

**“The Next One Changes Everything”:  
Parental Adjustment to the Second Child  
Among Middle-Class American Families**

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This working paper is intended to report preliminary results of research-in-progress. Comments are welcome. Please do not cite without author permission.

## **Abstract**

This paper highlights some key issues which have emerged in this study of parental adjustment to the second child and family formation. In a society where dual earning couples are increasingly the norm and the idea of a two-child family persists, this research explores, how couples negotiate the expanding family and time consuming workplaces. It highlights in particular; how the cultural expectation to have two children exists and is manifested in U.S. society, how the birth of a second child profoundly affects male understandings and roles as fathers and lastly, how female bodies and childbearing are inextricably linked with ideas of the ideal mother, worker and family.

Statistics suggest that the advent of the second child has an affect upon women's participation in the paid workforce. While most working mothers return to full time work after the birth of a first child, labor force participation drops off significantly after the birth of a second. In addition, despite a cultural expectation to have more than one child, the financial, personal and professional strains among middle class individuals can come into sharpest relief at the planning and birth of a second child. Few ethnographic studies exist however that investigate these changes in family and work life at the advent of a second child.

Based upon preliminary ethnographic research, this paper attempts to illustrate how couples interpret and balance these work and family obligations. It highlights how individuals negotiate identities and understand their roles as parents and in particular, how those identities and balancing acts are negotiated when the second child is born, when the "next one changes everything".

“You’ve finally got it made. All those middle of the night wake ups to bare your breasts or get a bottle are just a memory now. No more burping baby to the theme of the Late Late Show. No more dribble on your best designer work clothes, you’ve created the balance between working and taking care of that little one. And now, you’re cute little baby has grown, right before your very tired eyes, into a talkative, toilet trained toddler...but despite the ‘good life’ that seems to lie just ahead, you may decide to throw caution to the wind and do it all over again. If so you won’t be alone. Many parents have taken the stretchies, Snuglis and Swyngomatics out of storage, making ready for their second baby, even before their first one has been shuttled off to nursery school and day care and like you, may often end up wondering why, how?” [adapted from Weiss 1981: 17].

## **Introduction and Project Description**

Research on the contemporary American middle class has been increasing in anthropological literature over the past decades. Studies have focused upon the meaning of work, constructions and symbols of family, the desire and meaning of material culture and how technology and workplace changes have affected U.S. societies and families. Studies have also focused on how childbearing and parenthood have transformed and the meanings given to those changes in the past several years. Increasingly, many women have entered the paid workforce, and childbearing has become delayed. For many of these working couples, the pressure and desire to have children is central and the precarious balance between work and family comes into sharp relief-particularly the case when the second child comes along.

As the above citation suggests, having a second child is fraught with contradiction, emotion and decision. The audience is intended to be middle class; female and professional, economically secure we assume and aware of the appropriate middle class image complete with the designer work clothes, and already balancing work,

family, and time and day care for the first child. Despite this incentive, increased financial pressures and gender obligations, many working couples are making the decision and cite a certain cultural ‘obligation’ or expectation to have at least two children. Yet, as ethnographic evidence makes clear and as many respondents from this study have suggested, “it is the next one that often changes everything”.

This paper highlights some key issues which have emerged in this study of parental adjustment to the second child and family formation. In a society where dual earning couples are increasingly the norm and yet very clearly, the idea of a two-child family persists, this research explores, how couples negotiate the expanding family and time consuming workplaces. It builds upon what other researchers such as Hochschild (1989, 1997), Schor (1992), Nippert-Eng (1995) and Newman (1988, 1993) have suggested; that the dual burden of managing time and work among dual earning families is an ever present and constantly negotiated boundary in contemporary American life. In many ways, this research undertakes the question of actual versus potential selves; how do we imagine “families” to be? With two parents? With two children? With two years spaced between them? As the citation above suggests, such decisions are conscious, planned and particularly spaced-the second comes along before the first is even “shuttled off to nursery school”.

### *The Powerful Trope of Two*

As the historian John Gillis notes, “by the twentieth century, middle-class families could no longer imagine themselves without children...they [children] were a powerful

symbolic presence” (1996:73). It was during this period Gillis points out, that the very *idea* of a family changed critically, indeed, the growth of the image of a “family” emerged and “the simulacra of family became the measure of family. The copy took on a reality that had previously belonged to the thing itself” (1996: 72). Children became valued symbolically and as family size dwindled, the idea of the nuclear family grew.

Today, having two children is a powerful trope in the story of American middle class families. As many respondents in this study have suggested, two children are appropriate in that they provide a visible “balance”, *a one for me and one for my spouse* ideology. In addition, biological or familial reproduction is as much social as it is physiological. As some insist-the children will provide company for one another, or, “I had siblings, I don’t want my children to miss out on that”. Additionally, there is evidence that family size preferences and ideals are greatly influenced by couples own family backgrounds and situations.<sup>1</sup> As another respondent said, “I had two siblings, my husband is an only child, his mother had really difficult births and right now there are no other grandchildren or anything so we sort of figured that to have three kids was just about right”.

Having two is a powerful if often conflictual moment in American life. Yet several initial reasons<sup>2</sup> for why couples decide to have two children have become clear. For the majority of individuals, both men and women have discussed; the belief that children should have each other to develop and learn social skills; that having a balance, (a girl and a boy) is appropriate and lastly that couples own family backgrounds and

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<sup>1</sup> See Axinn, W.G.; M.E. Clarkberg and A. Thornton, “Family Influences on Family Size Preferences”. *Demography*, 1994; 31:1;65-79.

relationships help determine their own perspectives on numbers of children they will have. Of course, some couples will have two same sex children and often state then that they will try for a third to “provide that balance” and there are individuals who experience such tremendous difficulty in pregnancy that they decide to limit their family size. For the purposes of this study, I have limited close ethnographic investigation to couples who are planning to have or have just had their second child but have conducted in-depth interviews and discussions with those who fall into those fore-mentioned categories.

### *Ethnography and Everyday Life*

This research is being conducted with couples and individuals who identify as middle class and/or dual earning couples in the midwest. The majority of respondents are living in the Ann Arbor, Detroit metro area, an area that is often described as “being a good place to raise kids”. A key feature of this research is its ethnographic approach. While quantitative study can tell us much about the statistical makeup of American families and provide a survey data backdrop, close, participant observation and involvement in the daily lives of couples can provide much richer and specific data. Ethnography demonstrates how the idea of the imagined community (to borrow from Anderson 1983) and thus the imagined family may or may not be comprised of two earners, two professionals, with two children-despite cultural belief and pervasive symbols of such. It demonstrates how in practice, ideas of work and family become

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<sup>2</sup> Individuals in this study are initially asked in a preliminary interview family size preference and to explain their choices. These initial answers are compared both with ethnographic data, discussions and

reinterpreted, defined and prioritized, and how very clearly, this image persists. Through the use of ethnography as method and theoretical perspective, it helps to elucidate and explain the *practice* of everyday life (cf. Ortner 1984). It allows for reflexivity in science of social life as researchers of the U.S. come to understand the complexities and intricacies of everyday life in ways that may be taken for granted in the majority of various others kinds of research. Indeed, little qualitative or ethnographic anthropological work has been done on family formation after the second child and this research seeks to fill that gap.

*Balancing Work and Family: Gender, Work and Motherhood*

As noted earlier, studies of work and family in the US increasingly focus upon how couples balance work and family time obligations. As part of that balancing act, women experience not only the classic dual burden of home work and paid employment; as Hochschild (1989) describes, the “second shift”. Yet, as this research has begun to suggest, it is often those competing obligations which have created a whole new set of tensions around when is the “right time” to have children, what is the “right number” to have. In Hochschild’s research for example, several couples experienced great strain, a “crisis” at the birth of the second child, and one that became most difficult for the women in the working couple. Being good mothers and being good workers are inextricably linked. The crux of those links however is that it is not just that women have delayed childbearing in order to have and build a “career”, but in addition, there is still the pressure to actually have children, to build and complete the “family”.

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later follow up interviews.

Timing and career building however are very important aspects of middle class life today. As Newman points out, a central aspect of the balancing act between work and family is financial. Dual earning couples must dually earn. She notes, “they, [the couples] are in a quandary. If they delay having children in order to squirrel away money, they feel frustrated, unable to follow their emotions, unable to cement bonds of husband and wife. If they have children ‘on time’, they often find they cannot provide what they consider an adequate standard of living. Those who work double time to shore up their standard of living sacrifice precious time with their kids...this leaves...them open to the unsettling thought then that they are neglecting their duties as parents and are too dependent on institutional solutions that may prove to be wanting...” (1993: 29). What Newman’s citation tells us however is that having children *remains* a significant factor in work and family decisions. It is not a question of “if” but rather of “when” and interestingly, the question of “how” to balance provides much rich data for this research.

Birth itself has long been studied and considered as a ritual event, as demarcating a different status for women and in the creation of the family unit. In the United States for example, Davis-Floyd (1992) has pointed that childbirth is a particular American rite of passage, a stepping stone on to the path of adulthood and one which is carefully controlled and scrutinized by the medical establishment. Indeed motherhood in the U.S., has been considered by both sociologists and anthropologists alike, as central to studies of the family. Yet, these studies tend to focus and remain focused upon changes in the family structure at the birth of the first child. Even with increasing attention being paid to studies of fatherhood (cf. Kimmel 1998), researchers tend to remain focused on the birth of the first child. A key theme however that has emerged at this preliminary point

however is that it is the advent of the second child which has a profound affect upon men's visions of themselves as parents and providers. (see also Miller and Newman 1978). Based upon this research however, the pressures upon families, couples and individuals come into sharpest relief at the advent of the second child.

### *Key Emergent Issues*

This working paper is an attempt to highlight some of the key issues involved in family formation among middle class couples in the United States at the birth of the second child and is not intended to provide any particular conclusions at this point. Specifically, I am concerned with how couples and individuals and in particular, working women, experience and internalize cultural norms about how the ideal family and working mom "should be" constituted. Congruently, at the advent of the second child, the idea and meaning of fatherhood comes into sharpest relief. Both in ethnographic investigation and in cultural texts, the idea that a "father" becomes more central to the family, at least ideologically, occurs at the advent of the second birth. Secondly, as couples feel the time bind and the pressure to work longer and longer hours however, many report that despite this being the ideal, it rarely comes to fruition. A third aspect of this research project that has emerged as salient, is how female bodies, and particularly pregnant ones, become commodified and imagined in U.S. society and workplaces. Through both investigation into family life, interviews and discussion with women about contemporary images and values they feel are being placed upon them as working

mothers, I explore and raise questions as to how significant these images and symbols can be in middle class identity.

The challenges of combining family responsibilities and paid employment have been extensively documented, as has the fact that the combination has differing effects for women and men. Ideologies of motherhood and what makes a complete family call into question women's commitment to paid employment. Indeed, while most paid, professional women return full time to the work force after the birth of a first child, over 50% of women change to part time work or take a leave at the birth of the second. The effects of a second child on marriage, work and income are profound and yet remain largely unstudied. Women who build a career may defer the transition to motherhood or face considerable conflict and struggle as they attempt to synchronize parenthood and a paying job. Clearly, a generational shift has occurred where women are delaying childbearing in greater numbers than even a few decades ago. For these women however, there persists a certain image and expectation that one should or will have children and as their age increases, these obligations become ever increasingly competitive. While this study is in essence about generational change-the addition of another family member to a kinship group-it also points to how we understand and replicate throughout generations, the meaning and importance of work and workplace norms and mores. It is about how those broad institutional images and values get transferred, imagined and lived at the individual level (cf. Sennet 1998).

Finally, there are also individuals who resist these images. The exceptions that prove the rule to a large extent-couples and individuals who talk about the valence of the image of the American middle class family with 2 kids, the house, the jobs without

necessarily subscribing or participating in those models. These couples' descriptions and actions point to the reification of these symbols in our everyday lives. Through these individuals, the importance and significance of having two children in a working couple is clear as these individuals struggle to maintain identity and balance obligations to work and home in light of persistent family ideologies. While this study focuses upon dual earning couples who are expecting or just had their second child, it remains important to bear in mind how the meaning of having two children is understood in various contexts in the U.S.

### **Methods and Research Goals**

This project is an ongoing ethnographic investigation. The methods employed are largely grounded in ethnographic theory, where as an anthropologist I am immersed in the daily activities of the participants, observing, living with and discussing events, emotions and activities with one another. There are several phases of the project.

The first stage of the project includes brief and then more in depth interviews with various individuals and couples, within the research area including different contexts such as various workplaces, interactions or everyday conversations. These interviews (initial N=37) are crucial as they ground this ethnographic project in everyday concerns and reality of the participants. They were conducted (and continue to be conducted) in order to elucidate pertinent questions, to determine what topics resonate with respondents and in order to find patterns of responses and attitudes. Some of these interviews have been taped and others have been more on-going conversations and discussions or even

brief interactions at serendipitous moments. Interviewees were found on a network basis, the majority of whom were friends of friends, individuals met through day care services in the area and at local health clubs, local hospitals, clinics and midwifery contacts. Web based discussions on parenting and chat groups devoted to discussion of siblings and having several children have been invaluable. Many of these groups are also avenues of discussion for difficulties at work and a forum in which to discuss relationships anonymously. They offer a means through which participants have said they feel more “free” to express their concerns, their fears, and often their annoyances with having and raising children-issues they often felt were at times, “taboo” to talk about in work or family settings.

The second phase of research, currently underway, involves the more in depth, ethnographic component of field research. At this juncture, based upon some of the contacts made during interviews and follow up discussions, I have solicited the assistance of several types of families in order to participate with them in their daily lives. With these families research involves activities such as grocery shopping, day care transport, meals, trips to the Detroit Zoo, playground and park visits, doctors office visits, church, ice cream trips, trips to the gym or health club and on occasion-arguments and family discussions. While this phase of the research is still relatively new, I do hope to expand upon these activities to include some workplace visits if at all possible. Some individuals work at home and in those cases, the work/family/childcare arrangements are more easily observed but the tension of balancing them just as difficult.

The latter part of this next phase involves continuing to participate in the activities, lives and difficulties, triumphs and occasions of these families in addition to

collecting further interviews. As the project progresses, it will be particularly important to re-interview some couples and individuals and to conduct follow up interviews with select respondents. This allows some retrospective and thoughtful analysis by the respondents themselves in addition to allowing me the opportunity to check questions or comments that become particularly pertinent the longer I am in the field. Throughout this period I will continue to maintain rapport with these families and will have the chance to observe the actual advent of the second child in at least one of these families (ideally more as I continue to seek couples who are willing to adopt me as “their” anthropologist).

A final stage of the research project will include a random sample questionnaire of couples with two children in the research area. This final sample will help to again contextualize this specific study in a larger, more comprehensive selection of the population regarding attitudes and beliefs about family size preferences, work/family balances and gender role expectations.

### *Identity and Reciprocity in Fieldwork*

The large question that drives my research is of course how individuals balance work and family at the advent of the second child. I argue that despite increasingly delayed childbearing, in large part due to the increase of paid labor force participation by women, there exists certain cultural ideologies and symbols which state that to be a “family” one should complete that picture by having two children. Statistics demonstrate however that it is precisely at the advent of the second child that women’s full time

participation in the labor market drops off profoundly.<sup>3</sup> My ethnographic investigation thus far elucidates how profound this time period is, as many respondents have said, “it’s the next one [the second child] that changes everything”. A central piece of this is the idea of personhood and identity. Gendered identity in particular is significant as many respondents have followed the previous statement by saying, “it’s the second one that changes everything, *including* how much you think your gender roles are [changed]”.

I am interested in not only what constitutes the “ideal” family but also how individuals envision the “ideal” self. For many women who consider themselves part of the contemporary middle class, this means how to be a healthy, fit self. In the contemporary US, the ideas of being a good mother, a fit parent, an attractive and successful professional woman are conflated. In the magazines and media that we see, the messages are clear, one must be able to “do it all” and yet find they have increasingly little time or other resources to do so. While women that I talk to recognize and often vehemently talk about how these images are negative and damaging to women and their everyday lives, most still talk about how there is always pressure to live up to the “ideal”- at work, at home, as a woman, and most importantly as the fulcrum that balances all of these nodes of everyday life. As Garey’s (1999) wonderful new book suggests, a better model with which to understand these balancing acts is as a process of “weaving” work and motherhood, a model which moves analysis away from a simple (albeit divisive and difficult) understanding of women as *either* workers or mothers. Through ethnographic investigation, I have begun to see how these pressures are enacted. Close ethnography is

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<sup>3</sup> Census Bureau information suggests that the average number of children per family in 1998 was 1.90 for married couples and 1.85 for total number of all families. At the advent of the second child, statistics demonstrate that labor force participation for women with children under 1 year drops for all cohorts of ages 15-44.

particularly important in this case as many early respondents expounded upon the meaning of fitness and health when discussing their children in initial interviews but only through more intensive, participant observation have the repercussions and significance's of these opinions and actions become clear. In this vein, as many respondents/couples have reiterated how difficult life is with two children and work, I have begun to offer my services as a childcare provider. In this way I can give something back to the families who have offered their lives to me and it is something that all feel they desperately need-time together or by themselves without children, to either work, go to the movies or go to the gym. As a childcare provider for even limited periods of time I am directly involved in the actual and everyday balance of work, family, time and the identity of selves within these families and it has become invaluable-both for me and hopefully for my respondents.

### **Cultural Expectations: Why Have Two Children?**

The idea that in order to complete a "family" in the United States couples must have two children has persisted throughout generations. Whether or not this is reflective of actual lives or more importantly a reflection of imagined lives and families is apart from the fact that for many respondents, the idea that having two children was "expected", was and is the norm. How couples and individuals experience and understand these expectations is the focus of this study and several examples follow which help to illustrate these themes.

*Nancy and Paul*

Nancy is thirty four, she has been married for seven years to Paul and they own their own company together in the Ann Arbor area. They have two children, Karrie who is four and Timothy who is now seven months. Both work full time and have devoted much of their careers to the development of their store which caters to the upscale clientele of the area, selling art and ceramic pieces. I posed the question as to why have two children to Nancy and she told me the story of her birth experience and alluded to the cultural and medical expectation about family formation. She said, “well I was lying on the table, literally, me legs you know, knees still up and the doctor came in, my obstetrician, who I really think is great most of the time, but I remember this one thing she said, as if I had nothing to do with it, she said, ‘okay, this time I gave you a girl and the next time we’ll make sure it’ll be a boy’ and I was totally shocked, here I was – just had one child and proud and all and then here was everyone talking about the next one will come along, like I had no choice you know, it was inevitable and my little girl was just a stepping stone along the way...I mean, it was like, to complete the picture you know? I mean, what if...what if we had only wanted to have one?”

While not all couples and women have such an experience, for many working women, the pressure to have a second child, or perhaps appropriately the assumption that there will be a second child, particularly if they have delayed having a first child can be tremendous. As Nancy said, it was clear that she would indeed have a second child can be tremendous. As Nancy said, it was clear that she would indeed have a second child, the only question was *when*.

For many women, it is not just the pressure from the medical or broader society that influences their ideologies of having two children. For many, it was peer group pressure and other women who “expected” them to complete the family model. As Nancy stated, “it was right around when Karrie was two, that’s when all the questions started, when were we going to have another, that kind of thing, I was thinking we would talk about what our toddlers were doing these days or other parts of our lives,...how to get back into work, how are jobs and coworkers were dealing, our husbands, or whatever, but when I got together with this group it was always stuff like, ‘oh, so and so is expecting again, eventually it got around to me and when was I planning to have another!” For many women who have delayed childbearing particularly to pursue a career, these questions can build steadily, not only does the pressure to expand the family grow more intensely as the years go by, but the pressure to answer questions about the direction of one’s career and objectives grow.

#### *Ann and David*

Both partners and others are party to the pressure that women and families feel to have a second child. Local parks are sights where childcarers/primary parents and for the most part, women, spend a lot of time and take children for walks and exercise out of doors. These parks also offer sights where women and, increasingly men, can bring their children and more importantly, talk with others about childraising.

On several occasions, the topic of pressure to have at least two children has been central. David, a father of two who has chosen to work at home part time and considers

himself the children's primary parent (even arguing that he was the one doing the 'second shift'). David described his typical day now as consisting of working on the computer as much as he could, preparing lectures and writing during the morning while the children were being sat by a neighbor. At noon, he takes the children somewhere, in the warmer months, with others to the park. He says that at first he went because it was "good for the kids" but he admits that now his primary reason is often to see and talk with others who he feels close to and "can talk to about these issues, well, although its probably different for women and men". David feels that having support from others can be a good thing, particularly as a man who is raising and caring for the children during the day. On the other hand, he pointed out, similar to Nancy's observation, that when their first child reached the age of 18 months, people began asking, joking even about when they would as he put it, "pump out another one". "It was really weird, because it was like suddenly your whole life was a public event, Ann, my wife she was getting really annoyed, I mean I think because she wanted to just have one and felt like even more than pregnancy this was this huge intrusion in our lives, like why couldn't people keep their opinions to themselves you know?" David recalls.

There are two interesting aspects to David's comment and the impact that has on the pressure to have two children. The first is the very *publicity* of having two children and family building. It is not unusual in U.S. society as many pregnant women that I have talked to have described, for perfect strangers will come up and feel the right to be able to touch and feel their pregnant bodies. In a similar manner, many women have talked to me about if they don't have children after several years of marriage, how if they

have reproductive problems or otherwise, strangers feel compelled, obliged even, to comment upon how they are not, quite obviously, “completing the family image”.

The second aspect of what David was saying is that “one was just not enough”. He said, “I think that Ann would have been happy with one child, well, we talked about it, but I sort of felt like, well, if you are going to have one you should have two, its either zero or two for me and two’s how it turned out”. David’s reasoning is that children should have companions as siblings and that one child was not going to be enough. His wife however, framed most of her responses in terms of the family at large, she did not focus on the children’s relations per se, rather she talked in terms of “the family” and how one child would be enough to “complete their family and feel like a home”.

These observations and sentiments are common themes and emerge in several of the discussions/examples which follow. Both the debate between having a right number of children, zero or two or just one, and the very visible, public and social realm to which these decisions belong are evident in the stories of various couples and everyday lives.

### **Gender and the Meaning of Fatherhood**

Another aspect of this research which is particularly significant is the impact of the second child on gender roles, expectations and ideologies. For men, in particular, the advent of the second child is most profound along with their understandings and roles as parents and fathers. While much has been written about the first child and family formation [cf. Miller and Newman eds. 1978] little research exists on the impact of the second child upon that formation and continuation. Specifically, little in-depth

ethnographic research exists. There have been some studies which suggest however that the second birth is (profound) in the development of the relationship between the couple and children and the father. These more recent investigations are grounded in the recent turn by social scientists toward studying fathers, men and the cultural and symbolic meaning of being a “father” in contemporary society.

As Michael S. Kimmel has argued, the meaning of fatherhood has changed significantly over the last several decades. Indeed, as he notes, “few 1990’s men fit the traditional picture of distant father, patriarchal husband, and work-obsessed breadwinner; fewer still have dropped out of the working world completely into full-time daddydom and househusbandhood...today’s organization man carries a briefcase while pushing a baby carriage. He’s in his late thirties or forties, balding, perhaps a bit paunchy since there’s no time these days for the health club; he no longer wears power ties and his shirts are rumpled. While he considers his career important, he doesn’t want to sacrifice time with his family. His wife may have a demanding job, which he supports; but he may wonder if she thinks he’s less of a man than her father, and he may resent her for the time she spends away from home” (in Wharton 1998:434). For many of the men in this study, these issues and concerns were often discussed and came to the forefront when the decision to have a second child was under negotiation.

Tracing the significance of fatherhood in U.S. society provides an interesting backdrop to how individuals today are balancing work and family obligations. The significance again, is striking at the birth of the second child. As Hochschild pointed out in her own research on childcare and parenting, gender ideology and parenting are not necessarily so easily/neatly/strictly correlated. That is, Hochschild writes that “I

imagined a man's gender ideology would 'determine' how he wanted to divide the second shift. Couples with more egalitarian ideas about men and women would share more, those with traditional ideas, less." (1989: 190). But as Hochschild points out, the set of ideas that individuals have about gender are not entirely coherent or seemingly consistent. The same is true with child birth and the decision to have a second child. As one respondent put it, "yep, when you have another one [child] its like you both regress, you suddenly have to put up with lots of gender role stereotypes and expectations, no matter how equal you say you are!". It is also often the case that at the birth of the second child is a transition point for men and their beliefs and practices about childraising/parenting. For many men, this is a period where they must reconsider their "belongingness" to the family and many actually report feeling *more* included than after the birth of the first child as Jim describes below.

A basic gender tenet/stereotype that remains pervasive in contemporary US society is that male identity is closely tied to employment and paid work and female identity is greatly shaped by motherhood and childbearing. One need only look at recent research on work to find narrative by women in the workplace who either feel criticized for not having children or alternatively, who feel discriminated against as a result of having to balance, work and a family life. At the birth of the first child, many female respondents have spoken about how they felt they were now truly a parent, a mother and as one woman put it, "have different priorities". For men, these priorities and obligations may shift at different times, stages in building the family and in relationship to their work.

*Jim and Stella*

As Jim, an employee of a local stationary store pointed out, “well, it was like my wife had this deeper attachment to our children when they were still inside her, I mean that makes sense, I understood that, but I always felt like I was waiting around to be part of the family and here she was experiencing it already...and then yes, when our second child was born that was even more fundamental for me, we were a family with one child but it really took the two to make me a father!” These responses are similar to what Professor Robert Stewart at Oakland University in Michigan has found in his own research—a long term study of couples with two children. Stewart’s study found that for men, it was a change in the role of provider which was most profound. As Jim explained, “well, before I felt like I was providing support, I was sort of the like, behind the scenes guy, but my wife was pretty much working full time with our first child, but then with the second it was so much harder, it was as if all the things we had to do multiplied by a thousand and I wasn’t just a family provider, I was really a full time dad! It took the one to make my wife a mother but two to make me a father”. While not all dads in this study, as we shall see, feel like their role as provider and interactive parent changed with the second child, many do speak of the fact that this second child had important effects no matter what. Indeed, as Hochschild (1989) and Weiss (1981) have both pointed out, these effects are often spoken about as a “crisis” within the family. To return however to the case of Jim and his wife, Stella, it is clear, that while things change, they can often be for the better in the couples’ view and have implications for how we study and understand the role of fatherhood and middle class identity.

Jim and Stella own a small but comfortable two storey home in the Detroit metro area in southeast Michigan. Jim works in the stationary store he manages and Stella is employed now part time in a communications technology firm. Prior to the birth of their second child, Stella had worked for one of the larger tech firms in the Detroit area, closer to where she was raised. She claims however that she is much happier now working part time at a smaller company and with time for the children. Jim and Stella have been married for twelve years, both are in their late thirties and have two, active young boys aged five and three years old. They had been married for seven years prior to the birth of their first child, a decision which they both described as being their preferred choice and yet one which caused friction within their families. “All of our relatives, they kept asking when we were going to have kids, like all this pressure and we were failing them if here we were married and not producing any grandchildren or anything, it got pretty bad there for a while! But we were happy with that decision and glad we waited, we did things together and got our bills paid and sort of felt more secure starting a family like this” Stella relates.

It is often Jim these days who says he has the more flexible schedule, he is able to get the boys from daycare when Stella is working and since he owns the store, he feels he is in a better position than many other men. Indeed, Jim speaks often about how his work flexibility has allowed and even fostered his new or transitioning role as a father, stating that “yes, I think that if you are a man, a father who’s like really really into that whole job thing, well, its easier, I mean, you’re doing what you’re supposed to you know, you have a job, you provide and then you have kids and that’s just what you’re supposed to do, you’ve fulfilled the picture. But the way I think about it is that it’s the most amazing

thing-the having kids, I mean, that was way more to me, than, ‘oh okay, I completed the picture’ – we’re a family now -- you know?”.

*Susan and Scott*

It seems however that the “crisis” or advent of the second child upon a family is in many senses profoundly affective. That is, men feel their roles change to some extent, perhaps being part of the family and being called upon even to do things with the older child. But as profound as the experience can be, in many cases, it is simply too stressful an event or life stage for the couple and the family itself. In some instances, it is the anticipated stress and strain upon the couple themselves which affects the decision to have or not to have any more children.

For many couples, and in many cases, couples who delayed childbearing and so have spent a considerable part of their marriage just together as a couple, the shock of the firstborn is indeed a crisis. Many women talk about having “baby brain”, where they are so overworked, tired and their schedules upset by the change in routine with having a baby that they simply cannot organize or keep track of their day the way they once did. Susan, who has two children, speaks of how having “baby brain” was bad the first time they had a child but how “I just couldn’t believe it could get worse, its like I’m spaced out all of the time...AND I’m supposed to be working still! You wouldn’t believe the kinds of silly mistakes I make there”. While Susan is worried about how tired she is and needs to take time for herself to pull herself together [I return to this issue in a following section], it was not problematic enough to influence she and her husband, Scott’s

decision to have a second child. What many new second mothers have suggested however is that it is not just that they feel particularly subject to household pressures/stress, rather that, despite an even overly emphasized feeling of equality between the spouses/sexes, at the second child, it is the woman who must “be prepared” to take on the quintessential role of mother. As one mother put it, “just be ready for the fact that those stereotypes are out there-suddenly there’s this whole reversion to those old roles, you know, be the mom, do double duty at home with two kids, even if before you were both all like, well...we’ll be equal, we’ll both take care of the kids, and I think that parents think that when you have two, it’ll even it out...you know, like one for each of you, but noooo, now its more like all that extra work for the woman in the couple!”.

*The Challenge of Two Children: Joanne and Karl*

As part of the research project, I have interviewed and talked with several couples who just have one child. Some are considering getting pregnant with a second [and these couples will comprise the part of the study where pregnancy and the actual birth of the second child are recorded and followed] child yet have either not come to that decision or are taking steps to get pregnant at the moment. While it is understandable that parents are often hesitant to expand their family; fears loom about time commitments, financial feasibility (an oft cited concern about having a second child) and even whether there will be enough love to go around for the second child-there are couples in this study who have decided or are vehemently against having another child for the sake of their marriage and family. For these couples the belief that two children may in fact be easier than one is

not a salient message (cf. Weiss 1981 on the ease and role of the second child). One couple in particular stands out as particularly hesitant to take that step to have another child.

Joanne and Karl define themselves as “your pretty typical middle class, working hard to achieve couple”. They own a home in the Ann Arbor, Michigan area and both continue to work full time with one daughter, now aged five. Both stressed to me, together and separately how important their careers were to them and how hard they had worked to get where they were, and to own a house. They felt like they were doing a good job raising their daughter, Tamarah. The problem as they saw it though was that their relationship had suffered greatly as a result of their Tamarah’s birth. Joanne points out that her life, her body, really changed and that it has been extremely difficult for her to get back to “feeling good or even having some time for herself”. For Karl, the changes were initially less discernible – his body didn’t become pregnant, he was not the one getting up at all hours to breast feed. Yet, his reactions and feelings as their daughter grew were ones of jealousy, anger, contention and confusion basically. The couple argued constantly and Karl came to feel as if he was on the outside of a family looking in. In contrast to Jim, for example, who spoke of feeling somewhat distant predominantly while his wife was pregnant, Karl’s distance remained and only became exacerbated after the birth of the child. Joanne and Karl are working on getting counseling and organizing their lives and schedules so that they find time for themselves and as a couple but have decided, quite adamantly that they will not have another child. As Joanne put it when speaking to me by herself, “the first was such a strain on our marriage, I mean, we are at loose ends and don’t even know each other any more, we just can’t imagine having

another, we're too afraid about what that might do to us". Karl agreed though expressed some regret, saying, "its too bad, I had siblings, I feel like we're supposed to be having more than one child but here we are just trying to protect our family like this". Karl's statement raises an interesting point echoed by Joanne in a different conversation. She had asked me if I ever heard of couples "faking infertility" because they had decided to only have one child. She continued, "its unbearable, I mean, it was bad enough everyone felt they could just come right up and touch you when pregnant but there's this whole sense that people can ask you whatever they want, like, 'when are you having your second' stuff like that, and here I am getting to the point where I am almost saying that I am having trouble, like we can't get pregnant again and instantly people back off, they're like, 'oh, we're so sorry' and here I am feeling like such a faker, knowing that I just really don't want to have another child and everyone else expects it".

### **The Pregnant Body**

Child spacing and the body are intricately related issues for the American middle class family. A large part of middle class identity is based upon the role that the body and image play in contemporary US society. Being competent, successful at work and at home are all inextricably linked to images and values placed in this society on achieving and maintaining a certain character. Based upon this preliminary research, these issues become extremely highlighted at the planning or birth of a second child into the household unit.

Many couples in the study have delayed first childbearing until they are in their mid thirties and/or feel that they are “established” enough in their careers-the timing is right and appropriate. After the birth of the first child however, if they believe that they will have another, many individuals speak about how important spacing is in a different manner with respect to the children-how there should be ideally “about two years between the kids”. Indeed, if one peruses the books on how to prepare one’s family for the addition of a second child and how to make the first child adjust to the second, it is clear that a central concern that is emphasized is the appropriate amount of time *between* children.

*Peter and Jerrie*

Related to the spacing question is the issue of “having enough time” to spend with another child and on work. Many of the individuals that have been interviewed who have one child and are thinking about having another cite concern over having enough resources, in terms of time and money, to spend on the second child. Some even worry that they wouldn’t have enough affection or love for the second child. As Peter, a father of two pointed out, “well, it is true, I mean look through any photo album and you see that there are all these pictures of the first child you know, everyone loves it and specially if it’s the first grandchild...well, then, but then the second, you know, there are less pictures, I’m not saying that changes how you feel about that child, its just that its not such an event”.

For some couples, while a second child may be intended, the pregnancy may occur earlier than perhaps the couple had wanted to. Peter's wife for example got pregnant very quickly after they decided to try to have another child. As Peter puts it, "we thought it would take a while, but nope, Jerrie was pregnant like that! And the thing is though, she was pretty resentful – actually I think she really still resents me in some ways, it was like she didn't have time to recover, or whatever, her body, her time, you know and then bam, here she is again having to deal with being pregnant. She really resents me." Unfortunately, Peter's situation is strained, his wife, in a separate conversation talks about herself and her struggles to get back into "shape" and focused repeatedly upon how with the first pregnancy she was able to get back into her "size four jeans within two months-now I'm still in sixes!".

Jerrie admits that she feels resentful, as if Peter just couldn't understand the pressures she was feeling, and put forth that despite his constant reassurances and the knowledge that she was well below average weight for women in the U.S. and very fit, she still felt unattractive, unsuccessful. "I used to be really good at my job and now, while I think we're really really good parents and Peter's all into that and all, I wish I could go back, I feel so guilty wanting to be really good at my job again and yet, I feel like I should never say that". For Jerrie, myriad pressures, to fit a certain "image" of middle class successful parents were constantly being played out in her everyday life. While certainly not all middle class professional women experience these pressures in the same manner or to such a degree, it is significant to note that issues of weight, body, presentation of self and the concept of being "healthy" are salient themes which run throughout the interviews on observations in this study. (cf. Sault 1994).

*Carolyn and Rick*

In a different case, Carolyn, mother of Lissa, an eighteen month old girl, offers different perspectives on issues of health and the body, though echoes some of the concerns raised in discussion with Jerrie. Having a healthy pregnancy is an often cited phrase in the majority of pregnancy and child care literature. Balancing that with work and additional children is accepted as one of the difficult aspects of negotiating the birth of the second child. This balancing act comes into play with physical appearance as well. Carolyn, now 34, a first time mother, is an avid gym-goer and talks openly and often about the importance of “health” and being a good mother. She states, “well, I think you have to set a good example for the kids, otherwise its no wonder that all these children are overweight these days, I mean, I’m lucky, my husband, he’s got a great schedule, he’s writing his thesis, I can work both at home and the office so someone is always there for her...also, he is really great about letting me take time to go to the gym, I have been working really hard on that, a year ago I thought, ‘oh, will I ever have a normal body again’? Now I do think and yet...mmm..about a month ago I thought I might be pregnant again and I was sooooo excited, I was really happy, I *loved* being pregnant, I felt really good and strong but then I was telling my husband Rick and he was happy but then he said, ‘oh, but what a shame, just after you got your body back’..and it was true”.

In the United States, body image and presentation of oneself in work and public domains has a powerful impact upon individuals and the middle class ideology of success. In a recent article in Harper’s magazine, the author stated, “In upscale corporate

America,...being fat is taboo, a sure-fire career killer. If you can't control your own contours, goes the logic, how can you control a budget or a staff?" (March 2000: 47). While this is certainly not the case for *all* middle class professional couples/individuals, the fact that such media representations and images invade homes and thinking points to the significance of paying attention to research on body image and its relationship with class and status in the contemporary U.S. Pregnancy and childbearing adds different and visible pressures on female bodies and particularly working women.

For pregnant women, the publicity of their bodies has been mentioned by many of the individuals I've interviewed or had casual conversations with over time. Many working women have argued that in the work place they feel they are even more scrutinized for the quality of their work, for the quality of their lives. Many talk about how even what they eat and when and how they spend their time comes under the gaze of others in their workspace.<sup>4</sup>

For many, their relationship with their body and body image directly interrelated with their relationship with their spouse and with their feelings about being a working woman in contemporary society. As Carolyn finished a discussion one day, "you're supposed to do it all, be the together working woman and raise you're kids right, but today, there's all this focus on raising kids who aren't overweight, and then there's all this concern about weight gain...I worry about it all the time, I gained so much with my first, I'm just worried about what will happen with the second". These concerns are voiced by many second time pregnant moms. For many, the publicity of their bodies,

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<sup>4</sup> An interesting and important aspect of the publicity of female bodies in the workplace involves the question of breastfeeding and pumping in the office. All of the second time mothers in this study have discussed breastfeeding/pumping as one of the most difficult aspects of returning to work and this topic will be the subject of a following working paper on the body in the middle class workplace.

their visible balancing act between work, financial stability, pregnancy and a family is a source of constant scrutiny and concern. As one working mom put it, “even in the hospital, with my provider, I felt like just this pregnant body, even though I had done this before, it seemed like I was out there, waiting for everyone’s approval”.

### **Discussion and conclusions: The ‘ideal’ family?**

When asked in initial interviews what they envisioned as an “ideal” family, most respondents have replied that they had an image of the “two parents, two kids, a boy and a girl” type family, whether or not this reflected their own current or future plans for family size. Arguably, the imagined family in the United States continues to include two children. Little ethnographic investigation exists however on precisely what occurs to the balance of work and family obligations at the advent of that presumed second child. Not surprisingly, this could be in part due to the fact that the first child in family formation is traumatic, a very different relationship within the household. The second child is often seen as a fulfillment of expectations, of cultural prescribed norms and obligations. Yet it is the advent of the second child that most profoundly affects couples relationships to each other and female paid labor force participation. Additionally, in a society where socially created and controlled images of women and the body are ubiquitous, maintaining a certain “family image” in addition to a certain “individual image” as a successful, fit, professional are often in competition and/or are overwhelming. The birth of the second child appears to challenge and highlight the often carefully constructed boundaries between work, family, body and society.

For men, the birth of a second child appears to affect the implications and constructions of fatherhood as well. Many male respondents, such as Jim, have spoken about how the second child really created a stronger feeling of belonging to a family and a greater tie with the first child. As studies of fatherhood increase and become more integral to studies of the family, understanding how fatherhood itself is understood at different family building stages is crucial. Early in the research period, Chad, the divorced father of two and a regular commuter between Detroit and Indianapolis, argued that for his wife, motherhood was really the most central and important thing—a basic part of her identity. Later in the interview however, it became clear that for Chad, being a father, being “there” whether physically, emotionally or financially was a basic tenet of parenthood and one that he felt increased as his family had grown. For Chad, the ideal family was not one that was divorced, but that was almost a secondary part of his vision of a family with “two kids, you know, a mom and a dad”. As individuals such as Jim and Chad’s stories unfold, it is clear that studying the birth of the second child can tell us much about male/father identity and how that transforms over time.

In this study I have come across several couples and individuals who have talked about their difficulties in getting pregnant with a second child. Many say that they are experiencing secondary infertility, the inability or difficulty carrying a pregnancy to term after having had at least one successful pregnancy previously. Through these families and their belief that two children would complete their family we can also begin to understand some of the motivations and frustrations associated with family building and what the ideal, or more correctly, “imagined” middle class family may look like.

This research project remains in the early stages of analysis and research. At this point several key themes have emerged as particularly important both to the researcher and the respondents. These key themes include; the publicity and expectation that couples will actually “have” two children despite the fact that financial and time constraints come into sharpest relief at the advent of this second child, no matter when or whether it was planned. Secondly, the role of fathers, while important and a subject of much new research on family formation, is rarely examined at the birth of the second child, a time which this research suggests, many fathers take on increased roles as parents and providers for the family. Lastly, women’s roles as mothers, as pregnant women and as working women come under close public scrutiny at this particular reproductive moment. While arguably women’s bodies are under social control in general, reproducing a family and the balancing act between boundaries of work and ideological family and gender roles/spaces is often most strained and significant at this juncture.

This research will become more detailed and more particular conclusions able to be drawn as this research continues. In the next nine months I will be actively engaged in the lives of several families in the southeastern Michigan area, living with and participating in daily activities and balancing acts between the workplace and home. In addition, several women who are trying to get pregnant or are pregnant with their second child will be followed throughout this second pregnancy. Both partners will be particularly important to study and involve throughout this period. Drawing upon some of the salient themes raised in this broad general overview of the project on the second child, future papers and further research will focus more particularly upon some of the key themes. For example, how women talk about and negotiate their notions and

understandings of body image and success when pregnant is currently being considered more closely, with a discussion of how breastfeeding affects both the individual woman, the family and the workplace.

Discussion based on the research thus far has pointed repeatedly to the notion that indeed, having the “next one changes everything”-despite being an arguable representation of an “ideal” family. Family, friends and coworkers point out the changes in families who have had a second child and families themselves struggle to balance personal and social identity in the contemporary U.S. This research promises to shed further light on important issues about the value of children, the meaning of family and the omnipresent negotiation of gender roles in both work and family life in the U.S.

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