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I. Interview with Dr. Caitlyn Collins

In each newsletter, we feature an interview with one of our networking community members about their current and future work. This newsletter interview is with Dr. Caitlyn Collins. She is an Assistant Professor in The Department of Sociology at Washington University in St. Louis. Her book [*Making Motherhood Work: How Women Manage Careers and Caregiving*](https://press.princeton.edu/titles/13324.html) (<https://press.princeton.edu/titles/13324.html>) was recently published by Princeton University Press.

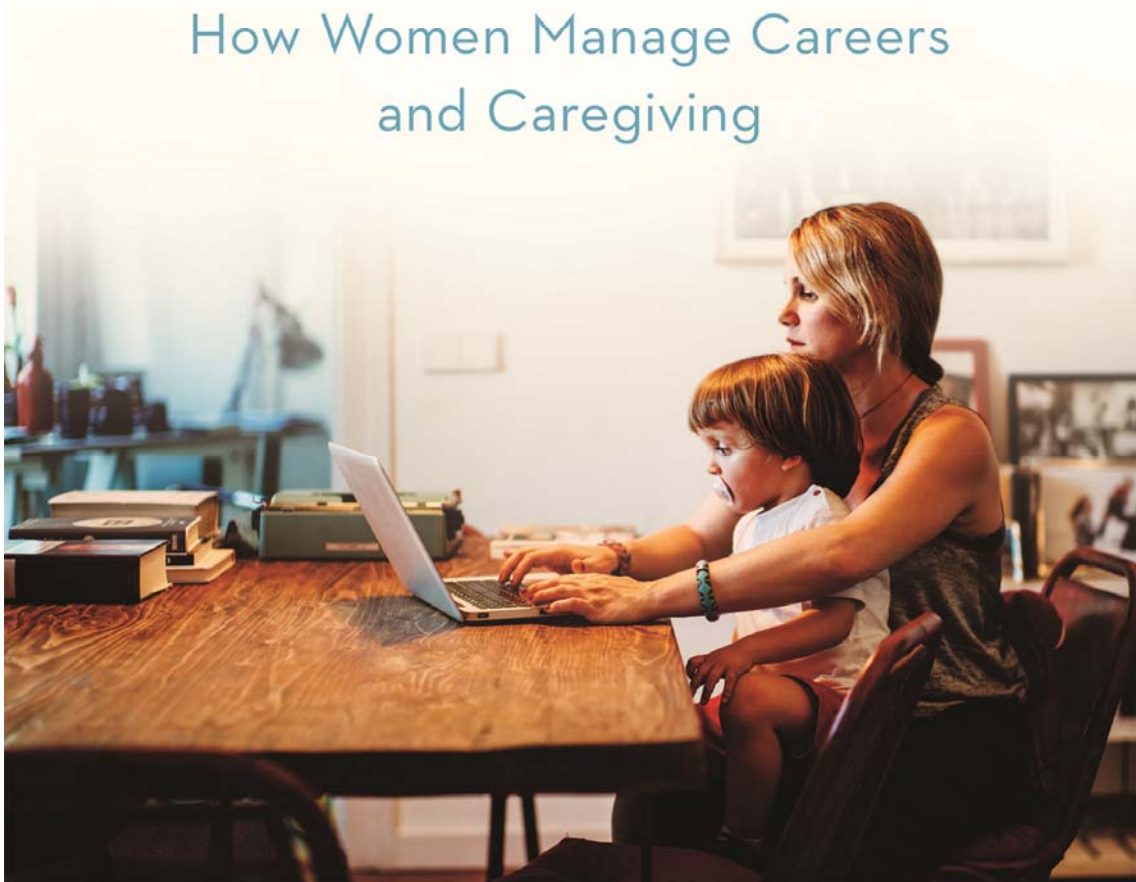


CAITLYN COLLINS



Making Motherhood Work

How Women Manage Careers
and Caregiving



The first four questions are from the Princeton University Press Blog. To read more of that interview, please visit their blog at <http://blog.press.princeton.edu/?s=caitlyn+collins>

1. Tons of academics and journalists have written about motherhood and work-family conflict. What's different about your book?

Making Motherhood Work pushes the conversation about work-family conflict beyond national borders. There's clear consensus: the United States' free market approach to social provisioning is failing families. Working mothers' struggles are only intensifying. We need structural change. Many of these writers point to European-style policies as promising models.

This book is the first to compare work-family policies cross-nationally from the perspective of mothers themselves. I begin—rather than end—with the question of policy. What's life like under these different policy models? *Making Motherhood Work* complements accounts of U.S. women's experiences with stories from European women. I engage them in a virtual transatlantic conversation to consider a wide range of possibilities to better support mothers and families. Women's perspectives should be central to any endeavors in the U.S. to craft, advocate for (or against), and enact work-family policy as a force for social change.

2. How did you approach the research for the book?

I conducted interviews with 135 middle-class working moms in Sweden, Germany, Italy, and the United States over the course of five years. I spent time with women in their homes, neighborhoods, and workplaces, and with their children, partners, relatives, neighbors, and colleagues. We can think of these women as a conservative test of how employed moms think and feel about work-family conflict. As sociologist Pamela Stone writes, if middle- and upper-class working mothers struggle to manage work and family, these difficulties are akin to “the miners' canary—a frontline indication that something is seriously amiss.” Things are much, much harder for mothers who are low-income, have little formal education, unrewarding jobs, unreliable or no transportation, and for people without legal residency or citizenship. Studies with these women are vital. I hope this book inspires more research on disadvantaged mothers across national contexts.

3. Where do mothers have it “best”? Can we import their policies to the U.S.?

The most satisfied women live in Sweden. I left Stockholm feeling optimistic about prospects for working moms. Cultural attitudes and work-family policies can play in reducing gender inequality. I show that Swedish social policies are part of a larger cultural discourse about parenting, work, and gender equality. Their social democratic policies operate in the context of societal beliefs that child-rearing is a collective responsibility, that both men and women can and should work for pay and care for their families, and that workplaces recognize and support employees' nonwork responsibilities and interests. These cultural beliefs are incompatible with the neoliberal ideology ascendant in the US. In other words, work-family policies are symptomatic of larger ethical and cultural understandings of what is and isn't appropriate for mothers. As such, they play a role in reproducing the existing social order.

The larger point is this: context matters. We can't roll out a Swedish or German or Italian policy in the U.S. and expect it to have similar consequences. Instead, with any policy, we need to examine its assumptions, content, and practical implications in relation to the wider political, economic, and social

context. We need to evaluate policy reforms in light of prevailing cultural ideals to understand their effects on mothers. They're likely to differ in important ways for different groups of women.

4. What about dads? They struggle to manage work and family life, too.

Absolutely they do. I focus on mothers because in all industrialized countries, they've historically been the targets of work-family policy. Women are still responsible for most housework and childcare. They report greater work-family conflict than men. And they use work-family policies more often than men. The conversation needs to be about dads as much as about moms.

These policies are necessary but insufficient if they're offered to and used mostly by women and not men. In other words, work-family policies should be enacted in a cultural environment supportive of gender equality. Policies can be pro-mother without being pro-equality. To be clear, ridding a society of sexism isn't a necessary precondition for implementing work-family justice oriented policies. But we need a renewed conversation about gender equality policy and policy instruments aimed at changing men's behavior alongside work-family policy debates to improve the social and economic climate for all working parents.

5. What do you view as promising future directions in the gender and work-family area of study?

I think generally that much of the gender/work/family research is disconnected from sociological theories and critical insights on race and poverty. The subfield is due for a deep intersectional reckoning. I think there's a tendency to frame work-family issues as pertaining to white, middle-class, highly educated families. I think the field will move forward in exciting new ways if we engage more with folks who study these issues among low-income, racial/ethnic minority families—especially those who don't think of themselves as work-family scholars.

And relatedly, I think promising future directions in this area will continue to focus on solutions for workers' excruciating work-family conflict, stress, and exhaustion—whether through organizational interventions, policy change at the city/county/state level, and more comparative, cross-national work. We have an abundance of fantastic studies showing that life is exceedingly tough for U.S. families, especially those living in poverty. The work that excites me the most these days are studies that focus on what we can do now with this knowledge to help ease families' struggles.

6. Can you tell us about a few gender and work-family publications that have been especially influential in your own work?

I wanted to be a sociologist after reading Annette Lareau's *Unequal Childhoods* in my Sociology of the Family undergrad class at Whitman College, and her work continues to shape my way of thinking about the world. Janet Gornick and Marcia Meyers' *Families That Work* and Mary Blair-Loy's *Competing Devotions* were deeply influential in writing my own book, as are the great series of articles co-authored by Michelle Budig, Irene Boeckmann, and Joya Misra. I'm fascinated by the puzzle of how policy and culture interact to shape people's daily lives and what they can imagine for themselves. Erin Kelly's work inspires me for the reasons I mentioned above—I think her studies on workplace interventions are powerful examples of what it means to try and apply our concepts and theories to the "real" world of work. And there's a slew of amazing junior faculty working on these issues that inspire me: my fellow

WFRN Early Career Fellows and Dawn Dow, Patrick Ishizuka, David Pedulla, Aliya Rao, and Kate Weisshaar, to name a few.

II. Call for future newsletter submissions

- Please submit items for our next newsletter. The deadline for submissions is June 3, 2019.
 - We would also love to hear about any upcoming work-family and gender related conferences or special issues of journals.
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III. Recent publications by members

- Nieuwenhuis, R., Need, A., & Van Der Kolk, H. (2019). Family policy as an institutional context of economic inequality. *Acta Sociologica*, 62(1), 64–80. <http://doi.org/10.1177/0001699318760125>
- Allison Konrad, Professor of Organizational Behavior at the Ivey Business School at Western University has a recently published case (with Lindsay Birbrager) about Fauzia Kehar. Details can be found here: <https://www.iveycases.com/ProductBrowse.aspx?q=Fauzia%20Kehar&em=0>
- WFRN members Corey Shdaimah (University of Maryland), Linda Houser (Widener University), and Jessica Kahn (Lehman College) co-edited a special issue of *Social Work and Society on Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC)*. The special issue includes an introduction by the editors and seven articles that examines various aspects of ECEC including leave policies, the impact of minimum wage increases on child care provision, and a ranking of work-family policy across OECD countries. A number of the articles were also written by WFRN members, including one by Elizabeth Palley (Adelphi) and Corey Shdaimah, and another by Jing Guo (Hawaii). As a collection, the articles address ECEC through a social work lens in several ways. They draw from social work values, such as social justice, equality, and self-determination; they elucidate the value of using a holistic, person-in-environment orientation to analyze and develop the many aspects of early education and care; and they explore the ways that ECEC work tends to be essentialized, naturalized, and gendered, despite the fact that such work requires skill and has, as its focus, the well-being of future generations. Taken together, these articles demonstrate the need for advocacy from social workers and our allies to find common ground to improve the systems and daily operations of early education and child care.

Links to the special issue and all of the articles can be accessed here:

www.socwork.net/sws/issue/current

IV. Upcoming conferences of interest to members

- The 2019 Annual ESPAnet Conference: Social Citizenship, Migration and Conflict- Equality and opportunity in European Welfare States, 5-7 September in Stockholm. More information at <https://espanet2019.se/cfp/>
 - Work, Stress and Health 2019, November 6 – November 9 in Philadelphia, PA. More information can be found at <https://www.apa.org/wsh>
 - The 8th International Community, Work and Family Conference will take place on May 23 – 25, 2019 at the University of Malta. The theme is “Community, Work, and Family in Diverse Contexts and Changing Times.” More information can be found at <https://www.um.edu.mt/events/cwf2019>
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