

SPECIAL REPORTS

When lab meets life

BY SPECTRUM

14 NOVEMBER 2016



Gizem Vural

Advances in autism research usually take center stage on *Spectrum*, but we don't often talk about what it takes to get there: years training for a faculty job, long hours at the bench, deferred marriage or children, missed vacations, long-distance relationships and, perhaps, complex childcare arrangements.

In this special report, we decided to focus on these behind-the-scenes circumstances of autism researchers' lives.

Several contributors offered **recipes for balancing** work and life. **Brian O'Roak** starts with what matters most and then fills in the rest. **Helen Tager-Flusberg** describes how the balance continually shifts over a lifetime. **Camilla Bellone** underscores the importance of support. And **Jessica Cardin** advises that erasing boundaries between the two might in fact be the best approach.

A play-by-play of one day in **Vanessa Bal's** life offers insight into how **one young scientist** nurtures a toddler along with a career. Bal landed a prestigious post as assistant professor at the University of California, San Francisco. Not everyone is so lucky. **During the postdoctoral years,**

life may be particularly difficult to wrangle. Long hours and low pay, coupled with uncertain job prospects, take an emotional toll on young scientists and their families.

No matter how busy life gets, says **Bhismadev Chakrabarti**, science communication is a worthy addition to the to-do list. He recommends that institutions provide incentives for frazzled scientists who explain their research to the **general public**.

When scientists find love, they may need two jobs rather than one, in order to accommodate a partner. Some scientists have spun this **'two-body problem'** into opportunity. A move for a spouse's job — or the arrival of children — may cause a scientist to take a break from his or her career. A few available grants can help **ease reentry into science**.

Although work-life balance is a challenge for both women and men, women often face higher expectations on both fronts. In a Q&A, **Yael Niv** says scientists need to make a concerted effort, particularly when planning conferences, to counteract the implicit bias that undermines the **careers of female scientists**.

You can hear some of these voices in the accompanying podcast (below). Articles from our archives round out this special report, which we hope provides a broad perspective on the lives of scientists.

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