

The Work/Life Collision

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People are living in a work/life collision

It is made up of:

- Changes at Work
 - Changes at home
 - Not enough change in institutions
 - Not enough change in in dominant cultures
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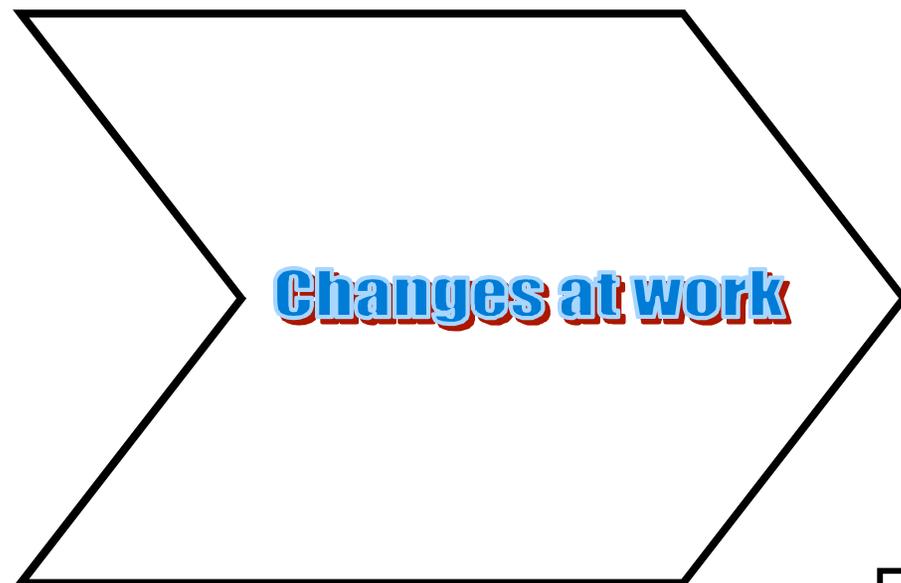
Changes at work

1. Contraction in those at home caring.
 - In Australia in 1966, two-thirds of women were at home. Now 45%.
2. Increasing hours for full-timers.
 - Average hours of full-timers increasing - by 3.1 hours 1982-2001
 - A quarter of Australians now work more than 45 hours a week.
3. Traveling time is increasing.
4. The intensity of work is increasing.
5. Common family time is being degraded or lost.
6. Most new jobs have been part-time: the work/family mechanism of choice in Australia.
7. But it has unique characteristics: two-thirds is casual with restricted rights, tenure, respect, predictability of earnings and hours, retirement savings, and limited job security.

Changes in households

1. Contraction in traditional 'male breadwinner/female carer' families
 - over half of couples with kids in 1984; less than a third now.
 - 62 per cent of couple households with kids now have two earners.
 - Future plans suggest 75% dual earner.
2. Birthrate has fallen - 25% of young Australians are now unlikely to have kids.
3. No great compensating rush of men out of jobs to home while partner works (less than 3 per cent)
4. Or into housework:
 - in 1997 Australian women did twice as much housework as men (33 hours, compared to 17)
 - And very little change between 1992 and 1997 except that women did a bit less and bought more help.

THE COLLISION



UNCHANGING:

- 'Ideal worker' norms (full-time, 'care-less')
- Gendered distribution of domestic work and care, women doing most
- Cultural constructions of motherhood, fatherhood and carers
- Leave regimes
- The precarious nature of part-time work
- Legal framework of work

The fallout

Declining quality of life
Loss of community. Shift of community from street to workplace
Rising levels of guilt
Erosion of relationships and intimacy
Pressure on carers at home, and on grandparents.
Marketisation of care and love?

Changes in households

- The 1950s family of four children gives way to the 1990s family of one or two children...
- With both parents holding jobs...
- Or a sole-parent households (mostly headed by a woman)...
- Or a blended households...
- And parents making transitions into and out of the paid labour market...

The domestic standoff



Mother's turn to the market



**The culture of motherhood:
ever-loving, always there?**



The ever-attentive partner?



But there is no going back...

- Women are not going back home to replenish care and 'restore' a fake ideal
- Women's participation rates will continue to increase
- And men's to fall
- So, will we adapt as a society, or leave the individual to privately juggle?
- Demographics, the quest for a decent life and ideals of fairness demand that we do better.

Institutional mal-adaption: the example of casual work

- Rapid growth: now 26% in Australia
- Polarised opinions amongst workers
 - The *positive* casual
 - Has back-up income, and
 - A good boss. Reciprocal negotiation.
 - Many casuals lack these and are negative
- Two great labour market lies:
 - That it is employee 'choice' to be casual or contract*
 - That it gives flexibility to employee*

Short-term, irregular Vs. 'permanent' casual work

- Most want predictable earnings and hours
- Respect
- Not a pathway to permanency for most
- Pay: under-classification, inadequate loading
- Effects on health of individuals, their families, kids and community...
- Casual work overshadows many workplaces and occupations
- It often involves close surveillance
- It degrades life and work

- Our institutions lag behind changes in our patterns of work and our households
 - We rank 17th out of 20 OECD countries in terms of the generosity of public support for childcare, paid leave for parents and child benefits, with only New Zealand, Mexico and Turkey worse off.
 - and our communities and families bear the cost of dissonance between institutions, cultures and preferences.
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- Women and mothers especially affected
 - Women without children are also contaminated.
 - Men are also affected
 - And children are not immune...

What do young people think?

- Recent study: 21 focus groups
- Kids are pragmatic - they know why parents work
- But if there is enough 'basic money', they prefer more time over more money from parental earnings
- Long or unsocial parental hours drive a strong preference for more time
- Parent-specific 'time hunger': one parent at home, *doesn't make up* for the one who is absent a lot
- Many fathers in sole income couple families are away from their families for long periods
- Kids notice and are affected
- They say they will won't work like that...

Young People's Plans...

- All expect to have paid jobs
- Many want to have fun doing them...
- Most expect to have kids
- Dual-earner couple households will increase
- Most expect to share care of kids
- But men will fit kids around work, while women more likely to fit work around kids
- Big expectations of grandmothers...

So what needs to be done?

1. An improved leave regime
2. De-casualisation of 'permanent casual' jobs
3. Improved quality, accessible, affordable childcare
4. Better 'transition points' between care/work/types of jobs
5. Reduced hours of work and overtime
6. More flexibility in work regimes
7. New cultures for 'proper mothers', 'proper fathers', 'proper workers'
8. Shared domestic work and unpaid care
9. Improved family payments system
10. Decent minimum standards - via awards and legislation - to give all Australian worker/carers fair leave, employment security and quality part-time work.

Judy Onofrio, Scupture, www.judyonofrio.com/.../balancing_act_large.jpg

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