes is due in part to the unacknowledged dependency of much of the sociology of the

family on a 'male breadwinner' model of reproduction long after social change has rendered it obsolete. I then reviewed some empirical evidence that appeared to confirm the influence on fertility aspirations of women's employment and the collapse of the male breadwinner system and its associated ideologies on the one hand, and changes in attitudes towards family and marital obligations and the rise of reflexive 'identity' and life-project discourses on the other. I suggested that these changes might usefully be understood using a concept of 'parental identity' to grasp changing ideas about the nature and organisation of parenthood, including the obligations and rewards it comprises, and its reflexive relationship to individual life projects. It includes changing views of what obligations parents owe children in terms of emotional attachment and practical and material support and whether this differs between mothers and fathers. It thus presupposes a model of what childhood comprises. *Parental identity* is developed and negotiated within a variable set of social constraints: the time, income and other material resources that members of a family have access to; networks of friends and relations who can be drawn upon for support; relevant services and transfer income provided by local and central government; employment arrangements and benefits provided by actual or potential employers; legal constraints (e.g. family and inheritance law) and general social mechanisms to deal with what Myrdal (1941) called the 'cumbersomeness' of children ('child friendly' public spaces, transport facilities etc.).

Allied to the concept of parental identity, we might also wish to think of the concept of a 'right to parent'. Above, I quoted Goode (1964) in order to show how sociology has focused on socialisation of infants rather than on their production in the first place. Another way of understanding this is to argue that sociological analyses of modern industrial society have tended to focus on the social relations of *production* at the expense of the social relations of *reproduction*. For example, Marx analysed the conditions under which labour became commoditised, and the social consequences of this historical development for other social relations and institutions. Weber's analysis of modernity focused on bureaucracy as the institutional incarnation of formal rationality in the public sphere and its tendency to incarcerate its unwitting authors in an unanticipated 'iron cage'. Durkheim analysed the rise of the organic forms of solidarity and its potential to create forced or anomic divisions of labour. All three emphasised the potential for the new society to generate contradictions and crises that required some form of public management. This has been a concern not only of the nineteenth century 'founding fathers' of the discipline but of contemporary debates too, such as those over the labour process or globalisation. At a political or practical level, critics have argued that the demand for 'the right to work' or for 'social citizenship' (Marshall 1950) underpins social progress by raising issues about the social relations within which people work and the rewards they receive for it. Such demands have attempted to bring some form of

collective social regulation to bear on individuals' opportunities in the labour market by positing the existence of a collective, social interest distinct from the immediate calculus of choice that may face any given individual. Controversy has centred on how far it is possible to check the potential of unregulated markets to cause disorder, chaos or socially unacceptable levels of material inequality without undermining their ability to promote innovation or individual liberty (e.g. Polanyi 1944, Wolfe 1989).

My argument here is that less sociological attention has been paid, however, to the crisis in *reproduction* that modern industrial society appears to generate. Perhaps this might be better brought into focus by thinking in terms of a '*right to parent*' broadly analogous to other elements of social citizenship such as a 'right to work' or to a minimum standard of living and so on. The elaboration of such a right would raise such issues as how the increasingly varied family forms of contemporary society can be guaranteed the resources in terms of time, money and public services, that make it possible to undertake appropriate parenting; and it could bring into focus the extent to which various social institutions discriminate, directly or indirectly, between those who currently have or do not have parenting responsibilities of various kinds. If such a concept were to encourage a more intense exchange of ideas between demography and sociology, it would serve a very useful purpose indeed.

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