

Hans-Peter Blossfeld and Sonja Drobnič (Eds.) *Careers of Couples in Contemporary Societies: From Male-Breadwinner to Dual-Earner Families*

Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001

*Abstract:*

This is the first systematic cross-national comparative book on the transition from male breadwinner to dual-earner families in modern societies and the transformation of couples' careers in the post-war period. Hans-Peter Blossfeld (University of Bielefeld) and Sonja Drobnič (University of Bremen), coordinated the research work of an international team of researchers, who used longitudinal data on life histories to explore what has and what has not changed for couples in various countries due to women's increasing involvement in paid employment. The countries included are Germany, the Netherlands, the Flemish part of Belgium, Italy, Spain, Great Britain, the United States, Sweden, Denmark, Poland, Hungary, and China.

All in all, this study also implies that the diffusion of dual-earner families in male breadwinner societies in the past 20 years has contributed to the increase in social inequalities. The reason for this is a high marriage homogamy, that is, men and women tend to choose marriage partners that are similar to them in terms of education and social status. In the 1960s and 1970s, working class families compensated part of their income disadvantage through wives' paid employment. Wives most likely to be employed were those married to low-income husbands, and their participation in the labor market had an equalizing effect on household income and reduced inequality. However, when women with high occupational resources – as a rule married to men with high earnings – start to enter the labor force on a massive scale, this contributes to the increase in inequality between households, and the inequality distance between social classes increases again. Consequently, not only families with a sole breadwinner (and often numerous children) but also lower class families with a traditionally high female labor force participation are the relative losers of these developments. If we want to avoid the conclusion that a decreasing gender inequality in the labor market leads to an increasing social class inequality, we need a political will which is sensitive to gender and class-related issues, and effectively uses social policy interventions and tax regulations to target all the groups most affected by the societal transformation from the male breadwinner to dual-earner family model.

*Contributors to the book:* Fabrizio Bernardi, Wim Bernasco, Hans-Peter Blossfeld, Erzsébet Bukodi, Martine Corijn, Paul M. De Graaf, Shirley Dex, Sonja Drobnič, Ewa Frątczak, María José González-López, Shin-Kap Han, John Hendrickx, Ursula Henz, Søren Leth-Sørensen, Ruud Luijkx, Andrew McCulloch, Phyllis Moen, Péter Róbert, Götz Rohwer, Marianne Sundström, Xueguang Zhou

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