



***By the Light of the Silvery Moon: Teacher Moonlighting
and the Dark Side of Teachers' Work***
By Eleanor J. Blair, Editor

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Abstract

This review of By the Light of the Silvery Moon: Teacher Moonlighting and the Dark Side of Teachers' Work (2018) discusses the descriptions, realities, and challenges faced by teachers who moonlight and the researchers that study them. This book not only defines moonlighting, it offers insight as to why the phenomena occurs, and why researchers, educators, and policymakers should take notice. Each chapter offers a different perspective on teacher moonlighting, highlighting its complicated intricacies, and the impact the phenomena has on the person as well as the profession of teaching.

Keywords: moonlighting; teacher salary

Teacher Moonlighting: Time for a Waning Moon

Eleanor J. Blair's *By the Light of the Silvery Moon: Teacher Moonlighting and the Dark Side of Teachers' Work* (2018), is an edifying account of a modestly explored phenomenon. Organized into three sections: *Teacher Moonlighting: Studied and Still Misunderstood*, *Teacher Moonlighting IS Teachers' Work*, and *Teacher Moonlighting in the 21st Century: An Old Wine in a New Bottle*, Blair adequately presents the complex history of teacher moonlighting and guides researchers down a path for consistent and reliable study in the future.

The question, why do teachers moonlight?, is truly an open-ended one. While the correlation of moonlighting to teacher salaries may be a simple extrapolation, the reality is more perplexing. Perhaps one of the most compelling facets of *By the Light of the Silvery Moon*, is Blair's dedication to the enigma that is teacher moonlighting. On the surface, the rationale behind teacher moonlighting seems basic: money. However, beneath the surface lies multiple layers of varying depth rendering the phenomena both simple to understand, yet difficult to solve.

In her introduction, Blair offers two verities about teacher moonlighting: 1) teachers moonlight for money, and 2) they *like* their moonlighting jobs (p. 2). With that said, the proverbial devil is in the proverbial details. Teachers may like their moonlighting jobs, but why they sought them in the first place is the critical question. As an example, being a coach or a faculty sponsor involves a stipend that when averaged out to an hourly wage pays the equivalent of outsourced labor. An assistant varsity football coach, for example, may receive a \$2,500 stipend for their time in-season.

The reality is that “in-season” includes summer camps for the high school, possibly a summer camp for the middle school, maybe even a summer camp for the elementary kids, strength and conditioning training, practice before the school year begins which typically runs for 10-12 days in August (an eight hour day when film study and preparation is included), practice after school (followed by a meeting for the next day), at least one game night per week (a 5-9 hour experience based on location) for a minimum of 10 weeks, followed up by weekend preparation for the next opponent. Once the season is finished there are administrative duties: collecting equipment, evaluations, preparing for the year end banquet, and so forth. On the short-end, this lasts 5-6 months of the year. For most coaches, because they like their “moonlighting” job, it is a 10-12 month commitment. And, when all is said and done, the hourly wage for that 2,500 stipend works out to be far less than minimum wage.

Moonlighting Misunderstood

Section One, *Teacher Moonlighting: Studied and Still Misunderstood*, removes the gray area from the definition of moonlighting and provides personal and professional characteristics of teachers who moonlight. Additionally, this section highlights the unintended consequences of moonlighting on beginning teachers, those who are expected to moonlight as part of their teaching assignment, and the implications of moonlighting inside or outside of the school system.

Chapter Summaries

Chapter One, *Shedding Light on the Dark Side of Teacher Moonlighting*, by Jeffery A. Raffel and Lance R. Groff, introduces two terms: “willing” and “reluctant” moonlighters (p. 15) that are critical to the understanding of the phenomena. This categorizing of moonlighting provides a parameter based on the financial aspect of teaching which falls in line with the common theme of inadequate salaries. A possible warning sign for district administrative personnel is the fact that 42.5% of reluctant moonlighters were preparing to leave the profession (p. 22), and, again, 42.5% reported a perceived hindrance of both mental health and general life outlook because of having to hold a second job (p. 26). Obtaining this information could assist with intervention strategies to assist teachers who are considering leaving the profession.

Chapter Two, *A Study of Moonlighting by Public School Teachers*, by Donya M. Smith and Bernice Cooper, categorizes moonlighters into “personal characteristics” (p. 38), and “professional characteristics” (p. 39) with each providing statistically significant results. Based on the information provided, we can posit that teacher salary schedules are an antiquated method of compensation that leaves the most vulnerable (beginning teachers) open to the combination of financial stress endured as a result of a low teaching salary and the emotional and mental demands often experienced by novice educators. Operating under this premise, it would be beneficial to examine how introductory teachers are compensated as they develop their tradecraft.

Chapter Three, *Teacher Moonlighting: Interviews with Physical Educators*, by Jacquelin A. Williams, highlights some of the professional expectations associated with moonlighting. Operating under the premise that coaching is moonlighting, physical educators could be seen as an anomaly as they are expected to moonlight. This expectation also creates an unintended dynamic within the working environment that should not be overlooked (p. 57). Another complicating factor within the physical education ranks is the dilemma of teacher versus coach. It is not unrealistic for a school district to hire a teacher based on his or her coaching ability. And if such is the case,

which job is the moonlight position, teacher or coach? Additionally, the qualitative methodology in this chapter is well defined and beneficial to the study of moonlighting for future researchers.

Chapter Four, *Teacher Moonlighting: An Unstudied Phenomenon*, by Richard Wisniewski and Paul Kleine, completes the first section and offers a biting reality: teaching is a semi-profession. Here is why, “The fact that so many teachers need the supplementary income that moonlighting provides seriously jeopardizes the social status of all teachers” (p. 76). Perhaps that is a strong statement, however, teachers appear to moonlight more than in any other profession (p. 69). Nested within teacher moonlighting are those who moonlight “within the school system” or “outside the school system” (p. 72). Just as the willingness or reluctance (from Chapter 1) associated with moonlighting makes a difference, so may the decision to work inside or outside the school system. Albeit, the rationale that teaching is a semi-profession is logical considering the impact moonlighting has on a variety of personal and professional factors.

Implications of Misunderstanding Teacher Moonlighting

While the intricacies of moonlighting may be qualitative in nature, the quantitative aspects yield statistically significant results which are difficult to ignore. Where teachers moonlight matters and deserves attention. Furthermore, the existence of teachers who coach or sponsor a club and work an additional “third” job is a reality. While this may complicate the definition of moonlighting, the truth is it does not. Basically, researchers need to create a column, “the number of jobs held outside your teaching contract” and begin to tally instead of deleting the outliers. Albeit, this continued misunderstanding of teacher moonlighting, coupled with inaction, will have a detrimental impact as potential teachers shun the profession because of the unsustainable combination of low pay, low social status, high expectations, and high accountability. The simple fact that individuals are willing to jettison an intrinsically rewarding career due to external factors and a beginning income barely above the federal poverty level needs to resonate

Moonlighting IS Making a Difference

Section Two, *Teacher Moonlighting IS Teachers’ Work*, highlights the challenges for researchers investigating the moonlighting phenomenon. The reality that teacher moonlighting impacts classroom performance may create a dilemma for central office personnel as expectations for district performance are on an upward trajectory. A policy response to limit teacher moonlighting may seem logical; however, based on teacher perceptions concerning working conditions, restricting additional decision making may have unintended consequences.

Chapter Summaries

Chapter Five, *Gender Differences in Multiple Jobs: Moonlighting Among Teachers*, by Stephen C. Betts, reminds us that other professions moonlight, with one example being medical residents. Unlike teaching, however, the debt incurred by medical professionals is commonly accepted as the primary reason for their moonlighting (p. 84). This explanation seems plausible, but medical professionals can receive loan repayment as part of their professional contracts once they graduate and enter the field. Perhaps the lure of lucrative moonlighting compensation and professional experience (generally not found in education) may be an additional factor for medical professionals. Another salient point from Chapter 5 is the modest amount of empirical research

conducted on moonlighting (p. 85). There are empirical challenges associated with studying moonlighting, with the most concerning being the inability to generalize the finding across occupations (p. 86). Albeit, the research conducted in this chapter compared to past research by Wisniewsky and Hilty (1987) indicated either a trend or an anomaly as both supplemental contract and summer moonlighting are increasing (p. 90).

Chapter Six, *Moonlighting and Morale: The Impact on Educators Who Moonlight and How Classroom Teaching Suffers*, by Sharon Brown, Sam L. Sullivan, and Bob Maninger, provides a sobering reality - moonlighting impacts teaching. If we as a society are willing to accept this conclusion, and there's no reason to assume we would, the suggestion that moonlighting may negatively impact teaching should resonate. Conversely, on p. 102, the statement, "Whether teaching in Missouri and making the lowest salary of \$45,317," may be based off averages obtained through reliable sources, the number is in fact misleading. The base salary for the 2018-2019 school year in a rural Missouri district is \$30,600. In fact, a bachelor's degree and 27 years of experience, in the same district, will net an annual salary of \$41,310; a number still below the represented lowest salary for the state (*Boonville, Missouri Certified Salary Schedule*). With that being said, the research on teacher retention indicates there are methods of compensation that may have the potential to replace moonlighting, such as paid leadership roles, housing stipends, etc., suitable to teachers (p. 104). Finally, an alarming statistic from Chapter 6, only 10% of survey respondents were men (p. 112).

Chapter Seven, *Characteristics and Working Conditions of Moonlighting Teachers: Evidence from the 2011-2012 Schools and Staffing Survey*, by Paul G. Fitchett, Tina L. Heafner, and Susan B. Harden concludes the second section and explains the difficulty in obtaining consistent results when studying teacher moonlighting as studies by various researchers have produced conflicting evidence on teacher performance (p. 127). Again, however, the indication that teachers moonlighting outside education are more prone to "burnout" (p. 133) is consistent within the research on the phenomenon. Additionally, over 40% of teachers moonlighting outside the profession would not choose teaching as a career if given the option (p. 134). The research on working conditions is focused on classroom control and influence in school decision making (p. 136). The results indicate teacher concern over their ability to participate in professional decisions, however, there are other variables associated with working conditions that may weigh more heavily; such as student/teacher ratios, evaluation procedures, standardization, classroom budget, access to technology, and so forth.

Implications of Moonlighting Making a Difference

Standardized testing is an important educational event as student test scores can affect teacher evaluations and job performance markers. It is common for teachers and administrators to inculcate the importance of healthy eating and sleeping habits to students during standardized testing events so students can be at their best when pencil meets paper. However, does teacher moonlighting affect the educator in this scenario as well? If career implications lie at the end of test results, would it be reasonable to request teachers avoid moonlighting activities during this time so they can be at their best as well? Bonuses and merit pay linked to student achievement scores are not the answer. Neither is stricter policy or more demanding requirements. In reality, it is difficult to change the shape of education without taking a look at the mold itself. Until that time, the definition of insanity is apropos.

Half Moon

Section Three, “*Teacher Moonlighting in the 21st Century: An Old Wine in a New Bottle*”, provides insight to what the future of moonlighting may entail for the teaching profession. The convenience and omnipresence of technology will introduce unexplored territories for teacher moonlighting with the effects being unknown during the beginning stages. At the same time, the increase of non-traditional educators should be anticipated as the teacher shortage is far from over. The skillset and life experiences of these individuals should be considered as they acclimate to the teaching profession with the anticipated lure of what moonlighting may have to offer.

Chapter Summaries

Chapter Eight, *Teacher Moonlighting: The Bad, the Good, and the Possible*, by Stephen P. Gordon and Janis Newby Parham, is a qualitative study that provides ample attention to both the negative and positive effects of moonlighting. Some of the themes are consistent with earlier chapters, which should highlight the accuracy of the information being provided. Whether it be “Career Stage” (p. 165) or encouraging moonlighting within the district (p. 167), the triangulation, at this point, is salient. In an attempt to illuminate moonlighting under a full moon, both the negative and positive aspects of teacher moonlighting are represented in this chapter. The negative impact on instruction has been reported, but the additional consequences of reduced opportunities for professional development and collaboration with colleagues (pp. 156-157) sheds light on how detrimental moonlighting can be professionally. From a positive aspect, teacher moonlighting may provide experiences transferable to the classroom, and may build confidence and self-esteem (p. 163). Overall, the positive results seemed to be interpretative, based on individual characteristics and mindset.

Chapter Nine, *New Moon: Teacher Moonlighting in the Digital Age*, by Rick Hartsell and Sarah Hunt-Barron, promotes some modern ideas that may have a positive impact if moonlighting is to remain consistent within the profession. Perhaps the most in need of development or study is, “The single best side hustle I have ever come across” (p. 180). This, “side hustle” is virtual teaching involving students from another country that allows the educator to control and maintain the environment. Therefore, not only is the educator working within the profession, he/she is in control of the schedule and the opportunity to earn additional income. Which, for lack of a better term, may be considered the moonlighting hat trick.

Chapter 10, *I’m a Sinner, I’m a Saint: A Teacher’s Perspective on Moonlighting in the Nightlife Industry*, by Cara Kronen, is an honest representation of a reality that should be accepted. And while the idea of a bartending (p. 189) teacher may seem abnormal, there are probably more moonlighters in the “nightlife” industry than anticipated. Consider the base teaching salary and the abilities of teachers (they are personable, caring, and good listeners) and, aside from driving an “Uber” (p. 3), bartending may not be completely obtuse. After all, “bartending was quite lucrative” (p. 193) and it’s difficult to blame a professional earning \$15,000 less than their peers in similarly trained entry-level positions (p. 193) for seeking additional income.

Chapter 11, *Sabryia and Me, An Essential Conversation about the Nontraditional Teacher Professional and a Life of Teacher Moonlighting*, by Hilton Kelly, provides an understanding of what may become a developing phenomenon: nontraditional teachers. Whether they transition to teaching from another field, or as in Sabryia’s case, begin college later in life (p. 202), the idea of

a teacher pipeline has gone from a vast supply to critical shortage. Albeit, there are individuals interested in becoming teachers who would contribute to the profession if they had access to the same pipeline reserved for traditional undergraduate students. Eventually, it will happen, but the wheels of legislation are powered by an energy source not commonly found in the grassroots of society.

Implications of a Half Moon

The implications of a half moon are knowing which half is being revealed. Is teacher moonlighting entering a waxing or waning phase? Perhaps the reality is, teacher moonlighting will forever be suspended in a half moon phase due to the nature of the phenomenon. There are certain aspects of teaching and moonlighting that are part of the profession, such as sponsoring a club or coaching a sport. However, the dark half of the moon is of concern is its gravitational pull may lead individuals out of education and into another profession. If teacher moonlighting is to remain consistent in the future, the landscape needs to be tended by researchers and policymakers as the consequences will deviate from the current norms. Governmentally, anticipating the future of moonlighting is more difficult than reacting to the phenomenon. Oddly enough, technology is developing self-driving cars: is it inappropriate to assume a former or potential teacher is involved in the process?

Concluding Thoughts

Chapter 12, *Conclusion: Where Do We Go From Here?* As stated by Blair, “So long as moonlighting remains an unacknowledged part of the teacher’s world, reform and transformation of the profession will be limited by our failure to truly explore what it means to do teacher’s work” (p. 216). In her final chapter, Blair offers additional realities concerning the state of education, and the results will resonate. However, instead of dwelling on what is, Blair poses 10 questions for 21st Century policymakers and researchers (pp. 230-231). To call for a watershed moment regarding teacher salaries may not be enough. It’s going take a breach in the dam of policy, funding, status, infrastructure, and so forth. What’s best for kids is a popular mantra in education as it highlights the professions dedication to the child. What’s best for teachers is a different story; although statistically significant research indicates (outside of socio-economic factors) teachers may in fact be what’s best for kids. And while it may be commonly accepted, the decision to enter the teaching profession is not a monetary one, the understanding of what “moonlighting” is and how the activities associated with and related to can impact both the teacher and the students should be considered as the drive to increase student achievement is now part of the educational tapestry. The United States is the most powerful and wealthy nation in the history of the world. We spend almost \$700 billion dollars in defense of this nation, but less than \$60 billion to educate its citizens.

While reflecting on his teaching career in the forward, Dr. Richard Wisniewski states, “I do not recall any of us complaining about having to work outside the classroom. It seemed like such a common practice that we simply assumed it was part of what being a teacher required” (p. vii). Perhaps this casual acceptance of teacher moonlight within the profession is the final stage of capitulation with an understanding that: Yes, I can obtain a graduate degree and still find the necessity to work two jobs.

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