"We're Parents Too!" Changes in Father Involvement in Domestic Labor Among Urban Middle Class Dual-worker Couples

Ruth Burgett Jolie

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This dissertation is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication:  

Approved by the Dissertation Committee:  

[Signatures]
“WE’RE PARENTS TOO!” CHANGES IN FATHER INVOLVEMENT IN DOMESTIC LABOR AMONG URBAN MIDDLE CLASS, DUAL-WORKER COUPLES

BY

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DISSERTATION

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy
Anthropology

The University of New Mexico
Albuquerque, New Mexico

December, 2010
Acknowledgements

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this dissertation is to investigate fathers’ involvement in domestic labor among middle class, dual-worker families in Albuquerque, New Mexico. I argue that men’s participation in domestic labor is affected by their parental identities. Three things influence parental identity: (1) demographics, including socioeconomic position, age, race/ethnicity, (2) religiosity, meaning ones adherence to religious values and participation in a formal religious institution (Wilcox 2002:781), and (3) parental ideology, denoting the belief structure surrounding what a parent ought to do. Demography and religiosity are themselves mediated by parental ideology, and in turn also further shape, parental ideology. Parental ideology directly influences parental identity. How an individual identifies as a parent determines his or her parental involvement in the family, including housework and childcare.
I discuss how fathers’ identities and the structural forces, such as family background, education, and employment, affect the division of household labor. Data from my ethnographic study indicate that although certain household tasks remain gender-specific, men are doing more household tasks, especially childcare, than previous research suggests. Importantly, both men and women emphasize being in a partnership, which enforces egalitarian ideals. There has been a shift in men’s perception of the father role, with men strongly identifying as fathers and placing importance on this role. These changes are a consequence of a general shift in gender roles, towards a more egalitarian understanding. However, women of childbearing age are viewed as mothers—over any other role—first, which assists in explaining why women appear to embrace more traditional gender roles than their husbands.

I address how an individual’s degree of religiosity influences their understanding of gender roles, and their enactment of those roles as “parent.” Those with high degrees of religiosity that belong to a Conservative Christian group tend to be less egalitarian in parenting and their perception of the fatherhood role than other Christians. Mainstream Protestants are most similar to agnostics, and even Catholics with high religiosity are more egalitarian in their father role than Conservative Christians. I conclude by proposing a selection of policy recommendations in order to assist not just the dual-working middle-class father, but American families as a whole.
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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Absolutely, always put your family before your career. My biggest contribution to my family and to society is developing my family. Kids are the future...they are the most important things, because they are the foundation of the family...[Being a father] is very rewarding, more than a career or monetary-type things. What society deems “success” should be taking part in your kids upbringing. But it’s hard. It’s a balancing act.
—Paul Montgomery, interview, May 2008

Being a parent is the most important job God gave me.
—Seth Maier, interview, May 2008

Like Paul Montgomery and Seth Maier, participants in my dissertation research, many citizens in the United States claim that families are the most important thing in their lives and that their families should take priority over everything else (Bogenschnieder 2002:xxiv; Bookman 2004).¹ Now that the majority (71 percent) of mothers are in the workforce, fathers are increasingly involved in their families (USDLB 2009). Yet, both mothers and fathers struggle to balance work and family and are concerned about how to manage childcare, household chores, and the pressure of two jobs. Today’s typical American middle class family, comprising over 60 percent of the United States population, is characterized by a dual-worker household, a trend that began in the 1970s. Social scientists suggest that during this time most men began participating more fully in the family because their spouses were also working full-time (Hochschild 2003[1989]; Hood 1983; Lamb 1975, 1976; Levine 1976; Pleck 1974, 1985; Rotundo 1985). Despite this generational shift affecting male participation in domestic labor, it

¹ As Collier et al. (1992:32) have pointed out, “the family,” as it is usually referred to in the United States, is an ideological construct perpetuated within capitalistic states. It is neither a universal institution nor the only organization capable of fulfilling human needs. There are two principal ways that the term “family” is used by social scientists. The first includes all extended multigenerational kin, related affinally and consanguinally, from one’s mother and father. The second refers to the family as a household, where only nuclear kin (mother, father, and children) reside. For the purposes of my study, I use the second definition.
appears that women, regardless of employment, socioeconomic position, ethnicity, or personal inclination, still do more household and childcare tasks than men (Bianchi et al. 2000; Bookman 2004; Coltrane 2000; Shelton and John 1996). That mothers continue to assume greater responsibility for domestic labor gives rise to several questions about fathers’ contributions to domestic labor: Do today’s fathers participate more in the domestic division of labor than their fathers, or in different ways? What motivates men to be more involved fathers and how do they identify with their role as father? What part does religion play in fathers’ involvement in their families? On a fundamental level, families are formative for gender roles, and how individuals learn what is “appropriate” behavior for each gender has long-term impacts for future generations in terms of gender equality and the structure of both reproductive and productive labor.

The purpose of this dissertation is to investigate fathers’ involvement in domestic labor among middle class, dual-worker families in Albuquerque, New Mexico. I argue that men’s participation in domestic labor is affected by their parental identities. Three

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2 Housework entails those tasks that include the upkeep of the house: dusting, yard work, laundry, cooking, and so forth. Childcare is narrowly defined as those chores necessary to keep children healthy and happy (e.g., Shelton and John 1996). This includes such tasks as bathing the child, getting up with the child in the middle of the night to get her a drink of water, buying the child clothing, and so forth. Both housework and childcare are subsumed under the broader category of domestic labor (Coverman 1985). I use “household labor” and “domestic labor” synonymously.

3 Although the term “role” was first introduced by Linton and elaborated on most famously by Merton, role has a wide variety of uses (Banton 1965:28). Basically, role is “a set of norms and expectations applied to the incumbent of a particular position” (Banton 1965:29). An individual can have many roles. Following Banton (1965), I take role to be the behavior played out by an individual that is shaped by his or her ideas of what others expect of him or her, as well as his or her own ideas of what is appropriate behavior in a particular situation.

4 Productive labor refers to goods created by an individual that he or she could use for his or her own purposes or exchange for a wage from an employer. Reproductive labor involves reproducing and maintaining the productive labor force, that is, workers (c.f., Marx [1867]1978). In the United States, families’ households are the loci for most of the reproductive labor, as domestic labor comprises part of reproductive labor.
Things influence parental identity: (1) demographics, including socioeconomic position, age, race/ethnicity, (2) religiosity, meaning one's adherence to religious values and participation in a formal religious institution (Wilcox 2002:781), and (3) parental ideology, denoting the belief structure surrounding what a parent ought to do. Demography and religiosity are themselves mediated by parental ideology, and in turn also further shape, parental ideology. Parental ideology directly influences parental identity. How an individual identifies as a parent determines his or her parental involvement in the family, including housework and childcare. [See Figure 1: Factors Affecting Paternal Involvement]

![Diagram](image)

**Figure 1: Factors Affecting Paternal Involvement in Domestic Labor:**
Demographics, religiosity, and parental ideology are independent variables that are mediated by parental identity. Parental identity, as an intervening variable, affects paternal involvement.

---

5 I use the term “mediate” in a broad sense; to effect as an intermediate mechanism—to occupy a middle position—between two things.
My research contributes to the general literature on father involvement and fathers’ participation in the household, related topics that have been under-studied in anthropology as compared to mothers’ involvement in domestic labor. To understand fathers’ involvement in their families, we need to understand mothers’ involvement and their interactions with fathers, too. My research adds to previous social science literature on father involvement by showing that the ways men conceptualize themselves as parents form the basis for their behavior and the extent to which they are involved in their families (see also Fox and Bruce 2001; Hossain and Roopnarine 1994). Some studies indicate that Christian fathers are more involved in their families than non-Christian men (Bartkowski and Xu 2000; Gallagher 2003; Gallagher and Smith 1999; Goldscheider and Waite 1999; King 2003; Wilcox 2002; Wilcox and Bartkowski 2000), but these studies fall short in determining what other demographic markers affect a Christian man’s parental involvement. My project is unique in that I examined how the interconnected variables of religiosity, race/ethnicity, age, and socioeconomic status affect, and become part of, paternal identity, and how this identity impacts childcare involvement. Even though my study focused on middle class families, the norms and expectations of the middle class, a large percentage of the population, permeate other socioeconomic groups (Bourdieu 1977; 1984; Frank 2007; Veblen [1899]1994), which makes this research more widely applicable to other American families.

Methods and Study Population

The research methods that I employed to illuminate paternal involvement included participant observation, semi-structured interviews, open-ended interviews (life histories), and identity pie charts. Triangulation of these methods provided a fuller
understanding of how middle class, urban fathers in Albuquerque, New Mexico, constructed and maintained their parental identities as a “father.” Furthermore, these methods were useful in gathering data to determine how parental identities affected the amount of domestic labor, particularly childcare, that my participants performed.

In order to meet participants for my study I volunteered at three religiously diverse daycare centers. I also volunteered at the non-denominational daycare facility on the University of New Mexico’s campus. Additionally, in order to build my sample, I interviewed parents based on recommendations from other participants.

My study population was comprised of thirty married dual-worker middle class families with children under the age of seven years. I was particularly interested in examining the effect of religiosity on paternal involvement within this group of young families as some recent literature suggests that Christian fathers highly value paternal involvement (Bartkowski and Xu 2000; Gallagher 2003; Gallagher and Smith 1999; Goldscheider and Waite 1999; King 2003; Wilcox 2002; Wilcox and Bartowski 2000). Since I was intrigued by the possibility that religiosity could be a key variable because it also cross-cuts socioeconomic position, race/ethnicity, and age, I decided to chose a sample that allowed me to determine if there were important differences among fathers of different Christian religious denominations, and among fathers that did not practice any particular religion. I selected my sample so that I would have roughly equal numbers of couples representing four Christian denominations (Conservative Christian, Catholic, Mainstream Protestant, and non-religious practicing).6 I interviewed eighteen

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6 When I refer to the fourth category of people as “non-practicing” I mean to indicate that they are, specifically, non-religious practicing. They could—and some did—count themselves as spiritual people.
Conservative Christians (nine men and nine women), sixteen Catholics (eight men and eight women), fourteen Mainstream Protestants (seven men and seven women), and twelve individuals (six men and six women) who did not claim to be practicing Christians.

Although I was also interested in ethnic/racial and age differences, I selected my sample based primarily on religious denominations. Nonetheless, 19 of the men and 18 of the women I interviewed self-identified as White/Euro-American/Caucasian, nine men and 11 women self-described Hispanic/Latino/Spanish descent, two men identified as Native American, and one woman self-identified as African American.\(^7\) The median age of the men in my sample was 36 years old and for women it was 34 years old. In order to minimize variation that was not related to socioeconomic status, race/ethnicity, or religiosity in my sample, I only worked with families where both parents were the children’s biological or adoptive parents.

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\(^7\) Circe Sturm (2002:15) writes that race and ethnicity are often conflated and that “when ethnicity is used, it substitutes for race and brings to mind ‘style-of-life’ distinctions based on cultural differences such as religion, language, food and clothing.” During my dissertation research I also collapsed race and ethnicity. My goal was to get at those “style of life” differences among the participants in my study, or what would best be categorized as ethnic differences. I did not give my study participants the option of distinguishing between race and ethnicity. As a result, throughout this dissertation I use the terms that the individuals in my study employed. For example, individuals from New Mexico whose families have a long history in New Mexico, chose from a broad spectrum of identifiers, including “Spanish,” “Latino,” “Spanish-American” or, most commonly, “Hispanic.” Additionally, since 1970 the United States Census has used the designator “Hispanic” to identify people of Latin American and Spanish descent currently living in the United States (Oboler 1995:xiii), so when referring to census records I also use the broad term Hispanic for these groups. I also employ racialized categories, such as White and Black, when I refer to census records. For fallback categories I use the terms that I most often heard my participants use: “Hispanic” to indicate Native New Mexicans, “White” to refer to people of mostly Euro-American ancestry, “Native American” for individuals who emphasized their American Indian heritage, and “African American” as a label for those who would be considered Black on a census record.
From my sample of thirty families I selected a sub-sample of eight families in order to conduct participant observation and additional in-depth interviews. This sub-sample was mostly a convenience sample in that these families were those who graciously consented to further study. Nonetheless, this sample was representative in that it reflected the religious composition of my larger sample, including two Charismatic Christians, three Mainstream Protestants, two Catholic, and one non-practicing family.

**Fathering in Historical Perspective**

Historians note that prior to the 1970s many men valued their role as father and participated in their families in appropriate ways for the time. For instance, men could be playmates to their children and moral guides, as well as the main economic providers for their families (E. Pleck 2004). Importantly, while the 1970s witnessed an increase in male participation in domestic labor, this trend has not ceased and men have been steadily increasing their contributions in the domestic arena over the last generation, since about the mid 1980s (Lamb 1978, 2010). Indeed, when compared to women, who still do more domestic labor, men have increased their participation over the last two generations. Today’s fathers on average spend 94 percent more time with their children, as compared to fathers in 1965 (Bianchi et al. 2006). Two generations ago, up until roughly the 1960s, men were viewed primarily as economic providers (LaRossa 1997; Pleck and Pleck 1997). If they did any childcare or housework at all, it was to help their wives (Johansen 2000). Beginning in the 1970s, the second wave feminist movement helped free men from their traditional masculine roles and afforded them the opportunity to define themselves as something other than breadwinners (Kimmel 1996). Although doing more domestic labor than their own fathers, most men raising families in the 1970s and 1980s
still thought of housework and childcare as predominately women’s responsibility, regardless of the fact that they had wives engaged in wage work, too (Bianchi et al. 2000; Coltrane 2000; Pleck 1974; Shelton and John 1996).

**Previous Research on Father Involvement**

Research prior to the 1980s examining father involvement only looked at the broad picture of whether men were involved at all and rarely examined the intricacies of what, specifically, it means to be an “involved” father. As Sanderson and Thompson note (2002:99), fatherhood involvement may manifest over many domains or modalities, including cognitive, affective, and behavioral. A useful typology for understanding father involvement in early childcare has been developed by Michael Lamb and colleagues (Lamb et al. 1985, 1987a; Lamb 2004; Lamb and Tamis-LeMonda 2004). Lamb’s model helps to examine not only the direct contact that a man has with his children, but also his indirect involvement. For Lamb, involvement can be divided into three areas: engagement, accessibility, and responsibility. Depending on the amount of time and energy that a man devotes to each of these categories, Lamb classifies the father as involved, or not, with his children. *Engagement* includes direct interaction with a child, either in caretaking, play, or leisure. A father playing baseball, helping with homework, or baking cookies, with his children are all examples of engagement. *Accessibility* refers to whether a man is available to meet his child’s needs and wants, even if he is not

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8 Coltrane and Adams (2001:75; see also Hawkins and Dollahite 1997:20-21) make the distinction between *fatherhood/motherhood* and *fatherwork/motherwork*. Fatherhood and motherhood are statuses. Fatherwork and motherwork are the tasks performed by fathers and mothers in their role as “father” or “mother.”

9 In their original publication outlining a tripartite model of paternal involvement, Lamb et al. (1985) referred to “engagement” as “interaction.” The model as it is seen today—engagement, accessibility and responsibility—was first published in 1987. Although four authors originally that formulated the involvement model, throughout the dissertation I refer to it as “Lamb’s model” for the sake of convenience.
directly occupied with his child at the time. This includes performing household chores or work-related activities, such as checking e-mail while simultaneously being accessible to his child. *Responsibility* denotes how a father ensures that his child is cared for, or what Walzer (1996) refers to as “mental baby care.” Thinking about the needs of the children and arranging resources for his children, such as educational activities, babysitters, and doctors, indicate that a man is responsible for his children. In other words, responsibility means that the father feels obligated to undertake the duties that are necessary for his child’s welfare and does not wait to be told by his spouse/partner to perform a childcare task.

Pleck (2010) recently wrote that paternal involvement must be viewed as part of the network of overall family relationships. For instance, some research that has examined marital quality and happiness as it relates to paternal involvement has indicated that the better the relationship, the more likely a man is to be involved in his children’s lives (Bruce and Hawkins 2006; Cummings et al. 2010; Eggebeen and Knoester 2001; Ihinger-Tallman et al. 1993). I argue that we need to go even further and examine women’s roles in the family, with particular regard to what her expectations are for her husband’s involvement when it comes to parenting and housework. Childcare is embedded in domestic labor and by only examining men’s participation in childcare, and not housework, we are missing a piece of the puzzle critical to understanding men’s involvement in their families.

**Identities**

Lamb’s model provides a good starting point for understanding what men actually do regarding childcare, but it does not take into account how men understand their own
participation in the family (Mauer et al. 2003). Much research examining urban dual-worker families, even those studies utilizing Lamb’s model, have not considered whether and how a father’s identity has conditioned the childcare tasks he has performed. In other words, this research says little about how paternal identities influence paternal involvement.

The term “identity” has been conceptualized in a variety of ways since its inception in the social science literature in the 1950s (Brubaker and Cooper 2000). I see identities as layered, meaning that an individual’s personal identity is constructed and enacted in multiple roles that are created by a person’s individual situation, and is positioned in relationship to larger social structures (Kondo 1990:43-45). People are strategic actors and generally quite adept at role switching, depending on what they see as the important role to emphasize at the time. Therefore, depending on the context and the people present, an actor will express and give priority to certain roles, such as the “worker” or “father” role (Burke and Cast 1997:277). An individual’s identity consists of his or her internal perceptions of how he or she understands his or her own identities and how others understand him or her. For example, a man may strongly identify as a father (his paternal identity), but that identification is influenced by his perceptions of what a father ought to be and other individuals’ reactions to his role as father, such as his wife’s. Importantly, identities are processual and are influenced by socioeconomic position, ethnicity/race, and religion (Crenshaw 1989; McCall 2005). These variables intersect and are influenced by each other and cannot be separated from one another. How an individual understands who he or she is, taking into account these markers, also affects
his or her actions and how that individual understands and performs his or her various roles.

**Religiosity**

How a man self-identifies as a father is an important subject that has been explored only recently, but rarely in conjunction with aspects of socioeconomic position and religiosity. Although some studies indicate that Christian fathers have higher levels of family involvement than other men (Bartkowski and Xu 2000; Gallagher 2003; Gallagher and Smith 1999; Goldscheider and Waite 1999; King 2003; Wilcox 2002; Wilcox and Bartowski 2000), these studies have not examined the specific aspects of involvement, nor have they examined the influence of socioeconomic position in Christian families.

When I formulated my dissertation proposal I anticipated that degree of religiosity would impact parenting practices in one of two ways. First, I expected that a middle class man who considers himself very religious and see his role solely as being the family’s economic provider, regardless of whether his wife also works. Alternatively, a very religious father might believe that his Christian duty is to be very involved in childrearing and perform the same childcare tasks that his wife does. Thus, the link between religiosity and childrearing commitments was a key aspect to be explored in this study. Moreover, religiosity must be considered in conjunction with demographic markers, such as race/ethnicity and socioeconomic position, in order to get a fuller picture of paternal involvement.
Demographic Markers

Race/ethnicity. In the social sciences, the terms “race” and “ethnicity” are rarely defined, are often conflated, and are usually fraught with contention.\(^\text{10}\) Ethnicity is often used in reference to a group of people with a shared language, religion, and/or other cultural traits (Smedley 1998). Ethnicity is a fluid category that, like culture in general, changes over time and space. Conversely, race is often based on physical differences that originated in different geographic locales. Ethnicity can be independent of race and is often more nuanced than race. An individual can identify as Jewish, which is currently regarded as a ethnic category, \textit{and} be Black or White, which are racial categories (c.f. Brown et al. 2007). Importantly, the United States census has codified these racial categories and they do not necessarily always reflect the self-identification of particular individuals. For example, some individuals who might be labeled “Black” in the census as a racial category, might not identify as such on a daily basis (Oboler 1995).

I predicted that ethnicity would impact the type of religious affiliation a person chooses which, in turn, can affect an individual’s degree of religiosity. For example, while doing preliminary research in Albuquerque, it appeared that Hispanics were more likely to be Catholic and Whites more Protestant. The movement towards Evangelicalism, however, has drawn people of all ethnicities (Gallagher 2003). Evangelicals, as a branch of Conservative Christianity, tend to stress paternal

\(^{10}\) “Race” and “ethnicity” are not problem-free categories but I find that race, especially, poorly describes what it sets out to do, namely, say something culturally relevant about different groups of humanity (e.g. Thompson 2006). “Race” has often been used as a social construct, albeit one rooted in physical if not strictly genetic differences, but there are more physical differences among races than between races ([Livingston 1962] in Reardon 2006; Serre and Pääbo 2004). Race has been historically used to marginalize “non-White” individuals and to rationalize inequalities between groups of people based on phenotypic traits (Omi and Winant 1994; Roberts 1997; Smedley 2007; Thompson 2006). However, ethnicity has sometimes also been used to discriminate against individuals because they differ (e.g., religiously, linguistically) from mainstream culture in the United States (Omi and Winant 1994:15).
participation more than Catholics or Mainstream Protestants (Wilcox 2002). Because I
expected that religiosity would be the most important predictor of paternal involvement, I
anticipated that ethnicity would be a less important factor in determining religiosity and,
therefore paternal involvement, if my interviewees were Conservative Christian as
opposed to Mainstream Protestants or Catholics.

As Shelton and John (1996) note, social science studies show mixed results
concerning whether race/ethnicity is a determining factor in the gendered division of
household labor. One of the reasons for this is that researchers rarely control for
socioeconomic position (Coltrane and Valdez 1993). Additionally, because there is such
variability among and between socioeconomic groups, it is difficult to determine if the
differences in families are because of socioeconomic status, or because of race/ethnicity.
The exceptions are some studies that show that regardless of whether their wives were
working full or part-time, and whether they are working or middle class, employed
African American men tend to do more housework than their White and Hispanic
counterparts (Ahmeduzzaman and Roopnarine 1992; Fagan 1998; Hossain and
Roopnarine 1993, 1994). This is explained by the fact that Black mothers have,
historically, always been in the workforce and they engaged the assistance of their
children in household chores; Black men presumably do more chores than other men
since they learned to do so as children (Landry 2000; McLoyd 1993).

I originally thought that race/ethnicity would significantly influence paternal
involvement. I predicted that Hispanic men would be more involved in the day-to-day
activities than White fathers since “the family” is a central concept familiar for many
Hispanics (Elasser et al. 1980; Mirande 2010 et al.; Vega 1990). Other detailed studies
indicate that the concept of the patriarchal father in Hispanic and Mexican families does not preclude him from doing childcare (Gutmann 1996; Lamphere et al. 1993; Pesquera 1997).

**Age.** The age of the child/children is important to consider given that the younger the child, the more care he or she needs. Because I was particularly interested in which parent completes and is responsible for those repetitive daily childcare chores, I chose to examine families with young children, preferably pre-school aged (under seven years old). I did not attempt to control for the age of the parent in my dissertation research, as I thought it more important to control for the age of their children as I was interested in examining parental participation in childcare tasks with young children. However, I measured the fathers’ age when conducting my research.

Shelton and John (1993:143) found that a father’s age had no bearing on whether he would engage in domestic labor or not. Rather, what mattered was his partner’s economic activity; the more hours she worked, the more likely he was to do household and childcare chores. Along such lines, I expected that the age of the father in my dual-career couples would be inconsequential, since his peers in his parenting cohort (regardless of actual age) would influence him more than his peers in his age cohort.

**Socioeconomic position.** Socioeconomic position is intertwined with ethnicity/race and other personal factors (Ortner 2003:12). Gender roles are shaped by an individual’s socioeconomic position, and people learn what constitutes appropriate behavior for men and women depending on the socioeconomic class in which they are raised (Bourdieu 1977, 1984; Jenkins 1996). Although the socioeconomic status that one is born into is often the one that he or she remains in throughout life, many individuals’
experience upward mobility or downward movement. Importantly, when people move from one socioeconomic status to another, they tend to adopt the ideology of their new socioeconomic position (Bourdieu 1984).

In broad terms, socioeconomic status/class is conventionally understood to be divided into three categories: the upper, middle, and lower classes (e.g., Ortner 2003; Warner 1960[1949]; Weber 1978[1963]). I have adapted a Weberian approach which emphasizes a continuum of “lower-middle-upper,” rather than a clearly demarcated group based on the means of production (Weber 1979[1963]). The “middle” of this tripartite scheme is itself divided into upper-middle/professional, middle-middle, and lower-middle/working class (Ortner 2003). Although socioeconomic position is difficult to pinpoint, as there tends to be more variation among than between the classes, there are three broad categories that, when taken together, help to determine socioeconomic position. These categories are education, income, and occupation (Gilbert 1998; Scott and Leonhardt 2005; Weber 1978[1963]).

**Education.** Generally, to be considered middle class in the United States today, one should have a baccalaureate degree and perhaps even have completed some post-

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11 Karl Marx introduced the concept of class in terms of a relationship to the mode of production. Max Weber amended this theory to include the notion of status to encompass other aspects of one’s economic position, including education, which influences but not directly related to, one’s occupation and the income derived from it. Education and occupation are aspects of status, whereas income is an aspect of class. Weber was interested in the value given to certain occupations; those with higher values translate into a higher status for the individual employed in the higher valued occupations. Both theories have shaped the social stratification literature. Theoretical differences are important, but beyond the scope hereafter I use the concept of class rather than status, but define it in terms of the Weberian dimensions of education, occupation, and income.

12 “Middle class” remains an amorphous category for many Americans. When asked, most people will place themselves in the very broad category of middle class, perhaps so as to avoid drawing attention to their socioeconomic position (Ortner 2003). No one wants to claim a lower-middle socioeconomic status because many automatically assume that “lower” equals “bad.” Even the moniker “working class,” which is often synonymous with lower-middle socioeconomic class, is shunned by many (e.g., Fussell 1992[1983]).
graduate master’s level work as well. Professional/upper-middle class individuals must have an advanced degree, such as a PhD, MBA, law, or medical degree. Lower-middle class and working class individuals tend to have only a high school degree and, if they go beyond high school, a two-year or equivalent degree from a community college.

**Occupation.** A college degree enables an individual to have an occupation where there is some autonomy and control over his or her career, which is another hallmark of the middle class. In the middle class (either professional or middle-middle) an individual has a career with a salary calculated on an annual basis, whereas a working class individual tends to calculate his or her wage by the hour in a job. A professional career, such as a doctor of veterinary medicine or college professor, affords flexibility and autonomy that is much greater than in a middle-middle, lower-middle, or working class career. An accountant working for a firm or a teacher for a high school are examples of middle-middle class careers. Among the working class, there is often little autonomy and/or flexibility in work. For example, a tile installer working for Lowe’s Home Improvement Store is a working class job.

**Income.** In 2008, the median national household income (which does not take into account household size) was approximately $51,000 (PEW 2008). However, New Mexico is a poorer state in comparison to other states and the median household income for New Mexico in 2008 was approximately $48,000 (U.S. Census). In view of the statistical definition of middle class, if we take 80 percent to 120 percent of that median income to define middle class in the United States, it works out to be $40,800 to $61,200 per year for a middle class household and $38,400 to $57,000 per year for a New Mexican household.
The median household income does not in itself determine middle class status, however, since two individuals with high school education who are both employed in working class jobs can combine their wages to make the median household income. By contrast, a middle class individual with a college degree, for example a loan officer at a bank, a nurse, or an accountant, can earn the median household income alone. For a dual-earner middle class household, we would then expect a middle class combined salary to be around $80,000 to $120,000. This level of income would automatically catapult this household into the top 20 percent of households in New Mexico, but this household income would still be less than a dual-earner professional household (two lawyers, for example, making over $250,000 a year together), who can easily be in the top 10 percent of New Mexican households. Middle-middle class earnings allow a middle class family to own a home, purchase a car, pay their pay bills, and save for retirement and their children’s education. For example, the majority of the families in my study had college degrees, worked as editors, accountants, teachers, and other similar middle class jobs, which enabled them to have household incomes between $75,000-$110,000.

Previous research examining the domestic division of labor indicates that the earning power of the wife is one of the key predictors of how domestic labor is divided in dual-worker households (e.g., Bittman et al. 2003; Hood 1983; Lamphere et al. 1993; Mannino and Deutsch 2007; Pesquera 1997). Therefore, I predicted that the income of the wife, relative to her husband’s income, would be the most important variable.

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13 Inheritance is one aspect of wealth. Usually, an individual in the middle class will have investments but they do not necessarily have inheritance unless it is a small amount. Inheritance large enough that it that allows one to live off the accrued interest is more of an upper class phenomenon (Gilbert 1998).
influencing how domestic labor was divided among my study participants.\textsuperscript{14} Further, I expected that upwardly mobile individuals would embrace the ideology of the middle class, particularly relating to parental ideology, which would, in turn, influence parental involvement.

**Parenting Ideologies**

A relationship exists between parental ideologies, which are conceptions of what a “good” parent should do, and gender role performance. People are socialized into knowing what a “good” mother or father does. Gender is an incredibly complex subject, but we can think of a parent’s gender role as an enactment of part of his or her identity. Parental identity is itself partially formed in relation to parenting ideologies.\textsuperscript{15}

An “ideology” is a consciously accepted set of principals that often form around a central concept or cluster of concepts. Ideology is a belief structure that is conscious, explicit, and articulated by those with power (Gramsci 1971; Williams 1977). In the United States this includes professionals, religious leaders, and politicians who are largely from the White professional class. Parental ideologies are disseminated by the media and are accepted in varying degrees by the working and middle classes. Individuals are rarely able to see the part that parental ideology plays in their own

\textsuperscript{14} While I was particularly interested in fathers’ socioeconomic position, it was important to take into consideration their wives’ socioeconomic position because together they form a collective unit. Expectations about the domestic division of labor are likewise based on socioeconomic class. As a couple’s collective education rises, and therefore their overall socioeconomic position, the traditional, strict division of labor decreases (Bourdieu 1984:109).

\textsuperscript{15} I take hegemony to be the entire system of meanings and values in a society that are reproduced through the very act of living (e.g. Gramsci 1971; Williams 1977). Ideology, as the most conscious aspect of hegemony, is enacted in identity and shapes personal identity.
parenting because they are living within the social relations that produce those meanings and values, and they are often unable to perceive any inequalities.16

**Gender Role Socialization**

Parenting ideologies are learned by individuals as children and those ideologies affect the enactment of their adult gender roles as “fathers” (Montgomery 2010; Whiting and Edwards 1988). Yet, men can act against the particular gender roles that they grew up with because parental ideologies that ultimately affect gender roles are transmitted obliquely through the media and through the dominant culture in general. It is not just being socialized into a particular family, but socialized into a particular culture, that is noteworthy. Children growing up in the 1980s and 1990s (the age of the fathers in my sample) grew up seeing their fathers, fathers’ peers, and middle class fathers engaged in some domestic labor. This socialized them, as children, into those parental gender roles. Importantly, how a man embraces a particular gender role has to do with a combination of how much he sympathizes with his own father and what his father’s paternal role was, not necessarily whether a man grew up seeing his father share, or not, in domestic labor (Hochschild 2003[1989]:227).

**Framework for the Dual Worker Family**

Arlie Hochschild (2003[1989]), in a seminal book on the division of labor among dual-worker families in the early 1980s, identified three family patterns—traditional, transitional, and egalitarian—based on how the dual-worker spouses divided the domestic

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16 The domestic division of labor, including childcare and household chores, is fraught with inequalities. Men are the privileged gender in our society. When men do not do as much housework or childcare as women, it is still regarded as “fair” by both sexes (Swearingen-Hilker and Yoder 2002). The acceptability of men’s under-contribution to housework among people who claim to embrace egalitarian ideals in the gendered division of labor is a prime example of an accepted, if rarely articulated, inequality.
labor (including childcare). In her conceptual scheme, individuals who hold *traditional* values believe that there ought to be a strict division of labor, with women tending the house and men serving as primary economic providers. Individuals who hold *transitional* views of gender believe that a man should help their wives in the home, since she has to work to make money, but that a woman should still be responsible for the household and the man responsible for economically supporting the family. Individuals with *egalitarian* views, in contrast, believe that housework and breadwinning should be shared equally by both husband and wife. Hochschild (2003[1989]:59) found that 40 percent of her 50 couple sample held traditional views, 40 were transitional and 20 percent of her sample could be classified as “egalitarian.”

**My Findings**

Although the categories that Hochschild outlined still exist, I argue that there has been a shift in the frequency of the households corresponding to each of these categories. The participants in my study had to both work for wages, accomplish the necessary housework and childcare, and maintain marital satisfaction. Given the contemporary

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17 Other social scientists examining the gendered domestic division of labor came up with categories that worked well for their studies (Bookman 2004; Hood 1983; Lamphere et al. 1993; Pesquera 1997). I choose to borrow from Hochschild’s categories because they best highlight and explicate what I observed in my own research.

18 Interestingly, Hochschild found that while individuals embracing egalitarian ideals really did consciously work to equally divide the domestic labor, there was not a direct correlation between gender role ideology and gender role enactment when it came to traditional men. Traditional men in her study actually did more domestic labor than transitional men. Hochschild explained this, however, by examining those values that traditional men hold. While traditional men (and traditional women) believe that women should be solely responsible for the domestic labor, if she can not complete an aspect of the labor because she is incompetent doing a particular chore (i.e., cooking rice, paying bills, grocery shopping) than a traditional man will step up and “rescue” his wife by doing those chores. In this way, they are still traditional because he is only “helping” her because of her incompetence. It is a traditional value that women are not as competent as men; as well, it is a traditional value that men are “chivalrous” and willing to “rescue” their wives when needed (Hochschild 2003[1989]. See chapter two for more details).
middle class ideal that domestic labor ought to be shared, it is difficult for dual-career
couples to say that a strict traditional gendered division of labor is acceptable (e.g.,
Descartes and Kottak 2009). Even if they secretly believe this, it is difficult to practice
today. In fact, I observed no strictly traditional families in my sample. While Hochschild
found that only 20 percent (50 couples) of her sample professed egalitarian ideals and
really did try to split the housework and childcare equally, over 80 percent (25 families)
of my sample attempted to divide housework and childcare equally and, importantly,
asserted that it was important for men and women to share both wage and domestic work.
Thus, the most “traditional” men and women in my sample actually fit best into what
Hochschild terms “transitional.” The new traditional is yesterday’s transitional.

In my study, when men subscribed to more traditional gender ideals, there was a
more traditional division of labor in the household, regardless of the women’s gender
ideologies. Men in five families were transitional, but not strictly traditional, in their
gender roles. In two of these families, the women were frustrated that they assumed the
lion’s share of the domestic labor, but felt that they had no recourse.

However, the majority (n=25) of the men and women in my study professed to
holding egalitarian ideals even though women were still doing more cleaning tasks, but
the childcare was fairly evenly divided. It is noteworthy that within this majority I
identified that there was a continuum in how my participants viewed “egalitarian.”
Although a true egalitarian would perfectly divide housework and childcare and wage
work, I did not find any families where every kind of work was exactly, perfectly,
egalitarian. Rather, I identified two types of egalitarian family: divide-and-conquer and
reminder egalitarian. For the purposes of this study, I have classified all egalitarian
families as either divide-and-conquer or reminder egalitarian, but there is variation between the two groups and the distinctions are not necessarily clear-cut.

There were seven families who embraced egalitarian ideals and split up the domestic labor along “his” and “her” tasks. Using this strategy of dividing tasks (what one of my interviewees called a “divide-and-conquer” approach) preserved a gendered division of labor, except that the labor is more equally divided than then it was a generation ago. Whereas a generation ago cooking and childcare were firmly “women’s tasks,” my participants viewed them as gender neutral tasks. This allowed for the domestic labor to be more equally divided.

Eighteen families shared tasks, except that the wife felt that she needed to remind her husband to make sure that the task was completed to her satisfaction. I refer to these egalitarian families as “reminder” egalitarians. Most mothers in my sample were similar to what other researchers call “gatekeepers,” which is a long established role for mothers. They had ultimate control over the tasks that their husbands did and they did not want to give up the power that being a mother brings, even if it meant that they had to take on slightly more chores.¹⁹ Importantly, however, they still referred to themselves as egalitarian and more-or-less split up the chores, especially childcare.²⁰

¹⁹ Allen and Hawkins (1999) were the first to define maternal gatekeeping as a key factor in women’s gender role adherence and behaviors that prohibit men’s participation in the family. As Allen and Hawkins (1999:199) describe it, “gatekeepers” are mothers who set very high domestic standards, have external validation of their primary identity as mother, and hold dichotomous gender roles. By believing that mothers are better than fathers and setting high standards that their husbands cannot meet or will not tell them how to meet, these women (21 percent of their sample) effectively prohibit men’s involvement. For my sample, the women who I define as gatekeepers also define a great portion of their sense of self as mothers, but so do non-gatekeeper mothers. For the purposes of my study, I define gatekeeping as any mother who is the primary caregiver and feels that it is necessary to regulate other family members, particularly their husbands’, involvement. In this case, gatekeeper mothers can exist in egalitarian households, too. The woman allows her spouse to help her or share tasks, she just directs him in his endeavors. I choose the term “reminder” egalitarian, as opposed to “gatekeeper” because “gatekeeper”
A generation has passed since Hochschild’s study. The children of the parents she interviewed are now the age of the parents that I interviewed. The men in my sample grew up with the idea that mothers work outside of the home, too, so fathers must help with domestic labor. Strikingly, today’s generation of fathers, as represented by my study participants, talked about being in a partnership, such that both spouses “help” one another make money and raise their children. It is amazing how much has changed in just a generation!

At the same time, there have always been men in the past who did domestic labor and even today there are many middle class men who do little of it. This was made obvious to me when my participants mentioned their cousins, uncles, neighbors, and other men that they knew who were not involved in domestic labor. What is important about my sample is that over 80 percent of them (25 men) professed to holding egalitarian ideals and strongly identified with being domestic partners and sharing wage work and domestic labor. Sharing decisions, wage work and domestic labor were important for all of these families. How the tasks were exactly split was less important for these families than the notion of sharing.

Housework and childcare are both embedded in the larger picture of domestic labor. That said, there is also some overlap between the tasks (i.e., cooking for the entire family is also a childcare task in that the parent is making certain that the child is fed). It conjures up notions of women excluding their husbands from family life. That was not what the women in my sample did. They wanted to include husbands in daily domestic tasks, but sometimes had to “remind” them to be involved or to do particular tasks.

Because there is a continuum among egalitarians in my study, it allowed for loose comparison, especially among the “reminder” and “divide-and-conquer” egalitarians, which are heuristic categories. There are other ways of examining how domestic labor is divided, but I found that this was the best way of untangling the diversity present among the egalitarian families.
was important to examine housework and childcare together, especially because the dual-worker couples in my sample had to squeeze a lot of work into a short amount of time. Given these time constraints, housework could easily take away from childcare (or vice versa) and parenting overall.

Data obtained during my research suggests that male participants embraced being a “good” and involved father. This is especially true if they did not have a father growing up, or if their father did not live up to their expectations of what they were socialized to believe a “good” father ought to be. Their ideas about “good” fathering were gleaned from popular media that has increasingly endorsed involved fathers, wives’ expectations of an egalitarian household and, for devout Christians, religious leaders.

Even though the dominant parental ideology holds that a “good” father is an involved father (engaged, accessible, and responsible), this does not require being a good housekeeper, too. At the time of my study, the male interviewees cleaned more than their fathers, but on average they did not do anywhere near the amount that their wives did. They did perform a near-equal amount of childcare, however. Generally, childcare is the part of domestic labor that is the most rewarding and consequently has the most prestige (Daly 1996, 2001).

Men who talked about being in partnerships with their wives were very involved fathers and felt responsible for their children, but there are subtle indicators that men deferred to their wives. Women were still seen (by both genders) as the ones who ought to have ultimate domestic responsibility because they are mothers. Men may have had a more vested interest in the domestic division of labor and they might have been very involved in childcare, but they still did not do as much as their wives in the domestic
realm. Women, like men, used the word “share” in reference to childcare and indicated to me that they were happy that their husbands shared the childcare with them.

Although a few of the participants in my study had involved fathers themselves, most told me that when their own fathers did domestic labor it was only “to help.” Generally speaking, the preceding generation of fathers helped their spouses less than today’s fathers, which is why the female participants in my study were so grateful to have their husbands participate in family life by willingly carrying out close to half of the childcare chores. The women did not seem to expect their husbands to do as much housework as they did.

This finding underscores why an analysis of paternal involvement in childcare must go beyond Lamb’s original model of examining whether a father is engaged, accessible, and responsible for his child. We must also examine a man’s contribution to overall domestic labor, as childcare is only one aspect (housework is the other aspect) of domestic work. An additional consideration is how women mediate their husbands’ involvement in domestic labor. Lamb’s model tends to be used in quantitative research, which often precludes qualitative data that can get at rich detail, like examining the process of paternal involvement as related to the relationship between spouses.

**Work-childcare dilemma.** My findings suggest that a work-childcare dilemma exists that can be explained in terms of the structural forces that constrain both women and men. Women do more housework and childcare overall because their labor, since the industrial revolution, has been structured as reproductive rather than productive (Beechey 1978:185). When women were drawn into the labor force, their labor was always valued less than men’s because women were seen as marginal and erratic members of the labor
force (Lamphere 1987; Matthaei 1982). Women were thought of as wives and mothers first, not wage workers (Beechey 1978; Thorne 1982; Weiner 1985). Even in the current economy where dual-worker families are a necessity, for many women of childbearing age the “worker” role is not emphasized to the extent that the “mother” role is emphasized. Part of the explanation for this has to do with the fact that women’s labor has historically been devalued (Lamphere 1987). There are still gender segregated jobs and women are consistently paid less than men. Women make, on average, eighty cents to every dollar that men make (IWPR 2009). As Tiano (1994:122) writes,

> Although households have some decision-making latitude in forging their labor allocation strategies, they must operate within the structural parameters set by the gender-based division of labor with its attendant ideologies about appropriate roles for men and women. The segregation of the labor market confining women to jobs deemed suitable for female workers imparts one set of limits to the household’s labor allocation strategies, and the almost universal assignment of domestic tasks to women imposes another set of constraints.

Women are limited to those jobs considered appropriate for women. Gender segregation of available wage work is a crucial aspect of why women are paid less than men. Women tend to work in female dominated fields and some jobs have come to be “feminized” such as daycare workers, nurses, elementary school teachers, and social workers, to name just a few. Even though a woman will work as many hours and have a similar level of education as a man in a typical “male” job (i.e., firemen, police officer, and so forth) if she is working in a traditionally female-dominated field, she will be paid less than a man in a comparable, but male-dominated, field. Additionally, the fact that women are also responsible for domestic work inhibits women’s complete participation in the labor force. Women might chose to emphasize their position as “mother” over “worker” because in many cases women are not treated fairly in employment contexts where paternalistic
attitudes prevail and gender subordination is reinforced (Safa 1995; Toro-Morn 1997). In the face of these structural constraints it is logical for the mother to be the parent who works fewer hours and/or devotes more time to the domestic sphere. The majority of the women in my sample chose to have flexible careers at the expense of making more money.21 Unfortunately, this also presents a dilemma to working women: women typically make less money than men because if they are in their childbearing years they are viewed as mothers and homemakers first and this becomes a justification for paying them less than men, who are presumably more committed to their jobs than women. Because women are seen as mothers first, and are expected to focus on the home, they earn less than their male counterparts and are often seen as only providing a secondary income. Men, alternatively, are still seen as career- or job-oriented first. They are financially compensated for this gender role since the expectation is that they will prioritize wage work over family. But it also means that when men ask for work flexibility in order to be more involved at home, they are often thought of as lackadaisical about their work (Jacobs and Gerson 2004).

**Predictions and expectations revisited.** Although I expected that race/ethnicity would be an important predictor of paternal involvement, I found few differences among my participants based on race/ethnicity. More of the Hispanic families in my sample were able to draw upon larger family networks to help to care for their children, but they still paid those extended family members, just like the rest of the participants paid for institutional daycare. Regarding paternal involvement, there were no perceptible differences between study participants that could be explained by race/ethnicity. Perhaps

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21 Even though the women in my sample work at least 32 hours a week, this is, on average, 10-20 hours fewer than their husbands work.
this can be accounted for by the fact that they were all middle class and actively embraced the middle class parental ideology that is influential among White Protestant professionals.

While I crafted my dissertation prospectus during an economic high-point, by the time I began conducting fieldwork the economic recession of 2008 was in full-swing. According to two of my participants, the recession caused everybody to work harder to make the same amount of money and stay employed. Those individuals who came from working class families, and were middle class at the time of my research, were comfortable in that they had achieved some upward mobility but were not overtly working to go any higher. Rather, these individuals, as well as the majority of my sample population, actively downplayed their breadwinning roles and emphasized their father roles. I cannot say whether the economic downturn was a prime motivator for this rejection of the breadwinning role or not, but I suspect that it played only a minor part.

I did not expect that, regardless of age, over 80 percent (25) of the men in my sample would emphasize being a father and in an egalitarian partnership with their wives. In fact, the older fathers (age 37-42) were able to settle down and in their late thirties focus on being a father to their pre-school aged children, since they had already achieved a level of seniority in their careers. It appears that a man’s parenting cohort has more influence on what he does as a father than peers his own age do.

Religiosity’s affect on paternal involvement was more complex than I originally expected. There were no clear-cut distinctions between those exhibiting a high degree of religiosity versus those exhibiting a low degree of religiosity with respect to being an involved father. Those exhibiting a high degree of religiosity (two men) who belonged to
one of the Conservative Christian churches tended to be less egalitarian in parenting and their perception of the fatherhood role than the other seven, highly religious, Conservative Christian men. They claimed to be involved in childcare equally but, in reality, were less involved than their wives. Of the five men in my sample who were not egalitarian, but had more transitional gender roles, only three of them were Conservative Christian (one was Catholic with a low degree of religiosity and one man claimed to be non-practicing, also with a low degree of religiosity). All Mainstream Protestants (n=seven), whether high or low religiosity, were most similar to non-practicing men (n=six) who all, obviously, scored low on the religiosity scale. Even the four Catholics with a high degree of religiosity were still more egalitarian than the eight Conservative Christians exhibiting a high degree of religiosity.

**Generalizability.** Most social scientists utilizing Lamb’s model conduct quantitative work, using methods such as surveys and time allocation charts. In contrast, I am interested in getting at the *process* of being a good father. I was interested in the connections, if any, between what people say that they do, versus what they really do when it comes to conducting childcare and housework. Participant observation, as a qualitative method, allowed me to see this interaction and helped me to better understand the complexity around the issue of parental involvement. Likewise, Lamb’s model was not set up to examine the relationship and influence that the wife has on her husband to be an involved father.

The patterns that I found would be generalizable to other middle class, non-professional, dual-worker families. The very fact that the participants in my sample were dual-worker made it extremely difficult if not impossible to embrace traditional gender
roles, where the wife does not work outside of the home. My findings would not be
generalizable to multi-child immigrant families, or families with stay-at-home mothers,
for instance. Moreover, my study compliments the findings of other resent social science
work that reports that middle class dual-worker families, regardless of ethnic/racial
background, view domestic labor, especially childcare, as an endeavor that ought to be
shared between spouses (i.e., Bianchi et al. 2006; Sayer 2005).

**Structure of the Dissertation**

In the pages that follow I consider in greater detail the manner in which parental
identity influences the gendered domestic division of labor among a population of
contemporary, middle class urban families in the Southwestern United States. I argue that
there has been a shift over the last three generations in terms of how men view their
parental identities and enact them through their father roles. That men strongly identify
with being a father has led to greater paternal involvement, specifically with respect to
childcare, by the men in my study.

In chapter two I provide demographic profiles of the families in my sample in
order to establish the context for understanding the participants’ socioeconomic position.
I also discuss how the history of the ideal father plays into parental identity. Given that
identities, by being played out through the father role, influence the domestic division of
labor, I also review the body of literature examining the domestic division of labor. In
particular, I provide an in-depth discussion of the three frameworks (i.e., time/availability
constraints, relative resource, and gender socialization) commonly used by social
scientists for examining and understanding how domestic labor (household chores and
childcare), is allocated among married dual-worker couples with children (Coltrane 2000).

Chapter three begins with a description of my research site, situating Albuquerque, New Mexico, regionally, as well as describing its neighborhoods and demographic composition. I also outline my research methods, detailing how I initiated contact with my participants, how successful I was in getting families to participate, and the specific research methods that I utilized to gather and analyze my data. Ethnographic methods provide in-depth detail that is not available in impersonal surveys, that illuminate and complicate our understanding of paternal involvement.

In chapter four I demonstrate that father involvement has many dimensions. To illustrate this, I highlight eight very involved fathers from different Christian denominations. The primary disparities among the involved fathers in my study have to do with how both men and women conceptualized their parental identities, and how those are played out in their gender roles regarding parental involvement with their children.

Childcare is only part of the larger domain of domestic labor. That fathers are taking an active role in childcare is interesting, but what is more noteworthy is that they are not automatically associating childcare with housework, in general. Chapter five examines how the married women and men in my study divided the household chores as well as childcare, and how they perceived their individual family arrangements.

I describe more fully in chapter six how religion was less important in modeling paternal involvement than I had originally expected. However, religiosity still influenced paternal identity and therefore the domestic division of labor. Among my sample of
Christian and non-practicing men, strong religiosity was only sometimes associated with more dichotomous gender roles.

Regardless of religiosity, the middle class men in my sample strongly identified with their role as a father, but there were structural inequalities that inhibited them from participating more at home. This had implications for women’s equity, too, since they were expected to have ultimate domestic responsibility at the expense of their careers. Gender equality, or a lack thereof, is a structural issue that can only be addressed when our society chooses to enact laws to support and promote equality among men and women, both at work and at home. Individuals learn culturally appropriate gendered behavior for each gender in the family setting. This has long-term impacts for future generations in terms of gender equity and how Americans balance both work and family.

In chapter seven, I outline some of the ways that we as a society can make more family-friendly policies in order to affect structural change with positive implications for gender equity. My suggestions include expanding the Family Medical Leave Act, encouraging flexible work schedules, and creating and maintaining good quality childcare (daycare) and after-school care. If we had more policies that supported families, specifically fathers, more fathers would not only participate equally in their families, but it would be socially acceptable for them to do so. This would allow both mothers and fathers to find a better balance between work and family, where both parents are expected, and really do, equally share domestic and wage work. I conclude by summarizing my findings in chapter eight and offer potential directions for future research.
CHAPTER 2

Background

I relaxed into the bench’s padded embrace, thinking to myself that a casual lunch with one of my study participants is going to be nice. I won’t have to worry about taking notes, just enjoying the company, which is good because the diner was getting full and noisy. After we chatted about the then-upcoming presidential election, and if the weather was going to be pleasant enough to go hiking that weekend, the conversation inevitably turned to parenting. Jared Portalla pushed his plate away and said, “it took me by surprise.”

“What took you by surprise?” I asked, not quite knowing where the conversation was headed, but wondering if I should reach for my tiny recorder that resided in my purse.

“Being a parent. It took a few weeks to immediately grasp the situation. And we were mature, we weren’t teenagers. We were ready, we were financially capable, we were mature enough and ready to do it. It was planned. It just took me a while to grasp it. After the second one, there was no change, it just reinforced it, being a parent. Now, like I told you before, it is the most important thing in my life. But I just didn’t expect it to hit me like I did. I guess Alice had nine months to get used to the idea.”

“Well, you had nine months too.”

“Yeah, but hers is biological. There’s nothing biological for guys, not really.”

We both ate for a few more seconds. I didn’t want to cut Jared off but I didn’t immediately know what to say to this man whom I knew (from conducting fieldwork) to be an involved father, one who took his responsibilities as a father and husband very
seriously. For example, he allowed his wife to sleep and he got up in the middle of the night when the baby cried. He also always managed to go to work the next day, albeit in a sleep deprived state, because he wanted to have the financial means to provide a good life for his sons. I would have expected that Jared would have been mentally ready to have children before they were born, instead of this admission that he was not fully psychologically prepared for it until after his sons were months old.

Jared swallowed a bite of salad and continued, “It is the greatest responsibility. There is nothing more important for me and I knew that before, but I never appreciated it when I didn’t have kids, how much love they bring. There is no way to capture that. You could never have told me how much love they bring. You could never know. But it is the most important thing that you have to do. It begins when they are in the womb and it continues forever. The early years are clearly the most important because of the influence you have. But, even now my father has an influence on me and I am sure that I will have an influence on my children long after they are grown.”

Jared Portalla, it turns out, is not unique among middle class fathers. The vast majority of the men that I worked with conceptualize themselves as fathers first and foremost. In this chapter I situate men’s paternal identity within its broader social context to illustrate how historically, cultural perceptions of fathering and fatherhood have shaped, and continue to shape, men’s understanding of these roles. Popular notions of the “ideal father” emerge as a prominent force in this process. How fathers have been depicted and understood by American society at large over the past two centuries is informative because a man constructs his identity as “father” within the norms of the society he is born into. In order to help me both describe and conceptualize the degree
and kind of father involvement I observed among the families that I studied, I invoke Michael Lamb and colleagues’ (Lamb et al. 1987a; Lamb 2004) tripartite model of fatherhood involvement: engagement, accessibility, and responsibility. The advantage of Lamb’s model is that it examines direct and indirect involvement and therefore facilitates a detailed understanding of men’s participation in the family regarding childcare that has been largely absent in previous research. In this regard, it is instructive to review some of the pertinent literature on how the domestic decision of labor has been considered by social scientists. Doing so provides opportunities to examine connections between how men’s role as “father” interrelates with broader issues of kin and household maintenance.

**History of the Ideal Father**

Historical documents allow us to infer, to a degree, what the parenting ideals of the past were like. We should keep in mind, however, that many of the historical records (i.e., letters, pamphlets, magazine articles) detailing conventional tasks that fathers performed were developed by and for the economically privileged strata of society. In the United States, these were predominantly White Protestant men. In colonial America during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, in the northeastern United States, a “good father” was the moral guide for his children (E. Pleck 2004). He was also the disciplinarian and protector of his children. These fathers were not only responsible for their children on a moral plane, but were also directly engaged in childcare tasks. Brown (1996:347) notes how colonial fathers were intimately concerned with the health of their children, keeping track of “bowel movements, the passage of worms, the color and

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22 Puritan ideals required that a man be responsible for not only his children’s but also his wife’s spiritual well being. Ulrich (1979) brings attention to the fact that this hierarchical ordering of the household reflected the broader social hierarchy of the day.
quantity of urine, the contents of vomit and, above all, the presence of different kinds of bile.” Eighteenth century elite colonial men, such as southern planters, were more playful with their children, although a southern man was still primarily responsible for the moral guidance of his children (E. Pleck 2004:36).

Pleck and Pleck (1997) argue that the industrial revolution led to a decline in paternal involvement since the ideals of the time dictated that the father work outside of the home and the mother operate in the domestic sphere, caring for and being attentive to their children. These dichotomous notions of gender mandated that a man spend his time and focus on the marketplace. For a man to spend too much time at home doing intimate childcare tasks called into question his masculinity (Gavanas 2004:8).

Christian ethics of the nineteenth century heavily influenced what the ideal father ought to be. Many Protestant ministers published pamphlets extolling the father to teach his children “correct” Christian morals. More than anything else, however, a good nineteenth century father was a financial provider. Other duties that made him a good father in the nineteenth century were more peripheral and included being a moral guide, disciplinarian, and, for his sons, an occupational guide. Some middle class fathers did engage in childcare tasks, but it was usually to assist an ailing spouse (Johansen 2000). For example, a good husband/father would do some childcare duties while his wife was confined to postpartum bed rest. When a good nineteenth century middle class father returned home after a day of work, he was a playmate to his children (Frank 1998). Being
a “fun dad” was a very important part of being a good father during this time. This is a role that, by and large, continues to this day.23

LaRossa (1997; LaRossa et al. 1991; LaRossa and Reitzes 1995) writes about the “modernization of fatherhood” and targets the late 1930s and early 1940s as the time in America when this modernization occurred. Part of this modernization included being the main economic provider for his family, although this has been a constant hallmark of a good father since the industrial revolution. The United States became more secularized after the first World War and the good “modern” father of the 1930s was not necessarily involved in his children’s religious education. Rather, the children’s religious indoctrination became the mother’s responsibility.24 Although they were no longer expected to be the religious models, good fathers of the 1930s were still role models for their children. Men were honored by American society because they were seen as valuable to the community at large. In other words, fathers were ethical role models who positively influenced their children, the next generation of adult citizens, to the benefit of society. Part of being a good role model was demonstrating good work habits, but also exhibiting “manly behavior,” such as stoicism and honesty. There was a commonly held view that fathers were an antidote to maternal overprotection (Griswold 1993; LaRossa 1997; Pleck 1974). A wide variety of problems (e.g., mental illness, physical

23 In the nineteenth century immigrant and working class fathers were not, generally, thought of as a good fathers because they could not fulfill the obligations that middle class fathers could in the roles of breadwinner, playmate, and moral guide (E. Pleck 2004:38). Although many of these men worked over 60 hours a week in hard industrial labor, their wages were not adequate to support their families. Wives and/or older children’s wages were necessary, too. Also, due to the long hours and exhausting nature of the work, it was more difficult for a father to come home after work and play with his children (Griswold 1993:42).

24 In traditional Christian families, the father is, and continues to be, thought of as the primary moral guide for the family.
underdevelopment, poor school grades, and so forth) were attributed to children, especially sons, who had spent too much time in the company of their mothers. Therefore, a good father spent time with his children, mostly sons, to teach them proper gender roles so as to avoid “feminization” (Weiss 2000:85).

By the 1950s, as anyone who has watched old television re-runs of Leave it to Beaver, I Love Lucy, or Father Knows Best can attest, the “good father” role of the 1930s had solidified into the ideal for all North Americans. This was a time when fathers were viewed primarily as economic breadwinners. The idealized model of the homemaker mother and the breadwinner father is what Dorothy Smith (1999:159) calls the “Standard North American Family” (SNAF). The SNAF arose out of the economic conditions following World War II that allowed many nuclear families to have a breadwinner father/husband and a domestic mother/wife. After the war, demand was higher for workers to make the products that Americans had gone without during the war years, as well as rebuild that which was lost or destroyed during the war. Unemployment plummeted as discharged soldiers easily found jobs or went to school on the G.I. Bill. Education that ex-soldiers received allowed them to enter the workforce in more specialized and higher paying jobs. This, coupled with the fact that women were getting married younger and having shorter birth intervals between children as compared to preceding generations, led to the phenomenon of the stay-at-home-mother and breadwinner father for most middle class families (Coontz 1992; May 1999[1988]).

25 The “traditional” family is an ideal but not the norm. Even during the 1950s when it appeared to be the norm, only half of American families ever obtained this state (Coontz 1992). Although attainable for some Euro-American, middle-class families, the typical family remains the dual-worker family, in which both parents work outside of the home for wages (Coontz 1992; Hertz 1986; Rapp 1999; Strober 1988).
Although he was still expected to be the disciplinarian and gender role model, the emotionally distant father had become socially acceptable. In the mid-twentieth century it was thought that the homemaker mother was more than able to care for the emotional, moral, and physical needs of her children without any assistance (excluding economic) from her spouse (LaRossa 1997; Levine 1976). Then-current psychological literature supported the idea that children only formed attachment to one parent. Prevailing notions held that it was the mother who should spend the most time with the child during his or her formative years. Fathers, then, had understandable reasons to not see themselves as anything but the breadwinner, or the stern and aloof father who could, at best, provide a gender role model for his sons to emulate (and for his daughters to know what proper masculine behavior entails so that she will choose a proper, masculine, husband). Consequently, a good mid-twentieth century father had no reason to contribute to childcare tasks or be emotionally close to his children.

The 1970s heralded a new way of understanding middle class American fathers’ involvement with their children that largely persists to this day. From alternative views in psychology, during the 1950s and 1960s fathers were perceived as incompetent in dealing with their children, but by the 1970s fathers were understood as being capable of performing any parenting role that a mother could (LaRossa et al. 1991:988). Many fathers in the 1970s showed a desire to be involved in their children’s lives, as well (Lamb 1975; Pleck 1987). Michael Lamb was one of the first social scientists to bring to attention this “new father;” that is, that White, middle class men were becoming

SNAF has never been attainable for many working class families, single mothers or a majority of non-Anglo Americans (Hansen 2005; Silva and Smart 1999).
increasingly involved and wanted to be involved (Lamb 1975, 1978, 2004; Lamb et al. 1987a). The great recessions of the 1970s and 1980s, as well as reduced wages and inflation, resulted in a huge proportion of women with small children of all socioeconomic brackets and ethnic groups entering the work force full-time (Moghadam 2006:253). Since women’s roles were changing, it stood to reason that men’s roles would, too. This parenting model from the 1970s has been called “androgy nous fatherhood” by Rotundo (1985:17) because fathers, like mothers, were “active participants in the details of day-to-day childcare.” This included everyday childcare tasks as well as being emotionally involved with their children (Lamb 1975; Lamb et al. 1987a; Pleck 1974).

**Today’s ideal family.** Economic trends are a motivating force behind the “new” androgy nous fatherhood. Ehrenreich (1983; see also Kimmel 1996) argues that beginning in the 1970s men were no longer interested in being the sole breadwinner because they recognized that women also work outside of the home as breadwinners. For many American families today, it is necessary to have two salaries in order to meet the expectations of our consumer-driven society.

Although it is increasingly common for all classes of women to work outside of the home, women still bear the burden of what Arlie Hochschild (2003[1989]) termed the “second shift.” That is, being responsible for domestic labor, including the household and childcare chores at home, as well as working outside the home for economic gain (Berk 1985; Coltrane 1989; Hochschild 1997, 2003[1989]; Lamphere et al. 1993; Russell 1983; Ryan 1999; Staines and Pleck 1983). Although it is known that many women essentially work two jobs, one in the home and one outside of the home, how much work a man
should contribute to domestic duties continues to be debated. Is it enough for a father to be the primary breadwinner, as defined by the comparative income of women and men, or should he make an equal contribution to childcare and household duties as well (Coltrane 1996; Coltrane and Adams 2001)?

Interestingly enough, some social scientists suggest that for many middle class Americans, the idea that the father is as equally involved with his family as his wife is a myth (LaRossa 1988; Pleck 1987:84). LaRossa (1988) argues that the ideal of an egalitarian marriage and domestic division of labor and childcare is detrimental to today’s family. He suggests that it is harmful because many wives expect an equal amount of assistance in child-rearing and housekeeping, but their domestic partners are unable or unwilling to deliver that assistance. Men are unable to be the egalitarian helpmate because they do not know how to do so, or they believe that their first goal is to be the primary breadwinner, while their spouses believe that their husbands’ role is to be emotionally supportive (Christiansen and Palkovitz 2001). This leads to dissatisfied wives and guilty husbands who do not know how to modify their behavior, but feel that they ought to because they have been enculturated to believe that men should equally share housework and childcare duties with their partners (LaRossa 1988:456).

Alternatively, some men desire to be more involved with their children, but their wives do not allow them to do so. Such “gatekeeper” mothers are reluctant to give up their role as primary caregiver, usually because they have been raised to believe that this role is the most appropriate one for the female gender (Allen and Hawkins 2006:199; Parke and Brott 1999:119). Gatekeeper mothers do not necessarily want to exclude their husbands from their children’s lives, but they want to be the ones who are ultimately
responsible for the workings of the household. They still want domestic assistance, as
they often still subscribe to egalitarian ideals. But by assuming a gatekeeper position,
they are able to negotiate between the egalitarian ideals where both spouses willingly
share the work, and a more traditional maternal role where the mother is in charge.

**Studying Paternal Identities and Involvement**

The majority of published studies on fathers that examine paternal identity do so
on the basis of illustrating how paternal identity does, or does not, influence the amount
of time and energy invested in a man’s children. Unfortunately, most social scientists do
not make the distinction between the types of involvement laid out by Lamb and
colleagues—engagement, accessibility, and responsibility—and how a man self-identifies
with his role as a father. (It is important to note that social scientists cannot be criticized
for neglecting Lamb’s model if it was not part of their research plan.) It is necessary to
examine not only the nuances of paternal involvement, but to look at the features that are
distinct to each man in his specific situation that assist in formulating his identities. Such
markers include socioeconomic position, ethnic background, and religious orientation, as
well as psychological factors including emotional stability and marital satisfaction. Only
by taking into consideration the multiple situational variables that influence a man’s
identities can we understand a man’s involvement with his family (Bradford and Hawkins
2006; Ihinger-Tallman et al. 1993).

The Parental Narrative Interview (PNI) facilitates distinguishing between
responsibility and engagement, and serves as a method to explore parental narratives to
understand personal identity in fathers (Stueve and Pleck 2001; Pleck and Stueve 2004).
In the anthropological literature such interviews are referred to as “life histories” or
“autobiographical narratives” (e.g., Bourdieu 1987; Oakdale 2005; Peacock and Holland 1993). The Parental Narrative Interview focuses on one aspect of a man’s life history: his experiences as a father. Using PNIs, Stueve and Pleck (2001) propose that for their urban middle class sample of fathers, life-altering parenting experiences (e.g., birth of a child) change how parents talk about their parenting experiences. For early parenting experiences, men talk about parenting as a joint effort with their spouses, using the pronoun “we” most often. Narratives that focus on recent parenting experiences, however, show that fathers who talk about parenting as a solo effort use the first person voice (“I”). Stueve and Pleck (2001) argue that middle class fathers construct their paternal identity in relation to caregiving tasks (engagement in Lamb’s model) because the first person voice is most often used when the fathers describe themselves caring for their children.

Fox and Bruce (2001), using multi-city telephone surveys, make a case that a man’s evaluation of his paternal identity directly affects his parenting performance, regardless of socioeconomic status and other demographic variables. How a man self-identifies as a father is influenced by how he thinks others (such as his domestic partner) see him as a father, as well as the satisfaction that a man gets from his role as father (Mauer et al. 2001, 2003; Fox and Bruce 2001). This, in turn, strongly influences how engaged a man is with his children. Strauss and Goldberg (1999) and Minton and Pasley (1996), using large scale questionnaires to study an urban U.S. population, suggest that men who internalize contemporary fatherhood ideals as a nurturing parent, conceptualize a larger part of their self as a parent. Therefore, they do more childcare tasks. Surprisingly, most studies show little correlation between a man self-identifying as a
“good father” and a high level of engaged paternal involvement (McBride and Mills 1993; McBride and Rane 1997; Minton and Pasley 1996; Sanderson and Thompson 2002) although a few (Fox and Bruce 2001; Hossain and Roopnarine 1994) have demonstrated a relationship.

There exists a small but significant amount of research indicating that a man’s perception of his role as father is intimately intertwined with his role as partner, regardless of socioeconomic class or race/ethnicity (Eggebeen and Knoester 2001; Fox and Bruce 2001; Mauer et al. 2001, 2003; Minton and Pasley 1996; Seltzer et al. 1989). For example, if a man is in an emotionally stable relationship with the mother of his children, and if she indicates that she thinks that he is a good father, he will be more likely to self-identity as a good father. Furthermore, he will be willing to do childcare tasks and take responsibility for his children (Mauer et al. 2001, 2003). Conversely, if a man accepts that his wife thinks of him as the primary economic supporter, it weakens his paternal identity and he emphasizes the breadwinner role and has little direct engagement with his children (Mauer et al. 2001).

Unlike women, most men, regardless of socioeconomic status, experience a decrease in the importance of their fatherhood role post-divorce and no longer self-identify with their role as father as an important part of their identity (Ihinger-Tallman et al. 1993). Consequently, the degree that a man is involved with his children is also negatively affected because he does not self-identity as a father. This is compounded by the fact that most women get primary custody of the children after divorce, which curtails a father’s involvement in day-to-day contexts (Jacobs 1986).
Although religious orientation among mainstream Protestant religious practitioners has not been well discussed in the literature on fatherhood involvement, there have been a few studies conducted among Evangelical or, more broadly, Conservative Christians. Wilcox (2002, 2004) maintains that Catholics and Mainstream Protestants are more alike in their parenting practices than Conservative Protestants and Mainstream Protestants. Generally, fathers who attend church are more likely to be involved with their children (Bartkowski and Xu 2000; Wilcox 2002). Additionally, for middle class Evangelical Christian men, being a Christian is the primary identity that they construct for themselves and that being a good father is subsumed under this Christian identity (Armato and Marsiglio 2002). Broadly, religious middle class families emphasize egalitarianism in childrearing, although this does not directly translate to an egalitarian division of childcare at home (Erickson and Gecas 1991; Marciano 1991). A wide variety of other factors, such as time spent at work and denomination influence a man’s involvement with his children. Given that Conservative Christian churches tend to be pro-family, Christian fathers are more involved fathers than non-Christian fathers and report higher quality relationships with their children (King 2003:388). Urban, middle class Conservative Christian fathers also have higher levels of involvement (Goldscheider and Waite 1991; King 2003; Wilcox and Bartowski 2000). Gallagher (2003; Gallagher and Smith 1999) illustrates how the Evangelical men in her sample use traditional Christian gender roles as “head” of the household as well as broader current cultural views of men’s egalitarian role in the family, to increase men’s participation in the
How religiosity specifically affects paternal involvement is examined in depth in chapter six.

**Persistent questions about father involvement.** Often when studying paternal identity, family research scholars do not distinguish between the status of being a father (just the fact that a man has children and claims to be a father) and the tasks specific to engagement in his role as father (Maurer et al. 2003:117). It is difficult to correlate what a man thinks defines a “good father,” with his level of involvement in childcare. For instance, if a man says that a good father is involved in taking care of his children on a daily basis and the man self-identifies as a good father, perhaps he will do a fair amount of childcare tasks. If he is only asked about being a father and the man responds that he is a good father, we do not know how that paternal identity correlates with his participation in his family (e.g., Strauss and Goldberg 1999; Minton and Pasley 1996). It may be that for that particular man being a good father involves being the primary breadwinner.

While parental narratives have proven useful in understanding paternal identity, Stueve and Pleck (2001; Pleck and Stueve 2004) do not provide enough details about what the men in their samples actually did as parents. Narrative voices are used when talking about engagement tasks, but we do not know what narrative voices are used if and when the fathers talk about responsibility tasks. If fathers are responsible parents, what did they do as “responsible” fathers? Responsibility indicates that a man co-parents or is the accountable parent, which tells us much more about gender roles and the domestic division of labor than by examining engagement by itself. An “engaged” father is obviously an involved father, but when a father performs engagement tasks, it could be

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26 “Headship” refers to God having established men to be the final authority in their household and be spiritually accountable for their families (Gallagher 2003:12).
considered “helping out” his wife or simply that the father feels like a co-parent (e.g., Hochschild 2003[1989]). “Accessible” and “responsible” fathers are more likely to be co-parents. Thus, narratives are a great method for understanding identity construction in fathers, but they are only as good as the research questions.

Although social scientists have looked at multiple factors that influence a man’s participation in childcare, such as workplace environment and the gender of the child, researchers examining paternal identity as it relates to family involvement have focused their studies on investigating variables such as marital satisfaction. Ihinger-Tallman et al.’s (1993) work with divorced fathers and Bradford and Hawkins (2006), Cummings et al. (2010), Eggebeen and Knoester (2001), and Fox and Bruce’s (2001) work with fathers in amiable domestic circumstances illustrates a very important aspect of identity and paternal involvement. In general, there is a direct correlation between how a man thinks his partner sees him as a father and how involved a father he is with his children. If a man’s wife thinks that he is a good father and emphasizes that, to her, a good father does childcare tasks, the man is more likely to construct a large part of his identity as a father and engage in childcare tasks. Interestingly, there is no correlation between a husband thinking that his wife is a good mother and the wife doing more childcare tasks or constructing her identity as a mother because of her spouse’s opinions. Women almost always construct their identities as mothers, regardless of marital status or marital satisfaction. This is something specific to men, although it could also be that a man who is more predisposed to being a good husband will also want to be a good father (Descartes and Kottak 2009; Townsend 2002).
Gendered Division of Labor

Men’s participation in childcare is, obviously, important to understanding current parental ideology and parental involvement in childcare, but a larger question revolves around the general domestic division of labor, of which childcare is only a part. Bianchi et al. (2000) have argued convincingly that contemporary families do not spend as much time engaged in domestic labor as they did in the 1950s. They explain this as a product of women’s increased participation in the labor force. Women simply do not have the time to spend doing housework and all the childcare if they also work outside of the home. In response, men have steadily increased their participation in housework and childcare since women began to work full-time. However, it is well documented that women of all ages, socioeconomic classes, and race/ethnicities do more housework than men, regardless of women’s paid wage work outside of the home (Bianchi et al. 2000; Bookman 2004; Coverman 1985; Coltrane 2000; Shelton and John 1996).

Domestic labor is usually conceptualized in the social science literature as unpaid work performed to maintain family members and households (Shelton and John 1996 call this “housework”). Domestic labor almost always includes daily or weekly repetitive tasks of household management, which I have chosen to refer to as “housework” or “household chores” or “household tasks” synonymously. Such tasks commonly include housecleaning, home and vehicle maintenance, preparing meals, clothing care, and financial record keeping (for an exhaustive list of household tasks, see Coltrane and Valdez 1993:60). Emotional support given to family members is sometimes included when accounting for domestic labor (Erickson 2005). Di Leonardo (1987) notes that kinwork, which includes the organization of extended family members for special occasions
and the maintenance of contact with those extended family members, can also be subsumed under domestic labor as a whole. Childcare and all that it entails are also part of the domestic labor.

Some social scientists (e.g., Coverman 1985; Coltrane 1996; Hochschild 2003[1989]; Hood 1983; Lamb 2004) have drawn attention to the fact that being responsible for a task greatly differs from “helping out” with household tasks and childcare. Who is responsible for ensuring that a specific task of domestic labor is carried out is more difficult to measure than merely accounting for the completion of a particular chore. It is only by considering which family member in a household is responsible for particular areas of domestic labor can we begin to understand gender and family dynamics, which often structure the entire household division of labor. The domestic division of labor in a particular family might appear to be easy to predict, but it is dependent on a wide variety of personal, interfamilial, and social factors. Coltrane (2000:1209) observed that domestic labor,

[I]s embedded in complex and shifting patterns of social relations…housework cannot be understood without realizing how it is related to gender, household structure, family interaction, and the operation of both formal and informal market economies.

Among the most salient variables to consider include the education of both partners, each individual’s contribution to household income, religious orientation, gender, race/ethnicity, age, and the presence of children or older relatives in the house.

**Conceptual Explanations of Men’s Participation**

Variables that influence the domestic division of labor, such as socioeconomic class and ethnic background, cannot be ignored if we are to understand the domestic
division of labor in urban North American households. Yet, the variables that researchers deem to be most important will differ depending on the theoretical framework within which they operate. After summarizing relevant literature on the division of household labor, Coltrane (2000) noticed that, depending on the methods used and the conclusions derived, the literature fell into seven primary categories. Within these seven categories Coltrane (2000) identified three broad conceptual divisions into which the work conducted by social science researchers examining the domestic division of labor can be classified: (1) time/availability constraints, (2) relative resources, or (3) gender role attitude/socialization. These divisions are necessarily broad and are neither mutually exclusive nor exhaustive (Bianchi et al. 2000; Coltrane 2000:1213). Many researchers, especially since the mid-1990s, have taken into account the complex personal characteristics of the individuals with whom they work and have combined one or more of these themes to provide a clearer picture of the domestic division of labor in dual-worker urban households.

27 Most research on the gendered domestic division of labor has been conducted on heterosexual couples. Because my research also focused on heterosexual couples, I do not address how same sex couples divide domestic labor.

28 Although Coltrane (2000) refers to this category of literature as “socialization-gender role attitudes,” I have concerns that much of the published literature on gender role socialization asserts socialization as an explanation rather than demonstrates its role with empirical, longitudinal study data. Whiting and Edwards (1988) show that cross-culturally, children are conditioned at an early age into their society’s gender roles.

29 Coverman (1985) was one of the first social scientists to attempt to account for men’s participation in domestic labor. She hypothesized that, (1) the more money a man makes, the less housework he will do, which falls into the relative resource category Coltrane (2000) identified; (2) more traditional men would do less domestic labor, which could be included in Coltrane’s (2000) gender role attitude/socialization category; and (3) that the more housework and childcare demands that a woman makes on the father of her children, the more likely he will be to engage in domestic labor. But Coverman does not account for why a woman would put more demands on the man, other than that she works, or what the factors are that would entice a man to do more domestic labor, other than that his wife asks him to do so because they have young children and they both work.
**Time/availability constraints.** One of the first ways used by social scientists to explain the unequal domestic division of labor was by understanding time/availability constraints of each spouse. Basically, this framework assumes that the more time an individual spends at work outside of the home, the less time he or she will spend doing domestic tasks (Ross 1987). Theoretically, if a woman and a man both work similar hours outside of the home, they will contribute equally to the maintenance of their home and family.

Early forerunners employing this framework, such as Berk and Berk (1978), found that among two-income families, women did most childcare tasks, but husbands helped out with childcare in the evenings while the wives made dinner. Meissner et al. (1976) similarly found that when there were young children in the household, husbands contributed “slightly” to household chores and “helping” with childcare tasks. Staines and Pleck (1983) noted about their middle class sample that even though all the women worked outside of the house, there was no correlation between women working more and men doing more domestic labor. Staines and Pleck (1983:20) write, “[Studies]…. suggest a possible sexual asymmetry: A husband’s work time may be associated with an increase in his wife’s level of work/family conflict, but her temporal involvement in work appears unrelated to his experience of conflict.” Lee and Waite (2005) noted that within their cross-cultural 500 person sample of middle class families, women and men both overestimated the amount of time that they thought that women spent on domestic labor and that women underestimated the amount of time that the men spent on these tasks. In this case, women drastically overestimated the time (seventeen hours too much per week) that they thought they spent on household chores and childcare. But in reality, women
still performed more tasks. Similarly, Barnett and Shen (1997) observed that men and women who made comparable amounts of money and worked similar hours did equal amounts of household tasks, but did not do equal amounts of childcare. If the child was an infant or toddler, women performed more childcare tasks than their partners.

**Relative resources.** When social scientists use the relative resources framework to understand the domestic division of labor among families, they assume that the person who contributes more income to the household has more power in the family and, as a consequence, will do less domestic labor. Unlike a time/availability constraints model, how much free time a person has is not taken into account. Economists Strober and Chan (1999:87) call this “bargaining power theory.” In these contexts, individuals in the family not only consciously evaluate the economic earnings of each member but the economic needs of each person as well (Schmink 1984). The greater the economic need a spouse has in his or her marriage, the less bargaining power he or she will have relative to his or her partner (Coltrane and Ishi-Kuntz 1992). Family members are viewed as calculating social actors who actively negotiate for the best position in the family based on their self-interests (Brines 1993). For example, if a person likes to cook, that is the task that he or she will take. Less desirable tasks, such as cleaning toilets, will be left to the other person.

Landry (2000) argued that African American couples have always been more egalitarian in the domestic division of labor because the majority of African American women have always worked outside the home. They can, and do, demand participation in domestic labor because they have economic power. Hood (1983) noted that for working class White families, when the wife’s earnings were believed to be crucial for the
survival of the family, there was more equal participation from her spouse regarding household and childcare tasks. Regardless of their financial situation, when the man thought of the money brought home by his wife as “icing on the cake” his wife had no bargaining power in their household regarding the domestic division of labor (Hood 1983).

Pesquera’s (1997) research among working blue collar and white collar professional Chicanas lends support to a relative resources model. In those cases where the wife’s salary was considered inconsequential among white collar women whose husbands made more money, she had less participation in domestic labor from her spouse. In those cases where women (both blue collar and white collar) made more or equal amounts, the woman could demand more assistance from her husband. Lamphere et al. (1993) noticed similar patterns among the Hispano and Euro-Americans with whom they worked in New Mexico. Coltrane and Valdez (1993:172) reported like findings among dual-earner urban Chicanos in California. When men and women contributed equally to the economic maintenance of the household, it translated into shared domestic maintenance as well. When working class women were married to working class men, and when professional class women were married to professional class men, the women did not have any more bargaining power in the household because, in both cases, the men made more money than the women. Because men made more money than their wives, the women did not get as much help in the house from their husbands. Only in the cases where women made more money did they get assistance from their husbands regarding domestic labor.
A relative resources framework also assumes that no aspect of housework is pleasurable or satisfying. However, many people profess enjoyment for certain aspects of domestic labor, such as childcare (Lamb 2004) or cooking (Beller 1993; Penha-Lopes 2006). Tasks that are conducted by men often are those tasks that they want to do (since they often have more resources on which to draw). In Lamphere et al.’s (1993) study of two income working class families in the 1980s, this often meant childcare tasks, as men preferred childcare to more “female” tasks like cooking and cleaning. Specifically, women who were secondary providers were more likely to be in more traditional households (where husbands made more money) compared to co-provider and mainstay provider women (whose wages were more equal to the husbands’ wages) (Lamphere et al. 1993:284). Mannino and Deutsch (2007) report that women who made more money than their spouses were able to negotiate for an equal division of housework, but not childcare. They chose not to ask for help, and so the men appeared to think that the women wanted to do the childcare. Men did not do more childcare unless they were asked explicitly to do so (Mannino and Deutsch 2007:322). Perhaps this is because men prefer childcare to housework, so they assume that their wives do too, regardless of the fact that it is still work (Bianchi and Raley 2005).

**Gender role socialization.** It is a demonstrated fact that in the urban United States today many housework tasks are gendered (e.g., Bianchi et al. 2000; Coltrane 2000; Hochschild 2003[1989]; Presser 1994). For example, mowing the lawn is typically thought of as a male chore, while doing laundry is a female task (Kroska 2003). Often,  

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30 Even if men know how to do a task, like learning to do laundry in college or when they were single, it does not necessarily translate into them doing laundry when they are married. However, certain tasks shift
those tasks that are considered repetitive, revolting, and/or less likely to be noticed, such as dusting furniture or cleaning the toilet, are female tasks. Cooking and childcare are tasks that need to be done throughout the day, but they are also highly valued socially, so they are responsibilities that can be accomplished by men or women, or shared, depending on the family (Hochschild 2003[1989]; Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994).

Kroska (2003) notes that childcare is a feminine task that, such as cooking, is a way of showing love for family members. Hays (1996) and other social scientists (e.g., Chant 2003; Glenn 1994; Moore 1996) argue that there is an “ideology of mothering” that views the role of mother as a moral endeavor as well as one that is emotionally satisfying. A mother will, therefore, want to do the majority of childcare tasks.

Since many domestic tasks are gendered, individuals who are socialized into believing that women only do certain tasks and men only do other tasks, will conform to these beliefs. Because more domestic chores are traditionally within the purview of women (although some, such as cooking, are now classified as both), this is held to explain why women do more domestic work relative to men. In couples that hold traditional attitudes towards gender roles (i.e., the man is the economic provider, the woman cares for the home), women perform more household tasks. By comparison, couples that do not accept traditional gender roles have a more egalitarian domestic division of labor (Amato and Booth 1995; Burke and Cast 1997; Kaufmann 2000).

In an attempt to refine and better to explain the connection between gender role socialization and what men and women actually do regarding housework and childcare, Hochschild (2003[1989]), in her study of dual-worker families in the late 1976 and early over time regarding which gender is more likely to do the task. For instance, in the 1980s, laundry was a more female dominated task but it is becoming, slowly, a shared task today.
1980s, highlighted the distinction between a gendered ideology—what people thought a man and would ought to do in their roles as man or woman—and a gendered strategy—how men and women enacted those roles. She identified three family patterns, traditional, transitional, and egalitarian, based on how the dual-worker spouses thought that domestic work between the genders and how they actually divided the domestic labor (including childcare). As was outlined in chapter one, Hochschild classified individuals as “traditional” if they believed that there ought to be a strict division of domestic and wage labor, with women tending the house and men serving as primary economic providers. Hochschild found a blurring of the lines between traditional and transitional, however. Individuals who embraced “transitional” views of gender believed that a man should help their wives in the home but that a woman should still be responsible for the household and only help him with some wage work, and the man responsible for economically supporting the family. Individuals with egalitarian views, in contrast, believe that housework and breadwinning should be shared equally by both husband and wife. Interestingly, Hochschild found that while the 20 percent of her sample that were egalitarian actually did share housework and childcare equally, traditionally minded men did slightly more domestic work than traditionally minded men. She explained this contradictory finding in light of the fact that traditional men, who did any housework or domestic labor, did it because their wives were incompetent doing it in some way and that they had to “rescue” their wives (which allowed them to be chivalrous, which is a traditional male trait); or what she calls a woman’s “strategy of incompetence” (Hochschild 2003[1989]:75).
It is no longer acceptable in the first decade of the twenty-first century (especially for middle class individuals) to express the idea that women are responsible for housework and childcare as it was a generation ago, in the 1980s (e.g., Descartes and Kottak 2009; LaRossa 1988; Rotundo 1985). Still, these ideas persist and appear to be deeply held. Swearingen-Hilker and Yoder (2002:8) noted that middle class White and Chicano college students exhibit “benevolent sexism.” The men in their study would never profess that women are responsible for housework, but when they were confronted with examples of women who did two-thirds of the housework, the men in their study did not think that there was anything wrong with the situation. Rather, the study participants viewed men as entitled to under-contribute to housework.

When broadly compared to other racial/ethnic groups, African Americans tend to be different in how domestic labor is divided among family members. Penha-Lopes (2006) found that African American children are given household tasks to do that are not allocated on the basis of gender. In many White and Hispanic households, laundry and ironing are usually performed by women. Conversely, in African American households, this is done by men or women and, more often than not, men. Indeed, in many African American households there is no gendered division of labor and no notion that a man will not do something because it is “women’s work.” Penha-Lopes (2006) argue that while it is true that African American women still do more housework than African American men, one of the reasons why African American men do so much is because, unlike other men of contrasting race/ethnicities, they cannot claim ineptitude or ignorance of a particular household task in order to avoid doing the task. Spitze and Ward (1995) also found that African American children are expected to do more housework than other
children. These studies support the gender role socialization model because, unlike other ethnicities/racial groups where there is a clear gendered division of labor that children grow up accepting, most African American children appear to have been socialized to believe that there are no gendered differences.\textsuperscript{31}

Contrary to the relative resources model, but supporting the gender socialization model, professional class and working class women, regardless of ethnicity, who make more money than their husbands sometimes do more housework because they are uneasy about being the breadwinner (Deutsch et al. 1993; Hochschild 2003[1989]). Tichenor’s (2005) sample of professional class White women shows that a woman’s power diminishes as she makes more money if she has a traditional gender ideology. As a result, she ends up performing a greater proportion of the housework, especially childcare. Mannino and Deutsch (2007) and Bittman et al. (2003) found that the men in their studies were threatened by their wives making more money than they did. Consequently, the men consciously asserted their traditional gender roles by doing very little housework. The housework that they chose to do included those tasks that are traditionally masculine, such as yard-work or playing with their children. As Mannino and Deutsch (2007:321) write, “It appears, then, that a threshold level exists; when women begin to earn a majority of the household income, the threat to conventional gender relations can be thwarted by a more conventional division of household labor.”

Sometimes women and men perform domestic duties that have nothing to do with who works more or less hours. In this case, the concept of “fairness” comes into play. Even if the woman knows that she is doing more housework and childcare than her

\textsuperscript{31} Perhaps one of the reasons why African American children are expected to do more housework is because many of them grew up with female-headed households.
partner, if the amount that her partner accomplishes is what she thinks that he ought to do, the “fair” amount, then she is happy (Glass and Fujimoto 1994; Greenstein 1996; Lennon and Rosenfield 1994; Major 1993; Pyke and Coltrane 1996). This is especially true when men participate in childcare tasks. Some women, regardless of race/ethnicity or socioeconomic status, are just happy that their husbands are doing some domestic labor, even if it is only childcare, and not cleaning, too. So, even though taking care of children is more fun, rewarding, and less arduous than other household chores, if men do it, then it is often perceived as “fair” by both spouses.

Currently in North America, even when men are the “house husbands/stay-at-home fathers” (which comprises less than two percent of the family forms), men still do less housework than their counterpart stay-at-home mothers. Interestingly, because the men are the primary caregivers, the breadwinning wives are, more or less, happy with their arrangement (Doucet 2006). This supports the argument that identifying with one's paternal identity often positively affects childcare involvement, but that paternal identity does not positively affect a man’s involvement in housework.

**Summary.** Three conceptual frameworks are commonly employed to explain the gendered division of labor in urban, dual-worker households. The time/availability constraints model holds that when men and women work equal hours outside of the home, the amount of housework that they do will be divided equally. A relative resource

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32 The number of fathers who are stay-at-home parents is steadily increasing, although there is still stigma surrounding this “role reversal” with men taking on a traditionally female role (Brescoll and Uhlmann 2005; Roberts-Holmes 2009). Yet, the body of literature on stay-at-home fathers is very slim. It appears that the majority of men who stay-at-home and have a breadwinning wife do so because their wife has a greater earning potential and/or the men are in-between jobs or careers (Doucet 2004, 2006; Marshall 1998; Zimmerman 2000).
model understands the division of labor to be based on the bargaining power of the
individuals in that couple. The more money or economic resources that a person has, the
more power he or she has in the household. In this case, if a woman makes more money
than her husband she will demand and receive a reasonable division of labor in the
household. The gender role socialization model is perhaps the only framework that sets
out to understand why there is an unequal domestic division of labor. Most North
American women work outside of the home, many of them full-time like their partners.
Also, some women make more money than their husbands. So, why is there an unfair
domestic division of labor? The gender role socialization model suggests that because
housework and childcare are gendered, and more housework falls under the rubric of
“women’s work,” women will continue to do gendered tasks, even when it means more
work for the women.

Discussion of models. While all three models have been used with success by
various social scientists over the last forty years, I argue that gender role socialization
provides the best framework for studying and explaining the domestic division of labor
today.

It is noteworthy that attitudes around what individuals deem “proper” for each
gender often affect the kinds of careers that men and women choose. Couples that hold
the notion that a man is supposed to be the economic supporter and a woman the
housekeeper/child tender will choose to place more emphasis on the man’s job and less
on the woman’s. The woman will make less money if she works outside of the house and
will, therefore, not have bargaining power within the house. She will also probably
choose to work fewer hours, which in turn gives her more time to devote to housework
(e.g., Strober and Chan 1999). Within the time/availability constraints model, it is argued that if a woman works part-time, then she will automatically do more around the house to “make up the hours.” Bookman (2004:63) calls this the “neo-traditional family” where one person, usually the man, works full-time. The woman chooses to reduce her hours to part-time so that she can take care of the housework and not have to rely on her partner for assistance. Indeed, Gorman (1999) noted that married couples in her middle class sample were more likely to assign income-earning responsibility to the man and housework to the woman, even if they both worked. Many families make sacrifices so that men will pursue job patterns that lead to higher salaries, while women make more job trade-offs so that they can support their spouses-as-wage-earner, as well as assume responsibility for the housework (Gorman 1999; Maume 2006; Zvonkovic et al. 1996). In these cases, it is significant that it is the woman who assumes responsibility for household chores and childcare. Even when women are in a position to make as much or more money than their husbands, couples make a conscious choice to adhere to more traditional gender patterns (Pyke and Coltrane 1996).

It is necessary to note, however, that in the United States overall women make less money than men. Generally, for every dollar that a man makes, a woman only earns eighty cents (IWPR 2009). There are still gender segregated jobs and women’s jobs pay less than male jobs, partly because women’s labor has historically been devalued relative to male labor (Lamphere 1987).33 Given this gross injustice, if one of the parents is going to cut back on hours, it makes sense for the woman to do so. Ideology works together

33 Before mothers went to work outside of the home, it was more common for working class daughters to enter the labor market. Daughters’ labor could be expended in the market and was worth less because they were not potential male breadwinners (Lamphere 1987).
with wages since the middle class women in my sample consciously chose to have careers that afford them flexibility, even if it meant that they made less money. But this also presents a dilemma: because women of childbearing age are seen as mothers first, who need to be home, they earn less than their male counterparts; but because they earn less money than men, they emphasize their maternal role over their breadwinning one.

The time/availability constraints model has illuminated a pertinent aspect of the division of labor among middle class couples. If each individual in a household makes the same amount of money and works the same amount of hours, the division of labor in the household is usually equally divided except with regards to childcare. Childcare is a key aspect of domestic labor that it cannot be ignored. Because dual-worker families only have a limited amount of time to devote to the broader category of domestic work, some things will necessarily be neglected. A family can ignore aspects of housework, such as a dirty floor or laundry piling up. They cannot (usually) disregard a dirty baby or child who needs help with his or her homework. Most middle class and working class parents claim that being with the child is more important than cleaning a bathroom, so they are willing to put in the effort to spend time with their children (Daly 1996, 2001). Many social scientists argue that childcare carried out with children under the age of five is the one area where women always do more of the work, even when couples work equal amounts outside of the home. When the child gets older, parents split childcare duties more evenly, because this is when men who do any housework at all take on childcare duties (Mannino and Deutsch 2007).

The main problem with the time/availability constraints model is that it is too simplistic and has consistently been negated by findings derived from relative resources
and gender role socialization studies. It is true that when a woman works outside of the house she can usually, but not always, obtain some assistance from her husband, but it is not the equal participation that we would anticipate if there was equal time spent at work. However, even earlier researchers noted that there was an unequal domestic division of labor (e.g., Berk and Berk 1978; Meissner et al. 1976; Staines and Pleck 1983).

The relative resources model allows us to understand when women can, hypothetically, have more bargaining power. It works well if the woman contributes a significant amount to the household and her spouse understands that her salary is necessary. This has been documented for many working class couples. Professional class couples might need the wife’s salary to maintain their standard of living, as in Coltrane and Adam’s (2001) study. However, they will not starve or loose their house if the woman does not work, as in Hood’s (1983) or Lamphere et al. (1993) studies. Just because a woman’s salary is necessary, or she makes more money, it does not necessarily follow that she has bargaining power. Women who are primary providers are often either uneasy with themselves with this “role reversal” or their husbands are threatened by the unconventional gender role. The result is that women end up doing more domestic work (Bittman et al. 2003; Deutsch et al. 1993; Hochschild 2003[1989]; Tichenor 2005; Zvonkovic et al. 1996).

Additionally, and in contrast to both the time/availability constraints and relative resources models, some social scientists (e.g., Shelton and John 1993; Stack 1997[1974]) have consistently found that when African American men are employed they do more housework. This is in stark contrast to White and Hispanic men who do much less domestic labor when they are employed outside of the home, and only when they are
unemployed are the likely to be the primary caregivers for their children (Casper and O’Connell 1998). For some African American families, unlike White or Hispanic families, women’s workforce participation had no effect on the amount of domestic work that the men contribute (Orbuch and Custer 1995; Hossain and Roopnarine 1993). Further, the men consistently paid more attention to their children when they were employed. These findings suggest that African American men identify paid wage work with domestic work as going together; if they are employed they will also do domestic work. Townsend (2002) reported similar results among his study of White working class families. Collectively these studies contradict the expectations of a relative resources model because an employed man clearly makes more money than an unemployed man and, therefore, should have more bargaining power in the household. Instead, these men did more domestic labor when they were employed, not less. However, like men of other race/ethnicities, African American men did not increase their housework and childcare contribution in response to their partner working more (Roopnarine 2004), which we would expect to find in a pure time/availability allocation model.

While all three of the frameworks for understanding the division of labor in the urban household are useful to a degree, I believe that we must take into account how individuals conceptualize their identities, and therefore how they will enact them in gender roles, if we are to understand how and why they divide their time and rationalize the resources they bring to their household. Gender cannot be divorced from socioeconomic class and race/ethnicity because they work in concert. For example, gender ideology affects an individual’s choice of partner and work. If a woman holds traditional views of gender, she will not want to work at a job that will force her to devote
a significant fraction of her energy to wage labor. Rather, she will want a part-time job that allows her to do the majority of the housework. She will not have the bargaining power to ask her partner to share domestic work, either. In these cases gender ideologies, enacted in gender roles, influence the amount of resources an individual can bring to the family and which, in turn, influence the domestic division of labor. A time/availability model does not appear to have a strong position on its own since many social science studies have disproven the assumption that the person with the most “free time” (time not spent working at a job) will do more around the house. Perhaps this would work if a time/availability model were used in conjunction with a relative resources model and a gender role socialization model.

This is not to say that the gender role socialization model has no flaws. Indeed, it is often a “fall-back” model. It is easy to explain the domestic division of labor as gendered, and stop the questioning there. We need to ask why is it gendered in contemporary society? How are these roles created and maintained? Indeed, it needs to be noted that individuals are socialized into broader ideologies of parenting and gender in general; it is not just the direct vertical transmission of gender ideologies from parent to child that needs to be considered. A man or a woman can grow up in a particular household where there are very traditional gender roles being played out by the mother and the father, but if he or she rejects those roles and embraces the cultural norm, such as egalitarianism for the middle class, than that will have more influence than the immediate family unit.
Conclusion

Thus, socialization into particular gender roles affects the overall domestic division of labor, of which childcare is only a part of family and house maintenance. Lamb’s model is good at providing a more detailed and in-depth understanding of men’s participation in the family and what they actually do as fathers by looking at the categories and the nuances of involvement. Lamb’s model of involvement is useful but it does not go far enough as involvement is even more detailed than Lamb’s three categories of engagement, accessibility, and responsibility. For example, both parents can claim to be responsible! It falls a little short in understanding how men view their paternal identities and how those identities mediate paternal involvement. This is where examination of men’s identities and how men understand and enact their roles within their specific culture construct is crucial. Further, Lamb’s model examines only fathers’ roles. This is not a flaw of Lamb’s model, but when social scientists use Lamb’s model they must also take into consideration other actors around the father and how they affect a man’s participation in his family (Pleck 2010). At its most basic, this model also does not take into account how childcare fits into the larger picture of domestic labor. In the next chapter I consider the context to my study and justify the methods I used to study parental involvement among middle class families.
CHAPTER 3

Conducting Research in a Southwestern City

As a graduate student, I seem to spend an inordinate amount of time at bars and the impetus for my dissertation research began during frequent visits to a particular pub. At the time, early in my coursework in the ethnology program at the University of New Mexico, I was on track to continue research relating to my master’s thesis examining material culture, specifically textiles, and ethnoaesthetics. However, while frequenting O’Malley’s, a family-friendly bar on the West Side of the city, I became interested in the interactions between parents and their children. Although I have no children myself, I found it interesting to observe the gender differences in parenting expressed by individuals in a public setting. I belong to a large, extended, tightly-knit, middle class family from northwestern Pennsylvania and in it, fathers are involved with their children’s lives, supporting them emotionally and financially. While I no longer have daily or even monthly contact with my extended family, I remember that at gatherings the women were with the children upstairs in the kitchen and the men were pretty much secluded in the game room. What I saw at O’Malley’s was different from my personal experiences, where mothers are the primary caregivers. Of course, there were some differences between what I grew up seeing and what I experienced at O’Malley’s. First of all, O’Malley’s was a public setting, not a private gathering, and individuals act differently in public than they do in private. The most important difference was the generational difference. My family memories are all of when I grew up, a generation ago. The parents I saw at O’Malley’s were currently around my age, in their late 20s and early 30s.
Although not all couples with small children acted in precisely the same manner, I noticed a particular parenting pattern at O’Malley’s. It appeared that when out in a public place fathers did the child-tending, presumably to give the mother a break, and/or because they enjoyed the time with their children. In a small number of the families I observed over the course of two months for a class project, the women’s partners did everything for the children, and the mothers were mostly by-standers.

One night while I was at O’Malley’s I noticed a family that put to rest any thoughts I had that men who look like “Bikers” could not be involved dads, too. I had assumed, wrongly, that this group of people, who cultivate a “rough and tumble” highly masculinized image, are incapable of being sensitive and child-centric, as well. The group consisted of the mother who I called Kate, her daughter Diana, Diana’s father Tom, and her Uncle Butch. Kate appeared content to allow her daughter get the lion’s share of attention from the men, and the whole family was very relaxed. As I wrote in my field notes later,

Butch and Tom are beefy fellows in their 40s or 50s. My husband Ed says that they look like bikers. I do not know about that, but I am fairly sure that they are not CEOs of a large company. Their extensive arm tattoos are well displayed in t-shirts with the sleeves cut off. They have the beer bellies that only years of careful conditioning can create, but they still look tough enough to take on an entire bar’s worth of malcontents and come out the winners. Tom has gold hoop earrings and thin wire-rimmed glasses that still manage to glint in the low lights of the establishment, as he obliquely reaches across the table to cut up Diana’s food for her. Diana is a beautiful young girl, around seven years old, who looks like the poster-child for The Limited Too clothing store. She wears a lavender shirt with ruffled hems and sleeves, white capris and sporty tennis shoes with graphic flowers on them. Her shiny brown hair is caught in a pony tail that Butch, hairless himself, tugs to get her attention. Diana has lots of attention this night. She chats on and on, gesturing animatedly with her hands and whole body. Butch and Tom lean forward, elbows on the table, to catch every word Diana says. The mother, Kate, a middle age woman with big, big, big curly hair and a Grateful Dead tie-dyed t-shirt, leans back in her booth and drinks her frosty beverage.
Diana has a Shirley Temple. I know this because I hear Butch order one for her, along with another round of Miller.

The pub’s clientele was largely middle class with some working class patrons. For example, employees still wearing the slacks and tie from their office jobs at Intel sat next to construction workers just off a job. The racial and ethnic make-up of the clientele also appeared to be diverse, but it is nearly impossible to determine racial or ethnic heritage from phenotypic traits alone. I would venture that, like me, two-thirds of the patrons would claim European ancestry, while one-third were Hispanic or Native American. There were very few African American customers on any of the nights I was there. The age range of the establishment was also diverse. Young and older individuals, either single, as couples, or mixed sex groups, as well as many young couples with their small children, were the typical clientele at O’Malley’s.

Overall, I thought that it was a decent cross section of the citizens of Albuquerque, New Mexico. Later, I could not get the repeated images of the involved fathers out of my head. For some reason I was surprised to see what, in my mind and in my limited experience, was a reversal of gender roles; that is, the father doing the primary care giving. Could this parenting pattern be explained by temporal or geographical differences from what I was familiar with? Was it a difference in socioeconomic status or even religious affiliation? I mused about this for a while, annoyed friends with children with my queries, and read up on this subject in between writing papers on archaeological textiles. I soon abandoned my first dissertation topic as I was spending more time researching an “outside” project (i.e., involved fathers) than my “official” project.
This chapter describes the research locale and methods I employed while conducting my dissertation research. The Albuquerque neighborhoods where my interviewees reside and the daycare centers where I initially contacted many of the participants, are discussed in detail. I also explicate the research methods I chose in order to show how they are best suited to the questions that I asked. I recount how I analyzed my data. To conclude, I provide an in-depth description of the middle class families in my sample, focusing on aspects of socioeconomic position, ethnicity, and religious adherence. I also present family profiles of 13 families who are featured throughout the text in multiple chapters as case studies.

**Description of Research Locale**

**Albuquerque, New Mexico.** I found Albuquerque to be an ideal research locale. For example, Albuquerque is a large city with an assortment of individuals of different race/ethnic backgrounds. It is also a city with a deep religious history. Furthermore, the socioeconomic range of Albuquerque’s inhabitants is very similar to the United States’ average.

Albuquerque is a high desert city located in central New Mexico, situated in the Rio Grande valley and flanked to the east by the Sandia Mountains [See Figure 2: New Mexico Map]. It was founded in honor of the Spanish Duke of Albuquerque in 1706, although the first Spanish settlement on the Rio Grande was established in 1598. The land that became Albuquerque was used by Pueblo peoples for thousands of years prior to the Spanish arrival. Albuquerque, as well as New Mexico as a whole, was incorporated as a United States territory in 1850. Today, in addition to being the largest city in the state, Albuquerque is the thirty-third largest city in the United States and is rapidly
growing with a population of around 472,000 people (U.S. Census Bureau 2007). Including the immediate neighboring towns and cities (i.e., Los Lunas, Rio Rancho), Albuquerque has over a half million residents.

Figure 2: New Mexico Map

Albuquerque and its surrounding metro areas, including the city of Rio Rancho (72,000 residents), have favorable tax incentives for businesses. As a consequence,
Albuquerque is consistently rated as one of the best cities for business by *Forbes* magazine (Technology Company 2007). Overall, around a quarter of the city’s jobs are supported by either the state or federal government. Kirtland Air Force Base alone employs around 40,000 people, over 34,000 of them civilians. The defense industry is also represented in other employers, such as Sandia Labs, where 8,400 people work. The University of New Mexico, the largest university in the state, employs 14,300 people (Technology Company 2007). The software and technology industry is a huge employer, as well. Intel, which manufactures semi-conductor wafers, employs over 5,000 people and virtually put the city of Rio Rancho on the map when it moved there in the 1980s. Generally, these jobs require individuals with higher education and they are paid accordingly. New Mexico has more college-educated and post-graduates (32 percent) compared to the United States as a whole (27 percent). Yet, there is also a correspondingly wide range of socioeconomic class differences in Albuquerque. The median household income for a family of four is $48,223.00. This is slightly lower than the United States average median household income of $50,740.00 (U.S. Census 2007).

Fortunately, the cost of living in Albuquerque is reasonable. Food, gas, and other commodities are not significantly lower or higher than other areas of the country. Also, the housing is affordable. As one real estate agent told me when discussing housing prices, “well, we never have any highs here, but we don’t have any lows, either.” The affordability of Albuquerque also adds to the desirability of relocating families.

Employment opportunities and good cost of living are not the only draws to residing in New Mexico. New Mexico has a sunny, arid environment with over 300 days of sun a year. The city is also known for its affordable cultural activities. These include
the Balloon Fiesta in October, the numerous fiestas sponsored by various churches celebrating saints’ days, and the multitude of diverse museums, such as the Albuquerque Museum of Art and History, the Indian Pueblo Cultural Center, the National Museum of Nuclear Science and History, and the tiny Rattlesnake Museum, to name but a few. The Natural History Museum’s Explora Children’s Museum and the Bio Park Complex with a zoo, aquarium, and beautiful kid-friendly gardens, are popular places to take children. Albuquerque is also close to numerous national and historic parks and forests. One popular destination is Chaco Culture National Historic Park, a 1,000 year old Prehispanic community with multi-story buildings that is only three hours away. Petroglyph National Monument, an austere place of black basalt inscribed with ancient and historic petroglyphs, is within the city limits itself. Nineteen Pueblos are within a day’s drive or less from Albuquerque. These native communities often hold feast days that are open to the public. All told, the rich cultural and natural heritage of Albuquerque and its surrounding areas is one of its biggest attractions.

Most people who live in the Albuquerque metro area work in Albuquerque, but some commute to Santa Fe (and vice versa). Albuquerque is only an hour from Santa Fe which is home to a large number of museums, shops and restaurants specializing in Native American, Hispanic, and pan-Southwestern arts and food. Other neighboring cities include Denver, Colorado, which is 450 miles away to the north and El Paso, Texas, which is 267 miles to the south on the United States boarder with Mexico. The megalopolis of Phoenix, Arizona is located 420 miles to the west, while modestly sized Amarillo, Texas is the closest city, at 289 miles, to the east of Albuquerque.
Albuquerque is one of the oldest cities in the country and has a large Hispanic, Native American, and White population (City of Albuquerque 2007). Although Albuquerque is typically known as a “tri-racial” city, it is home to a variety of other ethnic populations, such as a significant pan-Asian contingent and a broad African American community [See Table 1: Albuquerque Demographics]. Most of the population speaks English, although almost one third speak Spanish (U.S. Census Bureau 2007).34 The major religious affiliations in Albuquerque are Catholic (34 percent), Conservative Christian (11 percent), and Mainstream Protestant (six percent), while 45 percent of the population does not claim to practice any particular religion and four percent practice something “other”(ARDA 2000).35

Albuquerque neighborhoods. Albuquerque is most commonly divided into quadrants along Central Avenue (also known as Old Route 66) which runs east to west, and by the railroads which run north to south [See Figure 3: neighborhood map]. Each quadrant has its own neighborhoods with their own distinct personalities. It is useful to think of the city as having neighborhoods either in the north or south valleys or the heights, which are the western and eastern areas of the city. Most of the individuals whom I interviewed in 2008 and 2009 lived either in the Northwest Heights neighborhoods (e.g., Taylor Ranch on “the West Side”) or the North Valley (e.g., Los Ranchos de Albuquerque), although a few lived in the Northeast Heights, and some lived in the South Valley portion of the city. I only describe portions of the city where my

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34 I am a native English speaker, although I am able to speak some Spanish. My participants all spoke English fluently, although not always as a first language. All interviews were conducted in English.

35 The religious demography reflects the history and current religious trends in New Mexico, which will be discussed more in-depth in chapter six.
Table 1: *Albuquerque Demographics*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographics</th>
<th>Percentage of Total Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ethnicity</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>71.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Education</strong></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highschool degree</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bachelor degree and post-graduate degrees</td>
<td>31.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Households</strong></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persons per household</td>
<td>2.4 people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persons under the age of five</td>
<td>7% of the population</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persons below poverty</td>
<td>13.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median household income</td>
<td>$38,272.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median household income for a family of four</td>
<td>$48,223.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household ownership rate</td>
<td>60.4% of the population</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Note: data obtained from U.S. Census Bureau 2000 census)
Figure 3: Albuquerque Neighborhood Map

interviewees resided. The Southeast Heights, for example, is part of Albuquerque but since I did not interview anyone who lived there, I do not describe this area here.

The Village of Los Ranchos de Albuquerque (Los Ranchos) is in the heart of the North Valley. It is ethnically heterogeneous, is close to the Rio Grande, and only seven miles from downtown Albuquerque. It is one of the two oldest incorporated municipalities in Albuquerque (founded in 1958). Los Ranchos has a unique mixture of agricultural and residential houses. These houses range from multi-million dollar mansions and horse farms close to the Rio Grande, to more modest sized houses along the perimeter of Los Ranchos. Many of my interviewees’ houses in Los Ranchos were small, modest, one story adobes, with wooden floors and narrow, lush, green lots. Nearly all of the houses that I visited in Los Ranchos were in various states of moderate renovation, such as putting in a dishwasher or replacing inefficient windows. Some families found the original layout of two bedrooms and one bathroom too confining, and either contemplated or completed additions to the house rather than move out of Los Ranchos to find a larger house.

During the informal chit-chat periods that preceded or followed many interviews, my participants and I often talked about their neighborhoods. Los Ranchos residents enthusiastically endorsed living in their village. Among its attractions are being close to downtown and the strong sense of community for a village of nearly 6,000 people (Village de los Ranchos 2009). During one of my first interviews in late spring 2008, as my interviewee Amelia Abbott and I sat in their backyard, her child came up and presented me with one of their chickens. I declined the kind gift of another pet, and Amelia nodded at the chicken and said:
We’ve got character here in Los Ranchos. We can keep chickens. For their eggs, you see. They are organic this way and do you have any idea how expensive organic eggs are when you buy them in the store? Our neighbor keeps a burro. And he’s an architect. Where else in Albuquerque do you find boutiques next to feed stores sharing a lot with a greasy spoon dive featured on the Food Network? We’re close to everything here, even if the house is sometimes confining with two four year olds and their toys! But we have a great yard and neighbors and it’s worth it.

Ten minutes drive northwest of Los Ranchos is what realtors call the “Northwest Heights” but everyone else (including myself) who lives there call it the “West Side” (Patmontrose 2009). This is a newer area, only established since the 1980s and rapidly expanding both north and, especially, west. One individual development on the West Side is Taylor Ranch. It is one of the oldest planned communities and many of my study participants lived there. It is close to Petroglyph National Park and other smaller recreational parks where little kids’ soccer games are continuously playing on the weekend and dogs are walked on the weekdays. Ventana Ranch, even further on the outskirts of Albuquerque’s West Side, is another new development with houses abutting the desert. There is homogeneity of the houses, being mostly brick with two or three bedrooms, two bathrooms and a layout that allows for a “great room” (combined living, dining and kitchen). The houses are certainly larger than those found in Los Ranchos, yet they are also cheaper per square foot. Interestingly, most of my interviewees living on the West Side did not have plans to stay in a West Side neighborhood, citing that it is just too far away from the downtown area. However, most of my interviewees acknowledged that the public schools are not bad there and, furthermore, there is no way that they could have afforded a similar house anywhere else in Albuquerque. Because of its rapidly growing nature, there are shops, parks, and restaurants on the West Side, but there is very
little of a neighborhood feel, such as in the North Valley area. As Charles Lee described living in Ventana Ranch,

You don’t know your neighbors here. You get home late from work, they get home late—because it is a 40 minute commute on a good day from downtown—and then you don’t want to make that drive on the weekends if something is going on. So, yes, I’d like to move in a few more years, if we can afford it. But my wife and I like this house, we just wish it were closer to everything.

The South Valley is one of the oldest areas of town, historically populated by long-term Hispanic residents, and close to the Rio Grande Zoo, Old Town Albuquerque, and the Albuquerque Biological Park. For all the cultural attractions, the South Valley is still very affordable, offering the cheapest housing in Albuquerque. Part of the reason for its affordability, however, lies in its reputation as having higher crime rates. This reputation was mentioned repeatedly by the individuals who lived there at the time of my study. Evan Frazier, who married a woman who grew up in the South Valley, complained to me about where they lived. His wife, Rachel, interrupted him with a laugh, flipped her long, dark, hair and crisply said,

Hey Babe, you are just feeding into stereotypes. I think we have a reputation for crime because during the 1980s there were lots of immigrants from Mexico and they brought gangs in…but we don’t have that anymore. Not really. It was different when I was growing up than it is now.

I never felt unsafe during any of my visits to the South Valley and enjoyed driving to the agricultural areas, which happen to be the South Valley. Like Los Ranchos, which is an incorporated village within the city of Albuquerque, parts of the South Valley are also outside of Albuquerque’s official jurisdiction. It is one of the oldest areas and is not as strictly zoned as some of the newer neighborhoods on the West Side. For example, in the

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36 While it is true that the South Valley has more reported violent crime than some other areas of the city, it is an unfair assumption that the South Valley is any more dangerous than other areas, such as downtown Albuquerque (City of Albuquerque 2010).
South Valley two houses can share a lot. A paved road automatically ends and becomes dirt. Abandoned trailers are neighbors to a well-kept house with a picket fence enclosing an oasis of fruit trees and chile peppers. All of my study participants living there at the time of my research are Hispanic with deep ties to the area and still lived within a short walk to numerous extended family members. Also contributing to the Hispanic characteristic of the South Valley neighborhoods (77 percent claim Hispanic or Latino ethnicity) are the many recent Mexican and Central American immigrants living in the area (Neighborhood Scout 2009).

The Northeast Heights, a vast area situated on the foothills of the Sandia Mountains, is touted as a safe and pleasant area by real estate agents as well as the people who live there. While the people I interviewed lived in split level ranch houses dating from the 1960s, this is also an area with multi-million dollar homes. A rule of thumb appears to be that the closer to the foothills the more expensive the homes become. Only one family I interviewed actually lived in the “Foothill” neighborhood, but their house was not a multi-million dollar house. The people I interviewed tended to live in the Oñate and Osuna Park neighborhoods, which are actually closer to downtown Albuquerque than the Foothills, but still in the Northeast Heights. This area in general has a good reputation because of its schools. The neighborhoods are well established and frequently police vehicles cruise the shady, tree lined streets. Like most of Albuquerque, the road construction on Interstate 40 going east from downtown or the West Side made it a nerve-wracking, tedious experience to get there for me, but the families I spoke to love living within the shadows of the mountains and talked about the attraction of well-established, safe neighborhoods. Indeed, after looking out of the Renaud’s house
windows and seeing a sofa normally reserved for the inside of the house on their
neighbor’s porch, I asked Crystal if she was happy where she lived. A look of incredulity
passed over her face at the question and she exclaimed, “But of course! We’re living in
the Northeast Heights. This is a great place to live!”

Daycare centers in Albuquerque. Daycare centers are proxies for the larger
communities in Albuquerque. While living in on the West Side of Albuquerque I spent
many fieldwork hours at daycare centers in order to recruit families for my dissertation
research. Clark-Stewart and Allhusen (2005:51), in their broad study of daycare center
users, claim that most people choose daycare centers based on proximity to their home
and affordability, while quality is a secondary consideration. However, everyone I spoke
to cited the quality of the care their children received at the chosen daycare facilities as
the most important aspect. Nonetheless, geographical convenience did play a part in the
choice of daycare center as the daycare centers chosen were always only a few miles
from the research participants’ homes or work.

Daycare centers are ideal places to meet dual-worker families because they
represent many smaller communities in Albuquerque and tend, in general, to be
ethnically and socially homogenous. Nationally, two-parent families are more likely to
use childcare centers than family-provided care (Clark-Stewart and Allhusen 2005:58).
Given this, while some of the dual-career families in my sample engaged the services of
friends and family members to watch their children while the parents worked, most
families left their children at a specialized childcare institution and have the financial
means to do so. Families I interviewed that did not use a daycare provider employed various extended family members to watch their children while they worked. Such families usually chose a combination of shift work and the services of extended family members to avoid leaving their children with strangers. These families were Hispanic (but not all Hispanic families used extended kin to watch their children) and were fortunate in that they had larger kin networks on which to draw to assist them in childcare. Whereas parents that used daycare providers did not have the luxury of a geographically close extended family member to watch their children while they were at work (e.g., Lamphere et al. 1993).

I spent varying amounts of time at three Protestant affiliated daycare centers in the Albuquerque metropolitan area, one in the Northeast Heights, one on the West Side and one in the North Valley. The nondenominational daycare institution run by the University of New Mexico is the fourth daycare center where I established contacts, who all live in various parts of the city. After speaking with various daycare center directors, I chose these daycare centers based on the demographically diverse middle class families that use these institutions. Although I contacted four Charismatic Christian and Evangelical churches in order to meet families of the appropriate demographic for my research I was denied entry by the ministers of the congregation. There are no Catholic affiliated daycare centers in Albuquerque. Therefore, all of the Catholic and Charismatic Christian families in my sample were recruited from the Mainstream Protestant daycare centers or through snowball sampling.

The average price families I interviewed were paying, per child, for full-time daycare was $500.00 a month. This is a large expenditure (between 10-18 percent of a family’s income) especially when one considers that the majority of families had two children in daycare at the same time. No family claimed that they could not afford daycare services.
All of the Protestant daycare centers were of a modest size, caring for under 100 children in total, with a small staff. The daycare centers all had pleasant, spacious rooms, longer than wider, usually with one wall of windows looking out over the playground. One end had tables and craft supplies, a carpet in the middle, and a larger play-space at the other end, where there were blocks and books and other toys and dress-up clothes. Often there is was theme to each room, such as bugs, with the stereotypical decorations. These decorations included the children’s names printed clearly on construction paper ladybugs that were plastered to the cement walls, lots of furniture for tiny people in bright primary colors, sanitizing wipes and Kleenex placed around the room for easy access, the alphabet strung across the door, and a hermit crab in its plastic aquarium. Often, there were pictures of Jesus, lambs, and biblical sayings on the hall walls. These were easygoing places, not too concerned with education, just making certain the children were happy, healthy, and polite. Often, there was one director, an assistant, and about three high school helpers per dozen children at any given day, so that the daycare centers, being small in staff and children, really were small communities in and of themselves.

The nondenominational daycare center located on the campus of the University of New Mexico (UNM) catered to an economically and ethnically diverse group of people, including students, professors, and university employees. Although this daycare center was funded with federal and state grants, student fees, and payment from parents, it was still the most expensive daycare center in my sample and also had the longest waiting list. The UNM’s daycare center had (and at the time of this writing, continues to have) an excellent reputation and focused on early childhood education. These aspects were appealing to the families that sent their children there, in the hopes of giving their
children academic advantages. Unlike the other daycare institutions where I volunteered, UNM’s is very large. It was a veritable complex of rooms for specific age-grades of children with a host of qualified staff to deal with the children. It was also protected like Fort Knox. Whereas the other daycare centers were so small that a stranger is immediately and suspiciously spotted, UNM’s daycare center was large and knowing everybody was an impossibility. Therefore, while the director and staff were helpful, as a researcher I was required to sign in, get a visitor’s badge, go through security checks, and was not allowed to interact with the children unless expressly given permission to do so by the daycare center director.

**Research Processes and Methods**

**Building rapport.** Dual-worker parents may be the busiest segment of the population in the United States today (Darrah et al. 2007). Between working full-time, volunteering at various children-focused functions and other events, attending children’s activities, and conducting household and childcare chores, many parents have little time left in the day for something such as an interview with a strange anthropologist. In order to gain entry into this notoriously busy and time-crunched population, I decided to volunteer at various daycare centers, hoping that when parents saw me on a regular basis at the daycare center and at the various picnics, concerts, and other out-of-school activities associated with the daycare centers, they would be more likely to consent to an interview. The daycare center directors were excellent middlemen who often went out of their way to introduce me to particular parents whom they thought would best fit my criteria, that is, dual-worker, middle class families with children six years old and younger. One daycare center director went to so far as to ask particular parents if they
would agree to do an interview with me! Rarely did the people personally asked by the
daycare director say no, or at least not in front of the daycare center director.

Unlike many female social scientists who noted great difficulties in interviewing
men versus women, I did not find that to be the case in my fieldwork (e.g., Gavananas
2000). I only had one family where the father was outwardly hesitant to be interviewed,
but after the first five minutes of the interview he relaxed. I tended to approach women
first as that was the best way to engage both the woman and her partner in my research. I
had only one family who denied my requests for interviews specifically because the
husband did not want to participate.

My difficulty was not in getting men, specifically, to commit to an interview.
Rather, it was more challenging to get individuals who fit the criteria for my study.
Additionally, because the demographic group that I was interested in looking at (the dual-
worker middle class with young children) were so busy and simply did not have time (or
at least that was the main reason for any of the refusals), I averaged about a twenty
percent success rate. That is, for every ten people I asked to participate, only two fit the
criteria, agreed to an interview, and carried through with the interview. Many people who
fit my criteria initially agreed but by the time I called them to establish a time and place
for the interviews, they had decided that they did not want to participate after all.38

Wanting to avoid coercion but also wanting people to participate meant that I had to be
persistent and call them often, unless, of course, they told me that they did not want to

38 Most individuals I spoke to were nice and they did not want to come off as rude by telling me, no, they
do not want to participate. However, some dissembled and said that they were still waiting to hear from
their spouse (weeks and months later) or that they would call me back and I should not worry about calling
them again (and they never called me back.) Very rarely did a person bluntly state that he was not
interested after all.
participate. Calling potential contacts proved frustrating and time consuming but the results were worth the effort. A few times people forgot about our scheduled interviews and I was stood up. In these instances the families always rescheduled. Naturally, schedules had to be worked around and I conducted the majority of the interviews after normal work hours (5:00 p.m.-9:00 p.m.) or on weekends.

**Positionality.** Social scientists, particularly anthropologists, almost always comment on their positionality in relation to the people with whom they work, because who we are often influences the type of data that we gather. Socioeconomic context, ethnicity, and gender are the categories most often considered. I am a female of Euro-American descent, coming from a middle class family. Significantly, I study “my own” people: urban, middle class people (see Narayan 1993). There are some notable differences between my study participants and me, of course. I grew up in northwestern Pennsylvania on the outskirts of Erie, a city one fifth the size of Albuquerque. I am obviously not a father nor am I particularly religious. My lack of religious affiliation was negatively perceived only by some of the more devoutly religious families, while at the same time, it was helpful with non-religious parents. The majority of the time I found that my interviewees were amazingly non-judgmental and they rarely proselytized in my presence.

Perhaps because I was accommodating to their schedules and did not come off as busy and over scheduled (after all, I had time to hang out with them for days on end), my position in relation to the people with whom I worked differed from the experiences described by many anthropologists. Throughout the course of fieldwork I have been mistaken for a babysitter, a traditional undergraduate student, and, in general, naïve,
young, and poor. No matter how often I mentioned that I had legitimate employment, as a teaching assistant at the university and as a curatorial assistant at the Maxwell Museum of Anthropology, my status as “student” usurped all.

For a person working with families, reproductive status is very important. I was fortunate in one sense that I was not a parent. Many of the people with whom I worked were more apt to explain aspects of parenting in great detail, because they assumed that nothing could be taken for granted when conversing with me, a childless woman. I cannot express the horror I felt on occasion after women’s unsolicited renditions of birthing stories, or the women’s very graphic explanations of why they prefer for the father to bathe the children (because the bath can get gross, quickly). To quote one of the women with whom I conducted participant observation, Hope Griego, “sometimes the baby poops in the water. I don’t want to deal with that. That is why I make John do it.” At that point John chimed in, “Oh, I hate that. You have no idea how gross that is. I just try to ignore it, but its hard to.” Conversely, I know that I missed some great opportunities because I was not “in the mommy club,” to use study participant Michelle Byrd’s apt phrase. But being a younger female did have its advantages, as I was non-threatening and presumably easier to talk to. My marriage status also made most of the mothers who I interviewed consider me “safe” to leave alone with their husbands.

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39 I was around twenty-nine years old at the time I conducted fieldwork which is about five years younger, on average, than most of my contacts.

40 My husband was invaluable to my research; that is to say, when he was in town. As an archaeology graduate student, he was often away conducting his own research. When he was home, he unselfishly took time to go to church and participate in other dissertation related functions with me. But the fact that he was out of town so much, and that we do not have children ourselves, certainly colored people’s perception and attitudes towards me.
Not having dependants of my own also came in handy in some ways. I did the majority of my interviews in the evenings after work. This inevitably intruded on dinner time. Many parents, realizing that it was late and that my husband was out of town, invited me to stay for dinner. This was wonderful in that I ate something much better than I was going to cook at home! But more importantly, it allowed me to follow up on some parts of the interview or to ask questions not directly related to the interview, but which were pertinent nonetheless.

However, some parents assumed that since I did not have children I possessed a lot of free time and no commitments. This presumed freedom allowed some of them to call on me to be a babysitter. Although this is not a role that I am eminently suited for, I did play the babysitter occasionally, pro bono, because it was a way of giving back to the generous people who took time out of their busy schedules to let me interview them.

My usual way of giving back to the people I interviewed was to bring them homemade cookies and other baked goods. This is a small thing but there are few direct compensatory measures a graduate student can offer when working with middle class North Americans. If I were to pay them for their time, it would be prohibitively expensive, as my study participants’ time was worth more than any granting agency would be willing to allot as part of an award. In fact, during the course of participant observation most of the families customarily went out for brunch after church services. Time and time again I tried to pay for my own meal, gestures that were brushed away by the parents who refused to let me pay. As Frank Gonzalez put it, “Oh, yeah, like we’re gonna take money from a student?! Please, you just ate eggs. I think we can cover that.”
Although I had no power in any relationship with my interviewees, many of the participants told me that they agreed to do the interviews because they value education. What I was doing by interviewing them was, essentially, advancing my own education, which they perceived as a good thing. Many of the parents had master’s degrees or equivalents so they understood what it is like to be a graduate student (as many of them remarked, “poor and stressed”) and wanted to assist me in my endeavors.

**Research methods.**

*Ethnography is arguably compelling because it allows us to act as voyeurs gazing at the minutiae of other peoples’ lives; indeed, doing so becomes a scholarly virtue (Darrah et al. 2007:256)*

My dissertation research took place in Albuquerque between February 2008 and September 2009. The methods I employed to study paternal identity and its influence on the gendered division of labor included participant observation, semi-structured interviews, open-ended interviews (life histories), and identity pie charts. Triangulation of these methods provided a fuller understanding of how middle class, urban, religious, fathers in Albuquerque construct and maintain their identity as a “father” and how that, in turn, affected the amount of domestic labor, particularly childcare, that they performed. My study population was comprised of thirty, heterosexual, dual-worker, middle class, families. I used the nonprobability sampling technique of snowball sampling to identify contacts (Bernard 1995:95-97). Stated another way, I built a sample of study participants based on informal conversations, interviews, and recommendations from participants as to who else might agree to participate and fill my selection criteria. I selected families so that they all had children under the age of seven, though all were from the middle class. Importantly, I built my sample around the four religious categories—Mainstream
Protestant, Conservative Christian, Catholic, and non-practicing fathers—that I wanted to contrast. From this thirty family sample I selected a sub-sample of eight middle class families capturing the range of religious variability. In order to minimize variation in the overall sample that was not related to socioeconomic status, ethnicity, or religiosity, I only worked with families where both parents are the children’s biological or legally adopted parents. Furthermore, I chose to examine only parents who were married, since marital status has shown to have an effect on the domestic division of labor, with married people being more likely to be gender segregated in their domestic division of labor (Shelton and John 1996). I tried to get an equal representation of families with female and male children. Nevertheless, the ultimate deciding factor was one of convenience, meaning that my sample, by necessity, consisted of families that fit all my demographic criteria and were willing to be interviewed.

Coltrane and Adams (2001:76-77) note that when the middle class parents in their sample were expecting the birth of their first child they talked about how they would participate equally in childcare duties. However, when the baby was born, the reality of the situation was not an equal division of labor. Rather, women typically performed most of the childcare and household tasks. To see whether this held true for my sample, I worked with families whose children were under the age of seven because it allowed me to investigate parents who were still defining and negotiating their roles regarding childcare duties (Fivaz-Depeursinge and Corboz-Warnery 1999).\(^4\)

I limited my study participants to those from dual-worker/two-parent families. Although I am most interested in contemporary, Christian, urban fathers, previous

\(^{4}\) Two families had children who were seven years old, but they also had younger siblings.
research demonstrates that men’s wives directly influence how men understand their identities as fathers, as well as the childcare tasks that they perform (Fox and Bruce 2001; Ihinger-Tallman 1993; Maurer et al. 2001, 2003). Acknowledging this, I studied both parents in a cohabitating couple in order to understand paternal identity and paternal involvement.

I engaged in what Stacey (1990:32) terms “commuter fieldwork,” meaning that my research sites, being daycare centers and homes, did not facilitate my living on-site. I lived in Albuquerque during the entire time of my fieldwork and when not specifically at the houses or daycare centers of the people with whom I worked, I would often cordially encounter them running errands, at church, or out to dinner. Although Albuquerque is a large city, over 90 percent of the people I interviewed lived within a 15 minute drive from my house.

**Semi-structured interviews.** Along with participant observation, I administered interviews that were conducted with each parent separately at their home or in a public space of their choosing. A semi-structured interview, which mixed closed- and open-ended questions and lasted anywhere from 45 to 90 minutes was administered to each adult in the 30 family sample (for a total of 60 interviews) in order to explore religious adherence, parental ideology and participation in household and childcare tasks.

A number of religious practices are carried out on a daily or weekly basis such as prayer before bed and church attendance, while other practices are carried out on a more limited basis, such as weddings and baptisms. Religiosity can also be indirectly inferred from linguistic clues. For example, saying “God Bless you” before parting with one

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42 One married couple was reluctant to be interviewed separately, so they were interviewed together.
another. It can also be suggested from iconographic evidence (i.e., religious statuary, pictures, and personal adornment). These data, in conjunction with parents’ statements about how religious they are, allowed me to assess the intensity of each parents’ religiosity.

A second component of semi-structured interviews was gathering information about parents’ participation in childcare tasks using Lamb’s tripartite model of engagement, accessibility, and responsibility (Lamb et al. 1985, 1987a; Lamb 2004; Lamb and Tamis-LeMonda 2004). My questions regarding men’s engagement included topics like asking about the kinds of play activities they participated in with their children. I also asked about which parent undertook specific childcare tasks, such as reading before bed or bathing the child. Accessibility was understood by asking which parent, if any or both, were conscientious and available for their children even when they were not in the same area as the child or directly engaged with the child. For example, I asked questions such as, “who does the pre-school nurse call when the child is sick and needs to come home?” Responsibility, as a category, was better understood by asking questions like, “who’s responsible for making doctor’s appointments?” Or asking which parent decides when it is bath time for their children. One parent might be the engaged parent during the children’s bath time, but another parent might actually be responsible for initiating the bath time.

The third component of my semi-structured interview was to understand how men self identified as parents and whether this affected other aspects of their identities. Asking about a person’s identity is notoriously difficult because it is such an intangible subject of research. Despite this, Cowan and Cowan (1992) have successfully used the identity pie
chart technique to assess parental identity. I modified their model in order to obtain additional information on how fathers view their individual, varied roles. Information on individuals’ parental identity was partially obtained by asking them to illustrate their images of self on a “pie.” For example, if an empty circle represents “the self,” the individual divides the circle into portions that he thinks represent the various aspects of himself, such as “spouse,” “friend,” and “parent.” I did not provide any specifics, rather, I let the men choose those roles that were important to them, whatever they may have been. “Father” was always an important role, but some other men also chose unique roles such as “outdoorsman” and “child of god,” which were not necessarily repeated by others. Identity pie charts are not only a good way of getting reticent individuals to discuss their identity in a creative manner, but they are also illuminating from the standpoint of allowing people to determine those roles that they think are most important at the time of study. Most fathers found the activity interesting and it was also very useful in providing a stimulus for further discussion.43

A fourth component to my semi-structured interview entailed creating a demographic profile of the families. This survey queried parents’ socioeconomic status. Although I knew the general socioeconomic status of the families from talking to the directors of the daycare or the parents themselves, this survey allowed me to obtain a more nuanced view of the families’ status. I assessed dimensions of socioeconomic status, such as education, occupation, income, family history of employment, as well as consumption patterns. After I conducted the semi-structured interviews I was in a position to select my sub-sample of eight families who represented the range of religious

43 Five fathers refused to do an identity pie chart, usually on the grounds that they were not comfortable with illustrating something so intangible as their multiple roles.
variability among the participants, for further participant observation and open-ended interviews (life histories).

**Participant observation.** Participant observation was the primary data-gathering method that I used throughout my research. Indeed, my richest data came from following people around! I originally allotted one month per each daycare center to conduct participant observation, but I varied that time depending on the particular daycare center and degree of data saturation obtained. I spent a few days a week for two weeks, at most daycare centers. I was particularly interested in the morning drop-off and afternoon pick-up times at the daycare centers so that I could observe interactions between the children and parents, as well as meet and converse with the parents myself. Given that parents are often very busy during these times I also engaged in participant observation when parents volunteered at the daycare centers, such as when they came in for “story hour” (usually an hour set aside in the morning and afternoons when parents can come in and read a child’s book to the children in the daycare center). More infrequently, I was there during the potlucks and annual recitals enacted by the children of the daycare centers.

I conducted lengthier participant observation with eight individual families who were either Conservative Christian, Catholic, Mainstream Protestant, or non-practicing (the Frazier and Robinson families were Conservative Christian. The Gonzalez and Griego families were Catholic. The Bowman, Maxwell, and Reeds were Mainstream Protestants. The Grahams were non-practicing at the time of my study.) I had three goals for participant observation in this setting: Firstly, I attempted to explore the contexts of identity formation for fathers to understand their participation in childcare. Secondly, I employed informal, open-ended interviews to understand the life histories of the
participants in this subset, and I conducted them during participant observations. Thirdly, I wanted to see what the men actually did regarding domestic labor. I initially intended to conduct participant observation with a 12 family sub-sample. In spite of that original goal, asking to come and practically live with a family turned out to be a much more difficult proposition than asking for an interview. Therefore, the eight families that I did participant observation with were the ones with whom I felt most comfortable and were willing to accommodate my research needs.

I conducted most of my participant observation on the weekends or days off when families were able to spend time with each other. Using a rotating schedule I spent, on average, two weekend days (usually from 7:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m., although often longer and sometimes earlier) and one evening (usually from 4:00 p.m.-9:30 p.m.) with each family. I made certain that I observed the families at various times throughout the day in order to gather information on the allocation of housework and childcare tasks, but particularly paying attention to those times when children need the most attention: early morning, mealtimes, and bedtimes. This is also the time when individuals have time to do housework, too. I spent time doing family-related duties with each family (i.e., help cook dinner, play with children), and I noted the time allocated to individual childcare tasks and household chores and observed which parent performed which particular chore and with what frequency and duration. I also noted when, and who, initiated and completed, housework (i.e., laundry, vacuuming, washing dishes) as well as childcare.

Borrowing from Lamb’s involvement model I looked for aspects of childcare that indicated not only engagement, but accessibility, and responsibility as well (Lamb et al. 1987a; Lamb and Tamis-LeMonda 2004). Childcare duties include aspects of hygiene
and health, feeding, entertaining, educating, and discipline, and how the parents negotiate their roles with each other while tending to the child. Further, I recorded when the father was occupied by another task, such as watching television or checking electronic mail, but still accessible to his child’s needs and wants. I also noted those times when the father exhibited responsibility for his child, even if the child was not present. Responsibility included such things as the father taking the initiative and making a doctor’s appointment for his child or setting up a play-date.

Participant observation with my sub-sample of eight families also allowed me to look at the contexts and people that influence paternal identity and how it is constructed and maintained. Contextual situations were classified according to the main activity being performed at the time, such as leisure, work, family, worship, or volunteering. Activities do not have to be directly associated with childcare duties to influence paternal identity. Rather, all the other things that a father does could potentially influence how he views his role as father and, therefore, what he accomplishes in relation to childcare tasks. It is not just the amount of time that a man spends at a task, but the importance that the man places on the activities carried out that really matter. For instance, most men spend the majority of their waking time at their place of employment. However, not one man in my sample placed the most importance, compared to other roles, on being an economic provider.

This is not to say that there are not both limitations and benefits to doing this kind of participant observation, both as a commuter researcher and one under relative time constraints of keeping their dissertation fieldwork under two years. Indeed, when I teach introductory anthropology classes and present ethnographic field methods to the students,
I inevitably use Malinowski’s multiple years living among the Trobriand Islanders as an “ideal” for anthropological fieldwork, as immersion in a particular culture or sub-culture is an ethnographic ideal which is best facilitated by a lengthy stay.⁴⁴ Although an extensive look at how anthropology has changed in the near century since Malinowski conducted his work is not appropriate here, it is sufficient to say that anthropologists no longer restrict their work to examining “the other,” nor do we have the luxury of years of fieldwork. My experience conducting ethnographic fieldwork, specifically participant observation, among urban families, has been rather different from the enduring and endearing vision of the White anthropologist sitting surreptitiously in the corner of public place taking notes on a social event.

The argument can be made that even though I spent long days with particular families, there remains the possibility that they were on their best behavior and, furthermore, knew that I was looking broadly at gender roles in the family and shaped their behavior to reflect what they thought that I wanted to see. I have accepted that my position affected how people acted around me. Nonetheless, I also believe that people cannot be on their best behavior at all times. This is especially true for the nightly rituals of putting children to bed and cleaning up the kitchen (or not, as the case may be) after dinner, which are fairly set. When certain tasks were deviated from, I was often clued in by the children. Although one mother told me that she and her husband always take turns every other night to read to their daughter, their four year old daughter contradicted this

⁴⁴ Malinowski’s *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (1984[1922]) was immediately hailed as a great book (e.g. Gifford 1923) because it was one of the first detailed monographs of indigenous life, in which the collection of ethnographic data was both systematic and organized, as well as being guided by a theoretical framework (Stocking 1995:409). To date, the ideal in anthropology of intensive and extended periods of ethnographic fieldwork can be traced back to Malinowski (Stocking 1992:354).
statement. One night I was doing participant observation with this family and the mother told me that tonight is her husband’s night to read a book before bedtime. Her child made a fuss when her mother did not come and read to her at bedtime, exclaiming, “but you always read to me, too!” And Olivia Maxwell told me, while her mother was making the bed, that they never make their beds except when company comes over. But many of the families that I choose to spend time with were very honest with me and I would often hear the phrase, “well, this is what we usually do on a Sunday, I hope you aren’t bored.” I assured them honestly that I was never bored.

Naturally, friendships formed with a number of the families with whom I worked, but this was after I mustered up my courage to ask if I might infiltrate their intimate family life. It is not my personality to impose, but it was something that had to be done. I tried to make up for my presence by being useful, such as helping to clean up dinner dishes, playing with the kids, and so forth, since I knew that it was not an easy situation for the families, either. I will always be grateful for the generosity of time and kindness that I encountered during fieldwork.

At times I wondered if I did not do too good of a job trying to be ignored or accepted by the families. Indeed, one child referred to me as “Grandma Ruth” since, in his limited frame of reference, only his grandmother spent as much time with him and his immediate family as I did. Dinah Gonzalez and Olivia Maxwell, four year old daughters from families I did participant observation with, both asked me why I bothered to go home at night since I am “always there” at their houses. They each suggested that I ought to just spend the night and “borrow one of mommy’s nightgowns.”
**Open-ended informal interviews.** When conducting participant observation with the eight family sub-sample, I asked the parents additional questions (open-ended interviews) to document life history information about the fathers. These interviews were open-ended and very informal, often conducted while prepping dinner or playing soccer with the children, or sometimes they were carried out over adult beverages while the kids were asleep. Stated another way, they were not formal, sit-down interviews like I conducted during the semi-structured interviews. The men’s wives were usually there during these informal life history interviews, and they often added their comments and clarified for me aspects that they thought were important. Unlike the semi-structured interviews, which I recorded, I was forced to rely on my memory and surreptitious notes in order to record fathers’ life histories.

Although life histories are often modeled on autobiographies (Weintraub 1974) there are other ways of structuring life histories that are not necessarily linear, beginning with the informant telling the anthropologist about his/her birth or earliest memory and moving forward from there (Bourdieu 1987; Peacock and Holland 1993). Narratives can be brief segments of a person’s life. Even though the particular portions of a life that are told to the listener are rarely communicated in a linear fashion, this does not negate their value. One component of these open-ended life history interviews was inquiry into the division of labor in which my interviewees’ parent(s) engaged in order to ascertain how my interviewees understood changes in the division of labor and gender roles from generation to generation, particularly for their own families. Life histories also allowed me to understand the parents’ religious adherence while growing up to see if and where there were any changes in religious practice throughout their lives. This approach also
provided further context about how peoples’ ethnic and status distinctions were
influenced throughout their childhood which is, essentially, how aspects of identities are
constructed.

**Data Analysis**

I maintained the confidentiality of my study participants by using pseudonyms. I
also attempted to obscure identifying information, such as specific employment, home
address, and so forth. I changed the names of the daycare institutions and have concealed
identifying details here.

Following Charmez (2006), I coded data generated from interviews and
observations into categories based on variables from my research questions, such as
“play,” “church attendance,” and “good parent.” Although I started with etic categories,
borrowed from Lamb, I was attentive to those emic categories regarding involvement that
my participants indicated. For instance “responsibility,” as a category of involvement,
was perceived differently within my sample of fathers. A few of the fathers did not find
“accessibility” to be meaningful to them in their perceptions of what fatherhood entails.

I looked for patterns that helped to explain parenting behavior and trends that
indicated paternal identities. I examined the identity pie charts generated by the parents
and looked for changes indicating modifications and transformations in the parents’
identities and what part, if any, religion, race/ethnicity, and socioeconomic status played
in paternal identity. Qualitative data gathered from structured observation were coded to
see how much childcare and housework each parent engages in. Codes, translated from
my data, were then transferred into the Hyperesearch data organizing program.

Hyperesearch allows the operator to create and maintain code boundaries, look for
relationships between codes, and easily access portions of transcribed field notes where similar codes are used. In this way it was easier to ascertain how gender roles are understood and how paternal identity influences childcare involvement.

I also used demographic data obtained from semi-structured interviews and entered it into the Statistical Package for the Social Scientist (SPSS) program. From these data, I was able to explore whether status differences, in conjunction with religiosity and ethnicity, correlate with each other. I also used SPSS to ascertain whether there are significant links between these variables studied and fathers’ involvement. In the final stage of data analysis, three families who I was closest to consented to listen to me, to give me their opinions on my conclusions (see Brettell 1996[1993]). Copies of my dissertation will also be made available to the participants in my sample.

**Family Demographics**

The following section is to acquaint the reader with the basic demographics of the thirty families that participated in my research. I begin by providing an overview of the participants, specifically focusing on aspects of socioeconomic position, race/ethnicity, and religious denominations. I conclude with 13 family profiles (eight with whom I conducted participant observation) who are featured extensively throughout the text.

Because the impact of religion on parental involvement was originally one of the primary variables I sought to explain, I tried to get participants that equally reflected various Christian factions: Catholic, Conservative Christian, Mainstream Protestant, as well as those individuals who were not practicing any religion at the time of the study. I interviewed eight Catholic men, nine Conservative Christian (Charismatic Christian, Fundamental Baptist, Church of Latter Day Saints [LDS], and Evangelical) men, seven
men who self-identified as one of the Mainstream Protestant groups (Episcopal and Lutheran), and six men who did not practice any religion. Of the non-practicing men, only one was atheist and the rest were, for various reasons, currently unhappy with organized religion but agnostic at the time of my study. Most of the non-practicing men were open to the idea of attending organized religion at some point in the future.

One of the constraints of my research had to do with the age of the children, as I tried to interview people of childbearing years with young children, preferably six years old and younger. Most people (18 or 60 percent) had two children at the time of my study. Ten couples (33 percent) had one child, and only two couples (less than one percent) had three young children.

Although I controlled for the children’s age, I did not for the parents’ age and there was a 19 year gap between the oldest parent and the youngest parent in my sample. The median age of the fathers was 36 years old and the mothers was 34 years old at the time of my study. Both the oldest father and the oldest mother in my sample were 46 years old and the youngest father and mother were 27 years old at the time of the study. Men were slightly older than their wives—overall, about two or three years older. Nine men (30 percent) were in their early 40s while only four women (13 percent) were in their early 40s. Ten men (33 percent) and seven women (23 percent) were in their late 30s. Six men (20 percent) and 13 women (43 percent) were in their early 30s. Five of the fathers (17 percent) were in their late 20s and six women (20 percent) were in their late 20s.

Ethnically, 19 (63 percent) of the fathers identified as having some form of Caucasian ancestry (e.g., Anglo, Irish-American, White), nine (30 percent) as Hispanic
(including Spanish-American, Chicano) and two (less than one percent) as belonging to a Native American tribe. Of the mothers, 18 (60 percent) claimed to be White, 11 (37 percent) Hispanic and one woman (less than one percent) claimed African American ancestry. In this manner, there were mixed racial couples (see below for greater detail).

Taking into consideration education, income, and occupation, I interviewed 60 people (30 married couples) who self-identified as middle class and who I also determined to be middle class. All of the men that I interviewed had college degrees or comparable post-high-school training necessary for their jobs. Of these men, 11 (37 percent) had graduate degrees, but none had doctorates or degrees from law or medical schools, which would indicate that they were professionals. Similarly, all the women I interviewed also had college or post-high-school training and 13 (43 percent) of them had similar graduate degrees to the men. Eighteen men (60 percent) and 19 women (63 percent) came from similar middle class families but ten men (33 percent) and nine women (30 percent) were born to working class parents (e.g., their parents were farmers, secretaries, cement masons and the like, with high school degrees). Only two women and two men (less than one percent, each) came from an upper-middle class family (e.g., their fathers were private attorneys or physicians), although are now in the middle-middle class themselves. None of the parents in my sample came from an upper class family.

Occupation is one of the factors for determining socioeconomic position. Six of the men in my sample were engineers and six more men were supervisors or managers in some capacity for private industries. Three men each were teachers, salesmen, contractors, accountants, and software developers. Of the remaining three men in my sample, one was a police officer, one was a religious leader, and one was a musician. The
female participants were employed in slightly more diverse careers. Five women were project supervisors in some capacity, but usually for private industries with government contracts. Three women were writers/editors, three were accountants, three were engineers, and three were nurses with four-year bachelor degrees in nursing. Two women each were teachers, counselors, research associates, occupational therapists, and saleswomen. One woman was a loan officer, one was a software developer, and one was a social worker.

Yet, what one does for a living is only part of the story. Money that one earns either through salary or investments is crucial to understanding socioeconomic position. Most people have been brought up to believe that it is gauche to discuss ones financial resources. As Ortner (2003:10) notes, “It has been said that most Americans would sooner discuss their sex lives than their incomes. American children learn early on not to talk about their family’s resources, high or low.”

Asking about how much money a person makes was a daunting prospect, uncomfortable for both me and my interviewees, and I could not take the chance of offending any of my study participants by pressing for this personal information. However, people were slightly more comfortable telling me that they fell within a broad range increments of $15,000 of family earnings. Judging from this, the majority of the families that I interviewed made between $80,000-$110,000 a year, although two families made around $65,000 and five of the families made over $135,000 a year. Overall, the families in my sample were closer to the upper-middle

45 As the witty Paul Fussell noted when working on a book about the American class system, many people looked at him as if he had said, “I’m working on a book urging the beating to death of baby whales using the dead bodies of baby seals.” I got a similar response from my own mother, who moaned in embarrassment for me, “You are asking people about how much money they make?! Honey, that is so rude. They will never tell you.” So for the record, my mother did her best to instill good American values in her daughter but I ignored her teachings in this respect.
range of the middle class than the lower-middle range, as they were in the top 20 percent of the American households. When asked to break down how much each spouse made, about half of the families could not or would not do that with any confidence.

I also asked how individuals spent money, how they saved money, if they had outstanding debt and what it was for. Asking about debt is also a very uncomfortable subject, even more so than asking how much money an individual makes, but it appears that if the individuals in my sample had debt, other than a mortgage, it was because of school loans. Surprisingly, most of the parents I interviewed did not admit to having much, if any, debt at all. Debt for new vehicles, houses, and school loans were on payment plans. The more common response I got was that they were allocating every penny that they made, although part of that allocation was towards savings and some towards paying off debt.

Contrary to popular belief that most Americans are living on their credit cards and have no savings (e.g., Manning 2000; Williams 2004), I did not find that to be the case among the adults in my sample. They admitted to having credit cards but were very aware of the usurious rates charged by credit card companies and tried not to use them.

Granted, Sara Chee laughed when I asked her about retirement or other possible savings,

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46 Because I interviewed people at their homes I was able to see the material goods that they chose to spend money on, such as their houses and furnishings. Some families had wood floors as opposed to contractor grade carpet. One family chose to have $25,000 in electronics and a cheap, factory made pine kitchen table. This is in contrast with a family who did not own a television but had a newly renovated kitchen. All of these examples give an indication of what is important to individuals and can indicate socioeconomic position. I could not discern any particular pattern related to ethnicity or income level, for example, when it came to how people decorated their houses and spent money. However, I did notice that the Hispanic families tended to have very nice media equipment but not necessarily expensive furniture or upgrades on their houses (with the exception of two Hispanic families who had both nice electronics and furniture). All of the families in my sample lived in one of the residential areas of Albuquerque and all had mid-size houses (two or three bedrooms, one or two bathrooms), either an older house that was modestly renovated in the North Valley area, or a newer construction house on the West Side with contractor grade materials (e.g., mid-level priced tile rather than custom slab granite for countertops in the kitchen).
saying “What? You mean beyond the bills shoved in the coffee can under the bed?” Then
she went on to elaborate that while she and her husband did not save the 10 percent of
their salaries that their financial advisor suggested, they did save what they could.
Another participant, Megan Olsen, frankly told me that at age 27, she and her husband
had just finished paying off school debt and 2008 was the first year that they started
saving for their future. Not surprisingly, younger parents in their mid-to-late 20s tended
to have fewer or no savings. As parents became more established in their careers and paid
off school debt, they began to focus on saving for themselves. Rachel Frazier, also 27
years old at the time of my study, shared with me that she knew that she needed to “pay
herself” for retirement, but she also needed to “pay the bills for the baby” first.

Although debt related to education was ubiquitous throughout my sample, the
second most common reason for debt was medical bills. Even with insurance, going to
the emergency room for a broken leg or having an un-planned cesarean section ate into
savings or, worse, as with the Fraziers. Their unexpected medical bills caused them to put
other bills on their credit cards in order to pay off the bills from the birth of their
daughter.

In general, the families in my sample were fairly frugal. They indicated to me that
they were apt to take vacations to other parts of the United States that coincide with visits
to extended family members. They also all mentioned how they enjoy spending time
together as a family hiking, camping, watching movies, or taking long weekend trips to
Disneyland in California or Las Vegas, Nevada. While it can be argued that Disney is not
a cheap vacation, it is not as expensive as going to Europe, for example.
Education is something that the families that I interviewed, by-and-large, emphasized as important. Of the 30 families in my sample, only three men claimed that they did not care if their children went to college. The other parents, particularly fathers, were adamant during our interviews that while they want their children to do what makes them happy, they also have to get some schooling for that happiness to be achievable! This includes not just college but elementary and high-school education as well. Unfortunately, Albuquerque Public Schools (A.P.S.) were not highly regarded by any of the families that I interviewed although some felt more strongly about A.P.S.’s inadequacies than others. Many of the families who lived on the West Side, on the whole, liked the particular A.P.S. elementary schools, but were not optimistic about the quality of the A.P.S. high school education. Those who felt the strongest that their children could not get a good education in a safe environment planned to send their children to a private school and told me that they were already saving for it. Indeed, if a family reported having retirement savings, they were also more likely to set aside money for their children’s educational future, or had plans to regardless of how much money they made. One family, the Byrds, whose annual income in 2008 was $65,000, had educational savings accounts for their young children. On the other end of the salary spectrum, the Webbs, who in the same year made nearly a $100,000 more than the Byrds, also had similarly sized educational accounts for their children.47

47 While the importance of education was unanimously agreed on, food was one of the only, but certainly biggest, differences I saw among families. There were those parents who focused on buying organic foods and made certain that their children got the USDA recommended servings of vegetables. Alternatively, there were parents who were content to serve their children pre-processed chicken nuggets and were more lax on the subject of green leafy vegetables, helping to pick out the lettuce on a ready-made sandwich before the child could whine about it. The six women who focused on organic foods (and made sure that their husbands did, too) came from middle class backgrounds themselves and self-identified as White. This is not to say that all White women from middle class backgrounds are like this, however. I mention food
Family profiles. Although I interviewed 30 families, I only provide brief backgrounds of the 13 families that appear multiple times in the following chapters (see Table 2: Socioeconomic Position Table). I conducted formal participant observation with eight families: the Bowmans, Fraziers, Gonzalezes, Grahams, Griegos, Maxwells, Reeds, and Robinsons. I did not conduct participant observation with the Maiers, Montgomerys, Portallas, Smiths and Trujillos. However, with these families, I ate meals and/or did follow up interviews with them that allowed me greater access to data than simply conducting an interview. These sketches are necessarily brief, intended to give a sense of family history and current socioeconomic position, some aspects of personality, religious affiliation, gender roles and family patterns (transitional versus egalitarian), and in which chapters they appear.

All of the fathers highlighted here, indeed, all of the fathers that I interviewed, strongly identify with being “fathers.” However, paternal involvement is nuanced and complex. Within my larger sample of 30 families, only five of them exhibited transitional family forms. Twenty-five families claimed to share the domestic labor, more of less equally. Among those twenty-five families, however, two distinct methods of dividing domestic labor appeared. One was the “divide-and-conquer” egalitarian family, which represented seven of the families in my sample, where each spouse assumed responsibility for certain tasks. Reminder egalitarians, 18 families, claimed to share choices because food is often ethnically specific, and is also telling of socioeconomic class distinctions, with middle class or upwardly mobile people willing to invest in healthy (or indicate that it is important to do so) foods more than working class individuals. Organic food in particular is much more expensive than non-organic food. Cooking vegetables (e.g., washing, peeling, cutting, and cooking the asparagus and then cleaning up the cutting board, knife, and pan) is also more time consuming than just heating up a frozen pepperoni pizza. It is also a lot more work getting children to eat organic vegetables since most of the children in the families I interviewed were not thrilled with anything that did not resemble melted cheese. The families that emphasized the importance of healthy food also tended to cook a lot more than other families, although they were not opposed to getting take-out once a week or so.
Table 2: Socioeconomic Position of the 13 Families

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Religious Adherence</th>
<th>Highest Degree (Education)</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Annual Income</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conservative Christians</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evan Fraizer</td>
<td>BA</td>
<td>Supervisor</td>
<td>$35,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rachael Frazier</td>
<td>MA</td>
<td>Technical Writer</td>
<td>$45,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seth Maier</td>
<td>BA</td>
<td>Salesperson</td>
<td>$50,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wendy Maier</td>
<td>BA</td>
<td>Salesperson</td>
<td>$50,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will Robinson</td>
<td>MA</td>
<td>Engineer</td>
<td>$95,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liz Robinson</td>
<td>MA</td>
<td>Engineer</td>
<td>$45,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noah Smith</td>
<td>BA</td>
<td>Systems Analyst</td>
<td>$60,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emily Smith</td>
<td>BA</td>
<td>Nurse</td>
<td>$25,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholics</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frank Gonzalez</td>
<td>BA</td>
<td>Software Designer</td>
<td>$60,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grace Gonzalez</td>
<td>BA</td>
<td>Project Manager</td>
<td>$40,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Griego</td>
<td>BA</td>
<td>Accountant</td>
<td>$70,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hope Griego</td>
<td>BA</td>
<td>Social Worker</td>
<td>$24,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainstream Protestants</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Garrett Bowman</td>
<td>MA</td>
<td>Supervisor</td>
<td>$45,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Molly Bowman</td>
<td>MA</td>
<td>Counselor</td>
<td>$45,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mike Maxwell</td>
<td>MA</td>
<td>Architect</td>
<td>$75,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cindy Maxwell</td>
<td>BA</td>
<td>Loan Manager</td>
<td>$25,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paul Montgomery</td>
<td>BA</td>
<td>Engineer</td>
<td>$45,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ariana Montgomery</td>
<td>BA</td>
<td>Salesperson</td>
<td>$80,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Julian Reed</td>
<td>MA</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>$25,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Lara Reed</td>
<td>MA</td>
<td>Engineer</td>
<td>$70,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2 Continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Religious Adherence</th>
<th>Highest Degree (Education)</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Annual Income</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Non-Practicing</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gilbert Graham</td>
<td>MA</td>
<td>Musician</td>
<td>$20,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ingrid Graham</td>
<td>BA</td>
<td>Administrator</td>
<td>$25,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jared Portalla</td>
<td>BA</td>
<td>Salesperson</td>
<td>$45,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alice Portalla</td>
<td>BA</td>
<td>Salesperson</td>
<td>$55,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

haphazardly, that is, whomever gets to the task first will do it.\(^{48}\) The only problem with that is that most of the times, the women “get to the task first” or if they do not, they have to “remind” their husband to do so. Even in those families where the husbands do not need to be reminded to do a task, the wife in the family still feels that she needs to remind him. Although these families profess to egalitarian ideals in parenting, there is still an insidious idea that women are ultimately responsible for childcare and housework. By being reminder egalitarians, women and men in my sample were able to satisfy both norms to their satisfaction.

**Conservative Christian Families.** *The Frazier Family.* Evan Frazier is White and works as the main supervisor in the an electronics industry. His parents are middle class and raised him in a very Conservative Christian church. His wife, Rachel, is almost a decade younger than he is and comes from a Hispanic Catholic working class family. She now goes to a Charismatic Christian church with her husband. Rachel has a masters

\(^{48}\) I borrow these terms from my participants; in other words, these are heuristic categories. Michelle Byrd explained to me that they “divide and conquer” housework. She did not mean to imply a colonial power structure, as when the British attempted to “divide-and-conquer” indigenous peoples to make them part of their empire. Further, many women described how they have to “remind” their husbands to do a task. But, as Amelia Abbott notes, her husband might have to be reminded, but he does housework cheerfully.
degree and works around 32 hours a week as an editor. Her job is more flexible than his and she makes more money than Evan does. Together they make close to $80,000 a year. They live in a small, recently built house in the South Valley of Albuquerque. They have a lot of high-end electronics such as flat screen televisions, Tivo, iPods, and a surround sound speak system, but have minimally decorated their house. They have one baby daughter together, Alexa. The Fraziers, as a transitional family, appear extensively in chapter four on father involvement and chapter six on religion’s impact on father involvement. Rachel is quoted briefly in chapter five on the domestic division of labor.

*The Maier Family.* Seth Maier is an intense, friendly man, interweaving God into every subject during our time together. Wendy Maier is more reserved than her husband. They both self-identify as Caucasian. Interestingly, Seth does not identify as Christian, since he was never baptized and has a strong suspicion of organized religion. Nevertheless, he attempts to model his life on Jesus Christ’s life and keeps seven different versions of the bible at hand for reference. Seth goes to a Charismatic church to make his wife happy. Wendy claims to be Catholic but has gone to the Charismatic Christian church her entire adult life. They make roughly equal amounts of money, about $50,000 each, and both work full-time. Making money is distressing to Seth as he is fairly certain that “a rich man can’t get into heaven.” But since we live in the world we do, he is forced to make and spend the money he earns and not give it all away. Seth is in sales and Wendy is in sales administration. Wendy’s position takes her on monthly business trips outside of Albuquerque. They have a newly remodeled ranch home in the east mountains that put them slightly in debt, but they plan on paying it all off in a year or two. They both come from working class backgrounds. They have one toddler son,
Devin. The Maiers are one of the five transitional families in my study. Wendy Maier is quoted in chapter four, when she tells me that women are just better parents than men. Both Maiers appear in chapters five and six when I argue that Conservative Christian values are used by some Charismatic Christians to maintain a more dichotomous gendered division of labor.

*The Robinson Family.* William and Liz Robinson are both Caucasian. They come from middle class backgrounds and make about $140,000 a year together. Liz works about 30 hours a week and her husband, William, works full-time. They both have masters degrees in science and look like they spend their entire lives outdoors, but are, in actuality, engineers. They live in a charming house in Los Ranchos de Albuquerque, in a neighborhood where the houses have been mostly renovated or added onto. The gardens look like a landscape architect had a hand in the design. They are comfortable with the style of life that they have now, being better educated and slightly better off financially than their own parents. They focus on their family and not the acquisition of more money. They have two children, Owen who is three years old, and an infant daughter, Maggie. They belong to a Conservative Charismatic Christian church, although Liz was raised Catholic and William was raised in a much stricter Conservative Christian Church. The Robinsons are one of the reminder egalitarian family, although devoutly religious at the same time. You will read about the Robinsons in chapters four and six; specifically how their religious ideals influence their notions of involved parenting as both believe that women are slightly better suited to being nurturing parents than men.

*The Smith Family.* The Smiths are a Caucasian Charismatic Christian family who live on the West Side of Albuquerque, in a minimally decorated house. They are not, they
emphasized to me repeatedly, materialistic people. The house is filled with music, the scents of delicious food, smiles, and a lot of religious iconography. There are numerous crosses on the walls and over the television niche “FAITH” is spelled out in large black block letters. Both Noah and his wife Emily are athletic and are usually casually dressed, but with prominently placed, matching, silver crucifixes.

Both of the Smiths come from middle class backgrounds. Noah refers to his wife as a “stay-at-home-mom,” but Emily told me that she works anywhere from eight to 32 hours a week as a nurse. Noah works full-time as a systems analyst. They make between $75,000 and $85,000 a year, with Emily making only about a third of what her husband makes, although she makes more when she works more. Noah told me that “he doesn’t give a rat’s behind about money.” Nonetheless, they provide well for their family but also elect to emphasize moral values and not monetary values to their two sons, Junior (aged five and a half) and Wyatt (aged four). The Smiths are one of the transitional families and are highlighted in chapter six when I discuss how some Conservative Christians use the notion “headship” to structure their gendered family relations into separate but equal roles for men and women.

**Catholic Families. The Gonzalez Family.** Frank and Grace Gonzalez are Hispanic and devoutly Catholic. Generous, kind, and boisterous is the only way to describe this family. Like the large Catholic families I grew up with, one more person is always welcome, so I ate Sunday supper with aunts, uncles, cousins, and a grandma. Although coming from working class backgrounds, both Frank and Grace made the decision in college to major in subjects that allow them to live a comfortable life and provide easily for their family. Both the Gonzalezes work full-time in the defense
industry. Grace, being a very efficient worker, is able to work a few hours at night, when her son and daughter are in bed. This enables her to come home a little early every day and pick up her kids at daycare so that they are not away from home for eight or ten hours a day. Together, they make a little over $100,000, which is divided fairly equally, although Grace makes slightly less than her husband. They live on the West Side of town in a large house. They admit that they are not interested in shopping, so their house is minimally decorated, although they do have a very nice entertainment system. Otherwise, they are very frugal and without debt. They have two children, Dinah (aged five) and Harry (aged three). The Gonzalez family, as a reminder egalitarian family, provides one of the case studies in chapter four on father involvement, as well as being quoted in chapters six on religion and seven on the need for family-friendly policy.

*The Griego Family.* Both John and Hope Griego self-identify as Hispanic and Catholic, coming from families that have lived in New Mexico since the Spanish arrived. John has a gentle demeanor with a smile always hovering around his lips. His wife Hope is more energetic, laughing outright when her husband smiles. Their house on the West Mesa is filled with cheer even if it is a bare of any art. The only thing that distinguishes it from a builder’s model are the multiple pictures of their daughters, nieces and nephews, as well as their children’s toys neatly stacked along the living room wall. They both have bachelors degrees in their respective fields. John is an accountant and Hope is a social worker. Hope works around 30 hours a week and John works over 40 hours a week. John makes almost three times what his wife makes and they have a comfortable annual income of around $95,000. Hope comes from a working class background, where her father was an electrician and her mother an administrative assistant, and John comes from
a middle class background with his parents who worked in the A.P.S. system. The Griegos concentrate their efforts on their daughters in order to provide the good educations and life experiences that they never had. They have two daughters, Lily (aged four) and Hanna (aged one). Hope Griego, who still wants her husband to share the domestic labor equally but feels that she must have the final say in the matter, epitomizes the “reminder” in the reminder egalitarian family. Although John is a cheerful and competent man and a very engaged father, he defers to his wife in domestic matters and tolerates her reminding him to do chores that he often already completed. The Griego family provides an important component to chapters four (father involvement), five (domestic division of labor) given that they are in a reminder egalitarian family, and seven (policy).

Mainstream Protestant Families. The Bowman Family. The Bowmans self-identify as “Caucasian,” specifically, and live in Los Ranchos de Albuquerque, and while their house is small, it is filled with interesting books, art, and handmade textiles. The Bowmans are as equally comfortable to be around as their house is to be in. Garrett and Molly Bowman participate in an Episcopal church. They have one daughter, Zoë, aged three and a half. Although they have masters degrees in art, Garrett works in landscape and Molly works as a counselor. They have fairly flexible jobs but both work full-time. They make between $85,000-95,000 a year and it is split equally between the two of them. Molly comes from a working class background while Garrett comes from a more middle class family. Their school loans are large so they have to be frugal even now, a decade after they graduated, but they prioritize money for family activities and individual art projects after they pay all their bills. The Bowmans are also a reminder egalitarian
family. The Bowmans figure prominently in chapter four, illustrating that Garrett is a very involved father but defers to his wife when she is in the house. He is a father that actively attempts to be the opposite of his own absent father. Garrett is also quoted in chapter six on the need for spirituality over dogmatic religion, as a guiding force in being a father.

The Maxwell Family. The Maxwell family lives in one of the West Side neighborhoods where the gardens are groomed, the cars are mostly SUVs, and kids all play together in the cul-de-sacs. Brick houses make the neighborhood look homogenous, but there are a variety of different colored brick facings and floor plans. The Maxwell house is typical of West Side homes in layout, with three bedrooms and a kitchen-living room combination, as well as a separate, more formal sitting room and office area. Framed family photos, modern furniture, and harmonious colored walls give the house a modish aura that fits well with Cindy Maxwell’s own chic style. They both self-identify as White and are very friendly, kind people.

Cindy Maxwell works very close to full-time in finance. Her husband, Mike, is an independent contractor who works significantly more than 40 hours a week, although he manages to do a lot of his work at night when the house is quiet, leaving the afternoons and weekends for “family time.” The Maxwell's lights shine through the windows at night, when all of the other houses are dark and quiet, with Mike making use of those hours when most people sleep. Together they make around $110,000 a year, with Mike making more than his wife. They both come from similar middle class family backgrounds. They have two children, Olivia (aged five) and Tate (aged three) whom they are raising in an Episcopal church. Doing participant observation with the Maxwells
provided great detail regarding how the middle class fathers in my sample are involved, which you will read about in chapter four. The Maxwells are a reminder egalitarian family and are highlighted in the opening vignette, as well as throughout, chapter five on the domestic of division of labor; illustrating that Cindy, like many mothers in my sample, is happy that her husband does so much childcare even if he falls a little short in doing housework. Mike, also like other men, tries his hardest to be fair to Cindy and do chores her way.

The Montgomery Family. Paul Montgomery is an athletic man, whipcord over bone, with an easy-going manner that was offset by his earnest, thoughtful answers. He self-identifies as “White and Episcopalian.” Paul goes to a Catholic church and consented to raise his son in the Catholic church to make his wife, Ariana, happy. He does not particularly care what religion his son subscribes to later in life and believes in having an open mind and respect for all religions. He is a full-time engineer, a position that allows him schedule flexibility. Ariana Montgomery is also very trim and sporty. She calls herself Spanish-American and Catholic, although with her fair coloring some might guess Norwegian. She was not as talkative as her eloquent husband. Indeed, she said that she often lets her husband do the talking for them, since “he is so much better at it and we are of one mind, anyway.” As reserved as Ariana was, I was surprised to find out that she was in sales. She makes over $80,000 a year while her husband brings in “significantly less” (they would not tell me what their combined income is). Their house in Los Ranchos de Albuquerque could be an “after” picture for Lowe’s Home Improvement Store and is modest but modern. When I commented on their lovely family photos of them in exotic places skiing, biking, hiking, and surfing, Paul said, “Oh yes, we love to
travel. But you need money to do that! Money is such a necessary evil, like work!” She comes from a working class background while Paul’s family is middle class. They have one son together, Knox, who is three years old. Paul provides an opening quote for chapter one on how family is the most important aspect of his life. Both Paul and Ariana are presented as one of the reminder egalitarian family case studies in chapter five on the domestic division of labor, where Ariana is more traditional than Paul is regarding gender ideologies.

The Reed Family. Julian and Lara Reed are White and both come from middle class backgrounds. Julian is a teacher and Lara is an engineer. They both have masters degrees in science. Although both technically work full-time, Lara works at least ten hours a week more than Julian. Together they make over $85,000 a year, with Lara bringing in close to $70,000 alone. They have one four year old son, Griffin. They are both very spiritual and go to an Episcopal church. They are both quietly funny and frighteningly intelligent, traits that they passed onto their son. They live in a modest house on the West Side of Albuquerque. They emphasize quality time spent with their family over making money. In chapter four you will learn that Julian is the only father in my sample who is a primary caregiver to their son, given that he has a more flexible schedule and technically works less than his wife. Although, Lara does more housework and they are a “divide-and-conquer” egalitarian household whom you will read about in chapter five. Lara and Julian are also in chapter six, epitomizing how deeply spiritual individuals draw on religious teachings to help them parent.

Non-practicing Families. The Graham Family. The Grahams are both of European descent. Gilbert grew up in a middle class household while his wife, Ingrid,
grew up in a more working class family. Their life goal is to live a good and healthy life. They live frugally in a nice but not particularly large house in Taylor Ranch, with sprawling and lush gardens. They both gave up stressful, albeit more lucrative, careers in sales about six years ago when their first daughter was born. They are able to live on a relatively small amount of money (around $40,000 from their salaries, but the wealth generated from their investments—which fluctuates quarterly—is also a key factor in allowing them to live on frugal salaries) because they had saved so much money and paid off all debt. Ingrid works as a hospital administrator and her husband is a successful, self-employed, musician. They have a hectic but very flexible schedule. They chose this schedule in order to home-school their children, but they also take their daughters to many cultural classes for music and dance. They have two daughters: Cassandra is six years old and Camilla is three years old. The girls all have their mother’s smiling, warm brown eyes and their father’s inquisitive nature. Gilbert is “culturally Christian” and only goes to the Unitarian church at his wife’s request. Ingrid was raised Catholic but is more comfortable in a very relaxed and liberal religious institution. The Grahams are one of the families with whom I conducted participant observation, and subsequently provide one of the case studies of an involved father in chapter four. Ingrid is quoted in chapter five when discussing the domestic division of labor, as they are a reminder egalitarian family.

49 The Unitarian Church that the Grahams frequent is not technically Christian because it ignores one of the key teachings of Christianity, namely that Jesus Christ was the son of God, was crucified and died for humanity’s sins, and then was resurrected (see chapter six for more detail on Christianity’s tenets). For example, the spring service at the Graham’s Unitarian church taking place Easter Sunday 2009 discussed Passover and Jesus’ crucifixion, but stopped short of mentioning the resurrection. Further, Gilbert Graham did not claim to be a Christian at the time of the study.
The Portalla Family. Jared and Alice Portalla are a very affectionate Hispanic couple. They have trim and compact figures and they always seem to be smiling. They both work full-time for insurance companies and together make around $100,000 a year. Alice makes slightly more than Jared does. They stressed throughout the interview that they both come from working class backgrounds (her father was an iron worker and mother an administrative assistant, while Jared’s father was an artist who also did odd jobs and his mother worked her way up to be an administrator in a community bank although she only had a high school education) and now work very hard in order to give their children more options than they had growing up. They live in a large house in a nice part of town, chosen for its good schools even though their two sons are still four years from school-age. They continually stressed the need to provide education and cultural experiences for their children that they never had. They have two sons, six month old Ben and three year old Logan. Jared has always been agnostic and Alice has experience in a variety of churches, such as Baptist and Catholic. They do not currently attend church but are searching for a church in which to raise their sons they get older.

The Portallas are featured in chapters two, five, and six. Jared is quoted in the opening vignette in chapter two on how being a father is something that a man is never prepared for, but is the most important thing in a man’s life after it happens. Both Jared and Alice play an important part in chapter five on the domestic division of labor, illustrating that most men in my sample embrace society’s broader egalitarian ideals regarding the gendered division of labor. Nonetheless, the domestic labor done in the Portalla household falls along gendered lines, with Jared doing certain tasks and Alice doing others—they typify the divide-and-conquer egalitarian household. Although, some
of the typically female-dominated tasks in the last generation, such as cooking and childcare, are thought of as more gender neutral today, so in the Portalla household, they really do have an egalitarian domestic labor. They are also featured in chapter six, regarding religion’s impact on father involvement. Briefly, Jared believes that raising children in a church is one of the things that is important to do, in his role as father.

*The Trujillo Family.* Dominic Trujillo has an associates degree and is a manager for a chain of restaurants. While he loves what he does, Dominic also works ridiculously long hours—around fifty-five a week, sometimes more—and often at night until the very early hours of the morning. He makes around $50,000 a year which is hardly adequate compensation for such an inflexible job. Sandra Trujillo has a master’s degree and is a project manager at a large federal institution in Albuquerque. She makes a little more than half of what her husband makes. Sandra works about 35 hours a week. Together, the Trujillos have household earnings of around $80-85,000 a year. Sandra’s position as a project manager is stressful, but more flexible than her husbands’ position. Sandra comes from a more middle class family since her mother is an attorney (i.e., professional) while her father is a carpenter (i.e., working class), while her husband comes from a working class family where his parents worked as drivers for a long-distance hauling company. Both admit to wanting a lifestyle similar to her parents, which they have achieved. Sandra is a bubbly blonde, Caucasian, and agnostic. Dominic self-identifies as Hispanic and “lapsed Catholic, well, non-denominational Christian.” They do not attend any church. They live near his extended family and have one infant daughter, Gabriella.

The Trujillos are the only non-practicing, transitional family in my sample and are highlighted in chapters five on the gendered domestic division of labor, and in chapter six
on the role spirituality plays in Dominic’s conceptualization of a “good” father. Sandra, unfortunately, is one of the wives who is unhappy with how household tasks and childcare are allocated; basically, she does the lion’s share of the cleaning and childcare. She cites his long working hours as the reason why she needs to cut back to less than 40 hours. Yet, Sandra has greater earning potential than her husband. To understand the Trujillo’s decision in having the wife cut back her hours at work, it is not as simple as saying that because the woman makes less money, she will be the one to sacrifice her career in order to focus on the family. Rather, as transitionals, they have prioritized Dominic’s career and cite the need for one of the spouses to have a flexible career to be with the baby, which is, to them and many American families, a woman’s primary role.

**Summary of family profiles.** Religiosity has little to do with whether a family will be transitional or egalitarian. Even among the Conservative Christians, where one would expect transitional men, that was not always the case. The Maiers were Conservative Christians who were also transitionals, but William Robinson was a Conservative Christian living in a reminder egalitarian household. While three of the five transitional families were Conservative Christian, not all Conservative Christians were transitional. The Conservative Christians, as a group, were very diverse in their family forms; three Conservative Christians, as I noted above, were transitionals, but one (the Gilzean family you will meet in the next chapter) was a divide-and-conquer egalitarian and the rest (five) were reminder egalitarians. Among the Catholics, most were like the Griegos and Gonzalez families, who were both living in reminder egalitarian households, but two other Catholic families were like the non-practicing Portallas, that is, in divide-and-conquer households. One Catholic man was in a transitional family. All Mainstream
Protestants were reminder egalitarian households, but, it ran the continuum from the Reed family where Julian Reed was the primary caregiver to the Bowmans, where Garrett Bowman exhibited engagement, accessibility, and responsibility for his daughter, but his wife was still the one ultimately responsible for domestic labor. The non-practicing men were similarly diverse, with one family, the Trujilos, living in a transitional household. Three non-practicing families were divide-and-conquer families, and the remainder (two) were reminder egalitarians.

**Conclusion**

What materialized from this research project is an ethnographic account of 30 middle class, dual-worker, religious, families with young children, specifically attentive to father involvement. My research focused on the narrower demographic of the middle-middle to upper-middle class in order to have more rigorous data. Most studies involving middle class parenting are quantitative in manner, and my research used a mixed methodology, including semi-structured and open-ended interviews, participant observation, and identity pie charts. I primarily relied on qualitative data in order to understand how parental identities influence parental involvement in domestic labor.

The semi-structured interviews were illuminating in that they allowed me to explore my interviewees’ religious adherence. They also allowed me to gather information about parents’ participation in childcare tasks using Lamb’s tripartite model of engagement, accessibility, and responsibility, and see where they differed from this model. I also created a demographic profile of the families to understand aspects of status, from the data gathered during the semi-structured interviews. Identity pie charts, conducted at the same time I conducted other portions of the semi-structured interview,
allowed me to better understand parental identities; specifically how men in my sample prioritized their different roles, including that of breadwinner and parent.

Participant observation with a sub-sample (eight) of my research participants was a key component to my mixed methodology. I was able to examine the contexts and people that influence parental identities. As well, participant observation allowed me to note the specific allocation of childcare tasks. While my primary dissertation research took place in 2008-2009, I am still friends with many of the families that I worked with and see some of them on a frequent basis. During the writing of the dissertation I have taken advantage of these friendships to address further queries and incorporated them into my findings.

I have designed my study to have applied, policy-focused, implications, which will be explored in chapter seven. Suffice it to say here that part of my semi-structured interview elicited from my participants the kinds of changes that they would like to see implemented in order to address the gap in the policies for middle class families.

In the next chapter, chapter four, I provide in-depth detail from my participant observation field notes to describe the types of father involvement following Lamb’s model. I also explore how paternal identity affects paternal involvement. I conclude chapter four by exploring how women’s roles intimately affect their husbands’ roles as “father.”
CHAPTER 4
Father Involvement

The sunlight streamed in from the window, refracting on the cut glass between us and sending rainbow fragments all over the walls and my notes on the table. Walter Gilzean shyly smiled and stared at the light playing on the wall. I began to gather up my notes and turned off my recorder, having finished the interview. He sighed a little. Then Walter gave me a slightly quizzical look, as if he were trying to make up his mind whether to say something. Finally he said, “It makes me crazy to talk about things this way. Feelings.” I wondered what he was about to disclose and I smiled in what I hoped was an encouraging way. Our interview had started out a little stilted, as they sometimes can when two individuals who are strangers talk about finances, religion, and parenting—certainly not issues that inspire immediate comfort. But Walter had relaxed by the end of the interview. He had mentioned earlier that it is important for him to be an involved father, as well as a good husband and a socially responsible adult in general. Walter sighed again and said,

If you don’t have a child, it is hard to explain how having a child changes your entire life. Your entire life. You now focus on the child, not you, and that lasts forever. You become a father and you will always be a father. That is you, now. Because being a father shapes everything you relate to in the world. Yes, it is important for me to make money, as it is one way to support my family. But that is where it ends. The first thing you need to understand is that a child is a source of love. Being a scientist, I have no problem looking at people as point sources of energy. It is a brand new source of love that wasn’t there before. The most satisfying experience is having a child—having love just come out of nowhere and “pow!” It surprises you all the time!

Walter Gilzean was not the first man to find it difficult to articulate how important being a father is to him. Although deeply embedded in their parental identities, most men
I talked to were not always comfortable discussing how they identified as fathers, nor were they used to talking about what they did, in their roles, as fathers. Nonetheless, men strongly identified as fathers and they placed a great deal of importance on the enactment of their father role. At the time of my study, they were also more involved in their families than their own fathers had been.

Here I focus on the eight fathers with whom I conducted participant observation, in order to bring attention to the types of involvement (engagement, accessibility, responsibility) as laid out by Lamb and colleagues (1987). While Lamb’s model is a good starting point, I argue that involvement is much more nuanced than just determining whether a man is “responsible” or not. All fathers claimed to be responsible and involved, so it is necessary to understand what they meant by responsibility and why it applied to them. There are many variables to consider that affect paternal involvement, but all must be considered within the context of the mothers’ interactions with the child of the father. In the last portion of the chapter I discuss how women’s position as “mother” affects their husbands’ participation in their families. All women, like men, placed great importance on being a parent and encouraged their husbands to embrace egalitarian, androgy nous parenting roles. However, many women in these families tended to retain ultimate responsibility over the household. I argue that the structural forces that constrain women’s position in the workforce compel them to emphasize their mother role, a traditionally honored role for women, even among the middle class today.

I first determined men to be “involved” fathers based on semi-structured interviews. I asked questions such as, “when the child is sick, who has responsibility to stay home from work and care for the child?” Also, during the first stage of research, I
administered identity pie charts in order to ascertain how men viewed their varied roles. Participant observation, carried out in the second stage of my research, allowed more detailed examination of father involvement. During while acting as a participant observer, I was attentive to gradations of involvement, looking for examples of when a father was engaged, accessible, and responsible for his children. Participant observation was also a time when I informally discussed the participants’ life histories. Life histories helped me to understand how involved the men’s own fathers were. In short, I examined how society’s ideals of what constitutes an involved (“good”) father influenced paternal identity and how that identity mediated their involvement in their families. I have included quotes when appropriate that draw attention to paternal identity and the varied factors that affected men’s socialization into the father role.

The first two fathers of the eight that I highlight here in order to illuminate everyday paternal interaction, William Robinson and Evan Frasier, belonged to different Conservative Christian Churches, and their behavior followed from this divergence. Then we move on to the Gonzalez and Grigio families, who were both Catholic, but judging from the fathers’ participation in their families, they were more like the Mainstream Protestants than the Conservative Christian men. The Mainstream Protestant families with whom I conducted participant observation, the Bowmans, the Maxwells and the Reeds, are discussed after the Catholic families. The last family I discuss in detail, the Grahams, were non-practicing for all intents and purposes, although they went to a Unitarian church a few times a year. Gilbert Graham’s participation in his family was very similar to the Mainstream Protestant men’s involvement in their families.
I argue that currently many middle class men in dual-career families, like those in my study, principally conceptualize themselves as fathers and family men, and not primarily in terms of their economic provider role. These men saw their roles as fathers to include participating in childcare and they tended to share childcare tasks with their wives. Certainly they did more than their own fathers had when my participants were children. Nonetheless, I saw that there were different ways and patterns that being an involved father took, based on how parental ideology (which itself linked to demographic markers and religious adherence) contributed to shaping both the man’s parental identities, and his wife’s.

Here I identify two main types of households based on the degree of involvement in both housework and childcare conducted by the parents. These household types were determined by how domestic tasks were allocated, based on gender roles: traditional, transitional, or egalitarian. None of the families in my sample professed to be traditional; that there should be a strict division of both domestic and wage labor with the woman occupying the domestic sphere and the man the public sphere as primary breadwinner. A few families (20 percent) in my sample embraced transitional gender roles, where men and women are seen to have different but complimentary roles as parents (Hochschild 2003[1989]). Transitional individuals believe that both men and women ought to work, however, the man should be the primary breadwinner and only help his wife with the domestic chores. The majority of families (n=25) are those I classify as holding egalitarian gender roles and stressed the need for a partnership with their spouse.

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50 As was discussed in chapter one, gender roles, like the role of father, are themselves influenced by the interconnectivity of socioeconomic class, race/ethnicity, and religious adherence, and mediated by parental identities.
Egalitarian minded people professed to me that women and men can both parent equally well. In some of these egalitarian families, parents noted that they shared responsibilities, but it was the wife in her role as mother who spent more time overseeing the children. Families in my sample ran the continuum, of course, with an egalitarian family that was pretty close to the transitional mold with men who articulated an egalitarian gender ideology but did less than half the domestic labor or, alternatively, an egalitarian family that was very close to a non-traditional pattern where the man did half of the domestic tasks as well as professing egalitarian gender ideals. In short, though, men’s particular gender roles—not women’s—affect how men and women divided their time and efforts at work and at home.

From what I could determine, very few families (n=five) in my sample held strictly transitional gender roles. The Frasier family was one of them. At the time of my study, Evan Frasier was an involved father but he admitted that his wife gets more pleasure out of being a mother than he does out of being a father; he explained this by citing the fact that she is a woman, so it is natural for her to focus on being a parent. Therefore, he allowed her to direct him and he conceded to her wishes regarding their daughter. She also did more childcare than Evan. During my time with them, Evan got up early on a Sunday morning with Alexa, but it was in order to give his wife a break and let her sleep in. Both of them agreed that there is something special about women, in their ability to be mothers, that men simply cannot replicate as fathers. Both Evan and Rachel agreed that a man ought to focus on being the primary economic earner. This is not to assume that a man who places emphasis on being a breadwinner cannot be an involved father, too, but that for those transitional families, the father allowed his wife to be the
one responsible for the children. For these fathers, involvement usually centered around some engagement and some accessibility. Interestingly, for two transitional men (Seth Maier and Noah Smith who you will read about later) even if they were not as engaged as their spouses in childcare, they still believed that because their wife tells them what is going on in their children’s lives, that makes them responsible fathers; because they care enough to know what is going on they believe that they are responsible fathers.

Families that fell into the egalitarian category are those in which both men and women agreed that there is no difference in parenting ability based on gender. Yet, this is also the family type where women were the ones who reduced their hours at work in order to be with their children. Most of the families, like the Griegos who you will read about here, could not articulate why they chose to have the mother take time off. From what I saw, John and Hope had an egalitarian relationship when it came to raising their children, but at the same time, they seemed surprised when I asked why Hope was the one who worked fewer hours and not John since he was the one that did more of the childcare tasks. When I asked if it was because she was a woman, they replied in the negative. They both agreed that because she is the mother, Hope should work fewer hours. Hope wanted to have ultimate responsibility, but she was more than willing to allow her husband to be an involved father in other respects. Similarly, the Gonzalezes told me that they have an equal partnership. It was Grace Gonzalez, however, who chose to reduce her hours and not Frank Gonzalez. Frank explained this by saying that his wife is more efficient than he is so it makes sense for her to be the one to be home more. Grace agreed that her job was more conducive to reduced hours.
Fathers like Garrett Bowman, Gilbert Graham, Mike Maxwell, and William Robinson were also very egalitarian in how they divided childcare. Nonetheless, their wives assumed ultimate responsibility for their children. This was made obvious when the women oversaw the childcare that their husbands did and often initiated the childcare chores that they wanted their husbands to do.

Only the Reeds, of all of the families I worked with, were not only egalitarian in their gender roles, but they also had Julian doing more childcare than his wife. This is not to say that Lara did not feel very strongly that her role as mother is important. Indeed, she was a very involved mother; she was engaged, accessible, and responsible for her son all of the times that I conducted participant observation with the Reed family. Her husband happened to be slightly more involved than she was, however.

William Robinson

I was at the Robinson house in Rio Rancho at 7:00 a.m. one summer morning. Owen, their young son, met me at the door in dinosaur themed pajamas. His mother, Liz, was dressing and his father was orchestrating breakfast and holding their infant, Maggie. Normally Liz works about 30 or 32 hours a week as an engineer but she was on maternity leave at the time, although one would never tell by looking that she had a baby only three weeks previously. William works full-time as an engineer, too, but told me that he is looking for ways to cut back on his hours so that he will be able to spend more time with his family, especially during the evenings.

William told me that their Charismatic Christian Church has its first, smaller, service at 8:00 a.m. and we planned to walk there through their neighborhood which was bordered by mature trees and well-maintained fences. While William cleaned up the
kitchen and held the baby, Liz attempted to dress her son. She walked into Owen’s bedroom and told him to come on and get dressed. When that elicited no response, William said, “Owen, you don’t want Mama to have to come and get you, do you?” Owen thought hard about it, but then he decided that he would get dressed. William went about collecting sunhats and a carrying apparatus for the walk to church. Liz pushed the stroller with Owen in it and William carried the baby.

The children were extremely well behaved during the service. Part of this can be attributed to the fact that Liz brought coloring books for Owen, and Maggie was asleep. The Robinsons expect good behavior from their children in church. It was a friendly church; everybody knew everybody else, and the appeal of a new person (me) and a new baby (Maggie) was a great draw. After the service, William and I left Owen and Maggie with Liz. They usually alternate taking Owen to Sunday School, and Liz had to nurse the baby, anyway, so she stayed there while we took a stroll to get coffee a few blocks away. During our walk William and I talked about residential zoning, the environmental impact of having children, and the historical roots of his church. William belongs to an informal church group that he enjoys as much for the socialization as for the study of biblical text. I asked if his church had many families in the congregation, since I only saw one other young couple. William said, yes, there are families, but the congregation is mostly older. He knows some fathers from his church group but he is not that close to them. William shared with me,

I don’t like to define myself by work or activities, because then that becomes life and family goes second. For example, I know PhDs at work who do this. “Doctor” is important to them. The job defines them. I belong to this church group, and some of those guys assume that, they let their jobs define them…You have to define yourself as a father, not a bicyclist, or something like that, because
you can’t do both. Some people have tried, but I imagine it is hard on one person. It is hard on the other spouse in the family.

By this point we had arrived back at the church and we collected Liz and the kids and walked home. When we got there, a neighbor and her daughter came over for a play date. This amounted to Liz and her holding the baby and chatting while William and I took the older kids into the vegetable garden to harvest cherry tomatoes. William had to gently remind them to pick only the red ones. Owen loves cherry tomatoes and ate most of them. William put the little neighbor girl’s tomatoes in a plastic bag for her to take home but some of them were eaten, too.

Bits of the damp, dark loam was tracked into their tiled living room. When the neighbor left an hour and a half later, William asked me if I wouldn’t mind holding the baby so that he could get some cleaning done while Owen got some quality playtime in with his Mama (they read a story about trucks and played with a wooden train set). I was happy to have something to do that made me feel useful that wasn’t doing the laundry, cleaning the bathrooms, sweeping, or mopping the floor, all activities that William engaged in during this time. He also changed the baby and then gave her back to me. Since Maggie looked content with me, Liz made quesadillas for us, putting out the fruit I brought, and then we all sat down to eat.

Owen, who is a charming young man most times, insisted that he didn’t want and didn’t like quesadillas. William told him “Mama always makes you nice lunches.” Liz calmly told him that it was fine if he didn’t eat, but then he couldn’t have a cookie Ruth brought. His eyes lit up and a fourth of the quesadilla was consumed instantly. The chocolate chip cookies were appreciated and the amount of chocolate on his person was
amazing. I cleaned up lunch, but not Owen since he looked like he was saving some of the chocolate for later, while Liz tried to nurse. Then she changed Maggie again. The look of amazed horror at this display of constant vigilance must have shown on my face because William laughed and told me that babies that young are constantly nursing and, therefore, constantly have to be changed. Liz said that when Owen was little and cried at night she would jump out of bed and now she’ll poke William and ask if he wouldn’t mind getting up and changing her.

After her feeding duties were over, Liz and Owen played a bit more. Liz told Owen that they had some time before they read a book and napped. After ten minutes of play time she took him to the bathroom and then put him to bed. William called out a reminder to Liz—he was mopping the already clean kitchen at the time—not to forget to put the vapor barrier down on their son’s bed. He explained to me that Owen is not yet potty trained at night, but for his nap they let Owen wear “big boy underwear,” but always put a waterproof blanket down just in case. He hasn’t had any accidents for a while, but still, better to be on the safe side. William claimed that he had too much to do and wanted to be there when Owen awoke from his nap, so he did not nap. Liz napped and William continued to do some home improvement tasks before their dinner engagement later that night.

**Analysis.** Sometimes ethnographers get lucky and their interviewees deliver perfect quotes to illustrate a point. In this case, William flatly told me that he thinks it is important for men to define themselves as fathers first and foremost. He wants to cut back on his work hours in order to have more time in the evenings with his family. He does not want to be one of those men who only spend a hectic hour with their children
before they have to go to bed. It is important for William to be a father for his own sake, and also for the sake of his wife. According to Lamb’s involvement model, William is an engaged father. The tasks that he engaged in during my stint of participant observation, such as changing the baby’s diaper and entertaining the children, were tasks that he chose to do. He did not wait to be asked by his wife, for example, to carry out those tasks. William exhibited accessibility when he decided to forgo a nap so that he could be awake when his son woke from his nap. William wanted to make certain that Owen did not wake up to a silent house where both parents and baby sister were asleep. During this time William was engaged in other tasks while he waited for Owen to awaken. And, most importantly, William showed himself to be a responsible father in many ways, although of Lamb’s category, responsibility is the most difficult to demonstrate. William, regardless of what he was doing, always had an eye out for his children (i.e., when they were eating, when he reminded Liz to put the vapor barrier down on the bed, when they were picking cherry tomatoes, and when they were at church) and made certain that Owen had bonding time with his mother and ate his lunch.

In the Robinson household, responsibility for the children is shared equally. This includes childcare tasks but also the emotional drain that goes along with being responsible for a child. Although I visited when they were still adjusting to the disruption and joy a new baby brings, they managed to share childcare tasks very well. While Liz wryly told me that since she had Maggie, she just nurses and William does everything else, this is obviously not the case. However, William did end up doing a lot more of the household chores since Liz was almost constantly nursing. William, it needs to be noted, took over most of the cleaning chores while his wife did more of the childcare chores,
such as getting Owen dressed or putting him down for a nap. From some of his earlier comments during our interview, William thinks that mothers are slightly better at taking care of children, “maybe because of the biology thing.” This view, however, did not inhibit his deep involvement with his children and commitment to his family.

William’s father had not been as engaged a father as William proved to be. William shrugged this off as just being a different time, when fathers were not the ones who changed babies’ diapers or took paternity leave. He also grew up with a stay-at-home mother and a breadwinner father. When William was young his parents were involved in a very conservative Christian church which emphasizes a traditional gendered division of labor. This religious aspect, as well as being of a different generation, affected how William’s father parented. Now, William contends, men ought to be equally responsible for their children in all ways, since that is part and parcel of being a father. His father, however, was a good family man and while they are from different generations, William internalized the message about the importance of being a good father, even if the specific tasks that define a father differ.

Evan Frazier

“Good morning, Munchkin Face” I announced when Evan opened the door for me to their small house in the South Valley one August Sunday morning at 7:30 a.m. while holding his infant, Alexa, a.k.a. “Munchkin Face.” “Hi to you, too, Evan” I amended, as he gave me a one-armed hug and told me that his wife, Rachel, was still sleeping but that he and Alexa were watching a documentary on boxing in the living room if I wanted to join them. Although I thought that was a slightly odd thing to watch before we went to their Conservative Charismatic Christian church, I responded that of course I wanted to
watch the documentary. For the next hour Evan attempted to feed his daughter a bottle. He apologized for the clutter—both he and his wife apologized every time I was over—and I told him, as I do every time, not to worry about it. Clutter happens.

An hour later, Rachel emerged from the bedroom looking fresh and rested, and immediately picked up her baby from her husband’s arms. She kindly quizzed Evan, asking him when he last made up a new bottle. The last time I was at their house I had to vouch for Evan. I told Rachel that “I promise, I saw Evan make a new bottle before you got home from work!” This time, however, Evan just sighed and went to make a new bottle, which he promptly gave to his wife. Rachel settled in the comfortable chair that Evan vacated and tried to feed her daughter.

After we finished watching the documentary, Rachel asked Evan if he was going to make breakfast. Evan jokingly responded, “Since we don’t want you to make it, I will!”

They discussed what he was going to make, with our assistance. Actually, I held the baby and watched while Rachel burned biscuits and Evan cooked almost everything else. After we carbo-loaded, as is only proper on Sunday morning, Rachel asked Evan if he wouldn’t mind cleaning up the kitchen while she bathed Alexa. He teasingly said, “Wow, you really know how to take advantage, don’t you?” and they both laughed.

Then, Rachel looked around the kitchen and said, “Or maybe you want to wait until after I do dishtowels. I really need to do laundry. Honey, you don’t think I’m a bad wife because I didn’t do the laundry, did you?” to which his response was, “Doing laundry doesn’t make a good wife” and then they kissed over their daughter’s head. Rachel smiled and then told me that her mom was able to work and have a sparkling
clean house, but that she would rather play with Alexa and relax when she got home. She also agreed with Evan that she was not as good of a cook as he was. Evan said it was self-preservation at first, learning to cook, but he actually likes it now. Then he told Rachel to go ahead and take a shower. The state that the kitchen was in, being filled to the brim with dirty dishes, was annoying him so he cleaned up while I held Alexa. Evan confidentially told me that he is the one that usually cooks and cleans up the kitchen. He continued, “Rachel loves being a mom. I love being a dad, too, but I know that it means even more to her, so I let her do the fun jobs, of being with Alexa more.”

“But you guys arrange your schedule so that one of you or her [Rachel’s] parents are always with Alexa, right?” I asked.

“Yeah, and it is hard sometimes. I love being with my daughter, but I wonder if it isn’t time to put her in daycare. But Rachel won’t do it, won’t even think about it until Alexa is a year old, and that is almost six months away,” Evan responded while washing out bottles.

When the kitchen was clean, Evan measured out formula for the day’s bottles, explaining that they must go through $200.00 a month in formula. When Rachel was done showering, Evan handed the baby off to Rachel and asked if it was ok to run the dishwasher now. She acquiesced. Although it was a little loud in the house, with the television on in the background, the dishwasher running, Rachel blow-drying her hair, and me entertaining the baby with a blinky squeaky toy, Evan took a nap and then showered. By this point it was close to noon. They debated trying to make the last service at their Charismatic Christian mega-church, but decided that it just wasn’t going to happen in time since they live on the southern end of town and the church was at least 35
minutes away to the north. I was slightly surprised that they decided to forego church, since Evan had called religion his “life line” in an earlier conversation. I expected him to be adamant about going every week. He told me that he prefers to go every week, but ever since the baby was born it has gotten harder to do so.

I did not have much time to ponder the fact that we weren’t going to church because Rachel discussed what the family ought to do for the afternoon. Rachel has lived all of her life in Albuquerque, coming from a Hispanic family that has been here since the Spanish first came. She was surprised and distressed that I had not experienced some of the smaller but fun things that Albuquerque has to offer. We were going to meet her parents at the flea market, Rachel announced. After the flea market we were going to drive around the South Valley so I could see where she grew up, she finished. On the way to the flea market Rachel told me about the motherhood blog she is writing and how being a mother is the best thing in the world. Evan was in the backseat with his daughter, coaxing her to take another bottle.

After a fun day—I met her parents, wandered around the flea market with Rachel, Evan and Alexa in tow, and experienced Rachel as a wonderful tour guide for the South Valley—we got back to the Frazier house and began to watch a movie. Rachel asked Evan what he was making for dinner and he said that he thought maybe pasta. I offered to help clean up and Evan told me not to worry about it as he had Mondays off so he would clean it up in the morning. Plus, his mother-in-law comes on Mondays to do her laundry and she always cleans up the house when she visits.

During the movie and after dinner, which we ate on the couch, they took turns feeding their daughter, but Rachel held her more. When Alexa fusses while Evan was
holding her, Rachel rushed over and took Alexa from Evan. When Alexa stopped fussing, Evan said, “Oh, she loves her mommy more” to which Rachel agreed. Even after Alexa was asleep and Evan offered to take her to bed, Rachel said, no, she just wants to hold Alexa a little longer. By 9:30 p.m. the movie was over and all of us were falling asleep on the couch, Alexa still ensconced in her mother’s arms.

**Analysis.** When using Lamb’s model to understand Evan’s paternal involvement, it is clear that Evan is engaged with his daughter. As the above passage illustrates, he fed Alexa a bottle and offered to give her baths. He was accessible for Alexa, such as when I was holding her and he cleaned up the kitchen, keeping one eye on his daughter at all times. Evan told me during our interview that being a father is a very important part of him, but he also claims that Rachel is a wonderful mother and when push comes to shove, she is the primary caregiver and responsible for their daughter. For example, the one time their daughter was ill it was his day to watch her, but Rachel took off work and she was the one who took Alexa to the doctor.

Giving way to his wife in the realm of parenting stems, I believe, from Evan’s notions of “proper” (more traditional) gender dichotomies. He wishes that he could make enough money so that Rachel did not have to work and could stay home full time with their daughter. He views women as being better at taking care of children, telling me countless times that “Alexa loves her daddy, but she loves her mommy more.” And his wife always agreed.

Evan’s father died when Evan was still in high school. Evan did not like to talk about his parents very much. Not that they were not good parents to him, he hastened to tell me. They raised him strictly in a Conservative Christian Church. He is happy that his
parents gave him a religious foundation and claims that this was one of the most important things that his parents did for him. Evan plans on raising his daughter with the same religious ideals. Evan had a falling out with his mother and step-father when he was 16 years old and the church helped him during that time. It appears that Evan gets his cues on fathering from his wife and church and not necessarily from his own father.

**Frank Gonzalez**

The wind on the West Mesa can be pretty intense. I practically blew into the Gonzalez house when the door was opened for me at 4:30 p.m., inadvertently bringing in a variety of leaves and dust, as well as myself and an angel food cake. Grace was home earlier than her husband, as usual, and was attempting to tame the clutter leftover from the weekend, when they had their Catholic priest and some relatives over for dinner. Although she gets off work two hours before her husband, she is the one who picks the kids up at daycare and maybe makes a grocery store run, too, so it is not like she is home that much earlier. The time she is home she prefers to spend with the kids, not cleaning and cooking. Today was an exception, however, as she set about assembling the homemade enchiladas her husband prepared last night in anticipation of my visit. Frank and I had compared stories about our own large closely knit families the previous week and had come to the conclusion that if you substituted lasagna for enchiladas, my family could be his. He takes pride in his cooking and feeding friends and family. I offered to help be Grace’s sous chef, but she took pity on me and told me to play with the kids, as that is more fun. Unfortunately, I could not seem to do anything right with the kids. Any game I proposed or played had one or another of them crying. Grace, however, did not seem to find it stressful, as she serenely took the tears in stride. Even when her son put a
soccer goal net on the dining room table, Grace did not lose her cool. Even when Dinah, in a tantrum, threw all the playing cards on the floor, Grace just told her to pick them up. When Frank got home, at around 5:45 p.m., the tantrums decreased in both frequency and duration.

Frank told me all of these things while he helped Grace prep fixings for the enchiladas. When he was spooning beans into a bowl to reheat, Harry came up and demanded something from his father. Frank responded with something like, “I’ll come and help in a minute, Harry, let me finish this first though.”

During dinner, Dinah said “Grace” and was praised by her father and then he asked why she could not have done it that well when the priest was over last week instead of being shy? After supper at 6:30 p.m. I offered to clean up the table, but Frank told me to leave it. He candidly stated that some days the dishes will sit there for another four hours. Sometimes they don’t cook and a survival strategy is to order take out because there is no clean up with take out. Frank and Grace sent home food for my husband Edward. I tried to tell them that was not necessary, but they insisted, saying it was too bad that he couldn’t come to dinner, but the least they could do was to send him food.

By 7:30 p.m. we were all watching a Tinkerbelle movie while Grace prepped the dip she was making to bring to work the next day for their potluck lunch. We didn’t finish the entire movie. Frank tried to prepare the kids for bed. When Dinah insisted that she was not tired and not ready for bed, Grace left the kitchen and told her, “Mommy knows best, so it is time for bed.” Frank then corralled his offspring and took them to their bedroom, delightfully painted with child-appropriate biblical murals. Frank told me that they try to get the kids into bed by 8:00 p.m., but before that they have to be washed
up. Sometimes stories are read, hot cocoa drunk, and prayers uttered and then, hopefully, sleep. At 8:15 p.m. Grace supervised the kids while they brushed their teeth. While balancing two sippy cups full of hot cocoa that he had just prepared, Frank mentioned that they don’t usually read to the kids before bed and I was not to think that they were bad parents. I assured him that I have no right to make any judgments considering that I raised a terrible cat!

After the children were officially in bed, prayers said and lights out, the adults went to the living room. Although it was only 9:00 p.m., the Gonzalezes looked tired and I know I was. Just when we thought that the children were asleep, Frank smiled and said how great it is having kids, they are so much fun and he just loves them. He told me that it is different today than when he was young, nearly forty years ago. His dad was a good dad. Really strict, very Catholic, always provided for them, made them go to church, taught his children how to be good workers, but was not necessarily involved in the day-to-day activities. Grace interjected that is because Frank’s mom was a housewife, the kind that had dinner on the table every night when her husband got home. Consequently, Frank’s father did not have the kind of responsibility for his children that Frank’s mother had. But, Grace continued, times were different then. Her words were barely out of her mouth when their daughter’s angelic countenance peeked over the railing into the living room. Frank had a smile on his face and asked what she needed. She pondered the question, obviously playing for time, when her mother said in ominous tones, “Dinah…” Thinking quickly, she requested more hot chocolate. Frank obliged, and Grace told him that when one of the kids has to go to the bathroom in the middle of the night, he can take them. He amiably agreed.
**Analysis.** Frank is a fun dad who likes to play with his children, and he is an engaged father. Judging from the time that I spent with him, he shares childcare tasks equally with his wife, although his wife tends to initiate childcare tasks, such as putting the kids to bed. He also spends less time with his children during the weekday than his wife does, because his wife has reduced her hours at work. Frank is accessible to his children, just as he is engaged with them. This was best seen when he and Grace were making enchiladas and Harry needed something. Frank was the one who addressed the child’s need. They both claim equal responsibility, but because Grace has more time off she tends to be the one who takes them to the doctor, for example, or picks them up from daycare.

Frank places great emphasis on being an involved father. Like other fathers, he admits that times have changed and what made his father a good father are not necessarily the same kinds of things that makes a good father today. Later, he compared his own father to his grandfather, claiming that his father was more involved than his grandfather. His grandfather’s main involvement with his children was to be a provider and to make certain that his children were good Catholics who married good Catholics. His father had the same goals, but would spend time with his sons, too, teaching them some carpentry skills for fun. Like his predecessors, Frank wants to provide for his children, raise them to be good Catholics, play with them, and teach them skills, but he does not want to relegate all the childcare chores and responsibility to his wife. He said that he didn’t know any man today whose wife works that can do that, and really, why would they even want to? Part of being a dad is being responsible for them, he insisted.
John Griego

I observed the sun coming up over the Sandia mountains and idly wondered why, when I was contemplating this dissertation topic, had it never occurred to me that in order to get good participant observation data I would have to be up earlier than the families themselves. Families with young children get up very early. It was not even 6:30 a.m. as I drove up to the Griego’s house. I noticed a small grinning face in the picture window, waving wildly, and looking entirely too fresh and perky. When I got to the door it was already open and I stooped down to give the little girl a hug. When I came up her father, John, had a mug of steaming coffee that he gave to me with a grin similar to his daughter’s. I was early but in time for John’s famous Saturday morning breakfast. I do not know how they stay thin. His wife Hope teased him that he goes to all that trouble even though the girls don’t care if they ever eat eggs, but he said that he likes it. Also, it is important for him that Lily and Hanna have a good memory of him making them breakfast on the weekends. Well, he amended, Saturday as Sunday mornings see them getting ready for Catholic Mass, which they go to nearly every week. As John catered to us, filling plates, coaxing Lily to eat, and spooning eggs into the baby, his wife was busy constructing the most elaborate grocery list I have ever seen. Intermittently, she would look up and ask John if he thought that they needed hair conditioner or frozen chicken nuggets. He usually responded that he was not sure. Hope may have looked like she was totally preoccupied with the intricacies of provisioning, but she noticed everything going on at the breakfast table. She was able to note that Lily coolly ignored John’s gentle suggestions on how many more bites she needed to eat before she could go watch cartoons. Lily did not eat until her mother, kindly but in a no-nonsense voice, told her to.
Hanna started fussing and John took her off to change her diaper. Five minutes later, Hope asked John to change the baby and he said, “Oh, I did already.”

This became a pattern in their household over the two days I spent there that week and the other hours that I hung out with them that year: Hope would suggest a course of action regarding their daughters’ care but John had already cheerfully done it. However, as Hope reminded me, it is only fair that he do at least half of the childcare. But then she admitted that he probably does more of the childcare. But she likes to know what is going on and he respects her opinions on childrearing.

“For example, last night, he gave them a bath but I spent that time researching private schools, then I came back to the tub and we talked about it,” she informed me.

“Did you come to a decision? Is it your decision?” I asked, around mouthfuls of toast, not even wondering if I was asking a leading question.

“Well, ultimately it is my decision. I want to know what he thinks, but I’ll make this decision.”

“Why is that?” I asked

“I think because I am the one with the degree in child psychology. He respects my expertise on it,” Hope replied.

I admitted that their daughters are some of the best behaved children I had ever been around. Most children have little melt-downs (some adults do too!) and it is to be expected. But when tears threatened in the Griego household, they were quickly halted by Hope. So maybe it helps to have a degree in child psychology. Hope laughed and told me that kids are like dogs, “You just have to make sure that you are firm, consistent, and affectionate, and they’ll turn out fine.”
Later that day, after John made up a packet of sandwiches, filled three water bottles, packed extra clothes, diapers, crackers, and heaven only knows what else, we were prepared for an excursion with the girls. We planned to be gone an hour, but it took us that long to get ready for it and we could have survived a nuclear attack since John was so well prepared. We took the girls to Costco while Hope went to a more conventional grocery store to gather things not available at the discount warehouse. We got to take Lily and Hanna since Hope said that it is easier for him to take them than her to take them grocery shopping. Plus she’s with Lily and Hanna more during the day when they can be grouchy, so it is only fair that he take them on the weekends more, she added with a laugh. With one last little reminder from Hope to make sure that we disinfect the shopping cart, we left her smiling and waving in the driveway. While we were driving, I asked John about some of the things that Hope told me earlier.

“Was your dad really involved with his children?” I asked, coming into full “ethnographer mode,” after remembering what Hope had told me. She had compared her husband to all the other men in her family who do practically nothing around the house or with their children.

He quietly replied, “I’d guess you could say that he was. But my mom died when I was pretty young so it was not like he had much of a choice about it. There was no one else to do it, so he had to. Well, when I got older I helped out, too.”

When we got home from our trip to the store Lily and Hanna did some crafts, which John supervised while he unloaded the dishwasher. Hope came home and unloaded her groceries. While I was pondering where to put the frozen chicken nuggets, as their freezer was already full of pizza from their niece’s school fundraiser, Lily
decided that she needed some more glue. She bypassed her mother and put sticky fingers on John’s pant leg to get his attention.

“What is it, Babe?” he asked.

“I need more sparkly glue, Daddy” she announced with a winsome smile.

“Sure, hold on, we have some more here by your sister. You’ll have to share with her.” He explained. The rest of the day passed quickly, and when I went home that night, I found sparkly glue in my hair. My husband and I decided that it was a small price to pay for such a fun and productive day.

**Analysis.** While John respects his wife’s expertise in childrearing, he is still a very involved father when assessed in terms of Lamb’s tripartite model. For instance, he carried out half, if not more, of the childcare tasks when I was with them. Hope laid it out for me when she told me that while she spends more waking hours with the girls, she and John have an egalitarian relationship and try to split the childcare equally. Or, as Hope admitted, she has him do a little more of the actual scheduled tasks since she has to be with them more in the afternoons. John was very accessible to his children. The children chose to interrupt their father rather than their mother when they needed something or when their parents were occupied with other tasks. John exhibited responsibility, too. Not only does he claim responsibility, like most fathers, but after talking to him and Hope, it seems to me that they both take responsibility for different aspects of their children’s well-being. He makes more money than she does, but she also has more time off. She spent some of that time off researching schools, for example. Because she is also the one with more time off, she is the one that takes their daughters to the doctor and to other extracurricular activities.
John’s father was a school counselor so he had both the education and a flexible, good schedule that enabled him to be an involved father. Earlier in the summer when I had administered the semi-structured interview John told me that he did not know where it came from, or why, but he always knew that he wanted to be an involved father. He wants to be a father who shares the childcare and the responsibility of parenting equally with his wife.

Garrett Bowman

The Bowmans are Episcopalian, but during my first interviews with them I noticed that they had a very extensive library on Buddhism, Taoism, and the history of early Christian thought, among other similar books. When I got to the Bowman’s modest, comfortable, cozy house in Los Ranchos I noticed the jolly looking Buddha standing watch over the garden.

Garrett and his daughter Zoë got home from daycare at 4:30 p.m. Zoë was wearing the same cool-aid mustache that she has had since May (to be fair, it could be a birthmark….or it renews itself daily like Prometheus’ liver) and was in possession of a dozen Halloween-themed crafts and, most important of all, a bag of Halloween candy. This was distributed, her father informed me, by a good friend with evil parents! Zoë, over the course of the next hour before her mother Molly came home and put a stop to it, proceeded to go through a goodly amount of candy. She went about it with gusto. I blinked and in the space of that infinitesimal amount of time she managed to get the largest wad of gum I have ever seen in my life in her mouth. Zoë intermittently took out the gum and placed it on any surface available in order to consume another piece of candy. While engrossed in the short book I was reading to her, Zoë succeeded in tangling
the gum all over her person and myself. Soap does not do a great job of getting strands of
gum off of skin and hair. I tried to wash her, since it was my fault I was not paying
attention to her while she played with her gum. When Molly came home at 5:30 p.m.,
after surveying the state of dinner preparation, she immediately asked Garrett in a nice
voice (Molly only has a nice and calm voice) if he had any idea how much candy their
daughter had consumed. Garrett looked to me for help and we both had identical sheepish
grins on our faces because no, we were not monitoring this. This did not make Molly
happy but she let the subject drop. She did, however, explain to Zoë in a loud voice so we
all could hear, that “sugar makes you ill and this is why you are spazzing out, Zoë.”

I think that the reason Garrett was not monitoring Zoë was because he was busy
when he first came home and had the added distraction of me chatting with him. He
picked up the lone purple child’s sock on the floor, took out the dog, mixed the corn
muffin mix for dinner, and got Molly’s really good green chili chicken soup out of the
fridge and started it heating up. She had made the soup earlier in anticipation of the
evening’s meal when I was over. He also called back the doctor’s office which had left a
message specifically for him (not Molly or Zoë’s parents in general) about Zoë’s
upcoming doctor’s appointment.

Molly came home, pulled her blond hair into a ponytail, and efficiency entered
the kitchen. She prepped the salad, asked Garrett and I to clear off Zoë’s art project from
the dinner table and set it, and asked what Zoë wanted to eat for dinner. Zoë wanted a
quesadilla and Molly was about to say yes, when Garrett vetoed that dinner option in
favor of spaghetti and meat sauce since Zoë already had a quesadilla for lunch. Molly
nodded her assent. Garrett prepped Zoë’s meal while Molly got out all of the condiments
for the green chili chicken soup and put them on the table. She also managed to catch Zoë in the act of dipping her fingers in sour cream and licking them and going back for more. This was the only time I heard Molly speak sternly to her daughter, telling her not to put her hands in the communal food. Garrett forgot about the muffins in the oven but Molly remembered them before they were too scorched. We all sat down while Zoë ate her green things and waited for her pasta while we readied our bowls of soup. Then we held hands and the adults said Grace while Zoë wiggled. Right as the adults were about to eat Molly remembered Zoë’s noodles and got up (she was closer to the kitchen) and got them for her.

After dinner we cleaned up; Molly at the sink and Garrett and I cleaning all around her. Usually, whoever cooks dinner does not clean up afterwards and she usually cooks. While she still continued to clean, Garrett got out special pumpkin carvers and little pumpkins. Molly and I both bit our lips in worry, envisioning the horrors to come as Zoë made a grab for a knife. Molly warned Garrett not to let their daughter cut herself and Garrett responded, “It’s ok, they are child-safe.” Miraculously, while bits of gourd were flung around, no bits of little girl were, and in the end two pumpkins were successfully carved. While we were still admiring the glow of the fresh jack-o-lanterns, my meringue cookies inspired a melt-down. Rather, the denial of a meringue caused Zoë first to whine, then tear up, then, when those actions got no response from her calm parents, roof-shaking screams ensued. Molly quietly explained why more sugar was evil and in between sobs took their daughter to be bathed. Although it was Garrett’s turn to wash Zoë, she insisted that her mama do it. Garrett and I sighed in relief when we heard the sobs abate, or maybe they just became drowned out by the water, and we discussed
liberal politics, art, and how it is so hard not to want to give in when a darling daughter just wants one, tiny, little, insignificant meringue. I restated how impressed I was that they are so calm and collected at all times, even under duress. Garrett admitted it is “hard, but you want to raise them right, so that is always in the back of your mind when dealing with kids.” As we sat in the darkened living room Garrett paused and then said,

You know, I almost didn’t want to have kids. I was really worried I’d be like my dad. Not a good one. He left my mom and me and I never saw him. It is really important for me not to do that. It is always in the back of my mind that I am not going to be like my dad. I try to be a good one.

Before I could respond to Garrett’s statement, a slightly harried Molly and a smiling Zoë emerged from the bath. Molly reminded Garrett that it was his day to read the bedtime story. Zoë, however, having had a difficult evening, demanded stories from both parents and she got her wish. After she was safely tucked into bed I made my departure, telling them that I would see them for hiking next week.

**Analysis.** Garrett Bowman is the epitome of the middle class father today. He and his wife are egalitarian when it comes to childcare chores. Garrett not only willingly cleans up the house and tries to follow his wife’s cooking directions, but he also engages in childcare chores, like reading to his daughter and getting her dinner. He was accessible to Zoë while he made dinner and she did a project, calling out praise when she showed him her drawing but still mixing muffin ingredients at the same time. He did not watch her like his wife watched their daughter, that is, like a hawk. Garrett was not cognizant of the fact that Zoë managed to consume pounds of candy while he was accessible to her. But, the fact remains that he was still there to give her attention when she requested it. He also took his wife’s directions regarding childcare with equanimity. Responsibility, as
Lamb’s third component of involvement, was easier to see. For example, Garrett made the doctor’s appointment for his daughter. He is also the parent who usually picks Zoë up from daycare. Garrett feels responsible for her, claiming that wanting to be a good parent is always in the back of his mind. During our interview he told me that being a father is, of course, the most important thing to him. Part of the desire to be an involved parent stems from his own absentee father. Growing up and being acutely aware that he did not have a father influences his involvement today.

Mike Maxwell

Where, I wondered to myself, is Norman Rockwell when you need him? It was a balmy Saturday night and the Maxwell parents and I were finishing off beers as we sat on the porch of their West Side home, having successfully bathed and put the kids to bed. Cindy, as always, initiated the nightly bedtime ritual, but Mike competently did his part without any help or suggestions from his wife. They are like a well-oiled machine. Their kids are in bed, story read, and prayers said by 8:00 p.m. sharp every night. My presence never seemed to throw them off. As we sat there, their neighbors and fellow soccer parent-coaches came over with beers in hand. They discussed the day’s pee-wee soccer game (which was hilarious and amounted to me and the parent-coaches running on the sidelines shouting to the players that they were to run the other way and that they should try to kick the ball with their feet). Maybe not quite a scene out of a Rockwell painting, but the sentiments were pure Americana and I basked in the bliss of not talking about theory or ancient bison bones with projectile points embedded in them (I married an archaeologist, after all). As stygian darkness descended (no street lights in this
neighborhood) and the beer was gone, I made my farewells and told them that I would see them in a few hours for church services at their Episcopal church.

The next morning I was back at the Maxwell house ready for church. It was a little strange not seeing Mike in his vibrant blue and black soccer coach uniform, but in slacks and button-down shirt. He had a meeting with the other board members of his Protestant church before service, he explained, smoothing down his shirt front. Cindy, as always, was fashionably dressed and she helped her daughter dress in something pink while she left her son to be attired by Mike. Mike surveyed his son’s little cowboy boots and said, “Looking good, son!”

“Thanks dad!” Tate proudly replied.

“Son, I sure do love you.”

“I sure do love you too, Dad!”

His daughter asked who he loved more and Mike smoothly replied, “You are my favorite daughter, and Tate is my favorite son,” which did not quite appease Olivia but, being an intelligent child, she took what she could get.

The rest of the day after church was spent leisurely. Mike and Cindy equally divided playing with the kids. If Cindy was playing “manicure” with the kids, Mike was trying to get a little work done, and if Mike was playing catch with them, she was making turkey burgers for dinner. The kids were never left on their own except when Mike grilled the burgers and Cindy set the table, but even then the kids were around, watching and trying to help fold napkins or bring plates to their dad outside. Even when we were watching a Barbie movie, one of the parents was there. One time it got too quiet and Mike came in from his office to make sure everything was alright.
Over dinner Mike asked me if I was prepared for the birthday party next week. I know that at times I am a source of amusement for the people with whom I work, as I can be clueless when it comes to childrearing, so I simply nodded and responded that of course I was ready. Who wouldn’t want be ready for some balloons and cake? I should have been suspicious when I saw the Maxwells exchange sly smiles. But Mike just said that kids now expect a lot more than we ever did for birthdays and frankly, it is worth the mere $200.00 to out-source the birthday party. This is why they arranged to have their daughter’s sixth birthday party at Hoot’s Ultimate Party Zone.

I don’t think that the term “mass chaos” is too strong to apply to the pandemonium that greeted us when we opened the doors to Hoot’s. Heaps of children sat on the floor watching a magic trick. Dozens of tiny yet energetic folk running around aimlessly or playing a multitude of loud video games dominated the scene. Picture 25 colorful blurs about knee-high to an adult, yelling and running. That is what swirled around us. I almost dropped the cake. Cindy and I raised eyebrows at each other and tried to make our way to the front desk. I was not comforted when I saw that the people in charge were teenagers. Mike, thankfully, took charge of the kids and led them to play air hockey while we waited for the “real” party to begin. (Indeed, what I just described was the reception room, not the party room which was filled with large blow-up play gymnasiums). Of the 13 parents who came, only four were fathers and they accompanied their wives.

“Thank goodness you were here, Ruth. It took three adults to deal with that today.” Cindy said, scraping old cake off her elbow at the conclusion of the party.
“Yeah, I don’t know how single parents do it.” I replied, balancing the birthday gifts and walking through their living room.

“I’m so lucky Mike is not like his dad.” Then Cindy proceeded to tell me that Mike’s dad is very traditional, almost standoffish. He does not do anything around the house, nor did he really interact with his children until they were grown, since it has been more like he is in competition with them.

“I don’t enter into that competition….” Mike called out from his position in the kitchen. Cindy assured me that Mike is a good dad. He is really interactive and supportive of his children because he doesn’t want to be like his father. She leaned against the wall and frankly said, “I may have had to have a conversation with him about how he should WANT to help me do the dishes, but I never had to have a conversation with him about how he should want to help me with the kids. He is a really good dad.”

**Analysis.** It is easy to see that Mike is an engaged father. He helped his son dress and bathed his children. He often plays with his children. He wants a consensus with his wife regarding childcare because he sees them as partners. If she suggests that it is time to start the night routine, he immediately acquiesces, or he asks Cindy if she thinks it is time to start getting them ready for bed and waits for her to agree with him. In this manner they are egalitarian, but she is still has the final say. He is always accessible and willingly drops work to attend to his children’s needs. During our interview he claimed responsibility, too, and this responsibility manifested itself in interesting ways. He coaches his daughter’s soccer team because it is important for him that his children learn sportsmanship and this is the way that he can guarantee that. He works very hard at his career, because he loves it, but also to provide for his family.
Although his wife is very forthright when it come to discussing why Mike, in her opinion, is such a good dad, Mike is less enthusiastic about delving into this topic. He agrees that his dad always provided for his family, but it is important for Mike to be more involved than his father was. For example, he aims to treat his children as friends and not rivals. He also agrees with Cindy that she did have to tell him that she needed his participation in household maintenance, but he always wanted to be intimately involved with his kids. He does not want to be the kind of father that is told by their wife what is going on in his children’s lives.

Julian Reed

It was cold, windy, and dark by 3:50 p.m. when I got at the Reed house on the West Side one Tuesday evening in November. I had met the Reeds at their Episcopal church in the spring, which felt like so long ago, but they, like so many of the families I studied, were very busy and it was not uncommon for six months to go by before we could schedule another interview or a session of participant observation. I particularly wanted to spend some participant observation hours with the Reeds because, unlike all of the other families I worked with, Julian is the only father that has a shorter daily schedule (he is a teacher) as compared to his wife’s career (engineer). He is the one who picks up their child at daycare early, begins dinner preparations and similar chores. Similar to mothers in this position, he does not spend all his extra time at home cleaning, but prefers to play with his son. Since they were a little late, it gave me time to notice their neighbors’ weedy yards (good to know it isn’t just my neighborhood) and their eclectic gardening decorations. When they arrived, Julian apologized and said that sometimes it is difficult to get Griffin out of daycare immediately when Julian shows up. This day they
had a late snack at the daycare and he couldn’t not let Griffin get his snack. Griffin was very excited to see me and said immediately, “Miss Ruth! Do you want to see what I can do!” I proceeded to chat with Julian in the cold and watch Griffin ride his tricycle all around. After about 20 minutes Julian said that it was just too cold and we all had to go inside or we would freeze. Plus, it was time for Griffin to go to the bathroom.

After Griffin’s bathroom break, we headed into Griffin’s cheerily painted bedroom to put together a toy train track and play monster trucks until about 5:30 p.m. This entire time Julian attempted to get his son to tell him what he wanted for dinner, but monster trucks were too distracting. In the end Julian made him noodles and cheese, feeding him before the adults. While Griffin and I played “monster trucks,” Julian prepared a delicious Mediterranean dinner for the adults, to be served when his wife got home from work. When I offered to help in dinner preparations, he responded, “No. Thank you for playing with Griffin, it makes it easier for me.” But Griffin still wanted to have his dad’s attention, which Julian, being one of the nicest men in the world, gave immediately when asked. Needless to say, between the interruptions and the fact that Julian is slower in the kitchen than his wife is (his admission), it took a while for dinner to be ready. Lara called at 6:10 p.m. to tell Julian that she would be leaving work soon. I managed to chat a bit with Julian as he unloaded the dishwasher and cooked, when I was not playing with Griffin. Julian wryly shared how difficult it is to get work done with Griffin, especially “thinking” type work. Instead of sitting still, writing, thinking, that kind of thing, he has to constantly get up with Griffin.

At 6:40 p.m. Lara got home, much to the joy of her son. He rushed her, giving her big hugs while she dropped her briefcase and hugged back. Then Griffin insisted that we
all go into his room and play “Time Travel.” This amounted to us laying on his bed, lights off, staring at the day glow stars on the ceiling until we were “in another century.” Then we watched a brief documentary on the making of the moon. Griffin explained to me about dark matter and how it is formed. After watching the movie twice, Julian tried to tell him that we didn’t want to watch it anymore, but after the third time Lara announced that it was time for dinner.

It was 7:10 p.m. when we sat down to eat. Griffin joined us but had already eaten some of his noodles earlier so was not very hungry. Julian sat next to his son the entire time. He gently suggested that Griffin eat an olive or a piece of pita, interrupting his own dinner to make sure that his active son got a little more to eat.

After dinner Lara and I, as has been our habit every time I came over, chatted and drank tea while Julian played with Griffin. At 8:15 p.m. Lara warned her son that it was almost time for bed. Griffin announced that he was not tired and frankly never is tired. I grinned to myself, wondering how this pronouncement from such an articulate little man was going to go over. Earlier I had found myself under Griffin’s spell; his melting brown eyes and gap-toothed grin made it hard to resist him. Lara, who seems to epitomize gentle but firm and is made of stronger stuff than me, allowed him to play with his play dough for a few more minutes while Julian unloaded the dishwasher. At 8:45 p.m. Lara picked up Griffin and got his teeth brushed, pajamas on, and ready for bed. She then asked him who he wanted to read to him. Griffin chose Julian. He chooses Julian all the time, Julian informed me. Lara agreed and then we went into the kitchen to do some dishes. Actually, I perused their amazingly diverse collection of books—medieval French poetry, Harry
Potter novels, gardening manuals, meditation books all sharing a shelf—while she cleaned up the counters.

Lara told me, her arms soapy to the elbow as she did dishes, that it was Julian’s idea to stay home with the baby. He did not want to put the child in daycare until their son was older and even then Julian did not want to have the child in institutional daycare all day. Lara tried to reason with Julian that plenty of children go to daycare centers as babies and are fine, but Julian refused to have his son in a daycare center any more than was absolutely necessary. Consequently, he had to make some difficult choices about work, choosing a teaching track that allowed him flexibility and more time off during the day (getting off work at around 3:00 p.m.), but also not making a lot of money.

“You know,” she said suddenly, “how people either turn into their parents or are the complete opposite of them? At least when it comes to parenting? Well, Julian is the exact opposite of his father. His father was not involved at all.”

Later, by 9:15 p.m. when Griffin was finally asleep, Julian who to my knowledge did not hear his wife’s earlier comments about his father, quietly said something about how his dad was always drinking alcohol and who wants to be around that? While we drank more tea, he explained some of his childhood. He spent a lot of time at his grandparent’s house growing up, especially in the summer and escaped to their house when he could. He also knew that he wanted to be an involved father like some of the other fathers he saw and not like his own father.

**Analysis.** Of all the fathers I interviewed, Julian is the only primary caregiver. That is not to say that Lara leaves all the childcare tasks to her husband, as she initiated and carried out a great portion of the nighttime routine. As a teacher, Julian spends more
time with his son in the afternoon, so naturally a greater portion of the tasks fall on him. In fact, while Julian would like to pursue a social science doctorate, his son comes before his own ambitions. Julian is obviously engaged. He is accessible at all times. Even when his wife is in the room, she is not as accessible as her husband. For example, when Julian was making dinner, he was always available for his son and stopped what he was doing in order to play with, or give attention to, Griffin. Julian is also very responsible for his son. He was the one who took a detour in his career path because it was important to him to be an involved father. Part of being an involved father is being responsible for Griffin. Julian is the one who takes his son to the doctor, who takes and picks up his son from daycare, and who sets the daycare schedule. Like other men, being a father is the most important role that Julian plays. He is conscious of being a good dad and part of that stems from being different than his own father.

**Gilbert Graham**

I stepped into paradise, I thought to myself. I had made my way to the Graham house one early autumn Sunday morning at 7:45 a.m. and I walked though the gate into a oasis of carefully tended, verdant, vegetation. The seductive smells of espresso wafted though the corn and pumpkins to where I stood. I was greeted by cherubs, or at least the Graham daughters that looked suspiciously like them, if cherubs wear little Hello Kitty nightgowns and demand to know where the cookies I brought were. Because they do not belong to a church, the Grahams had a less structured Sunday than most of the families with whom I conducted participant observation. This Sunday Gilbert was tending the garden and making toast and espresso while his wife was in the shower after a dawn bike ride.
The parents made use of my babysitting abilities and cleaned up the kitchen while I played with their daughters in the garden before our outing that day. I heard Gilbert and Ingrid discuss whether they ought to pack a lunch or snacks and I was surprised that we were going to be gone that long. It turns out that we were not gone that long, it just took a long time (three hours) to get everybody ready to go. The hold-ups, if they can be called that, centered on Cassandra’s attire. Strong-willed and smart, she argued with her mother about what she was going to wear, if she really needed to bathe her face, and so forth. Her mother just kept gently repeating that yes, she did need to wear what her mother picked out and yes, she did need to put on sunscreen. During this time, Gilbert was helping his youngest daughter, Camilla, with her multiplication tables in another room.

After we went to the park and came back, we ate a late lunch. Gilbert and Ingrid shared making lunch and they also shared cleaning up. After lunch Ingrid, the girls, and I rearranged the girls’ bedroom. At first Gilbert was hesitant to do this but after Ingrid explained that she had promised the girls that they would move the beds, he was on board. We then immersed ourselves in crafts, all of us painting. Only some of us actually painted on the paper. Others painted their sisters until their mothers laughingly caught them doing so.

Even though the bunk bed was in a new position the girls did not want to take their naps. Ingrid tenderly insisted that there had been too many meltdowns already and that they needed their rest. She took this subsequent two hour break to call her parents, research places for a family vacation, and do laundry. Gilbert spent this time researching new computers; something he did not want to do but their computer had unexpectedly died. After their naps ended at 6:00 p.m. Ingrid heated up some soup for the girls. Gilbert
and I sat with the girls as they ate dinner. He got them bread and butter, not hearing that his wife asked him not to, but by then it was too late. Negotiations between Cassandra and her mother ensued after supper. Cassandra insisted that she be allowed to play with me and not clean up for bed. An agreement was reached that we would play for a little bit and then I would read to them. Gilbert bathed the children.

When I left at 9:30 p.m., I arranged to spend the next day’s afternoon with Gilbert and the girls while Ingrid worked her “long day” as an administrator in a private hospital. Because Ingrid has such a long day on Mondays, that is one of the days that Gilbert takes off. Conversely, when he has long days, such as on Thursdays, she takes off. Because he is a self-employed musician it is easy for him to make his own schedule and as an administrator, she is able to do some work from home and also set her own hours to a degree.

Gilbert met me at the door that next Monday afternoon at 3:30 p.m. in a masculine red apron. He and his daughters had just gotten back from the market and he was putting away the vegetables. The girls were crafting again. He asked them to finish cleaning their rooms so that he could run the vacuum. He was expertly ignored and Gilbert was busy talking to me so he did not remind them. He told me that they had to go buy a computer this morning instead of doing school work, so if I would help Cassandra with her social science project (something I ought to be an expert in) he would help Camilla do some school work that afternoon.

While I was still trying to explain the difference between “qualitative” and “quantitative” research to a six year old, Gilbert’s parents came over for supper. I got hugs all around. The girls did not eat much and were excited to have not only their
grandparent’s and father’s attention, but mine as well. After dinner, the girls were obviously very tired. When Gilbert looked torn between loading the dishwasher and getting his daughters in the bath, his mother took pity on him and told him that we would clean up if he wanted to get them ready for bed. With a grateful look, he ushered his little girls into the bath, with his eldest daughter attempting to use the same arguments regarding the unnecessary aspects of hygiene with her father as she did with her mother. Gilbert, like his wife, was not deterred, nor did he lose his cool. When the girls came out of the bath, wreathed in steam and terrycloth, they requested that their grandmother and I be the storytellers for the evening. Mrs. Graham gave the dishtowel to her husband and told him to finish up in the kitchen with Gilbert. She nudged me and said, “Gilbert does so much more than his father does. I have to ask his father to help but Ingrid doesn’t have to ask Gilbert to help. Ah, the difference a generation can make!”

**Analysis.** The Gilberts home-school their children and while they do not have a strict schedule of when and who is going to teach the girls, I noticed that Gilbert is the one who organizes the curriculum and initiates their lessons. They tend to do lessons in the morning or later at night. Gilbert told me that it is important for them to home-school their daughters because he wants to make certain that they are being challenged and learning more than what they would in a public school. Since it only matters that the girls pass state tests, which are easy, home-schooling gives the Graham family flexibility that they would not have if the girls were enrolled in an institutional school.

The Grahams can travel at will, and often do. Making money is only important to Gilbert and Ingrid in that it allows them travel and live a comfortable life. Having a large house, or a new car, or fashionable clothes is simply not important to this family. As
Gilbert told me, when they decided to have kids they knew that they would have to take, and do take, a “child-centric” approach to life. Work and play have to revolve around the children. They were a little older than most first-time parents, in their mid-late 30s, when they had their first daughter. Gilbert and Ingrid had saved up money from their prior high-paying sales and marketing jobs. They decided to switch to more flexible and healthy, albeit less paying, careers in order to spend as much time as possible with their children and be happy in general.

The adults both have portions of their work week (which changes monthly) where they can work at home so they take turns on whose day it is to work from home so that someone is always with Cassandra and Camilla. In this manner they are co-caregivers. When they are both home, they both look after their daughters, equally, although sometimes Gilbert will consult with Ingrid before he does a childcare task a little more than Ingrid consults with Gilbert.

In short, Gilbert and Ingrid have an egalitarian division of labor and a child-centric approach to their lives. They equally share childcare chores and are equally engaged. When they are together, Ingrid seems to have more interaction with the girls but she does not do it all and she does not tell Gilbert what to do. While she got them ready for the day, he packed snacks, for example. They are both accessible to their children but, again, Ingrid seems to be the one that the girls go to more when both parents are home. They claim equal responsibility and this is seen in how they divide up the work week so that they spend close to equal time with their daughters. Ingrid does a little more of the conventional childcare tasks, such as bathing, but Gilbert teaches the girls more, which is, in this family, a childcare task.
Being a father is the most important role that Gilbert identifies with and he is different than his own father. Instead of having hearsay, like I did with other families, I actually got to meet Gilbert’s father. This did not necessarily help determine how involved he was with Gilbert’s life, but it was obvious that he was more traditional than Gilbert.

**Discussion**

Understanding men’s particular gender roles—what they actually do as fathers—is key to understanding men’s commitment to being involved fathers; since all men in my sample claimed to be involved and “good” fathers, it is important to see which childcare tasks they actually carried out. Middle class norms dictate gender roles. For middle class men, to be a “modern” man means that a man will conceptualize part of his masculine identity as an “involved” father in an egalitarian relationship with his spouse (e.g., Cooper 2004; Ishii-Kunz 2009; Shows and Gerstel 2009). This is the overarching masculine identity for middle class men, and for 25 of the men in my sample, illustrated by the case studies in this chapter (William Robinson, John Griego, Frank Gonzalez, Mike Maxwell, Garrett Bowman, Julian Reed, and Gilbert Graham), this is what they have embraced. The other five men in my sample, Evan Frasier being one of them, have chosen to adhere to a sub-role that is popular and supported by Conservative Christians in the United States. The particular sub-role I observed was the “headship” role, meaning that men are the head of the household which puts women in a subordinate position. In this position, women have responsibility over the daily house and kin maintenance, and men are involved fathers, but not necessarily regarding engagement tasks. They are role models and “play dads” in a more conventional father role (e.g., Lamb 2004). Within the
Conservative Christian sub-culture, fathers are expected to be “good family men” and “involved fathers.” It needs to be noted that all of these fathers met Lamb’s three criteria for being involved, regardless of the gender roles that they embraced.

As was illustrated from field note excerpts, all men in my sample internalized society’s norms that a good father today is an involved father. This is not necessarily directly translated from their own fathers, however. Even if the men had very uninvolved fathers themselves, but embraced the ideal that a man should be an involved father, the men in my sample tended to be very involved in their own families. This is especially seen in Mike Maxwell and Garrett Bowman. Furthermore, all these men highlighted here internalized what their parenting cohort judges to be an involved father. This included claiming that a responsible father, and therefore a “good father,” is engaged in everyday childcare tasks and accessible for their childrens’ needs. In this sense, all these men identified very strongly with being a father. For most of them, this was the role that took precedence over all other roles. Furthermore, although they conceptualized their relationships with their wives as partners, the men in my sample conceded ultimate domestic responsibility to their wives.

**The age of fathers.** Men rarely talked about giving their wives ultimate responsibility. All men articulated the need to be as responsible as their wives since they co-parent. Part of this child-centric approach and strong identification with being a father can be attributed to the age of the fathers. All men who identified with being a father over any other role are those who had children in their late 30s or older. [See Table 3: Roles by Age of Man] They also all were in egalitarian relationships with their wives and

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51 A parenting cohort includes those men who are in the same socioeconomic strata and have similarly aged children.
claimed to enjoy sharing childcare. At the time of my study these fathers were also all Mainstream Protestants, except Gilbert Graham, who was agnostic. The Catholics and Conservative Christians tended to be younger—in their twenties—when they had children and also they equally emphasized the parent and spousal roles.

During dinner one night Gilbert Graham told me that he had time to do a lot of other fun things before he had kids, but now he is at a stage in his life where it is time to focus on being a father which he loves to do. Other men who accomplished many things in their lives before they had children reflected on how those accomplishments pale in comparison to being a father. A Mainstream Protestant father, Phillip Brewer, told me,

I used to believe that if you didn’t have kids, it’s fine. But now I think that if you don’t have kids, well, you don’t know that you don’t have a full and happy life, but you don’t. I have older friends, couples who don’t have kids. And it is always something. More school, more degrees... You are always trying to fill it with something. And missing the. . . .Always feel like you gotta accomplish more. Now that I have kids, I don’t have time. It’s a done deal.

Similarly, when I asked Paul Montgomery, a Mainstream Protestant, if there was anything he wanted to add to the interview he thought about it and said,

I wish I had kids younger and was younger because kids change your perspective on life and what is important. Growing up, I thought I was the last person on the planet who would have kids. And then our son came along in our late 30s and I have friends who are teetering on “should we have kids?” and I’m like, “I can’t tell you, but it changes your perspective on life.” It allows you to go though your childhood again, if you take part in it and, you know, experience life and things that you may have missed as kids, or do it again. You know, it [having kids] is just very rewarding, way more than a career or any monetary type... you know, what society deems “success” should be taking part in your kids upbringing…”

Clarence Chee, who went to the same Mainstream Protestant Episcopal church as Paul Montgomery, also addressed the fact that he was an older father as compared to most of his childhood friends. He admitted that he has more in common with men a decade or
two younger than he is than he does with his own age cohort, all because he and these younger men have similarly aged children. 

A lot of guys my age have older kids, they are like 10 years old. Well, we started late and it puts you in a whole different [category]. So that makes friendships hard, because people who have kids our age are much younger and listening to music you don’t want to listen to, than us, and people who are our age have kids much older than our kids. I have friends from high school who are grandparents! I am like, “wow, I just started!”

There is a relationship between the age of the men in my study and the importance they place on the role of father. The older the man was at the time of the birth of his first child (in his 30s for the first child), the greater the importance he placed on being a father. There are some good reasons for this, I believe. In my sample, Charismatic Christians and Catholics, for the most part, had children younger (early-to-middle 20s for their first child) than their Protestant and non-practicing counterparts. The greater the degree of religiosity, the more emphasis a man placed on his spousal role versus his paternal role, perhaps because Christian teachings emphasize the marriage role. One would assume that older men would internalize more traditional gender ideologies, but that is not the case with older (in middle-to-late thirties when child was born) Mainstream Protestant men. As illustrated by the identity pie charts, men assigned greater importance to the “parent” role over other roles, the exception being the “spouse” role for Conservative Christians and some Catholics [See Figures 4a-f].
Table 3: Roles by Age of the Man; data gathered from identity pie charts

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<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Parent Role</th>
<th>Spouse Role</th>
<th>Family Member Role</th>
<th>Economic Provider Role</th>
<th>Friend Role</th>
<th>Hobbyist Role</th>
<th>Religious Man Role</th>
<th>Citizen Role</th>
<th>Student Role</th>
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KEY
1. All numbers are percentages
2. All numbers are rounded up to the nearest whole number
3. Age = Age of man at birth of first child
Figure 4a: Identity Pie Chart for Noah Smith, Conservative Christian and Transitional

Figure 4b: Identity Pie Chart for Matthew Olsen, Conservative Christian and Egalitarian
Figure 4c: Identity Pie Chart for Frank Gonzalez, Catholic and Egalitarian

Figure 4d: Identity Pie Chart for Kevin Chee, Mainstream Protestant and Egalitarian
**Figure 4e:** Identity Pie Chart for Garrett Bowman, Mainstream Protestant and Egalitarian

**Figure 4f:** Identity Pie Chart for Edwin Abbott, Non-practicing and Egalitarian
Religiosity affecting types of involvement. The more conservative the religious institution, including all Conservative Christians and devout Catholics, in which men and women were raised, the more they admitted that women are slightly better at taking care of children. These are also the same men that placed more importance on the role of spouse rather than the role of father. [see Table 4: Identity Roles by Religious Affiliation of the Man] Even those men who grew up in a fairly strict religious household but at the time of my study were either not practicing or in a more liberal church, claimed that women are slightly better, because of innate biological reasons, for caring for young children. Mainstream Protestant and non-practicing men, interestingly, did not concede that women are better suited to parenting and strongly believed that women and men are just as able to care for children. Religiosity, as it affects parental involvement, is taken up more fully in chapter six.

Economic contribution and its role in masculine identities. Regardless of religious devotion, there was a correlation between peoples’ particular gender roles, the kind of household that they ran, and how they viewed the individual spouses’ economic contributions. Where the division of labor was more or less egalitarian, participants routinely downplayed the importance of being a breadwinner and did not necessarily view it as important to their identities. As we can see from Table 5, these men downplayed the breadwinner role [see Table 5: Men’s Roles]. As Paul Montgomery, an engineer in an egalitarian household and a Mainstream Protestant responded,

Is it important for me being a breadwinner? Not necessarily, since I have the belief that it is not as important as being a parent, which is the most important thing. But [we] have to be financially successful as a group. How we do that as a family is [important].
Table 4: Roles by Religious Affiliation of the Man; data gathered from identity pie charts

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<tr>
<th>Religious Affiliation</th>
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**KEY**
1. All numbers are percentages
2. All numbers are rounded up to the nearest whole number, so totals do not always add up to 100%
3. CC = Conservative Christian, MP = Mainstream Protestant, NP = Non-practicing
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**KEY**
1. All numbers are percentages
2. Age = Age of man at birth of first child
4. Men living in transitional households are highlighted in red. Dominic Trujillo and Evan Frazier, also transitional, did not complete an identity pie chart.
After musing over my questions on spousal economic contributions, Garrett Bowman, also a Mainstream Protestant and a landscape designer told me,

Money. It is a necessity. It just IS. You gotta live. It needs to be done. I don’t derive. Hmmm. I don’t know how to say it. A lot of men get a sense of who they are, by being that [economic provider] but I don’t see it that way.

Parents in egalitarian relationships stated that since they both make money, as long as the household is economically provided for it really does not matter who is making the money. One Mainstream Protestant father and a general contractor, Phillip Brewer, laughed when I asked him if it was important for him to be an economic provider and said,

I would have no problem being a house dad, but it is important that the household be provided for. If my wife made a $100,000 a year, I’d be like, “fine, I’ll stay home.” It’s not a gender thought…I told Yvonne that she can come home, the house would be clean and dinner cooked and I’d be standing there naked in the doorway waiting for her every day!

The Fraziers both have internalized transitional gender roles and are one of the Charismatic Christian households in which the wife acted as the one ultimately responsible for the household but still accepted help with childcare and household chores. Rachel Frazier also indicated to me that she wished that her husband would make enough money so that she could greatly reduce her hours at work. As Rachel told me, “I have to be the breadwinner because I make the most, but I wish I didn’t have to be.” Her husband later said, “I’d like to be the breadwinner, but it’s Rachel, because she’s the breadwinner. It is aggravating. But she’s doing it.”

Conservative Christian households where the division of labor was equally shared, (such as among William Robinson and Xavier Patton), respected their wives’ careers as well as appreciated their wives’ unique role as mother. They did not see
women and men’s roles as interchangeable, but still saw the need to be equally involved fathers since the father role is as important as the mother role. As William Robinson shared with me,

You know, if the tables would turn, like if I lost my job, I would stay home with my son. But I’ve known guys who did that and it was harder for them, because they felt that the mother should be home and with their roles [as stay-at-home dad] it was harder for them. It is difficult to switch roles. I think moms should do it, may be because of the biology thing. They actually had the child. Maybe guys are already more detached? So, as much as I would say that we would do that it probably would be very difficult to switch those roles…I grew up in a more traditional mold, like Liz, where both moms stayed home, watched the kids, then went back to work. I think traditional upbringings made us want to do the same thing for Owen, but Liz’s career is important too and if she walks out of it there might not be the opportunity to walk back in.

In this case, William Robinson respected his wife’s work, but also her unique, biologically-based, position as a mother.

Husbands that belonged to egalitarian households (25 in my sample) downplayed the importance of making money. In these households, men routinely agreed that if their wives could work and make enough money for their families to be comfortable, they would easily be stay-at-home dads. They did not see breadwinning as that important, as long as their families were financially secure.

But the majority of women in my sample also admitted to wanting to work fewer hours so that they could be at home more. Although, they still wanted to work some hours outside of the home, as they viewed employment positively. I view this as women being more traditional in their gender ideologies than the men. Men seemed to be, on average, the more progressive spouse.

In two of the five transitional households, the Jones and the Trujillos (where the wife does everything regarding kin maintenance and works and the husband just works
and minimally helps around the house), this pattern was shaped by the high number of hours that the man worked. The kinds of employment that people chose to do, and the amount of hours that they worked, can be understood in terms of the kinds of gender roles that they have internalized. However, the women in these cases were adamant about how they wished their households were more egalitarian. They did not think that it was fair that they, because they are female, did more of the childcare and household tasks. They were at a disadvantage because at the time of my study they made less money than their husbands, but also because they chose more flexible jobs. They made the choice, at least for the time being, to put their husbands’ careers before theirs. In all of the families that I studied, only two families (the Trujillos and the Joneses) have husbands who held slightly more traditional views than their wives. In the other three transitional households (Fraziers, Maiers, and Smiths) both the wives and the husbands were similarly transitional. Nonetheless, Aaron Jones and Dominic Trujillo claimed that they would have been willing to work less and take care of the house and children more if it were possible. That is, if their wives received better pay and had less flexible jobs. As Aaron Jones thoughtfully said,

Being an economic provider…It is important to me. Maybe more than it should be. More from the background from which I was raised it is very hard to get past that, I think. It is gonna be interesting for Renee and me in the future. She has now passed me in education and in the future, it’s probably gonna be like a reverse role for us. She will have the potential to make more than me.

Ruth: Would that bother you?

Aaron: No, it doesn’t bother me. But I can see that there would have to be a change in attitude on my part. We would have to reprioritize. Like we talked about who’s responsibility is it to take a day off and mind the kids. Up to this point, Renee’s schedule has been more flexible, in the future I might have to make mine more flexible.
For the five transitional families also in two income households, both spouses placed more importance on men making money. Nevertheless, the majority of men in my sample did not derive a large part of their identities from being a breadwinner. It is important to note that they were part of a dual-earner household and the burden of economically supporting the family did not fall solely on one spouse. Men were realistic in understanding that making money as a collective unit is important for survival, and this is what partners do, that is, share. Perhaps this can be attributed to their greater participation in domestic labor because they did not hold with dichotomous gender roles. I credit this to a shift in priorities among many middle class families.

**Escaping the rat race.** A common theme that I found was a conscious rejection of upward mobility or, as one father put it, “escaping the rat race.” As Charles Lee told me,

> The whole idea—like the American Dream, if you were to ask me a year ago, it was a decent house, job, family, 2.5 kids, you know. And now…it can be so many other things…As of late, I have been of late, questioning everything. If you asked me a year ago, what expectations did I have for my kids, I would have said anything that would make a lot of money, because that would make life easier, but now, no, that’s not what it is about.

These men rejected the breadwinner image and instead internalized the caretaker and teacher image of what a father should be. Xavier Patton astutely observed,

> I think that with both parents working the kids can still be healthy, if parents work at it. With our society today lots of parents are working two jobs to make ends meet, but they sacrifice the kids. I’m not saying its been a cake walk these last ten years but I’ve seen friends [pause]. My kids are more spiritually whole than if they were tossed in daycare [all day] with every Tom, Dick and Harry. I’ve sacrificed my progression in career but I don’t regret it. Basically, I have worked my schedule around my kids. The shifts I choose are not the shifts I want, but I do [them] for the benefit of my kids and my family. You know, childcare, my child spends two to three hours in childcare a week. Where some kids spend all day in
childcare when their parents are at work. It works for some but not for others. For me, it was one of those that, I made the decision, when we decided to have our first our first priority was defiantly going to be one that worked my schedule around my child or around my children.

These fathers, overall, stressed opting out of the “rat race.” They would rather make less money but have more time to spend with their families. As Paul Montgomery declared, “You know, it [having kids] is just very rewarding, way more than a career or any monetary type…you know, what society deems ‘success’ should be taking part in your kids upbringing…”

Fourteen women in my sample worked full-time, but even then, their full-time working husbands still worked more hours than they did. Often the men worked up to ten hours more than their full-time employed wife. In 12 families out of my 30 family sample women worked less than full-time, approximately 32 or 35 hours a week. Only one man, Julian Reed, worked fewer hours than his wife, although they both technically worked full-time. Additionally, eight women of the 30 women wanted to work fewer hours, but did not feel that they could afford the reduction in salary that working less hours would entail. Kathy Webb, a Catholic mother and accountant, stated in exasperation,

I hate working full-time! I would rather that I just work until 3:00 p.m. or so and then could pick up the kids…With my daughter, I tell her why I work—a lot of her friends’ moms don’t work—so they know why I do this, so they can have things in life, like private school. Choices. So they know that there are hard choices.

Unlike the 24 women who commented on how they either love working fewer hours (16 women) or wish they could (eight women), only five men were explicit in that they wished that they could reduce their hours and stay home with their children more.
The work-childcare dilemma. At the time of my study, all of the female participants had bachelor’s degrees and many of them had completed graduate degrees or certificate programs, as well. Their levels of education have allowed them to have good, decent paying occupations. They simply did not want to work full-time to the detriment of their children. As Sara Chee told me,

When I was pregnant I said, “I’m going to be a career woman and a mom” and then I got pregnant and all I wanted to do was to be at home. I remember driving to work, I was two months pregnant and I started to cry because all I wanted to do was to be home with my baby. But we had to put him in daycare and then after our second son was born, I had to cut down. Had to do it. Financially, well, our priorities shifted.

Housework always came up last on their list of priorities, so women were not necessarily cutting back their hours so that they could clean, although they did clean more than their spouses. Indeed, almost every woman I talked to stated in tones of weary acceptance that they are judged on having a clean house, not their husbands. Therefore, they were the ones who arranged for a cleaning service, ended up doing the cleaning themselves, or telling their husbands to do it (this will be discussed more in chapter five). Women chose to cut back their hours so that they could be certain that their children were not in institutional or family daycare for eight or twelve hours a day. Women in American society, and my study is reflective of this national statistic, make about twenty percent less money than men (IWPR 2009). However, in New Mexico the gap is even greater, with New Mexican woman making between 75.4 to 77.9 percent of New Mexican men (Semega 2009). So, if one of the parents is going to cut back on hours, it is typically more economically advantageous for the woman to do so.
Interestingly enough, there were mothers in my sample who had greater earning potential than their husbands and still felt that women should be the ones to cut back on their hours. Often, biological or presumed biological reasons (i.e., breastfeeding, women are inherently more nurturing) were cited as the reasons why women should cut back their employment hours. Some men told me that they wished that they could be the ones to reduce their hours, instead of their wives, but they also drew on the biological explanation of why they chose to have their wives cut back on work hours.

Although women want to work fewer hours, not one woman in my sample stated that she wanted to be stay-at-home mother. Instead, women told me without prompting that they felt personal satisfaction from working outside of the home. Six women who had tried being stay-at-home mothers shared with me that they preferred working, and two of those six women adamantly disliked being a stay-at-home mother. Rebecca Jones, a Protestant, development councilor, in a transitional household, told me frankly,

I was a stay-at-home mom for almost two years, and that was the unhappiest I have ever been. I like to work. I couldn’t find a job in Albuquerque that could pay well enough and have kids. It is hard on your identity not to work. The rough parts of our marriage were when I wasn’t working. I like working part-time, or three-quarter-time like I do now.

Hope Griego, a Catholic, social worker in a reminder egalitarian relationship, also told me that the two years that she was a stay-at-home mother were not good years. “It just didn’t measure up to what I thought it would be,” she told me. I asked her what, specifically, she thought it would be and she said, “Well, it wasn’t as much fun as I thought it would be. I was bored. And I still had John do a lot of the childcare because even as a stay-at-home mom it wasn’t fair for me to do it all.”
I argue that 25 couples held egalitarian ideals, but it cannot be denied that with many women working fewer hours they also spent more time with their children and at home doing more domestic labor. That does not mean that the women automatically did more of the childcare tasks, however. Primary childcare tasks need to be accomplished in the morning and evening. This usually happens when both parents are home from work and can, theoretically, assist each other in completing the tasks. Usually the women cut back on work for an hour or two in the afternoon, so that they could pick up their children from daycare earlier. Some used that time to grocery shop or make dinner. Some just played with their children. Some ignored their children completely during this time, allowing them to play by themselves while the women engaged in personal tasks.

Although only two of the families I studied had infants in 2008-2009, families routinely noted that when their child was a newborn the mother did more childcare. Part of the explanation for this is biological. Many mothers breastfed their babies and while technology exists that allows fathers to participate in feeding children (i.e. pumps to extract the breast milk so that it can be put in a bottle) most families agreed that it is sometimes more work than it is worth. While only five women took off a month or less for maternity leave, the rest took much more time off: three women took six weeks off, eight women took three months off, three women took four months off, and four women took six months off. Also, six women took a year or more off after having a baby. During maternity leave women were not working outside of the home and they naturally assumed more childcare tasks, since that is a main point of maternity leave. Childcare became more egalitarian when the children were older than one year.
Mothers’ identities and involvement. Men, I argue, construct their identities as fathers in accordance with their relationships with their wives. People who were Conservative Christian at the time of my research, or were raised conservatively in a Catholic church, did not differentiate their roles as husband and father; rather those roles were collapsed into a broader role of “family man.” They expressed that they wanted to have good marriages because, if for no other reason, they saw it as better for their children. However, women’s roles as “mother” also directly affected their husbands’ conceptualizations of being a “father.”

The women with whom I worked, like their husbands, strongly identified with their role as mother. They felt respected in this role and they had internalized the notion that motherhood is the most important job that a woman can have (see Crittenden 2001). Broadly, some women, even those with fulfilling careers, marriages, and friendships, often still feel that there is something missing if they do not have children. Indeed, even in these times where dual-career families are necessary, women are still looked down upon for engaging in any activity that could take them away from their family (Hays 1996). I was made aware of this fact when I interviewed a Conservative Christian woman, Megan Olsen. Leaning over close to me so that her long blonde hair puddled on the table, Megan shared,

I enjoy what I do, but we waited a long time to have our baby and she always comes first. I have nothing against working moms, I am a working mom. I have always felt that you can’t judge a person until you have walked a mile in her shoes and even then I am not sure that you can judge! And we have had a lot of judgment against us because of me working. Ideally, I would love to be home with Kate, she is better than working, but I can’t. Now if Matthew would just make more money [laughs]. One of the elders in the church said that Matthew and I need to sit down and really think about what we can cut out so that he can work
and I can stay home and be a mother! But that is not realistic. I make more money than he does. I guess we are in a unique position.  

Although I chose to focus my study on fathers I could not help but notice women’s conceptualization of parenting roles. The women, regardless of religious adherence, generally stressed how great their husbands were as fathers and noted how lucky they were that their husbands did so much with their children. As Margo Gilzean told me, “I’m so blessed that he does so much. He is an exemplary father.” Michelle Byrd, Crystal Renaud, Molly Bowman, Rachel Frazier, and Cindy Maxwell all, at one time or another, assured me that their husbands were “good daddies” and “do a lot.” Presumably their told their husbands this, and perhaps this praised reinforced their husbands’ participation in the household. Perhaps there is a causal connection here, in that women praise their husbands for being good fathers so men want to be involved and get that praise. Men, alternatively, hardly mentioned that their wives were fabulous mothers. It was taken for granted that they were.

One Conservative Christian mother, Wendy Maier, was surprised when we began to discuss parental involvement. Although she was engaged at that moment in stuffing pork chops for dinner, she paused and put down the knife and looked me straight in the eyes and said, “We’re mothers. We’re the mamma bears. Women will always be mothers

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52 Megan Olsen also commented during our interview that she really enjoys working. She did not expect her husband to make all the money, she just wanted him to make more so that she could work less and their quality of life would not change.

53 One glaring exception to this was Seth Maier calling his wife a “superwoman” when he described how she cleans, makes dinner, takes care of their son, and works full-time. Other fathers were more like Frank Gonzalez who obliquely praised his wife. Frank informed me that his wife is just more efficient than he is. It should be noted that I did not solicit from my participants whether they thought that their spouses were “good” parents, since it was not my intention to pass judgment. I asked what they thought what a good parent did (chapter six) and I also asked if they were happy, in general, and if they were not, what they would change.
first, no matter what. Of course it is important. I don’t think you’ll find any woman who will say otherwise.” I tried not to look skeptical and invoke the ire of a woman holding a sharp knife, but she must have seen my doubt because she reiterated, “We’re mamma bears. We protect our kids. Not every dad is going to do that.”

As it turns out, Wendy was correct. I often received looks of incredulity from women when we discussed any topic remotely related to their position as mothers. It was as if they could understand why I would be interested in fathers since fathers might be neglected, but everybody already knows how important mothers are. Similarly, Cindy Maxwell, a Mainstream Protestant, hesitated at the end of our interview and then looked at me quizzically and said, “Well, I think Mommies are Mommies and [pause] are better at these kinda things. Does this make sense? I just think that Mommies are Mommies and maybe its is instinct or something.”

Rachel Frasier, a Charismatic Conservative Christian like Wendy Maier living in a transitional household, regarded me with a little bit of pity when I told her that I was not a mother. She reached over the table where we were sitting drinking coffee and patted my hand. Then she said, “You’ll understand one day. It is the best thing in the world, being a mother. Just wait. It’s hard to describe it if you’re not one.” It was not just Conservative Christian mothers who have this position, but mothers from all religious traditions. Alice Portalla, an agnostic, told me that one of the benefits of being a parent is that she can now relate to so many other women that she could not relate to before. Being
a mother gave her a similar status and a common ground with her family and co-workers.54

Additionally, during a pilot project I administered identity pie charts to six women, to see how they would allocate the “slices” (the roles) of the pie. Two of the women shaded in the entire pie as “mother” and the other four women were confused about the concept. Women had a much more difficult time subdividing their roles than the men in my pilot sample, stating that the mother role simply affected all of their other roles. Based on this, I chose not to administer identity pie charts to women during my main research project. Perhaps this was a mistake, but from the data that I gathered, it is still clear that women are very committed to being involved mothers.

The excerpts given above make it obvious that all the women in my sample are engaged, accessible, and responsible for their children. More importantly, they take final responsibility in the domestic arena. This does not belittle their husbands’ involvement in their families, but it does suggest that it is important to acknowledge that while both spouses can claim responsibility, it is also important to see who has ultimate responsibility in the family.

The extreme importance of being a mother also allowed women to have power in the family. Sometimes this translated into women—regardless of if they lived in an egalitarian or transitional household—being “gatekeepers,” which sometimes inhibited men from taking full responsibility for their children. As Amelia Abbott, an agnostic

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54 Both Frank Gonzalez and Justin Byrd both mentioned that since they joined “the daddy club” they can relate to other men who have children. Frank told me, “I can tell funny stories and it gives people a common experience, breaks a lot of ground when you both have kids. You know, there are guys at work, there are some people where you kinda have a hard time approaching, and when you find out that they have kids the same age as yours it gives you a common experience and breaks a lot of ground.”
mother in a reminder egalitarian household, told me, “Look, when you have bratty kids, who gets blamed first? The mom. Oh sure, people will say it’s the parents’ fault, together, but they really mean the mom.”

For this cohort of women, gender role socialization helps to explain why they emphasized the mother role over all others. Mothers that social scientists classify as “gatekeepers” are socialized into embracing and enacting, this role (e.g., Allen and Hawkins 2006; Park and Brott 1999). Because women of childbearing age are viewed as mothers, it stands to reason that they identify strongly with being mothers. A Conservative Christian, Florence Lee commented,

For me, being a mom is something that I have always wanted and although there are times when, as my husband and I say, we understand why some animals eat their young, I still enjoy it! For my husband, I think that there are other things that he thinks are more important. But it is still important for him to be there for his kids, for his family.

This group of middle class women (and men) did not, for the most part, have careers that required a huge amount of time and energy investment beyond the workday. They differ from professional women (physicians, college professors, and so forth) who have careers that require very long hours, usually 60 hours or more a week. Professional careers are also more demanding; weekends and nights are never fully “free” for professional women and there is a lot of mental and emotional investment in professional careers. This is not to demean the careers that the women in my sample chose or the amount of effort that they put into their careers. Rather, at the time of my research, these women did not usually have a “greedy” career competing with their primary role as mother. As Lamphere (1987) points out, occupation is still gender segregated in the
United States. Moreover, occupation is segregated by motherhood status, as well (Ridgeway and Correll 2004).

Indeed, motherhood might be revered in the ideal, but mothers are also economically discriminated against in the workplace. Ridgeway and Correll (2004; see also Glauber 2007) note that women who are identified as mothers by other people in their workplace, get paid less than women who deemphasize their mothering role. Since it is routinely believed that a woman will automatically put her family before her work, employers do not pay mothers as much childless women. For women 34 years old and younger, the pay gap is now greater between mothers and childless women than it is between young men and young women (Crittenden 2001:94). In this case, at work, being a mother is actually low status, but it can still be argued that the ideal of the nurturing mother is still admired by many Americans. Part of this can be explained by the fact that in our capitalist system, there is very little flexibility when it comes to the kind of worker an employer wants. Overall, employers want to get as much out of their workers that they can and classify a “good worker” as one that can always be on-call, have no distractions, and be very productive. This is a worker role that men, who have historically never been pulled in two directions of work and family, excel. Women, who are burdened by familial obligations much more than men, have difficulty fitting into this narrow mold. By choosing careers that will not inhibit their participation in the family, many women choose to give the mother role prominence, but for many it is not like they have much of a choice in the matter. Indeed, by not being respected as a worker, it makes more sense to emphasize the mother role, a role from which women still gain much respect. I also see this as a cyclical dilemma for women and families in general. By choosing careers that
afford them flexibility, it keeps those jobs gender segregated, or at least provides a glass ceiling.

However, the fact that they were working mothers explains why these women encouraged their husbands to take an active role in their children's lives. The women in my sample were well educated and knew that their children's emotional and psychological wellbeing was enhanced when they have involved fathers. As the voluminous literature on mothering notes (see chapter two and also Chant 2003; Glenn 1994; Moore 1996), today’s middle class women also recognize that they cannot and should not do everything. My research supports the more general research on mothering, showing that women do not want to, or feel that they cannot, give up the ultimate responsibility and control that being a mother brings. In this way, women were a bit more traditionally minded than their husbands.

Notably, many men in my sample professed more egalitarian ideals than their wives. Often the men earnestly stated that they believed that women and men need to be treated equally, their wives disagreed. Women agreed that both men and women should parent, and both genders can be good parents, but sometimes they stated that women are just better at it. It is important to note that when I asked them outright any question along the lines of, “Are women better at parenting then men?” all but one women answered that they were not. Yet, during our interview, most women would say something about how, because they are mothers, they notice when their children needs something, or that unlike their husbands they are always thinking about their children. It was usually a very vague statement, usually something such as “moms are just moms, you know?” which is how Cindy Maxwell put it. In this manner, women were almost honoring the mother role over
the father role, as if, they believe that women are equal, but better at the same time. This was especially true for Conservative Christian women who held more transitional views of gender, such as Florence Lee, Wendy Maier, Emily Smith, and Rachel Frazier. Egalitarian minded women, such as Hope Griego, Ariana Montgomery, and Amelia Abbott also agreed with this position.

Summary and Conclusion

Ethnography, specifically in-depth participant observation, is a valuable method for understanding fathers participation in their children’s lives. When a researcher spends large amounts of time in intimate settings with a selection of families, this provides opportunities to ascertain more specifics about parental involvement. Participant observation allows one to examine parental involvement by employing Lamb’s tripartite model of engagement, accessibility, and responsibility; a model which affords a finer level of detail regarding involvement. Although Lamb’s model is useful for understanding the nuances of father involvement, it falls a little short of why men chose, or chose not, to be involved fathers. There are many reasons why men all claimed to be “responsible” and “involved.” I argue that the main reason why men identified strongly with being a father reflects the over-arching paternal ideology. It is necessary, if a man wants to claim middle class status, to emphasize being a father. For the men in my sample, they were all very committed to being fathers and conceptualized a large part of their identities as fathers. Nonetheless, a man can identify with the role very highly and claim to be an involved father, and yet still not fully participate in all of Lamb’s

55 Florence Lee was actually much more traditionally minded than her husband. They live in a reminder egalitarian household.
involvement categories. Therefore, it is useful to take into account ideology regarding gender roles, more generally.

I recognized two main types of households following Hochschild’s three categories. These household types are determined by how tasks are allocated than run the continuum from transitional to egalitarian (there were no strictly traditional men in my sample). How men and women adhered to their parental identities affected their gender roles and, therefore, how they chose to allocate domestic labor, (including childcare), as well as wage work. Transitional families were the least egalitarian and saw mothers doing more childcare tasks and were over-all responsible for domestic labor. Conversely, most egalitarian families admitted that there are no differences between how men and women parent and that everybody ought to be treated equally. Following from this, men were very involved with their children, exhibiting engagement, accessibility, and responsibility for their children. In practice, however, women tended to be the ones who were engaged in slightly more childcare and were the ones with final responsibility for the children. The Reeds were the only family where they claimed egalitarian roles but Julian Reed did more childcare than his wife.

Gender role socialization helps to explain why men are involved in their children's lives. The men in my sample grew up when dual-worker households were the norm, and androgynous parenting was a socially accepted pattern among middle class households. The men in my study have internalized this position and are doing more fatherwork than their fathers did before them. Even men who were older when they had children were still very involved fathers in my study. The older the man was when his first child was born the more involved he actually was in his children’s lives at the time
of my study; perhaps because he was able to accomplish other life goals prior to having children and was then able to more fully commit to being a father.

Nonetheless, women, as mothers, were to a great degree the ones who felt ultimately responsible for their households to run smoothly and their children to be cared for. Being a mother is still a highly valued role for women. This is best explained by understanding the structural constraints that American society imposes on women. Women are paid less overall and not as respected as workers, unlike men. Part of this stems from the fact that women are expected to put their family first. Employers want a worker who can fit the “typical” worker mold, that is, always being available to work and having no distractions. Simply put, this is a form of labor that men, who traditionally have not had to worry about work-family balance, generally do well. Men have the opportunity, if they wish, to identify with the breadwinner role, although as I stated earlier, the men in my sample did not. If middle class women were to emphasize the economic provider role over their mother role, they would be looked down upon by society at large. They would also, as Amelia Abbott noted earlier, be the parent who is blamed by society when something is wrong with the child. This may explain why the women in my sample, overall, were slightly more traditional than their partners. They gave androgynous parenting lip-service but they still wanted to hold onto the mother role and have ultimate authority as mothers since they are subjugated under a patriarchal job system. If they cannot have authority and respect at work, at least they can have it at home (see also Safa 1995). Women appreciated the amount of childcare that their husbands did and have come to expect it, too, as they also worked outside of the home. Related to this finding is that women were happy that their husbands did childcare—
which is one piece of domestic labor—so that they did not seem to press their husbands too much to do other aspects of domestic labor, that is, housework.

Dual-worker households are in an interesting position because breadwinning is not assigned to only one partner. Both incomes are required in order to have a comfortable lifestyle. The couples in my study, by-and-large, focused on having healthy families. The prevailing notion was that it is good for women to work and be fulfilled personally, but it is also important for children to have active and engaged parents. Therefore, the majority of the families in my study had a parent who reduced their hours at work in order to spend more time with the children. They routinely talked about “opting out of the rat race,” and while money is important for survival, it was never a primary goal.

That men in these dual-career couples took an active role in childcare is interesting, but what is noteworthy is that they did not conflate childcare chores with housework tasks; because they engaged in childcare does not mean that they also engaged in cleaning the house. Chapter five examines how the married women and men in my study divided household chores as well as childcare, and how their parental ideologies played out in their domestic arrangements, including who my participants felt was responsible for a task. Furthermore, religiosity helps to encourage and sustain fathers’ involvement in their families. How particular religions teach and support specific parental ideologies, and how that impacts parental identities and therefore paternal involvement, are explored in detail in chapter six.
CHAPTER 5

The Gendered Domestic Division of Labor

I was at the Maxwell house to have dinner after a block party. It was an informal dinner and more of the neighbors were showing up than were originally expected. Mike Maxwell was sent off to buy more beer and Cindy Maxwell and I were in the kitchen going through her cupboards looking for more pre-packaged food to prepare. She found some cornbread mix and I found some brownie mix. As I foraged through her well-stocked refrigerator looking for eggs, a hundred children ran through the kitchen on the way to the backyard (it felt like a hundred children, but it was probably only five kids). Cindy called out a warning, “Don’t run, you might fall and hurt yourselves. Wait until you get outside.” As we mixed up dinner, one of the other mothers came to help us while the husbands opened beer and grilled meat. Later, the women cleaned up after dinner. I found myself part of a female procession carrying leftovers to a neighbor’s refrigerator while the men each opened another beer. I was struck by the stereotypical 1950s character that pervaded the Maxwell house that day. It was different than what I had previously seen. The gender roles had never been that strictly or obviously defined any other time I came to do participant observation. Where was the Mike I knew? The one who gave the kids a bath? The one who played with his children? The one who worked while we played? Why, all of a sudden, were the women doing the stereotypically “female” tasks? I must have muttered something along these lines because Cindy smiled at me and said,

I don’t mind. He’s a wonderful father. It’s not like my house is perfectly clean. Well, it is clean, but it’s filled with what I call “fun dirt,” like clutter. We have a maid to do some of the gross stuff like bathrooms. I’m not going to be like my
mom who spent her whole weekend cleaning. And I can’t complain since Mike does so much! It is more important for me to have him be a good dad and my kids to benefit from that than it is if he cleans up the counters. Which he does, too, a lot. And it is important for my son and daughter to see that their Daddy does things with them, like getting them dressed, too, so they’ll expect that from men when they grow up. Look, if my husband gets the kids ready in the morning, Olivia will look like she is homeless when she goes off to school. I mean, I have to wonder, did he even brush her hair? Or worse, is that what he calls brushing hair? And I cringe. But who cares, since he is the one who got her ready. You can’t ask for help and then complain how it’s done. The days of mothers “doing it all” are over.

It is interesting that when people congregate, women tend to take over the bulk of the domestic tasks, such as cooking, child-tending, and cleaning. I suggest that this is because women have ultimate domestic responsibility, which is easily seen when there are groups of women together. Conversely, when a wife and husband are alone together, they share domestic responsibilities much more fully since they only have each other to rely on. When there are multiple mothers in a room, it becomes clear that men might be great fathers, but they are also the privileged gender regarding household tasks. That is, they simply do not do as much cleaning as their wives. This can be explained by the emphasis that the parents in my sample place on fathering. Cindy Maxwell is typical of the mothers in my sample in that she is more concerned that her husband do his fair share of the childrearing than that they, as a couple, split cleaning equally. Part of this comes down to priorities, as the women believed that it is more important to raise healthy and well-adjusted children then it is to ensure that the dishes are washed after every meal. Dual-worker couples do not have the time, nor the inclination, to keep a spotless house. Women in my sample indicated that they are overwhelmingly grateful that their husbands are involved and responsible fathers because it makes their job as a mother that much
easier. Childrearing, of all the tasks that fall into the realm of domestic labor, is by far the most important to “get right.”

In chapter four, I argued that there has been a generational shift in fathering. While my participants’ fathers did more childcare than their own fathers (the grandfathers of my participants), since their wives were in the workforce, these men did not see completing domestic labor as part of being a good father. Rather, carrying out childcare was just something that they had to do because their wives asked them to. In contrast, today, men place great emphasis on being a father which sees them doing a near equal amount of childcare as their wives. Here I argue that this shift in fathering must be situated within the larger picture of domestic labor, of which childcare is only part.

This chapter examines how the married women and men in my study divided domestic work, specifically household chores, and, importantly, how they perceived their individual family arrangements. Although childcare is discussed explicitly in chapter four, it cannot be divorced from the larger picture of domestic labor presented here. For dual-career couples, there are two basic components that have to be considered: work and family. Everyone in my sample emphasized that family ought to come first even though paid work is a necessity for supporting family, but how individuals balanced work and family differed. My research attempted to answer questions such as, why is domestic labor still gender segregated? How are parental ideologies, which influence the domestic division of labor (particularly the aspect of childcare), created and maintained? How do parental ideologies mediate parental involvement, not only in childcare, but in domestic labor, generally? Therefore, I examined the decisions that couples made when dividing household tasks and childcare. I am not necessarily concerned with the amount of time
spent at a task, but who actually did a particular task and who (if anyone) assumed responsibility for seeing a task completed. The ideology behind gender roles influences how an individual will manage work and family obligations. Although people’s gender roles ran the continuum between what Hochschild (2003[1989]) terms “transitional” to “egalitarian” I found that the majority of the couples in my study professed an egalitarian relationship regarding the domestic division of labor. However, how tasks were divided differed and who took ultimate responsibility also differed among families. Here I provide five case studies of families that emphasize the continuum between transitional and egalitarian households based on gender roles. You will read about the Maiers, who are a model transitional family, then you will read about the Trujillos who illustrate the diversity I found within this group of transitionals. The egalitarian families I segregate into two camps: the “divide-and-conquer egalitarians,” like the Portallas, and the “reminder egalitarians,” like the Griegos. Spanning the gap between the divide-and-conquer egalitarians and the reminder egalitarians are families like the Montgomerys, where each spouse has a different idea of how they come to divide domestic tasks. I further evaluate how structural forces, such as economic position growing up, type of employment, and so forth, influenced my participants’ decisions.

The Allocation of Domestic Labor in Albuquerque

My study yielded information on thirty dual worker households. Both men and women were forthright during interviews. Sometimes men squirmed uncomfortably in their seat when they admitted that they did not do as much as their wife with regard to household duties such as cleaning. During participant observation with eight of these families I saw firsthand which partner was responsible for particular household and
childcare tasks, and there seemed to be very little difference in who did what depending on the day (whether it was a weekend day or a weeknight) when both parents were there. It became obvious that some women overestimated the amount of domestic work that they did. Conversely, I also found that some women overestimated the contributions of their husbands.

During my semi-structured interviews with each couple I conducted a survey on how they allocated the domestic labor. Participants ranked their involvement in particular tasks on a scale of zero to five, with zero indicating that they were not involved in that task at all and five indicating they felt exclusively responsible for seeing the task to completion. A ranking of two and a half, for example, indicated that the task was equally shared. I ran multiple paired t-tests to see if there was any statistical significance to the tasks. 56 [See Tables 6 and 7: Household chore T-Tests]. My findings suggest that there are still certain gender dominated tasks. There is a distinction between “inside” and “outside” work, with many men assuming responsibility for “outside” tasks and women for “inside” ones. There are exceptions, of course, but even such exceptions are gendered. For example, home repairs are often understood to be within the purview of men, regardless of whether the repairs are inside of the house or not. Additionally, ornamental plant gardening is often considered to be a female dominated task (versus mowing the lawn, a male task). Unlike the patterns seen in previous studies, there is less of a distinction between what my study participants viewed as “women’s work” versus “men’s work” (e.g. Hochschild 2003[1989]; Lamphere et al. 1993; Yanagisako 1977).

56 Paired t-tests provides an exact test for the equality of the means of two normal populations with unknown, but equal, variances. In this case, gender and specific household tasks.]
Table 6: Mean Difference in Responsibility Assumed by Mothers and Fathers for Domestic Labor Grouped by Common Categories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Household Tasks</th>
<th>Father (n=30)</th>
<th>Mother (n=30)</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>Significant</th>
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<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
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<td>Mother (n=30)</td>
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<td>---------------</td>
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Table 7 Continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Household Tasks</th>
<th>Father (n=30)</th>
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<th>t</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>significant</th>
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<td>SD</td>
<td>M</td>
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<td>1.52</td>
<td>2.95</td>
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Table 7 Continued

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<th>Household Tasks</th>
<th>Father (n=30)</th>
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<td></td>
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<td>2.98</td>
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<td>Soothing Child’s Hurts</td>
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<td>0.95</td>
<td>3.43</td>
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</table>
Nonetheless, of the forty chores (including nineteen specifically related to childcare) I asked about during the semi-structured interview, three (e.g., fixing the house, vehicle maintenance, yard work) are traditionally male dominated chores and ten (e.g., mopping, vacuuming, washing, folding and ironing laundry, doing dishes and cleaning up kitchen, dusting, cleaning bathrooms, and washing windows) are historically female dominated chores.\(^{57}\) The remaining chores (e.g. balancing checkbooks/managing retirement funds, cooking, and all childcare) are today considered gender neutral. It is especially interesting in that the childcare chores were viewed as “neutral” by the participants in my study, which could explain why so many men were comfortable and took pride in their engagement in childcare, and shared this chore equally with their wives. Additionally, cooking, as a category of housework, has traditionally been a female task. For example, in Lamphere et al.’s study of working class women in the 1980s, cooking was often thought of as a woman’s job. Judging from the literature, sometime in the late 1980s cooking lost much of its female-dominated identity (at least in middle class households; see Hochschild 2003[1989] and Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994). In my research, cooking was viewed as a gender neutral task. Stated another way, either men or women can cook without being labeled as doing “women’s work.” This may be explained by the relative status cooking is given over other household chores, since a cook is often praised for the

\(^{57}\) About halfway through my interviews I realized that I neglected to ask about some historically male tasks, such as taking the garbage out and cleaning up after the family pet (if applicable). Therefore, my questions were weighted towards traditional “women’s chores.” That omission notwithstanding, these are the tasks that have to get done on a weekly if not daily basis. Interestingly, some chores like laundry were “shared” in some households but are still female-dominated in that more women did it, as even in those households were it is shared, most women did not trust their husbands to do anything delicate or difficult such as washing the women’s clothes or lace tablecloths.
food he or she creates, whereas it is rarer for a window washer to be commended (e.g., Beller 1993; Penha-Lopes 2006).

During and after the surveys, I asked more detailed questions about participation in domestic chores and this is where inconsistencies came to light. For example, Pat Vargas described equally sharing laundry and dish washing duties. He claimed that he and his wife Sara trade off doing either laundry or dishes every other week. However, when it is his week to do the laundry, he abstains from doing any of her laundry or anything requiring delicate treatment. Sara agreed and told me that when it is her week to do the laundry, she does it all. In other words, Sara did not leave Pat’s clothes for him to do later, like Pat did with Sara’s clothes. In this case, she was still doing more work overall, but they asserted that they were happy with the arrangement. Sara mock sighed as she told me that she does not trust him to wash her clothing and that it is just easier for her to take on a little more work than risk a laundry disaster. Nonetheless, they both ranked laundry and dishes as “2.5” or split equally.

I also asked participants if they held any particular expectations at the time of their marriage about who would do what tasks, and what expectations and enactments, if any, had changed over the years, especially since they had children. I asked the related question of how they came to divide up tasks. Did they ever discuss who would do what task and why? I further inquired whether people were happy with their arrangement as it stood today and what they would change. These details gained from participants’ answers

58 I believe that the recent rise of male “celebrity chefs” such as Mario Batali, Bobby Flay, Emeril Lagasse, and Wolfgang Puck, have contributed to the respect that cooking and food in general have received in the last decade in the United States. The men in my study may not have grown up with their fathers cooking, unless it was grilling outside in the summer, but they came of age with a popular culture in which it is socially acceptable, and even desirable, for men to cook.
illuminated not only the domestic division of labor but how people came to understand their roles in the household.

I saw a continuum of household arrangements based on gender roles that spanned from transitional to egalitarian. Following Hochschild (2003[1989]), people holding transitional views believe that the mother should do the majority of the childcare and housekeeping. These individuals believe that since both wife and husband are working outside of the home, the husband should “help out” to be fair. But he does not have to like helping and still accedes responsibility to the wife regarding domestic duties. Only five (20 percent; the Frazier, Jones, Maier, Smith, and Trujillo families) of the families that I interviewed held transitional gender roles.

Conversely, 25 (over 80 percent) of the families I studied were in egalitarian households and professed to egalitarian ideals about spouses sharing housework equally, but I recognized two different forms of egalitarianism: “divide-and-conquer” versus “reminder” egalitarians. It is noteworthy that in seven of these egalitarian households there were still certain tasks, though they varied from household to household, that were typically done by only the wife or the husband. In other words, the tasks themselves were not necessarily thought to be gender neutral. The spouses divided all the tasks based on “his” or “her” tasks, so that no one person in the house was doing more. So, one person always cleaned the toilets and another person always did the grocery shopping. I have chosen to call this “divide-and-conquer egalitarianism.” In this sense, the divide-and-conquer egalitarians are closer to the transitional families in that both see the domestic labor as involving both male or female tasks.
Divide-and-conquer egalitarians differ from what I have called, for lack of a better term, “reminder egalitarians” who made up 11 of the egalitarian households I studied. Ideally, in these households, if women and men saw something that needed to be cleaned or cooked, whomever was available at the time did it. For instance, they both vacuumed, they both changed light bulbs, and they both cooked. It is noteworthy that even when they shared tasks, many women still felt responsible for making certain a particular task was completed. Even if they had husbands who did not need to be reminded (hence, the term “reminder egalitarians”) or told to do a task, the women did so often, anyway. They saw themselves as egalitarian but in actual practice this was not completely the case.

In seven other egalitarian households, there was a mix of assigning tasks and picking up whatever tasks needed to be done so they were both reminder and divide-and-conquer egalitarians. When the floor needed vacuuming, for example, either the husband or the wife could do it, but cooking might be strictly his job and dusting strictly her job. Within these seven families, they had many more tasks that were haphazardly done by either the wife or the husband, so in that sense, they were closer to being reminder egalitarians than divide-and-conquer egalitarians.

Interestingly enough, most egalitarians of all forms claimed that they shared responsibility for their domestic arrangements, regardless of who actually carried out the tasks. Since this is the case, it is important to examine how the couples not only carried out tasks, but who assumed ultimate responsibility. In the following section I provide five brief case studies of different families in order to illustrate the continuum between transitional and egalitarian gender roles as they play out in the domestic division of labor.
Transitional households. The Maier Family. I’m dialed in on all this stuff and I’ll do it if she asks me to.—Seth Maier

Seth Maier made it very clear that he considers himself the luckiest man in the world. He has, as he brags to his friends when they compare wives, the best, most fabulous wife, Wendy. Contributing to this is that she is an efficient and hard worker. He referred to Wendy as a “superwoman.” They both work full-time in sales and each make around $50,000 a year, but she was able to work from home a few hours a week to make up for being gone on business trips once a month. At the time of my study, they went to a Charismatic Church that promoted conservative Christian values, and the dichotomous gender roles supported at their church played out very well in their house. Seth admitted that even when it is “his” chore to do (few were exclusively “his,” except mowing the grass), Wendy helped him do it, such as cleaning up after the dinner she made. As for something such as larger cleaning jobs (e.g., organizing the garage), Seth stated, “I am very involved because she needs help.” And, “I’ve had to remind her that certain jobs are mine, like, when she takes out the garbage, I am like, ‘honey, that is my job.’ It bums me out when she takes it out. We aren’t freaky about it. We just do it, whatever needs to be done.” Wendy tended to get to most tasks before her husband did.

It appears that the only time Seth did childcare was when his wife was gone on a business trip. He told me, “I am dialed in on all that stuff, like when Wendy is gone. I know what Devin has to have, as far as his diaper bag goes, making sure that he has shoes, clothes.” So, because Seth knew what was going on, he felt that he was responsible. Seth loves to play with his son, but Devin often wants Wendy to play with
him instead. As Seth informed me, “but when we put it down, that he has to hang out
with Dad, we have a good time. Like, we’ll go to the park.”

Wendy said that she is mostly satisfied with their domestic division of labor. “For
the most part. It would be nice if he came home and cleaned the house. I would fall over!
I always want more free time, so, it would be nice if he pitched in more…he does help
me with Devin on the weekends.” Alternatively, Seth responded that he is satisfied with
the arrangement, but with one caveat: “The only way that I am not satisfied is I would
like to do more for her. I don’t want to do the bathrooms, but I would if she asked me. I
would cook, I am capable, but she never asks me to.” He rarely if ever volunteered to do
those tasks, however.

It looks as if Wendy was satisfied if her husband did the minimum domestic labor
and she seemed happy that he at least knew what to do when she was gone. The positive
aspect of adhering to a transitional gender role is that it allowed Wendy to emphasize and
get enjoyment out of being a mother, as was discussed in chapter four when she claimed
that women are “mama bears” and better able than men to care for children. The
downside is that she did the lion’s share of the cleaning, cooking, and other domestic
labor. In other words, although it might mean more cleaning on her part, it also meant
that she felt that she was more attuned to her child and knew better how to take care of
him and love him.

Seth was a transitional man. At the time of my study, he did very little household
work and when he interacted with his child he assumed the traditional “play dad” role
(e.g., Lamb 2004). Both he and his wife agreed that since he is a man, he is the head of
the household and is the ultimate decision maker. Unlike his wife, Seth did not think that
women are better suited to care for the house or children but he still believed that men should help their wives since women assume responsibility for household and kin maintenance. Seth did not see the economic provider role as a key part of his identity and believed that men and women should share this responsibility.

In sum, the Maiers, like other families with transitional gender roles, put the father in a position of privilege. Although some acknowledged that the husband ought to help out more in the household, they did not actually do so. Rather, they praised their wives for their efficiency but did not claim that their wives couldn’t do anything that they could not do. They took responsibility for the machinations of the household, even if they were not directly engaged in those tasks. They were the play dads and the teacher dads, not necessarily the primary caregiver dads, as they let their wives do those childcare chores.

The Trujillo Family. Sometimes I feel like a single mother.—Sandra Trujillo

When I met him, Dominic Trujillo was the manager for a chain of restaurants and the $50,000 a year that he made barely compensated for the long, difficult, inflexible hours. He told me that he is a “typical New Mexican Hispanic” which, to him, is a lapsed Catholic. But then he went on to describe himself as a very spiritual person, even though he was not a church-going person at all. His wife, he told me, was neither religious nor very spiritual. Blonde and bubbly, Sandra was a project manager for the state, which allowed her to have flexible hours so she could spend more time with their baby, but she barely earned $35,000 a year. Both Dominic and Sandra Trujillo agreed that Sandra did the majority of the cleaning, cooking, and childcare in their house. She was also responsible for the finances. If Dominic did anything around the house it tended to be
those traditionally male tasks, such as moving the lawn and fixing things. These tasks,
unlike the chores that Sandra did, do not have to be done on a daily basis, so his
contribution to maintaining the household (and their baby) were minimal. Growing up,
Sandra remembered her parents splitting the tasks a little more than she and her husband.
Dominic had grown up in a working class family where the division of labor was very
segregated. Not surprisingly, Sandra claimed that she was unhappy with this
arrangement:

I would have him step up more, if I could change anything. Especially now with
the baby being born. But we’ve had that conversation, several times. And I know
he tries to step up more, but after a couple of months it goes away. I know it
sounds silly. But it’s really our only argument in our marriage, which I guess if
you think about it, it’s a big one. But if you think about all the things that have to
get done on your daily to-do list, and I get three times as much stuff done as he
does in day. It’s just our dynamic. I won’t say that it is all men, but you got to
wonder sometimes! What’s interesting is that he can watch a movie or watch
ESPN and be totally focused on it. And I’m changing the baby, getting the baby
ready, and I’m doing the laundry and running back and forth…I’m always doing
something else. And it’s not because I always want to be busy. I think he thinks I
like that lifestyle. Well, I do like to be busy and productive, but if I don’t do it, it
won’t get done, that is the philosophy I have kinda taken on. And he knows that.
He helps when he can, when his work schedule permits. His work schedule is
insane. I am very appreciative that he works so hard for us. I am really
appreciative of all he does, like reading to her when he does, but there are many
times when I feel like a stay-at-home mom because he is gone twelve, fourteen
hours a day, and most of that is at night, so he gets home at 2:00 a.m. or 3:00 a.m.
and sleeps in, well, not in, but sleeps until 10:00 a.m. and by then, our daughter is
already dressed and up and she goes to bed before he gets home, so I do all that,
too.

When I asked Dominic about the domestic division of labor he stated that,

[RF]ight now, the responsibility does fall on Sandra. At this point, we definitely put
my career in front. We have had discussions about that, maybe because I bring in
more of the income? Maybe because her job is more flexible? With my days off I
definitely try to share responsibility.
Although Sandra was unhappy with their arrangement and Dominic declared himself to be unhappy because Sandra was unhappy, at the time of the study he did not make any real effort to change. He gave priority to his career and only “tries to share responsibility” on the weekends, which is to say, he did not share responsibility at all. He helped with some of the domestic tasks when he had time off and those he did on a regular basis were the traditionally male tasks, like playing with the kids on the weekends or fixing the car.

Gender role socialization assists in explaining Dominic’s level of involvement in his family. Dominic came from working class background where his father had a very traditional gender role as economic provider. Because Dominic’s mother also worked when he was growing up, and his wife works, he knew that he ought to help doing some of the domestic labor, but like other transitionals, he did not see domestic labor as his responsibility. In this manner he is still involved, just not as involved as the egalitarian fathers.

**Egalitarian household: Divide-and-conquer Egalitarian. The Portalla Family.** We have….accepted those limitations of the other. When we moved in together we had a lot of set clear ideas of how things were going to work: finances, laundry, cooking. It is unfortunate that more people don’t do that before hand, because then you get into the marriage and are blindsided.—Jared Portalla

Alice and Jared Portalla both worked full-time for different insurance companies and made roughly $50,000 a year, apiece, in 2009. When I spoke to them they were very busy people with an infant and a toddler son they had not found the time to find the “right” church, particularly one that fit their agnostic orientation. They belong to
extensive Hispanic families that also took up a great deal of their spare time. Perhaps because they did not have a lot of time to waste, the Portallas needed to be as efficient as possible in order to get all the chores accomplished in their large house. The Portallas were one of the households that managed to be egalitarian because they took on a “divide-and-conquer” approach to housework. The best way of understanding one of these divide-and-conquer egalitarian families is to read an excerpt of a conversation we had over lunch one winter day in 2009.

Alice: Certain things that we knew about before we moved in. Like, he knew that I can’t cook worth shit, like I literally had a Raman noodle cabinet. So, you know, he knew that if he moved in he would have to do all the cooking. Some things were not, I mean, when he moved in, I had already been in that house before so I—like the laundry, the cleaning—I had already been doing those things before, so I guess I just assumed those roles since he was doing the cooking and I was already doing those other things. Then we moved into the bigger house, then we had to share the cleaning because it was just too much. So, I guess it wasn’t a conscious decision, it was just kinda, what we knew the limitations of the other person was. Like, I did all the finances, cause I couldn’t cook worth shit and he couldn’t balance a checkbook….

Jared: So we have identified those things, accepted those limitations of the other. When we moved in together we had a lot of set, clear ideas of how things were going to work, finances, laundry, cooking. It is unfortunate that more people don’t do that before hand, because then you get into the marriage and are blindsided. But we knew that going in. But with the children, it has evolved, but I think that we have a nice system, a nice balance.

Ruth: Are you satisfied with how things are today, with the kids, too? You said earlier that you split those tasks, pretty much, except Alice does more in the morning with them.

Alice: Yeah. I feel guilty that he gets up every night. I’ve never gotten up with the boys.

Jared: But it is temporary and you had to birth them, do all that, risk your life. The least I can do is get up with them!

Alice: I get to sleep more, relax more on the weekends. But I have a busier job.
Jared: She does, it is more stressful.

Alice: So my stress levels are higher.

Jared: She works for a big employer whereas I work for a smaller company, it is flexible and the stress level isn’t the same. It is nice to give her a break. Some things I don’t think are fair, like Alice does all the laundry. Every once in a while I put a load in and help her, but it is like a 10:1 ratio. Yard stuff, I do all that but I don’t expect her to do all that. That’s for me and the boys, when they get old enough, there are plenty of things in the house that keep her busy.

When Jared and Alice Portalla married they decided that the best way to assure that the domestic labor would get done was to assign certain chores for each of them, based on personal inclination: a “divide-and-conquer” approach to housework and childcare. If one of them could not complete one of their assigned tasks, then they would ask their spouse to help them out. There is comfort in knowing that everything will get done without either spouse having to assume responsibility over all housework in general. When Jared first told me that they share the chores equally, based on who is better at certain tasks, I almost snorted my iced tea up my nose because, in my experience, that is an oblique way of saying, “We share, but since she is better at cleaning the house, washing the laundry, making lunches, preparing breakfast, balancing the checkbook, planting flowers, bathing the baby, shopping for Christmas gifts, and taking the dog to the vet, she does those things. I’m better at taking out the garbage and getting the mail, so that is what I do.” However, with the Portallas, it was not the case that Alice was more competent and so did more chores. Part of this can be explained by the fact that Jared, like some other men in my sample, viewed childcare and cooking as gender neutral tasks. This does not mean that these two tasks are automatically shared equally in all my study’s families. Rather, these are two large groups of tasks that a generation or two ago
were viewed as “female” and were usually done by females, but today are done by either men or women. Stated another way, men can easily cook or tend a child without having to defend their masculinity. I argue that for the middle class men in my sample, part of being a middle class man is being able to feed your family, as well as change a diaper. Other chores, like yard work and laundry, the Portallas strictly divided along gender lines, to the degree that in the future he will have his sons help him in the yard but there is no mention of his sons helping his wife in dusting, Jared referred to it as “helping” his wife do their laundry, when he puts in a load once in a while. Of course, the fact that there is a lot more laundry to do for a family of four than there is comparable yard work might have something to do with Jared feeling guilty that he was not helping more, since they strived to be fair and divide housework equally.

Although it might appear at first that Jared and Alice sound a lot like the Maiers, with him “helping” to do certain tasks, remember that Jared did nearly half of the housework. Neither of them felt that because Alice is a woman she ought to do all of the housework or that the husband should have the final say in familial matters. The Portallas told me that both housework and wage work ought to be shared. Because Alice’s job is stressful, Jared shared with me that he likes to give her a break on the weekends by assuming a greater portion of the childcare. During the time of my study, the Portallas embraced being in a partnership and by dividing and conquering housework; it enabled them to feel that they were being fair to each other.

Egalitarian household: A mix of divide-and-conquer and reminder

Egalitarian. *The Montgomery Family.* My wife and I are really good at sharing

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59 This is not to say that men have to be as good a cook as their wives or mothers. But it is no longer acceptable to claim ignorance of cooking for middle class men.
Paul Montgomery is Episcopalian and his wife Ariana is Catholic, but that is about the only significant difference I saw in their relationship. They are making it work by going to a Catholic church. When I went to interview them on a beautiful summer day in 2008, Ariana told me that I should interview Paul first because he is more of a talker and he speaks for both of them, as they are always “on the same page about everything.” I was glad that I did interview both of them, since on the surface they were en rapport, but their explanations for how they split up domestic duties differed. They are one of the families that was a combination of reminder and divide-and-conquer egalitarianism. According to Ariana, she reminds him to divide-and-conquer or she instructs the maid service to clean whatever he does not. In contrast, Paul maintained that they share things equally, but they do not have any set plan of who does what since they are partners and just do whatever needs to be done when it needs to be done.

Indeed, Paul disregarded a lot of the questions about cleaning with very short answers: they shared. He was not being rude and he was not uncomfortable with the questions, it was just that cleaning is not important to him, so he did not see any reason to dwell on those questions. He did speak at length about childcare and the importance of being a father and a partner with his wife. In fact, both Paul and his wife Ariana admitted

More progressive companies, especially those in the technology industry, often pair up team leaders. These co-leaders can talk through key decisions, rely on each other, and do not have to manage alone. In this way they are equally responsible for the work that they do. This is considered the “two in a box” management style.
that their three year old son wanted to be with his father more, for bath time, playing, and reading at night. This could be attributed to the fact that at the time of my research, Paul spent more time with Knox than his wife did. At the time, Ariana traveled a lot for work from her job in sales and Paul took Knox to work with him. Paul had been an engineer for nearly twenty years but, by his own admission, he had not appreciated some of the family-friendly policies that his company grants their employees until his son was born. He smiled as he told me how he gets his son ready in the morning to go to work with him, drops him off at the company’s daycare center and later eats lunch with his son. He took the three month paternity leave offered, which was really important to him as it allowed him to bond with and get to know his infant son.

Ariana painted a slightly different view of their domestic arrangements than Paul, although she agreed with her husband that they share housework equally. There are some tasks that she likes, such as cooking and some childcare, so she did them.

Ariana: You know, it’s weird, the gender thing really comes into play. Like with the meals. Even though I work and he’s home earlier, I’ll usually prepare the meals. I’ll make Knox’s lunch, getting him ready in the morning, packing his bag… (Whispers) Those things that I just don’t think that men in general think about.

Ruth: But what about all the other things your husband does? Do you think that you take responsibility for those, too? Like the not-fun jobs, like cleaning the bathrooms?

Ariana: Oh, no. I won’t do bathrooms or that kind of cleaning, that’s gross. We have a cleaning lady and I fought for that… When it comes to home improvements I tell him what I want done and he does it [or] hires someone.

Regarding childcare, Paul actually did more since he was with his son more, although they both took full responsibility for it. Yet, Ariana was the one who initiated the morning and afternoon routine when she was home. In household chores, they both
claimed responsibility, but Ariana was the one who initially arranged for maid service and did the majority of the cooking. She did very little in the way of cleaning and Paul carried out the cleaning tasks that the cleaning person did not. During our interview, Ariana told me that a wife ought to be the primary child tender, cook, and organizer for the cleaning, since women are more aware of those tasks. She did not think that men “think about” some of the domestic tasks, so she, in her capacity as wife and mother, had to figure out how they would get done. Paul was actually more non-traditional since he embraced egalitarianism and believed that spouses are team members and should split everything. Because of Paul, the Montgomerys had an egalitarian household. If it were up to Ariana, she would still do the childcare she does, since she likes it, and she would instruct the maid service to do even more cleaning. She traveled a lot for work as a sales representative and she had the financial resources to outsource some of cleaning.

**Egalitarian household: Reminder Egalitarian. The Griego Family.** *My husband does A LOT, but I am the director! I’ll ask his opinion about things, like schooling, but it is ultimately my decision.*—Hope Griego

The Griegos are Catholic and Hispanic and when I visited them they had a household in which there was an egalitarian division of labor, but Hope felt that she needed to be the director of their family to make sure that everything got done. She accomplished this by reminding her husband John to do tasks. They equally shared the cleaning chores and childcare and developed a work schedule that allowed them both to work outside of the house while also sharing childcare and household chores. John and Hope were both very frank during our interviews and they each said that they went into their marriage expecting to share everything. They also worked out a schedule that
allowed the Griego children to be in daycare for only for half a day, which was important to them. Generally, Hope started work as a social worker very early in the morning so that she could pick her children up around 3:00 p.m. from the sitter. This allowed her to be home with them and cook dinner. In the morning, Hope got herself ready and packed their daughters’ lunches. She also dropped the children off at daycare. John got himself and their children ready in the morning. John usually got home from his work as an accountant around 6:00 p.m. and they usually ate whatever Hope prepared, although, as she disclosed to me, “There’s not much cooking in this house. I normally heat up stuff.” Hope told me that she almost always left dinner clean-up and getting the girls ready for bed to her husband. She then used those few hours at night to catch up on paperwork for her job that she was unable to get done earlier in the day. When I asked how they came up with this particular division of labor Hope stated that it was only fair that he did the majority of getting the daughters ready for the day as well as bed, as she was with them in the afternoons when they were grouchy! John amiably agreed. The Griegos were also fortunate in that they had a maid service that came every other week to do the major cleaning, such as the bathrooms and kitchen. Hope said that she often vacuums the week that the maid is not there or she will ask her husband to do it.

The Griegos both invested in egalitarian gender roles. John insisted that he does not think that there is any difference in what they do or what men and women should do. He admitted that their household is very different from some of his cousins’ households, where the women do all the chores and the fathers just play with their children. He reiterated that they try to be as fair as possible to one another. He grew up in a house
where he saw his mother and father splitting the chores and thinks that it is a nice way of dividing domestic labor. Comparing her husband to the men in her family, Hope shared:

I didn’t marry the typical Machismo. I’m actually embarrassed to say he does more. He’s the “A” parent and does the playing, interacting and caretaking. Maybe because I am home with them more. He’s very into being a dad. All I hear from everybody is ‘oh, you are so lucky’ and they know because I tell them, but my response isn’t that I’m lucky, that’s how it is supposed to be!

Because John was such an involved father and did do a great deal of the cleaning and cooking, Hope over-estimated the amount of cleaning carried out by her husband. The ultimate responsibility still rested with Hope, and that was agreed on by both John and Hope. John openly told me that he respects his wife’s expertise in childcare and admitted that she is a little bit more concerned about cleanliness than him. She heartily laughed and said, “Ugh! The counters! That kills me that he doesn’t wipe them down. I’m always wiping them down.” John’s usual amiable reaction to this was to roll his eyes, grin and shrug. In the Griego household, Hope interpreted her position as the one who has to remind everyone to do housework. In this case, John did more childcare and about half of the cleaning. Embracing egalitarian ideals, they viewed both spouses as capable of completing any task.

**Summary of household types.** The Maiers are the clearest example of the five transitional households, where Wendy Maier worked full-time, just like her husband, but only received her husband’s “help” at home when she asked for it. The Trujillos are also a transitional household but while they told me that they would like to be egalitarian, there was a significant discrepancy between aspiration and achievement. They cannot be egalitarian because in order to achieve a work-family balance they placed greater importance on Dominic Trujillo’s career obligations, which forced Sandra Trujillo to
deemphasize her career and in order to focus on their family. They would not have done this, however, if they did not believe that men should only “help” their wives in the domestic sphere rather than sharing responsibility equally.

The Portallas are like the other six divide-and-conquer families in my study (the Byrd, Gilzean, Luna, Pickersgill, Renaud, and Vargas families). Jared and Alice Portalla shared everything—making money, childcare, running the household—and believed that spouses should share the domestic labor, but they have divided labor along strict lines, into “his” and “her” tasks. The only reason that Alice did not do the majority of domestic tasks rests on the fact that Jared was able to justify cooking and childcare as gender “neutral” tasks. Jared also did the traditionally “male” tasks, like yard work and pet clean-up, and not the traditionally “female” tasks like cleaning the toilet or other tasks to keep the inside of the house clean and neat.

The last two cases of egalitarian families I illustrate here epitomize the many (18) egalitarian families with whom I worked: the reminder egalitarians. Paul Montgomery and John Griego did slightly more childcare tasks than their wives, but their wives felt that they had to remind their husbands to do the housework and they assumed responsibility over cleaning and other domestic tasks to ensure that they were accomplished. Ariana Montgomery believed that women are just better, or are more likely to think about, some tasks that men do not, so she felt responsible for making sure those tasks were accomplished. Her husband, interestingly, was oblivious to this and claimed that they have a very egalitarian household. Both Hope Griego and Ariana Montgomery indicated to me that they were so grateful that their husbands were excellent
fathers and did a lot of cleaning, so they did not care that they did more domestic labor overall, than their husbands.

Discussion

When Arlie Hochschild conducted her fieldwork in the early 1980s, she found that the majority of her sample professed to more traditional gender ideals, where men and women ought to have different roles. Many of the men in her sample came off as petulant that they were expected to do housework at all, even though their wives worked outside of the home, too. This put their wives in a very difficult position, since they had to do the juggling act of working while also assuming responsibility for the housework and childcare. Not surprisingly, this put a strain on their marriages.

A generation later a different pattern emerges where men, whether they are conscious of it or not, realize that if they want to maintain marital satisfaction, they need to make certain that the division of labor is viewed as fair in their households. It is noteworthy that none of the families I studied hold traditional views of gender—that is, that men must be the breadwinners and mothers must stay home and take care of the house and children. This is not surprising since I worked with dual-worker households and women did not have the “luxury” of being able to stay home, but women did not necessarily want to be stay-at-home spouses, at any rate.

Only five families (20 percent) of the families with whom I worked were even remotely traditional. I classified them as “transitional.” These men (the Fraziers, Jones, Maiers, Smiths, and Trujillos) believed that women should work outside of the home, but that they also should be responsible for the house and children, and men should “help” their spouses since their wives work.
Strong religious adherence appears to be a critical component for all individuals in transitional households, but this is not to say that all devoutly religious men and women were in transitional households. When I interviewed Noah Smith, he enthusiastically discussed religious matters with me and I came away from that interview with a deeper appreciation of how his religious values influenced his masculine identity and what he thought of as proper behavior for a man, as well as how his identity mediated his participation in his family. He was very concerned with having a good marriage and from all accounts it appeared that he did have a good relationship with his wife. Noah described his relationship with Emily as a partnership, where each partner had a different role to perform for the household to run smoothly. Using Conservative Christian parlance he, like Seth Maier and many other of the Conservative Christians I interviewed, said that he is head of the household. This is an obligation men have for being responsible for their families, but he leaves the daily running of the houses to the wives.\textsuperscript{61} I must have had a questioning look on my face when Noah told me about being responsible, but not really seeing through any task, because then he elaborated, “Like, last week when our youngest son went to the doctor, I knew what was going on, even though she took him [pause] I make the decisions here.” Or, when they plan for a family vacation, they will talk about what they want to do, but Emily will be the one who actually books the plane tickets, reserves the hotel room, packs the children’s swimming suits, and so forth. Noah claimed responsibility for everything that Emily did because he knew about it. This is similar to Seth Maier’s comment that because he knew what needed to go in his son’s diaper bag and can pack the diaper bag when he pressed to do so, he was responsible for his son.

\textsuperscript{61} “Headship” is discussed in greater detail in chapter six.
Likewise, both Seth Maier and Noah Smith claimed that their wives were wonderful women, partially because they manage to work and keep the house clean. They told me that they would help clean more if their wives asked them, but because their wives’ standards were too high, they did not offer. Cooking, as I argued earlier, was considered a gender neutral task. Noah told me that he loved to cook and cooked when he had time on the weekends, as well as cleaned up from cooking. Thinking that childcare, like cooking, is now a gender neutral task, I expected Noah to do an equal amount of childcare. But, like some other Conservative Christians, he was a more traditional father in that he played with his sons, was the disciplinarian, and teacher. Noah had a close relationship with his sons whom I remember as being fun, bright, and well-behaved children.

Regarding actual childcare, he repeatedly told me that my questions were not fair. For example, when I asked who gets up in the middle of the night when the child has a nightmare or needs a glass of water, Noah responded, “That’s not a fair question. I’ll wake up, but I won’t get up.” It appeared that if the childcare chore was not a fun task, or one given high status like teaching his children, he did not assume that he should do it.

Childcare chores have, historically, been women’s jobs. His Conservative but Charismatic Christian Church supports dichotomous gender roles and, like Seth Maier and Evan Frasier, these notions of proper roles for men and women played out in their houses. But even within these transitional families, some men did more childcare than others. I argued in chapter four that Evan Frasier was an involved father and did a lot of childcare, but he always accedes responsibility to his wife and conceptualizes it as helping her. As for housework, he cooked and cleaned up the kitchen and his wife or his wife’s mother cleaned the house.
Although all three of the “model” transitional families (the Fraizers, Maiers, and Smiths) attended the same Conservative Charismatic Christian Church, we cannot attribute transitional gender role attitudes to the Conservative Christian churches alone, since only three of the nine Conservative Christians, including other Charismatic branches of Christianity, adhered to transitional gender roles. The rest of the Conservative Christian men, like the other middle class men in the sample, embraced egalitarian roles. Other families, like the Trujillos, who found themselves in transitional households and were not Conservative Christians. In fact, the Trujillos were agnostic at the time of my study. The last transitional family to discuss, the Joneses, were a mixed religious family in 2009: Aaron Jones was Catholic and his wife Renee was Unitarian.

The Trujillos and the Joneses would, ideally, have liked to be egalitarian but they both blamed the husbands’ long and inflexible hours for keeping them from living in an egalitarian household. Another feature that these two families had in common is that both the husbands came from working class backgrounds, unlike their wives who came from solidly middle class families. There are many families in the sample in which the husband grew up working class but had embraced egalitarian ideals, so economic position growing up cannot be the main reason why the Joneses and Trujillos, specifically, were transitional. The fact remains that both Sandra Trujillo and Renee Jones took responsibility for practically everything in the household, from vacuuming to childcare to balancing the checkbook. These women were not necessarily happy with their arrangements, but they felt that the careers of their husbands held precluded them from assisting equally in the house and with the children. Their husbands agreed. These two women had higher levels of education than their husbands and had the potential for
better paying careers. Nonetheless, the women scaled back their work hours because they believed that one partner ought to be home to take care of the children when daycare ends. Even though these women, like the majority of the women in my sample, worked at least thirty-two hours a week, it was still around twenty fewer hours than their husbands worked.

One blustery Sunday morning I interviewed Renee Jones while her husband Aaron, a quiet and thoughtful man, was at Mass. At the time, Renee worked for a non-profit organization as a counselor and made “a pittance” to use her phrase, while her husband was an engineer and earned the bulk of their family’s annual income of $90,000. She gestured to the piles of papers, Tupperware, and folded laundry on the kitchen table when she said, “look, if he’s here, he’ll help. The fact is that he just has a shitty schedule. He works Saturday, so Sunday is the only day he can [help]. It is the hardest thing, shift work, it is like being a single mom.” Aaron told me that he generally worked 7:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. on his compressed schedule and had mandatory meetings Wednesdays after work. Those long days left Aaron with very little time to spend with his family. When I commented on this, Renee dryly told me that during those few nights that he was at home, she usually asked him to read bedtime stories to their daughters, so they could get in some “daddy bonding time” and then she would have “me time.” When I asked what she could do in the 20 minutes of bedtime reading, she wistfully said, “Oh, wash my face. Put a load of laundry in….” But then she laughed, too. She went on to tell me that she hates his schedule, she hates how she has to do everything and how it is not fair. Renee continued,
In year two of our marriage, I put up a chore chart and I guess what I was hoping to gain from that is give him a consciousness that these things happen, since I was at home and he was at work and it is a lot of work to manage all of that and children, but he never really got it. Yeah. He didn’t really get it. But I was maintaining the chore chart, I was becoming the chore chart Nazi, and it was more work for me! I mean, when things get to crisis mode, Aaron is your man. It’s just convincing him that it’s to that point!

I agree that for the Trujillos and Joneses, the men’s work schedules dictated who could do which chores around the house. Of all the fathers I studied, these men had some of the worst schedules: constantly changing, inflexible, long hours, stressful jobs, coupled with a lot of responsibility. Although they said that they wanted to do more to help their wives, and thought that it was important that they do more, they simply did not have flexibility of schedule. They did nothing to make their schedules more flexible, but this is at least partially reflected in the fact that in 2008 and early 2009, when I did the bulk of my interviews, New Mexico, like the rest of the United States, was moving deeper into an economic depression. Work, even for educated, industrious people like these men, was just not easy to find, much less jobs that entailed a more flexible schedule. These families honored the husbands’ careers over the wives’ occupations although the wives had the potential to make as much or more money than their husbands if they choose to work the hours their husbands work. Both Renee and Sandra told me that they needed to be good mothers and it was impossible to be a good mother, work full-time, and have husbands who worked as many hours as their husbands did. These women enacted transitional gender roles even though they did not like doing it. They felt that their husbands should help them, since they were the primary caregivers, or else they would continue to feel like “single mothers.”
What is interesting about the Trujillos and Joneses is not necessarily the gender roles of the wives, but the gender roles of the husbands. Sandra Trujillo and Renee Jones were not all that different from many of the other women in my sample, but because they had married men who were more traditional than they were, they were stuck in non-equalitarian households. This is a theme seen again and again, such as in the Montgomery household where it appears that the husband’s gender ideology dictated how the household was run. Paul Montgomery embraced an egalitarian gender ideology and he consequently performed that role at home. If he were a transitional man, Ariana would not change what she did around the home (half the childcare and the cooking). She would outsource even more of the cleaning and leave it at that. Because Paul Montgomery liked to think of his role as husband as being a member of a team, he did some of the cleaning around the house to be fair to the other team member, Ariana.

Renee Jones and Sandra Trujillo, like the rest of the women in my sample, are sensible women. They are looking to achieve a work-family balance. At the time of the interviews they did not have that balance and part of that was the disjuncture between their transitional households and what society was telling them that men should do; that is, contribute equally to kin maintenance and not invest every moment and all their effort in wage work. Unlike a generation ago when one of the ways that many middle class women tried to achieve a work-family balance was to be a “supermom,” and do everything well, today’s women are more apt to realize that the supermom strategy is just not practical.\footnote{Supermom\textsuperscript{62} is a term that has made it into common parlance (first used by M. Bedell 1977, see also Bookman 2004:70) and denotes a professional, educated woman who gives 100 percent to her work, 100 percent to her family and, essentially, 100 percent of herself to anything that she undertakes. Her house is} It was not sensible in the 1980s or 1990s, either! Ann Bookman (2004)
described the “superwomen” strategy in her sample of dual-worker couples from the 1990s and concluded that that it was a stop-gap measure, because after a few years of doing everything and more, supermoms were burnt out. Many of the women in my sample vehemently asserted that being a supermom and doing it all is not realistic. Yet because women are continue to be seen by society as the ones ultimately responsible for the household and children they recognized that they needed assistance, though the strategies that they employed varied. The women in my sample cut back on work hours, hired domestic help, lowered cleaning standards, and/or enlisted their husbands’ labor—in short, they rejected the supermom strategy.

If they can, women will do some or all of the above: reduce work hours, hire help, ignore dust and order pizza, and expect domestic assistance from their husbands. This may explain why the majority (25 families or 83 percent) of my study’s families claimed to be, generally, egalitarian—they embraced an egalitarian ideology. They more or less equally shared the division of household labor because they had to or face marital unhappiness. Women in these cases, overall, tended to do more of the actual cleaning, but the childcare was split more or less equally and that made them happy. Women felt that they had the responsibility for making sure that the house was picked up, everybody was fed, the children had shoes, and so on. In this I see the women in my sample as adhering to slightly more traditional roles and it is the men who have changed in the last generation. The men in these 25 households all professed an egalitarian view of the division of household labor. They also took an active role in childcare, as seen in chapter four, not just doing amusing or less tedious jobs, but the less pleasant tasks, too, such as

clean, her children are happy in homemade Halloween costumes and they are eating her homemade pies. She is also, ideally, attractive, and happy, and never stressed out by her many responsibilities.
changing diapers. Nonetheless, they still did less of the housework than their wives although in many cases they cooked. Childcare and cooking are the two tasks that needed to be accomplished on a daily basis, so men’s participation in these two categories relieved the burden of sole responsibility from the wife. It cannot be ignored that wives did at least a third as much housework (depending on the particular chore) than their husbands did [See Table 6: Mean Difference in Responsibility Assumed by Mother and Fathers for Domestic Labor Grouped by Common Categories and Table 7: Mean Difference in Responsibility Assumed by Mothers and Fathers for Common Household Tasks Including Childcare]. However, eight (27 percent) of these families also had the luxury of outsourcing some of the cleaning as most had a maid service come in once a week or once every two weeks. Other families simply lowered their cleanliness standards because they had to, or, to quote Edwin Abbott (a man living in a reminder egalitarian household), they would “go insane.” “The world will not end if the dishwasher is not emptied immediately,” Lara Reed sardonically noted.

Try as I might, I could not find any similarities in ethnic or racial background, religious adherence, age of the child, or flexibility of spouse’ careers, that all, or even a majority, of the divide-and-conquer egalitarians had when compared to the reminder egalitarians. If anything, personality and family history tended to be the only features that

63 Although this is not a judgment, it should also be noted that the families with whom I worked were not particularly fanatical about keeping a perfectly clean house. Most houses were certainly clean enough but they are all filled with “fun dirt,” to quote Cindy Maxwell. In other words, toys are often strewn about, beds are not made, and there can be dust on the dining room table. Sometimes the only time the bathroom is cleaned is if a cleaning person or their own mother comes in, or if they know that they’re having guests over. “Martha Stewart,” one mother sensibly told me, “would not approve, but since when has Martha Stewart been known for having a good family life?” In other words, they would rather spend time together with their children than spend that time cleaning. This supports Daly’s (1996, 2001) arguments that family time comes before cleaning for many middle class families. Nor are the families in my sample slaving at making homemade meals every night. Prepackaged food is acceptable, as are restaurants’ food.
shaped the divide-and-conquer egalitarians. Every wife in the divide-and-conquer egalitarian group (and some in the reminder egalitarians, too) told me a story of how early on in the marriage she had felt overwhelmed with all the work that had to get done at home and had to draw attention to this gross unfairness.

Unlike previous generations, however, where some women fought the fight for equality in domestic labor but lost, the women in my sample did not necessarily have to fight for egalitarianism. Rather, from the stories that they told me, they did not fight about who would do what chore, as much as forcefully point out to their husbands (with, at times, self-righteous indignation) the injustice in women doing much, much more housework and childcare. Megan Olsen, a Conservative Christian living in a reminder egalitarian household, grinned self-deprecatingly when she told me that “a light went on” when she told her husband she needed help. She added, “And he does it. Because he knows that if he didn’t, I wouldn’t be happy. And he doesn’t want to live with me if I’m unhappy!” Similarly, Sara Vargas, a divide-and-conquer egalitarian, laughed softly when I asked how she and her husband came to their decision about how they were going to manage the housework and then she said, “I was all stressed out all the time! And I finally said, ‘you need to do some of this stuff too, since I’m not at home.’”

All but two of the divide-and-conquer egalitarian women had husbands who as children were not expected to do chores. So, when the men moved in to cohabitate with their spouses, it came as a bit of shock that they were expected to clean. Pat Vargas, an easy-going man who juggled working full-time, volunteering at his Catholic church, and raising three young children, frankly admitted that it was an adjustment learning how to do the chores that his mother always did when he was growing up. He told me that his
wife was pregnant with their second child and their first was still a baby when she said to him, “I can’t do this all!” Up until this time, he was only cleaning up after the dogs and doing some yard work. As he explained to me,

...[S]o we trade off doing dishes, cleaning up dinner, making dinner, laundry every week. She does the other stuff...the things that I do I wouldn’t expect her to do, like the cars, the dogs, I wouldn’t expect her to do, unless I am not around. Like, if my job sends me out somewhere, then I could ask her to fill in. I don’t know. I guess it is working out pretty well. I had to get used to do laundry and stuff like that. That was an adjustment…I’ve pretty much become accustomed and we both work and it has to be done, I think or one of us will go crazy.

Like the Portalla and the Vargas families, having a baby and/or being pregnant with another child was the impetus for women to draw attention to the fact that they were saddled with too much housework. One freezing winter morning while Michelle Byrd and I were chatting over coffee and watching her husband and toddler out the window while they were playing in the dry snow, she told me that they split childcare equally and that was never an issue in their marriage. They both had demanding careers and she felt that she was taking on too much of the petty cleaning. When her daughter was born, well, it was obvious that she was doing an unfair amount of the domestic labor.

I think before our first child was born, it was haphazard, like whatever, and after our daughter, we fell into these traditional gender roles with household duties. Like I do the laundry, he works outside with the yard work. And I don’t know exactly why it is that way. It was an adjustment when we had Gwen, there were arguments earlier, like one felt that they were doing more than the other, so we had to assign tasks, we had to decide that, ok, I will concentrate on laundry, so I know that will get done and you concentrate on household repairs. And the food and meals and the kitchen stuff we split too that but the other is delineated, you do this and I do that, and it seems to work out better, so we know that those things get done.

Later, when her husband Justin came in from the snow, carrying sobbing little Gwen who did not want to come indoors, he grinned and said, “I’m a dish guy. I do the dishes. She
looks at the floor more (*laughter*), so she does the floor. But yeah, we just had to divide it up. Sometimes she’ll do more deep cleaning and she’ll be like, ‘Hey! I need your help here!’”

Similarly, when I was at the Renaud house one February morning in 2009 for an interview, Clarence Renaud met me at the door with a vacuum cleaner in one hand and his three-and-a-half-year old son Gavin, in the other. Although they both worked full-time in counseling, Crystal worked outside of the house more and brought in more of their earnings. Crystal was entering her third trimester of pregnancy but she was cheerful throughout our interview. During this time she told me that they were always egalitarian, but had only recently implemented a divide-and-conquer approach to housework. Indeed, on their refrigerator there was a neatly arranged, color-coded chore chart. When I asked her why she and Clarence decided to use a chore chart, she patted her round stomach and said,

> Because I felt like I was doing everything! [*laughter*] And I wanted Gavin to be a part of it too. And it’s an early literacy learning activity for him. I think Clarence would rather not do that, being pigeon holed into something, assigned to do something. But that is why I make it volunteer, we all talk about it. Like who is doing the couches, and Gavin is like, ‘ME!’ But that way we know it will get done.

Ruth: but your son is not yet four years old. How is he going to do the couches?

Crystal: We’ll help him. But I want him to grow up knowing that he has to help out around the house...[I]f you are raised as a boy, you are not comfortable with cleaning, if your mom doesn’t make you cook or clean. Which is what I am going to do differently with Gavin! So he helps out, like he helped make pancakes this morning. It was really cute. And Clarence encourages it too, for Gavin to develop those skills.

Crystal Renaud was not the first woman to bring to my attention that she was training her son to be competent in household tasks. Cindy Maxwell and Michelle Byrd both
mentioned that times have changed and their future daughter-in-laws are going to expect their husbands to be useful around the house. Given this, we can confidently expect that the next generation will see even more active participation by men in household maintenance!

That egalitarian minded women were raising their children to expect male participation in the home might stem from the fact that it is very taxing having to remind or ask a spouse to do a chore. After all, having to ask your spouse to do a task is a chore in and of itself (Hochschild 2003[1989]:210). Perhaps this can explain why seven of the egalitarian households chose a divide-and-conquer approach to the domestic tasks. That way, no one person had to assume ultimate responsibility over all of it. Rather, each would have their own tasks to worry about. The fact that most of the tasks fall into “his” and “hers” tasks makes it more traditional in a sense, but because men do so many of the traditionally female tasks, such as mopping floors and no one professes that, for example, mopping floors is women’s work or cleaning up the dog is men’s work, it works for people who profess to be egalitarian. The way that divide-and-conquer egalitarians talked about “helping” each other sounds a little more traditional, until you realize that they are helping each other because of their commitment to helping one’s partner when he or she needs it.

Other egalitarians, those whom I term “reminder egalitarians,” usually stated that they liked the flexibility of just picking up a task when they saw that it needed doing. They did not like to be assigned chores. The kinds of careers that these people had also allow them flexibility and no one directly told them what to do at work, so they brought that mind-set to domestic labor, too. As long as the job got done, it did not matter when
or how it was accomplished. Like the divide-and-conquer egalitarians, the reminder egalitarians also thought of being in a partnership and they helped each other to make sure the children were healthy, everyone was fed, and the house was picked-up.

A few husbands were like Ezra Webb, and had to learn to do things their wives’ way. Growing up in a very Conservative Christian household, Ezra did not have to do any housework. Since both he and his wife were full-time accountants in 2008, Ezra had to learn to do housework and since she was the one who cared more about how it is done, he chose to do it her way to make her happy. Ezra remarked that he would rather wait to do the laundry until it was all piled up, but his wife would rather do a little laundry at a time, so it does not pile up and become an all-day affair. Other men also chose to do housework to their wives’ specifications since it was a way of being fair and maintaining marital harmony. Mike Maxwell also grew up doing little housework in his Mainstream Protestant home. As a full-time architect who would rather work than do dishes, he told me that he did the dishes immediately after a meal because he knew that if he does not, it will drive his wife crazy. Mike remarked one day at dinner, “You want to be fair, you know? I mean, I don’t want to do the dishes, but if I leave them and think I’m going to come back to them later, she’ll just do them and that’s not fair for her.”

It turns out that the notion of fairness has a great deal to do with marital satisfaction (e.g., Glass and Fujimoto 1994; Greenstein 1996; Lennon and Rosenfield 1994; Major 1993; Pyke and Coltrane 1996; see also Stevens et al. [2001] for details on other factors that can influence marital satisfaction). Because most men equally participated in childcare, or at the very least did a great deal of it, women were able to look past the fact that they were doing more of the cleaning and organizing and were
generally responsible for housework. In other words, when the women in my sample felt that there was a fair division, they were happy. As mentioned earlier, housework is not assigned the importance that childcare is, so it ends up being the last thing done. Linda Patton, a cheerful, Conservative Christian woman, explained how they equally divided childcare. Both she and her husband decided to put their children before their careers and opt for flexible schedules, he full-time in law enforcement, she as an occupational therapist working 33 hours a week (although Linda works fewer hours, she contributes half of their $95,000 annual income). Linda told me,

Xavier helps out a lot. He does a lot with the kids. When I leave for work I never have to give him instructions or tell him what needs to be done, unless there is a change in the schedule, like a doctor’s appointment or whatever, but, it’s not something that I ever worry about. So yeah, there’s a big change there to mutually figure out how to get the kids taken care of. I would like, maybe, help with more of the house cleaning so it is more evenly divided. That seems to be the one area that is low on the totem pole, as far as cleaning house. It has to be done, but it is not a priority, so if it were a little more evenly dispersed it would be helpful.

Ruth: Did you ever discuss this with him?

Linda: Yeah. And it has gotten a lot better.

Her husband, however, claimed that they split everything equally, depending on who thinks what needs to be done, and when I asked Linda if she was happy with how everything is split, she said that yes, she is really lucky that her husband does so much and he is a fabulous father.

Although I did not quantify if the participants in my study were “happy,” from what they told me in open discussion, those in egalitarian families were satisfied with their marriages and how the division of household labor was allocated. Maybe women just said that they are happy with their husbands, but I suspect that, at the time of the
interview, they really were satisfied. At the very least, as Evelyn Navarro, a devout Catholic mother and a real estate agent, put it, “no one wants to be the nagging spouse.” One of the problems with being part of a reminder egalitarian household, where flexibility is prized, is that women often noticed that the floor needed to be swept or the laundry was piling up before their husbands noticed, so the women ended up doing more of the chores. Ingrid Graham, a non-practicing mother said, “Yes, we split it up, but really, it is not worth fussing. If it is dirty, like I notice the floor needs [to be] mopped, I’ll just do it.” Part of this has to do with their career choices, since Ingrid and Gilbert Graham were rarely at the house together at the same time, as her employment in the medical field and her husband’s in music left them with a very hectic schedule. Her husband, Gilbert, priding himself on being a modern man and sharing everything with his wife, informed me that he notices when the floor is dirty and mops. Only when Gilbert sat and really thought about it did he start to look uncomfortable and accede that maybe she did do a little more of the cleaning. It is not like Ingrid was cleaning more when Gilbert was relaxing or sleeping, since they cherished their partnership and they both worked really hard at finding a balance where one of the spouses was not feeling put-upon.

Other mothers who claimed to be in egalitarian households, but did slightly more of the tasks, blamed themselves for taking on those tasks. I argue that by embracing an ideology of egalitarianism, but not having truly egalitarian gender roles being played out in the house, women needed to find a justification for the disparity between the ideal and the actuality. For example, Kathleen Webb (married to Ezra quoted above) called herself
a “control freak” and elaborated on this theme: “I am just better at it. It’s not like I don’t think that he can do them, I get mad if he does it wrong!”

Conversely, Megan Olsen, a Conservative Christian woman, also said that she had high standards, but she was learning to let them go since she only had herself to blame if she did more housework. She also remarked that since both she and her husband worked full-time as accountants, she simply did not have the time to devote to cleaning the house that her stay-at-home mother did, so her husband had to “do his share” otherwise “I’ll be unhappy and he doesn’t want to live with that!” Cindy Maxwell, who you read about in chapter four, made it look like she effortlessly balanced her volunteer duties at their Episcopal church, a career in finance, and being an involved mother, candidly said that, “you can’t ask for help and then complain how it is done.”

Women who embrace an ideology of egalitarianism do not automatically assume that they have a right to equal participation; they think that they should get it, but they are also able to appreciate that their husbands contribute so much because they know a lot of women who have traditionally-minded husbands who do not do a thing to help their wives maintain their home. Hope Griego, one of the Catholic mothers married to a very involved man whom you read about in chapter four, told me that she does not think that it is fair that so many of her cousins have husbands who do nothing. She would not put up with having to do everything, but it also makes her appreciate her own husband, she added. Hope’s face was a caricature of incredulity when she described one of her cousins. Her cousin, Hope told me, came home and was in the process of making dinner after

64 Rachel Frazier, a Conservative Christian who along with her husband holds transitional gender role ideals, also claims to be a “control” freak. “If I need help, and he always asks, but if I want it done right, I’ll do it myself.”
work while her husband watched sports, and the cousin stopped what she was doing to get her husband a beer while he just sat there! The women in my sample strongly identified with egalitarianism but they also understood that they not only got more help but more amiable help from their husbands. This is compared to their friends or family members, but especially when compared to what their own mothers received. Amelia Abbott, a teacher and a non-practicing women, summed up a reminding egalitarian household when she stated, “I’m the person who is ultimately responsible, but he does a lot. He happily does it as well.” Women married to husbands with similar egalitarian gender roles still felt, deep down inside, that they were ultimately responsible so they tended to remind their husbands to do tasks. By reminding, it maintained the equilibrium so that no one person was doing a huge amount more, but still, reminding is a chore. The phrase, “Well, she’ll tell me what to do!” was often uttered by husbands during our interviews.

We can explain the slight disjuncture between ideals and reality in egalitarian households by drawing attention to the fact that it is a middle class expectation for men to be equally involved in their families even if they are not (e.g. Descartes and Kottak 2009; LaRossa 1988; Pleck 1987; 2010). The fact is, women are still doing more housework, as is seen in my sample. The ideology remains that both men and women claim that they are sharing equally.

It is noteworthy that of all of the tasks that need to be done to maintain the family, cleaning has the lowest status. Maybe that is why women are stuck doing it, since women are still the less privileged gender. Those women in my sample (16) who reduced their hours at work in order to have three or five more hours at home a week did not do that so
they could clean, even though they found themselves using that extra time to do
housework. Women in my sample chose a career trajectory that allowed them flexibility
so that they could be with their children, so that they could be mothers, and not so that
they could be maids.

Because the men and women with whom I worked emphasized the importance of
being parents, women appeared happy that their husbands were excellent fathers and so
they seemed to overlook the fact that their husbands did fewer cleaning chores. Even if
the division of labor was not “fair” in a strict sense, the people who claimed to be in
egalitarian households were happy with the division of labor, overall. Unfortunately, this
still put women as the partner who was not just ultimately responsible for their children
but also the one who was ultimately responsible over the other household chores, too.
Ideology works together with wages since the middle class women in my sample
consciously chose to have careers that afford them flexibility, even if it meant that they
earned less money. In general, women get paid less than men because they are the gender
that is expected to be distracted by their familial obligations, but because they are paid
less than men, women are also the ones who reduce their hours in order to spend time at
home.

**Summary and Conclusions**

Although there has been a steady increase in male participation in domestic labor
over the last 40 years, women still do more housework than men (e.g., Bianchi et al.
2000; Bookman 2004; Coltrane 2000; Shelton and John 1996). Three broad theoretical
models have been used by social scientists to explain and study the domestic labor: time
availability constraints, relative resources, or socialization of gender roles (Coltrane
2000) (see chapter two). I argue that understanding individuals’ parental identities, and how they were socialized into particular gender roles, provides the best framework for understanding who does what in urban households. A women embracing ideologies of a traditional division of labor will enact dichotomous gender roles. She will choose to work fewer hours outside of the home and will therefore make less money and have fewer resources for bargaining power for help in the home. Because she chooses to reduce her wage work, she will also have more time to devote to the home. In short, a person’s particular adherence to a gender role dictates how many resources or how much time that individual has to dedicate to maintaining the household. Socioeconomic position plays a role in understanding the allocation of domestic labor given that people are socialized into particular gender roles depending on the socioeconomic class-context in which they are raised.

Understanding how people grew up and the kinds of gender roles that they experienced as children is important because it affects their enactment of their gender roles as adults. If a man grew up with parents who divided chores fairly equally, he also tended to adopt that position in his own home. Some other men consciously rejected the kind of father that their own father was, especially if he was a traditional father adhering to strict dichotomous gender roles. Part of this can be attributed to the fact that even though men may have grown up with a traditional father during the 1970s and 1980s, they still grew up in the broader cultural milieu that saw many fathers increasing their participation in domestic labor (e.g. Lamb 1975). The men who adhered to egalitarian gender roles in my sample stated that times have changed; with both spouses working, both spouses should share the domestic labor, too.
In my study, I found there to be a continuum of household arrangements ranging from transitional to egalitarian. The majority (25) of the couples in my study professed an egalitarian relationship with their spouses regarding the domestic division of labor. However, how the tasks were divided and who took ultimate responsibility differed among households. Although discussed extensively in chapter four, it needs to be reiterated here that there is an idea, held by many women and some men, that women are slightly better at taking care of the house and children, which is why they hold ultimate responsibility in the domestic realm. What is truly interesting is that even individuals who believe this also often embrace an egalitarian gender ideology. For 25 of the families in my sample, a large portion of the housework was shared (even though women did around a third more housework than men), more or less with good will. Over the last generation or two, the gendered nature of some domestic tasks has shifted from being primarily female to being thought of as gender neutral. This shift has taken some of the burden off of women. For example, cooking is now a gender neutral task. Like childcare, food preparation is both high-status and routine. People have to eat every day, just like they have to dress their child every day. Laundry, dusting, vacuuming, yard work, and so forth simply do not have the immediacy that food preparation and childcare have. That said, parents in my sample did not cook elaborate dinners and sometimes their kids skipped a bath, but that does not lessen the importance of both feeding a family and caring for a child. Also, eight of these 25 egalitarian families were able to outsource some of the house cleaning, as well.

Egalitarian families divided housework two different ways. The first way was to split chores equally into “his” and “her” tasks so that no spouse was responsible for more
tasks than the other, which I call a “divide-and-conquer” approach. The other way was to have flexibility in who did what chore, but because women overall tended to notice that something needed done before their husbands did, women took to “reminding” their husband to do a chore. Perhaps because women have universally been the gender in charge of kin and household maintenance, even today in egalitarian households women still feel responsible for making certain that the housework is completed. These women also ended up doing more cleaning than their husbands, too, although their husbands did a lot of chores. These women put up with a slightly unbalanced division of labor because they felt grateful that their husbands did a share of the domestic labor. Although not strictly “fair” in a perfectly equal division of labor, women were happy that their husbands were excellent, involved fathers, which made up for a lot of other foibles, like not sharing cleaning in a strict sense.

Being responsible for housework has never been part of an accepted masculine gender role, whereas being a father has always held status for men in Christianity (e.g., [Mather 1692] Gallagher 2003). Christian norms underlie much of American society, which affected all the men in my sample. Although specific denominational religious observance turned out to be less important than I originally expected, it still played a role affecting paternal identity and, in turn, the domestic division of labor. In chapter six, I illustrate how belonging to a particular denomination does not necessarily correlate with an individual’s degree of religiosity. Strong religiosity was, however, associated with

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65 Early Christian writings stress the importance of interdependency among husband and wife in raising children and providing for the home; this helped to emphasize men’s importance in the Christian family. Although, for most of Christianity’s history (and for many evangelicals today), men were viewed as the patriarchs of the family and women as “meet helps” (e.g., Ulrich 1979). In other words, husbands and wives were viewed as having different, but equally important, responsibilities (Gallagher 2003:22).
more dichotomous gender roles, as was seen among Conservative Christian denominations and some devout Catholics in my sample.
CHAPTER 6
The Impact of Religiosity on Father Involvement

I was lost. I usually am when trying to find a participant’s house among the labyrinthine streets that make up the many subdivisions of Albuquerque. This time, however, I was lost in a church. But not just any church; one of the aptly named “mega” Charismatic Christian churches. I was there to meet the Smiths, a family that I had previously interviewed. I hoped to experience one of the services that Noah Smith gave me reason to think actively shaped and reinforced traditional masculine gender roles. I wandered around the large, modern atrium, shielding my eyes from the glaring morning sun that came streaming in from the tall windows. The light illuminated the different kiosks, some of them with multi-media and Internet capabilities, that flanked the opposite wall. One was a mini gift shop plastered with t-shirts with gothic lettering spelling out “ready for everything except sin.” There were large consoles explaining the 18 diverse ministries this church has to offer. I thought of asking one of the security guards if he knew the Smith family and if he had seen them, but the fact that on any given weekend over 5,000 people will attend services did not inspire confidence that the guard would personally know any of the congregation. I walked over to my husband who was leaning against a wall with posters framed in movie lights announcing the pastor’s selection of sermons for the week. The day’s service was entitled “If Loving is Wrong, I Don’t Want to be Right,” part of the “First Comes Love, Then Comes Marriage, Then Comes the Baby in the Baby Carriage” series.
“Oh, you’re back. I worried that you were lost. We stand out. We should get seated.” My husband addressed me but took a program from one of the middle aged “greeters” at the inner doors.

“What do you mean we stand out?” I asked, “There is a great diversity of people here. Young Hispanic women, middle-aged White couples, teenage boys with piercings…”

“I thought you said that this was a conservative Christian church? It hardly looks like a church at all,” Ed said, as he gestured to the auditorium with seating for 1,000 people. Although this mega church looked nothing like the small, wooden pewed, Catholic church, or the sparse but comfortable Episcopalian church, or even like the bare-bones Southern Baptist church that we had visited in the course of my fieldwork, it was still obviously a place of religious worship.

“Well,” I responded, getting into lecture mode, “there are all sorts of Conservative Christian churches out there. This is one of the most popular and the fastest growing segment of Christianity in the United States today, and they are known for their support of dichotomous gender roles.66

I then allowed a professional-looking woman with a clipboard to usher us into the auditorium. We sat ourselves directly in the middle. It turns out that it didn’t matter if we got good seats or not, since every seat was good. There were two enormous screens on the sides and one behind the sound stage so that everyone could see the minister up close.

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66 Finke and Stark (2005) note that particular denominations, such as with the current Charismatic Christian movement, gain rapid popularity because they fill a void that well-established denominations do not. Namely, they provide a more “authentic” and captivating experience. After these churches have been around long enough to lose their fervor, they will also lose their adherents to another, newer church that feels more “home grown.” This explains how Methodism had such a rapid ascent in the 19th century, and how Baptists in turn took over in popularity after Methodism became larger, wealthier and more liberal, in the beginning of the 20th century.
The screens served the purpose of running the words to the songs on the bottom of the screen so one could sing along. The audience was expected to sing along to the Christian rock band, singing about Jesus’ love of humanity, because “you don’t want the angels to out sing you, do you!? Put your hands together! Raise your voices to Heaven!” announced the pastor.

At first Ed and I didn’t know it was the pastor who was up there on the stage. A middle-aged man in jeans, sneakers, and a button-up black short-sleeved shirt was the one calling us to prayer. There were no vestments of any sort to be found in the room. Although it was All Saints Day, no mention of this holy day was announced; in other words, there was no liturgy. No iconography or crucifixes marred the sleek perfection of the black and gray walls, except for large audio sound speakers. There were no bibles, hymnals, or other Christian literature available. There was no baptismal font and no Communion offered that day, although you could make an appointment for Communion. Rather than baptism, parents got up in front of the congregation and “dedicated” their child to God, promising to raise the child in a Christian manner.

The Pastor, Tim, spent a great deal of time making people laugh. Two women close to me were taking notes on the sermon, underlining relevant words or sentences in the handout. There was precious little in the way of passages taken from the bible, and the structure that I had come to expect from other churches was absent. Neither the Nicene Creed nor Lord’s Prayer were communally recited, as often happens in Episcopalian and Catholic churches. Tim’s message, while very polished and professional, did not give much pause for reflection because I was bombarded with music, movie clips, and “funny” stories to get the message that one cannot love anyone
else without first loving Jesus. The Pastor asked Jesus to help fathers be the spiritual guide for their family, but he said nothing about the mother’s role. Tim’s stories essentially played off of gender stereotypes, such as, men like to watch sports on Sundays and women like to shop. I felt that he catered to the men, while women were passive listeners and not really his audience. He said, for example, “Men, you know how we are. We are hunters. Women are browsers,” and “Men, you need to love your wife and then she will give you respect,” as well as, “Us men have to understand that women are just hardwired differently. And that is why we love them, because they are different than us. We didn’t want to marry someone exactly like us!” So, in a way, women learned what they should do by inference, or by knowing that if men are the head of the family, they are not. Ed called it “veiled sexism” because he felt that by making fun of women, and if everyone laughs, then people won’t think of it as sexism, it is just funny.

Of all the churches and different religious traditions I was exposed to throughout the course of my research, the Conservative Charismatic Churches were the most interesting with respect to my research questions about how Christian ideals shape gender roles. Conservative churches uphold dichotomous gender roles that women and men are inherently different, yet these differences compliment each another. Catholic priests I spoke to also suggested that women and men have different roles to play, but never in the course of my fieldwork did I experience Catholic priests addressing their congregation differently based on gender. The church that I spent the most time at, an Episcopal church, was more liberal even than other Mainstream Protestant churches, and the congregation was treated equally regardless of gender or sexual inclination. Because parenting roles are based on broader parenting norms (parental ideology) what constitutes
a good father or a good mother tends to be different for Conservative Christians, Catholics, Mainstream Protestants, and non-practicing individuals.

How a man self-identifies as a father influences his involvement in the family, and religiosity can be a key in affecting paternal identities. There exists, however, comparatively little research examining the impact of Christian religiosity in parental identity formation among dual-worker, middle class fathers. Here, I highlight four different Christian fathers (Charismatic Christian, Mainstream Protestant, Catholic, and non-practicing) with the goal of exploring how they internalize their paternal identities and how this affects their involvement in their families. Particular attention is given to how men conceptualize what a good father is, and how their religion helps to support this. The search for spirituality, regardless of denomination, is also important to consider, since spirituality meshes very well with American notions of individualism, particularly for the middle class. I also discuss the particulars of Christian denominations in order to explicate the subtleties underlying different Christian factions. A person will choose a church that he or she feels most comfortable in, but it is also true that, for the vast majority of people, they will choose a church that is similar to the church that they grew up in, if they grew up in a church. Gender roles are influenced by religious teachings and one learns about “proper” gender roles as a child. Denominations also reinforce particular gender roles. For instance, the more conservative the church, the more dichotomous the gender roles are expected to be. One would predict that more dichotomous gender roles would place a father outside of the family, as a breadwinner.

67 All of the eight Catholics in my sample grew up Catholic. Individuals now Episcopal told me that they grew up either Episcopal or some other sort of Presbyterian church. Only the Charismatic Christians in my sample came from diverse backgrounds, anywhere from Catholics to non-practicing to another stricter form of Conservative Christianity.
but in Christian teachings today emphasis is placed on being an involved father. Notions of Christian “headship” are key to understanding masculine gender roles. That many of the Conservative Christian families were able to conflate headship with egalitarianism is an example of how the overarching gender norms in the United States really did affect everyone in my middle class sample.

**Interweaving Religion, Identity, and Paternal Involvement**

Some work has been conducted among middle class Protestants examining paternal identity and involvement (Armato and Marsiglio 2002; Erickson and Gecas 1991; Gallagher and Smith 1999; Marciano 1991; Wilcox 2002, 2004). Much of the current Conservative Christian subculture is aimed at father involvement, which tends to stress the economic provider role as well as being an involved father (Gavanas 2000; Wilcox 2002). Christian values as a whole still deeply influence broader social values of what it means to be a “good father.” Even within specific sub-groups of Christians, (e.g., Catholics, Mainstream Protestants, Conservative Christians), different values are placed on specific roles for “good” fathers to perform. Among Conservative Christians, there is not even a single universal father role (Gallagher 2003; Lockhart 2000). Therefore, stating that a religious father is an involved father does not tell us what makes a father involved, or what particular role or roles he is identifying with as a “Christian.” It is more important to take into consideration the degree of religiosity and the particular denomination when attempting to understand paternal involvement.

Religion cross-cuts ethnicity and class lines. It is not accurate to say that “all Catholics are working class” or “all Episcopalians are White.” As I described in the opening vignette, the Conservative Charismatic “mega” churches exhibit amazing
heterogeneity in their congregations. There are a few factors that do predict religious adherence, however. Being married and having young children positively impacts involvement in religious organizations (e.g., Marler 1995; Edgell 2006; Sherkat and Ellison 1999:368; Stolzenberg et al. 1995:84). This is especially true for parents in their late 20s to mid 30s, which is largely the age group I examined. What religious organization a father chooses to attend is important to note. Many religious ideals are deeply seated in history and have cultural depth. Therefore, it is necessary to understand the differences between Christian denominations in the United States if we are to understand how religion influences men’s roles as fathers.

**Christian belief systems in the United States.** There are over two billion Christians worldwide and over 130,000,000 in the United States alone (U.S. Census 2000). Diverse Christian denominations throughout the United States have different histories and beliefs that, in the end, affect how individual men self-identify as a Christian. All Christians belong to a monotheistic religion and profess to believe in a higher power, a single God who created the world and takes an interest in the world that he created, specifically the humans created in his image. God sent his son, Jesus, to be the savior of humanity as the Messiah. Jesus’ life, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension into Heaven are proof of God’s love for humanity. Although the particular Christology of each denomination varies, Jesus Christ is usually understood to be both the son of God and human. The doctrine of the trinity is a core belief for Christians. According to the trinity concept, God is composed of three distinct “persons:” the father, son and holy spirit.\(^68\) Christians universally believe that there is an afterlife. This is constituted either

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\(^{68}\) Mormons (Church of Latter Day Saints) are one of the few Christian sects that do not believe the trinity.
in heaven as a place for the good and righteous to go after mortal death, or hell, for those who were not good Christians. The main sacred text for Christians is the bible, consisting of both the New and Old Testament (e.g., McGrath 2001; Placher 1983).

The oldest branch of Christianity is Catholicism. In this very hierarchical denomination, priests are allotted much authority over their congregations. They are led by the Pope, the ultimate head of the Catholic church, who is headquartered in Rome. Most Catholics also believe in papal infallibility. Catholics base their religion around a belief in seven sacraments: baptism, confirmation, Eucharist, penance and reconciliation, anointing of the sick, holy orders, and matrimony. The sacraments are, according to a Vatican spokesperson,

Efficacious signs of grace, instituted by Christ and entrusted to the Church, by which divine life is dispensed to us. The visible rites by which the sacraments are celebrated signify and make present the graces proper to each sacrament. They bear fruit in those who receive them with the required dispositions” (Vatican 1993).

New Mexico has a deep history with the Catholic Church. It was the religion practiced by the Spanish when they colonized the Southwest in the 17th century. The Catholicism practiced in New Mexico today is slightly different than the versions found elsewhere in the world (Espinoza 1993; Wroth 1988). To my interviewees moving from other parts of the country to New Mexico, the Catholic Church in New Mexico appears more strict than, say, the Catholic Church in Seattle or Pittsburgh. One of my interviewees called New Mexico Catholicism “medieval.” Other interviewees spoke to me about how they were raised Catholic but when they moved to New Mexico they could not find a Catholic Church that was as liberal as the one that they left. Rather, they felt

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69 Papal infallibility means that the Pope is appointed by God, and in matters of the Catholic faith, is always correct.
more comfortable in a New Mexican Conservative Protestant church. Aaron Jones, a soft-spoken man from the United Kingdom, had this to say about the Catholic church in New Mexico:

    I guess I see the church as less conservative in Ireland. In Ireland it is more laid back, not hard-core religious. It is much more rigid here. People who are religious here are very strong in their beliefs, and pray and are more outspoken, I think. In Ireland, it is hard to describe it, but the whole thing is just more laid back. It was kinda going with the flow a little bit more and less about, well, it is just a different system than I see it over here.70

Although the Catholic Church in New Mexico might be more conservative than elsewhere, New Mexican Mainstream Protestant churches are not necessarily so. Perhaps this rests on the fact that there are so many different Protestant denominations from which to choose. One can choose a liberal, more mainstream Protestant church, or one of the diverse Conservative Christian denominations. Protestantism arose during the 16th century reformation in Europe as a reaction against what many saw as corruption in the Catholic Church. Although numerous wars have been fought and much blood shed over the differences between Catholicism and Protestantism, many differences that exist are based in scriptural interpretation. For example, Protestants believe that the bible alone is a sufficient authority (*sola scriptura*) whereas Catholics hold that the Sacred Roman Catholic tradition (i.e., praying to saints, belief in purgatory, venerating Mary) is equally important. Catholics believe that the Pope is infallible and has authority in matters of faith, whereas Protestants do not believe that any person is infallible. Protestants also believe that faith alone (*sola fide*) in Christ is enough to make one a good Christian. Catholics agree that faith is important but claim that participating in the sacraments is

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70 I find Aaron Jones’ comment ironic, since the Catholic church in Ireland has long been a vehicle for political resistance against an external (English) political force bent on domination (Stark and McCann [1989] in Finke and Stark [2005]).
also necessary to be saved (see Mead and Hill [2005] for a more detailed list of the differences).

Although there are doctrinal differences between Catholics and Protestants there are also some very significant differences among various Protestant groups, especially between Mainstream Protestants (e.g., Episcopalians, Methodists) and what are now considered Conservative Protestants (e.g., Southern or Primitive Baptists, Disciples of Christ, and those that claim to be “non-denominational” Christian are almost always Conservative Christians). By the early 20th century, theological liberalism, which draws on scientific explanations to understand the world and not a literal interpretation of the bible, had become common (Gallagher 2003:6; Peacock 1980). Conversely, Conservative Christian sects are really a continuation of older Protestant values (Gallagher 2003:5; Peacock 1980). Most scholars agree that “Conservative Christian” is a diverse category that can be divided into four not necessarily mutually exclusive factions: Fundamentals, Pentecostals, Charismatics, and Evangelicals (Harding 2000). Woodbury and Smith (1998) suggest that “Conservative Christian” is a general term and that “Evangelical” should be reserved for politically moderate Conservative Christians. Evangelicalism as it is known today was established after World War II as intellectual approach to biblical interpretations. It privileges biblical authority and Christian doctrine, and stresses engagement with contemporary society (Gallagher 2003:8; Marsden 1987). The fundamental branch of Conservative Christianity that emerged in the beginning of the 20th century is concerned with a literal interpretation of the bible, dispensational
theology, and premillennial eschatology (Woodbury and Smith 1998:29).\footnote{Dispensational theology is a way of understanding biblical history. Within this belief system, God treated humans differently in different time periods. In each of these periods, called “dispensations,” God tested humans but they always failed (see Scofield 2002[1909]). This differs from Covenant Theology, held by most Mainstream Protestants, in which history is organized around several covenants (arrangements) between humans and God. Eschatology is the study of the end of history from a religious viewpoint. Premillennialists believe that there will literally be a 1,000 year period when Christ returns to earth in order to rule all Christians or those that acted Christ-like before the advent of Christ (Pocock 2009). This is preceded by a seven year reign of the Antichrist (an unspecified world religious-political leader). Final Judgment will follow the “golden age” of Christ’s rule.}

Fundamentalists do not hold with glossolalia (“speaking in tongues”) or modern prophets. Pentecostalism, which also emerged in the early 20th century, accepts glossolalia as legitimate, believes in modern prophets, and the ability to heal without outward medical assistance. Charismatic Christians, a group that emerged in the 1960s, are the fastest growing segment of Conservative Christians in the world. They interpret the bible more literally than their mainstream counterparts and also view glossolalia to be doctrinally valid (Woodbury and Smith 1998), even if it rarely appears during services.

Generally, Conservative Christians of all denominations tend to be more alike in their philosophies than Mainstream Protestants. Nonetheless, in my sample there were more similarities between a Catholic father and a Charismatic Christian father, who were both highly religious, than between two Catholics of differing degrees of religiosity. Ezra Webb, who was raised in a fundamental southern Baptist family and still considered himself Baptist, was raising his children Catholic at his wife’s request. Although he missed his beloved Monday night football to talk to me, he generously shared his views on religion. His views were informed by studying scripture, taking classes on comparative religions in college, and personal experience. Ezra leaned forward in his easy chair to emphasize his points and said,
I think that they [Baptists and Catholics] believe in the essentials, even if I don’t believe in the Catholic faith. I do believe in God, and that he controls the universe and we have an obligation to him in life and that there is a life after this life and everything you do in this life has consequences and those consequences are somewhat controlled by a supreme being. Catholics differ from Baptist but in many ways are similar—similar in the fundamentals. They are weighed more towards Mary, but who cares how they do the sign of the cross? Catholics believe in God, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit. I want them [the children] to believe in Jesus Christ and that he came here for them, in the Holy Spirit, and they are getting that from the Catholic church. I hope that at some point in time—I don’t want to be derogatory to the Catholic faith—but I hope that they can later choose their church, make the choice of what religion is best for them as they are adults. My wife would be stunned if they left the Catholic faith. Baptists have their faults, Catholics have their faults, but we tend to look towards God and not one particular church. If you look towards church and not God, then that is a problem.

Ezra, like most devout Christians I interviewed, views the differences between denominations as less important than following what they see as God’s word and living a good Christian life.

**Methods to understanding religiosity.** “Religiosity” refers to the nature of the religious values held and the extent of a person’s participation in a formal religious institution (Wilcox 2002:781). Religiosity as a concept helps social scientists to understand how devoutly religious a person is by looking at how often he or she goes to church and how strongly he or she believes in a church’s creed or the values endorsed by their particular church. In order to ascertain how religious an individual was at the time of my study, I asked how often an individual attends church, what, if any, are the other church-related activities he or she engages in, and how often he or she does so. I also asked if and how often my participants read the bible as well as other religious literature. It was important to know how often they pray and whether they are teaching, or intend to teach, their children to pray. If appropriate to the particular denomination, I asked if the individual has gone through the sacraments (such as baptism and marriage). Finally, I
inquired as to whether it is important to raise their children as Christians. If a man told me that it is important to raise his child in a particular church, I asked “why,” and “why this church?” “What are the benefits of raising a child Christian? Or Catholic, specifically?” I also asked questions alluding to the importance of religion in their lives. To further understand religiosity, I administered a short survey on theological conceptions and gender ideologies to each of my participants [See Table 8: Theological Conceptions and Tables 9 and 10: Gender Ideologies].

I interviewed eight Catholic men, nine Conservative Christian men (Charismatic Christian, Fundamental Baptist, Church of Latter Day Saints [LDS], and Evangelical), seven men who self-identified as belonging to one of the Mainstream Protestant groups (Episcopal and Lutheran), and six men who did not practice or self-identify with any religion. Of the non-practicing men, only one was atheist. The rest were, for various reasons, unhappy with organized religion but agnostic.

It quickly became clear that the participants in my research who identified as agnostic or non-practicing still derived a great deal of comfort from Christian tradition and self-identified as “spiritual” people. For example, I went to the Renaud’s house, expecting to interview a non-religious practitioner, as this was how Clarence Renaud self-identified to me during our initial contact. During the interview I sat on the couch under a prominent photograph of the LDS Temple in Salt Lake City. This was juxtaposed against a large framed wedding photograph of Clarence and Crystal Renaud, posed outside of an elaborate house of worship. I expected that with this many religiously devoted pictures that Clarence would identify with being Christian or at least a spiritual man. Clarence explained to me that he was raised in the LDS church by his White
Table 8: Theological Conceptions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Which of the following statements do you agree with?</th>
<th>Conservative Christians (n=9)</th>
<th>Catholics (n=8)</th>
<th>Mainstream Protestants (n=7)</th>
<th>Non-practitioners (n=6)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Biblical Statements</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The bible is the inspired word of God and is to be taken literally</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The bible is the inspired word of God and is to be taken literally except in science and historical matters</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The bible becomes the word of God when a person reads it in faith</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The bible is an ancient book of legends, history, and moral precepts recorded by humans</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do not know</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Life After Death Statements</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The only hope for heaven is through personal faith in Jesus Christ</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The only hope for heaven is through personal faith in Jesus Christ except for those who have not heard of Jesus Christ</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There will be a divine reward for those who earn it by their good life</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Everyone goes to heaven</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is no life after death</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do not know</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Origin of Humans Statements</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>God created Adam and Eve, which was the start of human life</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>God began an evolutionary cycle for all living things but personally intervened at a point and transformed humans into God’s image</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humans evolved from other animals into the creatures they are today</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do not know</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Origin of the World Statements</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The earth was created in six 24 hour days</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The earth was created in six days, but each “day” corresponds to a geologic period</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The biblical account is intended to be symbolic and not literal</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The bible reflects what was known of the origin of the world at the time it was written</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do not know</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 9: Gender Ideology Frequencies, Women’s Responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Which of the following statements do you agree with?</th>
<th>Conservative Christians (n=9)</th>
<th>Catholics (n=8)</th>
<th>Mainstream Protestants (n=7)</th>
<th>Non-practitioners (n=6)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A husband should have the final say in family decision making</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A husband should be responsible for the spiritual well-being of his family</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A mother is better able to care for children</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A husband should be the primary breadwinner</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A married woman should not work if her husband is capable of supporting her and the children</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A working mother can establish a warm and secure relationship with her children just like a stay-at-home mother can</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A married woman who does not want at least one child is being selfish</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A married man who does not want at least one child is being selfish</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A man should put his wife and children before his career</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A woman should put her husband and children before her career</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A woman can have a full and happy life without marrying</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A man can have a full and happy life without marrying</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 10: Gender Ideology Frequencies, Men’s Responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Which of the following statements do you agree with?</th>
<th>Conservative Christians (n=9)</th>
<th>Catholics (n=8)</th>
<th>Mainstream Protestants (n=7)</th>
<th>Non-practitioners (n=6)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A husband should have the final say in family decision making</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A husband should be responsible for the spiritual well-being of his family</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A mother is better able to care for children</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A husband should be the primary breadwinner</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A married woman should not work if her husband is capable of supporting her and the children</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A working mother can establish a warm and secure relationship with her children just like a stay-at-home mother can</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A married woman who does not want at least one child is being selfish</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A married man who does not want at least one child is being selfish</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A man should put his wife and children before his career</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A woman should put her husband and children before her career</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A woman can have a full and happy life without marrying</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A man can have a full and happy life without marrying</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
mother, but also influenced by his Native American father’s participation in the Native American Church.  

I have to not believe in anything. I practice spirituality. I derive spiritual comfort from my dad doing the pipe blessing and I don’t drink, and that is a Mormon practice (from my mom), but really, I am agnostic. Religion in itself is B.S.! It is hard for me to rationalize all that, that God is used as a political tool to oppress. There is something out there. But he, she, it, isn’t always used in the best way.

Although Clarence did not identify with any particular religion, he described himself as a spiritual man. In the United States, there is a quest for spirituality. We are a nation focused on the individual, and, so, most of us want an individual religious experience (Kaplan 2009). By and large, Americans want to experience God in their own, unique way. For many people the church or other official place of worship is a vehicle for finding that spirituality (Kaplan 2009). For others, like Clarence, organized religion is not necessary. As Kaplan (2009:2) eloquently writes,

Many Americans have shifted from believing in a religion that has an established church and set rituals to a privatized spirituality. Rather than trying to placate a demanding deity, they are looking to find ways to realize their human potential….Each person needs to embark on her own spiritual journey in order to find her own personal path to the sacred.

I did not ask questions specifically about spirituality, but I noted when people substituted talking about spirituality when we discussed religion.

**Religious participation in Albuquerque.** When examining my study participants’ religious practices and networks I found that going to church regularly was a hallmark of Conservative Christianity (see Table 11: Religious Practices and Networks). Only Conservative Christian one man did not go every week or most weeks. Half of the Catholics (four) whom I interviewed attended church every week, a quarter (two) went

---

72 Clarence Renaud self-identified as member of one of the western Native American tribes.
infrequently and a quarter (two) went twice a year at major holidays. Going to church was not of crucial importance for Mainstream Protestants, although Mainstream Protestants participated in other church activities much more than any other group. This was compared to Catholics or Charismatic Christians, who either never or infrequently participated in other church activities. Of the self-identified “non-practicing” subgroup one man told me that he went to church about once a month, but the majority (five) of non-practicing men said that they never went to church. This one father who claimed not to practice any particular religion but was a consistent outlier in religious practices, including going to church a dozen times a year. Whereas the other five non-practicing men stated that they did not read the bible or pray, he admitted to doing both, albeit infrequently. Saying grace was of about equal importance to all Protestant groups. Interestingly, over three quarters of Catholics told me that they did not say grace or read the bible. However, because Catholicism is hierarchical, giving the priests power over the congregation, Catholicism has always placed more importance on the priests’ interpretation of the bible for their congregation than individuals interpreting the bible on their own. Conservative Christians had slightly higher rates of both reading the bible and praying than their Mainstream Protestant counterparts. It appears that the outward trappings of being a religious man, such as going to church, reading the bible, saying grace, and praying, were expressed the most by Conservative Christians, followed by Mainstream Protestants, and then Catholics. Not unexpectedly, non-practicing men scored the lowest on this assessment.

73 Church activities include church-sponsored fundraising campaigns to fix the church roof, helping economically disadvantaged children in Nicaragua, family-centered picnics and retreats, going to Christmas choir recitals, and the like.
## Table 11: Religious Practices and Networks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How often do you participate in the following religious activities?</th>
<th>Conservative Christians (n=9)</th>
<th>Catholics (n=8)</th>
<th>Mainstream Protestants (n=7)</th>
<th>Non-practitioners (n=6)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Church Attendance?</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Every week</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two or three times a month</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once a month</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once every six months</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Say Grace?</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Every meal</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most meals</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Only on special occasions</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Participate in Extracurricular Church Activities?</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once a week</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infrequently</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Read the Bible?</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than once a day</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Every day</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Every week</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once every six months</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pray?</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than once a day</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once a day</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infrequently</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Are You Teaching Your Children to Pray?</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
There were few discrepancies between the importance my interviewees placed on religion and their religious practices [See Table 12: Religious Frequencies]. Conservative Christians overwhelmingly agreed that a person could be a good Christian without going to church. More Mainstream Protestants and Catholics “struggled” with this question but nearly three quarters agreed with the statement that “a person can be a good Christian without attending church.” Most Christians, regardless of affiliation, strongly identified with being a Christian and agreed that it is a very important part of their lives, regardless of their actual practices. The only seeming incongruity I saw was with the Catholics. Although they, as a group, claimed not to place much importance in going to church, reading the bible or prayer, they still placed great importance on the role of religion in their lives and deeply self-identified as Catholics.

Interestingly, when examining the four different subgroups’ theological conceptions, Catholics had a more literal interpretation of the bible than any other group, although they were closely followed by Conservative Christians [See Table 8: Theological Conceptions]. Mainstream Protestants, following a liberal theology, took a more scientific approach to their faith. Non-practicing men were the most liberal on the subject of theology. My sample varied in the degree of religiosity; as a group the Conservative Christians were more religious than any other group, followed by the Catholics, then the Mainstream Protestants, and then, not surprisingly, by the non-religious practicing men. That said, individuals varied in religiosity among and between groups.

Naturally, men in my sample joined churches that fit their beliefs. Often, but not always, the religious tradition in which individuals were raised was reflected in the
particular denomination they chose as adults. For example, William Robinson (a Conservative Christian living in a reminder egalitarian household whom you read about in chapter four on father involvement) grew up in a very Conservative Christian church, and still had internalized many of the positions advocated by Conservative Christianity, such as the perspective that women are special in their position as mothers. As a well educated adult with a masters’ degree in hard science, William also rejected what he saw as the heavy-handedness of his parent’s Baptist church. He told me that he does not believe that a woman’s place should be in the home, for example. So, he consciously chose a Charismatic church that comes from a Conservative Christian tradition but also is more liberal socially and allowed him to frame his ideas about dichotomous gender roles in a more socially appropriate manner. That is, that women and men are different, but by claiming biology as the defining variable and not because God made women to be subservient to men.

**What constitutes a good father today?** Religiosity, identity, socioeconomic position, and parental involvement are intimately intertwined and it is difficult to disentangle them. However, I argue that religiosity, socioeconomic position, and ethnicity/race all assist in mediating parental identity. Furthermore, the fathers in my sample internalized broader cultural values of what it means to be a good father, otherwise known as parental ideology. For most of my sample, the men have internalized a parental ideology that stresses that engagement in childcare tasks and responsibility for ones children are crucial to being a good father. This ideology influenced the men’s paternal identities, which in turn, influenced parental involvement.
Table 12: Religious Frequencies, Questions Pertaining to the Importance of Religion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions Pertaining to the Importance of Religion</th>
<th>Conservative Christians (n=9)</th>
<th>Catholics (n=8)</th>
<th>Mainstream Protestants (n=7)</th>
<th>Non-practitioners (n=6)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Can a person can be a good Christian without attending church regularly?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I struggle with that question</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How closely do you identity with a religious denomination?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slightly</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderately</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very strongly</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How important is religion in your life?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all important</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slightly important</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very important</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The most important thing in my life</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How often do you seek comfort in religion?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rarely</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Often</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Always</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Lamb’s model, as seen in chapter four, provides a good etic framework for understanding what constitutes an involved father; in other words, for assessing what men actually do as fathers. The middle class men in my sample strongly identified with being an involved father. Participant observation allows us to go beyond Lamb’s tripartite model to uncover the subtleties of his categories, such as responsibility. Men can claim responsibility, but how they view their actions in light of their wives’ responsibilities can be telling.

I also wanted to ascertain what my interviewees thought being a good father entailed (an emic definition). Data gathered from semi-structured interviews and identity pie charts illustrate that the men in my sample are consciously committed to the broad cultural norm of the fatherhood ideal. My interviewees, by and large, agreed that an involved father was a good father (note that none of the participants included participating in household chores as part of being a parent). Some men specified that this includes supporting their children emotionally as well as being responsible for their health and general well-being. Interestingly, no one said that “being a good father is changing diapers, bathing, and combing hair,” or other direct engagement tasks. Mothers gave similar responses to this question. Like their husbands, they emphasized the importance of caring for the whole child: mind, body, and soul. Both men and women in my sample also underscored the importance of being a moral guide and teacher, so that their children would grow up to be productive members of society. Very few men stressed the role of playmate, although all of the men that I talked to played with their children, some more than others. Many ruefully included self sacrifice as a significant attribute of being a good father. Being the main breadwinner was not often mentioned as
a critical to being a good father, although men shared with me that a good father has to provide for his children. Love for one’s children was a key theme, specifically including the idea that love negates any parenting mistakes.

**Parental love.** I met Julian Reed, a Mainstream Protestant father and primary caregiver to his son who appeared as a case study in chapter four, at a coffee shop. While his son Griffin napped, he summed up what being a good parent entails:

I think every person has this ability, to be able to show endless love, no matter what. For some this comes more naturally, but for others it is a struggle, so you have to train yourself to show that. But other than that, lots of details. As long as you can show endless love. I was told, ‘you are such a good parent because you play with your son so much’ but being a good parent is more than playing. You have to show them social norms, like table manners. Children don’t naturally have table manners. Play doesn’t make you a good parent, it makes you a good play partner, but not a good parent if that is all you can do. You have to take care of them when they are sick, you have to listen to them very nicely when they have a problem. You can’t ignore that stuff. You can’t just do one task, you kinda have to be good at all of it, in some ways.

I saw first hand that Julian had an endless stores of patience (with both his son and the anthropologist practically living with them) on which he drew when teaching his son.

The response of Justin Byrd—a scientist, atheist and reminder egalitarian (see chapter five)—response to this same query was not very different from any other father when he told me, in between sips of a drink,

I would probably say that a good parent should be happy and willing to sacrifice their own personal needs and wants for their children. In most cases they put the child first before their own desires. I would say that a good parent is compassionate, patient, loving. A caretaker, a teacher. A disciplinarian at times if needed. Let me think about the individual man and woman thing [a mother vs. a father] well, I prefer to talk about it generally for both—what I just said for both. Needs to provide—without sounding too traditional—but provide the necessities the child needs to grow, daycare needs, to take them to the doctor when they need medical help or whatever, food, whatever. That is probably most of it.
A devout Catholic, John Griego whom you read about in chapter four as an example of a very engaged father and in chapter five as living in a reminder egalitarian household, shared that, for him, being a good parent is, “Just the example you set for your children. Because that’s going to lay down the foundation of morals, values, things like that. I think when you do that, when you lay down the foundation, it is the most important thing a person, a parent, can do.” This father, although I had seen him cheerfully do childcare tasks, never mentioned the importance of them. When I later asked John why he did not mention the importance of caregiving tasks during our interview, he laughed out loud and said something like, “because they have to get done or you are the parent on the block with the dirty kid!” In other words, such daily caregiving tasks are innocuous and so commonplace as not to need to be mentioned. The more important role for this Catholic father was in being a moral role model for his children.

Being a moral role model. Conservative Christian men in my sample saw being a parent as a God-given duty, and emphasize this role. As Seth Maier, who lived in a transitional household at the time of my study, told me, “Being a parent, it is the most important job God has given me. Then I am a provider, a good husband, and good friend.” Seth went onto elaborate that, in his opinion,

A good parent is loving, is nurturing. I think that the hidden secrets are respect, being a child yourself, being a good example in your behavior, not just what you say, but do it, too. In other words, if you say that you are supposed to love your neighbor, you had better be showing it. That is what God is going to help me with, love thy neighbor as I love myself.

Seth Maier, like all the other Conservative Christians, over half of the Catholics, and a quarter of the non-practicing men I interviewed, viewed being a father as being a moral role model. When I asked Evan Frazier, one of the transitional Conservative Christian
fathers highlighted in chapter four, what being a good father entailed he quickly told me, “A good parent has a moral stance, patience and understands. Is strict and fair and fun. Need to be fun while being a being a teacher, a friend while being a disciplinarian. From a father’s perspective, you have to be the standard that your child sees.”

When I asked the same question of Dominic Trujillo (one of the transitional men discussed in chapter five), a deeply spiritual man but currently not practicing in a formal religious institution, he mentioned that being a good parent is complicated, but it is mainly love. He went on to say much more, and spent some time emphasizing the role model aspect of being a good father. As he shared with me,


**Tough dads and soft moms.** Four Conservative Christian men mentioned that there were differences in mothering and fathering which usually revolved around their perceptions of women being “softer” and “more sympathetic” than men. Charles Lee, who indicated to me that he shared childcare equally with his wife (they are in a reminder egalitarian household), told me:

Like, when I said earlier that my wife has a better, she is more comforting with their “booboos,” [laugh] with being injured. I don’t know if that is just in her nature. I don’t know if that is every female. I would generalize and say that it is every female. A sympathetic quality. I almost want to use the term “motherly” if that makes sense. I don’t know. So that, being said, the father would be more stern. Ah, [pause]. I mean, I play the role as a father. I don’t think that a father can play a role as mother even though I stay home and do things that are traditional, that are thought of as a motherly or a woman’s job. I don’t think that the roles are reversed…the duties. But you can’t take away the fact that I am a man, and that I still have different views of things and that I act a certain way that do…that creates different relationships with the children…I think that my daughter can draw on the experiences of having a father later on in her life. She has a better
sense of what a man is, good or bad, whatever that is, because she had a father. That kind of thing.

Two other Conservative Christian men living in transitional households, Seth Maier and Noah Smith, laughed when they told me that they were “tough dads.” When their sons fall down and cry, they jokingly tell them to “rub some dirt in it!” Presumably, this is their way of teaching their sons to be stoic which is a desirable masculine trait. Their wives, the men told me, are nicer to the kids and hug them and soothe them when they have minor injuries. It should be noted that two egalitarian Mainstream Protestant men and two egalitarian agnostic men mentioned that because women have the physical ability to breastfeed, they are different parents in that way. But these men quickly informed me that there are no differences between parents after the children are weaned. This is not the same as saying, as some Conservative Christians do, that women are inherently more sympathetic, a trait that makes them “mothers.”

In order to illustrate some of the themes contingent upon being a good father (i.e., teaching, moral guide, loving, protecting, and so forth) in greater detail, I provide three case studies: a Charismatic Christian father, an Episcopal father, and a Roman Catholic father, all of who ranked high on my scale of religiosity. I also discuss a non-practicing father’s view. I then compare the non-practicing fathers to the Catholic and Mainstream Protestant fathers who are less religious.

**Ethnographic case study: Conservative Christian. The Smith Family.** The excerpt that opened this chapter painted a picture of Noah Smith’s Charismatic Christian church, one of the Conservative Christian churches in Albuquerque. Noah Smith, whom you also read about in chapter five as holding “transitional” gender roles, told me that he
is “old fashioned.” I took this to mean that he did not let his sons get away with inappropriate behavior. Indeed, the boys with spiky blond hair and fake superman tattoos were polite, if energetic, children when I saw them. The first day that I met the Smiths, Noah told his son, Wyatt, who had a scraped knee, to “walk it off, son, you’re all right.” This made me hold my breath in anticipation, but the child’s tears never came. Wyatt was all smiles two minutes later, showing us his homework and being praised by both his father and me. The kids went for attention to their father as much as their mother.

When I interviewed Noah on a windy spring day, I learned about the importance that God held in his life. He deftly interwove his religious dedication with his ideas about masculinity and fatherhood. Noah rejected the image of the sole breadwinning father. Yet, he placed more importance on his economic contribution than his wife’s. Noah did not appear to embrace the idea of androgynous parenting, either. He told me that women and men parent differently, because they are different genders. But, both he and his wife alleged to share childcare tasks. From my time with them, it is apparent that Noah did do a lot. He took responsibility for his children’s wellbeing and, on a symbolic plane, claimed headship for the household. As Noah shared with me,

I will tell you that you have to love God in order to love others. So, here are the roles that are important to me…. God. Wife. Kids. Friends. You know, it is hard to be a father. You have to make your wife happy, her parents happy. But I believe that the father still has a final say in decision making—in the end, you have to fight for what you think is right. That doesn’t mean that he should make every decision, but you have to fight for what you believe. Right now, I believe that society is making men de-masculinated—is that even a word? Well, this is the English language, so I’m gonna use it. And I don’t mean to be sexist here, but I believe that men are losing their masculine identities. They are losing that role as head of the home. That is why so many marriages are breaking up. Look at TV, all the kids’ shows. There are hot moms and dork dads. There is enough crap on the media saying that dad’s opinion doesn’t count. That is why you need to stand up when it matters—mostly it doesn’t matter—because we need to combat this
demasculinating image. Look, I am not a very masculine guy. I don’t like bugs! [But] I do believe that men have a responsibility for the spiritual well-being of the entire family.

Ruth: Even your wife?

Noah: “….[H]er salvation reflects on me. In many ways you have to look at it like a hierarchy, in many ways we are equal, but there is still a hierarchy. That is why the men carry the family name. I’m not sayin’ that her name is not important, but truth is, men carry the name. God wanted it that way. I am just doing the best I can [pause]. Men are the head of the house spiritually and socially. They have a social responsibility. Especially if you have sons to raise. You need to make them stand on their own two feet.

By claiming headship, being responsible for the spiritual as well as social well-being of the family, Noah Smith was able to combat the “demasculinating” image created by popular culture. Nevertheless, he was willing to simultaneously be a provider, the play dad, the teacher dad, as well as do some everyday childcare chores (although as we saw in chapter five, he leaves the bulk of those chores to his wife). As Noah cleaned up dinner he told me that my earlier interview interrupted “Lego time” with the boys. In this case, the “demasculinating” image of the father is not because he did childcare chores or because he was not the sole breadwinner, but because men are no longer claiming their “right” as the head of the household. Claiming headship is a way for men to be involved, on a responsible level, for their family (see also Gallagher 2003). The Smiths consulted with one another on childcare, such as taking the child to the doctor, but it was usually Emily who took their children to the doctor. Noah claimed responsibility for his children because he knew what went on in his family, even if he was not the one that physically took his children to the doctor. In Noah’s view, men and women complement each other and to be a good father, you have to be a good husband, too. As Noah stated,
I believe that a marriage is between a man and a woman who love each other very much and between two people who want to bring a child into this world to have his own identity, have their own faith, have their own lives and raise them to be life-changers. You need to have a kind, compassionate, caring heart, but there are times when you have to be strict. We both have things that we are better at. She’s softer, I am stricter. We don’t have to have similar interests but we have to complement each other. I think that my wife and I are polar opposites, but together we make one person and complement each other.

That men and women complement each other in their differences is a common theme among all of the Conservative Christians that I interviewed.

**Ethnographic case study: Catholic. The Gonzalez Family.** The Gonzalez family is one of the reminder egalitarian families in my study. They are also devoutly Catholic. Grace Gonzalez told me that she goes to church because of her husband. She told me that that Frank is “much more religious me.” Frank Gonzalez, hearing us from the kitchen where he was making hot chocolate for the kids, said, “No way! You should see my older sister. She is much more religious than I am!” After meeting his sister, I agree that she probably is more religious, but Frank also scored high on the religiosity scale. After going to church with them and seeing the angst that a long mass created in his children, I can only admire the devotion that it took to go to church every week when the children were obviously bored, restless, and wishing they were playing outside instead of sitting quietly in a pew.

Like all Christian men, regardless of religiosity, Frank Gonzalez drew on his Christian faith when parenting. He told me that he wants to raise his children to be good, morally abiding people; in short, good Christians. When we discussed this, at first he asserted that his religious views did not influence his being a father. However, what
Frank meant was that he did not specifically subscribe to a Catholic viewpoint, but drew on broader Christian values, like compassion, to raise his children. As he told me,

You got the Christian model that you follow….like “do unto others” which is part of the Christian model. So, again, it is hard to separate, it is like, ok, we are doing this for religious reasons and we are doing this for fun, but even with fun, you have to pull in the Christian thing.

Frank Gonzalez also used a religious analogy when he related what a good parent is to him:

For me, a good parent, we’re teachers. We [he and his wife] went to this pre-marriage counseling thing and they asked a series of questions, and one of the questions asked about disciplining the kids, and I over and over again kept using the word “punish” them, and they said, well, is that the only way to get the message through? And I said, yeah. And they suggested discipline, like teach, like disciples were taught. And I was like, oh, well there’s a new concept! I try the latest thing, I ask, “could you have handled that differently” to get them to think through when they do something wrong, so they can think and learn from experiences. That is one of the greatest things that I can give them, personally.

I classified the Gonzalezes as having created an egalitarian household. During my time with them, as illustrated in chapter four, Frank Gonzales did a significant amount of the childcare tasks, about equal to his wife’s contribution. He played with his children more than his wife did, but that was because Grace was taking care of the laundry while they played. Frank laughingly told me that Grace lets him take on the fun tasks, such as housing projects that he can involve the kids in, since she does the laundry. They both indicated to me that they respect each other very much, and acknowledged that since both of them work to earn money, it does not matter who makes more money as long as all of the family’s needs are met.

Ethnographic case study: Mainstream Protestant. The Maxwell Family.

During my research, the Maxwells were involved in their Episcopal church and went
almost every week, dropping their children off at bible school but leaving a little early in order to beat the crowds in the parking lot. The children informed me that they look forward to church because they go out to brunch afterwards. Their parents laughed at this and Cindy Maxwell said that she hoped that one day her children would get more out of church than the food afterwards.

As well as being a moral role model, Mike Maxwell was a play father. Indeed, he taught me how to play the board game “Candyland.” When I was ready to toss the game in the air out of boredom, he caught my eye and smiled and I continued playing and tried, as he did, to appreciate that we were making the kids happy. As I discussed in the last two chapters, the Maxwells are what I refer to as a reminder egalitarian household and Mike did a lot of childcare tasks. Mike asked his wife, every night I was there, if it was ok to run the bath for the kids. When Cindy nodded assent, he did it and popped the kids in the water, checking on them in between talking to his wife and me. Perhaps most importantly for my project, Mike took his role of father, as a moral guide, very seriously. His seemed to be a quietly religious man, as well as being intelligent and hardworking. In one our conversations when we were ruminating over what it means to be a middle class father today, he leaned back in his chair and was quiet for several moments before telling me,

Well, I identify with the role of father, but not the image. The image is a pasty suburban guy in a plaid shirt with an SUV in the garage. And here I sit, in a plaid shirt with an S.U.V in my garage [laughter]. But I would like to modify our life more so it is more refined. So that the role of parent is more refined, since I think that kids learn by observation. You probably know more about this than I do, but there are equal amounts of nature versus nurture. So, to provide the nurture part, they have to have a positive role model, a nice person, but also a role model for success. I don’t want them to see a pudgy slob of a dad and say, “oh, it is ok for me
to be a pudgy slob, too.” Dogma is not important. What is important is that religion can give them a moral compass and you, as a father, give them that.

**Ethnographic case study: Non-practicing. The Portalla Family.** Jared and Alice Portalla (a case study for one of the divide-and-conquer families in chapter five on the domestic division of labor) took pride sharing childcare and household tasks since they saw themselves as partners. They were also proud of the fact that they were good parents. Indeed, Jared shared with me that he wishes more people were as conscientious parents as he and his wife. The only lack that he saw in his parenting was that he had not exposed his children to Christianity in a systematic way.

That is, he felt that he needed to find a church to join:

> We’ve been selfish to ourselves, maybe to their detriment, because I think that it is an important part of life. Recently a priest said, on this religious station I came across by accident but I kept it on and listen to it every once in a while, and I was just looking, we have these early family bibles in my son’s room and we need to make a decision. There are going to be questions for us as well as them, we need to plug that part into our lives. We do everything else, we live every other part of our lives so well that we need to. We’re missing that big piece.

The Portallas epitomized the type of agnostic that I interviewed. Neither Jared nor Alice identified with any one Christian religion, but had instead a personal history in one or more churches. They did not belong or frequent a church at the time of our interviews. They did not pray or say grace, either. They were bewildered by the selection of different Christian denominations available and, consequently, were “church shopping” to find “the right fit.” As Jared told me,

> There was always a conflict with the practicality of evolution with the conflicting stories that you’ll read in the bible. I literally remember going to an anthropology class and learning about a cave man and then going to Calvary [Conservative Christian church] and they made me believe that it wasn’t true. There were no cavemen. So I was put in a position where I was basically picking and choosing. And I was in a position where I was like, hey, you can’t pick and choose. And I
have recently accepted that you can. I do that with everything else. When I hear something, something on the news I am constantly picking and choosing and I deal with that. And it is ok.

But they told me that they think that finding a church of the “right fit” is important for their children. At the time of my study, they saw the spiritual benefits as outweighed by the social benefits of going to church and identifying with a religious denomination. It was important for Jared Portalla to be a good father and he agreed with many other participants that part of being a good parent, a good father, is providing a religious background for their children.

**Discussion**

The social benefits accrued by being a member of a Christian church was a theme that ran through all the men’s discussions pertaining to religion, regardless of religious denomination (or lack thereof). It comes as no surprise that non-practicing men de-emphasized going to church for spiritual or religious reasons. However, they appreciated the social aspect that belonging to a religious community can provide, not only for themselves, but also for their children. Because they were not extremely devout individuals, and had relatively low degrees of religiosity, they did not feel drawn to a particular church. So, looking for a church, or even contemplating looking for a church, it was a daunting prospect. Mainstream Protestants emphasized spirituality over religious dogma (e.g., Kaplan 2009). For most of them, going to church was just not an important part of being a good Christian. Rather, like non-practicing men, they saw church as a good place to help socialize their children to be positive, productive, members of society.

This is not to say that social benefits were the only benefits mentioned by the participants in my study. Conservative Christians and Catholics, as a whole, viewed
church-going as an important part of being a good Christian. For all Christian men, being a good father was teaching their children about God, regardless of whether they went to church or not.

I was struck by the fact that agnostics and less religious men of all denominations mentioned the social benefits of church over the spiritual benefits as a reason to introduce their children to religion. Charles Lee (in a reminder egalitarian household), the only Conservative Christian in my study who was not very religious, confided to me that,

I am not very social and I would like them to be more social. At their ages they just go up to people and say hi—they are friends right away. Our son met both our neighbors before I did, he is not shy at all. It is wonderful. I am not like that. I wouldn’t say that I am antisocial, but not really social. So, the social aspect I would say, definitely, I would encourage for them, and church is a definite great way to become part of a community.

For Charles, the social benefits outweighed all else, Although, he tacked on “And also the spiritual benefits” at the very end of when he discussed the usefulness of indoctrinating his children into Christianity.

Justin Byrd, the sole atheist whom I interviewed, saw church as good for its social benefits, if not spiritual benefits. He told me during our interview that it did not necessarily matter to him if his children ever grew up to believe in a god, since he does not, but then said,

I don’t know if it is an issue, but it is defiantly a question. It is not that it is important, but I think that going to church can be good for socialization, learning lessons in life. The community solidarity you learn at church is good. But we don’t go. We want her to decide and going occasionally can give her that choice. My wife wants her to go more than I do.

This, however, informs us more about religiosity than about particular denominations. Those of lower religiosity tended to be more flexible and appreciated
more the spiritual side of religion. Spirituality was a quest for the Mainstream Protestants and agnostics in my study. Because so much of the American psyche is tied up with notions of individualism, it is not too much of a surprise that many men in my study placed such importance on individual spirituality, both for themselves and for their children.

I first realized the powerful distinction between religiosity and spirituality came when I was attempting to engage in Christian meditation. I had been assured by Julian and Lara Reed that I would love Christian meditation with their (Mainstream Protestant) Episcopal, but Buddhist trained, rector. They suggested that I try it with them, so I did. The rector skillfully reminded the few of us in the congregation that Sunday morning that we were supposed to be meditating on Christ, and to let all other thoughts dissolve. Overall, it was easy for me to forget that I was sitting in an urban light filled church. It was easy to forget that the desert air outside was not that of Egypt and it was not the third century A.D., and I was not an ascetic. I closed my eyes and smelled the faint hint of incense and heard the soothing trickle of the water from the baptismal font to my right, and felt the warm, dry air blow in from outside. This calm was shattered by a little body sliding on the slick wooden pew and slamming into my side. Griffin, the Reed’s son and disturber of the peace, gave me a gap-toothed grin and I grinned back. Lara sighed and mentioned that this is why they usually take turns going to church. One spouse went to service and the other stayed home with their son. Although, Lara mentioned, it is not that she has to go to church to get a spiritual connection, she just finds it much easier without other distractions. Her husband, Julian, agreed and said that sometimes he feels a spiritual
connection when Griffin smiles at the autumnal leaves, for example, but it is easier to get that spiritual connection in a church atmosphere.

For the Reeds, the main component to spirituality is allowing yourself to appreciate nature, the goodness in other people and yourself, and understand that God is in everything and you just have to listen. Christianity helps in those endeavors, but it is an individual quest. For participants like the Reeds, as well as the Bowmans and Maxwells, who are also very liberal Mainstream Protestants, or the Abbots, Grahams, Renauds, and Trujillos, who are agnostic, spirituality and having a personal connection to a Creator was more important than religion. While they all scored low in religiosity, they still agreed with highly religious individuals that being a good father includes giving their children a religious base from which to draw later in life. Because spirituality is simply easier to achieve with a religious education, the families with whom I worked emphasized giving their children that religious base. As one Mainstream Protestant man, Garrett Bowman an involved father living in a reminder egalitarian household whom you read about in chapter four, told me,

It is not important to indoctrinate my daughter in any particular religion. If she is an Episcopalian or a Buddhist, it would not matter. What matters is that she walks the walk and talks the talk. That she has a value system that benefits society and makes her happy. Spiritually, it is very important. Religion is less, and in our age it can be harmful in certain forms. For example, exclusionary dogmatics, using it to condemn people because of certain things, and divide up people.

Practically echoing Garrett Bowman, Clarence Renaud, a non-practicing “divide-and-conquer” egalitarian, told me that religion is “B.S.” but wherever he can find spiritual comfort, he does. Clarence told me that he is also happy that his own father, a practitioner in the Native American church, has taken his grandson (Clarence’s son) to
Native American church services. At the time of my research, Clarence was teaching his son to pray and know God, so that he could forge his own spiritual connection with God.

If Mainstream Protestants gave short shrift to going to a particular church, Catholics were the opposite. Regardless of religiosity, all Catholic fathers mentioned that a family history of going to a Catholic church is important to them. They wanted their children to be Catholic because everyone else in the family was Catholic. This was the only religious denomination in which I found this aspect of family history to have such weight. Catholic fathers that scored high in religiosity stressed that not only being a good Christian is important, but being a good Catholic is important. This is the position that the Catholic church takes, as well. A Catholic father, Pat Vargas, told me that he wants to make sure that his children are spiritually well prepared: “It is very important for me that they be Catholic. There is definitely the spiritual side. I want them to know the background, our history. And I want them to know how it can pertain to their daily life.”

Another very devout Catholic father, Arthur Navarro, indicated to me that the Catholic church is the true faith, it is the faith that Jesus set up and there is no reason to stray from that original, true faith. In his opinion, being a good Christian is not good enough, so he was careful to indoctrinate his children into the Catholic faith. Only Catholics in my sample responded that they want their children to follow the Catholic faith, specifically.

Family networks were important for Hispanic Catholics (n=seven) in my middle class sample. Most lived in close proximity to their families, regularly seeing siblings, parents, cousins. It stands to reason that they might have thought it important to belong to the same denomination, if not the same church. Indeed, two Hispanic Catholic fathers (Frank Gonzalez and Pat Vargas) I spoke with lived on the West Side of town but
regularly commuted to the South Valley in order to go to the church that they had grown up in and whose extended family members still attended.

Conservative Christians did not, like Catholics, emphasize extended family, but rather, the immediate family unit. Every Conservative Christian mentioned, at one time or another, the importance of a healthy, happy marriage. Margo Gilzean, Liz Robinson and Megan Olsen called their stable marriages “a gift I give my child.” Conservative Christian men also conceptualized a greater portion of their identity as “spouse” than “father,” claiming that you have to be a good spouse to be a good father. The importance that Conservative Christians placed on their spousal role is reflected in Ezra Webb’s pithy comment:

I was brought up to believe [your] priorities are: (1) God, (2) spouse, (3) kids, (4) career. You can’t be a good parent without God and working. My priorities today are: (1) wife, (2) children, (3) career, although you can’t do any of that without God.

He went on to say that children need two parents, too. In this case, God is the bridge connecting him to his family.

Matthew Olsen and Evan Frazier were the only two men, both Conservative Christians, in my sample who emphasized the breadwinning role, (but who also emphasized being a good spouse and father, too). In my study, these men placed emphasis on being the main economic provider, although actually they both earned less money than their wives. They understood, however, that they needed their wives’ salaries to maintain their middle class lifestyle and having working wives in no way negatively impacted their views of being an involved father.
All the women I spoke to liked working outside of the home, for the economic and social benefits, although not all of them wanted to work full-time. Megan Olsen, who was featured in chapter five as a reminder egalitarian, frankly told me that she did not go to college just so she could live in a squalid little apartment with her infant while her husband struggled to provide for them. Her husband agreed and said that while it would be nice if he could make enough to be the sole provider for his family, as God provides for his children, he could not at the time of our interview. Matthew Olsen also acknowledged that Megan is good at what she does and likes it, too. So, it would be foolish for them to go to a one breadwinner household.

Unlike Megan Olsen, three of the Conservative Christian women who went to the same Charismatic mega church, maintained that their husbands ought to be the breadwinners. These women were all in transitional households. Emily Smith told me, “I think that if he is making enough to provide for us, let him do it. But I think it is important for women to have something to do. If you stay home with the kids all day you will go crazy. I see men as having the priority to take care of the family.” Similarly, Rachael Frazier told me that she wishes her husband made more money so that she did not have to work full-time, but at the time of our interview in 2009 she made more than her husband, so it was not feasible for her to quit or reduce her hours.

Interestingly, although the Maiers and the Smiths are transitional, it was the wives and not the husbands, who emphasized the importance of men being the breadwinners. In the case of Noah Smith, he simply did not see making money as important at all and continuously mentioned that Americans need to be less materialistic, an aim he strived for in his own house. Seth Maier was also uneasy with making money, as he was certain
that Jesus preached against the acquisition of money. Neither Seth nor Noah thought their wives should be the primary breadwinners. In fact, Noah Smith referred to his wife as a “stay-at-home mom” when I initially interview him, although she was a nurse working up to 32 hours a week, depending on the week in question. Further, these men were still transitional in the sense that they assigned greater domestic responsibility to their wives, but did not necessarily see women as better parents than men.

The three transitional, Conservative Christian women—Rachel Frazier, Wendy Maier, and Emily Smith—were also the most vocal about the importance of being a mother. As Wendy Maier told us in chapter four, women are the “mama bears” and inherently better at taking care of children because they are always aware of what is going on with their children and always thinking about their children. Rachel Frazier also mentioned that being a mother eclipsed all else in her life. As was seen in chapter four on father involvement, Evan Frazier, unlike Seth Maier and Noah Smith, cheerfully agreed that while being a father is incredibly important, his wife’s role as mother was different and she was better at being a parent because she was a mother.

To reiterate a theme from the last two chapters, women want to work some, but they do not want to give up the power that being a mother gives them in American society. Part of this stems from the fact that as middle class women they often get more respect as mothers than as workers. Religiosity, in the case of these three transitional minded women, also helps to explain and maintain their gender roles. While Mainstream Protestants mirror what mainstream society accepts as ideals, that is, egalitarian, androgynous gender roles, that is not the position of devout Conservative Christians. The particular Conservative Charismatic Christian Church that the Fraizers, Maiers, and
Smiths participated in, as is seen in the opening vignette, endorses dichotomous gender roles. Part of this dichotomy supports men’s active participation in the family by giving men the headship role. Women, although subordinated under the husbands as heads of the family, maintain their unique status as mothers and a source of power and influence.

**Gendered headship.** Over half of the Conservative Christian fathers I interviewed, including three Charismatic Christians and two fundamentalist Christians, tended to do less childcare and household chores than their wives did but still claimed egalitarian partnership roles and embraced an egalitarian ideology regarding parental roles. However, only two of the nine Conservative Christians (Seth Maier and Noah Smith, both transitional) affirmed that they were the absolute head of their households where they have the final say in family decision making [See Table 9: Male Gender Ideology and Table 10: Female Gender Ideology]. However, when I asked about men being the head of the household in *spiritual* matters, six of the nine men agreed (of note, one Mainstream Protestant and one Catholic also agreed that the male should be the spiritual head). The headship role is, as Gallagher (2003) notes, a symbolic position that Conservative Christian men draw on that reinforces their involvement in the family. In this case, however, involvement was not necessarily engagement tasks but a general feeling of responsibility for their family. It should be noted that the Conservative Christian men in my sample were married to equally devout women who supported their husbands as head of the family. Emily Smith narrated her view of headship in this way:

> A husband should be responsible for the spiritual well-being of his family. The pattern was laid out in the bible of submission and [male] authority and maybe misinterpreted at times. I am very lucky that my husband is a leader and if we ever came to a head, even though I feel that I am a strong woman, I still wouldn’t be able not to [pause] not listen to him.
The “mega” Charismatic Christian church that the Smiths, Maiers, Fraizers and others attended is the most conservative at its core, closer to its Baptist roots than the more liberal Charismatic Church that the Robinsons attended. Yet, all Conservative Christian churches, including the fundamental denominations, maintain that men are the head of the family. The Catholic church also has a patriarchal tradition, but among the Catholics in my sample it was not so obvious as with the Conservative Christians. If Catholics claimed that men are the head of the family, like the Navarros and Luceros did, then it was only because men are the spiritual heads. That is, men have a duty to make certain that their wives and children are being good Christians in order to save their souls. The other six Catholics that I interviewed shook their heads negatively when I asked if the man should have final authority. The remaining Conservative Christians also saw the headship role as a spiritual one but believed it goes beyond the spiritual dimension. In short, “headship” to these men meant being the person in charge of the family.

I was initially perplexed by what I saw as contradictions: both Conservative Christian men and women asserted that men are the head of the household and men have ultimate responsibility over their family, yet when I was doing participant observation it was obvious that men ceded ultimate responsibility to their wives in the domestic realm. Socioeconomic position plays into how the Conservative Christians in my sample were able to negotiate the two primary gender ideologies relevant to them today. The overarching ideology among the United States middle class, is that there should be an egalitarian division of labor. Therefore, a “modern” man in this sense has to respect his wife’s position and view their marriage as a partnership. At the same time, there is the
idea that men have ultimate familial responsibility (whatever form that takes, depending on the family). Conservative Christians were able to conflate these two disparate positions.

The headship role is a more symbolic role, and my interviewees viewed the responsibility that the women had as penultimate responsibility, or responsibility only in regards to day-to-day domestic tasks (see also Harding 2000). So, when push comes to shove, men ought to consult their wives as experts as mothers, and should follow their advice in domestic matters, but if they feel it necessary men can ignore that advice and do what they see as right for their family. Yet, push hardly ever comes to shove, so headship becomes a symbolic position. I asked the individuals who held this view to give me examples or to tell me of a situation that they had ever been in or, theoretically, would be in, where male headship would come into play. None of my contacts had actually been in that position and were very vague about a potential situation. Margo Gilzean was the most specific. After a period of musing, she suggested that if her husband wanted to move but she did not, she would still have to move since he is the head of the family. By granting men this symbolic position in the family, women are still able to maintain control over the domestic field, secure in their unique position as mothers. This is good for families, too, since the Conservative Christians in my sample were involved fathers, and viewed part of being a Christian man in his role as head of the household, as being a “good” father.

The headship role was not universally embraced by all the Conservative Christian men in my sample, however. As Lockhart (2000:85) notes, “There is no longer one Evangelical ideology of gender,” so there cannot not possibly be one Christian ideology
of gender. Indeed, when discussing ideas about “head of the household” most men in my sample look at me warily as if I was trying to trap them into making a sexist admission, or as if I was joking. I recall many men snorting with derision at my query and they informed me that their wives tell them what to do or, more often, that they are in a partnership in which no one is head over another. As previously stated, for only in a fraction (two) of the Conservative Christian families with whom I worked did “headship” contribute to being an involved father. For the rest of my middle class sample, an involved father at least proclaimed to be in an egalitarian relationship. There were no differences attributable to religion or ethnicity. I argue, then, that the role of the involved father for my participants was more about internalizing middle class, egalitarian, norms than any other variable. For those Conservative Christians who did embrace headship, they were still able to do so in the midst of the broader middle class, egalitarian, ideology.

**Conclusions**

I argue that a relationship exists between how men construct their parental identities and how they performed their roles as fathers by doing many childcare tasks. Given that religious beliefs, socioeconomic class, and parenting ideology intertwine to impact parental identity, it is essential to examine these variables together to understand how today’s urban fathers perform their roles as parents. It is difficult to generalize about what most American fathers do, since the domestic division of labor is dependent on a wide variety of personal, interfamilial, and social factors. Variables to consider include the education of both parents, their gender ideologies, each individual’s contribution to household income, the presence of children or older relatives in the household,
racial/ethnic background, and age, to name only some of the most pertinent attributes. Each spouse’s religious orientation is also important to account for when examining the domestic division of labor. The roles of financial provider, spiritual/moral guide, and the physical caretaker, were the most important to the men in my middle class sample.

My research compliments and adds context and detail to previous social science literature on paternal involvement. In this chapter I highlighted four very different Christian fathers (Charismatic Christian, Mainstream Protestant, Catholic and non-practicing) to examine how they internalized their paternal identities and how this affected their parental participation. Degree of religiosity is important, but so too is the particular Christian denomination to which a man belongs. Those with high degrees of religiosity who participated in one of the Conservative Christian groups tended to be less egalitarian in parenting than other Christians. Catholics with high degrees of religiosity were still more egalitarian in their father role than Conservative Christians. Mainstream Protestants were the most similar to agnostics when it came to how they conceptualized their paternal identities. Spirituality, as an individual quest, turned out to unite all the Mainstream Protestants and all but one of the non-practicing men, which in turn affected their notions of what a “good” parent ought to do.

Given that most of the men that I interviewed internalized broader views of being in an egalitarian relationship and being involved fathers, it is time to address their needs in policy making today. Men want to be involved in their children’s lives but sometimes there are barriers that inhibit them: women can be “gatekeepers” and men are not supported by society as fathers in the same ways that women are supported as mothers. If we had more policies that supported families, specifically fathers, more fathers would not
only participate equally in their families, but it would be socially acceptable for them to
do so. In the penultimate chapter, I outline some of the ways that the United States can
implement family-friendly policies that encourage male participation in domestic labor
and promote egalitarian gender roles in our society.
CHAPTER 7

Policy Recommendations

For the middle class, for us..... the policies, none have to do with me, so why should I care? Either it’s all about social welfare or the upper classes are complaining about taxes. I guess we’re ignored.—George Luna, interview, May 2009

We need fathers to understand that their work doesn’t end with conception. What truly makes a man a father is the ability to raise a child and investing in that child. We need fathers to be involved in their kids’ lives, not just when it’s easy, not just during the afternoons in the park or the zoo, when it’s all fun and games. But when it’s hard, when young people are struggling...it’s not an obligation, it’s a privilege to be a father.—President Obama, Father’s Day, 2009.

Public opinion polls consistently show that Americans rank families as the most important thing in their lives (Bogenschneider 2002:xxiv). Generally, politicians respond to the views of their constituents with appropriate policies. But unlike most European countries, the United States does not have a comprehensive family-friendly policy. Rather, legislation has been piecemeal and these disparate policies do not provide sufficient support to working families. As the above quote by a participant in my research, George Luna illustrates, middle class families tend to be ignored in policy making. Perhaps this is because they, like George Luna, view themselves as self-supporting individuals. Many of the individuals that I interviewed prefaced any discussion of policy with the words, “I don’t want to complain, but...,” before discussing changes that they would like to see made.

The United States prides itself on its laissez-faire philosophy with regard to government interference (Heymann 2000). Another reason why there are lacunae in family policy is that Americans, regardless of rhetoric about “family values,” devalue the care necessary for family maintenance because it is usually within the purview of women
Although my dissertation research focused specifically on men’s participation in dual-career families, it is equally important to understand women’s position, since each spouse creates and maintains his or her parental identities and enacts those identities through their parental roles within the situation of the family. As my research has affirmed, in most households women assume responsibility for family maintenance in practice if not name. Given this, it is necessary to understand and address women’s positions in the family in order to suggest helpful policy for current middle class families. However, men’s roles in the family should not be ignored. Men want to be an important part of their family and they feel responsible for their children. Fathers need official policies to recognize and support them as fathers, which will, in turn, encourage active paternal participation in the family. But, the United States government does not have a unified position on family policies; those that do exist focus on assisting women and children. What we have is an amalgamation of separate acts and legislative bills that lack the ability to support working families.

Here I review family-friendly policies in other developed countries and examine the lack of similar policies in the United States. Some of the policies that exist in the United States today are a good beginning towards a comprehensive family-friendly policy. The United States government’s position on interference in the area of work-family balance states that there should be no interference in the domestic realm by

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74 It is not that children need fathers, specifically, but caring and supportive parents, generally (Biblarz and Stacey 2010; Walker and McGraw 2000). Multiple studies show that the gender of the parents does not matter (Flaks et al. 1995; Patterson 1992, 2008). A child with two lesbian mothers or two gay fathers will not be at a disadvantage as long as the parents create a positive family environment. Yet, since the vast majority of children have fathers, it is important to encourage men to be positively involved in their children’s lives and help to create a family that caters to children’s physical, emotional, and psychological development (e.g., Lamb 2010).
government. I argue that this position is ill-conceived and needs to be changed. Currently, daycare, preschool, and after-school programs are only subsidized for economically disadvantaged families. In reality, the government should view these programs as analogous to public education and funnel more tax monies towards these programs as part of our public education system. Importantly, if more high-quality, dependable, and affordable childcare, after-school and similar programs were available, women would not feel the need to reduce their hours at work—and therefore sacrifice their careers—in order to be home with their children during the time gap when school gets out and the work day ends. Furthermore, I suggest that flex-time and flex-place policies be implemented for all workers, as they are now only available for those with accommodating employers. Implementing these various policies will allow families more time together, the one thing that all the individuals that I interviewed want and need. More importantly, I suggest these avenues for policy revision will improve all Americans’ quality of life by encouraging more egalitarian gender roles in the family. Given that gender roles are learned in a family setting, by encouraging more egalitarianism between the sexes through policy, children will see their fathers being equally involved as their mothers. This will socialize children into these egalitarian ideals, and, hopefully, encourage the next generation to both embrace and enact, egalitarian gender roles.

75 Flex-time denotes a flexible work schedule, meaning that the worker decides when he or she will work the requisite hours. Flex-place means that the worker can choose to work from home and is not tethered to the physical work place.
European Policy

Creating a work-family balance is increasingly difficult for dual-worker families. The United States government does the minimum to promote this balance but European countries have historically done better at creating policies that undermine dichotomous gender roles and encourage both women’s participation in the work force and male participation at home. However, various European and other westernized countries like Japan are not creating policies for altruistic purposes (Fukuda 2008). That is, they care less about making their populations happy and supporting egalitarianism between men and women than they care about future population replacement and the economic benefits of more workforce participation from their citizens (Neyer 2003). Many of these family-friendly policies are set up to encourage (White) women to have more children since Europe is looking at a population replacement problem in a few years. Women in Europe, like the United States, recognize that they bear the greater burden of childcare and housework, regardless of whether they work outside of the home or not. At present, women in Europe are making the choice to remain childless or have fewer children then the previous generation. This makes perfect sense on an individual level, but politicians (and economists) recognize that if women do not have children, then there will be no future workers: no one to care for this generation and no one to tax (Neyer 2003).

Countries are also better off economically when both mothers and fathers participate in the workforce (Fagnani 2002). Maternal leave is set up to encourage women to take time off, but then re-enter the workforce (Fagnani 2002). Paternal leave has been

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76 In a recent article Gupta et al. (2008) argue that maternal leaves of two years or more that countries such as Germany, Sweden, Norway, and Austria, provide actually negatively impact gender equality in the workplace because when women are out of work for that long their careers are stifled.
implemented in some form in all European countries (even if it is only a few weeks of unpaid leave) in order to encourage men to be involved in housework and childcare to assist mothers. When mothers feel supported at home, they are more likely to have more children and work outside of the home, too (Neyer 2003).

A similar issue that both the United States and European countries have, which could be solved with restructuring work and family by encouraging family friendly policies, has to do with gender equality. Although many Americans profess to holding egalitarian ideals, when it comes to truly egalitarian relationships between men and women, the United States falls short. Gender equality must be actively encouraged. Statistics show that women still get paid less than men do (IWPR 2009). So, it makes economic sense for women to be the ones to sacrifice their careers for their families. There is a pervasive idea that women should sacrifice for their family and prioritize their families over all else (e.g., Chant 2003; Glenn 1994; Hays 1996; Moore 1996). But, both men and women consistently claim that family is the most important thing to them (Bogenschneider 2002). Work-family obstacles are the number one reason that American men and women cite for men not participating fully in their families (Glenn and Whitehead 2009). We need to make a concerted effort to reduce these structural obstacles based on gender ideology that keep women focused on the home and men on paid labor. Many countries, especially in Scandinavia have implemented non-transferable paternal leave rights for fathers that has been effective in encouraging egalitarianism at home between men and women.

Sweden and Norway offer generous parental leave allowances, up to 163 weeks in Sweden and 150 weeks in Norway of protected time off for parents after the birth of a
Since the 1970s, Swedish and Norwegian men have had an optional two months of non-transferable paternity leave (Haas and Hwang 2008). This means that men have to be the parent that uses these specific two months of parental leave. They cannot transfer those two months to the mother of the child. This matters because even in Scandinavia women still are in gender segregated jobs and therefore make less money than men (Haas and Hwang 2008).

In Sweden, as well as other diverse countries such as Portugal and France, the government has invested in public awareness campaigns encouraging men to take the non-transferable paternal leave. The aim is for the public to view paternal leave as the norm, so that men are not discriminated against at work or by society at large by taking paternal leave (Bergman and Hobson 2002; Shwalb et al. 2004). When men feel that their peers believe that it is acceptable to take leave, they do so. It also helps that there are currently more women in professional careers than there was a generation ago, and as men’s co-workers, they support and encourage men to take paternal leave (Haas and Hwang 2008). This has seen men increase their participation in childcare at home even after they use their leave (Haas and Hwang 2008). As a result, there really is more gender equality today than there was a generation ago, especially among the middle classes, who are, as a group, the men who tend to take paternal leave (Haas and Hwang 2008).

There is a cyclical relationship where men want to be more involved in their families and when they are “forced” to be involved in “take it or leave it” paternal leaves, they participate more (Hobson and Morgan 2002; O’Brian and Moss 2002). Because they participate more, they want to be further involved so they seek out those opportunities to

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“Protected” time off means that a worker cannot be fired for taking parental leave and that when they go back to work they are ensured of still having a job.
be involved. Also, by taking the paternal leave and being involved in their families, men send a message to other men that it is acceptable for men to be involved in their families (Haas and Hwang 2008). Father involvement has proven to be a crucial component to children’s well being and their development (e.g., Lamb 2004; Rohner and Veneziano 2001). For that reason, paternal involvement should be encouraged and supported through family-friendly policies. But paternal involvement also needs to be supported publicly in order to encourage egalitarianism so that women are not the gender who must assume ultimate responsibility in domestic matters.

**Family-Friendly Programs Today**

New Mexico is comparable to most other states in the United States in that it focuses its tax monies, both state and federal, on children considered “at risk,” and not families specifically, and certainly not in increasing paternal participation in families. “At risk” children are those coming from economically disadvantaged households or ones who are developmentally challenged. One successful program, The Prek Initiative, academically prepares children for primary school. There is also a statewide family, infant, and toddler program (FIT) that provides services to infants and toddlers who are developmentally challenged or at risk of being developmentally delayed in order to prepare them for school (FIT 2009). Other programs receiving partial federal funding act as a safety net for low income individuals, such as supplemental food programs that make healthy foods available to those who cannot otherwise afford it (e.g., WIC, the Special Supplemental Food Program for Women, Infants, and Children [WIC 2009], and SNAP, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program [SNAP 2009]). Such programs are especially helpful for women with small children. Again, these programs aim to assist
families, specifically families with children, that are determined to be 185 percent at or below the poverty level (WIC 2009).\footnote{The poverty level in New Mexico is set at $10,830 a year for a single person and $22,050 a year for a family of four. For each additional person in a household $3,740 is added to the cumulative yearly income (HHS 2009).}

Programs for lower income families are crucial because they assist the sector of society that is essentially powerless: children. When I inquired about family-friendly policies, my interviewees maintained that the programs in place are a boon for those who need them, even if they themselves cannot take advantage of them. The middle class families that I interviewed generally make between $75,000-$120,000 annually and live more or less frugally. Most of these families do not warrant any financial assistance from the government, but those at the lower end of the salary range did find themselves struggling to pay for some necessities, such as good quality daycare. While the United States government tends to focus family policies on supporting children, one of the best ways to ensure that children are protected is to support the parents, too. Therefore, it is necessary to make family-friendly policies that are more balanced with respect to gender and recognize that laws need to be enacted that protect fathers \textit{and} mothers.

One act benefiting middle class families that has the potential to encourage egalitarian relations between men in women is the United States federal Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA) of 1993. The FMLA was originally designed to assist working women achieve a better balance regarding work and family. According to the act, an employee’s job (or equivalent job) will be assured for the optional 12 weeks a year of unpaid leave an employee can take in order to care for a sick immediate family member,
for adoption and foster care, or for the birth of a baby (Department of Labor 2007). Unfortunately, the FMLA is not a comprehensive policy. It only covers those people working in large businesses (50 or more people) who have worked at their place of employment full-time for a minimum of 52 weeks. Additionally, if both spouses work for the same company, the company is not required to give each spouse 12 weeks off, but the couple 12 weeks in total (FMLA 2009). Significantly, because FMLA leave is unpaid many individuals cannot afford to take advantage of it, even middle class individuals. This is especially true for men since they generally make more money than their wives. If one of the spouses is not going to be paid, in order to care for the infant for example, it is advantageous for the spouse who makes less money to take the time off. Although there are a handful of states that have expanded FMLA (New Mexico is not one of them), California is currently the only state that supplements the pay of workers who take time off under the FMLA (Thompson 2004).

Another aspect of a comprehensive family-friendly policy would be childcare, but the United States does not have comprehensive policy addressing childcare (Cohen 1996). Historically, the United States has provided public daycare centers but they were always set up in “emergency situations.” National daycare centers were first established in the United States during the 19th century for poor, urban, single working mothers but even then they were few and far between (Kaminer 2007). Women who used these centers were stigmatized because the prevailing notion was that a women’s place is in the

79 An “equivalent job” indicates that the employer must give the parent returning to work a job that has the same pay and benefits of his or her old job, even if the employer cannot guarantee the exact position that the worker had before taking parental leave under FMLA. For instance, a high school teacher cannot be told that the school district hired someone in the interim while he or she was on FMLA leave and that the only job available is to be a janitor or a secretary. The school district, under the provisions of FMLA, must ensure that the parent worker get either his or her exact old teaching job back, or another teaching job.
home taking care of their children. Americans were so disturbed by the idea that strangers would care for these poor working women’s children that during the New Deal era of the 1930s legislation was passed that gave economically disadvantaged mothers money to stay home with their children so that they would not have to join the workforce. The stigma of leaving children at a government-run center diminished during World War II when a large portion of women entered the workforce for the war effort. There was no way around the fact that women, if they were to work outside of the home, needed the government’s support in the form of institutionalized childcare. As soon as the war ended government-supported daycares ceased to exist. Women were expected to happily return to being homemakers and mothers (Cohen 1996). In 1971 the United States government came the closest it ever has to passing a Comprehensive Childcare Act that would have made childcare a federal concern. Unfortunately, it was vetoed by President Nixon and families were left on their own to find and pay for childcare. In the 1990s greater subsidies were available to lower income families to help pay for childcare but these subsidies were far from being a comprehensive childcare policy for Americans with young children (Kaminer 2007).

Likewise, there are some after-school programs available to keep children safe in-between the times when school is dismissed and their caregiver gets off work but affordable, high quality programs are scarce and a relatively recent innovation. The After School and Federal Economic Stimulus Bill (under the 2009 American Recovery and Reinvestment Act) gives unprecedented funding towards after-school and summer learning programs (ARRA 2009). Unfortunately, not all of the funding goes towards helping working parents, as some of the money is earmarked for university programs.
(e.g., work-study), among other unrelated things. It is unclear how much of this money actually goes to non-economically disadvantaged schools.

Although children benefit from being part of after-school, summer, daycare, and other educational programs, a related benefit is how it helps parents and families as a whole. Parents, knowing that their children are safe, can worry less and focus on their work. This is especially pertinent for women who have historically been expected to sacrifice progress in their careers for the benefit of their families.

**Factors Affecting Family-Friendly Policy**

The United States court system has historically adopted a gender neutral stance. From this position, all people are equal and, theoretically, treated without bias. Regrettably, when men and women are viewed as completely equal and by implication, identical, it ignores biological differences between the sexes (Jaggar 1983:42). Such hard-line perspectives deny any way of addressing some women’s unique needs, such as the need for institutional policies for care post-childbirth.

The Pregnancy Discrimination Act (PDA) of 1978, an amendment to Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, makes it illegal to discriminate against pregnancy or pregnancy-related conditions in the workplace (Williams 2009). Incredibly, some politicians and employers argued vehemently against the act, suggesting that women are inherently more expensive to maintain as workers than men because many of them are mothers and need more time off to deal with their families than men do. The PDA was enacted in response to the 1976 General Electric Co. vs. Gilbert supreme court ruling (Pedriana 2009). In that case, General Electric workers protested a health care package that offered no maternity leave. The Supreme Court claimed that General Electric was not
discriminating against women, only “pregnant persons” (Pedriana 2009; Rothman 2000:196). In this case, mothers were treated unfairly even though the government was trying to treat men and women as equals, with identical needs.

While it is given that women are more than reproductive beings, the fact remains that as a group they bear the physical burden of reproduction for humanity. We cannot ignore that there are fundamental things that make women different from men (e.g., Bordo 1994). Importantly, we need to minimize the social repercussions because of the biological repercussions that women are subject to because they are the sex who naturally has to give birth.

Equality between men and women is still possible, by giving them the same resources and options (equal pay, benefits, and so forth), while at the same time recognizing that there are times when an individual needs some extra consideration. By attempting to treat men and women blindly, there are times when women are discriminated against. Nonetheless, the few biological differences between men and women should not be interpreted as meaning that women should not work because of their sex. It is only a short step from saying that some women—mothers—need special consideration for a brief time in their lives because of the physiological affects of pregnancy and childbirth, to saying that because females give birth that is all women should do and should eschew wage work entirely.

Conservative biological determinists put forward a very insidious argument when they propose that the government should be “pro-family” and support “healthy families” (e.g., Blakemhorn 1995; Popenoe 1996). After all, there are no politicians who proclaim “I am against healthy families.” Yet, many conservatives define a “healthy family” as a
monogamous, heterosexual, two-parent family where the mother devotes herself to the majority of childcare tasks and the father supplies economic support (see Blakenhorn 1995). By doing so they discriminate against any other family form not following this model, including homosexual unions, single parents, or even dual-working heterosexual families. This view also ignores men’s non-financial contributions to the family and inhibits men from fully participating in the family.

Although making laws that attempt to force equal opportunities without acknowledging sexual differences is not necessarily bad, since the goal is intended to promote gender equality, it is more important to change the way that people think about gender roles. Elson (1992:26) maintains that there must be a “gender-aware approach to economic policy and the household.” We must move beyond restructuring economies and restructure the social relations that constrain women. As was discussed in previous chapters, women in the United States are typically paid close to twenty percent less than men (IWPR 2009). In my sample of middle class families, it is usually the wives who choose to reduce their hours in order to spend more time with their children. By cutting back on work women stymie their career opportunities later on. Women, regardless of socioeconomic class, are still in charge of the parenting and housework that maintains a family (e.g., Glenn 1994). Elson (1992:37) writes that,

As long as women carry the double burden of unpaid work in the reproduction and maintenance of human resources as well as paid work producing goods and services, then women are unable to compete with men in the market and on equal terms.

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80 A first step towards women’s equality was moving beyond the static image of homemaker as women took jobs outside of the home. Although many of the jobs are poorly paid jobs, they are still a good beginning for working towards women’s equality (Tiano 2001; Jaggar 1983).
Although women are often the gender most discriminated against, men who want to be in an egalitarian parenting relationship are at a disadvantage. It is becoming more typical for men to claim responsibility for the home and children, but this is still not socially acceptable because the home is traditionally thought of as the mother’s domain. Many middle class men want to take an active, intimate, role in their families. When we create policies for women, we are simultaneously helping families. Similarly, these policies that support families can equally support fathers, too.

**Family-Relevant Policy for the Future**

In the section that follows, I propose some relevant family-friendly policies that the participants in my research alluded to, as they are aware that there are gaps in current policy. Such policies include mandatory paid parental leave, government funded daycare, preschool, and after-school programs, as well as expanded flex-time and flex-place work (see also O’Brian and Moss 2010). Although more family time together is a secondary benefit of these programs, the main benefit of supporting family-friendly policies is that they have the potential to support and promote egalitarian gender relations by encouraging fathers’ participation in the family, which is an area where women historically and currently, tend to have ultimate responsibility.

**Mandatory paid parental leave.** “I would like to see paternal leave mandatory. Because now we use vacations or FMLA which you don’t get paid for, not even a week.”—Frank Gonzalez

The federal government needs to ensure that time taken off under the FMLA is paid and that the FMLA is made applicable to all workers in the United States, not just those who work for a large company. Most European countries that offer a minimum of
16 paid weeks a year for family leave for the birth or adoption of a child or to care of ill family members (Bogenschneider 2002; Brandth and Kvande 1998; O’Brian 2004). In fact, all western countries except the United States and Australia offer some sort of paid parental leave (Ray et al. 2009:7). This is significant because for many low-and middle-income families, having the right to take leave is a moot point if they cannot afford to do so. Countries that offer compensated parental leave see their male citizens taking more leave and more father involvement. I believe that it is also crucial to make parental leave under FMLA mandatory for all Americans regardless of gender. When paternal leave is optional it is too easy for a father to be discriminated against at his place of employment (Jacobs and Gerson 2004:178). Since men are expected to be workers first and fathers second, when men take paternal leave, they are often regarded as unserious about their work and are passed over for promotions and other opportunities (Albiston 2005; Jacobs and Gerson 2004).

I asked each participant if they took any parental leave time. All women took at least two weeks off and the prevailing notion was that they took whatever they could afford, but they needed a minimum of two weeks to physically recuperate. Men,

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81 All “developed” countries offer some sort of subsidized parental leave. France and Spain are the most generous, offering up to three years off for both parents to stay home with their child. Norway, German and Sweden offer between 170 and 150 weeks of supplemented parental leave, and the United Kingdom offers up to 80 weeks of leave. Canada offers up to 52 weeks, 14 of which are paid leave and Japan offers 58 weeks, 26 of which are paid. Switzerland, of all the European countries, offers the least leave, 14 weeks, but all but three of those weeks are paid (Ray et al. 2009).

82 Australia offers a “baby bonus” to new parents to help offset some of the costs that having a new member of the family can entail. This is not a huge amount of money, usually equivalent to a month’s salary (Ray et al. 2009).

83 Most physicians recommend a minimum of six weeks of postpartum rest for a woman’s body to recuperate from the extreme stress of pregnancy and childbirth, although many find six weeks too short a period especially if there were complications or a cesarean section was preformed (Tulman and Fawcett 1988).
however, gave various reasons for not taking leave but excuses revolved around financial issues. Most men responded, “I couldn’t afford it!!” Some men could not take off work because their companies did not have provisions for paternal leave or they did not know that they had the right to apply and take FMLA. Pat Vargas, a Catholic father living in a divide-and-conquer egalitarian household, told me that he did not take advantage of the FMLA because he did not know if it was even available (it technically was). John Griego, who we saw in chapter four is a very involved father and in a reminder egalitarian relationship, admitted that he took a week off after the birth of his daughters, but part of that was to help his wife and he had to use vacation time. John stressed that his company has good benefits, except for non-existent paternal leave. He told me that he took “one week for each of them. I had to take vacation time and I didn’t have enough time saved up...”

The 16 fathers I spoke to who took paternal leave, or at least some unofficial time off, were unanimous in their praise of it, citing the time spent off work as very important to their relationship with their children. But only three of those men utilized FMLA time off. The rest of the men took anywhere from one week to two weeks off. Four other men, such as Charles Lee, a Conservative Christian father living in a reminder egalitarian household, cut back on his work hours in order to be with his daughter when she was born. He did not take any time off with his older son, because he could not afford to. At the time of his daughter’s birth, however, his wife had a better paying job and it made more sense for him to be the primary caregiver for their daughter. Charles told me in almost chagrined tones that he is much closer to his daughter than to his older son,
Tobias, and he believes that he does not have this closeness with Tobias simply because Charles did not spend the time with him like he did with his daughter.

With my son, I worked full-time, so I didn’t take care of him as much as with my daughter, so it has given me a different perspective of what it means to be a parent. Now I deal with everyday happenings and I do realize that I missed out on the little things with my son which upsets me now but you can’t go back and do anything about it.

Similarly, Kevin Chee, a Mainstream Episcopal father living in a reminder egalitarian household, told me,

I’ve always felt this, that I’ve had a different relationship with Chuck than I do with Gus because I think it goes back to when Chuck was four or five months old. I’ve been with him most of the day when he was four or five months old, I would be with him most of the day then I would put him in daycare for a few hours while I went to class and then my wife would pick him up. With Gus, when he was born, I was working full-time and so my wife was home with him all summer and then later, when school started with him, my cousin used to baby-sit for us for a while, [since] we both were full-time. I didn’t have that relationship with Gus. But I think that that showed me, ‘hey, this isn’t easy;’ When he wasn’t feeling well, I couldn’t, I’ve had to figure out what will soothe him. I have that as an advantage over other dads, that I’ve had to be responsible for an infant.

It is obvious that many men want paternal leave to be with their children. If paternal and maternal leave were mandatory there would be less discrimination when men want to take the time off to be with their families. The FMLA was originally opposed by many in the small business sector on the grounds that it would cost too much to have an employee gone for up to 12 weeks (Bornstein 2000). These oppositions have since been shown to be unjustified. When employees feel that their company supports them and their families, they are more productive and the company’s turn-over rate is lower (Bookman 2004:229). Some individuals might argue that making the FMLA mandatory is discriminating against childless workers. But the FMLA is not only for people with children, it is available for those who need time off to care for a sick partner or parent;
the FMLA is for all citizens, not just parents. Importantly, when parents establish routines where both take care of the baby, it assists in promoting gender equality so that the women is not doing the burden of the childcare (Devin and Moss 2002). Another inevitable argument against mandatory paid parental leave is that there are going to be individuals who abuse the system. Naturally every society has its shirkers and frauds but given that so many people, especially men, are discriminated against for wanting to take time off to be with their children, I argue that making the FMLA mandatory would help more people than it would hinder.

More importantly, it is necessary to introduce an educational campaign to help Americans understand why these policies are important for families. For approximately twenty years Sweden and Japan have engaged in extensive public awareness campaigns explaining the need for father involvement in the family (Bergman and Hobson 2002; Shwalb et al. 2004). The result is much greater social acceptance of the role of father and more fathers participating in their home, taking paternal leave, and engaging in childcare tasks. Throughout the United States, there are some organizations whose missions are to raise public awareness regarding the importance of responsible fathers in their children’s lives. Such organizations include the National Fatherhood Initiative (NFI), the National Center for Fathering (NCF), and the National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse (NRFC) (NCF 2010; NFI 2009; NRFC 2010). While the NFI, NCF, and NRFC have websites devoted to increasing awareness of the importance of fathers in children’s lives and even some money being channeled into the NRFC by the United States government, there is very little in the way of mass marketing. In other words, media emphasis on the need for men to be responsible fathers is largely restricted to a few billboards. The NRFC
funded a billboard showing an attractive but tough-looking man holding a baby with the caption, “Be a Father. Be a Man” [See Figure 5]. Another billboard shows various men kissing babies with a caption clearly meant to appeal to women, stating “Bring out the Superdad in your husband.” This also presumes that it is women’s job to make their husbands responsible for being “super” (i.e., good) dads [See Figure 6]. America’s First Father, President Obama, has endorsed the NRFC to promote “responsible fathering,” which includes spending time with and listening to their children. With fathering currently promoted by people in the top echelons of the government, the time is right to introduce policies and public ad campaigns that support fathers and families.

Public childcare. Free high quality daycare center care. I researched every decent place in the city and this one we go to, it is one of the best, but we were on the waiting list for two years!—Amelia Abbott

It is crucial that there be more high-quality, affordable childcare and preschools. New Mexico is no different from the rest of the United States in that the average annual allotment per child for daycare is around $6,000 and closer to $7,000 per year for infant care (NACCRRRA 2009). This makes childcare costs the third or fourth largest expenditure for families, even middle class ones. Full-time in-state tuition at the University of New Mexico is only $4,570 annually (UNM 2009). Shockingly, university education is cheaper than daycare! I propose that daycare centers and preschools should be paid for by the United States federal government with our tax dollars. There are some subsidized daycare centers available, especially for economically disadvantaged families, but there are very few subsidies for middle class families (Clark-Steward and Allhusen 2005:62). Consequently, quality daycare is out of reach for many families or, in the case
Figure 5: Advertisement Encouraging Responsible Fathering
Figure 6: Advertisement Encouraging Involved Fathers

of many of the families with whom I worked, prohibitively expensive. Families with three young children in daycare, for example, practically have one parent working solely to pay daycare center fees.

Some Hispanic families, like the Griegos, Gonzalezes, and Portallas, were fortunate in that they have family members, such as sisters or fathers, who were willing to provide in-home care for a fee. All of the families that I talked to who used a daycare facility remarked that it was important to them that it be a good quality one. As Kaminer (2007:497) writes, “while children’s education, health care, equipment and toys are regulated by the government to ensure minimum levels of safety, the same monitoring does not exist for childcare.” There is a dearth of quality daycare centers. The parents in my sample invested money, as well as time and effort ensuring that their children are as safe as possible when they are at daycare. Many families were on waiting lists for up to two years in order to send their children to a safe and educational center. One of the Protestant daycare centers where I was able to recruit many families for my research provided excellent care, but the families that sent their children there told me horror
stories about other daycare centers. Paul Montgomery, leaning on the table and crushing cookies under his elbows in the process, told me that I simply “have no idea how hard it is to get into a good daycare.” Cindy Maxwell suggested that I start saving now for the costs of childcare and that I put myself on a good daycare center list “ASAP, if you even think you are going to have a baby!”

High-quality child care has been proven to be important for children’s emotional and psychological development (Belsky 2006; Galinsky and Hooks 1977; Rose 1999). Therefore, ensuring quality control for daycare centers is a way of investing in children and should be viewed as a collective responsibility and supported by tax dollars. The United States lags behind most developed countries in this area. Governments in Israel and Japan, for instance, give widespread financial support in order to ensure that their children are taken care of properly (daycare centers, after-school programs, and so forth) while their parents work (Kaminer 2007; Peng 2002).

Perhaps one of the reasons that there is currently no comprehensive childcare policy in the United States is that many Americans view publicly supported childcare as really only supporting women (Morgan 2006; White 2009). Since women are viewed as the gender that ought to take care of children, then they are the ones who would benefit the most from daycare. But this is also ignores the fact that good daycares assist fathers, too, as they are half of a parenting team.

**Free after-school programs.** Similar to childcare and preschool, the cost of after-school care in New Mexico, which is comparable to other parts of the United States, is close to $5,000 per year, per child (NACCRA 2009). Although the families with whom I worked did not have school-aged children, that did not keep parents from fretting about
the few short years before their children would attend primary school and what they were going to do with them in between when they got off work and when their children got out of school. Regardless of religious denomination, all reminder egalitarians, mothers such as Amelia Abbott, Hope Griego, and Cindy Maxwell indicated to me that they plan on being home for this interval that worries most parents. Other parents, like William Robinson (whom you read about in chapter four as a Conservative Christian living in a reminder egalitarian household and a very involved father) and Kevin Chee (a Mainstream Protestant also living in a reminder egalitarian household), wondered if their wives would be able to always be there for the “time gap” between when school ends and work ends. Xavier Patton, a Conservative Christian living in a reminder egalitarian household, told me that he will be able to work his flexible schedule around his daughter Avery’s school schedule, but frankly admitted that was only because his employer, the Albuquerque Police Department, is supportive of families and because he had the seniority to request whatever schedule he wants. Other families, regardless of denomination but also living in reminder egalitarian households, like the Gonzalezes, Olsens, and Webbs wondered how they are going to manage this gap.

Like childcare at a daycare institution, after-school programs are expensive and only subsidized for low-income families. Currently, elementary and secondary schools are paid for with local taxes and government grants. Daycare, preschool, and after-school programs ought to be paid for in a similar manner. Given the importance of daycare and after-school programs for children’s healthy development (e.g., Belsky 2006) this is an especially relevant policy for America’s families. Perhaps even more importantly, by making these programs available and higher quality, women will not feel that they need
to sacrifice time spent at their careers so that they are the parent home during the time gap between when school lets out and when work ends.

**Family friendly work policies.** *Oh that’s an easy question! What do I wish I could change? I wish I had more time with my wife and kids! That I could be independently wealthy and just hang with them.—Noah Smith*

*I wish I could create more time. It feels like there’s never enough time.—Philip Brewer*

When I asked if there was something that parents would like to change about their family life, the most common response was that they wanted more “free time” or “family time.” Americans today are in a time crunch (Darrah et al. 2007). Parents are busier than ever and part of the time crunch is due to the fact that children are scheduled more than they ever were, with a wide variety of activities that keep parents on the run. A bigger problem is the number of hours parents dedicate to their work. Middle class parents feel increasingly obligated to put more than the standard 40 hour work week in if they have hopes of career advancement (Bookman 2004:227). Even in my sample where men eschewed the breadwinning role, they still had pride in their work and wanted to advance in their careers. However, they prioritized their families over their work and cherished time together as a family. It is no surprise that Mike Maxwell worked deep into the night, while his family slept. He wanted to advance as an architect, but he also wanted to spend time with his children. This saw him working until 4:00 p.m. or so then resuming work after the children are in bed by 8:00 p.m. Sometimes Kevin Chee left his work as an engineer at 5:00 p.m. to spend time with his sons Chuck and Gus, playing soccer or just being with them during bath-time. After his little sons were asleep he drove back to the
office. One way that families can have more time together and share the domestic labor is to implement and support various family-friendly work policies, such as more flex-time and flex-place, for all workers.

Unlike free daycare, after-school care, and universally funded extra curricular activities in public schools, there may be resistance to my proposition of flexible employment. Some of the fathers that I spoke to found themselves working more hours, technically over-time, just to keep up with their job requirements. This seriously cut into family time and being able to do some of the domestic labor. Alternatively, many men sacrificed career advancement for healthy, well-adjusted, children (see chapter five).

Many fathers admitted that they were passed up for promotions and other career advancements because they chose to work only a “normal” eight hour day in order to be there to see their children grow up. One Conservative Christian father, William Robinson, sadly told me that he knows friends at work who do not get home from work until 6:30 p.m. They then have to eat dinner and immediately get their children ready for bed. In this case, the men do not really get to see and interact with their children which, according to William, is a terrible shame.

Family-friendly policies, such as flex-time (work any combination of hours in a standard work day) and flex-place (work from home) are at the discretion of the employer and there are no federal or state mandated polices on flex-time or flex-place. Even when they are available, they are not always taken advantage of because they are not always socially accepted. There is a strong feeling among some employers that if a person is not working at the office during “normal” hours, he or she is not really working.

Interestingly, many of the women in my sample took advantage of any flexibility
in their workplace as it appears that their employers were willing to be flexible so that they had happy and productive (female) workers. Grace Gonzalez told me that a day before she was scheduled to go back to work after using all her allotted FMLA time she came to the realization that she could not commit to a 40 hour or more work week and be a good mother. She called her boss and told him that she was sorry, but she could not go back to work full-time. He responded by buying her a laptop computer and putting her on contract hours. Grace told me that being on contract allowed her to choose how many hours she wanted to work a week, which was around 32 to 35 hours a week, although her benefits were no longer paid. Grace found herself working more hours than she was paid for because she was so grateful that she could work from home a few hours a week by combining flex-time and flex-place policies.

Few of the men in my sample took advantage of any flex-time or place-place, or these policies are unavailable at their place of employment. I believe that this is because employers are more willing to believe that women “need” flex-time and flex-place more, because they are mothers. There is no socially acceptable rationale that fathers “need” flex-time and flex-place just as much, when, in reality, they do.

**Conclusion**

The United States has policies in place for economically disadvantaged family members, but there is a dearth of family-friendly policy for the middle class. There are a variety of reasons for this, including that Americans are hesitant to support policies that assist only one gender, and many of the family friendly policies available today were originally written to assist working women. We need to restructure how Americans think of gender relations. Structural change is more difficult to stimulate than surface change. It
is relatively easy to write laws, but having them enforced and accepted is harder.

Women’s work in the informal and formal economy should have forced gender role change, but women consistently do more housework and childcare tasks than men do, as well as work outside of the home. Increasingly, more men are taking an active role in their families. They want to be responsible and spend time with their families but there is a lag in national support for this. I believe that a new family-friendly, unified, policy is desperately needed for America’s workers. We need policy to support families in order to support gender equality so that women do not bear the burden of sacrificing careers for their families. The historical record illustrates that when some laws were passed, like the forty-hour work week and minimum wage, they were met with strong resistance claiming “government interference” (Jacobs and Gerson 2004:177). Today these laws are viewed as essential to maintaining a good quality of life. Similar laws for families may at first meet with opposition, but they will soon be seen as crucial for in the 21st century. These policies include mandatory paid parental leave, free daycare, preschool, and after-school programs, as well as making available flex-time and flex-place work policies. All of this allows, in one way or another, for more family time. Having more time available to spend together ensures a better quality of life for all Americans. Importantly, by enacting laws and supporting gender equality in the home, children will see their parents as co-parents and equally involved. This will socialize children into these egalitarian ideals and encourage the next generation to both embrace and enact, egalitarian gender roles.
CHAPTER 8

Conclusions

I don’t like to define myself by work or activities, because then that becomes life and family goes second. For example, I know PhDs at work who do this. “Doctor” is important to them. The job defines them. I belong to this church group, and some of those guys assume that, they let their jobs define them...You have to define yourself as a father, not a bicyclist, or something like that, because you can’t do both. Some people have tried, but I imagine it is hard on one person. It is hard on the other spouse in the family.
—William Robinson

William Robinson’s comments speak to several questions that are key to this dissertation: How do men’s paternal identities mediate their participation in domestic labor, particularly childcare? How do the wives and partners of the men influence men’s involvement with their families? What part does religiosity play among middle class men regarding father involvement? What are the broader implications for men’s participation in their families? I addressed these questions throughout this dissertation by exploring the interrelationship between demographic factors, religiosity, and parental ideology (what constitutes a “good” father) and how they mediate parental identity, which impacted the gendered division of labor among a population (n=30) of contemporary, middle class urban families in Albuquerque, New Mexico. I have demonstrated throughout this dissertation that there has been a generational shift in middle class fathers’ participation in their families, and an attendant shift in how men view their paternal identities which impacts how they enact their roles as fathers. All the men in the sample strongly identified with being a parent and for 25 of the fathers in my sample (over 80 percent) childcare was more or less divided equally. It was more important for the individuals in my study to feel that they were in a partnership with their spouse than perfectly divide all work equally. Interestingly, religion was not the primary motivator of paternal
involvement, although it played a part in influencing parental identity, and, therefore, men’s involvement in the family. While denomination is an important consideration, a high degree of religiosity regardless of denomination tended to encourage more dichotomous gender roles in the family.

Ethnographic methods provided in-depth detail that both illuminated and complicated our understanding of paternal involvement. I used both qualitative and quantitative methods, including participant observation, semi-structured interviews, open-ended interviews and identity pie charts, to understand paternal involvement among 30 middle class, dual-worker couples with young children. The semi-structured interviews, which included a set of questions on 40 household chores and childcare tasks, documented what people said that they did. Participant observation with a sub-sample of eight of these families allowed me to determine which of the partners was responsible for particular household and childcare tasks. Participant observation and life histories, in particular, have given insight into how fathers’ identities, as influenced by their socioeconomic position and other demographics, affected the domestic division of labor, particularly childcare.

The families that I interviewed, taking into account both spouses, were solidly middle class, judging from their educational attainment, occupation, and income. At the time of my research, the participants were prudent in spending and investments. Usually, my interviewees were not interested in having a high income, but rather just having enough money to be comfortable and pay their bills and save for the future. Men generally stated that when an individual is too career-focused, that can negatively affect
their participation with their families—something the men in my sample, by-and-large, wanted to avoid.

I explored how the male participants in my study conceptualized their identities as “fathers.” How men understood their role as “father” and how that particular gender role was played out in the division of labor at home, especially as it concerns childcare, was detailed in chapter four. In order to help me both describe and conceptualize the degree and kind of involvement I observed among the families that I studied, I invoked Michael Lamb and colleagues (Lamb et al. 1987a; Lamb 2004) tripartite framework of fatherhood involvement: engagement, accessibility, and responsibility. The advantage of Lamb’s model is that it facilitates a detailed understanding of men’s participation in the family that has been largely absent in previous research. However, all the fathers that I spoke to claimed to be “involved” fathers; indeed, most of them exhibited themselves to be engaged, accessible, and responsible fathers. When it came to childcare, the men in my study did nearly equal amounts as their spouses. I argue that involvement is more complicated than even Lamb’s model suggests. Chapter four highlighted seven very involved fathers of different Christian denominations, and one non-religious practicing father, who was also involved. The primary disparities among the involved fathers have to do with how both men and women conceptualized their gender roles.

Generally, childcare is the part of domestic labor that is the most rewarding and is held in high esteem (Daly 1996, 2001). The men in my sample were very involved in childcare, but they still did not do as much as their wives in the domestic realm. Women, taking a cue from their own mothers, were happy that their husbands were involved in childcare, if nothing else. Women, like men, used the word “share” in reference to
childcare. In other words, the participants in my study embraced the ideal of a partnership among spouses and attempted to share childcare. Although a few of the participants in my study had involved fathers themselves, most told me that when their own fathers did any domestic labor, it was explicitly to “help” their wives. This is interesting in that the men in my sample grew up in the 1970s and 1980s, the era when fathers started participating more in their families. But that generation, although engaged in childcare, did not see themselves as necessarily responsible for the daily machinations of the household. The fathers who parented in the 1970s and 1980s were still more involved than the fathers a generation before that who parented in the 1950s and 1960s. Those men who would be the grandparents of my interviewees, really did conceptualized themselves as breadwinners and did little, if any, housework. The female participants in my study acknowledged that their husbands did more domestic labor compared to their own fathers. These women were grateful to have their husbands participate in family life by willingly carrying out close to half of the childcare chores, that the women did not demand or expect an equal division of other household chores.

Childcare is only part of the larger domain of domestic labor; housework is the other part. That men in my study took an active role in childcare is an exciting finding, but what is also interesting is that they did not conflate childcare with housework. Chapter five examined how the married women and men in my study divided household chores, beyond childcare, and how they perceived their individual family arrangements. I

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84 Some of these women also acknowledged that their husbands do more than neighbors or cousins or “other” men that they have heard about, which makes them grateful that their husbands are willing to share in maintaining the house and carrying out childcare.
also discussed how their parental identities influenced their domestic arrangements, including who my participants felt was responsible for a task.\textsuperscript{85}

Although three broad frameworks have been employed by social scientists to explain the gendered division of labor, I argue that the gender role socialization framework is the best explanatory model (in contrast to a time/availability or relative resources model). This framework suggests that because housework is gendered and more housework falls under the rubric of “women’s work,” women will continue to do gendered tasks regardless of paid labor. When the men in my study subscribed to more traditional gender roles (although none were strictly “traditional” as Hochschild describes, that is, stating that there should be a strict division of labor among men and women, with men in the public sphere as wage earners and women in the domestic sphere), there was a more traditional division of labor in the household, regardless of whether women wanted an egalitarian division of labor or not. This was exemplified by two of the transitional families, the Jones and Trujillos, that I interviewed. The men in these two families were transitional in their gender roles, meaning that they thought that they should share both wage work and domestic work, but that women ought to be responsible for making certain that the domestic tasks are done while the husband concentrates on making money. In contrast, the women in both these families were frustrated that they assumed the lion’s share of the domestic labor, but felt that they had no recourse.

Three more fathers (Evan Frazier, Seth Maier and Noah Smith), all Conservative Christians, were also transitional men but they were married to women who also were

\textsuperscript{85} As was discussed in depth in chapters one and two, gender roles are the enactment of an individual’s identity that has been formed in relation to parenting ideologies.
transitional. Both Seth Maier and Noah Smith claimed that they were in egalitarian relationships and were responsible for their families, but the basis of this was not that they were actually carrying out the domestic tasks—their wives were doing more of the tasks—but the men claimed that since they knew what was going on in their houses, they were responsible. Evan Frazier was a very involved father, but he acceded to his wife in all domestic areas and wished that he could make enough money so that his wife did not have to work.

The majority of the men and women in my study, 25 families, professed to holding egalitarian ideals even though women were still doing more cleaning tasks. It is noteworthy that within this majority there was a continuum in how they viewed “egalitarian.” There were no perfectly egalitarian families in my sample; that is, not one family perfectly divided wage and domestic work equally. Rather, all of the families attempted to share both wage work and domestic work and had two different strategies to do so: divide-and-conquer egalitarians and reminder egalitarians.

Seven of the 25 families embraced egalitarian ideals and split up the housework along “his” and “her” tasks. Using this strategy of dividing tasks, what I have termed “divide and conquer” egalitarianism, helped preserve a gendered division of labor, except that labor was more equally divided than it was a generation ago. Whereas a generation ago cooking and childcare were firmly “women’s tasks,” my participants viewed them as gender neutral tasks. This allowed housework to be more equally divided.

Eighteen families shared tasks, except that the wife felt like she needed to remind her husband to make sure that the task was completed to her satisfaction; these are the “reminder” egalitarians. They had ultimate control over the tasks that their husbands did
and they did not want to give up the power that being a mother brings, even if it meant that they had to take on slightly more chores. At the most liberal end of the egalitarian continuum were the Reeds, in which the husband was the primary caregiver to their son and shared most of the housework with his wife.

Regardless of the fact that my participants embraced being in a partnership and egalitarian gender roles, women still did more domestic labor than their husbands. There exists a work-childcare dilemma among the participants in my study that can be explained in terms of the structural forces that constrain both women and men today. Women do more housework and childcare overall because their labor, since the industrial revolution, has been structured as reproductive rather than productive (Beechy 1987; Tiano 1994). Although women have always participated in the labor force, it was usually unmarried daughters that worked outside of the home. Only in the 1930s did mothers enter the workforce. Yet, women’s labor was always valued less than male labor because they were seen as marginal or erratic members of the labor force (Lamphere 1987). Since the 1930s women have principally been thought of as wives and mothers first, not wage workers. Even in the current economy where dual-worker families are a necessity, most women do not emphasize the “worker” role to the extent that the “mother” role is emphasized. Part of the explanation for this has to do with the fact that women’s labor has historically been devalued (Lamphere 1987), and women are still viewed as less productive than male workers. There are still gender segregated jobs and even full-time working women are consistently paid around 20 percent less than men (IWPR 2009). Indeed, even when women are in “male” careers, mothers (as opposed to childless women) are paid less than other workers because employers assume that mothers will put
their families before their careers (Crittenden 2001). Men, who have historically never had to balance work and family like women have had to, are seen as ideal workers in our capitalist system.

In the face of these structural constraints, it makes economic sense for the mother to be the parent to work fewer hours and/or devote more time to the domestic sphere. The majority of the women in my sample chose to have flexible careers at the expense of making more money. Unfortunately, this also presents a dilemma for working women: women make less money because women of childbearing age are viewed as mothers and homemakers first. Because they are seen as mothers first, who need to focus on the home, they earn less than their male or childless female counterparts. Men, alternatively, are still seen as career- or job-oriented first. They are financially compensated for their role as economic provider, but it also means that when they ask for work flexibility in order to be more involved at home, it is more difficult for them because they are often viewed as unserious about their work (Albiston 2005; Jacobs and Gerson 2004).

Being responsible for housework has never been part of an accepted masculine gender role, whereas being a father has held status among Christians (e.g., [Mather 1692] Gallagher 2003). Although religion was less important than I originally expected, it still played a role affecting parental identity, which in turn affected the domestic division of labor. Chapter six revealed that Christian morals underlie much of U.S. society, which affected all the men in my sample. People are socialized into knowing what a “good”

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86 Even though the women in my sample work at least 32 hours a week, this is 10-20 hours fewer than their husbands work, on average.

87 As I described in chapter six, I interviewed eight Catholic men, nine Conservative Christian (Charismatic Christian, Fundamental Baptist, Church of Latter Day Saints [LDS], and Evangelical) men, seven men who
mother or father does. Strong religiosity, however, was also associated with more dichotomous gender roles. This was especially true for Conservative Christian denominations and some devout Catholics. Those with high degrees of religiosity (the Maiers and Smiths) that belonged to one of the Conservative Christian groups tended to be less egalitarian in parenting and their perception of the fatherhood role than other Christians. The strongly Conservative Christian men claimed to be involved in childcare equally but in reality were less involved than their wives. Mainstream Protestants were the most similar to agnostics. Even Catholics with high religiosity, such as the Gonzalezes, Griegos, and Navarros, were still more egalitarian in their father role than Conservative Christians with high religiosity.

Regardless of religiosity, the middle class men in my sample strongly identified with the role of father. They also were involved in their children’s lives and took being a father very seriously. Men talked about being married as a partnership and equally contributing to caring for their children is part of being a partner. The men in my study wanted to be involved in their children’s lives but sometimes there were barriers that inhibited them: women sometimes, as transitional or reminder egalitarians, acted as “gatekeepers,” but significantly, men were not supported by society in their role as “father” the way that women were supported as mothers. As I demonstrated in chapter seven, the United States government needs to institute policies that support families, specifically fathers. If this were to be done, more fathers would participate in their families and feel encouraged by society for them to do so. As illustrated in chapter six, self-identified as one of the Mainstream Protestant groups (Episcopal and Lutheran), and six men who did not practice or self-identify as any religion. Of the non-practicing men, only one was atheist and the rest were agnostic.
the men in my study internalized broader cultural norms—parental ideology—regarding fatherhood. Having laws on the legal books supporting fathers is the first step towards a more egalitarian relationship at home.

Currently, our government does not have a comprehensive position on family policy. Most of the policies that indirectly assist families were put in place to help children or economically disadvantaged individuals. To recap from chapter seven, the PreK initiative and similar programs provide resources in order for developmentally “at risk” children in order to prepare them for school. Similarly, the United States government has funneled monies into encouraging non-residential and/or poor fathers to participate in their families. But the families I spoke to would like to see governmental support to better balance their work and family obligations. Unfortunately, the United States government’s position on is there should be no governmental interference in something private like work and family. While I find this to be a faulty position, it is also not even perfectly adhered to by our government. Consider the Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA). The FMLA was originally set up to help women cope with work and family responsibilities. Those of my interviewees who took advantage of the FMLA were unanimous in support of parental leave policies. However, many of my participants could not take time off under FMLA since they could not afford it. Furthermore, since their wives generally made less money than they did, they had to make an economic decision as a family to allow the wife to take the FMLA and not the higher-earning husband. European countries, such as Sweden and Norway, that offer non-transferable paternal leaves have seen an increase in paternal participation at home even after the leave is completed. I believe that there is a cyclical relationship where men want to be more
involved in their families and when they are “forced” to be involved in “take it or leave it” paternal leaves, they participate more. Additionally, given that the men participate more, they want to be further involved in their families, so they seek out those opportunities to be involved. By taking paternal leave and being involved in their families, men send a message to other men that it is acceptable for men to be involved in their families.

I also suggested universal federal support for childcare. Currently, many women sacrifice their careers so that they are home to cover the gap between when the school day ends and the work day ends. By subsidizing programs like after-school programs, women could focus on work more and both parents would be able to better balance work and family. In the end, family-friendly policies can work towards encouraging a more egalitarian division of labor in the family. The household is where children learn gender roles. When children see both parents participate more equally in domestic labor, it sets a standard, with the hope that those children will grow up to embrace egalitarian ideals of gender, too.

**Potential Directions for Future Research**

Given that my participants were middle class, my findings can be broadly generalized to other dual worker, middle class, American families with young children. In terms of education, occupation and income, the participants in my sample are comparable to other middle class families in Albuquerque, New Mexico. My sample was biased in the sense it was small (n=60) and the people with whom I ended up working most closely were the ones who were kind and generous with their time. All research has its inherent biases, however, so I feel that the benefits of working with my sample
outweighed any potentially detrimental costs. The fine-grained detail afforded by ethnographic methods is crucial to understanding paternal involvement. Working intimately with a small group of people, I was able to see the complex interplay between gender and demographic markers, and how parental identities play out at home, that a large survey would have missed. I was able to see the differences between what people said and what they really did when it came to childcare and other domestic tasks.

The next stage of research would be to gather data on working class fathers. Have these fathers internalized the “ideal” father role like middle class fathers have? Or do they emphasize the breadwinner role?

There has been little scholarly research conducted specifically on the work/family balance among upper-middle class families. I expect that, given their greater economic resources, they may outsource even more domestic tasks than their “middle” middle class counterparts. If this is the case, do women still do more domestic labor or is the little bit that is left divided fairly? Do the men with “greedy” careers (i.e., doctors, lawyers) in the professional class also emphasize the father role? My participants deemphasized being a breadwinner and focused on being a father, but perhaps that was because they were not as devoted to their careers as I suspect professionals are.

I would also like to see a study that compares Christian men with practitioners of other faiths, such as Judaism or Hinduism. Do Americans who are not culturally or practicing Christians internalize some of the Christian values defining a “good” father that are implicit in our society? Additionally, how do Catholics from other geographical areas compare to Catholics in New Mexico?
Another avenue of research should examine non-residential fathers (fathers who are not living with or interacting every day with their children) for comparison with fathers who claim marital satisfaction. While it is known that lower marital quality tends to correlate with less father involvement among married men (e.g., Cummings et al. 2010) what about happily unmarried fathers? Regardless, I think we will find that even with non-residential fathers, the mothers of their children can both encourage and inhibit paternal involvement. Currently, being in an egalitarian and satisfying partnership is beneficial to paternal involvement. But if men really are focusing on being fathers at the expense of other roles, as I have argued throughout the dissertation, than it would stand to reason that non-residential fathers also feel this way. Yet, previous research from the 1990s indicates that men conceptualize being a father as part of being a husband (e.g., Ihinger-Tallman et al. 1993). Has this changed?

Although Albuquerque is an appropriate analogue to other similarly sized and diverse cities, I am interested in investigating how the city or regional area itself affects how men participate in their family. In other words, do Christian middle class fathers in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, for example, also emphasize the father role, or are very involved fathers more characteristic of the Southwest? There are a myriad of directions for future research, and given the under-studied nature of paternal involvement, it is necessary that we attempt to fill the research lacunae on paternal involvement.

The difference today, versus men from previous generations, is that men are even more engaged fathers and more apt to embrace egalitarian ideals. The future looks bright for a continuation of egalitarianism among spouses. At the Renaud house I watched while their four year old son cheerfully did his best to vacuum the sofa (a task that his father
completed when the vacuum hose got too heavy for the child). Tate Maxwell, also under six years old, seriously explained to me how “we all have to help mommy and daddy” when we were picking up toys one sunny Saturday afternoon. I cannot speak to the next generation being as involved parents as my participants were, but I feel confident that by growing up in the homes that they did, where both parents were involved, it is probable.
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