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978-1-107-09812-1 - The Politics of Work–Family Policies: Comparing Japan,  
France, Germany and the United States

Patricia Boling

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## The Politics of Work–Family Policies

The work–family policies of Sweden and France are often held up as models for other nations to follow, yet political structures and resources can present obstacles to fundamental change that must be taken into account. Patricia Boling argues that we need to think realistically about how to create political and policy change in this vital area. She evaluates policy approaches in the US, France, Germany and Japan, analyzing their policy histories, power resources and political institutions to explain their approaches, and to propose realistic trajectories toward change. Arguing that much of the story lies in the way that job markets are structured, Boling shows that when women have reasonable chances of resuming their careers after giving birth, they are more likely to have children than in countries where even brief breaks put an end to a career, or where motherhood restricts them to part-time work.

PATRICIA BOLING is an associate professor in the Department of Political Science at Purdue University in the United States. She is interested in how issues housed in the private sphere of the family get translated into negotiable political issues, and has written a book about the politics of intimate life, edited a book on new reproductive technologies, and authored various articles and chapters related to public–private distinctions and work–family policies. Having lived in Japan for three years, her research agenda has considered various practices that mostly occur in the intimacy of family that raise issues of justice and equality both in Japan and around the world.

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*Comparing Japan, France, Germany  
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## Interviewees

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- Amino Takehiro (interviews, October 19, 1999; November 11, 1999). Professor, Shakai Fukushi-gakka (School of Social Welfare), Sophia University, Tokyo.
- Atoh Makoto (interviews, October 29, 1996; October 5, 1999; June 2, 2008). In 1996 and 1999, he was Director-General of the National Institute of Population Problems, part of the NIPSSR (国立社会保障・人口問題研究所). In 2008 Atoh had retired from the NIPSSR and had a research affiliation with the Faculty of Human Sciences at Waseda University in Tokyo.
- Bothfeld, Silke (interview, July 12, 2004). Researcher affiliated with the Social Science Research Institute, Berlin [WZB, Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin].
- Brin, Hubert (interview, July 18, 2005). President of the National Union of Family Associations (Président de l'Union Nationale des Associations Familiales), Paris.
- Calman, Leslie, and Lisalyn Jacobs (interview, August 4, 2004). Calman: Senior Vice President and Director, Family Initiatives, Legal Momentum, Washington, DC; Jacobs: Vice-President for Government Relations, Legal Momentum, Washington, DC (Legal Momentum used to be called the NOW Legal Defense Fund).
- Coleman, Liv (interview, April 4, 2011).
- Daniel, Yasmine (interview, August 3, 2004). Director of Early Childhood Development, Children's Defense Fund, Washington, DC.
- Fagnani, Jeanne (interviews, June 1, 1999; June 11, 2003). Researcher with MATISSE-CNRS and adviser to the French National Family Funds (Directrice de recherche au CNRS, MATISSE – Université de Paris 1, Conseillère à la CNAF, Caisse national d'allocations familiales).
- Golin, Stacie (interview, June 27, 2003). Study Director, Institute for Women's Policy Research, Washington, DC.
- Goto Eiji (interview, February 26, 1997). Director, Department of Research and Investigation, The Foundation for Children's Future (Kodomo Mirai Zaidan).
- Grant, Jodi (interview, July 26, 2003). National Partnership for Women & Families.
- Greenberg, Mark (interview, August 5, 2004). Director of Policy, Center for Law and Social Policy, Washington, DC.
- Hartman, Heidi, and Barbara Gault (interview, August 4, 2004). Hartman: Director of the Institute for Women's Policy Research, Washington, DC; Gault: Associate Director of the Institute for Women's Policy Research, Washington, DC.
- Helmke, Hans Joachim (interview, July 14, 2004). Assistant Secretary – Director of the Office in charge of Child Support payments at the German Family Ministry (Ministerialrat, Leiter des Referats 205, Kindergeld, BMFSFJ).

- Hihara Tomomi (interviews, November 15, 1999; June 2, 2011). In 1999 Hihara was a mid-level bureaucrat in the Children and Family Bureau Childcare Office at Japan's Ministry of Health and Welfare (厚生省児童家庭局保育課). In 2011, she was a principal researcher at the Institute for Health Economics and Policy in Tokyo.
- Honda Hajime (interview, January 18, 2001). Director, Child-Rearing Promotion Division at Japan's Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare (厚生労働省雇用均等児童家庭局育成環境課長 課長).
- Horie Izumi (interview, November 13, 1999). Member, Public Employees' Union, Day-care Teachers' Union (Hobosan kumiai).
- Kamohara Motomichi (interview, January 21, 2001). Head, Child Allowances room, Childrearing Environment Section, Equal Employment – Child Family Division at Japan's Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare (厚生労働省雇用均等・児童家庭局育成環境課, 児童手当管理室長).
- Kobayashi Kazuhiro (interview, December 20, 1999). Section head of the Child and Family Planning Section at Japan's Ministry of Health and Welfare (厚生省児童家庭局企画課長).
- Kornbluh, Karen (interview, June 26, 2003). Director, Work & Family Program, New America Foundation, Washington, DC.
- Kull, Silke (interview, July 16, 2004). Research Assistant at the WZB, Social Science Research Institute, Berlin.
- Letablier, Marie-Thérèse, and Olivier Büttner (interview, May 23, 2003). Letablier: researcher at the Center for Study of Employment (Centre d'études de l'emploi, Noisy-le-Grand). Büttner: research assistant on Letablier's team.
- Manabe (interview, November 21, 1996). Deputy Director, Policy Planning and Evaluation Division, Minister's Secretariat at Japan's Ministry of Health and Welfare.
- Martin, Claude (interview, June 5, 2003). Researcher and sociologist, University of Rennes (Université de Rennes).
- Muraki Atsuko (interview, January 22, 2001). Director of the Equal Employment Policy Division at Japan's Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare (厚生労働省雇用均等・児童家庭局 雇用均等政策課長).
- Naumann, Ingela (interview, June 30, 2004). Naumann was the graduate student who assisted me with German translation, summer 2004. In addition to helping me with translation, she also gave me significant help with substantive explanations of family policy issues.
- Nishizawa Hideaki (interview, June 13, 2008). Bureaucrat with the Children and Families General Affairs Section at Japan's Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare (厚生労働省児童家庭局総務課).
- Okazaki Tomiko (interview, June 1, 2011). Member of Japan's House of Councilors from Miyagi (Democratic Party of Japan).
- Périvier, Hélène (interviews, June 6, 2003; July 13, 2005). Researcher, French Observatory for Economic Concerns (Observatoire français des conjonctures économiques, Fondation nationale des sciences politiques, Paris).
- Rolston, Howard L. (interview, June 26, 2003). Director of Planning, Research and Evaluation, Administration of Children, Youth and Families, at the US Department of Health and Human Services.
- Saimura Jun (interview, November 12, 1999). Researcher, Japan Children and Family Research Institute (日本子ども家庭総合研究所).

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- Shimbo Yukio (interview, February 20, 1997). Chief, Family Welfare Division, Children and Families Bureau at Japan's Ministry of Health and Welfare.
- Shimomura Toshifumi (interview, June 12, 2008). Deputy Director for the Declining Fertility / Aging Society Countermeasures Office in Japan's Cabinet Office Social Policy General Headquarters (内閣府共生社会政策統括官少子高齢化対策第一担当参事括官).
- Strobel Pierre, (interviews, May 28, 2003; July 12, 2005). Director of MIRE (Research arm of DREES, the Research, Studies, Assessment and Statistics Directorate) for the French Ministry of Social Affairs, Labor and Solidarity (Mission Recherche [MIRE], Direction de la recherche, des études, de l'évaluation et des statistiques, Ministère des affaires sociales, du travail et de la solidarité).
- Struck, Jutta (interview, July 19, 2004). Assistant Secretary – Director of the Office in charge of Child Rearing and Paid Maternity Leave at the German Family Ministry (Ministerialrätin, Leiterin des Referats 204, Bundeserziehungsgeldgesetz, Mutterschutzgesetz, Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend [BMFSFJ]).
- Tanaka Shigeki (interview, June 12, 2008). Deputy Director for the Declining Fertility Countermeasures Office in Japan's Cabinet Office Social Policy General Headquarters (内閣府共生社会政策統括官少子化対策第一担当参事括官).
- Toulemon, Laurent (interviews, May 27, 1999; June 5, 2003; July 10, 2005). In 2003 and 2005 Toulemon was a researcher at INED, the French National Institute for Demographic Studies (Institut national d'études démographiques).
- Tsukasaki Yūko (interview, June 12, 2008). She was head of the Gender Equality Promotion Division at the Cabinet Office Gender Equality Bureau (内閣府男女共同参画局推進課長). (Note: this was a joint interview with four people, Tsukasaki, Tanaka, Shimomura and Yoshino, each of whom is cited separately here – citation in text is “Tsukasaki, 2008.”)
- Tsukasaki Yūko (interview, May 25, 2011). Section head for the Work–Childrearing Section of the Work–Family Harmonization Office at Japan's Ministry of Health and Welfare (塚崎 裕子, 厚生労働省 雇用均等・児童家庭局 職業家庭両立課長).
- Tvedt, Karen, *et al.* (interview, June 25, 2003). Policy and Research Director, Child Care Bureau, at the United States Department of Health and Human Services. Several others attended this meeting along with Tvedt, although without speaking or interacting with me: a career HHS bureaucrat named Shannon Christian (Associate Director, Child Care Bureau), Ron Filewich, Shannon Rutacil and an intern named Ngozi Onunaku.
- Ulrich, Ralf E. (interview, July 13, 2004). Researcher at the Institute for Population Research (Institut für Bevölkerungsforschung und Sozialpolitik), University of Bielefeld.
- Villac, Michel (interview, May 27, 2003). Chief of the Project on Upgrading Information for the Health System at the French Ministry for Health, Family and Handicapped Persons (Chef de la MISS – Mission pour l'information du système de santé, Ministère de la santé, de la famille et des personnes handicapées).
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- von Keyserlingk, Ulrike (interview, July 14, 2004). Assistant Secretary – Director of the Office in charge of Promoting Local Family Support Networks at the German Family Ministry (Ministerialrätin, Leiterin des Referats 206, Lokale Bündnisse und Engagement für Familien, BMFSFJ).
- Wersig, Maria (interview, July 19, 2004). Wersig was pursuing graduate studies in law, at Freie Universität in Berlin.
- Wiesner, Reinhard (interview, July 19, 2004). Assistant Secretary – Director of the Office in charge of Child and Youth Health at the German Family Ministry (Ministerialrat, Leiter des Referats 511, Kinder- und Jugendhilfe, BMFSFJ).
- Yamamoto Mami (October 25, 1999). Researcher, Japan Children and Family Research Institute (Kodomo katei sougou kenkyujo, 子ども家庭総合研究所).
- Yoshino Hideo (interview, June 12, 2008). Member of the Survey Analysis section in Japan’s Cabinet Office Social Policy General Headquarters (内閣府男女共同参画局調査分析).

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## Preface

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The idea of comparing several countries with respect to how well they support working parents occurred to me at a point in my life when I was immersed in establishing an academic career and raising three small children. Because my children were born before I had tenure, I got to experience how parents manage to find and pay for childcare on a shoestring budget, and to do so in both Japan and the United States. The experience ignited my desire to understand why some countries are more willing and able to support working parents than others.<sup>1</sup>

My first two children were born while I was in grad school, and the third a couple of years later. During the run up to completing my dissertation, my older daughter attended the University of California Berkeley childcare centers for two years, and the other two children attended these excellent centers (and ones run by the nearby city of Albany) for a stretch in the late 1980s. Once cut loose from the Berkeley umbilical cord, I found myself working to find adequate care in ordinary American cities that would fit my schedule and budget. The options were not wonderful: for a time, one of my kids attended a commercial, for-profit center whose caregivers had little training or interest in being teachers. For a few months, the next-door neighbor watched the two older kids after school until I got home from work. I relied on several different “family home care” arrangements, in which I took the kids to a provider’s home where she took care of them along with several other children. After muddling along with these arrangements, we eventually worked our way to the top of the waiting list for one of the best early childhood programs in our city, which was a happy location for my youngest child for a year or so. At a later stage, I hired students from the university I taught at to be at home with the kids after school a few days a week. A dual-academic household, my husband and I did our best to arrange

<sup>1</sup> At the outset, I acknowledge that the work–family issues I address here are those facing families with children, leaving out the practices and policy lacunae that make work and family difficult for other kinds of families. Of course, other kinds of families – childless ones, single person, empty nest, same-sex partners with or without children – face problems reconciling work and family life too. I take part of my focus here to be on low-fertility issues and concerns about encouraging people to have more babies, so this book addresses the work–family problems facing families that are raising children.

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complementary schedules and to use the flexibility we had as professors to minimize both the amount of paid care we needed and the amount of time the children spent as “latch key” kids.

Unexpectedly, a high point to this busy period of trying to keep two academic careers on track and raise three young children was a 2½-year stay in Tokyo in the late 1980s. At the start of this period, our daughters were 4½ and 2 years old; our son was born in Tokyo. We sent all of them to childcare centers (*hoikuen*) in Fuchu-shi (about 30 minutes west of central Tokyo on a fast commuter train), utilizing three different private centers in all, one unlicensed and two licensed ones. All three of them attended a large licensed center in Higashi Fuchu for more than a year; the oldest child graduated from this center and attended first grade and after-school care – *gakudō kurabu* – for 9 months.

We learned a lot about Japanese childcare from this experience. One thing was absolutely obvious: a low-income family could find much better, more affordable care for their children in Japan than in the USA. In Japan, teachers were well trained; many had special skills (e.g., they could lead singing or crafts or teach children to play musical instruments); they thought being a day care teacher was a good job, and stayed in their positions for long periods of time; and they were treated by parents and children with respect and warmth. We were charged nominal amounts for full-time childcare, based on our family income; despite the fact that we were resident foreigners, the national, prefectural and city governments provided substantial subsidies.

The contrast with our experiences in the United States was remarkable: at home, the Flex Spending account and tax credits we got to help pay for childcare were tiny compared to the total cost, and we were hard pressed to find adequate care that we could afford on a modest income. In each new community we moved to, we had to figure out what providers were available and how good they were. Over and over we had to make tradeoffs, settling for a caregiver who was kind but not trained, or picking a home care mother in the neighborhood who was convenient but apt to park kids in front of the television set, or scrimping on other expenditures in order to be able to afford a better childcare center. Except for our experience with UC Berkeley’s exceptionally well-run, professional childcare centers, we never encountered affordable, high-quality childcare in the USA that matched the childcare provided in licensed facilities in Japan.<sup>2</sup> Nor does the USA offer monthly family allowance payments or paid maternity or parental leaves, both standard features of many countries’ policies to support working parents.

<sup>2</sup> These centers were run as a service to enable students at UC Berkeley to concentrate on their studies; they only provided about 25 hours a week of care, and they required 2 hours of parent participation per child per week. The teachers were well trained, compassionate, experienced, and thoughtful.

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## xvi Preface

After my experience of dealing with caring for my children in a country with quite different work–family reconciliation policies, it struck me that it would be interesting and important to understand why different countries take such divergent approaches to supporting working parents. Why does the United States, despite being the largest and most productive economy in the world, mostly leave matters related to caring for babies and children up to individuals and families, despite the fact that many parents struggle to pay for their children’s care or to take a few months off from work without pay? Why did the “few child crisis” and work–family issues become a prominent part of Japan’s public discourse by the mid-1990s, and what impact did this sense of crisis have on efforts to improve childcare and parental leave policies?

Initially, the goal of the project was to understand Japanese and American work–family reconciliation policies in comparative perspective, in part because Japan was not a case that many scholars doing comparative work had addressed with care.<sup>3</sup> Eventually I decided to include France and Germany, conservative European welfare states that spend much more than the United States or Japan on family support policies. France has developed a variety of childcare and early childhood education programs that insure affordable care for many infants and toddlers and most preschoolers, while Germany sends more ambivalent messages to working mothers, spending heavily on policies that encourage male breadwinner families, and only recently developing short well-paid parental and paternity leaves. It still does much less to support childcare than France. Both share Japan’s concern with supporting fertility; indeed, in recent years Germany has been ranked with Japan among the lowest low-fertility countries in the world. Adding them to the comparison made sense, especially given the attention Japanese policy makers pay to both these countries’ approaches to work–family issues.

Managing life as a dual-career academic couple with three small children living in Japan and the United States gave rise to the problems and insights that led me to write this book, and led me to do comparative research on policy making. Although the road has been a long one, I’m glad my experiences led me to take this approach.

<sup>3</sup> Esping-Andersen has written about Japan as a hybrid and as one of the “familialistic” welfare states like Italy, Spain and Greece (1997, 1999), but without much familiarity with Japanese policy history or its welfare state; Kasza (2006) has addressed Japan’s approach to social welfare in comparative context, but without much focus on work–family policies; Gelb (2003) writes generally about women’s movements and rights in Japan and the United States, as does Kobayashi in her 2004 study of state feminism in Japan, but neither focuses closely on policy processes or family support policies.



## Acknowledgements

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I got a good start on this project in Tokyo as a Fulbright Fellow in 1999, returning for short visits in 2000 and 2001, and receiving a grant from the Japan–US Friendship Commission that enabled me to travel to Berlin, Paris and Washington DC to conduct interviews with scholars, demographers, bureaucrats and activists. The project hit some weedy stretches in the early 2000s due to family upheavals and ill health which made it hard to focus on writing for a stretch. I am grateful to the many friends and colleagues who expressed confidence that I would figure out what I wanted to say about the interesting case study material I had accumulated. Sometimes it takes a community to provide the varieties of support that one needs to see one's work through to completion, and this book is certainly such an instance.

I have accumulated many debts over the years in pursuing this project, and I am happy to acknowledge all of the various forms of support I have received with it. I received generous support from several institutions, including a Fulbright research fellowship to study in Japan in late 1999, a grant from the Social Science Research Council to fund a follow-up trip in 2000, two Northeast Asia Council travel grants funded through the Association for Asian Studies, a grant from the Japan–US Friendship Commission that permitted travel to multiple countries, and an invitation from an incisive young scholar named Sawako Shirahase to spend a stretch as a visiting scholar at the NIPSSR in Tokyo (Japanese names are given in Western order throughout).

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Of course, any errors of fact or interpretation are my own.