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Good Parents or Good Workers: How Policy Shapes Families' Daily Lives. Jill Duerr Berrick and Bruce Fuller (Eds.).

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Book Notes

J. Duerr Berrick and Bruce Fuller (Eds.), *Good Parents or Good Workers: How Policy Shapes Families' Daily Lives*. New York: Palgrave, 2005. \$39.95 hardcover.

Nearly ten years have passed since the passage of the 1996 welfare reform legislation. By some measures, welfare reform has been an astonishing success, evidenced by the national welfare caseload shrinking by 50 percent. Of course, this statistic obscures the fact that not all women leaving welfare are able to lift themselves and their families out of poverty. These women are faced with multiple challenges in their daily lives, and one of the most central dilemmas they face is how to balance the requirements and responsibilities of both breadwinner and caregiver. In a new edited volume, Duerr Berrick and Fuller offer a collection of research findings, drawn primarily from qualitative studies, which richly describes the tensions and negotiations inherent in the lived experience of families after welfare reform.

The book is divided into three sections: women's roles as workers and mothers, policy effects on children, and fathers' roles within this policy context. The first section includes chapters regarding families' economic self-sufficiency, childcare arrangements, and caregiving capacities. The chapter on caregiving, by Laura Frame, provides the most original contribution in this section. Frame explores parents' psychological experience of caregiving under conditions of poverty and the extent to which welfare reform exacerbates or ameliorates conditions associated with poverty and caregiving. All the chapters in Section I point out that economic self-sufficiency for families leaving welfare is contingent not only upon finding a good job, but also upon additional supports that ensure consistent and quality child care while parents are working.

Section II consists of two chapters that focus on the effects of welfare reform on children. Both chapters provide a synthesis of evidence from quantitative and qualitative perspectives, nicely illustrating the added dimension that the qualitative data provide. This section captures the range of factors, in addition to parental employment, that impact child well-being, concluding with policy recommendations, such as removing the family cap on TANF payments, which may foster child well-being.

The last section of the book addresses the role that fathers play in these families. In their introduction, Duerr Berrick and Fuller point out that while welfare reform contains important provisions related to fathers and their financial obligations, not enough is known about “fathers’ experiences and capacities vis-à-vis their affective relationships with their children and their former partners” (p. 10). Pate’s chapter in this section provides a counterpart to the “deadbeat dad” image of these fathers, giving voice to several men who are trying to meet their responsibilities as fathers, while under significant financial duress themselves.

Overall, this is a solid collection of articles that makes a significant contribution to our understanding of poverty, the effects of welfare reform, and the lived experience of families transitioning from welfare to employment. Each article provides a useful lens through which to understand these issues, and as a whole, reinforces the simple, yet extremely important fact that policies related to welfare reform affect *families*, not just the mothers making the transition into work activities.

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Ellen Reese, *Backlash Against Welfare Mothers Past and Present*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2005. \$ 19.95 papercover.

Since the passage of welfare reform in 1996 there has been extensive research on its implementation and the impact of its provisions on children and families. In addition to the wealth of articles produced for academic journals, a number of recent