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The Two Worlds of Father Politics in the Republic of
Ireland:
The Scandinavian Model or the United States model?

Michael Rush

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The Two World's of Father Politics in the Republic of Ireland:
Swedish versus American Influences*

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INTRODUCTION

The social politics of fatherhood have gained increasing attention in comparative family studies. However, welfare state variations in the social politics of fatherhood as yet remain a relatively under researched topic. Early pioneering studies on the transformation of men's family relations raised questions concerning the declining significance of male-breadwinning fatherhood for children's educational and financial supports in European welfare states (Bjornberg & Kollind, 1996). More recently, analysis of the rights and responsibilities of fatherhood in the USA and selected European countries involved the proposition of a comparative typology based on studies of 'policy regimes and fatherhood regimes' (Hobson & Morgan 2002). Not surprisingly from a comparative welfare state perspective, early studies of fatherhood have been shaped by analysis of national variations in the balance between individual roles or responsibilities and universal or selective entitlements. This paper contributes to emerging knowledge of welfare state variations in the social politics of fatherhood by presenting Sweden and the USA as influential archetypes, represented here as the 'two world's' of father politics. The paper utilises this comparative analytical framework of the 'two world's' model to compare and contrast Swedish versus American influences on the contemporary politicisation of fatherhood in Ireland through analysis of a succession of government-level reports published during the decade 1996-2006 regarding (i) family support, (ii) the Constitutional status quo and (iii) reform of the One Parent Family (OPF) payment.

From the 1970s to the 1990s Ireland was made more open to egalitarian Swedish influences on social questions concerning child welfare and families through an

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** School of Applied Social Science, College of Human Sciences, University College Dublin, Ireland.

exponential European Union emphasis on gender equality. However, from the 1970s to late 1990s, fatherhood was never addressed as a serious concern of Irish social policy. Subsequently a parliamentary proposal in 1998 to establish a Commission on the Status of Men was rejected (Hearn, 2005). However, this paper illustrates firstly that from the late 1990's fatherhood gained greater significance in government reports concerning child maintenance, 'vulnerable' fatherhood and the Constitutional status of married and non-married fathers and secondly that contemporary Irish social policy perspectives on fatherhood have been much more open to the influence of US welfare ideologies and father politics, rather than Swedish perspectives. The paper concludes that the contemporary politicisation of fatherhood has involved a largely residual role for the Irish welfare state where family supports have been targeted at 'vulnerable' fathers without any serious consideration of the Swedish experience which, is distinguished by an "immediate and long-term connection to Government policies" aimed at the promotion of a parental settlement based on a dual-earner and dual-carer model of child-rearing (Klinth, 2008).

FATHERS AND SOCIAL POLICY: COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVES

Early comparative studies of fatherhood emphasised global perspectives or what might alternatively be termed convergence perspectives on fatherhood shaped in the main by research output from the USA (Russell, 2001). On the other hand this paper places a primary emphasis on welfare state variations in the social politics of fatherhood and the divergent influences of American and Swedish perspectives. The concept of the 'two worlds' of father politics presented here builds on Gosta Esping Andersen's *The Three World's of Welfare Capitalism* typology (1990). This seminal approach to welfare state typology combined political science with political economy to identify three dominant 'models' or 'regimes' of welfare capitalism. Welfare effort was measured using the concept of de-comodification; that is, the extent to which welfare systems compensate for the labour market dependency of paid employees or in welfare terms, 'comodified workers'. Within the *Three World's of Welfare Capital* typology 'social democratic' Nordic regimes typified by Sweden and 'conservative' Corporatist regimes typified by Germany emerged as strong welfare states in terms of welfare effort, rendering residual 'liberal' Anglo-Saxon regimes typified by the USA and the UK as 'welfare laggards' and therefore the most market dependent for

workers. The economic-liberal type associated with the USA can also be characterised in terms of primary loyalty to the market, the German conservative model can be characterised in terms of a primary loyalty to the family whereas the Swedish social democratic model can be characterised in terms of primary loyalty to citizens through universal welfare state support, that is social policy supports that serve to “liberate” individual women, and men, from dependency on the family or other social institutions in civil society. Ireland was positioned ambivalently by Esping-Andersen’s decommodification index as a low ranking Anglo-Saxon type system but one with some conservative welfare state features (Esping-Andersen, 1990)

Consequential research dedicated exclusively to analysis of ‘Ireland’s place in the world’s of welfare capitalism’ claimed that the Irish welfare state, as a semi-peripheral ex colony with a high reliance on agriculture, tended to be under-analysed or misrepresented within comparative analysis only to fit awkwardly into industrialized European models such as Esping-Andersen’s (1990) *Three Worlds of Welfare Capital* (Cousins 1997). This problem of positioning Ireland within existing classifications was reconciled more recently by the proposition that the international significance of the Irish welfare system “rests mainly in its counterpoint value” as a mixed economy of welfare with a highly centralised social security system and a powerful “Catholic factor in welfare development” and welfare delivery (Peillon, 2001:2). By way of contrast, this article does not seek so much to position Ireland within existing welfare models or even within the ‘two world’s’ of father politics proposed here, but rather to identify distinct Swedish and American influences on perceptions of fatherhood within Irish welfare state development..

The ‘two worlds’ model of father politics presented here differs from Esping-Andersen’s welfare capitalism model by focusing not on the treatment of men as decomodified workers but rather on their conceptual and practical treatment as fathers in terms of social policies. In the Swedish case fathers and mothers are both highly decomodified through features of parental leave insurance that provide for substantial parental leave entitlements. A total of 480 days’ benefit is paid per child. 60 of these days are reserved for each parent. In 1995 and 2002, a first and a second non-transferable parental leave month were introduced commonly referred to as the

'daddy months'. Swedish family policy encourages fathers to participate in child-rearing regardless of marital status and parents with joint custody are entitled to 240 days of parental benefit each (www.fk.se/sprak/eng). This all-inclusive approach to parenting pre-dates contemporary interest in active fatherhood and can be traced back to the foundations of Swedish family policy in the 1930s which, promoted universal child well-being over the promotion of any particular family type (Arve-Pares, 1995). A second stage in the development of Swedish family policy dedicated to the reconciliation of work and family life took off during the 1960s. As a result Swedish social policies from the 1970s to the present day have given exponential prominence to the role of fatherhood in the design of parental leave insurance schemes (Bergman and Hobson, 2004). However, despite this exponential emphasis on the role of the father in Swedish social policy, contemporary sociological analysis spanning five continents also presents Sweden as a pioneer of gender equality and the decline of patriarchy (Therborn, 2004). Therborn re-defined patriarchy as 'the rule of the father' and traced the origins of what he termed the long 'de-patriarchalisation' process back to the establishment of the Scandinavian Law Commission (1905) and the consequential marriage law reforms which were established by Sweden in 1915. Similar marriage law reforms were introduced to Norway, (1909), Denmark (1922) and Finland (1929).

Therefore Swedish social policy places a practical emphasis on the improvement of child-rearing opportunities for fathers regardless of marital status within a historical structural context that emphasises equality in the gender relations of paid work and parenting and the dismantling of patriarchy within families. By contrast fathers in the USA remain highly commodified as male-breadwinners with only residual recognition of their social citizenship entitlements as parents. In their typology of 'policy regimes and fatherhood regimes', Hobson and Morgan presented the USA as less family policy orientated than Britain making it an extreme or outlier example of market reliance with the argument that:

Whereas in Britain the family plays a more central role in social policy, market reliance is stronger in the US, where both women and men are supposed to support themselves through market work (2002:13).

American research, from a comparative psychological perspective, has placed a recurring emphasis on the significance of father salience to child development and

socialisation (Lamb, 1976, 1981, 1986, 2004). However in practical social policy terms the USA offers little support to working fathers apart from the promotion of selective community based father intervention programmes (Mincy and Pound, 2002). Baskerville, a US political scientist, used the term *The Politics of Fatherhood* to reflect the line of reasoning that fatherhood had rapidly become “the number one social policy issue in America...Yet despite its salience in public policy debates and within psychology, sociology, and law, fatherhood has received little attention from political scientists” (2002). Baskerville’s core argument was that prevailing depictions in the USA of a “crisis of fatherhood” should be understood much less as a sociological or psychological problem and much more as a political problem (2002). At the same time Hobson and Morgan were raising concerns from a comparative gender perspective that policy makers had depicted a “crisis of fatherhood” which had somehow become “woven into the warp of the crisis in welfare states” (2002:2).

Hobson and Morgan coined the term ‘the social politics of fatherhood’ to denote the importance of “policy legacies, political constellations and mobilized constituencies” for comparative analysis (2002:3). In order to broadly define the term ‘father politics’ this paper draws on *Politicising Parenthood in Scandinavia: Gender Relations and Welfare States* by Ellingsaeter and Leira (2006:4) to convey an understanding that in contemporary welfare states fatherhood is increasingly attracting public interest and concern, and projected as a matter for political intervention and investment. The practice of characterising welfare states in terms of models or typologies was referred to by Abrahamson as the ‘welfare modelling business’ (1999). Abrahamson (1999) and Ellingsaeter and Leira (2006) focus on the “Scandinavian model” of welfare, which accordingly includes analysis of Sweden, Norway and Denmark. On the other hand Eydal made a study of “policies and caring fathers in the Nordic countries” which for that reason included analysis of the three Scandinavian countries plus Finland and Iceland (2006). However Sweden is generally represented as the exemplar social democratic and universal welfare state in studies of both the ‘Scandinavian’ and ‘Nordic’ models of welfare. This paper can therefore be characterised as a contribution to what it terms ‘welfare state models of fatherhood’ by placing a particular emphasis on welfare state variations in the social politics of fatherhood and on Swedish and American influences. The next section expands on some of the main differences between welfare state approaches in the USA and Sweden.

THE 'TWO WORLDS' OF FATHER POLITICS

Swedish Social Policy: Welfare State Idealisation of Fathers

The gender relations of paid work and parenting and the emotional security and well-being of children are prominent issues in Swedish social policy and were presented by Haas, Allard & Hwang as the core concerns of the Swedish welfare state (2002:321). From the 1970's Swedish social policy promoted greater opportunities for father involvement in child-rearing through social insurance based provision of parental leave (Bergman and Hobson, 2002). As further encouragement from 1995 one month or 30 days parental leave became non-transferable and this was extended in 2002 when a second month became non-transferable. These non-transferable features of parental leave insurance, popularly termed the 'daddy months', were positioned as a significant feature of a longer-term Swedish welfare state campaign to promote a 'dual-earner dual-carer' model or 'half-each' ideal of parenting regardless of marital status (Klinth 2008). The archetypal significance of Swedish support for paternal involvement in child-rearing was emphasised in a recent review from Uppsala University of longitudinal studies (n=24) of fathers' salience to child-development outcomes by the observation that

“Paid parental leave for father's...and employers supportive of men staying at home with their infants and sick children are still but a dream in most countries” (Sarkadi *et al* 2007).

A recent ethological or comparative psychological emphasis on father salience to child development at the level of the family is therefore strongly tempered in the above quote by a complementary emphasis on structural support within the Swedish welfare economy. The archetypal and influential significance of this complementary Swedish emphasis on agency at the individual level and structural support within the welfare economy was emphasised for comparative analysis of European family policies policy by the observation that “the family in Sweden is understood more as an agency of society than as a realm of privacy...and the husbands assumption of family responsibilities is accorded special importance” (Kaufman, 2002). However, although on the one hand Swedish social policy places a conventional emphasis on a complementary relationship between social structure at the level of the welfare

economy and individual agency at the level of paternal involvement in family life, on the other hand Swedish family policy does not promote complementary or strongly gender differentiated parental roles. On the contrary early research into men's parenting roles in low to middle income neighbourhoods in Stockholm and Goteberg (n=128 families) claimed that gender impacted positively on children when parents acted as if gender doesn't matter (Sanqvist 1996). The Stockholm-Goteberg sample illustrated a direct challenge to the significance of complementary parenting roles and suggested that male and female parental identities were gender differentiated to a lesser extent in Sweden than in the USA. Sanqvist identified the mid-1980s as an era when men first became "a research topic" illustrated by the Swedish Ministry of Labour's establishment of 'The Man Group' to study men's roles including their roles as fathers (1987:147). The period from the mid 1970's to the early 1990's thus represented a social policy departure from traditional parenting roles. A newspaper campaign in mid 1950's Sweden, which begged the question "Can a Real Man Push a Pram" served to illustrate the origins of this Swedish 'liberation' from complementary parenting roles (Sanqvist 1987:145).

American Social Policy : Father Salience to Child Development

Comparative psychological or ethological perspectives of father salience to child development and sociological concerns with father absence have gained remarkable influence within American social policy (Baskerville, 2002). Subsequently a recurring research question that has preoccupied academics and policy makers in the USA is "whether father involvement, in any or all of its forms is associated with child well-being" (Greene, Halle, Menestrel, Moore & West, 2001). This origins of this ethological or behavioural preoccupation can be traced back to Lamb's seminal article on 'Fathers: forgotten contributors to child development' (1975). A vast canon of research has since developed that presents a dual challenge: firstly to attachment-theory representations associated with Bowlby (1969) of mothers as the primary carer and secondly to functionalist portrayals of fathers as instrumental-breadwinners by Parsons and Bales (1955). These trends in American research are represented here in terms of an 'ethological quest' to substantiate a salient role for fathers that goes

beyond a legacy of 'instrumental' breadwinning and into the 'expressive' realm of parenting traditionally associated with mother-infant attachments.

More contemporary sociological research has given prominence to the issue of father absence as an explanatory feature of child-poverty in mother headed households in the USA (McLanahan & Sandefur 1994). Prominent social commentators on 'family decline' including Popenoe (1996) and Blankenhorn (1995) characterise 'fatherlessness' as a malign aspect of social reproduction in the USA. However critics argue that these conservative claims concerning family decline and fatherlessness in the USA have tended to conflate the negative consequences of divorce and separation on child socialisation with the experiences of father absence (Stacey, 1993). Contemporary father politics in the USA have combined the promotion of community-based intervention programmes for 'vulnerable' fathers with the punitive enforcement of child maintenance enforcement through the courts (Olah, 2002). A recurring preoccupation with father absence and the legitimacy of lone-mother welfare entitlements in the USA was blamed in a study of 'men without children' on the influence of underclass theories and the persistent power of conservative family and welfare ideologies (Ackerlof, 1998:307). Time-limited welfare arrangements such as the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) programme introduced under the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity and Reconciliation Act of 1996 (PRWORA) were designed in the words of President Bill Clinton to "end welfare as we know it" (Handler, 2000). However, it is understood without any hint of controversy that that time-limited welfare entitlements have "made it harder for a single woman to raise a child" in the USA (McLanahan & Carlson, 2006). Therefore instead of responding positively to demographic change and the changing role of fatherhood it has been claimed that contemporary American welfare reforms have turned lone-mothers, and by association non-resident fathers, into "second class social citizens" (Mettler, 2000). A Janus-faced understanding of American fatherhood has subsequently prevailed based on a long-standing dualism of 'good dads' in 'intact' families and 'bad dads' who fail to measure up to their moral and financial obligations (Furstenberg, 1988, Pleck 2004).

Differences between Swedish and US Perspectives

In Table 1 below this paper maps out the different methodological and substantive principles of the ‘two worlds’ of father politics.

Table 1
Methodological and Substantive Principles of the ‘Two Worlds’ of Father Politics

US Father Politics	Swedish Father Politics
Clinical and psychological Perspectives	Social policy Perspectives
Positivist perspectives on agency	Social constructionist perspectives on social structure
Measurement of father salience	Measurement of paternal leave take-up
Social commentary on dead-beat dads	Media campaigns promoting caring fathers
Social pathology blamed on ‘Fatherless America’	Low take-up of paternal leave blamed on employers
Bottom-up fathers rights movements	Grass-roots feminism & father think-tanks
Normative concern with new father ideologies and the ‘marriage benefit’	Normative concern with idealized egalitarian fathers and family agency/diversity
Family diversity discouraged by social policy	Marriage not-privileged by social policy
Social pathology of lone parent families	Normalisation of Lone parent families
Emphasis on child maintenance enforcement	Emphasis on public child care entitlement
Strong Male-Breadwinner Culture based on dual-earner/ primary-carer marriage	Weak Male-Breadwinner Culture based on dual-earner-dual-carer family model
New politics of authoritarian-nurturing fatherhood, private patriarchy, complementary parenting and marriage	New politics of idealized egalitarian fatherhood, state feminism, gender equal parenting and family diversity

Table 1 illustrates the significance given in this article to comparison between the USA and Sweden as influential archetypes of father politics. In addition the table illustrates an ongoing trajectory within the US of an economic-liberal and fundamentally neo-patriarchal discourse of father politics as set against a Swedish gender equality discourse of father politics aimed at dismantling patriarchal power in the internal life of families.

IRELAND: EMPIRICAL RESEARCH FOCUS

This section involves documentary analysis of government-level social policy reports spanning the decade 1996-2006. Documentary investigation has always provided a rich vein for social science research and the distinction between ‘documents’ and ‘contemporary literature’ became an established orthodoxy within the classic sociological tradition (Scott, 1990:1). Documents are written to support the actions of individuals, organisations and communities from the realm of the individual to the realm of the nation state. On the other hand contemporary literature is other written sources such as newspapers, sermons and conceptual literature, which are contemporary to the period or events under review. This empirical section gives examples of print-media commentary for illustrative purposes only, rather than from a systematic study. However, the article concentrates on ‘characteristic’ social policy ‘documents’ published under the auspices the Irish Government.

Irish Government documents relating to three interlocking themes were chosen for analysis on the basis of their relevance to father politics, which was often implicit rather than explicit. Firstly documents from the domain of Irish family support debates were chosen and in this instance the ‘characteristic’ document identified was *The Final Report of the Commission on the Family – Strengthening Families for Life* (Government of Ireland, 1998). Secondly documents from normative debates concerning the amendment of the 1937 Constitution of Ireland (Bunreacht na hEireann) were chosen and in this instance the ‘characteristic’ documents identified were *The Report of the Constitutional Review Group* (Government of Ireland, 1996) and the *All-Party Oireachtas {parliamentary} Committee on the Constitution Progress Report on the Family* (Government of Ireland, 2006). Thirdly documents from debates concerning social welfare reform were chosen specifically to examine the implementation of child-maintenance recovery strategies towards non-resident fathers and the introduction of US-style ‘time-limits’ for lone-mothers. In this instance the ‘characteristic’ documents were identified as the *Review of the One Parent Family (OPF) Payment* report (Government of Ireland, 2000) and the *Report of the Senior Officials Group on Social Inclusion (SOGSI): Analysis of Obstacles to Employment for Lone Parents* (Government of Ireland, 2006).

PATRIARCHAL FAMILISM VERSUS DE-FAMILISATION & GENDER EGALITARIANISM

The Irish historical starting place consists of patriarchal familism and male breadwinning conventions that are deeply embedded in Roman Catholic cultural traditions. Roman Catholic traditions are reflected in the 1937 Irish Constitutional where in accordance with Article 41:

1. The State recognises the Family as the natural primary and fundamental unit group of society and as a moral institution possessing inalienable and imprescriptible rights, antecedent and superior to all positive law
2. The State, therefore guarantees to protect the family in its constitution and authority, as the necessary basis of social order and as indispensable to the welfare of the Nation and the state.

In addition Article 41.3 reads as follows

The State pledges itself to guard with special care the institution of marriage, on which the family is founded, and to protect it against attack.

From 1973 however European Union membership, welfare state expansion and social modernisation rendered Ireland increasingly open to more secular and egalitarian Swedish social policy influences. These influences were most prominent in child welfare debates, which promoted the concept of ‘defamilisation’. Specifically the constitutional status of the child became politicised in debates about children’s rights and child protection through opposition to the concept of ‘familisation’ defined by Richardson as ‘the fusion of childhood into the institution of the family defining children only as an extension of their parents’ (1999:188). Opposition to the concept of ‘familisation’ provided egalitarian-individualist opposition to the Roman Catholic bias of the 1937 Constitution with a unifying set of ‘defamilisation’ arguments throughout the 1980’s and 1990’s. Subsequently in 1996 the Constitutional Review Group argued that Articles 41 and 42 of the Irish Constitution “were heavily influenced by Roman Catholic teaching and Papal encyclicals”. The Government had

established the Constitution Review Group with elder statesman Dr TK Whitaker as chairman, in April 1995. The CRG had fifteen members selected from different backgrounds; administration, economics, education, law, political science and sociology, with lawyers predominating. The *Report of the Constitution Review Group* was published in July 1996, comprising within its 700 pages the most thorough normative and vocational analysis of the Constitution ever made.

The CRG sought to neutralize the influence of Catholic social teaching in the Constitution. The 1996 CRG report published in the same year as the introduction of the Family Law (Divorce) Act 1996 presented a case for normative-vocationalist opposition to the Constitutional status quo. The CRG argued that Articles 41 and 42 of the Constitution “were clearly drafted with one family in mind, namely, the family based on marriage”. The CRG raised long-standing concerns that Articles 41 and 42 “had distorted attitudes to non-marital families” (1996). The CRG reflected a broader secular perspective when it recommended “social changes call for amendments in the Constitution” (1996). The CRG recommended that all families including those outside marriage should receive Constitutional recognition and protection in respect to their family life. The CRG recognized that an increasing number of fathers had no formal status in relation to their children and recommended that the Constitution should be amended to reflect a contemporary situation where more births were taking place outside marriage.

Two years later however *the Final Report of the Commission on the Family – Strengthening Families for Life* raised questions about the social status of marriage and argued rather more conservatively that “marriage as a visible institution, underpinned by contractual obligations, presents clear advantages from a public policy perspective, in promoting security and stability in family life and in providing a continuity in society” (1998:183). *Strengthening Families for Life* construed concerns about “the changes taking place in the institution of marriage” in terms of “marital breakdown, the fall in the marriage rate and in the birth rate and the continuous rise in births outside marriage” (1998:182). Table 1 below on family categories from Census of Population data illustrates the extent of family change in the Republic of Ireland. Table 1 illustrates the number of cohabiting couples with children nearly quadrupled from 12,658 in 1996 to 43,093 in 2002. Cohabiting couples with children (43,093)

and Lone-mother families (144,847) were enumerated to consist of up to 187,940 families which, according to the Constitutional and legislative status quo occluded biological fathers.

Family Categories	1996	2002	Increase	%	2006	Increase	%
Husband and wife without children	154,854	184,950	30,096	19%	217,374	32,424	18%
Cohabiting couple without children	18,640	47,907	29,267	157%	76,045	28,138	59%
Married couple with children	491,567	508,035	16,468	4%	490,592	- 17,443	-3%
Cohabiting couple with children	12,658	29,709	17,051	134%	43,093	13,384	45%
Lone mother with children	108,282	130,364	22,082	20%	144,847	14,483	11%
Lone father with children	20,834	23,499	2,665	13%	24,933	1,434	6%
<i>Source: Census 2002, 2006</i>							

This understanding of the occlusion of biological fathers from families outside marriage was provided by the Supreme Court in *The State (Nicolaou) v An Bord Uchtala* where it was judged that “a natural father is not a member of the a family within Article 41” and furthermore “a natural father is not a parent within Article 42”. According to this judgement biological fathers outside marriage have “no personal right in relation to his child which the State is bound to protect under Article 40.3”. Walsh J, made this judgement on the basis that

It has not been shown to the satisfaction of this court that the father of an illegitimate child has any natural right, as distinct from legal rights, to either the custody, or society of that child and the Court has not been satisfied that any such right has ever been recognised as part of the natural law. (Cited by the Constitutional Review Group 1996)

It is assumed under Irish natural law that fathers outside marriage have waived any right to a formal parental relationship. In the same ruling, *The State (Nicolaou) v An Bord Uchtala*, a birth-mother was understood by natural law to have a right in relation to her child that was protected under Article 40.3 of the Irish Constitution. Thus a

lone-mother or a cohabiting mother does not waive her right to a parental relationship by giving birth outside marriage in the same way that a biological father does (McKeown, 2001). Despite expressing grave reservations about the absence of rights for natural fathers under the Constitution both the CRG and the *Strengthening Families for Life* report specifically recommended there should be no amendments in this regard because firstly it would include fatherhood resulting from rape, incest, or sperm donor-ship and secondly it would include fathers who had no stable relationship with the mother (1998:326)

In many respects the 1998 *Strengthening Families for Life* report can be read as a socially cautious response to (I) the Family Law (Divorce) Act 1996, (II) the final report of the Constitutional Review Group (Government of Ireland 1996) and (III) an increase in births outside marriage. *Strengthening Families for Life* contained a chapter entitled 'Fathers: Irish experience in an international context' authored by three prominent father's rights advocates which, deviated explicitly from what it termed the "feminist/fairness perspective" in favour of American psychological or 'development' perspectives (McKeown, Rooney and Ferguson 1998a, 404-460). The 'developmental perspective' represented a conceptual departure from the feminist paradigm of gender equality associated with 1970's. The gender equality or 'fairness perspective' overturned specifically in *Strengthening Families For Life* had previously adopted by Kiely (1995) for a study of urban fathers (n=513) which, was methodologically informed by a paper delivered to the 1993 Copenhagen conference on 'Fathers in Families of Tomorrow' (de Singly, 1993). McKeown, Rooney and Ferguson went on in subsequent publication to argue that "paternal participation need not be a personal sacrifice of patriarchal privilege for the sake of social justice" instead it could be viewed "as an important step in one's personal growth" (1998b: 115). The *Strengthening Families for Life* report ushered in an era of government backed reports under the newly established Family Research Programme and the Springboard Family Support Initiative. These government backed studies included reports on the significance of fathers to family support policies (McKeown, 2001, Ferguson & Hogan, 2004), reports on social policy and family well-being (McKeown, Pratschke & Haase, T., 2003), comparative studies of European family policies (Daly and Clavero, 2002) and the experiences of socially disadvantaged young men including young fathers (Cleary, Corbett, Galvin, Wall, 2004). A subsequent review of the first

generation of studies carried out under the Family Research Programme illustrated that the personality characteristics of parents had emerged as “important determinants” of family well-being (Cousins, 2006). Overall therefore *The Final Report of the Commission on the Family – Strengthening Families for Life* ushered in an era of exponential growth for family support services in Ireland that included a significant discussion on the role of fatherhood, albeit in a selective context of targeted social intervention for vulnerable fathers. However, notwithstanding the claim by Cleary that “the absence of a father is not inherently problematic for the male child” (2004:24), in general father orientated research carried out in the period following the Commission of the Family (1998) tended to be more open to the influences of American research experiences. Irish government-backed reports on fatherhood engaged significantly with American research to advance a socio-psychological and behavioural approach to social exclusion and social disadvantage in Irish family policy (McKeown, Rooney and Ferguson 1998a, McKeown, 2001, Ferguson and Hogan, 2004). Therefore American research influences have tended to serve the ongoing development of a selective emphasis on agency and individual behaviour within disadvantaged families. Nearly a decade later the prevailing influence of conservative family and welfare ideologies from the USA was made apparent in the *The All-Party Oireachtas (parliamentary) Committee (APOC) on the Constitution 10th Progress Report on the Family (2006)*.

Research studies on marriage and fatherhood from the USA were cited extensively in the public submissions to the APOC report including *Why Marriage Matters* from the Center of the American Experiment. The APOC report discussed *Why Marriage Matters* in some detail using its findings to build a case for its own conclusions about the importance of the traditional family based on marriage. *Why Marriage Matters* provided the APOC report with;

Findings from the social sciences on an important range of marriage issues arising from American experience, findings on the relationship of marriage to family, economics, physical health and longevity, mental health and emotional well-being and crime and domestic violence. Its fundamental conclusion is that marriage is an important social good, associated with an impressively broad array of positive outcomes for children and adults alike (2006:62).

The European Life Network (ELN) submitted *Why Marriage Matters* to the 10th All-Party Oireachtas Committee. The ELN, declared, “current social scientific research in the United States confirms the importance of marriage and the family” (2006:A61). The ELN referred to US research referentially as a “powerful body of scientific inquiry” and in terms of a “huge amounts of research” or “compelling research” with the additional caveat that “there are many more studies and experts we could quote”. The impression given was that the sheer volume of research from the USA advocating the benefits of marriage to social reproduction and stability was testimony not only to its legitimacy but also to its universal significance and pre-eminence. The sheer scale of submissions citing US research provoked the 10th All-Party Oireachtas Committee to caution its audience that it “did not receive comparable wide-ranging research on European experience” (2006:62). This strong bias in public submissions towards social science research from the USA in Irish Constitutional debates concerning families was therefore highlighted and to some extent cautioned against by the 10th All-Party Oireachtas Committee. American sociological and ethological orientated understandings of the salience of fatherhood to child development played an influential role in the deliberations of the 10th All-Party Oireachtas Committee and the following quote from the Focus on the Family in Ireland (FFI) was characteristic of the public submissions:

Sara McLanahan of Princeton University, a leading scholar on how family formation affects child well-being, finds in numerous studies that children raised with only one biological parent are about twice as likely to drop out of school as children being raised with two biological parents (2006:A82).

The underlying message of the mainly conservative submissions to the All-Party Oireachtas Committee was characterised by the European Life Network (ELN) who contended that “current social scientific research in the United States confirms the importance of marriage and the family” with the warning that “giving non-marital relationships the same status as marriage does not expand the definition of marriage; it destroys it” (2006:A61). The influence of American conservative and patriarchal understandings of fatherhood was made particularly apparent when the FFI favourably cited the viewpoint of J. Q. Wilson that “by family I mean a lasting, socially enforced legislation between a man and a woman that authorizes sexual congress and the supervision of children” (2002:16). These conservative ideologies

notwithstanding the *APOC* report did go so far as to recommend legislative and constitutional recognition to birth fathers outside marriage in as a birth-right for children.

The immediate relevance of the conservative and patriarchal welfare ideologies from the USA was not so readily accepted by Irish welfare reform debates. For example a research survey on the preferences and viewpoints of lone mothers published as part of the *Review of the One Family Parent Payment* declared that “young single mothers would prefer not to accept maintenance...[because]...if the father paid maintenance this would undermine their ability to control and access and to protect their children (as they saw it) (Russell & Corcoran 2000:17). The policy proposal to enforce child maintenance payments through the courts came under criticism from McKeown in Irish administrative debates (2001:28). In addition comparative analysis of welfare to work programmes in the *Review of the One Family Parent Payment* report argued that social welfare ‘time-limits’ for lone parents were introduced under the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) programme following a ‘hardening of attitudes’ towards lone mothers in the USA and that similar developments in Ireland “were neither practical nor acceptable at this point in time” (Government Publications 2000:47-83). However, just over half a decade later, the *Report of the Senior Officials Group on Social Inclusion (SOGSI): Analysis of Obstacles to Employment for Lone Parents* recommended the introduction of similar US-style time limits (Government Publications, 2006).

Equally significant however, and despite the protestations of lone-mother welfare recipients, Maintenance Recovery Programmes were introduced to Ireland on the recommendation of the aforementioned *Review of the One Family Parent Payment* report (Government of Ireland, 2000). Consequently in April 2004 the Department of Social and Family Affairs Maintenance Recovery Section won what a prominent Irish Times journalist labeled as ‘a landmark ruling’ against four absent fathers who had failed to comply with a ‘Liable Relative Determination Order’ (Holland, K. 2004). The court cases were heralded in the Sunday Independent newspaper as “the first of their kind in Ireland” taken against “four errant fathers” and a punitive understanding of these welfare developments was conveyed in the following quote;

For the first time last week, the Maintenance Recovery Unit of the Department put the talking to one side and hit fathers where it hurts – in their pockets. The Department's maintenance recovery is expected to yield €14m this year through complying relatives...no small change in anyone's language (O'Keefe, 18th April 2004).

The pursuit of maintenance recovery from 'Liable Relatives' by the Department of Social and Family Affairs coupled with social welfare reform debates gave non-resident fathers, and even more so, lone-mother families a heightened profile in print media reporting. These debates were summarised in a newspaper article by prominent academic Dr Ed Walsh who went on to declare that "Some countries such as Britain and the United States have reviewed public policies to ensure that the formation of lone-parent families is not encouraged". In addition the role of fathers was highlighted implicitly when the Walsh article explained that "national and international studies show statistically that children who are cared for by both their biological parents are less likely to drop out of school, less likely to be abused and less likely to be involved in violent crime (Sunday Business Post 13/02/2005). Conservative tendencies to blame feminism and lone-mother welfare entitlement for father absence was castigated by Anne Carey a feature columnist with the Irish Sunday Times newspaper, who argued that the depiction of an Irish feminist-dominated dystopia was a result of wholesale societal amnesia regarding the previous ill-treatment of lone mother families by Irish patriarchal familism:

How many awful films, books and documentaries have we seen about Magdalene Laundries and babies sold for adoption? How many pregnant women were packed off in disgrace and never heard from again? Why was the state obliged to pay deserted wives and single mothers an allowance in the first place? The fathers weren't exactly banging down the doors and rescuing the women from the laundries, were they? Shared custody is a relatively new concept for a nation that in one generation went from locking up pregnant women to supporting them financially -in both cases because the fathers weren't interested. (Irish Sunday Times, 27th May 2007)

Controversial movies such as 'The Magdalene Sisters' (2002) mentioned above portrayed as oppressive the institutionalisation of teenage and older women who were incarcerated in Magdalene asylums to do hard labour in convent laundries because they were claimed to have sexually transgressed Irish patriarchal codes of female behaviour in the 1960's. Pregnancy carried to term outside marriage was

conventionally sermonized to be the most serious female transgression of these patriarchal codes of behaviour.

IRELAND IN COMPARISON

Today births outside marriage in Ireland as elsewhere in the OECD have become a widespread phenomenon Table 2 below, illustrates using data, from 1980 to 2005 the increase in births outside marriage in 12 selected countries.

<i>Table 2 Births to unmarried women as a percent of all live births in 12 selected countries</i>						
Country	1980	1990	1995	2000	2004	2005
United States	18.4	28.0	32.2	33.2	35.8	36.8
Canada	12.8	24.4	27.6	28.3	25.6	
Japan	0.8	1.1	1.2	1.6	2.0	
Denmark	33.2	46.4	46.5	44.6	45.4	45.7
France	11.4	30.1	37.6	43.6	47.4	48.4
Germany	-	15.1	16.1	23.4	27.9	29.2
Ireland	5.9	14.6	22.3	31.5	31.9	32.0
Italy	4.3	6.5	8.1	9.7		13.8
Netherlands	4.1	11.4	15.5	24.9	32.5	34.9
Spain	3.9	9.6	11.1	17.7	25.1	26.8
Sweden	39.7	47.0	53.0	55.3	55.4	55.4
United Kingdom	11.5	27.9	33.5	39.5	42.3	42.9
<i>Source: US Federal Interagency on Child and Family Statistics Data Tables</i>						

The comparative data in table 2 above illustrates that births outside marriage have become an almost universal phenomenon either rivalling births within marriage or surpassing them as in the case of Sweden. From comparative data on the percentage of all working age parents with dependant children who are lone parents it is clear, that notwithstanding welfare state variations, lone motherhood has also become a universally widespread phenomenon (Bradshaw & Finch, 2002). However, a prevailing conundrum of the behavioural sciences in the USA is that - to date - social

scientists have failed to adequately explain the apparent exodus of men from the family life of their biological off-spring which these global trends signify (Lamb & Tamis Lemonda, 2004:16). The ‘human carnage of fatherless-ness’ was a term coined in the USA by Popenoe to denote ‘declining child well-being, rising juvenile violent crime, the rise of eating disorders and unipolar depression among girls, a tripling of teenage suicide, and an increase from 15% to 22% in child poverty rates’ (Popenoe, 1996). A basic principle of this type of American sociological is that fatherless-ness has led to “a startling increase in child poverty” in the USA where the “proliferation of mother-headed families now constitutes something of national economic emergency” (Popenoe, 1996:54). On the other hand in an international study of contemporary social policies related to family types and child well-being outcomes, Kamerman, Neuman, Waldford and Brooks-Gunn made the simple but cogent claim that

Contrary to common belief, disparities in the percentage of single parent families do not explain the cross country variations in child poverty and disadvantage already noted. The varied results depend how countries treat these families in their policies (2003:19).

However in Ireland the most recent trends have been to follow American influences and to forge stronger links between social welfare policies and punitive legal maintenance enforcement (Commission on the Family, 1998). These influences are illustrated in the following quote from the Irish Sunday Times:

The huge bill for supporting lone parents is now a political issue in America. In many states, "deadbeat" dads who refuse to pay up become non-persons. They are not allowed to apply for any public work or contracts, and all state permits such as driving licences are automatically refused. (Bushe, A. 18th Nov 2004).

In addition the 2006 *Report of the Senior Officials Group on Social Inclusion (SOGSI)* carried out by the Department of the Taoiseach (Prime Minister) and the *Working Group on Lone Parents Report* by the Department of Social and Family Affairs (2006) both recommended the introduction of US-style ‘time limits’ for lone mothers in terms of welfare entitlement. This may yet involve the abolition of the One Parent Family Payment and a transfer onto a proposed temporary ‘Parental Allowance’ until a child reaches 7 years of age when parental status under the social

welfare code would all but disappear under a new ‘welfare to work’ oriented benefit called the ‘Participation Income’ (NESC, 2005:219). This would involve a complete u-turn in Irish social policy from a situation where comparative analysis has shown that Ireland has the least time-limits and most generous duration for lone-mother welfare entitlement in the OECD countries (Eardley 1996).

These neo-liberal trends are not at variance with the future trajectory of the Irish welfare state as envisaged by the National Economic and Social Council (NESC), who have put forward “the contention that welfare reform in Ireland should primarily be about increased targeting and travelling further down the road of a residual welfare state” (NESC, 2005:150). In terms of the social politics of fatherhood politics this residual proposition the NESC suggests an accelerated trajectory towards American laissez-faire approaches. Such a trajectory is in keeping with a behavioural emphasis within Irish social policy on individual father responsibility/agency combined with a fiscal emphasis on child-maintenance enforcement. Greater opportunities for father involvement in child-rearing through the provision of parental leave regimes and joint child custody arrangements along the lines of the Swedish social democratic model of fatherhood have been bypassed in Ireland in favour of American conservative neo-patriarchal influences and neo-liberal welfare ideologies.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

By contrast with earlier depictions of global understandings of fatherhood by Russell (2001), this paper proposes that Sweden and the USA represent two divergent worlds of father politics. The paper has emphasised how Swedish and American father politics differ in terms of welfare ideologies. The paper highlighted an almost exclusive significance of psychological and sociological perspectives within American father politics. The former preoccupied mainly by questions concerning the salience of fatherhood to child development and the latter concerned overly with social pathologies of father absence in mother-headed households. These American psychological and sociological perspectives on fatherhood provide an exaggerated emphasis on human agency that generally fails to address the limitations and often punitive nature of neo-liberal approaches to family welfare. On the other hand Swedish understandings of father politics are based mainly on gender equality perspectives. Swedish gender equality perspectives on fatherhood provide an

emphasis on social structure and on the universal role of social policy in reforming the gender relations of labour markets and dismantling patriarchal familism.

A major difference between American and Swedish understandings of fatherhood is that in the latter case marriage is not privileged by the welfare state. On the other hand parenting is universally supported through the decommodification of mothers and fathers from paid employment by egalitarian parental leave entitlements. To summarise American understandings of fatherhood revolve around an exaggerated emphasis on the significance of complementary parenting within marriage while on the other hand Swedish understandings revolve around an emphasis on gender equal/neutral parenting and extensive periods of parental leave. In the Swedish case a 'half-each' approach to paid work and parenting by fathers is promoted as a patriotic duty not only to children but also as an egalitarian duty to facilitate the career development opportunities of the birth-mother. (Klinth, 2007). This patriotic duty for Swedish fathers to raise children equally alongside working mothers transcends marriage, cohabitation and non-residency and applies to all natural fathers regardless of marital status. The long-term politicisation of fatherhood in Sweden involving a first stage in the 1970s and the second stage in the 1990s has been a social policy success story in terms of gender equality outcomes and improved father involvement in child-rearing so much so that Swedish society now enjoys a situation where there are "fewer and fewer fathers who lose contact with their children after divorce" (Haas & Hwang, 2007)

On the other hand this paper showed that according to Irish Constitutional status quo fathers outside marriage, even in the contemporary era, are understood by volition to have embarked on a 'flight from fatherhood' and waived their rights to a formal father-child relationship. Ironically the paper has revealed that the 10th *All Party Oireachtas Committee (APOC) Report on the Family* reinforced the Constitutional status quo not so much on the basis of Roman Catholic social teaching but rather on the basis of American patriarchal-familist influences concerning the benefits of marriage to individual well-being and social stability. Basically in the contemporary era American social science beliefs about the salience of natural fatherhood to child development and the benefits of marriage to social reproduction have provided Irish patriarchal-familism with a unifying set of arguments in favour of the Constitutional

status quo. By failing to extend the definition of the family based on marriage or to formally recognise biological fatherhood outside marriage the *10th APOC* report ‘pushed’ claims to formal fatherhood further beyond the reach of many non-resident and cohabiting fathers. It has recently been shown that a traditional patriarchal-familist emphasis on male-breadwinning and gender differentiated parenting roles already serves to keep many fathers working long hours and on the periphery of child-rearing and housework in most families (McGinnity & Russell, 2008)). This suggests that non-residency through divorce and separation serves only to strengthen an already peripheral ‘instrumental’ role in parenting and the interior world of the family for many Irish fathers.

A conceptual shift towards US psychology orientated developmental perspectives within Irish father politics and family welfare debates was shown in this paper to have eclipsed earlier trends towards welfare state expansion and Scandinavian understandings of child welfare and child protection based on the concept of defamilisation. In addition the Irish adoption of these US psychology orientated developmental perspectives was seen to eclipse earlier conceptual understandings of fatherhood based on Scandinavian derived social constructionist and gender equality perspectives (Kiely, 1995, de-Singly, 1993)

A significant conclusion of this paper is that governmental-level social policy reports regarding family support, social welfare provision and the Constitutional status quo in Ireland have drawn, often exclusively, on US social science findings and US social policy models. These US research findings and social policy models have been applied to consideration of Irish social policy approaches to child-maintenance enforcement, the introduction of ‘time-limited’ welfare for lone-mothers and the role of ‘vulnerable’ fathers in residual family support strategies. In relation to Irish welfare state development the paper highlighted that that these trends towards American hegemony in Irish father politics are fully in keeping with a National Economic and Social Council consensus for a residual welfare state trajectory (NESC, 2005).

An ongoing normative analytical preference for an American-type residual economic-liberal approach to welfare state development prevails in the Republic of Ireland. This now combines with a US-derived neo-conservative approach to father politics and

family support. These neo-liberal and neo-patriarchal developments reinvent a long-standing patriarchal-familist and male-breadwinning understanding of fatherhood in Ireland. Contemporary Irish social policy debates indicate the persistence of conceptual understandings of fatherhood that revolve around a peripheral ‘instrumental’ role for fathers rather than a caring ‘expressive’ role. These American derived social policy understandings of fatherhood depict an Irish crisis of masculinity and social reproduction. Against this Scandinavian understandings offer generous paternal leave regimes as a practical approach to the decline of male-breadwinning marriage. However Irish social policy has consistently failed to consider the Swedish alternative. The Irish approach has been influenced largely by American approaches in that it increasingly encourages ‘vulnerable’ men to become better fathers through a combination of agency and therapeutic family support. However the recommendation of the *APOC* report to give legislative and constitutional recognition to birth fathers outside marriage, if implemented, would eventually take Ireland somewhat closer towards the Swedish situation. However, Irish social policy seems a long way from exploring the emancipatory potential of shared parental leave to improve gender equality in labour market participation or from exploring the potential of labour market de-commodification in the form of parental leave to contribute to child and father socialisation in Ireland.

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