3. Work–family entanglement: drawing lessons from the complex lives of low-income women[1]

Ameeta Jaga, Bianca Stumbitz and Susan Lambert

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Work–family concerns that hinder progress towards gender equality, such as women's disproportionate care work and masculine workplace norms, mostly centre around white-collar middle-class lives (Jaga and Ollier-Malaterre 2022). Concepts like 'work–family boundary management' are helpful in understanding how people combine work and family when they have some choice, for example how they blur boundaries between work and family when working remotely. However, concepts that assume choice and boundaries are insufficient for understanding the lives of the vast majority of low-income women across the world, particularly those who occupy precarious forms of informal or non-standard work and who live in diverse family structures that may cross geographical distances, as in the case of migrant work arrangements. This chapter aims to expand conceptualizations of the work–family nexus with the goal of offering new insights into and from the lived realities of low-income women. From these women's perspectives, choice – which envisages boundaries between work and family life – is a rare privilege. We address the following questions: how would we conceptualize the relationship between work and family were we to begin with the experiences of marginalized low-income women workers rather than privileged white-collar workers; and what new strategies emerge from such a conceptualization for tackling gender inequality and reducing the challenges of combining work and family?

Low-income workers may be marginalized by societies, but globally they constitute the majority of the working population (Kochhar 2020). Rising neoliberal policies, leading to reductions in social protection programmes and/or institutionalized care policies, mean that low-income workers across the world are employing a range of strategies to reconcile work and family. To earn, they

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are likely to take up irregular informal labour, such as street vending or domestic work in urban centres away from their families. To care, they may rely on a network of supports that may span different households and/or geographies. Their work–family strategies may change regularly. Focused more on surviving than thriving, these strategies are not able to surmount broader structural constraints that perpetuate gender and income inequalities.

To address the lacuna in existing literature, we contribute a novel framing which we term 'work–family entanglement'. Work–family entanglement shifts the field's focus to acknowledging the complex web of kinship networks, social infrastructure, migration, cultural norms, social policy and workplace arrangements within which work and family take place for low-income workers. Work–family entanglement extends the ideas of boundary management that work–family boundary strategies are within the control of individuals by highlighting how socially constructed and structurally embedded inequalities reduce control, choice and predictability in managing their work–family nexus.

3.2 DEVELOPMENT OF WORK–FAMILY BOUNDARY DISCOURSES

The conceptualization of work and family as separate spheres of life emerged hand in hand with the initial industrial revolution. For example, with economic and social developments in the Global North, work and family roles became separated and gendered. Life domains were divided into a private sphere – initially associated with women and the home – and a public sphere – associated with men, work, and politics (Davies and Frink 2014). Some of the earliest research on the relationship between spheres of life examined the link between the quality of men's jobs and the quality of their leisure pursuits, and is the origin of the concepts of work–life segmentation and spill-over (e.g. Dubin 1963). In the 1960s, work–family research became a significant field of study focusing on samples in the Global North. The studies sought to understand the interplay between public and private roles for both men and women, and how these roles structured gender inequality in the workplace and the home (Perry-Jenkins and Wadsworth 2017).

Contemporary considerations of the work–family nexus continue to incorporate notions of boundaries between work and family. Within the work–family field, boundary theory (Ashforth, Kreiner and Fugate 2000) has helped make sense of individuals' needs to strive for work–family balance (e.g. Bulger, Matthews and Hoffman 2007), reduced work–family conflict (e.g. Chen, Powell and Greenhaus 2009), and improved work–family enrichment (e.g. Daniel and Sonnentag 2016) through managing the ease of transitions between their work and family roles. Both a role's permeability (aspects of

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one role can spill over into another role) and its flexibility (adaptable spatial and temporal boundaries to enact different roles) define boundary strength, shaping individuals' choices in managing their work–family boundaries (Ashforth, Kreiner and Fugate 2000). These choices fall upon a linear continuum from segmentation (strong boundaries – keeping roles distinct) to integration (weak boundaries – overlapping roles) (Kossek et al. 2012). In this framing, the individual is tacitly framed as the central element of the experience rather than within a complex web of people and structures. This focus on individual preference and responsibility implies that individuals can create, maintain and amend role boundaries in various forms, including temporal, spatial and psychological boundaries, to simplify their environment and manage multiple roles more efficiently (Cho 2020). Accordingly, individual strategies suggested for employees to adopt to improve work–family balance include cognitive transitioning (Smit et al. 2016), setting digital boundaries, and negotiating flexible or hybrid working arrangements. These strategies are often not options for low-income workers whose work–family lives overlap in complex ways stemming from intersecting systems of oppressions at the individual, household, organizational and societal levels.

The underlying premise of separate spheres with boundaries has been criticized by some feminist scholars, who argue that work and non-work spheres are in reality enmeshed or blurred and that the gendered assignment of women to the home sphere serves capitalism (e.g. Kanter 2006). The concept of blurred work–family boundaries, however, does not go far enough in problematizing the underlying premise that individuals can create, maintain, and amend role boundaries. For instance, it does not adequately consider the relationships that lock people into responsibilities and obligations in societies valuing collectivism and kinship and where large segments of the working population are low-income with limited control over their resources and time. These are more representative of realities in the Global South (e.g. 54% of workers on the continent of Africa are poor, representing 56% of the world's working poor; ILO 2019). However, the rise in non-standard employment, the deregulation of employment, and austerity leading to reduction of state services may be having a similar effect in higher income countries.

The individual management strategies of role boundaries are also somewhat insufficient in contexts where people seek migrant work across geographies to improve the lives of their families (Choudhari 2020). Feelings of loneliness and helplessness from being unable to provide emotional and care support to family members in another town or country highlight how relations and spatial boundaries that are multifaceted can create complexity in managing the work–family nexus that is rarely reflected in theory. A specific example is contexts where family is understood to be kin, as in many traditional African cultures. Family includes not only household members but also members of

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the larger lineage group across generations. While parents are recognized as parents, children are in the care of the broader kinship group who may be geographically dispersed. Every adult in the kin has the responsibilities of a parent and may help, discipline, or advise a child. This contrasts with persisting assumptions that only biological (or adoptive) parents are responsible for their children's wellbeing (van Breda and Pinkerton 2020). This individualistic perspective prevails even though the nuclear family is either not the norm in many nations or has been declining in those where it once was (Popenoe 2020). For example, in 2021, only 17.8% of US households included married parents with children, down from 40% in the 1970s (US Census Bureau 2021), and nearly half (44%) of all UK children now grow up outside a nuclear family compared with 21% in the 1970s (Children's Commissioner 2022).

Prioritizing work–family boundary management theories based on white-collar, middle-class experiences with traditional household views has led to a universalism that silences diverse epistemic and ontological perspectives. These individualistic conceptualizations appear untenable when considering people's material circumstances in contexts of collectivity, poverty, informality, precarity, and inequality that shape their conceptualization of life spheres (see Stumbitz and Jaga 2020). We thus asked, if we were to begin with the experiences of marginalized low-income women workers – whose lives typically reflect multifaceted work and family roles with complex interconnection across people, space, and temporalities (such as the temporariness of work) – could we gain new insights into these relations and build new vocabularies, to more meaningfully address the requirements of women in unstable economic and social conditions through fairer policies and practices?

3.3 STARTING IN A DIFFERENT PLACE: WORK–FAMILY ENTANGLEMENT

The compartmentalization of work and family, and of a singular linear boundary management process controlled by the individual to achieve predictability and order, does not sufficiently account for the multifaceted nature of the work and family nexus revealed in research on low-income workers, especially in low-resourced nations. Unintentionally, this conceptualization, and the policies and practices that emerge from it (e.g. requesting flexible work), can exacerbate inequalities because work–family circumstances are shaped by broader social, economic, historical, and political structures. Concepts of work–family boundaries may create increased conditions of vulnerability for marginalized women because they obscure how so-called work–family choices are determined by broader social, economic, historical, and political structures.

To equip us as scholars, practitioners, and policy makers, to respond more appropriately to work–family complexities in diverse contexts, we develop

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new theory based on an alternative paradigm emerging from low-income women's experiences and coping strategies focusing on a multiplicity of spaces and social relations. These insights are grounded in their everyday material and social realities of precarity, inequality, interdependence, and solidarity. This epistemic and ontological paradigm helps address the geopolitics in knowledge production and enables plural ways of understanding the work–family nexus. Rather than framing all women's experiences within a boundary management discourse of individual choice and preference, low-income women's work–family management practices are best understood as depending on and functioning within a complex web of work–family entanglement. The concept of work–family entanglement opens new pathways for understanding work–family management experiences at the intersection of social class realities.

We observe that low-income women's understanding of spaces and relations between the public and private spheres is embedded and entangled within collective communities within which they actively and creatively negotiate their various roles and responsibilities. These negotiations operate on multiple axes that are less linear, individual, and static, and more multidimensional, collective, and dynamic, requiring a range of strategies within conditions of uncertainty. For instance, these axes may include unpredictable time (e.g. in casual labour), temporary spaces (e.g. in makeshift housing), unreliable infrastructure (e.g. no or unstable electricity; unreliable and unsafe transport), and complex collective negotiations of care across borders and networks of carers.

This idea that boundaries are produced relationally and are multi-dimensional, shifting, and contingent is not necessarily new. These phenomena have long histories in Global South contexts (Comaroff and Comaroff 2012), where boundary complexities, uncertainties, and inequalities are more present. Hence, although not unique to the Global South, the South provides a useful and diverse context from which to begin theorizing. In this chapter, we develop work–family entanglement by adopting an approach where we centre the complex realities of low-income women's lives.

Based on research and work with low-income women on work–family concerns, this chapter seeks to expand analysis and theory to incorporate the experiences of women neglected by mainstream perspectives. It offers a framework of work–family entanglement as one possibility for capturing the complicated everydayness of low-income workers managing work and family. It presents three examples drawn from research to show how material realities and contextual specificities inform their experiences: (1) breastfeeding in garment factories in South Africa; (2) maternity protection in Ghana's informal economy; and (3) work schedule precarity in the US. These examples underscore the realities of women in jobs in the lower levels of these diverse economies and present plural discourses that shed light on the creation of informal mechanisms embedded in local communities. Together, these exam-

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ples extend work–family knowledge through the framework of work–family entanglement, to reflect the experiences of large populations of workers more accurately across the globe who are marginalized by societies yet central to all economies.

3.4 BREASTFEEDING AT WORK AMONG LOW-INCOME GARMENT WORKERS IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT

Breastfeeding tends to be treated as a matter to be addressed in the health facility, family, and community sphere. The role that workplaces can play in promoting breastfeeding is rarely focused on (Rollins et al. 2016) despite advancements in global and local policy and legislation by the International Labour Organization (ILO), the World Health Organization (WHO) and UNICEF. In South Africa, post-apartheid labour laws and a constitution that provided for gender equality saw a sharp rise in women's participation in the formal labour market. Pro-feminist legislation in the 1990s facilitated the increased entry of women into employment, now representing just over half the labour force (53%) (Statistics South Africa 2023), with high increases at the unskilled and semi-skilled levels. Maternity protection includes four months of maternity leave (paid at two-thirds of previous earnings through the unemployment insurance fund) and the right of mothers to breastfeed at work via two daily breaks of 30 minutes for the first six months of the child's life (South African Government 2018). Not only is policy implementation poor owing to ignorance of laws and a weak enforcement structure (Martin-Wiesner 2018), but the policy also has a bias towards women with middle class advantages in formalized employment and resources such as the internet to access information. These maternity protection policies do not adequately support women in informal and precarious types of non-standard employment, and have not been designed with a consideration of low-income mothers' lived realities.

Combining breastfeeding with employment remains a challenge for women in South Africa and across the globe. The WHO recommends 6 months of exclusive breastfeeding (giving breastmilk only) for optimal infant nutrition. In 2012, South Africa reported the lowest exclusive breastfeeding rates in the world at 8% (UNICEF 2012), despite high breastfeeding initiation rates of up to 97%. With several policy changes on the removal of free formula, Prevention of Mother-to-Child Transmission of HIV programmes, and legislation on the code of marketing of breastmilk substitutes (Jackson et al. 2019), this rate increased in 2016 to 24% for infants aged 4–5 months (SADHS 2016). However, progress is still too slow to reach the WHO goal of 50% by 2025. A major reason for breastfeeding cessation both globally (Rollins et al. 2016)

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and in South Africa (Siziba et al. 2015) is a mother's return to work. This occurrence is amplified in the context of low-income women who return to work early out of economic necessity and their low-skilled labour being easily replaceable (Stumbitz and Jaga 2020).

In South Africa, approximately 40% of households are women-headed for a range of reasons, including fathers who have migrated for work or been killed in conflicts, female labour migration (even if transitory) (Nwosu and Ndinda 2018), and the evolving gendered economy (Posel and Casale 2019). These women are mostly black and low-income. There is heterogeneity within these women's household headships, which is associated with employment status, family structures, and the availability of support. These lived realities require a redefinition of traditional conceptions of the breadwinner, family forms, and of the division of labour, and challenge assumed universals in scholarship on work–family boundary management.

We use findings from a study on breastfeeding at work among low-income women and focus on those working in garment factories in the city of Cape Town, South Africa (see Stumbitz and Jaga 2020) to illustrate the work–family entanglement that is at play for women working to meet work and family demands. Garment factories in South Africa provide a specific local context for perceived 'low- and semi-skilled', low-income female labour at mass. The analysis for this project was carried out on fieldwork data collected in 2018 and 2019 in four garment factories in Cape Town from 71 face-to-face semi-structured interviews with mothers working in the factories as well as line supervisors and managers.

The reality of many of the low-income mothers was the various familial or community networks within their daily lives with which they negotiated support for care of their children to be able to earn an income. In the absence of a partner or being a very young mother and breadwinner to an extended family, support was garnered through a combination of parents and siblings, proximal neighbours, geographically distant grandparents, and even the factory line-supervisor when the mother had no other support. One line-supervisor said, 'I'm the mother, I'm the social worker, I'm everything [to the women on my line]' (S7_TCI_L).

This network of support demonstrates how employment, breastfeeding, and care work are embedded in a wider set of contextual constraints and advantages that is unique in specific contexts, yet also widespread. The infant and mother almost always do not exist in a nuclear family setting, which means that the infant's nourishment does not lie exclusively within nuclear networks of care either. For example, an infant may be in the care of a neighbour who embraces the notion of kinship and who will therefore make care decisions independent of the mother who is at work. Or a grandmother may believe that she knows best having raised her own children and that her actions are in the

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best interests of her daughter (who wants to return to work) and her grandchild. This young new mother shared:

> Some people now tell me that my mother put him on the bottle too early, and I didn't know. She started bottle feeding him at two months. I said to her that I wanted to start working again. She then told me that I must put him on the bottle and in the mornings before I go to work and in the evenings, he could still be breastfed, but he then refused the breast. (C2_ALS_M)

In low-income collective contexts where children are in the care of kin, there is a movement of both the mother and infant between different people who assist with care. While this mother may breastfeed in the morning and night, in the day, someone else determines the rhythm of the care for the infant so that she can earn an income. For this mother, her own childhood was in the care of her grandmother and neighbours, while her mother worked in the city, some distance away, to support her. She adds:

> We didn't grow up with my mother. We were brought up by our grandmother. My mother had to work a lot for us. She was working in Cape Town and we were living in Graaff Reinet (a distance of about 700 km) – we are originally from Graaff Reinet. However, she assisted me much and when she didn't know something, she would call our neighbour. The neighbour would help us then. (C2_ALS_M)

It was quite common for women, in preparation for their return to work after maternity leave, to send their young children to rural areas in the Eastern Cape (a neighbouring province over 900 km from the city Cape Town), where they are raised by grandparents and extended family, as the women have often migrated to the city for employment. These women send remittances to the caregivers, keep in contact with their children, and return to visit them about once a year when the factories close for year-end holidays. Only about 34% of South African children live with both their parents (Hall and Sambu 2019). Therefore, this split family arrangement is a strategy to survive the complex socio-economic conditions in which these women find themselves. Parenting children from a distance through a substitute caregiver has become normalized in South Africa, mainly because of migrant labour, which has reconfigured the notions of family and parenting (Seepamore 2016).

The assumption that a mother has individual choice and control over the wellbeing of her child is thus steeped in individualism. The extension of care from neighbours, grandmothers, and other community members was common in the stories of the garment factory workers, not only for childminding during

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the day so that a mother could continue paid work, but also for sharing breast-milk. A mother shared:

> I told her to bring her baby and I will breastfeed him, don't be shy, come to me and I will breastfeed him. There were also many times when she didn't have money to buy milk for the baby. Then I told her to bring her baby and I would breastfeed him after my baby was full and I still had plenty of milk left.

In this example, collective care with a sensitivity to context of the high cost of infant formula for a low-income working mother disrupts assumptions of individual control over work–family boundary decisions that do not adequately fit the rhythms of these low-income women working in garment factories in a resource-constrained context. These working women create their own pluralistic means of caring for children in the community and seek informed advice from more experienced mothers in the family and community that they trust.

Importantly, the family and community forms of care that we see here are not necessarily unique to black, low-income settings in garment factories in South Africa. They also show that practices and policies formed on ideologies of families being nuclear, of children living with their parents, of mothers having autonomy over their breastfeeding practices, and of having choice over linear boundary management preferences are challenged in this context. Here, mothers are less able to control the boundaries between work and family to ensure employment and the well-being of their children. Their material and economic realities encompass complex interactions between work and family, in and across multiple boundary dimensions, that must be managed between neighbours, extended family, in and across provincial borders, and supervisors. Labour and care policies, programmes, and practices must take these intersecting identities into account at the design and development stages to have meaningful and equitable benefits to diverse women.

3.5 MATERNITY PROTECTION AT WORK IN GHANA'S INFORMAL ECONOMY

Maternity protection[2] at work is not only an important instrument for helping new mothers to combine work and family, but a fundamental human right and crucial to promoting maternal and child health, as well as preventing discrimination against women at work. However, maternity protection mostly benefits workers in formal and standard[3] employment. In lower-income countries, employment can mainly be found in the informal economy. Informal employment is particularly prevalent in Africa (84%), leaving a considerable majority of working women without adequate maternity protection (ILO 2023).

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In Ghana, national legislation (Labour Act 2003, Act 651), provides for 12 weeks of maternity leave expected to be paid fully by the employer at 100% of previous earnings. However, 90.1% of total employment and 94% of female employment is in the informal economy (ILO 2018) where this legislation is not enforced. Although informal economy workers tend to be treated as vulnerable workers 'on the margins' in the work–family literature, in Ghana they are the vast majority of the economy and thus the norm. Most enterprises here are small or micro-businesses with fewer than 10 employees and scarce resources, whose key focus is on short-term survival and minimizing costs. Informal economy employers mostly cannot afford to pay maternity leave, forcing new mothers to return to work shortly after birth out of economic necessity (Lewis et al. 2014). It is also notable that the majority of informal economy employers are women and mothers themselves and that the levels and nature of maternity support that they provide for their employees are driven by their own vulnerability (Stumbitz et al. 2017, Stumbitz 2020).

An ILO-funded study, led by co-author Bianca Stumbitz (see Stumbitz et al. 2017), explored maternity protection in various forms and sizes of enterprise[4] in Ghana, a country with high rates of maternal mortality and morbidity. Qualitative interviews were conducted with 29 employers, 34 employees and 37 self-employed (own-account) workers across three geographic regions of Ghana (Accra, Eastern Region, Upper East).

The study only identified a few cases in the informal economy where employers provided paid leave, although at a reduced level, for example, paying 100% of previous earnings for two months or 50% of earnings for three months. The length of employees' time off from work after childbirth thus depended on their individual circumstances and their ability to draw on savings or financial and in-kind support from their spouse, their family and friends. Particularly in the poverty-stricken Upper Eastern region it was common practice for women to return to work just a few days after the birth. When asked about the reasons for this practice, one of the participants commented 'out of necessity we close our eyes'.

However, the same study also found that informal economy workplaces develop their own approaches to supporting new mothers at work. These approaches are adapted to the resource-constrained circumstances of these settings. Informal economy employers were struggling to provide legal aspects of maternity protection, such as paid maternity leave, but were much better at providing family-friendly support measures, such as informal childcare support and opportunities for breastfeeding at work. Particularly in rural areas, formal childcare facilities were extremely scarce. In addition, in contrast to professional workers in the formal economy, informal economy workers regarded breastfeeding as the norm, as formula was simply too costly and not widely available outside urban areas. The ability to breastfeed is thus not part

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of a Western-born 'breast is best' or choice discourse but instead, a potential life and death decision for an infant.

In most informal workplaces it was therefore common practice for employees to bring their babies to work on a regular or even daily basis and to breastfeed when necessary. Here, the boundaries between work and care had been almost entirely dissolved, as illustrated by the following example:

> The employer's main objective is to help single mothers take care of their babies so that is why I came to work here. He does not give us maternity leave so […] when you give birth you just bring the baby with you to work because if you stay at home you will not be paid. He does not mind when the babies are with us during working hours, so anytime the baby wants breast milk we give them. (Beadmaker, informal, Eastern Region)

In a few cases, informal businesses had also developed their own formalized support structures. For example, one of our fieldwork settings, an informal market in Accra, had a crèche and a pre-school on site which was used by the market traders, catering for children aged 1.5–5 years.[5] It allowed women to continue their work when their children had reached an age where they were more likely to run around, and the market had become unsafe for them. Mothers carried their younger children in a cloth on their backs, enabling work and care simultaneously. Similarly, in a weaving business, both the employer and her apprentices brought their babies to work and could breastfeed when necessary. Older children were attending school nearby and would come after school to help look after their younger siblings.

A key theme across the data was that workplace culture in smaller firms was characterized by much closer relationships between employers, employees and co-workers than in large businesses, as found in other research (Lewis et al. 2014). Workplaces often became extensions of the culturally highly valued and respected community and family settings, with staff members calling their employer 'Mama' and employers regarding their staff as their children:

> My organization is like a family business […] and I see [my workers'] babies as mine, like a grandma. I have a worker who is a breastfeeding mother – she worked very hard during pregnancy. Three more people have been on maternity recently. I allow them to bring their babies to work. I treat them like family and I have decided to help them. (Restaurant owner, informal, 15 staff, Eastern Region)

According to informal economy employers, their employees often showed their appreciation of family-friendly support by being more motivated and loyal to the business (even if they had not received any paid maternity leave). The following example demonstrates how witnessing a mother being sup-

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ported could also increase the motivation of colleagues and create a sense of unity rather than rivalry among the team:

> by helping that lady, it improves the work in the kitchen, and they will see that madam will stand by them and not sack them. It has changed their mentality to know that they are secure and that, if they are in the same situation, they will not be left alone. (Restaurant owner, informal, five staff, urban Upper East)

These examples demonstrate the entanglement of the work–family nexus in all its messiness. Without wanting to glorify working conditions in the informal economy, there is much that workplaces across the world can learn from the context-sensitive coping strategies that are responsive to a deficient social protection system. Here the need to integrate motherhood with employment is at least regarded as the norm. The notion of choice with respect to the management of work and family, however, is an alien concept for most of the working population. Rather, it is only applicable to a small minority of professional workers in the formal economy where women's work–family choices are constrained in similar ways as in other parts of the globe.

3.6 PRECARIOUS WORK SCHEDULES IN LOW-WAGE JOBS IN THE UNITED STATES

Recognition of the growing precarity of employment in the US has generated research examining the changing nature of work hours and its ramifications for workers and families. This work started as a reaction to outdated depictions of the 'standard' work schedule as 9–5, Monday to Friday. So-called standard forms of employment – defined as work that is full-time, indefinite and constructed around an employer–employee relationship – has decreased in both industrialized and developing countries over the past two decades (ILO 2016). Even in the 1990s, most US workers worked at least 50% of their time outside the 'standard', which has long been true among low-income workers, especially women of colour (Presser 2003). Over the past 20 years, researchers have advanced understanding of specific aspects of work schedules that undermine household economic security and worker and family well-being at the lower levels of the US labour market. However, the starting place for inquiry continues to be 'standard' hour arrangements. In this section, we explore what might be learned about the work and family nexus if researchers from the Global North investigated work hours from the starting point of employment conditions in the Global South, building on the themes included in our prior examination of work–family entanglement in South Africa and Ghana.

When we use the Global South as a starting point, the usefulness of the juxtaposition of 'standard' v. 'non-standard' is called into question. As in Ghana,

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where over 90% of workers toil in the informal economy and in South Africa, where many workers are excluded from formal social protections, precarity is widespread in the US labour market, especially among workers in jobs paid by the hour. Over half (56%) of workers in the formal US labour market are paid by the hour which means that earnings vary in concert with hours worked (US Bureau of Labor Statistics 2022). In 2016, 80% of hourly paid employees in the US reported week-to-week hour fluctuations that averaged more than a full day of pay (12 hours of work) and 40% reported a week or less of advance notice (Lambert, Henly and Kim 2019) Starting with the perspective that schedule instability and unpredictability are the rule rather than the exception reveals how the term 'non-standard' obscures what is actually commonplace for the majority.

The notion of boundary management can serve as a smokescreen by implying both control and boundaries. About half of US workers in hourly jobs report that they have little input into the number of hours they work (47%) or the timing of their hours (65%) (Lambert, Henly and Kim 2019). Without schedule control, the only management that can happen is on the personal/family side but, like low-income women in South Africa, low-income women in the US have restricted access to supports provided through public programmes and private employers (Henly, Lambert and Dresser 2021).

And, like workers in South Africa and Ghana, the boundaries between work and family are elusive for US workers in jobs where working time is constantly shifting at the behest of the employer. Recent research using daily time-diaries of low-income women working in the US retail sector shows that rather than freeing up quality time to spend with children, having a shift cut at the last minute increases stress that undermines mother–child interactions (Ananat and Gassman-Pines 2021).

The limitations of assuming distinct boundaries show up in studies of the relationship between work and family among low-income workers. A common framing is one of work–family conflict, which is adopted with the laudable goal of acknowledging that unpredictable schedules make unpaid care work especially difficult for low-resourced workers (Henly and Lambert 2014; Luhr, Schneider and Harknett 2022). Although not explicitly termed 'boundary management,' 'work–family conflict' builds on the assumption that work and family are different spheres of life, even if not isolated ones. However, the concept of work–family conflict falls short of offering insight into the unique realities of the interwoven nature of work and family experienced by low-paid workers around the globe.[6]

From the cases of workers in South Africa and Ghana, work–family entanglement is relational and local, even though structured by broader forces. The concept of 'work–family entanglement' thus helps in understanding how entangled relationships within the local workplace matter for workers' ability

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to survive and possibly thrive. Here, we provide an example of the usefulness of the concept for capturing the intertwined relationships between frontline supervisors and workers in US retail and food service workplaces during COVID-19 and how work hours can be a central site of work–family entanglement for low-paid workers.[7]

Supervisors' scheduling practices during the pandemic both revealed and expanded space for the consideration of workers' family responsibilities. Rather than viewing workers as cogs in a machine, a common complaint in critical reviews of scheduling algorithms (see Kesavan et al. 2022), supervisors talked about how they took workers' personal and caregiving responsibilities into account when scheduling employees for work during the pandemic:

> There's a lot of thought that goes into every schedule based on every individual who is scheduled … Because they're real people that we work with every day and we know them. On a personal level, we spend 10, 11, 12 hours a day working side by side with these employees. We hear their stories about home life … children and pets, and it's like family members. (Fast food Supervisor, woman, December 2020)

The multi-level entanglement of work and family for supervisors and workers shows up in how some supervisors considered the diverse financial needs of employees when scheduling workers. When asked whether management laid off or furloughed any employees during the pandemic, a fast-food supervisor replied:

> They have to pay their own bills too. So, I don't cut them any hours … If they want more hours, I give them extra hours, no problem … Because I hired them, and I told them I'll give them this hour, or they said they need extra money. Because I respect them too, because they have some other bills to pay too, right. (Fast food supervisor, woman, June 2022)

A supervisor in a retail store talked about how showing her own stress during the pandemic strengthened her connections with staff, highlighting how intertwined their lives had become:

> I think my employees know that I'm human. And I think I have tried to sort of intentionally show my concern and my stress … And I think by allowing myself to share a little bit of that with my employees and let them know where I'm coming from, it's made them feel less alone and less isolated … And then also just kind of being the store mom as it were and making sure that they always know that their safety is my priority. (Specialty retail supervisor, woman, June 2022)

A work–family entanglement perspective thus reveals the complexities of the intertwined nature of work hours and family life and the interwoven lives of frontline supervisors and their staff members. This is just a taste of what can be

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learned by starting inquiries on the nexus of work and family from the margins rather than, or in addition to, dominant discourses of white-collar workers in relatively advantaged conditions. In this case, work–family entanglement maps more easily onto the experiences of US workers with precarious work schedules than do concepts that assume boundary control and clarity. Because women are over-represented in US service industries, including supervisory positions, work–family entanglement may also offer new insight into gender dynamics in these settings.

3.7 ADVANCING GENDER EQUALITY AT THE WORK–FAMILY INTERFACE: DRAWING LESSONS FROM AND FOR MARGINALIZED WOMEN

This chapter has tried to show that women's work–family experiences are not characterized by homogeneous labour relations, family forms, or work practices; rather they are diverse and complex, and vary across the world economy (Mezzadri and Fan 2018). It reviews prevalent narratives on challenges in the work–family interface by shifting the starting point of these perspectives to women working at the 'margins' of labour markets in two ways: first, the examples speak to possibilities of tackling gender inequality in low-income, rather than white-collar, women's work–family experiences by bringing their voices from the margins to the centre in these key discourses. Second, it starts discussion from the South, which has traditionally been positioned at the margins, outside the centre (Connell 2007). Regretfully, knowledge is still predominantly transmitted from the North to the South, and too often knowledge transfer from the South to the North is undervalued (Abimbola et al. 2021). The chapter shows that knowledge can be produced and exchanged in both directions between North and South, to address socially complex issues of managing work and family in diverse contexts.

The chapter offers a framework for work–family entanglement as one example of how theory that is grounded in the specificities of low-income women in the South speaks back to the North – thereby enhancing a reflexive practice on the geopolitical boundaries of knowledge production in general (Milani and Lazar 2017) and low-income women's work–family experiences in particular. To advance gender equality, plural views are needed of how women in diverse contexts negotiate their multiple work–family demands to inform relevant policy and practice. The chapter demonstrates that the inclusion of women on the margins enables the development of a more comprehensive understanding of the many shapes the work–family nexus can take.

Reframing the conceptualization of boundary management to a more complex work–family entanglement is not meant to glamorize low-income

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work or work hour precarity. Rather, this chapter proposes the notion of work–family entanglement as an additional conceptual tool with the goal of honouring the realities of life for many low-paid workers and their supervisors, and a framework that can potentially help to address the challenges these workers are facing. Rather than focusing on how to reduce barriers to effective boundary management, work–family entanglement acknowledges the interwoven connections between work, family, and community that, when nurtured, enable low-resourced workers and communities to thrive. Instead of focusing on how policy supports fall short, starting from a perspective that assumes a lack of formal policies or that few workers will have access to them, as in South Africa and Ghana, focuses attention on the strengths that workers find in kinship and community, identifying new possibilities for change.

3.8 IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY, PRACTICE, AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Legal frameworks and policies for supporting low-income women across workplace contexts are important, as they extend rights and are thus important drivers of gender equality, but they are clearly not sufficient. There is a need for a multi-pronged approach that includes regulation, awareness-raising initiatives, information, and guidance for informal support measures, alongside formal policy and encouragement of local community initiatives. The provision of these activities is a shared responsibility. There is thus a need for multiple stakeholders, including international organizations, government ministries, employers' and workers' organizations, employers, employees, the health sector, NGOs, and community leaders, to work collectively to achieve more comprehensive and adequate support measures and networks.

At national level, it is crucial that any implementation efforts of the global ILO policy frameworks on maternity protection and workers with family responsibilities are undertaken in a context-sensitive manner. Views on women's roles as mothers and workers are rooted in specific cultural, political and economic histories which differ between and within countries. Neglect of these national and regional specificities in the implementation process inevitably results in resistance and unsuccessful outcomes. It is thus important that implementation strategies that were successful in some national contexts are not imposed on other countries, particularly with respect to uncritically transferring Global North strategies to Global South contexts (Stumbitz 2020).

The concept of work–family entanglement gives rise to opportunities for meaningful and equitable care and labour policy and practice innovations that are more responsive to low-income mothers' needs. We encourage policy makers to actively seek voices that have been marginalized – incorporating diverse perspectives and acknowledging multiple realities – in their design

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and development processes. Additionally recognizing low-income women as knowledge holders who can inform policy and practice development speaks to different ways of creating more equitable policies. For example, low-income mothers can deepen recognition of how kinship networks, failed social infrastructure, and cultural norms inform diverse work and family lived realities and create different needs among women. Co-designed policies and support measures ensure more comprehensive, targeted and needs-based solutions that reach low-income mothers in ways that they endorse. This approach can help to ensure that those at the margins are no longer excluded as policy beneficiaries and can contribute to an expanded ecosystem of development change on gender equity.

Finally, we advocate for further research to refine the conceptualization of work–family entanglement and fully illustrate its multifaceted nature in diverse contexts. We recommend the use of an analytical lens prompting researchers to delve into the complexities of intersecting identities and precarious subjectivities to reveal gendered intersecting vulnerabilities that are often invisible, resulting in the lack of caring support for low-income women in policies and practices. We suggest conducting empirical qualitative studies using decolonial methods that prioritize the voices and experiences of marginalized populations, with an emphasis on inclusivity and global perspectives, to advance the understanding of work–family entanglement in diverse contexts.

Through sharing the experiences of diverse contexts and local knowledges, this chapter has strengthened dialogue on the complexities of work and family. The examples set out in this chapter support arguments to strengthen the engagement of scholars in practices that build bridges across geographical, epistemological, and ontological boundaries to connect ideas, share lived realities, encourage learning across settings, and acknowledge the equality of knowledge, regardless of the geographic location where it was generated (van Breda and Pinkerton 2020). Such an exchange can foster the construction of new shared theoretical frameworks by asking different questions and by building new vocabularies (Bhan 2019). In conclusion, to adequately address gender inequality across all contexts, a broader comparative and collaborative scholarship and practice is needed that accounts for the many different pathways of experiencing the world.

NOTES

1. An abbreviated and earlier version of this paper was presented as a keynote in the Diversity, Equality, and Inclusion track by Ameeta Jaga at the ILERA conference, Sweden, June 2021.
2. As defined by the ILO, maternity protection includes maternity leave; health protection at work for pregnant and breastfeeding women; employment protection and non-discrimination; breastfeeding support and childcare arrangements after

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the return to work; work–life balance or family-friendly policies for new mothers and fathers.

3. According to the ILO (2017), standard employment refers to a job that is continuous, full-time, with a direct relationship between employer and employee.
4. To reflect Ghana's business landscape, the research focused on small and medium-sized enterprises, including mostly micro and small firms (with up to 30 staff) in both the formal and informal economy, and a small number of medium-sized (31–99 staff) and large enterprises in the formal economy.
5. The crèche was provided by the association of market traders and funded through membership fees.
6. This is not to discount the seminal contributions to knowledge that Greenhaus and Beutell's (1985) classic conceptualization of types of work–family conflict has spurred for decades.
7. Semi-structured telephone interviews were conducted between October 2020 and August 2022 with 78 frontline business managers responsible for scheduling and supervising workers in retail and food service worksites in the Seattle, Washington area. This research was funded by the City of Seattle and the Russell Sage Foundation.

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