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Motherhood, the Elephant in the Laboratory: Women Scientists Speak Out

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Out

in which unions have successfully been able to maintain their autonomy and influence while being closely allied to national politics? Kraus has performed a major service to scholars and activists alike in stimulating an informed debate on some of the key issues facing Africa today.

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Economic and Social Security and Substandard Working Conditions

Motherhood, the Elephant in the Laboratory: Women Scientists Speak Out. Edited by Emily Monosson. Ithaca, N.Y.: ILR Press (an imprint of Cornell University Press), 2008. 232 pp. ISBN 978-0-8014-4664-1, \$25.00 (cloth).

Emily Monosson has edited a very interesting book. She has collected essays written by 34 female scientists on how they managed to combine being a scientist with being a mother. The women, who received their degrees between the 1970s and 2000s, are a heterogeneous assortment: single, married, divorced; working full-time, working part-time, self-employed; academics, government researchers, industrial scientists, teachers, consultants, writers. Besides contributing one regular chapter, Monosson wrote the book's introduction and conclusion, as well as a short introduction to each of the four sections.

It is regrettable that the subject of this book has continued to be relevant despite many decades of struggle by scientists to find a balance between work and family. The problems remain unsolved.

It is illuminating to compare the essays by the older women with those by women who have only recently received their degrees. The older women show the fatigue that results from years of compromise. For example, Deborah Ross (Ph.D. from Rutgers, 1974; currently a Professor at Purdue University) writes,

If I sound bitter, it's because I am. I think I have given up a great deal over the years but have not received adequate recognition for it. I enjoy teaching, and my students think I am good at it, but this is not sufficient to receive promotions or above-average salary increments at my institution. My research isn't of sufficient quantity to receive adequate recognition from my peers in the scientific community. But I'm not so sure I would have done things differently.... I still wish, however, that I

hadn't had to choose between my daughter and my career during my years before tenure. (pp. 39–40)

Similarly, Suzanne Epstein (Ph.D. from MIT, 1979; currently an Immunologist at the FDA Center for Biologics Evaluation and Research) writes,

It's true that I was lucky to have humane bosses, but I made an effort to choose them. Women I knew who were ambitious above all else might not have selected those jobs. I also had to accept the consequences of my choices, such as not traveling a lot or having a large lab. My chosen career path in a non-academic setting was also looked down on by some. A few years ago my graduate school sent a letter inviting alumni to give talks on career options, and I volunteered. I never received a reply. (p. 60)

The women who have recently received their degrees seem, at first blush, to be somewhat more optimistic about their prospects for achieving a good work/family balance. But this optimism is sadly tempered by a recognition of difficulties that could lie ahead, difficulties that do not seem very different in kind from those endured by these women's older peers. Kimberley D'Anna (fourth-year Ph.D. candidate at the University of Wisconsin–Madison) writes,

I don't know how long I will stay in science. I can only hope that as more women with children enter the academic sciences, science will become more accommodating to our needs as mothers, which ultimately will increase the quality of the work. I also hope to give the message to women in science who have children or are thinking about having children that it can be done, and done well. This was something I was unaware of when I entered the sciences. I assumed most women in science chose not to have children and that female scientists with families were rare. I now know differently and am so happy to meet other mothers in science because we need to know that even if we feel we are alone, we're not. (p. 201)

The essays are provocative and refreshingly informal. I do have a few reservations, however. First are two superficial ones, concerning the book's title and cover illustration. Speaking as a mother who worked during my childbearing years (two children, born 1972 and 1975), I find the "elephant in the room" metaphor painfully evocative of my own shape in the labs where I worked during my pregnancies. As for the photograph on the dust jacket, showing a woman in a laboratory holding a flask filled with green liquid, we see a rubber ducky, a teething ring, and a milk-filled baby's bottle *in her lab coat pocket*. The point of the juxtaposition is obvious, but the image itself is jarringly implausible. Labs are exceedingly strict these days about safety and sterility, and no lab safety officer would permit such a breach.

My substantive criticism concerns the contributor selection and a lack of analytical depth. The

34 contributors to this book were women who answered a "short note" sent by Emily Monosson to the Listserv for former fellows of the American Association for the Advancement of Science. They are a varied and interesting group (albeit primarily from the United States), but it is not clear exactly how they were selected. One quality for which they do *not* appear to have been selected is their expression of strong or intellectually cogent views on the ways women manage in today's American culture. We read, for example, that it was hard to find a part-time job or that success depends, to a great extent, on a supportive mentor—but there is no discussion of the way society could be changed so that men and women, together, could make careers and parenthood more easily compatible. Nor is there any discussion about whether other countries do this better than the United States.

Although it is hard to size up progress in societal matters as complex as those that are the subject of this book, it appears that not very much has changed, despite the many years over which dedicated scientists/mothers have tried to make the best of a difficult situation. Making science careers friendly to women who also wish to be mothers is a project as yet unaccomplished. As such, I believe this book would have been more useful if the contributors and the editor had dedicated more time to some thoughtful policy discussion. Still, the book is a pleasure to read and is valuable as a window into the lives of female scientists today and yesterday.

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Do Community Colleges Respond to Local Needs? Evidence from California. By Duane E. Leigh and Andrew M. Gill. Kalamazoo, Mich.: W. E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research, 2007. 219 pp. ISBN 978-0-88099-328-9, \$40 (cloth); 978-0-88099-327-2, \$18 (paper).

Community colleges, established almost a century ago to fill a gap in worker training and also to give educationally, economically, or socially disadvantaged students a leg up, are an important part of American public higher education. They meet the needs of student populations that are diverse in terms of demographic characteristics, educational aspirations, economic backgrounds, and work experience. Duane Leigh and Andrew Gill's *Do Community Colleges Respond to Local Needs?* explores the performance of the California Com-

munity College System (CCCS) in two areas: providing educational and training services to immigrants, and responding to local labor market conditions.

The introduction discusses the importance of the above two issues from a Californian perspective. California has the largest and most developed community college system in United States, and the degree to which it has contributed toward the making of an equitable society is a story worth telling. The second issue—adapting community college programs to labor market needs—has gained prominence as globalization-induced changes in the American economy have created a need for continuous improvement of workplace skills.

Following an excellent overview of the CCCS—including a clear explanation of the division of responsibilities and appropriation of funds among the three pillars of public higher education in California, the University of California, the California State University system, and CCCS—Chapters 3 and 4 provide reviews of the literature on the two research questions. These chapters also lay the groundwork for the analytical approaches the authors will presently take. Chapter 3 first cites research establishing a link between the immigrant/native white wage gap and an educational gap, then reviews studies that, using a combination of national-level and student-level data, appear to demonstrate favorable effects of community colleges on immigrants' educational outcomes.

The difficulties involved in showing such a link are the subject of Chapter 4. The question of how responsive a community college is to local labor market conditions will have multiple answers depending on which definition of responsiveness is used. After considering various definitions, the authors settle on the one provided by the Department of Education (DoED) community college Labor Market Responsiveness Initiative: a responsive college is one having academic programs designed to align the demand and supply forces in the local labor market. Previous work by Louis Jacobson, Robert LaLonde, and Daniel G. Sullivan ("Estimating the Returns to Community College Schooling for Displaced Workers," *Journal of Econometrics*, Vol. 125, 2005) has looked only at labor market outcomes of community college education, and has found them to be positive. Looking at the responsiveness of colleges to the local labor market is a new approach and one of the major contributions of this study.

Chapters 5–7 present the econometric results, analysis, and interpretations of the study. Chapter 5 introduces the CCCS's First-Time-Freshman (FTF) dataset, a rich information source that is the basis for the authors' attempt to transcend