BALANCING THE THREE-LEGGED STOOL:
SUSTAINABLE CHILDMARARING ROUTINES, FAMILY, AND WORK IN TWO
AMERICAN CITIES

by
Elizabeth Mary Talbert

A dissertation submitted to Johns Hopkins University in conformity with the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Baltimore, Maryland
October 2018

© 2018 Elizabeth Talbert
All rights reserved
Abstract

Within a policy regime built on an ideal of “implicit familialism,” American parents experience a great deal of conflict between the spheres of work and family. By using childrearing as the potential realm of social inequality or mobility, this research looks at how the geographic and economic structure of work and kin relationships play together in the daily lives of individual parents and their children as they balance the “three-legged stool” of work, home, and child care or schooling arrangements. The research uses data from the How Parents House Kids qualitative interview study, which sought to understand choices parents of children between the ages of three and eight make about where they live and send their children to school. In 2014 team of interviewers questioned 126 parents in areas around Cleveland, Ohio and Dallas, Texas about their daily childrearing routines and many other aspects of their lives. Transcripts were coded for themes of work, home and housing, and child care or schooling. Findings show that making the three-legged routine sustainable shapes choices parents make about where to work, where to live, and where to send their children to care and school. Parents also create or alleviate gender inequalities through their choices about childrearing, with higher-income mothers often “supermomming,” or carrying major responsibilities in both parenting and work, and lower-income parents “cooperatively” parenting to accommodate economic and time constraints. Additionally, the majority of families of all classes and races in this sample rely on extended family members to aid in childrearing at least weekly, with differences depending on employment status and local child care policy. Finally, transitions in the three-legged stool affect social inequality. Lower-income families experience more non-volitional “push” transitions, and these transitions often precede or happen at the same time as transitions in other legs. Higher-income families experience mobility through volitional “pull” transitions that are more often
isolated. These findings suggest that the ideal breadwinner/homemaker nuclear family, is no longer an accurate model for American research and public policy, and that choices that parents make daily about childrearing are related to social inequality and mobility.

Readers: Andrew J. Cherlin (advisor), Kathryn J. Edin (advisor), Meredith Greif, Lindsay J. Thompson, Donna Strobino
Acknowledgements

The journey through graduate school is not exactly the archetypical hero’s quest, but it is an epic path in its own way: experiences, encounters, periods of despair, moments of elation, and occasionally revelation. My greatest revelation is how many important people have worked hard, intelligently, and with great love to get me to this point, and to them I am forever grateful. I am may not be a hero (though I may, as I discuss in Chapter 3, be very much a “supermom,”), but many people along my journey have been to me.

My decision to go to Johns Hopkins was cemented when I met Andy Cherlin. I was interested in studying women and work, and poverty and inequality, and international development, and gender, and leadership in organizations. And a lot of other things. Andy encouraged this, and gave me the space and support in my early years of the doctoral program to pursue my interest of the month. At the same time, he brought me on board to develop my own research skills in his important and well-defined projects on family formation, working-class culture, and the economic recession.

Andy is one of the reasons I stayed the course, especially because, when I came to him in my third-year questioning if I could see this doctoral program through, he said replied with characteristic wisdom. “I am absolutely sure you can,” he said, “But you don’t have to. You will be okay and do important work no matter what you do.” This moment was revelatory, empowering, and has allowed me to choose every day to continue to stay the academic course and do this important work. Andy’s keen criticism of my writing, analysis and additions to my ideas, and incredible knowledge of everything about family sociology has been invaluable. He is also a kind, calm presence, a great conversationalist, and a generous and available mentor.
Early in my first year, Andy brought me onboard a project headed by Kathy Edin about civic participation among the working- and middle-class in Philadelphia. This project introduced me to my greatest academic love, qualitative data, applied in the context of class, race, and culture. More importantly, it allowed me to meet and establish a collaborative friendship with Kathy Edin. During my first two years of graduate school, when Kathy was at Harvard, and we would meet for coffee when Kathy was in Baltimore. When I was in Boston, she invited me to visit her at her home, where we discussed creativity and academics and writing and life. Kathy and Tim Nelson brought me to Camden with them one summer weekend to make a short video for their book *Doing the Best I Can*. After one of these meetings, I called my best friend in one of those moments: “Kathy Edin says I’m going to write books. And she thinks they’re even going to be good.”

The stars aligned for me when Kathy came to Hopkins at the beginning of my third year. With Kathy and Andy to advise a dissertation on family, poverty, and inequality, I could have had enough. But I worked with both of them to support the budding Social Policy Minor as a Teaching Assistant; through this, they helped me navigate the lack of maternity leave policy at Hopkins after the birth of my first son. I got to teach *Poverty and Social Welfare Policy* with Kathy twice. Kathy and Stefanie DeLuca brought me on as an interviewer for the How Parents House Kids Project when I was seven months pregnant and never thought twice about it. That experience was essential in defining this dissertation, and access to the data made it possible. Kathy’s leadership of the 21st Century Cities initiative at Hopkins opened up unique opportunities for me in this organization: we ran an internship program over the summer, brought together people who really want to advance urban life in the 21st century, and planned and led a celebrity-hosted series of events about Redlining. Her advocacy for me and belief in
my talents has opened up new opportunities with the National Poverty Study, and I thank her greatly for these open doors. Kathy understands how I think and create, and having her mentorship has been formational.

    Andy and Kathy, thank you for encouraging this dissertation to be better, grow and thrive, and for helping me think beyond the normal walls of analysis.

    My other committee members are incredibly important parts of this journey as well. Thank you all for your attention, thoughts, and time.

    Meredith Greif joined the Hopkins faculty right around the time that Kathy did, and has been a calm, affirming, and intelligent part of my path ever since. Thank you for working on this project with me through all its iterations: I look forward to aligning more of our research in the future. I also look forward to the rare but wonderful moments we catch to chat whenever we find ourselves in the same city.

    Lindsay Thompson is a friend and mentor, brought to me through Redlining and the 21st Century Cities Initiative, who’s cross-disciplinary work in business, ethics, and policy is inspiring. Thank you, Lindsay, for the good conversation, support, research opportunities, and great friendship. The beauty of relationships like these are second to none.

    Though we have not yet met in person, thank you Donna Strobino for your participation in this process for me, and for generously giving your time and intellectual gifts to reading and commenting on these pages. I am glad to know you, and very grateful.

    Others at Hopkins have been particularly important in my journey through the doctoral program. A huge thanks to Stefanie DeLuca, who took me into her qualitative research family in my first year and gave me amazing research experience, and mentorship, though the Thompson housing qualitative research and the Moving to Opportunity follow-up interviews. You are an
inspiration and a force of nature. Thank you for believing in me when I couldn’t quite believe in
myself, and for your continued leadership of PIRL.

Thanks to Katrina Bell MacDonald, whom I completed my research apprenticeship with,
and who became a good friend and colleague over the years. Thank you for the hugs, the wine,
and the conversations and laughter.

Thanks to Lingxin Hao, one of the best methods teacher a student could ever ask for.
When I needed to perform a logistic regression for a chapter in this dissertation, your notes were
spot on. Thanks for holding me to high standards and finding ways to make categorical data
analysis comprehensible and enjoyable.

A warm hug and huge thanks to Tim Nelson, who taught my favorite class at Hopkins.
You are a teaching inspiration, an amazing thinker, and a good friend.

Thanks to Ben Seigel and the rest of the staff at the 21st Century Cities Initiative for the
support of this dissertation and colleagueship. I am grateful for the unique and career-shaping
work I got to pursue alongside you.

The other people who have come along through the years to support this dissertation are
countless, but I will try to count a few. First, thanks to the amazing How Parents House Kids
research team, who fearlessly took on Dallas and Cleveland in the summers of 2013 and 2014 to
learn how parents make decisions about their kids, housing, and neighborhoods. The project was
generously supported by the Annie E. Casey Foundation and the John D. and Catherine T.
MacArthur Foundation. Thanks to the Principal Investigators, Kathryn Edin and Stefanie
DeLuca, for their leadership and vision. Thanks to our Hopkins support staff, Terri Thomas,
Megan Prior, and Jessie Albee. And thank you to the hard work, perseverance, and intelligence
of the field staff, many of whom I am lucky to count among my friends: Eva Rosen, Melody
Boyd, Asad Asad, Monica Bell, Angela Simms, Siri Warkentien, Hope Harvey, Kelley Fong, Meredith Greif, Philip Garboden, Ann Owens, Beth Schueler, Kristin Perkins, Kathryn Reed, Hilario Dominguez, Holly Howell Koogler, Barbara Kiviat, Kaitlin Edin-Nelson, Sophie Damas, Jennifer Darrah, Anna Rhodes, Jessica Tollette, Margot Moinester, Brielle Bryan, Jennifer Ferentz, Liz Gomez, and Sarah Jabour. And a huge thanks to Lauren Abrahams who was my research assistant and support in Dallas for follow-up interviews.

The families who opened their homes to us in Cleveland and Dallas—and spoke candidly about their experiences parenting in the 21st century—made this dissertation possible. I am grateful for the many families who overcame the initial distrust of having someone on their doorsteps. Their generously-given stories made me better understand the shape of family, inequality, and mobility in this country, and I hope these pages and the work I do in the future can be faithful to what they have taught me.

A huge thanks to Anna Rhodes and Phil Garboden, who made the long days and short nights more fun. Deciding to share that windowless office in Merg was a great decision, made better by our beautiful office at the Poverty and Inequality Research Lab. Thanks for your friendship, your insights, your calm/outrage (as appropriate), and making it comfortable for me to pump at my desk. You supported me as a person, a scholar, and a mom, and I am eternally grateful. I value and miss our grad-student-tripod more than you know, but hope I get to tell you both in person soon. Your friendships are some of the best things the last seven years brought me.

This is a dissertation about childrearing, and I am unwaveringly grateful to my children’s caretakers, who made my routines and transitions doable and enjoyable. Kate Karbowniczek Bloom, who was William’s amazing nanny in Baltimore, became one of my best friends. Your
friendship is important and I always treasure the years we were able to mom together in the
Greatest City in America. Maria Alejandra Bolaños Muñoz became part of our family when she
came from Colombia to be our au pair. Thank you, Ale, for your support, friendship, and the
great care you give to my sons. I am grateful to all caretakers who make this kind of work
possible, but especially to Kate and Ale, who have been integral to my success and well-being.

My friends who became family in Baltimore, Washington, Ann Arbor, New York, and
Iowa have also been on this journey with me. It takes a village to raise my boys (and you are part
of that village), and it also took a village to get me to this point of education. Thank you all.

And, Sarah, thanks for taking it seriously when I told you, “Kathy Edin says I’m going to
write books!” and for simply answering, “Of course you are.”

This is also a dissertation about family, and I thank my family with more force than I’ll
ever be able to write. You have all believed in me when I couldn’t believe in myself, seen to it
that I was loved, and made sure I was keeping everything in perspective. Thanks to my mother,
who read all these chapters (as she has read every important thing I have ever written) and also
let me cry and laugh and be me. (We’ll always have Cleveland.) Thanks to my stepdad Bob, who
has always “gotten it” when it came to how hard this stuff was, and has always believed that I
would do it. Thanks to my father, who brought me one peanut butter cup an hour while I wrote
these chapters in his basement, and to my stepmom Janice, for reminding me that everything
would be all right. Thanks to my mother-in-law, Ann, who has been supportive of this journey
with her words and by taking care of my kids when I had to write. Thanks to my father-in-law,
Larry, who is a strong force of kindness and support. Thanks to Brad, Amy, and Juni for the hugs
through the journey. Hansen and Stefan, my stepbrothers, amaze and inspire me. My sister,
Meredith, still sends real, paper letters in the mail. And she sends them at the most appropriate
times. I got one last week while in the depth of dissertation revision and uncertainty: it simply said I was amazing and she was proud of me and was excited to see what would be next. More importantly, the letter reminded me that I got lucky and grew up with my biggest believer, supporter, and friend. I’m trying to take her advice and do more of what I love.

Finally, Dave has been on this journey with me for fifteen years. I love you more than you’ll ever know, and am so glad to have experienced this with you. When we sat in Fells Point with a pint each at Max’s Taphouse, a month after our wedding, we fell in love with Baltimore and this crazy dream was born. Dave got a job in Washington, and while searching online for fun things for me to do, found a doctoral program in sociology at Johns Hopkins. I applied. Dave came with me when I visited and interviewed. Dave made sure our first house had an office where I could do my work (and a comfy cushion for Maya-the-Weimardoodle to hang out on while I did it). Dave, you have believed in me and kept the faith when I couldn’t. You supported me and fought through it with me and made me laugh the whole way. Thank you for loving me, and for always looking outward in the same direction.
For William and Patrick, who make childrearing the best thing in the world.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 1 – Introduction and Methodology</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 2 – Family Waypoints and Routines</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 3 – Cooperative, Specialized, and Homesteaded Parenting</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 4 – Living Near Family</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 5 – A Year in Transitions</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 6 – Conclusion</td>
<td>172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REFERENCES</td>
<td>187</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**APPENDICES**

- Appendix B – Childrearing-specific Follow-up Interview Guide (2015-16) | 211
- VITA | 217
# LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.1: Demographic Summary of 2014 HPHK Data</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1: Families with Specialized Stay-at-Home-Parents, by Income</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2: Families with Supermomming Parents</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3: Cooperative Parenting Families</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4: Separate versus Blended Spheres: Overlap of Homesteading and Other Parenting Forms</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1: Daily and Weekly Extended Family Involvement in Childrearing, by City</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2: Extended Family Involvement, by Income</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3: Extended Family Involvement, by Race/Ethnicity</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4: Extended Family Involvement, by Employment Status</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1: All Transitions, by Location</td>
<td>134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2: All Transitions, by Income</td>
<td>135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3: All Transitions, by Race/Ethnicity</td>
<td>135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.4: “Push” Transitions, by Income</td>
<td>138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.5: “Push” Transitions, by Race/Ethnicity</td>
<td>139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.6: “Pull” Transitions, by Income</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.7: “Pull” Transitions, by Race/Ethnicity</td>
<td>141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.8: Transitions by Homeownership Status</td>
<td>143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.9: Logistic Regression of Transitions on Demographic Data</td>
<td>144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.10: Number of Legs of Transitions for Respondents Who Made At Least One Transition</td>
<td>156</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 1

Introduction and Methodology

Introduction

Childrearing routines structure parental work and family life, especially during the years that children are young, and thus link the realms of work and family in unique, important, and daily ways. The importance of work and family as structuring institutions in modern society cannot be overstated. In his 2008 address to the American Sociological Association, Arne Kalleberg described the multi-level interface through which work structures society:

Work is a core activity in society. It is central to individual identity, links individuals to each other, and locates people within the stratification system. Perhaps only kin relationships are as influential in people’s everyday lives. (Kalleberg 2009:1)

Despite the importance of both the institutions of work and family, however, they are often theorized separately and without much overlap. The strong literature on “work-life balance” attempts to link the two, but overall the spheres of public work and private family life have been addressed separately and to different purposes. By using childrearing as the bridge between these two spheres, this research looks at how the geographic and economic structure of work and kin relationships play together in the daily lives of individual parents and their children. Parents weave geographic, temporal, and familial webs to create sustainable childrearing routines. By better understanding the constant push and pull of daily childrearing routines, this dissertation seeks to better understand the reproduction of social inequalities, and how they intersect with the institutions of work and family.

A primary project of the study of inequality in the past several decades is the study of mobility, broadly defined. This dissertation engages the project by looking at how economic mobility and neighborhood mobility may be helped or hindered by the kinds of negotiations—
and the many pieces of life that go into these negotiations—that families go through daily in the pursuit of childrearing. Research into mobility has looked in depth at the role of neighborhoods, job opportunities, civic amenities, and the economy at large. Less attention has been given to the daily grind of parenting, and how mobility may be helped or hindered as a result of choices parents make to try to sustain their childrearing routines.

This dissertation shows how daily childrearing routines become sustainable—or remain unsustainable—for families, and how the process of trying to reach an equilibrium of sustainability impacts location of work, home, and care, the trifecta of balance that I refer to as the “three-legged stool.” Importantly, the search for this sustainability affects how parents of young children interact with and utilize their extended family networks. The need to be close to extended family cuts across class and racial lines. This has implications for both economic and racial residential segregation in cities.

Parents also must negotiate relationships between each other according to culturally gendered roles and relationships within their families in their search for sustainable childrearing routines. These negotiations have implications that are highly linked to class, and affect the division of labor in dual- and multi-parent households. Finally, the search for sustainable childrearing routines impacts the stability or instability of a family’s care or school, work, or housing arrangements. Families with fewer resources must often renegotiate these arrangements not only more often, as a system of relationships where one transition catalyzes or affects another. This coordination of transitions over the course of a year has implications for the stability of children’s environments, as well as for the family’s upward economic mobility.

The choices, arrangements, and trade-offs families make in caring for their children are daily and often invisible acts of social reproduction; daily routines influence the importance of
proximity to kin, the functioning of parental relationships, and the stability of children’s lives are day-to-day and year-to-year. These small and daily social actions that make sure children are cared for by an appropriate adult while parents make a living in the public world of work defy the traditional public/private boundaries often used to conceptualize the worlds of work and home. This research seeks to better understand how parents arrange childrearing in a hands-off family policy regime, and how these arrangements affect their ability to take part in work- and family-life. Finally, this research brings the discussion of childrearing into the twenty-first century by looking at how geography of family locations, urban amenities like childcare providers, schools, and employment opportunities shape family life and affect persistent social inequalities in a world where most families do not have a parent exclusively dedicated to the provision of childrearing.

**Background**

Daily childrearing routines are necessarily unique to parents, and reproduce inequalities that play out and become entrenched through the everyday actions of American family life. For some years now, American leaders and thinkers have tried to understand and sometimes stem the rising tide of inequality in America. Researchers have pointed to the shrinking working- and middle-classes, mostly focusing on the changes in the American economy and resulting job possibilities (Cherlin 2014). This dissertation builds on the discussion of economic inequality, broadly, by looking especially at the daily negotiations of childrearing in a world where dual-earner families are the majority, and in a policy regime that does not yet support such a reality. I contend that this consideration of parental responsibilities and possibilities under certain economic, social, and political constraints is important to understanding the lack of social
mobility in 21st century American society. Class, racial, and gender inequalities are intricately connected to economic production and we must also understand how they are connected to social reproduction coordinated within private families under a particular policy regime.

In addition to describing changes in the economy and class mobility in the United States, researchers have documented changes in conception and organization of family life over the past century, and how these changes have been intricately linked to changes in the American and global economy (Ruggles 2015). From a patriarchal “corporate” family at the turn of the 20th century, to the single-earner/homemaker family of the mid-20th century, to the dual-earner family of the late 20th and early 21st century, family forms have changed in ways to fit the economic realities of the times. However, public supports for childrearing have remained rather inflexible to new parental realities. For example, public school hours still do not align with work hours, despite the fact that the majority of American households do not have a parent at home devoted to caring for children. Though the forms of family have changed, and though the landscape of work has changed for both men and women, the responsibilities of childrearing still fall mainly on the private family, under assumptions of a family regime that is no longer the reality for most Americans. It is almost as if the cultural understanding of family that informs policy in America—policy in realms ranging from work to education to healthcare—remains locked in the nuclear conception of a breadwinner/homemaker family that Goode (1970). theorized was the expected end-point of family form.

This outdated concept of family is changing culturally, and may be driving new policy considerations. Recently some political attention has turned to the issues of parental leave in the United States (Talbot 2015). The United States is unique in developed Western economies—indeed, it, Oman, and Papua New Guinea are unique in the world—in that it provides no paid
time off to mothers after the birth of a child (Talbot 2015). This lack of parental leave, researchers suggest, exemplifies a particular American ideology, and also sustains and reproduces American gender inequality (Lokteff & Piercy 2012). Like the lack of universal parental leave policy in the United States, the lack of quality, affordable childcare in America has received attention (Hipp et al. 2016; Palley & Shdaimah 2014; Polokow 2007). However, the overall intricacies of childrearing as a topic of conversation in American rhetoric relegates it to something that private families may groan about, but something that—aside from child care vouchers for the poor and some regulation of professional daycare centers—public policy has not addressed. Because women—despite work status, hours, or earnings from employment—still perform most childcare duties or find suitable arrangements when they cannot perform them (Karpi et al 2013; Lokteff & Piecry 2012; Geist 2011; Kan et al 2011; Craig & Mullan 2011; Hook 2010; Bianchi & Raley 2005; Bianchi 2005), the realm of childrearing is a rich one for understanding persistent gender inequality.

Childrearing—including selection of schools for children—may also have significant implications for segregation of communities, as well as for the ways people move through space for housing and work. We know that urban communities in the United States are changing, but that racial (Ellen 2008) and economic segregation (Florida et al. 2018) remain high. However, we have not yet examined the connection between decisions made about childrearing and the continuation of racial and economic segregation, aside from the literature about school choice and disadvantage (Laurea and Goyette 2014). We also do not know enough about the role the location of extended family plays in the “in-between” times, those times when kids are neither in school nor in the care of parents, and how the location of extended family affects family decisions about neighborhood location.
Recent research has turned to the web-like effects of workplace schedules and how instability in them permeates into the schedules of fellow employees and even spouses (Gerstel and Clawson 2018). This dissertation builds on this idea of permeability by bringing in not only the work lives of the adult family members, but also the care and schooling lives of children, and even the physical neighborhood location of the family. Having children complicates routines and roles exponentially for couples (Coltrane 2008), and to truly understand how family and work interact, we must bring in the important aspect of childrearing, including the locations, geographies, and activities parents negotiate for their children as part of a sustainable routine.

**Rational Choices in Cultural and Institutional Context**

I analyze families’ choices about childrearing, allowing rational choice theory to be informed by the power dynamics inherent in certain institutional and cultural realities for 21\textsuperscript{st} century American families. Rational choice theory assumes economic optimization in all social choices; what will optimize these choices, however, depends on particular institutional contexts that have privileged and empowered certain groups while disempowering other groups along the axes of gender, race, and class. In particular, much understanding of rational choice may not take into account the publically disempowered private sphere of family routines when explaining choices in the public sphere of paid work, as well as the particular cultural context in which these choices exist.

Rational choice theory assumes that individuals are “rational, self-interested actors [who] pursue their advantage in any situation” (Calhoun et al. 2012). Thus, the theory suggests that social behavior and the resulting inequalities therein are a direct result of individuals making choices to optimize utility. Individuals within families (or families themselves) will create
sustainable childrearing routines by making trade-offs that optimize the ability to use resources effectively, and to gain the most benefit from the situation. This functional view of social reality supposes an objective economic reality, defined by circumstances, that follows rules of costs and benefits.

We can expect that individual parents or individual families mobilize various forms of capital (Bourdieu 1986) in trade for a childrearing situation that works for the family. The more capital a family has, and the more that capital “buys,” the more optimal the resulting situation. For example, if a family is wealthy, that family may trade economic capital to buy a more sustainable childrearing routine. Perhaps this requires a live-in nanny who not only negates the necessity of a trip through space for childrearing, but also covers the unanticipated child care needs. Alternately, a poor family may have little economic capital, but may have social capital close at hand: poor families may be more likely to “double-up” in housing or to rely on free kincare in lieu of paid child care.

Looking at choices through the lens of a particular culture allows us to consider the particular context in which decisions about childrearing are made (as we are able to do in rational choice theory) as well as the kind of cultural understanding that underpins and is reproduced by those decisions. For example, economists and rational choice theorists might expect a family to make childrearing choices based on the human capital divide of the wife and husband—whichever spouse has the greater earning capacity will be the spouse who performs the most work for wages, whereas the spouse with the lesser amount of human capital will perform most of the childcare tasks. We know, however, that this is not how it plays out: researchers from Hochschild (1989) to Hook (2010) have shown that a direct relationship between education/earnings and time performing or arranging for childrearing does not exist. Instead, this
relationship is mediated by the gender of the spouses, with women performing more housework than men across the world and across policy regimes. West and Zimmerman (1987) would acknowledge that this is one way that gender is performed and reproduced in daily life; other theorists who specifically study family work and care arrangements agree (Gimenez-Nadal & Molina 2015). Social research must also allow social subjects to define the parameters of what is rational in a certain cultural and historical context. Allowing parents to explain the decisions they make about childrearing outside of any kind of prescribed economic understanding (that is, the regular variables ascribed to supply and demand models) will allow this research more breadth in the possible explanations of why certain social behavior exists and of possible interventions to the inequality it reproduces.

To this end, I look at how the institutional context of American families in the 21st century influence the behavior and experience of individual families. As Kalleberg’s quote, above, suggests much American identity and social structure is wrapped up in the institution of work. However, the ability to best take part in this institution—and to make rational decisions about how to take part in it—is hampered by of a hands-off American childcare regime, what Kremer (2006) calls “implicit familialism,” a policy regime that makes assumptions about American families and workers that are outdated and unhelpful. Implicit familialism underpins the American economy because families are still by and large privately responsible for the arrangement of care for their children, even if the state provides educational opportunities during limited hours for children between ages five and 18. The institutions of American education, economic policy, childcare provision, and work are all influenced by this idea of implicit familialism, something that is discordant to the daily reality of many working American families.
This dissertation looks at the relationship of the macro-geography of two American cities to the micro-geography of childrearing routines. Families exist not only in socially produced systems like class, race, and gender, but also in physically real institutional geographies like cities. American cities are very real, meaningful units, with economic, educational, and leisure opportunities that residents share. They are also machines of segregation and inequality. Recent work by Raj Chetty et al. (2016) shows that a person’s zip-code is linked to his or her link to future mobility, so looking at the level of neighborhood, city, and more generally, place, is key to a project purporting to consider the reproduction of inequality in urban America. Additionally, historical policies about homeownership and residential segregation by race that created the geography of current American cities still have very real effects in the lives of American parents and how they make rational choices about childrearing, in a particular cultural and institutional context.

**Research Objectives**

This dissertation has five main research objectives:

1.) Describe the “three-legged stool” of the work, home, and care or schooling arrangements that parents from various backgrounds navigate in pursuit of sustainable childcare routines

2.) Analyze how the daily pursuit and organization of daily childcare routines may lead to increased or stagnant/decreased economic and residential mobility, and examine how this link to mobility may affect inequality within and between families.

3.) Analyze the patterns of sharing childrearing that occur in multi-parent families, and how these patterns affect the gendered division of labor in families.
4.) Examine the role that extended family plays in the organization of daily childcare routines, and evaluate how geographic proximity to extended family may influence residential segregation patterns.

5.) Examine and analyze the ways transitions in the “three-legged stool” of care/school, work, and home affect each other, the sustainability of childrearing routines and stability of family life, or mobility.

**Outline of Chapters**

The chapters in this dissertation look at how the pursuit of sustainable childrearing routines within the 21st century urban American family contribute to families’ experiences of and contributions to social inequalities along the lines of race, class, and gender. Chapter 2 considers the daily routines and waypoints families traverse to secure work, care and schooling for their children, and an acceptable neighborhood location. I call this the “three-legged stool,” a way that parents make sure their daily routines balance, however precariously. This balance often requires intense planning, communication, and gymnastics of time and transportation on the part of parents. The chapter not only describes the complications of the lived experiences of regular American parents—and that these complications cut across class, race, and even gender of individual parents—but also that the sustainable arrangement of these waypoints may either support or compromise economic and neighborhood mobility. In the context of recent research findings that neighborhood context indeed does matter for child outcomes (Chetty 2016), and that certain types of neighborhoods are more conducive to mobility than others, it is particularly important to consider that the ways families make routines sustainable may have very real consequences for mobility.
Chapter 3 delves more deeply into the family care and work arrangements of parent partners. This chapter builds on Presser’s (2003) work on unconventional work hours and family organization, and shows qualitatively the various arrangements of family life that Presser uncovers in quantitative data. The analysis of data in this chapter reveals class differences in how gender is done and undone (West and Zimmerman 1987) through parenting arrangements, work schedules, and responsibilities at home. Whereas middle-class couples are more likely to purport to share responsibilities and to make this sharing a goal, they also are able to be financially stable with one income. Often in these middle-class couples, the man is the primary breadwinner, and the mother either stays home or becomes a “supermom,” the primary parent and an employed worker. In this arrangement, the mother usually has the responsibility for kids and house, and the father helps as he can. Alternately, working-class and low-income couples more often have an arrangement of “cooperative parenting,” one that shift work or nontraditional schedules makes possible.

Chapter 3 also highlights a particular type of cooperative parenting, “homesteaded” parenting, that is unique to the 21st century gig- and technology-based economy. Couples who “homestead” look, in fact, somewhat like traditional agricultural families, or families at the turn of the 20th century who worked together for income through piece-work, in that their connection to the paid economy happens at home and within the family itself. Almost always, young children of “homesteaded” parents are cared for by the parents as part of the normal work day; sometimes, school-aged children of “homesteaded” parents are also homeschooled. Both arrangements bring the points of home, work, and care or school into the same location, negating the need for a complicated geographic commute. Homesteading, as well as cooperative parenting
and supermomming, comes with its own challenges, and highlights a change in the economy that blurs the lines between family and work, for better or worse.

Chapter 4 examines how families of all socioeconomic classes cooperate with extended family to create sustainable childrearing routines. Extended family care is often essential to parents who have irregular schedules, parents who have fewer resources to buffer the irregularities of scheduling and raising children, and parents who cannot afford any other type of care. The majority of families of all classes and various situations, however, rely on other adults in their extended networks at least weekly to care for young children. This reliance suggests that the trajectory of family did not, as Goode (1963) suggested it would, crystalize in the nuclear family form. Instead, data from Chapter 4 suggest that certain complexities in our modern economy and society—complexities that have yet to be addressed by widespread public policies—make the involvement of extended family and kin necessary to families across classes and across geographies. Indeed, the chapter shows that families often make decisions about where to live based on the proximity to extended family, and that childrearing is a main reason that this proximity is necessary.

Finally, Chapter 5 re-engages the idea of the three-legged stool first presented in Chapter 2. It looks at how transitions and instability in any one part of the three-legged stool have repercussions for the other parts, and how transitions that “pull” versus “push” families result in different outcomes. Previous literature has looked at pieces of the puzzle of instability within the childrearing routine as a whole: school instability, housing instability, employment instability, etc. However, Chapter 5 examines how different legs of the stool are intricately interrelated, and how families must negotiate various areas of their childcare routine—housing, jobs, and care or school—together and not separately. Families who move through multiple childrearing
transitions in a year face a set of costs than families who do not make these transitions do not. Families also face different types of transitions—those transitions that are made because of a positive “pull” force, and those that are made because of a more problematic “push” force (Harvey et al. 2016).

Past research shows that families with fewer economic resources have more instability, and Chapter 5 affirms this by showing that families with fewer economic resources make considerably more, and considerably more complicated, push transitions in their childrearing routines throughout the year. Transitions often occur simultaneously or in sequence: if a transition occurs in one leg of the three-legged stool, families often have to rearrange other legs for balance to make the childrearing routine sustainable once again. This often leads to multiple push transitions over the course of a year. Economic and social resources can buffer these transitions, and Chapter 5 examines a large class divide in who makes transitions—and who makes push versus pull transitions—as well as how interrelated those transitions are. This cycle reinforces and recreates socioeconomic inequality, and is particularly problematic when we think of how stability is extremely important in children’s lives.

Data and Methods

*How Parents House Kids—A Longitudinal Qualitative Study*

The “How Parents House Kids” (HPHK) study, sponsored by the MacArthur Network and the Casey Foundation, consists of interviews with randomly selected families in Cuyahoga County, Ohio and Dallas County, Texas. The study sought to better understand how parents of various classes and races make decisions about where to house their children and send them to school. Interviews occurred during the summer months of 2013 and 2014. Households were
sampled randomly from a stratified random sample of census block groups in each metropolitan area, with an over-sample of households from low-income block groups. For every high-income (median income >50k) block group sampled, two moderate-income (between 25k and 50k) and three low-income (<25k) block groups were sampled. Fieldworkers, of whom I was one, screened and recruited a primary caregiver respondent from the randomly selected addresses in each block group. Households with at least one child between the ages of three and eight were eligible. The two-year response rate for the study was 79.6%, excluding households that were deemed ineligible or were vacant.

Trained interviewers conducted in-depth interviews with the primary parent in the household. Interviewees were prompted to tell the interviewer the story of their lives, and interviews proceeded from there. Interviews addressed a wide range of topics, including work, schooling, family, and housing choice. Trade-offs families make in choosing housing, schooling, and other aspects of their daily lives made up a large proportion of the interviews. In 2014, a module was added to the interview guide that specifically asked about childcare arrangements, family proximity, and the family’s daily routines between home, work, and childcare (see Appendix A). Interviews lasted approximately two hours and captured the story of the respondent’s life in a holistic, story-based way. Interviews were conducted in English or, more rarely, in Spanish.

Interviews and spoken field notes by interviewers were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Spanish interviews were translated into English after transcription. Interviewers also wrote extensive field notes about the interview experience and major themes, which also comprised a piece of data for each respondent case. A team of trained coders then coded the transcripts, using MaxQDA, for thematic content, paying particular attention to the importance
of trade-offs in family decision making about where to live. Coders worked together and with a supervisor, and checked in frequently to maintain inter-coder reliability. Additionally, a sheet of information on family income, children, race, and other important demographic factors was compiled into spreadsheet form for quantitative analysis. In the months of December 2015 and January 2016, I went back to Dallas and Cleveland to conduct interviews specifically about childrearing arrangements, routines, and parenthood. In Cleveland, I conducted these interviews alone; in Dallas, I was accompanied by a research assistant who spoke fluent Spanish. I used a similar qualitative protocol, but focused on issues particularly relevant to this dissertation.

I began my own analysis into childrearing routines with these pre-coded interviews. I paid particular attention to the sections coded as “childcare” and “family routines,” as well as the “employment,” and “housing” sections of the coded interviews. My secondary coding examined how families discuss this organization of routines within the spatial context of their neighborhoods and metropolitan areas, paying particular attention to mention of the geographic relationships of their family and social networks, and how such relationships formed housing and neighborhood choices. This allowed me to understand the importance of geography in the way a family organizes sustainable childcare routines, and how important or unimportant the proximity of extended family is to that organization. I also analyzed why particularly childrearing arrangements took shape and how onerous or convenient they are, as experienced by the primary caretaker. This approach allowed me to follow several emergent themes, like patterns of sharing in dual-parent families, and how a transition in one leg of the three-legged stool often affected other legs.
Quantitative analysis of categories, experiences, income, and other count variables were done using Stata. More detail about exact methodology of coding and analysis for each chapter is presented in individual chapters.

The importance of the methodology used to collect the “How Parents House Kids” data must be underscored. This was a multi-year study of a group sampled in a way that allows me to look across class, race, and even gender. The number of qualitative interviews is large, and the questions asked across interviews, and in the two different cities, remain consistent. In this way, I analyzed both emergent, qualitative themes as well as quantitatively categorizing families in a certain way in certain ways related to demographics, childrearing strategies, and location to show patterns across the sample. Though the number of respondents in this sample is not quite large enough to perform sophisticated statistical calculations, it points to very real patterns in a sample of the population found using randomization techniques. The chapters in this dissertation show the overall patterns, and break down these lived experiences of respondents into patterns through use of through quotations, stories, and observations made by fieldworkers.

Sample Characteristics

Though data was collected in both 2013 and 2014, I limit my analysis to data from respondents who were interviewed in 2014 because the qualitative protocol was revised for that year to include a section about “daily routines” (See Appendix A). Though many of the respondents interviewed in 2013 were also interviewed in 2014, some were not, and these respondents are not part of my final sample. Though descriptions of daily routines and family negotiations for sustainable childrearing often emerged, unsolicited, as themes in the 2013 interviews (indeed, analysis of the 2013 interviews and their emergent themes informed our
revision of the interview protocol in 2014), questions about daily routines, childrearing, and family location were not asked uniformly across the sample in 2013. Additionally, several interviewees were primary caregivers of children between the ages of three and eight in 2013, but by 2014, they were no longer primary caregivers. Because I am interested in routines of childrearing pursued by parents (and primary caregivers) of children, I limited my sample to only those respondents from 2013 who were still providing daily care to children in 2014. My analytic sample is thus the 2013 respondents who were interviewed again in 2014 and were still primary caregivers of children (N=106, or 78.5% of the original 2013 sample, across both sites) and respondents who were interviewed for the first time in 2014 (N=20).

Table 1.1: Demographic Summary of 2014 HPHK Respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>CLEVELAND</th>
<th>DALLAS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
<td>34.2 (7.24 S.D.)</td>
<td>35.6 (10.19 S.D.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of Children</strong></td>
<td>2.6 (1.2 S.D.)</td>
<td>2.5 (1.1 S.D.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>%¹ Number</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sex</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>12% 7</td>
<td>16% 11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>88% 50</td>
<td>84% 58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Education</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than HS</td>
<td>11% 6</td>
<td>25% 17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HS Degree</td>
<td>18% 10</td>
<td>26% 18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some College</td>
<td>47% 27</td>
<td>29% 20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College Degree</td>
<td>14% 8</td>
<td>13% 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advanced Degree</td>
<td>7% 4</td>
<td>6% 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>4% 2</td>
<td>1% 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Race</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>58% 33</td>
<td>36% 25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>30% 17</td>
<td>16% 11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>5% 3</td>
<td>48% 33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>7% 4</td>
<td>0% 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Marital</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹ Percentages may not add up exactly to 100% because of rounding
In addition to the broad interviews done in the summers of 2013 and 2014, I returned individually to Cleveland and Dallas in December 2015, and January, 2016, respectively. I conducted interviews specific to parenthood and childrearing with a subgroup of 29 families, using an interview guide based on the 2014 guide (see Appendix B). These interviews provided richer details of the childrearing arrangements of parents, and I use some qualitative data from these interviews in the following chapters. However, demographic and quantitative analysis of

---

2 Includes stay-at-home parents with employed spouses or partners
3 Using respondents’ self-reported annual cash income in the most recent interview—including earnings from formal and informal employment, Supplemental Security Income, Social Security Disability Insurance, Temporary Assistance to Needy Families, and child support—we categorized respondents as low-income if their total income was below 50 percent of county-area median (up to $21,816 in Cuyahoga County, $24,580 in Dallas County), working-class if their income was between 51 and 100 percent of median (up to $43,631 in Cuyahoga County, $49,159 in Dallas County), and middle-class if their income was over 100 percent of median.
themes relies solely on information from 2014 interviews, and (for Chapter 5) from the comparison of 2013 to 2014 interviews.
CHAPTER 2

Family Waypoints and Routines:
Searching for Sustainability in Geographic Space

Introduction

Families cross many geographic boundaries daily in pursuit of work, school, childcare, sustenance, and leisure. This chapter examines how daily routines of childrearing, work, and family life reproduce gender and class inequalities through the time, cost, and relationships necessary to execute these routines, and how families achieve sustainable routines. I look at how families maintain workable geographic relationships between home, employment and childcare or schooling, and how these relationships are much more complex that most surveys would be able to describe. Using data from in-depth interviews with families in the metropolitan areas of Dallas, Texas and Cleveland, Ohio, I analyze the routines caregivers describe as integral to the needs of their families. I examine differences in the time, cost, and responsibilities of family routines across class and gender. Particularly, I look at the daily routes families travel between home, childcare or school, and work; and how families sustain the work they do in these daily negotiations.

I find that caregivers from all classes spend a great deal of time, cost, or both arranging routines to link childcare or school, work, and home, the trifecta I will refer to as the “three-legged stool”. Low- and middle-income families often rely on private networks of family and friends, experience long commute times and get less sleep than they need, for the successful execution of these routines across space. In the absence of successful networks and temporal acrobatics, these families struggle—to stay connected to the labor market, to keep children in affordable and quality care or school, and to increase their economic security. High-income families face similar geographic obstacles, but their abilities to pay for market substitutions for
private networks—and to locate to neighborhoods of their choice in the first place—allow them to maintain better connections to employment, housing, and care or schooling. However, families of all classes struggle with the sustainability of their routines, and complications like immigration documentation status or work insecurity amplify these struggles.

Ultimately, the way a family is able to arrange sustainable daily childrearing routines in geographic space restrains or enhances on that family’s neighborhood and economic mobility. This challenge of arranging sustainable routines creates mobility obstacles for already marginalized populations, and, while more advantaged populations also describe a struggle to create sustainable routines, they use their greater financial and material resources to mediate the struggle. To truly address inequality, we have to account for the costs and challenges of daily childrearing routines families take on to get themselves to all of their responsibilities. What constitutes the sustainability of the daily routine is different for every family, but families must establish this foundation of sustainability before they can benefit from economic and residential mobility. The arrangement of daily waypoints that comprise the three-legged stool of families’ care/schooling, home and employment can aid or compromise economic and neighborhood mobility for a family.

**Literature Review**

*Childrearing, Family, and Work in Geographic Space*

Childrearing is unique to the category of housework in many ways; one of these ways is that it is a mobile task—unlike cleaning the living room, childrearing does not have to be performed in a home location, or in the same location daily. Thus, this research takes the spatial dimension of childrearing location into account, much like past research has taken into account
the spatial dimension of distance between residence and work, and how this creates unique constraints for workers in the negotiation of economic opportunity.

The commute between work and home is most easily conceptualized as a straight line, traveled by the unencumbered (childless, unmarried) worker whose only responsibilities are to attend his job and to regroup at home in the evening. Cherlin describes this pattern at the beginning of industrial America: “The husband’s journey to work and his long hours away from home became part of family life” (2014:12). This model of family life, however, is unrealistic for the majority of American families, who also balance the needs of dual-jobs, child care, schooling and the many geographical and time constraints that accompany those needs. One of the potentially onerous, untheorized daily tasks for parents is the commute to and from the place where they pay for their children to be cared for during the workday. The “childrearing commute” is something that no one has yet theorized or analyzed in great detail, but its implications for gender and class inequality may be vast. This research suggests that analyzing the geographical mismatch of childrearing resources is one important way to understand the daily lives of parents and the inequalities these lives reproduce.

Researchers—many of them geographers—have critiqued research on commuting and distance between resources for failing to consider how gender dominates the worlds of home and work (Briggs et al. 2010; Blumenberg 2004; McLafferty & Preston 1996; Pratt & Hanson 1994; McLafferty & Preston 1992). They suggest that this work usually focuses almost solely on men’s experiences in the labor market. Men, these researchers contend, are less likely to be in charge of children and home responsibilities than women, and thus their daily negotiations of space are more likely two-point, from home to work. For women, however, who more often juggle work, home, and the in-between world of children’s activities and schooling, the day is
often a matter of waypoints along a complex route, linking work, home, and childrearing in some sustainable way. My analysis, below, shows that though women do a larger part of the childrearing transportation, men—from custodial fathers to grandfathers and uncles who help out—play a large role in these arrangements are well, especially in lower-and working-class families. All in all, parents who are active in their children’s lives must contend with many waypoints during a day of childrearing work.

Research has shown “most [transportation] trips [for women] are not related to employment” (Blumenberg 2004:272). For example, Blumenberg finds that only about 32% of women’s transit time during a standard day is to and from employment: other responsibilities, including transporting children to and from activities and child care, make up the majority of the time spent commuting across space in women’s lives. Schwanen (2007) finds that though men and women both take part in the childrearing commute, mothers’ responsibilities are often more “embodied” than fathers’, and that the mother does more “behind the scenes” work than the father, including rearranging her work schedule, soliciting instrumental support from friends and relatives, and prioritizing chauffeuring over work to make sure children are transported to where they need to be. Schwanen also makes the distinction between “occasional and structural” chauffeuring (460), and shows that the former requires more juggling of schedules and geography, usually by the mother.

Other research looks at commuting times of male and female partners. Gimenez-Nadal & Molina (2015) find that women spend less time commuting than men do. However, their research takes into account only the commute to and from work, not the other commuting trips necessary in the pursuit of daily social reproduction. Indeed, the commute in this study is operationalized as distinct from “household responsibilities,” with commute time found to be
inversely related to time spent on household responsibilities, particularly for women. Without an ability to account for household responsibilities that might require a commute, scholars cannot answer the question of what the commute to and from childcare looks like. Another recent study suggests that we consider the labor supply of couples as a unit, taking into account the time spent commuting by both partners to understand participation in the labor force (Carta & Phillipis 2015). Though this model suggests we might be able to understand the family as a productive unit, it does not account for the social reproduction that happens through the transportation of children to and from care as part of the family labor supply.

Additionally, McLafferty and Preston (1996) find that, in the New York metropolitan area by the mid-1990’s, the discrepancy in experienced spatial mismatch between low-income and middle-class women (in terms of the traditional jobs-to-workers geographical metric) had declined quite steeply. However, a woman’s resources mediated the ability to get to work: whereas middle-class women often commuted by car, low-income women more often relied on public transportation, and thus covered shorter distances in longer commuting times. Unfortunately, data about the “invisible” time of the child care commute is by and large not available in large datasets, including the census, and is often not accounted for in literature on gender and work inequalities.

*Sustainability and Daily Routines: Linking Geography and Family Well-being*

To understand a family’s commuting behavior, I suggest we try to understand how the commute is incorporated into a family unit’s daily routine as a series of waypoints throughout the day. Weisner et al. (2005) have proposed a “family social ecology,” something that arises
from a daily family routine (Weisner et al. 2005). Sustainability of this routine, the researchers suggest, is what should be the unit of analysis. To be sustainable, a routine must:

1.) Fit the family’s available resources
2.) Align with the family’s goals and values
3.) Balance inevitable family conflicts
4.) Provide some predictability and stability for family members (Weisner et al. 2005)

Defined this way, the success of a sustainable fit of a daily routine is necessarily different for different families, as families work with different resources, goals, values, conflicts, and understanding of stability. Weisner et al. suggest that the age of children has something to do with the sustainability of routines, with families where children are 13 or older finding more sustainable routines than those with younger children.

Sustainability of family routines is important to parents because a large part of a parent’s day is consumed with negotiating time and place for and between childrearing activities and work, as the above studies suggest. Sustainability is also important for child development and well-being. Children who experience more chaotic environments fare worse than do children with more regular environments, and research suggests that the sustainability of a family routine is one major factor in a stable, regular environment (Weiser 2008). Like sustainability, chaos in an environment is variable by family goals, values, and resources: is it chaotic for a low-income mother to take her children to four different care situations over the course of a week? Is it chaotic for a high-income stay-at-home mom to shuttle three different children to four different activities over the course of an evening? The best way to understand if there will be negative effects due to chaos is to understand if families see their situations as sustainable or not, and how well families can engage “in the daily activities of a cultural community that the community deems desirable” (Weisner 2008:211).
Daily Routines, Geographic Space, and Residential Mobility

In addition to the very real psychological consequences that the creation or lack of a sustainable childrearing routine has on children and families, the process of creating and daily practice of sustainable childrearing routines may also be related to increasing inequality in America, and to the possibilities for families’ economic and residential mobility. Creating a sustainable routine requires certain tradeoffs: to be closer to work, for example, and to be able to be home in time to meet children from school, a family may choose a neighborhood in a mediocre school district. Families might also trade-off work quality or quantity to be able to better arrange a sustainable childrearing routine. Indeed, families may forgo moves to better neighborhoods—or make moves to resource-poor neighborhoods—because of how they must align work, home, and care/school locations daily in their childrearing routines.

Residential mobility has been proposed as a policy solution to increasing economic mobility among disadvantaged populations. Residential mobility programs seek to alleviate segregation and poverty through a change in neighborhood resources. This strategy stems from the idea, illustrated by Wilson’s (1987) work on inner-city disadvantage, that neighborhoods are a “proxy for resources” (Mendenhall et al. 2005) and the lack thereof. Research has shown mixed results from mobility programs. Initial conclusions reached from quantitative studies of the Gautreaux program in Chicago suggested that moving to a better neighborhood improves a family’s economic well-being (Mendenhall et al. 2005). Follow-up studies showed fewer positive results of family economic well-being years after the initial move (Deluca et al. 2010).

Understanding the geographic arrangement of childrearing routines is crucial to understanding whether or not families are able to experience economic mobility because of—or
despite—a residential move. In their volume on the MTO housing mobility random control trial study, Briggs et al. (2010) explain:

In effect, the challenges for these low-income, low-skill parents, most of them single mothers, was lining up spatial matches that included jobs, housing and vital job support—especially reliable childcare that was usually obtained within networks of reciprocal, but often unstable, support. (Briggs et al. 2010: 207)

To truly understand the economic success—or failure—of low-income mothers, the authors suggest that we must consider that “the balancing acts these women sustain are extraordinary” (Briggs et al. 2010: 209). We must also locate this balance in geographic space. These “balancing acts,” the ability to achieve sustainable childrearing routines, are crucial to successful residential mobility, and ultimately to the economic mobility of families.

The following analysis examines how childrearing, work, and neighborhood location exist in the daily lives of families in Cleveland and Dallas, and how families seek to make their routines sustainable even in a complicated geography, with few public supports. It shows that understanding how families try to make their daily childrearing routines sustainable in the geography of an urban center is important in understanding American institutions of work and family in the twenty-first century. How families seek and maintain sustainability also has important implications for gender and class inequalities, as well as for children’s education and family economic mobility.

Data and Methods

In 2014, a new section of the qualitative protocol was added to the How Parents House Kids interview guide that specifically asked about childcare arrangements, family proximity, and the family’s daily routines between home, work, and childcare. As the childcare and family network arrangements of families are of particular interest to this paper, the 2014 interviews and
their accompanying descriptive field notes from interviews are used as the primary data. 2013 interviews are used only when the 2014 interviews do not provide enough background information. Additionally, four of the respondents interviewed in 2014 were fathers or grandfathers no longer playing a regular part in the lives of their children. They are excluded from the analytic sample in this paper.

In December 2015 and January 2016 I returned to Cleveland and Dallas to conduct follow-up interviews with a subset of families. I asked directly about hypothesized “childcare triangles,” and included an activity in the interview in which parents “drew” their daily routines for me. These interviews were transcribed verbatim and all drawings were scanned.

For this analysis of the geographic relationship between home, work, and childcare or school, I did secondary coding, looking particularly at the daily routines and geographic arrangements of parents and their school-aged and younger children. I first coded locations of childcare/school, home, and work. I then looked at how parents discussed their daily childrearing commute—in terms of distance, time, onerousness, or changeability. I coded where children need to be during the day compared to where parents are and how this relationship changes with the proximity of extended family. I look at these patterns across race, and then consider the gender of the respondents. Finally, I use scanned “drawings” from follow up interviews to interpret how parents in different situations—currently employed or not, single or married, low-, middle-, or high-income, and men versus women—interpret their daily childrearing routines.

**Findings and Analysis**

Almost every parent in the sample described some kind of predictable daily routine, even if it took place (as it sometimes did for unemployed parents of very young children) in the
confined geographic space of an apartment or a city block. Most parents, however, navigated a routine that took them to several waypoints every day. This route often went to school or daycare, perhaps work, and eventually home. These routes were differentiated in simplicity and length by the type of family, type of work, and ages and needs of children in the family. They also differed in their sustainability to the families executing them.

Parents who have only small children at home and who do not work focus their childrearing routine within a singular point (they stay basically in the same geographic confines for the day, and the kids are always with them). Some parents have a straight line to navigate: men who have a stay-at-home partner to watch the very young children have the traditional commute between work and home; alternately, unemployed parents of school-aged children, who take kids to and from school, also have a commute, but without the waypoint of work.

Working parents with children in some kind of school/care outside the home deal with a more complicated geographic negotiation to achieve a sustainable childrearing routine; as the results below will suggest, the number of waypoints and complications of a routine grows quickly when complexities like more than one child, more than one place of work, or several places of childcare are introduced into the mix. Importantly, these daily geographic negotiations have implications for a family’s economic wellbeing, school and care quality, and stress levels. The way families choose to make these routines more sustainable, in turn, has implications on how economically or residentially mobile families can be. Sustainable routines also vary by location within the city, between cities, between classes, and to some extent (because of residential segregation) between races and ethnicities. The age of the children being cared for—and the ability of those children to help in their own transportation—changes this sustainability somewhat as well. Overall, the parents in our sample described complex, time-consuming
commutes that took a lot of planning and luck to execute daily for the economic and emotional wellbeing of the family.

The Myth of the Two-Point Commute

In some ways, Mary is the ideal worker: she works in downtown Cleveland as a project manager for IT, and has made a point of keeping up with the changes in the IT culture so she can be the best project manager possible: “I’m 52 and I work in technology…. Now I do project management, which means there isn’t - but, but for the most part, IT has traditionally been - they are looking for young, bright kids. Now, that's not the case with project managers because we’re supposed to be the ones organizing those young, bright kids right?” She lives in a wealthy Westside suburb of Cleveland, and though her commute can be an hour to work in traffic, she doesn’t think that is particularly taxing. In fact, she says that her neighborhood is a pretty ideal location. “It's so convenient to work and everything else.”

Mary is also a single-mother of a seven-year-old girl, so her commute to and from work is the least complicated part of her daily routine. Even though her work hours are regular—from 8 a.m. until 5 p.m.—Mary’s daughter needs to be dropped off at school at 8 a.m., and school only lasts until 3. Luckily, Mary has found a private Catholic school for her daughter that allows an early drop-off, and also has an aftercare program that keeps her daughter until 6 p.m. Even so, Mary says, “Monday through Friday is a blur.” Mary and her daughter get up at 6 a.m. and are out the door by 7:05. After dropping her daughter off at school, Mary hits the road and gets to downtown Cleveland and her job around 8, though with traffic sometimes she gets there a bit later. After a full day at work, Mary leaves the office by 5 to go back to her neighborhood, where she picks up her daughter from the afterschool program, and then heads back home for dinner,
homework, and bedtime. Though she would like her daughter to be involved in more extracurricular activities, she has a hard time managing the schedule:

Usually we do a spring swim class sessions – to get her warmed up before, um, before the summer swimming session. And they'll usually be like Monday and Wednesday from 5:20 to 6:00 o'clock or something like that. Well, to get her there by 5:20 I have to leave work at 4:00.

Mary understands why people at her job don’t like her leaving at 4 twice a week for two months, but says she has to do this if she’s going to do anything with her daughter besides school, homework and bedtime. Mary has set up her daily routine so that her childrearing and work commute align easily with the location of her home. Even so, she has a hard time making the schedule sustainable every day and describes the days that it works out without a hitch as “a blur.”

Audrey is a middle-income, single-mother of two boys who lives in Dallas. She has a steady, solidly middle-income job at a pharmaceutical company in a Northern Suburb of Dallas. Her commute itself would be about 30 minutes to and from the office, but as most working parents do, she adds in a childcare stop at a daycare down the street from her apartment. Audrey found this daycare because it was close and she keeps the kids there because the daycare provides transportation to and from the older son’s public elementary school. She does think her older son would do better in a slightly more educational program, especially during the summer. Even though Audrey’s commute covers a relatively convenient geography for her—she doesn’t have to go too far out of her way to get to her kids’ daycare—she still wakes up at 4 a.m. each day to get two little boys and herself ready. By the time she drops the kids off at daycare at 6:30 a.m., Audrey has already been awake for two hours, and she won’t go to bed that night until 10 p.m., at the earliest. For the time being, the routine is sustainable, but it churns with a sense of manic energy:
My day starts at 4:00 AM and it starts at 4:00. On the days that I don’t wash my hair I’ll get up at 4:30 but that’s kind of my only time to myself. So between say 4:00, 4:30 to 6:00 that gives me time to take a shower, get dressed, get myself ready because then at 6:00 they’re up and it’s just like a madhouse. And then you know, dropping them off at 6:30, I’m at work by 7:00, 7:15 at the latest and then it’s just a crazy day.

Tiffany, a low-income single mother of one daughter, works at a grocery store chain and also attends classes. She relies on the proximity of her 7-year-old daughter’s daycare, school, and of her own full-time work to their home in a Northeastern suburb of Dallas. She is proud of making it work on her own: “Nobody helps me. I do it myself.” Tiffany has made her routine sustainable by finding a job, apartment, and school for her daughter all within a relatively small geographic area. Even so, Tiffany relies on the daycare to provide transportation to and from school for her daughter. Additionally, she has worked out a program with a community college that she does online, negating the need for another commute based on education: “It’s convenient because of my work schedule and then having to deal with kids and then when school is in I have to help her. It’s convenient for me.” Tiffany has managed to make a convenient, if somewhat exhausting, schedule work for family life by keeping their commuting routines short and close: “From my job to daycare is probably like 15 minutes … And then probably from daycare to home is probably 10 minutes. So [the whole time I drive during the day] is probably like 45 minutes.” In Dallas, Tiffany tells the interviewers, this is rare, but it is what keeps her able to manage her routine as a single, working mom.

Working parents who have only one child, or who have children of similar-enough ages, can often more easily make their routines sustainable, much like Mary, Audrey, and Tiffany have. These parents often have enough financial resources—or a large enough state subsidy for childcare—to enroll kids in some kind of private care program. Though this extra stop in the
daily commute routine makes a parent’s day more complicated—and though it has been overlooked by much previous research—it does not necessarily add chaos to the daily lives of parents. With the right planning and early-set alarm clocks, parents find ways to make this commute a sustainable part of their childrearing routines.

In fact, parents with a single child and more than one adult to care for that child—married couples, couples who have been long-term partners, or even parents who live in a multi-generational household where all adults care for the one child—set up routines that share the commuting and maximize convenience for all people involved. Ann and Steve, high-income married parents of a four-year-old who live in a Western suburb of Cleveland, both have upper-level jobs with city agencies, Ann’s in Lorain (about 30 minutes west of their home in the Cleveland suburbs) and Steve’s in Cleveland. They have set up a commute that takes their son to daycare about sixteen minutes west of their suburb. In the morning, Steve goes the opposite direction from his job to drop their son off. In the evening, Ann, already coming back from Lorain, picks the boy up. Though Steve’s commute takes half an hour longer in the morning than it would without a child, it is direct in the afternoon; Ann’s is direct in the morning, but includes the childcare pickup on the way back.

Other high-income, dual-earner couples have set up routines similar to those of Ann and Steve. In fact, sharing the childrearing commute not only makes the entire day less onerous for the family, it also allows middle class families to act out a gender-equal partnership. For example, Justin and his wife who live in a high-income suburb of Cleveland share the commuting responsibility for their children, though she works across town and he has a home office near the kids’ daycare. The proximity of Justin’s wife’s work to their neighborhood made the home very attractive; additionally, they chose the daycare—which costs nearly $24,000 a
year for two kids—when deciding between two similar places because “it was just a bit closer.” Though parents with fewer financial resources often discuss proximity of care to their home as one of the deciding factors for where to send their children, the routines of these families often involve a more complex network of adults, more places of care or school, and a more complicated set of transportation options.

**Routine Complexity: Sustainability or Chaos?**

The vast majority of parents interviewed in our study, 83.3%, had more than one child, and many of those children were ages that spanned different developmental and educational levels. Parents also were variably employed, with some staying home, some working part-time, some working from home, and some working in more than one location. Finally, family networks that parents use to help with the shuffle increase a family’s resources by number of adults able to help with children, but also increase a commute’s complexity. More children, different types of employment and work, more adults to help, and more places to go mean that all sizes—and shapes—do not fit every commute.

Before her fiancé went to jail for 18 months, Tanya relied on his help to transport her kids to and from care and school every day. She still lives with his mother, who is helpful with the kids occasionally in the evenings, but Tanya is now responsible for figuring out how to get one infant to daycare, her daughter to school (which is far away, because she doesn’t like the neighborhood school), and herself to work at two different homes where she assists as a home health aide. To do this, Tanya has arranged care for the infant close to her house: “How did I find the daycare? It was down the street from me. I drive past there a lot so.” She then drops off her 5-year-old daughter at her mother’s home, about a ten-minute drive from her home, and goes to work for part of the day, and school for the rest. At the end of the day, she picks up her daughter
from her mother’s home, then heads back to their own neighborhood to pick up her infant at the daycare, and everyone returns to Tanya’s home to sleep at night. In the meantime, Tanya’s mother has taken the 5-year-old to school, worked, and then picked her up at the end of the day. Tanya has a commute with multiple stops, but she also relies on another family member to do another commuting routine with her youngest daughter. Even so Tanya is up at 5 a.m. every morning to get the routine started: “I’m a busy mom. A very, very busy mom. By the time I go to school and get off work, I be tired…And pick them up and cook and clean. Then put them in the tub and put them to bed. And I’m going to bed.” Being “tired” is a sign that perhaps routines are less than sustainable.

Ken, a middle-income partnered-dad from Dallas, shares his childrearing commute for his young daughter with his girlfriend, who works part-time and goes to school. His mother, who lives nearby, also plays a role. All three adults work to transport the child to and from her school. Ken, who lives in a Southwestern neighborhood of Dallas, leaves early in the morning for his work in a Northern suburb. His girlfriend, who commutes to school and works in downtown Dallas, drops of Ken’s daughter at daycare on her way to work. Because Ken’s hours do not allow him to get back in time to pick up his daughter from her school, Ken’s grandmother picks up Ken’s daughter and takes her back to the grandparents’ home. Ken then commutes from his work to his grandmother’s home, about a ten-minute drive from his own house. There, he picks up his daughter and takes her home. Ken himself has a predictable, sustainable commute: from his home, to work, to his grandmother’s home where he picks up his daughter at the end of the day. Indeed, like many of the single parents, above, he has an added childrearing “stop” that literature on commuting ignores. However, Ken’s daughter’s routine requires three adults—two in addition to Ken—to progress sustainably through geographic space every school day. Ken’s
girlfriend has a commute that takes her first to the daughter’s school, then to her own employment. Ken’s mother then picks up the daughter from school and brings her back to her house. The family unit’s routine is much more complicated than a straight line commute, but is sustainable because of the many adult resources involved.

Though it is a word often used in a negative context when discussing low-income family arrangements, complexity is not necessarily bad. For Ken, who relies on a village to help raise his daughter, the complicated nature of his daughter’s commute allows him to have a relatively unencumbered geographic routine that works with the timing of his employment. A large part of this is the fact that school hours do not necessarily line up with the hours of work; they are almost always shorter than work hours. Ken’s arrangement works because his girlfriend does not start her work until later in the day and thus can drop off his daughter at the appropriate time, even though Ken cannot. In fact, if we reconsider the routines of Audrey and Tiffany, above, we find that these two single mothers are not doing all the transportation of their children themselves: the daycares take their school-aged children to and from the school, and this complexity of routine is a large part of why Audrey and Tiffany chose the daycares in the first place. If Audrey and Tiffany had to further complicate their days by leaving work to transport their school-aged children to and from school at the appropriate times, they would almost certainly not continue to be employed.

Routines—and maintaining their sustainability—become much more complicated when more than one child enters a family’s daily childrearing commute. Some families, like Audrey’s (above) deal with issues of more than one child’s routine by finding a daycare center that accepts a range of ages, and also provides transportation to and from a school for school aged children. Of course, the families above still describe childrearing routines and commutes that sap energy,
require a great deal of planning and balance, and sometimes just don’t work out. Even those with the least complexity in their routines deal with complex situations.

The majority of families in our sample have some degree of added complexity to a traditional commuting routine, whether it is a parent based mostly at home (thus allowing the other parent, if there is one, to have a more traditional commute to and from work), a constellation of different care and schooling arrangements for different children (and sometimes even the same children, especially if those children are involved in any kind of extracurricular activity), or transportation problems and considerations that make linking the different nodes of the conceived geographic triangle more difficult. All in all, parents use their resources—whether it is residential proximity to work, care, or school; their mode of transportation; flexibility at their job; or helpful family networks—to make their childrearing routine as convenient as possible.

*Changeability: Shifting Gears Daily, Weekly, and Seasonally*

One characteristic of a sustainable routine is that it is predictable, whatever that means to the people involved. In our sample, many families were able to describe a predictable daily routine that shifted on the weekends (or whenever the parent or parents were not working) but maintained a predictable rhythm through the year. Other families, however, described changeable routines that shifted seasonally, weekly, or even daily, based on a variety of factors.

Parents of all classes described the change that happens to a family’s routine when school gets out in the summer; children are at home instead, and parents need to adjust. For families with a devoted stay-at-home parent of children who were not yet school aged, summer did not change the routine that much. However, parents who rely on school to provide the bulk of the
care for their children while they work find themselves making changes every summer to create sustainability in the routine. For example, Elizabeth, a low-income mother from Dallas, worked at a factory until her children ended school at the beginning of June. Then she left work:

I work, well, right now I’m not working because the babysitter charges me more than what I earn so I stopped working because if I give them to her so she can take care of them, well, no, so I stopped working to be with them during their vacation time, and if God permits it I’ll work when they go back to school.

Whereas Elizabeth had to quit work to make her summer routine sustainable, Suzy, a married, high-income mother from Cleveland, relies on her mother-in-law, who lives next door, to watch her twin school-aged daughters during the summer. “I just keep telling people it takes a village to raise kids. …And we’re lucky. I mean, I love our living situation here.” Seasonal changes in routine require readjustments to maintain sustainability; parents negotiate their resources, goals, conflicts, and values to create a new, predictable routine for their children.

Normal weekly instability in the routine challenges parents, especially single parents who have to negotiate changes on their own to reassure stability. Gabrielle, a single mom of two school-aged children, says that she is on her cellphone a lot, calling her neighbor who helps her with the kids after school, or her mom, who can also step in. Even though she says, “It actually feel like this year all I’ve only been doing is getting up and going to work and coming home, go to sleep,” she then describes a much more complicated, variable routine:

Get up at 6:00. Get them ready for school, so I can make it to work by 8:00, 8:30. So I drop them off. … If it’s too early, I take them to my friend’s house, because they walk to school with um my kids. They all walk to school together, because the school don’t open until 7:15. I go to work. Um I usually get off maybe around 5:00. … Um my kids, all of them go to the after-school program. They go to the after-school program, and they don’t get out of the after school program until like um 5:30. They let out at 6:00 … They walk to my friend’s house which is right across. … They just walk right across from school. I get off of work. If I’m tired, my friend usually let me come home and take a nap, then come get them. Or if not, I come straight and get them, come home. Sometimes they did their homework. Most of the times they haven’t. So I make them do their homework. We eat. We sit up um, go to sleep. Yeah, yeah. It just depends on what the day is.
Sustaining a routine requires a constant negotiation of changing needs, events, and actors in the childrearing commute.

*When Perceived School Quality Conflicts with Sustainability: School Choice*

Ella is a middle-income single mother of three school-aged girls who has done well for herself working as a sales associate at Nordstrom in Cleveland. She has been so successful, in fact, that recently she was offered a promotion, but she turned it down. The interviewer asks her why. Without looking up from braiding her daughter’s hair, Ella shrugs. “Because I have the kids. And the promotion would mean I have to work until 11:00 at night which I can’t commit to right now. … Well, it’s a swing shift, so some days you would work 8:00 to 5:00, and then some days you would work like 2:00 to 11:00. And I can’t commit to that.” Ella’s life is quite regimented by time right now: to avoid public schools in her suburb of Cleveland, which she thinks are subpar, she takes her kids the opposite direction to a school system further from the city with an open enrollment policy. She has her commute to her oldest daughter’s school, to her youngest two daughters’ daycare (in the further out town, which transports them to their school), then jumps back on the highway in the opposite direction to get to work:

Rain has to be at school at 7:21. So we usually leave out – no, I’m sorry 7:31. So we usually leave out right at 7:00 to get her to school on time. And then we drop her off, and then jump back on the freeway, circle around, and then once I get to the daycare like I’ve got it timed down to the minute. So then, but if one person is like just not in the mood, or not you know being um a team player, then it throws off the entire team. So I always try to talk to them just about you know hey, you can put your shoes on in the car. If need be. You know there’s certain things that you don’t need to do in the house. If you wanted to walk to the car and take your shoes with you, because we have a attached garage. Like just walk through and get in the car. So um some days if I don’t have to be to work until 11:00, I love those days. Because then I don’t have to wake up until 6:15, because I don’t have to get dressed.
Ella’s schedule is so tight already that a shift in hours that would include an 11 p.m. cut off is a no go for her family at this point.

Ella’s work hours change throughout the week: some days she is there from 8 a.m. until 5 p.m., and some days she is there from 1 p.m. until 9 p.m. The evenings she has to work late, she cannot make the last leg of her commute on time, and so relies on her sister or the kids’ father to get them from the daycare, which takes them to and from school, and then closes at 9 p.m.: she tells us that the drive from Nordstrom to daycare is exactly 40 minutes and from home to Nordstrom, exactly 20. And only the two youngest go to daycare—Ella’s oldest daughter, who is in a different school than her sisters, goes over to Ella’s mother’s house in the town where they go to school, at the end of the day. Sometimes she just stays there for the night. If she comes back to the closer-in suburb with Ella for the evening, sometimes she will stay at the house with the other kids while Ella goes to the gym. Ella says she rarely goes to bed before 1 a.m., and never before midnight.

Ella’s story exemplifies what happens when parents try to optimize their children’s access to high quality education or childcare institutions in an urban environment that is distinctly and systemically unequal by neighborhood. Ella’s story and many of those in Cleveland are notable because of Cleveland city’s robust school choice regime: charter schools are prominent, advertised, and always opening or closing in the city. Many families—especially Black families who live in neighborhoods where they have a lot of social support—make use of this regime because the neighborhood schools do not meet their expectations.

Tasha’s family has had quite a bit of residential mobility in the past two years—they had recently moved to the far East side of Cleveland city when we talked with her in 2014—but her children have stayed at their same schools because they are enrolled in two different choice
schools on the East side. Her eldest son goes to Cleveland Central Catholic, and though he receives a voucher from the city, Tasha has to pay a bit of money every month. Her other two children go to a school about 40 blocks closer to downtown Cleveland than the family’s current home. Notably, Tasha has always spent a lot of time shuffling the kids to and from school: not only do they attend two different schools, they are also very involved in extracurricular activities.

Recently, however, Tasha lost her job and has been enjoying her time at home and her new ability to focus on the kids and their needs in many geographic spots. It’s not a solution in the long-run, she says, because of the money, but “I can do whatever it is I want to do for the kids. Like I go to the school … Anything they have at school, I’m there.” She does acknowledge, however, that even with this newfound time and flexibility, the different locations of the two schools (one is considerably south and west of the family’s new residence) means she can’t be at all extracurricular activities every time. It also means the family spends a considerable amount of time in the car and money on gas. However, being on the East side of the city is non-negotiable. Before this last move, the family had been interested in a house in a more affluent West side suburb—one with notably good public schools—but because Tasha wanted to keep her kids’ schools consistent, she kept the family on the East side. A 30- to 45-minute drive across town is too far, and with the new house and existing schools, “everything is on this side of town.”

Though Texas has a different school choice policy and the landscape of charter and alternative schools is different—and, indeed, the spread of Dallas is in many ways more daunting than the more centralized nature of Cleveland’s neighborhoods—parents in Dallas discuss how having a good school sometimes reasonably complicated the childrearing commute. For example, Ray, who lives in a southern neighborhood of Dallas, has a difficult commute to begin with because he and his wife do not own a car. Additionally, though Ray’s wife does hair
relatively regularly for very little money, Ray has sickle cell anemia, which keeps him from holding down a regular job. Instead, he does odd jobs to make ends meet, and receives a disability check. Ray and his wife are sending their four-year-old son to KIPP Destiny, a charter where he has been accepted, and make the three-mile commute to and from the school on the bus every day. This usually takes about half an hour each way. In the morning, Ray takes the bus with his son to drop him off at school; in the evening, his wife picks her son up and takes the bus home. Though their neighborhood school would locate care and education close to their home, thus eliminating a complication in the daily childrearing commute, Ray and his wife have decided to keep their son in this school as long as possible, as they had bad experiences with Dallas public schools: “We both, because me and his mom, we both went to Dallas schools … Now [our kids] can go to charter school, but they can’t go to the public school.” If the family ever finds the resources to move, Ray thinks, they will likely try to relocate closer to the school.

The fact that good schools and good care are rare enough in certain neighborhoods to warrant traveling far afield for them can be another driver of inequality in American cities. Where policy focuses on ameliorating school inequality by providing out-of-neighborhood—sometimes far out-of-neighborhood schools—that do not necessarily serve all a family’s children, parents may have to pay a tax for this education in terms of the length and complexity of their commuting routine.

Immigrant Waypoints: Hiding in Plain Sight

In Dallas, we spoke to a number of immigrant families from Mexico and Latin America. They had a variety of experiences, income-levels, and documentation statuses. Consistently, though, immigrant families with at least one undocumented parent described an additional factor
in their sustainable routine: the constant worry of the possibility of deportation. They employed
strategies to avoid the worry and the deportation, while still maintaining the balance of
sustainable childrearing. Many of these respondents described feeling isolated in their routine
because they did not want to put themselves outside their immediate neighborhood too often.
Staying “off-the-grid” as an undocumented immigrant makes achieving a sustainable routine in
geographic space that much harder.

Cecilia, an undocumented mother of two small children, describes the problems of
commuting that come from being undocumented within an American city. Her husband, a
carpet-installer, makes approximately eight dollars an hour, but Cecilia says that leaving the
house to go to work is stressful on her husband and their family, in a way that sounds less than
sustainable:

Well, they deny you a license, they deny you… you have to do good, how can I explain
this… you can’t spend a lot of time on the street because since you don’t have a license
sometimes they detain you, they take your car, sometimes they even deport them. You
must be very, um… my husband got insurance so if they stop him they won’t take his car
away, and, um… well, it’s hard to live like this.

Whereas other families describe lack of sleep or complicated schedules as the reason it is “hard
to live like this,” Cecilia describes the very thing that many families take for granted as part of a
sustainable routine: the ability to simply move about without being detained.

Tina’s husband, who is undocumented, recently got a new job working for a local man
they know, and Tina is relieved because he no longer has to drive far afield.

We don't have to worry about being pulled over and them taking them from us, you know
and those are things we have to worry about, so we stay close to home just about always
for them same reasons. When he goes to work, I worry and now we don't have to do that
because he has something saying you can have not take him because he's getting his stuff
fixed.
Tina is the documented partner in this Dallas family, and she and her four school-aged children worry constantly about the deportation of her husband. Tina describes how, while her husband is “getting his papers fixed,” the family exists in a state of perpetual worry and changeability: it’s hard to plan and execute a sustainable routine when one of the partners involved may be deported. “No it's just more or less waiting to see what happens you know. We're just kind of taking it day by day to see how it goes with his papers and you know right now he's really nervous like what if they just send me back? Well don't think you're escaping that easy because we're going with you.” Like many undocumented immigrants, Tina and her family must be prepared for a routine that could be changeable tomorrow if they encounter the wrong authorities in the work and childrearing commute routine today.

Adriana, an undocumented single-mother of three children living just outside of Dallas, feels stuck in her current situation because she does not feel like she can even pursue a sustainable routine that includes work, or even transportation. She describes the problem with not having “papers”:

You feel like you are less because you can't go anywhere. You have to be in the place you arrived. If you travel, if you travel by road, there are checkpoints...It feels horrible because we can't go anywhere. We can just go to stores or to buy groceries or clothes. If you have money, if not you can't buy anything. Plus food to feed the children.

Hiding in plain sight makes it harder for undocumented immigrants—and in Adriana’s case, impossible—to maintain a routine outside the home, one that is necessary if a family is going to increase their financial well-being through employment outside the home.

Tradeoffs and Commutes
Childrearing complicates commutes and daily routines: the traditionally conceived commute to and from work only exists in families that either do not have children or other dependents who need some kind of hands-on care daily, or have a devoted stay-at-home parent and children young enough to stay home through the day. Parenthood and childrearing complicate the assumption of the “ideal worker” as a person unencumbered by caretaking responsibilities. Parenthood and childrearing also complicate the idea of how people must move through geographic space daily. Furthermore, multiple children and the patchwork web of care that many Americans rely on daily complicate childrearing, and thus further complicate the movement of families through geographic space in their quest to best care and provide for their children. As shown above, childrearing routines do not happen along a straight-forward, straight line but often a complex polygon of arrangements, concessions, and timing. How well parents are able to make these routines sustainable may have direct implications for children’s well-being, as stability is associated with more positive outcomes. However, the sustainability of routines also has very real implications for residential and economic mobility, and how families make decisions that affect their economic well-being as well as their residential location.

For the wealthier families in our sample, trade-offs are often made at the time of relocation to a new neighborhood. These families discuss being able to choose the location of their homes in relation to good schools, proximity to their places of work, proximity to family (See Chapter 4) and, to some extent, proximity to good childcare. Susan, for example, discusses how her family chose their neighborhood to put themselves in close proximity to the private school where she works and where her two daughters are educated. People with higher-income jobs often work long days and have a lot of responsibilities in the “concerted cultivation” (Lareau 2003) of their children after work and school hours, but can afford both reliable, private
transportation and locating to a neighborhood that aligns with the busy commuting schedule. In effect, they get the “package deal” (Rhodes and Warkentein 2017) of good neighborhoods and schools, as well as convenience to work. In this stable, sustainable context, economic well-being and mobility is possible and likely.

Lower-income families seem to make many more trade-offs when it comes to the childrearing commute. Whether it is, like Ella, putting up with long and inflexible timetables for getting kids where they need to be, or forgoing promotions at jobs because it will not work with the daily routines of childrearing. More time commuting means less time working, and less money made, and forgoing promotions at work has direct consequences for the possibilities of economic mobility. However, some families must make decisions in pursuit of a sustainable routine before mobility is even considered.

Alternately, like Tasha describes, lower-income families may forgo relocation to better neighborhoods because these neighborhoods would make the commute to and from schools and children’s needs too onerous. As economic mobility is highly linked to geographic location in the United States (Chetty et al. 2014), and parents with fewer resources sometimes forgo possible transitions to these neighborhoods because of no possibility for a sustainable routine, mobility of both kinds may be hampered as a tradeoff for childrearing sustainability. Many low-income parents describe routines that just sound exhausting, and much of the trade-off is made in the number of hours these parents get to sleep. Tanya and Audrey both describe routines that allow for fewer than six hours of sleep a night, and for the foreseeable future, neither woman expects this to change. With less sleep, fewer residential resources, and more taxing routines, economic mobility is hampered even further for disadvantaged families.
“Staying in the Midways”: Balancing a Family’s Resources for Sustainability

In Weisner et al.’s (2005) assessment of the sustainability of a family’s routine, the first item is the fit of the routine with the family’s available resources. The data above describes a general, predictable pattern: the more resources a family has, the more sustainable they are able to make their routine, even in the face of intense complexity and competing demands. We see that high-income people often arrange a routine in a neighborhood and with a job that provides resources and possibility for economic mobility; lower- and middle-income people have less “give” in their system of childrearing routines (see Chapter 5) and thus may seek—but not find—sustainability, often at the expense of economic mobility. Thus, enhancing resources available to a family may very well enhance the sustainability of the family’s routine.

These infused resources take different forms. For example, some daycares provide transportation services for the children in their charge. Many low- and middle-income parents who work rely on paid daycare to take care of their children during the times the children are not at school and before the parents come home from work. A significant proportion of these parents rely on the daycares to transport their children between care and school and back to care, because a child’s school day is almost always shorter than a parent’s workday. This resource is something parents look for in choosing a daycare because it allows them to sustain a workable, predictable family routine; leaving work to transport children to and from school at the necessary hours would not be a sustainable solution for most parents. Not all daycares provide this service, however, nor do all daycares have hours that align with the schedule a parent may need. Annalise, for example, is ecstatic that she has found a nearby daycare that is open until midnight, a resource she needs to align all the moving parts of her day to create sustainability: “There’s a daycare down the street that’s open until midnight so I’m trying to put them in there.” Other
mothers, like Audrey and Tiffany, above, rely on the early hours of their daycare centers and the transportation those centers provide between school and care. Sustainability of daily routines must be in place before parents can seek higher-order needs of mobility.

Other resources are an important part in the sustainable routine constellation. Parents also use their own vehicles or easy and reliable access to public transportation to make routines sustainable. In the absence of a vehicle or reliable transit—this happens when parents lose their cars momentarily or permanently for various reasons, or when a family makes a residential move farther from a bus line—routines that otherwise have been sustainable become chaotic. Other resources parents rely on include their extended family members, and this is the subject of Chapter 4. All in all, some resources can be provided to families to enhance the possibility of building a sustainable childrearing routine, one that does not require trade-offs that may limit economic mobility.

Despite these resource supports that policy and programming have started to build, the amount of resources families begin with really define, more than any other one characteristic of sustainability, how they are able to pursue a sustainable routine. Rhonda is a divorced mom of three children who lives with her boyfriend in Dallas. She works at an Army and Airforce exchange and shares some of the childrearing commute routine responsibilities with her boyfriend. She doesn’t really like the neighborhood where they live, and she doesn’t really like the schools, but she keeps her family in the same home and her children in the same school because she wants to live within her means; by doing this, she feels her routine can remain sustainable. In creating this sustainability, she has forgone certain opportunities for residential and economic mobility: “I didn’t get my house in Mesquite because the property value was outrageous,” Rhonda says, “And well, the property taxes was outrageous, and the same house in
Mesquite would have been almost twice as much.” She made her decision about schools in a similar way, trading off the quality of preferred schools to maintain a sustainable routine:

I wanted them to go to Langton, but I couldn’t do that because it didn’t work with my schedule. I was – I would have to drop them off and pick them up and then I’d be doing two different schools. … And I couldn’t. I just couldn’t. I couldn’t filter that in with my schedule. So yeah, that was not going to be an option. I really wanted them to go, but I couldn’t work with that schedule-wise.

Instead of pursuing a particular home, a particular school, or a particular work arrangement, Rhonda pursues a sustainable arrangement of all three, and this sustainability is an end in itself. “I’ll stay in the midways,” she says. “I don’t want to get over my own head.” Families must arrange a sustainable routine within their particular context and resources. In doing so, they sometimes get stuck “in the midways.” Programs and policies that enhance the sustainability of family routines for disadvantaged groups may be a first step to ameliorate economic and residential inequality in America.
CHAPTER 3

Cooperative, Specialized, and Homesteaded Parenting: 
Gendered Routines in the 21st Century Urban Family

Introduction

Parents create and sustain childrearing routines in geographic space, and also within a household and relationships. Parents, especially dual-earner partners, negotiate time, economic resources, power within the household to find ways to create sustainable and acceptable childrearing routines. Research has shown that, although men in the 21st century do more housework and childrearing than they did in the middle of the 20th century, women still carry the bulk of the house and childrearing responsibilities. Recent research has also looked into the ways that dual-earner households, in an economy that relies more and more on non-traditional schedules and types of wage labor, make decisions about childrearing and work.

This chapter investigates the ways that parents—particularly couples—in two American cities at the beginning of the 21st century work with the changing landscape of the economy and expectations for childrearing to best negotiate their daily routines. Several important themes emerge from an analysis of qualitative transcripts. Dual-parent families with a stay-at-home parent in this sample universally divide the labor along traditional gender lines, with a male breadwinner and a female homemaker. Traditional gender roles still play a large part in many families, but there are important class differences to note. High-income families with dual-earner parents are more likely to have a “supermom,” one parent who works for pay and is primarily responsible for the childrearing for the week; the other parent is able to thus pursue the breadwinner role without much encumbrance. This often reifies gendered roles within the family, and puts the burden of childrearing more squarely on the mother, with a few exceptions. Dual
earner low- and middle-income families, on the other hand, are more likely to engage in “cooperative” parenting, something that other scholars have analyzed as “shift work” (Presser 2003). Cooperative parents both work for pay, but plan their schedules and working lives around the fact that each will also assume parenting (and usually household) duties when the other is working. This often results in less-traditional gender roles, making fathers equally or almost equally responsible for many of the parenting and household duties.

Finally, the chapter considers another family form, post-industrial “homesteaded” families. Several families in the HPHK sample bring every part of the three-legged stool—work, care/school, and home—back into the household. At least one parent works for pay from of the house, while simultaneously caring for or educating children. In several cases, both parents work side-by-side, either in the same or different occupations, and raise their children. This hearkens back to the pre-industrial family of the late 1800’s and early 1900’s, but differs in important ways. The “homesteaded” family of the 21st century relies on the gig economy, under-the-table labor, and technological connection to employment. These three forms of parenting, “supermom,” “cooperative,” and “homesteaded,” parenting, highlight and ameliorate or reproduce certain gender and class inequalities, and are most likely specific to this particular moment in American economic history.

**Literature Review**

After middle-class women began to enter the workforce in unprecedented numbers in the 1970’s, research began to identify the conflicts that mothers face between their roles as workers and their roles as mothers (Hochschild 1989). Both roles are “greedy,” culturally requiring complete devotion from the individual inhabiting them at any given time, which creates conflict
in the lives of parent-workers (Blair-Loy 2003). Scholars, activists, and policy makers began to question whether there was a new “Opt-Out Revolution” (Belkin 2003) of highly-educated, professional women leaving the workforce to pursue intensive 21st century motherhood instead of intensive work. By and large, the literature on women and work in the early 21st century focuses mainly on middle- and upper-class women and their decisions to stay in the labor market or leave it. Recent scholarship (Williams 2012) claims that looking only at middle class women is not only incomplete, but can be divisive politically even while advocacy groups hope to build coalitions to increase needed policy measure like paid family leave, better child care supports, and living wages.

Despite the gaps in the literature on women and work, scholars have turned to how families deal with the competing demands of the separate spheres of work and home life. Studies have shown, usually with middle-class subjects, that the people with caregiving responsibilities experience more work to family conflict and its subsequent stress than do people without these responsibilities, and that women experience such conflict differently from men (Hochschild 1993; Tement & Korunka 2013). One model of work to family conflict demonstrates that job demands can exacerbate work to family conflict, and that job resources can alleviate such conflict (Bakker & Demerouti 2007). Jobs identified in this particular study, however, are mainly professional jobs, and thus do not adequately theorize the effect of demands and resources on low-income families in low-status jobs. Recent work on the idea of “permeability” between the domains of work and family—the idea that work and family can overlap, despite workplace and family norms—has shown that families with fewer economic resources experience more work to family conflict (Schieman & Young 2011). This positive association
between economic hardship and work to family conflict is stronger for workers with less authority and more job pressures (Schieman & Young 2011).

Gender roles within the family—and within the larger culture of work—have also been examined in recent years. Although men of the current generation of householders do more domestic work than men of previous generations, women still carry a larger proportion of the household and care responsibilities (Lyonette & Crompton 2015; Pedulla & Thébaud 2015). Women who earn more or the same as their husbands share more of the household chores, but still end up doing more household work (Lyonette & Crompton 2015). They may argue about this more with their partners. This is a cross-national phenomenon, mediated slightly by cultural expectations: women, despite the amount of paid work they do relative to their husbands, still end up doing more of the daily child care, showing that “gender [is] the strongest influence on the composition and share of child care” (Craig & Mullan 2011). Women are more likely than men to engage in routine or “solo” care, whereas men are as likely as women to engage in non-routine child care (like attending sports practice, etc.) (Craig & Mullan 2011). Indeed, gender is at play in the types of work people do inside and outside the home: one study found that marriages of women to men who were engaged in traditionally “female” paid work such as nursing or teaching had an even starker traditional gender divide of household responsibilities (Schneider 2012). Work people do outside the home, and the gender roles therein, seems to help define the work in the household as well.

Recent scholars are particularly interested in the long hours expected of American workers, especially in professional occupations, despite the expectation of highly-coordinated, cultivating parenting (Lareau 2011). Research has found that a husband’s long hours are positively related to the likelihood that a wife will quit her job, but that a wife’s long hours have
no relationship to the likelihood of her husband leaving the labor market (Cha 2010). Long, irregular hours also affect lower- and middle-income families that cannot exist on one income alone. Presser (2003) shows that the two-fifths of married couples working irregular or off-shift hours face particular obstacles in their own relationships and in caring for their children. Off-hours and staggered shifts require spouses to spend less time together, and require parents to “cobble together” childcare arrangements that fall outside the arrangements available on the paid marketplace. Other scholars have shown that nonstandard schedules in single-mother and dual-partner households are associated with increased childcare complexity (Hepburn 2018), though the complexity and lack of continuity in care is greater for children of single-mothers.

Research shows that this phenomenon of shared-shift parenting—and the patchwork of child care arrangements it leads to—is occurring, but has yet to show exactly the different ways that families are making this work on-the-ground, day-by-day. Some research suggests that men, especially low-income men, will have to begin taking on more of the routine household tasks in this shift-work arrangement (Maume 2015). However, whether or not the men will do this, and whether or not the institution of work in the United States will make more room for home responsibilities, are open questions.

Finally, the 21st century American—and global—economy is becoming more individualistic, entrepreneurial and gig-based than ever before. The Economist called the United States “a beacon of entrepreneurship” (“The United States of Entrepreneurs” 2009) for creating an average of 550,000 small businesses every month between 1996 and 2004. In 2017, young entrepreneurs in America were more optimistic than their older counterparts, but still struggled with the nuts and bolts of business (Morelix et al. 2017). The number of self-employed
Americans aged 21 and over increased by 40.9 million, which represents a 2.8% increase from numbers in 2016 (MBO 2018).

Economists, labor researchers, and entrepreneurship organizations have taken up this question of the rise of “alternative work arrangements” in the post-Great Recession economy. Katz & Krueger (2017) suggest that, though high unemployment resulting from the Great Recession had a small part to play in the rise of the new American entrepreneurial spirit, rising inequality and technology-based contract work—that is, the “gig economy”—have played a larger part. Entrepreneurship is molding professional work as well as gig-based work, and more Americans are looking to alternative work arrangements, even as these arrangements transfer risk from a corporation to the individual (Styhre 2017). “Precarious” is one way to classify many of these gig-based arrangements, which can lead to ever-shifting professional identities (Petriglieri, Ashford & Wrzesniewski 2018).

In sum, as families adjust to new patterns of caring, sharing, and working in the 24/7 economy, so too the economy adjusts to the possibilities of a new, less-institutionalized technological era. As the economy changes, so too must work, and as work changes, so too must families. This chapter looks at how families of different socioeconomic classes construct gender through their daily routines, and how these routines connect to changes in parenting responsibilities and options for work. This is a question of both economic well-being and personal happiness. Parents in the United States, a country that offers very few public parenting supports and expects long work hours of its citizens, find themselves scrambling to put together strategies that alleviate some of the persistent work-family conflict in their lives. National work-reconciliation policies like state-funded childcare and universal parental leave have been shown to have positive effects on parents’ happiness (Glass, Andersson & Simon 2016); in the absence
of a national policy, American parents work privately within their particular situations to make
the new economy, intense parenting expectations, and home life, work for themselves and their
families.

Data and Methods

This chapter uses data from 127 families who were interviewed in the summer of 2014 as
part of the How Parents House Kids study in Dallas and Cleveland. Secondary coding of the
interviews for this chapter assessed how parents shared responsibilities or engaged in parenting
on their own. Whereas previous research has focused mainly on partnered couples in looking at
how parents share parenting, I study at all families. In doing so, I am able to assess how non-
traditional family forms work together in pursuit of childrearing, and how we may better include
these forms in future quantitative analyses. I code particularly for parents doing shift-work or
some other form of what I call “cooperative” parenting; families that have a traditional stay-at-
home parent who does not work for pay and is heavily if not solely responsible for the
childrearing; and families who have a parent who is “supermomming,” or engaging in paid work
while also being heavily responsible for the day-to-day of childrearing and household upkeep
(Hochschild 1989). A fifth code—that cuts across several of the other codes—includes a
“homesteaded parenting” code for families who work side-by-side with their children and/or
spouse in pursuit of education and economic well-being.

I pay particular attention to families working for pay outside a traditional institution of
work. That is, I code for families who mention some kind of self-employment, whether it is a
primary or a side job, and look at the reasons they give for entering into that kind of
employment. In this way, I am able to best understand how parents bring their work home, and how this affects daily routines and gendered division of labor.

Findings and Analysis

Intersection of Class and Gender: Complexities of the Stay-at-Home Parent

The current model of the American workplace does not systematically take into account childrearing needs because it—like many of America’s work-related policies and much of its work culture—assumes that there is a parent dedicated to being at work with the children. This assumption of separate roles within the family also assumes family routines that are simpler, more straight-forward, and more specialized.

In our sample, 44 of 126, or 34.9%, of respondent nuclear families (those families who live under the same roof with consistency and who share a routine and budget), have a true stay at home parent. By stay-at-home parent (SAHP), I mean someone who recognizes him or herself, and who is in turn recognized by the family, as the person who works only in the home, without pay. In our sample, true stay-at-home parents usually have a spouse or significant other who is making enough money to support the family; in rare cases, a stay-at-home parent is providing for her family by patching together public help and vouchers. True stay-at-home parents in this sample are, with one exception, women. The majority are married. Only two of these parents bring in any kind of income, and this income is very small compared to their partner’s income. For example, the only stay-at-home dad in our sample works for $10 an hour a few hours a month for his landlord, and the other, a stay-at-home mom, makes about $50 a week delivering meals to neighbors. Most of these families operate along traditional lines for the division of labor for daily routines. I call these families “Specialized SAHP” families, because one parent
specializes in work, and one specializes in home and child rearing, and there is little overlap between the two spheres.

Two distinct types of families still have at least one parent heavily devoted to raising children, but both parents are in the paid workforce. “Supermomming” families have one parent—usually the mother—who brings in some outside income, either with a formal part- or full-time job or with a range of entrepreneurial activities while one parent who works full-time. The parents in these supermomming families often have very specialized roles. The supermomming parent specializes in keeping up the household, caring for and transporting the kids, as well as working part- or full-time. Usually, this means that the importance of the supermomming partner’s work is overshadowed by the traditional worker’s job, which provides the bulk of the family’s income. Supermomming parenting fits the needs of many high-income parents who engage in concerted cultivation of their children, those who want to be full-time parents as well as bring in extra income. Supermomming families often seem to have traditional gender ideologies.

Cooperative parents comprise another group of acting-SAHP families. An adult in the household is almost always available for the needs of childrearing, but this availability is because the family has arranged a shift schedule or a particular type of work that allows at least one parent to be on call for home needs at all time, even if not actually at home all the time. Unlike supermomming families, cooperative families tend to be from low- or middle-income groups, and work because they truly need every dollar from every job. This particular form of parenting seems to result in surprisingly gender egalitarian households when compared with other forms of parenting discussed in this chapter. The “all-hands-on-deck” approach to work accompanies an “all-hands-on-deck” approach to parenting.
Finally, homesteaded parents can exist within other forms of parenting models described above. These parents bring work, home, and childrearing to the family home as much as possible. I use the term homesteaded to evoke the pre-industrial agricultural or corporate family form, where parents worked and raised children side by side, usually in farming situation. Though the parents in Dallas and Cleveland are not, by and large, raising crops or animals (though one father in Dallas makes extra income by raising, slaughtering, and preparing farm animals for celebrations in his community), they have blurred the boundaries between the lines of home and work in a way that hearkens back to a pre-industrial era, but is decidedly post-industrial. Though these families represent only a small portion of the families in the entire study, the homesteaded parenting arrangement points to how families evolve in tandem with changing economic and technological possibilities.

Specialized Stay-at-Home Parents

Specialized stay-at-home parent (SAHP) families have organized their relationship to work and child rearing around the traditional breadwinner/homemaker model. One parent stays home and is responsible for the house and the children during the day, and (if there is more than one parent in the household) one parent works for pay in the labor market. SAHP families with only one parent at home are low-income families surviving by patching together public assistance and help from extended family (see Chapter 4); eight such families exist in our sample, out of 44 SAHP families. Overall, SAHP families have a father or male partner working for pay, and a mother staying at home to raise the children, take them to school and activities, and take care of the house.
Table 3.1 shows that there are more SAHP families—both proportionally and in real numbers—among the low-income group in our sample: they represent about 48.2% of all families in the sample. The middle-income group is comprised of 30% SAHP families, and the high-income group has approximately 18.8% SAHP families. In comparison to Dallas, Cleveland has fewer SAHP families in all income categories; this might suggest some cultural difference between the two cities and their regions. The responsibilities of the primary caregiving parents in these families are surprisingly similar across income groups—usually, the mother gets up and takes care of the kids while the father heads off to work; her day centers around home and family, his revolves around work. Sometimes, SAHP families are single-parents who receive some kind of income from a source other than work, often cash welfare, disability, or some kind of pension. This separate-spheres approach to family life and parenting is the model around which the American labor market is built; though the family has only one income coming in (if that), there are often fewer work to life conflicts.

Table 3.1: Families with Specialized Stay-At-Home-Parents, by Income

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Income</th>
<th>All</th>
<th>Cleveland Only</th>
<th>Dallas Only</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAHP</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(48.2%)</td>
<td>(30.0%)</td>
<td>(18.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No SAHP</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(51.9%)</td>
<td>(70.0%)</td>
<td>(81.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Katherine is an upper-income specialized SAHP who lives in a Cleveland suburb with her two daughters and her husband. He makes a good income as a lawyer at his own law firm. Though Katherine worked consistently from age 16 until her second child was born, she decided to stay home and raise the kids. Her husband’s high income allows her to do this, and she also
has help from her extended family when she needs a break. Katherine’s day centers around
getting her eldest daughter to school and caring for her youngest, who will go to preschool next
year. Though she hopes to someday go back to work, she also loves the ability to stay home with
her young children and to watch them grow up. She compares her life now favorably to how it
was three years ago before the second was born and she was still working:

I have to say though that, you know, it used to be, so three years ago, it would, say our
younger one had a doctor’s appointment, my first thought would be, alright, what do we
have, you know, what’s going on at work that week, am I going to be able to squeeze that
in? Oh, I need to get a baby sitter, I, uh, you know, what if it goes late, and all of these
like twenty thoughts would go through my head.

Janice is a high-income mother from Dallas who has two school-aged children and an
MBA. After leaving her job in technology before we interviewed her in 2013, Janice continued
to be a specialized SAHP through the summer of 2014. She was working on her real estate
license at a leisurely pace, but her main goal for work was to find a job with flexibility: “So even
in my new job, I want flexibility—a lot more flexibility than what I had and especially because
my children are getting older.” Janice described to us how the pace of her life had gotten slower
and more manageable since she had stopped working, and how this was beneficial to her family
and to her own happiness:

I'm there for everything. I think that, um, you know when you are working, you do the
best that you can but I think when you are at home, you see everything. There are
probably some things that you let slide when you work because you are working and
since I'm at home, you know, I was at the school more often, you know, daily; you know,
they got to see me, there were things that - and I paid attention too when I was working
but I just realized that there were a few things that I could fine tune a little bit more when
I am at home.

Her husband earns enough money at his white-collar job to support the family, and they also own
several rental properties in Dallas.
Lower-income families make up the bulk of the SAHP families in this sample, and some have a very stable arrangement of the traditional separate spheres model. For example, Aracelli and Rafael, an immigrant couple from Mexico, live in a suburb of Dallas with their two young daughters. Rafael works as a painter, and Aracelli stays at home with their daughters—the youngest is still a baby, and the oldest goes to the local elementary school. Since becoming a mother, Aracelli has not worked, and the family spends as much time together as a unit as they can. Rafael is undocumented and Aracelli is a DREAMer. She completed high school in Dallas. Aracelli’s attorney told her that she has to work in order to get her DREAMer status renewed; she may lose her status soon if she does not get a formal job: “I’m going to have to start working. And I don’t like that because I don’t want to leave my baby alone - with someone else - I don’t like that.”

Annette, an unmarried mother of two children, ages 8 and 13, is a SAHP in Cleveland. She is not presently married, but relies heavily on the father of her oldest for financial and instrumental support: he helps fix things around the house and drives the family to places they can’t get to on the bus because Annette doesn’t have a car. Though Annette used to work, she has been unemployed for eight years, since her younger son was born; she receives housing assistance, food stamps, child support, and some social security assistance. Her daughter has epilepsy, and Annette is grateful she can be home now as she ends up going to her daughter’s school often for emergencies. In fact, Annette chose the location of their home because of the proximity to school: “Because if something happens, I can’t be trying to catch three buses trying to get up and see about her.” Annette’s main priority is raising her children and keeping them safe; though she is not married, she relies on their fathers to provide financially.
Annette and Aracelli are somewhat unique in the group of SAHP from low- or middle-income families in that that they have been a SAHP fairly consistently for the past few years. Other mothers from low-income SAHP families have more transitions (see Chapter 5) in and out of the workforce: many are at home “temporarily” because of a job loss or some other recent event. For example, Jennifer, a low-income married mother of three from Dallas DLW19U44, was employed when we spoke to her in 2013, and spoke proudly of contributing to the family economy. She had quit her job by the 2014 interview, a change precipitated by the family’s move to a rather isolated suburb of Dallas from a neighborhood where Jennifer had a large network of friends and family. Because Jennifer relied on her family for childcare, and they were no longer in the area, she quit working:

No, I – I’m actually not working. I don’t know anybody that like watches kids and, the neigh - I mean, like the day cares, you know, I’ve had a bad experience in Dallas - well, not a bad experience with my kids, no. like they’re – I guess you can say our kids are not used to it, but like my kids are really used to having me around, you know?

She likes being home with her children, but would also like to go back to work so she can make money: “I want to, you know — better their lives.”

Yolanda, a middle-income mother who lives in Dallas with her two children and common-law husband, worked recently, but is currently staying at home with the children. This change was also because of a residential move to a neighborhood to be closer to her husband’s work. The biggest change for this new SAHP family is how the homemaking and childrearing responsibilities have shifted completely to Yolanda now that her husband is not working:

But when I ask him, when I get mad and tell him that he needs to play with them he does. He's like that for a while then he forgets again. Right now, he doesn't help me as much as he used to when I worked. He would wash - sometimes he washes his clothes. When I worked he cooked, he washed my clothes, and he bathed the children. He says that I don't do anything here. [Interviewer: How does that make you feel?] Sometimes I get mad. I get mad. Sometimes he does things but I have to tell him to do it. On weekends he does cook. He cooks but that's it.
This change from being a family with two working parents to being a specialized SAHP family has taken a toll on Yolanda’s relationship with her husband. In fact, she tells the interviewer that if something were to happen to her, she’d want her kids to go live with her mother and sister instead of staying with their dad: “He is very responsible but I don't think he'd raise them right. I'm the one that does it. I don't think he'd correct how they speak, eat, and sit. I don't know. How they behave.”

Tasha is a SAHP from a family that was middle-income according to their 2013 tax returns; now that she is home and unemployed, they may drop into the low-income category. Her husband picks up odd jobs here and there, and Tasha does hair once in a while to make a little cash, but overall she spends most of her day shuttling her three school-aged children between their schools and activities, and volunteering in their schools.

Um I can do whatever it is I want to do for the kids. Like I go to the school like Mike and Mellie. Anything they have at school, I’m there. [...]When I’m working, I can’t do that. Because the type I work I work office jobs, and there always restrictions, especially like in call centers.

Tasha describes enjoying this life as a SAHP, even though it is “not feasible” for her family in the long run—they will need her to bring in an income eventually. However, she does enjoy the freedom from some of the stress that attempting to find a work-life balance created in the past.

One low-income SAHP family has a father who stays home to care for the children and a mom who earns an income as a home healthcare aid. Shaheem describes, how as a young man he sold illegal drugs on the street, bringing in “$6000 a week,” and finally getting sent to jail for seven months. Since “getting clean,” he has moved in with his fiancé with whom he has four children—he also takes care of her other two children from a previous relationship: “So I’m like man forget that type of living. Now up to date as today 2014. I’m self-employed right now. I got
a little business me and my uncle running. I work for my landlord. I take care of six kids.”

Though Shaheem mentions his self-employment, he also acknowledges that most of his day is spent caring for the children—in fact, he’s excited that he can start pursuing his own work again now that his partner has been approved for public assistance child care vouchers:

Because my baby mama just got done with vouchers for them kids. It took her a long while. She was too comfortable on me watching the kids. And I was keeping a lot of money and sometimes I can’t about make it, because I ain’t got nobody watching those four kids for me. You know what I’m saying. So um but I don’t want to make her lose her job. She been doing it for like two years you know. And she make good money. She does home health aide.

Shaheem fully expects to go back to work when they have assistance with daycare but until then, he specializes in caring for the children and his fiancé specializes in paid work outside the home.

Some SAHP families in our interviews are categorized such because of the time of year we interviewed them: children are out of school in the summer time, so several families arrange a SAHP model season-by-season. For example, Elizabeth quit her job at a plastics factory several weeks before our summer 2014 interview:

I’m not working because the babysitter charges me more than what I earn so I stopped working because if I give them to her so she can take care of them, well, no, so I stopped working to be with them during their vacation time, and if God permits it I’ll work when they go back to school, my youngest daughter, the 4 year old, is starting school, I won’t have to pay a babysitter, I won’t have to.

When all the children are home over the summer, the cost for a babysitter was more than Elizabeth would make hourly, so she made a financial decision to quit. She loves being with the children, but also sees herself as a worker, saying “I’ll work when they go back to school.”

Luckily, Elizabeth has a job that allows her to transition in and out of work—she is an extreme example of how volatile the SAHP arrangement can be for low-income families, but illustrates the phenomenon well.
Supermomming Parents

A small number of families—mostly high-income families in this sample—deal with the burden of work and childrearing balance by “supermomming.” One parent is the primary-earner, and the other has a job (and sometimes a well-paying, very formal job) but is almost exclusively in charge of the childrearing commutes. The primary-earner parent has a traditional relationship to work (that is, a relationship mostly unencumbered by the needs of children and a family) and the supermomming parent works to achieve a work-life balance that is more often associated with working women than working men. Indeed, most supermomming families in this sample are upper-middle class families, and in the minority of these families, the supermomming—“superdadding”—parent is a man.

Table 3.2: Families with Supermomming Parents, by Income

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Low-income</th>
<th>Middle-income</th>
<th>High-income</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not Supermomming</td>
<td>53 (98.2%)</td>
<td>38 (95.0%)</td>
<td>26 (81.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supermomming</td>
<td>1 (1.8%)</td>
<td>2 (5.0%)</td>
<td>6 (18.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Hope is a high-income mother of four, ages seven through 24, who lives with her husband and his parents in a suburb of Cleveland. She works part-time as a medical technician at a hospital that is “close enough to walk to,” though she doesn’t walk because she works the night shift. She works only three nights a week, and spends the rest of her time shuttling kids to and from schools and to their extracurricular activities. The youngest two go to a neighborhood school and the 17-year-old goes to a private school that is about a half hour commute. Hope spends a great deal of both commuting time and money on her kids’ activities: the family spent
over $10,000 on the extracurricular commitments of the two youngest children in the past year. On mornings after Hope has worked, her husband takes the kids to school, but most mornings Hope is in charge of the commute to and from school, and then to and from various sporting clubs and musical lessons in the Cleveland metro area. This division of care usually allows her husband, whose commute to his work as an IT professional in downtown Cleveland is about 45 minutes each way, to have a traditional, childrearing-free commute. It also means that Hope only has about 4 hours to sleep on days after she works.

Like Hope, Anna has both a formal, part-time job—as a pharmacist—and an informal, full-time job as a mother, homemaker and chauffeur. Anna’s husband is an executive at a big company in Dallas and makes over $300,000 a year. The family lives comfortably, especially because Anna has arranged her work in response to the family’s childrearing needs. Her husband helps—when he is not traveling—by dropping their 7-year-old son at his elementary school a few blocks away. After that, the rest of the day’s childrearing is up to Anna. She first takes her daughter to a special school for children with hearing impairments, about 35 minutes away from their home. She then drives about 15 minutes from the school to work.

I work, pick her back up at 1:30, come home and um, or run to the grocery store with her, come home and then um, either pick him up or I…I car pool so I have to…half the time I pick him up and half the time he get picked up by my friend. And he comes home and usually it’s whatever extra after school activity we have going on, if its sports or you know, lessons or whatever it is, we’ll do that. Then get dinner on the table and he does homework and usually that’s the…usually my husband’s home like…it depends, like 7, 7:30 and she’s going to bed like at 7:30 and he goes to bed about 8, 8:30.

Anna says after describing her day, “I spend a lot of time in the car!” But this is the way she expects it has to be, with her husband’s busy executive schedule and the many needs of their lifestyle:

I mean I’m very happy with my current…, that I’m able to work at all right now because I didn’t work for seven years, so, just kind of getting my skills back and, um, getting back
into that so that at some point if my kids are at college or independent or whatever that I could have a career, you know, because my husband works all the time so I can’t just not do anything [laughs]. But right now we can’t both do it all. There’s gotta be someone to run the house.

Like Anna, Susan is an upper-income married mother who lives in Dallas with her husband, also a high-powered professional, practicing law as a civil defense attorney at a large Dallas firm. Susan herself is a teacher, and actually teaches at the expensive private school that her two daughters attend. Her son, the oldest, attends the boys’ version of this school, about 10 minutes from the home. The family actually chose their neighborhood location because it was close to the private school they wanted for their daughters: Susan says she likes the “neighborhood feel,” and, even though it isn’t the zoned public school, that she likes to “be really close to where everything happens.”

Susan describes to the interviewer that she realizes she has two different jobs, one as a teacher until the school day is over, and then another as a mom.

That’s kind of my thing. That’s why I’m a teacher. I can keep the same hours as them, so, you know, school gets out and, you know, I start my second life and that, you know, running them around and we, um, I told you my daughter dances. We go to downtown every day to take her to dance. And the other two play lots of sports and so it’s – I do it, most of it. My husband does when he can. But I don’t want anybody else taking – I don’t have a nanny. I’ve never had one. Don’t want any of that. Um, that’s just not something that – I don’t want my kids raised by somebody else. Even if it’s at the expense of me being exhausted or grumpy or whatever, that’s still to me better than having Maria pick them up.

Susan loves her career as a teacher, and also loves that it gives her the kind of schedule she desires as a mother. Notably, she describes one of the costs to this kind of lifestyle: “being exhausted or grumpy or whatever.” She goes on to say, however, that this is better to her than to having Maria (a generic name she uses to denote a lot of nannies in Dallas) be in charge of her children. Though she is not a stay-at-home parent and has a recognized career outside the house, Susan still acts as the de facto stay-at-home parent in response to her own desire to be that kind
of a mother and because of her husband’s demanding career. Whereas his relationship to paid work is traditional, hers incorporates school, work, kids’ activities, and home.

Several high-income men also engage in this “supermomming” form of parenting; Ria’s husband Tim is one example. Ria is employed as an engineer in a town about a 45-minute drive from their home in Cleveland, and though she helps with transporting their kids to school, he does most of the afterschool care and cooking around the house. Tim works from home as a car mechanic—they have built auto bays in their backyard—and can arrange his work schedule around the needs of the kids. The family consciously chose this arrangement to keep one parent at home with the kids while the other went off to work far away: “And…I mean we…we actually…I choose for him to not work [outside the home] so that we are raising our children instead of sticking them in daycare and having someone else raise our children.” Like most supermomming families, the income of the supermomming parent is secondary; Ria describes Tim’s income: “It’s for extras. Yeah, it’s for extras. So we can pay all the bills with what I make and do most of what we want. But not…not super extravagant. There’s still…I’m still budget conscious about things.”

Like Tim, Justin is a high-income supermomming dad. He, his wife, and his two children live in a suburb of Cleveland, and while Justin’s wife works as a medical researcher at Cleveland Clinic, Justin runs an IT company from his home office. His wife picks up their sons from daycare in the afternoon, but Justin is responsible for most of the rest of the day, including any kind of scheduling issues that come up, and for getting the boys to school in the morning. Like many primary parents in supermomming families, Justin adjusts his paid work to fit the needs of his family:

I'm actually in the process of trying to reorganize things with my work and so he [my son] can maybe stay home an extra day a week - - um, just to - - so he's not so stressed out
all the time. He does - I mean, some days he's great and then some days he seems really stressed out by having to go to school. And so - I mean the world won't end if I work one less day a week, I don’t think so. It's worth - at least trying to make that sacrifice to see if that helps him.

Though the family outsources much of the daily care, they still rely on one parent to be the primary point of contact during they day.

Sally is the one low-income mother in the sample who is supermomming, and she has actually just started working for the first time since becoming a parent over a decade ago. When we spoke to her in 2014, she had recently taken a part-time job at the same lumber company her husband works for full-time, and most likely her extra income will push the family up into a higher income category in 2014. She is also thrilled to be working again: “Yeah, I’ve always loved working because it gives me something to do. I’ve never been a home person. I don’t like being at home. Being a stay-at-home mom was actually very dull.” However, Sally describes the job as being flexible around her children’s school hours and needs, and she is still the primary parent in the household. In fact, it is not a coincidence that Sally took this job the same year she finally felt comfortable allowing her eight- and eleven-year-old children to walk themselves several blocks to the neighborhood school in the morning; now that they are old enough to be a bit more independent, she looks forward to contributing to the family as both a mom and a worker.

Cooperative Parents

Whereas many of the high-income families deal with the dual-earner model by having one working parent more (if not exclusively) responsible for the childrearing arrangements, low- and middle-income families more often arrange their parenting cooperatively. This cooperative parenting arrangement allows families to split the childrearing responsibilities along schedule
lines, often by engaging in shift work. For example, Marina and her husband are both Mexican immigrants and have three children together, ages 1, 3, and 5 years. The oldest went to school this past year, at the nearby elementary school for a few hours a day; up until then Marina and her husband had cared for the kids almost exclusively in a tandem arrangement that depends on their schedules. Marina works part-time at two fast-food restaurants, totaling between 40-50 hours a week. She works during morning and into the early afternoon, and her husband stays home with the kids. Though he has help from family and friends who also live in the complex, he is the primary point of care during the hours that Marina is at work. When Marina gets home, she and her husband trade the roles of worker and stay-at-home parent. He then goes to his job cleaning office buildings at night, and Marina is home. Marina describes her day in a straightforward way: “My day's routine? I get up, I go work. I come back. I wash clothes, clean, make the beds. Cook food. Dinner. Give the girls a bath.” In this arrangement, both parents have a shift of child care that alternates with their work shift. In a shift-care arrangement like this, at least one parent must work non-traditional hours: in this case, Marina’s husband works overnight.

Table 3.3: Cooperative Parenting Families, by Income

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Low-income</th>
<th>Middle-income</th>
<th>High-income</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cooperative</td>
<td>11 (20.4%)</td>
<td>8 (20.0%)</td>
<td>3 (9.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not cooperative</td>
<td>43 (79.6%)</td>
<td>32 (80.0%)</td>
<td>29 (90.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Many other immigrant families in Dallas engage in this kind of cooperative parenting, working schedules around each other and kids’ needs in a complicated dance of days and hours.
Maite and David, for example, are Guatemalan immigrants and parents of a five-year-old and a fifteen-year-old. In the past year, they went from working for a company that makes health food to sell to the Latino population in Dallas to owning a small franchise of this company; this allows them to better cooperatively parent. Maite works in the office in the morning while David cares for their children—getting them to school—and takes care of the house; in the afternoon, Maite picks up the children from school and arranges dinner and homework time, while David works in the warehouse or on the delivery truck: “When we get up, my husband is the first one to go out with them. He goes to the gym and takes the girls to school. I stay and around 9 or 9:30 I start getting ready because I leave at 10. The office opens at 10. We do administrative work. See what we have to do.”

Natalia and her husband cooperatively parent with different start and end times to their work during the day, and also rely on Natalia’s sister—who lives in the same apartment complex—to cover child care responsibilities when the kids are off of school in the summer. Natalia works as a seamstress and her husband works at a tire shop; both partners work full time and earn less than $10 an hour. The schedule works because their children are old enough to be in school, and because they have staggered their shifts. Natalia’s husband goes in early in the morning and is off of work in time to get the kids from school; Natalia gets the kids to school, does some housework, and then goes into work, often getting home around 9 in the evening: “I get home, lay in bed for a while, then at 5:00 or 6:00 AM, get up, wake them up at 7:00, get them dressed, feed them breakfast, and take them to school.” Despite this hectic schedule, Natalia describes a solid, cooperative relationship with her partner:

He has his job and so do I. We share the housework. He helps the kids with homework. When I get home, he has already fed them dinner. So all I have left to do is a little bit of housework and prepare some food. So I can’t really ask him for more than he can do. […]He has given me a lot of support. We have been in communion a lot. We have carried
heavy loads together, such as problems, sometimes the lack of things, sometimes - I mean, we have been together in good and bad times. We have given each other a lot of support.

In Natalia’s case, the positive parts of cooperative parenting have alleviated some of the negative effects that shift work—and the lack of time together—might have on a couple.

Some families engage in cooperative parenting across generations, not just across gender. For example, Maritza lives with her mother and her husband, who recently returned from Mexico after a deportation. The three adults all work, and arrange their schedules to care for the three children living in the household, ages 8, 10, and 11. Maritza works cleaning houses about 2 days a week, and her mother works at a nearby carwash during the day; Maritza’s husband works evenings at a junkyard, often getting home around one o’clock in the morning. The family splits parenting, house, and money-earning responsibilities cooperatively. “Because I work 2 days at work, in the mornings he takes care of them. Then I get home and he leaves and they stay with me. I don’t work every day to the point where we have to leave the kids somewhere.”

Like Maritza’s family, Sonya’s family is multi-generational: she and her husband share the home with Sonya’s three school-aged children, his 16-year-old daughter, Sonya’s 21-year-old daughter, and the 21-year-old daughter’s 3-year-old daughter. In this Cleveland home, it’s an “all-hands-on-deck” approach to parenting and shuttling daily. Sonya works the second shift at a daycare, 2:30 in the afternoon until midnight, so is often sleeping when her husband gets the school-aged kids fed and off to school in the morning. Sonya takes care of the home until she leaves in the afternoon, and then her daughter—who works mornings from 6:45 until early afternoon as a cook at a local school—picks up all the kids from school and feeds them. Sonya’s husband works nights at Wendy’s and sleeps most of the day after he takes the kids to school.
The house is crowded, but all the adults work together to make sure the children are supervised and income is coming in.

Some families work across different home locations to cooperatively parent amongst a variety of alternative work schedules. Linda is a low-income mother of two school-aged children. She is single, but the father of her kids—Steve—and Linda’s adult daughter are all involved in parenting the two children, ages 5 and 10, and Linda’s daughter’s young son. In fact, the three working adults share a single car, which Steve uses to do most of the school pick-ups and drop-offs for the family. Linda’s daughter works during the day, and leaves her young son with Linda while she works. Her daughter lives close by, “No, if you go across the, bypass, the overpass…and it’s…literally it’s there,” but would not be counted in the same household. Linda works the third shift, overnight, at a local WalMart, and relies on her daughter to spend the night at her home to make sure the kids are cared for. Linda does this crazy schedule (and is often asleep when her kids are home) for an income of about $13,000 per year. For the very poor, the day-to-day negotiation of cooperative parenting often extends beyond the nuclear family, blurring the lines between what is “shift” help and what is help from extended family. Cooperative parenting can take place across households, and with unmarried people, but this kind of arrangement will not necessarily be counted in any kind of survey research.

Cooperative parenting may accompany cooperative paid work. Ricardo and his wife work together during the day as subcontractors for a flooring business; they are able to define their own schedule and work together to shuttle their three school-aged children between school, church, and other activities. They also split household duties.

No, it’s good. As I’ve said, if I’m nearby I’ll pick them up, if she’s nearby she’ll do it and she’ll cooks, if on that day I stay at home I’ll pick them up and cook for my daughters. […] Oh, yes, on the days off, like, for example, a Saturday, a Sunday, I don’t know what
you call it but we say, we’re going to prepare a type of soup, Mondongo, let’s make chicken soup, beef soup, enchiladas, let’s make chicken dumplings and yes, we spend a good day.

Ricardo and his wife are not only examples of cooperative parents; they are also a good example of a “homesteaded” family that works, plays, and rears children as a team.

Self-Employed and Homesteaded Parents: Rise of the Gig and Entrepreneurial Economy

Finally, some parents of both classes have arranged their employment so that it is carried out at home or elsewhere but on their own terms, either because they have a lot of flexibility through their employer or because they have sought the entrepreneurial arrangement of self-employment. These parents have tapped into the entrepreneurial spirit and the gig economy of the new millennium, and have really brought their work home with them. I call these parents “homesteaded” parents, as they have relocated their work location to home, and thus often have more fluidity between home and work responsibilities. Indeed, in several cases, these parents have decided to homeschool their children; in other cases, parents work together from home at different jobs or work together as self-employees in and outside the home. These families are rare, but show an interesting form of returning to a family form that is preindustrial, where families labored—and often educated their children—side by side on the family farm or homestead.

Lynn, a high-income mother who lives in a Cleveland suburb, has arranged her full-time work in her home and is thus able to supervise twin 4-year-old daughters during the day. Lynn runs a licensed in-home daycare and has been trying to expand the number of children she can have in her care by adding things to the house, like a new fence. Her business is good—she already has 8 children on the waiting list for her new spots—and she is able to deal with her role
as de facto stay-at-home parent and worker seamlessly. Her daycare is open from 6 a.m. until 10 p.m., so she is rarely away from the house. Her husband, who works as the head of a maintenance department at a local hospital, is thus able to have a traditional home to work to home commute. However, Lynn has already started thinking about the problems that will arise when her twins have to go to Kindergarten in a year. Though she has been impressed with the charter school her sister’s children attend, she isn’t sure she’ll be able to make that part of her routine: “My sister’s kids, they go to the school that I wouldn’t mind my kids going there but um, I wouldn’t be able to make that um, trip everyday.”

JC is a single dad who lives in Dallas and has four children, ages 2, 4, 5, and 6. He lives with his children in a home that he bought in the neighborhood in which he grew up. His mom is down the street, and she helps occasionally, but JC has arranged his work with American Airlines so that he can do it from home. During the interview, he shows us his work space and tells us that he likes his kids school because its location works with his routine: “They not gonna--it’s gotta has easy access for me. I have to be able to maneuver, in and out due to my job situation and everything.” John relies on this proximity because he has to pick up his kids from school during his 30-minute “lunch” break in the afternoon. He can then let them play in and around the house as he finishes up his shift with American Airline’s customer service call center. This ability to work from home or for American Airlines—with his own computer in his own home—is not exactly the “gig” economy, but is flexible in a way traditional work arrangements are not. Additionally, in order to make ends meet and to pursue a better economic future for his family, JC also runs his own franchise of a fried chicken restaurant. After he has worked a full-shift for American, he often has his mother (who lives down the street) come over to watch the kids, and goes to seek his entrepreneurial fortune in the evening hours. “It sounds like a lot of
work,” the interviewer says to him. “It is,” JC replies. “But if you used to juggling it…--like that then it’’s---what someone else think is a ton, it’’s just natural to you.”

Homesteaded parents are not necessarily in the house all day long. Instead, they sometimes work as a family unit in the larger gig-based economy. Alejandra and her husband work for the same party store, cleaning party equipment like trampolines before they are rented out again. The job is gig-based—they get paid a certain amount of money for every trampoline they clean, and doesn’t have set hours—and they bring their children with them in the summer, and any other times the children are not in the local school:

Well, I work all day, I take my kids and they also go there and get bored. They do help me sometimes because it’s a job the entire family can do. My husband, the kids, me, and you do what you can, because it’s a job that you don’t have to do like a certain way, we clean trampolines where kids jump up and down. So that day I turn one of them on and let them have fun while we clean, and if we do 5 or 6 it doesn’t matter, no one says anything, they just have to be ready on Saturday.

Carolina also makes pinatas from her home to sell at the party store, and is paid a certain amount of money for each pinata.

Carolina acknowledges that the work is hard, and that it is seasonal: the family has to save in the spring and fall months to get through the winter months when it is too cold for trampolines, and in the summer when it is too hot. She suggests that her job is not a “good job,” but it meets other requirements of her life that are also important.

A good job is where I can make a bit more money and not struggle as much, because if we’d wanted to we’d look for it. I don’t know why we haven’t looked for it. [Laughs]. I don’t know, because we don’t want someone else looking after our kids, because I don’t like other people taking care of them and it’s not that I don’t trust them, I just don’t like it. […] But as I’ve said, the job I have right now is very good because I can take the kids, they can play, and no one says anything as long as the job is done by Saturday.

As homesteaded parents, Carolina and her husband are also cooperative in their negotiations of childrearing, home, and work. In the summer, when the kids are not in school, the family is
together during the work day. This kind of blurring of lines between work, home, and care is illustrative of the homesteaded parent type.

Money certainly has something to do with self-employment and desire for self-sufficiency (outside the traditional confines of an incorporated company) for many of the respondents who seek it out in this sample. For example, Ron, a low-income father of one from Dallas, lost his low-wage job in the past year after a heart attack and a flair-up of his sickle cell anemia. The family has struggled financially, but Ron has made it a priority to remain in the current neighborhood because of his son’s pre-K place at the local KIPP academy school. To make ends meet, Ron hires himself out for odd jobs, and he and his wife spend the day together putting together plans for the small convenience store they will run out of their apartment: “As a way of our parents don’t have to Walmart or run to some corner store, you know, we’re right here in the apartment complex for the community and it’s just the convenience, you know, because the ice cream trucks out here are ridiculous with their prices.”

Not all homesteaded parents are struggling economically. Others “homestead” to achieve certain cultural goals, like what they consider better educational opportunities for their families. Allison, a high-income mother of two young daughters, has a teaching degree but is using the gig economy to stay home. She works for an Internet education company that produces educational videos for parents, and at the same time homeschools her two young daughters: “I homeschool more because of my philosophy of education. Um, so, and part of that philosophy does go into, I think there is an importance of habit formation, and of loving to learn.” Though Allison is also an example of a supermomming parent; that is, she brings in an income to supplement her partner’s full-time income, but devotes much of her time to caring for her children and the
Allison’s ability to multi-task—educate her children, enjoy family time, and work for pay—is one of the defining characteristics of supermomming, and a characteristic this type of parent shares with homesteaded parents.

Marissa, a middle-income mom from Dallas, and her husband are perhaps the most poignant examples of homesteaded parents in this sample. Having moved to Dallas quickly, they were happy to find a four-bedroom apartment large enough for their family of five. However, Marissa did not research the neighborhood schools before moving, and she learned they were not of the quality she desired. As a teacher, she was discerning in her school search. Marissa applied to several charter schools, but the ones close enough to her did not have space for her daughters: “I’m not going to go crazy and go I’m going to take a 45-minute commute to send my kids to ….

So, I’m not one of those that so extreme as to have my kids go to a school that’s an hour away from me.” Instead of commuting a long distance to pursue choice schools, Marissa went to the opposite end of the schooling spectrum: she started homeschooling her three daughters. Her husband also quit his job as a cash register repairman to start his own business, which he now runs out of their home. To supplement their income, Marissa has a gig job doing customer service from home—about 40 hours a week—and makes balloon animals (“I’m a balloon
artist.”) for parties around Dallas on the weekends. She and her husband both work to educate their children, do their jobs, and run the household together all day.

Marissa reflects on class and the demands of a new entrepreneurial economy:

Um, you know, so, but I would say—-but definitely the majority people here are all working class. Most of the people that I talk to and have conversations with are all also very much go getters, trying to figure out what they can do to ---to better their situation a little bit better, whether it’s to go to school, whether it’s make contacts with the right people um, to you know, to advance things they got going on the side. Everybody here got something that they’re doing on the side. … You know they got their regular daytime job and then they got something going on the side. It’s either a side business they, they’ve got, that they’re getting a little extra petty cash from or its going to school. Um, so, yeah, everybody---everybody here is hustling something.

This “hustle” that defines the gig-based economy and economy of self-employment allows people to bring their work, home, and childrearing activities to one location. However, as critics of such economic structures have suggested, it also shifts the risks from corporations and government to individuals, allowing them the credit if they achieve and handing them the downfall if they fail. The flexibility of self-employment and gig-based work, though, allows families to arrange a fluidity between childrearing and work in a way that traditional jobs rarely do.

Work, Childrearing, and Roles in the Household Economy

Class and gender intersect to create particular models that parents utilize in pursuit of childrearing and work. Though all parents have some kind of arrangement to balance work and childrearing, low- and middle-income families with two parents often have to divide and conquer, whereas high-income families—especially those with more than one child—more often seem to specialize. Here we see the phenomenon of the supermomming stay-at-home parent, usually a mother who works at least part-time outside of the home but is also almost solely responsible for the childrearing routines that take place every day. This is possible because the
parent who avoids the majority of the childrearing responsibilities often has a job that provides enough income on its own. For lower-income families, childrearing responsibilities are often split by parents who work different shifts or have scheduling variability week to week. This cooperation is not the same as having flexibility in schedule—something reserved for mainly the higher-income parents in the study—but instead means having to reorganize the division of childrearing and responsibilities weekly if not daily. Notably, the form of “homesteaded” parenting arises, and homesteaded parents can be engaged in either supermomming parenting, or cooperative parenting.

Table 3.4: Separate versus Blended Spheres: Overlap of Homesteading and Other Parenting Forms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Separate Spheres: Traditional model</th>
<th>Supermomming</th>
<th>Cooperative parenting</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Homemaker/worker and breadwinner</strong>—One partner engages in “supermomming” while working for pay and childrearing, the other partner is the main breadwinner and less involved in childrearing</td>
<td><strong>Shift work</strong>—partners arrange alternating shifts at work to coincide with childrearing needs inside the home</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Blended Spheres Homesteader model | **Single home/self-employment and breadwinner**—One partner stays at home and engages in paid employment while remaining responsible for the bulk of daily childrearing, other partner works for pay outside the home | **Dual home/self-employment**—each partner has paid work (often gig work) that takes place in the home, and childrearing also happens in the home |

Gender roles within families are illustrated within and shaped by these arrangements. Hochschild (1989) describes three different “gender ideologies”: traditional, in which the woman is responsible mainly for the home and the man responsible mainly for work outside the home; transitional, in which the woman works outside the home and the man helps a bit, but her realm is still primarily home and children, and his is primarily work and income; and egalitarian, in which a man and a woman share the household responsibilities, childrearing, and income-earning.
equally. Of course, no family falls exactly into one particular categorization, even in *The Second Shift*, but families fall more easily into one model than the others.

The different parenting models described in this chapter lend themselves more easily to different gender ideologies. For example, the specialized stay-at-home parent model of family seen in the How Parents House Kids (HPHK) data is quite traditional: in all but one of 44 families who have a traditional SAHP, that stay-at-home parent is a woman. If a parent works outside the home in these situations, it is the man in the relationship. In these families, men do very little housework and childrearing, and women do very little income-earning. In a culture where engaging in work is important for status, and child care and housekeeping are no longer considered “work” (Boydston 1990), these arrangements tend to systematically strip status from women and enhance it for men.

The supermomming families described above could be considered transitional in terms of gender ideology. Though much of the childrearing and work is still split along the lines of women and men, mothers in these arrangements are working as well as caring for children, and fathers help with some of the daily transportation of children. Additionally, several of the supermomming families have fathers who are the “supermom,” or “superdad” as it were. These families are truly transitional, or even egalitarian, blurring traditional gender lines for the sake of what works best for the family’s situation.

The most egalitarian families in the How Parents House Kids sample are families that engage in cooperative parenting. These families are usually lower-income families who have taken an “all-hands-on-deck” approach to income-earning and childrearing. Parents either split childcare hours by working alternate schedules or working side-by-side and blurring the lines of what constitutes work, what constitutes home life, and what constitutes childrearing activity.
Why do parents of different income classes engage in different forms of blended childrearing, notably the middle-income supermomming parents and the middle- and low-income cooperative parents? The answer may be hidden in the kind of status that concertedly cultivating a child creates among the American middle-class (Lareau 2003). When a family has enough income from one partner, but both partners have high human capital and expect higher status, producing a child (through shuttling to activities, working part-time to spend more time with the child, and even taking the primary role so the child has a de-facto stay-at-home parent) may constitute some creation of status lost by not working full-time in a high-status job. Low- and middle-income people, on the other hand, do not necessarily have the luxury to seek status as high-income people do: the hierarchy of needs most likely prioritizes economic survival, and thus both parents must bring in money. However, both parents also coordinate to be at home, parenting their children with similar responsibilities and intensity, instead of shifting the household and childrearing work to primarily one parent.

Finally, the gendered division of childrearing labor is related to institutions beyond the family as well as gender and parenting ideologies within it. One way to examine this point is by looking at the men engaged in activities and parenting models traditionally filled by women partners. Shaheem, discussed above, is the sole man in our sample who is a specialized stay-at-home parent. Though Shaheem expects to follow the entrepreneurial dream soon—now that his fiancé has secured childcare vouchers and he will have a little more time for work—he has been the primary parent for the past year. He says that this role is because his fiancé has a job and he does not, and it is almost certainly due in some part to the fact that Shaheem has a criminal record. Whereas his fiancé is certified as a home health aid, Shaheem’s interaction with the institution of the criminal justice system has decreased his own power in the formal labor market.
Men who act as the primary parent in the “supermomming” family model all have wives who have more steady, well-paid jobs, probably the jobs that provide the benefits for the family. Ria’s husband, Tim, is only one example of this small handful. Tim has no advanced education; but his wife, Ria, has an engineering degree, and her job can support the family. Tim’s work can be run out of the house, in tandem with raising the children. Thus, Tim is “supermomming” in a homesteaded way, keeping work and home together and thus reducing somewhat the geographic negotiations of childrearing. Justin, a high-income, “homesteaded” father from Cleveland whose wife works as a researcher for Cleveland Clinic, started his own IT business recently and works from home. Though she makes more money and has benefits with her job, Justin has much more flexibility than his wife and is the one thinking of reducing his work and being at home with his son a couple of days a week because his son is having a hard time being in daycare full time.

Some immigrant families have particularly strained relationships with institutions due to lack of documentation in the United States. As detailed in Chapter 2, this leads to family routines being constrained in space and time in ways that documented immigrants and citizens do not experience. Additionally, immigrant families in which one parent is documented and another is not may require one parent to engage with institutions like schooling for their children, even if the other parent is actually the primary caregiver. This means that some immigrant fathers who are partnered to undocumented, stay-at-home mothers end up taking on some of the primary caregiver role as far as transportation to and interactions with institutions are concerned.

Low-income families who engage in cooperative parenting are shaped by institutions, maybe more than by any kind of gender ideology. The emerging 24/7 nature of the economy, the high probability that both spouses will have to work in order to make ends meet, and the sluggishness with which public family supports have adjusted to these things have resulted in
many low-income families seeking cooperative parenting solutions. Presser (2003) finds that shift-work strains marriages, and this strain is most certainly true in terms of lack of time together and chaotic schedules. The cooperative parents in the How Parents House Kids sample seem to have positive views on the amount of work their partners do, unlike many of the parents (mostly women) in the supermomming and specialized stay-at-home parent groups. Whereas mothers who stay home with their children or are the primary caregivers may complain about the lack of daily help their partners can or are willing to provide, cooperative parents either praise their partners or see this as a non-issue.

As the institution of work becomes more and more gig-based and rates of self-employment and non-traditional hours rise, research should address to the ways that family forms are changing. The HPHK sample shows a new form of “homesteaded” family arising across classes, from those who are very poor and work gig-based jobs to make ends meet, while bringing their children with them, to those who are well-educated and well-off, making a decision to homeschool children and work at home in a kind of overdrive “supermomming” model. This change is, in some ways, a kind of pre-industrial arrangement: work, home, and care/school is now all based in the same place, much like the “corporate” family (Ruggles 2015) or the “piecework” family of the early 1900’s (Davies & Frink 2014). However, the new homestead is also much different, and based in a different institutional context entirely.

Because of child labor laws and changing cultural ideas about the universal need for education, children’s education is now of paramount importance in homesteaded families, whereas it was mostly ignored in the family production unit of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Additionally, male dominance of household production may have gone the way of assumed patriarchy in general. Therborn writes, “Compared to the world of 1900 patriarchy has
had to retreat everywhere” (2004:129). Homesteaded partners may very well be just that—partners—in ways unavailable in the early 1900’s, thanks to “political and cultural changes [that] have undercut the authority of fathers and elders” (Therborn 2004:129).

I return again to the idea of the “traditional” family, the nuclear, breadwinner/homemaker family upheld by functionalists in the 1950s and 1960s as the convergent form of family in an industrial society. We see from the descriptions of family forms that urban American families in the early 21st century sometimes divide labor and work along the breadwinner/homemaker model, but most often they do not. The new forms of parental relationships and parenting organization described above show new complexity in how parents organize childrearing. The complexity reflects not just a changing economy—one in which dual-earner families are the norm in two-parent families—but also changing cultural values of gendered parenting and the blurring of lines between work and family.

When women entered the workforce in greater numbers in the latter half of the twentieth century, attempts to balance work and life evolved. The American institution of work in the latter half of the twentieth century was very much a sphere separate from the home; in the first part of the twenty-first century this division of spheres is slowly changing as more people see work in the gig economy and through self-employment and entrepreneurship. Family, too, will adjust, and examining how and why these adjustments are happening will be imperative for scholars of twenty-first century work, gender, and child development.
CHAPTER 4
Living Near Family:
Kin Support for Parents’ Work and Wellbeing

Introduction

Past research has documented the importance of kin support for childrearing and daily survival in poor communities, especially as it pertains to poor, single mothers. Though basic market theory and past research suggests that middle- and upper-class families can use financial resources to buy the childcare they need, emerging studies suggest that families of all classes use kincare. This paper shows that most parents of all classes often rely on some amount of informal kincare while their children are young. Using data from in-depth, qualitative interviews with a stratified, random sample of poor, working-class, and middle-class families in two large American cities, I analyze the role that extended family plays in successful organization of childcare by working parents. I examine differences in the time, cost, and responsibilities for family care, and the importance of extended family location in parents’ decisions about residential location.

Findings show that kincare is a necessary private safety net for parents’ public work. Low-income and working-class families from the sample often rely on private networks for either all or part of their daily childcare. In the absence of these networks, families from the lower classes face obstacles in scheduling or payment of formal care. These problems can make it difficult for lower- and working-class families to attain or advance in paid employment. Middle-class families in our sample often pay for childcare, and this allows them to better maintain connections to good employment. However, middle-class families also rely on extended family networks for childcare, particularly for the gap times of day between when
school or childcare ends and when the workday ends, or during times when work is particularly
demanding. Notably, both lower- and middle-class families describe the importance of proximity
to extended family in choosing residential location. Differences in the labor markets of each city,
as well as the differences in childcare assistance policies of each state, seem to be related to how
and when families call upon kincare for help with their children. I conclude that further research
should examine the cost of the lack of an American childcare safety net on all classes.

**Literature Review**

In the mid-twentieth century, functionalist sociologists began to consider the change in
family form that would happen because of the rapid changes in the economy. Parsons and Bale
(1956) suggested that, as the family was no longer the main unit of production, family was no
longer as functional as it once was, and thus divorce rates and general disorganization were
higher. Sociologist William Goode (1963) put forward the idea that, as a result of the
industrialization of the world economic system, family would converge on a conjugal, nuclear
form, something that functioned outside the extended family network. He hypothesized that, as
the world economy became more industrial and less agricultural, linking families to work
through one waged earner as opposed to production within the family unit itself, “Extended
kinship ties weaken, lineage patterns dissolve, and a trend toward some form of the conjugal
system begins to appear—that is, the nuclear family becomes a more independent kinship unit”
(Goode 1963:6).

The nuclear family that Goode predicted would be the main form once industrialization
had taken root nationally and globally is the one depicted in many popular imaginations as the
“traditional” family: a husband and father who goes outside the house to earn money through
waged work and a wife and mother who stays at home to tend to the house and raise the children. These nuclear families would be able to best react to changes in the economy and become mobile for jobs that might exist in locales away from their extended kin. However, recent sociologists (see Cherlin 2012; Cherlin 2010; Therborn 2004) have contended that the nuclear family of the mid-twentieth century may be yet another vestige of a particular era and dominant ideology. Indeed, help from—and even residence with—extended family, and the importance of “kincare” in childrearing routines, has received scholarly attention for decades.

Research has suggested that informal economic and instrumental support from family and close friends are necessary survival strategies for many poor, single mothers. Just preceding the passage of welfare reform in 1996, Edin and Lein (1997) conducted an extensive study of how single mothers were faring economically within the cycle of welfare and work in which they often found themselves. The authors found that mothers relied on a variety of informal supports from family that included money, food, and instrumental support caring for children. In fact, many of Edin and Lein’s findings underlined earlier work by Stack (1974) on the interdependence of family members in poor communities for survival. Edin and Lein pointed to high welfare recidivism rates in their conclusion that, though there was a “continuing attraction of work for these women” (87), they had a very hard time making work pay for all the necessities of life, the cost of which was greatly exacerbated by the need to care for, or buy care for, children.

Networks of family and close friends in the inner city were essential to the material and economic survival of many of the women: “We uncovered similar [to Stack] evidence of survival networks, particularly among women who lived in very poor neighborhoods. Indeed, their reliance on these networks was one of the reasons mothers gave for not moving to the suburbs or
to other cities with somewhat better employment prospects” (216). Stack and Burton (1993) theorize this kind of familial interdependence as “kinscripts” and suggest that social science researchers need to consider not only the experience and narrative of the individual, but to locate that individual within a family, which has its own unique experience and narrative. Isolating this individual from the family in theory or empirical studies, the authors suggest, ignores a large part of the social story within which that individual exists, and ignores the “kin work” necessary for individual and family survival.

More recent research into the effects of networks on childcare decisions and family geography is scarce, and results are mixed. Brewster & Padavic (2002) found that kin care in African American families actually declined significantly between 1977 and 1994, but that the decline was much less pronounced for young single mothers who did not live in the South. These findings suggested that support from relatives was usually available if needed, but that many mothers wanted to do without it, and would try to seek market-based solutions for care if they could. Another study using data from the Fragile Families study (Lui & Anderson 2012) found that mothers who had household incomes between 100% and 200% of the poverty line were more likely to use relative care than mothers who were 200% or more above the poverty line, suggesting a link between economic need and relative care.

Other studies have found that kinship ties may deter inter-neighborhood mobility and that such ties are most geographically binding for low-income families (Dawkins 2006). Finally, another recent study found that families moving in an intra-urban context often choose to move nearer to family, and that low-income families with children are more likely drawn to neighborhoods with family than their higher-income or non-parental counterparts (Hedman 2012). The authors state that the “results presented in this paper do not explain why people
moved to areas where family members live, although they do allow for some qualified guesses” (Hedman 2012:43). One hypothesis the authors propose is that family members facilitate daily work and survival related to childcare and other household work.

Less research focuses on the importance of kincare for middle- and upper-class families. Most sociological literature suggests that, because they are able to buy market-based childcare solutions, the middle- and upper-classes do not have or use networks (especially family networks) to the same extent as the poor, though new research into school choice seems to contest at least part of this claim (see Lareau 2013). Findings from recent exploratory, multi-class studies suggest a link between proximity of a grandmother and a mother’s connection to the labor force across classes. An Italian study of women’s labor force participation and grandmother’s proximity and ability to care for a woman’s children (by being retired) suggests a link between a mother’s ability to work and a grandmother’s presence (Aparicio-Fenoll & Vidal-Fernandez 2014). This study acknowledges the particularities of the Italian context—the propensity to have informal care provisions among “families with children less than three years of age because childcare is scarce and service is rationed” (9)—but points to data from the U.S. Survey of Income and Program Participation that suggest 1 in 5 preschool-aged America children with working mothers are primarily cared for by grandparents (1). A study using panel-data collected in the United States through the 1990’s suggests that the proximity of a woman’s mother or mother-in-law increases the probability of her labor force participation by 4-10 percentage points (Compton & Pollak 2014). This economic study concludes that the mechanism by which this increase happens is availability of childcare, particularly as insurance for problems arising from “irregular or unanticipated childcare needs” (72).
Overall, the literature on middle- and upper-class families, and particularly the mothers in them, and how they arrange a work-life balance ignores the potentially important question of how having informal family networks aid this balance. The individual, not the family, is considered as the unit of analysis, and thus studies have yet to truly parse out the “kin work” (Stack and Burton 1993) that happens, at least to some extent, in all classes. Understanding this private arrangement in America is important to understanding how childcare problems transcend class, while reinforcing gender and class inequalities. The middle- and upper-classes can buy their ways out of some of the problems with regular childcare—the quality of care chosen is usually better and the amount of care they can buy is directly related to income. However, problems arise for middle- and upper-class parents when economic capital—money—does not buy a way out of an irregular situation: a child is sick and cannot go to the trusted care provider, or parents must work on an irregular day when the provider isn’t open. In these situations, social capital is more important, and—because we assume that economic resources trump social resources for wealthier people—we know very little about how middle- and upper-class families activate social capital in response to the unreliability of raising children.

Geographic and Policy Contexts: Cuyohoga County, Ohio and Dallas County, Texas

Cuyohoga County, Ohio and Dallas County, Texas exemplify two major types of metropolitan areas in the United States. Cuyohoga County—and its largest city, Cleveland—is a rust-belt area of Northeastern Ohio in the midst of a population decline, though the decline is slowing: it lost just 2.4% of its population between 2010 and 2016 (U.S. Census Bureau. The U.S. Census estimated the 2010 population of Cuyohoga County as 1.28 million people, with a racial distribution of approximately 64% White and 31% Black. Cuyohoga County is home to
approximately 33,161 employers and the average commute workers make is about 24 minutes. Cuyohoga County is poorer than America as a whole, with a poverty rate estimated at 18.3% versus 14.0% (U.S. Census 2016, “Cuyahoga County”).

On the other hand, Dallas County—and its largest city Dallas—is a sun-belt area experiencing a population boom, with 8.8% growth between 2010 and 2016. The U.S. Census estimated the 2010 population of Dallas County, Texas in 2010 as 2.37 million, with a racial distribution of 67% White and 24% Black; 40% of Dallas County residents identify as Hispanic. Dallas County is home to approximately 64,505 employers and the average commute workers make is about 27 minutes. Dallas County is also poorer than America as a whole, with a poverty rate estimated at 16.3% (U.S. Census 2016, “Dallas County.”)

Though both counties are home to many employers, Cuyohoga County is by far a more regional city than Dallas County, which is more international and national in some of its business. For example, the 2015 Fortune 500 list included only three companies within Cuyohoga County limits; there were 15 companies from Dallas County proper (and more within a commutable distance in surrounding counties) that made the same list in 2015 (Dempsey 2015).

Childcare policy differences between these two states are also important for this analysis. Notably, the availability of and process for receiving childcare assistance in the form of a state subsidy—a program available to many low-income parents throughout the United States, from the Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) block grant—differs greatly between these two locales (Stevens et al. 2016). In Ohio, childcare assistance is administered by the county in which recipients live. Ohio has guaranteed assistance to recipients of cash welfare, or Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), who are working or in school, and also guarantees
childcare assistance to families with children under the purview of Child Protective Services (CPS). Any kind of schooling makes an applicant eligible for a subsidy, and Ohio has no work or educational hour minimum to qualify for the subsidy. A subsidy recipient who is in the midst of a job search does not have to do that search at an approved facility in the state of Ohio. Homeless families in Ohio who apply are also guaranteed a childcare subsidy. Additionally, the website for Cuyohoga County’s child care assistance states that each new application for child care assistance for families at 130% of the poverty level will be processed within 30 days of receipt. The website does not mention a waitlist (Cuyahoga County 2018).

In Texas, the Texas Workforce Commission has given over the administration of child care services to a third party, Workforce Solutions (Texas Rising Star 2018). Though the initial eligibility cutoff for Texas is higher, at 200% of the federal poverty line, fewer families are guaranteed childcare: TANF recipients, children with special needs, and CPS cases are sometimes prioritized but not guaranteed a subsidy. According to one Workforce Solutions website, applications are open for assistance but all applications will be placed on a waiting list: “Funding for CCS assistance is limited and the waiting list is longer than it was in the past. We cannot give a timeline for enrollment from the wait list. Remember you must contact us every ninety (90) days to keep your place on the waiting list.” To qualify for a subsidy while engaging in a job search in Texas, a recipient must perform this search from an approved facility. Additionally, though recipients do not have any restrictions on the type of education they pursue, they must be at work or in an educational setting at least 25 hours per week to qualify for and keep the subsidy.

Data and Methods
For this analysis of extended family support of childcare and family routines, I did secondary coding, looking particularly at the arrangements of parents and their school-aged and younger children in relation to the extended family help they received. I first categorized all respondents by the type of family support they received for childcare, using rules detailed in Appendix A. I then designated whether families received daily help from extended family (that is, extended family provided their routine childcare); and whether families received at least weekly help from families (that is, extended family provided occasional scheduled childcare, or helped as needed during childcare breakdowns or family provided all childcare.)

Findings and Analysis

I separate the two metro areas of Cleveland and Dallas to better discern how geography of a place plays into the use of extended family care. The samples from each city are similar, however, as Table 4.1 shows. The Cleveland sample for this analysis totals 56 individuals interviewed; the Dallas sample totals 67. Ages of individuals are similar, with Cleveland respondents being, on average, two years younger than those in Dallas. The individuals in the Cleveland sample are, on average, better educated than those in the Dallas sample, but the percentage of respondents who had received a college degree or more by the time of the interview is the same. Employment is similar, though Dallas has a larger proportion of individuals employed full time than Cleveland. The main demographic differences between the two cities are those of race and ethnicity and marital status. The majority of the Cleveland sample (59%) identify as black, whereas the large plurality (48%) of the Dallas sample identify as Hispanic. This is similar to the demographic differences of the cities in general. Additionally, 39% of our Cleveland sample is married, compared to 54% of the Dallas sample. However,
approximately the same percentage of respondents in Cleveland and Dallas (62% and 69%, respectively) cohabit with a romantic partner, married or unmarried.

Table 4.1: Daily and Weekly Extended Family Involvement in Childrearing, by City

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Cleveland (Total N=57)</th>
<th>Dallas (Total N=69)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>%</td>
<td>Number</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily Involvement</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weekly Involvement</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.1 shows one of the major findings of this paper: a majority of families from both metro areas rely on extended family members at least weekly to provide some kind of childcare. In Cleveland, three-quarters of families in the sample rely on family care at least weekly, and in Dallas, two-thirds of the families rely on care weekly.

Out of the 126 families interviewed in Dallas and Cleveland in 2014, only 22 and 14, or 33% and 25% respectively, relied primarily on extended family for daily childcare provision. Counting extended-family care used as “coverage,” or in emergency situations (school closings or a child’s illness) or as relief for parents (when parents needed to run an errand and needed to leave children with another adult for a period of time), 66% of Dallas parents and 75% of Cleveland parents reported relying on extended family for help with childcare at least weekly.

Kincare by Family Characteristics

Extended family care plays a role—daily and weekly—in the routines of the majority of the families in our sample. Tables 1, 2, and 3 describe the breakdown of extended family involvement by type of involvement (Table 4.1), and then relate this type of involvement by

---

4Includes families with daily involvement.
family characteristics, race (Table 4.2), and class, as determined by reported income in 2013 (Table 4.3). Tables show results for both Cleveland and Dallas families separately.

Table 4.2: Extended Family Involvement, by Income

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Cleveland</th>
<th></th>
<th>Dallas</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Low-Income</td>
<td>Middle-Income</td>
<td>High-Income</td>
<td>Low-Income</td>
<td>Middle-Income</td>
<td>High-Income</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group N</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily Involvement</td>
<td>19% (5)</td>
<td>50% (7)</td>
<td>12% (2)</td>
<td>36% (10)</td>
<td>35% (9)</td>
<td>27% (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weekly Involvement</td>
<td>69% (18)</td>
<td>86% (12)</td>
<td>76% (13)</td>
<td>61% (17)</td>
<td>73% (19)</td>
<td>60% (9)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.3: Extended Family Involvement, by Race/Ethnicity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Cleveland</th>
<th></th>
<th>Dallas</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group N</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily Involvement</td>
<td>30% (10)</td>
<td>18% (3)</td>
<td>0% (0)</td>
<td>25% (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weekly Involvement</td>
<td>76% (25)</td>
<td>76% (13)</td>
<td>67% (2)</td>
<td>75% (3)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.4: Extended Family Involvement, by Employment Status

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Cleveland</th>
<th></th>
<th>Dallas</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>Part-time</td>
<td>Full-time</td>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>Part-time</td>
<td>Full-time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group N</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily Involvement</td>
<td>0% (0)</td>
<td>50% (7)</td>
<td>26% (7)</td>
<td>26% (6)</td>
<td>55% (6)</td>
<td>32% (11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weekly Involvement</td>
<td>44% (7)</td>
<td>100% (14)</td>
<td>82% (22)</td>
<td>52% (12)</td>
<td>82% (9)</td>
<td>69% (24)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The majority of families in all income classes utilize at least weekly extended family care. Interestingly, the middle-income families (those making 50-100% of the area median income) are most likely to utilize family for weekly care. Compared with low-income families, middle-income families are and just as likely in Dallas and more likely in Cleveland to utilize daily care.
Though Black respondents in both cities are more likely to rely on family for daily childcare, Black and White respondents in Cleveland are almost equally likely to rely on family for weekly care, with 76% and 75% of respondents, respectively, reporting some kind of extended family care during the week. In Dallas, only 55% of White respondents reported weekly family care, as opposed to 66% of Hispanic respondents and 71% of Black respondents.

Employment status also seems to have a relationship to the kind of extended family care a respondent uses (see Table 4.4). Fifty percent of part-time respondents in Cleveland and 55% of part-time respondents in Dallas use family care on a daily basis, compared with 27% and 32% of full-time employees in Cleveland and Dallas, respectively. One-hundred percent of respondents employed part-time in Cleveland and 82% of respondents employed part-time in Dallas used extended family care at least weekly; this is compared to 81% and 71% of full-time employed respondents in Cleveland and Dallas, respectively, who used family care at least weekly. Though unemployed respondents in both cities were less likely to use some kind of family care, 44% of unemployed respondents in Cleveland and 50% of unemployed respondents in Dallas still relied on some kind of weekly extended family help.

Family’s Experiences: How Availability of Extended Family for Childcare Shapes Work, Residential, and Parenting Choices

*June, Black, low-income, Cuyahoga County*

June, a single mother from Cleveland who works about 20 hours a week, relies on a combination of center daycare (which she pays for with a voucher) and help from her family. The family network is close in emotional and geographic location to June: she and her two children, and occasionally her fiancé, live with June’s older aunt, who work at a bank downtown, and her mother lives close by. June’s grandmother, who is retired and has more time flexibility,
lives out “by the airport,” but has a car and drives to help June with her kids every day. In fact, during the week, June’s oldest child lives with June’s grandmother who is closer to his behavioral therapist. Her son attends a daycare near her home—she chose it specifically for its proximity, “just in case somebody from the house can just walk around the corner and pick them up”—and June’s grandmother or mom keep June’s baby daughter when she goes to work. Though June just received her driver’s license, she does not have a car, and so takes the bus to and from her job program downtown. The commute is about an hour each way. Luckily, her grandmother stays around June’s aunt’s home during the day to care for the baby and act as backup for daycare pickups.

June appreciates the work she does—she is part of a training program through TANF—but also realizes that she would be unable to even apply or interview for a job without the help of her family. As her daycare voucher is dependent on whether or not she is presently working, June had a hard time applying for a job because of her childcare responsibilities. Her grandmother made it possible: “[I] tried to go put in applications, they could have said no take your kids with you. I might have not have got a job. But for the simple fact my Grandma she was like, ‘You know what I see you trying to push yourself more to get yourself to do better to get your kids together I got you. I’ll watch the kids you go put in some more applications.’” June’s mom and aunt also step in on a daily or weekly basis to pick up her son from daycare when June is late at work. The proximity of June’s mom’s residence to where June lives, and the proximity of the daycare itself, make this possible.

June would like to move to a nicer area of Cuyahoga county. She does not really like the schools or the persistent problems with amenities and crime in her inner-ring suburb. However, she has a family network that she relies on heavily and accepts that this network will be a big
part of her future neighborhood decisions. She mentions Elyria as an ideal place to live, and says right away that it’s not too far “because I have people that live out so it's like not really worried about it.” What if you didn’t have people out there, we ask. “Then I probably wouldn't move out there.” June then goes to list of other surrounding areas that would be too far:

No because Akron is too far right now so yeah. Wouldn't go to Akron, I definitely wouldn't go to Lorraine; I definitely wouldn't go to Canton; I would probably stay in Cleveland. … It's like I'm close to certain people in my family, so I want to be at least in the vicinity not as close but close enough that if something happens it don't take them four or five hours just to get to where we're at.

In fact, June describes the proximity of her family network while raising kids and trying to work as the thing that has been essential to her own development: “It gave me more of a variety of me trying to make; I can't even think of the word, me getting myself together more. Together more of that push.”

_Julie, white, high-income, Cuyahoga County_

Julie is a married mother of two daughters. She lives in an affluent suburb of Cleveland, and sends her oldest to the public schools there; her youngest daughter attends a private daycare, the same one her older daughter goes to in the mornings before school and after school lets out, before her parents get home. Julie laments the fact that they have to pay for the daycare—she would rather spend the money for other things: “We’d change the kitchen. We’d change the floors. Um, and we’ve had many a discussion about this, but we’ve got to wait for daycare to be done, you know, or at least have one of them out of daycare.” Between Julie and her husband’s professional salaries, however, the family is able to afford the cost of this care and their other necessities. She does wonder why the schools in their suburb don’t offer before or after school care: “Fabulous school system, [but] they think everybody stays home.”
Julie and her husband grew up in the neighborhood they now live in, as do her parents and most of her siblings; she talks about how her brother lives about 10 minutes away, and a sister who lives 25 minutes away. In contrast, it takes about three minutes to get to her parents’ house by car. Julie’s mother-in-law is about half a mile down the road, so even closer. Though Julie relies on paid care and school during the day for her girls while she and her husband are at work, she relies heavily on her husband’s family when childcare breakdowns occur. Julie relays a story about her younger daughter’s daycare closing for weather reasons, and not letting her know until she had to pick them up 15 minutes later:

They said, “Well, due to the weather, we’re shutting down early, we need you to come pick Julianna up.” And I said, “I’m in downtown Cleveland, which is gonna be about 45 minutes to where you are in this weather.” … I said, “I never got a notice about this.” … And, um, so my mother-in-law, again, jumped to the rescue and went and got her in the snowstorm and she had already been out once to get Mary for us ‘cause we both work downtown.

Julie’s mother-in-law had already picked up her oldest from school earlier in the day because of weather, and ended up getting the youngest as well. The fact that Julie’s young family lives close by her parents and her mother-in-law make the daily shuffle much more convenient, with Julie’s mother-in-law providing weekly “backup” care for her daughters and allowing Julie and her husband to finish their days at work downtown when the kids have emergencies. Additionally, Julie’s mother-in-law helps with the cost of the paid daycare, because she “feels bad” that she doesn’t have the energy or the desire to watch the kids on a regular, daily basis.

Julie has done well in her profession as a loan officer at a credit union; in fact, her husband has told her that she should take “one of those management positions” that come up for good employees, but Julie has thus far resisted a move up the career ladder: she says it’s “too much stress.” When her husband declares that he would like to be a stay-at-home dad, they both
laugh in a similar way: they are comfortable but rely on both parental incomes to make ends
meet, and rely on both themselves and their nearby extended families to pull the weight of
raising children.

Julie’s family has always lived in this neighborhood, and she expects that they always
will live there. This is a happy thing for Julie, because though she sometimes considers what it
would be like to live elsewhere, she has everything she needs and wants for herself and her
children in their neighborhood:

I mean, which is really wonderful... You know, to be so close with them, in proximity to
everybody so... Marc's is down the street, Giant Eagle's down the street, you know.
...Daycare's around the corner, the other one's down the corner, so within a mile or two,
what, you know, for us so it's really -... I mean, I think it's a perfect location.

When she considers moving—hypothetically, of course—Julie discusses how she wouldn’t move
too far away from her family, and they would want to keep their relatively short 25-minute
commute to work.

It'd have to be thinking that way, but we would probably be one of the surrounding
Westside suburbs... One, close to work, and then two, to family ‘cause that’s it - the
ride's not bad....

Family factors into Julie and her family’s moving decisions, and she knows that this will not
only get them the proximity to family that they desire and need to raise their children, but it will
put their children in a desirable, safe, and amenity-filled neighborhood.

Possibility versus Convenience

Some class similarity in experience of using extended family at least weekly for childcare
needs is also shown in the tables. People who are well-educated and uneducated and people who
make a lot of money as well as people who make very little or no money rely, to a large extent,
on at least some type of family childcare to get through a normal week. However, the story of the
class differences between how and why families use extended family care arises from the analysis of our in-depth qualitative interviews. Indeed, it seems that families with fewer economic resources often use extended family care to make balancing work and children possible, whereas families with more resources use extended family care to make balancing work and children convenient.

Linda, a White low-income mother of two daughters who lives in Cleveland city, describes the difficulty of taking a new job while waiting for a daycare voucher to come through. Though her oldest daughter goes to school, her youngest is not yet old enough. Linda thus relies on her sister to watch her youngest—and provide care for her oldest before and after school—during the times she is working and hasn’t yet received a daycare voucher: “I’m not in school anymore, so now that I’m working I have to go down there and reapply [for the daycare voucher]. And for the two weeks that it will take, my sister will keep them while I go to work.” Linda’s work is made possible by the fact that she lives in the same household as her adult sister, and that her sister is able and willing to watch her children. This arrangement is necessary even though Linda will qualify for and eventually receive state assistance for daycare; Linda’s job requires that she start immediately, and she cannot apply for assistance until she has this job.

Similarly, Linda Beth, a Black mother of two from Dallas, relies on family care to make her night shift employment schedule work out. She has two adopted young children at home now, but her older biological daughter acts as her extended family care, and Linda acts in the same way for this daughter. Linda works nights at Walmart, and her daughter is the adult at the house with the adopted children and her own son: “My daughter’s - she moved here.” In the morning, Linda’s daughter gets the kids ready for school. Linda Beth arrives home around 7:30

---

5 Respondents in Cleveland note that, after application, daycare vouchers usually take about two weeks to receive.
in the morning, and then she takes over as primary parent. Linda Beth’s daughter works during
the day and gets home in the afternoon, about the same time the older kids get home from school.
Linda Beth then sleeps for a few hours: “I go about 4 o’clock, and then I get up about 9.” The
routine then repeats. Not only does Linda Beth’s schedule almost preclude her from using
traditional daycare, she also doesn’t want to pay for it because “Walmart don’t pay me enough
money.” To make her work at this low-income job possible, Linda relies on extended family
care. In fact, to make both her job and her daughter’s job possible, her daughter has moved into
the household.

Some working-class and most middle-class parents experience this differently. They do
not necessarily need family around to work,, but having family around certainly makes working
and raising children more convenient. Jennifer, a White middle-class mother of one from Dallas,
and her husband moved to their current neighborhood to be near Jennifer’s family. However,
with her daughter in a private school and her husband’s lucrative executive level job, the family
does not need Jennifer’s parents around to be able to work. It does, however, make it more
convenient to be working parents. Jennifer, who works from home part-time as a meal
preparation chef, says, “My mom is eight minutes from here, which is nice. She would drop in
on her way home from work. My dad’s right by here. This is the area I’m familiar with so it’s
just super convenient.” Her parents take turns watching her daughter during the hours that school
is off and that Jennifer needs to work; they also provide care when Jennifer and her husband
want to do something by themselves on the weekends or in the evenings.

Katherine, a White middle-class mother from an affluent suburb of Cleveland, relocated
from another suburb to be closer to her family. Though she is a stay-at-home mom, and her
husband makes a very large income as a partner at his own law firm, Katherine uses her own
family instead of paid babysitters to make her life convenient. Indeed, her family expects and delights in this:

Um so they do, they’re really great about um they love having them for a sleep overs and things like that or if we’re if we go out of town, they’ll take them for a weekend. Um we, it’s usually me, well, me taking them, usually if it’s going to their house it’s for a sleepover. My mom will sometimes come over and watch the girls if um I have something going on during the day and I usually try and work in you know lunch together or make it a social thing, too.

Katherine’s family expects her to rely on them for care, and expects her to utilize this care to facilitate activities besides work. Likewise, Lauren, a middle-class income White mother of three from Dallas, moved into her current house with her husband because the neighborhood was close to her family. A former classroom teacher, Lauren stays home with her three children, but engages her family to give her a break during the week:

My mom will come over a couple of times a week. Do you want to go to the store? Do you want to run? And [my sister is] home from college so she's been here a ton and, like I got to get a haircut today because she was here.

These middle-class income families have a stay-at-home parent, but have still moved to their present locations to be closer to family, because their families provide childcare that makes their lives easier and less stressful.

**A Stay-at-Home-Parent in (Almost) Every Network**

A large portion of our respondents—35%—are traditional stay-at-home parents, either voluntarily or involuntarily as they are unemployed and look for work. All of these stay-at-home parents are women. Stay-at-home mothers have often worked in the past but dropped out of the labor market to raise their children, especially when they are young. As childcare is hard to attain, arrange, and pay for, this is unsurprising. Stay-at-home parents of all classes in the

---

6 This is explored further in Chapter 3.
study speak of the convenience not having to work creates in their daily routines; they also sometimes speak longingly of going back to work. This longing to go back to work can be because of a desire for more monetary resources and/or a desire to be reconnected to the labor force for reasons of satisfaction and identity. However, all stay-at-home parents seem to derive some convenience out of the fact that they are not trying to juggle children’s care needs with the demands of the workforce.

Alternately, an analysis of the family routines that make up the daily lives of our respondents shows that many more families have an “acting stay-at-home parent” (“acting SAHP”), or a parent who works at least some of the time for wages but is able to be flexible enough to do most of the childrearing commute responsibilities in addition to his or her own employment. Additionally, the acting SAHP could also be a grandparent or other relative who lives in the home—and in two cases, in Cleveland, lives in the home next door—who takes care of most of the childrearing routines during the week. This might also be a relative who is the parent “on-call,” someone who is close enough to the child’s location during the workweek that he or she can take care of any issues that arise. Of our 125 families, 51 have some kind of “acting SAHP” arrangement, where at least one parent who is in the workforce arranges work to be part-time or flexible enough to still take on the full-time childrearing responsibilities. This means that, between true SAPH and acting SAHP families, 95, or approximately three-quarters of families in our sample, have some arrangement that allows them to have at least one parent (or close family member) solely or heavily devoted to childrearing during the week.

Some families have a “stay-at-home” or “on-call” parent who works fulltime and does quite well, often because they are self-employed or have exceedingly flexible schedules. For example, Justin, a White high-income father of two from Cleveland makes over $100,000 a year
running a programming company from his kitchen table while his wife works as a research scientist at the prestigious Cleveland Clinic. This work arrangement allows him to be in charge of transporting the kids to and from daycare—and eventually, to and from school—while maintaining a high income. He sets his own hours, and can work on his own schedule after the boys go to bed in the evening. Justin’s flexibility is particularly important for his family because his wife has a rather rigid job in a university lab. He is the only possible stay-at-home parent in his family network, because both his family and his wife’s family live out of state. When they thought about moving to Colorado to be closer to his wife’s family, Justin said they decided not to because the cost of living—especially the cost of childcare—would be too high.7

What happens when there is not a network on-call parent? The parents of young children become even more overwhelmed than they already are; some have to quit jobs, some are fired, and some decide to move closer to their networks. All these things might happen because of a vacuum—every network seems to need an on-call parent, someone who is close enough to home, flexible enough, and physically able to put the care needs of the children before everything else. In the absence of this on-call parent, primary parents experience a great deal of emotional, mental, and economic stress while they negotiate alternatives.

If there is almost always an on-call parent, why then do some parents still risk actions that could lead to sanctions in jobs—being late, taking too many days off, or leaving early? Parents in our sample seem to prefer to deal with their own childcare breakdowns and issues, even if there is another willing and able adult in their network who may not face the same kind of employment problems for dealing with them. Parents either want to be there for their own children during breakdowns or worry that the “on-call” parent is already doing more than she or he should be doing. Rose, a White single mother of two boys in Cleveland, works full time as a

7 The different forms of parents who work at home and care for children are more fully explored in Chapter 3.
medical assistant. Her mother helps her often—she works several blocks away from her
grandsons’ school and can “come and go as she pleases” at her job, thus enabling the kids to be
picked up by grandma in an emergency. Even so, Rose has still used six of her 15 allotted
vacation days this year to stay home with her kids during a particularly snowy winter when
schools were closed. She says, “I have used six days already and my mom has babysat them I
think three times.”

The Hidden Perk or Problematic Draw of Residential Location: Choosing Where to Live

According to the stories and descriptions of daily life from many of our respondents, the
location of extended family could be seen as a neighborhood amenity to take into consideration
when families decide if and where to relocate. The novel HPHK interview protocol asked
various questions about how parents make decisions about relocating, and what kind of amenities
are important in those decisions. We heard from many parents about the importance of—or,
sometimes, problems with—the proximity of family in residential decisions.

Parents often thought about moving in relation to how far they would be away from their
family networks—their “on-call network parent” or their daily family help with childcare—and
consciously factored such distance constraints into their moving plans. Dawn, a black working-
class income mother of two who lives in an inner-ring Cleveland suburb, was in the process of
looking to purchase a house when we interviewed her. When we asked where she was looking
she said, “I want to stay close to my mom and I want to stay close to my dad, I don’t want to go
too far.” Dawn works nights as a bartender and goes to school for a Criminal Justice degree
during the day. Though her children attend school during the hours she is in school and their
father stays with them during the nights she works, she wants to make sure she is close to her
parents for unforeseen childcare issues that arise. Likewise, Rebecca, a Black middle-class
mother of two, moved to the neighborhood they did because it was where they could find and
afford a duplex to house Rebecca’s nuclear family upstairs and her mother- and brother-in-law
downstairs. Rebecca says that any future moves will be made with the same criteria of keeping
the extended family together under the same roof.

Some parents had made a move in the past year for the very reason of being closer to
family. Amina, a low-income Black mother of two from Cleveland, is one such respondent.
Though she was living in a neighborhood she loved, she realized she was too isolated from her
family to meet her daily and weekly childcare needs:

Well, I have family here and I have more support, so like if I need something or I can’t
get to work or I can’t get there like my family, they have cars, and they’re like in walking
distance. But over on the west side, it was difficult, you know, to get help and I was like
literally like kind of by myself.

In the same way, Simone, a Black low-income step-mother to a one-year-old boy, moved with
her partner (the boys’ father) from the East side of Cleveland to the West side in the past year:

Family’s on the west side. Everything is on the west side, so anytime you want to get up
and do something, we have to catch a bus and go over there. So why not already be over
there.

Though Simone and her partner do almost all the care for their son themselves, they want their
son to grow up around his family on the West Side.

Alternately, some respondents did not directly consider the proximity of family in their
hypothetical and real moving arrangements, but did have a definite distance, usually measured in
driving time, that would be too far away from their networks. For example, Ta-Kahala is a Black
low-income mother of three who lives in an inner-ring Cleveland suburb with her aunt and
mother. She works 40 hours a week as a hostess at Olive Garden and sends her children to a
daycare near her home. She is considering moving, so when we asked her to do the housing simulation, she was prepared with certain search criteria:

Ta-Khala: I just put 10 miles.

Interviewer: Why'd you put ten miles?

Ta-Khala: Cause it’s as far as I'm willing to go, I don't want to go any farther than that.

Interviewer: What do you mean by that

Ta-Khala: Cause I feel like it would be too far from my mom. I can't just pop up and bother her or she can’t pop up and bother me.

Though Ta-Khala says that proximity to family is not necessarily on the top of her list for a place to relocate because “I can drive there,” 10 miles seems to be the furthest she is willing to drive.

Parents who did not have family close by to help sometimes discussed future moves in relation to getting closer to their family. Mary, a White, single, middle-class mother of one from a Cleveland suburb, described active plans to move closer to her parents, mainly for help raising her daughter: “There’s no-one in town, that’s why I’m moving to Maryland.” Mary relies on paid babysitters when she cannot be with her daughter, but realizes the precariousness of this situation, especially during unforeseen scheduling problems like snow days:

You know when we had snow days this winter, I called my friends and they'd be like, "Oh, they are at the grandparents', I'm at work."… Um, and that was - that sucked. … When I’m really desperate, um, usually thank God my babysitter wanted to be a school teacher…. So if Gracie's school is closed, Megan's school is usually closed.”

On days that Mary cannot get a babysitter, she works from home, but it is affecting her job:

“Especially since I don’t have a - I don’t work for a company that's all that keen on people working from home.” Beecause she has no family network in the area, Mary plans to relocate to Maryland before the next school year.
Finally, some parents we talked to expressed a desire to move away from their family—towards a better neighborhood or away from drama within their own family structure—but also expressed reluctance to do so because of the necessity of family help in raising children. Elie, a low-income Hispanic mother of three children lives with her mother in Dallas and is presently looking for work. She does hair and massage on the side, as well as fixes furniture to make ends meet. Her older children go to school, and she stays with the youngest when she is not working; her mother and other extended family members help out with her kids when she is working. She still lives in the same house she grew up in, and wants to move out and “live far away because of just flowing my dreams or whatever.” However, she realizes it’s going to be difficult because she relies so much on her extended family network to help with her kids:

Ima move out on my own is just…it something, or far away from home, that it’s something that it’s kind of hard because my family, they do help me a lot with my girls if I have to go to school or do something.

Like many respondents, Elie dreams of making it on her own in a place different from that she grew up in. However, because of the support she receives from her family, and because they are not moving anywhere anytime soon, she knows any kind of move will be difficult for her

*Regional City versus National City: Isolated Families in Cleveland and Dallas*

As noted above, Dallas and Cleveland are two very distinct metro areas. Each has its local and regional flavor and a particular history that connects it to the story of the post-industrial American economy. Dallas is the ninth largest city in the nation; Cleveland is the forty-eighth. Dallas is a more national—and even international city, with many Mexican immigrants—whereas Cleveland is more a regional city.
Overall, parents in Cleveland are more likely than parents in Dallas to call on extended family for weekly care, and parents in Dallas are more likely to call upon family for daily care. The distinction between the two cities, when it comes to family care and its geographic network, really seems to come in understanding who is isolated from a family network. By isolated, I mean a family is the definition of nuclear, consisting of only a parent or parents and children in a reasonably close geographic area. Families who are “isolated” do not have the “on-call” parent, and though they may have neighbors and other social supports they can call upon, mainly function as an independent, nuclear unit. Table 1, above, shows that 75% of parents in Cleveland versus 66% of parents in Dallas rely on family for at least weekly care.

The parents in our sample who are “isolated” from greater extended family networks are often in either Cleveland or Dallas for the reason of work alone. Dallas may have more companies that recruit nationally and even internationally for highly educated workers; there is also more work-based migration for people—mainly immigrants—on the low-end of the educational and economic spectrum in Dallas. In Cleveland, work sometimes draws highly-educated individuals to relocate—Justin and his wife who is a researcher at the Cleveland Clinic are examples—but Cleveland draws from a much more regional labor market. Thus, people of all socioeconomic classes and education may be more likely to have a reason to be in Cleveland beyond the economic opportunities there.

The “isolated” families are the minority in both the Cleveland and Dallas samples, but they provide interesting case studies into the reasons and ways that nuclear families function in the absence of extended family support. Anna and her husband, high-income residents of Dallas with two children, are an example. They met in college and the family moved when Anna’s husband was offered a highly-paid executive-level job at a company in Dallas if he relocated
from San Antonio. Her parents are at least a two-hour drive away; his parents are farther away. Anna works part-time as a pharmacist (after staying home for seven years) but also takes on the “second-shift” of household manager and childcare arranger, working with her older child’s school and her younger child’s babysitter to coordinate a routine that works for the family. Anna and her husband certainly have the monetary resources to buy market-based solutions to childcare, but she still says she wishes she had family around. (quote from 2015 interview) Much of Anna’s time after work hours is spent transporting her family: “I’m in the car all the time.” She is the stopgap for everything; with no “on-call” parent and a husband who works long hours and travels, Anna is the “on-call” parent for her network. Accordingly, she does not think she will ever take on full-time hours at her job, even though they would like her to do so. In fact, Anna expects the family may relocate again in the future, as promotions and reassignments in her husband’s job are common. This family, with considerable resources, negotiated childcare and work without a nearby extended family network.

On the other end of the economic spectrum are the families who, because of immigration laws and/or geographic distance, are isolated from their families of origin because of low-income work they seek in Dallas or in Cleveland. For example, Ricardo, a Hispanic father of two who does plumbing work and raises and sells animals came to Dallas in search of better employment. He and his wife are away from their families—he is mostly in Chicago, and hers is in Mexico. His wife stays home with their two children while he works, so she has become the “on-call” parent for their small network. They see his extended family when the family comes down to Dallas en route to Mexico, and his wife and children visit her family in Mexico in the summer. However, Ricardo is undocumented and thus cannot go with them.
Likewise, Tamika, a Black low-income mother of four daughters who lives in an inner-ring Cleveland suburb, moved to Cleveland for work at a factory some time ago; her extended family is still mainly in Niagra Falls, New York, though she has several cousins who have since relocated to Cleveland. She and her husband, who does construction, still go back and forth between Cleveland and Niagra Falls, about a three-and-a-half hour drive, for work and to visit family. She has been without help raising her kids, often taking the night shift to work and being a primary parent during the day. However, the kids usually spent considerable time in the summer with their grandparents, and now her two grown daughters actually work and live in Niagra most of the time.

Though some families are isolated from their extended family networks, the majority of the families in this stratified random sample of real, working families relied at least weekly on some form of family care support to raise their children.

The Cross-Class, Cross-Race Need for Kincare

The analysis of the HPHK data from Cleveland and Dallas suggests that, though many families are housed as “nuclear” families, with mother, perhaps father, and children under one roof, the proximity and availability of extended family in childrearing routines is still very important. In fact, Goode’s (1963) proposition that the nuclear family is the end form of family in an industrialized society does not hold up in an analysis of this data. Instead, we can see clearly that the majority of families from all classes, with a variety of amount and types of attachment to the formal labor market, rely on the instrumental support of extended family for their childrearing routines. Families from across the economic spectrum—even those with the most education who, in Goode’s theorization of family form, would be the most apt to move for
jobs—make choices to stay close to extended family, in a large part because of the daily demands of childrearing.

The Policy Context: Subsidies and the Working Poor

The childcare policy contexts of Cuyahoga County, Ohio and Dallas County, Texas are similar for the majority working, middle-class, and wealthy respondents: there really is no childcare policy for these Americans. There is, of course, a small tax credit that some people may claim, but most American childcare that is not for school-aged children during the school day is a privately funded and privately arranged affair. Our wealthier parents may bemoan the cost of care and sometimes describe problems with their centers, but if these parents work and need care, they pay market rate for it. Working-class respondents, whom I will discuss in more detail below, cannot qualify for assistance—their incomes are more than 130% or 200% of the poverty line—but cannot comfortably pay for childcare either. It is the working-poor respondents—those at or below 200% of the poverty line—who mainly are affected by the differences in childcare subsidy policy.

In Cleveland, respondents whose incomes qualified them for childcare subsidies talked about childcare as a kind of given if they could get a job. Indeed, many of these respondents fell into the categories of families who are guaranteed a subsidy if they can prove employment or schooling: they were receiving cash welfare, were transitioning from cash welfare, were under CPS care, or were homeless. Additionally, families who did not fall into these categories but who qualified by income did not see many barriers to getting a child care voucher—the majority of the working poor in our Cleveland sample expected that a voucher would pay for their childcare services.
In Dallas, however, many respondents, mentioned being on a waitlist for a very long time before they had received a childcare voucher, did not mention the use of a childcare voucher at all. Other respondents discussed the worry they faced in losing their jobs—they also worried about losing their childcare vouchers in the process, and having to get back onto the waitlist. Without this childcare subsidy, respondents sometimes turned to family (a larger percentage of our low-income respondents in Dallas versus Cleveland utilized family for daily childcare). Additionally, the large percentage of undocumented immigrants in our Dallas sample would not have been eligible for childcare vouchers, by virtue of their undocumented status. Finally, we might understand the higher rate of SAHPs in Dallas as having to do with the less-assured childcare benefits, especially amongst the poorer families in the sample: whereas 38% of low-income interviewed families in Cleveland had a SAHP, over half, 57%, of interviewed families in Dallas had a SAHP.

Class and the Private Safety Net

Childcare vouchers do not usually cover the working-class, parents with children who work but make just above the 130% of 200% of the poverty line thresholds for Cleveland and Dallas, respectively. These parents have incomes high enough to automatically disqualify them from seeking childcare assistance initially, but have incomes too low to comfortably pay the market price of childcare for their children. As a group, they thus turn to family to fill the gap.

Workers in this sample with annual family incomes between $25-50,000 a year are the most likely of all groups in Cleveland to use kuncare daily (50% do so), and as likely as the low-income respondents in Dallas to do so (35% of both groups utilize family care on a daily basis.) Whereas there is some public safety net for the low-income respondents in the form of childcare
subsidies, and there is quite a bit of financial cushion for the middle-class families to afford market-based childcare, the working-class families have neither the public safety net nor the financial resources to easily afford market based childcare. These workers are, by and large, most reliant on family for the mere possibility of work, let alone the convenience of having family help with children on a weekly, as-needed basis.

Similarly, workers with schedules more likely to be variable and unstable—those who report part-time but not full-time work—are most likely to use family care; 50% of the part-time workers in Cleveland and 55% of the part-time workers in Dallas describe daily childcare arrangements that rely on extended kin care. These workers fall in between what policy addresses and what they can afford. Daycare facilities may be open only certain hours, and require adherence to a certain schedule; parents who do not work regular hours or have regular schedules either must rely on more expensive, individual care (like nannies that wealthier families might be able to afford) or the patchwork of private safety-net arrangements that kin care provides. When a family finds a large gap created where public policy for childcare ends and financial ability to buy appropriate childcare begins, extended kin care is most important. Indeed, for these families whom the post-industrial economy has left behind and the public safety net does not cover, we see the biggest return to extended family involvement. Though there is, as Therborn (2004) says, “A demand for and an enjoyment of individual autonomy,” there is also “an actual family dependence, which in many counties has rather increased in recent years” (314). Therborn describes this dependence in terms of children still living with their parents into adulthood; here, we see also adult children living near their parents to make their own childrearing sustainable.

Reproduction of Neighborhood Racial and Economic Segregation
Working-class and low-income respondents in our sample rely, most heavily on kincare for the mere possibility of work, not just for the convenience it creates in balancing work and family life, *all* classes of respondents rely heavily on family to help in the effort of childrearing. Living near extended family is, by and large, helpful for families of all classes. Families recognize this and make decisions about moving based on the proximity of kin. This finding is in line with the fact that the majority of the families in the sample rely on kincare *on at least a weekly basis* to make complicated family schedules, priorities, and responsibilities work. Thus, families of all classes and races do not just have preferences for certain types of neighborhoods—those with a particular racial or economic makeup—they have preferences for their own neighborhoods because it is beneficial to have family nearby. This fact alone, given how residential patterns have been and continued to be shaped by economic and racial segregation, stands to replicate segregation.

Low-income, minority respondents acknowledge a desire to move their families to “better” neighborhoods, and often describe hopes and dreams taking them far away, even out of state, to idealized locations with more opportunity. However, when asked how far they would consider moving away from family, most low-income respondents who rely heavily on family members for childrearing help admit that moves that would take them out of immediate range—whether that is around the block or a thirty-minute drive—would be too far for the circumstances of their families at the moment. These respondents have a kind of push-and-pull from their neighborhoods of origin—they feel pushed to make a better life for themselves and their own children in neighborhoods with more resources and less negative influences, but are pulled back by the very important and irreplaceable resource of their own kin networks. This push-and-pull
force sometimes results in more residential mobility for these families, perhaps leading them to rent in neighborhoods for a while when they would actually like to buy later.

Higher-income, White respondents, on the other hand, have a kind of double-pull force to their neighborhoods of origin. These neighborhoods often have more amenities like good schools and recreational opportunities, are primarily safe, and have the added bonus of kin close by. As the middle-class families are more likely than not to rely on kin for at least weekly childrearing help, being close to family is also desirable, especially with schedules that require coverage between the end of the school day and the end of the work day or during unforeseen care circumstances.

Like lower-income minority respondents, many of our higher-income White respondents describe proximity to family as a must-have in future residential moves. Those who have moved recently—or who plan to move in the near future—have made moving decisions based on family location as well as neighborhood amenities. Unlike the lower-income, minority respondents in the sample, however, neighborhood quality and proximity to family are not usually inversely related for our upper-class, White respondents. Despite the differences in motivation for using kincare regularly—making childrearing routines possible versus convenient—the near universality of kincare dependence serves to reinforce patterns of class and racial segregation in these two American cities.

The importance of kincare for working parents cannot be understated: it cuts across class, race, and geographic location, and aids parents in the logistics of working and raising a family. Families who rely on kincare for their daily childrearing arrangements are in the minority, and are by-and-large working-class or low-income parents. However, a majority of parents of all classes—low-income, working-class, and middle-class—rely on some kind of arrangement with
extended family members at least weekly. This finding shows the universal importance of the private family safety net, and highlights where public policy falls short. Affordability of childcare, availability of childcare, or how childcare schedules and locations often fail to meet the very diverse needs of families. Researchers and policy makers should attend to the universal importance of kincare, especially in looking at childcare arrangements that fill the gaps that current policy and practice create. This attention should specifically focus on the working-class, who—in absence of voucher qualification—often have the least ability to pay for market-rate care. Finally, research and policy into the mechanisms of continued racial and economic segregation in American cities should consider looking closely at how childrearing responsibilities shape parents’ choices about residential location, and the tradeoffs in neighborhood quality they are willing to make for kincare proximity. The data here suggests that in the era of longer work-hours and frequent dual-earner families, American parents of all classes and races need the help of extended family for successful, sustainable childrearing.
CHAPTER 5

A Year in Transitions:
How Families Balance and Re-Balance the Uncertain Three-legged Stool

Introduction

Parents spend a great deal of time and energy and often cover large geographical distances in the pursuit of childrearing. These parents must work to link children to home and care, school, and activities, and often link themselves to work. We see from the results in Chapter 2 that parents use their resources to try to create sustainable childrearing routines for their families with more or less success. Results in Chapter 3 explain how different patterns of parenting and specialization have occurred, especially in the 21st century economy of gig-work and entrepreneurship. Finally, those in Chapter 4 show that one resource parents of all classes call on most often is nearby kin—making daily routines sustainable and allowing parenting practices to thrive often requires the help of different generations and different nuclear families. All of these arrangements, however, take place in temporal space as well as in geographic space. Over the course of a year, families make many decisions about these arrangements that can lead to continuity or instability in the lives of parents and children.

I use the metaphor of a “three-legged stool” that needs to balance on all three legs (home, work, and care/school). I show that a change affecting any of the legs necessarily affects the balance of the stool. Readjusting the other two legs becomes necessary, and can be effortless or onerous depending on the circumstances, options, and strategies a family uses. The three-legged stool is a good metaphor for how families must have a “leg” (or a workable routine and plan) for negotiating childcare or school, residential location, and work responsibilities. When one of the legs changes (in length, in width, in stability, or is even removed altogether) the other two legs
will not hold up the stool. Instead, the change must be addressed in some way (perhaps with a patchwork of supports to hold the leg at its original height) until rearrangements of the other legs can be arranged to stabilize the sitting surface.

This chapter expands on the previous chapters by placing childrearing arrangements within the dimension of *time*. It looks at the changes that happen over the year of a family’s life, and what those changes mean to individual parents, children, and families as a whole. What, then, happens when something changes in the daily routine? We know that human lives go through different transitions, and that these transitions can fall along the three dimensions interrogated in this research: school or care, employment, and residential location. How does a transition in one of these dimensions affect the other two, and how does it affect the daily functioning of a family’s routine and parenting structure? How do the dimensions readjust over time to accommodate changes? What other transitions in a family’s life affect the routines families use to balance care, employment and residential location? And finally, what do these continual readjustments after transitions do to ameliorate or increase inequality in contemporary urban America?

I try to understand how families best negotiate changes over the course of a year. These changes are particularly important to the question of how children thrive in different environments, because instability—the result of many subsequent and recurring transitions—has been shown to be detrimental to child development and family outcomes (Sandstrom & Huerta 2013). Additionally, understanding how a *system* of childrearing works and reacts is important, as each leg of the three-legged stool is important, and not isolated, in the daily lives of families with young children. How—and how often—families deploy resources to stabilize the three-
legged stool may have direct consequences for important outcomes of social and economic mobility.

I use the unique longitudinal nature of the How Parents House Kids data to answer these questions and illustrate how transitions in care, work, and home affect the other legs of the three-legged stool, and how they can influence a family’s financial and emotional wellbeing. A majority of the families interviewed in 2013 with How Parents House Kids were interviewed again in 2014. This data thus lends itself to looking at the kinds of transitions that happen within families over the course of a year: families discuss how they dealt with these transitions and how they rearranged their daily routines to make them work—make them sustainable—again. Additionally, the diverse nature of the How Parents House Kids data allows an analysis that looks at the class, race, and gender differences in the numbers and types of transitions experienced by families and individual parents, and how strategies to negotiate these transitions may reflect social differences and inequalities.

Families with more transitions spend more energy making their daily routines sustainable; families with more transitions tend to be those with fewer financial resources. Additionally, parents who have more time to plan for or think through transitions often make less disruptive changes in their lives and those of their children; these families engage in certain strategies to “cushion” their children and themselves from the negative effects of constant transition. Finally, financial and familial resources also act as buffers for families throughout transitions; how parents choose to activate these resources varies. Notably, a transition in one point of the work, home, care constellation usually necessitates a rethinking of the other two points, and makes families renegotiate their routines in time, geographic space, and sustainability.
Transition can mean many things, and means something different to biologists than it does to life course scholars. I have co-opted the term for my own purposes in this chapter. I use transition to mean a qualitative change in some realm of life that requires a renegotiation of some aspect of the three-legged stool family routine; transitions can occur simultaneously in different axes of family life—work, residential location, and school or child care—or may occur as consequences of another transition. Transitions may also be discreet and affect only one family member in a particular life sphere, or may be all-encompassing and affect the entire family on all three axes. I focus on the experience of transitions of the three-legged stool, but these transitions may be precipitated by—or result in—transition in other related areas of family life, including but not limited to family composition and benefit receipt.

Finally, the analysis in this chapter extends our understandings of transitions not only in how they are connected through and influenced by numerous realms of family life. It also shows that families who might otherwise look relatively stable—those who do not experience homelessness, consistent job loss, or pathological instability in care and schooling arrangements, and thus are not considered by much of the research into transitions and instability—actually spend a great deal of time and energy in their daily routine to avoid the negative consequences of possible transitions. Additionally, we see that a number of families experience multiple transitions a year, and that though these changes are often a natural part of a family’s life course, the numerous problems and gaps in American policy may make these transitions more onerous and problematic than they might at first appear to be. Families who experience these interconnected transitions are often disadvantaged in other ways, and thus inequality continues to be reproduced.
Literature Review

Sociologists of poverty and inequality describe numerous transitions over the span of a certain period of time as instability. More specifically, instability can be described as “the experience of abrupt, involuntary, and/or negative change in an individual or family’s circumstances” (Sandstrom & Huerta:1). Instability is associated with those in precarious economic circumstances. For example, Hill et al. (2017) explain how workers in low-income jobs face greater within- and between-job instability and have higher rates of family instability than their higher-income peers. By this they mean that low-income workers have irregular schedules or hours within a job, as well as transition more often between jobs, than many of their high-income peers, and that their family arrangements transition more often as well. This kind of job instability for poor families accompanies general “material instability:” instability in basic needs and services like income, housing, and child care. Recent research has shown that this kind of instability has increased, especially for families with children during the Great Recession, and that instability has detrimental effects on child development (Sandstrom & Huerta 2015). Additionally, research has also shown that instability in family structure has generally negative effects on child development, effects that are mediated by the type of instability and demographic characteristics (Lee & McLanahan 2015).

Instability as an idea has negative connotations for the development of children and the wellbeing of families. The idea of a life transition can be much more neutral. Life course researchers have theorized transitions as part of the normal human lifecycle for decades. Sociologically speaking, these transitions have the potential to create instability, but may be understood in a more structured, purposeful way as well. For example, Nicholson (1984, 1990)
suggests a four-step process to life-transitions: (1) preparation for the transition; (2) encounter or occurrence of the transitions; (3) adjustment, or the short-term response to the transition; and (4) stabilization or long-term accommodation to the transition.

This approach has been criticized by other life-course theorists for being too narrow to understand the diversity of human experiences and social contexts. For example, George (1993) says that this kind of model is doomed to fail because transitions are far too heterogeneous due to differences in individuals and social structures. Researchers have, perhaps because of this inadequacy, focused on particular moments and institutions in the life course when using this type of model. For example, Schlossberg (2011) describes a coping model for a job transition—understanding “situation, self, supports, and strategies” (160)—and describes how transitions can be anticipated, unanticipated, or non-events. This typology is helpful in considering the different types of transitions we see in complicated, qualitative family data, but like other literature on transitions, it does not extend the model to more than one leg of the three-legged stool. Families with young children must arrange work, home, and care in any transition they make, even if that is figuring out the daily routine that will keep the three spheres the same as before the transitions.

Research results show that life transitions—major life events—are related to the daily hassles of life by the psychological impact those daily hassles have on a person. Many major transitions in life do not create discrete moments of psychological stress, but the daily hassles that occur as a result of these transitions often impact the psychological well-being of individuals (Wagner, Compas, & Howell 1988). More research into a life transition’s impact considers the “number of accommodations required” after such a transition and the resulting “sustainability of daily routines” (Rice & O’Brien 1990). Finally, life course researchers make a clear distinction between “anticipated and unanticipated” life events as these qualities can impact the individual
experiencing them differently (Schlossberg 2011). Unanticipated transitions are most problematic to an individual’s daily functioning.

The interconnectedness of transitions in different life spheres means cascading instability in the lives of parents, and more importantly, in the lives of their children. Though families may experience instability in the form of numerous transitions, parents are aware of the negative effects multiple transitions have on their children, and try to avoid unnecessary transitions to cushion their children from the negative impacts or experiences of those transitions. Like the researchers who cite the importance of sustainable routines in a workable family ecology (see Chapter 2), developmental experts suggest that “regularity, consistency, predictability, and controllability” (Evans et al. 2005:563) help to maintain a healthy childhood environment. Parents seek this regularity for their children even in times of extreme transition and instability: Mayberry et al. (2014) describe many strategies (both material and psychological) that homeless parents use to maintain consistent routines for their children. Though the parents in the stories of the findings, below, vary in their success at avoiding transitions or cushioning children from the negative impact of transitions, most parents use some strategies to create some sort of stable environment for their children.

Most scholars of transitions look simply at the change in one leg of the three-legged stool without deciphering how the other legs must adjust to rebalance the system. Setterson (2006) describes approaches to life course studies that look at how “individual lives are intimately connected with the lives of others” (27), while other scholars have recently started thinking about the “web of time” (Gertsel & Clawson 2018) and how job schedules of co-workers and family schedules of partners and children are intricately interrelated, and how in turn the entire web is related to power differentials:
The less slack there is in the system, the farther a single change reverberates. Similarly, the less power individuals have—which is likely to be linked to their class, race, or gender—the more likely their schedule is to be shifted in ways someone else controls. (Gertsel & Clawson 2018:9.4)

In this chapter I consider not the “web of time,” but reverberations in the three-legged stool: how interconnected are the transitions in each of the legs, and how does this relate to the “slack in the system”?

By “identifying this web” (Gerstel & Clawson 2018), or the identifying the importance of balance of the three-legged stool, I also look at how these interrelated transitions in employment, schooling or care, and home vary by socioeconomic class position of certain families, and what such transitions might mean for the cycle of poverty and inequality. With Gerstel and Clawson’s framework, we might consider more economic resources—as well as resources like education, family networks, and neighborhood amenities—to provide some “slack” in the system. Families with more resources may very well be able to avoid further reverberations, or transitions in other legs of the three-legged stool when a transition occurs in a discrete leg. Those without as many resources, on the other hand, may feel the reverberation of the unbalance leg through the system, and thus have to readjust other legs of the three-legged stool as a response to a change in one.

Analysis of the longitudinal HPHK data allows me to ascertain trends across our sample of parents in Dallas and Cleveland.

**Data and Methods**

To isolate the changes that happen to people in a year, I used only the families for which we had two years of interviews. Though families we interviewed for the first time in 2014 had relatively robust explanations of what had happened to them in the past year, and I was able to construct basic timelines of moves, job changes, and care or school changes for them and their
families, the data was not as thorough as that for the families we interviewed twice, one year apart. Thus, I limit the analysis for this chapter to people who spoke to us in 2013, and one year later in 2014. The resulting sample is reduced by 20 families, as 20 families across Cleveland and Dallas spoke to us for the first time in 2014. Thus, the final sample size for the analysis in this chapter is 106 families; of the 20 families who were interviewed for the first time in 2014, 7 were from Cleveland and 13 were from Dallas.

Because the 20 families recruited in 2014 were from addresses that were hard or impossible to reach in 2013, they may have even more interesting, complicated stories of transitions than those actually analyzed. The problematic nature of making contact with these families also possibly indicates some sampling bias that I cannot well control in this analysis. That said, the analysis of the 106 families interviewed twice is probably a conservative one in terms of transitions. For example, the team hypothesized that our presence in Dallas the previous year had increased the likelihood that low-income immigrant populations in the areas from which we recruited would trust us. Indeed, of the 13 families interviewed the first time in 2014 in Dallas, 11 were of Hispanic origin, and most were undocumented immigrants.

I coded all transition in the spheres of work, childcare or schooling, and housing. If a respondent did not complete a 2013 interview, their data was coding as missing and not used. Job transitions were coded as occurring if the new or same job was in a different, constant physical location, if another job was added, or if there was a significant increase or decrease in pay. If a respondent had lost or quit a job, a transition was counted. A qualitative change in a respondent’s schooling was also coded as a job transition. Home transitions were coded if the respondent had moved residences once or more in the past year, even if they had moved back to the original address before the 2014 interview. Schooling and care transitions were coded as occurring if
children were in a different school building, had gone from attending school to being homeschooled, or if care givers outside or within the home had changed. Additionally, if there were multiple children in the family, a transition was coded as having occurred if one or more of the children had some kind of schooling or care transition over the course of the year; it was not necessary that all children in the household experience a transition in school or care.

Using a method and criteria developed first by Harvey et al. (2016) in looking at all housing transitions with this same HPHK data, I then coded transitions as being “push” or “pull” transitions. Push transitions are transitions that occur in reaction to something negative or emergent in the original situation. Being fired from a job or leaving a job because of a terrible boss would be “push” transitions; accepting a new job with better duties or salary would be a “pull” transition. Having to change daycare situations because it was no longer easy to get to the location of daycare, or having a child expelled from school would be “push” transitions; a child naturally moving up a grade would be a “pull” transition. Leaving an apartment because of an eviction or a falling out with roommates would be “push transitions”; moving into a forever home or moving primarily to be in a better neighborhood would be “pull” transitions.8

For all transitions, the change needed to have happened before the day of the second interview to count as a transition. For example, one respondent had been promoted from assistant principal to principal, but her new position had not yet started, so no qualitative change in her daily life had occurred yet.

Finally, I perform several basic quantitative analyses of the coded data using Stata. I look at frequencies and sample percentages of transitions, broken down by class and race, using cross-

---

8 In every case but one, I agree with Harvey et al.’s coding of push and pull housing transitions. In the particular case I coded “pull” instead of “push,” I chose to call it a “pull” transition because the family said they had moved to their dream home, in their dream neighborhood. Harvey et al. had coded “push” because the house they moved from was in disrepair and they wanted to leave. However, the pull seemed to be greater than the push when I re-read the qualitative interview and notes.
tabulations. I then perform a series of basic logistic regressions of the probability of different transitions on homeownership, city, race, and class. I use the following formula, where $\pi_i$ is the probability of a certain type of transition (or transitions), and $x_1$ through $x_4$ are the independent variables of race, class, homeownership, and city:

$$
\log\left(\frac{\pi_i}{1-\pi_i}\right) = \beta_0 + \beta_1 x_{1i} + \beta_2 x_{2i} + \beta_3 x_{3i} + \beta_4 x_{4i}
$$

$$
\pi_i = \frac{e^{\beta_0 + \beta_1 x_{1i} + \beta_2 x_{2i} + \beta_3 x_{3i} + \beta_4 x_{4i}}}{1 + e^{\beta_0 + \beta_1 x_{1i} + \beta_2 x_{2i} + \beta_3 x_{3i} + \beta_4 x_{4i}}}
$$

All results are reported in an odds-ratio format for comprehensibility.

It is important to note that, because of comparatively small number of interviews, the statistical significance of the logistic regression is only an indication of a substantial result. I look primarily at the magnitude of the coefficients to determine possible relationships—while adjusting for important variables like race and class—between transitions and city and homeownership.

**Findings and Analysis**

Amina is a 22-year-old, low-income mother of two little boys, ages one and five. She recently moved from the West Side to the East Side of Cleveland. This push transition was precipitated by a job change, when she got a job on the East Side at a nursing home and the commute became too much. However, importantly for a discussion of stability and transitions, Amina works for a Temp Agency in hope that someday they will place her in a permanent position:

Um, when I left Home Depot, last year about June or July. It was only a seasonal – it was a temporary position, so I already knew that eventually something was going – so I got a
job at the Strafford Staffing, kitchen in a nursing home. I got a job over there, and I’m like, I can’t travel all the way from the west to the east. So after about a week, I was—yeah, it’s time to go. [Laughs] It’s time to get closer to work, you know? … So yeah, I started working over there and then it became easier. Like I found a good daycare on the East Side. She works with me. She’s so sweet. Like she’s so sweet. Um, she does transportation and I’m not working right now. She still asking for the kids to come back. Like she’s like just let them come back and—so everything. All my leans to help and support when you’re like a, you know, single woman with two sons, was on the East Side. So I had to make a decision.

The temp agency pushed her to a nursing home job, which pushed a move from the desirable West Side neighborhood where she liked the schools back to the East Side where she is near her family. However, this job is no longer stable and regular. She says she’s basically “on call” and works part time. Though Amina acknowledges that the new job on the East Side—and the untenable commute from the West Side—was the impetus for the move, she also wanted to be back on the East Side because she relies on help from family.

Her family is on the East Side and helped her find the new apartment, cushioning this push transition somewhat. They also help her with transportation and watching her kids when she goes on job interviews. She found a good daycare on the East Side, but apparently only gets it when she has a voucher. “I’m not working right now,” Amina says, and so she isn’t eligible for the daycare voucher. This constraint has pushed her kids to transition from a structured care setting to home. Amina says that it is difficult to raise her children and look for work as a single mom, but she makes it work. Her extended family in the neighborhood helps her watch her kids while she goes out on job interviews.

Amina’s older son has forgone a natural pull transition to school because of these other transitions—moving and new job—in his mother’s life. Though he was supposed to begin Head Start last year, the transportation issues and Amina’s original work schedule made it too difficult. “So I would’ve had to leave my job, pick him up at 12 and then take him somewhere else, and
then go back to work. I didn’t think it was easy for me on the bus.” Amina hopes to acquire a car in the next year: she sees the independent ability to link her daily routines geographically as a silver bullet to a lot of her problems.

Even after all this transition in the last year, Amina discusses how she wants to move back to the West Side because it is a better area with better schools. She doesn’t seem to think the issue of not having family support will be there if she has a car and a job that makes at least $11.50 an hour. However, her family network is in the worse East Side neighborhood, so that’s where she’s best able to align affordable housing, convenient childcare, and family support for her work right now.

Amina’s story illustrates how a change in one leg of the three-legged stool affects the other two legs. When her job changed, she found a new residential location closer to the new job, and moved her son to a new school. We know from literature that low-income people have more precarious jobs—as her most stable connection to work is with a temporary staffing agency, Amina is a poetic example of this—and thus they may have to readjust the work leg of the stool often for unpredictable push transitions. Amina tried to make her commute to work manageable by changing her residence, which in turn relocated her childcare: both of these were push, not pull, transitions. Moving closer to family cushioned these push transitions somewhat; this cushion may not be as soft if she moves back to the West Side for better schools (and a different temporary job) in the future.

The unpredictable flow of Amina’s temporary work location illustrates well how parents with tenuous connections to the labor market may renegotiate all three legs after every change in one leg. Amina’s story also illustrates the complicated nature of trying to identify the important qualitative aspects of transitions: is a transition to a new temporary job something that sets a
person on an upwardly mobile track, or is it something that merely interrupts the lives of the people involved? Is it different when the care and school transition of a child aligns with the natural course of academics, like moving to a middle school from an elementary school, versus when a child moves school or care locations mid-year without a natural progression? And how does socioeconomic class and institutionalized disadvantage relate to the number of transitions a family makes a year?

Quantitative patterns within the data are presented in tables, below. A qualitative analysis of the interviews follows, and discusses the differences in push and pull transitions linked to resources, class, and disadvantage that the numbers suggest.

Table 5.1: All Transitions, by Location

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Dallas</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Cleveland</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
<td>50</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No transitions</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>35.9%</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>32.1%</td>
<td></td>
<td>20</td>
<td>40.0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One transition</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>32.1%</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>39.3%</td>
<td></td>
<td>12</td>
<td>24.0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two Transitions</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>19.8%</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
<td></td>
<td>13</td>
<td>26.0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three Transitions</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>12.2%</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10.0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
<td>50</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 5.2: All Transitions, by Income

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>All</th>
<th>Low-Income</th>
<th>Middle-Income</th>
<th>High-Income</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>Number</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No transitions</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>20.9%</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One transition</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>25.6%</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two Transitions</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>27.9%</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three Transitions</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>25.6%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 5.3: All Transitions, by Race/Ethnicity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>All</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Hispanic</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number</td>
<td></td>
<td>Number</td>
<td></td>
<td>Number</td>
<td></td>
<td>Number</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No transitions</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>30.8%</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>50.0%</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>29.2%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One transition</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>26.9%</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>30.8%</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>45.8%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two Transitions</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>26.9%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>15.4%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three Transitions</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>15.4%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.9%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Housing transition | 19 | 36.5% | 3 | 11.5% | 5 | 20.8% | 2 | 50.0% |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Care/school transition</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>42.3%</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>23.1%</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>41.7%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>25.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job transition</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>48.1%</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>38.5%</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>45.8%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>25.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing only</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5.7%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8.3%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>25.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Care/school only</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5.8%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11.5%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job only</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>17.3%</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>19.2%</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Care/School and Job</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11.5%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7.7%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8.3%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job and Home</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.9%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7.7%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Care/School and Home</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11.5%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4.2%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home, Care/School, and Job</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>15.4%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.9%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Just over a third of families (35.9%) in the sample had no major transitions in any leg of the three-legged stool over the course of the 2013-2014 year. A little less than one-third experienced exactly one transition, and just under one-third had transitions in two or three legs of the three-legged stool of job, care or school, and home location. The incidence of transition is not spread equally across people of different backgrounds; whereas only 46.4% of higher-income families experienced a transition in any leg, 60.0% of middle-income families and 79.1% of low-income families experienced a transition in at least one leg of the three-legged stool between the interview in 2013 and the interview in 2014. Additionally, it is the groups of lower socioeconomic status that most often experience more than one transition, illustrating that the three-legged stool is even more unstable for those with fewer resources.

No higher-income family experienced transitions in all three legs of the three-legged stool, and only two families (7.6% of these families) in the higher-income bracket experienced transitions in two separate legs over the year. Over one-quarter (25.6%) of the low-income families in the study experienced transitions in all three legs of the stool. Higher-income families
were much more likely to experience discrete, isolated transitions in home, work, or school/care; lower-income families often had to negotiate these changes across several transitioning legs. The qualitative analysis, below, explains how families are able to use resources to cushion their families from transitions while still rebalancing the stool, and families without resources to deploy must often transition other legs of the stool.

Notably, more families experienced three-legged transitions than transitions in any one combination of two of the legs. Overall, 9.4% of families experienced a transition in both job and school/care; 3.8% a transition in both home and school/care; and 6.6% a transition in both job and home. However, nearly one eighth of all families in the study—12.3%—experienced a transition in all three legs of the three-legged stool.

Residential instability is often associated with lower-income groups; families in this group have a harder time finding the economic resources to maintain affordable, desirable, and functional housing in an increasingly unaffordable housing market. Indeed, as shown in Table 2, 48.8% of low-income families in the sample experienced at least one transition in housing over the course of a year. However, even more of these low-income families experienced transitions in jobs (53.5%) and school/care for their children (55.8%) over the same year.

Job transitions were the most frequent among all socioeconomic classes in this sample: 45.7% of middle-income families and 28.6% of high-income families experienced a transition in at least one parent’s job over the year. Job transitions were also the most likely leg of the three-legged stool to be experienced discretely; 11.6% of low-income families, 25.7% of middle-income families, and 21.4% of high-income families experienced a work transition over the year that was not accompanied by transitions in locations of home or school/care. High-income families were most likely to experience only one transition over the course of the year, and
whereas 9.3% and 2.9% of low- and middle-income families, respectively, experienced a discrete transition in school/care for their children, 17.9% of high-income families experienced an isolated school/care transition for their children, without any transitions in home or job.

Finally, as socioeconomic status is highly related to race and ethnicity, so are race and ethnicity related to the types of transition constellations that families face every year. Table 5.3 shows that white families were least likely to experience any type of transitions—only 50.0% do so, compared to 69.2% and 70.8% of Black and Hispanic families—and they also were more likely to experience discrete transitions that did not coincide with transitions from other legs of the stool. Alternately, 12.5% of Hispanic families and 15.4% of Black families in the sample experienced transitions in each of the three legs of the three-legged stool over the course of the year. Though these transitions cannot be claimed to necessarily cause each other, families experience them and negotiate them contemporaneously.

Table 5.4: “Push” Transitions, by Income

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>All</th>
<th>Low-Income</th>
<th>Middle-Income</th>
<th>High Income</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No transitions</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>30.2%</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>65.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One transition</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>23.3%</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>22.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two Transitions</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>32.6%</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three Transitions</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>14.0%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing transition</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>46.5%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Care/school transition</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>46.5%</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job transition</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>37.2%</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>22.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing only</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7.9%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Care/school only</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9.3%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job only</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9.3%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No transitions</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>48.1%</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>61.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One transition</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>19.3%</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>30.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two Transitions</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>23.1%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three Transitions</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9.6%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing transition</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>32.7%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Care/school transition</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>32.7%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>15.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job transition</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>28.9%</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>19.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing only</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7.7%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Care/school only</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5.8%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>15.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job only</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9.6%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Care/School and Job</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5.8%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job and Home</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.9%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Care/School and Home</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>13.5%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home, Care/School, and Job</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9.6%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is important to consider the nature of “pull” transitions separately from those that “push” because, as previous literature suggests, anticipated and unanticipated transitions are experienced much differently by those undergoing them (Schlossberg 2005). Whereas pull
transitions are something planned and positive, “push” transitions are often unplanned and non-volitional. Tables 5.4 and 5.5 show only “push” transitions—that is, transitions not necessarily toward something good but instead away from something negative.

The experience of push transitions is also very stratified by race and income, with a larger proportion of historically and economically disadvantaged groups experiencing push transitions than more advantaged groups. As Table 5.4 shows, the vast majority of both middle- and high-income respondents (65.7% and 75%) report no push transitions. Though middle- and high-income respondents and their families experience transitions over the course of the year, these transitions tend to be pull transitions, expected along the route of upward mobility. A minority of low-income respondents report a year free of push transitions; 30.2% of low-income families experienced no push transitions. Alternately, 13.5% of low-income families experienced push transitions in all three legs of the three-legged stool over the course of the year.

Table 5.5 shows the breakdown of push transitions by race. Though the difference is not as stark, Black families report more push transitions over the year than families of other races/ethnicities. Specifically, 32.7% of Black families report push housing transitions (compared to only 11.5% and 12.0% of Hispanic and White families, respectively); additionally, 9.6% of Black families and 8.3% of Hispanic families, compared to zero White families, describe push transitions in all three legs of the three-legged stool over the course of the year.

Table 5.6: “Pull” Transitions, by Income

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>All</th>
<th>Low-Income</th>
<th>Middle-Income</th>
<th>High Income</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No transitions</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>72.1%</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>62.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One transition</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>27.9%</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>28.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two Transitions</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Three Transitions</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Hispanic</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No transitions</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>71.2%</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>73.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One transition</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>25.0%</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>23.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two Transitions</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.9%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three Transitions</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Housing transition</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Hispanic</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing only</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.9%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Care/school transition</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9.6%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job transition</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>19.2%</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>19.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Care/school only</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Hispanic</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing only</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.9%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Care/school only</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5.8%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job only</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>15.4%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>15.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Care/School and Job</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Hispanic</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing only</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.9%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job and</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Whereas push transitions may hinder mobility or at least signal problematic conditions around a family’s mobility, pull transitions are more often signals of and experienced as social mobility and are experienced much differently (see Tables 5.6 and 5.7). In our sample, they are also much rarer than push transitions. One striking pattern is that the middle-income group—people making around the median income of the area—are most likely as a group to have at least one pull transition throughout the year: more than one in three families made some kind of pull transition over the course of the year, compared to about one in four for the other income groups. The middle-income group has a higher percentage of families who experienced pull transitions in housing—about 11.4% of respondents had one of these transitions—compared to the low- (2.3%) and high-income (3.6%) groups. This finding might seem counter-intuitive, as we see the higher-income making fewer transitions overall. However, the high-income group in this sample may have already made more mobility-enhancing, pull transitions, and thus do not seek changes through pull transitions in their home, job, and child care or schooling arrangements.

Hispanic respondents, as a whole, are more likely than any other racial/ethnic group to experience a pull transition over the course of the year: 41.7% have had at least one pull transition, compared to 28.8% of Black respondents, 26.9% of White respondents, and 25% of respondents who have other racial or ethnic identities. Hispanic respondents are also markedly more likely to have a pull housing transition than the other respondents in our sample: 12.5% of Hispanic respondents makes some kind of pull housing transition, compared to 3.9% of Black and White respondents, and no respondents classified as other.
Homeownership and city of residence—Cleveland or Dallas—emerge as possible characteristics that may mediate the number, types, and complexities of transitions that families experience. Homeownership is important because the lengthy process of searching for and attaining a “forever home” (Harvey et al. 2016) makes leaving that home less likely (at least in a post-housing crisis world), and thus makes housing transitions less likely. City of residence may well have an impact on transitions also: housing markets, job opportunities, and the landscape of care and schooling differs by city. Additionally, the Hispanic population from this study is mostly located in Dallas. As they are the racial/ethnic group that appears most likely to make certain kinds of pull transitions, it is necessary to look into the variables of homeownership and city of residence more closely to ascertain that the relationship is not just race and class being projected onto geography and the institution of homeownership.

Table 5.8: Transitions by Homeownership Status

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Any Transition</th>
<th>No Transition</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>Number</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homeowners</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>35.9%</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-homeowners</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>82.1%</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Any Push Transition</th>
<th>No Push Transition</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>Number</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homeowners</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>20.5%</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-homeowners</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>59.7%</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Any Pull Transition</th>
<th>No Pull Transition</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>Number</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homeowners</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>20.5%</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-homeowners</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>37.3%</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1-legged transition</th>
<th>2-legged transition</th>
<th>3-legged transition</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homeowner</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>20.5%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-homeowner</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>40.3%</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>25.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>11</td>
<td>16.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Indeed, if we look at whether or not homeowners versus non-homeowners (Table 5.8) had a transition, push or pull, in any leg of the three-legged stool, and the number of legs in which homeowners versus non-homeowners experienced a transition, a striking pattern emerges.

Whereas a vast majority—82.1%—of non-homeowners experienced at transition in at least one leg of the three-legged stool in the past year, a minority of homeowners—35.9%—experienced any kind of transition. The same percentage of homeowners, 20.5%, experienced at least one push transition as experienced at least one pull transition. However, whereas 37.3% of homeowners experienced some kind of planned or anticipated pull transition, 59.7% experienced a more disruptive push transition.

When broken down into the complexity of the three-legged stool transitions, the difference becomes even more striking. Amongst the minority of homeowners who made at least one transition in the past year, the majority made a transition in only one leg of the three-legged stool; only 5.1% (2 families overall) made a three-legged transition. The plurality of non-homeowners in the sample who made any transition—40.3%—made only one transition, but 25.4% made two-legged transitions, and 16.4% made three-legged transitions. Thus, homeownership seems to be associated with fewer transitions (push and pull), and non-homeownership is associated with more push transitions, and more complicated transitions that affect multiple legs of the three-legged stool.

Table 5.9: Logistic Regression of Transitions on Demographic Data, reported in Odds-Ratio (Reference category is a non-homeowner, low-income, Black resident of Cleveland)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>One-plus transitions v. no transitions</th>
<th>Two-plus transitions v. fewer</th>
<th>One-plus push transitions v. no push transitions</th>
<th>One-plus pull transitions v. no pull transitions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Odds-ratio</td>
<td>Std. Error</td>
<td>Odds-ratio</td>
<td>Std. Error</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homeownership</td>
<td>0.121***</td>
<td>0.067</td>
<td>0.583</td>
<td>0.341</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As homeownership and its impact on families is related to race and socioeconomic class, as well as city location (Mayock and Malacrida 2018), I performed a series of logistic regressions of transitions on demographic characteristics like race, class, homeownership, and city. The results above show that homeownership and city of residence seem to have relationships to the odds of experiencing one or more transitions over the year, even when controlling for race and class.

For example, controlling for socioeconomic class, race, and city, a homeowner has 87.9% lower odds than a non-homeowner of experiencing any transition over the course of a year. Controlling for other variables, a Dallas resident has a 64.1% greater odds to have a transition over the course of the year than a Cleveland resident in the sample. More complicated transitions also show certain patterns: controlling for race, city of residence, and homeownership, middle-income and high-income respondents had 63.5% and 90.3% lower odds, respectively, than low-income respondents of having two or more transitions over the course of the year. Homeowners have 41.7% lower odds than non-homeowners, controlling for other variables, of experiencing two or more transitions over the course of this year. This particular result is reported for magnitude only, as it is not significant statistically.

Homeownership is significantly related to the odds of having one push or one pull transition versus no push or no pull transition, when controlling for other variables. Homeowners
have 68.5% lower odds than non-homeowners of having a push transition, and 73.7% lower odds than non-homeowners of having a pull transition, holding other variables constant. City of residence also seems to be related to push and pull transitions. Adjusting for other variables, residents of Dallas have 28.7% lower odds than residents of Cleveland of having at least one push transition over the course of the year, whereas these same residents of Dallas have 160.7% greater odds than residents of Cleveland of experiencing at least one pull transition over the course of the year. Thus, it appears that city of residence and homeownership status do in fact have a relationship to the number and kinds of transitions a family faces over the course of the year, even when controlling for the very important variables of race and class.

An analysis of the qualitative data from which the above numbers come shows that resources and previous stability in jobs, housing, and care/school underlie a year with few transitions. Families with more resources may have better ability to pursue pull transitions and avoid push transitions. Push transitions also tend to happen in multiple legs of the three-legged-stool for more disadvantaged respondents. Without economic, material (including a car) or other network resources, families are more likely to feel the reverberations of a change in one leg of the three-legged stool in the other two legs. This finding has important implications for the stability of the lives of families, especially the children in them, and in the ability of families to achieve upward mobility through planned, pull transitions.

*The Three-Legged Transition: Renegotiating Home, Work, and School or Care*

When a family has transitions in three-legs of the three-legged stool, they are most often push transitions. In fact, as shown above, 7 out of the 13 families who had transitions in all three legs experienced exclusively push transitions; no families experienced only pull transitions when
they experienced transitions in all three legs of the three-legged stool. The three-legged transition is disruptive, and often is the result of factors outside the control—and plans—of the family.

June’s three-legged transitions have revolved around housing instability and changes in family composition. A low-income single mom now staying in her aunt’s home, June had a baby in the past year and also moved four times, from her aunt’s house (where we interviewed her in 2013) to her grandmother’s house. She then moved back to her aunt’s before moving in with her fiancé. Finally, June moved back in with her aunt. Because she spent the year without a driver’s license, June takes the bus. For the first part of the year, June was in a school program, and had to make a daycare transition for her oldest because of the lack of sustainability in her daily routine:

The one he was going to before I had to take him out of that because of the simple fact I was going through a school program that was all the way on the other side town. I'm like okay I keep getting there late because of the simple fact the program that I was going through we didn't get until about 4:00. I had to take three buses just to get home so my way of me getting home, I'm late getting him from daycare. … I'm like okay since there's two day cares close to the house why don't I put them in a day care close to the house. Just in case somebody from the house can just walk around the corner and pick them up.

June then got a job through Ohio’s welfare work program, Ohio Works First. At this job, she works 84 hours a month downtown, and wants to keep her son at the same daycare; her mom or grandmother (both of whom live close) stay with her 9-month-old baby while she is away. She does not like the job and really doesn’t like being away from her children, but she has made the transitions work by rebalancing the three-legged stool multiple times.

Jennifer, a low-income married mother of three from Dallas, used to work and was proud of it, but the family wanted a change from their current house. With this push, they moved to be closer to her husband’s job and chose the neighborhood because they were able to afford a house there and were not able to afford such a place in neighborhoods they knew better. Before they
bought, the family rented in several locations over the course of the year, and her school-aged children transitioned to several different schools: “I’ve moved this year a – like just numerous times and the kids have been at different schools.” After the final move, Jennifer quit working because she no longer knew anyone in the new area she trusted to take care of her kids: “No, I – I’m actually not working. I don’t know anybody that like watches kids and, the neigh - I mean, like the day cares, you know, I’ve had a bad experience in Dallas - well, not a bad experience with my kids, no…”

All three of these push transitions changed Jennifer’s daily life considerably: she went from having work and care outside the home to bringing everything back home, in a different a home location. She is not particularly happy about it. Though the family was able to pay cash for the house, the neighborhood they were able to afford is far away from her trusted network of friends and family. In 2013, Jennifer told interviewers she was proud to be working and helping to financially improve the lives of her children: “I'm just dedicating my whole life for my kids working and giving them what they need.” In 2014, she shrugged and stated that she wouldn’t let anyone she didn’t trust watch her children, so she could not work. This three-legged push transition was really a series of reactions to the push transition of moving to a very different residential location. Without network resources—she didn’t have anyone she trusted to watch her kids when they were out of school—Jennifer went from working to staying home.

Alternately, some three-legged transitions occur with much more purpose, and include more pull transitions, as a kind of “clean break” from a previous situation and a way that families pursue economic mobility. Manuel and Eloisa, an undocumented immigrant, middle-income couple, live in Dallas with their three children. The family realized in 2013 that they wanted more room than their two-bedroom apartment allowed, mainly because their oldest was going to
become a teenager. Eloisa looked in nearby neighborhoods, but rents were high and places were small. Her sister, who lives in a nearby suburb, suggested Eloisa take a look at an open apartment in her own complex: “My sister lives here. She recommended this place.” That was the pull they needed. The family signed a lease on a three-bedroom apartment and moved. The children enrolled in schools zoned for the new building, and Eloisa considered their feelings about moving. Her oldest was transitioning from elementary school to middle school, and she felt like aligning the housing transition with this schooling pull transition would disrupt their lives a little less. The other kids fell in line: “The middle [son] that is in sixth, he didn’t want to move here but he’s fine now.”

At the same time as the family was transitioning home and school locations, Manuel started his own business as a flooring subcontractor. He travels around the Dallas metro area for work, so housing location was less important than the additional money he brought in: whereas last year the family’s income was about $39,000 in total, Manuel now makes about $6000 per month. This families three-legged transition, made up of two pull transitions (housing and job) and one push transition (at least one of the children had to change schools without a natural break in the schooling cycle). They were able to make the transitions that may result in neighborhood and economic mobility—the new neighborhood and apartment, and her husband’s new job—because of network resources.

A Source of Stability in Push and Pull Transitions: Pivoting on an Anchor Leg

Sometimes families are able to use their resources—financial, material, and network—to anchor one leg of the three-legged stool, even when the other two legs experience readjustments and transitions. While the families build their new routines to balance the other two legs, this third “anchor” leg acts as a constant, and is an important source in both push and pull transitions.
of the other legs. It can be a home location—often a family home that has not changed location for generations—but it can also be a stable job or a schooling situation for which the family will negotiate other transitions. Material resources like transportation options, or a stable home that is consistently part of the family’s three-legged stool, are particularly important to keeping at least one leg of the three-legged stool stable.

Pivoting on Home

Annalise experienced push transitions in child care, schooling, and work in the past year. Annalise had to switch her child care arrangements every time she got a new job; her sister started watching her two young daughters after Annalise had to quit a good factory job because the daycare the girls were going to didn’t open in time to allow Annalise to get to her job:

I moved to the factory job where I was working 40 hours a week, but the hours just didn’t work with my daycare so I left that job. I worked from six to four Monday through Thursday, but it was out in Brook Park and my daycare didn’t open until six and I had to be to work at six. It took me like an hour and a half to get there. It was a conflict so I just quit.

Presently, Annalise works two part-time jobs, about 45 minutes away from each other on Cleveland public transit. In addition, Annalise’s eldest went to Kindergarten this year, and she has been in the process of trying to find a daycare that transports to her daughter’s school and also takes younger children. In the meantime, her sister continues to watch her children.

Though the legs of care/school and work on Annalise’s three-legged stool are pushed to transition often, her grandmother’s stable family home provides an anchor around which her hectic life can pivot. However, because of all the drama that comes with living with family, Annalise would like to move out on her own:

I just want to move away from everyone into my own place, my own everything. I don’t want T [her boyfriend] to come, I don’t want my sister to come, I just want it to be me and my kids in our place, but it’s so hard to do that because I have no help. I have no one
helping me and I can’t work two jobs for the rest of my life.

Annalise realizes, however, that she needs this home resource to make the other parts of her life work together:

If I don’t move in this area I’ll have to transfer [my daughter] because I don’t have a vehicle and that’s going to be really hard to get her to and from school with my jobs. That’s a problem now. When I do move from here, me having to be to work at seven, my grandma’s the only one that’s going to watch them that early in the morning so I don’t have to get them up at 5:00 in the morning and drag them here. It’s really convenient for me to be here

Rose, a middle-income married mother of four from Cleveland experienced a push transition in her job in the past year precipitated by an emergency, push transition in childcare arrangements. She quit her job as a manager at Big Lots when her youngest—who was in a nearby daycare—started acting upset whenever she changed his diaper. She became concerned with what was going on at daycare so “I called my job, I says, look, I can only go part-time in the evenings and I’ll work you know, eight, 10 hours, 12 hours on the weekends because my husband will be home.” Ultimately, the family was not able to balance the part-time schedule and her husband’s work as a commercial truck driver, so Rose left her job completely. All through this transition, however, her oldest stayed in the same neighborhood school because the family stayed in the same home. Transitions in work and care can sometimes be buffered by a pivot around a stable anchor of home.

Ron, a married dad of one in Dallas, has had a series of transitions in the past year, including a push transition of losing his job because of his declining health—he has sickle cell anemia—and a pull transition of enrolling his four-year-old son in a pre-K program near their home. However, Ron and his wife have continued to use their Section 8 voucher to rent at the same address through these transitions. Though they are looking forward to a pull transition in
housing next year—they would like a bigger place—they have a new anchor point: the son’s school, where he is thriving. “That’s the thing. That’s why we’re trying not to move too far away from the school.”

One notable quality that Ron, Rose, and Annalise share is that they are not homeowners. However, they all do have some kind of relatively permanent resource that keeps home consistent: Ron and his wife receive a housing voucher, Rose has a husband with a steady income to pay the rent, and Annalise has a long-term family home that provides her with a stable housing leg of the three-legged stool. Home is a central point around which the daily routine occurs, and though there are three legs of the three-legged stool, home may be particularly important in maintaining stability in the other two. Thus, we may hypothesize that homeownership could stabilize this home leg for families; additionally, resources that allow people to pay rent consistently and without undue financial burden—like the Section 8 voucher—may provide this kind of consistent resource as well.

Arlene, a high-income married mother of one who works in Information Technology in Dallas, is one of only four homeowner respondents who had a two-legged transition in the past year. She got a new job, a desired pull transition, and her three-year-old daughter also started preschool in the fall. However, because the family owns their home and has no plans to leave, Arlene was able to use the home location as an anchor point from which to arrange care and commute. She says that her commute to her new job is one and a half times longer than it was to her previous job, but the working conditions at the new place are worth it. In fact, when asked to consider if they would ever move, Arlene hesitates:

Um, and not you know, not shake it up too much because if, like my whole, my whole big goal about wanting to, um kind of adjust our, the way we live and our kind of like, balance of work and, and family, and household stuff, and all of that. That will be a major shift, and if we can work that out um, it would be easier for us to do that here.
Having the anchor location makes Arlene’s other life transitions more manageable and predictable, even in the presence of other “major shift[s].” Arlene illustrates how the material resource of homeownership makes possible fewer adjustments on the three-legged stool after one transition; that is, because of her stable home location, Arlene feels fewer “reverberations” after a transition in other areas.

**Pivoting on Work**

Many of the low-income people who had transitions on the home and school/care legs of the three-legged stool, but did not change their work situation, were unemployed or on disability in both 2013 and 2014. Thus, they did not change their job situation (they don’t have jobs) but this stable status does not necessarily provide any kind of stability in the three-legged stool. For example, Moke, a low-income mother of two from Cleveland, has made two rather large push moves (to and from Youngstown, Ohio) in the past year, and her children have changed schools during this time in push transitions (because of the moves). Moke, however, receives disability insurance and thus has not had to transition her work situation. Even though her rent is high—“It’s killing me”—and she’s almost always worried about how to pay the bills, she has not had to renegotiate the work leg of the three-legged stool in transitioning the other two legs. Likewise, Delores, a separated low-income mother of four from Cleveland, moved her entire family to a new neighborhood to access preferred schools in the past year. Because Delores receives disability for herself and one of her children, she pivoted around this source of income as it remained stable throughout the transitions of the other two legs. Because neither Moke nor Delores had to negotiate the geography of where work was, there was not transition for work.

Linda, a low-income married mother of two who lives in Dallas is the exception. Linda’s
family moved in a pull transition in the past year to put her closer to her third-shift job at Walmart, and to give the kids neighborhood access to better schools. Though she doesn’t really like the job—the pay isn’t good and the third-shift hours are hard—Linda has used it as the stable leg around which to rearrange her family’s three-legged stool.

So, um, I said I wanted to, uh, live close to the Walmart. [...] And it’s only life? five or ten minutes from here to Walmart. … I want to stay here because I like it, because the school is just around the corner. That’s why, that why I really like about it.

With only one car in the family, being close to work is an advantage, and Linda arranged around that necessity. However, she might not have optimized neighborhood location or school quality except that both were close to her job at Walmart.

Middle- and high-income families may experience transitions in care and housing but keep a well-paid job as an anchor. For example, Gabby, a middle-income single mother of two, had two pull-transitions that still created quite a bit of instability in the life of her family. She moved back in with her step-dad this year to help repair her credit; her daughter transitioned from middle-school to high school, and it was tough: “Oh high school tore her up, Oh it tore my baby up, I am hoping she got it all out of her system. She, ooh, yeah.” Throughout these transitions, though, Gabby kept her job as a lab technician with Mary Kay Labs, and has no plans to leave soon:

[I’m not] going anywhere because it’s a good company to work for. You know, and they believe in promoting within, first. You know. So if, if they feel like okay, I’ve been seeing her at a school and she can go to this, okay well this will be my next scientist in this lab.

She sees herself at this job long-term, and the income and stability in structure it provides is also a good leg around which school/care and home transitions can pivot.

*Pivoting on School/Care*
Peter and Lauren are the only high-income family in our sample to report two transitions that include a home transition: over the course of the year, they bought their dream house in Lauren’s childhood neighborhood, and Peter got a new job that pays better and is closer to their new home: “[T]his area is convenient, it's closer to my work, so um, you know, I don't have to pay the tolls, I can go in so you know, that saves a couple of hundred bucks a month.” Lauren, a stay-at-home mom, is thrilled to be closer to her family, who still live in the neighborhood. Their transitions revolved somewhat around the location of the family’s preferred Catholic school, in the neighborhood where they bought their new home. Lauren and her siblings went there, and now they all send their own children to the school. Peter and Lauren’s oldest was already attending this school even when they lived on the other side of town, and the two transitions of their three-legged stool over the year—home and work location—pivoted around the location of the school. Peter and Lauren use their considerable economic, material, and network resources to keep the care/school leg of the stool the same while seeking pull transitions that made balancing all the legs more convenient.

Lower-income families also may attempt to pivot on care or schooling during the transitions that take place over the course of a year, often to assure stability for their kids in at least one part of their lives. For example, Kim, a married mother of four in Cleveland, experienced two major push transitions over the past year: she and her family moved apartments and she lost her job. The family moved nearby to a larger home because the landlord at the previous apartment would not make changes. The family also needed more space because Kim’s mother moved in to help Kim with the kids during long days at work: “Well at the time I had needed her to watch the kids. I just need her in case if I get ready to start work so she can just be here to fix their dinner and, so when I get ready to come in they need to be watching TV and
ready to go to bed. So, that’s basically what I need her for and like I say, they getting bigger and older.” However, Kim lost her transportation that was vital to getting her daily to her job:

My husband’s—cousin said he could fix [my old car] up. Told me to take it to him. I didn’t know he was on some stuff at the time, let’s just say he was in it. He’s in jail now. He’ll be in there for a year. But went and got my car stolen. So we been walkin’ since.

Kim has been unemployed since losing her car, and her husband is also unemployed. The one leg that has remained stable throughout this year of transitions is her children’s enrollment in a local choice school. Because it is close to the house, she walks them there and back each day. Parents who choose schools outside of the “package deal” (see Rhodes and Warkentien 2017) may be more likely to keep schools as stable leg of the stool, even as the other two legs change. Ohio School choice policy makes this particularly salient in Cleveland.

The One-Legged Transition: Deploying Resources to Steady the Stool During Pull Transitions

Table 8, below, shows only families in each income level group who made transitions in at least one leg of the three-legged stool. Of those who made transitions, only 37.1% of low-income families made a transition in a single leg; 54.6% of middle-income families made a single-leg transition; and 84.6% of high-income families made a transition in one leg not accompanied by transitions in the other legs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Low-income</th>
<th>Middle-Income</th>
<th>High-Income</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>One-legged</td>
<td>11 32.4%</td>
<td>12 57.1%</td>
<td>11 84.6%</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two-legged</td>
<td>12 35.3%</td>
<td>7 33.3%</td>
<td>2 15.4%</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three-legged</td>
<td>11 32.4%</td>
<td>2 9.5%</td>
<td>13 0%</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It seems that resources, particularly economic resources, may be a big factor in a family’s ability to isolate a transition in work, home or school to only one leg of the three-legged stool.
Melissa, a high-income married mother of one from Dallas, provides a good example of how high-income families deploy resources to steady the three-legged stool after a transition in one leg. Over the past year, Melissa says, “We’ve had a lot of changes. … Um my husband just started his own company…within the last year…I’ve changed jobs, I actually start a new job on Monday.” Melissa and her husband both transitioned to new jobs: she has a better-paid job at a credit union, and her husband started his own business to which he commutes about 45 minutes. The family rents their house, but they have been stable in the location for several years, and their school-aged daughter attends a well-respected private school in the neighborhood for free, because her grandmother works there. Though Melissa’s daughter requires school care now that Melissa’s hours have changed with the new job, she will not have to transition the school or care arrangement. The school has aftercare included in their curriculum, and any “gap-time” between after care and when Melissa is able to get to the school will be covered by Grandma, a teacher at the school. Melissa’s family has activated family resources for care and economic resources to keep renting the same place, so has avoided transitions in other legs of the three-legged stool.

Ann and Steve, high-income parents of a three-year-old son in Cleveland, have kept their same jobs and stayed in the house they own. However, they decided that they needed to change their son’s care arrangements because his behavior at his grandmother’s house, where he went twice a week, was getting out of control: “Because he – there wasn't structure in con-, in consistency and boundaries.” They moved their son to the more structured environment of a home daycare center, and shifted their commute slightly to do so. Their son was thriving in the new situation at the time of the 2014 interview, and Ann and Steve were not concerned about the extra expense of care. Using their economic, material, and network resources, Ann and Steve seamlessly integrated a new school/care leg of the three-legged stool into their daily routine,
without necessitating or being precipitated by a change in the home or work leg. Ann and Steve both have cars, and their house (which they have owned for a number of years) is in a neighborhood convenient to acceptable care and school for their son.

Shantay, an engaged mother of one from Cleveland, moved twice in the past year. She first stayed with a friend, and then found an apartment to share with her mother and her adult sister. During this transition, she kept her job at the Cleveland Clinic—she is a registered nurse and does outpatient work—and kept her five-year-old daughter in the school she prefers. In fact, she and her mother worked together and actually crossed out addresses of a list of potential apartments because they were too far away from her daughter’s school, or the commute to work would have been too onerous:

So it was price range and the bedrooms and then my mom had some areas that she was interested in and I had areas that I was interested in. So we looked at both of the areas that we were both interested in and what was easiest, the farthest I’d commute. [M]y daughter goes to a school that I didn’t want to change her from. I didn’t want to have to make that a hard ride.

Shantay deployed her resources to keep transitions to only one leg of the stool: not only could the family afford a place within these guidelines because of the contributions of Shantay’s mother, they also had the time and brain-power of another mover—at network resource—to help make these decisions. Additionally, Shantay and her mother both have a car—making a transition in only one leg of the three-legged stool often requires this kind of additional transportation resource that will allow all the other legs to line up well, without additional transitions.

Finally, even the minority of low-income families who experience a transition in a single leg of the three-legged stool deploy extra resources to avoid more transitions. Tina is a low-income Hispanic mother of six who lives in Dallas. Her husband is employed steadily as an
electrician, and Tina is able to stay at home with her children and provide care before and after school. Though she is not fond of their neighborhood, the family has kept their rental house and most of their daily routines. The big pull transition in the past year is that Tina withdrew her children from the local, zoned school and enrolled them at the school zoned for her mother’s house. The school is only a five-minute drive away and Tina takes her children daily. Even though their finances are often very tight, Tina says, “Well I can say that things have gotten really really good for us.” Her ability to deploy even her limited economic, material, and network resources—the fact that her mother lives in a better school zone and her access to a car—allowed Tina and her family to negotiate only a one-legged transition for school/care instead of multiple transitions over the course of the year.

Stability of two-legs of the three-legged stool allows families to more easily and successfully completely pull transitions for work, home, or care and schooling. By focusing energy and other resources on only one transition, the rebalancing of the three-legged stool is less onerous, and more likely to result in some kind of positive mobility for the family.

*Strategies: How Parents Cushion their Children from the Impact of Transitions*

The above results show that parents encounter a variety of types of transitions that parents encounter every year as they navigate the three-legged stool of work, care or school, and home, and that these transitions are very often interconnected and somewhat dependent on each other. Families who experience a transition in only one leg of the three-legged stool deploy whatever resources are at their disposal to keep the other two legs steady, to varying degrees of success. Additionally, we see that parents consciously employ strategies before a potential transition, while a transition is occurring, or after a transition has occurred to minimize negative
impacts on themselves and their children. These strategies include forgoing a pull transition because of the instability it may create in the three-legged stool, using familial resources to shelter kids during push transitions, and using material resources like transportation, or network resources like kincare to keep one or more legs of the three-legged stool the same after both push and pull transitions.

**Forgoing Pull Transitions**

Justin is a high-income father of two who lives in Cleveland. In the past year, he and his wife thought seriously about the pull of moving back to Denver, where she grew up, because of the network of family they have there. However, they decided that the move would be too expensive, and that it would be too difficult to find good childcare in an area where they could afford a home: “[S]he was going to have to take a pay cut in the job in Colorado and the cost of living up there is quite a bit, uh, quite a bit higher….” The family decided not to pursue this pull move because they wanted to keep their stability of job, care and school, and home location in Cleveland.

Ria is high-income and a mother of three who lives in a low-income neighborhood in Cleveland. In the past, she negotiated Cleveland’s school choice policy expertly, and her children go to a public school outside their zoned neighborhood area. However, Ria found a charter school she prefers downtown, and would love for them to attend at some point. So far she has deferred this pull transition because the renegotiation of her commute with work and the location of their home would be too onerous: “I say, “Wow, I’m not driving all the way downtown every morning to take my kids to school.”
Other families report forgoing or deferring pull transitions to preferred schools for the same reason: there was no sustainable way to make the three-legged stool stable in the near future. Rhonda, a middle-income mother of three from Dallas, wanted her kids to go to a charter school that was touted as excellent, but she could not line up the hours of the school with her work schedule, and thus kept her children at the same, less-desirable school:

I wanted them to go to [the charter school], but I couldn’t do that because it didn’t work with my schedule. I was – I would have to drop them off and pick them up and then I’d be doing two different schools. … And I couldn’t. I just couldn’t. I couldn’t filter that in with my schedule. So yeah, that was not going to be an option. I really wanted them to go, but I couldn’t work with that schedule-wise.

Transitioning the kids would have created too much instability in the three-legged stool, and Rhonda made a trade-off, keeping her kids at a less desirable school to keep the stool balanced.

Similarly, Gabrielle, a middle-income single mother of three who was laid off on the day we spoke to her, would very much like to find a better school for her kids. She is well-versed in Ohio’s school choice policy, a policy that could result in a pull transition to a new school for her children. However, as a single mom with a delicate balance of school/child care, work, and home location, Gabrielle has not changed her children’s school. The school her kids go to is close to her home and she has a friend close by who can watch them in the times before or after school when Gabrielle is not yet home; she also has support nearby. “[M]y reason for not switching? Because I have no one to get them. If they go to another school I have the concerns if my child is sick who’s going to get him or? And in the case of them being right there, my brother stays right there. My sister – in –law, my best friend.” Though Gabrielle’s very recent transition from employment to unemployment (she had lost her job they day we interviewed her in 2014) will certainly affect her thinking, and possibly the other legs of her three-legged stool, the past year she kept the kids at the school because she did not want to destabilize these routines.
Finally, some families even forgo natural school transitions—coded as pull transitions here—to keep the three-legged stool balanced for one more year. Amina, described above, did not enroll her son in Head Start even though he was old enough and they qualified economically, because she could not figure out a way to rebalance the three-legged stool routine. Likewise, Hailey, a Dallas-based high-income mother of five, ages 2 through 20, described a decision to keep her four-year-old in pre-K for one more year, even though “she’s just a little too smart for her own good” as a decision made to balance the three-legged stool:

And so I’m like, if y’all will keep her one more year, I would love it cause it’s so convenient to drop them off at the same place. […] Cause I---I work my shift changed so I have to be at work at 6:30 in the morning.

Even though families strive for volitional, pull transitions within their families, reverberation of a change in one leg on all three legs of the three-legged stool after a transition sometimes delays these mobility-enhancing pull transitions.

The Safe House Approach: Using Extended Family to Cushion Children During Push Transitions

Families often find themselves in the midst of a transition—or three—that have created quite a bit of instability in the lives of themselves and their children. In these cases, parents often opt to anchor the child in a residential location that will not necessarily be shared with the parent, but will remain stable. For example, Tasha, a low-income mother of three from Cleveland, has had two push housing transitions this year, one from the original apartment where the rent went up, to homelessness, and eventually to a new rental. During the months that the family did not have a rental, Tasha and her husband bounced around between family members, friends, and
motels. However, Tasha sent her kids to her mother’s house, the same one she grew up in, to keep them in a consistent location throughout the transition to their new rental home.

That was more so I put the kids in her house, and I just traveled. I just I went here. I slept here. I slept there. I slept at his grandmother’s house. So you know it was kind of like here there, here there. Go over there in the morning, get the kids. But with my mother in the same house constantly.

The kids were thus able to maintain their routine of transportation to and from their various schools in the Cleveland area. Though Tasha was also between jobs at this time, her children did not have the same number of transitions that it looks like they might have from Tasha’s description of the family’s residential transitions between the 2013 and 2014 interviews.

Shay has been in and out of jobs this year, and has been in jail because of, as she describes, a trumped-up assault charge; she has also had two push residential moves. Shay recently moved back in with her mother (though she doesn’t want to live there long term) because she’s able to keep her kids in a safe, constant location and enroll them in the nearby school. Shay had to quit her low-income job as a waitress because of this move to her mother’s home, but it was worth it to her to give her kids housing stability in the midst of many push transitions. Even though she and her boyfriend would like to find their own place soon, she expects her daughter will continue to live with mom because to keep school consistent and safe.

Keeping School or Care the Same: Unsustainable Commutes to Avoid Push Transitions

Ella, a middle-income single mother from Cleveland, takes her three daughters back to their original school in Stowe, a 45-minute drive in the opposite direction from her work. Still, she wanted the new home to be in a certain neighborhood near family, and wanted to make sure her kids retained their good schooling. Keeping her kids cushioned from a possible push
transition has taken its toll on her time—as yesterday was the last day of school, she says, “[Today w]e slept in for the first time. In a long time.”—and her job. In fact, she told us when we interviewed her in 2014 that the next morning she was declining a promotion at work because of the need to balance the three-legged stool:

I have the kids. And the promotion would mean I have to work until 11:00 at night which I can’t commit to right now. … Well, it’s a swing shift, so some days you would work 8:00 to 5:00, and then some days you would work like 2:00 to 11:00. And I can’t commit to that.

Ella continued to do a long reverse-drive to her children’s original schools to cushion her kids from another push transition for the rest of the school year, but it eventually became unsustainable because of time pressures. By the time we caught up with her in 2015 for a second follow-up interview, Ella had moved the younger kids to a zoned school, and her oldest daughter was pursuing a High School degree from home.

Like Ella, Selena, a low-income, undocumented Hispanic mother of four school-aged children, and her husband Samuel, spent a great deal of time avoiding a push transition for their children by keeping them at the school they were at before the move to their current home. They also spent a great deal of money on bus fare—because she is undocumented and doesn’t have a license, she takes her kids to and from school on a bus:

The school is fine, it’s just that it’s a bit farther, and since we have to take the kids every day and you know I take them on the bus and I have to pay for the 4 of them, and it was, well, a bit… it’s hard for us when it comes to how much time and money we spend

However, because her husband faced a push transition, going from being employed to being unemployed for about three months, the family’s finances could no longer bear the bus fare, and the family has started to think about moving again. The commute to and from school has become unsustainable because of financial pressures. Selena doesn’t want to move until they have a
house and schools lined up—she doesn’t want a push transition that will shake the kids’ routine, and so will wait until the summertime when the family can more easily pursue a push transition.

The Ultimate Push Transition: The Uncertain Case of Undocumented Immigrants

The How Parents House Kids data is particularly relevant to today’s political situation, as it includes stories from a fair number of undocumented families living in Dallas. These families deal with the same negotiation of the three-legged stool that all other parents do, but they have a particularly unique relationship to the future as far as planning transitions goes. If a family doesn’t know whether or not a family member—or even the whole family—will be deported in the next year—an ultimate “push” residential transition—planning for transitions in the local three-legged stool is difficult. Interestingly, many workers in these undocumented families do not have a specific work location, moving instead around the Dallas metro area to work in various short-term, manual jobs. Housing and care location are still important, though, especially because (as detailed in Chapter 2) many undocumented parents do not like to travel far afield as they do not have legal driver’s licenses. Some families in which at least one parent is an undocumented immigrant also do not know the possibility of being deported or moving back to Mexico in the next year, so have a harder time planning mobility-enhancing pull transitions.

Teresa, a low-income mother of two from Dallas is a documented immigrant married to an undocumented immigrant. The family has stalled any pull transitions until her husband gets his papers, in case he needs to move back down to Mexico. “Right now,” Teresa says, “Everything hinges on whether her husband gets citizenship.” She signed the lease for only six months, not a year, in case he leaves and she has move the family closer to her mom, to make such a push transition less problematic on her kids. She doesn’t want to move to a home that may
be better for the family prematurely: if her husband is deported (or has to go live in Mexico for a certain period of time en route to citizenship) she needs to be able to still align the three-legged stool. She has planned around this possibility.

*Routine Instability and the Cushion of Upward Mobility*

What we call “instability” for the poor and, increasingly, the working-class may actually be understood as many transitions within a certain period of time. The advantage of considering instability in a model of transition is that it allows for a more structured response—and possible interventions at different points—than does broadly labeling the experience of unexpected change in poor families “instability.” For each moment of instability—each transition—there is opportunity for preparation, encounter, adjustment, and stabilization. Additionally, the work that goes into each transition is intense, and affects realms of life other than the one the transition (or instability) directly touches. Thinking of each change as a transition allows us to think about the arrangements of other legs of the daily routine, and how each may need to be adjusted. Adjustment to the transition requires a quick change in one leg of the three-legged stool, but often such a one-legged adjustment results in routines that are not sustainable; long-term accommodation requires that all three legs balance once again.

As we have seen, families encounter transitions for a variety of different reasons over the course of a year. Some families make reactive, non-volitional push transitions in home, care or school, or work location; other families carefully plan out the next steps for pull moves, often with better resources than those who encounter reactive, push transitions. Some families actively pursue pull transitions for the goal of upward mobility. For example, Peter and Rachel moved from their starter home to their dream home in Rachel’s childhood neighborhood the same year
that Peter got a better job opportunity. This family is also unique as the only high-income family in the entire sample to encounter a housing transition, and one of only two high-income families to encounter a transition in more than one leg of the three-legged stool over the course of the year. However, they moved into their “dream home,” and Peter’s job move was a pull move toward more opportunity. They also have family in the neighborhood, so their economic resources are supported by their local network resources.

Manuel and Eloisa had transitions in all legs of the three-legged stool over the year: Manuel changed jobs as he started his own business, the family moved from Dallas to a nearby suburb, close to Eloisa’s sister, and the children re-enrolled in school in the suburb. Though all of these transitions almost certainly created some instability in the lives of the children and parents while they were happening, they were for a larger—and stated—goal of upward mobility for the family. Eloisa and Manuel made the tradeoff of a few hard months, while they and their children adjusted, in exchange for a more comfortable and promising future.

Though their economic circumstances vary vastly Eloisa and Manuel’s family and Peter and Rachel’s family both made pull transitions over the course of the year in pursuit of upward mobility. These transitions were planned, executed with purpose, and supported by family networks throughout. However, we know from the vast spectrum of stories pertaining to transitions in this data that not all families are able to or try to plan transitions for this type of upward mobility, and are more often pushed into certain changes.

Families who make many push transitions tend to be those low-income families discussed in the literature on instability—they have fewer housing resources, more precarious jobs, and their children shift schools or care locations more often. Though the literature has underlined “instability,” this paper looks at “transitions” through a systems lens in an attempt to understand
one mechanism through which low-income families experience such frequent instability. The analysis above shows that having economic, material, or network resources helps to deflect the reverberations of a change in one leg of the three-legged stool from the other three legs. Families without as many of these resources must often approach a change in one leg of the three-legged stool by changing one or more other legs as well. The analysis of the “pivot” leg shows this: when a family has some kind of constant resource in one leg of the three-legged stool—whether an owned home, a stable job, or a choice school—the other two legs tend to pivot around this resource. In a Catch-22 of social and economic mobility, families with fewer resources not only experience transition more often (and in more complicated ways), but must more frequently use their scarcer resources to readjust after a transition.

Parents think about how transitions affect their kids. One way they adjust short-term to the transition is by alleviating the negative effects, cushioning their kids by keeping at least one leg of the three-legged stool constant. In the long-term, families who have transitioned will readjust their routine to become as sustainable as possible. When the routine is no longer sustainable—whether it is factor of a discrete leg of the three-legged stool making it so, or whether it is in the negotiation of the three legs together—another transition may happen. Past and present transitions affect the trajectory of families’ mobility possibilities, but so does the consideration of transitions in the future. Families may forgo chances for upward mobility—either by going to a new school, accepting a new job, or finding a home in a better neighborhood—because they understand the costly nature of rearranging the interrelated legs of the three-legged stool.

High-income parents also make discrete consumer-like choices that low- and middle-income parents do not have the resources to make. These choices often precede pull transitions.
Past research has shown that the ability of parents to choose the best education for their children is mediated by the resources available to different socioeconomic classes (Laureau & Goyette 2014). The How Parents House Kids data shows that high-income parents who experience a discrete schooling or care push transition—that is, a transition that is based on when a child moves to the next level of school—in care or schooling, usually do it as a consumer, for better child care or schooling. Engaging in this kind of school choice often delinks residential location from care or schooling, something that we see a lot of in today’s choice school environment (Rhodes & Wakerntien 2016). Ann and Steve changed their son’s daycare situation to better adjust to his behavioral needs, placing him in a more appropriate child-care setting while keeping their home and employment legs of the three-legged stool stable.

This ability to act as unencumbered consumers contrasts to low- and middle-income parents’ experiences. Like Gabrielle and Tiffany, described above, low- and middle-income parents would like to choose a school and engage in this kind of pull transition for their children, but they do not because of the delicate balance they have struck with work and home location. Though school choice programs have been touted by supportive leaders and policy makers as support for marginalized groups—namely, minorities or people of lower socioeconomic status—the How Parents House Kids data seems to show that the consumer behavior and environment assumed to exist in choice programs is only a reality for high-income families. Low- and middle-income families often forgo pull transitions because of the need to balance the three-legged stool, or they find themselves having to work through a push transition in another leg of the stool to achieve balance. Though school choice programs may work well in theory, in reality choosing the best school or care situation (regardless of location) has direct implications on the entire
three-legged stool. Such a choice requires families to expend resources on rebalancing the stool, and thus may be more unaffordable (or very costly) for low- and middle-income families.

Finally, the home leg of the three-legged stool seems to be particularly important in maintaining stability, and also possibly a particularly responsive location for intervention. Homeownership has a stabilizing relationship to not only the home leg of the three-legged stool, but also often allows people to avoid push transitions in the other legs. If reducing “instability”—or many push transitions—over the course of a family’s year is a goal of public policy, homeownership may be a potential place of intervention. Perhaps programs for subsidized homeownership, instead of programs for subsidized rentals, would help stem the multi-legged transitions lower-income people experience more often over the course of a year.

HPHK families of higher-incomes experience fewer transitions over the course of a year, and experience more pull transitions as a proportion of all transitions they make. These families are more likely to experience a single transition in the three-legged stool—indeed, only two high-income families experience two-legged transitions, and no high-income families experience three-legged transitions. In contrast, lower- and middle-income families experience more push transitions over the course of the year, and these transitions are experienced at the same time as other push transitions as the families try to balance their three-legged stools. Economic, material, and network resources seem to allow families to experience fewer transitions in the three-legged stool, and people with fewer of these resources (or more obstacles to deploying the resources appropriately) seem to have more complicated, multi-legged transitions over the course of the year. Because families also use scare resources to negotiate sustainable childrearing routines after such transitions, families with fewer resources may become stuck in a cycle of complicated, co-morbid transitions. This has negative implications for social and economic mobility.
Transitions in and of themselves are not necessarily bad, and could very well lead to progressive improvements in family wellbeing; indeed, we see this with families who experience pull transitions in school/care, housing, or employment. However, this chapter illustrates the fact that a transition in even one leg of the three-legged stool is often associated with transitions in other legs, especially for low-income families, and that these coinciding or successive transitions are often push transitions. This puts an extra burden on society’s most over-burdened families to re-stabilize family routines. The less energy a family must expend on this continual re-stabilization, the more energy it will have to pursue other more meaningful goals, like economic mobility.
CHAPTER 6

Conclusion

Summary

Work and family, two bedrock institutions of social life, can be examined through the lens of childrearing routines, “three-legged stools” that link aspects of work, home, and care or schooling. These complicated routines and arrangements help define daily life for families, especially families with children. The strategies parents use get to and from work, to and from school or care, and negotiate schedules and non-parental help in urban geography and the current American economy has implications for inequalities that we, as social researchers, care about very much. However, because these routines fall between the two realms of family and home, we sometimes overlook their importance to the functioning of daily life, and the daily production of social systems and reproduction of inequality. Additionally, these daily experiences of arranging and sustaining childcare routines may have important, poorly-understood links to economic and neighborhood mobility for families. In a point in time of such high inequality and stagnant mobility in America, understanding these links is particularly important.

Using data from a longitudinal, in-depth, qualitative study of parents of young children, I have analyzed these routines, their implications for gender, class, and racial inequality, and the complications they pose to life transitions over the course of a year. Through the analysis of transcripts of “the story of your life” and descriptions of daily experiences in two different American cities from over 100 primary caregivers of young children, I search for patterns in parental experiences across place, class, race, and gender. I find that creating and maintaining sustainable childrearing routines may be a hidden engine of certain persistent inequalities, especially when we look at differences across class and race.
Analysis of the data shows how parents seek to create sustainable childrearing routines for themselves, and in this pursuit may limit or expand their options for economic and neighborhood mobility. I describe the many “waypoints” during a day that parents navigate in pursuit of a sustainable childrearing routine. Parents perform geographic, temporal, and network acrobatics daily to make sure children are cared for, and economic and social resources help create sustainable childrearing routines in geographic space. Parents with more resources are better able to locate themselves in a good neighborhood close to good jobs and good care or schools; less well-off parents struggle to find affordable housing in a location that is also close to a well-paying job and good care or schooling for their children. Because sustainability of childrearing routines is itself a goal—and de facto necessity—for many parents, moving to a better neighborhood or better economic situation may be delayed or forgone if it destabilizes the childrearing routine of a family. This happens across socioeconomic classes and in neighborhoods of various resources. However, the lack of economic and neighborhood mobility has more immediate and problematic implications for those families who are already struggling at the bottom rungs of a very unequal economy and society. Understanding the context of interrelated legs of the three-legged stool allows a better understanding of the rationality behind the choices parents make to create and sustain a childrearing routine, even if those choices are not rational in the traditional economic sense.

The data suggests that the need to create and maintain sustainable childrearing routines works out within a household as well as over geographic space. The division of labor between parental partners is highly linked to class, but also a way that individual families negotiate gender ideologies and economic needs within the more private sphere of home. Parents arrange household life and relationship roles to create sustainable routines that link work, home, and care
or schooling for their children. The way parents—and particularly partners—arrange these roles to coincide with economic and social needs has implications for gender equality within marriage and partnerships. Analysis of the data shows that some middle-class parental partners are more likely to suggest that sharing childrearing equally between parents is a goal. Other middle-class partners have arranged their childrearing routines that puts the onus of work and childrearing squarely on the shoulders of one parent—usually the mother. These “supermomming” families are able to focus on the production of the children as well as the production of economic resources, and the all-consuming nature of work at the higher end of the economic spectrum often means that only one partner of a parental pair can engage in this work. The other partner, often highly-educated with impressive human capital as well, may pull back to work part-time and also be primarily responsible for childrearing routines. Like their “stay-at-home-parent” counterparts (across class, and more often in the lower classes), these “supermomming” families have found a way to separate main “breadwinning” from main “childrearing.” This division of labor along gendered lines may be one way gender inequalities in terms of economic power continue to be reproduced in the middle- and high-income families; choices these families make about childrearing take into account the “greedy” (Blair-Loy 2003) nature of both professional work and middle-class childrearing.

Working- and lower-income families also have a large proportion of traditional stay-at-home parents, but there is often more movement in and out of the labor force for these partners, especially as children become school-aged. Additionally, a “cooperative parenting” pattern of sharing childrearing and breadwinning occurs emerges from the data of the working- and lower-income families. Economic necessity often requires both parents to work, but they cooperatively create work schedules and childrearing routines that allow them to share relatively equally the
childrearing responsibilities during the week. When mom is working, dad takes care of the kids and cooks. These choices—rational in the sense that the family optimizes its resources to care for its children and make a living—blur the lines of gender roles held up by the “conjugal family” form of the mid-twentieth century. They may even be spurring changes in gender ideology amongst the lower- and middle-income families.

A specific form of parenting arrangement—what I term the “homesteaded” parent—also emerges from the data. These parents are engaged in the workforce in a way that allows them to mainly work from home, often while they care for or educate their children. Homesteaded parents can be either cooperative (both partners work at home, somehow engaging with the new forms of gig-economy or otherwise pursuing self-directed employment) or “supermomming” (one partner goes to work in a traditional sense, and the other partner is at home, working for pay in a non-traditional arrangement while caring for and/or educating children). Chapter 3 highlights the changing nature of family relationships because of choices families make, and how these relationships are formed by and may even form the institutions of work, child care and schooling in America in the 21st century. Though this chapter shows that families and childrearing routines have changed considerably since the mid-twentieth century, it suggests that we are not returning to a pre-industrial, “corporate” family form (Therborn 2004), but instead are forging a decidedly post-industrial form of family of work and childrearing.

Though the American institution of work—and much of child care and schooling—still operate within the framework of the “implicit familialism” (Kremer 2008) of the mid-twentieth century nuclear family, parents work within existing extended family, or kincare, networks to make their childrearing routines more sustainable. Kincare often takes the form of relying on an extended family member to provide regular care to children. Indeed, a majority of families across
the sample classes rely on kincare for their children at least weekly, and many working- and low-income families rely on family members for regular, daily child care. Reliance on kincare for daily activities of childrearing is related to where a family lives, and where they look to make future moves. Though some parents describe steps they will take to move away from family, the instrumental importance of kincare in many parents’ lives makes moves to family neighborhoods more likely, and sometimes prevents moves away from these same neighborhoods. We know that neighborhood of residence matters for future outcomes (Chetty 2016), but many parents make rational decisions to stay in neighborhoods of origin because of their childrearing networks. Patterns of segregation in American cities may be bolstered by the importance of the private family safety net in a country where the public provision of child care and family policy is particularly sparse.

Finally, using the longitudinal nature of the data for this dissertation, I show that the number, types, and interconnected experience of transitions in areas of childrearing is related to class and racial inequality. Returning to an analysis of the “three-legged” stool in the dimension of time allows a description of the transitions families make in the realms of work, home location, and care or schooling for their children over the course of a year. Whereas low-income and middle-income families have more transitions in any one leg of the three-legged stool over the course of the year, and many of these transitions are unplanned “push” transitions, middle-income people have fewer transitions overall, and, with the middle-income families, experience a higher proportion of mobility-enhancing “pull” transitions. More importantly, perhaps, is the interconnectedness of transitions, particularly for lower-income families. Whereas a middle-income family may have a pull transition in housing over the course of the year, their resources (like transportation, family economic support, or school knowledge) allow them to buffer the
other two legs of the three-legged stool from other transitions. Alternately, a low-income family more often faces push transitions in more than one leg. A move to a different neighborhood may also prompt a change of jobs (or loss of a job) as transportation to the previous job becomes too onerous. Families who have to do more this kind of renegotiation of the three-legged stool face a set of costs to daily living—and childrearing in particular—that families who do not have these kind of transitions do not face. Families act rationally within the institutional constraints they face: some forgo pull transitions because the renegotiation of the three-legged stool would be too onerous, and others buffer their children from push transitions by executing tiresome and lengthy childrearing commutes. These choices, however, reinforce and recreate socioeconomic inequality, and are particularly problematic for children, who overall thrive better in conditions of stability.

**Contributions to Knowledge**

This dissertation straddles the sociology of the family and the sociology of work, placing how parents arrange childrearing routines in the center of an analysis of the two. First, we see that family, especially childrearing practices amongst parents, is affected by needs of work and the larger economy. The landscape of work has changed dramatically since the mid-20th century: women have entered the workforce in great numbers, and working-class jobs of the industrial era have been decreasing. More families need two earners in a household to make ends meet, and this requires that children are cared for by someone other than a parent during the day.

As the economy has changed in the past one hundred years, so has family. These changes are somewhat functional to the economy itself, but it is also cultural. Due to the economy, families often must send out two parents to the workforce: two incomes are more essential now
than they were during the height of industrialization in America in the middle of the 20th century. The economy has become more global, and technology and other changes in the way we work and do business has created a much more frenetic pace in work that affects how childrearing can take place.

This dissertation shows that families make choices about childrearing that are by and large rational, but that rationality takes into account aspects of daily life previously unaccounted for in discussions of economic choices like type of job, neighborhood of residence, school type and location, and even amount and quality of child care. These aspects of daily life are often the delicate and ever-changing nature of the three-legged stool that families almost constantly balance and rebalance, and the type and amount of paid work a parent does must necessarily fit into the system. This kind of blending of the “home” and “work” spheres is something that daily routine necessitates, but that literature on neighborhood choice and work often ignores. This dissertation brings to light the critical importance of a family’s daily, sustainable routine to possibility of its physical and economic mobility.

Families—and our culture—also emphasize cultivation and educational success of children much more than they did in the middle of the 20th century, and certainly at the beginning of the century. Such an emphasis on education and development requires more resource and effort put into raising children and enriching their lives, and families work within their means and their own cultural milieu. Families have arranged for their children’s development by finding places of care for their children—and people to care for them—within a geographic context; they then must link these places of care with home and job location in a sustainable manner. How parents make rational choices affected by their class position and the resources therein: high-income parents more easily buy market substitutes for parental care, and
lower-income parents must often utilize a web of network resources to make sure children are cared for while they are at work.

In tandem with, and sometimes because of, the choices families make about childrearing routines, they develop, maintain, and redefine gender roles and identities. Though much has changed in the economy, work, and family in the past half a century, certain gendered roles between parental partners remain surprisingly steady, with new variations. Families of all classes still often have a dedicated stay-at-home parent, and that stay at home parent in all but one family in the HPHK data is a woman. Indeed, despite the economic need for many families to have dual-earners, the low-income groups in this study show the highest rates of stay-at-home parenting. The stay-at-home parent may have worked in the past, and even trained extensively for that work, but now specializes in homemaking and caretaking, while her partner (if there is one) brings home the paycheck.

Gender is also extremely important in dual-earner families, and the way dual-earner parents arrange responsibilities varies in interesting ways by class as families make rational choices in a particular cultural and institutional context. In high-income families, we see a higher incidence of “supermomming,” where one parent (usually the mother) works for pay and has a “second shift” (Hochschild 1989) as the primary parent as well. The other parent (usually the father) specializes in work and, though he is involved, is not an equal partner in childrearing and homemaking. This reifies the division of labor along the traditional lines of gender. Though some low- and middle-income families also engage in this kind of gendered division of labor, they are more likely to be “cooperative” parents, taking shifts at work and shifts at home with raising the children and doing housework. In this way, they distance themselves from the gendered division of labor prominent in the 1960’s middle-class often held up as the “traditional”
family arrangement. Though research on gender egalitarian ideals often comes from a tradition of feminism that favors the middle- and upper-classes (hooks 2000), we see cooperative parenting—the daily act of sharing responsibilities in family and work as equally as possible—is often necessary and desirable for the low-income families in this HPHK sample.

The rational choices families can and will make is affected by cultural production—like that of gender—and also by the increasing demands of the institution of work in American in the 21st century. Alternately, we see that work and the economy is affected by family needs. As parents become more interested in having a work-life balance, and complex urban commutes take up a great deal of a family’s day, some parents are choosing to work from home, and sometimes work for themselves. This entrepreneurial American spirit is not new, but the technology that allows it to happen in tandem with home life is. Additionally, the American gig economy continues to grow, and some researchers expect that work will become less centralized and more fluid in the coming years (Styhre 2017). Parents in the HPHK sample who work from home almost always cite childrearing responsibilities as one reason they want to do this—they can better make rational choices that balance the three-legged stool with the evolving flexibility of the institution of paid work. These at-home arrangements have the potential to decrease the complexity and increase the sustainability of their daily routines. As more parent workers seek these kind of alternative work arrangements, the once discrete realm of the American family could have an increasingly large impact on the landscape of American work.

All in all, there seems to be a “return to complexity” (Cherlin 2012b) or a “recovered complexity” (Therborn 2004) in family arrangements, and some or much of this complexity has to do with the dissonance of concertedly raising children in a very demanding culture of work, within complex urban geographies. Family at the beginning of the 20th century was often
organized in a “corporate” form (Ruggles 2015), with the father at the head of the household and
basic family economy, and everything revolving around him and his direction. Family and work
were overlapping spheres in this model. The middle of the 20th century saw the emergence of the
conjugal form of family, with nuclear families giving childrearing and homemaking
responsibilities to the mother, and work (almost always outside of the home) to the father. This
was the separate spheres approach to family and work. In the early 21st century, we see a
reemergence of particular complexities within the family, including a cross-class reliance on
extended family for help in childrearing, as well as some families bringing work back into the
home.

There are important differences between what family looks like today in the HPHK data
and the main forms in the mid- and early-21st century. First, the feminist revolution has occurred
and continues to develop, and women’s employment is protected by law and by culture in ways
that it was not by the middle of the 20th century. Though sexism and gendered expectations are
still rife in American culture, patriarchy is less embedded in our laws and even our personal
expectations than it was half a century ago. Thus, the reemergence of complexity in family form
is less of a reflection of the forms of the early 20th century and more of a post-modern variation
on it. Men and women specialize in home or work, but they do so less rigidly; most parents take
great care and time to parent their own children; childrearing is a multi-generational experience,
but all these generations must navigate a more robust and prominent educational system while
childrearing. Goren suggests that there is a “recovered complexity” in the family these days. This
is true, but the complexity is different from the complexity at the beginning of the 20th century.

Underlying this return to a new form of complexity in the American family is an
inadequate and archaic structure of public policy and programming in the United States. Most
public schools, the one universal provision of care and education for American children, have hours that do not coordinate well with working hours of parents, and many jobs do not provide provisions that parental workers find essential, like paid sick days and paid parental leave.

Though parents, especially those who need the economic resources, must to work to improve their family’s economic situations, the “implicit familism” (Kremer 2006) of American culture and public policy does not provide enough supports to parent workers. For most American parents, making childrearing and work compatible through sustainable routines takes a great deal of time and energy. Until our policies and programs recognize the dual-earner, dual-caretaker model of family, this will continue.

Finally, this dissertation brings to light childrearing routines as a complicated, potential underlying mechanism for the stalled economic and social mobility we see in the United States today. Creating and sustaining childrearing routines requires a great deal of time, energy, and potential tradeoffs that have direct implications for a family’s possible economic mobility. Creating a sustainable routine requires certain tradeoffs: to be closer to work, for example, and to be able to be home in time to meet children from school, a family may choose a neighborhood is a mediocre school district. Families might also trade-off work quality or quantity to be able to better arrange a sustainable childrearing routine. Indeed, families may forgo moves to better neighborhoods—or make moves to resource-poor neighborhoods—because of how they must align work, home, and care/school locations daily in their childrearing routines. We see all these tradeoffs happening at points in time and over time through the HPHK data: families forgo moves to better neighborhoods, or say to no promotions at work, or make changes to lower-quality schools for their children, to better align their childrearing routines in a sustainable way.
To truly understand family, work, and inequality in the United States at the beginning of the 21\textsuperscript{st} century, we must understand how parents arrange childrearing within geographic space, under certain constraints of time, resources, and networks. All in all, family and work life is more complicated now than it was at the beginning of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century, and most certainly more complicated than it was during the supposed high-point of modernity in the 1960’s. Work is more demanding, cities are more spread out, there is more choice in schooling and care for children, these choices are mediated by huge inequalities in wealth, and have direct cultural and mobility ramifications. The daily negotiations parents make in pursuit of sustainable childrearing routines generate and ameliorate inequalities in gender, class, and race, and must be taken into account when thinking of how to pursue options to alleviating American inequality in the 21\textsuperscript{st} century.

**Recommendations for Future Research and Policy**

The data and analysis in this dissertation are specific to points in time and geography, and cannot be completely extrapolated to the social reality of all parents. However, certain themes cut across class, race, gender, and place in this stratified sample, and can point to areas public policy may address issues of childrearing to better support American families. Overall, the research presented here points to the fact that the American policy landscape needs to become more flexible in terms of family, work, and care policy to best recognize and support the complexity families with children face in their daily routines. This informed flexibility will better support the American economy, American family values, and American children as they become the next generation of the 21\textsuperscript{st} century.
Future research into family, work, and childrearing should directly address the complexity of modern American life, and how this complexity is supported or not by current work and family policies. Childrearing routines are such an embedded part of parents’ everyday lives that we often do not see or consider the effort, time, and resources that go into carrying them out sustainably. Work and family has changed considerably since the mid-20th century, but much of the ideology underlying our research and practice still considers work and home in the “separate spheres” ideology (Davies & Frink 2014). Future research should look at how to quantitatively analyze the effects of patterns like “supermomming” and “cooperative parenting” on gender roles within families and class differences between families. Large datasets should look beyond the previously distinct categories of “work” and “home” when creating and defining variables, and consider how to best examine, in large, quantitative ways, the realities of crossed-boundaries that parents negotiate daily in pursuit of sustainable childrearing routines. We need to operationalize the variables of complexity that make up the daily routines of working parents in the 21st century.

As Cherlin (2012) and Therborn (2004) suggest, the independent nuclear family of the mid-twentieth century may well have been far from traditional, though it is touted as such in public discourse and held up as a model in many of our public policies. Future research should consider how the nuclear family is embedded in—not independent from—the extended family, and how necessary this embeddedness is in our American regime of “implicit familialism.” Additionally, research should look at how gender inequality is broken down and held up in families, and how it diffuses to the workplace and other realms of social experience. The findings about gender in this dissertation suggest that the gender revolution in the home and in
the workplace is still very much dynamic, and we need to better understand it as it develops with
the changing nature of the American family and the American institution of work.

In a regime of implicit familialism, forging policy that benefits families is difficult, as
public policy and private family are ideologically at odds. The interrelated nature of the legs of
the three-legged stool, however, can perhaps open up creative avenues to pursue policies that
benefit childrearing routines of families. For example, the Chapters 4 and 5 suggest the
importance of child care vouchers and housing vouchers, respectively, in providing availability,
affordability, and stability to childrearing routines. Expanding these vouchers to families who
struggle to find sustainable routines would be one possible policy intervention. Additionally, as
parents think about the three-legs when considering a transition in job, housing, or child care or
schooling, policy should consider how intervening in one of these areas of a family’s
childrearing routine usually necessitates an intervention—either to change the area or maintain
stability—in the other legs. Housing programs that move struggling families to more prosperous,
resource-rich neighborhoods must take into account the effects such a move may have on the
child care or schooling and work arrangements of families, and how to mediate those effects.

Linking the legs of home, care and schooling, and work is a daily acrobatic task, and, in
our regime of implicit familialism, families mostly do it independent of other institutions.
Linking the institutions of work and school or daycare more to the childrearing needs of
families—and to each other—could potentially support busy working families. For example,
some daycares provide transportation of children to and from school, so parents can better
arrange their work schedules. Schools often provide transportation of children to and from home,
via school buses. How, then, could such a transportation web best link parents to work and to
their children, and how could work be more closely related to home? As shown in Chapter 3,
new technology and the growth of work-from-home policies has allowed some parents to engage in parenting *while* working at home, and link home and care arrangements to work more seamlessly. Though there may be drawbacks to this arrangement—not the least of which are blurred lines between home and work in a larger culture that still sees work and home as separate spheres—more companies could pursue these kind of policies that recognize the interrelated nature of a parent’s work, home, and childrearing needs.

Finally, the institutions in which American workers and parents exist should continue to be scrutinized and adjusted to fit the modern and widespread forms of work and family in twenty-first century America. This is important for future research and targeted family policy. The independent, conjugal, nuclear family of the mid-twentieth century is no longer—and perhaps never was—a good model for the lived experiences of most American families. Likewise, a workplace that requires complete devotion from a worker unencumbered by family responsibilities is no longer aligned with the realities of most American families. Americans exist in diverse family structures, many of which rely on at least weekly childrearing help from extended family, and have a variety of work arrangements that often blur into family responsibilities. Work and families have been and will continue to evolve; the ideologies that help define the policies that govern them may as well.
REFERENCES


Pratt, Geraldine and Susan Hanson. 1994. “Geography and the Construction of Difference.” Gender, Place, and Culture 1: 5-29.


APPENDICES


HPHK FOLLOW-UP INTERVIEW GUIDE

My name is __________ and I am with Johns Hopkins University. I’m so glad we get to catch up with you again—the year went by so fast! Like last year, today we will be talking about your family, your children, your housing experiences, your neighborhood, your education, and your work history—any changes since we spoke last. Of course, I’m interested in your whole life story, but we will talk mostly about places you’ve lived, houses and apartments you’ve rented around here, and those you’re thinking about renting or living in, and especially anything that’s changed for you in the past year.

I have some questions in mind, and I’m sure you will have some things you want to talk about, too. So think of this as a conversation between friends, rather than an “interview.” We will be as informal as possible. You can stop talking at any time. If I raise an issue or ask a question you don’t want to talk about, just say so and we will move on to something else. No big deal.

I’m going to record our conversation because I don’t want to take many notes during the interview. This way, I can really concentrate on what you have to say. If you want me to turn the tape off for any reason or at any time, just say so. No one will hear the tape except for the research team and the secretary who transcribes it. Then we erase the tape. We take out your name and any other identifying information from the transcript. In other words, no one will know who you are, but a lot of people will hear what you have to say.

We ask people to choose a pseudonym, or a fake name, that we can use for your stories. We write this name on the tape and that way your real name isn’t attached to any of this information. Last year, you chose the name X. Is that still okay? [If not] What name would you like to choose?

Is it okay if I turn on the tape recorder now? [Get verbal consent].

[Note: Make the following statement after you have turned on the tape recorder]:

“The tape recorder is now on. This is [interviewer name], I am here with [respondent pseudonym], ID number [ID number here] and today is [insert date].”

Any questions? OK, let’s start.
*SECTION 1: WARM-UP, BACKGROUND, FAMILY ROSTER AND DYNAMICS*

**DYNAMICS:** I can’t believe it’s been a whole year since we last saw you! Tell me about some of the biggest changes that have occurred for you and your family.
PROBE FOR: employment, residential moves, family members (partners, children), household residents, children’s school attendance, and childcare arrangements.

To start, tell me about anyone who moved in/out of your apartment/home since we talked to you last year. Tell me the whole story about how that happened.

Sometimes people have family and friends who stay with them from time to time but don’t really live with them full time. What about for you? Tell me about anyone who stayed here for a while in the last year, but doesn’t live here permanently. TMMAT.

What about you, tell me about any other places you ended up staying in the last year. TMMAT

What about your kids? Tell me about any other places your kids have stayed in the last year. TMMAT. (Try to get the relationship to kids of people kids stay with. And get the whole story)

*SECTION 2: UNITS AND NEIGHBORHOODS*

As you probably remember from last year, a really important part of our study is understanding how people end up living where they do, and why they might move from one place to another. In this section, I am going to ask you about your move this past year.

**IF RESPONDENT HAS MOVED**

Tell me the whole story from start to finish. How did you decide to move?

Tell me the whole story about how you ended up in this apartment/home.

Sometimes people know lots about the schools in their new neighborhood before they move, other times they learn more about schools after they move. What about for you? Tell me about how you learned about the schools.

Tell me about all of the other apartments/homes you thought about renting/buying, but didn’t work out for one reason or another. Take me through each of those decisions.

Some people say that certain aspects of their personal situations really limit the kinds of apartments/homes they can get—bad credit, an eviction, transportation needs, even things like criminal records. How about for you? TMMAT.
Tell me about any units you applied for but weren’t able to get. TMMAT.

So we’ve talked about the specific apartments/homes you considered. Now we’re going to talk about the different neighborhoods you considered when you decided to make a move.

Tell me about all the neighborhoods you considered when making this move. What was distinctive about those particular neighborhoods? Tell me about how you knew about these neighborhoods.

Tell me about the neighborhoods that were definitely NOT on your list. What was distinctive about those particular neighborhoods? TMMAT.

Sometimes people decide where to live pretty much on their own. Sometimes other people get involved. How about for you? TMMAT. [Note: This is an important question. If someone else was involved, bring up their opinions during the rest of the interviews.]

Tell me all about your new apartment/house. What do you like best about the apartment/house? What do you like least? TMMAT.

How does this apartment/house compare to the one you lived in before?

What about the new neighborhood? What do you like best about living in this area? What do you like the least? TMMAT.

What if you had to make the move all over again—what would you change? First, would you have chosen this particular apartment/house? TMMAT. Second, would you have chosen this particular neighborhood? TMMAT.

How does this neighborhood compare to the one you lived in before?

What parts of the neighborhood do you tend to avoid? TMMAT. What parts of the neighborhood do you tell your kids to avoid? TMMAT. How did you/your kids learn what parts you needed to avoid? TMMAT.

Sometimes, when people move to a new area they experience a new mix of people. Tell me about the mix of people in this neighborhood. How does the mix of people here compare with the mix in your old neighborhood? TMMAT. How comfortable are you with the mix of people in your new neighborhood? How comfortable were you with the mix of people in your old neighborhood? If you could choose the mix of folks you wanted to live in your neighborhood, what would that look like? TMMAT. [If respondent says mixed: Tell me what mixed means – proportions of types of neighbors] Probe for voucher holders and race/ethnicity. They might also refer to other characteristics such as immigrant status, income, age, etc.

[FOR ALL RESPONDENTS]

We just want to clarify—whose name is officially on the lease/who holds the mortgage for this place? TMMAT.
I didn’t have time to review what you paid last year in your rent/mortgage. What is your monthly payment now? How has that changed from last year? [If multiple people in the household: How is that divided up?]

Tell me about any housing assistance or loan modification programs you’ve applied for in the last year. Tell us the whole story of signing up. How does the program work? Tell me the whole story of how you heard about the program. How much does that save you each month on your rent/mortgage? How about over the last year—how much total have you saved on your rent/mortgage?

What about a housing subsidy, do you have one now? Has that changed since last year? What is your share of the rent? How much does the program pay? How do you get a voucher? What was the process for you? When you got your voucher, did it come with “instructions”? TMMAT. What requirements did you have to meet to get a voucher? What requirements did you have to meet to actually use it? Tell me about any meetings at the housing authority.

(IF THEY GOT SUBSIDY IN PAST YEAR) Take me back to the moment you learned you were getting a voucher. How did you react? What happened next? What happened after that? Tell me the whole story about how getting that voucher led to living where you are right now. Probe: What steps did you have to take to get the voucher? What instructions did you receive after getting your voucher? What requirements did you have to fulfill to receive and use your voucher?

Tell me about any problems you’ve had with your house/apartment over the last year. TMMAT. How did you resolve those problems?

(RENTERS ONLY) Sometimes people have a lot of contact with their landlord/property manager. Sometimes they have very little contact. How about for you? Tell me about any interactions you’ve had with your landlord in the past year. Tell me the whole story of the last time you had any contact with your landlord/property manager.

(FOR NONMOVERS) In some neighborhoods, nothing changes much from year to year. In others, there is a lot of change. What about for your neighborhood? PROBE: Has anyone moved in or out on this block? TMMAT. Any crimes in the block? Any neighborhood events? Issues with the neighborhood association? Tell me, how do you feel about these changes?

Tell me about how your block has changed in the past year.

Tell me about your neighbors. Tell me a story about the last time you interacted with a neighbor. Tell me about anyone new you’ve gotten to know on the block in the past year. TMMAT.

In some neighborhoods, people talk to each other a lot and in other neighborhoods, people are more likely to keep to themselves. How about in this neighborhood?
Some people feel they should say something if they see a child doing something they shouldn’t. Other people feel they shouldn’t get in somebody else’s business. How about for you? Tell me about the last time you had to decide whether to say something or just mind your own business. Take me through that decision.

If a cousin of yours was moving to Cleveland [Dallas] and had kids the same age as yours, what advice would you give them about where to live? TMMAT. Probe: neighborhoods to think about/avoid, school considerations, safety issues, commute times, housing quality, cost

*HOUSING ACTIVITY TRADEOFFS:

NOTE: The most important component of this exercise is narration and dialogue. Actively engage the respondent as he or she looks through housing options, both to have a transcribed version of what is occurring, and to tease out those preferences which are potentially subconscious, or not articulated in nature.

BEFORE GETTING OUT THE COMPUTER.

Last year we talked a lot about how you decided where to live. This year we want to try something a little bit different on the computer, but I have a few questions for you first.

I’m interested in your ideas about what aspects of your apartment/home work well for your family right now and which don’t work so well. TMMAT. [Note: This is an important question. If possible, have the respondent actually show you the features of the unit that they feel work well or not well for the family—you can do the house tour here if appropriate, or at the end – we want to get at philosophies of what makes for a good environment for kids here.] Probes: How about a place to work? Place to play? Places to sleep? Places for kids to do school work? How about noise in the house? Privacy for different kids and adults?

Tell me about any plans you have to move in the next year.

We have been talking to a lot of families, and people have lots of different opinions about what is more important to them when they are looking for a new place to live. For you, when making a decision about where to live, what things are important to you? PROBE: the unit itself, the area in which the unit is located, the schools, proximity to family/work/childcare, the cost, or something else? TMMAT. [Note: Really probe here—this is the only direct question on housing tradeoffs - even asking for a ranking of these factors.]

How does cost affect the neighborhoods you would consider? How about the units you would consider?

In terms of an apartment/home, what are the “must haves,” the non-negotiables? TMMAT. What aspects of an apartment/home are you more willing to be flexible about? TMMAT. Probe: unit size (# of bedrooms), bathrooms, kitchen qualities, yard space, parking issues, apartment vs. single family home, tradeoffs with considerations of neighborhood and schools.

Ideally, what features of an apartment/home do you think are the most important for families with kids your kids’ ages? PROBE: Quality/size of unit versus safety/accessibility of neighborhoods vs. quality/location of schools vs. social connections/ease of moving to neighborhood, etc.
Okay, we’ve talked about the apartment/home. What about the neighborhood? In terms of a neighborhood, what are the “must haves,” the non-negotiables? What aspects of a neighborhood are you more willing to be flexible about? Probe: commute times, proximity to work, proximity to family, proximity to childcare, safety, qualities of neighbors

If you were going to move, what would your first steps be. Probe on method of information gathering and search. In some cases, especially if respondents indicate they would look up crime statistics or look up city hall websites or look at school quality websites. I have actually googled their preferred search terms on the computer at this point to see what kinds of information comes up and have them talk through the results.

**NOW USING COMPUTER**

1. OPEN-ENDED - RESPONDENT CAN PICK WEBSITE: Using personal computer, iPad have respondent look at available units to rent/own.

   - We have found that it is easier to facilitate the process if the researcher operates the computer but sits next to the respondent. Only one respondent so far has managed the computer himself. This also allows you to slowly ask them about properties and have them tell you what to click on. It forces an oral explanation of their thoughts.

   - Also if the respondent does not express a desire to search on an alternative website, it is easiest to simply go straight to the chosen website that we are consistently using for step 2.

2. OK let’s look at some units that are actually available, the website prompts you for certain types of information. What would you fill in and what would you leave blank to search for units? Enter their requested information, probing on reasons for their choices, and pull up search results.

   - **If respondent did not use neighborhood constraints in their open search** Sometimes, people only look in certain neighborhoods when they are looking for a unit. Earlier, we talked about some neighborhoods you definitely would and would not move to. In your search, you didn’t use any neighborhood constraints. TMMAT.

  Talk me through everything you are thinking when you see the units. Scroll through first page of housing results (note this ranges from 1 to 25 houses on the Cleveland website based on search criteria). PROBE: elimination methods (cost, neighborhood, unit qualities, etc…), cost – acceptable range, what likes, what doesn’t like, pros/cons/tradeoffs. For active movers, frame within the context of their current search.

   - You need to actively read out the language on the screen, especially for units that respondents indicate some interest, or express dislike, about. Reading the information that the site provides about the unit and describing how it looks, as you probe them about what their thoughts are on the unit.

2. USE A CONSISTENT WEBSITE OF YOUR CHOICE

   - Cleveland has been using the Cleveland.com real estate page for homeowners and the Cleveland.com rental page for renters because apartmentguide.com does not pull up many single-family homes, which is what most respondents are looking for.

   - Enter the qualities they looked for/discussed in the open-ended search (# of bedrooms, neighborhoods, cost, etc…). Go through the 1st page of results (up to 25 units). This gives you a baseline set of units to talk through, and then you can compare the results and options with what comes up when you remove the neighborhood constraints.

3. REMOVE NEIGHBORHOOD CONSTRAINTS
Now let's put the qualities you just looked for into cleveland.com’s real estate page except for neighborhoods to see what listings come up. Talk me through what you think about these units. What about the neighborhoods they are located in. Probe: tradeoffs of units vs. neighborhood location, cost vs. neighborhood and unit quality, why they reject units (nhood vs. unit qualities in particular), why they like units; what if previously-desired units were in non-desired neighborhoods (ideally, find examples of this and talk through)

- Take away any neighborhood search constraints, and again go through the 1st page of results to get respondents to discuss comparable units in different neighborhoods.
- If the results themselves do not easily facilitate a neighborhood tradeoffs discussion you can use a house they have expressed interest in, and press them about whether they would consider that house if it were located in various neighborhoods. Try to use neighborhoods they have mentioned as good and bad in the previous interview.
- Push back against their expressed preferences, framing questions that present them with tradeoffs between the neighborhoods, house qualities, cost, schools, etc... to see how their preferences may change based on the circumstances. Often, using a property they pick out as something they like to make the tradeoffs tangible is a useful tool.

4. ASK RESPONDENT TO IDENTIFY THEIR NEIGHBORHOOD ON A MAP
We talked some about your neighborhood earlier, but I’m not very familiar with Cleveland [Dallas]. What is the name of this neighborhood? I’m going to pull up a map so you can show me where the boundaries of this neighborhood are (pull up Google Maps).

- Ask respondent to describe any differences between their street and the broader census tract and city and to describe which areas of their neighborhood they see as more or less desirable.

SECTION 4: HOME

What do you have to do after moving into a house or an apartment to make it feel like YOUR HOME? Tell me about a time you decided not to decorate a place because you decided not to stay there very long.

*Tell me what you think about owning a home. What are the benefits and drawbacks of home ownership? [FOR RENTERS] What steps do you have to taken to own a home?

[FOR HOME OWNERS] Tell me about any home improvements you have made since living here. Tell me about any other improvements you would like to make to your home. Tell me what has been keeping you from making these improvements so far.

SECTION 5: CRIME & OUTSIDE ORGANIZATIONS

*Some people worry a lot about crime and violence in their neighborhoods, while others don’t think about this much at all. How much have you worried about crime in the last year? TMMAT. Tell me about any crime or violence you or your kids have been exposed to while living here. PROBE: experiences, feeling unsafe. PROBE: theft, property damage, drug use and drug dealing, gangs

When you see someone around who you don’t recognize, someone who looks a bit suspicious, what do you do? What kinds of people seem suspicious? What about when you
see something suspicious happening in the neighborhood—how do you react? Tell me about the last time you saw someone or something suspicious: Walk me through every step of how you reacted. [Probe for police.]

Tell me about a time when you called the police to deal with an issue. Tell me the whole story of what led to your most recent call. How did the police respond? How did you feel about that experience? Has there ever been a time when it might have been good to call the police, but you didn’t? TMMAT.

Some people trust the police most of the time, while others are suspicious of police. Generally speaking, how do you feel about the police? How about the officers in this neighborhood?

How often do you see police around here? Tell me a story about the last conversation or interaction you had with a police officer around here. What are some things you think the police do well? What things do police not do so well?

Tell me about any neighborhood watch or other crime prevention program in this neighborhood. In your opinion, what role does the presence/absence of a neighborhood watch or crime prevention program play in neighborhood safety? Tell me about any interactions you’ve had with any of these groups. [IF INVOLVED] Tell me the whole story of how you got involved with that group.

Some families tell us that other agencies, like child protective services or immigration, come by their neighborhoods. Other families don’t see these agencies in their neighborhood very much. How about for you? Some people say they are aware of CPS [or whatever other agency they name] when going about their daily business, and other people say they never think about it. How about for you?

Some people tell us that in their neighborhood, neighbors threaten to call CPS to be nosy or to get revenge for something. How much does that happen in your neighborhood? How does that make you feel about living here? How much has this happened in other neighborhoods you’ve lived in?

*Some people say that the level of police or government agencies like CPS or INS in the neighborhood can play a role in whether they decide to move to or stay in a particular neighborhood. How about for you?

SECTION 6: CHILDREN AND SCHOOLING

*Let’s catch up about each of your children. Tell me how they are doing and what has been happening with them over the past year. Probe: Have they done anything exciting, or had any new activities, good/bad grades, honors or awards, sports accomplishments? Have they struggled with anything this past year—friendships, classes, academics, sports, etc…? [Note: Prioritize and ask for every kid in the house 3-8. No need to follow up about other kids who don’t live there. Understanding how parents make trade-offs for kids of any age is important
to understand.]

*Where does X go to school? What has it been like for X at this school in the past year? PROBE: grades, activities, behavioral problems, fights, school’s disciplinary response, awards/accomplishments, teacher interactions, any issues of racial prejudice or discrimination, IEP experiences/services, if you had to do it over again would you send X to this school?

How long do you plan on having X go to that school?

*Some families tell us that they considered schools when deciding where to move and other families focused more on other important considerations. How about for you? PROBE: considering private schools vs. public schools; transportation to school

Tell me about the schools children can attend in Cleveland [Dallas]. What types of school options are available to families? PROBE: charter, parochial, magnet, special education, homeschooling, internet programs, etc. What is the cost of local private and religious schools? Tell me how school vouchers work around here.

*What school options have you considered for your child? Tell me about how you decide about schools for your child.

How do you learn about the available school options? Who do you go to for information about schools? PROBE: friends, neighbors, internet, mailings

What was the process like to enroll your child(ren) in their current school? How are the application/enrollment processes different at other types of schools (e.g. charter, private, magnet)? How does the application/enrollment process differ across types of schools? PROBE: applications, grades, tuition

If you were recommending a school to a parent who just moved to this area, what schools would you tell them to send their kids to? Which schools would you tell them to avoid? What would you tell them about how private schools compare to local public school options?

If a family had to move to a neighborhood that was zoned for a public school they weren’t happy with, what would you suggest they do? TMMAT. Tell me about any instances in which you have been unhappy with your local school. [We are interested in how families find a way to break the link between neighborhood and school, and for those who ‘successfully’ do this, where they get their information and what the process looks like.] Probe for schools the respondent would recommend and schools the respondent would avoid.

*(FOR PARENT WITH YOUNG CHILDREN) How has your child getting close to school age made you reconsider where (what neighborhood) you want to be living? TMMAT.

[IF NOT COVERED LAST YEAR] How did you decide to send X to this school? Is this a zoned school? What other schools did you consider? Tell me about the other choices you
had for where to send X to school. TMMAT.

In the past year, has X changed schools? Tell me the whole story about how X ended up that this school. PROBE: If non-promotional, who made the decision to change schools (child, parent, grandparent, someone else)? What schools did you consider? If several, how did you decide what to consider and what factors did you use to choose this school? (Note: Ask about whether family constraints such as transportation, work schedules, and childcare mattered in this decision.)

(IF X CHANGED SCHOOLS) Tell me how this school compares to the old school. What was the best part of changing schools for X? What was the worst part? Tell me all about how X reacted to the change. Tell me about how the student body is different at X’s new school. PROBE: race, SES. Tell me whether this is the school you would like X to be attending? If not, where would you prefer X go to school. TMMAT.

(IF X DID NOT CHANGE SCHOOLS) Sometimes parents have a chance to send their kid to a new school but choose to keep them in their old school (especially after a move). Has this happened with any of your kids in the past year? Tell me the whole story from start to finish.
Tell me what you teach your child about how to interact with teachers and other adults in school.

How often have you gone to X’s school this past year? Are there any other ways that you’re involved? TMMAT. Tell me about any events or meetings that X’s school wanted/expected parents to attend this past year? TMMAT. Tell me about X’s teachers. In general, what have your experiences with X’s teachers been like in the past year? How often do you interact? Was it usually visit, phone call, email?

SECTION 7: FAMILY MANAGEMENT ROUTINES

Parents spend a lot of time managing family routines. Take me through a typical day for your family, from waking up to going to bed. What do you do to get the kids to where (s)he needs to be, when (s)he needs to be there? How do you deal with work, kids, and other home responsibilities? How is this different during the weekend? The school year? Probe for types of transportation, distance to various locations, how far work is from school or childcare, who else helps out, exact times, etc.

As we’ve just discussed, parenting involves a lot of challenges from day to day. Tell me about some of the biggest problems or issues you have faced as a parent in the past two years. How did you address these problems? How did things turn out? What did you like or not like about how things turned out?

Not all problems parents face are big problems, but sometimes it’s still helpful to get support or advice for little things too. Tell me about some of the small things you have had other people help you and your child with. Tell me about the people you talk to, or the
places you go to for help with the small things. (Probes: school subjects, discipline issues, etc.... Probe: family, friends, church leaders, teachers, doctors, other adults as helpers?

*How does the child’s [children’s] mother/father [or mothers/fathers] fit into the daily routine? If not daily, how often does the other parent interact with X? How did this change from last year? How does mother/father help out with childcare? Get the whole story.

*Tell me about how family plays a role in your daily life. How about where you decide to live? How important is it to live close to mom/dad, grandparents, other family? (Note: We’re interested in other adults who root families to certain places.)

*How does transportation work for you every day? PROBE: car, bus, family member/friend’s assistance

How do you work childcare into your daily schedule—transportation there and back? How long does it take? Or does a caregiver come to your home? When do you use childcare (day, evening, nights out, weekends, “gap” time between school and end of work day, etc.)?

Parents tell us that childcare costs a lot of money. How do you manage to pay for it? PROBE: cash, voucher, in-kind transfers, benevolence of family members

Sometimes we hear about how people help other parents out by watching their kids routinely or once in a while. How about for you?

*If you moved to another neighborhood, how would it affect your childcare? PROBE: kids activities/sports or access to rec centers, transportation time to daycare or family care provider.

SECTION 8: EMPLOYMENT AND EDUCATION

*Let’s talk a little bit about work. Last year, you were [FILL IN FROM JOB INFORMATION FROM LAST YEAR]. What is your work situation right now? What’s changed about your work situation since last year? PROBE: How found the job, pay, hours per week (and are hours consistent), length of employment, duties/responsibilities, job skills needed, relationship of job to career goals, location/distance/transportation/commute time, childcare arrangements and location (if applicable), any accolades or problems in job. How difficult is it to keep your job? What types of things to people get fired for where you work?

(IF NOT WORKING) What is keeping you from working right now? TMMAT.

*Tell me about your educational pursuits over the past year. PROBE: GED, training classes, certifications—at work or separate

*Making ends meet in today’s economy can be really tough. Tell me, how do you manage? Tell me about any times in the past year that things have been particularly tight? How did you manage those times? PROBE: gone without something (food, clothing, electric, etc.), under-the-table jobs, illegal jobs, kids helping out, ignoring bills/debt, etc.
Tell me about anyone else who has helped you pay your bills over the last year.

SECTION 9: FUTURE

I’d like to hear about your hopes and dreams for the future. Tell me what you’d like to see happen for yourself.

What are your hopes for your children’s futures? What do want them to do, to be, or to avoid along the way?

Section 10: ONLY IF MISSING FROM INITIAL INTERVIEW

Fill in any blanks or clarify any moves from initial interview on the residential mobility roster.

CLOSING

Is there anything else you’d like to tell me before we end. Anything that you think I’ve missed or that I should know?

Is there anything I should I have asked that I didn’t?

Thank you for talking so freely about your life and your experiences.

***HOUSE TOUR***

IF RESPONDENT MOVED, IF MISSING FROM PREVIOUS INTERVIEW, OR IF RESPONDENT MENTIONS CHANGES TO UNIT

Optional here. May also be useful to do this earlier as a natural break in the interview. Get respondent to point to specific features of the unit that they believe are good or bad for kids.

Questions to probe for during tour:
Who sleeps where?
When other people stay here, who sleeps where?
On a typical day, where does everyone hang out when they are at home?
Meals: Where does everyone eat? Who eats in and who eats out? Who cooks?
Where do kids play and do homework?
Where do you go in the house for privacy?
What’s working for the family about the house / not working?
Are there problems (leaks, broken doors, chipping paint, etc.?)

***PHOTOS***

We want to get photos of everyone who agrees to have pictures taken. Ideally, photos of the respondent, the unit (outside and inside, specifically focusing on anything the respondent likes or
dislikes about the unit), and the respondent in front of the unit.

Thank you very much. I really appreciate your time and everything you have told me. I’ll leave a copy of the consent form for you, as well as my card and phone numbers for you to call in case you have any questions. There is also contact information for my university, in case you have questions about the study after I leave. You can contact us at any time—particularly if there are any changes in your life, and especially if you are going to move. We may be in contact with you over the next year or so, and would like to take down some information so we can be in touch with you.

If you think of anything you forgot to tell me, just call. Thanks again!
Appendix B: Childrearing-Specific Follow-Up Interview Guide (2015-16)

FAMILY ROUTINES FOLLOW-UP GUIDE

My name is __________ and I am with Johns Hopkins University. Thank you so much for agreeing to talk to us again as part of the study! Today we will be talking about your family, your children, your neighborhood, your education, your work history, and most importantly, how you take care of your children and arrange care for them. I’m interested in your whole life story, but we will talk mostly about the past few years of being a parent, and how you balance everything.

I have some questions in mind, and I’m sure you will have some things you want to talk about too. So think of this as a conversation between friends, rather than an “interview.” We will be as informal as possible. You can stop talking at any time. If I raise an issue or ask a question you don’t want to talk about, just say so and we will move on to something else. No big deal.

I’m going to record our conversation because I don’t want to take many notes during the interview. This way, I can really concentrate on what you have to say. If you want me to turn the tape off for any reason or at any time, just say so. No one will hear the tape except for the research team and the secretary who transcribes it. Then we erase the tape. We take out your name and any other identifying information from the transcript. In other words, no one will know who you are, but a lot of people will hear what you have to say.

Is it okay if I turn on the tape recorder now? [Get verbal consent].

[Note: Make the following statement after you have turned on the tape recorder]:

“The tape recorder is now on. This is [interviewer name], I am here with [respondent pseudonym], ID number [ID number here] and today is [insert date].”

Any questions?

OK, let’s start.
Section 1: WARM UP AND CHILDREN

1. I can’t believe it’s already 2016! Tell me what’s been going on in your life. Have there been any big changes? What’s remained the same?

A really important part of my study is about what it’s like to be a parent. We’re going to talk about your ideas about parenthood and your kids.

1. **Tell me about your children.**
   - Ages
   - Likes/dislikes
   - Where in school/daycare
   - Where else they spend time
   - Friends

2. **Tell me about the father (mother) of your children.**
   - Remind me again how you met?
   - Where living now
   - Overall involvement with children
   - Relationship of other parent to children
   - How is your relationship with father (mother)?

3. **Becoming a parent can be both exciting and overwhelming. Take me back to the moment you know you were going to become a parent. Tell me the whole story from beginning to end.**
   - How long trying?
   - How did you react? Other parent react? Family react?

4. **Tell me the story of having your first baby. Take me through the weeks and months that followed.**
   - Probe about:
     - Taking leave
     - Who helped out
     - How decisions got made about what to do with the baby
     - How decisions got made about going back to work/caretaking.

5. **How did you decide that it was time to go back to work?**
6. Tell me about negotiating work and being a mom (dad) for the first few months.

Section 2: FAMILY MANAGEMENT ROUTINES

FAMILY MANAGEMENT ROUTINES

2. Parents spend a lot of time managing family routines. Take me through a typical day for your family, from waking up to going to bed. What do you do to get the kids to where (s)he needs to be, when (s)he needs to be there? How do you deal with work, kids, and other home responsibilities? How is this different during the weekend? The school year? Probe for types of transportation, distance to various locations, how far work is from school or childcare, who watched the kids regularly, who else helps out, exact times, etc.

3. As we’ve just discussed, parenting involves a lot of challenges from day to day. Tell me about some of the biggest problems or issues you have faced as a parent in the past two years. How did you address these problems? How did things turn out? What did you like or not like about how things turned out?

4. Not all problems parents face are big problems, but sometimes it’s still helpful to get support or advice for little things too. Tell me about some of the small things you have had other people help you and your child with. Tell me about the people you talk to, or the places you go to for help with the small things. (Probes: school subjects, discipline issues, etc.... Probe: family, friends, church leaders, teachers, doctors, other adults as helpers?

5. How does the child’s [children’s] mother/father [or mothers/fathers] fit into the daily routine? If not daily, how often does the other parent interact with X? How does mother/father help out with childcare? Get the whole story.

6. Tell me about how family plays a role in your daily life. How about where you decide to live? How important is it to live close to mom/dad, grandparents, other family? (Note: We’re interested in other adults who root families to certain places.)

7. How does transportation work for you every day? PROBE: car, bus, family member/friend’s assistance

8. Parents tell us that childcare costs a lot of money. How do you manage to pay for it? PROBE: cash, voucher, in-kind transfers, benevolence of family members

9. Sometimes we hear about how people help other parents out by watching their kids routinely or once in a while. How about for you?

10. If you moved to another neighborhood, how would it affect your childcare or how your family manages day to day?

Section 3: WORK AND EDUCATION
NOTE: The next three sections may be redundant depending on how detailed the family routines answers are. Be aware that you may have already asked some of these questions, and try to get better details.

1. **Tell me about what your education and work background.**
   Get dates of where/when worked so we can line up with childcare.

2. **Let’s talk about this past year. From a year ago to now, tell me about what you did for work.**
   Probe for interruptions, job changes, problems, accolades, etc.

3. **Let’s talk about your job right now.**
   How much does it pay? Before or after taxes?
   Responsibilities?
   What do you like about it? Dislike?
   Where is it? How do you get there? How long does it take?

4. **Some places are more “family friendly” than others. How is your workplace?**

5. **Sometimes families have a hard time making ends meet, even with a paycheck or two. How about for you?**

---

**Section 4: CHILDCARE**

1. **Tell me about your PRESENT care arrangements for each of your children.** (NOTE: This can include school, but make sure you ask about before and after care as well. They may have already gone over it in section 2, so only probe for what you don’t already know.)
   How did you find that arrangement?
   Like/dislike? Why?
   Where is it exactly?
   How do they get there?
   Who else is there?
   How much do you pay? How (voucher, cash, under-table, etc.)

2. **How is this similar or different from any past care arrangements? Are there any that worked out better or worse for your family?**
3. Money doesn’t grow on trees, and we know childcare is expensive, and we all have to make choices. What if money wasn’t an issue in regards to childcare (and work)? What would you do?

4. Is there anything besides money that makes it hard for you to have the care arrangement you would find ideal for your children? What? Why would that be ideal?

Section 5: FAMILY/EXTENDED FAMILY/NETWORKS

We know family is an important part of life, and that extended family is really important when raising children.

1. Tell me about your family who doesn’t live in the house with you.

   *Probe:*
   - Jobs/interests/etc.
   - How far away are they?
   - How often do you see them?
   - How involved are they in your kids’ lives?

2. What kind of support do they give you and your children?

   *Probe:*
   - Cash transfers (recurring)
   - Childcare assistance
   - Emotional support
   - One-time cash transfers (car, house, etc.)
   - Educational support

3. How about how you support them?

Section 6: GEOGRAPHY MAP AND TRANSPORTATION TIME PROP

1. I know we talked lots earlier about all the places you go to daily—childcare, work, home, etc.—and I want to make sure I have them right. Can you draw me the daily routine? Start at your home and go from there.

   [Have respondent draw a map of their day. This can be really any format, but get exact addresses and approximate daily timing.]
Section 7: IDEALS AND GENDER/CLASS SITUATIONS

1. What would your ideal job be? Your ideal childcare situation? Your ideal family situation?

2. What do you like about the way you and your spouse (or partner, if applicable) share the work it takes to raise children? What do you wish was different?

3. We’re also interested in ways you think that communities or policies could better support working parents. Do you have any ideas?

4. Some people say women and men have become more equal in the past fifty years; other people say we have a long way to go. What do you think?

5. Some people say that it doesn’t matter how much money your family has, you can still be successful in America; other people say that people with more money have an unfair advantage. What do you think?

Section 8: CLOSING

Thank you for talking so freely about your life and your experiences.

6. As we close, I’d like to hear about your hopes and dreams for the future. Tell me what you’d like to see happen for yourself.

7. What are your hopes for your children’s futures? What do want them to do, to be, or to avoid along the way?

8. Is there anything else you’d like to tell me before we end. Anything that you think I’ve missed or that I should know?

9. Is there anything I should I have asked that I didn’t?
VITA


Elizabeth did her undergraduate work at Yale University and graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Psychology and Film Studies in 2005. During her undergraduate studies, Elizabeth spend a semester at the Sorbonne in Paris and a summer in France and South Africa on a traveling grant to study women in film. After graduation, Elizabeth matriculated into the 2005 Teach for America Corps in New York City. There, she taught fourth grade in the Bronx for two years and received her Master of Science in Teaching from Pace University in 2007.

Elizabeth went on to complete her Master of Public Policy degree with a Certificate in Women’s Studies at the University of Michigan’s Ford School of Public Policy in 2011. There, she worked on program analysis using qualitative surveys, was a graduate student instructor in the departments of Film, Sociology, and Psychology, and participated in the International Evaluation and Development Program.

In 2011, Elizabeth began her doctoral work in Sociology at Johns Hopkins. She worked on qualitative research projects with Andrew Cherlin, Kathryn Edin, Stephanie DeLuca, and Katrina Bell McDonald. Elizabeth was the first teaching assistant for the newly-developed Minor in Social Policy, co-taught Poverty and Social Welfare Policy with Kathryn Edin, and developed her own course, “Sociology and Film.” Elizabeth won the title of Best Undergraduate Teaching Assistant at Johns Hopkins in 2015. In addition to her academic work, Elizabeth worked with the interdisciplinary 21st Century Cities Initiative at Johns Hopkins. She will begin her post-doctoral fellowship with Stanford University’s Center on Poverty and Inequality in 2018.