Conversations with the Experts


Bio: Janet C. Gornick is Associate Professor of Political Science at Baruch College, and at the Graduate Center, of the City University of New York (CUNY). She holds a Bachelors Degree in Psychology and Social Relations (Harvard 1980), a Masters Degree in Public Administration (Harvard 1987), and a Ph.D. in Political Economy and Government (Harvard 1994). Dr. Gornick’s research focuses on social welfare policy. Most of her work is comparative -- across countries and across the 50 U.S. states -- and concerns the effects of family policies on child and family outcomes. Her core interest is in public programs that affect families' capacities to combine employment with caregiving, such as child care, maternity and parental leave, the regulation of working time, and income transfers targeted on families with children. In September 2004, Dr. Gornick will become the Associate Director of the Luxembourg Income Study.

Bio: Marcia K. Meyers is Associate Professor of Social Work and Public Affairs at the University of Washington, and an Affiliate of the Social Indicators Survey Center at Columbia University. She earned an M.P.A. at Harvard University and an M.S.W. and Ph.D. from the University of California, Berkeley. Dr. Meyers’ research focuses on public policies and programs for vulnerable populations, with a particular focus on issues of poverty, inequality, and policy implementation. Current research projects examine the impact of U.S. state policy regimes on the labor force participation of mothers, on inequality in access to early childhood education and care, and on disposable family income. In collaboration with researchers as the Rockefeller Institute of Government, she is studying the frontline delivery of welfare reforms in 11 sites around the country. With colleagues at the Social Indicators Survey Center she conducts a biannual survey to monitor the economic and social wellbeing of the residents of New York City.

A Conversation with Janet Gornick and Marcia Meyers

In their book, Families That Work: Policies for Reconciling Parenthood and Employment, Janet Gornick and Marcia Meyers examine work-family policies in the U.S., Canada and Europe and conclude there is no reason for the United States to be lagging so far behind other western countries in policy provisions in this area.

In contrast to many European countries, and Canada, where national policies grant parents paid time off to care for young children and labor market regulations aim to keep work from encroaching on family obligations, parents in the United States are left to find their own solutions to the competing demands of work and family. As a result, parents are forced to find private care for their children, which can be costly and of dubious quality; and it’s often women who are forced to compromise work and employment goals when they start a family. The authors argue that the lack of extensive social and labor market policies in the U.S. exacts a high price in the form of gender inequality in the workplace and at home, family stress and economic insecurity, and the wellbeing of children.

Gornick and Meyers show that, based on the experiences of other countries, it is possible to design paid family leave, working-time, and child care policies that would operate successfully in the United States. Furthermore, the authors present evidence that these programs are consistent with the preferences of American parents and, more generally, with American attitudes toward social welfare policy. Gornick and Meyers conclude that, in the foreseeable future, U.S. work-family policies are likely to catch up with those in place throughout much of Europe and in Canada.

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