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Striking a Balance: Work, Family, Life

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explanation. For example, a table shows a wide variation in employment rates among women with and without children across countries. But there is no discussion about what causes these differences or what lessons the reader is supposed to draw from the data.

This is a comprehensive, well-written book. It covers a wide variety of topics differently from most other textbooks. Instructors who want to focus their class on institutions and public policies, or on international comparisons, will especially appreciate this new book.

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Striking a Balance: Work, Family, Life. By Robert W. Drago. Boston: Dollars & Sense, 2007. 183 pp. ISBN 978-1-878585-62-2, \$18.95 (paper).

This analytical and yet also lively and provocative book by Robert Drago, Professor of Labor Studies and Women's Studies at Penn State University, should appeal across several audiences. *Striking a Balance* achieves its own careful balance of academic research, practical work-life strategies for employers and communities, public policy advocacy, and personal reflection. The research underpinning this effort reflects the diverse knowledge and experience of an author who began as a labor economist but became a leading analyst in the emerging field of work-life, bridging the array of disciplines that comprise what Kathleen Christiansen refers to as the field known best for its hyphen.

In the most recent General Social Survey, employed individuals are asked, "How often do demands of job interfere with family life?" About half of salaried workers report "often" or "sometimes," and fewer than one in five of them say "never." Thus, the glass being observed in the book is at least half empty. Notably, however, as many as one in three workers paid hourly say "never." How can it be that work-family conflict appears to be more prevalent for workers in the very salaried positions, often considered to be "good" jobs, with greater access to work-life support practices in organizations and federal and state policy supports? Drago's book systemically addresses such paradoxes. It explicates the un-

derlying conflict—between three *norms* that are largely irreconcilable—that create three "gaps." It also paves a safe way for researchers to adopt the basic features of the Becker model of time use—paid work, unpaid work, and leisure time—without conforming to its troubling assumptions that households are able to choose their own allocation of time and optimize their overall well-being. Drago shows that households face not only time and money constraints, but also institutional constraints far outside their control, some of which may be subtle and even subconscious.

The first of seven chapters sets out the book's themes. It defines the concept of "balance." This may be almost as difficult for the analyst to describe as it is elusive for working people to attain. The work-life field still gropes for the most accurate term. To the extent that work threatens balance, it is considered conflict, interference, strain, or overload. To the extent that work and life may be combined in such a way that one does not necessarily diminish the other, it is considered integration, facilitation, or satisfaction, or even enrichment or enhancement. To the economics-trained, balance might be thought of as an "equilibrium," where moving more in one direction or the other would leave an individual worse off. To other social sciences, balance may refer to minimized role conflicts, which may be time-based, strain-based, or behavior-based types of conflicts.

But Drago's purpose is broader-minded. Imbalance is more than just personal, it is social. Ultimately, its consequences may be traced to three persistent "gaps." The first is the "care gap," referring to the shortfall of care-giving for family members. Half of those needing it do not receive adequate care in the United States. The second is the "gender gap," which here refers less to the male/female difference in pay than to the earnings differential between mothers who engage in professional-managerial careers and those who, as unpaid (or underpaid) workers, provide direct care to their own children or relatives. Third is the well-known "income gap," which Drago considers the disparities between high-, middle-, and low-income families.

The core argument is that these gaps will persist as long as three norms prevail. First, the ideal worker norm, internalized mainly among professionals and managers, is the belief that career success requires total commitment of time, energy, and self-identity to work. This has been increasingly reinforced by high rewards to its display, contributing to the "income gap." The second powerful norm is that of "motherhood"—the belief, whether internalized or externally imposed, that women are first and foremost mothers with a

duty to provide unpaid care for family members. Finally, peculiar to the United States is the norm of individualism: the belief that we should be self-sufficient in providing care, without any need for government support.

Throughout the book, Drago details how and where these norms are incompatible, and how they generate the three gaps, to the detriment of workers, families, communities, the country, and even employers. Drago weaves together relevant research by others and by himself. The most crucial and newest clash is that between the norms of the ideal worker and the ideal mother, a particular problem for women who aspire to succeed in professional and managerial occupations. Indeed, Drago's plea in Chapter 2 is for both researchers and practitioners to cease viewing "balance" as a necessary trade-off between work and family or life, and to frame a new conception of "family" that challenges the ideal of mothers as chief, and chiefly, caregivers. Drago also advocates re-defining "overwork" as more than long hours on the job. Unpaid work looks and feels a lot like work.

Chapters 3–5 address exactly how these increasingly irreconcilable norms give rise to the "care gap," "new gender gap," and "income gap." The care gap is driven mainly by limited incomes, and secondarily by the substandard quality of market-based care. Also relevant here is the sensitive topic of "shared care" in the home. In dual-earner households, men's average share of child care time is about 46%, which is slightly higher than their share of housework time, which stands at about 40% (both of which women underestimate). Even though "shared care" appears to be highly valued, and appears to be rising, in practice it is not yet equivalent. The main barrier to achieving fully equal care time is the workplace. The dominant norm of the ideal worker continues to limit the number of good-quality jobs available at reduced hours, and to create subtle pressures to pass up the opportunities that do exist.

Chapter 4 explores the "motherhood penalty"-related "new gender gap" between women who enter and succeed on the career track and those who instead prioritize motherhood. Drago skillfully integrates the research on "bias avoidance" behaviors. Fearing negative sanctions against commitment to mothering, women engage in tactics to avoid them. (Men are about half as likely to adopt analogous tactics to avoid sanctions for parenting.) "Productive" bias avoidance behaviors include delayed marriage and delayed child-bearing, and "unproductive" bias avoidance would be behaviors such as skipping children's events and not request-

ing reduced work time or parental leave time. Thus, as illustrated in Chapter 5's examination of the "income gap," prevailing norms create income inequality both by discouraging women from entering the professions and managerial positions and by ill treatment of those who do enter. This pattern has been reinforced by the ever longer hours expected of "ideal workers." Among workers with both a college degree and work weeks exceeding 45 hours, eight of ten are in a salaried occupation. The proportions of them who "put job before family" and are "interrupted at home by job" are considerably higher. Mothers, however, represent less than one in twelve such ideal workers. The increasing numbers who do join the corps of ideal workers must strike a "Faustian bargain of ever longer hours for ever-more money," which in turn feeds the growing income gap. The clash of norms is exemplified, in Chapter 6, by the recent experiences of elementary school and child care teachers, who are expected to conform to the ideal of long hours, yet are frequently treated as if they were "just mothers" rather than "professionals."

In Chapter 6, Drago begins to explore the potential solutions. Part-time professional career tracks, he argues, would reinforce the gender gap and norms; and on-site child care remains an economically unviable investment for employers. What to do? Chapter 7 advocates a combination of more resources devoted to economic supports and institutional reform—more "inclusive processes" as a new norm.

Drago's contribution is clearly not another how-to book for the self-help shelves. His sights are set higher, aimed not at the symptoms but at the sources of the problem. The "good news," as Drago so often puts it, is that although institutionalized norms may be entrenched, the gaps can be altered with much concerted collective effort. "Wholesale changes" have been made successfully in both new workplace practices and public policies. Achieving meaningful reforms in both private and public spheres will require adoption of new economic supports, given that there are inherent externality problems here. Drago acknowledges, however, that these needed supports not only are at odds with the dominant norm of individualism, but also are quite costly up front.

Chapters 6 and 7 catalog several "best practices" to promote more inclusive practices. They range from the individual workgroup to the community level. The former includes implementing more flexible, family-friendly working time arrangements where employers also wish to extend operating hours. An example of the latter would be

creating consortia of constituencies—community organizations, labor unions, care service providers, employer associations—to provide on-site child care services. The final chapter proposes economic supports at a grander scale, such as a national policy of paid family leave, subsidization of child care, early childhood and after-school education, minimum wage increases and living wage ordinances, and national health insurance. Drago cites smaller-scale successes along these lines as a cause for optimism, such as California's paid leave policy that replaces half of workers' regular income at an average cost of only \$46 per employee per year. The book concludes with the "Working Family Bill of Rights," a proposed set of specific legal "rights to request" and "rights to refuse" that would help alleviate or reduce the incidence of work-life conflicts.

Some of the tougher questions are left for readers to explore on their own elsewhere, most likely to keep the book manageable. Thus, labor economist readers might be left wondering whether equally shared care time should truly be a goal in itself, from the standpoint of both household productivity and joint utility. Might the current distribution be pareto-optimal? Moreover, must not equally shared care time be accompanied by equally shared authority (for example, two-way "honey-do" lists)? Similarly, on the workplace side, is not flexibility more than just an instrument to reduce the gaps, but also an end in itself? Because there are disparities in access and safe use of flexibility practices, is there thus perhaps also a fourth gap, the shortfall in flexibility? Is there perhaps also an emerging norm of "ideal fatherhood" through which men can derive process benefits and uniquely male identities from performing unpaid work? Finally, are policies of inclusion truly something beyond the "voice" and "employee participation" institutions long examined and promoted in the literature? Obviously, answers to these questions are too much to ask of a handy, 175-page book that aims—with success—at promoting both work-life balance and new ways of thinking about it. As Juliet Schor remarks in the Foreword, Drago indeed has crafted a truly holistic and original analysis.

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Improving School-to-Work Transitions. Edited by David Neumark. New York: Russell Sage

Foundation, 2007. 288 pp. ISBN 978-0-87154-642-5, \$35.00 (cloth).

In their 1992 *Quarterly Journal of Economics* article "Job Mobility and the Careers of Young Men," Robert Topel and Michael Ward documented the staggering degree of employment instability among young men. On average, young men work at nearly seven different jobs in the first ten years of employment. This turbulent introduction to the labor market might provide information to young workers regarding their skills and preferences. Indeed, over time, most men find stable employment, and the frequency of job transitions slows. Some early labor market instability may therefore be necessary for establishing high-quality employment matches. The fitful transition from school to work comes at a significant cost, however. Young workers experience earnings losses from unemployment (or underemployment) along with reduced opportunities to invest in firm-specific human capital. The editor of the volume reviewed here, David Neumark, documented in 2002 that workers who experience early job changes for exogenous reasons receive lower wages in the long run ("Youth Labor Markets in the U.S.: Shopping Around vs. Staying Put," *Review of Economics and Statistics*).

The volume is a collection of eight essays examining programs and institutions designed to facilitate transition to the labor market. While these essays share a common overarching theme, each was clearly written independently and focuses on a distinctly different research question. Furthermore, the focus of the volume is on providing new research insights as opposed to summarizing the existing literature. For this reason, it is poorly suited as a primer for individuals hoping for a systematic overview of the problem of school-to-work transitions and possible solutions. It is, however, likely to be of value to researchers and policy makers already familiar with the literature. Given the structure of the book, I will organize the remainder of my comments around the individual chapters.

The first chapter, by Neumark, briefly introduces the literature documenting the difficulty of school-to-work transitions and outlines the major U.S. policy initiatives that have been undertaken to ease these transitions. Neumark also provides a useful summary of the primary research findings of the remaining essays. The conclusions and policy implications outlined at the end of the chapter are essentially a restatement of the primary research findings with little additional analysis.

The second chapter, written by Deborah Reed, Christopher Jepsen, and Laura E. Hill, examines