

Book Reviews

Balancing the Big Stuff: Finding Happiness in Work, Family, and Life

Miriam Liss and Holly H. Schiffrin
Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2014

REVIEWED BY MAYA E. BHAVE

Psychology professors, Miriam Liss and Holly Schiffrin, have produced a substantial, sweeping overview of how and why women struggle to find balance between their work and family lives. Approaching the subject matter as both scholars and mothers, their unique approach combines an expansive review of the existing multitudinous longitudinal studies, coupled with personal insights and family vignettes. Knowing that there is no mother, in the United States or elsewhere, that does not find difficulty in balancing her work and family spheres, I was thrilled to have a book in my hand that would finally help me clarify how to win that everyday battle.

The authors argue that creating balance evolves from layers of autonomy, competency, and relatedness. They address early on that women are intrinsically motivated, yet lose autonomy as they become mothers. In addition, Liss and Schiffrin expose how contemporary parenting has gone awry. Gone are the days when “parenting was something you were (noun), not something you did (verb)” (33). They dip into subjects of attachment parenting, co-sleeping, breastfeeding, and the constant pressures to intellectually stimulate our chil-

dren. I was surprised, however, that they didn't focus more intently on the role of sports in most young Americans lives. Many families in the United States presently structure their weeks and entire monthly family calendars around their children's sports activities. The authors mention the work of Annette Lareau (2011) who addresses such issues, but they could have addressed the idea more fully themselves.

Next they move to the workplace, showing how overworking decreases actual productivity and our sense of well-being. They show how women's participation in the labor force has gone up tremendously over the past 40 years, and yet vast inequity still exists. The authors note that the highest gender pay gap is for Hispanic and Latina women (118), men dominate higher paying jobs, and women typically don't negotiate the salary upon entry (121). Additionally, they address the "motherhood wage penalty" (123) and the lack of national policies to support families, documenting that only 11 percent of Americans have any paid leave, thus creating horrible environments for children (127). A critical point they make is that these issues need to be addressed not just by families, but also by everyone in a society (135). This last point illuminates one of the most valuable contributions of this book, and that is their constant argument that the responsibility for change here cannot be placed squarely just on the shoulders of women, but must be addressed equally by men as well.

In the last two chapters Liss and Schiffrin address how women can find happiness and meaning. Citing that one out of every five Americans is unhappy and depressed, they show that people believe external goals will make them happy; when in fact happiness is found by intentional activity and self-care. Their advice: do what you love, carve out choices, do activities that show your competence, challenge yourself, and foster meaningful relationships with others.

I realized after finishing this book that their analysis was lofty, broad, and sweeping, yet I was left wanting to know more about each and every study. I wanted the authors to provide more details about socio-economic and racial differences, and focus less on a middle and upper-middle class perspective. I recognized that many of their analyses about how both parents could not keep up a 60 hour week, and need to cut back (65), the need for workplace flexibility (66), discussion of Baby Einstein videos (44-46), or "autonomy-supportive parenting" (50-51) would not resonate with working class moms.

Thus, I was left feeling a bit "off-balance" at the end. This book is an excellent read for a brilliant summary of the breadth and width of all research out there about how women strive for autonomy, competency, and relatedness. Yet, as a sociologist, I wanted more socio-cultural evaluation and deeper extrapolation of their significant findings. At the end of the book they

argue people should find intrinsic joy of work, avoid miseries of overwork, and practice techniques to increase personal well being. These are lofty and admirable goals. I am hoping in their next book they unpack the studies more fully and help me determine how to move all moms closer to that critical and needed balance.

Complex Inequality and ‘Working Mothers’

Clare O’Hagan

Cork, Ireland: Cork University Press, 2015

REVIEWED BY CHRISTIE BYVELDS

That motherhood and paid employment do not work well together in contemporary western society is not news to us. Clare O’Hagan’s monograph, *Complex Inequality and ‘Working Mothers,’* underscores this challenge in a documentation of the experiences of middle-class ‘working mothers’ in Ireland. O’Hagan is a research fellow with the Sociology Department at the University of Limerick and her book is based on research conducted for a PhD in Sociology and Women’s Studies. She bases her study in the lived experiences of the women themselves, and through an extensive use of quotations, makes their voices central in her analysis. By applying an intersectional feminist analysis to first person accounts by the women, she is able to elucidate clearly the experiences of an important segment of the female Irish working class.

Complex Inequality and ‘Working Mothers’ is comprised of eleven chapters. The first two are devoted primarily to descriptions of the main theoretical and conceptual underpinnings employed in her analysis. These include: feminism, neoliberalism, individualism, intersectionality, discourse, and power. O’Hagan spells out the main tenets of each clearly and succinctly thereby establishing a framework for understanding the findings of the study. In chapter three, O’Hagan provides detailed information about the research process and the thirty female participants. Data were collected first through focus groups followed by semi-structured individual interviews one year later. Demographic information is found within an appendix as well as within the text, including detailed information about the women’s occupations, number of hours worked per week, childcare arrangements, marital status, age category and number of children and their age(s); this information serves to enrich the reader’s knowledge of the women who were interviewed. Analysis of the focus group discussions revealed that women draw on discourses of neoliberalism